

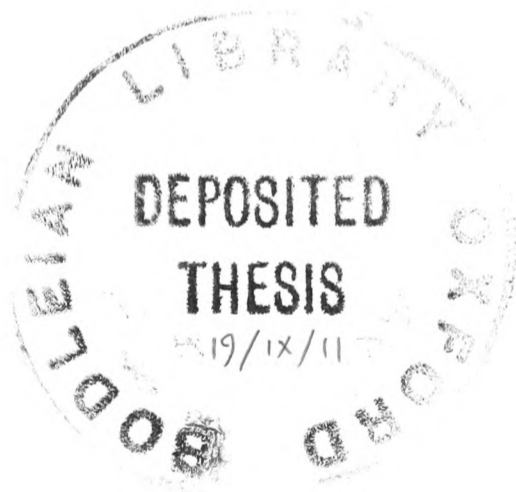
**Women's Writing in Exile:  
Three Austrian Case Studies  
Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, Lili Körber**

**Elizabeth Macleod Davidson**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages and Literature  
University of Oxford**

**Trinity Term 2010**



# **ABSTRACT**

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Despite the recent increase in scholarship on the subject of the female experience in exile, there is still much to be done. Exile scholars now have at their disposal an abundance of broad, general overviews of the circumstances and fates of displaced women writers, but a dearth of scholarship that considers specific literary works in an individualised fashion still exists. This is especially true of those female writers who have only recently been 'rediscovered', such as the three under discussion in this thesis.

This thesis explores in detail the exile writings of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber, about which little scholarship exists, and uses them as case studies to illuminate the situation of exiled women writers in general. The exile works of these three authors repay study both for their own literary merits and for what they can tell us about the individual experience of exile. In their broad similarities, these writers also provide us with case studies of the larger experience of authorial exile – particularly, but by no means exclusively, the gendered experience – that allow us to derive more general lessons about the influence of forced flight on literary art. By giving due consideration to work produced in exile, this thesis calls into question some of the generalisations commonly found in recent scholarship and demonstrates that, despite hardships and setbacks and contrary to common scholarly contention, all three women continued to write well into their exile years and that in those years they took their writing in new, skilful, and creative directions.

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This thesis explores in detail the exile writings of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber, about which little scholarship exists, and uses them as case studies to illuminate the situation of exiled women writers in general. By doing so, this thesis calls into question some of the generalisations commonly found in recent scholarship about the female authorial exile experience. This thesis demonstrates that, despite hardships and setbacks and contrary to common scholarly contention, all three women continued to write well into their exile years and that in those years they took their writing into new and creative directions.

An examination of the exile works of these three women writers and of the scant scholarship and biographical material available about them suggests certain underlying similarities despite their obvious differences. They were all, for instance, Viennese by birth or by choice, of Jewish descent, and politically minded. Their early writings were all critiques of the society in which they lived and moved and felt at home; none had been shy about expressing strong views in print. They all also employed lapidary, straightforward, narrative styles. In exile, despite their differing geographical and personal circumstances, and although they all experimented in different ways, their writing displays certain similarities. Their creative voices all, for example, moved away from the leftist political commitment that had animated and

shaped their younger lives, displaying at times a perceptibly sceptical and sometimes even jaundiced view of the political beliefs and commitments they had once fervently espoused, and toward religious and spiritual exploration in their later years. In exile, too, they each continued to produce work that reflected their maturity, their experience over many difficult years, and their evolution and growth as philosophical as well as political artists.

Scholars have traditionally paid relatively little heed to the particular experiences of those women writers who went into exile in the 1930s and 1940s. As Dagmar C. G. Lorenz explains, ‘The seemingly objective and gender-neutral perspective of earlier exile scholarship tended to exclude a differentiated examination of the exile experience from a gender-specific perspective – the male experience was implicitly treated as the norm, as too were the literary styles and messages of male authors’.<sup>1</sup> Certainly there are exceptions, which include ‘a few highly acclaimed women authors such as Anna Seghers, Else Lasker-Schüler and Nelly Sachs’, but ‘even they have received less critical attention than their male colleagues’ (‘Jewish Women Authors’, p. 225).

Since the mid-1980s, however, interest in female émigré writers has been increasing, albeit slowly. Nevertheless, although the number of studies devoted to women in exile has increased, this new-found attention has so far mainly resulted in introductions to and surveys of women writers in exile in which an author’s entire literary *oeuvre* is summed up in a few pages,<sup>2</sup> studies focusing on particular trends in certain exile writing,<sup>3</sup> and studies seeking to portray the complete lives of authors in

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<sup>1</sup> Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, ‘Jewish Women Authors and the Exile Experience: Claire Goll, Veza Canetti,

<sup>2</sup> Patrizia Guida-Laforgia, *Invisible Women Writers in Exile in the U.S.A.* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Hammel, *Everyday Life as Alternative Space in Exile Writing: The novels of Anna Gmeyner, Selma Kahn, Hilde Spiel, Martina Wied and Hermynia Zur Mühlen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

which the exile period sometimes plays only a subsidiary role.<sup>4</sup> As a result, they often contain sweeping generalisations that do not stand up to closer scrutiny when applied to particular authors such as the three under discussion here. One such generalisation is that these trials reduced women writers to silence in exile. Another is that their difficulties tended to lower the quality of the literary work that women in exile did manage to produce. Lorenz, for instance, argues that, 'In peacetime they had had enough energy left to sustain their own writing as well. However, exile presented them with additional hardships which, as seems to have been the case with Veza Canetti, resulted in the silencing of their creative voice or in causing the quality or direction of their writing to suffer significantly' (ibid.). Similarly, Peter Laemmle argues, 'Müßte die Exilforschung nicht auch einmal sagen, daß das Exil bzw. das Erlebnis des Exils Texte qualitativ verändert hat und zwar in einem negativen Sinn?'<sup>5</sup> and Sonja Hilzinger writes, 'All too often the silence imposed by exile turned into permanent neglect'.<sup>6</sup> It is contentions such as these that I question in this thesis.

Despite the recent increase in scholarship on the subject of the female experience in exile, there is still much to be done. Although exile scholars now have at their disposal an abundance of broad, general overviews of the circumstances and fates of displaced women writers, a dearth of scholarship that considers specific literary works in an individualised fashion still exists. This is especially true of those female writers who have only recently been 'rediscovered', such as the three under discussion in this thesis. Correcting this lacuna is important, for, as Elaine Showalter explains:

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<sup>4</sup> Andrea Capovilla, *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität in der Moderne: Milena Jesenská, Vicki Baum, Gina Kaus, Alice Rühle-Gerstel: Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Laemmle, 'Vorschläge für eine Revision der Exilforschung', *Akzente*, 20 (1973), 509-19 (p. 518).

<sup>6</sup> Sonja Hilzinger, 'Writing in exile', in *A History of Women's Writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, ed. by Jo Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 157-166 (p. 163).

Scholarship generated by the contemporary feminist movement has increased our sensitivity to the problems of sexual bias or projection in literary history, and has also begun to provide us with the information we need to understand the evolution of a female literary tradition. One of the most significant contributions has been the unearthing and reinterpretation of 'lost' works by women writers, and the documentation of their lives and careers.<sup>7</sup>

It is precisely the purpose of this thesis to unearth and reinterpret the 'lost' works of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber and thereby to contribute to 'understanding the evolution of a female literary tradition'. By examining the works, and by documenting the lives and careers of these women, we can gain greater insights into the experiences common to female artists in exile and the challenges they faced in leading their lives as women, as wives and mothers, and as writers.

Studies such as those done by Marion Kaplan have shown that even before they were forced into exile, the calamity facing Jews in Germany affected men and women in gender-specific ways. These studies suggest that women seemed quicker to recognise the Nazi threat than men and that they were the ones to encourage emigration. As Kaplan explains, 'In dangerous situations, men tend to "stand their ground," whereas women avoid conflict, preferring flight as a strategy'.<sup>8</sup> Their prescience may have saved their husbands' lives, but in exile it otherwise seems to have done most of these women little good. Marion Berghahn writes that in order to support their families, women also demonstrated a greater readiness to swallow their pride and accept whatever opportunity offered itself, regardless of how menial it was or how overqualified they were. Such sacrifices by women most likely ensured the

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1977), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Marion Kaplan, 'Prologue: Jewish Women in Nazi Germany Before Emigration', in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. by Sibylle Quack (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995), pp. 11-48 (p. 34).

family's survival. In many cases, however, they also meant that women, in particular professional women, had to put their careers aside.

In exile all three women under discussion here placed the survival of their marriages and families ahead of their careers as writers. But all three continued to write and as a result went to their graves leaving behind pages of unpublished prose. In exile Körber and Gmeyner found public outlets for their work; Canetti did not – at least not until well after her death. Körber, like other women writers such as Vicki Baum, Hilda Marx, and Hilda Spiel, turned to journalism, and Gmeyner, like Hermynia Zur Mühlen and Vicki Baum, turned to writing in English. Even so, departure into exile meant essentially the same thing for all three. Through no fault of their own, they grew obscure in their new environments, even as they turned away from the political and toward the philosophical and domestic as the focus of their writing.

'Women's writing', Elaine Showalter argues, 'is not determined by biology, anatomy, or psychology. It comes from women's relation to the literary market place, from pressures to live public and private lives, from literary influence'.<sup>9</sup> As Showalter implicitly posits, a focus purely on gendered authorial experience in exile runs the risk of ignoring or slighting the literary output of women who were first and foremost writers and artists. Such a focus thus also runs the risk of overlooking the significant contributions these three authors made to the twentieth-century literary canon. This is why in this thesis I have not sought to compare the female exile experience to the male or to place it within a particular racial, psychological, or even theoretical context. Instead I have sought to examine the lives and works of three women in exile, each Viennese by inclination and culture and Jewish by background,

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<sup>9</sup> Karen J. Winkler, 'The Literary Tradition of Women: Q&A with Elaine Showalter', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 55, Issue 31, 10 April 2009, B12.

each at once similar and dissimilar in their biographies and their *oeuvres*, more broadly and holistically. I have premised my approach primarily on the view that their later works are worthy of more study than they have so far received and that such an examination also has things to tell us about the relation of women in exile to the marketplace; about the particular pressures on women in exile to place their private ahead of their public lives, and about the literary and other influences on their work. These three women were, after all, accomplished, secure, and successful writers in their homeland for good reasons. That, through no fault of their own, they grew obscure in exile should not be allowed to detract from the value of their work.

It is thus particularly unfortunate that their later exile work, unlike their pre-exile or early exile work, has been subject to hardly any critical scrutiny. These works merit more attention than they have so far received, for in exile these three women continued to create art and through this art to teach us about the female experience in exile. They did not, as many scholars have argued, grow silent or lose their voices in exile or never again attempt to write once in exile. While the quality of their exile work may have been uneven, a criticism that can be levelled at virtually every prolific author's record, the stereotype that it declined overall in exile is simply not true. I show that each of these women not only went on writing in exile to a greater extent than has been realised, they also showed a capacity for self-renewal and change. Their exile writing reflects this capacity in the new styles they adopted, in the new subjects they explored, and in the new techniques they employed.

My thesis explores and analyses their exile work in order to illustrate this and also to defend their work against the charge of deficient literary quality. Because a number of studies have already been done on the early works of these three writers, this thesis does not go over the same ground in detail. Because of the limits placed on

the length of a doctoral thesis, its focus necessarily falls instead mainly on the fictional prose of each from their time in exile onwards, which has thus far largely been overlooked. I do, however, examine one dramatic work in detail, Veza Canetti's farce *Der Palankin*, because it represents both a crucial development in Canetti's response to English life and also her adoption of a specifically English genre, the Whitehall farce, in order to make fun of English life. I also examine some works – in particular, Lili Körber's unpublished manuscripts – that few, if any scholars, appear to have studied in depth to date.

In this thesis, I use each author's biographical details as a means to place her writing within a specific socio-historical context. I concentrate in particular on the relatively lightly examined works of each in later exile because this permits a more complete contextualisation of their *Gesamtwerke*, affords a fuller understanding of the long arc of their thematic, political, and artistic development, and uncovers works that hitherto had remained largely unexamined and in the shadows. By focusing on the continuities and changes in the political, social, and spiritual-religious contexts of their work over the entire span, one can then see what was altered in the light of the abrupt and wrenching transformations that each experienced in exile.

Such an examination reveals that, despite the setbacks each suffered in exile, all three of these authors continued to write well into their exile years and all three strove to reconstruct themselves in exile as human beings and writers in ways that took them in new creative directions.

In the Introduction I give an overview of what led to the need for flight into exile, common experiences in exile, the difficulties of getting published in exile, the fates of other authors like the ones under discussion, and show that the exile works of the three authors under discussion repay study both for their own literary merits and

for what they can tell us about gendered experience in exile. Chapter One demonstrates this by comparing Veza Canetti's earliest stories and her novel *Die Gelbe Straße*, which were so influenced by her husband's work, to her transitional novel *Die Schildkröten* and then to her later exile works. Chapter Two follows a similar path for the exile works of Anna Gmeyner, discussing and contextualising her two German-language novels as well as her subsequent works written in Britain and in English. Chapter Three, while surveying Lili Körber's early novels, including those practically ignored by critics and scholars today, focuses principally and critically on what she wrote in exile, not least her unpublished English works, and on how the experience of exile changed her writing as well as her life. The Conclusion summarises what has been shown by this examination.

By giving due consideration to work produced in exile, this thesis demonstrates that exile did not, as is sometimes contended, end these particular women's callings as artists. Instead, it broadened and deepened their literary production and enhanced their artistic achievements. The same was surely true of many other female, German-speaking writers forced to flee before and during the Holocaust. The German literary world can only benefit from the rediscovery of these authors.

## Acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis was written with the help, encouragement, and understanding of many kind people here in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Unfortunately it is only possible to give some of them particular mention here. Nevertheless, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to all.

First and foremost, I am exceedingly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Ritchie Robertson, for his guidance, support, untiring attention to my work, and willingness to read countless drafts of my thesis until I got it right. He introduced me to Exile Studies and to the writings of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber, and so without him this thesis would never have been written.

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My gratitude also goes to Mrs Margery Oplatka for sharing her memories of the Canettis with me.

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My fiancé, Dr Andrew Sayer, deserves very special thanks for his steadfast support, understanding, patience, and unselfish love during the last three years.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Douglas and Ellen Davidson, for their belief in me, their endless encouragement, and invaluable support. Everything I have achieved is because of them.

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## Introduction

When Adolf Hitler acceded to power in Germany on 30 January 1933, he and his fellow National Socialists committed themselves to reshaping German culture. Literature, because it was so influential, represented for them potentially the most subversive of the arts, a conviction that led the Nazis on 10 May 1933 to organise university students to burn over 25,000 books they deemed 'un-German' in an attempt to erase them from memory. The works of authors such as Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Ernst Glaeser, Erich Kästner, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Schnitzler, Erich Maria Remarque, Franz Werfel, Max Brod, and Stefan Zweig went up in flames. This act ushered in an era of state censorship and government-controlled culture. On 1 November 1933 a Reich Chamber of Culture was established to supervise the arts. It admitted only Aryans, and only its members could work as writers, painters, and musicians.<sup>1</sup> After this more and more writers felt compelled to flee Germany, either to escape arrest or because it had become clear that they could no longer publish their work in Germany and so had lost their livelihood.

On 12 March 1938 Nazi troops entered Austria. The country, which at that time had a Jewish population of roughly 200,000, most living in Vienna, was incorporated into Germany the next day. The consequences for Jews in Austria were immediate and far-reaching. As Saul Friedländer explains:

As a result of the Anschluss, an additional 190,000 Jews had fallen into Nazi hands. The persecution in Austria, particularly in Vienna, outpaced that in the Reich. Public humiliation was more blatant and sadistic; expropriation better organized; forced emigration more rapid [...] The populace relished the public shows of degradation; countless

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert E. Conot, *Justice at Nuremberg* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 1983), p. 123, and Lynn Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 9.

crooks from all walks of life, either wearing party uniforms or merely displaying improvised swastika armbands applied threats and extortion on the grandest scale: money, jewelry, furniture, cars, apartments, and businesses were grabbed from their terrified Jewish owners.<sup>2</sup>

Jews were also deprived of their rights as citizens, and, in some cases, even their freedom. Many were arrested, often on spurious charges of political opposition to the regime, and sent to concentration camps. Men and women who thought they were completely acculturated into Austrian society and who could not imagine abandoning it suddenly found themselves forced to flee into uncertain exile abroad. A year and a half after the Anschluss, the Jewish population of Austria had dwindled to 57,000, mainly because of out-migration.

The end of World War II did not bring an end to this migration. Most refugees chose not to return to Germany and Austria after the war. For many this was not because they did not long to return, but because they could find little incentive to do so. Having struggled for years to survive in their adopted countries, they feared giving up home, employment, and the often limited financial security they had been able to achieve in order to return to two countries that were now occupied. Nor did they want to start all over again with an equally uncertain future, especially when there was no guarantee that the occupying forces would even allow them to return. With entire communities wiped out by the Holocaust, many had no place and no one to return to, and no desire to live among those who had been accomplices to the murders of their family and friends. As Carl Zuckmayer wrote in his autobiography:

Die Fahrt ins Exil ist "the journey of no return". Wer sie antritt und von der Heimkehr träumt, ist verloren. Er mag wiederkehren – aber der Ort, den er dann findet, ist nicht mehr der gleiche, den er verlassen hat, und er ist selbst nicht mehr der gleiche, der fortgegangen ist. Er

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<sup>2</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), pp. 95-96.

mag wiederkehren, zu Menschen, die er entbehren mußte, zu Stätten, die er liebte und nicht vergaß, in den Bereich der Sprache, die seine eigene ist. Aber er kehrt niemals heim. 'You can't go home again' – 'Es führt kein Weg zurück' – ist der Titel eines Buchs vom dem selbst-exilierten amerikanischen Dichter Thomas Wolfe. Du kannst nicht ins Land der Kindheit zurück, in dem du noch ganz zu Hause warst – auch nicht in ein Land, aus dem du ausgewandert bist; denn du möchtest es so finden, wie es in dir lebt, und so ist es nicht mehr.<sup>3</sup>

But many of those who stayed in their adopted countries also discovered that they had not really been accepted there either and were now expected to leave. This meant that the feelings they had struggled with throughout their exile, such as isolation and cultural alienation, remained long after the war ended.

Among those who had joined this wave of permanent emigration were the writers Lili Körber and Veza Canetti,<sup>4</sup> who both left Austria in 1938. Another Viennese author of Jewish ancestry, Anna Gmeyner, preceded them abroad in 1933. This thesis will explore in detail the exile writings of these three women, about which little scholarship exists, and use them as case studies to illuminate the situation of exiled women writers in general. By doing so, this thesis will also call into question some of the generalisations commonly found in recent scholarship about the female authorial exile experience. This thesis will also demonstrate that, despite hardships and setbacks and contrary to common scholarly contention, all three women continued to write well into their exile years and that in those years they took their writing in new creative directions. Although they all experimented in different ways, their writing in exile nevertheless displays certain similarities, such as a move away

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Zuckmayer, *Als wär's ein Stück von mir. Horen der Freundschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1966), p. 461.

<sup>4</sup> Veza Canetti did not publish under her own name, and her husband was known as 'Canetti', so it is difficult to know how to refer to her. In her article 'Social Criticism in Veza Taubner-Calderon's Novel *Die Gelbe Straße*', Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, using her maiden name, refers to her as Veza Taubner-Calderon, while in his book *The Rediscovered Writings of Veza Canetti: Out of the Shadows of a Husband*, Julian Preece calls her Veza and her husband Canetti. In this thesis, for the sake of clarity, and in order to give due prominence to Veza Canetti, I shall reverse this usage and refer to Veza Taubner-Calderon Canetti as 'Canetti' and her husband as 'Elias'.

from the leftist political commitment that had animated and shaped their younger lives and toward religious and spiritual exploration in their later years. In exile, too, they each continued to produce work that reflected their maturity, their experience over the many difficult years, and their evolution and growth as philosophical as well as political artists.

Scholars have traditionally paid relatively little heed to the particular experiences of those women writers who went into exile in the 1930s and 1940s. As Dagmar C. G. Lorenz explains, 'The seemingly objective and gender-neutral perspective of earlier exile scholarship tended to exclude a differentiated examination of the exile experience from a gender-specific perspective – the male experience was implicitly treated as the norm, as too were the literary styles and messages of male authors'.<sup>5</sup> Certainly there are exceptions, which include 'a few highly acclaimed women authors such as Anna Seghers, Else Lasker-Schüler and Nelly Sachs', but 'even they have received less critical attention than their male colleagues' ('Jewish Women Authors', p. 225).

Since the mid-1980s, however, interest in female émigré writers has been increasing, albeit slowly. The German Gesellschaft für Exilforschung, for instance, has devoted two volumes of its international yearbook to the subject of women in exile (*Exilforschung*, 11 (1993) and 17 (1999)), and in 1991 it also created a working group called 'Frauen im Exil' whose annual meetings are dedicated to 'der Erforschung des Lebens und Wirkens von Emigrantinnen als einem in der allgemeinen Exilforschung lange vernachlässigten Aspekt'.<sup>6</sup> The Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies also dedicated one day of its Second International

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<sup>5</sup> Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Jewish Women Authors and the Exile Experience: Claire Goll, Veza Canetti, Else Lasker-Schüler, Nelly Sachs, Cordelia Edvardson', *German Life and Letters*, 51 (1998), 225-239 (p. 226).

<sup>6</sup> See 'AG "Frauen im Exil"' in <http://www.exilforschung.de/index.php?p=17> [accessed April 2010].

Symposium on German and Austrian Exiles in Great Britain, held in September 1996 in London and entitled 'Hitler's Gift to Britain', to the study of women exiles.

Nevertheless, although the number of such studies devoted to women in exile has increased, this new-found attention has so far mainly resulted in introductions to and surveys of women writers in exile in which an author's entire literary *oeuvre* is summed up in a few pages,<sup>7</sup> studies focusing on particular trends in certain exile writing,<sup>8</sup> and studies seeking to portray the complete lives of authors in which the exile period sometimes plays only a subsidiary role.<sup>9</sup> As a result, they often contain sweeping generalisations that do not stand up to closer scrutiny when applied to particular authors such as the three under discussion here. One such generalisation is that these trials reduced women writers to silence in exile. Another is that their difficulties tended to lower the quality of the literary work that women in exile did manage to produce. Lorenz, for instance, argues that women authors 'who, like Veza Canetti and Claire Goll, were married to intellectuals devoted themselves primarily to their husbands' careers and to the necessities of daily life' ('Jewish Women Authors', p. 231). She goes on to state, 'In peacetime they had had enough energy left to sustain their own writing as well. However, exile presented them with additional hardships which, as seems to have been the case with Veza Canetti, resulted in the silencing of their creative voice or in causing the quality or direction of their writing to suffer significantly. For emotional reassurance some of them turned to topics of personal significance [...]' (ibid.). Similarly Peter Laemmle argues, 'Müßte die Exilforschung nicht auch einmal sagen, daß das Exil bzw. das Erlebnis des Exils

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<sup>7</sup> Patrizia Guida-Laforgia, *Invisible Women Writers in Exile in the U.S.A.* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Hammel, *Everyday Life as Alternative Space in Exile Writing: The novels of Anna Gmeyner, Selma Kahn, Hilde Spiel, Martina Wied and Hermynia Zur Mühlen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Capovilla, *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität in der Moderne: Milena Jesenská, Vicki Baum, Gina Kaus, Alice Rühle-Gerstel: Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2004).

Texte qualitativ verändert hat und zwar in einem negativen Sinn?’<sup>10</sup> and Sonja Hilzinger writes, ‘All too often the silence imposed by exile turned into permanent neglect’.<sup>11</sup> It is contentions such as these that I shall question in this thesis.

In exile female writers encountered the same existential difficulties as did male writers. In the 1930s and 1940s the cultural climate was unwelcoming for German-language writers outside their native lands,<sup>12</sup> especially those with strong political bents to their work, and often, as noted above, inside it as well. As Nazism spread across Central Europe, it eliminated the market for German books beyond the Third Reich. In Great Britain and the United States of America there was essentially no reading public for works in German; German and Austrian writers were thus, to a greater extent than in exile in Paris, Prague, or Amsterdam, dependent on access to the English-language market through translation. Richard Dove writes: ‘One of the notable features of British publishing in the inter-war years is the lack of any European dimension. The most obvious measure of this cultural insularity was the reluctance to publish books in translation’ (Dove, p. 38). In other words, as J. M. Ritchie notes, although the existence of so many exiles, including publishers, in Britain did add a ‘certain receptivity and sensitivity’ to such literature, nevertheless, ‘publishers in exile in Britain [...] rightly recognised that there was little or no market for literary works published in German, indeed that there was no great market for books about German literature’.<sup>13</sup>

In the United States it was very much the same. Robert E. Cazden describes matters this way:

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Laemmle, ‘Vorschläge für eine Revision der Exilforschung’, *Akzente*, 20 (1973), 509-19 (p. 518).

<sup>11</sup> Sonja Hilzinger, ‘Writing in exile’, in *A History of Women’s Writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, ed. by Jo Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 157-166 (p. 163).

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Dove, *Journey of No Return: Five German-speaking Literary Exiles in Britain 1933-1945* (London: Libris, 2000), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> J. M. Ritchie, *German Exiles: British Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 49.

Some managed to weather the stormy years without abandoning the practice of their craft, and a few successfully broke into the world of American journalism. The rewards of working for the German-language press (usually on a part-time basis) were not sufficiently large to insure financial independence; while the majority of émigré writers may have preferred some sort of intellectual work – teaching, bookselling, and publishing were especially attractive – a great many were forced into manual labor and even domestic work.<sup>14</sup>

While writers did find outlets in émigré journals, very few, mostly those who had long ago broken into the English markets with successful translations, were able to continue the kinds of literary careers they had enjoyed in central Europe. In the aftermath of the war, as the situation in Germany improved, the publishing of German-language books in Britain decreased even further. In the United States it virtually ceased.<sup>15</sup>

Exiles, writers and non-writers alike, live what Dove describes as a ‘shadow existence’ (Dove, p. 5). Such an existence, Dove argues, brings with it ‘a sense of dispossession’, because exile is an almost complete dislocation from normal life patterns: ‘the physical separation from friends and even family, the abrupt loss of job and income, the disruption of daily routines, the disappearance of familiar landmarks, the sudden absence of the social and cultural certainties which previously buttressed existence’ (ibid.). If exile, as Dove maintains, is indeed an experience of dispossession, then the three writers under discussion here all surely suffered from just such an experience, from a feeling that their lives in exile amounted to a kind of shadow existence. It may, in fact, have been this sense of life in the shadows that compelled them to turn inward in their exile work.

For those who had escaped Nazi persecution, exile brought, in the words of Patrizia Guida-Laforgia, ‘the feeling of isolation’, ‘the intricacies of an unknown

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<sup>14</sup> Robert E. Cazden, *German Exile Literature in America 1933-1950: A History of the Free German Press and Book Trade* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), p. 143.

<sup>15</sup> See Cazden, p. 164.

language', and also 'the sense of guilt (for some) of being a survivor' (Guida-Laforgia, p. 3). For the writers among this group, one of the most difficult adjustments in exile was, as Guida-Laforgia also notes, 'the reconstruction of oneself as a human being and a writer' (ibid.). Exile in Great Britain or the United States meant the loss of one's native language, the loss of a reading public with whom one shared a cultural heritage, and the loss of publishing venues.

Exile writers who had been successful in their home countries were often unable to adjust to this loss. In many cases they could not make the transition to writing in English, and, even if they managed to find translators, they were still often forced to change what they wrote about and even how they wrote. As a result, many previously prominent novelists, poets, and critics now found themselves unknown in an alien land, often sinking into poverty, relying on aid from charities or friends, and humiliatingly forced to take on menial work in order to survive and provide for their families.

The fate of Henry William Katz, a male journalist-turned-novelist,<sup>16</sup> is emblematic of the experiences of many German-speaking writers in exile in the middle part of the previous century. After emigrating to the United States in 1941, he gave up his literary career, which had been highly successful in the German language world, in order to support his family, for he realised shortly after arriving that he could not make a living by writing for the American market. Not only was his English almost non-existent, but the topics he customarily wrote about were also of little interest to an American audience. Although he did not entirely give up writing,

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<sup>16</sup> H. W. Katz, *Die Fischmanns* (first published 1938; repr. Munich: List, 2000) and H. W. Katz, *Schloßgasse 21* (Berlin: Beltz Quadriga, 1994), which was first published in English translation in 1940 by Viking Press in New York.

his later works never found a publisher. He went to work in a factory and eventually became the vice-president of Claridge & Co.<sup>17</sup>

Katz was hardly unique. The list of once-prominent male writers who faded into obscurity in exile is extensive. In England, for instance, the distinguished theatre critic, essayist, and broadcaster Alfred Kerr failed to find the success he had once enjoyed in Germany. The same was true for the writer Karl Otten who, like Katz and Kerr, was too rooted in German language and culture to be able to transcend the cultural barriers that the English-speaking literary world had unconsciously erected for them.<sup>18</sup> Richard Dove terms Otten's case 'a classical example of the dislocation of exile' (Dove, p. 112).

