That’s where I came in and here you have it: the first-ever magazine of contemporary Austrian prose and poetry in English. Of course, it reflects many of my personal interests (Empress Sisi! Freud! Zweig! Vienna! ... although I resisted indulging in my passion for The Sound of Music!). But I didn’t create this magnificent volume alone: I consulted widely across Austria, the UK and the US, from the literary journalist Katja Gasser (my interview with Katja is our first item) to Jamie Bulloch, one of our great translators from German, who also studied Austrian history (read his fine essay), to Tess Lewis, our Empress of Austrian literary translation (and herself a wonderful essayist), to many others – the scores of writers, academics, journalists, translators and publishers who gave their time, ideas and extracts so generously, eager to put literary Austria on the map.

Alongside exclusive features on the three Nobel laureates of Austrian literature, Elias Canetti, Peter Handke and Elfriede Jelinek, we have interviews, reviews and extracts of writing by Robert Menasse, Doron Rabinovici and Raphaela Edelbauer – you name them, we have them. Thomas Bernhard in graphic novel form, anyone? You’ve come to the right place! And if you haven’t yet heard of Kaśka Bryla, Clemens J. Setz or Christine Lavant, you will after reading this. Book tips from Daniel Kehlmann? Read on! In his interview for this magazine, Daniel introduced me to Leo Perutz and Heimito von Doderer. Thus have many of the gaping holes in my knowledge of Austrian literature been filled. When I read German at
university, I never realised that many of the classics I was reading were Austrian; now I do. Several Austrian classics are being reappraised today – and I’m delighted that this magazine is contributing to this revival, with fascinating items on Elias Canetti, Joseph Roth, Stefan Zweig, Ilse Aichinger, and more. Read original essays on wide-ranging topics from Jewish Austria to regional languages, writing by women, writing for children, crime writing and a history of Austrian publishing.

My ambition was to create not just an anthology of Austrian writing but of writing about Austria, to incorporate some of our finest writers in English linked to Austria, people I admire very much: Edmund de Waal, Hella Pick, SJ Fowler and some of my former BBC colleagues – Max Easterman, Misha Glenny, Kirsty Lang, Angus Robertson and Caroline Wyatt. Unlike previous Riveter magazines, this one has also entailed considerable reading in the original language because – as I discovered – shockingly few Austrian writers today are being translated. Therefore, to entice potential publishers, large sections of the magazine are devoted to extracts and recommendations for translation. (Get in touch if you’re interested!)

The Austrian Riveter is our weightiest since I first conceived the idea of a magazine dedicated to riveting European literature in translation in 2017, and for that I’d like to thank my fellow Germanists, especially Deputy Editor Sheridan Marshall, everyone at New Books in German and the Austrian Cultural Forum (ACF) in London, namely the inspirational director Waltraud Dennhardt-Herzog and ACF librarian Hannah Kaip. Also, huge thanks to Lara Bulloch, who has compiled a unique bibliography of ten years of Austrian publishing in English – an invaluable service to publishers, accessible for free online. In fact, this whole magazine is free and for that I wish to thank Regina Rusz at the Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs, and Katja Gasser and her colleagues running the Austrian market focus at Leipzig Book Fair 2023. Finally, as ever, thank you to Anna Blasiak, Poetry Editor and Managing Editor of this and all our Riveters, and to the outstanding Lo Cole, artist and graphic designer, who has illustrated our cover and inside pages. It is thanks to him and all our contributors and supporters that The Austrian Riveter is as riveting and beautiful as I dreamed it might be.

Rosie Goldsmith
April 2023 is an important milestone for Austrian literature, when Austria features as Guest of Honour at the prestigious Leipzig Book Fair. It is also an important milestone for Austria’s international standing, focusing the book world’s attention on this lesser-known but richly diverse German-language literature. The Austrian Riveter itself, commissioned to coincide with Leipzig, is playing a key role in helping to promote Austrian literature in English and to highlight translation and publishing opportunities in the anglophone market. Rosie Goldsmith spoke with Katja Gasser, the artistic director of Austria’s Guest Country Focus at Leipzig Book Fair. An award-winning literary journalist with national broadcaster ORF, Katja is an enthusiastic champion of Austrian literature.

RG: How would you describe Austrian literature?

KG: That is an old question and closely linked to Austria’s past. First of all, Austria’s literature is multilingual. Compared with German literature – as we always are – I would say that one of the main features of Austrian literature is our strong focus on language, form and the actual process of writing. Our literary tradition is inseparable from these concerns. After 1945 these tendencies intensified, for obvious reasons. Austria’s politics, culture and society diverged from that of Germany and these differences are reflected in our language, which I’d call ‘Austrian German’. It may sound overly simplistic when I say that today Germany’s literature is more influenced by Britain and the US, with more issue-driven books with strong plots. Austrian authors less often approach literature through issues, more often via language. The idea that writing literature is a form of exploration and experiment is widespread for us. But that does not mean that Austrian literature is inward-looking or insular. Quite the contrary. Austria was politically late in coming to terms with its recent past, for example, but that wasn’t the case for Austria’s literature. It was always a couple of steps ahead of social progress in this country (something that remains true today, by the way). There were a lot of Austrian authors among those who realised that literature after 1945 also needed a radical rethinking of language: it was clear that new forms were needed to be able to articulate and reflect on the recent catastrophe and trauma. The Nazis partly destroyed the German language as a reliable system – this understanding continues to influence how we think about language.

Do you think it's important for Austrian writers to continue to write about the Holocaust and Austria's unique role in history?

Art is not obliged to fulfil any function. There is no democracy without freedom of art. Who am I to say what Austrian authors should or should not write? I do think that for the political consciousness of this country, it
was very important that authors reflected on what happened here and continue to do so. That’s our political heritage and it’s a difficult one. In Austria and Europe today, there is still a lot of writing about being Austrian and Jewish, and in translation and publishing abroad there is still a strong focus on Austrian authors looking back at the Holocaust and their family history.

To be blunt, it’s also what the market demands.

There is a lot of writing about the past but it is changing. Take the young Austrian author Raphaela Edelbauer, whose novel *The Liquid Land* is very popular and widely translated. She reflects on the historical heritage of this country that on the one hand quotes Elfriede Jelinek, while on the other seeks to tell the story of Austria’s past from scratch. Then you have Reinhard Kaiser-Mühlecker whose rural settings show a vanishing lifestyle – a sort of pre-industrial farming that is under siege everywhere at the moment. Austria’s past is only mentioned in the background, but it is of great importance. Then you have Helena Adler, a dynamic writer who doesn’t name the Holocaust or what her parents may or may not have done, but whose tone and anger are a direct legacy of this country. Something else is happening too – there is literature about Austria’s past and present coming from abroad. This is connected to Austria’s devastating past, when so many Jewish people fled Austria during the Nazi regime and never returned, although now that return is taking place in the form of literature. Like Edmund de Waal, for example.

In German-language publishing the big publishers are German. What does that mean for Austria?

Austrian writers usually start off with a smaller, independent Austrian publisher, and then, if they become successful, transfer to big German publishing houses. For Austrian publishers, this is definitely a problem. But Austria is a small country with a small market. And one of the main challenges is to be recognised on the German market. Germany has a lot of very good publishers, so there is a mismatch. But I will stick my neck out and claim that Austria’s literary power is even greater than Germany’s today so it’s not a question of content but of market dynamics and market power.

Do German readers read Austrian literature, and vice versa?

It’s a two-way street, however the majority of German books in Austrian bookshops are German, but in Germany only about 2% are Austrian – which is completely absurd, but that’s a fact. The interesting thing is that a lot of the really well-known Austrian authors like to be seen and read as German authors, because they publish in Germany.

If you compare Austria with Germany, is there an inferiority complex?

To put it humorously: I don’t see an inferiority complex, but rather megalomania! In fact, German literature today is heavily influenced by authors from Austria: where would German-language literature be without Peter Handke, Elfriede Jelinek, Josef Winkler, Clemens J. Setz, Robert Menasse, Maja Haderlap, Marlene Streeruwitz, Teresa Präauer, Anna Baar and others, who’ve won all kinds of major German prizes and are also published in Germany?

Do Austrian authors write about Austrian topics?

Every writer on earth is also writing about the circumstances they live in on a certain level, which is not necessarily visible in the writing at the first glance. That is true also for writers who live in Austria. Apart from that,
we’ve had times in Austria dominated by right-wing politics and there are lots of authors who reflect on that in their texts. But the tendency towards right-wing politics is today not just an Austrian problem, but also a European one, and Austrian authors often reflect upon European issues. Robert Menasse holds an important place in European literature with his perspective on the European Union. Austrian literature is full of very different political realities: take the Ukrainian-Austrian author Tanja Maljartschuk, or Serbian-born Barbi Marković, or Marko Dinić, and a lot of other writers who live in Austria now, but who have taken other cultural and language routes. That for me is the power of Austrian literature today.

**Looking back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, German wasn’t the only language spoken but Slovene, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Turkish, Italian and others: what impact does that have today?**

It is very important to highlight that Austria isn’t one mighty language country but shaped by migration and multiple cultures and languages. We have several official minority languages. We have Slovenian authors writing in Slovene and a really thriving literary scene, for example, represented in the writing of Florjan Lipuš. Actually, I don’t talk about ‘Austrian’ authors but authors who live in Austria, which makes a difference. I am myself a Slovene-speaking Carinthian. My interest in diversity is obviously also driven by my roots.

**What role do book prizes play in Austria? The Austrian Book Prize was only launched in 2016 but already has some great winners: Friederike Mayröcker, Eva Menasse, Daniel Wisser, Norbert Gstrein, Xaver Bayer, Raphaela Edelbauer and Verena Rossbacher in 2022.**

The Austrian Book Prize – like the German Book Prize – was invented to stimulate book sales, so these are prizes intended to heat up the market. Experience shows that if the titles are easy to read, then prizes reinforce sales, but if it’s a more complex title, like Mayröcker in the first year, then they don’t. The Ingeborg Bachmann Prize is also an important prize. The Austrian State Prize, which is awarded not just for literature, was won by author Anna Baar in 2022 and is Austria’s most prestigious arts award. But there are also Germany’s book prizes: first and foremost, the Georg Büchner Prize, which last year – as so often in the past – went to an Austrian, Clemens J. Setz. I should also mention the excellent and diverse provision of grants and fellowships for authors in Austria. The fact that the promotion of authors in Austria is so well funded by the state is one reason for the country’s wide array of literary talent – that’s also true for the Austrian publishing sector.

**Austria is a small country. What influence can such a small country have on literature?**

Franz Kafka – where did he come from?! Whether a country is big or small says nothing about the quality of the writing it produces. What makes Austria’s literature so special and powerful is its multicultural and multilingual minting. We are in the Balkans. No one wants to hear that, but we are in the Balkans. In Vienna – and elsewhere in Austria – you walk the streets and hear so many different languages. This is our identity. We Austrians are many things at the same time, many languages at the same time, many cultures at the same time. We are in a good place.

You can read the full interview with Katja Gasser online at eurolitnetwork.com.
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Coudenhove-Kalergi’s ancestry made him a global citizen in the truest sense of the world: the Coudenhoves were Dutch, the Kalergis Greek, his mother Japanese, and his father a much-travelled ambassador for the Habsburg Monarchy. After the Paris Peace Settlement in 1919 Richard found himself a Czecho- slovak citizen, although he and his movement were based in Vienna. These days he is little-known, especially in the anglophone world, but a recent biography by Martyn Bond (Hitler’s Cosmopolitan Bastard: Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and His Vision of Europe) may help rescue this colourful figure from obscurity.

It is no coincidence that the Pan-Europa movement established its home in post-First World War Austria. The prominent Austrian political figure of the 1920s, Ignaz Seipel, chancellor from 1922–24 and 1926–29, enthusiastically endorsed the movement and became president of its Austrian committee. Seipel was openly positive towards the idea of a United States of Europe in which he saw Austria playing a key role because of her unique multinational history. Seipel was also a keen advocate of a Danubian Federation, which would have seen Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary realign politically, perhaps under the Habsburg crown.

The quest for alternative geopolitical solutions came in the wake of the Paris Peace Settlement that reordered the map of Europe and had a profound psychological impact on what became the Republic of Austria. This rump country was shorn of its economic hinterlands (coal from Bohemia, grain from Hungary); French Prime Minister Clemenceau, who had been largely responsible for the punitive treaty against Germany,
famously referred to Austria as ‘what is left’. Vienna, once a great imperial capital, now felt too large for the small state it governed. Historians have debated whether Austria was in fact an economically viable state in the 1920s; what is certain is that the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire caused a crisis of Austrian identity that was not resolved until after the Second World War. To understand why this should be the case we might consider the words of the 19th-century politician Victor von Andrian-Werburg: ‘Austria is a purely imagined name, which means neither a distinct people nor a land or nation. It is a conventional name for a complex of clearly differentiated nationalities [...] There are Italians, Germans, Slavs, Hungarians, who together constitute the Austrian Empire. But there exists no Austria, no Austrian, no Austrian nationality, and, except for a span of land around Vienna, there never did.’ In other words, ‘Austria’ was a shorthand way of referring to the Habsburg Empire (and after 1867 to the non-Hungarian half of it), but more specifically to its ruling dynasty, which from the late Middle Ages was known as the ‘House of Austria’. The people who we might imagine to be Austrians, in fact saw themselves as Germans.

Further clarification can be found in Seipel’s 1916 treatise Nation und Staat (‘Nation and State’) in which he argued that they were two distinct entities. This is very different, of course, to the situation in countries like the US, France and Britain, where the nation is understood as a political construct, and thus congruent with the state. For Seipel, the state was a political community, the nation a cultural one. Maintaining that it was possible to have an allegiance to both nation and state – Seipel professed himself to be a proud German and loyal subject of the Habsburg Monarchy – he insisted that the supranational or multinational state offered a superior framework for the political organisation of peoples, leading to greater harmony and understanding between nations, a point which had particular relevance in wartime.

Although Seipel’s thesis in Nation und Staat was not new – the idea has its roots in the German Romantics, especially the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder – it had clear resonance in the aftermath of the Treaty of St Germain, which had prohibited Anschluss, or the political union of Austria with Germany. One of the key tenets of the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson’s much-touted principle of national self-determination, seemed to have been ignored in the German case. Quite apart from the Anschluss ban, core areas of the Habsburg Monarchy that were ethnically German, most notably the Sudetenland and the South Tyrol, found themselves outside of Austria – in Czechoslovakia and Italy respectively. Seipel, who
rejected the idea of the ‘nation state’, had foreseen this problem in his book when he wrote that it was neither possible to have a state which was purely homogenous in national terms, nor one which included all members of a particular nation.

Despite the ban on Anschluss imposed by the Allies, the idea of political union with Germany was highly popular in the years following the war, and the regions of Salzburg and Tyrol unilaterally held plebiscites in favour of such a move. Like many conservatives with a strong attachment to the old Monarchy, however, Seipel was cool towards Anschluss. This put him at odds with the majority of the population, but there was one point on which virtually all Austrian citizens could agree: there was no such thing as an Austrian nation.

Support for Anschluss – the ban was renewed in 1932 as a condition of Austria receiving a League of Nations loan to mitigate the effects of the Great Depression – vacillated throughout the First Republic. Hitler’s accession to power in Germany in January 1933 was a turning point that polarised opinion in Austria. As in Germany, many saw National Socialism as the solution to all Austria’s problems. Others, including those on the left as well as a dwindling proportion of conservatives, continued, albeit for different reasons, to support Austrian independence. A united political front was rendered impossible, however, when in March 1933 Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss used a procedural impasse in parliament to impose an authoritarian form of government, excluding the left from the political process. Incited by elements on the far right, the briefest of civil wars took place the following February, leading to an outright ban on the Social Democratic Party. The political rift in the country was irreparable.

Under Dollfuss, who was murdered by Austrian Nazis in an abortive putsch in July 1934, and his successor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, the authoritarian, quasi-fascist regime attempted to foster a patriotic movement in Austria, known as the Vaterländische Front (‘Fatherland Front’). Very much a pale imitation of the similar organisations in Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy, the Front did not enjoy anything like the same support. It was never a mass movement, having been imposed from above, while its ideology that insisted on Austria being a ‘German’ state was no match for the rabid nationalism of the Third Reich, where the idea of the nation had shifted from a cultural to a racial construct. When German troops entered Austria in March 1938 not a shot was fired, and the huge crowds that greeted them and cheered the Führer in Vienna’s Heldenplatz told their own story. Not all Austrians welcomed Anschluss, and those who were opposed generally kept quiet about it, but clearly an
identification with the Austrian Republic was too weak in the late 1930s to foster widespread resistance.

The Moscow Declaration of October 1943 stated that Austria had been the first victim of Nazi aggression, and that the Allied Powers desired to see a free and independent Austria restored after the war. They insisted, however, that she bore an inescapable responsibility for her participation on the side of Hitler’s Germany, and that when the final reckoning came it would be necessary to take into consideration the extent of her contribution to her own liberation. An attempt to encourage resistance, this document provided a sort of foundation myth for post-war Austria, allowing the Second Republic to distance itself from Germany.

Despite the Moscow Declaration, Austria, like Germany, was occupied by the Allies in 1945 and also divided into four zones. Unlike Germany, however, it managed to avoid decades of division by adopting a policy of permanent neutrality along the lines of Switzerland and Sweden. In 1955 the Austrian State Treaty was signed in Vienna, which made no mention of Austria’s responsibility for the war and its associated crimes. This selective interpretation of the past now made it easier for both main political parties to endorse and promote the idea of Austrian nationhood. As the years progressed opinion polls showed that the public too were increasingly embracing an Austrian national identity, and no longer felt their allegiances divided, unlike the Austrians of the interwar era.

But what of Coudenhove-Kalergi? Having been told he was high on the Gestapo’s hit list he left Austria with his Jewish wife as soon as Chancellor Schuschnigg announced his resignation in March 1938, effectively handing the country over to the National Socialists. He spent most of the war as a refugee in America, where he taught at New York University and also organised the third Pan-Europa congress in 1943. When in 1946 Winston Churchill called for a United States of Europe he name-checked Coudenhove for the contribution he had already made towards this. These days two Frenchmen, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, are far better known as founding fathers of the European project. Some commentators, however, see Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who continued his work after the war, including proposing ‘Ode to Joy’ as the European anthem, as an equally important pioneer.

In the one hundred years since the publication of the Pan-Europa manifesto, Austria has gone from being ‘the state that no one wanted’, via an integral part of the Third Reich, to a confident, economically dynamic country, still bound to neutrality but firmly embedded in the EU, which it joined along with Finland on 1 January 1995. There have been bumps along the way, most notably the Waldheim affair in the late 1980s, when it was revealed that
the then Austrian president Kurt Waldheim, a former secretary-general of the UN, had lied about his wartime past. In the wake of this scandal, Chancellor Franz Vranitzky finally admitted to Austrian complicity in the crimes of the Holocaust in July 1991. Then, in 2000, the EU temporarily imposed sanctions on Austria when the far-right Freedom Party was brought into a government coalition with the conservative People’s Party. But today Austria, while remaining an important element of the German cultural world, no longer has to look outside its borders for its own sense of national identification.

Jamie Bulloch
The building itself was constructed in the middle of the 19th century for the Imperial and Royal Exchequer Archive to store the Habsburg accounts and financial documents. Austria’s most important dramatist of the 19th century, Franz Grillparzer, was Director of the Archive from 1832–1856.

The museum’s unique ambience is largely due to the dark wooden shelves. Extending to the ceiling and dividing the large rooms into long sections across two floors, the shelves were originally used to store the royal accounts. When you walk in, you might be reminded of Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s ‘Carceri’ or Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘Library of Babel’.

The museum’s permanent exhibition of 2,000 objects is intended to illustrate the diversity and polyphony of Austrian literature. Arranged in historical and thematic chapters, the selection highlights what we believe characterises Austrian literature: its close affinity with music, the visual arts and all forms of theatrical expression; its frequent use of the grotesque, satire and polemics. Short-form prose, with masterpieces by Hofmannsthal, Altenberg, Musil, Canetti, (Elfriede) Gerstl and the Viennese avant-garde of the 1950s and ’60s, contrast with long-form narratives of famous modernist authors such as Kafka, Musil and Broch.

Austria is a country proud of its cultural identity, whose self-image is to a considerable extent based on its cultural achievements. It distinguishes itself from its much larger neighbour, Germany, through its particular linguistic and cultural characteristics. Contemporary Austrian literature is informed by the multi-ethnic and multilingual traditions of the multinational Habsburg state, characteristics which persisted after its collapse in 1918. On show we have many examples of texts, from the Enlightenment to today, by authors involved in the early creation and critical analysis of national clichés and stereotypes, given valuable context by being set against the backdrop of Austria’s precarious geographical, political and historical realities which shaped its literary history. One important theme deals with Vienna’s relationship as a metropolis with the provinces on the fringes of the Habsburg Empire; another theme is the writing of those authors exiled under National Socialism. The loci of Austrian literature, therefore, also lie

The Literature Museum in Vienna is not simply a museum full of books or precious manuscripts, nor is it dedicated to a single author: it is a showcase of Austria’s rich and varied literary output, from the Age of Enlightenment to the present. It opened in an historic building in Vienna’s city centre in 2015.
beyond its borders, and may be found anywhere in the world, from Galicia in Old Austria to the Himalayas.

I have selected four examples to illustrate the wide range of objects displayed in the museum.

1. The work of the Austrian writer **Thomas Bernhard** (1931–1989) represents an important contribution to world literature. On display is a pair of Thomas Bernhard’s work trousers. They were torn to shreds by a chainsaw during an accident and later saved for posterity by Bernhard’s neighbour, the real estate dealer Karl Ignaz Hennetmair. By labelling and cutting out the particularly damaged areas, the trousers were already a distinctive writer’s relic, even before they passed into the archive. The most direct reference to the accident, however, is made in Bernhard’s play *Die Jagdgesellschaft* (‘The Hunting Party’), which premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on 4 May 1974. For long stretches, the play consists of a rhythmic dialogue between a writer and a general, determined by the card game, Twenty-one. The talk finally turns to the ‘Zwischenfall mit der Motorsäge’ (‘incident with the chainsaw’). Unlike in real life, it is not the writer who suffers the horrible accident, but the general, who is also the owner of a huge area of forest infested by bark beetles. In the museum, the trousers therefore demonstrate a missing link between Bernhard’s life and work.

2. She was surely unique: writing and living were not separate for **Friederike Mayröcker** (1924–2021). Interweaving them was the prerequisite for her poetic life’s work. In her books, notes of conversations, literary quotations, remnants of dreams, and visual and acoustic impressions blend and form dense texts. Particularly noteworthy is Mayröcker’s openness as an author to influences from the visual arts, music, philosophy, and international poetry. Before her ninety-fifth birthday, Friederike Mayröcker decided to entrust her entire archive to us, to the Austrian National Library, and thus to secure it for the nation. This incomparable collection encompasses several hundred archival boxes and is of great value to scholars. It provides insights into the workshop of an obsessive writer. The objects survived for decades partly covered by layers of dust, like ores in a mine. Huge numbers of slips of paper, photographs, drawings, cassette tapes, packaging material, medications, stuffed animals, typewriters, dedicated poems, pictorial works by once-unknown and now-famous artists – all this is now part of our archive, physical evidence of the creative processes and artistic conditions of pre-digital production in the 20th century.

3. In the 1980s, **Peter Handke**’s (born 1942) writing changed from his experimental and language-critical early work to the high ideal
of ‘narrative description’. Ever since, he has written by hand. The ‘pencil manuscripts’ on display show his writing process. Handke continuously notes the date of origin of each individual page. The sheets of paper show signs of use, sometimes the typeface is blurred, especially when he writes outdoors. An impressive example in our collection is the manuscript for Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht (‘My Year in the No-Man’s Bay’) from the early 1990s. Handke wrote this epic narrative by a pond in the forest of Chaville, where he was living south of Paris. The work eschews the digital. It is old-fashioned, baggy and classic-heavy, with references to Homer, Goethe, Tolstoy and others. The pursuit of his ideal of pure ‘narrative description’ is based on Handke’s heightened sensitivity to visual, gestural, acoustic and linguistic stimuli, beyond the everyday. You can see this development clearly in his notebooks and manuscripts – as well as one of Handke’s walking sticks, which has a route between the Austrian border and Trieste engraved on it. These objects signify the ties of the written word to the physical process of its production.

4. Finally, a seemingly inconspicuous note from the literary estate of the Jewish writer, exile and feminist literary scholar Ruth Klüger (1931–2020). It shows again how everyday objects can be charged with meanings that exceed the object itself. Klüger’s decision to have her concentration camp tattoo removed was preceded by a long period of humiliation and pain. Although Klüger polarised opinions by showing her tattoo as a visible reminder of Nazi atrocities, she never understood it as ‘provocation’ or as ‘attention-seeking’. The incident concerning the tattoo took place around 1972 at the University of Virginia, when Klüger was a professor. This aggressive note, written in red pen and capital letters, was sent to her by an irritated and upset student: ‘I’m glad it’s getting cold and you’re starting to wear long sleeve dresses because I could not stand looking at your fucking tattoo for another five weeks. Do you want to make the whole world feel guilty about what the Nazis did to you?’ Klüger’s subsequent attempts to bring the case to the university’s student Honour Committee failed. No one wanted to have anything to do with it, no one cared in 1970s Virginia. The note is now on display at the Literary Museum. As a physical object, it bears witness to the humiliation, resentment and repression of Ruth Klüger and other Jewish writers.

Bernhard Fetz

The Literature Museum is holding an exhibition at the 2023 Leipzig Book Fair. For further information please see: https://gastland-leipzig23.at/ and: https://dnb.de/jetztundalles
Thomas Bernhard’s Old Masters has been called his ‘most enjoyable novel’ by the New York Review of Books. It’s a wild satire that takes place almost entirely in front of Tintoretto’s White-Bearded Man, on display in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, as two typically Viennese pedants (serving as alter egos for Bernhard himself) irreverently, even contemptuously take down high culture, society, state-supported artists, Heidegger, and much more.

It’s a book built on thought and conversation rather than action or visuals. Yet somehow celebrated Austrian cartoonist Nicholas Mahler has brought it to life in graphic form – and it’s brilliant. This volume presents Mahler’s typically minimalist cartoons alongside new translations of selected passages from the novel. The result is a version of Old Masters that is strikingly new, yet still true to Bernhard’s bleak vision, and to the novel’s outrageous proposition that the perfect work of art is truly unbearable even to think about – let alone behold.
The artists, the so-called great artists, so said Reger, I think, are the most unscrupulous of all people,

they are as unscrupulous as politicians.
The so-called old masters are, before anything, if one considers their works of art side by side,

mendacity enthusiasts,

who have curried favour and sold themselves out to the tastes of the Catholic state.
In Europe they have only ever painted into the hands of a Catholic God and up to his face, he said,

a Catholic God and his Catholic gods.
The painters have not painted what they should have painted but, rather, what they have been told to or what delivered or brought them money or fame.
Now two new films, two television series and a novel are doing their best to debunk this romantic image of Elisabeth as nothing more than a pretty figurehead. In 2022, Austrian director Marie Kreutzer’s film Corsage was awarded Best Film by the British Film Institute and was also a standout at Cannes. Vicky Krieps as Sisi is as lonely in her luxury and glamour as Kristen Stewart’s Princess Diana in the biopic Spencer, which came out six months earlier. Netflix Germany’s historical romance series The Empress, starring two lesser-known actors, has also been a huge hit. In contrast to Karen Duve’s novel Sisi, and Corsage, which both focus on the years around Elisabeth’s 40th birthday, the Netflix production depicts the early years of the Empress’s marriage. Another film release planned for spring 2023, from German director and writer Frauke Finsterwalder and Swiss author Christian Kracht, portrays Elisabeth in her later years from the perspective of her last lady-in-waiting, Countess Irma Sztáray.

Comparisons between the late Princess Diana and Empress Elisabeth are inevitable, particularly in the light of the Netflix series The Crown. Both Diana and Elisabeth were icons of their time, with Elisabeth setting the scene as the first celebrity royal in Europe. They were both adored by their devoted public, resisted the restrictive formalities of the monarchy, struggled to raise their children in a royal household, experienced an eating disorder and were idolised by society and media alike. And yet over time, both women created their own paths, fighting for the causes they believed in, and pursuing their own interests.

Karen Duve’s German novel, Sisi (Galiani Verlag, 2022), turns the saccharine image of the Empress firmly on its head. Apart from a few flashbacks, Duve’s novel captures individual days in the Empress’s life over a two-year period. She is in her late thirties, supposedly the most beautiful

www.eurolitnetwork.com/the-riveter/
woman in the world, undoubtedly the best and most reckless horsewoman of her time and afflicted with numerous foibles. Based on extensive historical sources and actual quotes (court life was meticulously documented at the time), Duve’s profound and clever novel is full of humour, showing the contradictory and fascinating person that Elisabeth was. Elisabeth’s fear of losing her beauty, her restrictive diet, her obsessive exercising and her mental health problems are issues that, unfortunately, are still relevant today and will therefore resonate with a modern-day audience.

Hopefully this current ‘Sisi-mania’, as it has been called, will play some part in rehabilitating Elisabeth’s image, from Bavarian ingénue to the cultured, caring and influential personality she became. Not many people know that she spoke several languages, including ancient and modern Greek, wrote poetry, revered Heinrich Heine and Homer, studied Schopenhauer and Goethe, and changed the course of history by arranging and influencing negotiations between Austria and Hungary, culminating in the double monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There was much sadness in her life – her first daughter died at the age of two, her only son committed suicide at the age of thirty. She battled depression, anorexia and related health issues, and constantly struggled with the severe restrictions of court life and the limitations placed on her as a mother. And yet she managed, for the most part, to shape her own life. When, at the age of sixty, she was stabbed to death by an Italian anarchist, she had come a long way from the gauche sixteen-year-old who married the Austrian Emperor to a disciplined, fearless and strong woman.

Alexandra Roesch
There are two things you cannot avoid in Vienna: cakes and references to the beautiful but tragic 19th-century Austro-Hungarian Empress Elisabeth, better known as ‘Sisi’. The prize-winning Austrian writer Linda Stift combines these two obsessions in *The Empress and the Cake*, a disturbing but darkly comic novel set in contemporary Vienna. It’s disturbing because the young female protagonist suffers (as Sisi did) from a serious eating disorder. The comedic moments come from a series of surreal moments involving a Sisi lookalike competition and an amateurish attempt by three women to blow up a statue of the former Empress in a Viennese park.

The story opens with the narrator walking past a patisserie where an elderly lady dressed in a long black dress with a black lace mantilla is ‘inspecting custard slices, glazed tarts and fancy meringues piled high in the window’. She notices the elderly woman has dropped her purse on the pavement and picks it up, thus eliciting an impromptu invitation to come for coffee and cake at the stranger’s home. The old woman’s flat is full of grainy black-and-white photographs of the Empress Elisabeth and her husband Franz Joseph sporting huge hairy mutton chops. Also resident are two parrots, a large dog and an aged housekeeper called Ida.

The mysterious Frau Hohenembs follows up with an invitation to a picnic in the Prater, a large public park with a funfair and a Ferris wheel (which famously featured in the film *The Third Man*). Alongside the shooting galleries and a ghost train is a History of Sex Museum full of vintage erotica which the elderly woman insists on visiting. Before long she has manipulated the fragile younger woman into becoming her accomplice in a series of mad capers involving stealing relics and artefacts that once belonged to the Empress. This includes the theft of a cocaine syringe and a macabre kitchen instrument used by Sisi’s servants to squeeze the blood and bone marrow from duck carcasses for the Empress’s...
broth. Frau Hohenembs seems to think she is a reincarnation of Sisi and therefore entitled to these objects.

The contemporary story is intercut with excerpts from the diary of one of Empress Sisi’s ladies-in-waiting who records her peculiar dietary habits and battles with melancholia in some detail thus mirroring the angst experienced by the narrator. There is an entire industry of books, films and TV series dedicated to the tragic Sisi. Linda Stift’s *The Empress and the Cake*, is a highly original take on this much told story, but readers should be warned that the mirroring of Sisi’s eating disorder with detailed descriptions of the narrator’s bulimia can be hard to read. Despite this, I enjoyed the Central European eccentricity and can’t think of another novel that combines Habsburg royal history, museum heists, eating disorders, an elderly Viennese housekeeper attempting to have illicit sex on her employer’s kitchen table, and a couple of parrots.

*Kirsty Lang*
In the case of biographies of poets, visual artists, and composers – like my ‘Austrian quintet’ – it is the interrelationships between their lives and works that define their being and resonance. Biographers assume that their ‘objects’ have something to tell us ‘today’, at the time of writing. Unless one is writing the first biography of a particular person, all biographies also deal with the achievements and failings of previous biographers.

So, what about Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Trakl, Oskar Kokoschka, Anton Bruckner and Stefan Zweig? Looking for common denominators other than their − in Rilke’s case − shaky ‘Austrianness’ is not an easy task if one does not want to distort their idiosyncrasies, plentiful contradictions, and their precarious psychological conditions, after all the very capital of any artist. Asked what it was that made me write these four partly biographic, partly monographic works in German and add a fifth one in English – crossovers in terms of genre – it was the intrinsic interconnection between life and work that intrigued me – with one exception, Anton Bruckner. With him, the main question was: where did these colossal symphonies come from? What was it in his development that prepared him for composing them? Bruckner was the most accomplished organ virtuoso of his time and much sought after, even in Paris and London. Originally a provincial musician, he became the composer of symphonies that constitute a world, if not cosmos of their own.

The members of my Austrian quintet share a radical individualism against the odds of their respective time – with Rilke implicitly and Zweig explicitly representing a decidedly European cosmopolitanism, whilst the
The artistic achievements of Bruckner and Kokoschka were transnational by definition. The fascination with the dark visionary Trakl rests on his poetry that made the bottomlessness of existence resound in vowel-dominated cadences. If I had to rewrite his biography, I would most likely call it: ‘A Life as Nightmare’. My quintet of artists originating from the cultural sphere of Austria and Bohemia share just one common feature: their lives and works exposed the crevasses in that very culture, which was almost too rich to be true.

The form of biography is a problem. If form contains the aesthetic aspect of truthfulness, we need to address the truth about the form of biography, too. If I ever write another biography, it might be of Friederike Mayröcker or Bertha von Suttner, and I might choose a diaristic approach: quasi daily reflections on aspects of their lives and works. But I fear that I would only be writing for my bottom drawer, as I doubt that any publisher would dream of taking such extravaganzas on board. Or, maybe, diaristic biographies are the life-writing of the future.

Rüdiger Görner
Alexander Lernet-Holenia and Baron Bagge were admired by no less than Stefan Zweig, who wrote to the author in 1936: ‘Truly you wrote this unforgettable novella in a state of grace.’ Only from this letter can it be inferred that Baron Bagge first appeared in German in 1936.

Widely regarded as Lernet-Holenia’s masterpiece, it is in many respects a classic novella: in a first-person narrative, the title figure, a former cavalry officer, relates his wartime experiences to a spellbound interlocutor. The interlocutor, like the reader, is faced with a hermeneutic puzzle, asked to make sense of real-world events – the narrated action takes place on Austria-Hungary’s Eastern Front in 1915 – that nonetheless appear to defy rational explanation. The foreword by Patti Smith tiptoes around the erotic narcissism of the central love story, and repeatedly hints at the dreamlike quality of Baron Bagge, in ways that are potentially perplexing for the uninitiated and amusing for those readers in the know. The mythical dimension of the narrative is nowhere mentioned.

This English translation, by Richard and Clara Winston, first appeared in 1956. Whether or not it has been updated in this reissue, perhaps by the couple’s daughter Krishna Winston, who has translated the three letters between Lernet-Holenia and Stefan Zweig that are appended to the text, remains unclear. Although this lack of information frustrates any interest the reader may have in the interpretative and creative acts that brought the translation into being, it cannot detract from the quality of the English of Baron Bagge which, whatever its genesis, makes for a crisp and engaging read. The Winstons do an excellent job of
conveying the hyperreal, wintery atmosphere in which the cavalry unit criss-crosses the sparsely populated southwestern Carpathians, dotted with eerie remnants of extinct volcanoes. The attentive reader is offered subtly phrased clues, while the liberal sprinkling of place names anglicised from their pre-1918 Hungarian forms heightens the impression of exoticism.

The decision to tiptoe around the biography of Alexander Lernet-Holenia (1897–1976) is rather more questionable than the cautious paratextual framing of the novella itself. We are told that Lernet-Holenia was an active combatant in the First World War, but not that he also saw active service in the Second World War. While his lack of public support for the Nazi regime made him for some a laudable example of ‘inner emigration’, what increasingly rankled in post-war Austria was his aristocratic conservatism, which looked back nostalgically to the Habsburg era and went hand in hand with a reluctance to engage critically with the legacies of Nazism within Austria.

When the presidency of the Austrian branch of PEN, the international writers’ association, became vacant in 1969, Lernet-Holenia, by then ensconced in an apartment in Vienna’s Hofburg Palace, was the obvious candidate; but it soon became equally obvious that the revolutions of the 1960s had left him far behind. Resigning the post three years later, in protest at the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the left-leaning Heinrich Böll, he precipitated the intergenerational rupture of post-war Austrian literature, prompting younger writers to form the breakaway Grazer Autoren-versammlung (‘Graz Authors’ Association’). But this volume offers no glimpse of such controversies.

This new Penguin Classics edition would arguably have been well served by an afterword situating Baron Bagge less evasively within his long and productive but not uncontentious career, which spanned poetry, drama, prose fiction and screenwriting. For time is a great healer, and the centenary of his birth in 1997 kickstarted a revival of interest in – and admiration for – Lernet-Holenia’s work. In the intervening decades it has begun to enjoy a more nuanced reception that acknowledges the complexities of his political self-positioning without allowing them to overshadow the enduring literary appeal of his best writing. In the Winstons’ translation of Baron Bagge, at least the latter is fully in evidence.

Judith Beniston
‘Vienna, City of My Dreams’, intoned the Austrian Richard Tauber, one of the 20th century’s finest operatic tenors; ‘Goodnight, Vienna’, warbled Jack Buchanan – one of Scotland’s more mundane vocalists of the last one hundred years – ‘You city of a million melodies’. Music, cake shops, magnificent art and architecture: the casual observer’s image of the city.

And yet, as Angus Robertson, a lifelong and respected observer of the city, describes in compelling and quite staggering detail, if Vienna has a million melodies, it also has a million memories from a thousand-year history that for nearly six hundred of them made it the epicentre of European politics and the nerve centre of the huge, multiracial Holy Roman Empire. It was the EU’s Brussels writ large, in control of territories stretching from Italy westwards through Spain (and including the Spanish colonies), north to the Low Countries and east through the German lands to western Ukraine and the Balkans.

But, of course, by the time Tauber et al. were singing its praises, Vienna had been reduced by war and the squandering of political capital to a shadow of its former glory: a centre for black marketeering, espionage and semi-starvation, so brilliantly portrayed later by Carrol Reed in his 1949 film The Third Man.

Robertson’s narrative of Vienna’s history, its triumphs, vicissitudes, several descents into tragedy and extraordinary capacity to clamber back against the odds, is both
entertaining and full of surprises, facts and figures that reveal its essential dynamism over many centuries. This city of Empress Maria Theresa and Mozart was also at one time or another home to Marx, Trotsky and Hitler; it housed the first purpose-built British Embassy; it was the first major European city to have a social democratic government and remains the continent’s largest public landlord, owning the homes of several hundred thousand of its citizens. Its penultimate Emperor, Franz Joseph I, was, until our own late queen’s reign, the longest-serving monarch in Europe, the last-but-one of the Habsburgs, who died in 1916 and whose dynasty had ruled since 1276 in Austria and almost continuously from 1438 to 1806 as Holy Roman Emperors. The history of Vienna is precisely the history of the Habsburgs: it was ‘their’ dynastic capital. They saw off the Huns and the Ottomans, who besieged Vienna twice; they were ‘beheaded’ by Napoleon in 1806 when he abolished the Holy Roman Empire – yet saw him off too, less than a decade later, and re-established their position at the centre of Europe with the Congress of Vienna and the creation of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy.

The Congress was the brainchild of the Austrian Chancellor, Prince Klemens von Metternich, who was building on Vienna’s long-established success as the diplomatic hub of the continent – a role the city took up several hundred years earlier, when the Habsburgs first allowed, and indeed guaranteed, foreign diplomats access to the Court – the only non-royal group to have this exalted status, much to the annoyance and frustration of the imperial nobility. The Congress was the apogee of Vienna’s diplomatic story, backed up by its fame as a centre of art and music. The Congress was supposed to last three or four weeks, but ‘the delegates … indulged in unrestrained celebrations … [and it] soon morphed into a glittering vanity fair … “sparkling chaos” that would light up the banks of the Danube’. The fêtes and balls only ended eight months later; but amid the ‘sparkling chaos’ Metternich and the many other reactionary forces of Europe re-established their dynasties and diplomatic ties after their almost total dismemberment during the Napoleonic wars. The ‘Metternich System’ of Congress meetings endured – the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 notwithstanding – until the entire edifice came tumbling down in the cataclysm of the First World War. The dual monarchy vanished as did the Habsburgs as a dynasty. The city of Vienna and the Austrian Republic that survived became shadows of the powerful capital and the mighty empire that had lasted nearly a millennium.

One might have expected Vienna to remain in unimportant and provincial obscurity, as indeed it did for several decades. But its –
and Austria’s – instinct for survival somehow triumphed: after the Second World War it was the only European capital occupied by the Soviets from which they eventually withdrew. Their insistence on Austrian neutrality as a condition of this had the unintended result of turning Vienna once again into a truly international city – which it has remained to this day. It is home to over forty international organisations; it was where the UN brokered its Convention on Diplomatic Relations, where Kennedy and Khrushchev held their famous summit and where numerous spies, diplomats and others have met, conspired and traded deals.

When I first visited Vienna as a student in the early 1960s, I thought it somewhat stuffy, yet at the same time rather arrogant; my impression didn’t change much when I returned as a BBC journalist in the early 1980s, when you could still see ladies parading in real fur coats. But perhaps the city had learned a thing or two: glitz is not everything. After all, the capital city that had been a byword for anti-Semitism in the early 20th century, and long before, had by the 1970s a Jewish Chancellor, Bruno Kreisky. Vienna had become a city self-confident enough to shrug off the inconvenience of a President with a dubious Nazi past, Kurt Waldheim, and has topped the international ratings for quality of life for many years. Indeed, the life of the city of Vienna flows on, as smoothly – and as deep – as the waters of the Danube. As Angus Robertson notes, during the 19th century, ‘the city created the modern age ... [it] became the capital of ideas and the battlefield of extremes. Monarchy versus revolution, fascism versus communism, wild decadence versus Catholic piety. It all happened in Vienna, the world city’. The reality is that, once again, Vienna is ‘a global meeting place, a neutral heart’ quietly beating in the centre of 21st-century Europe.

Max Easterman
The Viennese coffee house is a special kind of institution, and incomparable to any other in the world. It is actually a kind of democratic club, accessible to everyone for a cheap cup of coffee, where for this small fee every guest can sit for hours, discuss, write, play cards, receive their post and, above all, consume an unlimited number of newspapers and magazines,’ wrote Stefan Zweig in *The World of Yesterday*. His description, published in 1942, still holds true. The coffee house in Vienna was, and still is, an important meeting place for private, political, economic, artistic, and last but not least, literary ideas. Initiated by the Club of Viennese Coffee House Owners, Viennese coffee house culture was included on the UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2011. The history of the Viennese coffee house and its accompanying culture began in the late 17th century. Today we know for sure that it is not Georg Franz Kolschitzky, but a certain John Diodato (also Deodat or Theodat), who on 17 January 1685 received the *Ausschankprivileg* (licence) for serving coffee and opened Vienna’s first coffee house.

During the 18th century the number of coffee houses in Vienna grew rapidly and, as in other European cities, a coffee house culture developed in tandem. The Viennese coffee house was so special that other European cities considered it unique, as the following description from 1895 shows: ‘The same high rooms on the ground floor, decorated like a banquet hall, the same marble tables and the same throne of the cashier, who graciously grants audience to the favoured regulars, the same cosy establishments fitted with window seats, the same huge mirrored panes, which allowed the casual spectator to observe, greet and nod at the colourful street life […], the same elegant, softly upholstered furniture, the same quieter, darkened back rooms for the card players, the same elegance and comfort of the most secret places of recreation.’ Except for the *Sitzkassierin* (seated cashier), these features still exist in Viennese coffee houses today.
In 1788, the era of the concert café began with the Café Bellevue in Vienna. For a while, garden and summer cafés were particularly popular, along with Ausflugscafés (excursion cafés) such as Café Dommayer. In 1857, as part of the construction of the Ringstrasse, glamorous Ringstrasse cafés were created, of which Café Landtmann, Café Prückel and Café Schwarzenberg remain today.

