

The Necessity of Remembering Injustice and Suffering: History, Memory, and the Representation of the Romani Holocaust in Austrian Contemporary Literature

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[T]he present moment here . . . is an opaque cloth, laid over the table of the past. But for me the cloth is translucent, almost sheer, with a dark stain spreading beneath its surface—sometimes, sometimes bleeding through.
—(Sonneman 83)

The mid-1980s in Austria witnessed a heated discussion regarding Austria's National Socialist past; it was caused by the political situation during the presidential campaign in 1986 and culminated in the so-called Waldheim debate, when the past of conservative candidate and former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim became the center of public scrutiny. His "forgotten" role as a young officer of the Wehrmacht became a symbol of Austria's suppressed past, and it became clear that Austria finally had to question and face its cherished myth of having been the first victim of Nazi Germany. In the *London Times* journalist Hellas Pick called this past "an undigested lump in the body politic" and argued that "Austria had to absorb the lessons of the Waldheim-era and finally accept that the long sleep was over if it wanted to be in the mainstream of Post-Communist Europe. It could not continue to suppress the realities of the Nazi era" (Pick 150; see also Utgaard).

Paralleling the discussion in the various media, authors and literary critics began to concern themselves with this burdensome

past. The literary debate about Austria as a “realm of the dead and the killers” (Zeyringer 405) continued well into the 1990s and, as attested by the texts I have chosen to discuss here, is still an issue today. For instance, several authors had their “coming out” as Jews, a bold step considering the newly revived anti-Semitism, and this climate, though full of tensions and animosities, made it possible for another, more overlooked minority, the Roma, to go public.¹ The voice of Ceija Stojka, a Romni and survivor of several concentration camps, took the lead in this matter, and her autobiography, *Wir leben im Verborgenen. Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (We Live in the Dark: Memories of a Rom-Gypsy; 1988) encouraged various Romani groups to demand the political and social attention they had long been denied. In 1993 they succeeded in being acknowledged as a *Volksgruppe* (ethnic group), a status which, at least on paper, legally protects ethnic minorities and guarantees them certain special rights.²

The developments in Austria corresponded to a preoccupation with the past on a broader scale. In his essay “Present Pasts,” Andreas Huyssen traces this phenomenon back to the early 1980s, to the unprecedented interest in the Third Reich triggered by the US series Holocaust and several anniversaries of events in the history of National Socialism. Although the developments in Austria coincided with the general memory boom, as Huyssen calls it, we must not overlook the particularities: in Austria *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ‘overcoming the past’ is still an ongoing process and far from being completed. Part of that is remembering the Romani genocide, a task which only few care to undertake, because it is painful both for those who include memory in their writings and for those who read these writings. Literary memory, then, is not merely a sort of accessory for historians, but rather a concept that stands on its own, because it guarantees a more personal connection to specific cultural surroundings. It not only lends a personal touch to the understanding of history, it also has ethical implications, because literary memory evokes hidden voices that would not otherwise be heard. This was the case with regard to several autobiographies by Roma and Sinti in the 1980s and 1990s.³

French cultural historian Pierre Nora states: “Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are . . . haunted by

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the need to recover their buried pasts,” continuing, “the task of remembering makes everyone his own historian” and “the demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians” (15). Although it is true that minorities un/recover “their buried pasts,” we cannot ignore the fact that this is not only their history, but also a neglected and conveniently overlooked aspect of a national past. Romani history and Austrian history cannot and ought not to be viewed as separate entities. Austrian Romanies are Austrians: they belong to the same nation; their history is Austrian history. Though marginalized, the Roma are not isolated from society; they have contacts and relationships with neighbors, clients, and local and national authorities. When it comes to the genocide during the Third Reich, the connections are ever more apparent, for without the consent of Austrians to imprison, torture, and ultimately murder other Austrians, the Romanies would not have been decimated. This is precisely why authors like Elfriede Jelinek, Erich Hackl, Ludwig Laher, and Ceija Stojka have undertaken the task of disclosing unethical behavior toward and crimes against Romanies.

Through the texts of these four authors, I will demonstrate the significance of literary production as it relates to the retrieval of history that Austrian society has chosen to suppress. By including fictional and autobiographical writings in the historiographical process—by reconstructing the past—we can speak of a “kind of reawakening” of history, as Nora puts it (24). My inquiry includes the following questions: Why should we remember? Why do authors take the trouble to reconstruct a burdened past, which may mean reliving pain and suffering? How do authors address the connections between the past and the present? What roles do they assume in their aesthetic approach to history? Is it important to draw distinctions between non-Romani and Romani authors when we discuss the literary representation of the Romani genocide during the Third Reich?

