

# Casual Brutalities: Hans Lebert's *Die Wolfshaut*, Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* and Austrian Collective Memory

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Hans Lebert's *Die Wolfshaut* [*The Wolf's Fell*, 1960] and Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* [*Shrovetide*, 1967] are powerful narratives that address the continued existence of the fascist mentality in 1950s rural Austria. Though both contain allusions to Germany's racial war in Eastern Europe, neither of them deals explicitly with the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the status of the Nazi period within post-war Austrian collective memory is central to an understanding of both the novels themselves and their reception history. After situating the novels in the context of post-war Austria, I analyse them from the perspective of collective memory, before turning to the question of the texts' reception and their position within Austrian literary history.

## I

Approaches to the study of collective memory tend to be either sociological or psychoanalytic in orientation. Sociological theorists working in the tradition of Maurice Halbwachs contend that collective memory involves less the recall of the past than a reconfiguration of it in the light of present socio-political imperatives.<sup>1</sup> Accuracy and authenticity are often sacrificed to accommodate wider issues of identity formation, power and authority, and political affiliation. Memory can thus be seen as a form of social, cultural and political action that facilitates the establishment of social order and determines belonging, exclusivity and continuity. Furthermore, collective memory manifests itself in *material* culture, and finds expression in objects, narratives of the past, and diverse social practices, structures and rituals.<sup>2</sup>

In psychoanalysis, the late works of Freud contain accounts of repression, latency and return that transcend the level of individual psycho(patho)logy and stress a homology between individual psychical development and the

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> See Barbie Zelizer, 'Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1995), 214–39.

course of human civilization. Psychoanalysis thus becomes a powerful means of conceptualizing historical memory. The essential point is that repression and forgetting take place on a collective as well as an individual plane, with the result that structures of latency and belatedness can be seen at work within history itself. Several theorists have applied this schema productively to the phenomenon of Nazism, most notably Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in their book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* [*The Inability to Mourn*].<sup>3</sup> Subtitled 'Principles of Collective Behaviour', it explores West German society's problematic relationship with the Nazi past. The Mitscherlichs' argument centres on questions of repression and return, and suggests that the failure to work through the Nazi period, to remember it by both acknowledging its former existence and mourning its subsequent loss, results in a kind of psychosocial pathology which condemns the collective to relive past acts in the mode of repetition. This thesis can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Austria.

The Mitscherlichs' interest in the politics of memory suggests that sociological and psychoanalytic approaches need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, psychoanalysis can function as an effective meta-discourse, allowing local expressions of collective memory to be inserted into a wider narrative of socio-historical processes. This can be seen in the creation of post-war Austrian collective memory, which was grounded in the thesis that Austria had been a victim of Hitlerite aggression. This 'victim thesis' was enshrined in the seminal documents of post-war Austrian history: the Declaration of Independence (1945) and the State Treaty (1955). Furthermore, histories of Austria, school textbooks and other official publications constantly reinforced the notion that Austria was a victim of rather than a participant in Nazism.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that in West Germany the National Socialist past was normatively internalized as a reminder, a warning and a guide to political action, whereas Austria coped with the Nazi period by means of externalization. At the same time, however, liberal democracy brought with it an electoral free market, and reassuring Austrians that any involvement in Nazism would be forgotten became a pragmatic necessity if success at the ballot box was to be ensured. Austrian political memory in the post-war

<sup>3</sup> Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Leipzig, 1990 [Munich, 1967]).

<sup>4</sup> The baldest statement of this position can be found in Ernst Josef Görlich and Felix Romanik, *Geschichte Österreichs* (Innsbruck, 1970). This text was widely disseminated by the Austrian state (copies were donated, for example, to numerous British university libraries by the Austrian Embassy) and took on the status of an official history. It contains the following statements: 'The Second World War belongs to world history, but not to Austrian history. It was not an Austrian War. Austria did not participate in it' (p. 551).

decades was thus characterized by a kind of double-speak.<sup>5</sup> The victim thesis insisted that Germans, not Austrians, were responsible for the War and the Holocaust, while domestic politics tacitly acknowledged the fact that Nazi sympathies and willing participation in the *Wehrmacht* were widespread phenomena, and rehabilitated the vast majority of those who had been involved. Post-war Austria offers a particularly clear illustration of the workings of collective memory. The past was falsified in the crassest terms to serve the purposes of the present: the establishment of social cohesion, the consolidation of capitalist democracy as a mode of political and economic organization and the formation of a specifically Austrian national identity based on a notional continuity with the Habsburg past.

The Waldheim affair of 1986 coincided with a re-evaluation of the victim thesis and the configurations of memory that it supported. From the mid-1980s, post-war Austrian historiography and political memory were subjected to intense scrutiny and critique. Insofar as historiography and sociological investigation are themselves not only discourses *about* but simultaneously also vehicles *of* collective memory, the model of repression and belated return can be seen in operation here and, indeed, throughout Austrian society. Austria's role in Nazism was increasingly acknowledged in public discourse, and the extent to which collective memory followed suit can be gauged from the fact that eighty-one per cent of the Austrian population fully or partly agreed with Chancellor Franz Vranitzky's declaration in Israel in 1993 that Austria bore collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime.<sup>6</sup> The trajectory of political and collective memory of Nazism in the Second Republic can thus clearly be mapped in terms of repression and belated return.