A century later, in the 1950s, Italian style espresso-drinking became popular; from 2000 on, coffee shops took off everywhere and the so-called ‘third wave’ (American-style coffee shops and roasting culture) reached the Viennese market. In these new venues everything revolves around Fairtrade, the way coffee is prepared and consumed in comfort seated in the shop’s front window. This trend will certainly have an impact on the classic Vienna coffee house, adapting to people’s needs and present circumstances.

Last but not least, it was and is a place for intellectuals, artists and writers to discuss and perform their work, be inspired or withdraw to write. As Friedrich Torberg writes, in the coffee house, ‘literary schools and styles were born and discarded’. Especially around 1900, the combination of coffee houses and literature became an international phenomenon. In Vienna, the term, ‘coffee house literature’, found its way into literary history. It refers to works that were created either in part or entirely in the coffee house during the fin de siècle, and refers primarily to the work of the best-known coffee house writers: Peter Altenberg (the pen name of Richard Engländer, 1859–1919), Alfred Polgar (1873–1955), Egon Friedell (1878–1938) and Anton Kuh (1890–1941). According to Kuh, a coffee house writer is ‘a person in the coffee house who has time to think about what the others outside do not experience’.

The former Café Griensteidl (opened in 1847) is a distinctive literary café. The group Young Vienna, which included Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Peter Altenberg, Felix Salten and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, was organised by Hermann Bahr. Karl Kraus also frequented Café Griensteidl. His text, ‘The demolished literature’, a swan song to the Griensteidl which included not always favourable descriptions of his colleagues, ends with the question: ‘Where is our young literature headed now? And which is its future Griensteidl?’

Café Central then became the focal point of intellectual life in Vienna. Not only did all the writers frequent it, including
Franz Werfel, Hermann Broch, Stefan Zweig, Robert Musil and Anton Kuh, but also painters, architects, and guests ranging from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, to Russian revolutionaries. Peter Altenberg used this café as his residential address, and Adolf Loos, Egon Friedell and Alfred Polgar were regulars at his table.

In 1918, Café Central faced competition from Café Herrenhof, which had opened across the street frequented by numerous writers including Friedrich Torberg, Milan Dubrovic, Ernst Polak, Max Brod, Joseph Roth, Heimito von Doderer and Elias Canetti. In 1938 the café was expropriated from its (Jewish) owner and ‘aryanised’. After the Second World War, it never achieved the same status and was finally closed.

The Café Museum, designed by Adolf Loos and opened in 1899, was also an important meeting place for the city’s cultural and artistic celebrities. In addition to the painters Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka, the writers Joseph Roth, Karl Kraus, Georg Trakl, Elias Canetti, Hermann Broch, Franz Werfel, Robert Musil and Leo Perutz are mentioned as regular guests.

Café Hawelka, which opened in 1939, can also be described as a literary café in the classic sense in which, among others, the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group) of H. C. Artmann, Friedrich Achleitner, Gerhard Rühm, Konrad Bayer and Oswald Wiener met. André Heller, who discovered Café Hawelka when he was thirteen, described it as a ‘place of obvious illusions’; Robert Schindel as a ‘training centre’. Women authors also appear on the lists of famous guests, for example Elfriede Gerstl, Friederike Mayröcker or Hilde Spiel. After the heyday of Café Hawelka in the 1950s and 1960s there was a certain decentralisation of the coffee house literature scene. Authors were now less likely to be found in groups than they were by themselves in very specific coffee houses, for example Elfriede Jelinek in Café Korb or Thomas Bernhard in Café Bräunerhof.

To this day, many authors have their regular cafés and the same seats, such as Robert Schindel in Café Prückel or Friederike Mayröcker (until her death in 2021) in Café Sperl. Like other Viennese, authors organise their meetings in cafés. Author groups still meet, for example, in the back room of Café Sperlhof or in a booth at Café Am Heumarkt. Readings or events, such as Literature Sunday in Café Anno, provide platforms for authors to appear in public before the café audience. And finally, the Vienna coffee house is still a home for anyone wanting to spend hours over a cup of coffee simply reading or writing.

Barbara Rieger and Alain Barbero
Translated by Christina Daub
In the same way, my essay is not devoted to mainstream literature, but to the authors and history of Vienna’s ‘g’fäude’ side. My starting point is the pioneer of social reportage, Max Winter, who takes us back to the turn of the 20th century. Winter does not report on monarchical kitsch but focuses instead on the underbelly of the Habsburg metropolis. He writes about people living in the underground canals, the inhuman prison system, the shady bars of the then disreputable Viennese Prater area, where prostitution and illegal gambling flourished, and an illicit language known as ‘Rotwelsch’. Winter sought out the ‘G’fäude’ in the emerging Red Vienna and its socialist utopias. If he proved there were failures in the system, he believed the system would change. However, in the 1930s he was forced to flee the rising Austrofascism and died impoverished in Los Angeles in 1937.

During the Second World War, burglary and smuggling blossomed in Vienna, and during the occupation afterwards, the underworld divided the black market into its own districts. Spirits, cigarettes and goods of all kinds were traded on a grand scale – Carol Reed’s film classic The Third Man offers a glimpse into this world.

In the early post-war years, literary ‘G’fäude’ was explored by the poets and writers of the avant-garde ‘Art Club’ and ‘Wiener Gruppe’ (Vienna Group). Achleitner was not only a doyen of architectural criticism, but also an outstanding disruptor of literature and a leading force in these ground-breaking groups. Together with his allies, H.C. Artmann, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener, he went on countless walks in search of Vienna’s ‘G’fäude’.
The city of Graz also played a key role in creating Austria’s alternative literary scene. Forum Stadtpark became an important cultural hub, and the Graz-based literary magazine *manuskripte* published texts by the Wiener Gruppe from early on. The magazine *Wespennest*, founded in 1969 by authors Peter Henisch and Helmut Zenker was a cheeky response to the established *manuskripte*, a case perhaps of yesterday’s rebels destined to become tomorrow’s bourgeoisie? In 1976, Gerhard Jaschke founded the *Freibord* magazine together with Hermann Schürrer, an enfant terrible of the literary scene. *Freibord* brought the torch back to Vienna from Graz and formed an alliance between the literary avant-garde, Fluxus experiments and Viennese Actionism.

Only a few years ago, Vienna’s Perinetkeller, the birthplace of Actionism, with its performances of the scandalous ‘Einmauerung’ (‘immurement’), reopened for events. Today it is the venue for a whole programme of new events, from Jaschke’s series ‘Nekrothek’, in which he discusses Actionism’s dead protagonists, to events with Hermes Phettberg, a phenomenon in his own right, transforming his life from gay altar boy to glutton, to celebrated superstar, to destitute down-and-out. Several of these writers and performers work across different art disciplines, like filmmaker Lisl Ponger, who captured the Perinetkeller scene in her book of photographs, *Doppleranarchie*.

There have been several books written about the Viennese underworld. The most reliable if unsystematic account is by sociologist Robert Geher, *Wiener Blut* (‘Vienna Blood’), published in 1993. The conceptual artist and writer Marc Adrian also examined the Vienna underworld in his montage novel *Die Wunschpumpe* (‘Wish Pump’, 1991), based on notes he jotted down as a cab driver in the 1950s and ’60s in the crime-ridden area around the Vienna Prater. It was only decades later that he found the right format for his scribbles and arranged them in a strict conceptual art system of his own invention. He employed remnants of the ‘Rotwelsch’ language and depicted his ‘journey’ as a relentless ghost train ride between intellectual abstraction, geographical meticulousness and raw brutality. In Adrian’s inversion of the ‘Gfäude’, moving from Max Winter’s social misery into a surreal underworld, not much separates the Prater from the Perinetkeller, or life from art.

The notorious criminals of Vienna’s underworld are explored in several autobiographies, for example by Heinz Sobota or Heinz Karasek, but by far the most accessible fictional account comes from David Schalko, also president of the International Thomas Bernhard Society. In his underworld epic, *Schwere Knochen* (‘Heavy Bones’, 2018), Schalko pays tribute to the legendary 1960s
‘Wilde Wanda’, a circus child from the Prater, who became the only woman to establish herself in the Viennese underworld as a pimp.

Finally, we come to Xaver Bayer. Born in Vienna in 1977, he has been homing in on the Holy Grail of the ‘G’fäude’ since his early works, deliberately seeking out ‘g’fäude’ locations in Vienna and sitting there writing his books, always by hand. Locations like ancient drinking establishments, forgotten petrol stations, unspoiled canteens and remote, undocumented city spaces – places that would have made Achleitner’s eyes shine. ‘Non-writing places’, according to Bayer, are becoming increasingly rare and tracking them down requires time and passion. They are the last refuges in an increasingly antiseptic world of uniformity; utopias destroyed one by one, transformed from Max Winter’s spaces of social reform to hip contemporary ‘Art Club’ venues. Bayer describes his ‘g’fäude’ locations in abstract terms so that they cannot be discovered or ruined by other people. He does not offer a safari or city tour to these ‘forbidden’ places but through literary sublimation, transports his readers into his own universe, where new temptations and trap doors await. He says: ‘There, forbidden thoughts are still possible.’ The latest fruit of Bayer’s clandestine quest, his book of short stories, *Geschichten mit Marianne* (‘Stories with Marianne’), became a bestseller and won the 2020 Austrian Book Prize. Together with his fellow author Hanno Millesi, he has also published *Austropilot*, a collection of excellent but forgotten texts from Austria’s literary magazines. In this, his systematic focus on the ‘G’fäude’, Xaver Bayer is doing for Austrian literature what Friedrich Achleitner did for Austrian architecture.

*Clemens Marschall*
What can we expect from a book where the protagonist is shot in the very first chapter? More shots? Yes. A flashback? Not quite. Nightmares? Perhaps. Further encounters with the main character? Definitely. She won’t let herself be beaten that easily. So much can happen. But that’s no reason to disappear from the scene. Neither for Marianne nor for the first-person narrator. In Xaver Bayer’s ‘Stories with Marianne’, every chapter is a new beginning. In the twenty sequences, the two main characters – Marianne and the narrator – run through a series of experiments. They are in turn absurd, frightening or oppressive, intermittently Kafkaesque, bizarre, funny, surprising or a combination of all of the above. Only one thing is certain: (almost) nothing can be trusted. But that doesn’t matter. The stories, unswervingly, follow their own inner logic, and dispense with the laws of nature. (SD)

Hidden on roofs behind window frames along the pedestrian zone in the historic city centre, where the concentration of luxury stores, banks and posh restaurants is the highest, snipers have been indiscriminately shooting at passers-by since 8am. In addition, terrorists have taken hostages and are holed up with them in nearby stores, bars, and hotels. According to cautious estimates on the radio, around thirty people have been killed so far – a number that is probably understated because from Marianne’s parents’ apartment alone, where we’ve been since last night, we’ve already counted twenty-one dead, and the pedestrian zone stretches beyond the area we can see. One of the houses at the beginning of the shopping boulevard has half collapsed and is in flames because an assassin blew himself up when special forces tried to storm the rooftop. Nobody seems to know where the snipers are actually positioned and how many terrorists are involved in the attack. All of downtown is cordoned off, and there is a curfew in place. From our windows we can see pools of blood where pedestrians have been struck down, some of them are still lying there; rescue workers have tried to save some, but they

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They themselves have been shot at – as evidenced by a charred ambulance among other things. We also spotted a dead cameraman. Helicopters have been circling the city for hours. Allegedly the terrorists have shot down one of them in the meantime, but there’s still some confusion in the media about this. Hundreds of police officers in riot gear are posted in the surrounding alleys and military detachments have been deployed to support them. Several small tanks have now been set up in the pedestrian zone. At present, the attackers are keeping quiet. The air, however, is full of smoke and howling sirens, and again and again we hear the injured screaming in pain. To top it off, today is supposed to be the hottest day of the year, according to the week’s weather forecast. And rain isn’t expected to bring relief until evening or maybe even night. At present there are no clouds in the sky. Marianne has been in the kitchen for quite some time and I’ve made myself comfortable on the couch. Only now and then do I go to the window and inform her of the situation. Whenever I offer my help, she tells me it’s fine, she has everything under control. For a while I follow the live stream of a news station on Marianne’s tablet, even catch a glimpse of our apartment building, but then I think to myself, it’s ridiculous: I can actually view all of this up close. So I stand at the window again, eye the roof and the façade of the opposite building, and when I don’t see anyone, I stick my head out of the window. Just then, one of the security guards from the jewellers across the street does the same, he stretches his head out of the front door for a few seconds, and there’s a bang. He collapses, more shots are fired. Smoke cartridges are hurled into the middle of the pedestrian zone and cloud the area; obviously they want to rescue the man. A very loud detonation causes a few of the windows on the house facing us to burst – screams, more volleys, and the constant alarm sirens of some fancy stores ultimately prompts me to close the windows.

Xaver Bayer
Translated by Ida Cerne
August Becker is a respected photojournalist who regularly contributes to Forum, the major mainstream Austrian newsweekly. His latest assignment is to accompany the critical journalist Selma Kaltak into the countryside as she reports on the election campaign of Ulli Popp, a populist (pun intended) politician from a party that looks and acts a lot like the real-life Austrian FPÖ-Freedom Party. Rabinovici’s creation has qualities of political leaders Sebastian Kurz and H. C. Strache, but also of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Silvio Berlusconi, and Viktor Orbán. He is charismatic, self-possessed, rich, media and tech-savvy, and in touch with Austrian citizens’ fears about refugees, Islamisation, loss of Austrian culture and traditions, political correctness, and liberal elites.

August has a reputation for photographing the true nature of his subjects beneath their public masks. At a local festival he captures Popp ceremonially tapping a beer keg with a mallet, looking vicious and spiteful, just as left-leaning voters imagine him behind his façade. Through a comedy of errors this photo, intended for the cover of Forum, eventually becomes a campaign poster for Popp, whose fans are fired up by their idol’s flagrant aggression. August’s reputation for being unbribable is dashed – or is it?

August’s public troubles are accompanied by private ones, and the boundaries between them are slippery. Feeling out of touch with his son Tim, August assures him that he will pay his way at an elite foreign university, but he has no idea where the money will come from. August is attracted to Marion Ettl, a reporter for the tabloid TOTAL, but disdains her lack of journalistic ethics. His insecurities make him prey to the whims of others. His professional crisis is also a personal identity crisis as a father, a lover, and a creator.

For all its burning topicality, Die Einstellung (possible translations: ‘The Viewpoint’, ‘The Attitude’, ‘Settings’, ‘The Adjustment’, ‘Optics’) is quite abstract. The city...
of Vienna is never named, the towns mentioned don’t actually exist, the magazine and newspaper names are invented, no dates are given, Tim’s foreign university is not specified, and Ulli Popp himself is not a caricature of one single actual politician. Non-Austrian readers will see their own countries, media, and politicians reflected here, because the political polarisation at the heart of the plot is widespread in the Global North – and elsewhere too.

Doron Rabinovici, known for brilliant plotting intertwined with droll social criticism (The Search for M, Elsewhere), succeeds again in exposing human foibles, empathetically but incisively. Many of his plot twists and much of his humour stem from failures of language: his characters hear what they want to hear, misconstrue, or assume too much or too little. With its grasp of how news cycles tumble truth, Die Einstellung is absolutely of this moment. But writing about sensationalism and manipulation does not itself have to be sensationalist and manipulative. Doron Rabinovici’s latest novel is deadly serious without taking itself too seriously, a page-turner with artistic integrity.

Geoffrey C. Howes
In his latest novel, Doron Rabinovici dissects the connections between politics, media, and the language of images. The title of the book can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it’s about camera perspective, on the other hand, it’s about how the characters view the world. Die Einstellung is a novel full of contrasts, both in terms of the characters and the plot. While photographer August Becker is a drifter, the right-wing populist politician Ulli Popp makes everyone and everything do his bidding. The focus is on politics and the media and their mutual dependency. But Rabinovici intentionally refrains from any references to Austria’s current political or media landscape. He prefers to generalise, which does not mean he remains superficial. The juxtaposition of corruption and idealism is packed into a gripping, fast-paced story. Rabinovici does not want his readers to be bored. He needn’t worry. (EO)

Popp said he’s only saying what ordinary people think, because the elites are covering up a threat faced by the whole country, because there’s a tsunami coming that’s going to sweep it all away and whoever didn’t want to hear about it and instead lulled people into a false sense of security was betraying the interests of the entire nation. And then he said something that grabbed the attention of most of those present: ‘fake news,’ Popp said, and gave a short smug smile, as if he didn’t really mean to insult the present company, as if the words were simply a pet name, an ironic witticism – and in that moment August released the shutter and snapped a series of shots. Then he paused for a second, to check the images on the display. Just an automatic glance, a routine inspection to see if he needed to adjust the settings, but in the moment he looked at the shots something occurred that had never happened to him before. August was repulsed by his own photos. That was not what he’d been trying to capture. And suddenly all he wanted was to get out of there. He weaved his way through the crush of his colleagues from various media outlets, pushed past someone with a camera and sidestepped around

**DORON RABINOVICI**

From *DIE EINSTEILUNG* (‘The Viewpoint’) Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022

Introduced by Erkan Osmanović and translated by Laura Radosh

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Marion Ettl’s legs, who gave him such an astonished look that he immediately tripped over a radio reporter’s microphone cable. At the other end of the room, Popp, too, noticed the commotion and glanced in his direction, but by then August was already out on the street and a second later didn’t know what had gotten into him. But he didn’t want to go back in, past everyone again, and there was no real reason to photograph Popp today anyway. He wasn’t under deadline and nobody had sent him to this press conference. He’d gone of his own volition, because he’d felt like he had to prepare for the task. What a ridiculous idea! Since when did he need studies to do his job well? Maybe Selma had somehow led him into it.

Doron Rabinovici
Translated by Laura Radosh
The multi-talented Elias Hirschl, born in Vienna in 1994, is a spoken word artist, musician, playwright and novelist. His bestselling novel Salonfähig (‘Presentable’ or ‘Socially Acceptable’) featured in all German-language broadsheets and made Hirschl the go-to authority on the meteoric rise and spectacular fall in 2021 of Sebastian Kurz, Austria’s youngest ever chancellor. Kurz formed a first coalition with the far-right Freedom Party from 2017–2019, and the resonance of the German word Salonfähig implies that the use of xenophobic and fascist language had once again become socially acceptable, albeit in the slick guise of Sebastian Kurz.

When the second coalition of Kurz’s chancellorship, this time with the Green Party, collapsed after the publication of his social media posts detailing illegal media manipulation, and more, Hirschl’s novel, published some months earlier, seemed prophetic. Real life messages such as ‘I love my chancellor’ could have been uttered by the novel’s narrator, who idolises its young fictional chancellor, Julius Varga. The text’s quality and appeal does, however, go beyond the glittering surface of a roman-à-clef, and Kurz was not the sole inspiration.

Hirschl’s satirical and hilarious portrait of neo-conservative methodology and phraseology combine with a serious study of mental breakdown. The nameless narrator moulds himself after Varga by adopting his language and quite literally becomes him in a surreal and very funny final, and infinitely filmic, long take (but no spoilers!). The narrator craves authenticity, without any original thoughts or words whatsoever. All he can do is repeatedly post and spout ready-made factoids, which he disgorges at length to the irritation of recipients. One harrowing passage in the novel takes place in a toilet when he verbally barrages a survivor of the Shoah with empty words at a commemorative event in the former concentration camp at Mauthausen.

The novel was marketed as ‘Austrian Psycho’, referencing Bret
Easton Ellis’s classic novel *American Psycho*. There are indeed many parallels, and Elias Hirschl himself explained in one interview that a scene at a concert is itself a parody of David Foster Wallace’s parody of Bret Easton Ellis (whom he disliked, and vice versa). Whereas *American Psycho* is lengthily and explicitly violent, Hirschl’s novel is rather a meta-analysis of how we deal with media reports of violence. The narrator and his colleague are obsessed with terror attacks and rate them on their aesthetic qualities, talking about the Red Army Faction’s ‘late style’, for example. Such passages transcend the framework of a satirical novel about neo-conservatives to reflect more broadly on the challenges of how we react to and represent violence in society and in the media.

Andrea Capovilla

STEFANIE SARGNAGEL

DICHT (‘TIGHT’)

ROWOHLT, 2020

REVIEWED BY PETRA FREIMUND

Writer and comedian Stefanie Sargnagel (whose surname translates as ‘coffin nail’) became famous in Austria in the late 2000s for the sharp, witty social and political commentary – wrapped in a typically Austrian black humour – that she published on Facebook and Twitter.

Giving the underdogs a voice, and critical of Austria’s socio-political landscape, she became a literary icon for the social media generation. Excerpts from her online stories from 2008–2013, where she describes her time working in a call centre, the Viennese underground scene, or her crazy hitchhiking adventures, were published in book form with the title *Binge Living: Callcenter-Monologe* (2013).

The success of her very distinctive and timely writing helped her to achieve cult status amongst fans and launched her career as an author. In 2016 she was given the audience award of the annual Ingeborg Bachmann Prize and won several comedy awards between 2019 and
The accolades keep on coming and her first novel, *Dicht* – described by the author as auto-fictional – was highly anticipated.

Vienna has often ranked high as one of the world’s rudest cities. Reading Stefanie Sargnagel’s book confirms this status. Sargnagel tells stories about the underdogs, the outcasts, and those who have been dealt a raw deal in life. *Dicht* is an account of Sargnagel’s youth in Vienna, growing up between subcultures, non-conformism, and protest. Classed as auto-fiction, this makes it hard for the reader to know what is true and where she might exaggerate or try to satirise or mask her own sadness about the truth. It reads as a very honest, but distanced account of an outcast coming of age by staring into the abyss – waiting for a monster to look back at her. But there are no monsters in this story, only lost souls, overwhelmed by a world they can’t or won’t fit into, always in search of their own place in the gaps between. The central story revolves around Michael who is diagnosed with AIDS and becomes an outcast. Stefanie becomes friends with him and it seems as though their journeys are similar, although they end differently.

Knowing her short-form written oeuvre and her critical commentary well, I am not surprised that the book does not read as sharply and as on point as her short-form writing. Although the acerbic Viennese sense of humour is enjoyable and fun, I would not count this novel as her best work. It is full of love for her oddball characters, but I can’t imagine the humour transferring to English without losing its original charm. While undoubtedly funny and the perfect long read for her fans, it lacks the freshness, excitement and perfect pitch of her other literary works.

*Petra Freimund*
This quirky anthology of essays, literary criticism and other fragments is unlikely ever to be translated into English, since it appeals to a very niche audience. This is a pity, because for the niche audience of readers fascinated by Viennese culture and psyche, it is a very enlightening and funny work indeed. It is also a sophisticated attempt to commemorate the year 2020, with all its fear, despair and odd little anecdotes.

Franz Schuh is the latest in a long line of public polymath intellectuals who seem particularly abundant in Central Europe. He is a philosopher, writer and essayist, editor of literary journals, and promoter of artists and writers. His latest book Lachen und Sterben (‘Laughing and Dying’) also shows him branching out into poetry and playwriting. A few of the pieces were previously published in newspapers or literary journals, but most of them were specially commissioned for this volume.

2020 was the year in which Schuh was hospitalised with a serious illness; he recovered but was then categorised as ‘vulnerable’ when the Covid-19 pandemic started. Although he claims the title of the book has nothing to do with Covid, most of the pieces in the book are about finding a way to cope with a sudden reminder of one’s own mortality. Schuh’s philosophy is that humour is the weapon you can use preemptively to remove the sting from the things you fear most – this symbiotic relationship between humour and death is something very typically Viennese, he argues.

In his essay about the concept of Viennese ‘Schmäh’ – usually translated as wit, sarcasm, dry humour mixed with charm – Schuh stipulates that, funny though it undoubtedly is, there is frequently something deeply unpleasant about Schmäh, a streak of cruelty, of enjoying the mockery of others. He sees this sarcastic humour as a typical response to the depressive spirit of the Viennese, their passive approach to life, their tendency to accept anything for the sake of comfort. The truth, even if they do
not care to admit it, is that they feel powerless, so laughter becomes a way of asserting their strength or independence, a ‘weapon of the weak’ response to a deep-seated fear.

In addition to essays about fear and laughter, or critique of the gods of Austrian entertainment, such as TV personality Heinz Conrads or director Helmut Qualtinger, and pieces on writers Elias Canetti and Karl Kraus, there is the recurring theme of loneliness, very appropriate for the Covid-19 period but also perhaps for an ageing philosopher attempting to recalibrate his place in the modern world.

Marina Sofia
Pushkin Press publishes novels, non-fiction, crime, children’s books, everything from timeless classics to contemporary, including some of the 20th century’s most acclaimed authors, such as Stefan Zweig. Publisher and Managing Director Adam Freudenheim joined Pushkin in May 2012. Born in Baltimore, Adam lived and studied in Germany and came to the UK in 1997. Stefan Zweig was born in 1881 into a wealthy Austrian-Jewish family in Vienna. His dramatic short stories and gripping biographies of major historical and literary figures, including Beware of Pity and The World of Yesterday, made him one of the world’s most popular writers. In 1934, with the rise of Nazism, he briefly moved to London and New York, then settled in Brazil where he died in 1942.

RG: Pushkin Press publishes many modern classics in translation. When did you start to publish Stefan Zweig?
AF: Pushkin Press was founded in 1997, and Zweig’s works were among the first titles released in 1998. Pushkin founder Melissa Ulfane deserves all credit for her focus on Zweig from the start, a focus I’ve continued since taking over the Press. We publish about twenty-five different books by Zweig — stories, novels, essays, fiction, non-fiction — and no other author has anything like as many books on our list. Our editions are a mix of new translations and reissues of old translations, but all the major works — Beware of Pity, The World of Yesterday, Shooting Stars, Chess — are published in new translations.

Anthea Bell, the great translator who died in 2018, was closely associated with Zweig. How many did she translate for you?
Most of our new Zweig translations were done by Anthea Bell, who was a big fan of his work and really enjoyed translating him, I know. I remember a Zweig event with her at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London, where Ali Smith read aloud from one of Anthea’s translations, and Ali Smith said she wished she could write as well!
How widely read is Zweig today?
Sales remain very steady – and strong – for all of Zweig’s major works, but his bestsellers remain the one novel he completed in his lifetime, 
*Beware of Pity*, and his memoir *The World of Yesterday*. The Brexit referendum and the rise of populism in the UK and across Europe have undoubtedly contributed to current interest in *The World of Yesterday*, which is primarily about pre-World War One Europe and the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire Zweig grew up in. Sadly, I suspect these trends will be with us for some time to come. I hope Zweig will continue to be read, but if he becomes less ‘relevant’ that might be no bad thing!

You are of German-Jewish background yourself, and you are the publisher of Stefan Zweig: what does he signify for you?
My father was born in Stuttgart in 1937 and fled with his family – his parents and his brother – in March 1938. They were lucky enough to end up in the US, though it wasn’t easy for them to get out, as you can imagine. As a high school student in 1990/1991, I spent nearly a full year as an exchange student in a small town near Mönchengladbach and in college I majored in German literature and language. There’s no doubt that my German-Jewish background influences me – I am drawn to German-language writers, and I’ve been very pleased and proud of the success we’ve had with so many German-language writers – some of whom we’ve published in English for the very first time. I read *The World of Yesterday* one summer when I was in college. I was initially most attracted to Zweig’s pen portraits of people like Freud and Romain Rolland, among many others. It’s also undoubtedly a nostalgia-tinged book, and I confess to having a certain amount of nostalgia myself, particularly for pre-Second World War, pre-Holocaust Germany and Austria. Though I know there were problems for Jews – and Jewish writers – long before 1933, things were immeasurably worse after that.

Much less literature from Austria is published in English compared with that from Germany. Does Pushkin publish other Austrian authors?
Pushkin does indeed publish other Austrian writers! I’m perhaps most proud of an incredible 19th-century autobiography we published in English for the first time, which unfortunately received far too little attention. The book is *A Life in the Making* by Franz Michael Felder, translated by David Henry Wilson, and published in January 2021. Felder was an autodidact from rural, western Austria who died at just twenty-nine, and it’s a beautiful, moving book. Austria is a much smaller country than Germany, so it’s no surprise fewer Austrian writers are translated in absolute terms, but considering that I think a fair amount is translated. Pushkin also publishes Austrian authors Leo Perutz (too little known in English), Alexander Lernet-Holenia and Peter Handke, among others.

*You can read the full interview with Adam Freudenheim online at eurolitnetwork.com.*
This resonance partly explains why sales of Zweig’s memoir *The World of Yesterday* have surged in the United States and Great Britain in recent years. In this memoir, Zweig describes the decade before the First World War when the mass roll-out of exciting new technologies and rapid social change were tempered, and indeed sometimes fed, by the emergence of mass political movements with class, nationalist, populist, and racist ideologies. While not exact parallels, comparisons with today are easy to spot. So are Zweig’s implied warnings about Nazism and other forms of extremism. The memoir was Zweig’s final great work, and brings together in one coherent volume many of the themes he had explored in earlier works in greater detail.

After re-reading *The World of Yesterday*, I decided to turn to two of Zweig’s other works. I was already familiar with one, *Sternstunden der Menschheit*. This collection of key moments in – largely European – history has been variously translated into English, most recently as *Shooting Stars: Ten Historical Miniatures*. The stories are simply a great read. Both pithy and poetic, Zweig identifies the peculiar human constellations that fell into alignment at moments when history took a radically different path. Some, like the fall of Constantinople, are obvious choices, but other events are less well-known, such as the monumental effort and achievement in laying the first telegraph cable across the Atlantic which revolutionised communication between Europe and the Americas in the mid-19th century.

Zweig always kept one eye on technology and how its development moulded human consciousness and actions. In his short biography, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Erasmus of Rotterdam*, the printing press acts as a discreet backdrop to Zweig’s portrait of the greatest Humanist, Erasmus. In 1440 when Gutenberg and friends developed the printing press, there were tens of thousands of books in Europe. By the end of the century, just sixty years later, there were some fifteen to twenty million books in circulation in the homes of an ever-broadening class of literate men and women. In 1511,
Erasmus published his tract, *In Praise of Folly*, a sharp satire that attacked the superstitions and corruption of the Catholic Church. It was a huge bestseller across Europe. From then on, princes and politicians of every station and tongue sought Erasmus’s acquaintance and his approbation. When Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, he too was desperate to seek Erasmus’s endorsement. This was not forthcoming. Erasmus believed it would be a betrayal if he were to take sides in any dispute. His commitment was to learning and to reconciliation. Conflict and confrontation were anathema.

As the book progresses, it becomes harder to divorce the portrayal of Erasmus from Zweig himself. Zweig never deals in precise parallels but his own personality melts into that of Erasmus. The influence of Erasmus declines as that of Martin Luther accretes. Zweig portrays Luther as a violent bully, explicitly associating his spiritual critique of Rome with an aggressive German nationalism. Zweig’s book was published in 1934: plenty of time for him, and others like him, to understand the reality of Hitler’s electoral coup of January 1933. At the end of the book, Zweig turns on his Humanist hero. Erasmus is offered the chance to arbitrate the theological disputes between Luther and the Roman Church at the Diet of Augsburg, convened by Emperor Charles V. Yet again he turns down the opportunity to mediate, finally earning Zweig’s contempt for failing to influence the critical moment in history when the stars were aligned in his favour. Unwittingly, Zweig argues, he acts as handmaiden to the polarisation which prolonged the religious wars for almost another century before culminating in the greatest bloodletting ever witnessed until that point – the Thirty Years War.

The lessons for Zweig’s generation were clear. And they are worth revisiting today.

*Misha Glenny*
Robert Menasse, who was born in Vienna in 1954, is a novelist and essayist. His non-fiction output has focused on cultural theory, Austrian identity and, more recently, the European Union. In 2017 he published Die Hauptstadt (The Capital, translated by Jamie Bulloch, MacLehose Press, 2019), a novel exploring the dynamics of the European Commission and the characters running it. Die Hauptstadt won the German Book Prize that same year and a follow-up novel, Die Erweiterung, appeared in 2022 and won the Bruno Kreisky Award for a political book.

JB: At first glance the European Commission might not appear a promising subject for a novel. What made you write The Capital?
RM: The European Commission isn’t the subject of the novel. Novels don’t have subjects; they’re not essays. Let’s talk instead about what the novel is trying to do. The fundamental aim of every novel is (or ought to be) to capture its time in a narrative. To tell the story in a way that allows contemporaries to recognise themselves, and those in the future to understand the period. To take an example: how do I know about the life, living conditions and social contradictions in 19th-century London, a global metropolis at the time? Because I’ve read Charles Dickens. By reading his novels I know more than from history lessons. And this is precisely the aim of my novel too. To tell readers about how life was in my lifetime! I don’t believe you can talk about our lives without also describing the milieu and circumstances in which we live. And what defines our lives these days? The European Union and globalisation, of course. They produce the laws and the dynamic forces that encroach upon our lives. Everyone reacts to them, whether knowingly or not. All success and failure are determined by them. For my novel The Capital I entered the engine room, so to speak, in which the conditions of our lives are generated. I wanted to talk about what nobody had before: how all of this comes about. In Die Erweiterung (‘The Enlargement’) I made the narrative field broader. I discuss people’s lives, hopes, obstacles and failures in a Europe that’s defined by contradictions and historical amnesia. This is the natural stuff of novels, not a subject.

Was it clear from the outset that the novel had to be a satire?
The novel isn’t a satire. None of it. What I tried to do was to describe and reflect on reality as precisely and clear-sightedly as possible. If in places you get the impression you’re reading a satire, this is down to reality rather than the author. Yes, it’s true that readers laugh out loud when they read my novels. But it’s not my intention to be funny. Besides, I believe that these days the comic is ultimately tragic. And this is how I see
myself as a novelist. As an expert, no, more than that, as a seismograph of the tragicomic.

In *Die Erweiterung*, the sequel to *The Capital*, you look at the eastern enlargement of the EU. Given the current war in Ukraine, how do you see the future eastern expansion of Europe?

It should be obvious that the Balkans are part of Europe. The Balkans have always been a powder keg. It should be recognised that a fuse is burning there again. And it shouldn’t be hard to explain that the future solution to the problems in this region is the region’s integration into the European peace project and legal framework. What about Ukraine? The way this country is defending itself against the aggressor is admirable and of course its efforts must be supported. But the wording of EU leaders (for example, the president of the European Commission) on this point is sadly wrong, even grotesque. We are always hearing that Ukraine is ‘defending European values’, which is nonsense; the Ukrainians are defending life and freedom in their country. They don’t want to live under the yoke of a crazed imperialist aggressor and dictator. This ought to be enough for us to offer every means of help imaginable. But we must realise that the heroic resistance in Ukraine is also the start of something that radically contradicts the idea of the EU and its values, namely nation-building. The EU came about as a result of the experiences of nationalism, which laid waste to Europe and half of the world. The fundamental idea of the EU is to set in motion a post-national development, a post-national democratic legal framework. In Ukraine, however, heroic tales are now being written which form the basis for a powerful national identity.

After the Second World War Austria tried to distance itself from Germany and the crimes of the Third Reich, thereby encouraging the development of what might be viewed as an artificial Austrian identity. Do you nevertheless think that Austria’s multinational history has given it a particularly European destiny? And to what extent could your strong pro-European feeling be based on the fact that you are yourself Austrian?

I think it’s perfectly possible that Austria’s history has subconsciously given me a different, more pronounced understanding of Europe than authors from other countries. For what was the Habsburg Monarchy if, stripping it of its myths and kitsch, we look at it with an open mind? It was a large common market with a common administration and devoid of a national idea. This ought to be familiar to Europeans today. And this political entity collapsed because it was destroyed by nationalists, not because it didn’t work. What is interesting is that all the nations created on the territory of the former Habsburg Monarchy (with the exception of Czechoslovakia) didn’t enjoy a single day of sovereignty, freedom, rule of law and growing prosperity, but only experienced war, civil war, terror, Fascist and Stalinist occupation, dictatorship, misery and poverty – until these countries acceded to the post-national EU. This should be food for thought. But it’s true, Austria after 1945 – out of political pragmatism to distance itself from German guilt – has constructed an idea of nationhood that may be ridiculous but has worked. Even the most ridiculous national idea is dangerous, however, for the very reason that it promotes nationalism. And we can see today where this leads in
Austria’s European policy. The mongrels who believe they constitute a racially pure Austria need to be serviced and satisfied. I’ve never understood the concept of an Austrian nation. I’ve got the same passport as a Tyrolean. But what else do I have in common with a Tyrolean as far as an ethnic, linguistic, cultural or any other national idea is concerned? Does a passport, which is obsolete in Europe anyway, create in itself a national community? I don’t understand this. I can have friends in Tyrol, but I have no feelings of home there. And I can also have friends in Alentejo or in the Peloponnese and find both places beautiful without the feelings of home I only have in Vienna and the north of Austria, by the Czech border where I grew up. Why does one part of Tyrol belong to the Italian nation, while the other part belongs to the Austrian nation? This is a striking example of how arbitrary and irrational the concept of ‘nation’ is. And why aren’t the Kurds who live in Turkey and Syria, but don’t feel they belong to either, permitted to establish their own state? And so on, and so on. The European idea seems far more sensible, humane and, in the light of history, more progressive. But enough of politics – I’m a novelist!

You can read the full interview with Robert Menasse online at eurolitnetwork.com.
W
ould you mind waiting ten minutes while your colleagues pack away their things? I won’t be long, the prime minister said to Madame Delacroix. Please, Madame, there’s something I’d like to give you to take home, I’ll be right back.

Fifteen minutes later he returned in an elegant, dark-blue Versace suit, light-blue shirt, Oxford alumni tie (which he’d bought years ago at Old Spitalfields Market in London for a pound – a bargain!) and a cloud of Jean Patou D’Artagnan, an expensive aftershave with pronounced musk notes, which he regularly had sent from Paris. To round it all off, handcrafted shoes from Budapest, of course.

Please take a seat, he said, and Madame Delacroix, at a total loss, sat opposite him as if on remote control.

I’d be very happy to repeat the interview now, the prime minister said, and I’ll give you honest answers.

But the cameras have been packed away, and the sound – she looked around; the crew were ready to leave with their bags.

Oh, that’s a real shame! Look, what you broadcast is twaddle, empty phrases, and when it comes to the truth the first thing you say is: The furniture’s not right, the optics, we’ve got to change it all. Then you say: We’ve packed everything away. But, whatever – your president is a far-sighted man, he’ll understand the footage you bring him. And he’ll wonder if it

France has blocked accession negotiations between Albania and the EU. A French journalist, Colette Delacroix, goes to Tirana to interview the Albanian prime minister about the veto. Intent on revenge, the latter turns up late in his sports clothes and gives flippant answers to her questions. But once the cameras have been packed away, he gets properly dressed and invites her to repeat the interview... (JB)
Either Albania will come into the EU or the Albanians will come. As care workers, as illegal workers, as – let me put it delicately – as families with certain interests. Either way.

really was such a smart decision to force Albania to align itself with China rather than Brussels. Think about our copper mines. Europe’s largest copper deposits are in Albania.

Colette Delacroix indicated to her crew to unpack the cameras again; she waved her hands around: Quick, quick!

Do you know what’s funny, Madame? We give the Chinese the mining rights, but the EU pays for the necessary infrastructure because we’re still a candidate country and so we get the corresponding subsidies.

Fais vite! Vite! she urged the cameraman and sound technician, gesturing frantically.

Your president is a man with vision! Surely he must realise why we’re selling Tirana International Airport to China, but before we do we’re getting the EU to pay for a second terminal, which is good for the price and thus our budget.

Fais vite!

Now I’ll tell you something quite simple on a practical political level, something your far-sighted president will, of course, understand: Albania will join the EU. Either Albania will come into the EU or the Albanians will come. As care workers, as illegal workers, as – let me put it delicately – as families with certain interests. Either way.

We’re ready, Madame! Sound? Sound on!

The prime minister got to his feet. Thanks for the stimulating conversation, he said, offering her his hand. She took it, wincing as if it were infested with a virus.

Robert Menasse
Translated by Jamie Bulloch
Karl-Markus Gauss is the foremost literary cartographer of a vanishing Europe. His wide-ranging and incisive essays chronicle the diversity and wealth of languages and cultures, predominantly in Eastern Europe, that have played a formative role in shaping contemporary European identities but now risk being forgotten. A Herodotus of Central Europe, Gauss has spent more than three decades mapping the peripheries of Europe as well as its centre and giving voice to many ethnic minorities who have been all but silenced by the dominant cultures of their geographical regions. Gauss’s mix of genres, as varied as his interests, includes the essay, reportage, ethnography, travelogue, criticism, political commentary, and the personal journal. His books in general, but In the Forest of the Metropoles in particular, are animated by the conviction that it is necessary to understand a region’s traditions and history to understand its place in the world at present. Karl-Markus Gauss has assembled a study of figures who pursued in their lives and works the ideal of a progressive, enlightened, diverse, and unified Europe. (TL)

KARL-MARKUS GAUSS

From IN THE FOREST OF THE METROPOLES
Forthcoming publication from Seagull Books
Introduced and translated by Tess Lewis

An Apropos: Janus Pannonius (The Neo-Latinists III)

In the middle of the 15th century in Dalmatia, there was a young man who grew up to become an Italian scholar, a Croatian humanist, a Hungarian bishop, an Austrian writer, and an outlaw refugee. In the few Austro-Hungarian history books in which he has earned a footnote, he is called Janus Cecinge; in the few works of Balkan literary history that dedicate a few pages to the early period before the invention of a national standard written language, he is, on the other hand, referred to as Ivan Česmićki. The name he gave himself, however, is Janus Pannonius. Because Dalmatia was under Venetian rule in his day, he was educated in Italy in the legendary court of Lionello d’Este in Ferrara under the mentorship of the learned Guarino da Verona, who had established humanism in Ferrara. Guarino praised the sixteen-year-old: ‘when he spoke Latin, he seemed to have been born in Rome, when he spoke
Greek, he seemed to have been born in Athens.’ But this Croatian, educated to be an Italian humanist in Ferrara and appointed Archbishop of Pécs/Fünfkirchen by the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus who wanted to introduce the accomplishments of Western humanism into his chancelleries, this child of four peoples continued to write in Latin.

Threatened by intrigues and having fallen into disfavour through unfortunate political vicissitudes, he was forced to flee to a Croatian village, where he died at thirty-eight in a damp priory, but not before he had composed his own epitaph: ‘Here lies Janus, the first to have brought the laurel-wreathed Muses from Helicon’s heights to the banks of his native Ister.’ This beautifully illustrates the contradiction – unfortunately no longer decipherable for us today – that ran even more painfully through the classically educated humanists of the Balkans than through their brothers-in-spirit in the West with whom they maintained lively communications. In the Latin inscription, which Pannonius composed himself, he calls on Helicon, the Greek home of the Muses in order to give himself credit, as heir of the crowned singers of antiquity, for having made the Muses a home on the banks of the Ister, the ancient name for the Danube.

Before nations were invented, dialects normalised as national languages, and poetry appointed the guardian of national consciousness, there was a longing to implant and cultivate a European culture on the same level as that of ancient Greece throughout the region. For want of nations that could rise from the jumble of regional tribes and empower themselves as such and for want of codified languages with which nations would later identify themselves, this longing could only express itself in a language understood by the learned across the breadth of Europe and not by those who lived along the Rhine, the Vistula, or the Danube, in the Vosges, the Dolomites, or the Carpathian Mountains. It was an Enlightenment without people, succeeded by a national mobilisation without intellect.

