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Karl Müller

University of Salzburg

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Images of the Second World War in Austrian Literature after 1945

Abstract

The author examines selected examples of post-1945 Austrian literature, asking what pictures of the Second World War they imparted and what role they played when, certainly from 1948 on, a certain image of history began to take shape in Austria against the background of the Cold War. This image involved a fade-out in particular of the racist nature of the war, and it had a collectively exonerating and distorting impact. Attention is paid to the stories and novels of former participants in the war and National Socialists, such as, for example, Erich Landgrebe, Erich Kern, Hans Gustl Kernmayr, Kurt Ziesel. A contrast is seen in the anti-war novel, *Letzte Ausfahrt* (Last Exit) (1952) by the former soldier Herbert Zand, who turns against the dominant image of history, as well as in Ingeborg Bachmann's use of war memories as a topic. The texts are read as a reservoir of selective memory: on the one hand they are critical, individual counter-memories and on the other hand, they make a positive contribution to the formation of the aforesaid collective image. One may say that a war of perception was fought around the Second World War; it was undoubtedly won in the immediate post-war years by those literary works that legitimized or at least trivialized the war. The critical voices of Herbert Zand, Gerhard Fritsch, and Ingeborg Bachmann were unfortunately the quieter ones and were not particularly successful in their time.

Keywords

Austrian literature, postwar, World War II, Second World War, Cold War, racism, race, Erich Landgrebe, Erich Kern, Hans Gustl Kernmayr, Kurt Ziesel, anti-war novel, *Letzte Ausfahrt*, Last Exit, Herbert Zand, Ingeborg Bachmann, war memories, memories, post-war, Gerhard Fritsch

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Karl Müller
University of Salzburg

This is the way they will talk about it, but very few will really remember . . . For some have died and others have lost their minds, and others can no longer remember and the rest do not want to remember anymore, and there will be a lot of talk about other things, in families, in public houses, in parliaments; wherever people come together, there will be talk of other things. (Eisenreich 240)

Unbelievable though it is, no detailed, comprehensive presentation has yet emerged of the way in which the Second World War was treated in Austria after 1945, though sixty years have gone by since then. This is all the more remarkable since there are very few writers who have not in one way or another tackled the topic of the war and its consequences either as directly affected eye-witnesses or as members of the second or third generation after the war generation itself. Certainly the theme has been addressed here and there in related contexts by literary historians, but in no case has it been the focus of attention and analysis. Credit must go to the Polish Germanist Stefan H. Kaszynski for having published in 1985 the first academic piece exclusively on the "Austrian war-novel after 1945."¹ In contrast, a series of outstanding works has appeared in the meantime, for example in the seventies, devoted to the literary treatment of the concentration-camp experience, the holocaust, and exile.² All facets of these works make it clear that the war is, as it were, the decisive historic vanishing point, the background for almost all the oppres-

sive and terrible experiences to which people were exposed.

This author will select examples of prose texts on the topic of the Second World War written by male combatants, soldiers of the German Armed Forces, National-Socialists, and opponents of the war—members of the generation born between 1900 and 1923 who represent various politico-ideological convictions and whose texts were notably successful in the book market in the years immediately following the war years; the aim will be to show the range of ways in which these writers came to terms with the war and the forms in which they sought to deal with the experience. The questions that will also be pursued here are in particular: which images and pictures of the Second World War are imparted? what kinds of meanings are given to the experience? and what role accrued to these meaning after the first short time-phase that was dominated by anti-fascism? It was after that phase—let us say, about 1948—when a picture of history began to take shape in the shadow of the Cold War in which particularly the racist character of the war was faded out, and so a collectively exonerating and distorting picture emerged, ultimately coming to dominate the social consciousness of wide circles of the population for a long time.

Again and again Austrian authors have reflected on narrative as an ambiguous instrument of society's memory: they recognize on the one hand the need to visualize catastrophic historical events, their lasting consequences, and the power of such remembering, and on the other hand they see remembering as a gateway for the production of inadequate, distorted pictures of historical events. Narrative, therefore, has been seen on the one hand as precise remembering and thus as having emancipatory and cathartic power, on the other hand as manipulative construction of reality and thus a contribution to a forgetting that also exonerates, covers up, or represses. When after 1945, during the Cold War, former National-Socialists and the mass of repatriated soldiers were politically integrated and alleged to be "true victims of the war" (Helmer 11), this occurred in the framework of the "reconstruction" and of the domestic political "normalization" of Austria under the rubric of the "victim-idea," fundamental to the new state as an ultimately "successful national, political and social integration-formula" (Botz 58).

An effective, state-constructed consciousness took shape in Austria

according to which the Second World War could broadly be seen as a heroic, albeit cruel, preventive war against Russian Bolshevism.

Thus literary phenomena in themselves are not the only object of our interest, but also texts as a conflicting reservoir of selective memory—on the one hand in their affirming and therefore oppressing function in helping to shape the aforementioned collective perspective, on the other hand in their critical role which one might call individual counter-memory or memories. Indeed, one may speak directly of a battle of perceptions swirling around the Second World War: in the years immediately following the war, first of all, the battle was won by the literary products that legitimized or at all events played down many aspects of the war. Certainly, critical literary voices such as those of Herbert Zand, Gerhard Fritsch, or Ingeborg Bachmann were for a time, alas, the quieter ones.

1. Narrating and Remembering: A Look Back

come on father tell about the war
 come on father tell how you joined up
 come on father tell how you shot people
 come on father tell how you were wounded
 come on father tell how you were killed
 come on father tell about the war. (Jandl 716)

At the end of the war Ernst Jandl was twenty years old. He was ultimately to become one of the most important poets, linguistically, in Austria. Still scarcely more than a child, he served in the German Armed Forces until 1946, when he was freed from an American prisoner-of-war camp. His poem from the year 1966 takes as its topic the silence of the father-generation, probably in the face of terrible memories or of unconfessed guilt, and at the same time the penetrating questioning of the sons and daughters who want to know, and whose fantasies reach even into the absurd-grotesque: “come on father tell how you were killed.”