These five texts provide a comprehensive picture at the levels of both history and memory. Ceija Stojka’s autobiographical narratives were the first by a Romani author to be published in Austria and were of great significance for Romanies as well as for non-Romanies. *Wir leben im Verborgenen* (1988) and *Reisende auf dieser Welt. Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (Travelers in This World:

From the Life of a Rom-Gypsy; 1992) reflect Romani experience firsthand and convey a vast array of authentic individual and collective experiences, describing the chronology of twentieth-century Romani life in Austria from within, as it were, and thus providing a very unusual perspective. Erich Hackl's *Abschied von Sidonie* (1989; *Farewell Sidonia*, [1991]) and Ludwig Laher's *Herzfleischartung* (Degeneration of the Heart's Flesh; 2001) are thoroughly researched yet fictional texts concerned with the actions of the general Austrian population with respect to crimes against the Romanies. "Stecken, Stab und Stangl" (Rod, Staff, and Pole; 1997), by Elfriede Jelinek, is based on an actual incident in 1995, the murder of four Romani men in Oberwart, Burgenland, and links Austria's present with its past in a highly provocative manner. Since it has only been in the past decade that the Romani genocide has attracted the interest of historians and writers alike, these texts play a pivotal role in the process of memory construction, as well as in the production of counter-history.

For the purposes of this essay, I argue that history and memory are not separate but rather interdependent concepts; therefore, I will not draw a clear distinction between them.⁴ Remembering the past contributes to new historical knowledge no matter whether this generates new perspectives or not. According to Michel Foucault, counter-memory withstands official versions of historical continuity (139-64). Remembering against the grain, so to speak, is unsettling: counter-memories may accuse, hurt, or generate disbelief or even anger; counter-memories, or "unvarnished truths" (Davis/Starn 2), may question the self and the more traditional representations of one's own collective past. If counter-memory is taken seriously, whether by an individual or by a group, de-construction of accepted history or histories will bring forth re-construction and create something new at both the intellectual and the emotional levels; in other words, remembering the forgotten and/or repressed past reassembles the multiple pieces constituting the fabric of history. Counter-memory/history is, of course, also history, even if official history attempts to ignore alternatives. Aleida Assmann emphasizes the fact that there is always a struggle for memory space, because each social group treasures its own memory. "Culture" functions as a permanently contested space where different groups with their

own memories fight for representation (Interview).⁵

Texts fight for representation. Making counter-history and gaining representation in the realm of cultural memory requires vigorous efforts. Jelinek, Hackl, and Laher unmask the silence surrounding the plight of the Romanies in Austrian history, exposing the identity of the *Other*—here the Austrian perpetrators and bystanders—yet at the same time they are the *Other* and are therefore “self-destructive” (Funkenstein 80). By uncovering unwanted knowledge they venture into a battle zone of attack and guilt. Conversely and surprisingly, Stojka gives an account of her and her people’s experience, making the hidden visible and tangible for the reader, yet without polemical intentions. It is astonishing that her traumatic experiences as a persecuted Romni have left her free from bitterness. Her attitude is not naive, but rather shows her capacity to forgive and still stay alert and aware of social realities.

The concept of counter-memory/history is critical for an age that is “terminally ill with amnesia” (Huyssen, “Introduction” 1), for “forgetting is the ultimate transgression” (Huyssen, “Present Pasts” 74).⁶ How are we to deal with events that are out of reach or in the realm of the suppressed? First the past must be secured, an undertaking which in itself may prove to be traumatic. This is what our four authors have accomplished: by uncovering buried memory, they are able to secure the past. Huyssen argues that “memory, after all, can be no substitute for justice itself, and justice itself will inevitably be entangled in the unreliability of memory” (“Present Pasts” 75). Then why should we even be concerned with memory? Why bother with all that pain, effort, and time if the Holocaust is beyond the statute of limitations? Huyssen also points out the danger that people will become less interested in remembering once interest in the past wanes, and adds that memory is fickle, unreliable, and transitory, and “haunted by forgetting” (“Present Pasts” 76). Once the generation that experienced the atrocities has died out, forgetting will become more prevalent. There is indeed a narrow time frame between the first “forgetting” (post-experience) and the second (post-remembering).

So memory must be “spread” to be stable. Spreading memory involves making it available to as many people as possible, here through the literary text. For as long as people remember, memory

remains “active, alive, embodied in the social—that is, in individuals, families, groups, nations, and regions” (Huysssen, “Present Pasts” 76). And securing the past has a bearing on the future: memory should change the way people think and remember, cutting through thick layers of suppression, denial, and guilt by going directly to authentic sources such as original documents and witnesses. Thus, memory and ethical thinking are intrinsically linked; remembering someone, anyone, may involve concerns about social injustice, oppression, or, as here, genocide.

In his book *The Ethics of Memory*, Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit asks, “So what should humanity remember?” His answer is brief: “Striking examples of radical evil and crimes against humanity, such as enslavement, deportations of civilian populations, and mass exterminations” (78); radical evil, consisting of acts that “undermine the very foundation of morality itself”—like the elimination of Jews and Romanies, which was “a direct onslaught on the very idea of shared humanity” (79). Margalit demands that “[s]uch an attack on morality should be recorded and remembered” (79), noting that despite the traumatic nature of such memories, the very fact that the past is recalled is itself a “hopeful project” (82).