Double-speak, externalization and the belated return of a repressed past form the core thematic concerns of *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching*. Critical writing on both texts has dealt extensively with the legacy of fascism as represented in character configurations, rural customs and social institutions such as schools, the police, and *Kameradschaftsvereine* [veterans' associations]. But Fritsch's and Lebert's novels suggest that National Socialist views can persist in the Second Republic as long as they remain absent from public discourse, hence the rural population can privately espouse Nazi ideology while paying lip-service to democratic principles. In each case, the arrival of an outsider exposes the contradictions inherent in this double-speak, leading to a recrudescence of casual brutalities and mechanisms of scapegoating.

<sup>5</sup> On these issues, see Heidemarie Uhl, 'The Politics of Memory: Austria's Perception of the Second World War and the National Socialist Period', in *Austrian Historical Memory & National Identity*, ed. by Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (New Brunswick, NJ and London, 1997), pp. 64-94.

<sup>6</sup> The contributions to *Austrian Historical Memory*, ed. by Bischof and Pelinka, provide an excellent overview of the development of the debate.

## II

*Die Wolfshaut* narrates events that happen between 8 November 1952 and 14 February 1953 in the fictional Styrian village of Schweigen, an isolated community that is not even served by the rail network.<sup>7</sup> The protagonist, Johann Unfreund, is a sailor who, though born in Schweigen, returns only in 1946 after an absence of thirty years. At the beginning of the novel, he finds the corpse of the young Hans Höller leaning against the window frame of an abandoned brick factory with his eyes wide open as though in terror. This is the first of several mysterious deaths that take place, and Unfreund becomes drawn into an investigation that uncovers the causes of both the current fatalities and the unexplained suicide of his own father in 1945. It emerges that a group of villagers, the so-called 'Ortswacht', had executed six *Fremdarbeiter* (forced labourers from Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe) in the factory in the spring of 1945. Unfreund's father had been a member of the squad, as had those villagers who die during the course of the novel. Unfreund finally decides to expose the sole remaining murderer, the former *Ortsgruppenleiter* Habergeier. Habergeier had ordered the wartime executions and is subsequently an accessory to the murder of Johann Schrecken-schlager, a member of the 'Ortswacht' who is killed in order to prevent his blurting out the secret. In a final ironic turn it emerges that Habergeier is immune from prosecution because he has just been made a member of the *Landtag* [regional assembly].

Several competing discourses coalesce around the problem of collective memory in *Die Wolfshaut*. Structurally, it is a novel of crime and detection that places the ultimate moral responsibility for the current crisis on the wartime actions of the 'Ortswacht'. Furthermore, Unfreund, who takes on the role of detective, is haunted by his father's past and thus embodies the possibility of an ethically responsible mode of remembering. At the same

<sup>7</sup> The place-name Schweigen, which means not merely silence but the conscious act of remaining silent, is part of an elaborate scheme of symbolic names that exist in a quasi-adjectival relationship to the person or place they denote. In the case of the preternaturally sensitive hairdresser Zitter (from 'zittern', to tremble), the brutal and short-tempered Rotschädel (red face), the outsider Unfreund (non-friend), and the cattle dealer Ukrutník (a Czech insult that has no English equivalent, but which corresponds to the German 'Schweinehund'), the link between name and character is especially clear. In other cases, the names are suggestive rather than descriptive: the local politician and ex-*Ortsgruppenleiter* is called Habergeier ('Geier' means vulture), the first person to die in the text is Höller (reminiscent of 'Hölle', hell) and the village policeman is Habicht (hawk). Several critics have referred to this aspect of the text. See Maria Luise Caputo-Mayr, 'Hans Leberts Romane: Realismus und Dämonie, Zeitkritik und Gerichtstag', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 7.1/2 (1974), 79–98 (p. 84), and Konstanze Fliedl and Karl Wagner, 'Tote Zeit: Zum Problem der Darstellung von Geschichtserfahrung in den Romanen Erich Frieds und Hans Leberts', in *Literatur der Nachkriegszeit und der fünfziger Jahre in Österreich*, ed. by Friedbert Aspetsberger, Norbert Frei and Hubert Lengauer (Vienna, 1984), pp. 303–19 (p. 310).

time, the ironic ending and the mythological schema that the narrator imposes upon events function to undermine or even neutralize the implications of detection and of the potential for guilt to be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Whenever anyone tries to break the taboo surrounding the murder of the *Fremdarbeiter*, latent aggressiveness erupts into the *Gemütlichkeit* of Schweigen. When first Schreckenschlager and then Unfreund begin to uncover the events of April–May 1945, the past invades the present not as memory but as repetition, as the violence and rituals of scapegoating that characterized the Nazi period are re-enacted. Schreckenschlager is murdered to prevent him from talking, whereupon the villagers demand the arrest of Unfreund ‘weil er ja eigentlich gar nicht daher gehört und auch gar nicht zu uns paßt’ [because he doesn’t belong here and doesn’t fit in with us at all].<sup>8</sup> The authoritarian character of the locals means that they are easily disarmed by the reassurance of Habicht, the village policeman, but their bloodlust is swiftly transferred to an escaped convict known to be in the area. A manhunt is organized in which virtually everyone enthusiastically participates. The convict is beaten into confessing, then ‘accidentally’ shot dead by ex-Nazi Vinzenz Rotschädel as he tries to flee his captors once again (pp. 349–58).