But not all soldiers kept silent in the postwar period as Jandl’s poem suggests and as has been rumored by the legend of the silent father-generation. Many former soldiers after 1945 did not have
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among former comrades—in an intimate circle of friends, so to speak. Not only does the author of this study, born as he was after the war, know this from his own experiences in the provinces, it was also established in the 1960s by a sociological study. In a survey of 800 apprentices in Vienna and Lower Austria, it turned out that “the war experiences of the fathers were a dominant theme in family conversations” (Matzl/Stuhlpfarrer 603; see also Hornung). According to this survey the fathers talked more often about the war than about anything else, more often even than about sports, women, or favorite pastimes.

Such narrating and remembering usually neither possessed any politico-analytic qualities nor really helped to elucidate historical developments, least of all the connection between Nazi regime, war, and Holocaust. It focused rather on the “war adventure,” the supposedly unique “war as the acid test of masculinity,” the unpolitical-mythic “war as catastrophic fate,” or even the vitalist “war as life-giver,” war that nonetheless could have traumatic and threatening dimensions. This the historian and writer Elisabeth Reichart, born in 1953, well knows. She wrote about the narrating and remembering of the male war-generation “in a village in Austria, in the parlor” in her story “Der Sonntagsbraten” “The Sunday Roast” (1992): “It began and never ended on the ritualized Sundays . . . , after people lit up their pipes and cigarettes and the spittle went brown . . . , then began the men’s hunt for their lost years, which were not allowed to be lost, they were after all the best years of their lives.”³

Reichart’s narrative is an analysis of the attitude of members of a war generation whose “youth . . . coincided with the great slaughter that left its traces behind it though they did not pursue these traces, only those of comradeship, of the trenches, of escaped-by-the-skin-of-my-teeth, of soldiers’ leaves from the front.” Reichart pursues these “traces” and finds them in conversations in which the war is celebrated as an adventure in the lives of these men—for example, in the view that the fight was something in which they had believed “as they would never again believe in anything.” She discovers “traces” in the still present pride in the power to order people about, never again to be experienced—“work for once, for the only time in their lives had been fun, when they had foreign workers and concentration camp inmates under them to whom they could as-

sign the dirty work”—and not least in the pieces of wisdom that they had gained in the war and passed on to their children, such as the following: “Whoever stands out is already lost. With such sentences they betrayed their knowledge, they betrayed their fear . . . the murderers walked in their footsteps,” and “the war went on and on, and it has no end, no end. . .” (5–7).

The fact that the war haunted many soldiers their life long was recently dealt with in the apocalyptic sketch of a continuous and prolonged war in Christoph Ransmayr’s novel *Morbus Kitahara* (1995): set in a high-lying valley of Moor—there really was such a place, an outpost and granite quarry of the concentration camp Mauthausen—the novel provides the apocalyptic counter-plan to the glorious history of the postwar reconstruction period after 1945. The father returns from the Africa-campaign of the Hitler regime with the mark of Cain on his forehead and is observed with horror by his son; in the beginning he still makes an effort “to explain the desert to his family,” but later madness breaks out in him as a long-term consequence of his war experiences: “The old man was again deep in the war. . . . His memory stretched far and deep into the deserts of North Africa, and he could even describe the sky over the battle fields . . . , he spoke again and again of the desert and of the battle and of Halfayeh Pass. . . . They had to conquer this pass” (291).⁴

One can apply to the father who went mad in Ransmayr’s novel something written decades before, in 1953, in Herbert Zand’s anti-war novel *Letzte Ausfahrt* ‘Last Exit’: “If the world is mad, then one has to become mad oneself from time to time in order to grasp the normality of madness in contrast to the abnormality of one’s own reason” (232). Another form of craziness is the topic of Thomas Bernhard’s piece “Vor dem Ruhestand” ‘Before Retirement’ (1979), in which a former SS-officer is shown long after the end of the war celebrating the birthday of his idol Heinrich Himmler.

A different kind of confirmation of the literary observations of Elisabeth Reichart came recently from Ruth Beckermann, who made a documentary film on the occasion of the exhibit put on by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research “War of Annihilation. Crimes of the German Armed Forces 1941 to 1945,” which was also shown in several cities in Austria and which fundamentally called

into question the picture of the German Armed Forces who had remained “clean,” still present in many layers of the population. The exhibit provoked violent public debates, and by interviewing former combatants Beckermann succeeded in capturing the unadorned memories of former privates in the army, memories of crimes which members of the Armed Forces had to answer for; and she also succeeded in recording late self-critical utterances on the picture of the Second World War that was still dominant, so that the legend of the immaculate Armed Forces was shattered, as it were, from the inside. She also grasped in particular the central constituents of a collective consciousness according to which the Second World War would have become in retrospect a heroic defense against Russian Bolshevism—would, in other words, have justified it.

It becomes strikingly clear that this is a spontaneous, late echo of former Nazi propaganda, as well as a reverberation of the image of the war and the soldier peddled in the postwar period by popular illustrated newspapers, light novels, and war films.⁵ Not only this, but for broad sections of the collective consciousness of Austrian postwar society, the official state “Proclamation on the Independence of Austria” of April 27, 1945, played a considerable role. Here the collective victim thesis was formulated in the assertion that the “National Socialist German government of Adolf Hitler . . . led the people of Austria, powerless and with no will of their own, into a senseless and hopeless war of conquest which not a single Austrian ever wanted or had ever been in a position to foresee or to approve, to do battle with nations against whom no true Austrian had ever nursed feelings of enmity or of hate, into a war of conquest, which . . . recklessly sacrificed the entire youth and manhood of our people. . . .” (“Proklamation” 20). This amounted to moral and political exoneration and justification, or could at least very easily be used as such. In practical politics it meant for example a “presumptive amnesty” on the part of the Austrian Federal President for those returning from the war, and a recognition that the soldiers of the German Armed Forces who had sworn loyalty to Hitler were steadfast Austrian patriots; and this happened indeed in 1949, for example, in the case of a transport of soldiers returning from Russian prisoner-of-war camps (Kos and Riegele 99). To the fundamental elements and mainstays of this image of the Second World War, directed at

legitimation and exoneration, belong also the assertions, obviously still believed by many, that this war was no different from any other, that war has always been terrible and conducted brutally on both sides, that so-called partisan or guerilla warfare, the shooting of hostages, and the destruction of the civilian population are effective and justifiable instruments of war, or that this war had nothing to do with an ideology of race .