Understood in this light, memory sustains and gives life, and Margalit refers to those who remember and describe such “immeasurable pain” (148) firsthand as moral witnesses. Unquestionably Stojka, with her autobiographical writings, qualifies as such a moral witness. Hackl and Laher may not be in Margalit’s sense, for they neither experienced nor even observed the human disaster they write about, but memory is also sustained by historical research, and both extensively researched actual historical events to find material for their narratives. Hackl did so by going through documents and interviewing victims, bystanders, and perpetrators; Laher examined several thousand court documents in order to reconstruct the history of the labor- and later Gypsy camp in Weyer, Upper Austria. We may call them moral researchers. And Jelinek brings memory alive in yet a third way: by writing about violent death. Her provocative text and the anger that permeates it create a desire to know more and to take a critical stance vis-à-vis Austrian collective memory. We may call her a moral instigator.

I believe that we, the postwar generations (*Nachgeborene*), need
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moral witnesses, moral researchers, and moral instigators—truth and authenticity from various sources—to even begin to fathom the “immeasurable pain” of victims of genocide. We need to feel abhorrence and, consequently, a keen sense of inner resistance to injustice and violence, and that entails deep reflection and a conscious decision not to succumb to propaganda or outside pressure.

Each of the selected texts makes very clear that the present and the past are intrinsically connected. Although they represent different genres (play, documentary narrative or novel, and autobiography) and thus different aesthetic approaches, they have much in common: they focus on the Romani genocide and Austrian society’s contempt for this ethnic group; they reveal a profound desire to bring justice to a still ostracized people; and they speak for those who until quite recently have not spoken for themselves. The texts’ characters introduce representatives of several kinds of Austrians: victims, survivors, and perpetrators; those who resisted to various degrees and those who remained passive. By subverting official memory and history, these authors shed light on a dark side of Austria’s history and establish counter-memory.

Why the Roma as a people are such an ostracized minority is a complex question. Since their appearance in Europe they have been excluded from society on the grounds of their foreign origin, their non-Christian religion, their physical appearance, and their different way of life. They have survived discrimination and cruel persecution which culminated in the eighteenth century with the so-called Gypsy hunts and then again in the twentieth century during the Third Reich. In times of change or political crisis, rejection manifests itself all the more violently. Over time the Roma have become the epitome of the *Other*, and anti-Gypsism is still alive and well.⁷ Franz Maciejewski suggests that the majority population—mainly through propaganda—projects its fears, dissatisfactions, and perceived and real deficiencies onto the Romanies, who thus become scapegoats on different levels: economic, social, and individual. In today’s Austria, Romanies are still looked down upon as asocial, dirty, lazy, devious, or even dangerous. In order to avoid racist treatment, they frequently pretend to be Turkish immigrants, for instance, which is quite ironic if we consider the discrimination against immigrants in general; however, it only confirms the unre-

served rejection of the Roma and Sinti (see Bogdal, Breger, Hancock, and Reemtsma).

Elfriede Jelinek's play *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* has as its background the racially motivated murder of four Roma men in Oberwart, Burgenland, which the text stakes against the mass murders in Auschwitz. Her play becomes a space for memory and overcomes the historical distance between "den Mordverbrechen des Hitlerregimes" 'the murder crimes of the Hitler regime' (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl* 30) and the present-day tendencies in Austria (Heyer 281). In addition, the author compares and contrasts the representation of these two realities—the Oberwart murders and the concentration camps—with the euphemistic media representation of such reality. By using original quotations from the media, from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger—known for his sympathy for National Socialism and his obstinate refusal to include history in his ontology—and from the Jewish poet Paul Celan, who did not separate art and history, Jelinek constructs a collage of words that exposes their mendacity and challenges the reader to search for truth beyond language. Explaining her method in a short essay on her plays, the author writes, "I want language to be not a dress, but rather to stay beneath the dress, to be there but not to impose, not to protrude from under the dress" ("Sinn egal" 8).

Jelinek's "Verbalakrobatik" (Vogler 53), her dense language, along with the alienating stage setting and stereotypical characters, lay bare the Austrian uneasiness with its past (see also her plays *Totenaufer* [1991] and *Wolken. Heim* [1990]). The characters in the play entirely lack individuality and thus represent generally held opinions in the press about events at the time of the Oberwart murders. The media's interest in a cancer-stricken child, a mother who kills her children and then commits suicide, and the death of a famous ski star is disproportionately greater than its interest in the death of the four Romanies. The latter do not utter one word during the whole play, thus emphasizing their subordinate, voiceless position in society and history, and they become a symbol of Austria's involvement in the genocide during the Third Reich. In an interview Jelinek expresses her outrage over this injustice of the media: on the one hand individual suffering (cancer, suicide, accidental death), on the other collective death, or rather extermination on a large scale

("Ich bin im Grunde"). The play illustrates Jelinek's obsession, as she phrases it, with the death of millions, including Romanies, and she shows how such contradictions lead to a quasi schizophrenia.