Like all psychoanalytic symptoms, these outbursts of violence reveal the existence of the pathology that they are meant to conceal. In cases of compulsive repetition, therapy works by bringing the repressed material to consciousness and allowing the past to be integrated into a narrative that acknowledges it *as* past. The problem in *Die Wolfshaut* is that this process does not take place; the past continues to manifest itself only as repetition and re-enactment. For information about the murder of the *Fremdarbeiter*, therefore, Unfreund, as detective–therapist, has to rely firstly on the old blacksmith, who witnessed the crime and left the village shortly afterwards, and secondly on his father’s suicide note.

The villagers themselves resolutely refuse Unfreund’s therapy. When he finally announces his findings to the *Stammtisch*, the result is comic and appalling in equal measure. Franz Zopf’s exhortations to stick together, keep calm and not to talk (pp. 552–53) prove increasingly impotent as Unfreund confronts the villagers with a narrative of events leading up to the murder of the *Fremdarbeiter*. As Sousa’s *Stars and Stripes Forever* emanates from the new jukebox, a brawl breaks out that leaves several of the men spitting teeth (pp. 552–55). Habicht is called to the scene, but is left bemused by the entire fiasco: ‘“Es ist schon eigenartig, wie das zugeht”, denkt sich Habicht. “Da prügeln sie sich, schlagen einander die restlichen Zahnstümmel aus; doch — schau an! — im Handumdrehen sind sie schon wieder die innigsten Freunde, und niemand vermag mehr aus ihnen herauszubekommen, was eigentlich

<sup>8</sup> Hans Lebert, *Die Wolfshaut* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), p. 257.

los war”’ [‘It’s pretty weird, the way it happens,’ thought Habicht to himself. ‘One moment they’re beating each other up and smashing in the only teeth they’ve got left, and then — hey presto! — in the twinkling of an eye they’re the best of friends again and nobody can find out from them what was actually going on’] (p. 562). The conspiracy of silence is restored; there has been no change in the villagers’ consciousness; and, as the Mitscherlichs point out, it is only by means of a change in consciousness that the cycle of compulsive repetition can be broken.<sup>9</sup>

*Die Wolfshaut* can thus be seen as a kind of detective novel manqué. Classic examples of the genre evince a fundamental faith in the capacity of reason to bring the crime to light and the perpetrator to justice. It is no coincidence that the German word ‘aufklären’ can mean both ‘to enlighten’ and ‘to solve a crime’. In Lebert’s text, the crime is indeed uncovered, and the cause of recent happenings in the village is unequivocally located in the past actions of the ‘Ortswacht’. The silence surrounding the Nazi period, however, means that the belated revelation of the crime can result only in repetition: those who seek to break the silence are subjugated, and then responsibility for this subjugation is projected outwards, thus allowing the collective to avoid facing up to its responsibility for both past and present killings. The restoration of social order with which typical detective novels end takes place, but in inverted form: the detective is exiled, and Habergeier, the surviving criminal, continues to function as the community’s representative.

It may initially appear that the novel’s mythological discourse is at odds with the detective-novel structure, which insists on the centrality of human agency and moral responsibility. Lebert coined the term ‘Transparentismus’ [transparentism] to describe his narrative method.<sup>10</sup> It is a technique that allows the transcendent to be perceived behind or beyond the concrete realism of the fictional world. This has led to an oft-articulated suspicion that Lebert represents Nazism as an epiphenomenon of an all-pervasive metaphysical evil, diminishing his stature as an anti-fascist author.<sup>11</sup> This assumption is undermined in several ways, however. The mythological framework of *Die Wolfshaut* combines Judaeo-Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, Gnosticism, Taoism, folk superstition, and Germanic myth (as mediated through

<sup>9</sup> Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Viktor Suchy, quoted in Thomas Mießgang, *Sex, Mythos, Maskerade. Der antifaschistische Roman Österreichs im Zeitraum von 1960 bis 1980* (Vienna, 1988), p. 177.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Fliedl and Wagner, ‘Tote Zeit’, p. 313; and Jürgen Egyptien, *Der ‘Anschluß’ als Sündenfall. Hans Leberts literarisches Werk und intellektuelle Gestalt* (Vienna, 1998), pp. 144–45.

Wagner).<sup>12</sup> Such syncretism means that the transcendent superstructure cannot be reduced to a coherent metaphysical scheme that would adequately explain the events that take place at the level of the plot. An adequate understanding of the mythological level of *Die Wolfshaut* can be attained only by examining its role within the overall narrative economy.

It has often been pointed out that Lebert employs a first-person plural narrator, who speaks primarily as ‘wir’ and as such represents the collective. What has puzzled critics is the fact that this ‘wir’ does not obey the usual laws governing first-person narration. Generally, narrators situated on the same ontological plane as other characters have no access to these characters’ thought-processes, nor can they report on events unless they experience them first-hand or learn of them from third parties. *Die Wolfshaut* initially attempts to create such a ‘normal’ first-person narrator by means of an elaborate system of witness statements (pp. 10, 15, 17, 23, 33, 44, 49, 50, 58). This testimonial structure, however, all but disappears after page 58. Thereafter, the narrator becomes apparently omniscient, focalizing events alternately through Unfreund and the photographer Karl Maletta, narrating what happens to them when they are alone, and allowing the reader direct access to their mental world.<sup>13</sup> This clearly transgresses the conventions of first-person narration, but it is inadequate to claim, as Andrea Kunne does, that the ‘wir’ narrator is replaced by a third-person narrator, for the ‘wir’ persona continues to manifest himself and functions throughout as the notional source of the narrative.<sup>14</sup> However, he also baldly announces that much of what we read is purely speculative. Early on, we are told that the narration of a particular event is based on ‘Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung’ [calculation of probability] and ‘Im-dunkeln-Tappen’ [gropings in the dark] (p. 25). Furthermore, the conjectural nature of the narrative is foregrounded throughout by means of modalizing constructions (pp. 120, 168, 214, 216, 217, 310, 580) and eventually explicitly announced: ‘Stellen wir Spekulationen an!’ [Let’s indulge in some speculation!] (p. 578). The ultimate