But obscurity was not the only, or perhaps even the most serious, problem that exile writers confronted. Penury plagued many too. 'Most famous writers were impoverished by exile', Jean-Michel Palmier observes, 'and those less famous were completely ruined'.<sup>19</sup> It took Max Hermann-Neisse three years, he points out, to find a publisher for his collection of poetry, *Um uns die Fremde* (1936), which had a print run of only five hundred copies. While in exile in Buenos Aires Paul Zech, a major Expressionist poet, published only one book of poetry, which sold eleven copies, but he left fifty volumes of manuscript behind.

Of course, some writers did succeed in continuing their successful literary careers in exile. These, however, tended to be authors such as Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Erich Maria Remarque, and Franz Werfel who had achieved international fame and literary acclaim before the Nazis came to power. Franz Werfel, for instance, as Hans Wagener notes, 'managed to translate his previous

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<sup>17</sup> See Ena Pedersen, *Writer on the Run: German Jewish Identity and the Experience of Exile in the Life and Work of Henry William Katz* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> See Dove, p. 229.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, trans. by David Fembach (London: Verso, 2006), p. 239.

success, both in literary and financial terms, into a similar degree of success in the United States'.<sup>20</sup> His works in English all had excellent sales, and his novel *The Song of Bernadette* (1941) was not only a worldwide bestseller, but was also made into a film that premiered in 1943. His play *Jacobowsky und der Oberst: Kömodie einer Tragödie in drei Akten* (1944)<sup>21</sup> was translated, adapted, and performed successfully on Broadway.

As with male writers, though more rarely, some women writers were fortunate enough to escape from this trap. Some, like the poet, playwright, and essayist Else Lasker-Schüler, survived thanks to generous patrons abroad. Success also came to those women who had made a name for themselves abroad long before the need for exile arose and to those who were able to write in English or at least to find good translators. The novelist Vicki Baum, for example, recognising the Nazi threat early on, emigrated to the United States in 1933. Her novel *Grand Hotel*, which was not only a best-seller but was also turned into a film, had already been a success there. She translated that success into a contract with MGM for thirteen screenplays and for articles in newspapers for \$1,750 a week. Appreciating the need to write in English without the help of an outside translator, Baum did so successfully with her novels of the 1940s and 1950s, which were published first in English and later in German.

Hermynia Zur Mühlen, a well-known translator, novelist, and short story writer in the 1920s, offers another example of a successful transition to publishing in exile. Her capacity for languages proved invaluable, for in Britain she was able both to write in English and to translate her own works into English. The publisher Frederick Muller brought out her own translations of three of her novels. Even so,

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Wagener, *Understanding Franz Werfel* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> See 'The many faces of Werfel's Jacobowsky', in *German Exiles*, pp. 161-80.

she found publishers unwilling to print her overtly political novels, which forced her to compromise the political content of her writing in order to remain publishable.<sup>22</sup>

Baum's newspaper articles also point to another way in which women found varying degrees of success in exile: journalism. While creative writing could be difficult to pursue in exile, especially since exile writers found themselves handicapped by a lack of experience in and knowledge of their new cultural milieu upon which they could draw for their work, journalism often proved more forgiving. Such writers-turned-reporters discovered that if they could simply solve the problem of language, they might more easily achieve fame and even fortune in their new surroundings.

Like Baum and Zur Mühlen, the writer Hilde Spiel successfully made the transition into writing in English in exile in Britain. Although she was unsuccessful during those years in getting her English-language novels published, she did very well as a journalist for the *New Statesman*. Even after the war ended and she had returned to Austria where she continued her journalistic career, Spiel remained closely connected to British journalism and wrote for the *Guardian* between 1963 and 1979.

In similar fashion the sometime poet Hilde Marx began her life in exile in the United States with menial jobs, including a long stint as a masseuse, but ended the war and her life in United States as a freelance journalist and *Vortragskünstlerin* who travelled across the country performing a 'one-woman show' in an effort to educate Americans about the other Germany – the Germany of Goethe and Heine, not of Hitler and the National Socialists.<sup>23</sup> Women writers in exile also turned to seemingly minor genres, such as the short story or the serial novel, which were relatively easy to publish. The turn to such genres should not be disparaged. As Günter Berghaus notes:

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<sup>22</sup> See Ailsa Wallace, *Hermynia Zur Mühlen: The Guises of Socialist Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 248.

<sup>23</sup> See 'Hilde Marx: A Life of Testimony', in Guida-Laforgia, pp. 97-113.

New genres had sprung up in the 1920s (e.g. reportage, *Lehrstück*, photomontage, collage, etc.) because they were more flexible and versatile, and therefore more suitable to express contemporary artistic concerns. The small, 'operative' forms preferred by the exile artists must be seen in a similar light. Works of art should not be judged by 'absolute' aesthetic standards. Using criteria derived from other historical periods and applying them to creations which differ from those of previous centuries in aim and function will, by necessity, lead to distorted judgements. Any artistic product has to be assessed within the parameters or historical conditions which determine its creation, otherwise its specific qualities will easily be overlooked and misinterpreted. Since the circumstances under which the exiled artists were creating their works differed so fundamentally from those in pre-1933 Germany, these conditions have to be examined first before one can arrive at a critical, objective assessment of the artists' achievement in the various countries of exile.<sup>24</sup>

There were also some women who found initial success in exile writing in German but did not manage to maintain it. Irmgard Keun, for example, published *Nach Mitternacht* in 1937 in exile and followed it with *Kinder aller Länder* in 1938, but the Nazi takeover of the Netherlands, which put an abrupt end to the exile publishing houses Querido and Allert de Lange, and her decision to return to Germany in 1940 and live there under an assumed identity ended her chances for publication during this period. Once the war was over, she never managed to resume the promising career that had ended with her return. Although her final novel *Ferdinand, der Mann mit dem freundlichen Herzen* appeared in 1950, it made little or no impact, for she had by then been forgotten. After some preliminary success with journalistic and essayistic pieces, that part of her career soon faltered too, and she faded into obscurity.

Despite these examples of success, the list of male writers who faded into obscurity in exile is far longer than that of those who continued to thrive there. The list of female authors who suffered the same fate in exile, when compared to that of

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<sup>24</sup> Günter Berghaus, 'Producing Art in Exile: Perspectives on the German Refugees' Creative Activities in Great Britain', in *Theatre and Film in Exile: German Artists in Britain, 1933-1945*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 15-45 (p. 20).

their more successful female contemporaries, is even more extensive. In his book on the German exile experience in Britain, J. M. Ritchie provides a detailed list of women whose works have been overlooked.<sup>25</sup> In the thirteen years since his book's publication, that list has scarcely grown shorter. Renate Wall's *Lexikon Deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil 1933-1945*<sup>26</sup> offers further proof, if any were needed, of this phenomenon. As Wall puts it:

Neben so bekannten Namen wie Anna Seghers, Hilde Domain, Nelly Sachs oder Else Lasker-Schüler werden mehr als zweihundert Schriftstellerinnen vorgestellt, deren Werke verboten wurden, die in Konzentrationslagern ihr Leben ließen, ins Exil gingen, dort erst zu schreiben begannen oder verstummten, die zurückkehrten oder im Exilland blieben – ein Kapitel vergessener Literatur.

Vergessen die auflagenstarken Romane von Maria Leitner, Lili Körber, Rahel Sanzara, die avantgardistischen Dramen der Anna Gmeyner, die expressionistischen Gedichte der Henriette Hardenberg, die ironisch-heiteren Bestseller der Alice Berend, die politisch engagierten Schriften der Alice Rühle-Gerstel. (Wall, p. 7)

One cannot help but be struck, in perusing this book, both by how many women writers disappeared in exile and by how few are being studied today. Gender, in other words, also affected exile experience. As Irmela von der Lühe argues, this merits further research:

Dem Umstand, daß sich unter den Bedingungen des Exils die Differenz- und Alteritätserfahrungen von Frauen sowohl radikalieren als auch nivellieren, daß überkommene und vertraute Lebens- und Kommunikationsmuster zwischen den Geschlechtern fragil werden können, sollte die Exilforschung bei der Analyse literarischer und insbesondere autobiographischer Texte Rechnung tragen. Der fortwährenden kulturellen Marginalisierung steht im Exil häufig die mentale, soziale, und ökonomische Aufwertung und Funktionalisierung von Frauen gegenüber, und in welcher Weise solcher Brüche und Ungleichzeitigkeiten in literarische und

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<sup>25</sup> See 'Women in Exile in Great Britain', in *German Exiles*, pp. 181-200.

<sup>26</sup> Renate Wall, *Lexikon Deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil 1933-1945* (Giessen: Harland & Wirth, 2004).

autobiographische Texte einfließen, sie womöglich konstituieren, verdient eine genaue Untersuchung.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, studies such as those done by Marion Kaplan have shown that even before they were forced into exile, the calamity facing Jews in Germany affected men and women in gender-specific ways. These studies suggest that women seemed quicker to recognise the Nazi threat than men and that they were the ones to encourage emigration. As Kaplan explains, ‘In dangerous situations, men tend to “stand their ground,” whereas women avoid conflict, preferring flight as a strategy’.<sup>28</sup> Their prescience may have saved their husbands’ lives, but in exile it otherwise seems to have done most of these women little good.

With the advent of Nazi racial laws and the concomitant closure of Jewish businesses, Jewish women in Germany in the mid- and late-1930s were also the first to face decreasing employment opportunities. Traditionally women had been employed in small and often family-owned Jewish businesses; these were now closed down. Since men were treated preferentially in the constricted job market that resulted, women increasingly turned away from business or professional careers in favour of vocational work. According to Kaplan: ‘They [women] appeared “more versatile and adaptable”, and had “fewer inhibitions” than men, were amenable to changing their lives to fit the times, and were willing to enter retraining programs at older ages than were men’ (Kaplan, p. 31).

This adaptability would serve them and their families well in exile, but often at the price of their lives as writers. Marion Berghahn writes that in order to support their families, women demonstrated a greater readiness to swallow their pride and

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<sup>27</sup> Irmela von der Lühe, “Und der Mann war oft eine schwere, undankbare Last”. Frauen im Exil – Frauen in der Exilforschung’, *Exilforschung*, 14 (1996), 44-61 (p. 57).

<sup>28</sup> Marion Kaplan, ‘Prologue: Jewish Women in Nazi Germany Before Emigration’, in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. by Sibylle Quack (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995), pp. 11-48 (p. 34).

accept whatever opportunity offered itself, regardless of how menial it was or how overqualified they were; they

became the emotional bedrock of the family, who offered comfort to the other members of the family while their husbands lapsed into depression or even committed suicide. Women seized the initiative; they hurried from place to place, consulted refugee organizations about any, even unpaid, job possibilities for their husbands; they sifted the advertisement pages of newspapers. These efforts were not always fully appreciated.<sup>29</sup>

Such sacrifices by women most likely ensured the family's survival. In many cases, however, this also meant that women, in particular professional women, had to put their careers aside. The physician and poet Hertha Narthoff, for instance, worked as a cook, a maid, and a hospital nurse. Hilda Marx, the author, poet, and journalist, taught gymnastics. Elisabeth Freundlich, a writer, became a librarian. The poet Margarete Kollisch trained as a masseuse.<sup>30</sup> Married women, however accomplished, commonly found themselves having to accept the kinds of jobs that they could not have imagined in their native country in order to support their writer-husbands who were stubbornly attempting to continue, or at least to resume, the type of life they had had before. Bertolt Brecht's second wife, Helene Weigel, sacrificed her acting career for her husband during exile, just as Claire Goll sacrificed her writing career for her second husband, the poet Yvan Goll, and Julia Kerr her burgeoning career as a composer for Alfred Kerr.

Women writers in exile made such career sacrifices not just because they wanted to help provide for their families, but also because they felt their work was not as important as that of their spouses. As von der Lühe explains:

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<sup>29</sup> Marion Berghahn, 'Women Emigrés in England', in *Between Sorrow and Strength*, ed. by Quack, pp. 69-80 (pp. 76-77).

<sup>30</sup> See Guida-Laforgia, p. 10.

Gemeint ist die Tatsache, daß schriftstellerisch und künstlerisch tätige Frauen an der Tradierung ihrer Werke häufig weniger interessiert sind als an der Tradierung der Werke ihrer Männer, Väter, Lebenspartner, Brüder. Das gilt für Henriette Hardenberg, wie für Anna Gmeyner, für Erika Mann wie für Lili Körber, für Elisabeth Freundlich, Irmgard Keun und Veza Canetti. Die Beispiele ließen sich unschwer vermehren; sie alle indizieren ein für die Exilforschung erhebliches Problem, denn die offenbar tiefsitzende Skepsis von Frauen gegenüber der Dignität ihrer Werke, der möglichen traditionsbildenden Kraft ihrer Arbeit und der Überlieferungswürdigkeit ihrer Lebensgeschichte korrespondiert auf fatale Weise mit der anfangs analysierten Tendenz zu Heroisierung.<sup>31</sup>

The careers of the women writers discussed here fit these patterns. In exile all three women placed the survival of their marriages and families ahead of their careers as writers. But all three continued to write. As a result, all three went to their graves leaving behind pages of unpublished prose, and, in both Körber's and Gmeyner's cases, poetry as well. In exile Körber and Gmeyner found public outlets for their work; Canetti did not – at least not until well after her death. Körber, like Vicki Baum, Hilde Marx and Hilde Spiel, turned to journalism and Gmeyner, like Hermynia Zur Mühlen and Vicki Baum, turned to writing in English. Even so, departure into exile meant essentially the same thing for all three. Through no fault of their own, they grew obscure in their new environments, even as they turned away from the political and toward the philosophical and domestic as the focus of their writing.

Nevertheless, the work that these writers produced in exile is enough to show that they did not entirely fall silent. The following chapters will explore and analyse this exile work in order to illustrate this contention and also to defend it against the charge of deficient literary quality. First, though, I shall here briefly introduce these writers' exile writings and the scholarship that exists on them.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Und der Mann war oft eine schwere, undankbare Last', p. 58.

Canetti began her career as a writer in Vienna where between 1932 and 1937 she published short stories in a variety of newspapers. Her first novel, *Die Gelbe Straße*, was supposed to appear in print, and her first two plays, *Der Oger* and *Der Tiger*, were supposed to be staged in 1934. Thanks to the Austrian Civil War of February 1934 and the subsequent creation of a repressive, one-party state, none did so. *Die Gelbe Straße* appeared in print only in 1989, *Der Oger* a year later. It was first performed on stage in 1992. In that same year a collection of Canetti's previously published short stories entitled *Geduld bringt Rosen* also came onto the market again, while her second novel, *Die Schildkröten*, written in 1939, achieved publication only in 1999. A number of other published and unpublished short stories as well as two dramas, *Der Tiger* and *Der Palankin*, also had to wait until *Der Fund* came out in 2001 to find a readership.

In 2007 Hanser brought out *Briefe an Georges*, a book of personal letters exchanged among Canetti, her husband Elias, and his brother Georges. This book, together with Elias's memoirs, the memoirs of close friends such as Ernst Fischer, and Sven Hanschek's biography of Elias,<sup>32</sup> provide the remainder of the scant biographical material available today about Canetti, for she left neither journals nor memoirs of her own and in exile was circumspect in and about her writing.

With her works finally back in print, or indeed in print for the first time, interest in Canetti, her life, and her writing increased. In the nineties prominent critics such as Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, Jeremy Adler, Alexander Košenina, Eva Meidl, Elfrieda Czurda, and Anna Mitgutsch began to write about her in various journals. In 2002 Canetti became the subject of an issue of *Text + Kritik* edited by Helmut Göbel, as well as the subject in 2005 of a Droschl Dossier volume edited by Ingrid Spörk and

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<sup>32</sup> Sven Hanschek, *Elias Canetti* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2005).

Alexandra Strohmaier. The two most comprehensive works and the two that have the most bibliographical information about Canetti are by Angelika Schedel<sup>33</sup> and Julian Preece.<sup>34</sup> Schedel, who also provided an afterword for *Der Fund*, uses political and psychoanalytic theory to examine Canetti's writings. She does not, however, examine all of Canetti's *oeuvre*. Instead, she focuses on the short stories *Die Große* and *Der Dichter*, on the drama *Der Oger*, and on the novel *Die Gelbe Straße*.<sup>35</sup> Preece, by contrast, does examine all of Canetti's works, but he does not offer a detailed analysis of any of them, instead employing a thematic and synoptic approach to the whole. In 2008 Natalie Lorenz published a book examining both Canetti's early dramas and those of Marieluise Fleißer.<sup>36</sup> None of the aforementioned volumes, however, takes a close or critical look at the work Canetti produced once in exile.

Gmeyner began her career as a writer of dramas and screenplays. Though born in Vienna, she first found success in Berlin where her play *Heer ohne Helden* premiered in 1929. It was followed by *Zehn am Fließband* in 1932 and *Automatenbüfett* in 1933. She also worked on a number of films across Europe with well-known directors such as Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Although scholars such as J. M. Ritchie and Birte Werner have outlined Gmeyner's work in film, it is difficult to trace Gmeyner's exact contributions to many of these screenplays.<sup>37</sup> Heike Klapdor-Kops, for instance, sees strong similarities between Gmeyner's play *Heer ohne Helden* and Pabst's film *Kameradschaft* (1931) – 'Der konkrete Vergleich der Textfassungen läßt

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<sup>33</sup> Angelika Schedel, *Sozialismus und Psychoanalyse: Quellen von Veza Canettis literarischen Utopien* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Julian Preece, *The Rediscovered Writings of Veza Canetti: Out of the Shadows of a Husband* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> *Die Gelbe Straße* has also become the subject of graduate study such as Sarah Sabine Painitz, *An Austria Apart: Society and Subversion in the Work of Mela Hartwig, Marta Karlweis, and Veza Canetti* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, May 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Natalie Lorenz, *Texte im Dialog: Die frühen Theaterstücke von Marieluise Fleißer und Veza Canetti* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> See 'Anna Gmeyner and the Scottish Connection', in *German Exiles*, pp. 201-17 (p. 208), and Birte Werner, *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll: Die Zeitstücke und Exilromane Anna Gmeyners* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), p. 126.

Szenen, Konstellationen und vor allem den Dialog des Stücks als Elemente des Films erkennen'<sup>38</sup> – but in fact Gmeyner was uncredited for her work on that film.<sup>39</sup> Her work was also uncredited on the bilingual production *Don Quichotte* and *Don Quixote* (1932 and 1933),<sup>40</sup> and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1935). By contrast she was one of a number of credited script writers for *Pastor Hall* (1941) and *Thunder Rock* (1942). Gmeyner was the main scriptwriter, however, for only one film, the 1933 French film *Du haut en bas*,<sup>41</sup> which she adapted from a play by the Hungarian Ladislaus Bus-Fekete. Another film, *The Dawn Guard* (1941), was her idea, but it was only a five-minute propaganda piece for the Ministry of Information and was unscripted.

Even though interest in Gmeyner's film work appears to be growing – in March 2009, for instance, the Diagonale Festival of Austrian Film in Graz was devoted to her – this thesis will focus on Gmeyner's literary and not her cinematic or dramatic output, if only for reasons of space. In addition, film is commonly commissioned and collaborative and only rarely reflects an author's individual voice or personal choice of subject or theme in the way that narrative works of fiction do. Thus one cannot be certain to what extent Gmeyner was personally responsible for even the film for which she was the principal author. This makes it extremely difficult to assess the relevance of Gmeyner's film work to this essentially literary project.

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<sup>38</sup> Heike Klapdor-Kops, 'Die beiden Rivalen: Anna Gmeyners Schauspiel "Heer ohne Helden" und Pabsts Film' in *Kameradschaft/La tragédie de la mine: Drehbuch von Ladislaus Vadja, Karl Otten, Peter Martin Lampel nach einer Idee von Karl Otten zu G. W. Pabsts Film von 1931* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1997), 145-154 (p. 150).

<sup>39</sup> See Russell A. Berman, 'A Solidarity of Repression: *Kameradschaft* (1931)' in *The Films of G. W. Pabst: An Extraterritorial Cinema*, ed. by Eric Rentschler (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 116-124.

<sup>40</sup> In 'A House with Two Doors', Gmeyner writes that she was hired as the thirteenth writer for *Don Quixote*, p. 32. She also mentions *Kameradschaft* as one of Pabst's films, but does not discuss working on it.

<sup>41</sup> See Gertrud Koch, 'The Stairway to Exile: *High and Low* (1933)', in *The Films of G. W. Pabst*, ed. by Rentschler, pp. 147-154.

In 1933, when working in Paris and unable to return to Berlin, Gmeyner published her first novella, *Mary-Ann wartet*, in the Austrian journal *Moderne Welt. Almanach der Dame*. This was followed in 1938, when she was now in exile in England, by the publication of her first novel, *Manja*, and then, in 1941, by a second, *Café du Dôme*. Although both novels were written in German, only *Manja* was published in its original language. *Café du Dôme* appeared in English translation; the original German manuscript has been lost. While *Mary-Ann wartet* was republished a year later by the *Pariser Tageblatt*, Gmeyner's two novels were republished only after a long hiatus. *Manja* did not appear again in print until 1984 and *Café du Dôme* only in 2006.

Gmeyner herself, after a long interval, returned to writing in her later exile years, but now she wrote in English on historical and religious rather than political topics. In 1960 *The Death and Life of Julian*, a novel about Julian the Apostate, was published, followed a year later by *A Jar Laden with Water*, a collection of short stories about the search for enlightenment, and in 1964 by *No Screen for the Dying*, an autobiographical account of the death of Gmeyner's mother and the spiritual concerns raised by dealing with death. Her last published work, which first appeared in 1970 and was republished in 1987, was *The Sovereign Adventure: The Grail of Mankind*, a study of the legends and literary works devoted to the search for the Holy Grail. Today what remains of her literary estate can be found in the Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen in Berlin, which includes a fragmentary autobiographical document entitled 'A House with Two Doors'.

Interest in Gmeyner's work, as seen in articles and monographs and in four more comprehensive books by Anja C. Schmidt-Ott,<sup>42</sup> Birte Werner,<sup>43</sup> Andrea Hammel,<sup>44</sup> and Debbie Pinfold,<sup>45</sup> has focused mostly on her first novel, *Manja*.<sup>46</sup> Schmidt-Ott's book examines representations of love in *Manja*. Werner's study, the most wide-ranging work to deal with Gmeyner, examines both her early dramas and her first two exile novels, but says little about her subsequent exile works. Hammel's book employs feminist critical techniques to analyse *Manja* and *Café du Dôme*, and focuses particularly on the way in which Gmeyner uses gendered images of everyday life to create resistance. Pinfold examines *Manja* as part of a larger study of how German authors have used the child's perspective as a literary device, in particular one of defamiliarisation, to describe the Third Reich. While these first two exile works have seen some critical study, *Manja* more so than *Café du Dôme*, there is none about her later works in English.

Körper, like Canetti, began her career as a journalist in Vienna. Like Canetti, too, she was a prolific writer of shorter pieces. Between 1927 and 1940 she contributed frequently to newspapers and periodicals in Vienna, Prague, Zurich, and Paris. In 1932 she published her first novel, a fictionalised autobiography based on her experiences in the Soviet Union, called *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag: Ein*

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<sup>42</sup> Anja C. Schmidt-Ott, *Young Love - Negotiations of the Self and Society in Selected German Novels of the 1930s* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*.

<sup>44</sup> *Everyday Life as Alternative Space*.

<sup>45</sup> Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye among the Blind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> *Manja* has also been the subject of graduate studies such as Karin Wegner, *Orte des Weiblichen in den Roman österreichischer Exilautorinnen: Anna Gmeyner: Manja. Ein Roman um fünf Kinder. Lili Körper: Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz* (unpublished master's dissertation, Paris-Lodron University Salzburg, May 1989), Daniela Bender, *Antifaschistische Frauenromane. Lili Körper, Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz, Irmgard Keun, Nach Mitternacht, Anna Gmeyner, Manja* (unpublished master's dissertation, Stuttgart University, 1991), Veronica Weisskircher, *Österreichische Schriftstellerinnen im Exil: Anna Gmeyner, Lili Körper, Adrienne Thomas, Alice Rühle-Gerstel* (unpublished master's dissertation, Vienna University, November 1992) and Ilka Stäglin, *Das Deutschlandbild in Romanen ausgewählter Exilautorinnen (1934-1938) Lili Körper; Hermynia Zur Mühlen; Anna Gmeyner* (unpublished master's dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, Fachbereich Germanistik, summer 1995). However, these do not examine any other of Gmeyner's works.

*Tagebuch-Roman aus den Putilowwerken*. A fictional narrative describing life under National Socialism, *Eine Jüdin erlebt das Neue Deutschland*, followed in 1934. Her travels in the Far East gave rise to her travel journal *Begegnungen im Fernen Osten* and her satire on Japanese militarism *Sato-san, ein japanischer Held* in 1936. In exile she initially continued to get her work published in the German language. *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß*, in which she uses a fictional journal to recount contemporary events, appeared serially in 1938 in the Zurich *Volksrecht*. *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland*, a fictional account of life in Stalinist Russia, appeared between 1942 and 1943 in the New York *Neue Volkszeitung*.

From 1941 onwards, however, although articles by Körber occasionally cropped up in *Neue Volkszeitung* and, after the war ended, in the Viennese *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the bibliographical record is slim in comparison to her pre-war production. In exile Körber produced two English-language novels: *Farewell to Yesterday*, which is believed to have been written in 1949, and *Call me Nurse*, which is believed to have been written after Körber retired from nursing in 1959. Neither they nor a number of undated short stories, written in both English and German, found their way into print.

Also unpublished are three autobiographical documents that are useful for reconstructing Körber's biography. Körber prepared two of them at the request of Viktoria Hertling, who became interested in Körber in the context of her studies on literary reportage concerning the Soviet Union during the Weimar Republic. Hertling then came to know both Körber and her husband, Erich Gravé. Körber wrote one autobiographical document, 'Meine Biographie', in 1980 in the first person, and the other, 'Lili Körbers Biographie', a year later in the third person. An earlier, two-page autobiographical work, 'My Biography', dating from 1949, also formed part of Körber's literary estate given to Hertling after Gravé's death in 1996. In 1990

separate editions of Körber's novels, short prose, and poetry prepared by Hertling were announced for publication, but the project appears to have been abandoned. Hertling instead gave these materials to John Spalek, one of the founding fathers of Exile Studies, in 2006, and he in turn deposited Körber's literary estate in the exile archive in the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt am Main.

The 1980s saw a renewed interest in Körber and her works, with her novels beginning once again to appear in print. *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* was republished in 1984 under the title *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz*, and *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* was republished in 1988. That decade also witnessed the beginning of critical studies of those works. Gabriele Kreis interviewed Körber for her 1988 study of women in exile, though she wrote relatively little about Körber in that work.<sup>47</sup> Patrizia Guida-Laforgia, too, included Körber in a book about exile writing in 1995. Though the information therein is mostly biographical, it does take a cursory look at *Eine Jüdin*, *Eine Österreicherin*, and some of her published poetry.

The two most comprehensive studies of Körber are two books based on doctoral theses by Ute Lemke<sup>48</sup> and Yun Jung Seo.<sup>49</sup> Lemke's book is unparalleled for early biographical detail and for correcting inaccurate versions of Körber's biography which, Lemke claims, amount to a 'Legende', but it only follows Körber until 1938 and does not discuss her life or her writing in exile. Seo's book discusses only three of Körber's works, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag*, *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz*, and *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß*, comparing them to the writing of the Jewish anti-war novelist Adrienne Thomas. It says very little about

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<sup>47</sup> Gabriele Kreis, *Frauen im Exil: Dichtung und Wirklichkeit* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> Ute Lemke, *Lili Körber: Von Moskau nach Wien. Eine österreichische Autorin in den Wirren der Zeit (1915-1938)* (Bonn: Börschen, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Yun Jung Seo, *Frauendarstellungen bei Adrienne Thomas und Lili Körber* (Marburg: Tectum, 2003).

Körper's writing in exile beyond the odd mention of her unpublished novels *Farewell to Yesterday* and *Call me Nurse*.<sup>50</sup>

An examination of the exile works of these three women writers and of the scant scholarship and biographical material available about them suggests certain underlying similarities despite their obvious differences. They were all, for instance, Viennese by birth or by choice, of Jewish descent, and politically-minded. Their early writings were all critiques of the society in which they lived and moved and felt at home; none had been shy about expressing strong views in print. They all also employed lapidary, straightforward, narrative styles. In exile, despite their differing geographical and personal circumstances, their creative voices all changed in similar ways. Each turned away from the political and toward the personal and even the spiritual sides of life. In one sense, then, they all confirmed Gabriele Kreis's contention that 'Die Domäne der Frauen war der Alltag – im Leben wie im Schreiben' (Kreis, p. 221). But in exile each woman also displayed a perceptibly sceptical and sometimes even jaundiced view of the political beliefs and commitments she had once fervently espoused.

As a number of studies have already been done on the early works of Canetti and Gmeyner,<sup>51</sup> this thesis will not go over the same ground in detail. Because of the limits placed on the length of a doctoral thesis, its focus will therefore necessarily fall

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<sup>50</sup> *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* has also been the subject of graduate studies. See the dissertations already cited by Karin Wegner, Daniela Bender, Veronica Weisskircher, and Ilka Stäglin. These, however, do not examine Körper's other works.