The site of truth lies not merely in the words Jelinek uses, but transcends the text and unmask the spoken or written word. For instance one character representing Staberl (hence part of the play's title), a popular journalist from the daily paper *Die Kronenzeitung*, maintains that it was technically impossible to gas millions of people, adding cynically that they must have died of starvation or disease or were simply beaten to death; and the text reads, "The truth is pretty simple" (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl* 42). Similar satirical utterances recur throughout the play. Also, Jelinek prefaced the play by quoting a comment by Jörg Haider about the Oberwart incident—a suggestion that the murders simply resulted from some internal weapon- or drug deal, or perhaps car racketeering, typical of "such circles."⁸ This quote reveals popular discourse and clearly opposes Jelinek's views. Another example is the grotesque appearance in the play of Professor Dr. H. (Martin Heidegger), who mentions his "unprecedented success story" and then with no transition equates his criticism of modern technology with the "fabrication of corpses in the gas chambers" (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl* 43). By connecting two seemingly unrelated phenomena, the author exposes Heidegger's blindness to and contempt for the suffering of the Holocaust victims.

Jelinek uses language in a highly musical way, effecting melodies and rhythms. Some of the passages remind the reader of a speech choir (*Sprechchor*). For instance, she has children's voices—an allusion to the prestigious Vienna Boys Choir—interrupt a character's defensive speech with the interjection "barbarisch" 'barbaric' (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl* 46-47). Or again, several intertwined voices simultaneously cite lines from poems by Celan and reactionary statements by the journalist Staberl. She changes and distorts quotations in order to accentuate truth, thereby uncovering a bottomless pit as she calls it ("Ich bin im Grunde"). She turns language into a powerful device that makes visible the underlying repression of the events of the past. Through the entire play several characters repeatedly utter "Einmal muß Schluß sein!" 'It has to be over!' No one wants to be reminded of the Third Reich and all that the murder of the

four Roma has once again brought to the fore. One woman sums up everyone's uneasiness: "I have the constant feeling that death protrudes into our conscience like the corner of a table that we continually knock against because we cannot get used to its being there" ("Stecken, Stab und Stangl" 54). The "Herren Tote," the four dead Romani men, are held responsible for the resurgence of uncomfortable memories that must be suppressed.

As already mentioned above, various incidents that may seem rather trivial in the larger scheme of things are of far greater significance to the media and their readers/viewers than the death of the four Roma. Tellingly, the media consistently mention the death of "diese vier Herren" 'Those four gentlemen' in a negative context, but it is the information surrounding the death of the ski star or the accomplishments of other sports figures that receives exhaustive elaboration. In the interview mentioned earlier Jelinek states: "We constantly try to keep the dead at arm's length because we cannot live with this guilt; nobody can. This is a collective neurosis. And the more often one hears that one should not talk about Auschwitz, the more often it won't be dead" ("Ich bin im Grunde"). This guilt and anti-Gypsism prevent Austrians from feeling compassion for "diese vier Herren" and Romanies in general, because it would require taking a critical look at themselves and admitting to culpability and racism.

At the end of the play there is "Schluß" 'the end' indeed. The characters have managed to veil everything on the stage with crocheted and knitted fabric, a visual sign of how their particular use of language conceals reality—an apt metaphor which the author, of course, counteracts by writing and putting the play on stage. Jelinek believes that as long as we do not face the challenge of coming to terms with this particular past, the veil over our history will continue to tear and expose the truth beneath. It is a paradox: on the one hand it is necessary to lift the veil intentionally and uncover the morass; on the other hand it reveals itself, piercing through the veil—like suppressed memory that in one way or another will come to the surface.

Abschied von Sidonie (1989; *Farewell Sidonia* [1991]), by Erich Hackl, is a narrative about a Romani baby girl taken in by foster parents, Josepha and Hans Breirath (themselves *Gadje*), just before

the Austrian civil war in 1934. Officials argued that she should be returned to her biological mother, a “Gypsy” already imprisoned in a camp, and subsequently Sidonia died in Auschwitz in 1942, from “insult,” as one of the chronicler/narrator’s witnesses says.⁹ Robert Reimer writes, *Farewell Sidonia* “interweave[s] private story and public history to create a cautionary tale and moral lesson for multiethnic, post-cold war Europe” (142). Hackl’s narrative reads like a well-researched historical chronicle in that the author attempts to stay outside the story, and by avoiding personal comment he exposes harsh and cruel actions by authorities and individuals alike. His great merit is to put a human face on this system and to emphasize the responsibility that everyone has towards his/her fellow citizens.