<sup>12</sup> The Judaeo-Christian aspects of the text are highlighted by Caputo-Mayr, ‘Hans Leberts Romane’, passim. On Gnosticism, see Karl Müller, ‘“Ein neuer Gegenstand, ganz erneuert durch die Sicht”’: Zur Prosa Hans Leberts’, in *Hans Lebert*, ed. by Gerhard Fuchs and Günther A. Höfler, Dossier 12 (Vienna and Graz, 1997), pp. 37–63. For a Wagnerian reading, see Claudia Ainger, ‘Hans Leberts Romane: Wie man Wagner als Nazijäger einspannt’, in *Hans Lebert*, ed. by Fuchs and Höfler, pp. 143–69. Lebert himself draws attention to the Taoist aspects of *Die Wolfshaut* in Barbara Dobrick, ‘“Bei dem zweiten habe ich nicht mehr gelacht. . .”’: Gespräch mit Hans Lebert’, in *Hans Lebert*, ed. by Fuchs and Höfler, pp. 9–33 (p. 26).

<sup>13</sup> The term ‘focalizer’ is used in narrative theory to refer to the eyes or consciousness through which the narrative world is perceived. The focalizer may or may not be the same as the narrator. The distinction between focalization and narration is intended to avoid the potential ambiguity of the terms ‘perspective’ and ‘point of view’.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea Kunne, *Heimat im Roman. Last oder Lust? Transformationen in der österreichischen Nachkriegsliteratur* (Amsterdam, 1991), p. 130.

effect of this technique is to draw attention to the discrepancy between knowledge and narrative, an ironic move in the light of the fact that 'narrator' comes from the Latin 'gnarus', meaning 'one who knows'. Lebert's narrator is self-confessedly unreliable, and this in turn has serious implications for the interpretation of transcendence in *Die Wolfshaut*.

This transcendence takes many forms. It is usually invoked to explain the strange events that take place in Schweigen during the winter months of 1952–53, and amongst the metaphors employed is that of seepage: there is a hole in the fabric of the world, allowing evil to seep in. Karl Maletta provides the focal point for this metaphor. The narrator states: 'heute, nach einem Jahr [. . .], kommt es einem fast so vor, als sei Maletta selbst aus den Fugen gegangen, als sei er selbst jene undichte Stelle gewesen, er allein jenes winzige Leck in der Schiffshaut der Welt, durch welche das "Entsetzliche" [. . .] einzusickern anhub' [today, a year later, it almost seems as though Maletta himself had become unhinged, as though he himself were the place that was no longer watertight, he alone the tiny leak in the hull of the world through which the 'terror' began to seep] (p. 83). The portrayal of Maletta as the origin of evil and the point at which a malign transcendental power enters the phenomenal world is here announced as posthumous construct: looking at things *in retrospect*, it is *almost as though* he were a leak in the hull of the world.

On several further occasions Maletta is represented as the incubator of a long-dormant metaphysical evil that feeds on his blood until it is strong enough to set itself loose upon the world (pp. 198, 452–53, 523). As the text progresses, this construct takes on an independent existence. From being an 'als ob' construction employed by the narrator, the metaphors of the parasitic tumour and the leak in the hull come to characterize Maletta's perception of himself (pp. 535, 561). However, the narrator admits early on in the novel that his narration of Maletta's thought-processes is based exclusively on empathic fabrication (p. 27). There is thus no reason to assume that this is indeed how Maletta sees himself; it is a narrative sleight of hand that allows a purely discursive construct — the self-conscious metaphor of Maletta as a leak in the hull of the world — to attain the status of a fact within the narrative world. Once we realize this, it emerges that *Die Wolfshaut* actually dramatizes a process of myth formation. The 'leak in the hull of the world' cannot be merely accepted as a means by which Lebert mythologizes evil. Rather, it allows him to show how, in the hands of an unreliable narrator and the village community he represents, a metaphor can take on a life of its own and come to function as an explanatory model for events that appear to have no direct physical cause. Far from representing, as Hans Wolfschütz claims, a 'typically Austrian' retreat from the historico-political sphere, Lebert's text shows that myths of transcendent evil are themselves political, and can be enlisted in the service of an exculpatory discourse in order to preserve the silence that governs collective



memory of the Nazi period.<sup>15</sup> Mythologization is shown to be one more strategy of externalization, analogous to those prevalent both in Lebert's *Schweigen* and in Austria more generally.