“Whoever does not hold to the agreed codes is a traitor,” Beckermann noted in her film-diary, and she came to the remarkable and accurate conclusion: “Probably the codes on how to talk and how to be silent about this period came into being in the midst of defeat and collapse, were firmed up then in the prisoner-of-war camps and upheld in the home-land, enhanced by legends of the poor invaded Austrians” (92). There is particular food for thought in the fact that only very few visitors to the German Armed Forces exhibit showed interest in the section “Covering the Traces,” which showed how even in the middle of the war the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces and other responsible authorities were working on sketching out their image of the Second World War.

Parts of modern Austrian literature in the 1950s already had a feel for those turns of speech—“agreed codes”—legitimizing or trivializing the war with which former National-Socialists and soldiers in their regular get-togethers at the pub or in so-called comrades’ reunions—“a panorama of the Austrian male world” (Schmidt-Dengler 435)—talked about their war experiences and stamped those as traitors who did not submit to their consensual and unified position. This is demonstrated by Ingeborg Bachmann in her story “Unter Mördern und Irren” ‘Among Murderers and Madmen,’ written in the 50s. In this story an unknown man, an outsider, suddenly appears in a convivial group of men made up largely of ex-Nazis who are “wallowing in memories of the war,” and the outsider tackles the usual boozing-aggressive postwar ways of speaking about the war and about the exploits of former soldiers:

What was for the others simply a scene of war was for me a scene of murder . . . , “to wipe out,” “to rub out,” “to smoke out”—such words were out of the question for me, they made me sick, I could not say them at all . . . I could not shoot, that you have to understand . . . It

was easy for the others, they delivered their quota . . . These men were not murderers, were they? they wanted to survive or to earn themselves decorations, they thought of their families or of victory and the fatherland . . . I was condemned for cowardice in the field, and subversion of the German Armed Forces . . . (Bachmann 183)

This kind of talk ends fatally for the stranger: he is murdered on the fringes of a comrades' reunion. ". . . inconceivable provocation . . . I ask you . . . old soldiers from the front . . ." (186)—this is the outraged and at once cynical commentary of one of the comrade-warriors who do not intend to be disconcerted and are firmly resolved to preserve their Reich and their soldierly composure, even if it is "only" a remembered truth. One of Bachmann's figures is indeed given the sentence that reflects the obviously deceptive hope of the year 1945: "Yes, after the war . . . we thought after all that the world was forever divided into good and evil" (173). But her story does away with this naiveté in that she shows how the monopoly on war memories, sustained by former soldiers and cultivated as if in a club, still demands its victims who, of course, are not recognized as such in the "reconstruction era" (171).

A whole generation was confronted with the difficulties that undying memories brought with them. Seemingly reassuring ways out and self-deceits were quickly found, individual and collective. It was really the case that a great deal had to be said for therapeutic purposes, e.g. about new private happiness. Thus on Christmas Eve, of all times, Johannes Mario Simmel's despairing repatriated soldier and hero of the novel *Das geheime Brot* 'Secret Bread' (1950) finds his way back to the mother of his illegitimate son: "an engagement with happy dreams of the future" and "happy home-building together" (Schmidt-Dengler 428).

"For the purpose of homogenizing memory" (Kos 59) there had to be a lot of nice talk about Austria, for example as a "land on the way up," as a brochure from 1955, the year of the Austrian State Treaty, called it. There the constructed and prettified self-image of the young Second Republic was demonstrated in an exemplary way. Memory-materials were organized here by the year, and thus an ideal screenplay of postwar development emerged. Each year had a symbolic role to play in the Austrian postwar success story:

- 1945: Chaos and Liberation—visual leitmotif: St. Stephen's Cathedral in flames
- 1946: Year of Hunger—leitmotif: two naked, emaciated children
- 1947: Year of the Return Home—leitmotif: a happily reunited family on the railroad platform
- 1948: Year of Normalization—leitmotif: children with typical ringlets in their hair
- 1949: Bridge to a Better Time—leitmotif: a new concrete streetbridge
- 1950: Festive Country—leitmotif: dance around a Baroque fountain
- 1951: Land under Construction—leitmotif: construction of the power station at Kaprun
- 1952: Year of Youth—leitmotif: young man with serious look
- 1953: Year of Stabilization—leitmotif: construction workers climb up high on a steel scaffolding
- 1954: Upward Climb and Promotion—leitmotif: holiday-makers on the Acropolis. (Kos 61)

Serious authors did not play along with this glossing-over enterprise and did not want to be part of such picture-book construction of the postwar period in which the deeper dimensions of history—that is, any coming to terms with the roots and consequences of fascism—obviously played either a distorted role or no role at all.

2. The “Formative Phase” of the Exonerating Depiction of History after 1948

The series of Austrian world-war books began in 1948 with the novel *Von Dimitrowsk nach Dimitrowsk* ‘From Dimitrowsk to Dimitrowsk’ (in 1951 it appeared in a revised version with the more telling title *Mit dem Ende beginnt es* ‘It Begins with the End’), written by Eric Landgrebe (b. 1908), former Nazi party member, soldier in the German Army, and politically converted US prisoner of war. In the years up to 1956 Landgrebe went on produce further novels of war and home-coming, as well as war memoirs in novella form: “Die Nächte von Kuklino. Ein Nokturno” ‘The Nights of Kuklino.