<sup>51</sup> See Anne Stürzer, *Dramatikerinnen und Zeitstücke: Ein vergessenes Kapitel der Theatergeschichte von der Weimar Republik bis zur Nachkriegszeit* (Stuttgart, Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1993), Angelika Führich, *Aufbrüche des Weiblichen im Drama der Weimarer Republik: Brecht, Fleißer, Horváth, Gmeyner* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1992), *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*, Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'The Issue of Male Violence in Dramatic Works of the Two Austrian Republics: Veza Canetti and Felix Mitterer', in *Postwar Austrian Theater: Text and Performance*, ed. by Linda C. DeMerritt and Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002), Ritchie Robertson, 'Häusliche Gewalt in der Wiener Moderne: Zu Veza Canettis Erzählung "Der Oger"', *Veza Canetti: Text + Kritik*, 156 (2002), 48-64, Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Women's Concerns – Women's Popular Drama? Veza Canetti und Marie lise Fleisser', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 26, no. 3-4 (1993), 115-128, and *Texte im Dialog*.

instead mainly on the fictional prose of each from their time in exile onwards, which has thus far largely been overlooked. It will, however, examine one dramatic work in detail, Veza Canetti's farce *Der Palankin*, because it represents both a crucial development in Canetti's response to English life and also her adoption of a specifically English genre, the Whitehall farce, in order to make fun of English life.

In this thesis, then, I intend to use the biographical details of all three women as a means to place their writings within a specific socio-historical context. I shall concentrate in particular on the relatively lightly examined works of each in later exile because this permits a more complete contextualisation of their *Gesamtwerke*, affords a fuller understanding of the long arc of their thematic, political, and artistic development, and uncovers works that hitherto had remained largely unexamined and in the shadows. By focusing on the continuities and changes in the political, social, and spiritual-religious contexts of their work over the entire span, one can then see what was altered in the light of the abrupt and wrenching transformations that each experienced in exile.

Such an examination will reveal that, despite the setbacks each suffered in exile, all three of these authors continued to write well into their exile years and all three strove to reconstruct themselves in exile as human beings and writers in ways that went beyond mere 'emotional reassurance', in Lorenz's phrase, and instead took them in new creative directions. Chapter One will demonstrate this by comparing Veza Canetti's earliest stories and her novel *Die Gelbe Straße*, which were so influenced by her husband's work, to her transitional novel *Die Schildkröten* and then to her later exile works. Chapter Two will follow a similar path for the exile works of Anna Gmeyner, discussing and contextualising her two German-language novels as well as her subsequent works written in Britain and in English. Chapter Three will,

while surveying Lili Körber's early novels, including those practically ignored by critics and scholars today, focus principally and critically on what she wrote in exile, not least her unpublished English works, and on how the experience of exile changed her writing as well as her life.

The exile works of these three authors repay study both for their own literary merits and for what they can tell us about the experience of exile. In their broad similarities, these acculturated women writers, Jewish by heritage if not by current faith, also provide us with case studies of the larger experience of authorial exile – particularly the female experience – that allow us to derive more general lessons about the influence of forced flight on literary art. By giving due consideration to work produced in exile, this thesis will demonstrate that exile did not, as is sometimes contended, end these particular women's callings as artists. Instead, it broadened and deepened their literary production and enhanced their artistic achievements. The same was surely true of many other female, German-speaking writers forced to flee before and during the Holocaust. The German literary world can only benefit from the rediscovery of these authors.

## Chapter One: Veza Canetti

‘Es ist unnatürlich daß heute über Vezas Schreiben nichts bekannt ist.’<sup>1</sup>

### Biographical Sketch

Venetiana Taubner-Calderon was born on 21 November 1897 in Vienna to a Serbian Sephardic mother and a Hungarian Ashkenazi father. She had a damaged left arm – whether from childhood or as a result of an injury in adult life is uncertain – but she learned to cope with her disability and even to use a typewriter.<sup>2</sup> She attended school up to the Matura. In the 1920s she worked as a teacher in a private school and lived with her mother and stepfather in an apartment on Ferdinandstrasse, the street in the Second District that would later become the setting for her first novel, *Die Gelbe Straße*. Her stepfather, according to Canetti’s husband Elias, was abusive, but Canetti tamed him with what Elias calls wisdom beyond her years.<sup>3</sup> This stepfather, who ultimately disinherited her, was, according to Julian Preece:

a foundational figure in their [Canetti and Elias’s] literary imagination.<sup>4</sup> Both were inspired to write *against* all that he

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<sup>1</sup> Elias Canetti, ‘Vorwort’, in Veza Canetti, *Die Gelbe Straße* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993), pp. 5-9 (p. 7).

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate over Veza’s arm. Some believe she was born with a deformity, and others claim that she lost part of her left arm in a car crash when she was two years old and that she wore a prosthesis concealed by a brown leather glove. (See Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 355) Others still believe she injured herself in a car accident years later. In a letter to this author dated 23 March 2009, a friend of the Canettis, Mrs Margery Oplatka, wrote, ‘Did you ever hear that Veza had a damaged arm? It happened saving [Elias] Canetti’s life (stepping out into the road without looking). She took the brunt of the damage that he would have had and was disabled by that arm for the rest of her life’.

<sup>3</sup> Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Alkaley was the inspiration for the stepfather in ‘Geld – Geld – Geld. Das Leben eines reichen Mannes’, the last short story she published, and there are traces of him in Herr Vlk in *Die Gelbe Straße* – he lives off the rent from tenants, is completely self-obsessed, and ultimately goes mad – as well as in Herr Iger of *Die Gelbe Straße*, who is obsessed with money, is hostile to his children, greedy, and whose way of showing affection is to strike his children, just as in ‘Geld – Geld – Geld. Das Leben eines reichen Mannes’.

represented: his petty misuse of power, his self-obsession, his fixation on the dead and inert, crystallized in his worship of money – all that defined him as an ogre and demonstrated his social hypocrisy.<sup>5</sup>

Canetti met Elias at a Karl Kraus lecture in 1924. They married ten years later, a week after the end of the Civil War of February 1934. The Canetti marriage was not a typical one. Eighteen months before they were married, Canetti wrote Elias a letter in the back of one of his notebooks breaking off their sexual relationship and giving Elias the freedom to see other women, which he did, as long as she could know who they were and also get to know them. She seems to have given up hope of having her own child; referring to a miscarriage she had in the spring, she comments that she would have been the cleverest of mothers. She also promises to prove to Elias the type of mother she would have been, even referring to herself as his ‘mother’<sup>6</sup> – something that will become particularly significant in their exile years.

In a letter to her brother-in-law Georges dated 18 August 1937, Canetti shows that she lived up to this promise:

Ich kann nichts mildern in meinem Brief über Canetti [Elias]. Ich kann Ihnen nur versichern, dass er mehr gefährdet ist, als ich schreiben mag, dass Sie Unrecht hätten, daran zu zweifeln, dass ich ihn liebe, wie nur eine Mutter liebt, dass ich ihm aber in jeder Weise und bedingungslos diene – und dass mich dieser Dienst quält.<sup>7</sup>

Mrs Margery Oplatka, widow of the photographer Hans Oplatka, and friend of the Canettis, told this author that ‘Veza was selfless. She devoted herself to Canetti’.<sup>8</sup>

Elias may have been her son or her friend, but Georges was her passion. Her letters give the impression that her feelings for Georges surpassed normal sisterly

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<sup>5</sup> *The Rediscovered Writings*, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> Hanuschek, pp. 267-68.

<sup>7</sup> Veza Canetti and Elias Canetti, *Briefe an Georges*, ed. by Karen Lauer and Kristian Wachinger (Munich: Hanser, 2006), p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mrs Margery Oplatka, 7 March 2009.

affection. She addresses Georges with endearments such as 'Geliebter', 'Schöner Prinz', 'Lieber Beau' and 'Süsser Georg'. She tells him that he is the hero of a novel she is writing: 'Vor zwei Jahren hab ich einen Roman auf Englisch geschrieben. Natürlich warst Du der Held, und natürlich warst Du ein berühmter Arzt, und natürlich hast Du Hunderte Leben gerettet, und natürlich waren die Frauen alle hinter Dir her' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 118).<sup>9</sup> She writes of dreams she has of them: 'Ich träumte von der Nacht des 17. zum 18 dass ich mit Ihnen bin und ich küsste Sie sehr und war so glücklich im Traum, dass es mir ein wenig über den Lebensüberdruß im Wachen hinweghalf' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 27). Canetti's love for Georges, Adler comments in his review of *Briefe an Georges*, 'was possibly more intense than that for [Elias] Canetti himself, and – given Georges's homosexuality – even more hopeless. This dynamic involves her in constant suffering.'<sup>10</sup>

Canetti began to write for publication in the early 1930s. From the beginning she was a writer with a political bent and oppositionally left-wing. As Lorenz explains:

Many women writers and members of minorities, among them Veza Canetti, subscribed to the social reforms propounded by the Social Democrats. They envisioned a future society that would provide modern men and women with the basis of partnership and mutual respect. At the same time, Canetti was aware of the increasing rightwing radicalism that threatened the new republic and herself as a Jewish woman, and she was cognizant of the undefeated conservatism in the rural areas of what used to be the Habsburg Empire. ('Issue of Male Violence', p. 218)

She wrote mainly for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the principal daily of the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (SDAP). Considered the best-written newspaper in Vienna, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* published short stories by many well-known authors,

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<sup>9</sup> What happened to this novel is not known.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Adler, 'Tear up this letter', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 September 2006, 4-5 (p. 4).

including Maxim Gorki, Isaak Babel, and Joseph Roth. It also tackled many of the pressing social problems of the day. As Angelika Schedel notes:

Die AZ beteiligte sich an öffentlichen Streitfragen wie der Frage der Immigration von Juden aus Osteuropa, der Verarmung der Arbeiterklasse, des Feminismus. Bei einer 1931 durchgeführten Umfrage unter rund 700 in der Partei organisierten Arbeiterinnen gaben 54,8 Prozent an, die *Arbeiter-Zeitung* zu lesen, doch auch im konservativen Lager war sie gefragt. (*Sozialismus und Psychoanalyse*, p. 147)

In 1932 Malik Verlag's *Dreißig Erzähler des neuen Deutschland. Junge deutsche Prosa* included her short story 'Geduld bringt Rosen'. In 1933 the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* held a competition for the best short story, and although it did not award a first prize, Canetti received the second prize for 'Ein Kind rollt Geld', which became part of her novel *Die Gelbe Straße*.

Canetti did not, however, publish in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* under her own name. She used the pseudonyms Veza Magd, Veronika Knecht, and Martin Murner instead.<sup>11</sup> Her use of the first two surnames suggests that Canetti wished to present herself as a writer of humble origins. Maids, as Preece notes, are also recurrent figures in her fiction:

The number of different words in her first novel shows how ubiquitous they are behind the scenes of Viennese life: *Magd, Dienstmagd, Kammermagd, Mädchen, Dienstmädchen, Kindermädchen, Stubenmädchen, Hausgehilfin, Dienerin, Bedienerin, Bonne, Servierdame* are essentially interchangeable just as the women who do the work. The list is by no means exhaustive. Maids circulate for the most part invisibly among the better-off Yellow Street households. They gain a different viewpoint on the lives of their employers, to which we become privy through their narrative. (*The Rediscovered Writings*, pp. 90-91)

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<sup>11</sup> See *Sozialismus und Psychoanalyse*, pp. 10-11.

Later in exile, she portrayed herself in letters to Georges as a mere 'Wirtschafterin', housekeeper. She often signs these letters as 'Peggy' – 'Die arme Peggy Nur Dich liebt' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 233), 'Alles verdammte Liebe die verdammte PEGGY' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 251). She explains to Georges that in England Peggy 'der allerbescheidenste und häßlichste Name ist, der nur für antiquierte Wirtschafterinnen, Rentnerinnen und dergleichen gebraucht wird...' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 177). As she did with her pen names in Vienna, she thus associates herself with those in servile positions.

Contemporary descriptions of Canetti, however, add nuance to this self-portrait. Her long-time friend Ernst Fischer, for instance, argues that adopting the surname 'Magd' was 'in keeping with her nature. For all her pride, she was extremely modest'.<sup>12</sup> He continues: 'To be a maid is no humiliation if you have dubbed yourself such and take yourself at your own word; pride chooses the garb of modesty, service as a badge of honour, voluntary resignation. Her capacity for love was inexhaustible, never possessive, always ready to help anyone at any time' (Fischer, p. 204).

But she used pseudonyms for another reason as well: the latent anti-Semitism in Austrian society concerned her and threatened her work. As she once explained:

Ich selbst bin Sozialistin und schrieb in Wien für die 'Arbeiter-Zeitung' unter drei Pseudonymen, weil der sehr liebe Dr. König [an editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*], der wieder eingesetzt ist, mir bärbeißig klarmachte, 'bei dem latenten Antisemitismus kann man von einer Jüdin nicht so viele Geschichten und Romane bringen, und Ihre sind leider die besten.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ernst Fischer, *An Opposing Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 204.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Rudolf Hartung, the editor of Willi Weismann Verlag in Munich, dated 5 March 1950 as quoted in 'Veza Canetti Lebenschronik', in Veza Canetti, *Die Schildkröten* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), pp. 281-88 (pp. 284-85).

The pseudonyms did not, however, prevent her from being threatened in January 1934 with deportation.<sup>14</sup>

After the Anschluss in March 1938, the Canettis decided to leave Austria. They waited months for a visa, which the Austrian writer Robert Neumann, by now in exile in England, eventually helped them to secure. During that time they had to give up their home and move into a boarding house. During that time, too, Elias passed up a chance to move to Zurich because his wife could not come with him. They were thus present on *Kristallnacht* on 9 November 1938, when most of the synagogues in Vienna were set on fire, Jewish shops were destroyed, Jewish apartments looted, and Jews were persecuted and killed. Finally, by 19 November 1938, they were able to leave for London by way of Paris.<sup>15</sup>

Within four months of going into exile, Canetti had written her second novel, *Die Schildkröten*. Describing this as ‘the best literary account of how the Nazis secured their hold on power’, Jeremy Adler also argues that this novel is ‘a masterpiece that confirms her place among the twentieth century’s finest writers’.<sup>16</sup> In this novel she essentially turned the story of her last six months in Vienna into fiction. Although it was accepted by an English publisher, the outbreak of World War II prevented its publication.<sup>17</sup>

In her letters to Georges, Canetti mentions writing plays, including two in English, a musical, a novel in English, and short stories for a magazine for young adults, but as yet these have not been found. Her letters are filled with her desire to

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<sup>14</sup> Although she was a native of Vienna, she held a Yugoslav passport. See *The Rediscovered Writings*, p.18.

<sup>15</sup> Hanuschek, pp. 290-91.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Adler, ‘J. as in Jew’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 2003, 4-5 (p. 5).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Lebenschronik’, in Veza Canetti, *Die Schildkröten* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), pp. 281-88 (p. 287).

see her plays performed on stage, to see her novels published, and simply to see some success. Elias, too, writes of her work to his brother and praises her for her skill:

ich halte sie jetzt für *den geborenen Dramatiker*, und zwar für einen bedeutenden, dem man nur Raum schaffen muss. Alles wird ihr unter den Händen zu Szenen. Sie ist geladen mit dramatischen Vorwürfen. Sie hat eine ganz eigene Leichtigkeit und Anmut in der Komödie, drei *gute* Stücke von ihr liegen bereits vor. Mein Unglück und ihres war es, dass ich überhaupt keine Verbindung zum Theater hier besitze [...] (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 193)

But despite his efforts, including those to convince his brother Nissim, the stage producer, to look at her dramas, she never achieved her dream.<sup>18</sup> In her English exile, Canetti continued to write, but though she found work as a translator of, for example, Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, she was unsuccessful in getting her own works published.

In exile Canetti also turned her attention to her husband's work, which she viewed as more important than her own. In his foreword to *Die Gelbe Straße*, Elias writes that Canetti supported his work to the point of ignoring and belittling her own: 'Um sich nicht aufzugeben, begann sie selber zu schreiben, und um die Geste des großen Vorhabens, die ich brauchte, nicht zu gefährden, behandelte sie ihr Eigenes, als wäre es nichts'.<sup>19</sup> In 1948 Elias began to write *Masse und Macht*. It took him until 1960 before he finished and published it. It might never have appeared at all, if Canetti had not nagged, badgered, and coaxed it into existence. She dealt with Elias's correspondence, she read and corrected his work, she made him sit at his desk, and she selected the texts to include. She even put off visitors without his knowing to

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<sup>18</sup> In a letter dated 6 July 1946 to Georges, Canetti writes, 'Ein Wiener Schriftsteller, der jetzt nach Wien fährt, nimmt ein Stück von mir zum Josefstädter Theater mit, und Dein Bruder fängt an, mich auf die Bühne zu bringen' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 215), however nothing seems to have come of that and it is not mentioned again.

<sup>19</sup> Elias Canetti, 'Veza', in Veza Canetti, *Die Gelbe Straße* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003), pp. 7-11 (p. 7).

prevent him from being distracted. Elias credits *Masse und Macht* as being as much hers as his. He sent the book to Hermann Kesten with the following words:

Ich schicke Ihnen jetzt endlich ein Exemplar von *Masse und Macht*, das mich über 20 Jahre meines Lebens gekostet hat. Vielleicht, wenn Sie es lesen, werden Sie finden, daß das elende Leben meiner Frau nicht ganz umsonst war. Ihr geistiger Anteil daran ist so groß wie meiner. Es gibt keine Silbe darin, die wir nicht zusammen bedacht und besprochen haben.<sup>20</sup>

When they lived in Austria Elias read her his poems and, later, chapters from his novel, and she in turn commented on them and encouraged him, sometimes even writing in his own notebooks, but there is no evidence that she was as involved with his work then as she had been with *Masse und Macht*.

For much of their time in England, the Canettis lived apart. In a letter to their friend and fellow-exile Hans Günther Adler, Hans Oplatka described one of their many unusual arrangements: 'Sie [Veza Canetti] wohnt in einem kleinen Zimmer bei Freunden von Canetti in London und Canetti kommt jede Woche für einige Tage zu Besuch' (*Sozialismus und Psychoanalyse*, p. 182). When they did live together, life could not have been easy for Canetti. Elias and Canetti both suffered from depression. Canetti's was so severe that she even felt suicidal at times. As Elias explains in a letter dated 27 December 1937:

Veza ist jetzt höchst unglücklich, niedergeschlagen und verzweifelt [...] Du [Georges] kennst die Gefahren ihrer melancholischen Verfassung. Jeder neue Schlag kann die alten Selbstmordgelüste in ihr wieder wecken. Seit Weihnachten spricht sie plötzlich wieder davon, dass sie mein Unglück war, dass ich ihretwegen in Not leben muss, dass Dein Verhalten beweist, wie sehr Du derselben Meinung bist, dass sie jetzt endlich einer reichen und jungen Frau Platz machen müsse – kurz es sind die Gedankengänge, die ich bereits seit Jahren kenne und

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<sup>20</sup> Angelika Schedel, "Bitte das über seine Frau *nicht* auslassen" Briefe an Erich Fried, eine "gefälschte" Autorenschaft und Frauen im Hintergrund – Ein Beitrag zu Veza Canettis Jahren im Londoner Exil', *Veza Canetti: Text + Kritik*, 156 (2002), 82-94 (p. 86).

die jedesmal ihre melancholischen Selbstmordversuche ankündigen.  
(*Briefe an Georges*, p. 93)

The letters she and Elias sent to Georges also display Canetti's devotion to her husband, but her descriptions of him in these letters are not always flattering: 'Der Canetti ist bereits ein ausgewachsener sehr egoistischer Quälgeist, sehr entwöhnt und selbstständig, der wurstelt sich auch ohne mich weiter' (*Briefe an Georges*, pp. 27-28). Her letters to Georges discuss Elias's many extramarital affairs and his bouts of madness. In one she describes how, overcome by blindness, he crawled around on the floor on all fours, claiming that she wanted to stab him. He was also obsessed by a paranoid delusion that she was attempting to poison him (*Briefe an Georges*, pp. 78-79). His 'attacks' came and went for years. In her letters to Georges, Canetti mentions such attacks as early as 1936. She never mentions an end to such episodes.

In 1956, when a novel Canetti had submitted for publication was rejected, she destroyed many of her manuscripts and never wrote again. She died in 1963. This has led Lorenz to argue that 'Veza Canetti's case is that of a woman writer who, having avoided public attention while still in her native Vienna, fell silent in exile'.<sup>21</sup> But this silence was not intentional; it happened to her largely against her will. She continued to write until this point in her exile life. Her husband noted the quality of this work, writing to Georges in April 1946, 'Veza hat sich, nach vielen schweren Jahren, selbst als Schriftsteller unglaublich entwickelt. Sie geht ihre eigenen Wege, ist kaum mehr von mir beeinflusst' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 193).

In the 1990s, thanks in part to the efforts of Elias, Canetti's works began to appear in print (and in translation) again. The novel *Die Gelbe Straße*, which should have appeared in 1934, was not published until 1990, when Hanser in Munich

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<sup>21</sup> Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Jewish Women Authors and the Exile Experience: Claire Goll, Veza Canetti, Else Lasker-Schüler, Nelly Sachs, Cordelia Edvardson', *German Life and Letters*, 51 (1998), 225-39 (pp. 230-31).

brought it out twenty-seven years after her death. It was translated into seven languages and, as Preece points out, 'quickly acquired the status of a modern classic'.<sup>22</sup> She wrote *Der Oger* in 1934 as well, but it was not published until 1991 and was not staged until 1992, when it had its premiere in the Zurich Schauspielhaus.<sup>23</sup> *Die Schildkröten* was published in both German and English in 1999 and *Der Fund*, a collection of short stories and plays written largely in exile, was published for the first time in 2001, thirty-eight years after her death.

At the heart of all of Canetti's early work lay her concern with others and her desire to help them. In the foreword to *Die Gelbe Straße*, Elias describes Canetti thus:

Wenn sie sich eines Menschen einmal angenommen hatte, ließ sie nie mehr locker und war dann von den Leuten so erfüllt, daß sie über sie schreiben mußte. Es ging ihr um wirkliche Dinge, wie sie sagte, um Leute, die sie kannte. Ihre Sache sei es nicht, zu erfinden, das überlasse sie mir. Sie wolle ihren Leuten helfen und darum schreibe sie Geschichten über sie. Es geschah aber etwas sehr Merkwürdiges: alle ihre Figuren wirken, als wären sie erfunden. Zu jeder einzelnen von ihnen fällt mir, wenn ich in der 'Gelbe Straße' lese, das Vorbild ein, aber ich hätte jede von ihnen vergessen, wenn sie sie nicht auf ihre spitze, springende Weise erfunden hätte. ('Veza', *GS*, p. 10)

She used her writing to draw attention to the plight of others and to call for social reform in Austria. In exile, this political engagement disappears. Cut off from her home and the culture in which she had been raised, Canetti found herself one of the outsiders she had previously used her writing to try to help. In her letters to Georges she describes the difficulty of living in exile, of not being allowed to cry for fear a landlady would turn her out, of losing a room because another had bribed a landlady

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<sup>22</sup> Julian Preece, 'Introduction', in Veza Canetti, *Viennese Short Stories* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2006), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

<sup>23</sup> For more information on *Der Oger* see 'Issue of Male Violence', 'Women's Concerns', Robertson, 'Häusliche Gewalt', pp. 48-64, and for more information on *Der Oger* and Canetti's other early drama, *Der Tiger*, see *Texte im Dialog*.

for it, of dealing with anti-Semitism, of living off of tea and bread when bills were due, of working day and night because she only had seven weeks to translate a book. Looking back on her life in Vienna with maids and help, she compares it to life in England where she is forced to clean and polish incessantly wherever she lives for fear of being evicted, even when she lives in a house whose landlady is hardly a model of cleanliness and order. She wishes to move to America to live with a friend who can give her the life she grew up with, but she never actually goes. In 1945 she laments to her brother-in-law that she has moved twenty-seven times in the last ten years. She describes herself as haunted:

Verfolgt von dem Gedanken an mein eigenes Scheitern im Leben (als ich heulte, sagte ich zu Deinem Bruder, ich glaub ihm nicht, was er versprochen hat, daß ich nächstes Jahr in einer Loge sitz und die Aufführung meines Stückes in London erleb, denn ein Mensch, der von seinen Hausfrauen so erniedrigt wurde, kann zu keinen Höhen mehr aufsteigen, dafür gibt's in der Literatur keine Beispiele), verfolgt von dem Gedanken an einen Haufen verbrannter Leichen in Belsen und an die lebenden Gerippe, die einen Teil der Kadaver fressen, und an die Gegenwart und die Zukunft der Welt, seh ich es als eine Ehre an, wenn irgendein Mensch mit mir spricht. (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 160)

Her exile writing reflects this change in circumstance, this haunting, and becomes far more personal. At the same time, it goes in new directions. Where before her focus was realistic and dispassionate, her exile writing is full of symbolism, metaphor, allegory, and a range of emotions. Her early works reflected her desire to help others; her exile works reflect a need to find herself.

## Early Work: *Die Gelbe Straße*

In Vienna Canetti's work focused on the outcasts and the powerless in society, and especially on women, children, and people with disabilities. She was particularly concerned with the vulnerability of women and children under the law. Her writing was sympathetic towards them, but not sentimental. It was also dispassionately observant; she wrote matter-of-factly about what she saw. At the same time it was distinctly 'feminine' in the sense that it used domestic themes and scenes to depict social injustice and inequality, just as it used female characters to express her main concerns. Lorenz argues that 'few other authors have depicted the oppression of women and their suffering as directly as Veza Taubner-Calderon'.<sup>24</sup>

*Die Gelbe Straße* is a collection of stories drawn from her newspaper journalism and linked to form a whole. Each chapter introduces new characters, and each brings in old ones. Each illustrates a different political point, and, as Lorenz notes, each has a leftist cast:

*Die Gelbe Straße* evokes a complex urban scene, the leftovers of the old multinational state. The portrayal of this environment calls to mind the Socialist ideal of internationalism. The readers are reminded that the differences between the oppressed are exaggerated by capitalist propaganda. The latter dwells on race, language, and ethnicity which Marxism considers less important than those factors which unite the underprivileged: their poverty and their powerlessness. ('Social Criticism', pp. 278-79)

Each story in this collection concerns the victimisation of women. The female characters in this novel are by turns deformed, powerless under the law, vulnerable because they are from the lower classes and thus without much social protection, or

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<sup>24</sup> Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Social Criticism in Veza Taubner-Calderon's Novel *Die Gelbe Straße*', in *Jura Soyfer and His Time*, ed. by Donald G. Daviau (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1995), pp. 275-86 (p. 276).

children or orphans in abusive households. Preece observes that 'Magd-Canetti shows, too, how economic or sexual subservience can generate its own psychology of submission, which makes the economically weak or sexually victimized feel responsible for their own predicament or assume guilt for the suffering others cause them'.<sup>25</sup>

The first chapter in *Die Gelbe Straße*, 'Der Unhold', though, revolves around a woman who is less a victim of a patriarchal, capitalist society than she is of her own physical imperfections and mental resentments. Both deformed and paralysed, known by all as 'Die Runkel', a nickname stemming from the word 'Runkelrübe' or 'beetroot', the main character is monstrous not only in appearance but also in character. Her deformity has made her bitter and power-hungry. Lacking pity and remorse, she strives to hurt those around her because they are healthy and good looking. This impulse stems as much from human nature as from capitalist exploitation, but the effect is harmful all the same.

In the second chapter, 'Der Oger', Canetti illustrates the damage that the Austrian social and judicial system could do to women and children. In Vienna in the 1930s, the law was overwhelmingly on the side of the man of the house. It gave him unbounded license within the household he dominated to commit acts of violence, even rape, with impunity. As Ritchie Robertson explains:

Juristisch gesehen besaß der Mann eine fast unumschränkte Herrschaft über seine Familie. Die betreffenden Paragraphen des Allgemeinen Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches vertrauten dem Ehemann nicht nur die Ernährung seiner Familie und die Verwaltung der Finanzen an, sondern sprachen ihm außerdem ein 'häusliches Züchtigungsrecht' zu, das auch die Anwendung von physischer Gewalt gegen Gattin und Kinder zur Durchsetzung seines Willens gestattete. In vielen Fällen entschieden Richter auf Freispruch, selbst wenn die 'Züchtigung'

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<sup>25</sup> Julian Preece, 'The Re-Discovered Writings of Veza Magd-Canetti: On the Psychology of Subservience', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 28, no. 2 (1995), 53-70 (p. 56).

beträchtliche Verletzungen der Frau beziehungsweise des Kindes nach sich zog. Laut dem Gesetz konnte das Opfer auch um Milde für den Täter bitten, und es ist wahrscheinlich, dass viele Frauen gezwungen wurden, dies zu tun. Gewaltanwendung kam in allen Bevölkerungsschichten vor.<sup>26</sup>

The story concerns an almost literal ogre, the similarly named Herr Iger, who terrorises his wife, Maja, and their children. When Maja returns home after trying to escape her husband, he rapes her. When she tries to divorce her husband the next day, she finds she cannot, for 'Intimitäten' had taken place (*GS*, p. 64). According to the law of the day, such marital rape was an acceptable form of intimacy. Herr Iger then beats their children in order to force his wife to give him her inheritance. This, too, according to the law, was acceptable.

In a later chapter,<sup>27</sup> Iger gets his comeuppance, though it is not the law but rather public opinion that makes the difference. When one of his schemes backfires, Iger grows so terrified of the angry reaction of the people of Yellow Street that he runs away like 'ein zusammengesunkener Fesselballon' (*GS*, p. 170). Justice is thus eventually served, albeit in a different story and in a different way, but Canetti leaves the reader with the knowledge that Maja, presumably like so many other women of the time, is nevertheless irreparably damaged.