A rather different model of collective memory in *Die Wolfshaut* is mediated through the figure of Unfreund. He eludes the narrator's mythologizing tendencies, his goodness manifesting itself in ethical and political actions at the level of plot. He represents the possibility of positive political intervention in the present, consciously setting out to lift the repression of the Nazi past and bring into circulation the buried history of the murders committed in *Schweigen* in 1945. In addition, he embodies a mode of collective remembering that does not allow for processes of externalization. In an essay of 1975, the psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham put forward the notion of the 'transgenerational phantom'.<sup>16</sup> In the course of his clinical experience, Abraham encountered patients who appeared to be possessed not by their own unconscious but by someone else's (usually that of a deceased parent). This 'phantom' fulfils a function very different from dynamic repression:

The phantom's periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography. The imaginings issuing from the presence of a stranger have nothing to do with fantasy strictly speaking. They neither preserve the topographical status quo nor announce a shift in it.<sup>17</sup>

The phantom thus signals the presence of 'an unspeakable fact *within the love object*'.<sup>18</sup>

Unfreund's relationship with his dead father illustrates in paradigmatic fashion precisely this kind of transgenerational haunting. When he discovers the body of Hans Höller, he is immediately assailed by an uncomfortable feeling that this matter might somehow concern him. He interprets Höller's staring eyes as 'eine chiffrierte Nachricht an seine Adresse' [an encrypted message directed at him] (p. 66), and begins to hear mysterious whisperings that seek to initiate him into secrets that are not his own (pp. 66–67). He feels drawn to the brick factory like a criminal to the scene of his crime (p. 72), and his attempts to ignore Schreckenschlager's intimation that his father's suicide was connected with the brick factory result in his being pursued night after night by a disembodied voice that repeats the same assertion. Unfreund realizes that the secret Schreckenschlager wished to confide to him was a not merely his father's secret, but that of the other

<sup>15</sup> Hans Wolfschütz, 'Crisis and Revolt', in *Modern Austrian Writing. Literature and Society after 1945*, ed. by Alan Best and Hans Wolfschütz (London, 1980), pp. 197–213 (p. 205).

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology', in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London, 1994), pp. 171–76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

villagers as well (p. 290). What is more, it soon becomes apparent that this secret is a primal scene, an originating event that is the ultimate cause of the mysterious happenings in the present: Unfreund is visited by a vision of his father, whose eyes look backward towards a point in the forgotten past 'darin das Samenkorn der Zukunft keimte' [in which the seedcorn of the future germinated] (p. 293; cf. p. 390).

Couched in the rhetoric of voices, visions and ghosts, it is clear that Unfreund's experience corresponds in almost all particulars to Abraham's phantom, working like a ventriloquist within the subject's own mental topography and causing imaginings that issue from the presence of a stranger. The 'unspeakable fact *within the love object*' is precisely what is revealed when Unfreund discovers his father's suicide note. This provides the full resolution of the novel's structuring enigma. It was not only that six *Fremdarbeiter* were illegally shot, but that the *ad hoc* firing squad was gripped by a sense of ecstatic intoxication ('Rausch') as they carried out the murders (p. 572). Unfreund understands his father's letter as a testament and his reading of it as an acceptance of the guilt that his father has bequeathed (p. 575), thereby confirming that the metaphor of haunting is to be understood psychologically, as a mode of transgenerational transmission.

Though his attempts to force the villagers to remember and to bring Habergeier to justice are ultimately unsuccessful, Unfreund not only refuses to acquiesce in the silence that characterizes collective memory in Schweigen, but also carries within himself the possibility of a transgenerational remembering in which the 'unspeakable' past 'speaks', albeit belatedly, through the second generation.

### Modern Humanities Research Association III

Like Lebert's text, *Fasching* deals with the return of a native to a provincial Austrian community and the effect this has on collective memory. In early 1945, Felix Golub deserts from the *Wehrmacht* and lives, disguised in a *Dirndl*, as the maid and sex-slave of Vittoria Pisani, the widow of a Habsburg general.<sup>19</sup> Taking Golub for a girl, the garrison commander Lois Lubits tries to seduce him. Golub uses the opportunity to disarm Lubits, and forces him to surrender to the advancing Red Army without a struggle. He shoots dead

<sup>19</sup> Transvestitism is a central topos in the novel. Susanne Zobl reads it in the light of the wider thematics of conformity and coercion ('Transvestitismus und Deformation: Ein Motiv bei Gerhard Fritsch', *Literatur und Kritik*, 281 [1994], 67–75), as does Mießgang. Mießgang also argues, though, that the inversion of gender roles presents a distorted reflection ('Vexierbild') of patriarchy: the fact that men are forced by women to mimic stereotypically feminine behaviour serves to denaturalize the notion of 'the feminine', and expose the hierarchical structures of patriarchal society (*Sex, Mythos, Maskerade*, pp. 156–61). On this reading, *Fasching* emerges as a precursor of contemporary performative theories of gender.

an SS man named Kobielski in the process, but saves the town from certain destruction. The townspeople, however, denounce him to the occupying forces, and he is imprisoned for twelve years in the Soviet Union. Shortly after his release, he returns with his fiancée Hilga to the town to take over the studio of a retiring photographer. Rather than being feted as the town's saviour, he is viewed as a traitor and greeted with contempt, mockery and unconcealed hostility. The carnival celebrations culminate in his election to the office of 'Faschingsbraut' [carnival queen], and he is once more dressed in women's clothes. This provokes the aggression of the townsfolk yet further, and Golub is saved from being lynched only by Vittoria Pisani. She hides him beneath the floorboards of her house, just as she had after his desertion, and the fragmentation of Golub's interior monologue, with which the novel closes, suggests incipient mental breakdown.