A Nocturne’ (1952), “In sieben Tagen” ‘In Seven Days’ (1954), and

“Die Rueckkehr ins Paradies” ‘Return to Paradise’ (1956). In 1949 and 1952 two more former Nazis appeared in print: Erich Kern (b. 1906) with his text *Der große Rausch* ‘The Great Rapture,’ and Hans Gustl Kernmayr (b. 1900) with his novel *Wir waren keine Banditen* ‘We Were Not Bandits.’ In 1951 Kurt Ziesel (b. 1911) reemerged with his successful novel *Und was bleibt ist der Mensch* ‘And All that Remains is Man’; before 1945 he had been an enthusiastic Nazi and advocate of the war. Mention should also be made of Franz Tumlner (b. 1912), also a former National Socialist, with his novel *Heimfahrt* ‘Journey Home’ (1950). Voices were also raised by former soldiers of the German Armed Forces who had had nothing to do with the Nazi party, such as Fritz Habeck (b. 1916) and Herbert Zand (b.1923), Habeck with his novel *Das Boot kommt nach Mitternacht* ‘The Boat is Coming After Midnight’ (1951; see Schmidt-Dengler, esp. 423–25) and Zand with his decidedly anti-war novel *Letzte Ausfahrt* ‘Last Exit’ and the myth-making *Roman der Eingekesselten* ‘Novel of the Encircled Men.’

All these texts were published and cast into a historically explosive period in which a state-supported picture of history was gradually solidifying in postwar Austria whereby the Second World War was to play an organizing role as a preventive war, as an adventure or an acid test for soldierly heroes. And in addition some of these texts with their specific interpretations of the events of war—that is their “structures to create meaning,” as Stefan H. Kaszynski called them (“Der österreichische Kriegsroman” 17), made their disquieting contribution or were perhaps only a burning mirror to ignite historic consciousness and feeling. These texts became suddenly recognizable as a place of “collective remembering”; their function was seen to be one “of legitimizing supreme rule and delegitimizing counter-memories that threaten supreme rule,” for “one person’s remembering is at the same time another person’s forgetting” (Botz 70).

It was in the “formative” phase, the years between 1948 and 1956, that the historical picture of the Second World War was to develop, collectively exonerating and distorting and in particular fading out its racist nature. It remained dominant until the 1980s. The historical conditions for its development precisely in this phase had to do not least with the fact that between 1945 and 1949 around 470,000

prisoners of war returned to Austria in various batches and became a political factor. In 1946 around 270,000 soldiers were freed from American and British prisoner-of-war camps and around 14,000 in two great waves from Soviet camps (Mattl/Stuhlpfarrer 604).⁶ In 1947, 80,000 prisoners of war had still not been freed.

From 1948 on, the returning soldiers organized themselves into associations from which ultimately in the year 1952 the Austrian “Comradeship League” (Kameradschaftsbund) emerged (Embacher, Haas). Its main task was first of all to set up war memorials “in honor of the fallen soldiers and the dead of both world wars” almost everywhere in Austria. With the resulting “monument landscape” there arose a public “hierarchy of memory” (Embacher 99) which had a say in “what was to be remembered and which memories were to be faded out or repressed.” (Embacher 100) The mainstays of the consciousness endemic in all this were “I only did my duty in a preventive war”; “The German Armed Forces were disciplined, idealistic and internationally regarded”; “The ordinary soldier is the true martyr”; “Comradeship is the best thing in the life of a man”; “Reconciliation with the former enemy is desirable”; “Only the soldier knows the real truth” (Embacher 103-24). The Comradeship League won the battle for memory so that monuments in memory of the victims of National Socialism, such as Jews, Roma and Sinti, resistance fighters, and victims of euthanasia could not be erected until the 1980s, and then only hesitatingly and with resistance (Embacher 100). Jan Assmann could write, very much to the point:

That one remembers them [the dead or the memorials to them] is a matter of affective connection, of cultural shaping and conscious reference to the past that overcomes the break with it . . . New beginnings, renaissances, restorations occur again and again in the form of a reversion to the past. To the extent that they suggest, produce, reconstruct the future, they discover the past. (32, 34)

This fitted in accordingly with a broad awareness of the Second World War as a victim’s path for an entire people and for every individual Austrian—certainly by extensively fading out the energetic involvement of many Austrian men and women in the Nazi rule, in the war of conquest, and in the war of racial annihilation, as well

as extensively ignoring those who for racial but also for political or other reasons suffered severe persecution and death. Around 1-2 million Austrians had been in the German Armed Forces or had joined the SS; one third of the SS-men had been forcibly conscripted. Approximately 700,000 Austrian men and women were organized in the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party, i.e. the Nazi party).

Newer research into contemporary history is agreed on the fact that the soldiers in no way did their duty in conducting or having to conduct a "clean war for the defense of the fatherland," but in the east and southeast of Europe they also conducted a racially motivated war of annihilation against Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, and against the civilian population (Manoschek 97). The recognition arrived at by more recent contemporary research that the murder and annihilation actions in the concentration camps could only have been carried out under the protection of the front held together by the German Armed Forces and the SS probably did not play any role at all in the picture of history that took shape after 1945. Only this can explain the fact that in the texts of the named authors this terrible connection is simply not recognized. The fact that 60,000 Austrian men and women categorized as Jews by the so-called Nuremberg Race Laws (1935), about 11,000 "Gypsies," and ten thousand victims of euthanasia, as well as about 25,000 non-Jewish Austrian men and women were murdered in the hinterland as political opponents of the regime during the war (Manoschek 95), has no place in the memory reservoir of these texts, not even in those whose anti-war position is clear. This surely increases the urgency of questions about the "messages" of these texts and their selective views.