Hackl clearly identifies with Sidonia and her foster parents, standing behind them and their convictions, and the effect on the reader is a heightened desire to learn more about these fictionalized characters. Like the narrator, the reader gets involved with the main characters, yet at the same time questions whether or not s/he would have acted like Sidonia’s foster parents and brother, or perhaps like other characters in the text who claim only “decency” after the war (*Farewell Sidonia* 95). In a letter which seems to render the wording of the original document, Käthe Korn, a social worker instrumental in Sidonia’s deportation, remarks, “I find it better that the child be returned to her mother, for later on the situation she will find herself in owing to her background will be even more difficult” (95). Hackl leaves no doubt that it is precisely this overeager obedience that ultimately kills Sidonia. He describes how not only Korn but also another social worker, the teacher, and the village police officer tried to justify the actions of the Nazi government. Oberinspektor Siegfried Schiffler, for instance, “also argued for the child being returned, for strictly humanitarian reasons. A child belongs with its mother, that is always the best, and besides: who knows what the future will bring? . . . a Gypsy will always be a Gypsy” (94-95). Hackl unmasks the profoundly ingrained prejudice and contempt for people who are different or perceived as such. Hans-Markus Gauß summarizes as follows: “Sidonia would not have lost her life had it not been for the legions of overeager everyday perpetrators, in the house next door, in the neighborhood, at the welfare office, in the principal’s office, who all delegated their responsibilities to the su-

perior authority and had and still have a clear conscience, for it was not they themselves who murdered the girl with their own hands" (271). With the juxtaposition of the simple past and the present tense—"had and still have"—Gauß emphasizes the intrinsic link between the past and the present. While Sidonia, a member of a minority group, perished, and while her foster parents were never able to get over their loss, the majority population, silent or not so silent, supported the system. After the war, many did not feel guilty or were "not even ashamed" (*Farewell Sidonia* 122).

In one short passage the narrator succumbs to his feelings in a text that otherwise stays detached, rather evoking a wide array of emotions on the part of the reader. When Sidonia is being taken away from her foster family to be reunited with her biological mother and thus delivered to certain death, the narrator lets his guard down:

At this point the chronicler can no longer hide behind facts and conjecture. This is the point at which he wishes to scream in helpless rage. Sidonia's obliviousness. Her sudden fear. How she half turns around to cling to Josepha. Josepha's tears. Sidonia's tears. Josepha's ineffectual attempt to comfort the little girl. You must be brave, Sidi. I don't want to go to that woman. You must. I want to stay with you. You can't. You have to go with me. I can't. I'll come back. We won't forget you. Say hello to everyone for me. Don't cry. I am not crying. Everything will be alright. (103)

Hackl has been criticized for this "outburst, . . . which is detrimental to the literary quality" (Wallmann 465); however, the chronicler's remarks are absolutely appropriate. It is impossible to distance oneself constantly when observing injustice and utter pain.

In this passage the author explicitly reveals his compassion for Sidonia and her family. He makes us aware that the representation of memory and history is to venture beyond mere facts and figures, because both are made up of lived experiences. Compassion for Sidonia and her foster parents represents a condition for Hackl's writing, even a necessity. From this necessity arises the conviction that certain stories have to be told in order to revive memory, to create counter-memory, and also to serve as a warning to present and future generations. We are encouraged to question ourselves and,

most of all, to acquire the awareness that leads to moral action.

Unlike Hackl, who drew on oral history as well as written documents, Ludwig Laher only used written sources to create his novel. Like *Farewell Sidonia, Herzfleischartung* (Degeneration of the Heart's Flesh; 2001) is fiction based on fact. Laher availed himself of original documents—reports and minutes of interrogations of suspects, notes from hearings and briefings, correspondence among various authorities—to support the factual side of his novel. It is about a camp in Weyer, Upper Austria, originally a forced labor camp for men who were deemed unworthy members of society and admitted mostly by denunciation. The guards at the camp committed sadistic torture and murder, and after the camp doctor reported these incidents to the district attorney, the camp was investigated. However, the investigation soon came to a halt, the incidents were covered up, and the remaining inmates were sent to Mauthausen, the notorious concentration camp in Upper Austria. On January 19, 1941, Weyer was turned into a Gypsy camp. A year later none of the 300 resident Romanies remained alive—those who survived the harsh conditions at the camp had been deported and killed in Auschwitz. While the lawsuits in favor of the first camp inmates were reinstated with more or less success after the war, no one ever thought to incriminate those who had been in charge of the Gypsy camp. The failure to investigate the incidents there proves yet again that the power of anti-Gypsism and guilt was far greater than indignation over “radical evil” (Margalit 79). Still, Laher is keenly aware that, had he lived during those crucial times in Austria, he might have acted like many of the people of that period: “Had we lived through these 15 years, and not only observed but taken notes without most people even noticing, who knows how we would have behaved” (*Herzfleischartung* 182). He understands that it may be too easy to simply look back and claim integrity. He goes on: “It is not because we consider ourselves especially wise or because we are immune to self-doubt that we take the liberty to look so closely that it hurts” (183).