Like *Die Wolfshaut*, *Fasching* shows that collective memory manifests itself in repetition of the unassimilated past. There are characters whose individual behaviour illustrates this point, most obviously Hilga who, as a twelve-year-old, had collected copies of the *Luftwaffenillustrierte* and scrawled exclamation marks next to the 'heroes' she admired.<sup>20</sup> This teenage obsession resurfaces during the carnival celebrations, when she is willingly seduced by the former *Wehrmacht* officer and bearer of the Knight's Cross, Lois Lubits (pp. 103, 146, 227). We see repeatedly that, at a collective level, the ideological assumptions of the Nazi period continue to legitimize mob rule and ritualistic forms of humiliation and physical violence. In early 1945, a deserter named Josef Kravogl is executed by hanging on the town's bridge. The entire population turns out to watch, and the spectacle is bound up with a morbid eroticism (pp. 116–17). Felix himself is the victim of mob violence when, disguised as a woman, he intervenes to prevent his secret lover, the Polish *Fremdarbeiterin* Fela, from being attacked for tying her headscarf in the 'German' rather than the prescribed 'Slavic' manner. Both are deemed to have insulted the honour of German womanhood and are subjected to *Volksjustiz*. This involves their being shaven and forced to sit overnight in shop windows on opposite sides of the street, with signs around their necks that read 'Ich bin eine freche Polensau' [I am a presumptuous Polish bitch] (pp. 119–21).

In the town cemetery, the deserter Kravogl and the SS man Kobielski lie side by side, obfuscating the distinction between victim and perpetrator and symbolizing the burial of the difficult political and ethical questions that the Nazi period raised for post-war Austrians. Golub's return to the town after a gap of a dozen years, however, reopens old wounds (to use Fritsch's own metaphor, p. 146). The townsfolk can no longer 'bury' the past, but again it can emerge only as re-enactment of the same animosity towards deserters

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard Fritsch, *Fasching* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995), p. 71.

and the same *Volksjustiz*. This is first articulated as Golub and Hilga attempt to gain entrance to the 'Kameradschaftskränzchen', an annual dance organized by the local veterans' association. Felix's appearance in the foyer immediately provokes aggressive reactions. One veteran spits, another tries to barge Felix and a third exclaims 'nicht hineinlassen so was, Ordner!' [don't let his kind in there, doorman!] (p. 97). The expression 'so was' (literally 'such a thing') betrays the strategies of dehumanization that formed a cornerstone of Nazi racial rhetoric, legitimating the extermination of people who were construed as objects.

Hilga succeeds in extricating them from this potentially threatening situation, but they have to endure Lois Lubits's speech. Lubits begins by remembering those fallen comrades who 'did not die in vain', and stresses that those who fought in the *Wehrmacht* should be proud, not ashamed. Regarding deserters, he goes on:

Sie sollen getrost ihr Leben genießen, das ihnen so unglaublich kostbar ist. Sie sollen uns nur nicht sagen, daß sie —

Pfuirufe

— daß sie die Gerechten sind, und wir Frontsoldaten Verbrecher. Das lassen wir uns nicht bieten. Weder von einer gewissen Presse noch von einzelnen Außenseitern. Wir verachten sie und geben unserer Verachtung Ausdruck, wenn wir provoziert werden. Wir, die wir unsere Pflicht getan haben, sind und bleiben Kameraden. (p. 99)

[They should be free to enjoy the lives that are so incredibly dear to them. But they had better not tell us that they —

(Booing)

— that they are the righteous ones and we front-line soldiers the criminals. We won't put up with that kind of thing, neither from certain factions of the press, nor from individual outsiders. We despise them and give vent to our contempt if provoked. We, we who have done our duty, are and will remain comrades.]

The implication is that desertion is necessarily due to cowardice rather than having the courage of one's anti-fascist convictions, that Felix is an outsider *vis-à-vis* the war veterans and that expressing contempt for him is perfectly acceptable. The speech thus paves the way for the later outbursts of violence to which Felix is subjected. The Nazi ideologemes 'Pflichterfüllung' [doing one's duty] and 'Kameradschaft' [comradeship] continue to function as a legitimating discourse when it comes to the humiliation, exclusion and attempted annihilation of Golub. The seduction of his fiancée, his election to the office of 'Faschingsbraut', his being forced to dress up in women's clothes and the open physical violence in which the carnival celebrations culminate can be read as a repetition of the treatment meted out to Kravogl and Fela in 1945.

The attempted extermination of Golub is the literal enactment of an event that has already taken place in symbolic form during a visit to the town's new *Heimatmuseum* [museum of local history]. The museum setting is highly

significant. Robert Menasse has argued that reconstruction of Austrian national identity after 1945 relied on stressing continuity with the Habsburg past. The resultant cultural policies ultimately served to turn Austria into a museum whose task was to nurture and maintain the cultural heritage of the glorious past.<sup>21</sup> Museums are, of course, one of the most obvious vehicles for the construction and transmission of collective memory. Menasse sees the selectivity of Austria's museum culture as entailing a refusal of a more genuine historical consciousness, a view that is dramatized with particular explicitness in *Fasching*.<sup>22</sup> While looking round the *Heimatmuseum*, Golub finds himself alone in a room covered in murals depicting the history of the town from Roman times to the present. Tellingly, there is no reference to Golub's saving the town from destruction; he has been quite literally painted out of history.