3. Literary Examples: Erich Landgrebe (1908–1979)—War and the Celebration of Life

The series of world war books began then in 1948 with the novels of Erich Landgrebe. The way he dealt with his own war experience as a war reporter in Russia and Africa is remarkable on two counts: first, his confession that it was not until his own active war-service that he awoke out of "impotent unconsciousness"—"that I got away means nothing; I died nonetheless" (*Rückkehr* 244);⁷ and,

second, that he is among those authors who present the war “as the utmost burden and ultimate test of the value of life” (*Mit dem Ende* 300) and thereby seek to impart a comforting faith in life (Kramer-Badoni). Incessant general invocations to life were thus the order of the day in Landgrebe’s work. The war is straightforwardly stylized as the father of “tough vitality, bursting forth again and again” (*Mit dem Ende* 300), to quote from his first war novel and sharpened to a metaphor in the epigraph of the novel: “The eyes of the children are like golden rain, in their hands the glasses of wine gleam—I would like to lie down and sleep under the trees and no longer be a soldier” (“Schi-King,” *Mit dem Ende* 6).

He wanted nothing to do with the “hero’s death” idea and wrote about it in a casual tone: “something that smacks of company propaganda.” Thus it was that Landgrebe in his first war novel could put in the mouth of one of his characters the following message which grounds the whole novel: “You will never find me ready to believe that a man can crown his life with death; it can only be crowned with life. We human beings can only see clearly what is very small, therefore . . . death is only in life so that we can see life at all.” Elsewhere, to conclude the book, the narrator chooses to report on his sergeant, Hellmer: “He has long since learned to look death in the face . . . that is nothing. He has learned something much harder: to look life in the face. He feels full of it, and full of happiness” (*Mit dem Ende* 350).

Since in Landgrebe aspects of politico-historical analysis such as the theme of an anti-Bolshevist war, of racial crimes against the civilian population, and of political-military responsibilities are faded out or only hinted at euphemistically, the contemporary press reviews could praise the element of comfort in the book: “For in this world, constantly threatened by death and destruction, by madness and mutilation, life, this singular miracle-plant, still proves itself once again to be the strongest invincible force. The men in this book are no ‘heroes,’ but the hero of the book is man” (A.W.).

Eric Landgrebe, who in his youth was inspired by the ideas of the vitalistic “Wandervogel” youth movement, joined the NSDAP in 1936 and became a member of the “Association of German Authors in Austria,” alias the organization of Nazi authors of the “Ostmark” (the name given to Austria 1938-45). He was a contributor to the

Völkischer Beobachter (the main Nazi newspaper), and in 1938 he counted as one of the successful German authors to the extent that passages from his novel *Peter Halandt* (1937) were even included in the Nazi “Bekenntnisbuch österreichischer Dichter” ‘Confessions of Austrian’: “A nation and its people burst forth anew, and his (Peter’s) heart stands with them at the cradle and looks hopefully into the new morning of drunken devotion and proud belief” (*Heimkehr* 60). Ultimately in the course of the “Aryanizations” carried out after 1938, Landgrebe even became a “temporary administrator” and “facilitator” in the Viennese publishing business (Hall 1:400, 404; 2:253-58). His autobiographical piece was printed in the collection edited by Kurt Ziesel *Krieg und Dichtung* ‘War and Literature’ (1940-41), and in it one could read the following in the year 1941: “Think of how much it takes to prepare campaigns to conquer entire peoples in three or six weeks! . . . What we have to pull together in power, preparation, planning, in order to put on the overwhelming cavalcade of fire which gives continents a new face and digs out the riverbeds through which the fresh streams of a new spirit rush forward, foaming and clear!” (“Nachtwache” 299)

The war enthusiasm of Landgrebe was soon followed by disillusionment. In a poem of December 1942 Landgrebe, then a soldier in the Soviet Union, noted down by contrast the following sentences:

Not one of us returns again,
not one of us finds of ourselves
what he once left behind.
Nothing at all comes back any more—
in the harsh flash of lightening
one glimpses the spokes of the wheel.
That is war,
that it marks us all,
but all differently. (Gedichte 33)⁸

After Landgrebe was posted to North Africa in the spring of 1943 and soon after that became an American prisoner of war (in Concordia, Kansas), his attitude was to change. In his autobiographical “Self-Portrait” (September 1947) he wrote about the “great gift” of being in an Army/State Prisoner-of-war camp “where I could again

gather up in peace and quiet all the mistakes and the interruptions of my life from its beginnings, right in the middle of a time which was burying in its ruins the guilty, the unsuspecting and the mistaken" (*Selbstbildnis*).⁹

But there are notable differences between political-intellectual re-orientation on the one hand and coming to terms with the war in literature on the other. Landgrebe wrote long after the war about his continuing interest in the experience of war—in a style broadly characteristic of the processing mode of an author who had formerly been connected with the Nazi-movement: "I have never seen the soldier as advocate of any ideology—always as the man who is very close to an unsought fate and who has to show his worth as a man whose death sentence is almost carried out. It is an important experience for anyone for once to have lived with relentless, wall-to-wall demands" (*Rückkehr* 243).

Various things are in play here: for one thing, moral and political exoneration through existentially colored phrases such as "unsought fate"; for another, invoking tests of manhood and human indestructibility as well as the hard-won, direct experience of life; and, last but not least, euphemistic circumlocutions to ensure success with the readership: for example, "At that time, the great master had called us to battle against the lowlands in order to protect our mountains," says the first-person narrator in Landgrebe's second war novel, *Die Nächte von Kuklino* (1952), obviously referring to Hitler and the campaign to be launched against Poland and the Soviet Union (10); or: "Any reproach can be leveled against us about our lives, but there is one that cannot: That we spared ourselves. I know that in those days we were always ready to the last man to vouch for the way in which we met this world that was coming apart at the seams: with love, with passion, with renunciation" (14). Landgrebe had developed an effective method of serving and strengthening the losers of the world war and, specifically, their sense of being victims—"In any case, it is a book to love," wrote one enthusiastic critic at that time (Krämer-Badoni).