The narrator in the novel focuses on euphemistic expressions the leaders of the camp and the village doctor used in describing and covering up the violent deaths of inmates and children: “*Comotio cerebri*” ‘concussion,’ “*Gehirnerschütterung*” also ‘concussion,’

“Lebensschwäche” ‘general infirmity,’ or—a newly created word—“Herzfleiscentartung” ‘degeneration of the heart’s flesh.’ Through painstaking research, Laher gives us a glimpse into the lives of scores of mistreated people, of tortured and murdered inmates. Whereas some of the labor-camp inmates obtained justice *post mortem*, after the war, the Romanies were denied that “privilege,” for they remained, to say the least, undesirable. There is hardly any retrievable memory. Since there were no survivors of the Weyer Roma camp, there is no testimony for us to rely on; those who were in charge would not talk about it either. Moreover, the official village chronicle conceals the existence of the camp and what happened there altogether. The only obtainable information consists of two brief reports on the Austrian Comrades League (*Kameradschaftsbund*) and the Veterans Association (*Kriegsopferverband*), neither of which includes the real victims, neither the first group of forced laborers nor the Romanies. *Herzfleiscentartung* demonstrates that regular people can become sadistic brutes and killers only to return to their status as spotless citizens after the war. Laher’s text does not offer an explanation for this kind of human behavior, but rather exposes it:

No one will study the Roma camp over the next sixty years so intensely that little Rudolf Haas and the possibly dubious circumstances of his premature passing would be mentioned anywhere.¹⁰ In fact, hardly anyone, except for a lonesome historian, will deal with it at all—neither the attorney general of the Third Reich, nor the attorney general of the Republic of Austria, nor the attorney general of the municipality of St. Pantaleon in the province of Upper Austria—and probably only in their dreams some sensitive people who had to witness the misery.¹¹ (*Herzfleiscentartung* 69)

Because Laher recognized the necessity of uncovering hidden truth and reporting it in detail, he had to find an aesthetic and rhetorical mode that would allow him to cope with his knowledge. He chose irony and a laconic style that underscores the incomprehensibility of the historic circumstances. He is a moral researcher indeed. At the end of *Herzfleiscentartung* Laher gives the reason for writing the novel: in a vision-like scene he describes how a nine-year-old Roma girl appeared to him and requested that her story be told.

She is, in Jelinek's terms, one of the "undead." Like a ghost she cannot find peace until her and others' cases, however cold, are investigated. The narrator complies, but at the same time the reader gets a glimpse of his helplessness when faced with the task of investigating such barbaric human behavior. The narrator's final words are, "No, I have long suspected that there is no solid ground beneath my feet, and strangely enough, I seriously wonder if I will not simply break through; I wonder why we do not all break through and drown senselessly" (*Herzfleischartung* 185).

Neither Laher nor Hackl fulfills Margalit's definition of a moral witness. However, Margalit suggests the term "chronicler": someone who "is to be a perfect historical seismograph, to record accurately the vibrations of history. But a seismograph does not tell us what it is like to be in an earthquake" (163). Certainly neither author is personally acquainted with the experience of discrimination, torture, or murder. Nonetheless, they uncover evil. Moral researchers or chroniclers cannot reproduce the actual experience, but as writers they use their sensibility and creativity to construct reality, elicit reflection, and evoke compassion on the part of the reader. Furthermore, by virtue of being writers, they can use official records and transform them into fiction by touching our intellect and our emotions.

Again, we need both ethically motivated researchers and chroniclers to uncover truths even long after the fact and eye-witnesses like Stojka. Through their research Hackl and Laher uncover attempts to mask the truth, and thus they represent it. Jelinek, on the other hand, intricately links present and past insofar as she uses satire to dismantle trivializing speech patterns and unchanged human (group) behavior, employing erudite allusions and montages to criticize latent fascist tendencies in the Austrian media and society. Her play demonstrates how everyday discourse is shaped by television and newspaper representation, and she, as a moral instigator, intends to arouse public opinion by uncovering and attacking these tendencies.