In 'Der Kanal' Canetti turns her attention to the precarious position in which working girls found themselves, not only at risk from men who wished to take advantage, but also from unscrupulous female oppressors. In this story a Frau Hatvany arranges for unemployed girls to get work and even goes so far as to arrange for the prostitution of teenagers. The prospective employers do not select these girls on the basis of experience – a forty-year-old woman has trouble even getting an

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<sup>26</sup> Robertson, 'Häusliche Gewalt', pp. 56-57. See also Sabine Kolleth, 'Gewalt in Ehe und Intimpartnerschaft', in *Glücklich ist, wer vergift...? Das andere Wien um 1900*, ed. by H. C. Ehalt and others (Vienna, Cologne, Graz: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 145-72 (p. 146).

<sup>27</sup> 'Der Zwinger', in *GS*, pp. 145-171.

appointment because she is perceived as too old – but rather on appearance. One girl, Emilie, jumps into the canal in a fake suicide attempt to escape her fate. She is saved from drowning, cared for at a hospital, and then sent to the hostel where potential employers are interrogated so vigorously that any with less than honest plans for a maid leave quickly. It takes drastic measures to earn help and protection for working women in Viennese society: ‘Ja, so geht es zu. Wer das Leben wagt, bekommt Kost und Quartier, und wenn’s gut geht, auch noch einen Posten’ (GS, p. 118). As this summing-up suggests, this scene brims with the irony that marks this novel as a whole.

In the penultimate story, ‘Der Tiger’, feminine wiles recur in a new guise. Frau Andrea, a woman whose husband has squandered her fortune, outwits Herr Tiger, who owns one of the cafés in which she must now work, and leaves with her virtue and reputation intact. This story thus builds on, and at the same time plays on, the theme explored in the previous scene. As Lorenz explains:

The story of Frau Andrea [...] shows that the oppressed have every right to use dissimulation and deceit to defend their rights. The woman who manipulates her persecutor by taking advantage of his weakness, namely, his sexual desires, is portrayed as a heroine. (‘Social criticism’, p. 281)

The focus of this story, unlike the others which are set amongst the petty bourgeoisie, is on artists. Here, too, Canetti emphasises how women suffer and are vulnerable because of the misogynistic society in which they live. This story, which pits a woman who is forced to go to work because her husband has lost their money against a powerful man who seeks to exploit her, has a more positive end than ‘Der Oger’, not only because Frau Andrea ultimately triumphs, but also because of what the art in it represents. As Natalie Lorenz explains:

Mit der Bildhauerei der Tochter und dem Klavierspiel der Mutter werden zwei Kunstauffassungen gegenübergestellt. Für Diana bedeutet Kunst eine innere Notwendigkeit im Sinne einer Berufung. Für ihre Mutter ist das Klavierspiel zunächst Bestandteil der bürgerlichen Mädchenerziehung und entwickelt sich dann im Erwachsenenalter zur Möglichkeit der Zerstreuung. Die Musik ist damit bei Frau Sandoval zunächst ganz auf den häuslichen Bereich festgelegt, ein privater und ein von der Ökonomie abgeschirmter Bereich. (*Texte im Dialog*, p. 110)

The novel ends with 'Der Zwinger', in which Canetti contrasts the innocence of youth with the greed of adults. Besides exploring the madness of crowds, a theme that Elias would tackle almost concurrently in *Die Blendung*, this final entry also invites the reader to examine another social evil. The main characters, Hedi and Helli, live in a children's home, even though their mothers are still alive. Poor single mothers during this time had few options and received little in the way of social welfare; they were thus often forced to give up their children in an effort to give these children better lives. What kind of world is it, the author seems to be asking, where the only decent, honest, and protective creature is – a dog?

The chapters in *Die Gelbe Straße*, as noted above, first appeared as stories in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Perhaps because she was writing for a workers' newspaper, Canetti employed a direct narrative style and wrote simply, using popular idioms. Nor did she psychoanalyse or moralise. Rather, she set out the situation, presented the dark and painful facts, and left it to the reader to draw the obvious conclusions. The ironies with which her novel is laden cannot have escaped the more percipient of her readers.

## *Die Gelbe Straße and Die Blendung*

The number and type of similarities between Canetti's early published work and Elias's only novel suggest that her Vienna stories constitute a riposte to *Die Blendung*. Not only do both Canettis deal with many of the same themes and topics – obsession, illness, physical disability, greed, and the subservience of women to men – but stylistically, too, there are resemblances. Both Elias and Canetti employ extended passages of dialogue without identifying the speaker or speakers, both create physically and personally grotesque characters, and both write in ways that are either starkly real or equally unreal. Canetti's work, however, is far kinder to her characters than is her husband's. Her gender is apparent in her work, too, which seems to be in part a reply to Elias's misogyny.

Elias began writing his novel in 1930. Although he finished it the next year, he left it for a long time untouched in his room, only publishing it 1935, a year after Canetti became his wife. The main character in *Die Blendung*, Professor Peter Kien, a forty-something Sinologist with his own private library, resembles Pilatus Vlk, the obsessive-compulsive in *Die Gelbe Straße*. Both live in a world of their own and pay no attention to those around them. They are, in other words, removed from society.

Each Canetti also creates characters whose deformities arouse disgust and fear in others. In Elias's description of Therese, for example, her unattractive face and figure match her unattractive character:

Ihr Kopf saß schief. Beide Ohren waren breit, flach und abstehend. Da das rechte die Schulter streifte und von ihr zum Teil verdeckt wurde, erschien das linke um so größer. Beim Gehen und Sprechen wackelte sie mit dem Kopf. Ihre Schultern machten dazu abwechselnd

die Musik. Sie bückte sich, hob das Buch auf und fuhr mit dem Staubtuch ein dutzendmal gründlich drüber.<sup>28</sup>

This recalls Canetti's Runkel, the disabled 'Unhold', in *Die Gelbe Straße*.

Greed is another theme in both writers' works. Tellingly, though, each chooses the opposite gender to make his or her points. In *Die Blendung* Therese's battle for her husband's money makes up a large part of the novel. In Canetti's stories it is normally the male characters – e.g., Herr Iger in *Die Gelbe Straße* and the stepfather in 'Geld – Geld – Geld. Das Leben eines reichen Mannes' – who are driven by greed.

The apparently misogynistic tone of *Die Blendung* is one area, however, where Elias differs from Canetti. Her works criticise a society that demeans women and leaves them with little protection. Elias, in fact, later compared her to a contemporary militant feminist: 'Ihre Überzeugungen waren nicht weit von solchen entfernt, wie man sie heute vielfach und militant unter Frauen findet, aber sie hatte sie damals' (quoted in Preece, 'On the Psychology of Subservience', p. 55). *Die Blendung*, by contrast, portrays women as illiterate, sexually aggressive and insatiable, greedy, and lacking in morals. For the most part the women in this novel are unlikable, unadmirable, and unintelligent. William Donahue points out that there is a great deal of hatred of women on the part of the male characters and observes that 'like the men, the women are comic types; unlike the men, they are distinctly more limited in every imaginable way'.<sup>29</sup>

The two Canettis also employ similar narrative techniques. For most of the first two pages of *Die Blendung*, a conversation takes place with no names attached, leaving the reader with no idea who is speaking. In *Die Blendung* perspectives

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<sup>28</sup> Elias Canetti, *Die Blendung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Hanser, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> William Collins Donahue, *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fé* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 48.

constantly change as well. The first book of the novel focuses on Kien and Therese, but in the next a number of other characters take over. The novel is no longer what it seemed at the beginning. The combination of these two narrative techniques, as Donahue argues, leaves the reader feeling ‘duped’ (Donahue, p. 36) and unable to trust what he or she is reading.

In *Die Gelbe Straße* Canetti, too, creates dialogues in which the reader can sometimes have no clear idea who is speaking. But where Elias employs such modernist narrative techniques to highlight the isolation of one character from another, Canetti does so to create a sense of community. The lives of the people on Yellow Street overlap, as will, in a very different and more sinister way, those in *Die Schildkröten*. Even in the techniques she uses, Canetti plays off and against *Die Blendung*.

The similarities between the fictional works of Elias and Canetti, then, are strong, while the differences that exist between them seem to stem from their differing personalities and genders. Elias's work is more brutal and more misogynistic. Biographical and autobiographical works, in particular his own *Party im Blitz*, and his letters to his brother Georges, suggest he may have been that way in life.

This is not the only resemblance between these two books and the Canetti marriage in real life. The Pensionistin is, like Canetti, more a mother to Fischerle than a wife: ‘Sie liebte ihn nämlich, er war ihr Kind’ (*Blendung*, p. 192). Therese is also in a sense a mother figure and, like Canetti, is older than her husband. Kien marries her not out of love, but because she cares for his library. When describing her care for his books, the narrator uses mothering language: ‘Umständlich suchte sie ein passendes aus und legte es dem Buch um, wie einem Kind ein Kleid’ (*Die*

*Blendung*, p. 42). As Donahue writes, ‘The comparison of book to baby is apt: for this is precisely the function Kien envisions for her – mother to his library’ (Donahue, pp. 55-56). Perhaps the unusualness of the Canetti marriage coloured their perceptions of matrimony, for neither presents it as an attractive state.<sup>30</sup>

## ***Die Schildkröten***

*Die Schildkröten* represented a departure for Canetti both literally and figuratively. Previously she had chronicled the lives of ordinary people in Vienna without pathos or sentimentality and without demonising those in positions of authority. Now, as Fritz Arnold writes: ‘Die knappe, pointierte Diktion, die wir aus der ‘Gelben Straße’ und den Erzählungen Veza Canettis kennen, der souveräne Erzählton, der niemals urteilt und jeden Haß vermeidet, der Humor, mit dem die Menschen gesehen werden, scheint hier zuweilen wie unter dem Druck der Erinnerung an das Erlebte aus den Fugen zu geraten’.<sup>31</sup> The experience of exile seems to have affected, if not eliminated, the objectivity and distance that formerly marked her work. Imagery and symbolism, largely absent in *Die Gelbe Straße*, dominate *Die Schildkröten*. The tortoise provides not just the title for this work, but is also a recurring symbol within it. Traditionally the tortoise symbolises long life, wisdom, and seclusion. Through the course of the novel this small creature takes on

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<sup>30</sup> According to Preece: ‘Shortly before his [Elias] death he explained with great candour what the source of friction between them was. Veza “had never been able to free herself from the suspicion that Kien’s hatred of women somehow, indirectly, applied to her too”. In an unpublished passage from *The Play of Eyes* he concludes his explanation of their open marriage by recalling her horrified reaction to what he had written: “She spoke about it in such a way as to suggest that this freedom which she wished me to have was a matter of her own dignity. Her pride could not recover from the terrifying image of Therese in the novel.” In order to prove herself the opposite of the quintessential narrow-minded hausfrau, Veza insisted on the bohemian liaison that British readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century would find so shocking’ (*The Rediscovered Writings*, p. 126).

<sup>31</sup> Fritz Arnold, ‘Nachwort’, in Veza Canetti, *Die Schildkröten* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), pp. 277-79 (p. 279).

new meaning. Canetti writes, for instance, that the creature may have a shell that seems as armoured as a tank, but this does not mean it is not vulnerable: ‘Die Schildkröte lebt in einem harten Panzer, aber er wird ihr geraubt, weil er so schön ist, er schützte sie nicht und sie bleibt nackt’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 145). Still, she says, despite its vulnerability the tortoise survives. It will only truly die without warmth: ‘Ihr Geheimnis ist Gleichmut. Sie lebt von nichts, von Luft, von Blättern, sie läßt sich zerschneiden, zerstückeln, zerreißen, und sie lebt weiter, stumm und schwer. Aber sie braucht Wärme. Ohne Wärme muß sie sterben’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 145).

The main characters identify with the tortoise. Angered when he finds swastikas burned into the shells of a basketful of tortoises, Andreas Kain buys them all to rescue them. Even more fundamentally, however, he is angered by the torture they must suffer when separated from their shells. His brother Werner says that he would like to be a tortoise himself, for he admires their ability to blend in with stone: ‘Schildkröten haben etwas für sich. Sie klammern sich an Felsen, weil der Felsen das Alte und Ewige ist. Sie gleichen sich dem Felsen an. Hätte ich die Wahl, in einer anderen Form in dieser Welt zu leben, dann gewiß als Schildkröte’ (*Schildkröten*, pp. 223-24). Their shells also resemble the solid stone that Werner studies as a geologist. This association suggests endurance. Canetti is clearly comparing the Jewish people to the tortoise; they, too, will continue to endure and survive. But to separate them from the lives and the societies and the places they knew so well is to separate them from the warmth of their shells. Like the shell-less tortoises, the Jewish people will live on, though with some essential part of their lives – some protective carapace – missing, for to be in exile is to be without a shell.

Imagery of violence and death gives the novel a dark and turbulent feel. From the outset, for instance, the blood-red flag of National Socialism is associated with

death. The flag, in fact, looks and acts like blood: ‘Die Fahne sah aus wie Blut. Wie Blut, das fließt, das sickert, das trocknet und wieder aufgefrischt wird’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 8). It also seems deliberately to entangle Eva Kain and to knock her to the ground – a foreshadowing of the things to come: ‘Eva wollte vorüberreiten, doch die Fahne wehte aufgebläht bis zur Rampe hin, schwang sich über die Rampe, verlegte ihr den Weg, sie konnte nicht zurückweichen, sie verding sich und stürzte nieder’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 8). The flag, too, is like a ‘lohende Welle’ – a flaming wave. It is somehow both fire and water – a natural catastrophe of unnatural proportions, destructive in almost every possible way.

Of course, to the good Nazi the flag symbolises something very different. As Frau Wlk explains, the flag represents the joining of Austria to the greater German empire. It also represents a new religion, the religion of Hitler, whose adherents bow before his force – or violence, ‘Gewalt’ bearing both meanings – and refrain from all individual thought:

Dem Führer wird jetzt gehuldigt und nicht dem Gekreuzigten. Das bedeutet diese Fahne. Der Führer hat erlassen: Der Mensch sei arisch. Er sei vertrauensvoll. Er glaube an ihn und verneige sich vor ihm. Er lasse ab von allen Gedanken, von aller Eigenmacht. Er begeben sich in die Gewalt des Führers. Der werde für ihn sorgen. Besser als Jesus Christus. (*Schildkröten*, pp. 20-21)

These words refer to Nazi principles reduced to absurd simplicity. It seems improbable that anyone would really have uttered such thoughts aloud without some kind of prompting. Even so, though the words might not be her own, the sentiment is. Frau Wlk’s comparison of Hitler to Jesus Christ not only suggests that Nazism is a kind of religion, but proclaiming that Hitler is better than Christ also turns it into a perverse mirror image of Christianity. With God-like powers, it seems, Hitler can decree that man must be Aryan (‘Der Mensch sei arisch’). But, of course, since he

lacks God's power to create, the only way he can achieve this is to destroy – by eliminating those human beings who are not Aryans. Frau Wlk's words will prove, albeit unwittingly, prescient.

Other symbols employed by the Nazis only add to the darkness of the novel. References to the SS death's head recur often, as do descriptions of these 'Totenköpfe' on uniforms. Uniforms themselves become a motif; the narrator often refers to Nazis as uniforms and not as men: 'Die braune Uniform, SA genannt, erscheint am hellen Tag und in tiefer Nacht und läutet an. Vor diesem Läuten erschrickt jeder. Denn jeder hat einmal ein Gebet verrichtet, einen Herzog verehrt, einen Gedanken gehabt und einen Juden gekannt' (*Schildkröten*, p. 28). To have known a Jew is, like having a thought or saying a prayer, one of those things that people had commonly done before the uniforms appeared on the scene. Since 'Gedanke' can mean either 'thought' or 'idea', and since 'gehabt' is in the perfect tense, which grammatically is used to denote a completed action, even for an action that used to be continuous, this phrase also suggests that under the Nazis people no longer were able to think freely, or to think at all, as they once had done. This is now one of those things that frightened people can no longer expect to do. They must simply conform to Nazi doctrine without question. Her list is like a litany of sins, another perverted religious image. The morbid irony also recalls Frau Wlk's description of the cult of Hitler.

Together with the imagery of religion subverted and death impending is a strong sense of alienation. But it is a particularised form. The Kains suddenly have no rights in their own land and are told repeatedly that they need to leave. Andreas Kain's country, his work, and his life no longer belong to him. Even his own home has become strange and foreign: 'Er [Andreas] steigt in den Garten wie ein Mensch,

der nicht mehr hier wohnt. Der hier fremd ist und kein Recht hat. Zum ersten Mal war er unsicher in diesem Haus' (*Schildkröten*, p. 38). Feeling alienated from their own home, the Kains no longer feel comfortable with themselves: 'Es ist das schwerste Stück in diesem Leben. Daß man seinen Charakter verstecken muß. Daß man nicht mehr sieht, nicht hört, nicht denkt. Daß man sich wie ein Priester des Buddha in Nichts auflöst, nichts ist, nichts will, um nur zu fliegen. Endlich wegzuflehen. In Luft aufzugehen' (*Schildkröten*, p. 61). One may conceal one's character, but this only leads to nothingness. It is, in other words, ultimately no solution to the problems that faced the Kains and other persecuted Jews in Germany and Austria.

Still, appearances do successfully deceive. Although Eva, for instance, is so dark that she comes to loathe herself for it because others now do – 'man haßt mich plötzlich, bis ich mich selbst hasse' (*Schildkröten*, p. 13) – Hilde is not. Hilde thus invalidates the notion that one can tell who is Jewish simply from the way she looks, for, blond-haired and blue-eyed, she looks like the model Aryan. A Nazi with whom she has a run-in says he does not believe that she is Jewish and immediately assumes a mistake: 'Ob es kein Irrtum ist? Ob man sie nicht als Kind geraubt hat? Ob die Mutter nicht arisch ist und, von dem Bankier zur Ehe gezwungen, sich dann mit dem Gärtnerjungen gerächt hat. Den Bankier mit dem Gärtnerjungen verwechselt' (*Schildkröten*, p. 21). He is so desperate for an explanation for this that he creates a whole, if implausible, history for her on the spot. She cannot really be Jewish, he reasons, because she does not look Jewish. Therefore there must be some reason why she is really Aryan.

Kain, too, is hardly stereotypical, for he is twice mistaken for a Gentile. While walking down the street he even avoids censure for not wearing a Nazi symbol:

‘Wie sollte auch dieser strotzende Mensch mit dem hellen Gesicht zu den Sklaven gehören’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 40). When an SA man arrests Werner, Kain says that if they arrest Werner they must arrest him too, for he is Werner’s brother. The SA men react with laughter and do not believe him: ‘Sie lachen, weil Werner, vierschrötig und einfach, wie er aussieht, nach ihrer Ansicht und Theorie unmöglich Kains Bruder sein kann’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 69). In fact, most of the Jews in Canetti’s novel are scarcely very Jewish in either a stereotypical or a religious sense, and thus highlight the difficulty acculturated Jews had in understanding why they were being targeted by the Nazis.

This novel vividly describes how dangerous Jewish life in Austria became. As the novel progresses, the violence and the horrors mount. Jewish homes, for instance, are pillaged, and, faced with the stark choice of vacating their homes or being shot, Jews seek foreigners as tenants, for having foreigners in the home can act as a small protection against maltreatment. Felberbaum, arrested not for the first time, must help destroy a synagogue and all the sacred objects in it. Werner dies, in a tragically ironic fashion for a geologist, at work in a quarry of a concentration camp.

Madness also comes to seem normal. When, for instance, the women living in the flat opposite Werner’s kill themselves as the Nazis come to take their furniture away, their men having already been arrested, Eva observes that they do not even get a coffin: ‘Sie haben keine Särge, weil es keine Särge mehr gibt. Weil man so viele Särge nicht erzeugen kann, täglich nicht erzeugen kann, als es täglich Tote gibt in dieser Stadt. Darum ist kein Sarg für sie da’ (*Schildkröten*, p. 200). Her first reaction is that she must be going mad, for dead people are always first put in coffins. But then she realises this is not a product of her imagination: ‘Nein. Es war nicht das entzündete Gehirn, das dieses Bild wie schmerzende Flammen aufzucken ließ’ (*ibid.*).

Rather, it is because people are dying so fast that they cannot produce enough coffins. The 'schmerzende Flammen' and her 'entzündete Gehirn' are yet more images of fire and of her own sense of feverishness. The scene ends when Kain slams his fist on the table, an action out of character for such a nonviolent man. The violence engendered by Nazism on even the most innocent and peaceful of men and women is another leitmotif of this novel.

When the aptly named Nazi, Pilz, uses his position to get what he wants, the Kains' house, his invasion of a home, a private domain, symbolises the insidiousness and pervasiveness of Nazism. It also personalises the way in which National Socialism affected every facet of Austrian life. No place was safe for Jews any more; there was no longer any escape.

Eva describes Pilz as a parrot, 'Papagei', of Nazism, incapable of individual thought or action: 'Er spricht nur eingelernte Phrasen und erfäßt nur Phrasen' (*Schildkröten*, p. 96). This becomes clear when he teaches the neighbourhood children lessons by killing a sparrow because it is a parasite: 'Das war ein Parasit am Staatshaushalt. Invaliden gehören unter die Erde. Wir brauchen Platz, Lebensraum' (*Schildkröten*, p. 49). Here he uses Nazi phrases and clichés, such as the need for living space ('Lebensraum'), apparently unthinkingly and applies them even to animals. He shoots an old dog in front of the children for the same reason: 'Das war ein Parasit am Staatshaushalt. Es muß im Leben alles seinen Sinn und Zweck haben. Und verwertbar sein. Es gibt eine Wissenschaft, die heißt Ökonomie, sie ist von den Deutschen erfunden. Die bedeutet, daß alles nützlich verwertet werden kann. Was nicht nützlich ist, gehört ins Grab' (*Schildkröten*, p. 57). The sparrow and dog, of course, represent the alleged parasites in Austria and Germany – that is, the Jews. By encouraging the children to behave like him, to see the brutal as just and necessary,

Pilz is not only attempting to dehumanise the children, he is also personifying the larger effects of Nazism on Austrian society.

Frau Pilz, too, seems an uncomplicated caricature, but she turns out to be more than that. Herr Pilz describes the ideal German housewife as very limited in her interests: 'Eine deutsche Hausfrau befaßt sich mit dem Haushalt und den Kindern' (*Schildkröten*, p. 58).<sup>32</sup> His wife seems to fit the bill: she is blond, she cares mainly for her two sons and her kitchen, and she is not a deep thinker. But, even so, he cannot completely convince her that all Jews are bad:

Sie gestand, daß sie dies alles nicht gewußt hatte. Sie sei mit den Leuten gut gewesen, weil die Leute gut zu ihr waren. Daß sie schuld waren an dem Krieg, daß sie schuld waren an der Arbeitslosigkeit, daß sie die Zeitungen besetzt hielten, das Kapital usurpierten, daß sie die Frauen schändeten und die Kinder töteten, dies alles hatte sie nicht gewußt. Auch jetzt glaube sie noch an Ausnahmen, zum Beispiel dieser Schriftsteller hier in der Wohnung sei im Dorf geachtet, sogar beliebt. Die Frau dürfte auch nicht die Schlimmste sein, hier hatte sie sogar ein Madonnenbild hängen. (*Schildkröten*, p. 116)

Try as he does to refute his wife's words, Pilz never quite succeeds in convincing her that the Kains are evil: 'Sie war noch nicht ganz gefangen' (*Schildkröten*, p. 116). Frau Pilz's Christian values of tolerance and love for one's fellow man outweigh the ideological fervour of her husband's new religion. They overcome the attempt by the Nazis to pervert all that is good. Frau Pilz thus becomes more than a simple stereotype, and Canetti uses her to suggest that Nazism is perhaps not as deeply rooted as the Nazis would like. Even so, Frau Pilz, like the 'good' Austrians she represents, is too passive or frightened to do anything about her doubts.

The names of the characters in this novel are not idly chosen, either. Baldur for instance, is not only the name of the Germanic god of light, peace and rebirth, but

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<sup>32</sup> Eva is clearly not such a wife. Pilz is shocked and insulted when she dares to talk back to him intelligently: 'Sie haben einen Antworter! Nicht zum glauben, was in so einer kleinen Frau alles steckt!' (*Schildkröten*, p. 59).

is also presumably an allusion to the head of the Hitler Youth and Reichstatthalter of Vienna, Baldur von Schirach. 'Pilz' is the German word for 'mushroom' or 'fungus'. This combination of names makes him a figure of fun, playing as it does off the Nazis' propensity for Norse mythology, for this man is certainly no person of light and peace, but rather one who more resembles his last name. Like a fungus he infiltrates the Kain home and corrupts all he comes into contact with. He also resembles the parasite he describes to the neighbourhood children: he takes but does not give. In Irmela von der Lühe's view, Pilz is without doubt: 'eine Karikatur auf Adolf Hitler, den "Anstreicher aus Österreich" (Brecht) [...] Bilder und Motive, Formen und Namen konkretisieren den von ihm ausgehenden Schrecken.'<sup>33</sup>

The fourth chapter of this novel, 'Das Gastmahl', is also the centre point around which the entire work revolves. In this strange and original chapter, a superficially civilised conversation takes place among intelligent Jews and the naïve Nazi who has them in his power. The title of the chapter is an ironic allusion to Plato's *Symposium*, *Das Gastmahl* in German. As in a Greek symposium, in this chapter philosophical discussions take place during a special meal. In Plato's *Gastmahl* the discourse is about love. Here it is anything but; Canetti inverts everything about Plato's dialogue. On the surface it seems to represent a polite and at times almost light-hearted and pleasant philosophical dinner conversation à la Plato, but underlying it all is terrible tension and even fear.

In 'Das Gastmahl' the Kains and Hilde prepare a sumptuous meal for Pilz that includes 'Schildkrötensuppe'. Hilde tells Pilz that this food is 'die Speise für den Lindwurm. Damit er die Bewohner der Stadt verschone' (*Schildkröten*, p. 82). She adds, pointedly: 'Der Drache sind Sie, die Schildkröten sind wir' (ibid.). Although

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<sup>33</sup> Irmela von der Lühe, "Zum Andenken an die fröhlichste Stadt Zentraleuropas": Veza Canettis "Die Schildkröten" im Kontext der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur', *Veza Canetti: Text + Kritik*, 156 (2002), 65-81 (p. 78).

Pilz does not understand this analogy, Hilde chooses to associate herself and the Kains with tortoises because 'sie so zäh ist. Nicht auszurotten, trotz des ewigen Raubes an ihr' (*Schildkröten*, p. 83). The use of the word 'ausrotten' is prescient, foreshadowing the very term the Nazis will use to fulfill their desire to exterminate the Jewish race, which, as this choice of words suggests, stems from eternal ('ewig') predation – 'Raub,' tellingly can also mean 'rape' – against the Jews.

Andreas Kain resists Pilz's predations with the only weapons he (and, by extension, the Jews of Austria) has at hand – words. He calls him 'Herr Ingenieur', laughs at his use of clichés, and subtly insults him. When Pilz claims that flying produces a sensation like being a king, Kain corrects 'wie ein König' to 'Wie ein Diktator' (*Schildkröten*, p. 88). When Pilz describes a gruesome experience he had in Africa, Kain compares it to the sight of a woman in the Leopoldstadt docks, mad with grief, running around clutching a parcel of her son's ashes and shouting 'Heil'. Kain also points out that the Nazis are driving people to commit suicide in the thousands. When Eva asks him why he bothers to talk to that 'Papagei' in human terms, as Pilz does not understand what is being said to him, Kain answers that it serves a purpose: 'Den, Eva, daß ich mich vor mir selbst nicht schämen muß' (*Schildkröten*, p. 96).

Hilde, by contrast, seeking to gain Pilz's trust and thus to help in an escape plan for the Kains, decides to be charming and flirtatious. Hilde feels that it is her responsibility to do this 'an ihre Pflicht, mit List zu siegen' (*Schildkröten*, p. 86). This represents, as in *Die Gelbe Straße*, a condoning of the female use of subterfuge when dealing with a male oppressor. But she, too, simultaneously insults Pilz, calling him an 'Unhold' and 'scharlachroten Pilz' (*Schildkröten*, pp. 95-96), and, though he does not seem aware of it, talks down to him too: '[...] in einem Ton, als hätte sie es mit einem aus der Idiotenanstalt Entlaufenen zu tun' (*Schildkröten*, p. 86).

Through Hilde, Canetti also highlights the nonsensical aspects of Nazism. For example, Hilde asks Pilz, 'warum beruft er [Hitler] sich denn immer auf Gott, er mag doch die Leute nicht, die in die Kirche gehn' (*Schildkröten*, p. 99). Pilz's response, that Hitler does not like those who let themselves be persuaded by those higher up, is laughable in the face of Hitler's desire that people be persuaded by him. When Pilz goes on to say, 'solange sich die Pfaffen in die Politik mischen, ist der Teufel los' (*ibid.*), Hilde responds with a feminist anecdote about Napoleon:

Napoleon sagte zu ihr [Madame de Staël]: 'Ich mag es nicht leiden, wenn sich die Frauen in Politik mischen.' Madame de Staël antwortete darauf: 'Sire, wenn man ihnen die Köpfe abschlägt, müssen sie doch wenigstens wissen, warum.' (*ibid.*)

Pilz, who obviously does not understand the point of this story, replies with platitudes, arguing that Napoleon may be great but Hitler is greater: 'Und was für ein Mensch das ist [Hitler]! So einfach, so bescheiden! Er lebt von Nüssen' (*ibid.*). The absurdity of the last sentence speaks for itself.