The novella "Die Rückkehr ins Paradies" 'Return to Paradise' (1956) is one of the best examples of Landgrebe's skill in steering in a specific direction people's memories and perceptions of the war and the soldier—an example, too, of how the "spokes of the wheel"

marked him. To these ends he needed in this novella a love story in the Russian hinterland between a German soldier, overcome by desire and love, who with his unit is able to make a rest-stop in a Russian village almost as in peacetime, and a passionate Russian woman—"a glorious picture of flesh . . . she was wild and hot—the eternally tempting." It is at the same time the story of a German soldier who deserts because he is sick of the war and wants to live his dream of peace and love in said Russian village with his love, having finally to atone for this, however, in that he is shot by his own people—"a few puppets did the shooting!" So the picture is set: the peace-loving soldier as victim of a few comical clowns obeying orders. The tragedy of the German soldier obviously consists in the fact that he "had betrayed what he was, and had wanted to become what he could no longer be" (*Rückkehr* 70).

Erich Kern (1906–1991) and Hans Gustl Kernmayr (1900–1977)—
Nazi Justifications after 1945

Compared with Landgrebe, the authors Erich Kern and Hans Gustl Kernmayr were aiming to meet quite different reader needs. Accordingly they also chose quite different literary-rhetorical methods to impart their own "structures to create meaning." The book titles alone—Kern's *Der große Rausch. Rußlandfeldzug 1941–1945* 'The Great Rapture. The Russian Campaign 1941–45' (1949) and Kernmayr's *Wir waren keine Banditen* 'We Were Not Bandits' (1952)—speak a clearer language and a more than provocative one for many readers of today.

Although the main point in these books was the defense of Nazi rule and its imperial and racist population-political goals, they also strengthened the conviction that the war had to be understood "against a long tradition as defense of Western civilization, of European culture against the 'barbaric East,' as defense of the fatherland, of the 'homeland'" (Hanisch 373). *Der große Rausch*, Kern's war memoirs, gives an excellent and at the same time an unintentionally startling insight into the thinking, ways of speaking, and preoccupations of a convinced SS-man and staunch member of Adolf Hitler's bodyguard. It amounts to a single, defiant attempt to retrieve the honor of the German soldier and the German Armed

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Forces and to a state unshaken approval of the meaning of the war against the Soviet Union—an anti-Bolshevist, defensive war, so goes the belief and message of the former SS-leader. It offsets the concentration-camp crimes with those against German prisoners of war and interprets the German defeat as the result of political and military mistakes of the leadership. Not least, it is about the lasting joy of military battle: “If we have the inner strength for it [the fight against Bolshevism], then nothing is yet lost”—this from the year 1949:

Then the millions did not fall in vain in the East and can sleep peacefully in their destroyed and desecrated graves. Then we Germans have done our bit to eradicate the mistakes of yesterday. . . . Whoever emerged from the horrors of five bloody years and has learned nothing and forgotten everything, he deserves to be clubbed to death. . . . Our duty . . . is to the shattered fatherland, whether it is called Germany or Austria, and to the German people bleeding from a thousand wounds. (*Rausch* 198)

In the scenes of violence in their novels of the 60s, Gerhard Fritsch and Hans Leber were to take as a topic such threats of assassination as a readiness for violence that could be put into action at any time by a degenerate and mendacious community of criminals. On the appearance of Kern’s book, the Allied Council (*Allierter Rat*) issued to the Austrian Federal Chancellor an order to ban the distribution of this publication on account of fascist propaganda (“*Kriegshefte*”).

Similar comments can be made about Kernmayer’s novel *Wir waren keine Banditen*, with the subtitle “Ein soldatisches Requiem” ‘A Soldier’s Requiem.’ There is not a line in this book of anecdotes that does not amount to glorification of the hard but ultimately supposedly beautiful soldier’s life. It also ends accordingly; all responsibility is pushed off onto the “shepherds”—those who are politically and militarily responsible: “So it was—so it will be” (Kernmayer 249). And the soldiers’ song with an obviously optimistic ending is quoted at the end: “And always there came a new morning. One, two—one, two—” (Kernmayer 249), intended to extend the soldier’s life without a break into the postwar period with a cheerily

whistled pop-song tune. That such a product may have satisfied the needs of the little man and the “simple private” is proved by the review of the former chief editor of the renowned *Salzburger Nachrichten*, revived after all by the Americans; in it he claimed that he had seldom read “a more human book” as a retrieval of honor for the ordinary soldier. “Ordinary average men,” he wrote, were realistically depicted in it, and so the foundation for a new communal living was laid (Canaval).

Given their lack of literary merit, neither of these texts would be worth mentioning if Kern’s ideological message had not also appeared in Switzerland, in Turkey, in the Federal Republic of Germany, and in England; at a time when the Cold War was raging in the land it did not even receive hostile criticism, and German-national circles in Austria took note of this with delight. A book that will take up “a lasting place in contemporary literature” (KKS), it was said. Why it experienced such wide, even international resonance can be explained by the fact that this book supposedly went to bat for the underdog, and thus the “time of silence and quiet suffering” seemed to be over and “the downtrodden rose again to his own defense” (Reimann). The historical picture of the losers of the war, imbued with Nazi perspectives according to which liberation from Nazi rule was only a temporary collapse which one ought to defy anew militarily and intellectually, was to get new impetus.