It was an Enlightenment without people, succeeded by a national mobilisation without intellect.
In his novellas, short stories, plays and novels Alois Hotschnig has plumbed dark corners of the psyche. In elegantly cadenced prose, his eight books have explored the burdens of history and guilt, the fluid realm between lucidity and insanity, as well as the dark comedy and pathos in human relations. His two most recent novels, Ludwig’s Room and Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter (‘My Mother’s Silver Fox’), trace the ways aftershocks of the Second World War – both tangible and intangible – have warped several generations’ most intimate selves. Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter takes its title from the silver fox fur stoles often given by German soldiers as gifts to women in occupied northern territories and exposes the horrors of the Lebensborn program. This association was founded by Heinrich Himmler to promote the racial purity of the German population by encouraging births by unmarried ‘Aryan’ women. Inspired by the life of the renowned actor Heinz Fitz, the illegitimate child of a Norwegian woman and Austrian soldier in the Wehrmacht, this novel is a gripping first-person narrative that brings vividly to life a mother and her son who are buffeted by forces of history and ideology no less than by mundane acts of cruelty. A fierce reimagining of one man’s life, Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter, is also a profound meditation on memory and storytelling and how both can help us to – or prevent us from – understanding history and ourselves. (TL)

ATIIS HOTSCHNIDG

From DER SILBERFUCHS MEINER MUTTER
Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2021
Introduced and translated by Tess Lewis
Translation funding guaranteed via New Books in German

Only at sixty, not until I was sixty, did I meet my real father, this Anton Halbsleben in Hohenems, through a theatre usher, also from Hohenems.

My father did claim I wasn’t his, but the child of a Russian who drowned. I couldn’t talk to my mother about him; whenever I asked about him, she’d have another seizure, so I stopped asking. Once in a while, she’d mention him but rarely, very rarely. At some point he married someone else and I have three half-siblings who are younger than I am. Much younger.
In any case, I met him through this usher, Rudolf Radtke is his name. This Radtke said to me, I know your half-siblings, I’ll call them. Which he did and I got a call from the oldest, from Ingrid, who told me I should come see them in Hohenems sometime, that her father would like to meet me.

I drove there. You can call me father, he said. I guess he forgot the thing about the Russian and I didn’t ask. After that, I’d call him now and again, send a package now and again because I knew he liked chocolate, as I do, and he wasn’t supposed to eat it either. Diabetes. I inherited that disease from him. The neurasthenia, too.

The epilepsy I did not inherit. My mother got it from some shock. Something happened in Berlin and the attacks started very soon after that. Via Berlin she went to Hohenems. She had to leave Norway or she would have been shot, according to my father, he didn’t want her to get shot. Because she’d got involved with a Nazi, with him, in fact. He accompanied her part of the way, to Oslo, I think, then she had to go on alone.

She tried to see him again when I was already about fifteen. They were supposed to meet in Dornbirn in the Rote Haus restaurant, it’s still there, the Rote Haus is. She went, but he never showed up.

In ancient times, this illness was considered the sacred disease. In the Middle Ages, it was seen as sorcery, that is, epileptics were thought to be in a relationship with the devil because they survived so many things. And my mother certainly survived a number of things. In Norway she was the Nazi-whore. I went up there with her once. Disappear with that Nazi-whore, I was told. She had a big family, twelve siblings. The grandfather, my grandfather, her father, had been the mayor of the town. A few of her relatives fled to Russia. In any case, they did not want to see my mother there. And in Lustenau she was the Norwegian-whore because the women were convinced she was going to steal their husbands.
Starting in the west, in the small state of Vorarlberg, we find a charming character named Herr Faustini in five short novels by Wolfgang Hermann (1961–). In the first of these, *Herr Faustini Takes a Trip* (2006; translated by Rachel Hildebrand, KBR, 2015), our modest hero, an inveterate homebody living in the village of Hörbranz near the state capital Bregenz, is content to stay at home with his cat. Just stepping outside is an adventure for this passionate ‘traveller in miniature’. But one day he decides to take a trip to southern Switzerland to celebrate his sister’s birthday. New people and new worlds make him realise that by maintaining his comfortable life he has only limited himself. At the end of the book, he resolves to travel again, this time to the sea with his new friend, an African prince.

Vienna is the undisputed literary centre of Austria, but the so-called ‘provincial capitals’, of Bregenz, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Klagenfurt, Linz, Graz, St. Pölten and Eisenstadt, as well as other towns, have their own literary centres, archives and museums. And many, if not most, of the authors who make Vienna their home come from other Austrian regions. Here is a small, personal selection of works, all available in English translation, that give at least an initial sense of the geographical – and aesthetic – diversity of recent Austrian literature.

Alois Hotschnig (1959–) was born in Carinthia but has lived in Innsbruck in Tyrol since 1989. The stories in *Maybe This Time* (2006; translated by Tess Lewis, Peirene, 2011) also deal with being thrust out of what is familiar, but much more uncannily than Herr Faustini’s trip. In the story ‘The Beginning of Something’, for instance, the first-person protagonist wakes from a dream of being in an unfamiliar country only to find himself in a strange world that resembles the one in the dream. Even his body seems alien. He turns for enlightenment to notes he seems to have written during the night, and a mysterious letter, but as soon as he remembers anything, he forgets it again. He distrusts his own sentences, which mysteriously hint at some kind of evidence.

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against him, and he is suspicious of the noise from a neighbouring room. The last sentence: ‘Next door, the floor creaked.’

Salzburg is known for its natural and architectural beauty, but the boyhood memoir Gathering Evidence by Thomas Bernhard (1931–1989) looks beneath the refined exterior of the city of the famous music festival to find cruelty and corruption. This volume (translated by David McClintock, Knopf, 1985; Vintage edition 2011 including ‘My Prizes’, translated by Carol Brown Janeway) collects Bernhard’s five autobiographical books, which tell of his life in Bavaria with his grandparents at the beginning of the Second World War, his schooling in Salzburg under Nazi dominion, his budding musical education, the Allied bombing of the city, his decision to cut off his education to become a grocer’s apprentice, his chronic lung ailments and life in a pulmonary sanatorium, his defiant decision to stay alive, and his turning to literature. Bernhard famously loved and hated Austria, and so he loves and hates Salzburg. His style is bombastic yet musical, cutting yet sensitive. It’s hard to say which was worse for the young author: Salzburg in rubble, the noxious blend of Catholicism and Nazism, or his lung disease. Yet all of them helped make him a writer.

The southern federal state of Carinthia may not be well known to people outside Austria, but it has produced the Nobel Prize winner Peter Handke, the incomparable novelist and poet Ingeborg Bachmann, and the exquisite poetry of Christine Lavant (1915–1973; see Shatter the Bell in My Ear, translated by David Chorlton, Bitter Oleander Press, 2017). On the border with what was once Yugoslavia, Carinthia is home to a minority of Slovene speakers, among them Maja Haderlap (1961–), whose Angel of Oblivion (2011; translated by Tess Lewis, Archipelago, 2016) uses the first-person perspective of a young girl to wrestle with the legacy of the persecution of Slovenes during the war. Her grandmother was in a concentration camp, her grandfather and his sons fought alongside the partisans. Haderlap is a poet, and her language is rich and subtle even as it depicts unimaginable anguish.

Marlen Haushofer (1920–1970) was born and lived in Upper Austria. She is best known for her 1963 novel The Wall (translated by Shaun Whiteside, Cleis, 1990), in which a middle-aged woman – the unnamed narrator – joins her cousin and her cousin’s husband for a weekend at their mountain lodge. Her hosts leave to get dinner in the valley, and the next morning she wakes to find herself alone with their dog. Searching for her cousin, she encounters what seems to be an invisible wall. She cannot find a way around it, and she can only see one person beyond it, a motionless man. Something has killed anything
living on the other side. She is protected but trapped on the mountain. *The Wall* has been interpreted through a feminist lens and as a novel of the Cold War. In 2012 the Austrian director Julian Pölsler made a film based on Haushofer’s book.

Klaus Hoffer (1942–) was born and still lives in Graz, the capital of Styria. In 1979, he made his literary reputation with a novel titled *Halfway: Among the Bieresch I*, which was followed in 1983 by *The Great Potlatch: Among the Bieresch II*. After this promising debut – Hoffer won the Rauris Prize and was praised by reviewers – the author rarely appeared in public and published little else. Still, many regard *Among the Bieresch* as one of the most important post-war Austrian works, and in 2007 Droschl Verlag in Graz republished the two parts in one volume, which Isabel Fargo Cole translated and Seagull Books released in 2016. It is hard to synopsise this odd novel. The Bieresch were a social minority alongside the ethnic minorities – Croatians, Hungarians, and Roma – in the Burgenland, Austria’s easternmost state, which during the Habsburg monarchy was ‘German West Hungary’. They were mainly farmworkers for large, formerly Hungarian landowners. Hans arrives in the village of Zick near Lake Neusiedl because, according to a Bieresch tradition, he must assume the role of his late uncle, the village postman. Most of the book has no more plot than an account of conversations between the unwilling Hans and various members of the Bieresch community, in which he learns of this caste’s convoluted customs and history. They seem as frustrated as he is. His aunt tells him, ‘you must try to understand us, too. What on earth should we do? The curse has been upon us since the very first day! [...] We’re homesick for ourselves, because no one can be as he is – everyone only mirrors the nature of his surroundings’.

‘We’re homesick for ourselves’. This could apply to characters in all these books: Herr Faustini’s cheerful guardedness; the dissolving self in Hotschnig’s story; Bernhard’s defiance of brutality and illness; the girl’s dreadful fixation on her family’s past in *Angel of Oblivion*; the woman in *The Wall* who finds a terrible strength in isolation; and of course, not only the Bieresch, but Hans as well. These works give the lie to the idyllic idea that life in the provinces, and hence Austrian literature in the provinces, is less complex and less alienating than life in the big city. And like much good literature, they are highly localised but universally accessible. To read about regional Austria is also to learn about ourselves.

*Geoffrey C. Howes*
The ironically entitled novel, *We Are Doing Fine*, catapulted Geiger to international fame by winning the inaugural German Book Prize in 2005. This family saga, covering the years from 1938 to 2001, portrays the decline of a family over three generations. *We Are Doing Fine* begins at a low point in 2001 when Philipp Erlach inherits his maternal grandparents’ dilapidated house. His immediate aim is to clear the house of everything, regardless of value. The biggest headache, however, is the attic which has been colonised by a flock of pigeons. Imagine the mess! How far this mess applies to the history of Philipp’s family – and, by extension, metaphorically to Austria itself – is clarified in the episodic sections interwoven with the house clearance. These start in 1938, jumping forward in intervals of between seven and ten years. The earlier episodes align with key historical milestones (Anschluss 1938, defeat 1945, signing of the state treaty 1955). Ironically, Austrian defeat coincides with the rise of the family’s influence. Richard Sterk, a rare Austrian, who ‘did not have to account for his pre-1945 existence’, becomes a minister of state and plays an important role in the treaty negotiations. From there the family slides downhill, from the heights of respectability to mediocrity and aimlessness. However, thanks to Geiger’s vivid prose, the story is far more engaging than Philipp Erlach’s detachment would have us expect.

Richard Sterk loses everything, including his mind to dementia. The same illness afflicted the author’s
father, August, whose decline over a period of six years is charted in The Old King in His Exile. The memoir’s accuracy and honesty earned him awards from multiple medical societies around the globe. As his father becomes exiled from his own life, Geiger preserves his past, his character – the living person no less – by completing the narrative before the inevitable outcome.

August’s illness is traced from ‘the slip-ups he started to make after his retirement’. August Geiger had always been a little eccentric, so these were easy to laugh about. As the awful truth dawns, the family rallies as best it can, not everyone coping in the same way. After fighting on the Eastern Front during the Second World War, August Geiger never spoke about his wartime experiences. Not until the disease took hold and night terrors plunged a disoriented, terrified man back into the past; the result being that the son only really got to know his father during the time he was losing him.

August’s PTSD returns in Veit Kolbe, the wounded soldier of Geiger’s anti-war novel, Hinterland. Kolbe chooses to recover in the rural community of Mondsee alongside others including his future lover, Margot and her baby daughter, who have fled the bombing of Darmstadt. Mondsee is shielded from the worst of the war by the Drachenwand mountain that towers above it. The disappearance of one of the evacuees is a reminder that danger is ever-present, however, and the increasing frequency of bombing squads flying over on their way from Italy to Germany is evidence that the war could land on the doorstep at any time. In fact, it does by means of letters from those who are living in the eye of the storm.

Hinterland focuses on the civilian experience. Even Kolbe, who has no affiliation to Nazism, is more civilian than soldier, and therefore a sympathetic character – as are most of Geiger’s characters, despite their flaws. Geiger once said, ‘Each of my characters deserves to have a pulse, to live and breathe, even after the final page’. In Hinterland that afterlife is bestowed in an epilogue detailing what happened to each character after Kolbe’s return to the front line.

So why the need for an Austrian anti-war novel? Worries abound about the resurgence of the far right in Austria and Europe, as well as concerns about a narrative representing Austria as a victim of National Socialism. But Richard Sterk’s sending his son to fight for the German Reich in We Are Doing Fine, and the panicked paper-burning of those characters facing defeat, attest to Austrian complicity. Hinterland is an examination of the consequences of this. Thus does Philipp Erlach inherit an attic full of pigeon shit. This is such a strong metaphor for the stain of Austria’s role in the Second World War. Only by facing this past with honesty and sincere regret can the stain be removed and the chance of repeating the past minimised.

Lizzy Siddal
Judith W. Taschler has eight books to her name, all published between 2011 and 2022. Her plots are cleverly devised and well-structured, her characters adventurous, likeable but fallible, and her narrative style full of pace and mood. Taschler’s characters dare to strive for a different life in spite of family expectations or pressures, but never lose the ties that bind, are driven forward by love in its different guises, and deal courageously, at times ingeniously, with the unkind hand of fate. Typical Taschler themes transcend borders and cultures.

Über Carl reden wir morgen (‘Let’s Discuss Carl Tomorrow’) is a family history spanning over one hundred years, moving from Rosa Brugger’s bold decision in 1828 to leave rural life for Vienna, to the eponymous Carl faking his own death towards the end of the First World War. The plot is further enriched by time shifts – a particularly effective trick in Taschler’s work – that take us forward, back and forward again as we observe with excitement and puzzlement the lives of the Bruggers and the other key family, the Eders.

Brother and sister, Anton and Rosa Brugger, grow up in Taschler’s own district of the Mühlviertel. The boy is expected to take over the family mill, the girl to marry and make a home. But in 1828 Rosa strikes out for Vienna, first returning home twenty years later when her brother, widowed with three little girls and a baby boy after his wife dies in childbirth, writes to ask for her help. Anton’s fourth child, the boy they had longed for, is named Albert.

Once grown, Albert is restless and decides to enlist in the navy instead of immediately taking over the family mill. He first returns home in 1881 and eventually gets married to a young Viennese girl, Anna Svoboda. Albert and Anna have twin boys, Eugen and Carl. We don’t meet Carl until we are deep into the book, an additional page-turning device that works well.

A key moment in the book is a shockingly reckless but spontaneous action by Carl. Returning to the Front after being wounded, he witnesses
a barn fire in which three of his own men die. He rips off his identity tag – the one all soldiers have affixed to their uniforms – and hurls it into the burning barn. He is now a deserter. He is soon presumed dead. And when he then assumes the identity of another, he becomes an imposter.

Meanwhile Eugen has been trying out a new life in the United States among other European migrants. He had been informed that Carl had been killed but is naturally overjoyed to see him again when he visits in 1918. He decides to give Carl his own identity.

As Eugen Brugger, Carl will be in a position to take over the family mill and marry. But where does this leave the real Eugen, his twin?

Taschler has a strong narrative presence and a calm yet authoritative voice, with plenty of colour and pace. Her novels are full of tantalising puzzles that compel us to go straight back to the beginning once we have read the last sentence. It’s time to bring this lively writer to an English-language audience.

Deborah Langton

TERESA PRÄAUER
DAS GLÜCK IST EINE BOHNE. UND ANDERE GESCHICHTEN
(‘HAPPINESS IS A BEAN, AND OTHER STORIES’)

WALLSTEIN, 2021

REVIEWED BY EVE MASON

‘French Nails from America’, ‘A Face is a Landscape, a Cheek is a Field’, ‘A Lemon Sorbet Snowman’ – the titles of Teresa Präauer’s short stories invite you in. Beguiling and enigmatic, they hint at the curiosities to be found between the covers of ‘Happiness is a Bean, and Other Stories’.

A cabinet of curiosities is an apt analogy for Teresa Präauer’s short story collection. Her wide assortment of quirky prose texts takes on a tangible quality; like the smooth pebble in the final story, they resemble little stones you might carry in your pocket collected from the beach, or nuggets of glowing sea glass. I am not sure I agree with one reviewer who called it a page-turner; it is, in my opinion, a collection to rummage through and hold up to the light, each text by turn. Any more than a few stories at a time and their jewel-like quality loses its lustre.

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Präauer excels in her deftness of tone, weaving wistfulness with surprising moments of humour: ‘I long for après-ski, I long for the blueness of a kamikaze shot, I long for the haze of a village disco, I long for a snog from Roli, but right now Roli is slurping tequila out of Monika’s belly button.’ The best of her stories locate this nostalgia or melancholy in a specific place or object. It is here that Präauer’s writing achieves a density of emotion, whereas the few people she describes rarely come alive on the page. Glitter, for Präauer, becomes a symbol of transience: ‘Glitter clings to the memory of a celebration that has already ended. It is, perhaps from the very beginning, a residue: the dazzling but far too small remnant of a day. Weightless and sticky.’ Or her homesickness in America, for instance, is condensed into her longing for ‘dark bread with European butter’.

Language is a common theme across the texts, whether inconspicuously or explicitly. In a story about an interpreter at a literary event, she points out their expert skill when negotiating subtleties of language. The American wording of ‘Race and Gender’, for example, cannot simply be translated with ‘Rasse und Geschlecht’, since the word ‘Rasse’ has at least since the Nazi era carried extremely negative, derogatory connotations.

Präauer’s themes are wide-ranging. She focuses her attention on fashion, theatre, the fine arts, literature, the internet, on observations of daily life, on Kim Kardashian’s ass, which she manages to link to the philosophy of Adorno. Präauer’s concern for popular culture bears a similarity to Annie Ernaux’s The Years, and indeed Präauer’s most recent work, Mädchen, has been likened to Ernaux’s A Girl’s Story. Like Ernaux, Präauer’s attention to cultural artefacts and trends is interwoven with semi-autobiographical reflections. The texts in ‘Happiness is a Bean’ are usually fewer than five pages long, rarely more than ten. Despite the frequent nostalgic tone, they are firmly situated in the present day. The final eponymous text mentions ‘that whole nasty business with the virus’, where ‘suddenly everything that had been so beautiful was forbidden’. So the author decides to keep her lucky bean in her pocket for a while longer. We could do worse than to keep Präauer’s clear-sighted book by our side, a talisman for our busy, consuming daily lives.

Eve Mason
There are reasons why the breakthrough hasn’t yet happened: these are postmodern, essayistic meta-works of a kind to which anglophone readers have long been resistant. Quecksilberlicht is no exception. Billed as a novel, it is an amalgam of memoir, speculation, theoretical discourse and biographical speculation revolving around three key themes: the author’s (or narrator’s) own Austrian family history; the life and, importantly, death, of Branwell Brontë, the prodigiously unsuccessful brother of the novelist sisters; and the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang, notoriously poisoned by a supposedly life-giving elixir based on mercury (hence the book’s title).

There are recurring motifs: the opening words are, ‘The girl runs out of the house. All around there is nothing.’ Qin Shi’s nothingness – the idea is borrowed from an essay by Borges – is an adamant refusal to accept that anything exists beyond the bounds of his empire. The conquest of Japan? Didn’t happen, because it lies outside the recognised world of existence. Likewise, the girl, the narrator’s grandmother, the daughter of a Piedmontese master chimney sweep, leading a circumscribed life in Simmering, ‘the arse of Vienna’. And then we have young Branwell in Haworth, traumatised by a premature confrontation with mortality after being held over his dead mother’s bed, and his own and his sisters’ escape into the fantastical worlds of Glass Town, Gondrel and Angria, his wooden soldier-inspired imperial fantasies, his subsequent exploration of the great and terrifying metropolis of London.

These three strands circle, picking each other up and picking up suggestive threads of literary speculation (Virginia Woolf features largely), and advancing through time – yet not just advancing but...
travelling ‘backwards in time, diagonally through time, diagonally to time’ until everything is happening simultaneously. The swirling motion slows as we approach the reality, the inevitability of death, and the writing – freewheeling, often funny – assumes a solidity that was previously only suggested. Death is, in the German philosophical tradition, what gives life its weight, and literature, in Stangl’s vision, acts as a kind of counterweight, not immortality exactly (the Emperor’s toxic quicksilver) but still a life beyond the physical – ‘power beyond death is the only power that counts’, Qin Shi reflects.

It’s an intriguing and vivid literary journey, and Stangl carries us with him. With changing tastes and an increased enthusiasm for speculative meta-fictions, this could just be the book that brings him to an English-speaking readership.

Shaun Whiteside
This magnificent achievement was in large measure the product of one section of society: Vienna’s Jews, and, in particular, the assimilated, educated and cultured Jews who formed much of the most progressive and culturally dynamic elements in the city’s middle class. As the middle class became the driving force behind Vienna’s cultural flowering, it was the rapid ascent of Jews into that class that gave the process its decisive impetus.

Yet Jews had effectively been banned from imperial Vienna until well into the 19th century; at the time of the revolution of 1848, they numbered barely 1% of the city’s population of 400,000. But after the reforms of 1867, which swept away the remaining restrictions, their numbers grew with astonishing speed, as Jews from the far-flung territories of the Habsburg Empire flocked to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the metropolis. In the 1860s, the Jewish community grew by the phenomenal rate of 46% each year; by 1880, it had reached 73,000, or 10% of the city’s population, and by 1910 it numbered 175,000, or 8.6% of the total population.

What singled out the Jewish incomers was that, unlike the Czechs who migrated to Vienna in large numbers as manual and unskilled labourers, many of the Jews assimilated into the middle classes. That pathway led through education, and in particular through the institution of the Gymnasium,
roughly comparable to a grammar school, which provided an elite education allowing entrance to university. By 1900, some 30% of students at Gymnasien were Jewish, though Jews numbered only 10% of the city’s population; in the principal areas of Jewish settlement, the Inner City, Leopoldstadt and Alsergrund, Jewish students made up between 40% and 80% of students attending a Gymnasium. Education enabled Jews to become upwardly socially mobile, opening the doors to the professions, especially law and medicine, to academia and the creative arts. These children of Jewish immigrants who had worked their way up into the middle class came to place a high value on culture and education, on Bildung, a term that implies moral as well as purely intellectual improvement. That respect for high culture marked their lives, both privately and professionally.

The assimilation of Jews into Vienna’s middle classes was brutally interrupted by the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938, which unleashed an orgy of anti-Semitic violence and drove thousands of Jews to flee. Some 30,000 Jews from Austria were granted entry to Great Britain, which took more of Vienna’s Jews as their first country of refuge than anywhere else. Fully one sixth of Vienna’s 180,000 Jews were admitted to Britain, or almost one quarter of the 125,000 who survived the Holocaust. They mainly settled in London, especially in the then Borough of Hampstead, where in areas like Belsize Park, Swiss Cottage and West Hampstead, up and down the Finchley Road, continental-style restaurants, cafés and clubs sprang up, reminiscent of the atmosphere of Vienna in its glory days. The principal Austrian refugee organisation, the Austrian Centre, established a small theatre, the Laterndl, in Belsize Park, bringing the culture of the Viennese Kleinkunstbühne to London, with its tradition of artistic innovation and political cabaret. After the war, the Blue Danube Club on Finchley Road continued to stage witty and sophisticated cabaret pieces in the same inimitable style.

The Jewish refugees from Vienna brought their culture to Britain. At the highest level, they included a long list of celebrated names across the range of the arts and sciences. The descendants of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis and most famous of the pre-war refugees, formed a dynasty: Freud’s daughter Anna, who continued his work with high distinction; his son Ernst, a noted architect, and Ernst’s sons Lucian, one of Britain’s leading painters, and Clement, a mainstay of British public life; the novelist Esther Freud, Lucian’s daughter, and the broadcaster Emma Freud, Clement’s daughter. Other well-known contributors to British cultural and
intellectual life included the art historian Ernst Gombrich, the leader of the Amadeus Quartet Norbert Brainin, the philosopher Karl Popper, the molecular biologist Max Perutz, the foreign correspondent Hella Pick, the publisher George Weidenfeld, the historian Eric Hobsbawm and the actor Anton Walbrook, to name but a few.

At the broader public level, the Viennese refugees contributed to a major cultural revitalisation of British institutions. Rudolf Bing, after helping to establish the opera at Glyndebourne, went on to co-found the Edinburgh International Festival, becoming its first director. At the BBC, Stephen Hearst became Controller of Radio 3, against his rival Martin Esslin, who became Head of Radio Drama as well as writing seminal texts on modern theatre. Hans Keller, who also held senior positions at the BBC and was one of the most influential voices in British musical life, completed this trio of Viennese experts at Britain’s national broadcasting service. Typical of the institutions frequented by refugees from Vienna was the Wigmore Hall, where they composed a significant section of the audience; in the Cosman Collection at the Wigmore Hall, a collection of drawings of leading figures in the musical world, is a portrait of Hans Keller – Cosman’s husband. The cultural level of the refugees from Vienna as a group ensured that their influence came to pervade entire sections of British public life; for that, they should justly be celebrated.

Anthony Grenville
From THE EXILES RETURN

By EDMUND DE WAAL

In November 2018 there was a family gathering in Vienna to celebrate the opening of an exhibition about the Ephrussi family in the Jewish Museum. Cousins came from America and Mexico and the UK. There was a grand party and press interviews in the Palais Ephrussi, our former family home, seized by the Nazis in 1938. The President of Austria made a moving speech about citizenship. My father, then aged 90, talked of his return, spoke of why this mattered to him, his memories of his grandfather dying a refugee. And I kept being asked about restitution. I repeated that this wasn’t about art, it is about what art carries.

And our return to Vienna brought more questions. I am half-English and a quarter Dutch and a quarter Austrian and completely European. Why should this Austrian part of my heritage be so profoundly unsettling, so unresolved? I keep the words of Jean Améry close to me: I do not have clarity today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history ... nothing is resolved, nothing is settled, no remembering has become mere memory. For me my Austrian inheritance of stories from my great-uncle Iggie and my grandmother Elisabeth cannot be filed away.

I have read and re-read her novel, The Exiles Return. The yellowing typescript with some tippexed corrections was handed over to me by my father, along with a clutch of Elisabeth’s school reports from the Schottengymnasium in Vienna, and a manila envelope stuffed with essays on economics from her studies at the University. There were a few lambent pages of autobiography describing her childhood at the turn of the 20th century in the Palais Ephrussi on the Ringstrasse – the carriage horses, the interminable teas with great-aunts – and a clutch of letters between her and a favourite uncle. There was scant else. My father had joked in the liminal moment as the files were passed across that I was now the keeper of the archive. In the many, many months that followed in archives and libraries, as I tramped streets in Vienna, Paris and Odessa, in search of the family story that had become so compulsive for...
me (which I first wrote about in *The Hare With Amber Eyes*), I realised that this archival penury made complete sense. My grandmother had spent her life in transit between countries: she kept only the things that mattered to her. And these pages did.

Elisabeth de Waal was Viennese and this is a novel about being Viennese. As such, it is a novel about exile and about return, about the push and pull of love, anger and despair about a place which is part of your identity, but which has also rejected you. *The Exiles Return* is alive to this complexity and it stands, in part, as a kind of autobiography in its mapping of these emotions.

She was born Elisabeth von Ephrussi in 1899, into a complex dynastic Jewish family that had adopted Vienna as its home thirty years before. *The house I was born in stood, and still stands, outwardly unaltered, on the corner of the Ring*... she explains in a short fragment of writing about her early life. It was an extraordinary moment in an extraordinary place. Her home was the Palais Ephrussi, a vast slab of neo-classicism adorned with caryatids, on the newly constructed Ringstrasse, the arc of civic buildings and Imperial monuments erected to reflect the glory of the Habsburg Empire. The house, marble and gilded, was a calling card built by a vastly rich and aspirational family of financiers, one of many on the street known derisively in the city as Zionstrasse: the street of Jews. Elisabeth’s mother, a beautiful and appropriately titled Jewish baroness, had been born in the Palais Schey a few hundred yards away. Cousins lived next door. It was a safe – if complex – world in which to be born.

This fissile combination of money and status, the question of where you come from and where you belong, was part of the make-up of Vienna. As the capital city of the Empire, the streets were full of every nation and every ethnic group. From her bedroom window, looking through the branches of the lime trees to the University, Elisabeth could see and hear the marching bands of Imperial regiments from across a swathe of Europe.

As one of the protagonists of her novel, Professor Adler, reflects, in the sleepless hours before his return, ‘... from all directions of the compass they had come, seeking their fortune – Czech and Pole and Croat, Magyar and Italian, and Jew of course, to mix and feed and enrich this German city, which through them became unique and truly imperial’. Elisabeth’s memories were of a polyglot upbringing in a polyglot city. And her writing was born from an ease with different languages. She could choose which language to write in, as much as read in:
I was born and lived in Vienna, so German was the language which surrounded me, the Austrian kind of German with its soft and sometimes raucous vowels and muted consonants, a speech that could be coarse but never cutting, but the literate language nevertheless. It was for me as I grew up, the language of Goethe and Schiller, later of Rilke and Thomas Mann, of Kant and Schopenhauer and the language in which Reinhardt’s plays were produced. But it was not the language of my small, immediate and intimate world as a child. That was English.

Like many of her generation she was captivated by the lyric poetry of Rilke, the great and radical poet of the day. In his poetry Rilke combined directness of expression with intense sensuousness. His poems are full of epiphanies, moments when things come alive. Elisabeth was introduced to Rilke by an uncle and started a correspondence of great significance to her, sending poems to be critiqued and receiving long and involving replies, often accompanied by copies of the poems he was writing. When you look at the collected letters of Rilke, you realise that many of his correspondents were young, poetic and titled. Elisabeth fitted this demographic. But this cache of letters, taken with her on all her lifetime of travels from Vienna to Paris to Switzerland and then into her new life in England, was intensely symbolic for her. It was a benediction for her as a writer from a writer.

Her languages gave her an expansiveness across literature that was breathcatching. After her marriage to my grandfather Hendrick de Waal, she learnt Dutch and they wrote poetry for each other in that language. When living in Paris in the 1930s, she wrote for Le Figaro. She wrote book reviews of French novels for the TLS in the 1950s. Her first two novels were written in German, and her last two in English. No wonder I found her bookshelves so bewildering. When I was visiting her, as a student of English literature, conversation would swerve across genres and countries – a haphazard reference to Goethe would invoke the final scene from Faustus, learnt eighty years before. We talked of Rilke and Hugo von Hofmannstahl. And then of Joyce – and she produced her edition of Ulysses, bought from Shakespeare and Co in Paris, with its shimmering azure paper covers. And Proust. She re-read Proust constantly. When I found her single page describing her ‘quintessences of experience’, I felt this could be someone describing Proust.

The Exiles Return is profoundly autobiographical. In the figure of Resi, the beautiful girl lost in the
social milieu, there is the glimmer of projection. And in Professor Adler, the academic whose need to return to Vienna is at the heart of the book, and who has to evaluate where he belongs amongst those who stayed, I think there is a strong sense of an alternative life being lived out.

There are compelling moments of Elisabeth’s experiences too in the encounter between the character of Kanakis and a lawyer he consults about a property purchase. You can hear the memory of her own later encounters with Austrian lawyers in an attempt to find and restitute the looted family art collections and property, seized at the Anschluss in 1938, in this passage:

Sitting in his office surrounded by recently acquired art, a lawyer reveals a tremor of anxiety. These paintings come from the ‘Art collection of a Baron E.’ – died abroad unfortunately, in England, I believe. After they had recovered what could be traced of his property, his heirs had it all sold at auction; I suppose they had no use for this old-fashioned stuff in their modern homes. I acquired the pictures in the auction rooms, as well as most of the things you see here; all quite openly, publicly and legally, you understand...

Above all the novel is about exile and the heartbreak of returning.

This passage describes Adler’s return to Vienna:

Finally, there he was, on the Ring: the massive pile of the Natural History Museum on his right, the ramp of the Parliament building on his left, beyond it the spire of the Town Hall, and in front of him the railings of the Volksgarten and the Burgplatz. There he was, and there it all was; though the once tree-bordered footpaths across the roadway were stripped, treeless, only a few naked trunks still standing. Otherwise it was all there. And suddenly the dislocation of time which had been dizzying him with illusions and delusions snapped into focus, and he was real, everything was real, incontrovertible fate. He was there. Only the trees were not there, and this comparatively trivial sign of destruction, for which he had not been prepared, caused him incommensurate grief. Hurriedly he crossed the road, entered the park gates, sat down on a bench in a deserted avenue and wept.

This is a novel written by a truly ambitious writer. It has moments of great vividness and great tenderness within it. In its depiction of what it might mean to return from exile, it also reflects the life of
a woman of considerable courage. Elisabeth, a Jewish academic, returned to Vienna weeks after the Anschluss in 1938 in order to save her parents in their moment of greatest need. She managed to get her father to England in 1939. And she returned immediately after the war to find out what had happened to her family. She fought for a decade to get justice for the wrongs that had been done, battling the intransigence, hostility and derision of the authorities in Vienna. And she did this without losing her extraordinary ability to live fully in the present and not be held hostage by the experience of exile.

Bringing this novel into print, so many decades after the events it alludes to, is a wonderful celebration of someone who read and wrote and lived with such fortitude.

Edmund de Waal
Andrew Nagorski in his book, *Saving Freud: A Life in Vienna and an Escape to Freedom in London*, devotes only two brief chapters to Freud’s life as a much-honoured refugee in London. Instead he anchors the main theme of his book to his hero’s reluctance to leave anti-Semitic Vienna even after the Anschluss, and to the devotion of a small group of friends who were convinced that Freud could not insulate himself against Vienna’s anti-Semitism and who finally facilitated the great man’s transfer from Vienna to London. Woven around this core, Nagorski, an experienced American journalist, sets himself an almost impossible task. Early sections of the book summarise Freud’s life, family background, rise to fame, his theories and his relationship to Jung, against the background of anti-Semitism in Austria and Hitler’s rise to power. Nagorski then turns to the four ‘rescuers’, all but one of whom were close to Freud, and who plotted for years to find ways of convincing him to accept the prospect of emigration. They also had to figure out, when the time was ripe, how to achieve the great man’s withdrawal from Hitler’s Austria.

At this point the book goes astray. Each of the friends – Ernest Jones, the Welsh psychoanalyst,
William Bullitt, the journalist and diplomat, Marie Bonaparte, the wealthy aristocrat and Max Schur, his personal doctor – has a chapter devoted to their biography and to their links to Freud. Freud’s favoured daughter Anna’s personal trajectory is also portrayed in considerable detail. Plenty of space is given to the back story of Anton Sauerwald, the Nazi official who authorised Freud’s exit permit from Austria and instead of sequestering Freud’s papers, books and treasures allowed them later also to leave Austria. While all this background material contains snapshots and quotations of considerable interest, much of it diverts from the main story and risks losing the focus on Freud and his mistaken sense of security in Vienna.

Freud’s political antennae were not well-honed. In fact they were very inadequate. Though Nagorski makes no judgement, there are numerous Freud quotes to demonstrate how slow his hero was to understand that Hitler was no passing phenomenon and how blind he was even to the consequences of the Anschluss. It also shows up in Freud’s visceral dislike of the United States and in his harsh criticism of President Wilson and the League of Nations.

Nagorski explains that Freud could not have contemplated any country other than Britain as his place of asylum. But the author also takes it for granted that Freud could never have been treated as an ordinary refugee. It was only natural, we read, that Freud’s high status had to be respected at all times. Unlike many other prominent Jewish intellectuals, Freud was, in fact, given a unique kind of VIP refugee status. When the day for departure from Vienna came in June 1938, Marie Bonaparte ensured that Freud, his family and entourage – housekeeper included – travelled from door-to-door in style and luxury. Ernest Jones had intervened directly with the British Foreign Secretary to secure their visas, and the party had to go through none of the formalities that other refugees were obliged to undergo. Once installed in London, the VIP refugee was made welcome in ways few other refugees could ever have experienced.

The eighteen months left to Freud from 1938–39 were well spent in London, even though his long-standing cancer of the jaw was increasingly painful and slowly reaching a terminal stage. Max Schur kept an early promise and ensured that Freud did not have to suffer beyond a certain point. The book should also have ended at that point. But Nagorski could not be parted from his ‘rescue squad.’ He evidently felt obliged to deliver summaries of their post-Freud lives. It is, again, operation overkill.
Austria is a country with a double, with two realities: its earlier imperial incarnation, beloved of tourists and lovers of *The Sound of Music*, which throws a shadow over its collective cultural identity. And its hidden darker past: the country was centrally involved in both World Wars and the Holocaust, and for many decades, unlike Germany, skirted around public discussions of collective guilt and responsibility. How writers and thinkers address these dualities and secrets is central to Austrian literature.

In 2008 an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* referenced the notorious Lower-Austrian abuse case of Josef Fritzl, highlighting the prominent role that basements, cellars and canal systems assume in Austrian culture and collective memory. The author of the *TLS* article, Ritchie Robertson, notes that psychopathic and abusive patriarchal authority runs through Austrian literature as far back as Ferdinand Raimund and Johann Nestroy’s Viennese comedies, through Adalbert Stifter’s story ‘Turmalin’, (‘Tourmaline’, 1853), to recurring themes of torture described in the work of Elias and Veza Canetti. The protagonist of Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Malina* (1971) disappears into a wall in her own home to escape coercive control, and Elfriede Jelinek even made Fritzl the protagonist of her 2014 play, *Faust In and Out*. Marcus Fischer’s recent anti-Heimat novel *Die Rotte* (‘The Pack’, 2022) deals with the invasion of privacy as well as the brutal uncovering of hidden secrets and a history that has been collectively suppressed in a rural village.

It is the Viennese founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud who theorises the power of the metaphorical underground, representing the suppressed emotions which drive all human behaviour. His game-changing hypothesis was that we are not the rulers of our own psyche: what we think we know and see is impacted by our consciously or unconsciously suppressed feelings and knowledge about events and experiences. Freud’s ideas were taken up by his literary contemporaries, such as Hermann Bahr in *Dialog*...

Even a century later, Freud’s 1919 essay on ‘Das Unheimliche’ (‘The Uncanny’) still provides a blueprint for literary representations of uncanniness in human experience. As social historian and psychoanalyst Peter Gay says, we all ‘speak Freud’s language, whether we know it or not’. Freud’s uncanny centres on the return of the repressed: the unspoken and unspeakable presence of something familiar that cannot be acknowledged. Post-war and millennial Austrian culture offers rich potential for the uncanny.

The contemporary uncanny can be found in images of death and the return of the dead, as in Anna Kim’s Anatomie einer Nacht (‘Anatomy of a Night’, 2016), or the eerie presence of something absent becoming tangible in Thomas Glavinic’s Die Arbeit der Nacht (‘Night Work’, 2005), or Daniel Kehlmann’s F (2013) and Du hättest gehen sollen (‘You Should Have Left’, 2016). Blurred realities underlie Constantin Göttfert’s Satus Katze (‘Satu’s Cat’, 2011), Alois Hotschnig’s Die Kinder beruhigte das nicht (2006, Maybe This Time, 2011), as well as Clemens J. Setz’s novel Indigo (2012) and his story collection Der Trost runder Dinge (‘The Solace of Round Things’, 2019). For Kathrin Röggl, in Nachtsendung (‘Night Broadcast’, 2016), as also for Kim and Glavinic, night-time opens up the cracks of the uncanny other of daily life. Finally, Ann Cotton’s sci-fi-influenced collection Lyophilia (2019) explores the strange new worlds generated by AI or a bot as the author.

What unites these works is a deep irritation with the façade that Austria presents of a harmonious everyday reality. They remind us that Austrian society’s cellars and basements – as well as its hills – are alive with pathologies, monsters and weird collective dreams which continue to shape ‘Austrianness 2.0’.

Heide Kunzelmann and Lyn Marven
The Bachmann Centre provides a forum for scholarship and debate on Austrian literature and culture, and our events are open to all interested. It was founded in 2002 by Professor Rüdiger Görner, now at Queen Mary University, with the continuous support of the Austrian Cultural Forum in London. As the current IBC director, I am building on the work of my predecessors Heide Kunzelmann and Martin Liebscher. Ingeborg Bachmann has been chosen as our figurehead, because her work connects incisively with the Austrian literary tradition cut off by the fascist period, and at the same time her work radically challenges the post-war status quo and continues to inspire readers and artists in a variety of genres. Bachmann frequently references major Austrian writers in her texts, especially Robert Musil, Joseph Roth, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Ludwig Wittgenstein. However, the intertextual quality of her writing extends far beyond Austrian literature. She gained a doctorate in philosophy, translated from English and Italian, wrote opera libretti and lectured on poetics. As a cosmopolitan, transnational and rebellious writer and thinker, Bachmann was ahead of her time and the intellectual reach and urgency of her work has come to be fully appreciated but with considerable delay. Bachmann’s work, its reception and influence, is an important focus of the Centre’s work. Her novel Malina was reissued by Penguin in its Modern Classics series in 2019, and I organised a book launch where Philip Boehm presented his translation together with Heinz Bachmann, the late author’s brother, who has always been supportive of her legacy.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Bachmann’s death this year, the international conference Reading Bachmann Now will take place on 17–19 May 2023. Peter Filkins, who has translated Bachmann’s poems and the fragmentary novel cycle Todesarten (‘Ways of Dying’) will discuss the first English-language biography of her, which he is currently working on.

Beyond the engagement with Bachmann’s work, the Centre is a hub for scholars of Austrian literature and holds conferences on all aspects and periods of Austrian literature and culture. The term ‘Austrian’ itself is
frequently the focus of historical, transnational and poetological interrogation. Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Stefan Zweig or Joseph Roth are regarded and celebrated as Austrian writers, but borders were redrawn dramatically after the First World War and Jewish people were hounded out of their home countries under fascism. In the present, literature is not confined by borders or one language, and is informed by multiple streams of migration.

One focus of research is the work of writers who went into exile in the UK under fascism and frequently made it their home. In 2019, I contributed to one of SJ Fowler’s *Illuminations* events, in which a number of artists and scholars from the UK and Austria presented work on major Austrian writers as well as lesser-known but fascinating Anglo-Austrian writers, such as Theodor Kramer, Franz Baermann Steiner, Stella Rotenberg, HG Adler and Mela Hartwig.

Other events over the years were dedicated to the work of Ilse Aichinger and her twin sister Helga Michie, who, while Ilse went into hiding in Vienna, came to London in a Kindertransport and remained in London, working as a visual artist and poet.

The IBC also hosts bilingual readings by authors and translators, frequently showcasing work as yet unpublished in English translation. These events either take place within the IBC’s *Encounters* series, or at the Austrian Cultural Forum, which regularly invites Austrian authors. For information on the Ingeborg Bachmann Centre’s events go to: https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/research-centres/ingeborg-bachmann-centre-austrian-literature-culture-ibc.

*Andrea Capovilla*
The last few years have seen the continued growth, in the English-speaking world, of interest in the work of Joseph Roth (1894–1939), the great Austrian novelist and journalist best known as the author of Radetzkysmarsch (The Radetzky March, 1932) and Hiob (Job, 1930). The latest evidence for this comes in the form of two significant, though very different publications – Keiron Pim’s new biography of Roth, *Endless Flight*, and Hugo Hamilton’s novel *The Pages*, which is explicitly inspired by and indebted to Roth.

This wave of appreciation is pleasing to see, though it comes with a certain amount of natural lag in comparison with the German-speaking countries. There, Roth’s reputation was re-established, starting in the 1950s, through the gradual re-publication of his fiction, non-fiction and letters. In 1989–90, a near-comprehensive, six-volume *Works* appeared. In 1974 the American scholar David Bronsen published a meticulous biography establishing the facts of Roth’s life, and correcting many of the ‘myths’ surrounding this famously contradictory author. It is largely through the new translations by Michael Hofmann, published by Granta over the last couple of decades, that English-language readers today have had the opportunity to read the range of Roth’s work – but until now no English-language biography has been published.

With *Endless Flight* this omission has now been corrected. Pim, a professional biographer rather than a literature specialist or academic, has produced a detailed, persuasive and very readable account of Roth’s short, brilliantly creative and ultimately tragic life, synthesising in the process the key findings of the growing body of scholarship on Roth, which is generously and
transparently cited throughout. It’s beautifully written with a distinctive, empathetic humanity. Pim charts the stations of Roth’s life against their historical contexts: his childhood in Galicia, his student years in Vienna and military service in the First World War, and his trajectory as journalist, taking in almost every corner of Europe and the Soviet Union. He naturally covers Roth’s literary career in depth, tracking the genesis of the major works and accounting for his development and style. He does particular justice to the heart-breaking tale of Roth’s marriage to Friedl, whose decline into incurable mental illness saw her institutionalised. Readers of Roth in English finally have the biography they were craving.