But Pilz's buffoonish manner cannot completely obscure his chilling nature – and the power he wields. When Eva becomes distressed by their gruesome discussions, Pilz says to her: 'Aber Frau Doktor, wer wird denn so empfindlich sein, es geschieht Ihnen ja nichts. Ihnen darf keiner was tun, da verlassen Sie sich auf mich' (*Schildkröten*, p. 94). Confident in his ability to protect even the lowly Jews from the actions of those around him such as the police-sanctioned bombings, house plunderings, and acid burnings, Pilz condones these admittedly excessive measures using a biblical analogy:

Wenn man in ein Haus eindringen will, muss man dem Hund im Garten Fleisch hinwerfen. Die Christen sind auch den Stieren hingeworfen worden, jetzt wirft man halt einmal ein paar Juden hin. (*Schildkröten*, p. 95)

The persecution of the Jews is on par with distracting a dog to get into a house. Pilz considers such measures necessary precisely because it is the Nazis who are trying to get into the metaphorical house, just as Pilz himself took over the Kains'. Thus, throwing a few Jews to the 'Stieren' becomes an acceptable evil.

Pilz then lowers the level of conversation to an earthier sphere. Commenting that the room they are in reminds him of a booth set up for private assignations, he flirts with young Hilde, recommending that she hold onto him and telling her that she is a pretty young lady and a jealous minx and other such sentiments. The moment Kain is out of the room he propositions Eva, in front of Hilde, with utter confidence that they will soon play 'Adam und Eva' (*Schildkröten*, p. 107) and that he and Hilde will soon do the same. Although he purports to be against religion, he constantly resorts to the Bible to make his points. He even uses biblical language in his seduction attempts, saying: 'Angst hab ich keine – hupp –, ich bin doch nicht der Lot, und ihr seid nicht die Söhne vom Lot, Liebchen, sagen Sie mirs schnell ins Ohr, wann wir Lot spielen...' (*Schildkröten*, p. 107). Such Biblical references, however ironically they are used here, did not appear in Canetti's pre-exile work to any similar degree. These statements also exemplify the emptiness and amorality that lie at the heart of National Socialism. In this novel Pilz stands in not just for Adolf Hitler but for Nazism as a whole.

In many ways, too, the central characters in *Die Schildkröten* resemble both the Canettis themselves and Austrian Jews as a whole. The Canettis, having begun their married life on Ferdinandstrasse near the centre of Vienna, after a year and a half moved to a house on Himmelstrasse in Grinzing that resembled the house and the surroundings depicted in this novel. According to Lorenz, '*Die Schildkröten* [...] reveals that the move to the idyllic vineyards of Grinzing must be considered a retreat

from the increasingly problematic life in the capital, anti-Semitism, and the attacks on critical intellectuals'.<sup>34</sup>

Like Elias, too, Andreas Kain is a writer – and a Jew. For most of the novel Kain does not understand how bleak and grim his prospects as a Jew are. Those scholars, like Lorenz, who have suggested that male writers, admittedly real and not fictional figures, were so bound up in their culture and milieu that they lost contact with the life around them might well have had him in mind.<sup>35</sup> But life finally becomes so dangerous and complicated that it jolts even him into contact with reality. He finally understands that he must flee or die. He finally realises, too, like his wife well before him, that for Jews there can be no dealing or coming to terms with National Socialism, no solution but to get away.

The name Kain recalls the biblical Cain and links the biblical story to that of the Jews driven from Austria. In Genesis 4. 13-14, Cain says to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me'. This is surely close to what Canetti feels has happened to the Jews of Austria like herself.

In the next verse, Genesis 4. 15, the Lord places a mark on Cain so that no one will kill him, at least not without 'sevenfold' vengeance in return. In Vienna the Nazis placed marks on Jews that progressively removed them from society and eventually helped single them out for death. Cain survived to start a family and begin a race. With this reference, Canetti implies that Eva and Andreas, whose Greek name derives from the word for 'man' or 'mankind, just as does in Hebrew the name

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<sup>34</sup> Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Introduction', in *A Companion to the Works of Elias Canetti* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> See 'Jewish Women Authors', pp. 228-29.

'Adam', will survive their flight. Like her image of the enduring tortoise, it implies that the Jews, too, will build a new life for themselves now that they have been cast out of Eden.

All this makes *Die Schildkröten*, as von der Lühe points out, a novel of paradoxes:

Seine Modernität bezieht der Roman aus solchen paradoxen Rekursen auf biblische und mythische Bilder, aus seiner grotesk-realistischen Umdeutung alter Motive und Formen. Der als 'Lindwurm' und 'Giftpilz', als 'Pilzchen', 'Schwamm' oder 'Mann im Schierlingsgift' apostrophierte Protagonist des Nationalsozialismus fühlt sich durch den Verzehr der widerwärtigen Schildkrötensuppe wunderbar gekräftigt. Als dummer, brutaler und geldgieriger Spießier repräsentiert er die moderne Barbarei, die sich anschickt, die Traditionen von Kultur und Humanität außer Kraft zu setzen. ('Zum Andenken', p. 78)

In this, Canetti's first work written in exile, the simple political verities, the matter-of-fact realism, the straightforward prose of her Viennese days have largely vanished. Now, myth and reality mingle, religion plays a significant role, tradition takes on added importance, and while personal tragedy remains, the context in which it occurs has changed. The novel embodies the author's experience of loss of *Heimat* and *Identität*. The culture in which Canetti was reared, in which she felt comfortable, and in which she became an artist has ceased to exist, and thus, like the tortoise, she herself, now lost in exile, no longer has her shell.

## **Later Works in English Exile**

Once settled in exile, Canetti returned to the short form of fiction with which she had begun as a writer. The stories written in England, however, while still paying particular attention to domestic difficulties, lack the sympathy for her characters that

had characterised both her Viennese writing and her novel. Almost all of these stories are darker and harsher than her previous works. Religion, which, as noted above, had played no role in her earlier works, also becomes important, especially in the later stories both written and set in England. In these last works criticism of the sheltered British way of life predominates, and her previous championing of the have-nots in society largely vanishes. Canetti struggled with, and wrote a great deal in her letters about, Britain's insular nature and the lack of interest or understanding the British had for the events in Austria and Germany, in particular the suffering of the Jews on the Continent before and during the war. Her focus now is much more on the personal than on the political.

Irony marks these exile works, just as it did her earlier ones, but now her stories are also filled with sarcasm, sometimes gentle and sometimes strong. In *Der Fund*, as a collection published posthumously was titled, her wit is everywhere deadpan, dry, and pointed. But an air of disorientation and sometimes of savagery as well replaces the dispassionate realism of her Viennese works. The rise of Nazism, the need for flight and resettlement in a foreign country, and the Holocaust itself all must have contributed to this loss of faith. Canetti found her life in exile troubling, disappointing, and disillusioning. She seems to have adopted this more jaundiced tone as a means of personal salvation. Sarcasm, she herself said to a friend, helped her to survive exile: 'Ich bin sarkastisch. Es rettet mich'.<sup>36</sup> Often separated from her husband and always from her native culture, living from hand to mouth for long periods, uncomfortable among the English, she moved away from the cool, clear, and dispassionate voice of her earlier years.

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<sup>36</sup> Angelika Schedel, 'Nachwort', in Veza Canetti, *Der Fund* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), pp. 309-24 (p. 318).

In addition, although all of her writing is, in a sense, an attack on societal ills, this attack takes different forms before and after exile. In *Die Gelbe Straße* she combats stereotypes; in her English stories she creates them. In *Die Gelbe Straße* she criticised Austrian society on specific issues – domestic abuse, forced prostitution – and showed particular sympathy for the most vulnerable. In England she criticises Britons and British society as a whole with little apparent sympathy for any of her secondary characters. In part this may stem from the difference between being inside a society looking out and outside looking in, but it surely also stems from the frustration of living in a country that had little understanding of or interest in the events in her homeland.

Canetti's exile stories depict English life, both literally and metaphorically, as something lived as if in a cage. England seems sometimes surreal, sometimes frightening. The descriptions of the lives of Jewish refugees in England can at times even resemble descriptions of those of the Jews in Vienna in *Die Schildkröten*. The English, though free from Nazi ideology, nevertheless sometimes seem, albeit in a much smaller and more mundane way, almost as sinister. They, too, take advantage of the weak. They, too, do not offer to help those in need. Her despairing descriptions of the English are perhaps a sign of the disorientation and crisis of identity that exile can engender in a writer, particularly in a politically engaged female writer as rooted in local context and domestic and feminist concerns as Canetti was in Vienna.

## **‘London. Der Zoo’**

Two of the stories in *Der Fund* are set in a zoo. One, however, was written while Canetti still lived in Vienna and the other when she was in England. The differences are pronounced and reveal much about the changes in her that occurred in exile.

In ‘London. Der Zoo’ one of the denizens of that zoo, the chimpanzee Jack, is said to view the humans staring at him as simply ‘höher entwickelte Brüder’ (*Fund*, p. 30). It is almost as if Jack is in reality not so different from those who come to look at him. In fact, he has already taken on certain human habits, if not traits, ‘wenn er eine Zigarette raucht, die ein Zuschauer ihm reicht oder wenn er Eis ißt, manchmal aus der Schale, manchmal auf Bitten und Schmeicheln seiner Spenderin mit dem Löffel’ (*ibid.*). Humans give cigarettes to an ape in order to amuse themselves, not the ape. They also offer him food he would never naturally eat. He thus loses his instincts – his native culture in a sense – and becomes different. Superficially, things look the same, but in fact he is not living the life he would have lived in his native environment. It is perhaps not so different from what happens to Viennese émigrés congregating in a faux-Viennese coffee house in London.

In a zoo not only is the nature of beasts lost, but so, it seems, is a sense of reality. When people observe polar bears while safely standing on the other side of a trench, they forget how dangerous these creatures really are: ‘Man vergißt bei diesem schönen Anblick, daß man in Lebensgefahr ist und man ist es auch nicht, es ist eine optische Täuschung, ein Graben trennt die Bären von uns’ (*Fund*, pp. 30-31). In a place where animals smoke, large beasts become playthings, and dangerous animals appear benign, all sense of the natural order of things is absent.

Some very British traits drive this point home. When Jack throws his faeces in anger, those watching do not laugh. This is not because they notice the animal's distress, but because 'es war "rude"' (*Fund*, p. 30). As well as meaning offensive in manner or action, 'rude' also implies a lack of social refinement, either because of ignorance or indifference. Her choice of this English word in the German text gives the reader a glimpse into the English character of that time, when the use of this word would have been far more pejorative than its use today. Calling an animal 'rude' implies it has human characteristics. It also implies that the English cannot accept what is real and natural. The English seem to be childish, prudish, and uncomfortable with things as they really are. They seem, in other words, like caged animals: 'Die Engländer werden demnächst *alle* Tiere in eine so erträgliche Gefängenschaft übersiedeln. Der neue Zoo wird ein Paradies der Käfigtiere sein' (*Fund*, p. 31).

The zoo is a metaphor for Canetti's life in London. She may be surrounded by friends and family and recreated continental cafés, but London still seems artificial to her. It is the difference between life in a cage and life in the wild, between fish swimming in the sea and fish swimming endlessly around a tank. Animals in a zoo or fish in a tank may look at home, but they are not. For her living in London is like living in a zoo.

This contrasts sharply with the other short story in this collection about a zoo. 'Herr Hoe im Zoo' was written in 1935 and is presumably about a zoo in Vienna.<sup>37</sup> Given the political climate in Vienna at the time, it is not surprising that Canetti was drawn to a caged setting even then. As a Jewish Socialist woman, and as a writer no longer able to get published, she must have felt trapped in the increasingly National Socialist Austria. Although in this short story, too, we see how confinement changes

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<sup>37</sup> See *The Rediscovered Writings*, p. 162: 'Thanks to an encoded half-chapter found among the drafts for *The Play of Eyes*, Veza's "Herr Hoe at the Zoo" can be dated with some confidence to 1935'.

both human beings and animals, something that is starkly portrayed in 'London. Der Zoo', Canetti here has a different purpose in mind. Instead of serving as a metaphor for exile, a zoo serves as a means to demonstrate how easily people cling to their illusions – or delusions – even in the face of evidence that contradicts their beliefs. It recapitulates the way in which Germans and Austrians behaved in their growing enthusiasm for the certitudes and the confines of Nazism at the expense of true Socialism.

The main character in this story, Herr Hoe, is against the caging of animals in the zoo, arguing that there are no beasts of prey, only humans of prey: 'Es gibt keine Raubtiere, sondern nur Raubmenschen' (*Fund*, p. 33). Unfortunately, he is highly delusional and thinks he has lived in the jungle when he has not. He also believes he can survive inside the cages in a zoo. He begins with the cage of a wolf, which ignores him and instead paces to and fro, acting and looking like a dog rather than a wolf. Herr Hoe believes that a lone wolf is not dangerous, that only those in packs are. The narrator points out that the wolf has just eaten – 'Der Wolf beachtete Herrn Hoe übrigens so wenig, als wäre er ein Apfelwurm. Das kam daher, weil er gerade zu Mittag gegessen hatte' (*Fund*, p. 35) – and also wonders if the wolf thinks Herr Hoe is a zoo keeper. The wolf has lost his instincts by being locked in a cage. He has become used to human company and in that sense he *is* more like a domesticated dog than a creature of the wild.

Humans, here, are the corrupting factor. When Herr Hoe passes the apes he is startled by how much they resemble humans as they mock him: 'Sie waren so menschenähnlich, dass er [Herr Hoe] zu zittern begann' (*Fund*, p. 35). They spit shells at Herr Hoe; they pick his pocket; they even shove him around. Like Jack, the cigarette-smoking chimpanzee in the later zoo story, these chimpanzees have been

affected by their contact with humans. Neither frightened by Herr Hoe's presence nor angered by it, these chimpanzees instead simply take advantage of it for their own ends, and Herr Hoe sees this as very human – a grim view of humanity, to be sure.

Although Herr Hoe is obviously delusional, his companions not only egg him on, but actually persuade him to put himself in great danger to prove his delusions. Like the chimpanzees, they take advantage of him, but in this case they nearly get him killed. Herr Hoe does not see the danger in front of him because he is so convinced that he is right. Writing here a year after the civil war in Austria and the closure of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Canetti had, perhaps not surprisingly, come to see people as easily fooled or as overly willing to cling to convictions no matter how wrong and how dangerous they might be. After all, she experienced personally – and even later, in *Die Schildkröten*, wrote a novel about – how some Jews in Vienna did not see or believe or understand what was happening to them until it was too late.

In the end Herr Hoe enters the cage of a lion where he is nearly eaten. He is saved only by a quick-thinking zoo-keeper who throws meat into the cage for the lion to have for lunch instead of Herr Hoe. So saved, Herr Hoe then gives a speech about the nobility of the being we have the audacity to call a beast: 'Hier sehen Sie das Wesen, das wir "Bestie" nennen. Er hat seinen Hunger gestillt, er legt sich nieder, stolz und ruhig. Indessen der Mensch nicht und nicht genug kriegen kann' (*Fund*, p. 37). Although he faults himself for having doubted the lion, we know that the 'Bestie' probably would have eaten him, whatever he may now think, had not the more appetizing raw meat suddenly appeared. The narrator then archly credits the lavender in which Herr Hoe bathes himself and launders his clothes to ward off moths with having deterred the lion and motivated it to choose the meat instead. The tale concludes with the ironically amusing comment, 'Und auch mich klagt er an, wegen

meiner echt menschlichen Deutung mit dem Lavendel' (*Fund*, p. 37). Herr Hoe remains a man of convictions, however deluded, to the end.

This last sentence puts an interesting twist on the story. One can read until then believing that the narrator is omniscient. When, however, one learns at the very end that Herr Hoe faults the narrator for the explanation of his escape from the lion involving lavender, one realises that the narrator is a friend or at least an acquaintance of Herr Hoe – perhaps even one of the 'zwei Stammtischfreunden' mentioned at the beginning of the story. The objective distance we have attributed to the narrator up to this point vanishes with this revelation. The reader no longer knows quite what to believe about Herr Hoe. In a subtle and surprising way, the ending of this story raises questions about everything that has come before and thus, too, about perception and reality. As this ironic twist at the end suggests, this story, although critical of the behaviour of the characters it depicts, is nevertheless far gentler in its approach to contemporary life in Vienna than are the stories Canetti wrote only a few years later while she was living in England.

### **'Air raid'**

Canetti's other three stories about life in England are very different in tone from the one about the London Zoo. These three – 'Air raid', 'Der letzte Wille', and 'Toogoods oder das Licht' – at times feature Canetti's wicked sense of humour, but overall are filled with destruction, uncertainty and fear, as well as with a pervasive sense of deep dissatisfaction. In 'Air raid', as in 'Toogoods oder das Licht', the main characters live with strangers. Here we never even learn the name of the landlady, who is simply 'Die Dame des Hauses' or 'die alte Dame'. She is at one point called

‘Großmütterchen’ but whether this is out of respect or out of actual familial relation is not clear. The narrator and Harry, the other main character, may live with this woman, but they do not know her. They are frightened, they are guests, and they are not particularly welcome. It is a kind of double exile, which makes it worse. The landlady comments that the Spanish have lost the war: ‘weil ihr so ängstlich seid’ (*Fund*, p. 190). Referring to the narrator and Harry, she says, ‘ihr Spanier’. By dubbing the Spanish ‘theirs’ she is implying that they, like the losing side in the Spanish Civil War, are Socialists. This comes across as both a criticism and as another reason, perhaps, why the landlady keeps her distance from them. For a woman apparently so out of touch with reality, she does seem to be at least somewhat politically aware; she knows about not just Hitler but also Spain. In what must be a private joke, for it seems unlikely that a woman obsessed with mystery novels even during air raids would be aware of such arcane facts of history, her use of ‘Spanier’ also seems to allude to the Canettis’ origins in the Sephardic Jewish community in Spain – a community, too, that was largely driven into exile in the past. If this is the case, it is another of the religious allusions that mark Canetti’s later work. It is also another instance of the almost surreal set of contrasts that run through this story, in which the mundane concerns of daily existence appear side-by-side with the brutal results of war, just as the clear truth of the present mixes with the more arcane details of the past.

Commingling the quotidian with the existential, the story’s focus switches rapidly back and forth from matters of life and death to matters of everyday life, from an apparently collapsing marriage to a truly collapsing building. One moment the narrator describes her reactions to the frightening air raid: ‘In diesem Augenblick hörten wir ein Getöse, wie wenn es Eisenbarren auf den Krystall-Palast regnete. Ich

wollte unter den Tisch, war aber zu schwach ihrer Verachtung gegenüber' (*Fund*, p. 190). The next, she says to Harry, 'Du gehst mir auf die Nerven' (*Fund*, p. 191). The simile 'wie wenn es Eisenbarren auf den Krystall-Palast regnete' is particularly striking. Darkly comic, if not absurd, it both adds to the surreality of the scene and emphasises the narrator's vulnerability. Meanwhile, the old lady comes in and, as if bombs were not falling all around them, describes events from the detective novel she has borrowed from a neighbour. It is as if there are three different worlds inhabiting the same plane. There is the world of the war in which bombs are raining down, people are taking refuge under tables, and three tons of cement are collapsing on top of them – a world Canetti compares to hell: 'Die Sterne sahen jetzt wie Flugzeuge aus, wie Teufel, Bomben und Feuer. Der Himmel war zur Hölle geworden' (*Fund*, p. 192). There is the world of Harry and the narrator in which, in the midst of all this fear and action, the narrator can complain that Harry gets on her nerves, in which she can worry about being too close to the fire, and in which she can perform a normal everyday task like making tea. And finally, there is the world of the old lady, which seems completely removed from reality. She clearly does not seem to understand the enormity of what is going on: 'Hitler wird doch nicht *mein* Haus treffen', she says, as if Hitler were personally directing the targeting of each air strike with her in mind. Her reasons for this are, in a strange way, rational: 'Doch nicht dieses kleine Haus. Er sieht es nicht einmal. Mein Verstorbener ist jedes Jahr mit dem Flugzeug nach Paris und zurück gefahren und hat es nicht gesehen' (*Fund*, p. 190).

But of course that her house is small does not mean it will not get hit. While the narrator and Harry fear and worry, she retires to another room to read her detective novel. She is so wrapped up in this novel – so wrapped up in a made-up world – that she does not even notice the world she is in, and when the narrator tells

her that their country is being bombed, she is completely shocked. She had not noticed the noise, nor did she believe it to be possible: “‘Bomben?’” sagte sie und sah mich erstaunt an’ (*Fund*, p. 192). When her house is hit, she does not appear to care – or even, in fact, to notice. Neither does she bother to enquire after the health of her houseguests. Instead she simply complains that the lights went out at a crucial moment in her reading: ‘Denkt euch, das Licht ist ausgegangen, gerade wie sie den Mörder gefunden haben!’ (*Fund*, p. 193). The irony of her desire to find out ‘whodunit’, even as she fails to notice that her own life was in danger, comes through precisely with this single sentence. She is living proof that fiction, even detective stories, can take us completely out of our surroundings. She has clearly lost touch with hers.

In a way, too, the same thing appears to have happened to the narrator. War, the narrator implies, distorts everything and forces people to cope by ignoring the reality around them for one of their own choosing. How else could she shift perspectives so quickly in the middle of a bombing raid – from the world of the collapsing building, the reality around her, to the world of her perhaps-collapsing marriage, which is more the reality within? How else could she make tea as bombs explode, as if everything were perfectly normal?

The landlady also exemplifies the complacency of the English. Her almost indestructible sense of security – something the narrator seems to lack – has led her to ignore what has happened around her; she can grow excited over a fictional crime even while seeming to be unaware that real violence is taking place around her. Again, Canetti implicitly criticises the country in which she has been compelled to take refuge. The English, not having experienced first-hand the horrors of Nazism, she seems to suggest, do not really understand what is at stake. The landlady rather

unrealistically thinks her house is safe by virtue of its small size, much as perhaps the English think their nation safe, such air raids notwithstanding, by virtue of being an island.

### **‘Der letzte Wille’**

‘Der letzte Wille’, an atmospheric story also about England during the war, takes place amid the noise, darkness, and chaos of an air-raid: ‘Es pfiff durch die Luft und dröhnte, und jetzt bewegte sich der Boden unter uns. Wie ein Schiff im Sturm. Besinnungslos vor Angst lief ich ins Freie’ (*Fund*, p. 194). An air of bittersweetness, marked by the emphasised juxtapositions between light and darkness, between night and day, between the colours of the house that is still standing and the ash and rubble of the ruined one across the way, also runs through it.

In this brief story a brother and sister twice fail to help a stranger during the chaos. They first see a woman with ‘herb’ – ‘harsh’ or ‘austere’– features passing their house and do not call out to her or offer her shelter, though it does at least occur to the brother to do so, ‘Wir hätten sie hereinrufen sollen’ (*Fund*, p. 194). Later they find a woman, hair covered in blood, lying dead outside and the reader is left to assume that it is the same one. She looked as if she had been dead for only an hour; perhaps they could have saved her. During the night, after the air raid, when the fires were extinguished, the narrator and her brother fell exhausted into their beds, but were woken by a knocking at the door. Though the brother answered, he did not look carefully outside and thus did not see the woman in distress and did not assist her.

The sharp reality of the air-raid stands in contrast here to the reverie the narrator experiences once it had ended. The narrator thinks the knocking at the door

was a dream. It is not until morning that she realises what has actually happened. The horror becomes real only later, when the narrator sees the exact positioning of the dead body before them. When the brother moves the dead woman, we learn, her head lolls over his arms.

The story ends, however, by moving from horror to hope. The narrator and her brother rescue the dead woman's baby, who has somehow not only survived the cold, the war, and the mother's death, but is also even able to laugh. This survival against all odds is reminiscent of Canetti's use of the tortoise in *Die Schildkröten* to symbolise the survival of the Jewish people and their hope for the future. The baby's laughter overcomes everything: 'Es lachte, es lachte weiter. Und es überwältigte alles: die Hoffnungslosigkeit; den Anblick der jungen Frau; ja, selbst uns, unser Grauen' (*Fund*, p. 196). The narrator finishes the tale by saying that she and her brother never spoke of the knocking at the door again; the baby changed them: 'Es ist wie ein Stück Himmel, das Gesicht dieses Kindes. Wir werden kämpfen, oh, wir werden kämpfen, daß es ihm bleibt dieses Lächeln' (*Fund*, p. 196). The brief description of the laughing, bright-eyed child, who is wrapped in white, suggests a better future, as do other observations that the narrator makes, such as her passing comment that the moon shines on the harsh features of the dead woman, which are still marked by 'Bitterkeit'.<sup>38</sup> In this same moonlight she then observes, a little later, that in death, with the saving and the laughter of her child, the features of the woman seem to have changed. She seems to the narrator to have been released.

This story marks a change in Canetti's exile perspective. Rather than criticizing the insular nature of the British, she now makes a larger point about human

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<sup>38</sup> This, too, seems to be a biblical reference. Not only is the child called a piece of heaven, but it is also found wrapped up outside, for the mother could find no space indoors in which to hide. Similarly, Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger because there was no room inside the inn. See Luke 2.

nature. By failing to distinguish between reality and reverie, by not doing all they could to intervene, the brother and sister unwittingly facilitate the demise of the woman. By implication, then, she seems to be telling a parable about the larger failure of the world to prevent the Holocaust.

Throughout her exile work, Canetti also alludes to the impact war has on morality, as well as on traditional family structures. In *Die Schildkröten*, for example, it was Hilde, a young woman, who tried to plan an escape for her family and not her parents, thus reversing traditional roles. Here, a brother and sister become parents to a baby, which binds them in a way that blood ties cannot. Canetti leaves the story open-ended and does not make clear whether the brother and sister keep the child permanently or for only a short while. By leaving the fate of the child, as well as that of the narrator and her brother, uncertain, Canetti suggests not only the extraordinary turn of events that war can bring but also perhaps the uncertainty she herself felt about her future in exile – and perhaps the larger uncertainty about the fate of the Jewish people as well.

### **‘Toogoods oder das Licht’**

‘Toogoods oder das Licht’ is the most autobiographical of Canetti’s exile short stories. From *Party im Blitz* we know that the Canettis moved to the country and into the home of a pastor and his wife, the Milburns, who were the friends of a clairvoyant named Miss Lilly Slough. They all reappear, thinly disguised, in this work of short fiction. Elias’s treatment of the Milburns in *Party im Blitz* is far more sympathetic than is Canetti’s of the Toogoods. The latter seems to have found living with the Milburns more difficult than did her husband. Elias, however, gives the

misleading impression that the Milburns belonged to a fundamentalist Protestant sect. From other accounts,<sup>39</sup> it appears that Robert Gordon Milburn was a retired Anglican clergyman. To be sure, though, he and his wife had many beliefs that seemed to be not strictly in accord with Anglicanism. These perhaps stemmed from Milburn's interest in Asian religions.

Canetti clearly found Mrs Milburn, in particular, a trial. Elias records a typical conversation between the two, in which Mrs Milburn describes life in terms of religion, albeit a very peculiar sort of religion. Canetti regards life as more complicated than that:

Seine Frau [Mrs Milburn] erschrak ein wenig über Veza, die das Feuer auf ihrem Gesicht nicht zügeln konnte und gleich von den Luftangriffen auf London erzählte. Solche Dinge liebte Mrs. Milburn weder auszusprechen noch zu hören. 'Das Böse ist nicht wirklich,' sagte sie sanft, 'das Böse ist eine Einbildung von uns.' 'Und die Bomben?', fragte Veza, trotz meinen verzweifelten Bemühungen, sie zum Schweigen zu bringen. 'Die Bomben bilden wir uns ein', sagte Mrs. Milburn. Veza bemerkte endlich meine Zeichen und verstummte.<sup>40</sup>

Canetti was, at least in this account, obviously not the kind of person who could credit that anyone's faith should allow them to regard evil, not to mention bombing, as somehow imaginary.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, like an obedient wife, she also yielded to her husband's restraining signs and did not engage further in argument. Clearly he viewed the Milburns differently from her. Sven Hanschek captures the difference between the attitudes of husband and wife well when he says:

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<sup>39</sup> See Jill Lloyd, *The Undiscovered Expressionist: A Life of Marie-Louise von Motesiczky* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 120-121.

<sup>40</sup> Elias Canetti, *Party im Blitz* (Munich: Hanser, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> This recalls the mystery-reading landlady in the previous story. She, too, was surprised by the bombs and did not believe they could be real. Canetti viewed the Milburns' lack of touch with reality as a British trait, rather than specific to the couple, which is why such situations occur repeatedly in her exile writing.