Ceija Stojka, the fourth author I have chosen, approaches the past and the present through her own experience. As indicated above, Stojka wrote two autobiographical volumes: in *Wir leben im Verborgenen* (We Live in the Dark) she comes to terms with her life

in the 1930s in Austria and during the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, and her second volume, *Reisende auf dieser Welt* (Travelers in This World), begins immediately after the war and continues up to the late 1980s. In this sequel Stojka depicts how she forged her life in postwar Austria, her work as a commercial traveler, and her family. Her two autobiographical volumes, each of which includes a conversation with her editor, Karin Berger, and is written in a reflective and metaphoric style, are the first of their kind in Austria.¹²

Much of what Stojka does is a direct result of her encounter with fascism. She has turned to writing, painting, and singing to help herself cope with the haunting memories of the concentration camps. According to a conversation I had with her in August of 1997, neither her family nor her partner at first approved of her literary endeavors. Her children were astonished by her efforts since writing did not fit into her role as a woman and caretaker, and her brother, Karl, also a camp survivor, told her to dispose of her manuscript (*Wir leben im Verborgenen* 98). However, her desire to pen her memories was too strong to be ignored—it was as if she had to fight for her sanity. She writes, “Finally, I did not let myself be deterred anymore. Even when they said I should go into the kitchen I did not obey anymore. Too much was coming my way; I had experienced too much and had to struggle for too long. So that Auschwitz doesn’t [sic] matter” (*Wir leben im Verborgenen* 98).

When working on her autobiography and capturing her past in writing, Stojka often had to lay down her pen because she saw the SS-men advancing upon her—the memories were too palpable. Reading autobiographical texts by Romanies, we are tempted to conclude that the survivors are the ultimate victims and that memories of the Holocaust and encounters with racism completely overshadow their lives and shape their identities as victims. However, a tale of victimization is not all that emerges from these autobiographical texts. Stojka’s writings, for example, are those of a survivor who has managed to function in a society that has turned against her people. We learn about survival strategies in the camps, about the solidarity among the women and how they procured food for their children, about how Stojka’s mother advised her daughter to “disappear” (*Wir leben im Verborgenen* 18). Back in Vienna after the war, Stojka developed strategies to get by in a hostile environ-

ment. She credits her faith in God and her mother's support for her strength.

The life-affirming, positive attitude exhibited in Stojka's autobiographical works is in stark contrast to Jelinek's, Hackl's, and Laher's approach. They express the same helplessness when faced with such tremendous crimes against humanity, whether it be Jelinek's obsessive moralizing, Hackl's "helpless rage" (*Farewell Sidonia* 103), or Laher's retreat into irony. Although Stojka also speaks for those who perished during fascism, she focuses on survival and, especially in her second volume, on her desire to reach out to other Austrians. Her aim is to educate the public about the history of her people and to integrate their experience into Austrian history. As a Romani author she has overcome tremendous obstacles, and her look into the past serves as a bridge to the future. She recognizes the importance of her role as a moral witness. Regarding her own experience and the history of her people she says: "It should be known to the Austrian public. We, too, are historically connected to this country. . . . One should be able to trace back when and where Romanies lived. So much has happened, and the Romanies have suffered so much. . . . Who is to pass on our culture? I am ready; I will do it" (*Reisende auf dieser Welt* 172).¹³

In comparing the approach of the three non-Romani authors with Stojka's, we notice that Jelinek, Hackl, and Laher use the metaphor of a "world" behind or beneath some kind of cover. Jelinek speaks of the masks over faces and of a "bottomless pit" ("Ich bin im Grunde"), Hackl of a "veil of silence" (*Farewell Sidonia* 125), and Laher uses the metaphor of shaky ground that could give way at any moment (*Herzfleischartung* 185). Through their literary explorations these three authors create counter-memory/history. By writing against collective Austrian memory they honor those who have been silenced by murder or society's "forgetting." They write against village chronicles, press reports, textbooks, history books, war monuments, and so on. Stojka, on the other hand, is counter-memory. As a survivor, she writes from under cover and struggles through. The effects are similar whether from the outside or the inside, whether from below or above: repressed memory and history are retrieved and made visible.

What are we as readers to make of these texts? Are they capable of changing our thinking? Are they capable of engendering social change? The act of reading creates a space of reflection where reader and textual reality meet. Literature may disclose other worlds, may indicate alternatives and revise our process of thinking. Louise Rosenblatt rightly claims that “prolonged contact with literature may result in increased social sensitivity” (175). Fiction and autobiography provide us not only with information, but also with experiences that help us approach the *Other*. Participating in the life and, sadly, the death of the *Other* through our reading compels us to take a good look at that *Other*. As a result, we cannot remain indifferent or, even worse, hostile. Patrocino Schweickart suggests approaching a text as we would approach a person with whom we want to communicate, arguing that the act of reading is “a knowledge-project—not the usual epistemological model of a subject knowing an object, but that of a person knowing another person” (72). Therefore, reading literature forges a way to dialogue. Since literature is embedded in space and time, a text points us to social realities whether they are visible or invisible. When a text uncovers hidden realities, culture is written anew, here by means of counter-narratives that produce new knowledge by confronting ignorance and paving the way to reflection and dialogue.