Hugo Hamilton’s unusual novel *The Pages* provides further evidence not only of the appeal of Roth’s fiction but of the biographical and historical context that shaped it. Hamilton, an Irish author who grew up speaking both German and English, takes the bold decision to have as narrator in his novel not a human character but a book owned by the protagonist, Lena, an American artist of German heritage. The book in question is a first edition of Roth’s 1924 novel *Die Rebellion* (*Rebellion*), and through this magical conceit the reader is guided by a voice who can simultaneously bear witness to the drama that ensues when Lena travels to Berlin, reflect on the book’s own ‘biography’ through the Nazis’ seizure of power and beyond, and also tell us about the life of its author, Roth himself. The threefold strands are interwoven and intended to complement each other, and for the most part this works well.

Lena has travelled to Berlin seeking to solve the puzzle of a map drawn in the back of the book by its original owner, a German-Jewish academic who was murdered by the Nazis, and in the process becomes entangled in the lives of immigrants to contemporary Berlin while coming to terms with her own ambitions and family history. The present at times seems to map onto the past, intriguingly, and there are echoes of the plot of *Rebellion*, which tells the story of a disabled war veteran who falls victim to prejudice and spite, and of Roth’s traumatising relationship with Friedl. There were admittedly times when I found the perspective inconsistent and somewhat contrived, and I was not entirely convinced by the love affair at the heart of the story, sparked by the theft and return of the book-narrator, or the melodramatic denouement. But this is certainly a novel worth seeking out, especially if you have already read *Rebellion* or have an interest in Roth, and one that makes an interesting point of comparison to Pim’s biography.

*Jon Hughes*
Whatever your approach to the problem, I assume you did not shelve it with the Austrian books. But a case could be made. In 1904, Monastrishtsh was in Galicia, a province in the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In other words, Malka Lee was born an Austrian citizen. Languages played a different role then. Galicia’s population was a mix of native Polish, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and German speakers who often lived side by side, occupying distinct economic niches. The wider empire had fourteen official languages, and the word ‘Austrian’ stretched like an elastic band around centuries’ worth of imperial conquests and dynastic acquisitions across central and southeastern Europe.

The old Austrian empire had absorbed a natural profusion of languages, ethnicities, and religions. Empires have big appetites, and the ethnographic map of Europe retained many more intricate, ancient overlaps. Today’s far smaller republic makes German-speaking Catholics seem like the natural natives, and anyone else seem like marginal newcomers.

In the modern nation-state system, certain books lack an obvious shelf: not all people, and not all peoples, correspond neatly to a country on the map. Which is why, in a magazine devoted to Austria’s literature, you are reading about multilingual writers who were just passing through.

In one of the opening chess moves of the First World War, Russia invaded Ukraine. That is, the Russian Empire invaded the Austro-Hungarian Empire, specifically Galicia, which was home to the largest concentration of Jews in Europe and two-thirds of the western empire’s Jewish population. Combined with the adjoining province of Bukovina, that added up to a million people who were especially afraid of the invading force’s reputation for anti-Semitic violence. Meanwhile, some of their hometowns were being turned into active battlefields.

Malka Lee was in her early teens and already fleeing with her family when she first encountered the Russian army up close. In her unshelvable
memoir *Durkh Kindershe Oygn* (‘Through a Child’s Eyes’), she recalls: ‘The firing line was set up beneath the town. […] We packed ourselves with foodstuffs like camels in a desert and continued on our way. We ran. Behind our backs, the bullets ran after us.’ Most of the destitute Jewish refugees – roughly 150,000 of them by the spring of 1915 – eventually made their way by train to Vienna’s Northern Station and strayed no farther than the nearby district of Leopoldstadt, named for a Kaiser who had banished the Jews centuries prior. In the early 20th century, the district acquired a new nickname, ‘die Mazzesinsel’ (‘the island of matzah’). This is the unleavened bread eaten at Passover. The moniker is all the more apt because according to the Book of Exodus, the very first matzahs were consumed by Jews fleeing an advancing army.

Malka Lee, Rose Ausländer, Debora Vogel and Rokhl Korn were all born in Galicia or Bukovina, all spent part of their teenage years as refugees in wartime Vienna, and all became prolific and distinguished poets, despite the even greater obstacles confronting women writers of their generation. They wrote poems in Yiddish, German, Polish, Hebrew, and/or English – two or more languages per poet. They had the Austro-Hungarian Empire in common; individually they also lived in the Republic of Austria, Canada, Romania, Sweden, the US, the USSR, and West Germany. Was there a link between their time in Vienna and their successes as writers? Or between that period and the aesthetics of their future work? Which shelf or shelves do they belong on?

The territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire corresponds to all or parts of the following countries on today’s map: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine. Other than Austria itself, all these country names match the names of the country’s majority language.

The historian Eric Hobsbawm, born in Egypt to an Austrian mother and a British father, describes growing up in 1920s Vienna in his English-language memoir:

*I spent my childhood in the impoverished capital of a great empire, attached, after the empire’s collapse, to a smallish provincial republic of great beauty, which did not believe it ought to exist. […] The world of the Viennese middle class, and certainly of the Jews who formed so large a proportion of it, was still that of the vast polyglot region whose migrants had, in the past 80 years, turned its capital into a city of two million […] Our relatives had come from, or were still living in, places like Bielitz (now in Poland), Kaschau (now in Czechoslovakia) or Grosswardein (now in Romania).*
Our grocers and the porters of our apartment buildings were almost certainly Czech, our servant-girls or child-minders not native Viennese: I still remember the tales of werewolves told me by one from Slovenia. None of them was or felt uprooted or cut adrift from ‘the old country’.[.] Vienna, the capital of the Republic of Austria, is not quite the same city as Vienna, the co-capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Neither is Maonistrishtsh, Eastern Galicia quite the same place as today’s Monastyryska, Ukraine. And therefore Malka Lee’s memoir Durkh Kindershe Oygn is not quite Austrian, not really Ukrainian, not exactly American, though certainly Jewish literature. To this day, books like these lack an obvious shelf.

The world we live and read in today is still mostly demarcated by the same borders drawn after the First World War with a goal, in Hobsbawm’s words, of establishing ‘coherent territorial states each inhabited by a separate ethically and linguistically homogeneous population’. The disconnect between that nationalist vision and the multi-ethnic profusion of places like imperial Galicia and Vienna would lead to the mass murder and forced migration of millions in the ensuing decades.

The same disconnect between nations as we imagine them and people, in their messy distribution across the planet, is one reason why, without a more sophisticated and inclusive shelving system, so many important books and authors are left without a home.

Jake Schneider
Elias Canetti was born in 1905 to parents mesmerised by that distant power. Vienna was a four-day trip up the Danube from the port of Ruschuk (today Ruse) in Ottoman Bulgaria where Canetti’s mother Mathilde was born into the court of Ladino-speaking Jewish nobility. Her parents opposed her marriage to Jacques, the son of arrivistes who had worked their way up from unsophisticated nargileh-smoking Jews in Turkish Adrianople (today Edirne) to thriving Bulgarian merchants. But Mathilde and Jacques were born with their own imaginations. Thespians manqués, they found a common language in a private German, speaking in secret over their son’s head about the Burgtheater in Vienna and the performances they had seen in their schooldays. Little Elias grew up speaking Ladino, Turkish, and Bulgarian – the language of the village girls who worked as maids in the Canetti household and who terrified the little boy with tales of another Danube, a frozen river where hungry wolves attacked horse-drawn sleighs as they skated from Bulgaria to Romania on the distant shore. Even when Jacques moved the family to Manchester in 1911 and Elias had to learn English, German remained the boy’s language of magic and mystery.

When Jacques collapsed suddenly the next year, the twenty-seven-year-old Mathilde lost both her love and
the language that had nurtured that love, German. She packed up Elias and his younger brothers and let the language pull her back to Vienna. It was in this now fifth language that the young boy grew up and began to write. Even twenty years later in 1938, when the Anschluss threw the polarity of Austria on its head and Canetti fled back to England, German remained the language of his memoirs, his essays, and his single great novel Auto-da-Fé; the language that won Canetti the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981.

In *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole: An Elias Canetti Reader*, Joshua Cohen, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the novel *The Netanyahus*, has done much more than compile a simple playlist of the Nobel laureate’s Greatest Hits. In the best psycho-analytic tradition of Canetti’s fellow post-war refugee in London, Sigmund Freud, Cohen identifies and draws out Canetti’s recurring obsessions by introducing Canetti’s longer works with selections of his aphorisms and autobiographies.

The superb memoirist that Canetti is – *The Tongue Set Free* is arguably his masterpiece – doesn’t make Cohen’s detective work difficult. 15 July 1927, he wrote in *The Torch in My Ear*, ‘may have been the most crucial day of my life after my father’s death’. On that day, Canetti let the electrical force of a crowd pull him towards Vienna’s Palace of Justice. The building had been set on fire in protest against a verdict of ‘not guilty’ in the death of two young leftists the winter before. From the edges, Canetti watched as the police fired on the crowd, killing ninety and wounding over six hundred:

> In a side street, not far from the burning Palace of Justice, yet out of the way, stood a man, sharply distinguished from the crowd, flailing his hands in the air and moaning over and over again: ‘The files are burning! All the files!’... He was inconsolable. I found him comical, even in this situation. But I was also annoyed. ‘They’ve been shooting down people!’ I said angrily. ‘And you’re carrying on about files!’ He looked at me as if I weren’t there and wailed repeatedly: ‘The files are burning! All the files!’

The event figured largely thirty-five years later in Canetti’s extraordinary anthropological, socio-political essay *Crowds and Power*, a book that continues to resonate with every football stadium crush or Halloween parade disaster. 15 July 1927 also sparked Canetti’s only novel, ‘sprung from the darkest aspects of Vienna’. In *Auto-da-Fé*, Canetti grafts the Viennese clerk from the 1927 fire onto a distant cousin from La Mancha in Spain and creates a librarian driven as mad by books as Don Quixote. His Sancho Panza is a Jewish dwarf.
whose own fevered dream is to become a chess champion; his Dulcinea, his housekeeper. But the language of Canetti is not the satirical Spanish of Cervantes flowing with melodious vowels, but the dark and malevolent German of Kafka, where obsession runs up against multisyllabic brick walls of consonants.

Yet *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole* is hardly an analytical book. It reads more like a novel, with Canetti as Cohen’s hero of finite hobby horses but many faces. Canetti’s portraits of Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, and of James Joyce in the Café Culture of the final days of the Austrian Empire, are drawn with a painful self-consciousness – the ambitious and frustrated Canetti scuttling from one writer’s table to another searching for crumbs of praise. His aphorisms, preserved in notebooks and diaries, strive for Pascal yet fall somewhere between Kafka and Dylan – the aphoristic title of the book prefaced by, say, an ‘Oh Mama’, could easily be set to guitar and harmonica. But in his memoirs and his novel, Canetti finally sits at a table of his own, the writer and hero of his work, sailing up the beautiful blue inferno of 20th-century Europe with the defiance of a man who is at home nowhere except in language.

Jonathan Levi
Daniel Kehlmann is arguably the most successful young German-language writer alive today. He was born in Munich in 1975 and brought up in Vienna, where he also studied philosophy and German literature. He’s lived in Vienna, New York and Berlin – which is where Rosie Goldsmith interviewed him. He’s the author of eight novels, four plays, two essay collections, film and TV scripts. His novels, from Measuring The World to his latest Tyll, are bestsellers in many languages.

RG: Daniel, good to see you again! The first time was years ago when I interviewed you about Measuring The World! But I do need to ask, as this is an Austrian magazine, are you Austrian or German?

DK: There are lots of answers to that question! But the simplest answer is, I’m both, because I have both passports. Now I guess the next question is, how do I feel about Austria and Germany? Where do I feel I belong? Then it gets more complicated because that keeps changing. I spent my first six years in Munich – my mother is German – but I grew up in Vienna. My Dad was Austrian. My formative years were all in Austria. So I’m very much shaped by Austrian, especially Viennese, culture. But I was always interested in other influences as well. I moved to New York, where it didn’t matter if I was Austrian or German – I was just foreign or German – which was partly true! Now I’m back living in Berlin, but, with distance, I grow more and more fond of what Austria gave me, that dark sense of humour. When you spend months or years among northern Germans, you realise how important Austria is as a counterweight to Germany, that sombre, serious Protestant culture. So there’s no simple answer to your question! I’m a slightly different person in each country. I love how invigorating and inspiring New York is in terms of the people you talk to, the fast, intelligent conversations. It helps my writing and thinking enormously. It’s also very important for me today to live in the centre of Berlin, not as a visitor, but as a German writer connected to German culture, although a certain sense of humour and irony is missing in German discourse. I shouldn’t generalise, but lots of people here just don’t understand jokes. When I’m in Vienna though I’m very lucky, because some of my close friends are actual comedians, so I’m surrounded by funny people – this is one of the great privileges of my life.

Let’s talk more about the influence of Austria on your writing.

I don’t think there is an Austrian style – Austrian writers are too different from each other. I think it’s more a point of view. Austria is so small. Germany is so big. Austria has been pretty powerless for a while and Germany powerful, so when you’re in Austria you look at Germany with a mixture of awe and ridicule.

What about Austrian writers? Did you go through a Stefan Zweig period, as I did?
You might not want to print this, but I don’t like Stefan Zweig! I can’t read his novels or essays, although I think that *The World of Yesterday* is a very important book. During the first lockdown in early 2020, I rediscovered (Arthur) Schnitzler and (Hugo von) Hofmannsthal. But a much less well-known Austrian writer, who is a huge influence on me, is Leo Perutz. For me he’s one of the greatest writers of the early 20th century. His books are so rich and so well constructed. He wrote eleven novels — many translated into English — I would especially recommend *By Night Under the Stone Bridge*, which gave me the idea of constructing a novel out of short stories, which I did in *Fame*, and *The Swedish Cavalier*, which is one of the few perfect books written in German. Another amazing classic is Heimito von Doderer, who I love. He’s all style, but his style is unbelievably good. He’s mostly a plotless writer, pure psychology and language, which is interesting. I cannot imagine writing a plotless novel but I respect it!

**By the time of your big break, *Measuring The World* in 2005, you were only thirty and had written five novels. *Tyll* is your eighth novel. What attracted you to Tyll Uhlenspiegel?**

My first thought was not to write about Tyll but about the Thirty Years War. I wanted to write a big, long and extensive European novel about a cataclysmic time in Germany and Europe. Not through an overarching, continuous chronology but by capturing moments and scenes, with all the gaps — like in a play — where everything crystallises into a certain moment in time. Then I needed to find a character who could go anywhere, move around freely — a Jester would be perfect. And instead of inventing someone out of thin air, I decided to cast the most archetypal, legendary German jester, Tyll Uhlenspiegel. It was the first time I have taken a fictional character and made him real. Writing it was an amazing experience because I felt I was tapping into some very deep, strange world of European storytelling. Even though I invented my Tyll, he also came to me fully formed. I never had to think what he would say, how he would react. It was great to spend time with this mythological person. I miss him.

**I want to talk to you about your plays. You started writing plays much later than writing novels — your first play was *Ghosts of Princeton* in 2012. Why did you begin writing plays?**

I love the theatre. It is thanks to my father, who was a theatre and TV director. German theatre had moved away from the idea of plays depicting real life with real characters telling real stories. It wasn’t until I was living in New York, when I saw plays that tell stories, that I wanted to do it myself. And because of my success as a novelist, I had theatres ready to perform my plays. But before *Measuring the World*, no one would have touched them.

**You obviously love collaborating on your plays and films. I’m thinking of some of the names you’ve worked with — Jonathan Franzen, Tom Stoppard, Christopher Hampton, the actor Daniel Brühl ...**

Collaboration is the opposite of being a novelist. A novel is just me on my own. But then, as a vacation from novels, it’s wonderful to collaborate with really great people. With Daniel Brühl I worked on a film script (later a play), *Nebenan/Next Door*. We spent a lot of time talking, laughing. With Tom Stoppard it would be preposterous for me to describe that as collaboration. It was like being blessed. He adapted a play of mine for BBC Radio, *The Voyage of the St. Louis*. It was as if Chekhov had taken my work, put in a few rewrites and made it much better. It was a great and humbling learning
experience. It's similar with Christopher Hampton, who translates my plays, he’s so experienced and knows how things work on stage. I learn a lot. I also worked with Julian Schnabel on a film script, and that’s the equivalent of four years’ film school. But now I’m back to writing a novel – my first since Tyll – and it’s just me!

You mentioned translation. You have some amazing translators, Ross Benjamin, previously Carol Brown Janeway, but you yourself have had the ultimate translator’s experience translating Tom Stoppard’s partly autobiographical play *Leopoldstadt* into German. It’s about a Jewish family at the turn of the 20th century in Vienna. What does this play mean to you personally?

He sent me the manuscript, and I was so deeply moved that I wrote to him and said, if you’re looking for a translator, I would love to do it, because it means so much to me. One of the many reasons is because it feels very close to my family history. As you know, Stoppard came from Czechoslovakia, not from a big, bourgeois Austrian-Jewish family. It was a strange feeling. I felt he had written my family history, telling the stories my father told me about his family before the war and how they were taken away one by one to the camps. I took my wife and son to see *Leopoldstadt* in London in 2021. I said to my son, watch this play, then you’ll know about your own family. There’s another important thing about *Leopoldstadt*, and I might be wrong, but this may be the last major piece of art created by a Holocaust survivor. There are very few survivors left. Tom was very young and he was whisked away from danger but he is a survivor.

It’s very moving to hear you talk about this, because for a long time, I didn’t know that you were Jewish. You didn’t talk about it. You belong to a younger generation of Austrian and German Jews who didn’t directly experience the Nazi period or the Holocaust. What changed for you?

I felt a growing need to talk about it. I gave a few public speeches, mostly in Austria, and spoke openly about my father's history. I spoke out against the FPÖ. The right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria, in government intermittently up to 2019. It was unacceptable that these people were in power in Austria. My father was an assimilated Austrian Jew, like in *Leopoldstadt*, from one of those Jewish families who were baptized as adults because their Jewishness was of less importance. Until the 1930s when they were made to realise that it was important. My father was born in Vienna in 1927 and when he was seventeen he was sent to a labour camp. In my generation, there are only a couple of writers who are directly children of Holocaust survivors.

Do you feel a responsibility to write about that period?

I’m not sure I feel it’s my responsibility to write about this but I am actually writing about it, in a way, in my next novel, but I don’t want to talk about it yet. I’m superstitious, so I’m not saying anything, but if everything goes well, it might be published by the end of 2023.

Daniel, it’s been a joy talking to you. I look forward to interviewing you about your next novel – whenever that is!

You can read the full interview with Daniel Kehlmann online at eurolitnetwork.com.
As readers, we are treated to both a panoramic overview of medieval Germany, as well as microscopic detail as we are led by the hand through the village where Tyll was born, down to the river and deep into the forest. We see the pebbles in the river, the cows and goats in their pens, the food placed on the Uhlenspiegel table, the poverty and hard labour. We listen in to their conversations and their thoughts. Kehlmann has immersed himself in the historic period of Central Europe of the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), as battles were fought over territory, imperial rule and religious dominance. He has imagined the ideas, language, the stories people told each other, their beliefs, their fears. The writing is seductive, witty but never self-serving: Kehlmann is a discreet narrator who pushes himself hard, intellectually and stylistically, with every sentence. The novel relates the epic life of Tyll Uhlenspiegel (aka Till Eulenspiegel), a mythical figure from German folklore, first appearing in literature in the 16th century. He’s a trickster, jester, rogue, tramp, traveller, circus performer, magician and a wise fool whose purpose – like the Fool in Shakespeare’s plays – is to play pranks on people and expose their weaknesses, hypocrisy and vanity. We see Tyll made real, from boyhood to adulthood to old age, and follow him as he travels across Europe philosophising and entertaining. Tyll’s father Claus had been a simple miller, a kind pious man, a village healer and sage, a reader and thinker pursuing the Holy Grail of Knowledge, mesmerised by the power of books. After a clash with Jesuit witch-hunters (fresh from England after the Gunpowder Plot!), Claus is tried for heresy and hanged alongside a local

www.eurolitnetwork.com/the-riveter/
witch. The next day the young Tyll leaves home and begins his adventures. He shows no grief, no pain, nothing. He is already tough and primed to follow the money and the mayhem for the rest of his life.

As a child Tyll had taught himself how to walk a tightrope – it becomes a valuable life skill. Early in the novel we see him arriving with his troupe in a village. Suddenly, above them, the villagers see a black rope extended from the church window, and they are spellbound:

Above us Tyll Uhlenspiegel turned, slowly and carelessly — not like someone in danger but — like someone looking around with curiosity. He stood with his right foot lengthwise on the rope, his left crosswise, his knees slightly bent and his fists on his hips. And all of us, looking up, suddenly understood what lightness was. We understood what life could be like for someone who really did whatever he wanted, who believed in nothing and obeyed no one; we understood what it would be like to be such a person, and we understood that we would never be such people.

Like the villagers, we witness Tyll’s magnetism and incredible powers of survival. He flourishes while all around him there is war, starvation, captivity and plague. He weaves himself in and out of others’ stories, one moment down on his luck, the next the jester at the royal court in Imperial Vienna.

It’s a grim life. The thirty years of war in Europe were bleak; millions of people died from fighting, famine and disease, but the fictional and fantastic potential of the character Tyll liberates Kehlmann to fly into realms of ‘magical realism and adventure’ (publisher’s description), in stark contrast to the descriptions of the horrific reality of Europe’s political and religious dogmas and the ideology of the day. For the several centuries of the Holy Roman Empire, Europe was divided roughly into a Lutheran north and Catholic south. When the Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II tried unsuccessfully to impose religious harmony, the brutal religious and political conflict of the Thirty Years War began. Every single European power became sucked in, parts of Germany lost half their population, no single country could claim victory and Europe was changed forever.

The novel acquires further depth and colour when real-life historical figures join the cast of witches, warlords, tradespeople, travellers and scholars. There’s Frederick, King of Bohemia and his wife, the sad Winter Queen, Elizabeth Stuart, exiled daughter of King James I of England and granddaughter of Mary, Queen of Scots. ‘Liz’, as Tyll calls her, is the closest he comes to making a friend and they meet several times over the many decades of the novel. Liz is a great fan of Shakespeare and
The Riveter misses England. She and Tyll hold lively conversations about plays and performance. As the novel ends, both of them old and tired from all their travels and travails, she offers him a comfortable final chapter. But Tyll has no intention of dying or bowing out of history, or of Daniel Kehlmann’s novel:

‘Peace is coming, Tyll.’ Liz says. ‘I will return home. Across the sea to England. Do you want to come with me? I’ll give you a warm room, and you won’t go hungry. Even when you one day are no longer able to perform.’

Tyll replies: ‘Are you offering me charity, little Liz? A daily soup and a thick blanket and warm slippers until I die in my bed?’

‘That’s not so bad.’

‘But do you know what’s better? Even better than dying in one’s bed?’

‘Tell me.’

‘Not dying, little Liz. That is much better.’

And then Tyll simply disappears. The ultimate survivor, he’s probably still alive somewhere in Europe today, on stage in a theatre, on a battlefield, in a village or a royal court, the living, breathing hero of this outstanding European novel of our times.

Rosie Goldsmith
And it is, but in its own way. Characters are memorably drawn, but except for Melzer they all remain types instead of fully rounded personalities, the same at the end as they were at the beginning. The settings are strikingly vivid, but they function as props brought on and rolled away, like Prospero’s cloud-capped towers, only as the ubiquitous narrator needs them. This novel teems with episodes and incidents that don’t cohere into a unified plot: an intrigue centred on smuggling, a long-lost twin, a happily-ever-after ending that deliberately risks sentimentality – not one of which comes close to holding the structure together.

Doderer was a litterateur distrustful of literature. Searching for his own approach at the start of his career, he vehemently rejected the ‘writerly’ art of authors like Thomas Mann, labouring instead to set prose narrative free from standard constrictions. To do so, he had to dismantle ‘well-made’ practices, fragmenting the continuity provided by content and relying almost entirely on the coherence of form. After all, the governing central unity of The Strudlhof Steps resides in the steps themselves, an aesthetic and functional triumph of structure that creates and enables meaning, since any ‘one of the flights of steps becomes in itself a device of style, a means of achieving expression’, a guardian and guarantor of an order ennobling everyday life. Doderer’s project was not compatible with the received conventions of the novel, then. Musil and Broch expanded within traditional frameworks; like Fielding in Tom Jones, they reconstructed. Doderer, like Sterne in Tristram Shandy, deconstructed, a process this novel’s appealing surface makes it easy to overlook.
In his earliest days as a writer, around 1921, Doderer devised a working substitute for standard narrative, incorporating strategies of oral delivery with emphasis on musical elements like tempo, rhythm, and frequent motivic repetition to create structural unity. His biographer Wolfgang Fleischer notes that Doderer was striving at that time ‘to liberate narration from bookishness ... the divertimento form he devised ... struck him as most apt’ (my translation). Narrative tempo, deployment of motifs, and rhythmic dynamism were meant to predominate through this technique, according to Doderer’s most eminent critic, Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler. And Doderer’s own comments about the divertimento distinctly relegate content to form: ‘Toss your plot lines around every which way ... And if you manage to combine three of them through the common denominator of a final movement, then you have created a divertimento’ (my translation). He marked his manuscripts with musical directions such as rallentando when he gave readings from them. He repeatedly invoked with deep reverence the example of Beethoven and consciously modelled his proposed tetralogy (only The Waterfalls of Slunj was finished) on Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. (Doderer’s Divertimenti and Variations were published in my translation by Counterpath Press in 2008.)

So, The Strudlhof Steps, likewise in four parts like a symphony, comes into its own when it is ‘heard’ rather than ‘read,’ ith attention to tempo, motivic repetition, phrasal balance, cadence and rhythm, and other acoustical, musical effects predominating over story development. The development is there but can’t be grasped without listening carefully, after which insights emerge into both genre and form – neither of them conventional. Read for story and be thwarted; listen for sound and the story will emerge.

Vincent Kling
It took the destruction and privations of the Second World War finally to convince most Austrians of the emerging Second Republic that an independent and self-confident Austrian identity might be desirable, and Austrian politicians of all persuasions quickly realised that culture, and thus by extension the publishing industry, would play an essential role in establishing, even creating, an Austrian identity clearly distinguishable from that of its northern neighbour. (In the immediate post-war period the term ‘German’ was removed from some Austrian school timetables.)

Initially the four occupying powers of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France were responsible for everything that was published in their individual zones of occupation, as was the case in occupied Germany from 1945. The Allies granted the licences for publishers and publications, chose the key personnel in the publishing industry, and assigned paper for printing when it was still a scarce material, yet it is evident that not the same amount of effort had been invested by the occupying powers into thinking about the nature of a post-war Austria as had been devoted to post-war Germany, particularly by the Americans and the Soviets. And, as with denazification, matters were soon handed over to the Austrians themselves to administer.
Unlike other occupied countries during the Second World War, the Austrians had not formed a government in exile. There was no rallying point for those in exile and they did not acquire significance or status for their sacrifices in the eyes of those who had remained in Austria. This would have far-reaching consequences for the history of literary publication in post-war Austria. Those writers and publishers in Austria who had fled Austria – many to escape the Nazis but some even earlier from the authoritarian state of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg – were mainly on the left of Austrian politics, socialists or communists, and many were Jewish. When important posts were being filled in the early post-war years in the publishing houses, broadcasting and the newspaper industry, it was noticeable that there was no great call from within Austria to bring home those in exile. Strikingly, posts were often filled by lesser talents, those literary men, and a few women, who had stayed in Austria during the war years, some having identified themselves with the National Socialists and others with the clerical conservative politics of the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg regime.

The markedly conservative nature of much of early post-war Austrian life was reflected in literary tastes promoted by the government, including not only the central government but also by the nine provincial governments. Indeed, state and political patronage, a marked feature of Austrian life for most of the post-war period, dominated the book and newspaper market. Authors and publishers came to depend on government grants, prizes and awards. Textbooks for school use had to come from approved government lists. Experimental writing was of little use in educating a reading public to embrace a distinctly Austrian identity, so avant-garde writing found little favour, whilst a generation of conservative writers whose reputation had been established well before the 1938 continued to be promoted.

One immediate task after 1945 was to establish who owned and controlled various publishing houses. For instance, one of Austria’s most distinguished publishers, Paul Zsolnay Verlag, had been aryenised after 1938 and renamed Bischoff-Verlag once its Jewish founder had fled to London. The original name was restored after 1945 but the name would fall back into German hands when it was sold to a (West) German publisher in the 1980s during a time of financial difficulties. Today Zsolnay represents once again a major presence in the Austrian book market and, true to its origins, has an impressive catalogue of Austrian and international writers.

This was just one instance of an Austrian publisher coming under German control; simultaneously many of Austria’s most able and most successful writers have also
opted to appear under German imprint. Nearly all internationally known Austrian writers of the Second Republic are published in Germany, so it would be no exaggeration to say the copyright for Austrian literature and the decision to promote or simply reprint Austrian writers have often resided outside of Austria. This is in part a reflection of hard economic and demographic facts. Austria’s population is less than one-ninth of that of Germany. Austria’s import and export activity betrays the economy’s almost total dependence on the German market. It is far more lucrative for writers to publish with established German publishers, who in turn can market authors to a greater degree than a smaller Austrian printing house. The financial complexity and globalisation of the publishing and media industry make it difficult for Austrian publishers to establish a clear and distinct profile, and naturally a shared language with Germany means it is difficult for Austrian publishers to withstand perceived encroachments. It is therefore remarkable that a distinct Austrian publishing identity has persisted. Yet if we take the lid off that identity, we find that even within Austria itself there have been tensions, most noticeably between Vienna and the rest of Austria. By the mid-19th century Vienna had established itself as Austria’s major centre of publication. Intermittently there have been brave attempts to offset this imbalance by publishing ventures outside the Austrian metropole: the distinguished Residenz Verlag was founded in the mid-1950s in Salzburg, whilst the leading journal for contemporary and unpublished Austrian writing, *manuskripte*, emerged in Graz at the beginning of the 1960s, yet Vienna’s dominance within the publishing and media world remains unassailable within Austria.

In recent years the state’s financial support for the arts, including the publishing and literary industry, has changed. In the early days of the Second Republic the conservative People’s Party and the Austrian Socialist Party enjoyed an almost total monopoly over the major institutional posts. Writers and publishers today may have found greater autonomy but they are also exposed to the harsher realities of market forces. Yet despite all the economic vicissitudes of recent years there still seems to be no diminution of creative energy to write and publish in Austria and to articulate a perspective that is unique to those who have been shaped by life in this small Central-European state that draws on its own rich and unique literary inheritance.

*Anthony Bushell*
Alice Urbach was born in Vienna in 1886 to a large, wealthy and influential Jewish family. Her father Sigmund Mayer had worked himself up and out of the extreme hardship of the Pressburg (now Bratislava) ghetto. Precocious but not academic as a child, she tried to please her distant father, a gourmet, by cooking for him. After an ill-matched marriage to a gambler, Max Urbach – who died young but left her with her two beloved sons, Karl and Otto, Alice’s career took off. It was the end of the First World War and an era of poverty and inflation; cooking gave Alice ‘a feeling of security’. Vienna was already known for its great cafés, such as Demel and Sacher, and Alice too proved herself to be not only a great chef of traditional Viennese dishes and pastries, but a popular teacher, with her own cookery school, and author of several bestselling cookbooks. In 1935 she published her best-known, So kocht man in Wien! (‘Cooking the Viennese Way!’) which, ‘contained everything she had learned about cookery and housekeeping since the age of five’. By 1938 she was famous and had written two more cookbooks on vegetarian food and cakes and pastries.

So kocht man in Wien! is the main subject of this fascinating investigation into Nazi book theft. 1938 was the year that Austria was annexed to Germany and the year that ‘Alice’s book acquired a new author’, a mysterious Aryan author named Rudolph Rösch. Even today his identity is not 100% certain. This process of appropriating books was, we learn, common in the book trade under the Nazis, and is still
concealed by some parts of the German publishing industry today. Jewish authors were forced to relinquish copyrights and all publishing rights. Books were re-written, removed of Jewish names or multicultural references – difficult if you are writing about Austrian food, enriched by six hundred years of many and varied Austro-Hungarian flavours.

After the Nazis took power, Vienna’s sizable Jewish population was hunted down in a series of pogroms. Many died, many fled – if they could – or were deported to concentration camps, later to become the notorious Nazi death camps. Alice’s sons managed to emigrate to the USA, but three of her sisters were murdered. After a couple of attempts to leave, Alice was accepted as a refugee in Britain along with several other famous Austrian Jews, including Sigmund Freud. She became a domestic servant, several rungs below her social status in Austria, but she was proud of her skills, and the growing popularity of Viennese pastries in Britain meant she was in demand. She also worked as a matron and helped care for Britain’s Kindertransport children and for the Windemere Children – until 1946 when she emigrated to the USA, to be with her sons. Alice took her own well-thumbed cookbooks with her everywhere, unaware of the crime of book theft.

One day in 1949, when Alice returned to Vienna for a visit, she was delighted to spot one of her cookbooks in a shop window, but horrified when she saw the name of Rudolph Rösch on the cover. The awful truth dawned on her. Not only had the Nazis robbed her of her home, her profession and several family members, they had stolen her name and her fame. She set about trying to reclaim them, but it was a struggle for her. It was not until the 2020 publication in German of this outstanding history, *Alice’s Book*, researched and written by Alice’s historian grand-daughter, Karina Urbach, that the truth was revealed. Thanks to a wonderful translation by Jamie Bulloch – himself a specialist on Austrian history and an excellent chef – we can now read this moving story in English. A portrait not only of one book and one family but of many families and books; a story of the Jews of Austria, of Nazi crimes and cruelty and the continuing struggle for justice.

Alice herself died in San Francisco in 1983, still cooking and teaching a few years short of her one-hundredth birthday. *Alice’s Book* – and her cookbooks again bearing her name – are her legacy and this is one of the most remarkable historical accounts I have ever read.

*Rosie Goldsmith*
NAVEEN KISHORE, Seagull Books
Introduced and interviewed by Sheridan Marshall

Seagull Books is renowned for its commitment to publishing literature from all over the world in English-language translation, with a substantial Austrian list. Naveen Kishore founded Seagull Books in 1982, beginning with the New Indian Playwrights series. His dedicated leadership has seen Seagull publish translations of over 500 books, including titles by Nobel Prize winners Peter Handke, Herta Müller, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Mo Yan, and Man Booker International Prize winner László Krasznahorkai.

SM: How do you curate your Seagull Books list?
NK: Through instinct; a certain generosity of risk; and trust – in other publishers, translators, authors. In other words, a circle of affection and an ability to listen and respect a host of players from agents to scouts and booksellers. It is a community. And communities share – even whisper with – suppressed and sometimes open excitement about what they read. We become conduits, midwives if you will to this ‘eco-system’, and the list evolves. When, for example, you look back at the over 150 German, Austrian and Swiss titles, you see it coming together. Our curatorial vision is retrospective. The ‘doing’ on the other hand is immediate. What I had earlier called ‘content’ and ‘intent’. Add the word ‘regardless’ to it. Some books may work well, others may not; certain books, as you build your wish-list-back-list, will go on to ‘fund’ many others. One must carry on regardless.

You are one of the biggest publishers of Austrian literature in English-language translation. Why such a focus on Austrian literature?

Not sure about the ‘biggest’. Many wonderful presses led the way. Some new ones do it with great élan. Like everything else at Seagull, the ‘focus’ is always retrospective. In the beginning one is always attracted to fine writing. The attraction has to come from within this desire to publish texts that are vital and manage regardless of their own ‘age’ to shine a light on our contemporary ‘condition’. People often ask me about what makes us choose a book: I always use the term, ‘the human condition’. That which resonates across borders, across cultures, across divides and ends up with the possibility of changing lives. A publisher of the intuitive can only offer possibilities. The rest is up to the reader and the writer and their ensuing bond. Austrian literature has all of these qualities. It is a little oasis within the German-writing world. Hard to explain the distinction or even suggest that there is one, but clearly there is. We did not seek either this ‘distinction’ or set out to have a sub-list within our German-language translation list. It just grew into what you are calling a ‘substantial Austrian list’. What we sought was a writing of resonance. The focus is therefore a by-product of that intent.
What do you feel distinguishes Austrian literature from its bigger German cousin?

Tough! We have often heard so many people say that the best German writers were Austrian! I do not have a specific answer to this question. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that I do not ‘arrive’ at the texts I publish after too much ‘mulling’? I do not look for differences. Nor do I seek comparisons. The fact of the author being an Austrian, or Swiss-German or Bavarian or from some other part of Germany – all of which have little traces peculiar to their locations within the larger ‘German’ language world – and therefore if one were to study these deeply, I am sure a list of distinguishing features would emerge! For now, let me just do what I do best: publish!

Which Austrian authors stand out for you among those you have published?

Too many to list – both alive and those that are no longer amongst us – but the one name that personally matters a lot is Christoph Ransmayr.

You can read the full interview with Naveen Kishore online at eurolitnetwork.com.
In *Cox or The Course of Time*, he conjures up a journey to 18th-century China by a fictional English clockmaker, Alister Cox, who is based on a real-life counterpart called James Cox. Cox and the close-knit team from his workshop have been invited by the world’s most powerful man, Qiánlóng, the emperor of China, to his court in Beijing. Living a stiflingly enclosed life in the very heart of the Forbidden City, the visiting craftsmen are tasked with creating impossibly ingenious and elaborate mechanical clocks that mark the passing of time in very different ways. First, the time as it passes for a child (the challenge closest to Cox’s heart, as he meditates on the loss of his beloved daughter, and his grief at the resulting muteness of his young wife from the trauma). Then, a clock that will tell time as experienced by a man condemned to death. Cox contemplates the possibility of creating a clock that will tell time as it’s experienced by lovers, just as he begins to dwell dangerously on the beauty of An, the emperor’s favourite concubine, in the few brief glimpses he has of her.

These are merely the start of the test of Cox’s ingenuity, as the god-like emperor – also known as the ‘Lord of Time’ – presents the men with what could be a lethal challenge: to construct a clock capable of measuring eternity, a perpetual mobile that would need no human hand to touch it once it began its eternal (and to the rest of the jealous, gossiping court, perhaps infernal) work.

The story itself is a philosophical meditation on the meaning and nature of time and memory, as well as the power of human love, and the
uses and abuses of temporal power. It is immeasurably enhanced by Simon Pare’s luminous translation. If you like your novels to meander gently and metaphysically through imaginary lands, while pondering the meaning of life and death and love as we experience it (quickly or slowly) through our all-too-short span on this capricious earth, you will enjoy this vivid journey with Cox and his men.

Love, longing, death and loss are also at the heart of Ransmayr’s *The Flying Mountain*, originally published in 2006, which was long-listed for the International Booker Prize in 2018. It’s a verse epic of the fictional journey by two Irish brothers, Pádraic and Liam, to conquer the uncharted mountain in the Himalayas which the Tibetans know only as the ‘Flying Mountain’ or ‘Phur-Ri’. It begins with the narrator Pádraic describing the sensation of dying in a crevasse while he struggles desperately to find his brother in the darkness ahead as a freezing night descends on the enchanted mountain:


*I died
six thousand, eight hundred and forty metres above sea level
on the fourth of May in the Year of the Horse.*

*My deathplace
lay at the foot of an ice-armoured needle of rock
in whose lee I had survived the night.*

---

The air temperature at the time of my death
was minus 30 degrees Celsius
and I saw the moisture
of my final breath crystallize
and disperse like smoke into the light of dawn.
I felt no cold. I was in no pain.
The pulsing of the wound in my left hand
was strangely dulled.
Through the bottomless chasms at my feet
fists of cloud came drifting from the south-east.

The ridge leading from my shelter up and up
to the pyramidal peak
was lost in driving banners of ice,
but the sky above the highest heights
remained so deep a blue
that in it I thought I could make out the constellations
of Boötes, Serpens and Scorpio.

Ransmayr describes the broken verse form he uses as a ‘floating’ line or better still, a ‘flying’ line, which he believes does not belong to poets alone. It acts to slow the reader down, to make us savour each word. Once again, Simon Pare’s achievement in the fluency and beauty of his translation makes you feel the book must have been written in English. The story takes you deeper into the history of the brothers’ relationship, one of boundless love enmeshed with
lifelong rivalry for the love of their flawed and eccentric father and the absent mother who walked out on them all.

It’s at its strongest in the climbing scenes, the poetry soaring as Pádraic and Liam ascend closer to their goal. Ransmayr was inspired by the real-life climbers, brothers Günther and Reinhold Messner, and their tragedy. But their story is simply the spark for this unique meditation on two fictional brothers’ very different motivations for the climb, and their responses to the new world they discover as they scale their way up into the skies of the Himalayas.

In both works, Ransmayr is fascinated by perilous journeys into uncharted realms, and how travel can both take us out of our natural habitat and offer us the chance to delve deeper into ourselves, even as the writer dwells on the power imbalances and quirks of fate and birth that shape the lives of individuals and entire nations, be that in China and Tibet, or in the north and south of Ireland. Ultimately, Ransmayr’s poetic prose makes a powerful case for words’ ability to redeem us and offer a form of immortality that few other human endeavours can promise.

*Caroline Wyatt*
SNAPSHOTS OF A DEFAMILIARISED WORLD

by ROSS BENJAMIN

Ross Benjamin is an award-winning translator of German-language literature and a long-time champion of Clemens J. Setz’s work. He has translated Clemens J. Setz’s third novel Indigo (Liveright, 2014), as well as numerous poems and short stories, including most recently the short story ‘The Class Picture’ from Setz’s latest collection, ‘The Solace of Round Things’ (Der Trost runder Dinger, Suhrkamp, 2019). We are delighted to feature an exclusive new translation of another intriguing story from this collection, ‘Kvaløya’, with an introduction by Ross Benjamin in which he elucidates his relationship to Setz’s surreally beautiful and playfully inventive literary art.

The short story ‘Kvaløya’, by Austrian writer Clemens J. Setz, begins by presuming our prior knowledge about its imaginary universe, to which, in actuality, we are being introduced for the first time: ‘As everyone knows, it’s not easy to travel with an Or.’ If everyone knows this, it stands to reason, everyone must also know what an Or is. Which is why the first-person female narrator doesn’t bother to explain it to us. From the outset, we understand that an Or is a living being of some sort accompanying her on a trip from Germany to Norway, and we go on to witness how the Or behaves in various situations, how different people respond to it, and how all this affects the narrator. From the clues we gather in the course of reading the story, we might surmise certain things about the Or, but this won’t amount to a full elucidation of what it is, where it comes from, why it is the narrator’s travel companion, in short, what, exactly, is going on in this alternate reality, at times so strange, at times so like our own, from which the narrator is speaking to us.

It’s true that this makes the Or mystifying – a descendant, perhaps, minus five letters, of Kafka’s Odradek, whose physical description, for all its apparent precision, is a kind of riddle. Odradek, Kafka informs us, is a creature that is also a star-shaped spool with varied pieces of thread wound around it, attached to a wooden crossbar and a rod, which render it mobile; and it speaks, if only to give an enigmatic response to the question of where it lives: ‘Indefinite residence.’ No more than Kafka, however, does Setz use mystification for its own sake. In ‘Kvaløya’ the narrator tells her story as if there is no mystery, as if the basic features of her reality go without saying – just as, for example, the narrator of a story that takes place in London does not feel obliged to add that London is located on planet Earth. In this way, Setz gives her narration a plausibility that it would lack if she were to go out of her way to enlighten us about the very things that inhabitants of her universe take for
granted – the existence of Ors, extra wristwatch hands showing something called ‘proximal time’, or what it means when she reports that she wants to buy a new scarf for the Or because ‘the first one it had already assimilated in several places’.

Setz’s fiction hurters us into a twilight zone without the godlike voice of a Rod Serling to announce our stops. Another thing it does might at first seem like the opposite but is actually just the other side of the same coin: it looks around at our everyday reality as if through the eyes of a Martian who just landed here. For example, another story in the same volume in which ‘Kvaløya’ appears, Setz’s collection Der Trost runder Dingler (‘The Solace of Round Things’), contains the line: ‘On the street walked many people, most of them with facial expressions.’ (On second thought, Setz is the sort of writer we might find reporting that London is a city on Earth.) And from another story: ‘Fortunately, a soda machine existed directly beside us.’ Whether in thick novels – Die Frequenzen (‘The Frequencies’), Indigo, Die Stunde zwischen Frau und Gitarre (‘The Hour Between Woman and Guitar’) – or in tweets, Setz offers us snapshots of a defamiliarised world.