Während Elias Canettis Beschreibung ambivalent, auch amüsiert über die Ängste und den Geiz von Mary und Gordon Milburn bleibt – eben ein autobiographisches Werk –, macht der *Toogood*-Text boshafthumoristische Karikaturen aus dem Paar, bigotte, beschränkte Leute, die ihren Mietern mit dem eigenen Kot gedüngtes, schlecht gekochtes Wassergemüse servieren und die guten Lebensmittel heimlich verzehren. (Hanuschek, p. 328)

In this short story the way in which the narrator depicts the Toogoods is very likely a direct reflection of Canetti's feelings toward the Milburns. In her exile writings she often demonstrates her sensitivity to, and knowledge of, the nuances of English behaviour, but this does not mean that she approves of it. She also shows herself to be hostile not just to the behaviour she encounters in the Milburns but also to their sectarian Protestantism. Her initial descriptions of the Toogoods are repellent. When Canetti really wanted to vilify someone in writing, she gave them an obsession with excrement.<sup>42</sup> In this story the Toogoods are certainly not hygienic; they would even prefer it if guests did not flush the toilet.<sup>43</sup> But this is just the beginning of the Toogoods' association with dirt. In the next paragraph, the author describes in detail their composting, and later she writes of having to eat vegetables fertilised with this compost, which had come directly from the Toogoods' toilet. It makes, as it is clearly intended to do, for an unpleasant and uncomfortable read.

Canetti is also critical of the Toogoods themselves. From the very first sentence we learn that Frau Toogood is 'hager', or lean, and that the Toogoods live in a 'geräumige Haus'. This implies that they have more than they need, that they are selfish – an un-Christian trait. They are also anti-Semitic, as the author illustrates when she writes, 'Das Prinzip des pensionierten Geistlichen lautete: wenn das

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<sup>42</sup> Herr Vlk in *Die Gelbe Straße* is described painting his jail cell with his own excrement to make it yellow, and the stressed chimpanzee, Jack, is seen throwing his faeces in anger at the humans watching him.

<sup>43</sup> In her letters to Geroges, Canetti describes always being caught by the Milburns when trying to wash her stockings in secret, which got her into trouble with them because of the waste of water (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 146).

Empire die von Gott Gezeichneten einläßt, und ich sie gar ins Haus nehme, so haben sich mir diese Flüchtlinge für die Großmut Englands dankbar zu erweisen, und sie haben mir möglichst viel Nutzen zu bringen' (*Fund*, p. 197).<sup>44</sup> Here she is making a biblical reference, for 'von Gott Gezeichneten' is more than just a phrase suggesting Jews have been marked by God for disapproval. Here, as she did previously in *Die Schildkröten*, Canetti once again refers to the biblical story of Cain and specifically to Genesis 4. 15, which in German says, 'Darauf machte der Herr dem Kain ein Zeichen, damit ihn keiner erschlage, der ihn finde'. When she then writes 'viel Nutzen zu bringen,' she seems to suggest that one can also do well (financially) by doing good. 'Nutzen', referring to gain or profit, seems a harsh, even callous, statement in a biblical context. It hardly conjures up images of Christian charity. It also plays ironically off the stereotype of the rapacious Jew.

This kind of bitter irony runs throughout the story, though it is sometimes leavened with a lighter humour. The Toogoods' name, for instance, is the opposite of appropriate, for they are anything but too good. With sentences like 'In dieser Not schickte Gott die Bomben ins Land' (*Fund*, p. 200), Canetti also uses sly humour to pick away at their portentous, biblical-sounding phrases. The narrator seems to doubt what the Toogoods, and presumably the Milburns, hold to be true – that it is God who is sending the bombs Britain's way. This clearly recalls the kind of conversation about God, evil, and bombs that Elias describes. Like the Milburns, too, the Toogoods, are very concerned with sin and Satan, finding both everywhere, including in the deserted house next door. This house will become important, emblematic and even itself ironic at the story's end.

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<sup>44</sup> Canetti describes the Milburns as 'knauserig, geizig, gemein, schmutzig' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 145), and 'So fromm, daß sie mich um den Verstand brachten, weil sie uns jede Woche sagten, wir würden ausziehen müssen, denn die Deutschen könnten einmarschieren, und dann würden sie umgebracht, weil sie Juden Obdach gaben' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 146).

Perhaps it is her very non-believer's perspective that enables the narrator so clearly to see and so starkly to depict the hypocrisy of the Toogoods. They are, after all, a couple who decry rich people yet collect rent money from poor exiles who have to go to London to scrounge to pay it, and who eat well themselves yet give worm-infested food to their tenants. Here, as in the name she has chosen for her leading characters, Canetti cannot resist a play on words. The Toogoods, she writes, 'zahlen, das ist richtig, aber was ist Geld, wie eitel ist es, welcher Schein in den Augen eines Dieners Gottes' (*Fund*, p. 197). 'Schein' not only means shine, but also illusion. The Toogoods may claim not to care about money, but that is all an illusion for they very obviously do. This is, at the same time, an untranslatable pun referring to notes of money ('Geldscheine'). Their behaviour briefly becomes charitable when the Blitz reaches the countryside and they grow frightened, but when the Blitz recedes again they immediately revert to their previous patterns of behaviour. The narrator begins to pray for the bombing – 'Ich erbat Bomben' (*Fund*, p. 201) – because the Toogoods become kind and share good food when frightened.<sup>45</sup>

The bombing for which the narrator prays also brings out the contrast between Canetti's view of the Toogoods and Elias's of their real-life models. In his memoirs Elias describes how, during an air raid, the Milburns hid under the kitchen table and talked in low voices as if this would protect them:

Die beiden, einander nie lassend, schlüpfen unter diesen Tisch und legen sich nebeneinander unter seinen schützenden Himmel. Sie bleiben mäuschenstill, um keine Aufmerksamkeit auf sich zu ziehen, es ist anzunehmen, daß sie wie immer ins Beten verfielen, aber unter diesen Umständen lautlos. Allmählich, dank Veza, beruhigten sie sich. Veza hatte in solche Situationen nie Angst. Sie hatte einfach keine Zeit dazu, denn es waren immer andere da, die sie vor der Angst schützen mußte. Sie ging ruhig in der Küche auf und ab, die sie sonst nie betreten durfte, hantierte mit Geschirr und bereitete das Essen vor.

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<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Canetti writes to Georges, 'Oh, wie ich um Bomben betete!' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 146).

Wenn es lange dauerte, wurden die Milburns hungrig. Sie *sagten* es nie, ihre Befürchtung, daß ein Pilot oben durch ihre Stimmen auf sie aufmerksam werden könnte, setzte nie aus, aber wenn Veza ihnen das Essen unterm Tische zuschob, lappten sie es gierig auf wie Hunde. Die Laute ihres Schlüpfens waren bis zu uns hinauf zu vernehmen. Als Hunde fürchteten sie die Aufmerksamkeit der Flieger oben nicht. Nur Menschen hatten in jeder Hinsicht zu verschwinden. Ich kam dann auch in die Küche, einen solchen Anblick ließ ich mir nicht entgehen. Vezas Gegenwart empfanden sie als Schutz, der sich durch mein schweigendes Dazutreten verstärkte. Es war schwer zu glauben, daß die beiden dünnen Menschen unterm Tische zitterten und doch gierig aßen. (*Party im Blitz*, p. 59)

Although Mrs Milburn may have professed the belief that evil is not real, they certainly acted, unlike Canetti, as if it were.

The Toogoods feel fear during an air raid too. This does not bring out the best in them: 'Die beiden, um es kurz zu sagen, erbleichten, wurden kläglich, und bar jeder Würde krochen sie unter den mächtigen Küchentisch' (*Fund*, p. 200). The narrator, who calmly goes about her business and kindly offers them tea, compares the stolid Toogoods to the Jews wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt for their own safety: 'Bis zum Unglück die Bomben auf dem Lande aussetzen. Toogoods warteten nicht einmal so lange wie die Juden nach dem Auszug aus Ägypten, ehe sie wankend wurden' (*Fund*, p. 201). This is one of Canetti's many little ironies, since the Toogoods dislike their guests because they are Jewish. They were, she suggests, unlike the Jews in the wilderness, not models of fortitude. They clearly lack the hardiness and the nobility of spirit of those biblical, wandering Jews, too. As soon as the bombing stopped, the Toogoods began wavering ('wankend wurden'), reverting to their previous ungenerous behaviour.

This is by no means the only religious reference or religious metaphor in this story. For example, Canetti writes: 'Denn sparsam sei der Mensch und vergeude nichts, auch nicht seine Exkremente, dann wird der Herr es ihm lohnen. Und richtig,

der Herr lohnte es. Wer hat, dem wird gegeben, und sie hatten' (*Fund*, p. 197). 'Wer hat, dem wird gegeben' refers to the Gospel concept that to him that hath should be given. In Matthew 25. 29 it says, 'Denn wer hat, dem wird gegeben, und er wird im Überfluss haben; wer aber nicht hat, dem wird auch noch weggenommen, was er hat'. This verse pithily encapsulates Canetti's view of the treatment she and her husband received at the hands of the Milburns, whose actions by implication seem to her to contradict Jesus's teachings elsewhere in the New Testament. Canetti appears thus to use this particular passage to make a subtle criticism of avowed Christians like the Toogoods who, despite their religious devotion, are able to act selfishly and even unjustly.

Despite their fundamentalist religious views, the Toogoods fall prey to mysticism. Specifically, they listen to the words of a clairvoyant. During the war such seers gained in popularity, for, as Canetti points out, in wartime people turned to superstitions for comfort. But this was not a new experience for her, nor was it one apparently confined to wartime. On 14 March 1937 Canetti's short story 'Hellseher' appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Wiener Tag* 'Der Sonntag'.

Frau Toogood, like Mrs Milburn, believes in her *Hellseherin's* ability to see a light surrounding those who are good and have been saved and darkness around those possessed by the devil. In 'Toogoods' the clairvoyant is named Penny. Canetti's description of her in this story is reminiscent of Elias's description of Lilly Slough in *Party im Blitz* as 'eine große, dickliche Person mit schwammigem und doch kräftigem, erwartungsvollem Blick' (*Party im Blitz*, p. 48). Penny is also 'dick', and Canetti describes in great detail how her 'Fleischmassen kugelten um die Arme, zerbarsten die Backen und strotzten vom Hals herab' and her eyes were 'bedenklich' and her gaze 'lauernd' (*Fund*, p. 202). Once again, in her description of Penny's

visions, Canetti uses a hidden literary reference to make a subtle point: 'Ein Gott gab ihr zu sagen, was eben auf dem Schlachtfeld vorging, und irrte sie sich, so war das kleine Wort daran schuld, dessen sie sich bediente' (*Fund*, p. 202). 'Ein Gott gab ihr zu sagen' is an allusion to a well-known quotation from Goethe's play *Torquato Tasso* 'Gab mir ein Gott, zu sagen wie ich leide'.<sup>46</sup> But where Goethe's character, a poet, is saying that God enables him to express *his* suffering, Penny seems to be saying the opposite – that God gave her the power to say what *others* were suffering and thus almost seems to be replacing God. By changing the 'mir' to 'ihr', it is also no longer a personal prayer and instead becomes a statement of fact. But she proves to be wrong, so Canetti writes that she interprets 'belastet von dem engen Verstand des Menschen' (*Fund*, p. 202). Because of her narrow-mindedness she is unable to understand 'das Hohe' (*ibid.*), which one can perhaps loosely translate as 'the higher things'. For a clairvoyant Penny thus does not see very clearly; trapped by her humanity, she lives in darkness. By inverting a famous phrase, Canetti here draws on a sentiment familiar to all those well-versed in German literature to make Penny seem all the more ridiculous and pretentious.

Penny's vision, the vision of a battle between an angel and the devil, encapsulates the whole of the story. The narrator, who stands in opposition to the Christian Toogoods, is so constrained by them that she comes to be on the side of the devil. When they go to church, for instance, the narrator begins to sneak over to the house next door, there to worship the devil: 'Und wenn immer sie zur Kirche gingen, schlüpfte ich durch die Hecke und hielt beim Satan Andacht' (*Fund*, p. 200). When Penny describes her vision, the narrator is overcome by the same Satan: 'Hier trieb mich der Teufel, und ich konnte nicht widerstehen. Er trieb mich und stieß mich, und

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<sup>46</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Torquato Tasso: Ein Schauspiel* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978), p. 95 (line 3433).

ich fragte, wieso sie wisse, daß der Engel auf der richtigen Seite stand, denn manchmal steht er auf der falschen Seite. Darauf erhob sie sich und strich mir ruhig und nicht ohne Güte über das Haar' (*Fund*, p. 203). She cannot help but poke fun at this ridiculous woman.

The entire story thus rests on a foundation of ironic inversion of Christian imagery. In it sin becomes a kind of redemption. In the penultimate paragraph of her story, Canetti describes the house next door to the Toogoods as like a church – 'es war wie eine Kirche' (*Fund*, p. 204). It was not really a house of sin at all, but a place of reverence, of refuge. A true Christian household would offer such sanctuary; the house of the purportedly Christian Toogoods did not. Their church was thus not really what a House of God should be, while the place where the narrator worshipped Satan was.

This story is thus not only an attack on hypocrites like the Toogoods, and perhaps the English that they represent, but also at the same time a kind of elaborate mystery, in which the truth about the ivy-covered house next door takes on huge significance. It was 'unbewohnt und verpönt' (*Fund*, p. 200) and the object of a 'Hauptverbot' (*ibid.*). The house was like a jungle, and for the narrator that meant freedom, wildness, and peace. The control of the Toogoods, people so closed to the outside world that they even make their own manure, was too confining. At the end of the story, the narrator and her partner, A., move into the ivy-covered house: 'Seither lebten wir in der Hütte. Ich ließ die Sünde an den Wänden, ließ sie aus Haß, aus Protest, aus Ehrfurcht für diese Sünder. Sie atmen den Frieden, den wir gesucht haben' (*Fund*, p. 204). A house of sin has become a place of freedom and release from sinners.

Like so much of her exile work, the story ends ironically, if bitterly. What might appear normal to their neighbours or parishioners does not to the narrator, who is implanted in their midst like an alien – or housed and fed rather like a caged animal. The narrator's bleak view of the Toogoods stems partly from this outsider's perspective, this exile's view.

### ***Der Palankin***

*Der Palankin*, Canetti's third play, second comedy, and last surviving piece of writing, is striking in its dissimilarity to her earlier work in English exile. It is the longest work written during that time, it is broadly humorous, and it lacks the pervasive sense of unease, frustration, anger, and disillusionment that marked the short stories set in England. Although, like those stories, it still criticises the sheltered British, *Der Palankin* is more light-hearted. Its humour derives from its absurd situations and eccentric characters rather than from the biting sarcasm that marked her previous exile works. In *Der Palankin*, Canetti seems at last to have come to terms with life in exile and with the British.

Canetti had previously written two plays, *Der Oger* and *Der Tiger*. Both were based on chapters in and characters from her novel *Die Gelbe Straße* and both appeared in 1934. Canetti wrote to her brother-in-law Georges on 20 December 1934: 'Ich habe zwei Theaterstücke geschrieben. Das eine, ein Lustspiel, wird uns Geld einbringen, das Zweite ein Drama mir Ruhm' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 28) though, of course, neither was performed during her lifetime so that statement was not to come true. Preece describes the differences between these two early plays:

Unlike *The Ogre*, it [*Der Tiger*] was written with a view to performance, but, unlike *The Tortoises*, it was not written in freedom. While the first play is a hard-hitting critique of the use of money and male power in marriage, *The Tiger* is a mild drawing-room comedy with suspense and dénouement at the final curtain. The tone is light, the pace brisk, and the jokes come at regular intervals, all of which makes it the sort of anodyne entertainment that found its way on to the Viennese stage after February 1934. (*The Rediscovered Writings*, pp. 107-08)

*Der Oger* differs greatly from the story by the same name in *Die Gelbe Straße*. Although it, too, is about domestic violence, the protagonist is a Bosnian woman named Draga, and she, unlike Maja, is successful in her struggles to escape a brutal home life. In the play Canetti draws attention to the lack of legal protection that housewives, mothers, and children had in Austria in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> *Der Tiger*, on the other hand, is predominately about the integrity of artists, though the storyline from *Die Gelbe Straße*, in which Herr Tiger bets Zierhut that he will seduce Andrea Sandoval in the 'Lusthaus', remains. In both plays the women successfully overcome the males who oppress or try to oppress them.

Although *Der Palankin*, too, has a light tone, a brisk pace, and jokes (or, rather, absurd situations) at regular intervals, it differs in significant ways from the Viennese Lustspiel, *Der Tiger*, that preceded it. Set in London in the summer of 1952, it concerns a number of eccentric, upper-middle-class households that a thief named Peck attempts to burgle. Peck does this, we learn, not to enrich himself but rather in the hope of being caught and returned to prison. By the end of the play he even breaks *into* prison. But precisely because he is so desperate to be in prison Scotland Yard decides the best punishment for him is to set him free. Before this final break-in takes place, however, a comedy of errors occurs. Each household into which he breaks sends him on to another, promising that there he will get the jewels

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<sup>47</sup> See 'Issue of Male Violence'.

or money he wants, because each one in turn claims not to have cash on hand. Peck is in turn pursued by a detective, Davies, from whom each household protects him because each harbours its own crime of which Peck has become aware, and because each fears risking its own safety.

Like Peck, the other characters in this play behave in exactly the opposite way as they ought, or at least would be expected, to. They maintain the façade of respectable upper-middle-class people, but in fact they are all amoral, and they all shelter secrets. Christina Evans, the cleaning lady, is a would-be blackmailer; Clare Frazer has been hiding her husband, John, a deserter, during and long after World War II; Mr Spinks is a kleptomaniac. Canetti makes these and other characters comically eccentric. Lady Rexa wishes to be burgled. Agatha Valorbes not only owns two crocodiles, but also applies idolatrous terms to all those around her, calling John an 'Iconolâtre' (*Fund*, p. 208), a worshipper of icons; Clare an 'Idolâtre' (*ibid.*), a worshipper of idols; Christina Evans a 'Pyrolâtre' (*Fund*, p. 214), a worshipper of fire; and herself a 'Heliolâtre' (*Fund*, p. 209), a worshipper of the sun. Peck threatens to use a gun or grenades on the inhabitants of the houses he burgles, though in actual fact he is carrying only toy building blocks in his bag. During his burglaries, he repeatedly fishes them out and attempts to build a house out of them.<sup>48</sup> In this way he gradually becomes both peculiar and childlike, rather than the threatening villain he appears to be when we first encounter him. He becomes a pathetic character for whom an audience might well in the end feel pity.

Canetti also uses argument to humorous effect. The first scene opens with Agatha and Clare Frazer arguing about everything; each claims to have a more difficult life than the other. If Agatha says that Clare's life is 'sorgenfrei' (*Fund*, p.

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<sup>48</sup> Peck explains his desire to be in jail by saying: 'Ich habe Pläne gezeichnet! Ich habe ihnen gezeigt, wie ein ordentliches Gefängnis aussehen muß! Mauern hab ich niedrigerissen, einen ganzen Trakt bauen sie jetzt neu! Die bauen jetzt oben nach meinen Plänen!' (*Fund*, p. 305).

209) in comparison to hers, then Clare has to be 'immer in Angst' (ibid.). If Agatha is jealous that Clare gets to eat the finest foods, then Clare has to point out that: 'Aber ich habe keinen Appetit' (ibid.). The effect of these arguments is to make the two women appear absurd. Similarly, the Spinks constantly argue about whether to use their own faeces as fertiliser or instead to rely on store-bought, and therefore artificial, fertiliser. Mr Spinks is on the side of store-bought, but Mrs Spinks prefers their own natural produce:

MRS SPINKS Im Schmutz und Kot sind die gesunden Elemente und werden von den Wurzeln aufgesaugt.

MR SPINKS Unsinn! Kunstdünger ist alles!

MRS SPINKS Natürlicher Dünger!

MR SPINKS Durch Chemikalien wird man die kranken Elemente los.

MRS SPINKS Kot ist das Richtige! (*Fund*, pp. 244-45)

In 'Toogoods oder das Licht', Canetti uses the Toogoods' obsession with saving water by not flushing toilets and with using their own excrement for fertiliser to associate them with dirt and to make them seem niggardly and disgusting. Although the Spinks appear to be another incarnation of the Milburns – they do not simply make their fertiliser, they also are part of an unorthodox religion and believe in faith healers – she treats her reincarnated Milburns more gently. Manure now becomes humorous and the Spinks ridiculous – two elderly but 'sehr lebenslustig' (*Fund*, p. 244) people who, while eating their lunchtime meal, shout at each other in almost a telegraphic way. ('Kot ist das Richtige!') The Spinks, who appear to be enjoying themselves rather than to be truly angry, seem more light-hearted than the Toogoods, and, despite Mr Spinks' kleptomania,<sup>49</sup> in their desire to help Christina Evans learn to read, more well-intentioned as well.

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<sup>49</sup> According to Canetti, Mr Milburn was a kleptomaniac, 'Er stiehlt nur Kleinigkeiten, Nägel, Öl aus deiner Ölbüchse, und auch nur ganz wenig. Aber er stiehlt' (*Briefe an Georges*, p. 158).

In this play Canetti has adopted a genre popular with British theatrical audiences: the farce. According to Jessica Milner Davis: 'Towards the end of the nineteenth century [...] the influence of the more sexually sophisticated, contemporary Parisian farce began to make itself felt' in British theatres.<sup>50</sup> As Davis further explains:

A spate of English adaptations and translations of French farce followed, each dealing with the dubious adventures of highly respectable characters who, for the most understandable of reasons, have been tempted to venture beyond their normal haunts and thus to risk their reputations in suspicious circumstances. (Davis, p. 21)

Soon British playwrights like Noël Coward and Ben Travers were making their own 'bedroom farces'. These usually followed the French formula. They employed suggestive dialogue, and their plots usually revolved around errant husbands and wives, foolish servants, and mistaken identity. These are now common elements in farce, as are the use of extravagant and improbable situations, physical buffoonery, and a fast-paced plot whose speed usually increases. Leslie Smith says about farce, 'There is a release of inhibitions, a holiday from conventional morality; the carnival spirit is triumphant and outrage is permissible'.<sup>51</sup> In farce, as Davis states:

Comedy is drawn from the most human of strivings: our continual impulse to rebel against convention and morality and our continued efforts to master our own bodies and our physical environment. Most often, the joke entails the failure of the attempt: but it is a failure which must also touch the audience, since the joke is on us all as members of the human race. [...] Farce does not deny that human aspirations exist: it merely regards them as a joke. (Davis, pp. 22-23)

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<sup>50</sup> Jessica Milner Davis, *Farce* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Leslie Smith, *Modern British Farce: A Selective Study of British Farce from Pinero to the Present Day* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 8.

*Der Palankin* certainly appears to regard human aspiration as a joke. Its pace is fast but its humour derives not so much from innuendo as from the characters playing against type and the absurd situations.

In *Der Palankin* Canetti does not seem so much to be rebelling against convention, though her characters are certainly unconventional and amoral, as making a gentle social critique of the people she is writing about. If anything, her play is reminiscent of that of Ödön von Horváth, whose work she must have known. In his play *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald*, which appeared in 1931 and won the Kleist Prize, Horváth uses a petty-bourgeois society in which people deceive and mistreat one another in order to grasp at ephemeral pleasures to warn against the rise of fascism and to highlight how Austrian society's values have declined. Similarly, in *Der Palankin* Canetti portrays an upper-middle-class society whose members deceive and mistreat one another, though here they do so in order to protect themselves and their secrets from harm. In this way she suggests that the sheltered British existence has led to a loss of morals and values. Where Horváth uses the degradation of the character Marianne by the influence of the gambler and ne'er-do-well Alfred to represent the corruption of the Austrian people by outside forces, Canetti cautions against forces corrupting a society from within. Horváth contrasts the music of Johann Strauss to the brutal reality of the time to show the self-deception of the people who do not seem to recognize what has become and what is becoming of them. He wished both to 'illuminate certain facets of the Austrian and south-German mentality: smugness, cruelty, mental sloth, stupidity'<sup>52</sup>, as well as to warn. Canetti contrasts the seemingly genteel façade of her characters with their actions and secrets

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<sup>52</sup> Hugh Rank, 'Introduction', in Ödön von Horváth, *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald: Volkstück in drei Teilen* (London: Bell & Hyman, 1980), pp. 11-50 (p. 21).

to illuminate the egocentric and delusional nature of the British people. Both plays use humour and absurdity to criticise the society and people they are depicting.

*Der Palankin* is the more light-hearted of the two. The characters in *Der Palankin* are certainly amoral, and not above blackmail, adultery, desertion, and lying, but they lack the cruelty, malice, and depravity of Horváth's. Canetti seems to have left behind that sort of darkness in her earlier play, *Der Oger*. But even *Der Oger* ends on a positive note, with Draga escaping her abusive marriage, whereas *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* ends with the female protagonist, Marianne, finally overcome by all the preceding events, the cruelties and disappointments, repeating, 'Ich kann nicht mehr. Jetzt kann ich nicht mehr –' (Horváth, p. 128), as her abusive ex-fiancé leads her away.

The criticism of Britain comes through clearly in the choice of title for the play. Canetti always chose names carefully in her works, and she certainly did so here. A palanquin is an eastern Asian sedan chair, an enclosed litter borne on the shoulders of men by means of poles. In other words, it is a conveyance that places other people in charge of carrying one person around, with that one person inside an enclosed space, removed from contact with the public and usually also able to ignore his or her bearers. This title thus creates an image of a sheltered life, one protected from reality. The use of an Asian term also sounds more exotic and more eccentric than the term 'sedan chair'. Yet the exotic name masks a more mundane reality reflected in the play. Normally, the police shelter the English people and protect them from criminals, yet here the characters protect the criminals and frustrate the police. The title suggests that in this play, as in the short stories set in England before it, Canetti is casting a critical eye on the British because of their disconnection from the realities of the rest of the world.

Still, as noted above, this play also seems to suggest that Canetti had at last come to terms with her life in exile. Where previously English life annoyed and even repelled her, Canetti now seems to have accepted it and even to be amused by it. The most obvious sign of her acceptance is the character Connie – that is, Señora Consuelo Gonzalez y Soto. Preece believes that Connie is a self-portrait of Canetti herself. The character is Spanish, which is perhaps an echo of ‘Air raid’ where the narrator and Harry were dubbed ‘ihr Spanier’, both implying that they were Socialists, like the Canettis, as well as an allusion to the Canettis’ Sephardic Jewish origins. She is also in her fifties, and, also like Canetti, has fled her country, and claims it would break her heart to return to her home. Preece adds that Evans, the cleaning lady, is 34, the same age as Canetti when she first started to publish. Preece thus sees Evans as a sign of Canetti’s growing silence in exile. He writes that ‘She [Evans] is illiterate, which is surely a sign that the author senses that she is losing her ability to communicate in writing as shown by her failure to find a publisher in 1950s Britain or postwar Austria’ (*The Rediscovered Writings*, p. 90). While Preece has indicated the importance of the maid figure in Canetti’s work and even as a part of her identity in calling herself Veza Magd, he does not point out that the figure of the maid is treated quite differently in this play. Connie and Evans can also be viewed differently in light of Canetti’s financial struggles and her personal struggles with the Milburns. By making the character most like her wealthy and by having her attempt to steal a maid from the Milburns-like Spinks, Canetti may well have used this play as a form of revenge or catharsis.

For the Canetti of Vienna, maids were the vulnerable, despised, ‘unbehüteten Seele’ (*Fund*, p. 159):

Für wenig Geld gedungen und abgenützt, haben die Mägde so selten ihren Willen, ihre Freiheit, ja, selbst ihren eigenen Raum für sich, daß ihr Blick sich ziellos bewegt, immer einer Einschränkung gegenwärtig, eines Befehls, einer Ermahnung, – harte Hinweise auf ihre Besitzlosigkeit, Wurzellosigkeit, Weglosigkeit. (*Fund*, pp. 158-59)

But here, in her final story, one which has no signs of her husband who was so influential in her earlier writing, the maid is now in a position of power.<sup>53</sup> She is sought after by many people. She is known, respected, and wanted – all qualities or states that Canetti once used her writing to fight to help the subservient and downtrodden achieve. Canetti, who once published under the pseudonym *Veza Magd*, now seems, in at least a metaphorical sense, through the vehicle of this farcical play, at last to have achieved the upending of the social order that she began her career as a serious, engaged writer by seeking.

## Conclusion

Veza Canetti was unhappy in London. She dubbed it the ‘Fischtank’, and it never became home to her.<sup>54</sup> In her letters, writes Preece, she says that her weak heart had been broken ‘when she was forced to leave what had been the “happiest” city in Central Europe, which is the reason she could not bear to return’ (*The Rediscovered Writings*, p. 26). In England, however much she tried, she never was able to get her career as a writer back on track. For German-speaking writers it was very difficult to get published, especially in the initial years after the war. British publishers wanted books in English; the German language had become identified with the both the war and Nazism, and writers of German encountered a great deal of hostility. They either

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<sup>53</sup> See *The Rediscovered Writings*, pp. 140-67.

<sup>54</sup> Schedel, ‘Nachwort’, p. 318.

had to write in English or find a publisher willing to pay someone to translate their manuscripts into English. Canetti never found such a publisher. She sent *Die Gelbe Straße* to twenty different publishing houses; each returned it without a positive word. As she wrote to Wieland Herzfelde in 1947:

Buch ist von mir keines erschienen, denn meinen Wiener Roman wollten die Verleger nicht zur Übersetzung riskieren, weil auch Nazis darin vorkommen, und ich schreibe leider Theaterstücke, und kenne keine Theaterdirektoren.<sup>55</sup>

She continued to write, but by 1956, at the age of fifty-nine, eighteen years after going into exile and seven years before her death, she had grown so discouraged from all of her disappointments that she burned many of her manuscripts and gave up writing.