The point is hammered home when Golub is invited to sign a declaration to the effect that he owes his life to the humanitarian generosity of Lois Lubits and other townsfolk, who knew of his desertion but honoured his wish to be treated like a woman. Any claim to the contrary is to be considered baseless, as is the assertion that he played any part in saving the town from destruction (pp. 159–60). Golub is presented with the affidavit after he has been persuaded — ostensibly in jest — to try out some of the instruments of torture that the museum holds, and succumbs to the combined agony of thumbscrews, a suffocating mask, leg irons and other devices. This provides an ironic perspective on Menasse's notion of Austrian continuity: the way in which the historical past continues into the present manifests itself in sadistic and violent modes of corporal discipline. Furthermore, Felix is forced to collude in his own obliteration from the historical record, as the townsfolk seek to suppress the outsider who threatens to expose the assumptions on which the collective memory of the Nazi period rests.

The major difference between *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* is the status of the protagonist. Whereas Unfreund in *Die Wolfshaut* allows Lebert to sketch the possibility of a more positive mode of remembering, *Fasching* provides no such consolation. The reader perceives the narrative world almost exclusively through the eyes and consciousness of Felix Golub, but the identification with the protagonist that this kind of narrative technique usually encourages is blocked in *Fasching*.<sup>23</sup> As he lies beneath the floorboards, Golub betrays his desperate desire to conform, admitting that he would passively accept any treatment meted out to him by the townsfolk and even apply for

<sup>21</sup> Robert Menasse, *Überbau und Underground. Essays zum österreichischen Geist* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997), p. 171.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Menasse, *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften. Essay zur österreichischen Identität*, 3rd edn (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Menasse, 'Nachwort: Auf diesem Fasching tanzen wir noch immer', in *Fasching*, pp. 241–49 (p. 246).

membership of the 'Kameradschaftsverein' (p. 145). His need to be accepted by the community causes him to endure every humiliation, and he makes no attempt to defend himself or flee until it is too late. Golub's eagerness to conform and collusion in his own abjection imply that he is willing to adopt the collective memory that has been constructed by the populace. It is no coincidence that the novel ends as it began: with Felix holed up beneath the floorboards. *Fasching* presents a post-war Austria in which collective memory of the Nazi period is locked into a cycle of repression, return and re-enactment.

#### IV

*Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* dramatize, in different ways, a belated confrontation with the Nazi past and the ways in which the rural communities in question contain the threat that this poses to their sense of collective memory and identity. Ironically, this process is duplicated in the publication and reception history of the two texts. On first publication, both novels were widely reviewed, then promptly disappeared from view and were not reissued for decades. Lebert failed to find an Austrian publisher for *Die Wolfshaut*, and the book was published in Hamburg by Claassen in a print-run of only 3000. Two further editions appeared in the GDR and Austria in 1962, after which it was not reprinted until 1991, when the Europaverlag brought out new editions of all of Lebert's major prose works. A Fischer paperback followed in 1993. One reason for the neglect of *Die Wolfshaut* was the lack of effective marketing by Claassen. Another was the reception of Lebert's second novel *Der Feuerkreis* [*The Circle of Fire*, 1971], which was uniformly denigrated by reviewers. This significantly damaged a literary reputation that already rested rather precariously on a very slight *oeuvre*, and militated against the possibility of republishing *Die Wolfshaut*.<sup>24</sup>

The announcement that *Fasching* — Fritsch's second novel — was to be published by Rowohlt was regarded as a significant breakthrough for an author whose publisher had been the Salzburg firm Otto Müller, and whose reputation had hitherto been largely confined to Austria. However, the only positive notices the text received were by Ernst Wimmer in the Communist newspaper *Die Volksstimme* and Otto Breicha in the *Arbeiterzeitung*, both of whom praised the novel for its political acuity.<sup>25</sup> Repeatedly, *Fasching* was criticized in the press for being one-sided and undifferentiated in its portrayal of rural Austria, and for succumbing to a modish formalism. Furthermore, it

<sup>24</sup> Helmut Luger, 'Der Lykanthropos springt in den Feuerkreis', in *Hans Lebert*, ed. by Fuchs and Höfler, pp. 241–49 (p. 245).

<sup>25</sup> Ernst Wimmer, 'Endlich ein "böses" Buch', *Die Volksstimme*, 22 September 1967; Otto Breicha, 'Ein Mann erlebt seinen Fasching', *Arbeiterzeitung*, 12 November 1967.

was argued that, by presenting characters who were entirely unrealistic, the text forfeited the right to be taken seriously.<sup>26</sup> The fact that neither balance nor realism is a necessary criterion of cultural value makes it clear that these are political objections masquerading as aesthetic judgements. They can be seen as defence mechanisms that allowed reviewers to reject the book without explicitly acknowledging the fundamentally ideological reasons for this rejection. Nonetheless, the plethora of negative reviews detrimentally affected the book's sales. After Fritsch's suicide in 1969, the publisher returned the unsold copies to the novelist's widow. The book did not appear again until 1995, when Suhrkamp published a paperback edition. Like *Die Wolfshaut*, *Fasching* was thus out of print for nearly thirty years.

*Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* can be seen as novels that forced their readers to confront the Nazi past and its continued existence in the Second Republic. The way in which the institutions of publishing and reviewing functioned to defuse their potentially explosive force provides a microcosmic illustration of the capacity of public discourse to suppress anything that had the potential to disturb the silences on which the political memory of post-war Austria was based. In other words, the repression diagnosed by the novels themselves was also responsible for their neglect by the reading public.