To characterise Setz’s writing, it’s not enough to resort to clichés about what differentiates Austrian and German literature and culture. On an episode of American host Conan O’Brien’s talk show some time ago, Austrian actor Christoph Waltz made remarks that reflect Austria’s cultural self-understanding and pride in distinguishing itself from its larger, more dominant neighbour by likening the difference between Germany and Austria to ‘the difference between a battleship and a waltz’. The German sense of humour, Waltz went on, tends to aim for ‘a head-on collision’, rarely has ‘grace, melody, and rhythm’. The implication is that German humour is more of a blunt instrument, more straightforward, heavy-handed, and directed outward at others, whereas Austrian humour is more inward-looking, self-deprecating, slippery, and artful. Waltz suggested that ‘the difference between Austrians and German is very much like English and Irish’, the smaller countries cultivating greater subtlety, finesse, wit, and musicality.

Setz certainly exemplifies these qualities, but to call him a typically Austrian writer in this sense would be misleading. Nor does it do justice to his singularity to point out that his native city of Graz has its own rich literary culture distinct from that of Vienna. It’s not that Graz’s more experimental and avant-garde reputation, in contrast to the capital’s more traditional and classical one, is entirely irrelevant to the offbeat nature of Setz’s work. It’s just that the idiosyncrasy of his art can’t be pinpointed by these ever-narrowing coordinates. We would also have to scan extra-terrestrial and multi-dimensional realms.
When I translate Setz, I seek to treat each turn of phrase with the ingenuity, curiosity, playfulness, and tenderness with which the author does. Examples can be chosen almost at random: ‘A long pause. Time rushed softly in the room like a small indoor fountain.’ Or: ‘that intense anorak smell of collar snow that has melted and then grown warm in the lining.’ Or: ‘In the driveway lay a lost wool glove in the posture of a starfish washed up on the shore.’ Setz is always animating the inanimate, as in this line from ‘Kvaløya’: ‘The piano lid was closed, and a clay vase stood on it, its handles akimbo.’ It’s these magical, unforgettable moments that make his writing such a pleasure to read and to translate.

Ross Benjamin
As everyone knows, it’s not easy to travel with an Or. Starting at Frankfurt Airport and later at the one in Oslo, all sorts of things attracted its attention, and I had some trouble keeping it by my side. In front of the large flight information display, it stopped and stared upward, tilting its head slightly. The loudspeaker announcements accompanied by a jingle made it wince. For a while I was able to keep the Or occupied with the strap looped around my suitcase. I explained to it that the strap served to facilitate identification when the suitcase circled on the luggage conveyor belt.

On the airplane I tried to read. The Or was asleep, and I put my book down on its forehead to save space. The flight attendant offered me headphones once again. I noticed a coin that seemed stuck to the outside of the cabin window, but a careful touch revealed it to be on the inside. It was a midday flight. Gradually, as we flew farther north, twilight fell. Looking out the window, you could see at an angle behind us a curtain of darkness falling shut, and below it, on the horizon, the last glow of daylight. On the airplane a bottle of water cost 25 kroner, but tea or coffee was free, the flight attendant explained. I held my hand up, and she understood the gesture. The Or growled softly in its sleep. After about half an hour, strange nocturnal tracts of land appeared below, small island-like shapes, their edges glittering like gold dust. Were they small settlements? Or streets leading in circles? I looked at my watch and made calculations about the remaining flight time. My hand lay on the Or.

At Tromsø Airport it took us a long time to get a taxi. I was freezing and searched in my suitcase for my gloves. The Or stood next to me, stiff as a board and alert. A grey-haired man with large nostrils was leaning against a column and unwrapping a bread roll from its paper. I couldn’t help explaining to the Or – at first in a whisper, then, since presumably no one here spoke German, at a normal volume –
what the roll thing was all about. The old man bit into it, and the Or clutched my coat pocket in fright. Extensive systems of tunnels brought you from the airport down into the city. The streets in the tunnel seemed covered with ice. A folk song I’d never heard before was playing on the radio. Sixties, I thought. The Or listened and began to ask a question, but immediately broke off when we stopped at a barrier. The driver leaned far out the window to insert the ticket in a machine. The barrier rose. The Or imitated the movement with its fingers. At the hotel I had to fill out several forms. As I wrote in the blanks with the pen on a chain, the Or roamed around near the lobby piano. The piano lid was closed, and a clay vase stood on it, its handles akimbo. The lady at the reception desk had to call over a colleague, because the presence of the Or had confronted her with an unmanageable problem. Unless I was mistaken, she spoke with a Swedish accent. Her colleague listened to what she had to say and then fetched the forms; for him there was nothing about the whole situation that couldn’t be resolved.

Our room was bright and warm. A buzzing sound could be heard. I put the suitcase on the bed. The Or got tangled in the curtains. Then it understood and pulled them back and forth. In a fruit bowl next to the television was a bunch of spotlessly luminous bananas.

The first walk on the harbour proved difficult, since it had begun to snow and I had to wrap the Or in a scarf. It resisted and pleaded. You could see the yellow in its eyes. Pointing south across the water, I showed it the Arctic Cathedral, which was easy to make out even in the darkness of the polar night. Like a billowing sail, it rose among the houses. After a while, the Or, which had actually seemed to be viewing the cathedral closely, suddenly turned away and focused its attention on the snow on the street.

A woman with a dog stopped next to us. The animal kept its mouth closed, not panting as dogs usually do. The dog was also wearing a jacket. The woman was listening to someone speaking from her cell phone.

We continued slowly on our way, delayed by many trifles, until we reached a peculiar quarter, which was incapable of forming any real system of streets. The houses stood here as if they still had to discuss how they wished to some day be connected. Some had even given up and turned away from the others to face the water. A sign pointed us in the direction of the Polar Museum.
The Or’s eyes followed a gull that took off from a bench on a tiny traffic island and landed on a stoplight. The gull opened its bill, but there was no sound to be heard. I began to explain, but the Or seemed sad, so I left it alone and simply put my arm around its form.

Clemens J. Setz
Translated by Ross Benjamin

The complete story is available online. ENGLISH TRANSLATION COPYRIGHT © 2019 ROSS BENJAMIN
English-language rights for Clemens J. Setz’s book Der Trost runder Dinger available from Suhrkamp Verlag
Clemens J. Setz’s new novel – his first after being awarded the Georg Büchner Prize – MondevorderLandung, is published by Suhrkamp Verlag
THE 2022 AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM TRANSLATION COMPETITION

Introduced by JAMIE BULLOCH
Chair of Judges

The fourth Austrian Cultural Forum (ACF) Translation Competition, now a biennial event, was launched in May 2022. Once again there were two categories of entry: for professional literary translators (A) and for aspiring translators (B), i.e., those without a translation in print. The texts for translation were chosen from two works of contemporary Austrian literature. The category A translators were given an excerpt from Mareike Fallwickl’s Die Wut, die bleibt (‘The Rage That Remains’, Rowohlt, 2022), while category B were asked to tackle Daniel Wisser’s short story, ‘Silvia’, from his collection Die erfundene Frau (‘The Invented Woman’, Luchterhand, 2022).

Although the number of entries did not reach the great heights of 2020, when the constraints of lockdown led to thirty category A submissions and 120 in category B, this year we had twenty-eight in A and fifty-two in B. The jury of four came up with shortlists in each category from which the eventual winners were chosen. Our category A winner was Jozef van der Voort, who approached the tricky aspects of the text with intelligence and creativity, and produced a highly idiomatic translation overall. Also commended for their entries were Martha Turewicz and Sarah Rimmington. The category B competition was a close-run affair, with Lauren Harris very narrowly beating Esther Rathbone into second place. Lauren’s spirited translation of the short story was given even more brio by her entertaining reading of it at the prize-giving ceremony which was held on 16 November 2022 at the ACF, in the presence of the prize-winners and all four judges: as well as me, fellow translator Ruth Martin, the publisher Geoff Mulligan, and Tina Hartas, co-founder of TripFiction.

Jozef van der Voort’s translation is available to read on our website, and Lauren Harris’s is reprinted here. The next ACF Translation Competition is due to be held in 2024 and will be announced earlier that year.
Then the two of them had gone to Berlin for a fortnight to visit a friend of Ilona’s. It seemed to Karl that Ilona had abruptly become dismissive and hostile towards him. Whenever he reached out to touch her in the night, she would pick up his hand and remove it from her body. This happened on several occasions, at first with the excuse that her friend could hear them, then later without any explanation at all. ‘Now, don’t be offended. My body is not yours to grab whenever you feel like it,’ Ilona said. When they got home, Karl went back to work. Ilona spent her days sitting on the sofa. If Karl came home later than usual, she would say: ‘Met up with your girlfriend again, did you?’ Karl didn’t reply. In the evenings, Ilona complained of aches and pains. She said she was going through the change. She no longer felt like a real woman. Karl, wanting to comfort her, put his hand on her thigh. ‘Is that the only thing you can think about, you pervo?’ asked Ilona. Karl said nothing. It occurred to him that there was no such word as ‘pervo’. He tried to make the *aperitivo* exactly as it had been when they had had it in Italy. But it just didn’t taste the same. And it didn’t do the trick.

Once, they were out driving somewhere and had stopped at a red light. Karl gazed out of the passenger window, lost in thought. Ilona, who had been watching him, seemed to assume he had been staring at the female cyclist waiting at the lights. ‘So, does she pass inspection?’ asked Ilona. ‘What are you talking about?’ asked Karl. ‘The girl on the bike. You like her?’ Karl said nothing.
Ilona drove on. ‘She really does have an amazing arse on her,’ she said. ‘Does your girlfriend, the one you meet after work, have an arse like that, too? If this carries on, I’m asking for a divorce.’

In the old days, Ilona used to spend her lunch break with her friends at work and Karl hadn’t been allowed to call her. But now she was sitting at home and kept sending Karl texts. One of them read: You were seen. Last week. On the Burggasse. Holding hands with some blonde woman. I’ve had enough of this.

So now she had informers working for her. Karl wondered when he might have been spotted on the Burggasse. He crossed that street occasionally, but he couldn’t remember having been to a bar or a shop there recently, or even having walked down the street. He texted back: What has got into you now? Let’s talk this evening.

Ilona had wanted to meet in a bar. Karl was glad that she was at least leaving the house again. They met in a café. No sooner than Ilona had sat down, it started: ‘So, what’s she called?’ No waiter to be seen anywhere. Karl slid the salt and pepper cruet, which included a toothpick holder, from one edge of the table to the other. ‘Silvia,’ he said.

‘Silvia,’ replied Ilona, her tone already a little friendlier. ‘And does she happen to have a surname, too?’

Karl kept fiddling with the salt shaker. Without warning, Ilona snatched it out of his hands.

‘Would you stop that? It’s driving me nuts,’ she said.

Karl knew that was bad luck. He’d read it in a magazine: Hindus believed it brings bad luck if one person hands salt directly to another person. Karl looked out of the window. Across the street, he saw a sign: Böhmert Opticians.

‘So,’ said Ilona, ‘do you want to tell me her surname now?’

‘Böhmert,’ said Karl. ‘Silvia Böhmert.’

Ilona was satisfied. ‘Do you know her from Facebook?’

Karl shook his head. ‘She isn’t on Facebook.’

That night, Karl slept at his mother’s flat. The flat had been standing empty anyway ever since his mother had moved to Innsbruck. Karl usually only stopped by for the fire safety inspection and annual electricity meter reading. He couldn’t be bothered to make up the bed with clean sheets, so he laid down on the sofa. He tugged off his trousers and underpants and tried to visualise Silvia. She was tall. As tall as him. Her chestnut-brown hair came to her shoulders. No, longer than that. She had a dimple in her chin. Or, wait – even better – dimples in both cheeks that only appeared when she laughed. Stunningly beautiful, pert breasts. Not too big. Slender
The Riveter

shoulders and arms. The most beautiful neck in the world. His phone buzzed with a text: *Everything OK there or have I disturbed you and Silvia mid-fuck?*

The next morning, Karl made two soft-boiled eggs. That is, he tried to. His mother’s flat had an induction hob, not a gas stove like at home. Karl took out two egg cups and set them on the table, then placed spoons and the salt shaker next to them. He explained to Silvia that she should always put the salt shaker straight back onto the table after using it, and should under no circumstances hand it to him directly. That would bring bad luck. The eggs were way too soft, almost raw. That had never happened to Karl before. He apologised to Silvia and finished both eggs.

Karl set up an email address for Silvia Böhmert. She wore size 8 shoes, he decided. And he wrote down all her vital statistics in a little notebook.

A few months later, Ilona and Karl were invited to a party. The women were in the garden, while the men stood around in the kitchen. Karl wasn’t happy about the gender segregation. He went into the garden to eavesdrop on the women. The topic of conversation was religion. Ilona already looked a bit tipsy. She burst out: ‘So, we were created from the rib of man. Who believes this misogynistic bullshit? From the rib of man. What are we, a spare rib? Sounds like a bloody barbecue.’

It made Karl uncomfortable to hear Ilona go on and on like that. Back in the kitchen, one of the host’s friends was telling the others about his girlfriend’s toxic jealousy. She suspected every woman he ever met of wanting to get it on with him.

*Without thinking, Karl blurted out: ‘Ilona has been hassling me so much to tell her the name of the woman I’m cheating on her with, I invented one. I even set up an email address for her […]’*

The drinking continued. Later on in the evening, everyone was in the garden standing around the barbecue. One of the men who’d been with the group in the kitchen earlier asked Karl in a loud voice: ‘That story you told us about the invented woman was brilliant. What was she called again? After what you told us, I’m already half in love with her myself. Silvia something?’
Karl tried to answer under his breath, but by then it was too late.

As he said ‘Böhmert’, there was Ilona, standing right in front of him.

‘Right, that’s it. I want a divorce!’ she yelled.

‘Why? Because I haven’t cheated on you?’ asked Karl.

The other party guests laughed at Karl’s retort.

Ilona tried silvia.boehmert@gmx.at, silvia.boehmert@gmail.com, silvia.boehmert@chello.at, silvia.boehmert@aon.at, silvia_boehmert@yahoo.com and many other variations besides. She wrote:

Dear Ms Böhmert,

My husband has told me about you. Please don’t worry – this email isn’t to seek revenge or threaten you in any way. I would really like to talk to you. My husband has been cheating on me for years. We’ve been together for 18 years. I know that he feels there is something missing from our relationship. He doesn’t hold my hand anymore, now only kisses me very briefly and reluctantly, and seems to prefer sleeping apart from me. I miss the tenderness of the early days. I wonder whether you might be able to tell me what really turns him on? I’m sure the two of you must have felt that first flush of passion for each other.

My husband denies everything. Now he’s claiming he just invented you. The whole thing is so humiliating for me. Please help me!

Sincerely, Ilona Vass

Daniel Wisser
Translated by Lauren Harris
Although Lazar attempted to deflect anti-Semitism by adopting the Scandinavian pseudonym ‘Esther Grenen’, the political circumstances of the 1930s conspired against the publication of her major novels. Leben verboten!, written in 1932, appeared only in an abridged translation, as No Right to Live, in 1934. Extraordinarily, its publication in German would have to wait until 2020. Die Eingeborenen von Maria Blut (‘The Natives of Maria Blut’) was not published in its entirety until 1958. The new edition came out in 2015. This January 2023, a dramatised
version was performed for the first time at Vienna’s Burgtheater.

Why should we read these novels today? The simple answer is that they are both highly entertaining and disturbingly relevant in an era of populism and political unrest. Leben verboten! tells the story of Ernst von Ufermann, a patrician Berlin banker whose business is on the rocks by 1931. He is about to fly to Frankfurt to beg a business associate for support when a pickpocket pilfers his wallet and passport. Shortly afterwards Ufermann learns that the plane he missed has crashed and that the passengers’ burnt corpses are unidentifiable. He is faced with a choice: He could go home to his wife Irmgard, but his generous American life insurance policy makes him worth more dead than alive; the insurance will save his firm and fund the ailing Irmgard’s sanatorium visits in perpetuity. So, Ufermann decides to lie low, and an encounter with a shady character who needs a courier with a false identity to take a mysterious package to Vienna gives him the perfect opportunity to disappear. This novel has the suspense of a thriller, a strong sense of time and place (especially in the Austrian settings), and sharply drawn characters ranging from the once-smart Rameseder family who are trying to keep up appearances, to Professor Frey, the Jewish criminologist who foresees the moral degradation to come.

While Leben verboten! depicts big city life during the Depression and on the cusp of Fascism, Die Eingeborenen von Maria Blut paints a picture of rural conservatism in the same period. It is set in an imaginary ‘Austrian Lourdes’ whose Marian cult lucratively combines religion with tourism. After the closure of the nearby canning factory, locals are now putting their trust in a pseudo-scientist who claims to be able to harness ‘space energy’ for industrial purposes. At the same time, a ‘wonder doctor’ attracts patients from all over the country to the area. A young girl emulates the Catholic mystic Therese Neumann, while her brother’s dreams of being a new Messiah are channelled into Nazism. As the village celebrates its seventh centenary, violence erupts.

Both novels examine the social conditions under which political extremism, intolerance and scapegoating can thrive, an issue as pressing today as in the 1930s. Both are polyphonic, using dialogue, internal monologue and stream of consciousness to represent a large cast of memorable characters. Though the themes are serious, humour and wit abound. It is high time (a personal plea from me, as a translator) that we recognised Maria Lazar as the gifted stylist and prescient social commentator she was.

Fiona Graham

An English-language edition of Maria Lazar’s poems is coming out later this year. Contact Kathleen Dunmore (Maria Lazar’s granddaughter) at tredragon2@btinternet.com. Maria Lazar’s collected works and papers are in the Austrian Archives for Exile Studies, Literaturhaus Wien.
WHY PATRIOTS NEED A BODY: ON ELFRIEDE JELINEK

by LUCY JONES

Four bodies lie about, motionless. A broken sign next to them says ‘Roma, go back to India’. A reporter on the scene asks them to stand up because the show must go on. A woman hides shards of glass in the pocket of a young pianist to prevent her from playing at a concert. A headlong collision between two buses on a winding road strews passengers across the hillside.¹

To appear as a character in one of Jelinek’s settings is to risk your life; lucky escapees stagger about as zombies. But their voices – lamenting, criticising, or quoting, from speeches made by Treblinka commanders and articles by tabloid hacks or Bible passages – are unrelenting. Look at what’s being said about us in the press, they say. Look at what’s been done to us. They depend on Jelinek to carry on telling their stories. Watching one of her plays or reading one of her novels is like listening to a radio crackling with news, talk shows and song lyrics while someone turns the dial. On every channel, the programme is tuned to social critique.

Jelinek has never been afraid to challenge her country’s stance towards its history and for this, she has been pilloried in Austria, most publicly in 1995 by the populist Freedom Party-FPÖ leader Jörg Haider on his party’s election campaign poster: ‘Lieben Sie Scholten, Jelinek, Häupl, Peymann, Pasternak … oder Kunst und Kultur?’ (‘Do you love Scholten, Jelinek, Häupl, Peymann, Pasternak … or art and culture?’) A character appears in Jelinek’s Die Kinder der Toten (‘Children of the Dead’) whose tanned and athletic physique embodies the ideals of the ‘Buberlpartie’, those young male gangs popular during the late Haider’s heyday. Her protagonist is a young political leader whose flashing white teeth hide his otherwise crooked face and who has lifted his plans for the Third Republic from a similar figure.² Jelinek’s warning of the consequences of right-wing populism in 1995 was played down by most Austrian writers. Maybe now they would re-evaluate her warnings as timely and accurate?

Readers and critics have always been polarised by Jelinek’s writing. No doubt about it, her almost complete erasure of a narrative voice – replaced by a stream of populist invective, tabloid press jargon and Biblical gravitas – makes for difficult reading. If only the references were a bit clearer, I think to myself. Many are lost on me because I don’t have enough knowledge of Austria’s history or its politics. And yet, beneath the surface, I glimpse flashes of deeper meaning. Multi-layered doesn’t even get close to describing her technique. The flickering insights I’ve gained over the years, whether at
performances of her plays or reading perhaps her most accessible novel, *Die Klavierspielerin* (*The Piano Teacher*), have opened up completely new worlds of writing.

Once, during a literature seminar, the late Max Sebald told us we should dig ourselves into one corner of the library rather than trying to read everything. In the niche I picked, Jelinek was sitting close to Kafka, by mere adjacency of surnames. *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) and *Die Klavierspielerin* had more in common than I initially suspected: Kafka’s ‘monstrous insect’³ was the more obvious metaphor for physical alienation. But no less striking was Erika’s sadomasochistic relationship to her own body. Neither character could see an escape from the ‘locked-down regime of violence and submission’⁴ or from the body in which they were trapped.

*Die Klavierspielerin* stayed with me for years and the play version kept me in my seat long after everyone else had trooped out of the theatre. I stayed, waiting for one of those glimpses of insight, and was often rewarded. It made me think that Jelinek had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature because her writing lent a voice, if not a body, to the unheard and murdered. Self-styled patriots place the body at the heart of their ideology: the skin colour of these bodies determines who is permitted to cross borders, who is left to drown, be trafficked or disposed of, and who is selected for a higher purpose. The ears of those bodies are attuned to the dog whistles and sirens of the powerful. Jelinek, on the other side, is an Austrian voice who, by disinterring the dead and rejected, in some small measure returns them their voices.

Lucy Jones

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This land needs a lot of airspace for its blessed spirits to move freely above the waters. In some areas it rises over three thousand metres. That’s how much nature has gone into this land. In turn, the land — perhaps as a way of paying back its debt to nature — treated its people quite generously, throwing them right back into it as soon as they took the bait. The great dead, to name just a few, include: Karl Schubert, Franz Mozart, Otto Hayden, Fritz Eugen, the Last Breath, Zita Zits, Maria Theresiana, plus everything her namesake imperial military academy, the Theresianum, produced in Wiener Neustadt until 1918 and in Stalingrad 1943, plus several million more destroyed creatures. A place for wheeling and stealing: those sorts of deals and double deals are part and parcel of the tourist trade, in the course of which people, rather than getting worn out and thrown away, return in newer and better condition than they came; they are getting less for themselves though, as they have nothing left in their budget. Still, it was worth it. Unfortunately, some also crash in the process. We find ourselves where we can truly find ourselves at the core of our being, in an Austrian village, — or rather, at its outermost reaches which the mountain has already slipped into its pants pockets. Located rather on the fringe of tourism, the place is largely undeveloped. Only older people and families with lots of children go there, as there are hardly any opportunities for serious sports and entertainment. But all the more fresh air and deep forests. And beautiful mountains, about two thousand meters high, some even higher; but this area does not yet quite belong to the high alpine region. Hiking trails, a small local railroad, brooks, a clear river; however, if the dam is opened too quickly, the trout choke in the mud and they float by the bridge, belly up, countless squadrons, traveling along their choppy route just a moment ago, now driving away the tourists, who want to get to the inn on the other side, which is built into the rock, and can be reached only over a sort of chicken ladder, a nearly impassable pathway.
Today some of the guests registered for a trip. They want to visit the Wild Alps region with its lakes and the small castle of the Habsburg Archduke Johann, who married the postmaster’s daughter from Aussee and then dug up the land like a mole – because besides those daughters above the earth, there had to be some iron left for the sons below the earth that could be processed for ploughs or cannons, both sharing, as always, a place next to each other in harmony. The earth gave the ore and in return the hammer barons from the Mürz river canyon and the iron barons from Vienna returned to the earth her tender children, the cannon fodder. So there is a lot to see in this area, if you are interested in the history of the iron dynasty. Fresh cold air. The minibus they had reserved well in advance stops in front of the inn, which is connected to a farm and a hotel. Six people registered for the tour. Two of them, a couple from the Ruhr area, are dawdling around the entrance, asking each other for items they forgot and for the place they were to stop for lunch (included in the price); they are joined after a while by a single woman from Halle, (formerly East) Germany, they chat a bit – will the weather hold out, were they dressed properly, might it even be possible to arrange for a tour by one of the Archduke’s heirs? Would they be able to see the famous speedwell flower that Habsburg gentleman had planted himself in honour of the postmaster’s daughter? The Chrysler Voyager, ready to receive the passengers, pushes her snub nose across the parking lot, she already got wind of her living prey. It’s up to her whom she wants to deliver at the destination and in what condition, she has wild horses under the hood. The chauffeur is already slightly drunk, but he doesn’t care, around here everyone’s always somewhat inebriated, it’s the custom of the region and the regional champions eliminate each other in nightly piss-offs. Mornings at eight not even the players in the qualifying games are playing; they are asleep, leaden from the evening before. After the three passengers had already mounted the best seats, ready to let themselves be pushed out onto the water-grey country road that nearly gets squashed between all that luscious green rolling in from the left and the right, from above and below, four more people arrive – wait a minute, that’s one too many, no problem, we’ll just squeeze together a bit. During vacation you are more willing to accept things you wouldn’t tolerate at home. One of them, a young

Pine trees stand tall. Birds screech because of the disturbance, though deep inside they are unimpressed.
man, hadn’t made a reservation but wants to come along, nonetheless. Others, a mother and a daughter, not exactly a spring chicken either, the daughter, would not want to give up their seats or sit apart. Besides, the old lady wants to sit all the way in the front. That’s not possible either. But it’s possible to squeeze them all into the car. We are not that fat, joke the passengers who like company.

There is a murmur in the air that it will be a sunny day after all and people are eager, all too eager, to learn about anything assuring them that they are part of this world. Time has passed, the sun has climbed a bit, taking a breath around midday, but the car is merrily rolling along, now she climbs up a mountain road, snaking higher and higher around the steep curves. It seems to be quite warm outside. People on bikes are showing off their bodies. The pavement ribbon, a grayish, living continuum. The alpine panorama reveals itself here, at the Niederalpl, the little lower alp in all its splendor – mountains are pointed out by name, they nearly drown in all the sunlight, the motor hums soothingly. Now we are approaching the highest point, the summit of this ancient mountain path, and on the other side we’ll have to get down again. The summer storms, which hit this area especially hard, took parts of the road down into the river with them. Pretty red-white-red plastic ribbons stretched between poles have been placed along the road in many spots where the concrete had broken off; caution, motorists and fellow travelers! Where there used to be a firm shoulder and just enough room to get out of the way of an approaching SUV, there is a sudden chasm, a jagged wound in the road’s side. One doesn’t have to thrust anything – a lance – into it to see that the wound is real. Again and again signs commanding extremely low speed limits. A voice from Halle requests in a strange German accent to follow orders, ancient obedience drills keep twitching in this woman’s paws, but in this country official orders, which cling to us hungrily and want to ruin all our fun, are on principle not taken quite so seriously. So let’s keep driving those sixty kilometers per hour, what can happen. I am telling you: Unfortunately, coincidentally, a tour bus will pass exactly the same part of the road. Here, that giant vehicle harnessed in metal ads is irrefutably the stronger. Unexpectedly, that monster which a month ago bit off a side of the road and spit it into the creek gets a desert that’s not much easier to digest. Only some garnish is missing, but wait - we can still get you some: this multicolored woolen jacket looks quite good, that torn off shoe over there, yeah, it’s a little asymmetrical, the second one’s
missing, it’s still stuck to a dirty, twisted foot. And what’s that minibus doing down there all of a sudden, like a careless beetle tossed on its back by a giant step, limbs spread apart, idling in helpless rotations? Four persons spurted out of it, not wearing seatbelts, of course, now they lie here, colorful splashes of miracle whip and cream dotting the steep grassy incline that merges, together with the debris of the road into the creek that still carries the flood waters. One, two uprooted trees in-between. But those are left over from the flood. A twisted young man, two twisted women, an old woman, screaming, screaming like a sinner at the tabernacle, hurry, hurry!, before this roadside sale of humans closes. Torsos bent out of shape, arms tossed up high, as if a deep joy had overwhelmed those poor souls. Cool mountain air wafts across it all. The wheels are still spinning. The driver is pinned to his wheel that crushed his chest, a bit of liquid trickling from his mouth. But he won’t be able to drink it, he was dragged away from his discount beverages; clutching the half-filled bottle of his life, he still seems braced to resist the steering of a higher power. Up on the hill, people are getting off the bus, screaming and crying they are also trying to find their way, down the hill to the colorful meadow dotted with humans. Pine trees stand tall. Birds screech because of the disturbance, though deep inside they are unimpressed. The bus driver mumbles something sitting on the steps of the dangerous colossus entrusted to him. In any event, here you really can feel the tangy mountain climate. Like his passengers, the driver is Dutch and no longer understands the mountains or the world or those defeated people around here, this special breed which prides itself to be nature’s master and can’t even master its own cars. Something has been felled here, a clearing opens up, it generously makes room for the sun to shine on like a spotlight. Like rolling stones, helpful inhabitants of the valley clamber across the muddy meadow. From the giant balcony above, the terrace of the tourist centre, more human wrecks are tumbling down, unharmed, but unhinged by their grief for the victims, they will get in the way of the rescue workers. All are wearing colourful summer clothes until evening. Then they will throw on their sweaters. Like a woolly dog, playful and fresh, nature jumps around her guests, circling them, tossing them up in the air, but not catching them, because another little stick flying through the air seems suddenly more attractive; capriciously, nature puts her paws on this and that, lets go again ignoring that her playmate had been completely squashed and torn apart by her. She sniffs at the pieces, howls her song into the Lite until nightfall, then hauls another song from deep down
her throat. Nature! Jumping about clumsily, she bullies her way across the terrain like her bulldozers, which are already on the way. Endless the thrill of those life size dolls scattered about, their limbs spread-eagle, their mouths no longer speaking words. Branches are broken off, their leaves already wilting. Rising high in the midday heat are the human slopes, decorations for the landscape, from which this land lives, they stretch all the way up the hill, to the tourist center and even inside, where those continuing alive are scurrying about, rescuing their belongings on the trash pile; they’ve been saved, now they can spend themselves on the fitness trail. Dark forests below; those recent storms only ripped the hem, soon construction brigades will have it fixed and rip us off, if we dare to speed across it over thirty km/h. Let us proceed on foot, into the woods. The sun holds up a light to our faces, we think the Lite in front of us is a mirror and bang our heads against the mug that is us. Thus, we throw ourselves down the alpine valley, the dogs bark, something grabs us by the neck, but not the dogs, they want to assure us for now.

Elfriede Jelinek
Translated by Gitta Honegger

From Children of the Dead by Elfriede Jelinek, translated from the German by Gitta Honegger. Published by Yale University Press in 2024 in the Margellos World Republic of Letters series. Reproduced by permission.
Now, however, a new cadre of female authors is taking centre-stage, continuing the genre-breaking, language-bending traditions established by writers such as Jelinek and Fritz, but also venturing into uncharted territories, exploring contemporary themes and new modes of expression to establish a literary canon all their own. With Austria Guest of Honour at the 2023 Leipzig Book Fair, and a slew of recent prize nominations confirming their repute, what better time to take a closer look at the women writing Austria – some of the boldest, most exciting voices in contemporary German-language literature.

From Elfriede Jelinek to Ingeborg Bachmann, Marianne Fritz to Friederike Mayröcker, the Austrian literary canon contains the names of many celebrated women writers. Known for their often postmodern, subversive approaches to literature – in both style and substance – they have helped to ensure that this Alpine nation has had an impact on German-language literature that its size might belie.

Liquid Literature: Surrealism, Politics and the Past

Though, as with any national body of literature, it can be hard to define what exactly ‘Austrian literature’ is, one subject of particular importance to many of its authors is the country’s National Socialist past. The particular shape that reckoning with this period of history takes – or, rather, doesn’t take – in the national consciousness was famously set upon by writers such as Thomas Bernhard, Hans Lebert and Ilse Aichinger. Themes such as collective memory, inherited guilt and wilful suppression of the past continue to resonate loudly in contemporary literature, which often employs the same – sometimes even more pronounced – surrealist and allegorical approaches.

With its dark humour, dream-like tone and a good dose of ambiguity that asks its reader to do some work, Eva Menasse’s Dunkelblum (Darkenbloom, translation forthcoming by Charlotte Collins) offers a complex and chilling examination of Austria’s role in the Second World War – a topic about which Menasse has written before. In her fictional village of Darkenbloom, the very ground proves treacherous: a contentious excavation could bring to light evidence of mass graves from the 1940s, while increasingly porous borders take on an unsettlingly political aspect that can be extended to both Austria behind the Iron Curtain and the movement of people across Europe today. By holding up a mirror to the past, Menasse succeeds in also interrogating the present, with a strong message about accountability and collective silence.
Taking the surrealism up a notch, meanwhile – and making one of the biggest literary splashes in Austria of recent years – Raphaela Edelbauer’s mind-boggling Das flüssige Land (The Liquid Land, tr. Jen Calleja) also plays heavily with the ground beneath our feet to show how the past can be concealed but never entirely done away with. The Vienna-born author’s debut novel was shortlisted for the German Book Prize and firmly established her as a leading light in what could perhaps be termed ‘new Austrian surrealism’.

While comedy and surrealism offer a powerful, sometimes shocking, lens through which to view the past, they can also help to make sense of the present, as shown by Elisabeth Klar. In Himmelwärts (‘Heaven Bound’), she blends fairy tale with reality to explore how those perceived to be outsiders are treated in a society that will not abide deviation from its accepted norms. Similarly, Mercedes Spannagel’s Das Palaismussbrennen (‘The Palace Must Burn’), set in an absurd parallel present in which Austria has a far-right female president, is a fine example of one of the furious young voices calling for fundamental social and political change. Sharp-tongued, with a biting sense of humour that takes evident delight in undermining its narrator’s extreme anti-capitalist views, it is a creative examination of how intolerance at both ends of the political spectrum can lead to disaster – a rallying cry for dialogue.

Building on the firmly established Austrian tradition of the Anti-Heimatroman (anti-home-land novel), these varied works all mix surrealism with sharply realistic scenes to highlight the dangerous absurdities of the world in which we live, and how the past, as much as we may try to ignore it, is only ever a short way beneath our feet. But what of the overlap – often equally concerning – between present and future?

Slow Erosion: Climate Change and Dystopian Futures

It may not come as a surprise that Raphaela Edelbauer leads the way here too. Having made a name for herself by interrogating the past, she went on with her Austrian Book Prize-winning second novel, Dave, to deliver an unsettling visualisation of what is yet to come. Set in a dystopian future, Dave again uses surrealism and dark humour to great effect, calling into question what we think we know about the foundation of human experience – consciousness – and blurring the lines between the physical world and an absurdist dreamscape. Though artificial intelligence (AI) may be at its core, the novel draws on further themes such as community, loneliness and the morality of choice to explore how we interact with one another and our surroundings.

A different kind of dystopia appears in Lucia Leidenfrost’s Wir verlassenen Kinder (‘We Abandoned Children’), an unsettling view of
a society ruled by children, reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies*. But while power struggles, isolation and the threat of an increasingly intolerant ‘we’ help drive the plot, there is a deeper, yet more disturbing element in play here: these children appear to have been abandoned because their country is at war. Published in the pandemic, Leidenfrost’s slender novel has become even more eerily prescient in light of the war in Ukraine.

Quite different in style yet no less haunting, *Aufruhr der Meerestiere* (‘An Uprising of Sea Creatures’) is the second novel by *Marie Gamillscheg*. Following her highly acclaimed debut, *Alles was glänzt* (‘All that Glitters’), which explored the slow erosion of community in a former mining village feeling the effects of urban migration, Gamillscheg pursues her recognisable style of prose – thoughtful, by turns economical and lyrical – to tell the story of a young marine biologist returning to her hometown of Graz. Concerned with the impact humanity is having on the natural world, it also explores distinctly female experiences: the struggles women face in the scientific community, and the narrator’s destructive relationship with her own body. Contrasting powerfully with Gamillscheg’s nostalgia-ridden tone, these challenging topics call to mind Elfriede Jelinek’s outspokenness about women’s bodies and sexuality, given a contemporary overhaul.

**The Parts We Play: Family Dynamics and Women’s Roles**

Joining Raphaela Edelbauer and Marie Gamillscheg as a unique, fearless new voice in Austrian literature, *Mareike Fallwickl* champions female narrators in both her own and others’ writing. Following an Austrian Book Prize nomination for her debut novel, *Dunkelgrün fast schwarz* (‘Dark Green Almost Black’), she recently released her third, *Die Wut, die bleibt* (‘The Rage That Remains’), in which women’s multifarious roles are examined intently, often from a rather discomfiting angle. Suicide, sexual violence and self-harm all loom large in this unflinching novel, but Fallwickl also disrupts classic tropes by creating a gang of vigilante women who enact retaliatory violence on men who harm women. With a strong sense of black humour and extremely contemporary edge (the novel is set during the pandemic), Fallwickl looks at the female experience in terms of broader social concerns, but also at the minute details of domesticity and family relationships.

Family dynamics, particularly from children’s points of view, have long been a subject of fascination for *Monika Helfer*, who has been publishing critically acclaimed works for more than four decades. Her most recent novel, *Löwenherz* (‘Lionheart’), is the conclusion to a trilogy that employs a potent blend of fiction and autobiography to tell the story of Helfer’s own family. In this final instalment, the author’s brother Richard is the main protagonist: a man both ordinary and extraordinary, whose tragic fate is balanced by Helfer’s cool prose and lightly ironic tone. Despite its brevity,
Löwenherz captures complex relationships and also speaks to the process of writing, showing the author herself at work as she considers how best to convey certain episodes.

In *Die Nachricht* (‘The Message’) by Doris Knecht, we also meet a writer, this time fictional – though narrator Ruth is not without certain similarities to Knecht herself. This novel, too, is concerned with family dynamics, though of a gentler sort: following the death of her husband, Ludwig, Ruth finds herself borne up by family and friends. Knecht paints a rich and moving portrait of what it is to rebuild one’s life in the wake of tragedy, but also shines a light on female friendship, marriage, sexual violence and, specifically, how women are treated in the age of social media. As in her previous novels, trust and betrayal are important factors in the lives of Knecht’s characters. They are too for Laura Freudenthaler’s – particularly in *Geistergeschichte* (‘Ghost Story’), a novel with an imaginative premise that refreshes the love-triangle trope. Blending dreams and reality, *Geistergeschichte* also makes creative use of sound, becoming a lyrical, musical read that hints at female empowerment yet refuses to offer resolution.

**Why Austria, Why Now?**

For many of these writers, Austria provides a recognisable backdrop against which to explore universal themes. For others, the country itself is a stepping-off point from which to examine critically how society engages with the past, and how the long arm of history can inform the present. From Salzburg to Vienna to quiet countryside villages, all these novels express a distinctly Austrian flavour, yet at heart they highlight issues that go far beyond national borders, portraying the state of the country but also the wider human – and, in most cases, specifically female – experience.

Eleanor Updegraff

*A version of this article was first published on the New Books in German website: https://www.new-books-in-german.com/women-writing-austria/*
Readers seeking a new take on the familiar themes of guilt and memory need look no further than ‘Darkenbloom’, the latest novel by the award-winning Eva Menasse. Comic yet chilling, the novel tells the compelling tale of a town forced to confront its Nazi past.

EVA MENASSE

From DUNKELBLUM (‘Darkenbloom’)
Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2021
Forthcoming translation by Charlotte Collins (Scribe, 2023)

The Austrians are a people who confidently look forward to the past.
Proverb

In Darkenbloom the walls have ears, the flowers in the gardens have eyes; they turn their heads this way and that so nothing escapes them, and the grass has whiskers that register every step. People here have a sixth sense. Curtains billow as if fanned by quiet breathing, in and out, essential to life. Whenever God looks down into these houses from above, as though they had no roofs – when he peeps into the doll’s houses of the model town he constructed with the Devil to serve as a warning to all, in almost every house he sees people standing at the window, behind their curtains, peering out. Sometimes – often – there are two, even three of them in the same house, standing at windows in different rooms, concealed from one another. One wishes God could only see into houses and not into hearts.

In Darkenbloom, the locals know everything about each other, and the few tiny details they don’t know, that they can neither fabricate nor simply leave out – these are not irrelevant, these matter most of all. Whatever is not common knowledge predominates like a curse. The others, the incomers and those who have married in, don’t know much. They know that the castle burned down, that the count’s descendants now live in various far-flung countries but usually return for weddings and christenings, when there is great celebration throughout the town. The children gather flowers in the cottage gardens and wreathe garlands, the old women dig out their hundred-year-
old traditional costumes, and everyone stands the length of Herrengasse and waves. The foreign brides note with tight little smiles that, although the republicans took over many years ago, the subjects here can still be relied upon, on high days and holidays, at least.

It’s been a long time, though, since counts were buried here. The crypt can be visited, but it is no longer accepting occupants. It wasn’t until twenty years after the war that the counts were lured back to Darkenbloom, with the information that the family crypt was no longer watertight. By contrast, immediately after the war somebody – no one knows who – kept them away with astonishing diplomatic finesse: the news conveyed to them about the condition of the burnt-out ruin was greatly exaggerated. Demolished, alas, it had to be completely demolished: this was the assessment presented, amid wailing and gnashing of teeth. And the recently widowed countess-in-exile believed her former stewards and tenants and secretaries and maids, or whosoever was behind it, or whosoever passed on things they knew from hearsay or things they had been forced to say themselves. Perhaps the countess wanted to believe it. She was too lazy, or too cowardly, to come and see for herself, too low on funds to pay for a surveyor’s report. And so the castle was pulled down, and a huge piece of prime real estate became available in a previously inaccessible central location. Someone must have profited back then, because someone always does. The centre of Darkenbloom has been architecturally and atmospherically divided ever since: the centuries-old rustic half, with its winding streets and whitewashed houses with their blue or green shutters, and the other half, hideously functional, all steel and silicone, practical, easily wiped clean, just as people would have liked to have been themselves, back then, in the period of reconstruction.

Eva Menasse
Translated by Charlotte Collins
Löwenherz (‘Lionheart’) is the final instalment in Monika Helfer’s trilogy of autobiographical novels, a fascinatingly lucid body of literature that examines individual lives and how to represent them in writing. After taking her grandmother and father under her fictional lens in Die Bagage (‘The Riff-Raff’) and Vati (‘Daddy’), Helfer moves to the tragically short life of her younger brother, Richard.

Cared for as a baby by his adoring sisters, Richard is sent to live with an aunt after the death of their mother. From these intimate beginnings grows an unsettling distance, a wall of cool reserve that makes him seem, on rare visits, like a stranger. As she does throughout all three novels, Helfer narrates these difficult years with her characteristically observant touch, picking out sharp details but aware, too, of how memory works; what we believe we have experienced may not always be the ‘truth’. Later, the siblings find their way back to one another, and it is in this period, Helfer now a young mother extricating herself from a failing marriage, Richard a struggling artist who makes his living as a typesetter, that the novel’s main events take place. Following a bizarre encounter with a young woman, Richard ends up taking responsibility for a little girl known only by her nickname, Putzi – an assumed fatherhood that will have drastic consequences for the entire family.

It is no secret – we are told on the second page – that Richard died by suicide at the age of thirty, yet so tender and vivid is Helfer’s portrait that it is hard to read Löwenherz and not wish it might end differently. For a man who ‘thought constantly of lying down’, Richard’s role in the novel is mainly to wander – he is a restless character, never quite certain of his place in life. Yet the sudden appearance of Putzi (hot on the heels of his beloved dog, Schamasch) brings everything into sharper focus. From this point on, having described their childhood in gently evocative tones, Helfer’s prose
takes on an urgent, crystalline, even brittle quality, as the ties binding Richard to her – and indeed his own – life begin to tangle, stretch and, eventually, snap.

A eulogy for the brother she loved, but also an examination of family bonds, fatherhood and what it is to feel responsible for another person’s happiness, Löwenherz is remarkable for the way it pits fact and fiction against one another: a convincing portrait which nonetheless seems blurred by our understanding that the Richard of this novel is not necessarily the one who really existed. Clear-sighted, empathic and realistic about what words can and cannot do for us, Löwenherz is, perhaps, above all an attempt to let Richard live again, to give all the characters who move through these pages – and who so often hurt each other, whether or not intentionally – that most impossible of things: a second chance.