Kurt Ziesel (1911–2001)—Scent of a Human

Something similar applies to the novel *Und was bleibt ist der Mensch* ‘And All That Remains Is Man,’ by the former National Socialist and soldier Kurt Ziesel. The book appeared at the same time in reputable publishing houses in Germany (Verlag Deutsche Volksbücher) and Austria (Verlag Kremmayr and Scheriau) in 1952, and it drew a lot of attention and gave rise to fierce controversies (Strachwitz; Ziesel, *Du sollst*). It is the story of a young American Air Force officer who in an air battle shoots down a German-Austrian enemy and becomes so absorbed in guilt feelings about this that at the end of the war he visits the family that was left behind and in so doing experiences “the stations of suffering of the Germans in and after this war” (Leitenberger). The example of this young pilot is

an attempt at political and moral exoneration of those responsible, camouflaged as reconciliation and international understanding: “Because hate has changed into love and revenge is redeemed in forgiveness” (Ziesel, *Und was bleibt* 551).

The clumsy turns of phrase of the former publisher of the “Volksbuch” ‘People’s Book’ *Krieg und Dichtung. Soldaten werden Dichter—Dichter werden Soldaten* ‘War and Literature. Soldiers become Poets—Poets become Soldiers’ (1940) and of the author of the essay “On the Creative War” could not be overlooked by anti-Nazi critics with their sharp ears. In 1940 Ziesel had written in his essay on the “creative war”:

War as a natural and historical event is in its nature a symbol of destruction. Such a perception is afflicted with a purely external way of looking at things. For [war] is able to form, to purify, to revolutionize not only the fate of peoples but also its intellectual and artistic face in the individual human being. . . . The poet’s art should contribute to the structure that will bring Germany after a thousand years of wrestling to its true meaning and mission in the world. (Ziesel, *Krieg und Dichtung* 534–36)

Herbert Zand (1923-1970)—the First Anti-War Novel in Austria after 1945

The book that is most noteworthy in both the artistic and the intellectual sense in the series of named novels in the immediate postwar period is Herbert Zand’s novel *Letzte Ausfahrt* ‘Last Exit’ (1953), subtitled “Roman der Einkesselten” ‘Novel of the Encircled Men.’ This subtitle suggests the dominant meaning of the text. In contrast to previous examples, here we have to do with a text that did not serve the dominant comrade-consciousness, and resisted playing down or even legitimizing the Second World War. The opposite was the case: when the novel came out in a new edition in 1992, one critic wrote about it under the telling title “Not in Agreement” (Gauß), for Zand not only grapples fundamentally with the war as the most direct materialization of the state of the world—this is Zand’s conviction—but at the same time he reckons with almost all aspects that either remain faded out in the dominant picture of

the Second World War or were used to support the myth of the just, brave, hard battle.

Zand's text was directed against all the discourses spread around up to that point about the war. He raised objections to talking of the war as a human test, and of life rising like a phoenix, and of the new construction after the end of the war. He raised objections to the undiminished cultivation of military virtues when he said, "Nor did your soldiers die of bullets and grenades. They were felled from the inside. In the moment in which they reached for their guns, they had already died on the battlefield" (280). His text knows of the crime of giving orders and of criminal orders as well as of the cringing aspect of following orders. Zand's text knows only degrees of guilt "on a sliding scale" (230): he addressed the topic of the dubious role of the church in and for the war, and he knew about the lie of the defense of the homeland in the Far East and of the mendacious cult of honoring the dead at war memorials. The novel dispensed with the hawking of tales of male-hard action on the front, idyllic leaves in the hinterland, and equally with the incessantly invoked comradeship-ideology: "Comrades, that was scarcely more than smoke in the muzzle of a rifle" (100). He knew also of those "parts of a film from which the censor has cut out all the disagreeable pictures" (110). "The name war proved to be a thin veil covering the word murder" (66). Genocide, however, is not a theme in Zand's novel, which certainly reflects the way the topic was made taboo in the immediate postwar period.

Zand (b. 1923) was called up at nineteen and had to serve on the Eastern Front, where he was severely wounded several times, so that in 1970 he died of the delayed results of his war wounds. In 1952 he received the Austrian state prize for his novel, which, in fact, rested on those experiences that Zand also set down in his documentary war memoirs, *Durch die Pripet-Sümpfe* 'Through the Pripet-Swamps' and *Der Kessel von Brest-Litovsk* 'The Encirclement of Brest-Litovsk' (*Rückzug*), but this particular text focused on something fundamental, something essential. It is another form of war diary in which historical dates, such as battles or the number of divisional headquarters, do not play a role, but it is the state of the world and the human race that is under discussion: The apocalyptic events depicted in the novels are the narrative, sensual, linguistic

accoutrements of Zand's impressive attempt to grasp the war purely and simply as parable, as allegory, as symbol, even as "replica" (198) of life. The war which had just been endured was in this sense a further proof of Zand's theses in that everything that happens to Zand's figures—what they do and don't do, and the crimes they commit—is a replica of a world-historical, cosmic, unavoidable happening for which the narrator summons up a multitude of pictures and symbols which feed on Gnostic, biblical, and mythological sources, which are also to be found in the 50s in Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, André Malraux, Gabriel Marcel, Wolfgang Borchert (Kraus 299), and the Austrian Hans Lebert (*Die Wolfshaut* 'The Wolf's Skin' [1960]); *Der Feuerkreis* 'The Circle of Fire' [1971]). However at the same time, so it seems to me—despite and/or precisely because of the linguistically over-extravagant formulations—they are also the consequence and the expression of a kind of deficit in analysis and a desperate need to try and master the experience.

The central complex of images in the novel is the idea of the encircled area from which there is no escape: "the trap was life itself" (198) on the "star earth" (260). Over it all dances Shiva, god of creation and destruction alike (258, 270, 290). Zand began by representing the catastrophic effects of the war on the bodies and psyches of soldiers and participants: "Terror advances to become a community-fostering power" (26); or "convoy-spirit" (90), "labyrinth-fear" (94), or "the survivors themselves were the graves of a time that was trampled underfoot" (216)—these are his formulations. There is talk of vanishing without a trace, of fear of suffocation and disintegration of faith, of improvisation "with human material" (65), of the sense of being an "item" in a "sum" that "never adds up" (56), of the war as a phenomenon that lives "off itself with all the horror and vehemence of the elemental" (67), of death as the "big commissioner" for whom the "earth is a giant laboratory" (79), of the "error of creation in making human beings of flesh rather than of stone" (157), of matter as "purely and simply a beast of prey" (222), and not least of the rape of nature, which is also the way many anti-war poets such as Michael Guttenbrunner (Kaszynski, *Krieg und Gewalt* 100-15) and Gerhard Frisch saw it. In this way Zand tried to grasp the scenario war and the nature of war; thus two of the last chapters of the book are called "Marche funèbre and Waltz" (244) and "And

Shiva dances” (258).