This neglect carries over into the texts' academic reception and their position within literary history. Accounts of the literature produced in Austria in the first two decades after World War II generally focus on two trends. On the one hand, literature is seen as corresponding to the restorative tendencies within Austrian society itself. This applies particularly to the early post-war years, in which thematic emphasis was placed on traditional 'Austrian' values, and formal innovation was rejected in favour of more conservative modes of poetic and narrative discourse. On the other hand, a series of avant-garde movements, notably the Wiener Gruppe in the 1950s and the Grazer Gruppe in the 1960s, adopted an aggressively oppositional stance to tradition, their members devoting themselves to radical linguistic experiment in the service of a critique of bourgeois aesthetics.<sup>27</sup> While ostensibly divergent, however, these trends have one central feature in

<sup>26</sup> These criticisms can be found in Günter Blöcker, 'Das falsche Alibi: Gerhard Fritschs neuer Roman *Fasching*', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 November 1967; Kurt Skalnik, 'Vittoria und ihr Deserteur', *Die Furche*, 21 November 1967; and Hansjörg Graf, 'In der Schlangengrube', *Der Monat*, 233 (1968), 74–75. For further discussion of *Fasching* and its reviews, see Menasse, 'Nachwort', pp. 246–47 and Marion Hussong, *Der Nationalsozialismus im österreichischen Roman 1945–1969* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 119–20.

<sup>27</sup> Symptomatic of this view of post-war Austrian literary history are Kurt Bartsch, 'Die österreichische Gegenwartsliteratur', in *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Viktor Zmegac et al., 3 vols (Königstein/Ts., 1980–84), III, 695–825, and *Kindlers Literaturgeschichte der Gegenwart. Autoren, Werke, Themen, Tendenzen seit 1945*, 9 vols (Frankfurt a.M., 1980), v, *Die zeitgenössische Literatur Österreichs I: Einführung/Prosa*, ed. by Hilde Spiel. On

common: they both involve a refusal to engage with the Nazi period, turning instead to an idealized Habsburg past, or the inter-war European avant-garde.

Within this dominant narrative, there is little space for overtly — indeed, aggressively — political texts such as *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching*. As a result, these have been systematically marginalized or seen as anomalous individual cases.<sup>28</sup> But it will not do to argue, as Hussong does, that ‘it is unsurprising that the outsiders of the Austrian publishing industry [i.e. Lebert, Fritsch and Franz Klein] should get brushed under the carpet so that a more accessible, coherent image of the post-war period can be communicated’.<sup>29</sup> First, this is a circular argument: Lebert and Fritsch are brushed under the carpet because they are outsiders, and become outsiders through being brushed under the carpet. Second, the desirability of a ‘coherent image of the post-war period’ is uncritically accepted rather than analysed, and the purpose of such coherence remains unexplored. Hussong’s argument thus presupposes what it sets out to explain. The questions that really need to be addressed concern the social and ideological aspects of literary history, especially the ways in which notions of coherence, centrality and marginalization are determined by political considerations.

Since the mid-1980s, and particularly since their republication in the 1990s, critical interest in both novels has intensified dramatically. Recent attempts to understand *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* from a literary-historical standpoint have situated them within parallel traditions — of the novel of National Socialism (Hussong), the critical *Heimatroman* (Kunne), or the anti-fascist novel (*Mießgang*) — that are deemed to exist alongside the dominant narratives of post-war Austrian literature. Such strategies run the risk of reinforcing what they seek to correct, namely marginalization. At the same time, however, they betoken a belated acknowledgement of *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* as major works and imply a critique of their exclusion from earlier literary-historical narratives. This critique can be made more explicit

literary restoration, see Klaus Amann, ‘Vorgeschichten: Kontinuitäten in der österreichischen Literatur von den dreißiger zu den fünfziger Jahren’, in *Literatur in der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. by Aspetsberger, Frei and Lengauer, pp. 46–58; and Michael Mitchell, ‘Restoration or Renewal? Csokor, the Austrian PEN Club and the Re-establishment of Literary Life in Austria, 1945–1955’, in *Austria 1945–1955. Studies in Political and Cultural Re-emergence*, ed. by Anthony Bushell (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 54–83.

<sup>28</sup> For a useful synoptic account of Lebert and Fritsch’s position in post-war Austrian literary history, see Hussong, *Der Nationalsozialismus im österreichischen Roman*, pp. 7–14. Her findings need not be rehearsed here. Suffice it to add that contemporary literary histories tend to reproduce the problem. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler’s *Bruchlinien. Vorlesungen zur österreichischen Literatur 1945–1990* (Salzburg, 1995) devotes two pages to *Die Wolfshaut* and none to *Fasching*. A more adequate assessment of the novels’ status can be found in Klaus Zeyringer, *Österreichische Literatur seit 1945. Überblicke. Einschnitte. Wegmarken* (Innsbruck, 2001), which contains extended discussions of both (pp. 130–41).

<sup>29</sup> Hussong, *Der Nationalsozialismus im österreichischen Roman*, p. 10.



once we realize that establishing or denying the canonicity of texts — especially when this is done in the service of national literary histories — is inseparable from questions of identity and memory. Bearing in mind the discussion of Austrian collective remembering with which this article began, it is clear that the ‘coherent image of the post-war period’ is not ideologically innocent; the omission of *Die Wolfshaut*, *Fasching* and similar texts from literary-historical discourse is congruent with the wider failure of Austrian public narratives to confront the Nazi past. The challenge for literary history now is to take account of their shifting status within the canon, from their highly publicized appearance to their eclipse and their belated return.