*Eleanor Updegraff*
Compelling, fast-paced and self-aware, Doris Knecht’s ‘The Message’ is a deftly told novel by a writer at the top of her game. Examining our obsession with social media from a feminist perspective, it interweaves a tense and sometimes dark narrative with delicate, detailed descriptions of everyday life. Told in the first person, ‘The Message’ reads almost like a diary.
smoke, read my emails, look at the news, and scroll through Instagram and Twitter alone.

The message was sent by a faceless person called Ernst Breuer. I first wanted to delete it unread but then my curiosity got the better of me. Just as I clicked on the message, Wolf made a gesture with his hand, wafting my cigarette smoke away just very lightly.

I got up and said: ‘Should I sit somewhere else?’

‘No, of course not. It’s fine,’ replied Wolf with such an impeccable long-suffering look on his face that I moved to the other side of the bench anyway, wine glass in one hand, laptop in the other, and the cigarette that I was no longer enjoying between my lips. I could have just stubbed it out, but it was my lungs, my air, my life.

The message from the faceless person contained just one sentence: *Do you know about your handsome husband’s affair?*

*Doris Knecht*
*Translated by Lucy Jones*

*A version of this piece was first published on the New Books in German website: https://www.new-books-in-german.com/recommendations/the-message/*
When Ruth Schwarz’s parents are killed in a car crash, it is only the first of many shocks. The second is that they wish to be buried in their home village of Gross Einland, a place that does not exist on any map. This does not deter Ruth. She sets off on a quest to find it, which she does, eventually, and then only by chance. If she felt disorientated before, this place has the potential to take the ground out from beneath her feet. Literally.

For Gross Einland sits above extensive mineworks, and the ground is unstable. Sections of the town collapse without notice. Children simply disappear as sinkholes open on their way to school. At other times the ground opens up to reveal corpses of people long dead. Yet the villagers discourage Ruth from asking too many questions. All except the countess, who acts as a feudal overlord. She knows everything about everybody, including Ruth and her scientific credentials. Ruth is a theoretical physicist, and the countess, ignoring Ruth’s protests about the theoretical part of her job description, corrals her into inventing a filler to be injected into the ground to shore up Gross Einland’s foundations.

As Ruth sets about her assignment, she discovers that her parents, unknown to her, had been making frequent visits to Gross Einland. She suspects they had been investigating the hidden past, some secret tied to the fact that the mines acted as a substation of Mauthausen Concentration Camp, and that many of the labourers forced to work there remained unaccounted for after the war. Can it be that the pleasant people of this place are complicit in some huge war crime? Is the earth opening up to ensure that their guilt is revealed to all?

Edelbauer’s novel, shortlisted for both the Austrian and German Book Prizes in 2019, is a warning to her country that any attempts to downplay its role in Nazi atrocities cannot succeed: the truth will out, and it may well swallow the present. The almost feudal society of Gross
Einland does not detract from that message, but it does inject an enjoyable Brigadoon effect. This is a place out of time, where time flows differently, more slowly. When Ruth goes back to the ‘real world’, she has been gone twice as long as she thought. There is some ambitious mixing of fable and science here, not just in the ideas but in prose style with sections of Gross Einland’s past told as fable contrasting with Ruth’s detached scientific voice. Not an entirely successful mix for me, I must say. (I dropped physics at school like a hot potato.) Nevertheless, an interesting novel, not as cute as its cover, with a flawed narrator. For Ruth is crumbling too ...

Lizzy Siddal
These quieter, but no less profound, novels explore the way social structures can perpetuate the injuries inflicted on the weak and the defenceless. Maja Haderlap, Monika Helfer, Laura Freudenthaler, and Alois Hotschnig are among the most compelling Austrian writers today whose works expose the intricate ways trauma inserts its tentacles into the lives and psyches of those touched by it directly or indirectly across generations.

Parul Seghal has written in The New Yorker about the current popularity of the trauma plot, which often uses trauma as a crutch to bring an easy infusion of emotional and moral weight to threadbare narratives. However, she notes, ‘with a wider aperture, we move out of the therapeutic register and into a generational, social, and political one. It becomes a portal into history and into a common language.’ The strength of these Austrian writers lies precisely in the broad perspective they bring to their characters’ lives and their sensitivity to the pull of history’s undercurrents in the present.

Two doyennes of this interiorised fiction – Ingeborg Bachmann and Christine Lavant – both died in 1973 and both won great acclaim for their poetry before their equally accomplished prose was given its due. In many respects these two women were opposites. Highly educated in philosophy and literature, Bachmann was glamorous and cosmopolitan, an active public speaker, and politically outspoken. Lavant, born Christine Thonhauser, the ninth child of a poor miner, was a reclusive auto-didact who spent almost her entire life in a remote Carinthian valley. She was half-blind and tubercular and had a penchant for the mystical. As writers, however, Bachmann and Lavant shared many of the same concerns. Both were highly attuned to the myriad ways traditional patriarchy undermines the dignity and self-worth of all individuals in the system, and their fiction dramatised the ways women are psychically and physically destroyed by their fathers, husbands, lovers and brothers.
Maja Haderlap was known for her poetry in Slovenian before she burst onto the German-language literary scene in 2011 by winning the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for an excerpt from her novel *Angel of Oblivion*. This heartbreaking and lyrical novel is based on the experiences of her family and the Slovenian-speaking minority in Carinthia, many of whom fought as partisans in the Second World War and suffered resentment and suspicion from the German-speaking community in the decades after. It is also the coming-of-age story of a young girl who must learn to navigate the no-man’s land between two hostile communities and two historically and emotionally fraught languages. The community has been deeply scarred by the war and these scars give rise to a confusing mix of contradictory emotions: shame, grief and pride, nightmares and nostalgia. Illuminating an almost forgotten chapter of European history and the European present, the book portrays family dynamics poisoned by war and torture. Interwoven with this is a compelling reflection on storytelling: the narrator hopes to rid herself of the emotional burden of her past and to tell stories on behalf of those who cannot.

Monika Helfer’s clear-eyed, unsentimental trilogy – *Die Bagage*, *Vati*, and *Löwenherz* (‘The Riff-Raff’, ‘Daddy’, ‘Lionheart’) – relays the stories of her grandparents, parents and, in the final volume, her eccentric brother Richard. This family saga is filled with colourful, often tragic characters, and artfully told with authorial asides, flashes forward and flashbacks. Through her relatives’ fates, Helfer charts the effects and side-effects of poverty, narrow-mindedness and misogyny through three generations of a family in a remote valley in Vorarlberg. Maria Moosbrugger, Helfer’s happily married grandmother, was a woman of exceptional beauty, a beauty that drew the lust, suspicion, and envy of all the villagers, even – and perhaps most toxically – that of the parish priest. Maria’s husband, Josef, is called up and sent to the Ostfront in the Second World War. During Josef’s absence, a handsome German stranger shows up on her doorstep after noticing her at a fair. When Maria’s pregnancy begins to show a few months later, malicious tongues in the village immediately start counting the weeks since Josef left, disregarding his two visits home on leave, and conclude that the child is illegitimate. Despite Maria’s assurances, Josef believes the gossip and never once speaks to or looks directly at his fifth child, Grete, who will become Monika Helfer’s mother. This silence will reverberate through three generations.

In Laura Freudenthaler’s two recent novels, silence is a weapon of self-defence, particularly for women, but also a double-edged sword. In *Die Königin schweigt* (‘The Queen is Silent’; 2017), the widowed Fanny, like
Helfer’s grandmother, lived a hard, impoverished life in the early 20th century in a small mountain village. Still, she so internalised her father’s dictum, ‘there are certain things you just don’t talk about’, that she is unable to find any way to alleviate her own suffering or the pain of those around her. Although her granddaughter tries to break through Fanny’s veil of muteness, certain wounds remain shrouded in silence. In *Geistergeschichte* (‘Ghost Story’; 2019), we see a woman losing her ability to communicate at the same time as she loses her sense of self and her ability to play the piano. Anne is a French woman who moved to Austria to be with her Austrian husband but never overcame her sense of being a foreigner. Her marriage of twenty years is faltering and when she takes a sabbatical from teaching, her already fragile ego begins to fray. She and her husband are drawing farther apart and yet she is paralysed, unable to reach out to him or confront him with her suspicions that he’s having an affair. Isolation, stress and depression eat away at the foundations of her personality.

The narrator of Alois Hotschnig’s third novel, *Der Silberfuchs meiner Mutter* (‘My Mother’s Silver Fox’; 2021), talks eloquently, almost obsessively, about the circumstances of his difficult early life and his mother’s disastrous experiences during the Second World War. Heinz Fritz is a child of the Lebensborn, a state-supported system founded by the SS to increase Germany’s ‘Aryan’ population by relocating to the Reich women made pregnant by German soldiers in occupied territories. When Heinz’s mother, Gerd, a nurse in northernmost Norway is brought to Hohenems, the father of her child will have nothing to do with her or Heinz. After years in foster homes, Heinz is reunited with his mother who has become a scarred, erratic being. Heinz’s monologue skips forward and back, tracing his attempts to find his father and fill in the many gaps in his mother’s story.

Like the novels of Haderlap, Helfer, and Freudenthaler, Hotschnig’s fiction recounts stories of the silenced and the traumatised. Yet, by focusing on the unsaid, on the underside of history, and on how their characters’ experiences and wounds reflect the predatory social structures and destructive circumstances in which they lived, these writers elevate personal traumas to emblematic tragedies. Equally important is the artfulness with which these narratives are constructed. The complexities of memory and repression as well as the vagaries of our inner lives are reflected in the warp and weft of these narratives. As Joan Didion reflected, ‘We tell ourselves stories in order to live’. We also tell them – and read them – in order to understand the world around us and how history has shaped us.

*Tess Lewis*
Laura Freudenthaler is a master of concision and understatement. In her fiction, silence and words unsaid play a central role, being both weapons of self-defence, particularly for women, and double-edged swords. In her first novel, ‘The Queen is Silent’, the widowed Fanny’s childhood on a farm in the 1930s in a remote Austrian valley and her marriage to a schoolteacher were gruelling. Still, she so internalised her father’s dictum, ‘there are certain things you just don’t talk about’, that she is unable, her life long, to find any way to alleviate her own suffering or the pain of those around her. Too proud, too proper, too self-sufficient to indulge in unnecessary or unseemly talk, Fanny pays a high price for her regal reserve. When her granddaughter offers her a blank journal in an attempt to connect, Fanny leaves it untouched, preferring not to revisit the past. And yet, the past fills her thoughts and dreams, often so vividly that time dissolves. For all that, Fanny sees herself as anything but a victim. Freudenthaler, born in Salzburg in 1980, was awarded the prize for best German-language debut novel at the 2018 Festival du premier roman in Chambé. (TL)

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ince the news of her brother’s death had arrived, everything on her parents’ farm occurred more slowly. During the war, Fanny had sometimes stroked her father’s back without him noticing in an attempt to ward off his increasing torpor. Now she no longer came near him. Fanny had the feeling that her father never sat down, that he was always working even though he had sold all his cows and leased out one of his fields. There were no animals left on the farm in the hollow aside from the chickens. Still, he was often in the stable and when Fanny looked for him there, she found him sorting ropes and leather straps and tools. Once Fanny saw him mucking out the pigsty. Her father didn’t notice her. Fanny quickly left the sty and thought she must have been mistaken. There were no longer any pigs or bedding in the sty. When Fanny spoke to her father, he stopped what he was doing. Then he went out and started some other task. Her mother said that she would never get used to cooking for just two people again, no matter how long she lived. It was hopeless; she always prepared far too much food.
She saved the extra portions, but they were never eaten because she cooked fresh meals every day. What else was she to do? her mother asked. She threw the spoiled food where the dung heap used to be, along with the potato peels and eggshells and all the scraps she had fed to the pig when they still had one. Fanny’s father came into the kitchen and stood before Fanny and her mother. He gazed past them and looked as if he wanted to hear what they were saying but couldn’t understand. He left again without a word. Her father had always been taciturn. He believed reticence was a virtue because most of what people said was pointless chatter. Fanny asked her mother if Father ever spoke at all anymore. Her mother shrugged her shoulders and let them drop and Fanny did not know what that was supposed to mean.

At night she lay in bed and waited for her husband. The schoolteacher was often at some meeting or other that had to do with the party, but Fanny knew that he also liked to sit in the inn for no reason and play cards with the other men. In the old days, at the farm in the hollow, Fanny had never heard what people were saying in the village. Only after she became the schoolmistress did she realise that there were always two realities: a superficial reality that was discussed openly and another that was only discussed in whispers. There were events that officially occurred and at the same time things were always happening that could not be seen. Women lowered their voices when they spoke of those incidents. You would hear something and remember it clearly, even if you didn’t entirely understand what had happened until more information surfaced in another conversation. Fanny understood that you had to know what you could talk about with whom and that you and your own affairs were discussed when you weren’t there. She had sensed that her father was referring to exactly these hidden events when he said: ‘There are certain things you just don’t talk about.’ Without knowing how she had been informed, at some point Fanny had come to know that her father and Hans Malaun

Liese had come to the village after her husband’s death, at about the same time that Fanny had become the schoolmistress, and Liese often knew more than the other women because men talked to her differently, especially when one or the other visited her after dark.
were negotiating the sale of the farm in the hollow. She had heard, without anyone saying it, that the schoolteacher was involved in the negotiations. Fanny mentioned what she’d heard to her mother, who shrugged her shoulders and let them drop and talked about why this year’s potato crop had started to turn mouldy. Fanny often ran down to the farm in the hollow twice a day as she used to and tried to help, although there was nothing to do. She stayed anyway and watched her father and her mother, as if her mere presence on her parents’ farm could prevent something, although she didn’t know exactly what that might be. The words ‘gambling debts’ entered Fanny’s life. She wasn’t sure she had properly understood the murmurs she had overheard, namely that the schoolteacher owed Hans Malaun some gambling debts. Once, when Liese was sitting with Fanny in the schoolhouse kitchen, Fanny couldn’t bear it any longer and asked Liese if she knew anything about this. Liese had come to the village after her husband’s death, at about the same time that Fanny had become the schoolmistress, and Liese often knew more than the other women because men talked to her differently, especially when ne or the other visited her after dark. Fanny told Liese what she’d heard. Liese waved it away and said, ‘nonsense’. In the inn, they only play for small change. Fanny felt a bit reassured, but not for long.

Laura Freudenthaler
Translated by Tess Lewis
AUSTRIAN POETRY AND I

by SJ FOWLER

Here now I reflect on my collaborations with my Austrian poet contemporaries. When I first met many of them, they were well ahead of me in what I sensed I wanted to be doing. They were startling live performers. And could pack out bookshops too. And organised themselves. And were affable, if always self-aware. Fabian Faltin is the best literary performer I’ve ever worked with. Or perhaps Max Höfler is? Or jörg piringer is? Or Robert Prosser, or Esther Strauss? Is Anatol Knotek the best concrete poet of my age? There are a dozen others, two dozen even, who are some of the most inventive, present, resonant and wry poets and performers I’ve met and hosted, in the midst of the thousands I am lucky to meet from all over the world.

The Austrian Cultural Forum (ACF) in London supports my work, consistently, and has done for nearly a decade. It’s a second home in London, their beautiful building. The Kakania poetry project starts in 2014 and lasts two years. I pair many contemporary writers with figures of the Habsburg era. It’s funny, when you think about who was writing and doing and making and thinking in that time and place. Schönberg, Freud, Andreas-Salomé, Wittgenstein, Rilke, Klimt, Schiele, Weber, Mahler, Schnitzler, Kraus ... I wonder if this period has an effect on why contemporary Austrian poetry is so exceptional? We publish an anthology, hold nine events. I write a whole book about Kokoschka.

www.eurolitnetwork.com/the-riveter/
I give a lecture on Peter Handke’s poetry for the ‘Rest is Noise’ festival at Southbank Centre. Then I am asked to give another, and share the work of Thomas Bernhard. And another, so Elfriede Jelinek. And another, so Ingeborg Bachmann. Almost no one, in any of those large, public arts centre audiences, has heard of any of those authors as I begin to speak. Handke entirely hypnotises me, in English translation. How can the flat have such sheer drops? Bachmann’s and Celan’s letters are what love is and isn’t. Bernhard, so we are allowed to be so bitter as to be truthful. Jelinek, the anger can be in the language itself ... I’ve been teaching them every year since, to students at Kingston University. Why is it that Austrian writers won’t let the lie sit and demand to be heard? Nest besmirchers, I say. The ACF lets me run a new poetry series called Illuminations. Each event we celebrate a living or late 20th-century Austrian author. Those above, and Friederike Mayröcker, Stella Rotenberg, Mela Hartwig, Franz Baermann, Theodor Kramer, HG Adler, Alfred Marnau. Some British poets now get my Austrian bug.

In 2022 I am with Fabian Faltin again, making soup in front of an audience, at my festival. Then, I am in Einbaumöbel, a venue in Vienna, with twenty Austrian poets who don’t resent me organising a festival in their city; I am stepping on Max Höfler’s head. I am at a fake press conference at the W:ORTE festival in Innsbruck and Robert Prosser is holding my face. I am in Freud’s house, in London, and Esther Strauss is curled up, legitimately asleep on Anna Freud’s real couch, before an audience.

Viennese Actionism. A friend sees me smash a building with a spade in Latvia, on video, and suggests I look up the Actionists, knowing I don’t know them. I see why, and I see why they did what they did. I start attending Bob Cobbing’s writers’ forum after his death but before mine. I hear of his correspondences across the world, at the height of sound and concrete poetry’s first boom. He was close with Ernst Jandl. Oh, the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group) too, then. I copy out H. C. Artmann, Friedrich Achleitner, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm.

I am, again, being helped on by the Austrian Cultural Forum, and we make a film, *Where is Everyone Austria?*, during the lockdowns. The Austrian poets send me their footage, I roll around in the ACF bedrooms with a rainbow hippo. It is seen over 1,000 times online in the first few months. I am then performing at the Austrian Embassy, talking, making people laugh, hopefully, then uncomfortably, and the room stretches on like a glossy landlocked state. I am in Belgrade on the day of Brexit, having coffee with a surly Austrian poet, Stefanie Sargnagel. ‘Not a good day to be you,’ she says. I am
receiving a hamper of Austrian goods at my home, a gift from a friend, and eat the cake with my hands. I am in Graz, at the Forum Stadtpark. A film of my words is projected in massive letters across a public park. It says, ‘two dates and a line between, that is all there is’.

Who has the chance to be led to such a tradition, that isn’t their own? Who then gets to work with it, now, as an outsider? What a privilege to have built a structure which allows me to invite Austrians to perform in London, and to go to festivals there, and to collaborate. To learn of them through them, and to see their tradition in a way they never will. Envy is inspirational.

I organise one of the Illuminations events in Kensal Green Cemetery itself, to celebrate Erich Fried, where he is buried. I end up being poet-in-residence of this place, the cemetery, for a whole summer. I get to know Fried’s son David, his niece Maeve, his friend John Parham. They read for me, and us all, in the Dissenters’ Chapel. He was larger in that room, as he was in life. My younger British friends don’t know him. I’ll settle for them watching and reading the Austrian poets of their own age, for they are the ones who carry with them a century or more of something that no other country can, or will, commit to paper or the stage.

SJ Fowler
Michael Stavarič came to Austria as a seven-year-old child from the then neighbouring Czechoslovakia. The Stavarič family’s original plan was to go to Canada, so just think – he might have been given to the English language, and not to the German... Not untypically for a person coming from a different language, he explores the language he writes in with deep interest. He picks up on what is surreal, absurd, often grotesque.

1. They have it good at the central dairy they can bathe in milk if they want to and there’s never really never any black smoke rising from the chimney there they are the opposite of the former SS laughing and packaging milk children drink it the same day and the viennese citizen stirs it appreciatively into his coffee

2. I would like to go to the Prater again on my fiftieth buy myself a blood-red ice-cream and have a ride on the ghost train flinch and giggle and think about childhood a bit: when one of the skeletons grabs you when the ghosts circle around your head howling with laughter when the devil flips up in front of you with a mad flick the trident in his right hand and in his left a severed arm or a leg yes those were the days

Michael Stavarič
Translated by Sheridan Marshall
THE EYES
I.

Firs in fog
in a haggard world the hungry I
want to atone for nothing
but we have to we have to they told me
they said it all started with a bite

And the taste must have been a shard
broken from heaven and eyes cut open
look: there are possibilities
this idea was enough to chop any notion of love

God is a gravedigger I believe
he shovels a hole in me
and there he waits
a lie about redemption

Robert Prosser is yet another brilliant performer among contemporary Austrian poets. He likes adapting his own literary works for stage, turning them into recitations or performances. His ear for the performative element is clear in his poetry, with all its rhythms and alliterations. He can also be amazingly evocative – I could see, but also smell and taste what he was writing about. Firs in fog, caves and ravines in the mountains... This eye and ear for nature also comes across strongly in his prose writing.
They told me about caves and ravines inhabited by hermits
mountains echoing of their screams and visions and prayings
but here is none
except me except you
except us none is here blessed Mary

A piece of lime
I drag you pull you
I whittle my praying my love
until you find form
your face your hands our body
pricked and sunburned and frostbitten
we can stay at the river bank like lovers would do

All around us only rocks
I’d prefer an apple I’d choose apple and beauty
instead of stone and oblivion
the apple is a mirror hanging in the wilderness
we both are enough
to smash it and finally become one
to bite in the apple like in the flesh of another
in my mouth the knowledge about a second human

Mary your eyes
I carve them big and empty
can you be something other than ugly
the walking justifies my flaws
step by step more wood more rock more doubts
but Mary I feel Mary I obey
I build a shed on your command
a house for the two of us
and maybe someone will find it
discover carving and bone
of you of me

Robert Prosser
Translated by the author
DEAR SQUIRREL,

You have 8 million views on YouTube and I have, at this moment, maybe 20 or 30.

People love watching you when you’re drunk, eating fermented fruit on the grass. You throw yourself against your tree with suicidal energy and as you claw the bark, you tumble over backwards.

You move in senseless circles, running clockwise, panicking, starting and stopping, just like a video download.

Yesterday I saw you, or one of you, in front of my window, jumping onto the big paper-recycling bin, stuffed full with Amazon boxes. Scuttling around in a little puddle, dancing on soggy cardboard, a triumphant tap-dance on a mountain of capitalist waste.

It’s amazing how you can abandon yourself, at least for a moment, before you run over the street and disappear in the neighbour’s garden. I fear to lose control like that. To interrupt my fragile home-office balance and end up watching animal videos all day instead.

Control yourself, my friend, or else be controlled by the algorithms.

Take care, stay free.
Don’t kill yourself falling off a tree.

Fabian

PS: And go easy with that fermented fruit.
HEY FORMER LOVER,

Since you disappeared from my life, the animals have also stopped talking to me. To fill the silence, I've been re-reading your old letters, especially all those parts that were just blanks, things I didn’t want to see or hear.

Once, you write, you were in Estonia, sitting in a bus next to the famous Astrologer Igor Mung. He had a dog named Sufi and a mighty grey beard, and was on his way to pick up a set of rose-coloured glass windows for his library. They’d filter and tune the light just right, for reading, thinking, praying.

Maybe my tuning was never quite right for you. You always got a positive vibe from people like doctors and nurses, from clerks in the unemployment office, from witches and saunas.

You needed your rooms in a white that was not actually white, but yellow-white.
Not colour, you said, but an echo of colour.
And in your light-starved country, the blinds always had to be open.
Never a speck of dust anywhere.

Once you even went to the graveyard and raked the leaves off someone else’s grave.
I think my Viennese Baroque was wrong for you: you’d have been perfect in 10th-century Japan, in the Heian Period. A court lady, with precise everyday routines and opinions set in stone, on all the practical, feminist topics: Where to live, whether to have kids, how to split the work, how to have arguments and make money.

So I’m happy, at least, to see on the internet that you're still wearing the Japanese silk jacket I gave you as a goodbye present.

Cheers,
F

Fabian Faltin
FRANZISKA FÜCHSL

From MY HAARSCHWUND
Sampson Low, 2020
Written in English, introduced by Anna Blasiak

I was recently trying to write a poem about the Holocaust and I decided to use hair as a way into the subject, as I felt quite inadequate in addressing it. Hair, all its good and bad aspects, the amazing and the terrifying. How indulgent then to find Franziska Füchsl, and specifically her entire book devoted to hair. But please don’t get out your combs or brushes. Let all the entanglement excite you. Just follow the trail of the hair...

here,
here,

and ’ere. She, stiffening into her dice. She, prepared to appear in print. Her face, breast, hips knees and toes, her shoulders, arms, hands, fingers pasted and pressed: she, a cliché. Pressed to replicate. ’er black face-flecks, ’er black breast-flecks, ’er black hip-flecks, ’er black knee-flecks, ’er black toe-flecks, ’er black shoulder-flecks, ’er black arm-flecks, ’er black wrist-flecks, ’er black knuckle-flecks, ’er black nail-flecks to disseminate.

Press did not miss her barycenter - - dumper dumper. A mattress and a pullover to tuck her.
es wead scho glei duhumper
es wead scho glei noght
drum kim I za diaha her
the hei’hond af d’woght
wü singa a liahadl
the leapling the kloan
du me’hatst not schlohofm
I hear di nu woan
Somewhat is excelling exclamation, somewhat is exclaimed into existence. With the force of a cloudburst, ’er ’air pastes ’er ’ead. Skeins, thrums cut, reddish, are felt for ropes tightening our bemusement in sachets

’he pastes ’er ears with ’er ’air, sucked

[...]

Wallowing in ooze - - - wallowing in mire - - - wallowing in stillness - - - wallowing in ifs - - - walloping in ooze - - - walloping in mire - - - walloping up silence - - - swallowing my ifs - - - lowering my hair - - - lowering my hair into ooze - - - lowering my hair into this mire’s ooze - - - lowering my hair into silence, absolute - - - covering that silence with ifs

[...]

If the rest were a story, the story’d go: to wraiths, were witnesses necessitate faith. I have seen this face

’he’s beautiful: ’ere

’ere

’ere

and here

When did you accept to dissimilate? - - - To the rumpus

_Franziska Füchsl_

169 _The Riveter_
Sense of humour in poetry? A rare bird, I say. Even more so if it is clearly self-referencing. Which makes Max Höfler’s poems even more exhilarating and refreshing. Show me a reader who will read the line below and not chuckle, I dare you... Höfler enjoys breaking down poetic ‘borders’ in lots of other, different, often ingenious ways: combining words with images or – yes and why not? – bar codes and footnotes; playing with the form, experimenting. Always laughing at himself. He draws inspiration from the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century.

***

This is a very good poem in German.

Max Höfler
MISE EN ABYME

there is a terrace in a village on a cliff
where lovers sit on benches hand in hand
and such a vista opens up before them spread
over land and sea they might think that it belongs to them
but if one peers into the depths it is as if
this other pull catches one in its breathless dread
just as it is when love lulls one into complacency:
one forgets the void right beneath one’s feet
so I lie watching you, ma chère,
in this hotel bed here on the market square
you dressed in almost nothing on the balcony
feeding pigeons on the street with sunflower seeds
then you turn back to me once more
thinking there is nothing left could wreck me to the core

trentinara 17.6.22

EVA FROM THE NORTH

midday and winter across this flat land
the light slow and straight · not scattered with leaves:
trees razor-sharp · monotonous grey fields
and the hard outlines of the houses as if held there
one by one against the sky that vanishes at the edge
with the dissolving sun · this is what i know of her:
face and shoulder on a few photos · the voice on the phone
what we say about other people · never the same
but for the names · everything attracts
but is not yet one or at home · at peace
only the day as far as it reaches · the distance to her
air bright as her skin so one can almost taste it
like the mistletoe berries freckles

buxtehude 28.1.17
Evelyn Schlag has published a wide range of critically acclaimed books in her native German (poetry, prose, short stories). So far two volumes of her poems have appeared in English (with Carcanet), as well as one novel. She absolutely mesmerised me with her quiet attention to detail, her skill in talking about those tender moments that often go unnoticed.

EVELYN SCHLAG

TWO POEMS

from the sequence ‘Fotoalbum’ (‘Photo Album’)

Translated by Karen Leeder, introduced by Anna Blasiak

last evening, november 1957

he bedroom stayed where it was.
the windows did not crash to the street.
there was no howling from the hills
that thundered down into the town

as mother followed father to
new york for 8 months. the child lay
in bed with her plaits cast a love-sick
look towards the mother who was still

sitting at her side.

taken up into my grandparents’ care
i will be in the very best hands said the child.
in the soaring flight of the child’s gaze
the mother’s response sank
into the heart of childhood.

on the nightstand her father laughed
white coat stethoscope round his neck.
the teddy bear slept eyes open.
kodachrome 1958

...s that still her child
with the long
plaits
loose and longer than her blouse

on the doorframe she grows
another mark taller

while her mother
with her Jackie-glasses
smiles into the sun
in central park

bright blue sky
that lends the tall
white buildings
its name sky

scrapers - he she it is
while the waterfall

of shining hair
sweeps and flows
down to the hollow of the
child’s knee

white waterfall
of the storeys
of the sky-high scrapers
at back of the

beautiful mother
in new york

Evelyn Schlag
Translated by Karen Leeder
Maja Haderlap grew up in the border region of Carinthia in the south of Austria, a member of the Slovenian minority. The baggage that comes from growing up traumatised with inherited, transgenerational trauma – Slovenian Carinthians were persecuted during the Second World War – comes across strongly in Haderlap’s most recent volume of poetry. She deals with memory and history, with the volatility of where ‘the border strip / swung back and forth’, and where ‘villages / went astray’.

Haderlap began to receive recognition after publishing several volumes of poetry in Slovenian. At the age of fifty, she wrote a novel in German about her family’s and community’s experiences during the Second World War: Angel of Oblivion, also translated into English by Tess Lewis (Archipelago Books, 2016).

distant transit is Haderlap’s first poetry collection in German, and it has to be said that her relationship with German is marked by distress. The collection is sprinkled with Slovenian place names, plants and insects, myths and folklore; the German influenced by Slovenian diction and composition. ‘In my voice / the first language crystallises and / learns the codes of memory by heart.’ Haderlap writes openly about the push-and-pull experience of being situated between two languages, of the pressure, confusion and conflict it creates, and how that affects everything. The poet wonders what happened ‘when language left me’. This is a question often asked by people of diverse backgrounds who end up in the linguistic no-man’s-land, the forever ‘in-between’, whether as the result of immigration or shifting borders and territorial power grabs.

In fact, what Haderlap captures so well in her poems is the near interchangeability of language and identity. Language is, after all, mentality, identity. The poet shows how enriching it can be to experience this linguistic borderland, but also how difficult and dangerous it can be. Lethal, even. After all, minority languages are prone to disappear, to being devoured by more dominant ones. But minority languages can...
The Riveter

also prove resilient, put up a good fight, become stronger by feeding off the oppressor.

The poems in distant transit are quite intimate in their microscopic exploration of ordinariness. Apart from the convoluted history of her people, Haderlap also examines the natural world, Slovenian folklore and mythology. There is something gentle, like lapping waves in her lines, with an occasional surf breaking over the reader’s head with a surprisingly cold or salty spray. Though the droplets are no fine shower. They fall heavy and loaded. And even though everything seems to be balanced, measured and precise, even though there is not a surplus word here, the quiet tone cuts right to the quick.

Anna Blasiak

CHRISTINE LAVANT
SHATTER THE BELL IN MY EAR: SELECTED POEMS

TRANSLATED BY DAVID CHORLTON
THE BITTER OLEANDER PRESS, 2017

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH DANCE

Largely unknown outside her native Austria, it is hoped the publication of this bilingual edition of Christine Lavant’s selected poetry and letters by Austrian-born poet and translator David Chorlton will go some way to giving Lavant the English-language audience she deserves.

Chorlton’s thoughtful selection brings together for the first time poems from four of Lavant’s key collections: Die Bettlerschale (‘The Begging Bowl’), Spindel im Mond (‘Spindle in the Moon’), Der Pfauenschrei (‘The Peacock’s Cry’), and Kunst wie meine ist nur verstümmeltes Leben (‘Art like mine is only stunted life’), as well as a number of insightful letters touching on her art and personal life which Lavant wrote to her friends and publisher later in her literary career.

Born into poverty in 1915 in a socially conservative corner of Southern Austria, Christine Lavant produced a small yet powerful body of poetry and prose which stands as a deeply lyrical testament to her
struggles with illness and religious belief. Influenced by the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and the teachings and imagery of traditional Christianity, the poetry in this collection demonstrates Lavant’s talent for speaking passionately about elevated religious subjects such as grace and sacrifice, in a down-to-earth, rustic language, no less affecting for its directness and simple diction. As the Swiss poet Philippe Jaccottet once commented, Lavant’s poetry is ‘as beautiful as the old crucifixes in country churches, like old cloth, coarse and rough’.

In her debut collection, Die Bettlerschale, Lavant’s world is one of depression and physical illness in the wake of God’s silence. ‘Even as a child, I never trusted you’, Lavant admits, with her God often portrayed as a fickle, imperfect creator who fails to keep his promises or intercede when Lavant regularly cries out in pain, her body broken, her eyes ‘two columns of fire’. Lavant’s distrust of the divine continues throughout her later collections, Spindel im Mond and Der Pfauenschrei, which depict the poet’s long night of the soul where traditional Christian symbols of hope and steadfastness, like the dove of peace and the guiding Dog Star, are subverted and ‘now indicate a death year / and illness, enmity, worry’. But alongside this despair there is a growing acceptance of the limits of God’s love and life lived in an imperfect mortal body with the poet gradually coming to terms with her particular circumstances. These two central collections contain some of Lavant’s most striking imagery (‘my heart is a patchwork igloo / where a wolf eats the son’, ‘the suspension bridge of my brooding’), which Chorlton’s nuanced translation deftly captures without capsizing the pathos and tension of the original text.

Emerging from her purgatory, whilst the poems in the last collection fail to provide any sort of straightforward spiritual resolution, they do give tentative voice to an emerging religious pragmatism on the part of the poet, one which recognises ‘for creatures of my kind it is a long way to God’s heart’. As Chorlton aptly concludes in his introduction to this much-welcomed collection, despite an unorthodox approach to her faith, in her poetry at least, Lavant ‘found her way between blasphemy and belief’.

Joseph Dance
There is no doubt that Ilse Aichinger is one of the most important Austrian writers since the Second World War. She is also one of those writers who has been neglected in English, despite several books published in English translation over the years. Seagull Books is attempting to make amends, with the publication of Aichinger’s only collection of poetry as well as her volume of short prose pieces.

Ilse Aichinger was born in 1921 in Vienna to a Jewish mother and a Christian father. She was brought up Catholic which surely helped her survive the war. However, she was not spared Nazi persecution as a ‘half-Jew’. She was forbidden to study and forced to work as slave labour in a button factory. Her twin sister Helga escaped Austria with one of the last Kindertransporte in 1938 and settled in England. Later Aichinger wrote extensively about her wartime experiences.

Aichinger is a versatile writer, stretching her output across many genres. Her prose has been compared to that of Kafka and Daniil Kharms. She writes about loss, displacement and estrangement. Having written a novel, several short story collections and radio plays, in 1976 she published Bad Words, a declaration of her deep scepticism toward language itself and an attempt to construct a language free of preconceptions, misleading certainties, rules and ideologies; her foray into stripping language down to its bare bones. With this book her writing becomes playful and poetic, wittily sparse and experimental. The book reviewed here is its first translation into English, with several other short stories from the same period added to the original set. Aichinger’s struggle with language, her subversiveness and her writing ‘against’ language, makes it difficult not to read these short prose pieces as
poetry. And indeed, the same lack of trust towards language is clearly visible in her only poetry collection.

Poems from *Squandered Advice* were written between the 1950s and 70s and combined – or rather, carefully composed together – by the author in 1978, following a poetic and thematic, rather than chronological, order. In 1991 the second and final edition of this volume of poetry came out, which had some later poems also added to the original set. The poet’s voice is consistent, easily recognisable, concise and to the point, built around repetitions and alliterations, always very structured. The seemingly everyday images at times take a surreal turn, shaking readers out of their comfort zone, asking questions. Aichinger’s estrangement from her own language results in language becoming more and more alien; the inevitable conclusion being a new language:

*And*

*we were told something about periods of time.*

*Was this about periods, certain times,*

*about period times, about time, period,*

*or none of the above?*

Anna Blasiak
At the time of her death in June 2021, Friederike Mayröcker had spent more than sixty years as one of Austria’s most fêted authors, producing an impressive body of work including poetry, prose, audio plays, children’s books, and dramatic texts. Though she was linked to the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group) in her youth and broadly counted as an avant-garde writer throughout her career, Mayröcker’s densely constructed prose poetry, variously incorporating elements of autofiction and montage, and drawing heavily on classical and modernist references, has always evaded easy categorisation. These ‘proems’, as they are often called, are the subject of these two exciting new translations by Donna Stonecipher and Roslyn Theobald, appearing just over a decade after the original collections were published by Suhrkamp in Mayröcker’s native Austria.

Covering a period of two years, Études is a kaleidoscopic series of date-stamped prose poems composed between December 2010 and 2012. Operating as a deeply lyrical, fragmentary diary, the collection affords an insight into Mayröcker’s mind during this period of her life. Grand themes squat alongside domestic considerations with the past and the present often co-mingling. Memories feel like pulsing, tangible objects for Mayröcker and she deploys them obsessively throughout the text for varying impact, sometimes as baubles reflecting moments of nostalgia, and often as landmines transporting us to points of trauma, such as the death of her long-term partner and fellow poet, Ernst Jandl. Alongside this narrative of recollection, some of the most striking sequences are the poet’s lucid observations and emotional responses to the natural world and the art that inspires her. Early in the text, a March scene explodes with life as ‘the crane’s white feet / little
lead the rose’s inflammation, the blushing bloom and how it blazed’. Later, an encounter with a Man Ray photograph elicits a delighted response ‘the shoots, the reddening, I betwitching red in the glass’. Donna Stonecipher’s translation does an admirable job of communicating the playful oscillation of the poet’s thoughts, memories and observations, whilst also ensuring that Mayröcker’s use of wordplay and repetition, a core component of her work, is faithfully and meaningfully preserved.

Matching the ludic energy of Études, just sitting around here gruesomely now is a stream-of-consciousness prose poem set one stormy summer during which the poet muses to various family members and friends about the minutiae of daily existence, the wax and wane of her writing life, and a myriad of intellectual pursuits and concerns. Thick with structural allusions and stylistic references to the work of Virginia Woolf, Thomas Bernhard, Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein and other modernist and contemporary writers, the piece navigates many of Mayröcker’s private and creative obsessions, including questions of memory, mutability, and poetic inspiration. Roslyn Theobald’s translation is witty and profound where it matters, holding the reader in the hallucinatory whirl of a text which can very quickly cross the boundary between reality and nightmare.

Joseph Dance
I spend the summers of my primary school years from 1984–1988 back in Poland, my parents’ home country. One of these summers my father sends me to a nun, who teaches me how to read and write in Polish and at the end offers me a book. It is the first book that I read on my own in any language. In it, a young woman jumps into a lake, hits the bottom of the lake with her head and is left paralysed. The life she had imagined for herself vanishes but her faith in God remains strong. At some point a young man falls in love with her and stays by her side until the end. The story moves me deeply, especially the man’s sacrifice. I would like to become this kind of person. My faith is strong. But after that summer I always check the depth of the water before I jump in. I don’t remember my first book in German. My parents’ ambitious attempts to excite me with Polish Literature fail, so that they find themselves forced to switch to films. I only know the writers Władysław Reymont, Henryk Sienkiewicz, and Jerzy Andrzejewski through the interpretations of directors Andrzej Wajda or Jerzy Hoffman. I read the Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska in Polish thanks to a gift from my mum: a bilingual Polish-German edition.

At the age of fourteen I begin writing. Before this time whenever I was reading, I was searching for education or for myself; now I’m seeking out role models – writers I want to emulate with their language and literary form. But who to turn to in your own writing and your own language when the role models you are being presented with have little or nothing in common with your reality or your background?

My primary school teacher was a conservative woman in the sense that she let children stand in a corner of the classroom until they wet themselves. To me she says: ‘You are born here thus you are Austrian.’ To my father she says: ‘Her spelling is poor. It is best not to send her to a grammar school. Migrant children are rarely fit for higher education.’ My father nods politely.
and sends me to a grammar school, but my spelling struggle remains. Nobody ever explains to me why the name of my half-sister, who lives in Poland, is spelled in Polish with a ‘z’, in German with an ‘s’ but pronounced the same. Izabella, Isabella. When my father dies at the age of eighty-three and I am thirty-one, I still do not believe that a child of Polish immigrants can become an Austrian writer. After I have buried my father, I feel that I have nothing more to lose.

In 2019, I write the preface for a collection named Postmigrantische Störung (‘Post-migrant Disturbance’). I write: ‘Migration is a process which is significantly reshaping (Austrian) society, largely involving those who haven’t migrated themselves but are introducing and claiming the perspectives and experiences of their parents as a personal memory and collective knowledge. A knowledge which is often, if not always, loaded with feelings of shame, guilt and rage. Shame over the helplessness of their parents because of their lack of language skills and hence their humiliation; guilt ensuing from the lack of strength one had as a child to protect them from this humiliation, or even contributing to it by distancing oneself. And finally, rage resulting from this shame and guilt, finding its outlet in the acquired German language skills and thus allowing a regaining of lost solidarity with the parents.’

‘No, I really do not remember this’, says my godmother in the summer of 2022, sitting on the terrace of my parent’s house in Vienna. I notice that her eyes look warmer than they used to. ‘But you did. You gave me Giovanni’s Room by James Baldwin for my fifteenth birthday.’ – ‘That’s a good book.’ – ‘A gay black author and a gay storyline.’ – ‘Yes. That’s a good book.’ For her there seems to be nothing to discuss, so I close the topic without telling her that it was the first book I read which had something to do with me.

I know early that I am a lesbian. At the age of twelve. I also comprehend that it is not something to brag about as a migrant kid. Only at the age of seventeen do I come out. I don’t write about it, but since Giovanni’s Room I am aware of the possibility. You could write a gay story, real literature, even when you are black. I realise what it means to hold one’s ground as a black writer during my exchange year in the US in 1993–4. My thick English Literature textbook has but four pages titled ‘Black Literature’, and when we arrive at these four pages in class my teacher in Wisconsin states: ‘We can skip this chapter. There is no good literature to be found here.’

Bachmann, Bernhard and Böll. After my return from the US, I sense that my German has got worse. I find it harder to juggle my words and my vocabulary has narrowed. Like a cuckoo’s egg the English language
has settled in my thoughts and dreams. It has to leave! Full of panic I begin analysing German grammar, reading German books. Bernhard for his plays, Bachmann for her poetry and Böll for his content. Laborious, but at the same time I love it.

Meanwhile *Giovanni’s Room* and the desires it had awakened in me are fading into the background. There is not enough space for both. As once before with Polish I again choose German, worrying that otherwise I might not pass. But at the end of 1996 I stumble into queer and feminist circles and there is no more school restricting my education. The waters I’m looking at are transparent so that I can see all the way to the bottom.

Valerie Solanas, Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Leslie Feinberg and later, at the age of twenty, Jeanette Winterson – a revolution. Writing as a demonstration of what is possible. This I’m learning from her. What could have been and what could be.

If what could have been, would have been, what would then be the now? Suddenly in my twenties there is tons of literature I can relate to, telling me things about myself on so many levels. Still, I do not dare to offer any of my poetry or prose to a magazine or a publisher. It will take me another twelve years and an economics degree before I finally jump into the water.

Autumn 2022. My second novel *Die Eistaucher* (‘The Ice Divers’) has been published. I’m taking part in a literary event ‘Dyke Dogs’ at the Literarisches Colloquium in Berlin. The author Franziska Gänsler (*Ewig Sommer*, ‘Always Summer’) and I discuss our careers as writers, and she asks me what I was doing in my twenties, if I was writing. There is a moment of hesitation before I answer: ‘Hip-hop. I had a hip-hop band. Probably like most migrant kids.’

*Kaśka Bryla*
It’s rare for anything to be accurately described as Kafkaesque, but Tanja Maljartschuk’s short story collection *neunprozentiger haushaltsessig* (‘nine-percent household vinegar’) might just be the exception. Its twenty-six enigmatic, haunting, playful and sometimes surreal stories certainly owe a debt to Kafka in more ways than one. Maljartschuk mostly writes in Ukrainian, though she has produced some stories and creative non-fiction in German and worked as an investigative journalist in Kyiv before moving to Vienna in 2011. One of her three novels, *A Biography of a Chance Miracle*, is also available in English from Cadmus Press, translated by Zenia Tompkins. *neunprozentiger haushaltsessig* came out in 2009 in Claudia Dathe’s German translation. It is really three collections of stories, each with their own inner coherence, their own set of themes and recurring characters.