For Canetti exile seems to have brought a change in consciousness. The political engagement of her Vienna works disappears, and religion, which played almost no role in *Die Gelbe Straße*, appears. Her first work written in exile, *Die Schildkröten*, is rich in biblical allusions. As the novel itself suggests, Nazi persecution had forced even secular and assimilated Jews like the Canettis to become conscious of their Jewishness and Jewish identity. She seems to have carried this new-found consciousness into exile in the predominantly Protestant Christian society of Great Britain. This perhaps made life in England seem even more foreign to her.

Although her precise, astute, unpretentious prose style, with its characteristic simple syntax, grotesque images, and carefully-chosen and suggestive names was still much the same, as was her delight in suspense and unexpected twists in her plotting, her tone and her narrative techniques changed. The omniscient narrator found in her Viennese writing gave way to a focalised narrative voice in her exile works, just as

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<sup>55</sup> Angelika Schedel, 'Buch ist von mir keines erschienen', in *Veza Canetti*, ed. by Ingrid Spörk and Alexandra Stromaier, Dossier 24 (Vienna: Droschl, 2005), p. 197.

the realism of her earlier works gave way to the symbolism of her later works. Gender, economic, and social inequalities have no place in these later works. Even *Der Palankin*, which is filled with more humour and less sarcasm than her short stories and which strongly critiques British sensibility, does not address topics of oppression or subjugation. This change in approach does not denote a decline in quality. Instead, it follows from her change in focus, which in exile has turned inward.

Exile had changed her as it had changed her work. While her writing did not suffer for these changes, her career did. In Austria she had a place and a purpose; in exile she did not. In the end, she gave up her writing and became instead her husband's amanuensis and his muse. To the end, too, she longed for a home and a place and a life to which she was never able to return. In her life, as in her literary work, she seemed to feel only truly alive in German-speaking Vienna. Something Elias once said about himself surely applies even more strongly to his wife: 'Im Lesen und Schreiben bin ich nur deutsch am Leben' (Hanuschek, p. 310).

## Chapter Two: Anna Gmeyner

‘I suddenly heard myself saying, “I must know what death is.”’<sup>1</sup>

### **Biographical Sketch**

Anna Gmeyner was born on 16 March 1902 into a prosperous, non-orthodox Jewish lawyer’s family in Vienna. From childhood, she was interested in helping others. As Gmeyner herself recalled: ‘All through my years at home at a very early age I had asked why some had plenty and others suffered want. My mother had to keep the cupboards locked because I had on various occasions distributed all sorts of things which were stored away to people who I thought needed them’ (‘Two Doors’, p. 9). By the age of six she was also, according to her daughter, her neighbourhood’s acknowledged storyteller. At seven she dictated her memoirs to an aged relative, and at thirteen she wrote her first verse drama. In the autumn of 1920 she began what would be only two semesters of studying philosophy at the University of Vienna. She then attended lectures, seminars and tutorials in the German and English Philology departments, where she learned about the history and theory of German drama, English prose, and the history of Old and Middle English Literature.

In June 1924, at the age of twenty-two, Gmeyner married a penniless biologist, Berthold Paul Wiesner, and soon after moved to Berlin, where she wrote articles and became a teacher in order to help support them both. Gmeyner then followed her husband to Edinburgh, where he became a university lecturer; his research was on the maternal behaviour of rats. Impressed by the revolutionary theories of Kropotkin and books like Vera Figner’s *Night over Russia*, Gmeyner took

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Gmeyner, ‘A House with Two Doors’ (Nachlaß Anna Gmeyner, Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen, Berlin), p. 37.

a great interest in the General Strike of 1926. She even spent a day in a mine and talked with the families of the mining communities. She was so horrified by what she found that she turned her house into a collection centre for money and clothing.<sup>2</sup>

She also turned her experiences into a play, *Heer ohne Helden*, about a mining disaster and reactions to it. It can also be read as a warning against the rise of National Socialism. As Anne Stürzer explains:

Das Drama enthält implizit die Feststellung, daß die Katastrophe vermeidbar gewesen wäre, wenn mehr Bergleute den Gehorsam verweigert hätten. Diese Aussage läßt sich durchaus auch als Aufforderung an den zeitgenössischen Zuschauer verstehen, dem Vordringen der Nationalsozialisten Widerstand entgegenzusetzen. (Stürzer, p. 37)

The premiere of the play, which she wrote under the name Anni Wiesner, took place in Dresden in 1929. The *Rote Fahne*, the central German publication for the Communist Party of Germany, praised it:

In diesem Drama ist nichts konstruiert, die proletarische Wirklichkeit ist wuchtig und ideologisch klar [...] Anna Gmeyner, kein Literat, sondern revolutionärer Arbeiterschriftsteller gibt in ihrem Erstlingswerk eine Probe eines großen Talents. Wir empfehlen jedem Arbeiter den Besuch der Aufführung. (quoted in *German Exiles*, p. 204)

The Nazis denounced it as communistic 'Proletkunst' (*ibid.*).

Gmeyner's marriage ended in 1928, three years after the birth of her daughter, Eva, in January 1925. At the beginning of 1930 she moved with Eva to Berlin, where she worked as an adapter, translator, and reader of plays.<sup>3</sup> There she also collaborated

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<sup>2</sup> *German Exiles*, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Gmeyner first found success as a translator in 1926 when the Rikola Verlag in Vienna published *Der Ruf der Wildgänse*, her translation of the Canadian novelist Martha Ostenso's book *Wild Geese* (1925). In 1930 her translation of the American novelist Edna Ferber's book *Fanny Herself* (1917) was published by Gebr. Enoch in Hamburg as *Das ist Fanny*. Gmeyner adapted a play of the Hungarian

with Bertolt Brecht, composed lyrics for Hanns Eisler, and worked on film scripts for the Austrian film director Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Money was nevertheless so scarce that she had to send her daughter to Austria to live, first with her parents and then in a children's home. In later years she told her daughter that at times she had had to live on potato peelings.

In Berlin she wrote her second play, *Zehn am Fließband*, which only survives in fragmentary form.<sup>4</sup> As preparation, she had worked on an assembly line in a factory in Siemensstadt. In this social drama, which takes its name from the non-stop conveyor belt system of manufacturing, a worker invents a machine so efficient that it requires little human participation and causes widespread unemployment. The play features three main protagonists – a Jew, a Communist, and a Nazi – with opposing views. The 'Kolonne Links', a theatre group founded in Berlin in 1928 by unemployed workers and named the official 'Agitprop-Truppe' of International Workers Aid in 1929, first mounted this play, taking it to Russia in Magnitogorsk in 1932. It was not, however, particularly successful either in Russia or in Germany.

Her third play, *Automatenbüffet*, was better received. It was performed for the first time in Hamburg on 25 October 1932 by the Thalia Theater. It then moved to Berlin where it was performed at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm between 25 December 1932 and 11 February 1933. Gmeyner was lauded as a 'hoffnungsvolles junges Talent'<sup>5</sup> and *Automatenbüffet* was nominated in the 1932 competition for the annual German literature award, the Kleist Prize, receiving an 'honourable mention'. Like *Zehn am Fließband*, this play examines the effects of mechanisation on a community, but here it does so against the backdrop of an automated buffet

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writer Ladislaus Bus-Fekete into a screenplay for G. W. Pabst, which became the film *Du haut en bas* in 1933.

<sup>4</sup> Only a draft of Act II remains. For an account of the play see *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*, pp. 43-6.

<sup>5</sup> Birte, Werner, 'Nachwort', in Anna Gmeyner, *Café du Dôme* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 399-444 (p. 413).

restaurant. *Automatenbüfett* is, as Katrin Sieg points out, a 'Volksstück', a popular Viennese dialect drama, that uses a female protagonist, Eva, as a catalyst to highlight the philistinism and moral double standards of those who frequent the restaurant.<sup>6</sup>

Hitler's rise to power on 30 January 1933 ended Gmeyer's career in Berlin. Although as late as March 1933 the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* carried an advertisement announcing that *Automatenbüfett* would be performed in the Künstlertheater, there was no real chance of the work of such a 'Proletkunst' dramatist continuing to be performed in the new Germany. By then, too, most of the actors meant to be in it had been or were being arrested, or had fled Germany for fear of being arrested. The play moved to Zurich under the title *Im Trüben fischen* and was performed there on 12 September 1933.

Gmeyer's fourth play, *Welt überfüllt*, like *Zehn am Fließband*, is also about the baneful effects of unemployment on society. Unlike *Zehn am Fließband*, however, this play was never performed at all.<sup>7</sup> In it Gmeyer illustrates how redundancy, poverty, and forced idleness can drive people to despair and corruption. The characters in this play begin with strong morals and end as thieves, working for those who have been criminals all along. The student Erich, for example, goes from being unable to understand how a man could steal 100 marks because theft is a moral outrage to stealing a bicycle from outside a pub in the hopes of getting a delivery job. As he says, 'Ich versteh nicht, wie alles gekommen ist. Ich bin kein schlechter Mensch. Ich wollte leben, ohne jemanden zu kränken. Ich wollte arbeiten und in die Höhe kommen, und jetzt bin ich ein Dieb'.<sup>8</sup> When Erich tries to commit suicide, Gmeyer shows, as she did with a similar plot device in *Automatenbüfett*, just how far

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<sup>6</sup> Katrin Sieg, *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists: Women in Contemporary German Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> An edition by Birte Werner has been announced for publication, but has not yet appeared.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Gmeyer, *Welt Überfüllt* (New York Public Library, New York), p. 68.

desperation can push someone.<sup>9</sup>

During the summer of 1931 she travelled to Russia to work with Erwin Piscator on the film version of Anna Seghers's *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara*.<sup>10</sup> Although the film was never made, the trip itself had a great effect on her. She would later describe to her daughter how in a remote village Russian peasants brought her hay and water to feed her car, for they had no understanding of what an automobile was.<sup>11</sup>

She returned to Vienna between December 1932 and June 1933 and then travelled to Nice as well as Paris to work on the film *Don Quixote*. With Hitler and the National Socialists now in power, she felt she could not return to Berlin, so she stayed and continued to work in France. She settled in Paris and from there published her first novella, *Mary-Ann wartet*, in the Austrian journal *Moderne Welt. Almanach der Dame* in 1933.<sup>12</sup> It was republished the following year in the German opposition daily *Pariser Tageblatt*.<sup>13</sup> In her unpublished memoir Gmeyner remembers that 'this was just the time when the first casualties arrived in Paris, musicians, scientists, actors, people I knew or whom friends had sent to see me. So there was considerable activity in my tiny flat' ('Two Doors', p. 32).

There, too, she met and married Jascha Morduch, a Russian Jewish religious philosopher. In 1934 they moved to England, living with Jascha's brother for a time before settling in Belsize Park in London in 1935. In London Gmeyner continued her work with film. In 1936 she was one of the script writers for Berthold Viertel's film

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<sup>9</sup> For more information about Gmeyner's theatrical works, see Stürzer, Führich, and *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*.

<sup>10</sup> See Werner, 'Nachwort', p. 411-12.

<sup>11</sup> Although Ibbotson cites her mother as the source of this anecdote in this way in her 'Preface' (Eva Ibbotson, 'Preface', in Anna Gmeyner, *Manja: a novel about five children*, trans. by Kate Phillips (London: Persephone Books, 2002), v-xiv), p. x, Gmeyner herself attributed it to the 'roving reporter' E. E. Kisch in 'Two Doors', p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> According to Werner, *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*, p. 16, the story was illustrated by Franz Taussig and ran from June 1933 to January 1934.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Gmeyner, *Mary-Ann wartet*, *Pariser Tageblatt*, 1934, Issue 31-45.

*The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, and in 1939 she worked on his film *Pastor Hall*. She also worked with the Boultong Brothers on *The Dawn Guard* in 1941 and *Thunder Rock* in 1942.<sup>14</sup>

Gmeyner published her first two novels, *Manja* and *Café du Dôme*, in the years 1938 and 1941 respectively. The former was intensely political, the latter less so, but both condemned political developments in Germany and Austria. In order to protect her family, which was still in Austria at the time, she published both books under the pseudonym Anna Reiner. Her family eventually left Austria, one sister fleeing to Sweden and her mother and other sister to England. The latter sister, who had been forced out of the Viennese Conservatory because of new race policies, committed suicide shortly after going into English exile. It was only after her family had left Vienna that Gmeyner began to use her husband's surname, Morduch.

*Manja* was well received in the exile press. In a review in *Die Neue Weltbühne*, for example, Berthold Viertel wrote that 'Von allen Büchern, die bisher das neudeutsche Chaos zu gestalten versucht haben, scheint mir dieses [Manja] eines der reichsten, der lebensvollsten und der schönsten zu sein',<sup>15</sup> while in *Das Wort* Ingeborg Franke said:

Der Kreis der deutschen Schriftstellerinnen in der Emigration ist – auch hier regiert die viel strengere Auswahl, die der Kapitalismus Frauen gegenüber praktiziert – ein kleiner Kreis, dessen Produktion, als Ganzes genommen, sich im Laufe der Jahre als in jeder Beziehung ernsthaft und achtunggebietend durchgesetzt hat. Zu den wenigen Namen, die wir alle kennen, gesellte ich nunmehr ein neuer: *Anna Reiner*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*, p. 17, Werner, 'Nachwort', pp. 415-16, and *German Exiles*, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Berthold Viertel, 'Ein Roman um fünf Kinder', *Die Neue Weltbühne* 1938, Heft 43 (Nachlaß Anna Gmeyner, Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen Berlin).

<sup>16</sup> Ingeborg Franke, 'MANJA', *Das Wort* 1938, p. 12 (Nachlaß Anna Gmeyner, Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen Berlin).

Originally composed in German, *Café du Dôme* never appeared in Gmeyner's native language. After the Germans invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, they seized the Amsterdam-based Querido-Verlag, which had published her first exile novel, *Manja*, and placed it under the control of a National Socialist manager. *Café du Dôme* was subsequently translated into English by Trevor and Phyllis Blewitt and published in London by Hamish Hamilton and in New York by Alfred A. Knopf. The quality of the translation was, according to Gmeyner's friend Paul Falkenberg, 'mäßig'.<sup>17</sup> What has happened to the original German manuscript is not known. The English translations, however, garnered good reviews. For example, J. S. Southron wrote in *The New York Times*

It had to be more than a well-planned novel to carry off such an avalanche of tragic wretchedness, particularly such pitifully invertebrate villainy as Peter's [...] It had to be more than beautifully written and well translated. It had, in addition, so to blaze with essential truth that the pure passion which is its motive force would carry the reader on a tidal wave of strong emotion. It is – and it does – all this.<sup>18</sup>

By the time *Café du Dôme* was published, Britain was at war. Gmeyner moved with Jascha to Berkshire in 1940 and there withdrew from émigré circles as well as from her own literary work. According to her daughter, 'People making a pilgrimage to talk about her work in the Weimar Republic received short shrift. "That's all over," she said and led them to her herbaceous border.' (Ibbotson, p. xii). Gmeyner chose instead to focus on her husband and his philosophical tract entitled *Terzium Datur*, which his unexpected death in 1950 prevented him from finishing, believing that 'his work was far more important than my own' ('Two Doors', p. 32).

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<sup>17</sup> See Werner, 'Nachwort', p. 422.

<sup>18</sup> J. S. Southron, 'Review of *Café du Dôme*', *The New York Times*, 1941, p. 7 (Nachlaß Anna Gmeyner, Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen Berlin).

Jascha's death acted as a catalyst for Gmeyner. She began to write for herself again, though now her works were a mixture of non-fiction and spiritual fiction and lacked the political bent so significant in her earlier writing. She wrote narratives with religious topics – *The Death and Life of Julian*, *A Jar Laden with Water*, and *No Screen for the Dying* – and her last work was a poetic, psychological, and esoteric study of the Holy Grail called *The Sovereign Adventure: The Grail of Mankind*.<sup>19</sup> An essay on Thomas Aquinas and a narrative about Jakob Böhme are still unpublished. In her old age she moved to The Retreat, a Quaker hospital in York. She died there on 3 January 1991.

### *Mary-Ann wartet*

Gmeyner wrote *Mary-Ann wartet* when she was in Paris, where she found herself suddenly unable to return to her beloved Berlin because of the Nazi takeover and her past as a left-wing dramatist in the Weimar Republic. This novella loosely follows the adventures of Frank, a sailor who has been away at sea for two years. He returns to port in Glasgow and seeks out Mary Ann, the woman he had assured his shipmates would be waiting for him, only to find her gone. She has left the country with another man. He is devastated by this discovery, and to help salve his wounds, his friends arrange an assignation for him with a local prostitute whom he then marries, renames Mary Ann, and moves with to a farm in the Scottish countryside. When the second Mary Ann, in a moment of loneliness and weakness, also betrays him with another man, Frank discovers them and murders her lover. To save her

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<sup>19</sup> Gmeyner is said to have compiled and had privately printed an anthology of poetry, *A Way through the Wood*. See, for instance, 'Anna Gmeyner and the Scottish Connection' in *German Exiles*, p. 217 footnote 13. However, no such work appears to be known to the leading Gmeyner scholar, Birte Werner, who does not list it in her bibliography.

husband, Mary Ann tries unsuccessfully to take the blame. Ultimately Frank decides to turn himself in, and Mary Ann promises to wait for him while he is in prison. There the story ends.

According to Andrea Hammel, ‘*Mary Ann wartet*, the novella Gmeyer wrote in Paris, features a woman waiting for her sailor lover, who is travelling in the big wide world, a somewhat traditional scenario’.<sup>20</sup> This is, however, not entirely true. Although the title might suggest such an interpretation, the novella is actually more about not waiting than about waiting. The idealised Mary Ann does not wait for Frank to return to Scotland, but rather moves to the United States and marries her employer. The prostitute renamed Mary Ann does not wait while Frank goes to market, but rather lasts only a few hours after his departure before going to the local pub and taking home a former client of hers. The two Mary Anns, in other words, actually *warten nicht* – or at least *nicht lang*.

Furthermore, the novella is largely about, and told from the point of view of, Frank. This is, then, perhaps not quite as traditional a tale as Hammel suggests. Instead, it appears to be an ironic reversal of a common exile trope – that of waiting. That it was written just as Jewish artists were beginning to go into exile suggests a certain prescience on Gmeyer’s part. Even so, the novel is fundamentally about loneliness, betrayal, and forgiveness, perhaps hinting as well at a sense of hope in the author that the state of things in her homeland might still be reversed and overcome. It is really a story of moral redemption.

The Roman poet Ovid was famously sent into exile for ‘*carmen et error*’ – a song and a mistake. In this story the prostitute commits an error as well. Ovid’s sin is still unknown, but the motive for hers is a simple one: loneliness. She is bored and

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<sup>20</sup> *Everyday Life as Alternative Space*, p. 162.

depressed in the country – just as Ovid became in his Black Sea exile. While Frank happily works hard on the farm, she has little to do but cook and clean. She soon comes to despise her life. When Frank leaves her to go to the market for three days, even after she begs him not to because she cannot bear the solitude, she goes to the pub in order not to be alone. A combination of loneliness and misery – feelings that are also common to the exile experience – lead her to betray Frank.

But a significant part of the second half of the novella is devoted to her attempts to protect Frank and redeem herself. After Frank flees, having killed her lover, she hides the dead body and confesses herself as a murderess to the police, though she does both badly and unconvincingly.

The novella ends with Frank returning home, accepting the blame for what has happened, and in a gesture of forgiveness and true acceptance of who she is, especially now that she has waited for him, calling her by her real name: Milly. But Milly rejects this and tells him, ‘Jetzt bin ich Mary Ann’.<sup>21</sup> In waiting for him, she has given up her previous persona and taken on the one he created for her. She wants to be the idealised Mary Ann, not the weak Milly. Both characters have grown and developed throughout the story, and both offer each other forgiveness. Together they greet in a symbolic conclusion the sunrise, at peace with themselves and each other, the feelings of separation – the fundamental exile experience – no longer palpable.

Und dann sitzen die beiden bis zum Morgengrauen und spüren die Trennung nicht, die sie vielleicht auf Jahre auseinanderreißen wird, und haben keine Angst vor dem Tag, der schon fahl am Horizont aufdämmert.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 14. Fortsetzung, column 5.

<sup>22</sup> 14. Fortsetzung, column 6.

Ultimately, then, Mary Ann does, as the title and the refrain anticipate, wait for Frank, at least briefly, but it is a Mary Ann that neither Frank nor the reader expects. Whether Mary Ann continues to wait for Frank, as promised, is left unknown as the story closes. The reader can only surmise.

*Mary-Ann wartet* is a transitional piece from Gmeyner's drama to her prose writing. Like her play *Heer ohne Helden*, it is set mostly in Scotland and is about working-class characters. Interestingly, especially given the title, the story is predominantly told from the point of view of men: Frank, his fellow sailors, the men in the village in Scotland where he lives, the detective trying to prove him a murderer. Milly's is the only female perspective given. Here, too, the title creates expectations that the story subtly subverts.

Not yet as strong or complex as her later novels, *Mary-Ann wartet* is fundamentally still a work of Social Realism. Yet, in its irony and variety of viewpoints and perspectives, it anticipates both *Manja* and *Café du Dôme* and marks the beginnings of a directional change in Gmeyner's artistic approach to her work, a departure from her previous dramatic work. The impact of isolation is also a topic that Gmeyner will explore further in *Manja* and in *Café du Dôme*.

### ***Manja: Ein Roman um fünf Kinder***

The novel *Manja* is perhaps the best known of Gmeyner's works. To her daughter it was the amalgamation of all the experiences that had led to her exile:

The knowledge of Central European politics, the experience of the Nazi menace at first hand, the literary sophistication and expertise she had acquired working with the best minds in Germany. And her own

unquenchable emotionalism which annoyed some people but was as much part of her as her limbs. (Ibbotson, p. xi)

*Manja* is, like her earlier dramatic works, political, but it is also more domestically driven and shows the beginning of Gmeyner's interest in spirituality. *Manja* is in many respects a novel of Social Realism, a movement that, like the plays that preceded this novel, presented a critical picture of society by addressing social and economic issues of importance. Here Gmeyner successfully uses five different families from different social backgrounds to offer a panoramic, if small scale, view of Weimar society. The title character, Manja, unites the children of all the families together.

Obviously influenced by her dramatic past, *Manja* is divided into five sections, which resemble acts in a play. Each section is divided into chapters, which resemble scenes in an act. As in a classically constructed drama, too, there is a conflict and a climax in each section, building to a tragic climax for the book as a whole. The novel form, however, allows Gmeyner a much greater scope for expressing the inner lives of her characters than could a play or a film script. In this genre she is not only more lyrical, but also able to turn her focus more on the emotional and psychological forces driving her characters.

Writing in 1938, Gmeyner proved prescient about the larger direction that things would take and the ultimate fate of Jews in the Reich, even anticipating the 'Endlösung'. When, for instance, Anton Meissner forbids his son Franz from associating with Jews like Harry Hartung, Franz points out that Harry is a Protestant. To Meissner, however, that does not matter. Echoing Nazi beliefs, he argues that Jews form a race, not a religion: 'Du weißt ganz gut, dass es sich um das Rassistische

handelt, wie immer sie sich tarnen'.<sup>23</sup> It will not be long, he adds, before the Jews will be 'liquidiert' (*Manja*, p. 221).

As the novel progresses, so do the number of National Socialist references and anti-Semitic actions and comments, a novelistic device that well illustrates the changing political climate in Germany. Like Canetti, Gmeyner shows how National Socialism infiltrated even the most private and intimate of spaces. A striking example of this is the invasion by Martin, a member of the Hitler Youth, of the five children's refuge from politics, encroaching adulthood, and problems at home: the wall. Martin's scrutiny of it leads Franz and Harry, the two most insecure children, to feel almost ashamed of their safe haven, and eventually to avoid it. Martin represents the intrusion of National Socialism into the private sphere and its attack on childhood innocence and ideals.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout *Manja* Gmeyner both emphasises the terrifying reality of the rise of National Socialism and points to its essential moral and intellectual emptiness. For example, when describing a political gathering that swiftly turns to violence, she writes:

Trommeln, gellende Rufe, Sprechchor, Blasinstrumente, Fahnen und Stiefel, Stiefel über das ganze Land. Bricht ein Krieg aus oder feiert man einen seltsamen Karneval? Männer und Frauen werfen sich aus der abgelaufenen Spur ihres Lebens in den Tumult dieser Nacht. Arme sollen reich werden, Müde kräftig, vertrocknete Weiber begehrt. Blinde werden sehen und Lahme gehen. Alles wird anders, nichts ist vorüber. Jahrmarkt und Erlösung. Sie jubeln und winken. 'Heil Hitler! Juda verrecke! Deutschland ist erwacht!' (*Manja*, p. 188)

Her suddenly clipped prose and artful use of punctuation to break her normally flowing rhythm add momentum and force to her words. As the narrator suggests, one

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<sup>23</sup> Anna Gmeyner, *Manja: Ein Roman um fünf Kinder* (Mannheim: Persona, 2000), p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> See Schmidt-Ott, pp. 74-75.

cannot tell whether war has broken out or people are celebrating Carnival. She couples this confusion with the illusions the Nazis have created. Gmeyner here plays on the Nazi view of Adolf Hitler, who likened himself to Christ, as a Messiah, by implicitly comparing him to Jesus. Jesus made the lame walk and the blind see; now, Hitler should make the poor rich, the weak strong, and the withered desirable. This comparison does not, however, make Hitler godlike, but, by inserting the modal verb 'sollen', instead mocks the entire concept.

Gmeyner seeks throughout the novel to personalise the experience and the horror of National Socialism. She describes Hitler fully only once. It is neither awe-inspiring nor flattering. When Heidemann views a portrait of Hitler, he has the following reaction:

Nicht der Held der Unterdrückten ist das, nicht ein gewalttätiger und gewaltiger Führer einer siegreichen Revolution. Ein vorsichtiger Fanatiker. Der Held des kleinen Mannes. Der Heros der Mittelmäßigen. Und doch, zum Teufel mit der Absonderung, der Überschätzung des Geistigen, die den Raum um einen so abgräbt, dass man nicht mehr auf den Füßen, nicht mehr auf der großen Zehe stehen kann. Es sind nicht nur Rohlinge dabei, nicht nur Megären, auch Verzweifelte, Enthusiastische, Hungrige, die nicht warten können, Jugend, denen Zukunft versprochen ist. (*Manja*, pp. 206-07)

Hitler here becomes the ideal, the hero as she puts it, of the mediocre. At the same time, he gives hope to the hopeless, but, as Heidemann also notes, not just to 'ruffians' ('Rohlinge') but also to those, like youth, yearning for a better future. In a portrait and a few words, she has captured the essence of the attraction of Nazi ideology in the person of the Führer.

Although Heidemann is more than a simple stereotype, Gmeyner uses him to represent the archetypal ineffectual German. Through him she points to the failure of all Germans to take action against the new regime and its repressive policies:

Groß ist seine Ohnmacht, so groß wie der Zusammenbruch um ihn. Sie ist eine Form der Krankheit, an der Deutschland daniederliegt und die vielgestaltig ist wie die Tuberkulose. Die eine, die galoppierende Form, der Größenwahn und Machthunger der Bönickes [Nazis], die andere, latente, schleichende, der Wille sich zu unterwerfen und keine Verantwortung zu tragen, die dritte, die auch ihn angesteckt hat, die zur Lähmung der Lebenszentren führt und zur Starre. (*Manja*, p. 208)

Powerlessness, in other words, is a kind of sickness that holds all Germany in its grip, whereas the Nazis' hunger for power lends them a sort of insidious strength that allows them to prevail. With this metaphor Gmeyner almost excuses Heidemann, and Germans like him, for his ineffectuality, as if, like contracting an illness, it were something beyond his power to control.

From late antiquity on, authors have used illness as a metaphorical means to condemn repressive practices and ideals. As Susan Sontag explains: 'Modern disease metaphors specify an ideal of society's well-being, analogized to physical health, that is as frequently anti-political as it is a call for a new political order'.<sup>25</sup> Hitler himself used illness metaphors when dealing with Jews and 'in his [Hitler's] first political tract, an anti-Semitic diatribe written in September 1919, accused the Jews of producing "a racial tuberculosis among nations"' (Sontag, p. 83). The Nazis went on to adopt the image of cancer when discussing 'the Jewish problem', because 'to treat a cancer, once must cut out much of the healthy tissue around it' (Sontag, p. 83). (Until recently cancer and tuberculosis were considered the same thing.) Sontag describes cancer as 'ruthless, implacable, predatory' (Sontag, p. 61), much like the Nazi takeover.

Gmeyner here and throughout the novel uses disease metaphors against the Nazis themselves. Hospitals recur as a motif. Heidemann himself develops

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<sup>25</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 76.

consumption and is ill for a large part of the book. He is not only metaphorically infected by his antipathy to Nazism, it seems, but physically as well. The Nazi takeover is portrayed, like tuberculosis, as seemingly painless and happening quickly. Those like Heidemann who wished to bear no responsibility for the rise of National Socialism nevertheless find themselves infected. Like cancer, Germany is being devoured from within.