When a new edition of Zand’s novel appeared in 1992 on the initiative of Wolfgang Kraus in the *Europaverlag*, Austrian essayist Karl-Markus Gauß discussed its intellectual and poetic achievements but also its limitations, putting Zand’s novel in the context of the immediate postwar period. This critic established on the one hand the astonishing “speed with which monstrous terrors whose dimensions could really only recently be discerned were recast through literary symbols of eternal-human tragedy” and “all killing was transfigured into an allegory in which concrete history disappeared in an apotheosis of Western grief.” On the other hand Zand’s attempt remains in his opinion remarkable in (precisely not) “driving the horror out of the horror.” He sees it nevertheless as a kind of tragedy that Zand—shaped as he was within the intellectual and poetic horizons of his time—certainly wanted “to push forward into the unvarnished, naked truth of his generation” and “yet always arrived at the eternal-human,” because it was impossible for him to get beyond “the allegory and the symbolism” (“Nicht im Einverständnis” n.p.).

4. Epilogue

Let us close the circle and come back to Ernst Jandl, the poet who supposedly “played with the language,” but who was obviously haunted his life long by his war experiences. These, in his differentiated knowledge of the diverse “war discourses” after 1945, led to the following summing-up: Together with Friederike Mayröcker, Ernst Jandl won in the year 1968 the Radio-play Prize of the War-Blind for the play “Fünf Mann Menschen” ‘Five Humans at a Time.’ In eleven short scenes a continuous sound-tape draws a bow from maternity hospital to maternity hospital—“lovely sons” come into the world. In the meantime, however, in very short scenes the sets of conditioning instruments are introduced, which e.g. make the sons into soldiers, receivers of orders, braggarts, perpetrators acting collectively, or executed men. The lovely sons sit in the pub and carry on inappropriate and cynical conversations about their crimes: “Officer: Everything OK, men? M1-M5: Sure, Captain. Officer: War or peace?” (Müller 2005, <http://www.studium.uni-erlangen.de/~muller/iss1/32>). Laughter is stronger here than

words; it establishes non-verbal explicitness. The soldiers have obviously been shot in one ear by the bullets, and it is suggested that the sons/grandsons of the soldiers have remained “unscathed.” The “cultural” work on feelings and consciousness, on thought processes, was obviously “successful” and deeply anchored. And again and again, so history tells us, this “laughter” reactivates itself, or is reactivated—here and there, without end, so it is to be feared.

Translated by Dorothy James
Hunter College/CUNY Graduate School

Notes

1 I owe many valuable references to Gerhard Fuchs. In almost all relevant academic works on the German-language depiction of the Second World War, literature from the Federal Republic of Germany and the former German Democratic Republic dominate; see Pfeifer, Amberger, Kraft, Wagener. In 1994 the journal *Text + Kritik* devoted an entire volume to the phenomenon *Literaten und Krieg* ‘Literary Writers and War’ in the past and the present.

2 See for example Reiter. Since the beginning of the 1990s exile-research has been increasingly concerned with the literary responses of exiles to the Second World War. The essays in Pfanner, for example, are also concerned with exiles from Austria, or at all events from formerly Austrian territory, such as Franz Werfel, Günther Anders, Manès Sperber, Hans Habe, and Robert Ehenzweig.

3 For Elisabeth Reichart’s literary contributions to the theme “Erinnerung” ‘Memory,’ see Kecht.

4 On Christoph Ransmayr, see Gottwald, Kunne.

5 See *Vernichtungskrieg* 9. The catalogue contains about 70 relevant films, novels, and pamphlets (e.g. by Heinz G. Konsalik, Gert Ledig, Hugo Herrmann, Will Berthold, Claus Silvester, G. Rosser, Franz Taut, F. John Ferrer, Erwin Morzfeld und Emil Merker), which are arranged under the following topics: “Ein ganz normaler Krieg,” “Saubere Wehrmacht,” “Teufelsker-

le,” “Die Todgeweihten,” “Gefreiter Arsch,” “Verlorene Siege,” and “Getreu bis in den Tod.” See also Ritsert; Schornstheimer.

6 See also *Mitteilungen des Dokumentationsarchivs des österreichischen Widerstandes*, February 1999 (on the setting up of the research position for Postwar Justice.).

7 During the war itself various books by Landgrebe appeared showing no knowledge of the horrors and abysses of the war, e.g. *Gebratene Äpfel. Zehn kleine Geschichten* (1940), *Mit den Panzern in Ost und West* (ed. H. Guderian, 1942), *Ich in Vaters Hosen. Zehn fröhliche Geschichten* (1943), and *Das Hochzeitsschiff. Ein zärtlicher Roman* (1944).

8 The volume contains poems, pen drawings, and watercolors beginning in the 1930s and illustrates Landgrebe’s development up to the “isolation of the late years.”

9 I owe this important reference to Hildemar Holl, who also quotes in his presentation from a written document by the chief of the prisoner-of-war camp in which it was confirmed that “Lieutenant Landgrebe . . . from the beginning of his stay was known as a convinced Anti-Nazi.” Landgrebe had performed “outstanding service in the frame of re-education” (see “Entlassungsdokumente aus Amerika“ ‘Documents of Release from America,’ in Landgrebe’s “Nachlass”).

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