In the first section, ‘Voices’, we glimpse a young woman, really no more than a girl, from several points of view: her parents, from whom she runs away; her boyfriend, whose obsession with her sees him eventually transformed into a mole at the base of her throat; and the vet who happens to be passing when she is hit by a car and killed. These stories are interspersed with others, which give us access to the minds of several first-person narrators, alone in their apartments, thinking about the joys of smoking, or reflecting on their one burning desire: to grow a tail. Throughout the book, every sighting of the recurring figures sparks a little thrill of recognition; they return at different ages and from different angles, like variations on a musical theme. And always in Maljartschuk’s deceptively simple style, which is peppered with vivid images and has an undercurrent of dark humour.

The remote village of Samagurka provides the links between stories in the second section, where a cast of peculiar, parochial characters seems cut off from the rest of the world. People who leave the village, like the ugly and uneducated Wanjka, who
absconds from her life of drudgery while her husband is asleep, are assumed to have died – returning, to general amazement, with tales of tall buildings and horseless carriages.

The final section, ‘The Streets of the Murajow Battery’, also centres on a place: the apartment building in which the narrator grows up, where her friends and neighbours populate a set of increasingly unsettling tales. We meet Hryzian, the neighbours’ little boy whom the narrator babysits, and Marta, the girl who gets her into terrible trouble by encouraging her to steal.

Water rises inexorably through these stories: the narrator consistently fails to learn to swim; a mighty flood may or may not come to engulf the neighbourhood; and the little girl imagines herself caught in an angler’s net, drowned, and offered back to her parents for fish soup. These sinister, watery images also swirl around the final story, ‘PS’, which ends with a direct quote from Kafka – in case we were in any doubt about Tanja Maljartschuk’s literary heritage.

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**MARLENE STREERUWITZ**

*HANDBUCH GEGEN DEN KRIEG* (‘THE ANTI-WAR GUIDE’)

**BAHOE BOOKS, 2022**

**REVIEWED BY THEODORA DANEK**

*Everything is war, always. We have never lived without war; we have never really known peace; war defines all aspects of society. In her collection of micro-essays, Marlene Streeruwitz analyses how we perceive war and how the logic of war and conflict impact us.*

Streeruwitz offers a distinctly feminist, anti-capitalist perspective on what is, at first glance, a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Published in May 2022, against the backdrop of back-and-forths between intellectuals and would-be intellectuals in German-language *feuilletons*, these essays are an indictment of the op-eds and navel-gazing of the early days of the war. They’re also much more than that.

In chapters so succinct they sometimes consist of just a few aphoristic sentences, Streeruwitz does two things: she critiques war in and of itself, and she exposes the patriarchal and capitalist structures...
that produce and sustain war, and are sustained by it. Streuwwitz is at her most insightful here, showing how capitalism profits from violence in all its forms, and indeed, how violence is an essential element of capitalism: ‘economic history is, after all, a report of the subjugation of the individual by that which is called economic development.’ Meanwhile, the patriarchy is behind the pernicious devaluing of care work, of teaching, of children’s rights, and upholds violence and conflict as meaningful elements of society. The dismantling of patriarchal structures and thought systems is an essential step in progressing to a society that really and truly values peace. Unsurprisingly, Streuwwitz sees the ‘cultural avoidance of patriarchal language’ as a central element of this project.

Streuwwitz advocates for an overhaul of contemporary arts and culture, which she sees as a capitalist complex that only serves to entertain at all costs, where everything, especially in Anglo-American culture, has to be ‘funny’, and where war eventually becomes part of

entertainment. Streuwwitz’s own essays cannot be suspected of falling within this complex: her distinctive style, her fragmentary sentences don’t aim to please or entertain. Streuwwitz deeply distrusts omniscient narrators and narratives, whether in literature, politics, science or the economy: anyone who suggests they own the truth. Instead, her Handbuch offers a fragmentary, deeply subjective approach whose style effectively reflects the author’s aims. While her authorial voice has a ring of authoritative wisdom, it is far from omniscient.

Streuwwitz, unlike the op-ed writers she so clearly deplores, doesn’t take a side: she calls for an overhaul of the system itself. To make war unthinkable, to distrust easy narratives and populist charmers, to finally abolish the patriarchy instead of infusing feminism with capitalist self-actualisation. While this may be a frustratingly long-term project, it is also a necessary call to action.

Theodora Danek
Mwanza Mujila rose to literary fame with the publication of his first novel, Tram 83, in 2014. Touted by The Guardian as ‘the Congolese novel that’s wowing the literary world’, the French-language work recounts, in rapturous, arpeggio-like prose, the adventures of ‘two friends, one a budding writer home from abroad, the other an ambitious racketeer, [who] meet in a notorious nightclub in a war-torn city-state in secession, surrounded by profit-seekers of all languages and nationalities’. The novel’s fictive city-state is modelled loosely after the history of Mwanza Mujila’s mineral-rich home province, Katanga, whose geological wealth has been disputed and pillaged by local, regional, and international malefactors since independence. Translated into English by Roland Glasser and published by Jacaranda Books in the UK and Deep Vellum in the US, Tram 83 was longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize after winning the Etisalat Prize for debut African literature. In 2021, it became the most translated book in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The River in the Belly (Deep Vellum/Phoneme, 2021), his second book to appear in English, is a poetry collection made up of short poems and prose pieces the author calls ‘solitudes’. Originally published in a French-German bilingual edition by the Austrian indie press Thanhäuser, River’s jarring beauty, tonal shifts, and enigmatic politics are often as murky as the sediment-rich waters of the Congo River to which the book’s title refers. The collection explores coming of age in the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the 1980s and ’90s and the subsequent experience, in adulthood, of expatriation and homesickness. ‘I started writing this collection when I decided to resettle in Europe,’ the poet told me. ‘This book was, for me, an ablation, a rite of passage, a way of mourning my origins.’ The Ghanaian intellectual and Fellow of the British Academy Ato Quayson has deemed River, which was shortlisted for the 2022 Sarah Maguire Prize for Poetry in Translation, a ‘new and provocative contribution to African Literature’.

While Central Africa undoubtedly serves as the major setting for his fiction, Mwanza Mujila considers himself both Congolese and Austrian. International

www.eurolitnetwork.com/the-riveter/
press accounts sometimes overlook his Austrian-ness, preferring instead to double down on his Congolese roots or the romantic language of exile to describe his location in Europe, yet the writer himself is firmly implanted in the Austrian artistic landscape. He was recently named a finalist for ‘Person of the Year’ by the Kleine Zeitung newspaper and co-organised Graz’s ‘Weltwortreisende’, a transnational literary festival. Moreover, Mwanza Mujila’s transnational art and perspective resist the fixity of monocultural labels. ‘I don’t feel European, nor do I feel African,’ he put it in a recent interview. ‘Being African is vague as an identity. But I do feel Austrian and Congolese, and more. To me, identity is dynamic.’ This distaste for the flattening effects of national labels and single narratives of origin and belonging is characteristic of a writer who regards language as an intemperate river, a site of flux, improvisation, and freedom, and who, in recent texts, such as the play Après les Alpes, has also begun to set his work within Austrian borders.

His second novel, La danse du vilain (‘The Villain’s Dance’), which came out during the pandemic, won the 2021 Prix Littéraire Les Afriques. Described by Roland Glasser as a dazzling follow-up to the ‘madcap world he so poetically depicts in Tram 83’, its much-anticipated translation into English is expected in 2023 or 2024. A second volume of his poetry, an English translation of Kasala pour mon Kaku et autres poèmes (‘Kasala for my Kaku and other poems’, 2021), is also forthcoming from Deep Vellum/Phoneme. Translated poetry from other published collections, such as Soleil privé de mazout (‘Sun Low on Fuel’, 2016) and Craquelures (‘Cracks’, 2011), has appeared in anglophone literary journals, while his plays and recent edited book, Kontinentaldrift: Das Schwarze Europa (‘Continental Drift: Black Europe’, 2021), a groundbreaking anthology of Black European poets, are not yet available in English.

In interviews and elsewhere, Mwanza Mujila playfully declares that he originally dreamt of a career in music. ‘My first dream was to play sax,’ reads one of the poems in The River in the Belly. While his preferred vocation has changed, Mwanza Mujila’s writing remains marked by a durable interest in musicality and the sonic properties of language. An influential early review describes him as ‘le musicien des mots’, or the ‘word-musician’. Less a metaphor than a strict description of his craft, Mwanza Mujila’s rapprochement of words and musical forms is borne out by his many collaborations with jazz musicians and orchestras, from the Berlin Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester to his involvement on the experimental jazz album On boit Lumumba (‘We Drink Lumumba’). Of Graz, his adopted Austrian hometown, which has a well-established music scene, he extols: ‘its concerts – jazz, jazz, jazz, and free jazz!’

J. Bret Maney
And you, dear reader, better take all of these problems seriously, as you are in the fracas: the novel comes with a role-play booklet in the style of Dungeons & Dragons, inviting readers to assume a role within the story and choose their own adventure. The story is told from the point of view of young teen Vanja Dimić, in the second person singular, so that ‘you’ are one of the protagonists, and invited to make decisions based on her point of view.

The events begin in 1995, when Vanja, Marko and Kasandra, your ‘normal’ Belgrade teenagers, neglected and/or abused by their parents, find themselves in a fight with the estate’s gang leaders and are forced to steal famous singer Gana Savić’s gold crocodile medallion. As they are about to enter the house, there is a sudden maelstrom of light and colour and everything goes blank.

As it turns out, Gana Savić’s husband Miomir has built a time machine to escape the dreadful 1990s but it backfired and now everyone is stuck in the ‘all-90s’, uncontrollably jumping back and forth in time. To fix the machine, the gang needs to bring him two key objects: a red Porsche and the crocodile medallion. In their quest, hampered by throwbacks and jumps to different years in the 90s, these unlikely adventurers are having to resort to the main states Stranger Things meets The Wire, Dungeons & Dragons and No Logo, amidst the Yugoslav Wars. Apologies if you stumbled over the title, but with its vulgar ring, Barbi Marković sets the scene as this book, despite its playful and nostalgic cover, depicts the brutal world of 1990s Belgrade, reflected in its harsh language and tirades of swear words. In fact, ‘Schwanz’ (‘dick’) is one of the characters’ favourite words, no matter what age or social class they are. But don’t be put off: the language is as brutal as it is playful, with dialogues often purposefully sounding like verbatim translations from Serbian, and perfectly captures the protagonists’ reality within the macrocosm of the final years of Yugoslavia, as well as the nuances of surviving your teenage years by wearing the right brands.
of being of their time: violence and waiting, the latter a somewhat unusual plot device for an adventure novel. Yet, the story – which is persuasively realistic, despite its fantastical elements – is an exciting page-turner, driven by language: sentences and dialogues often veer off in unexpected directions, portraying the author’s keen eye for the minutiae of everyday life in Yugoslavia, its TV programmes, food shortages, a critique of the rise of capitalism and popular brands, and an increase in drug use, as well as its racism, at a time when the school subject ‘Serbo-Croat’ becomes ‘Serbian’ and nationalism brutally splits Yugoslavia into its constituent nations.

Barbi Marković has been honoured by the juries of the prestigious Adelbert von Chamisso Prize and the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize and is certainly one to watch when it comes to post-Yugoslav literature written in German, and Austrian literature more generally.

Rebecca DeWald

ANNA BAAR

NIL (‘NILE’)

WALLSTEIN VERLAG, 2021

REVIEWED BY HANNAH KAIP

Anna Baar was born in Zagreb, lives in Klagenfurt and Vienna, and in 2022 received the Großer Österreichischer Staatspreis (‘Great Austrian State Prize’), the highest Austrian accolade in the arts. Her works were described by the jury as ‘avant-garde’ and ‘composed like a piece of music’, giving her writing a distinctive voice.

In her novel Nil (‘Nile’), Baar constructs a tale that deconstructs itself and leaves the reader to scavenge in the ruins:

We cannot escape our stories if we tell them, or don’t tell them. Sometimes something slips into
the silence, time standing still, reduced to a mere anecdote, a short film clip. Maybe we add something or leave something out to elevate ourselves to the status of heroes and suppress others. [...] In the end, everything is true, even the imagined. It would be utterly absurd to demand the truth from a story.

Nil is not a straightforward read. Just like the river Nile, the story surprises with its depth and force. Reading it, I felt as though I was being pushed underwater by the current, resurfacing pages later not knowing how I got there.

A woman is writing a serial for a women’s magazine, trying to find a fitting ending, when what she is imagining starts to become reality. The question is what is fiction, what is reality? Who is the storyteller? Does the storyteller exist in real life? Living characters start to merge with fictional characters and ugly and grotesque memories surface. Just like the physical journey I took while finishing the book – a trip to Paris by high-speed train – when I reached my destination, the printed words had run out while the story lingered.

In the end, the Nile flows into the sea, and the reader of the novel is encouraged to dream, and to continue to immerse themselves in the story months after the final page is turned. I experienced the deeper meaning of the novel as though I were reading pages of poetry, as though the words and the meaning were too precious to exist within a novel. I found myself wanting to carve out whole sections to frame them with the respect they deserve.

Nil shows us what it means to be human and the struggles we undergo in questioning our internal and external world. It is an exceptional analogy of human lives as fragments of stories written and imagined by others, sometimes even created by us.

Hannah Kaip
Though Austria shares a not insignificant border with Germany, and neighbours Switzerland and Liechtenstein in the west, all four countries have a common language – albeit with considerable differences in regional dialect – and so it is much easier for authors and their work to slide between them. It is a different story altogether when it comes to Austria’s southern and eastern neighbours: Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia and, in the north-east, the Czech Republic. Here, where borders may not have existed historically – many only since the end of the First World War – over the past century they have been more strongly demarcated by factors varying from the conscious separation of languages and cultures to the almost impenetrable Iron Curtain. And yet, drive along sections of Austria’s perimeter today and borders seem to melt away to nothing, with signs announcing the names of villages in two languages and arts scenes that thrive on a mélange of influences.
Nowhere does this work better than in the lively exchange of literature and ideas between Austria and the northernmost part of Italy, particularly the regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Trentino-Alto Adige, or South Tyrol. Once part of an independent Tyrol and still a predominantly German-speaking part of Italy, South Tyrol continues to share close ties with Austria through its large and very active body of writers. Before his untimely death in 2005, Gerhard Kofler was perhaps the best known of these, translating Austrian authors into Italian, writing poetry in both languages, and concerning himself in his verse with the culture and history of his home region. In more recent years, Maddalena Fingerle’s award-winning Muttersprache (‘Mother Tongue’), which appeared originally under the Italian title of Lingua madre, has been widely acclaimed for its furious examination of homeland and language: an ‘anti-Heimat’ novel in the great Austrian tradition, written just across the border. Other novelists such as Tanja Raich, born in Merano and now based in Vienna, allow the peculiar in-betweenness of such regions to infuse their work more subtly: though not out and out concerned with borderlands, both her debut, Jesolo, and the more recent Schwerer als das Licht (‘Heavier than the Light’) probe geographical and psychological boundaries and the consequences of traversing them.

If Italy and Austria have a relatively robust literary relationship, it is considerably harder to define Austria’s relationship with its other neighbour to the south, Slovenia. In the Austrian state of Carinthia in particular, literature has been used to open a much-needed dialogue about the treatment of Carinthian Slovenes under National Socialism, which involved forced deportation and internment in concentration camps. Maja Haderlap’s searing autobiographical novel Engel des Vergessens (translated into English by Tess Lewis as Angel of Oblivion) is a haunting reckoning with this history, an attempt to come to terms with her family’s past and the discrimination that continued long after the war, manifesting itself in social ostracism and a resounding national failure to acknowledge these wrongs. Despite a noticeable shift in the last few years, there is still a long way to go – and, as suppression of the Slovenian language was a core element of the discrimination faced by Carinthian Slovenes, literature can be an effective tool in finally giving them a voice.

Further east along the Austrian-Slovenian border, the state of Styria and particularly its capital, Graz, have long been a hotbed of artistic exchange between the two neighbouring countries. Significant literary journals Lichtungen and manuskripte are based in Graz and routinely publish border-crossing (not to mention genre-defying) works, not just by Slovenian and Austrian writers, but authors of all languages and nationalities. Perhaps its location within easy reach of
Italy, Slovenia and beyond makes Graz so vibrant in this regard – it certainly seems true that many of Austria’s border towns and regions are attuned to how literature can help explore their unique geographical and cultural positions.

Take Burgenland – in particular the area around Lake Neusiedl – which borders Hungary and often sees writers, such as Bernhard Strobel, explore the many different voices that make up the tapestry of everyday life. Another author to note here is Stefan Horvath: born in a Roma settlement to Auschwitz survivors, he became a writer later in life following the pipe-bomb attack that killed his son and three others. Much like Maja Haderlap, Horvath uses literature to reckon with the past, exploring his own family history in powerful works such as Katzenstreu (‘Cat Litter’), as well as that of the Roma community in Burgenland during the Second World War and long after.

In many of Austria’s borderlands, then, the past has a lot to answer for. Certain population groups living within these regions have been subjected to intense suffering, social and linguistic discrimination and, in nearly all cases, a forced silencing that proved enduring. The writing now emerging surely demonstrates one of literature’s most important tasks: to give voice, to bear witness, to raise awareness of historical transgressions so that they may be neither repeated nor forgotten. As such, it is perhaps all the more imperative that borderland literature should not merely try to transcend boundaries, but instead to highlight them; only in becoming aware of ‘the other’ can we broaden our own perspective.

Galvanised by the additional borders thrown up during the Covid-19 pandemic, an array of multilingual, cross-border literature projects have recently been implemented with the support of the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Literatur (Austrian Society for Literature), including Neverend, which uses tandem writing partners to probe the scars of the Yugoslav Wars, and An/Grenzen, a literary dialogue led by Petra Nagenkögel that combines texts about her journeys along Austria’s outer limits with other authors’ definitions of the concept ‘border’, whether real or fictitious.

In addition to these shorter texts, it is well worth exploring the work of authors such as Slovakian-Austrian Zdenka Becker or Michael Stavarič, who arrived in Austria as a child from what was then Czechoslovakia. Questioning how we use language to define ourselves and our place in the world, his fiction – including 2020’s Fremdes Licht (‘Strange Light’) – takes characters far beyond their personal borders and blurs the lines between past and future, while essays such as ‘Der Autor als Sprachwanderer’ (‘The author as language traveller’).
reflect on real and imagined journeys alongside his lifelong existence between two languages and cultures.

It is tempting to describe Stavarič’s home of Vienna – a mere sixty kilometres from Bratislava – also as a ‘borderland’, inspiring or providing the setting for so many contemporary Austrian authors whose work sheds light on the complexities of border-crossing, immigration and living between two (or more) home countries. Marko Dinić, Sandra Gugić, Barbi Marković and Anna Baar are just a few of the writers who have lived in or written about the Austrian capital as a transient space, a place where linguistic and cultural boundaries topple only for others to be raised in their stead, where many voices compete to be heard and the face of the city – not to mention its literature – is evolving day by day.

What, then, defines a borderland? And what can such places teach us? How can literature be used to broaden our horizons, to offer us a different perspective? In Austria, at least, whether as a reckoning with the past, a voicing of trauma, a long-overdue unsilencing or merely an attempt to pinpoint one’s place in the world, the broadened linguistic spectrum and shifting, porous nature of border regions provides fertile ground for literature and a unique perspective on how it is both to belong and to live in the in-between.

Eleanor Updegraff
Handke is known as a poetic innovator, from his 1966 ‘anti-play’ *Offending the Audience*, to his moving reflection on his mother’s suicide *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, to the series of intensely poetic meditations on landscape he produced through the 1980s, along with the screenplay to Wim Wenders’ cult 1987 film *Wings of Desire*. Always in touch with the literary *Zeitgeist* while always apart from it, Handke’s work tried to push at the limits of language to explore extreme states, such as psychosis (*The Goalie’s Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 1972). He also pioneered a form of ecopoetics, testing the boundaries of human and non-human organisms, as in *Versuch über den Pilznarren* (‘Essay on the Mushroom Hunter’; 2013).

But the Nobel citation also nodded, in an oddly euphemistic fashion, to a darker aspect of Handke’s writing: ‘He distanced himself from prevailing demands on community-oriented and political positions.’ That’s an evasive way of saying that Handke moved from studied aloofness and from fashionable leftist in the 1970s, to apologism for the Serbian dictator, Slobodan Milošević, in the 1990s. He has produced reams of text expressing an affinity with Yugoslavia, and demanding ‘justice for Serbia’. Notoriously, Handke even spoke at Milošević’s funeral in 2006. Indeed, in an unauthorised interview in 2011, he cast doubts on the status of the genocide of Srebrenica. On being awarded the Nobel Prize in 2019, he refused to qualify his position on Serbian history, snapping ‘I am a writer, I come from Tolstoy, from Homer, from Cervantes. Leave me in peace and don’t ask me questions like that’ to Austrian journalists.

Somehow, Handke’s reputation has run on two almost parallel tracks since he first spoke out for Serbia in the 1990s. An affirmative Handke scholarly industry still works on, producing edited collections and conferences in the author’s honour, diligently digging into his copious notebooks and archives to produce renewed literary interpretations. Meanwhile, and particularly since 2019, Handke has been vigorously condemned for his pro-Milošević apologism by, among others, the German-Bosnian writer Saša Stanišić, as well as a wide range of critical academics and journalists. When these two reputational tracks collide,
uncomfortable questions about Handke’s work emerge. Do Handke’s deeply problematic views retrospectively cast a shadow on his earlier works? For instance, does his masterpiece *Repetition* (1986), tracing the footsteps of his lost brother who fought in Slovenia in the Second World War, now read more like a partisan defence of Yugoslav nationalism? How woman-centred can his exploration of his mother’s ‘sorrow beyond dreams’ really be, when we consider that it was written by an author apparently untroubled by a regime that systematically deployed rape as a method of genocide? Do the multitudinous works stand independently of their now extremely elderly author? Some brilliant, some turgid, some hopelessly outmoded, but all of them a significant part of 20th- and 21st-century Austrian and European literature.

Perhaps, instead, Handke’s lifelong aloofness from ‘community-oriented positions’ – his genocide-denying insult to his audience – is in fact inseparable from his hyper-subjective poetics. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek provocatively suggests that Handke’s cherished stance that a poet can be apolitical is ‘the stuff ethnic cleansing is made of’. If this is so, what does Handke’s canonisation within Austrian literature and by the Nobel committee say about the global institutions of literature in the past sixty years? A critical reading of Handke’s work in the context of other, less canonised and more critical voices – Balkan voices, feminist voices, decolonial voices – is therefore urgently important. Reading Handke in context will help us to understand not just what remains of Peter Handke, but what effect his canonisation has had on Austrian and world literature for sixty years.

*Helen Finch*
I am an enthusiastic admirer of Robert Seethaler’s fiction, having read all three of his novels translated into English – beginning with A Whole Life, the first to be published in the UK.

There’s something very attractive about a slim novel which encapsulates the life of an ordinary person, someone whose life might be judged narrow by those who stride across the world’s stage, but which turns out to be rich and well-lived. Opening in 1933, A Whole Life is about Andreas Egger who leaves his Alpine home just once to go to war in Russia. Egger is painted as a simple soul: he’s stolidly practical, feels adrift even a few miles away from his valley and finds women impossible to fathom. Yet Egger is also a great romantic, arranging a message spelled out in fire on the mountainside before finally finding the courage to propose to his beloved Marie. Seethaler’s style is wonderfully clipped and matter-of-fact, punctuated by the occasional philosophical reflection or lyrical descriptive passage. The tumult of change which swept through so many Alpine regions in the 20th century, marking the pristine landscape with gondolas and ski lifts but bringing prosperity, is strikingly captured through Egger’s experience. A simple life, then, but well-lived, and its ending is quite wonderful.

Very much darker than A Whole Life, The Tobacconist is set in Vienna,
opening in 1937 in the months before Germany annexed Austria. It follows seventeen-year-old Franz who begins the novel as a simple soul, a little over-indulged but with an eager questing mind, who ‘never really understood the business with the Jews’. Calling in a favour, Franz’s mother sets her son up with a job at a Viennese tobacconist. When he arrives, Otto tells him that the most important part of his job is to read the newspapers. Franz soon knows the regulars’ names and idiosyncrasies, cramming his head with the esoteric knowledge of a tobacconist’s accoutrements and anticipating his customers’ desires. When a frail man appears asking for Virginia’s, Otto tells Franz that this is Professor Sigmund Freud. Even a boy from the backwoods has heard of Freud and Franz decides to approach him for advice, first on how to get a girl, then on how to keep her. Initially a little impatient, Freud begins to look forward to Franz’s visits and his stories of the Bohemian girl who dances at a hole-in-the-wall club compèred by a Hitler impersonator. As with A Whole Life, the writing is plain and spare, studded with occasional vivid images. Seethaler shows us the city through the eyes of Franz who becomes increasingly appalled by what he sees, often poking pleasing fun at the pretensions of Viennese society. Such simple, sometimes slapstick comedy, throws the dreadful events unfolding throughout the city into stark relief.

In The Field, the third of his novels to be translated into English, Seethaler adopts the slightly risky device of telling the story of a small town through the voices of its dead. The novel is largely made up of the thoughts, memories and stories of those laid to rest in the unfarmable land that became part of Paulstadt’s cemetery thanks to a dubious deal between the mayor and the farmer, both now amongst its residents. Some of the dead remember their childhood, others the happiest day of their lives; some remember how they died, others who they loved. Slowly the story of the town emerges through their voices: the priest who burnt down the church with himself in it; the leisure centre, built on ground that collapsed killing three of the town’s citizens; the florist who lay dead in her shop for weeks before being found. As in life, some of the dead have a great deal to say, others very little, and some are notable by their absence. Each voice is distinct, some suffused with longing, others laced with humour. Seethaler brings to this novel the same understanding of the richness of everyday life that made A Whole Life so satisfying. Regret, sorrow, love, happiness, revenge, dishonesty, loneliness, misunderstanding, greed – all human life is here, so to speak.

Each of these very different novels is a thoroughly enjoyable, skilfully wrought piece of fiction filled with compassion and wit; all of them expertly translated by Charlotte Collins.
Reinhard Kaiser-Mühlecker’s writing is steeped in the authenticity of rural life, its archaic ways and precarious violence, and a moving sense of existential awareness. He grew up on his parents’ farm in Upper Austria, which today he runs himself, an experience that has profoundly shaped his writing. In each sentence the reader senses his physical familiarity with the subject matter. ‘Poacher’ is a powerful story about family, love, and the protagonist’s struggle with life in a radically changing world. The singular quality of Kaiser-Mühlecker’s prose consists not only in his skilled descriptions of the rural landscape and his development of character, but in the subtle comedy of hopelessness and despair. ‘Poacher’ was longlisted for the 2022 German Book Prize and shortlisted for the 2022 Austrian Book Prize. (AR)

REINHARD KAISER-MÜHLECKER

From WILDERER (‘Poacher’) S. Fischer Verlag, 2022
Introduced and translated by Alexandra Roesch

As soon as Jacob stepped into the clear, ice-cold, amber-coloured water, which was barely ankle-deep at this point, he spotted the bitch a stone’s throw away, standing with her forelegs splayed out in front of a deep spot, seemingly staring into the water, which was taking on a grey colour similar to that of the silt lying under the topsoil in the wetlands here. Jacob could see the muscles twitching above her withers. Although the sound of the stream was not very loud, more like a gurgle, it was loud enough for her not to hear him. Step by step he made his way through the water darting away beneath him. The stones, polished and covered with algae or moss, felt soft and slippery, and only occasionally did he step on something sharp; he did not always recognise what it was, as the sun’s rays penetrating the canopy or rather the undergrowth made the surface of the water gleam, blinding him and causing him to step more carefully. Landa was only a short distance away. A few metres. He had almost reached her. Two, three breaths. Jacob untied the knot he had made in the lead and took one last step and reached for the bitch, but before he could grab her, something sharp penetrated the sole of his foot with such force that he groaned, and although the pain did not make him stop, the brief delay was enough to make the bitch jump away to the side. She shook
herself as if she knew she had the time, that he was too slow or could not move any faster because his foot hurt and the water was getting deeper, and so she ran on as if nothing had happened, as if he had not just ordered her to come to him with a sharp command.

‘Damned bitch,’ Jacob hissed and pulled his foot up and looked at the sole; bright red blood, thin, thin as the water with which it was merging, was oozing from the ball of his foot right under the big toe. ‘You stupid bloody bitch. I’ll kill you.’

He knotted the lead in front of his belly and ran up the creek with hardly a thought for his feet, which were growing more and more numb from the coldness of the water. He ran and ran. Shouted her name again and again. It was a hunt that he had lost from the outset, a hunt in which the hunter never once got to see the hunted, a hunt that he did not give up, could not give up. It took him a long time to admit to himself that it was pointless to keep running, to keep limping along, because he would not catch up with her or track her down, and then he gave up. He was hoarse and bruised, bruised and hoarse. There was no sign of the bitch. Jacob climbed out of the stream and went back onto the road. He walked as if he had logs tied to his feet. As if he had no toes. He walked like a penguin. Every now and again someone came towards him, someone overtook him, a few times a car tooted at him; each time he just raised his chin a little or, with those coming from behind, his hand, not even paying any attention to who it was.

Reinhard Kaiser-Mühlecker
Translated by Alexandra Roesch
I was excited to pick up Angela Lehner’s novel 2001, describing seemingly unrelated events in a remote Austrian town in the period leading up to the September 11 attacks in Manhattan. I was only eight years old then, too young to fathom what it meant when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers, forever shaking perceptions of Western security. Angela Lehner, born in 1987, must have been fourteen or fifteen, the same age as her novel’s protagonist Julia.

Julia is an anti-hero treading a fine line, rejecting the rules of rural society in which she lives, while struggling to get through adolescence. She wants to be a hip-hop superstar, but she lives in Tal, a godforsaken Austrian village, where tourists love to ski while she can’t afford to. With a poor support system, a brother who wants to get out, and a crew of friends who are but teenagers themselves, it is a fight against the odds.

Lehner seamlessly combines the political with the apparently apolitical existence of Julia and the inhabitants of Tal to show how the destinies and traumas of individuals are inherently linked to the collective. This becomes evident when the history teacher attempts to implement a political experiment, reminiscent of the ‘Milgram experiment’ (1961). Each student represents a political character or institution and can only act as their assigned character in class. Julia is given the role of the United Nations, while the other participants engage in uncomfortable discussions about the news and world politics. The teacher is biased: the left-leaning students aren’t allowed to speak: racist rhetoric gets out of hand. Julia retreats, unable to find her voice. However, Julia would not be Julia if she resigned herself to hopelessness. When she stands up to right-wing bullies during a bar fight, she gets involved in an argument with the local police and is forced to spend hours cleaning phone booths. As the experiment continues, what happens in the classroom increasingly resembles real world politics. With various factions pointing fingers at a common foe – the immigrant.

The skill of Lehner’s writing lies in the way she highlights social and
political issues through engaging characters and a gripping story. Above all, this novel elevates the classic yet relatable coming-of-age story to a critique of socio-political structures. The final dénouement exceeds all expectations, as Julia breaks through her emotional paralysis in a dramatic turn linked to world events. The last page of the novel is dated 9/11/2001.

Hannah Kaip
Let’s begin at home in Austria with the Österreichischer Kinder- und Jugendbuchpreis (‘The Austrian Children’s and Young People’s Book Prize’), the annual state-funded prize celebrating the best children’s books. Founded in 1955, it highlights both Austrian publishing and Austrian creators. Each year, it picks four winners, with a further recommended reading list from the submissions.

In 2022, sixty-seven titles from twenty-two publishing houses were submitted for the prize. The four winners encompassed not only books aimed at different age groups, but also a mix of styles and genres. Zur Zeit, wo das Wünschen noch geholfen hat (‘A Time When Wishing Still Helped’, Gerstenberg Verlag) is a new 400-page publication of Grimms’ fairy tales, with sumptuous illustrations by Julie Völk, and described as a ‘magical masterpiece’.

Poetry was also a winner with the collection Mit Worten will ich dich umarmen (‘I Want to Hug You with Words’) by Lena Raubaum, illustrated by Katja Seifert (Tyrolia Verlag). So too was non-fiction in the form of Michael Stavarič and Michèle Ganser’s book about octopuses, Faszination Krake (‘The Fascinating Lives of Octopuses’, Leykam Verlag). The final winning title was An die, die wir nicht werden wollen. Eine Teenager-Symphonie (‘To Those We Don’t Wish to Become. A Teenage Symphony’, Tyrolia) German author Nils Mohl, with illustrations by Regina Kehn, of which more later.

Some of my personal favourites from previous rounds of the prize include Julya Rabinowich’s Dazwischen: Ich (Carl Hanser Verlag), a winner...
in 2017 and published in my English translation as *Me, In Between* by Andersen Press in 2022; picture book *Flucht* (‘Escape’) by Niki Glattauer and Verena Hochleitner (Tyrolia Verlag); and Agnes Ofner’s *Nicht so das Bilderbuchmädchen* (‘Not the Ideal Picture Book Girl’, Jungbrunnen Verlag).

This last book leads me nicely to the KIMI Siegel for diversity, a seal awarded to children’s books across the German-speaking world – including books translated into German – that celebrate diversity. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this prize is judged not only by adults but also by juries of children and young adults. As well as this accolade, Agnes Ofner’s LGBTQ+ novel has been highly praised, winning the 2020 national prize, the 2020 Vienna Children’s and Young People’s Book Prize (see below), as well as being nominated for the German Goldene Leslie award. It also featured among November 2019’s Best Seven Books for Young Readers, a long-running monthly list of recommendations curated by a jury and supported by media outlets Deutschlandfunk and Focus.

Within Austria itself, homegrown talent is encouraged through prizes like the Vienna Children’s and Young Person’s Book Prize. This is an annual award that grants three prizes for children’s books and one illustration prize to authors and illustrators who live in Austria and whose work has been published during the previous year by a Vienna-based publisher. At the time of writing, the 2022 prizes had not been announced; however, in 2021, three of the four works came from Tyrolia Verlag, demonstrating their dominance within the Austrian children’s publishing scene. The illustration prize went to the picture book *Jaguar, Zebra, Nerz* (‘Jaguar, Zebra, Mink’) by Heinz Janisch and Michael Roher (Tyrolia), which also won the national prize that same year. The jury said of this winner: ‘Twelve months, twelve texts, twelve pictures: in colourful pencil illustrations, all-round artist Michael Roher creates a dreamy, playful fantasy world which is both moving and inspiring.’ The three author prizes went to Leonora Leitl’s historical novel *Held Hermann: Als ich Hitler im Garten vergrub* (‘Hero Hermann: The Day I Buried Hitler in Our Garden’, Tyrolia), a historical teen novel about growing up during the Second World War; a non-fiction picture book about leeches called *Balthasar Blutberg*, by Michael Stavarič (Luftschacht Verlag); and Young Adult book *Esther und Salomon* (‘Esther and Salomon’) by Elisabeth Steinkellner (Tyrolia) presented in a ‘unique hybrid form’.

Austrian authors are also seeing success across the border in Germany. Linz-born Sarah Michaela Orlovský’s Middle Grade book *Eine halbe Banane und die Ordnung der*...
Welt (‘Half a Banana and the Order of the World’, Tyrolia) was one of the six nominations for the 2022 German Children’s Literature Prize. This book deals with the difficult subject of anorexia but comes at the topic from the perspective of a younger sister whose older sister is struggling with the illness. This narrative is conveyed in the form of a monologue, displayed on the page as short vignettes comprising single line sentences, almost like a series of lists, sharing the pain and heartbreak of witnessing a family member struggle.

For quality international children’s books, the annual White Ravens catalogue published by the International Youth Library in Munich is often seen as a benchmark of success. The 2022 catalogue included the aforementioned Austrian Young People’s Book Prize winner and ‘To Those We Don’t Wish to Become: A Teenage Symphony’ by Nils Mohl and Regina Kehn, which also won the 2022 Josef Guggenmos-Preis für Kinderlyrik. In the White Ravens entry, the book’s publisher Tyrolia is described as having ‘evolved into an excellent home for unconventional and experimental children’s and youth literature, literature beyond the mainstream’, something confirmed by several of the books I have mentioned. The White Ravens editorial team notes that this book is ‘not a coming-of-age novel, but rather an associative montage of poems, chats, miniatures, snippets, scraps, and fragments’. This proves that Austrian publishing is keen to publish not only the best Austrian creators but also to acquire works by writers and illustrators from across the German-speaking world. The other book to receive the White Ravens 2022 seal of approval was the Michael Stavarič and Michèle Ganser’s Faszination Krake (‘The Fascinating Lives of Octopuses’), also mentioned above and reviewed by Johanna McCalmont for this magazine.

In 2021, the only Austrian book to be included in White Ravens was Verena Hochleitner’s Der Schneeleopard (‘The Snow Leopard’, Luftschacht), a picture book for children aged three and over. The editorial team say, ‘Der Schneeleopard celebrates the imagination of children and the great potential of picture books’. For Viennese creator Hochleitner, this was her second consecutive year in the prestigious publication. Die drie Räuberinnen (‘The Three Robbers’, Tyrolia) featured the previous year alongside Sarah Michaela Orlovský’s Filomena Grau. Von Zaubertricks, Mutproben und Fellbündeln (‘Filomena Grau. Of Magic Tricks, Dares, and Bundles of Fur’), illustrated by Michael Roher (Picus Verlag).

International recognition for Austrian creators also came in 2022 with a Special Mention in the Bologna
Regazzi Awards at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair for Elisabeth Steinkellner’s delightful *Vom Flaniern und Weltspaziern* (‘Sauntering and Strolling the World’, Tyrolia), a collection of ‘rhymes and word games’. This accolade added to the anthology’s growing list of recognitions.

While few Austrian books appear to be trickling through to the English-speaking market, the Austrian children’s publishing scene is pushing boundaries and exploring all styles and genres. Hopefully I’ve provided enough inspiration and information to encourage publishers to fill the gap with some award-winning literature from Austria.

*Claire Storey*
Do you know some curious little explorers? Would you like to take them on a journey up into space and back down into the depths of the sea? Then this Austrian Children’s Book Prize 2022 winner, ‘The Fascinating Lives of Octopuses’, is just the ticket.

With fascinating facts, funny rhymes, octopus-themed jokes, and ‘spot the difference’ puzzles, this stunning science book for children aged eight and up is attention-grabbing in every way. It not only offers a lively overview of the universe in general before delving into the lives of octopuses beneath the waves, but it also provides a few laughs along the way.

Stavarič enthusiastically introduces us to one of the oldest intelligent forms of life on earth. After briefly exploring the origins of the universe and life on earth, we are submerged into the amazing world of cephalopods: where they live, what they eat, how they reproduce, how they think, how they protect themselves, and how they use their special superpowers.

By directly addressing readers with questions, inviting them to get out their pens to write their own list of dream jobs, urging little hands to add colour to the detailed black-and-white drawings or cut out their own octopus, and interspersing the lively prose with fact boxes especially for ‘smarty pants’, the author has created a truly interactive experience.

Ganser’s superbly detailed black, white and gold illustrations – reminiscent of scientific drawings – offer not only broad panoramas of deep-sea habitats and an overview of the variety of species that exist, but also captivating close-ups of these magnificent creatures. Each drawing is an individual artwork in itself.

This unique science book is bound to stimulate inquisitive minds and hopefully inspire researchers and story writers of the future to explore the world around them.

Johanna McCalmont
JULYA RABINOWICH

Introduced and interviewed by Claire Storey

Julya Rabinowich is a writer, columnist, playwright, painter and interpreter. She was born in St. Petersburg in 1970 and in 1977, her family moved to Vienna in an experience she refers to as having been ‘uprooted and repotted’. Her first novel Spaltkopf was published in German by Edition Exil in 2008, and in 2011 was translated into English by Tess Lewis and published as Splithead by Granta Books. She has written four further books for adults, all published by Deuticke. In 2016, Dazwischen: Ich was released, the first of three novels for young adults. This novel won the Friedrich Gerstäcker Prize and the Austrian Children’s Book Prize. The English translation, Me, In Between, was published by Andersen Press in 2022, translated by Claire Storey. Rabinowich is an outspoken defender of human rights and is a board member of the recently founded PEN Berlin. (CS)

CS: How did you first start writing and how has your writing evolved over the years?

JR: I have been writing since I was a child, probably since I was around seven. At the beginning this was a pleasant conversation with myself, like I was playing with reality – which in many ways I still am – but it wasn’t until after I had written Herznovelle (‘Heartnovel’, Zsolnay, 2011) that I realised there was a whole other world out there, the world of readers. In your books, both for adults and young adults, you often introduce a second narrative, displayed on the page in italics. Where did this concept come from?

I started out as a painter so the way the text looks on the page is really important for me. The visual effect separates the different layers of the story more easily, so too the different plotlines. At least for me it does, even as I’m writing it.

Your first book for young adults was published in English in 2022 with the title Me, In Between. While I was working on the translation, you mentioned that this story didn’t start off life as a YA novel. How did you first conceive it?

Me, In Between was originally a play, my first to be exact. It focused on Eli, the father in Me, In Between, and his antagonist, Amina, his sister-in-law. Madina appeared in the background. I was inspired by the stories I carried over from one language into another through my work as an interpreter for people displaced by war and victims of torture. I refer to this process as portraying the speaker’s pain in the listener’s language. But of course, at some point the suffering also affects the messenger, like waves building up to a crash. It got to the point where I couldn’t continue to work as an interpreter, but I could tell people about it and share what it is like to flee from war or experience torture. The play is a classic Greek tragedy: Eli is forced to choose between two evils. When the play was performed and the
young actor cast as Madina delivered her ten minutes, she upstaged everyone! That was the moment Me, In Between was conceived; she convinced me to tell Madina’s story as a novel for young people.

I was excited to read the sequel to Me, In Between and to learn what happens next for Madina. In ‘Us, In Between’ (as yet unpublished in English), we rejoin Madina and her family as they settle into their new life but with the challenges of growing xenophobia and hostility. How can books like ‘Us, In Between’ help young people navigate the current situation?

Perhaps it helps to clarify certain positions: there are those who are attacked, those who stand in solidarity and there are those who remain silent. Those who remain silent are complicit. Perhaps this book will help give people courage and search out allies. Perhaps it will move people to become allies. But above all, I wanted to lay bare the mechanisms that lie behind the escalation: it all begins with tiny steps, before suddenly flaring up. It starts with words, but doesn’t remain just words. We see this so often in the world, how the clockwork is set in motion. Isn’t it about time that we learned from it? Creating divisions between people is easy. Bringing them together is more difficult because it is reliant on compromise.

How does writing for adults differ from writing for young people?

I make very little distinction between the two groups, both groups intertwine. Saying that, I do allow for one difference: I have no wish to completely overload young people with ideas of great peril and hopelessness. That is why Madina tells her story reflecting back on the war; from the start it has to be clear that she escaped. Young people need more hope than adults.

Your writing often features themes of migration, identity, fleeing oppression. Why?

These themes come straight from the depths that call out to humanity and at the same time expose how thin the ice of civilisation is beneath our feet. If you listen carefully, you can hear it cracking, even now.

Are you working on anything new?

Yes, I am. I am finishing the trilogy about Madina. This book is triggered by the war in Ukraine. It is likely to be the most hard-hitting of the three novels. But Madina is on the cusp of adulthood. The plan is to tie up all the loose ends – both the terrible ones and the good ones.

You can read the full interview with Julya Rabinowich online at eurolitnetwork.com.

An extract from Dazwischen: Wir (‘Us, In Between’) is available to download on the Goethe Institut Litrix website and translation funding may be available to support publication in English.
Michael Köhlmeier is a household name in Austria, known for both his writing and his music, and he deserves more attention in the English-speaking world. I’ve translated two of his novels, which are published in the UK by Haus. The first is *The Statesman and the Tramp*, which imagines an unlikely friendship between Winston Churchill and Charlie Chaplin. Sparked by a chance encounter, the two meet several times over the years to discuss their shared struggle with depression. Churchill and Chaplin’s real biographies are interwoven with quotes from invented historical sources, and recounted with gentle humour and pathos. This extract (my translation) is Chaplin’s account of his first meeting with Churchill on Santa Monica beach:

At first, he recalled, he had been afraid that the other man, whoever he might be, would recognise him and either turn away in disgust or offer his sympathy and solidarity, depending on which camp he fell into and which newspapers he read. His thoughts of suicide, as the stranger had correctly surmised, had become dangerously acute during the media witch-hunt of the preceding weeks, though the possibility had been with him since childhood. Under the starry sky of this Californian February night, he was once again faced with the appalling fact: though he’d had so many friends in his life, he had never once met somebody with whom he could have discussed this subject.