Romani history must be made known and acknowledged. From individual to collective or group memory, both of which are limited in space and time because they are mostly oral, Romani experience must become a part of Austrian cultural memory, stretching over space and time. This cultural memory is increasingly stable as it is captured in writing, film, photographs, and so on; it increasingly guarantees the members of a particular society a sense of belonging and identity (A. Assmann, “1998” 50). Whether a text is written by Romanies or by *Gadje* is not relevant in this context. Within the framework of this essay, it is the intention to unveil repressed or even unknown history that is important, because these authors undermine the collective memory of the Austrian majority and force them to face either their own or their parents’ and grandparents’ history.

“Conscience is formed by memory . . . and no society can live in peace with itself on the basis of a false or repressed past anymore

than an individual can” (Sonneman 255). Many of the political and social issues in present-day Austria cannot be understood without knowledge of its past, particularly of its Nazi past. Remembering ought to entail knowledge of historical facts as well as the wisdom to understand the fragility of the human psyche. It is this wisdom that helps us comprehend, not excuse, human behavior. Simultaneously we gain a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to injustice and suffering, and hopefully the courage to resist all forms of oppression.

Notes

1 Romanies, traditionally though inaccurately called “Gypsies,” have lived in Europe for hundreds of years. They comprise different groups such as the Roma (mainly Central Europe), the Sinti (mainly Germany), the Manouch (France), the Romanichal (Great Britain), etc. While the term Roma is also used for the whole group, not all Romanies accept it. According to Ian Hancock, a Romani linguist and scholar, “all groups use the adjective *Romani* to describe themselves” (Hancock xix). The adjectival form *Romani* is also used as a noun (plural Romanies) to designate a person or the whole people. The term *Romani/Romanies* has gained increasing currency as a cover term in the past years—e.g., in 2000 the United States Congress agreed to follow this practice and the Library of Congress changed its subject heading from “Gypsies” to “Romanies” (cf. Hancock xx).

The author Ceija Stojka is a Romni, a female *Romani*.

Non-Romanies are called *Gadje*.

2 Other Austrian minorities (Croats, Slovenes, etc.) obtained this status in 1976. Although they had lived in Austria for several centuries, the Roma were not considered native Austrians.

3 After Ceija Stojka, her brother Karl published his autobiography. See also Mišo Nikolić and Mongo Stojka.

4 At first glance memory and history may appear as two opposed concepts: memory being personal, emotional, and subjective, and history institutional, intellectual, and objective. It is true that remembering (e.g., a family

gathering or a job interview) does not necessarily constitute history, and writing about the Thirty Years War is not memory; however, when the past is within our reach, when people can still remember, the conceptual distinctions become less meaningful and blurred. The texts discussed here do not tell “uncritical tales” (Davis/Starn 2): all four authors are conscious of the fact that their literary memory is of interest to a sizeable group of readers and bears the responsibility of representing historical facts.

5 Assmann differentiates between three forms of memory: the communicative or individual memory, the collective or group memory, and the cultural memory, which is the most stable of all. The communicative and collective memories are restricted to individuals or social or political groups and to a limited time frame. In contrast, it is the cultural memory that extends over space and time, because it includes the written word and a host of other cultural manifestations such as photographs, films, architecture, monuments (“1998 - Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis”; see also Jan Assmann).

6 For Huyssen the difference between memory and history lies in the “fading” of memory (“Introduction” 2). Memory is temporal (*zeitgebunden*); history is inscribed.

7 The term anti-Gypsism was first coined in the 1980s and expresses rejection of the Romanies solely on the basis of stereotype and prejudice (see Wippermann).

8 Jörg Haider was then leader of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party, which received up to 30% of the vote during the 1996 and 2000 national elections.

9 Hackl also wrote the screenplay for Karin Brandauer’s TV-film *Sidonie*, from 1991.

10 Rudolf Haas was a baby in the Gypsy camp who died shortly after his birth and stands for all the babies and children there.

11 St. Pantaleon is the town where the camp was located. Weyer belongs to the jurisdiction of St. Pantaleon.
<http://www.mrii.at/press/eng/stp/4/vol31/iss1/12>
DOI: 10.4148/2334-4415.1652

12 One of the first attempts to come to terms with prejudice against the Romanies and their history comes from the *Gadje* author Marie Thérèse Kerschbaumer. In *Woman's Face of Resistance* (1980; *Der weibliche Name des Widerstands*, a radio play and television film [both 1981] followed) Kerschbaumer critically examines society's prejudices against the Romanies as well as her own. For a thorough critical evaluation of these texts see Kecht.

13 Given the oral and confined culture of the Romanies, Stojka's decision to speak also in public to *Gadje* is of great significance.

14 Sonneman is quoting the "Declaration of Repentance" read by Catholic Bishop Olivier de Berranger of St. Denis at a ceremony in October 1997 and signed by a group of bishops of dioceses that had internment camps for Jews. The authors of the declaration apologize for the behavior and actions of the Catholic Church during the time of German Occupation (1940-1945). The whole text can be read on the following website: <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/documents/catholic/french_repentance.htm>.

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