The stranger pointed at his wound. ‘Tell me about it,’ he said, ‘and I will listen.’

The second of Michael Köhlmeier’s novels to appear in English was *Yiza*. Six-year-old Yiza has recently arrived in Germany; after being abandoned by the man who calls himself her uncle, and running away from a shelter for migrant children, she and her new friends Shamhan and Arian survive on the margins of society. The narrative’s child’s-eye view and
simple, understated language are extraordinarily powerful. In this passage (my translation), the children are about to break into an empty house in search of warmth and food:

*But it’s not the house you told me about. Is it?*
  *No, it isn’t.*
  *So that house doesn’t exist?*
  *No – it does. But it’s not this one.*
  *So we’re not going there anymore?*
  *No – we are going there. But first we’re going into this house.*
  *And we’re going to stay in the other house all winter?*
  *Yes, in the other one.*
  *Not this one?*
  *Probably not this one, no.*

Arian shook his head, looked down at the ground, dragged his shoe across the rotting brown grass.

*What? said Shamhan.*

Ruth Martin
The roots of Austrian crime fiction are strongly literary. The foul deed acts as a catalyst for the plot, often with a strong psychological twist. Two early, famous examples are *Ein Mord, den jeder begeht* (1938, *Every Man A Murderer*) by Heimito von Doderer, author of the Austrian classic *The Strudlhof*. Jorge Luis Borges included the Perutz title in his collection of great crime novels of the 20th century. After the Second World War, literary escapism concentrated on romance and love, preferably without a body count. Yet at the same time, Austria became synonymous with one of the best-known crime novels of the post-war era: *The Third Man* by Graham Greene showed a grey Vienna in all its depressing seediness as a centre for spies and criminals. And with that, Vienna’s role in crime fiction was set for decades to come: not as a creative hub itself, but as setting and location for others to write about crime. It is no wonder that to English-speaking audiences to this day, the criminal side of Vienna may be best known through the historic crime novels of Frank Tallis, author of *Vienna Blood* – to name but one.

Today, however, the Austrian crime-writing scene is teeming with life – if one can say that about novels in which death is essential. Authors like...

Wolf Haas, Marc Elsberg, Bernhard Aichner, Alex Beer or the child psychiatrist Paulus Hochgatterer, with his dark mysteries, have already made it onto the English-speaking market, with many more deserving to do so.

Simon Brenner and the Men of Words
The man who kicked off the new wave of Austrian crime fiction is Wolf Haas. When his clumsy detective Simon Brenner hit the scene in 1996 in Auferstehung der Toten (Resurrection, Melville House; 2014), he sounded completely different from the start, writing in a language that speaks directly to the reader, swallowing parts of his sentences and thriving on insinuations. ‘Murder does not interest me,’ says Wolf Haas about his books. Rather he focuses on weird and wonderful characters and their often-surreal humour. This strange and lively mixture has become Haas’s trademark. It has also made him the most translated Austrian crime novelist (Resurrection, The Bone Man, Come, Sweet Death! and Brenner and God are all available in English). In March 2022, after a break of eight years, Wolf Haas resurrected Brenner in Müll (‘Rubbish’, Hoffmann und Campe) as a worker on a Viennese rubbish dump, where, sure enough, body parts start turning up: Brenner at his very best. In the wake of Wolf Haas, three other Austrian writers entered the crime scene at the beginning of the millennium: Heinrich Steinfest, Stefan Slupetzky and Thomas Raab. They all showed some similarities: a strong focus on language, a lax attitude towards the criminal plot and very special protagonists. Heinrich Steinfest (born in Australia, as it happens) hit the jackpot with Markus Cheng, his one-armed private detective of Chinese descent, whose parents had emigrated to Vienna, because they loved to waltz. Steinfest, who is a prolific novelist, has won the Deutscher Krimipreis (German Crime-Writing Prize) for best crime novel a number of times. In 2022, he published his best Cheng-novel in a long time: Die Möbel des Teufels (‘The Devil’s Furniture’), centring on a memorable date for Austria, 1 August 1976, when Vienna’s Reichsbrücke (imperial bridge) collapsed and a few hours later Formula One star Niki Lauda suffered a near-fatal accident on the Nürburgring racecourse. Critics raved about the ‘wonderful story, realistic and at the same time absurd’.

The thrilling internationalists
Best known on the international scene, however, are Marc Elsberg and Bernhard Aichner, whose Woman of the Dead, about the revenge mission of the undertaker Brünhilde Blum, was translated into English by Anthea Bell and has been turned into a Netflix series. Aichner has written a number of books since,
the most promising being a new series about the press photographer David Bronski who is obsessed with taking pictures of pain and death: Dunkelkammer (‘Darkroom’, 2021), Gegenlicht (‘Backlight’, 2021), and Brennweite (‘Focal Length’, 2022) – not yet in English).

Marc Elsberg’s best-known novel couldn’t be more topical as countries, cities and households everywhere endure energy crises. Elsberg has made ‘real science’ thrillers his trademark: gripping tales around events with the potential to wreck modern societies. He has perfected this successful formula in Zero (published in English as Code Zero in 2019 by Europa Editions) about an online activist fighting against a powerful shadowy data-collecting empire, or in Gier (published in 2020 as Greed by Black Swan) about the theory that wealth could be equally distributed according to a formula.

One of the bestselling Austrian crime writers has managed the feat of not even being well-known in Austria. Andreas Gruber has become a star in Germany and has only just recently made his mark on home-ground. Gruber’s books lean strongly towards serial killers, his most popular series featuring the Dutch profiler Maarten S. Sneijder who trains young police officers in Vienna, recruiting his best student Sabine Nemez to help him solve cases which are not for fainthearted readers.

**Dangerous women on the rise**

Female voices are becoming increasingly loud and clear in Austrian crime writing. The best known amongst them, Ursula Poznanski, began her writing life with novels that appeal to all ages: Erebos (Allen & Unwin, 2012) is the thrilling tale of a computer game which starts at a London school and soon dictates the lives of the youngsters playing it. The German-language original was written in 2010, prophetic in the era of TikTok! In 2019, Poznanski hit the crime market for grown-ups with her Vanitas series, about a female undercover agent, who hides from an Arab gang she infiltrated in Germany, working as a florist at Vienna’s central cemetery. Poznanski tells her award-winning and gripping tale of flight, fight and revenge in three parts, culminating in a showdown in Germany. With Stille blutet (‘Silence Bleeds’, Knaur, 2022), she has just started a new series around the young police officer Fina Plank in which people are informed of their imminent deaths.

Two other names to watch are Mareike Fallwickl and Rebecca Russ, by coincidence both from Salzburg. Fallwickl excited critics in 2022 with Die Wut, die bleibt (‘The Rage That Remains’) about life in a man’s world. Fallwickl’s female characters reach a point where they refuse to bow to man-made rules and start hitting back. Literally. Die Wut, die bleibt is a book with – and like – a punch. Rebecca Russ’s Mutterliebe (‘Motherly Love’, Aufbau Taschenbuch, 2022), on the other hand, could easily stand next to Gillian Flynn or Paula Hawkins on the bookshelf. The main
character, Nora, implodes when her daughter Louisa vanishes after visiting her dad. Nora not only has to find Louisa, but also has to hide a secret which could destroy both their lives. And this is not the only surprise in this thrilling book of twists and turns.

The corpse at the Opera
One of the most popular sub-genres of crime fiction in Austria is historical. Bodies are forever turning up at the Opera, the Hotel Sacher or in a Fiaker carriage. Alex Beer’s novels, featuring the grumpy but brilliant detective inspector August Emmerich, serve up the finest Viennese crime currently on the market. Each of Beer’s books, set in the socially and economically tense 1920s, is well-researched. Beer’s first novel has been translated into English (The Second Rider, Europa Editions, 2018), and many more in the Emmerich-series are waiting to be discovered.

In 2022, Beer turned to Berlin as the setting for a new series about the master thief and dandy, Felix Blom. Set in 1878, Blom teams up with the resolute prostitute-turned-private eye Mathilde to find the person who had tried to ruin his life and was responsible for sending him to the infamous Moabit prison.

For those who like their crime a little cosier, there is Beate Maly, a writer who turns books out under many names. Maly has created a pair of investigative pensioners reminiscent of Miss Marple and her devoted sidekick Mr. Stringer, only in Maly’s cases they are the retired teacher Ernestine Kirsch and the former pharmacist Anton Böck. Also set between the two world wars, the sympathetic pair stumble over corpses in the Prater, Budapest, at the races and at the ice rink.

Bad Fucking and the King of Stinatz
The most successful branch of Austrian crime writing, however, has become Murder Most Regional. The author and director Kurt Palm put Austria on the map in 2010 with his crime novel Bad Fucking, which was turned into a film in 2013. ‘Bad’ in German is part of a place name meaning ‘spa’, but the sexual innuendo led to the real ‘Fucking’ renaming itself as ‘Fugging’ in 2020, after the village sign had been stolen countless times. Kurt Palm, whose speciality is absurd literary romps, surprised us in 2022 with a thoughtful and dark novel about a shooting rampage in a Vienna school, Der Hai im System (‘The Shark in the System’, Leykam Verlag).

The absolute king of rural crime is the comedian and actor, Thomas Stipsits, who sets his mysteries in the village of Stinatz, on the border with Hungary. Stipsits, whose family is from Stinatz, has dominated the market with his witty novels surrounding police inspector Sifkovits (‘Burgenland’s Columbo’), making benevolent fun of the
villagers. In 2020 his books were ranked first and third on the Austrian bestseller chart. Herbert Dutzler, winner of the 2022 Austrian crime award, and also a big seller, has chosen the spectacular scenery of Altaussee for his mysteries surrounding the slightly sleepy Inspector Franz Gasperlmaier. Austrians, it seems, not only like to buy regional when it comes to food, but also like to read regional.

Many people look down on crime novels as a matter of principle. A mistake – as is any wholesale judgement. True, at its worst, crime fiction is formula trash, written in substandard language, making up in blood and gore what it lacks in sophistication and imagination. At its best, however, crime fiction is a thrilling ride through people’s innermost secrets, fears and hopes. Nothing focuses the mind like the will to survive. The same is true of the bigger picture: nowhere can you experience the strengths and weaknesses of a society more directly than when society is under pressure. How lucky English-language readers and publishers are, a whole new uncharted territory awaits your discovery! Welcome to the wild, weird and wonderful world of Austrian crime fiction!

Doris Kraus
ILSE AICHINGER (1921–2016) was an Austrian writer known for her accounts of her persecution by the Nazis because of her Jewish ancestry. She wrote poems, short stories and radio plays, and won multiple European literary prizes, including the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1996.

ANNA BAAR is an Austrian writer. Her first novel Die Farbe des Granatapfels (‘The Colour of the Pomegranate’) was published in 2015 and an excerpt from the manuscript was shortlisted for the Bachmann Prize at the Festival of German-Language Literature 2015. Her latest novel, Nil, was shortlisted for the 2021 Austrian Book Prize.

ALAIN BARBERO, born in Annecy, France, lives as an artist-photographer in Paris and Dortmund, Germany. He has exhibited in France, Austria, Italy and Spain. With Barbara Rieger he founded and runs the blog cafe.entropy.at, from which two books have been published.

XAVER BAYER was born in Vienna. In addition to his novels, stories and plays, he has written texts for collaborative works with the painters Martha Jungwirth and David Schnell and the art collective G.R.A.M. He also co-wrote the screenplay for the film Glanz des Tages (‘Shine of the Day’) by Rainer Frimmel and Tizza Covi, which won the Max Ophüls Prize.

JUDITH BENISTON is Associate Professor of German at University College London. Her main research interest is 19th- and 20th-century Austrian literature and cultural history, with particular emphasis on drama and theatre history. She is an editor of Arthur Schnitzler digital, the historical-critical edition of Schnitzler’s works, 1905–1931.

ROSS BENJAMIN’s translations include Franz Kafka’s Diaries, Friedrich Hölderlin’s Hyperion, Joseph Roth’s Job, Clemens J. Setz’s Indigo, and Daniel Kehlmann’s You Should Have Left and Tyll. He has received the 2010 Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator’s Prize and a 2015 Guggenheim Fellowship.

THOMAS BERNHARD (1931–1989) was an Austrian poet, playwright and novelist. He won the Georg Büchner Prize in 1970. One of the most significant post-Second World War German-language writers, Bernhard is famous for his deeply critical stance towards Austria’s National Socialist past.


Born in Vienna, KAŚKA BRYLA grew up as a daughter of Polish immigrants between Vienna and Warsaw. Her play Das verkommene Land was staged in Leipzig, Bonn and Dortmund in 2021–2, and Im Herzen der Krähe will be staged in Vienna in 2023. Her debut novel, Roter Affe (2020) was followed by Die Eistaucher (2022).

JAMIE BULLOCH is the translator of almost fifty books from German including works by Daniela Krien, Timur Vermes, Robert Menasse, Arno Geiger, Romy Hausmann and Sebastian Fitzek. His translation of Birgit Venderbeke’s The Mussel Feast won the 2014 Schlegel-Tieck Prize. He is also the author of Karl Renner: Austria. Jamie lives in London with his wife and three daughters.

LARA BULLOCH is a third-year student of German Language and Literature at Oxford University. She is currently on a year abroad studying Germanistik at Leipzig University, where she is enjoying taking seminars in Medieval German love poetry as well as more recent publications within the Queer literary canon.

JEN CALLEJA is the author of I’m Afraid That’s All We’ve Got Time For (Prototype, 2020) and Vehicle (2023), as well as the Man Booker International Prize-shortlisted translator of Marion Poschmann’s The Pine Islands (Serpent’s Tail, 2019). She writes a column on translation for the Brixton Review of Books.

ANDREA CAPOVILLA is the director of the Ingeborg Bachmann Centre for Austrian Literature and Culture at the Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of London. She has taught German-language literature and film at the Universities of Vienna, Oxford and Cambridge. Special interests are gender, exile and migration.

IDA CERNE studied translation in Vienna, where she still lives, and specialises in translating poetry, fiction, screenplays and academic papers mainly from German, but also from Serbian and Russian, into English.

JOSHUA COHEN was born in New Jersey. He is the author of several books, including A Heaven of Others and Witz. His non-fiction has appeared in Bookforum, The Forward, Harper’s and other publications. Cohen was the recipient of the 2022 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, for his novel The Netanyahus (2021).

LO COLE is a British illustrator, author and printmaker. His witty, bold and imaginative artwork has featured on posters, in books, magazines, newspapers. A contributor to The Guardian and The Economist for many years, he also writes and illustrates children’s books, including Ten On A Twig, We Want a Dog and Ten In A Hurry.

CHARLOTTE COLLINS studied English Literature at Cambridge University and worked as an actor and radio journalist in Germany and the UK before becoming a literary translator. Her co-translation, with Ruth Martin, of Nino Haratischvili’s The Eighth Life won the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, and in 2017 she was awarded the Goethe-Institut’s Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator’s Prize for Robert Seethaler’s A Whole Life.

JOSEPH DANCE is an archivist, writer and poet. He previously worked as Head Archivist at the Marx Memorial Library & Workers’ School and has a BA and MA from the University of Cambridge in English Literature. He is currently working on his first collection of poetry.

THEODORA DANEF is a writer, editor and project manager. Now based in Vienna, she previously managed the translation programme at English PEN and the events programme at the Austrian Cultural Forum London before moving into publishing at Tilted Axis Press and The White Review. She is currently responsible for arts and culture at the European Forum Alpbach.

CLAUDIA DATHE translates literature from Russian and Ukrainian, including works by Andrey Kurkov, Serhij Zhadan, Ostap Slyvynsky, and Yevgenia Belorutes. In 2021 she was awarded the Drahomán Prize for the translation of Serhij Zhadan’s poetry collection Antenne and for the novel Märchen aus meinem Luftschutzkeller (‘Fairy Tales from My Air Raid Shelter’) by Oleksij Tschupa.

CHRISTINA DAUB, is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet, whose work has appeared in many literary journals and anthologies. The founder of The Plum Review, she has taught poetry and creative writing at George Washington University in Washington, DC. She also translates from German and Spanish into English.

REBECCA DeWALD is a bilingual translator for English, German, French and Spanish. She coordinates the Emerging Translator Mentorships Programme at the National Centre for Writing, runs the Translators’ Stammtisch and Translation Theory Lab at the Goethe-Institut Glasgow, and serves as co-chair of the Translators Association.

EDMUND DE WAAL CBE is an English author and ceramicist, exhibiting all over the world. His paternal grandparents Elisabeth and Viktor were members of the Jewish Austrian Ehrussi family, whose history he chronicled in The Hare with Amber Eyes (2010), which won many awards and sold over one million copies, The White Road (2015), a personal history of porcelain, was followed by Letters to Camondo (2021). Driven out of Vienna in 1938, his family reclaimed Austrian citizenship in 1919.

SABINE DENGSCHERZ studied German, journalism and Hungarian in Vienna. She is a writer and journalist as well as a researcher and lecturer at the University of Vienna.
MAX EASTERNMAN spent thirty-five years as a BBC broadcaster. He was a lecturer in journalism for ten years at Huddersfield University and is today a translator, media trainer with ‘Sounds Right’, jazz musician and reviewer. He is a regular contributor to The Riveter magazine and to Vintage Jazz Mart magazine.

RAPHAELA EDELBAUER was born in Vienna. She studied Language Art (Sprachkunst) with Robert Schindel at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. The Liquid Land was published by Klett-Cotta in 2019, and was shortlisted for the German Book Prize and the Austrian Book Prize. She won the Austrian Book Prize in 2021 for her novel, Dave.

MAREIKE FALLWICKL’s literary debut Dunkelgrün fast schwarz (‘Dark Green Almost Black’) was published in 2018 and nominated for the Austrian Book Prize. This was followed by Das Licht ist hier viel heller (‘The Light is Much Brighter Here’, 2019) and Die Wut, die bleibt (‘The Rage That Remains’, 2022).

FABIAN FALTIN is known for his novels, live performances and as a garden designer. He/his work has appeared at the Austrian Cultural Forum London, Festival der Regionen, Tate Modern, WUK, brut, Beijing Fringe, and many more. He lives and works in Vienna, where he also teaches creative writing.

BERNARD FETZ is Director of the Literature Archive, the Literature Museum, the Department of Planned Languages and the Esperanto Museum at the National Library of Austria, as well as Lecturer at the Institute of German Studies at the University of Vienna. He has published numerous monographs, edited volumes and essays on the theory of biography and the literary and cultural history of the 19th and 20th centuries.

HELEN FINCH teaches German at the University of Leeds. She writes about the representation of the Holocaust in German-language literature, and on queer identity and memory in German culture. She has also been thinking about Handke and his effect on German literature on and off throughout her career.

SJ FOWLER is a poet, writer and performer.

PETRA FREIMUND is a director, producer, cultural manager and dramaturg with over fifteen years of international experience working across the fields of art, media, technology and science to foster new imaginations and address current issues. She initiates and develops interdisciplinary cultural experiences and cross-sector collaborations based on storytelling.

LAURA FREUDENTHALER was awarded the Förderpreis zum Bremer Literaturpreis 2018 for her novel, Die Königin schweigt (‘The Queen is Silent’), which was also recommended as best German debut at the Festival du Premier Roman 2018 in Chambéry. Geistergeschichte (‘Ghost Story’) was awarded the EU Prize for Literature in 2019.

ADAM FREUDENHEIM has worked in publishing since 1998 and was Publisher of Penguin Classics, Modern Classics and Reference from 2004 to 2012. Adam joined Pushkin Press in May 2012, where he has launched the Pushkin Children’s Books, Pushkin Vertigo and ONE imprints.

FRANZISKA FÜCHSL lives in Vienna and Kiel. She studied German and English philology in Vienna and Sprache und Gestalt (Language and Form) at Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel. She is a member of the Vienna-based translation group Versatorium.

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KATJA GASSER is a literary critic and culture journalist. She was awarded a doctorate for a thesis about Ilse Aichinger and Günter Eich. She has been head of the literary department at ORF-TV since 2008. She was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literary Criticism in 2019. She is currently artistic director of Austria’s appearance at the Leipzig Book Fair 2023.

KARL-MARKUS GAUSS was born in Salzburg. Since 1991 he has been editor in chief of the literary magazine Literatur und Kritik, published by the Salzburg publishing house Otto Müller Verlag. Gauss is an essayist who uses his books to present and promote writers from Central and Eastern Europe, who are often relatively unknown in Austria and Germany.
ARNO GEIGER grew up in the Austrian Alps, in a village overlooking Lake Constance. In October 2005, he was the recipient of the first German Book Prize for his novel *We Are Doing Fine* and his writing has won numerous other prizes.

MISHA GLENNY is an award-winning British journalist. He covered the 1989 revolutions and wars in the former Yugoslavia for *The Guardian* and was the BBC’s Central Europe Correspondent. Specialising in southeast Europe, global organised crime, and cyber-security, his books include: *McMafia* (2008), *Dark Market* (2011) and *Némésis* (2015). He was appointed Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna in 2022.

ROSIE GOLDSMITH is Director and Founder of the European Literature Network and Editor-in-Chief of *The Riveter*. She was a BBC broadcaster for twenty years and is today an arts journalist and presenter. She was chair of the judges for the EBRD Literature Prize 2018–2020.

RÜDIGER GÖRNER is Professor of German with Comparative Literature at Queen Mary, University of London, and Founding Director of the Centre for Anglo-German Cultural Relations. Between 1999 and 2004 he was Director of the Institute of Germanic Studies where he founded the Ingeborg Bachmann Centre for Austrian Literature.

FIONA GRAHAM’s translations from German have appeared in *Quest: Stories of Journeys from Around Europe, Books First, No Man’s Land* and *The German Riveter*. Her translation (from Swedish) of Elin Anna Labba’s award-winning *Herrarna satte oss hit*, chronicling the forced displacement of the Northern Sámi people, is due out with University of Minnesota Press in 2023.

ANTHONY GRENVILLE (BA, DPhil, Oxford) lectured in German at Reading, Bristol and Westminster Universities, 1971–96. He worked for the Association of Jewish Refugees, London, and was Editor of its monthly journal, 2006–2017. Since 2013, he has been Chair of the Research Centre for German & Austrian Exile Studies, University of London.

MAJA HADERLAP is a bilingual Slovenian-German Austrian writer, best known for her multi-award-winning novel, *Angel of Oblivion*.

HUGO HAMILTON is the author of the *New York Times* notable memoir *The Speckled People* and its sequel *The Harbor Boys*. He has been awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, France’s Prix Femina étranger, and Italy’s Giuseppe Berto Prize. He lives in Dublin.

PETER HANDKE is an avant-garde Austrian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist, and one of the most original German-language writers in the second half of the 20th century. He was awarded the 2019 Nobel Prize for Literature.

LAUREN HARRIS AITI TSLI is a translator, interpreter and PR consultant based in Sheffield. She works as both a translator from French, German and Dutch into English and a British Sign Language interpreter. Lauren set up the consultancy Chancery Communications & Language Services Ltd in 2021.

MONIKA HELFER is an Austrian writer. She was the recipient of the Solothurn Literature Prize in 2020, and the Schubart Literature Prize in 2021. She has been nominated twice for the German Book Prize, in 2017 and 2021.

ELIAS HIRSCHL is an Austrian author, slam poet and musician. He won the 2022 Audience Award category of the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize.

MAX HÖFLER is an author, sound artist and curator. He is the co-founder of the international literature network CROWD. He has received numerous prizes and grants for his books. He regularly reads and performs at international events.

GITTA HONEGGER is the authorised translator of Elfriede Jelinek. She also translated works by Elias Canetti, Peter Handke and Thomas Bernhard, among others. Recent translations of Elfriede Jelinek include *Fury, reim GOLD, Charges* (*The Supplicants*), *The Merchant’s Contracts*, *Rechnitz*, *Shadow*, *Eurydice Says*, *Death/Valley/Mountain* (*Totenauberg*) and *The Children of the Dead*.

ALOIS HOTSCNIG was born in Carinthia and lives in Innsbruck. His books have won the Federal Chancellery of Austria’s Literature Prize, the Italo Svevo Prize, the Erich Fried Prize, the Anton Wildgans Prize, the inaugural 2011 Gert Jönke Prize, and the ORF Radio Play of the Year Award, among others.
GEORGE C. HOWES is a retired professor of German, translator, writer, and scholar, specialising in Austrian literature and culture. He is editor of No Man's Land and past co-editor of Modern Austrian Literature. His translations include books by Robert Musil, Peter Rosei, Gabriele Petricek, and Jürg Laederach.

JON HUGHES is Reader in German and Cultural Studies at Royal Holloway University of London. His research focuses on literature and film in interwar Germany and Austria, and he has published widely on the work of Joseph Roth.

ELFRIEDE JELINEK is an Austrian playwright and novelist. She is one of the most decorated authors writing in German today and was awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize for Literature.

LUCY JONES is a literary translator and writer who lives in Berlin. She has translated books by Anke Stelling, Theresia Enzensberger and Silke Scheuermann, among others, and her own writing has been published in Litro Magazine, SAND Journal, Pigeon Papers NYC and 3:AM Magazine. Her translation of Siblings by Brigitte Reimann will be published in spring 2023 by Penguin Classics and Transit Books.

HANNAH KAIP is a trained conference interpreter for German, English and French, from Austria. She is responsible for Science, Education and Dance as well as the library at the Austrian Cultural Forum London. She is pursuing a degree in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes at the Metanoia Institute in Bristol.

REINHARD KAISER-MÜHLECKER’s debut novel Der lange Gang über die Stationen (‘The Long Walk Across the Stations’) was published in 2008. Fremde Seele, Dunkler Wald (‘Foreign Soul, Dark Forest’) was shortlisted for the German Book Prize in 2016. Wilderer (‘Poacher’, 2022), was awarded the Bavarian Book Prize.

DORIS KISCH is the publisher of Seagull Books. He is the recipient of the Goethe Medal, the Chevalier Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the 2021 Ottaway Award for the Promotion of International Literature and the first Cesare De Michelis Award in 2022. Kishore has recently published his first book of poems, Knotted Grief.

VINCENT KLING, professor of German and French at La Salle University in Philadelphia, has published on Austrian literature and comparative literature as well as on the craft of translation. His work as a translator has been acknowledged by the award of the Schlegel-Tieck Prize in 2013 and the Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize in 2022.

DORIS KNECHT is a columnist and writer. Her first novel, Gruber geht (‘Gruber Goes’, 2011), was nominated for the German Book Prize and filmed for cinema. She is a recipient of the Ravensburg Foundation’s literary prize and the Book Prize of the Vienna Economy.

MICHAEL KÖHLEMEIER is an Austrian writer and musician. His works of fiction have met with considerable critical acclaim and his many awards include the Manès Sperber Prize for Literature and the Grimmelshausen Prize.

DORIS KRAUS lives in Vienna and edits the weekly book page of the Austrian newspaper Die Presse am Sonntag. She has had a colourful journalistic career with Die Presse, ranging from UK correspondent, to EU correspondent, to Local News Editor, to Editor of the ‘Life’ section in Die Presse am Sonntag. Doris Kraus is a devoted reader, hiker, golfer and family person, enjoying the mayhem of a big patchwork family with four kids and four grandchildren. Any crime novel pales in comparison!

HEIDE KUNZELMANN is an Austrian literature and culture historian and the founder of the Viennese company ThinkGerman.AT Language & Culture. Her specialism is Austrian avant-garde literature after 1945. Together with Lyn Marven, she is the co-editor of Austrian Studies 29, ‘Uncanny Valleys; Austrian Literature and Film in the New Millennium’.

KIRSTY LANG is a British journalist and broadcaster who works for BBC Radio and Television. Earlier in her career, she was on the staff of The Sunday Times and Channel 4 News, working as a presenter and reporter. Lang was a regular presenter of nightly arts and culture programme Radió Froi’s Front Row from 2004 until autumn 2021.
DEBORAH LANGTON’s latest translation is Living in Two Worlds, the Behrend-Rosenfeld diaries (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Earlier publications include bestsellers such as The Elephant Keeper’s Daughter (2018) by Julia Drosten and fact-based fiction, A Fight in Silence (2019) by Melanie Metzenthin. She has been Editorial Assistant at New Books in German.

CHRISTINE LAVANT (1915–1973) was an Austrian poet and novelist. She won the Georg Trakl Prize twice, in 1964 and 1974, and in 1970 was awarded the Great Austrian State Prize for Literature.

MARIA LAZAR (1895–1948) was an Austrian-Jewish writer who fled Austria for Denmark in 1933 with Bertold Brecht and Helene Weigel. Her literary works had mostly fallen into oblivion until Das vergessene Buch Verlag started republishing her books in 2014.

KAREN LEEDER is a writer and Schwarz-Taylor Professor of German at the University of Oxford. She is a prize-winning translator of contemporary German literature, including Evelyn Schlag, Raoul Schrott, Michael Krüger, Durs Grünbein, Volker Braun and Ulrike Almut Sandig, and has been awarded residences in the UK and Germany.

ANGELA LEHNER was born in Klagenfurt, grew up in East Tyrol and now lives in Berlin. Her debut novel Vater unser (‘Our Father’) was published in 2019 and won the Austrian Book Prize for a first novel, as well as being longlisted for the German Book Prize. Her next novel, 2001, was published in 2021.

ALEXANDER LERNET-HOLENIA (1897–1976) was an Austrian poet, novelist, dramaturgist and writer of screenplays and historical studies who produced a heterogeneous literary opus that included poetry, psychological novels describing the intrusion of otherworldly or unreal experiences into reality, and recreational films.


TESS LEWIS is a writer and translator from French and German with a soft spot for Austrian literature. She has translated works by Peter Handke, Karl-Markus Gauss, Alois Hotschnig, Doron Rabinovici and Julya Rabinowich, among many others. Her translation of Maja Haderlap’s Angel of Oblivion won the ACFNY Translation Prize and the 2017 PEN Translation Award.

J. BRET MANEY is a literary critic and translator from French and Spanish as well as a Professor in English Literature at The City University of New York. His most recent translation is Fiston Mwanza Mujila’s The River in the Belly (Deep Vellum/Phoneme, 2021).

NICOLAS MAHLER is a celebrated Austrian comic artist and illustrator living in Vienna. Published widely in newspapers and magazines, in addition his many satirical books have brought famous writers to life in graphic form, such as Lewis Carroll, James Joyce and Thomas Bernhard and are published in English by Seagull Books.

TANJA MALJARTSCHUK is a Ukrainian-born author who writes in both Ukrainian and, more recently, German. In 2018 she won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for Frösche im Meer (‘Frogs in the Sea’), an unpublished text that she read at the Festival of German-Language Literature.

BARBI MARKOVIĆ is a Serbian writer who has been resident in Austria since 2009, the same year she launched her literary career in German with Ausgehen (‘Going Out’, originally published in 2006 as Izlaženje), based on a story by Thomas Bernhard. She won the Chamisso Prize in 2017, Always on the lookout for the ‘Gfäude’ himself, Austrian journalist CLEMENS MARSHALL has documented (in collaboration with photographer Klaus Pichler) the last surviving drinking places and scenes of this kind in the photo-text volume Golden Days Before They End (Edition Patrick Frey, 2016).

SHERIDAN MARSHALL is the author of Forgetting to Remember: Religious Remembrance and the Literary Response to the Holocaust, (Valentine Mitchell, 2014). She has worked for the New Books in German project since 2010, promoting the translation of German-language literature into English, and is Deputy Editor of The Austrian Riveter.
RUTH MARTIN studied English literature before gaining a PhD in German. She has translated authors ranging from Joseph Roth and Hannah Arendt to Nino Haratischwill and Shida Bazyar. Ruth has taught translation at the University of Kent and the Bristol Translates summer school, and is a former co-chair of the UK’s Translators Association.

LYN MARVEN is a translator and Reader in German at the University of Liverpool, specialising in contemporary German-language literature. Together with Heide Kunzelmann, she is the co-editor of Austrian Studies 29, ‘Uncanny Valleys’, on the legacy of the uncanny in contemporary Austrian literature and film.

EVE MASON studied English and German literature at the Queen’s College, Oxford, and is now completing an MA in contemporary literature and publishing at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Her other research interests include fairy tales, and she has recently published a translation of five 19th-century German fairy tales by women writers.

JOHANNA McCALMONT is a Northern Irish translator and interpreter based in Brussels where she works from French, German, Dutch, and Italian. She has published several translations for children with Blue Dot Kids Press and is Co-Editor of the blog at Project World Kid Lit.

EVA MENASSE was born in Vienna and started out as a journalist before her fiction debut in 2005 with the family novel, Vienna. This was followed by novels and short stories which have won numerous awards, including the Heinrich Böll prize, the Friedrich Hölderlin prize, the Jonathan Swift prize, and the Austrian Book Prize. Eva Menasse has lived in Berlin for over twenty years and her works have been translated into numerous languages.

ROBERT MENASSE, born in Vienna, is a novelist and essayist. His non-fiction output has focused on cultural theory, Austrian identity and, more recently, the European Union. In 2017 he published Die Hauptstadt (The Capital, 2019), a novel exploring the dynamics of the European Commission and the characters running it. Die Haupstadt won the German Book Prize that same year and a follow-up novel, Die Erweiterung, appeared in 2022 and won the Bruno Kreisky Award for a political book.

FISTON MWANZA MUJILA was born in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and now lives in Graz, Austria. He is the author of Tram 83, published in English in 2015 by Deep Vellum, winner of the German International Literature award and longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize and the Prix du Monde.

ANDREW NAGORSKI is an award-winning journalist and author who spent more than three decades as a foreign correspondent and editor for Newsweek. From 2008 to April 2014, he was vice president and director of public policy for the EastWest Institute, an international affairs think tank.

SUSAN OSBORNE has spent much of her life working with books first as a bookseller, then as a magazine reviews editor and reviewer. She blogs at www.alifeinbooks.co.uk posting new title previews and reviews three times a week. She lives with her partner in Bath.

ERKAN OSMANOWIC is a literary scholar. He lives and works in Vienna and Brno.

SIMON PARE is a translator from French and German into English. Along with some twenty assorted fiction and non-fiction translations he has specialised in translating newspaper investigations of tax evasion and money laundering, most notably as part of the team that worked on the English version of Bastian Obermayer and Frederick Obermaier’s The Panama Papers.

HELLA PICK CBE was born in Vienna in 1929. She left Austria for Britain on a Kindertransport in 1938. A renowned British-Austrian journalist, she worked for the Guardian for thirty-five years and Invisible Walls, an account of her life and career in journalism, was published in 2021. She is also the author of Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice (1996) and Guilty Victim – Austria from the Holocaust to Haider (2000).

Teresa Präuwer is an Austrian writer and visual artist. Her publications include the collections of short stories, Das Glück ist eine Bohne (2021, ‘Happiness is a Bean’) and Mädchen (‘Girl’, 2022). Her work has received numerous awards including the 2017 Erich Fried Prize and the 2022 Ben Witter Prize.
ROBERT PROSSER is a writer and performance artist. He lives and works in Alpbach, Tyrol and in Vienna. His novel *Phantome* ('Phantoms', 2017) was nominated for the German Book Prize. His fourth novel, *Verschwinden in Lawinen* ('Disappearance in Avalanches'), was published in 2023 by Jung und Jung.

Doron Rabinovici is an Israeli-Austrian writer, historian and essayist. He was born in Tel Aviv and moved to Vienna aged three. He has been awarded numerous literary prizes, tackling his identity as a Jew born in Israel, living in Vienna and writing in German. He has published several major novels, from *Andernorts* (*Elsewhere*) to his political satire, *Die Einstellung* ('The Viewpoint').

Julya Rabinowich writes novels for adults and young people. She was born in St. Petersburg and has lived in Vienna since 1977. Her first young adult novel, *Dazwischen: Ich*, received numerous prestigious awards, among them the Friedrich Gerstäcker Prize, the Children's and Young Adult Literature Prize of the City of Oldenburg, and the Austrian Children's and Young Adult Literature Prize.

Laura Radosh is a Berlin-based freelance translator of mostly art and academic texts, including numerous contributions to scholarly journals and anthologies as well as museum catalogues.

Christoph Ransmayr is an award-winning Austrian author whose books have been translated into over thirty languages. His prodigious travels provided the material for *Atlas of an Anxious Man*, published by Seagull Books in 2016. In 2018 he received the Nicolas Born Prize for his literary works to date.

James Reidel is a poet, translator, editor and biographer. In addition to the works of Georg Trakl, he has translated novels by Franz Werfel and poetry by Thomas Bernhard, among others.

Barbara Rieger was born in Graz. She lives in Vienna and Upper Austria and is a writer, publisher, and teacher of creative writing. Together with Alain Barbero she founded and runs the bilingual photo and literature blog cafe.entropy.at. Her third novel will be published by Kremayr & Scheriau in 2024.

Angus Robertson is a Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Central and Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. For nearly ten years he was a journalist with ORF in Vienna. He holds the Decoration of Honour for Services to the Republic of Austria, the country's highest honour. When he first lived in Vienna, he looked for a history of the city: there wasn’t one, so he decided to write it himself.

Alexandra Roesch is a bi-lingual, bi-cultural translator from German to English. She holds an MA in Translation from the University of Bristol and has participated in various literary programmes including NBG, LCB, BCLT and FBF. Recent translations include Hans Fallada, Seraina Kobler and Harald Gilbers. Alexandra lives in Frankfurt with her family.

Joseph Roth (1894–1939) was an Austrian-Jewish journalist and novelist, best known for his family saga *The Radetzky March* (1932), about the decline and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his novel of Jewish life *Job* (1930) and his seminal essay *Juden auf Wanderschaft* ('The Wandering Jews', 1927).

Robert Seethaler was born in Vienna and is the author of several novels, including the international bestselling, Man Booker Prize-nominated *A Whole Life*. He also works as an actor, including in Paolo Sorrentino’s *Youth*. He lives in Berlin.

Stefanie Sarginagel is a writer and cartoonist published widely in German-language online and print media. Her essays and biofiction offer critical and irreverent explorations of Austria in the age of neoliberal capitalism.

Evelyn Schlag was born in Waidhofen an der Ybbs. Since her debut publication in 1981, she has published more than a dozen books of prose and six books of poetry, along with poetics lectures and memoirs. She received the Austrian State Prize for Literature in 2015 and the Hay Festival Medal for Poetry in 2018.

Jake Schneider is a translator, literary organiser, aspiring Yiddish poet, and proud member of Yiddish.Berlin. He was formerly editor-in-chief of the literary journal *SAND* and has received a literary translation fellowship from the US National Endowment for the Arts.
FRANZ SCHUH is an Austrian novelist, literary critic and essayist in the tradition of Karl Kraus and Alfred Polgar. Schuh was born and lives in Vienna, where, just like his predecessors, he prefers to write in one of the traditional coffeehouses.

RAOUL SCHROTT is one of Austria’s most successful writers: a polymath, translator from ancient languages, poet, novelist, dramatist, polemicist, academic, critic, and explorer. His most recent works include his 800-page epic poem Erste Erde ('First Earth', 2016) and the baroque travel novel Eine Geschichte des Windes ('A History of the Wind', 2019).

CLEMENS J. SETZ is an Austrian writer and translator. His novels have twice been shortlisted for the German Book Prize. He won the 2011 Leipzig Book Fair Prize with the short story collection Die Liebe zur Zeit des Mahlstätter Kindes ('Love in the Times of the Mahlstadt Child'). In 2020 he was awarded the Jakob-Wassermann-Literaturpreis and the Kleist Prize, and in 2021 he won the Georg Büchner Prize.

LIZZY SIDDAL is a British bibliophile and book blogger. Each November she hosts German Literature Month on her blog ‘Lizzy’s Literary Life (Volume Two)’.

MARINA SOFIA is a translator, author, editor and reviewer, who has never managed to shake off her Viennese accent when speaking German. She is also the co-founder of Corylus Books, purveyor of fine translated crime fiction with a social edge.

THOMAS STANGL was born in Vienna. His first novel, Der einzige Ort ('The Only Place'), was published in 2004 and received the aspekte-Literaturpreis for a first novel appearing in German. He has since won numerous awards for his work.

MICHAEL STAVARIČ is a writer, translator and lecturer, living in Vienna. His accolades include the Austrian State Prize for Children’s and Youth Literature, the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize and the City of Vienna Literature Prize. His most recent translations from German include Das Phantom (Luchterhand, 2023); Die Suche nach dem Ende der Dunkelheit (Limbus, 2023); Faszination Qualle (Leykam Verlag, 2023).

LINDA STIFT is an Austrian writer. She has published three novels to date: Kingapeng (2005), Stierhunger (2007) and Kein einziger Tag (2011). She won the Alfred Gesswein Literaturepreis in 2007 and was nominated for the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2009. Stierhunger was published in English as The Empress and the Cake by Peirene Press in 2017.

CLAIRE STOREY is a literary translator from Spanish and German into English, specialising in children’s literature. Claire is also co-editor of the blog at Project World Kid Lit. In 2021/2 she received funding from Arts Council England for a project focusing on translating young adult literature.

MARLENE STREERUWITZ is an Austrian playwright, novelist, poet, and short story writer. Streeruwitz has received many awards for her work including the Hermann Hesse Prize (2001), the City of Vienna Literature Prize (2001) and the Droste Prize (2009).

JUDITH W. TASCHLER studied history and German language and literature before working as a teacher for several years. Her novel Die Deutschlehrerin ('The German Teacher') was awarded the 2014 Friedrich Glauser Prize.

ELEANOR UPDEGRAFF is a freelance writer, editor and literary translator born in London and now based in Vienna. She holds a BA in English Literature, German and Russian from Durham University. Her translations and writing have appeared online and in print, including in No Man’s Land, Lunate, Panel and Stanchion.

KARINA URBACH is a historian and prize-winning novelist. She took her PhD at the University of Cambridge and researches 20th-century history at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton and the Institute for Historical Research, University of London.

JOZEF VAN DER VOORT is a literary and academic translator working from German and Dutch into English, currently employed at the German Historical Institute London. He is the winner of the 2022 Austrian Cultural Forum Translation Competition. Recent translations include the chapbooks Provinces by Tabea Steiner and Something Has to Happen by Maartje Wortel, both published by Strangers Press.

HEIMITO VON DODERER (1896–1966) was an Austrian novelist who achieved international fame with his novel of post-First World War Vienna, Die Dämonen (The Demons, 1956), on which he had worked since 1931. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature five times.

SHAUN WHITESIDE is a translator from German, French, Italian and Dutch. His most recent translations from German include To Die in Spring by Ralf Rothmann and Time of the Magicians by Wolfram Eilenberger. He lives in London.
DANIEL WISSE is an Austrian writer and musician. He has been writing prose, poetry and radio works since 1990 and is active as an editor and publisher of contemporary literature. He was awarded the Austrian Book Prize 2018 for his novel, König der Berge (‘Queen of the Mountains’).

CAROLINE WYATT became a BBC foreign correspondent in 1993, reporting on events across Europe, and conflicts ranging from Kosovo and Chechnya to Iraq and Afghanistan. Since being diagnosed with MS in 2015, Caroline has been the presenter of Radio 4’s Saturday PM programme, and makes radio documentaries – most recently Blood, Sweat and Tears for Radio 4 on the legacy for British troops of the war in Afghanistan.

STEFAN ZWEIG (1881–1942) was born into a wealthy Austrian-Jewish family in Vienna. His dramatic short stories and gripping biographies of major historical and literary figures, including Beware of Pity and The World of Yesterday, made him one of the world’s most popular writers. In 1934, with the rise of Nazism, he briefly moved to London and New York, then settled in Brazil where he died in 1942. His popularity and influence continue today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AUSTRIAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH
Austrian fiction, non-fiction and poetry, translated and published in the UK and USA between 2013 and 2023

The Austrian Riveter is proud to present the first dedicated bibliography of Austrian literature in English. It covers ten years of publishing and is available to download for free via the QR code below and via the websites of the European Literature Network, Austrian Cultural Forum and New Books in German. We hope that this special addition to the magazine will serve to encourage even more translation and publishing of Austrian writing into English.

The bibliography has been compiled for us by Lara Bulloch.