The few adults in the novel who are not held in National Socialism's thrall – Heidemann, Hartung, Meirowitz – illustrate how such Germans underestimated its power. With the exception of Müller, no one tries to stand up to the Nazi threat. Too late do they realise that 'Die Faust ist stärker als die Hand, der Tretende ist stärker als der Gehende, die Kugel stärker als das Herz, das sie durchbohrt' (*Manja*, p. 208). By then Nazism had completely taken over Germany. Heidemann compares the rise of Hitler and the Nazis to a bully from his military days called Bönicke. He uses this name, Bönicke, as a term, a kind of synecdoche, to represent Nazism as a whole and to show the effect the Nazis are having on everyone:

Hier in diesem Spital liegen blutig zerfetzt wie von Tieren zerrissen in allen Sälen Menschen, von Bönickes [Nazis] bestraft, weil sie nicht Bönickes sind. Auf den Tafeln über ihren Betten stehen keine Namen, ihre Krankheit heißt 'Unfall'. Niemand fragt, woher sie kommen. Wenn die Nachtklingel geht, liegt ein Mensch vor der Tür, den keiner gebracht hat. (*Manja*, pp. 207-08)

Bönicke gives Nazism a face and a persona. This technique recalls the way in which in *Die Schildkröten* Canetti made a flag almost come alive – another form of the personification of evil. By personalising Nazism in Bönicke, Gmeyner turns an abstraction into a reality.

As she does with Nazi rhetoric about illness, Gmeyner also plays both ironically and tragically on Nazi rhetoric about Jews. At first glance, for instance,

Meirowitz and Hartung might both almost be caricatures of the rapacious but weak Jews drawn by German anti-Semites; they are even both fat and unattractive. Lea, for example, initially views Meirowitz as monstrous. Both men are obsessed with money and both are unscrupulous and dishonest. Dissimulation and concealment are motifs that return whenever these two characters appear in the novel. Both, for instance, try to hide their Jewish identity. But both also love children not their own, which makes them more rounded as characters. Although Gmeyner does use her characters to represent certain political points by making them multi-faceted and by giving insight into what drives them, she also avoids creating simple stereotypes. She produces fully-rounded characters instead.

Moreover, as in Canetti's *Die Schildkröten*, there is little sense of pride in Jewish identity among any of the novel's Jewish characters. Hartung's son, Harry, is even in the Hitler Youth. Hartung himself believes he is being persecuted for a faith that he does not believe in or live by; he has, after all, like the author herself, converted to Christianity: 'Das Groteske ist, dass ich mich nicht als Jude fühle, dass ich für die nationale Sache allerlei getan habe, bevor sie die große Mode war. Ich habe neunzig Prozent des Antisemitismus immer unterschrieben [...] Es ist grotesk, dass man ein Märtyrer sein soll für etwas, das einen gar nichts angeht' (*Manja*, p. 295). He is, in fact, the hyper-accultured Jew incarnate.<sup>26</sup> In the end, however, not even this is enough to save him from National Socialism, just as it was not able to save so many of his compatriots, and by the close of the novel he has fled Germany.

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<sup>26</sup> Ritchie Robertson argues that 'an exaggerated identification with German political goals and with nationalist conceptions of German identity' is a part of the process of 'hyperacculturation'. See Ritchie Robertson, *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature, 1949-1939: Emancipation and its Discontents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 345.

Gmeyner uses Christian symbolism<sup>27</sup> and its inversion to remind the reader that while the National Socialists claimed to adhere to a type of Christianity, *Positives Christentum*, by changing its essence to make it conform to their political ideology, they perverted the religion itself. For example, Adrian is so taken with Hartung's beautiful wife, Hilde, that he describes her, in contrasting her to her sickly son Harry, as a Madonna-like figure:

Sie hätte den rotblauen Mantel der Madonna um die Schultern haben und ein engelsschönes Kind in den Armen halten können, nicht diese traurige Missgeburt. Er stand wie ein hässlicher Cherub an sie gelehnt und bewegte leise streichelnd die Finger auf ihren Schoß. (*Manja*, p. 112)

Hilde may be physically beautiful, but she is anything but Madonna-like. Instead, she is a mentally disturbed woman incapable of caring for her children, let alone herself, who by the end of the novel proves to be an adulteress and completely insane.

Gmeyner adds another layer of irony through her description of Harry. As a cherub he complements the image of Hilde as a Madonna, but this description is essentially oxymoronic. Cherubs are usually beautiful; here the cherub is ugly. Adrian seems to see Hilde as someone touched by God, but her child as a monstrosity. Jewish blood has, in his view, made a child who should be angelic gross, for surely such a divine figure would otherwise have produced a celestially beautiful son, especially if the father had been an Aryan. The son Adrian later has with Hilde is beautiful. Here, whether deliberately or ironically, Gmeyner seems to confirm the Nazis' theories on eugenics. She is certainly not a simplistic or didactic novelist.

Aryan characters, however, are not the only ones who use pagan or Christian metaphors. Hartung himself resorts to biblical references: "Die Ostjuden sind wie

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<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive look at the Biblical imagery in *Manja*, see Pin fold, pp. 100-103.

eine Heuschreckenplage über Deutschland hereingebrochen,” erwidert die Pardestimme seines Vaters, “und es ist höchste Zeit, dass das ein Ende nimmt” (*Manja*, p. 230). Hartung is not only resorting to a stereotype that Gmeyer proves false in the case of the young, educated and cultured Lea – whom, for instance, we first meet at a concert – but he is also speaking as if he himself were not a Jew at all. This reference to Chapter 10 of the Book of Exodus, equating the Jews of the East to a plague of locusts that once ravaged Egypt and devoured every living plant, both suggests the insidiousness of the Jews and distances Hartung – at least in his own mind – from people whom Gentiles in Germany might consider to be of the same race as he. It also reflects the confusion over identity in Germany’s secular and seemingly assimilated Jewish community during this time. Although Hartung changed his name, married an Aryan and did his best to be more German than German, in the end this could not shield him from his Jewish lineage. The openly Jewish Meirowitz family, by contrast, cannot make a successful place for themselves once they move to Germany from Poland. Because they are so poor, Lea trades her body to stave off debt, and Leo eventually abandons his family. Their daughter Manja, the title character, eventually kills herself rather than try to live in a Nazi world.

Although Manja represents the plight of Jewish women persecuted under Nazism, she is more than simply the archetype of Jewish womanhood. Gmeyer, who presents no evidence that Manja is being raised devoutly or that she even knows what exactly it means to be Jewish, even uses Christian rather than Jewish imagery when describing her. After Manja is born, Lea holds her and is comforted by the touch of the little girl’s hand and ‘Schaukelnd auf den Wellen dieses Glücks, taumelnd und schwindlig von ihnen hin und her getrieben, fiel sie in Schlaf’ (*Manja*, p. 77). The comfort and happiness that Manja brings are expressed with images of water. Manja

is associated with light and water not just once but throughout the novel. She has a special light in her eyes, light reflects off her at different times of day, she is sometimes surrounded by light, and she eventually kills herself through drowning. Light and water are two images commonly used in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> Thus these associations are spiritual ones and remind the reader that Manja is connected to something greater than herself and greater than the characters around her. But not even Manja's inner light can stand up to the brutality of Nazism.

The climax of this novel comes when Martin, the Hitler Youth, and classmate of her friends, rapes her. After the vicious attack, she is never the same again. The attack, which wipes away everything that made her special, is symbolic, as is so much of the novel, of the ill effects of Nazism. As Schmidt-Ott explains:

Manja's internal world cannot survive the blows of the external world. For Manja it seems that National Socialism has won over all of her friends, that they have lost their integrity as they leave the uncompromising world of childhood. Her suicide is really an act of self-preservation, as Manja preserves her moral integrity in death, keeping both her light and her sword. (Schmidt-Ott, p. 176)

Manja chooses suicide because she sees no other choice. As Schmidt-Ott argues, 'her [Manja's] persona can easily be read as symbolising morality [...] Only through her suicide does Manja succeed in preserving her ideals untainted by (National Socialist) society' (Schmidt-Ott, p. 177). The violence perpetrated against Manja and the death that inevitably follows encapsulate the larger triumph of evil in Nazi Germany.

Sexual violence is also a manifestation of power – in this case, over women – and a hunger for power is a feature of those who adhere to Nazism. Anton Meissner uses force on his wife Frieda: 'Lieber alles als das! Ihr dürrer Körper wird hart und fühllos wie ein Brett unter dem Griff seiner Hände. Er wird wütend darüber und

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<sup>28</sup> See John 8. 12 and Revelation 7. 17.

zugleich reizt ihn der Widerstand dieses sonst fühllos gefügigen Körpers. [...] Er tut ihr weh. Sie gibt nach – wie immer' (*Manja*, p. 21). Meissner, who embodies Nazism, is a man of rage and randomly (and sometimes not so randomly) directed violence. We are once again reminded, through the vehicle of such domestic violence, of the larger evils that have befallen Germany.

Like *Die Schildkröten*, *Manja* is laced with symbolism. The main symbol in Canetti's novel is its namesake, the humble and plodding tortoise. In Gmeyner's it is something more celestial and ethereal – the five-star constellation of Cassiopeia. The stars represent the five children with Manja as the central star in the constellation. For Manja herself the constellation represents a symbol of never-ending friendship, never-ending solidarity. After Manja commits suicide, the constellation appears to the remaining children as they mourn her loss and leaves them filled with joy. This almost mythological occurrence strengthens the sense that the novel is like an ancient Greek tragedy. It also presages the greater association of light with the spiritual and divine – including a pan-religious sense of rebirth and eternal life in death – that will increasingly mark Gmeyner's exile work.

*Manja*, then, is the story of a morally pure but defenceless girl in an increasingly immoral and overpoweringly evil world. She stands for the larger plight of the Jews in Germany. She escapes this world by taking her life – and by finding a new, if symbolic, life in the heavens above. In her preface to the English translation of *Manja*, Ibbotson writes about re-reading her mother's book: '[W]hat strikes me is its topicality, with its belief in "the unsubduable heroism of the human spirit", independent of any religious or political creed' (Ibbotson, p. xiv). As this suggests, *Manja* also represents Gmeyner's first step away from the party politics (and perhaps

also the organised religion) of her youth and her drama. She takes a larger step in her next work, *Café du Dôme*.

### *Café du Dôme*

Although she had written *Manja* in exile as well, it is only in *Café du Dôme* that Gmeyner tries to come to terms with the exile experience. In so doing, she creates a novel different in tone and style from its predecessor. *Café du Dôme*, as Andrea Hammel notes, ‘focuses more on political exiles than on those who had to leave Germany because of their Jewish background’.<sup>29</sup> *Manja* was an epic, extending across thirteen years and involving characters that seemed predestined to overlap, whereas *Café du Dôme* revolves around the many relationships that form, strengthen, and break during the course of a single year in exile. Unlike *Manja*, which has a linear narrative structure and ultimately subordinates all the characters to a single narratorial perspective, *Café du Dôme* unfolds in a non-linear fashion; its narrative voice and point of view change frequently, sometimes for only a few paragraphs at a time. This is not because of any sudden lack of artistry on the author’s part but because Gmeyner now has a different purpose in mind. By employing multiple narrative perspectives, she implies that there is no single truth to be had, that each person in this novel as presumably in life has his or her own version of truth. She does not, however, provide her readers with a means to reconcile these differing perspectives. Such multiple narrative points of view are one of the marks of modernist literary technique, an influence previously absent from Gmeyner’s work.

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<sup>29</sup> Andrea Hammel, ‘The Kaleidoscope of Elsewhereness in Women’s Exile Writing: Martina Wied’s *Das Krähenest* and Anna Gmeyner’s *Café du Dôme*’, in *Exile and Otherness: New Approaches to the Experience of the Nazi Refugees*, ed. by Alexander Stephan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 199-225 (p. 216).

In this novel Gmeyner, then, moves from an aesthetic of linearity to an aesthetic of fragmentation.

She uses these different perspectives to demonstrate, too, that politics are neither the sole motive for, nor necessarily the real reason behind, people's actions. Her politically engaged characters, each with feet of clay, relativise politics, making it seem unimportant in the greater scheme of things. It gradually becomes clear, for instance, that it is precisely Irène's political activism that allows her to lead the wild, romantic life that she enjoys. On the other hand, Martin, who unlike Irène is a true believer, nearly commits suicide out of disappointment when he discovers Peter, whom he idealised, has betrayed his cause. Nadia's role in this novel, as its principal character and dominant focus, is essentially to put politics into the proper perspective. She directs her energies and attention to the immediate pleasure of living and not the great political issues of the day. This novel, then, implies a warning against the destructive effects of an obsession with politics.

In *Manja*, too, Gmeyner had expressed doubts about the utility of political involvement, but these doubts become much stronger in *Café du Dôme* and help to shape the novel. Nadia, with whom the novel begins and ends, acts as a standard-bearer for such doubts. Through her, Gmeyner now begins to question some of the certainties of her pre-exile works. This novel is less socially determined than those early dramas; it seems instead to suggest that people are more than just the products of their class or their economic system, that they are more than just the victims of injustices such systems may create. Gmeyner is now more clearly than in *Manja* beginning to break away from a literature of political and social activism. This novel

instead revolves around the 'kaleidoscopic life of the *Dôme*, with its sudden and fleeting glimpses into the lives and destinies of all kinds of people'.<sup>30</sup>

It is, in fact, by crafting a novel informed by multiple perspectives that Gmeyner manages to portray the differing and varied effects of exile on individuals. By taking on some aspects of modernist literature in her narrative technique, Gmeyner would thus seem to be moving from Marxist-inspired Social Realism to a more inward-looking modernism (though, as will soon be discussed, she never quite completes this journey). According to Jane P. Tompkins: 'In modernist thinking, literature is by definition a form of discourse that has no designs on the world. It does not attempt to change things, but merely to represent them, and it does so in a specifically literary language whose claim to value lies in its uniqueness.'<sup>31</sup> Gmeyner, however, is more than just such an aesthete. She clearly is not writing purely for a political purpose, but neither is she an archetypical modernist attempting to break with reality and to arrange words in allusive and impressionistic patterns on a page in a 'specifically literary language'. She is instead writing about real human situations; she clearly still has designs on the world. The reality she describes in this novel is essentially that of a sense of loss of community, which is one of the characteristics of modernism but also of exile. In *Café du Dôme*, she strives to do more than simply to describe or evoke this loss. Instead, she also presents it as something to overcome.

If her novel *Café du Dôme* is compared to a more purely modernist novel such as Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), this difference becomes more apparent. Rilke, too, uses a fragmented aesthetic, and he, too, presents the effects of loss of community and isolation. His novel is made up of

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<sup>30</sup> Anna Gmeyner, *Café du Dôme* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> Jane P. Tompkins, 'Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 81-104 (p. 84).

disjointed notebook entries that capture the thoughts, moods, and experiences of the title-character, Malte Laurids Brigge. Brigge lives in complete isolation in Paris and thinks back to his childhood and family in Denmark and to the community he has lost: 'Es ist lächerlich. Ich sitze hier in meiner kleinen Stube, ich, Brigge, der achtundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden ist und von dem niemand weiß. Ich sitze hier und bin nichts'.<sup>32</sup> His statement 'I am nothing' sums up the sense of alienation and isolation that dominate this book. For most of the beginning of the novel Brigge does not even speak to another character. Instead he records what he sees around him, and the conversations that he does relay are from his past in Denmark.

By contrast, no one in Gmeyner's novel is that isolated. This is because Gmeyner, somewhat like Canetti in *Die Gelbe Straße*, strives to create a fictional community out of an otherwise disparate group of people who frequent the Café du Dôme. But where Canetti's characters are united mainly by geography – they all live on the same street – Gmeyner's are united both by circumstance – that is, by exile – and by a person. Gmeyner uses these connecting and overlapping lives to convey the varieties and the essence of exile experience, which link these disparate exiles together. As the novel progresses, its central character, Nadia, becomes the still centre of the kaleidoscope; the other characters whirl around her while she remains constant. Nadia, like Manja before her, is the focaliser of *Café du Dôme*, for she ties the intersecting subplots and the many narrative voices together.

The Café du Dôme becomes, in a sense, a focaliser as well, acting as a uniting factor for the exiles of the novel, for it is there that they go both to escape the drudgery of their lives and to feel connected to their pasts. In pre-Nazi Berlin, and

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<sup>32</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1982), p. 16.

especially in Vienna, coffee houses were immensely important for intellectual life.<sup>33</sup> In Paris such coffee houses offered emigrants a chance to recreate a piece of home. The coffee house is not surprisingly, then, a setting found in much of the writing done by exiled authors who lived in Paris after 1933. But in this novel, the *Café du Dôme* is more than just a place where exiles meet. Early in the novel the narrator says that everyone in the café was either there with a companion or ‘had an appointment with something that lay outside reality’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 10). The *Café du Dôme* is really a symbol of exile life itself.

Exiles, having lost their former lives but finding it hard to move on from them, begin to resemble spectral figures too. Exiles as ghosts – the living dead even – is a conceit that runs through the novel. When, for instance, Martin drags Nadia away from the *Café du Dôme* after his first meeting with her, he tells her that she does not belong there for it is ‘the home of ghosts and tourists’, and he is ‘a dead man on leave’, ‘Ghost and tourist in one’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 18). And when Nadia is taken to a different café, where members of the staff are Russian princes and princesses, and the headwaiter is an ex-Grand Duke, she reacts in this way:

She wondered why it was that she felt no pity for these fellow-exiles; these people here, just as much as those in the *Dôme*, had been flung out of the course of their lives, but they were even more spectral. They were not people who had really made an effort to start life anew, to adapt themselves, who humbled themselves like so many of her friends, cleaned windows, washed dishes, polished shoes, and polished them no worse than those who had done so all their lives. These were not people who set against the losses of the past the gains of the present; they were merely trying to perpetuate and gild a fragment of the past and to turn themselves into ghosts. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 107)

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<sup>33</sup> See Werner, ‘Nachwort’, p. 426.

These aristocrats refuse to accept the reality that surrounds them. Living in the past, they turn themselves instead into 'ghosts' of what they once were. Their alienation is not just from the society in which they live but even from the very time and place.

Through the character of Walter Gabriel, Gmeyner illustrates another aspect of this particular and apparently pervasive phenomenon, the spectrality of exile. He, too, is unwilling to humble himself; he, too, wishes simply to continue the life he had before. His chosen profession is acting. Such a profession, reliant as it is on language and context, makes the struggle of an exile all the more difficult. As Werner points out:

Gerade für Schauspieler, Schriftsteller und Regisseure, die Fremdsprachen oft nicht angemessen beherrschten und mit der Flucht außer der Sprache auch ihre Anbindung an den Kulturbetrieb verloren hatten, bedeutete das Exil eine existenzielle Katastrophe. (Werner, 'Nachwort', p. 430)

Gmeyner makes this existential catastrophe very personal for Gabriel. Seeing no other option, he ultimately kills himself.

Suicide is another unfortunately common aspect of exile, but it is not the only one. At Walter Gabriel's funeral, the playwright Kurt Ottevich evokes another mordant element of the catastrophe of exile life:

We are slowly devoured on all sides, as cheese is gnawed by rats. We cannot stop reading the newspapers, there is the struggle for existence, the problem of work and getting a permit to work, our personal lives, which never run a smooth course when there's nothing else to make existence worth while. And then it transpires that our American visas are not granted, our friends will no longer lend us money, our landlady threatens us with the police, and then comes some trifling detail, nothing of any importance now, a word, a voice, and suddenly, as though we were an empty building in which a time-bomb has always been ticking away, either audibly or inaudibly, everything collapses in ruins. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 300)

Ottevich's simile comparing exile to being gnawed by rats is surely a deliberately horrific image. Moreover, although this speech is a funeral oration for a particular person, the words Ottevich uses – 'our American visa', 'our friends', 'our landlady' – universalise his message. Ottevich surely expects all who hear it, no doubt exiles in the main, to empathise with what he is saying. His vivid, metaphorical language then shifts to something more insidious and explosive – a time bomb. His final image – the collapse into ruins – evokes images of war but also of the inevitable results of time: decay and, ultimately, death. It harks back to the image of exiles as ghosts or the living dead.

Peter's return is, in a sense, a return from the dead. The novel partly hinges on this return, for Peter, who is now trading one form of exile for another, will change not just Nadia's life but also others linked to hers through the Café du Dôme. Gmeyner's description of the newly returned Peter presages this change. His appearance recalls Ottevich's description of exile. He is not the man Nadia remembered:

This was not quite the old Peter. *He* would not have said such a thing, nor have said it in quite that way. There was something distressing about the way in which he stood there and said this; he seemed somehow to be ashamed of himself, to be acting a part he had rehearsed. And again Nadia felt that if any indictment were to be made, it should be made against those who had done this to him, not against him; she would have to make up to him for it a thousandfold. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 126)

Another juxtaposition – or, perhaps more accurately, another opposition – of characters in this novel similarly serves to present another aspect of exile. Apolitical and hard working, Nadia is still able to take pleasure in France, in people, and in life. Martin, a window-cleaner and important member of the Communist Party whom Nadia comes to love, by contrast is not. Though Nadia has little money and little

hope, she determines to take the pleasures in life that she can: 'The cold water felt good on her hot skin, and her life's maxim, café crème for every meal, but at all costs Oeillet Minardaise soap for the toilet, once more proved to be not only the highest wisdom but the supreme art of living' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 24). She has no interest in party politics and does not share the political activists' devotion to a cause or to a life of sacrifice. If we are invited to identify most with her, as the statement in the first paragraph of the novel – 'You were Nadia Schumacher, sitting at a table in the Café du Dôme' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 7) – surely suggests, then just as surely we are not invited to identify with the Communists in this book. Gmeyner presents Nadia's sheer pleasure in the physical world as a positive thing, as something that has value in itself, while Martin's devotion to a political cause makes him only a dull fanatic. The 'supreme art of living' is clearly not rooted in social activism.

Once a fervent Socialist, Gmeyner now seems to be moving away from the political views she had espoused earlier. Martin in *Café du Dôme* exemplifies this movement. He resembles Müller, the political activist in *Manja*, but the differences between them are significant. Martin is the more fleshed-out character and he, like his cause, is less idealised than Müller in *Manja*. There is no real explanation or any visible form of endorsement of Communism itself in this novel, either. In fact Gmeyner almost appears to be saying that it is too late for Communism. Every Communist meeting in this novel is instead both boring and futile; the members of the Party appear to be emotional cripples and completely out of touch with reality. Gmeyner describes one meeting two hours in and from Peter's perspective:

The comrades, as they sat there going point by point through the tedious agenda, seemed to have no realisation of what had been happening since Hitler came to power and to behave as though in a very short time they themselves would have the job of dividing up the world. They seemed to him shadowy and absurd as they sat there,

apparently quite unaffected by their chance transference to another capital, transacting their business with Teutonic solemnity and pomposity, in a gas-lit room almost identical with the one they had left behind. (*Café du Dôme*, pp. 203-04)

This is our introduction to the Central Committee, and it is not inspiring. By the end of the novel they have achieved nothing and seem unlikely to do more than sit in that gas-lit room, go over an agenda step by step for hours, and use phrases that are ‘worn as used half-pennies’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 204) in the future.

Although he views his comrades as ‘shadowy and absurd’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 203), Peter admits that in a less ‘disgruntled mood he might have seen and summed up the people who sat around the table quite differently’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 205). Disgruntled or not, Peter no longer takes the Communist cause seriously, yet he nevertheless puts on a façade and continues to take part in its activities, an act of dissimulation that Gmeyner emphasises when she writes that he stays at the meeting only for ‘the sake of appearances’ (ibid.). This statement hints that the changes in Peter since his return might be due to more than just the after-effects of imprisonment and torture. Gmeyner here is preparing the reader for the discovery that Peter is not just disillusioned, he is also so deeply flawed that he has become a traitor to his former cause.

Gmeyner does something similar with Martin, who becomes known as the ‘Crusader’. She portrays him as an idealist who struggles with inner feelings of futility and who achieves very little. She also presents him as a character who has seemingly based his whole belief system on Peter’s honesty. But Peter betrays everyone he knows because survival has come to be the only thing he believes in. When Martin realises that Peter might truly be a traitor, he nearly breaks down: ‘Martin passed through a mental crisis of almost unprecedented intensity. For if Peter

were bluffing and lying, the foundation of his life, the cornerstone on which everything he held dear was built, would collapse irrevocably and for ever. He would be unable to endure it' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 334). Martin is perhaps innately a follower. He appears to need someone to look up to, something to worship, some cause to champion, or his life loses meaning. His loss of sense of self would seem to stem less from exile itself than from the disillusionment that sets in when his idols are smashed.

But Gmeyner also suggests that his character and even his faith are really more deeply rooted than that. Martin is, after all, a 'Crusader', though not for Christianity but rather for the Communist cause. Like the Crusaders a millennium or so before, Martin has given up his interests, his studies, his former life to become 'a soldier of a great cause' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 172). Unlike them, of course, he can probably envision no financial reward for his fighting labours. Words like 'foundation' and 'cornerstone' also suggest an underlying strength and long-lasting determination that form the bedrock of his faith. In an ironic play on the Christian faith, Peter may represent for Martin a sort of false Messiah.

Communism is for Martin less a political than a spiritual doctrine. In an echo of the way in the novel *Manja* that National Socialism replaced Christianity for many, here – at least for Martin and others like him – Communism has taken the place that religion might otherwise have occupied. One of Martin's comrades makes this link explicit by telling him that 'in the Middle Ages you would have been a crusader, today you're a Communist' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 172). Gmeyner further emphasises this aspect of Martin's character by writing that Martin 'served his cause in purity and fervour like a mediaeval monk' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 173). Martin, then, is more than

simply a 'crusader' for the Communist Party. He is, as Werner notes, exactly like a monk who has given everything up for a religious cause or calling.<sup>34</sup>

But now, a modernist irony and uncertainty intrude on the seemingly realist lines of this story. Martin does not, in fact, die for his cause; instead he commits suicide rather than be taken by the Nazis. This act almost inevitably makes the reader wonder whether it is heroic or cowardly. Peter at least faced the Nazis and went to a concentration camp. Although this experience broke him and turned him into a traitor, initially he did live up to his ideals. Martin did not even attempt to survive and to do so. Who, Gmeyer prompts us to ask, is the more admirable? Or is it the betrayal of one that leads to the loss of faith of the other? Gmeyer abjures any absolute black or white distinction, leaving these questions to the reader to answer. She thus highlights the moral ambiguity of exile. The simple certainties of her previous pre-exile work are gone.

The other active Communist in this novel is also hardly a model of political engagement. Irène is instead 'the most unpolitical of political women' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 57). It was not her own finely developed ideals that led her into politics but a lover who 'infected me with his ideas, as though with syphilis' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 199). Comparing an interest in Communism to an infection from a sexually transmitted disease is hardly inspiring or uplifting; it does not speak to the nobility of the cause. She goes on to describe such ideas in crude or unpleasant sexual terms as well – 'mental rape', 'lecherous he-goat', 'obsession', 'horrible', and 'perverse' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 200). These words, which are themselves repulsive, make the ideology seem repulsive. As Sontag has noted, syphilis became a standard trope in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century anti-Semitic polemics; those who employed it

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<sup>34</sup> See *Illusionslos Hoffnungsvoll*, p. 250.

viewed syphilis as a debilitating infection that stemmed from moral corruption and thus a useful comparison to Judaism (Sontag, p. 82). Here Gmeyner, in another deployment of irony for effect, seems to be transferring that trope from anti-Semitic to political discourse and suggesting that it is political commitment, not Judaism, which is debilitating.

Irène's devotion to her political movement is somehow inexplicable, too, for Irène's own words repel us from it. Her politics distinguish and separate her from the apolitical focaliser of the story. At one point Irène describes watching five traitors to the Communist Party being shot in the Pyrenees. Nadia reacts 'violently' to this: "I just can't understand," said Nadia violently, "either you or Peter. What is it, where does it come from – the strength to commit such brutal acts? What is it that makes a person like you able to do such things or even to stand by and see them committed?" (*Café du Dôme*, p. 195). Presumably 'violently' is a translation of the word 'heftig', which might here be better served by being translated as 'intensely' or 'tempestuously' or 'fervidly', for the implication of denouncing violence 'violently' seems misleading. It is more likely that Gmeyner wanted Nadia to be passionate about her questions, rather than violent in nature herself. Whatever the proper translation, Gmeyner suggests that simply watching an act of violence can make a person culpable even if they do not take part in it. She also suggests that there are higher principles than fealty to a political cause.

Irène remains an enigma in other ways as well. Gmeyner does not, for instance, tell us where she is from or what, if anything, she does to support herself. She simply flits in and out of the novel. Still, it becomes clear that a need for adventure and a love of excitement motivate her. References to activities in Spain suggest that she had recently been fighting on, or at least assisting, the losing side in

that country's Civil War: 'Irène walked up and down the room, telling him [Peter] of rifles delivered in potato sacks, of battles and moonlight nights' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 175). Yet her political loyalties do not prevent her from having an affair with someone who would seem to be on the opposite side – a Nazi she describes as 'vain, stupid, and avaricious' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 305). Her political principles, if indeed she truly has them, are clearly flexible and subordinate to her emotions. If a man had written this novel, he might be accused of gender stereotyping in creating this character. In her bravery and adventurousness, however, Irène exhibits traits more commonly associated in traditional gender roles with men. Like the other principal characters in this novel, Irène is multi-faceted and not easily placed in a single stereotypical pigeon-hole.

As the novel progresses, Gmeyner increasingly associates characters with specific elements of nature. Nadia, for example, is linked with the earth. Such associative imagery serves an important, if subtle, purpose: it moves the reader from a focus on the mundane details of daily life presented in the novel to the contemplation of more fundamental questions of existence. The imagery causes the characters to become life forces as well as sentient beings; they come to stand for something larger than just themselves. With Irène, for instance, Gmeyner associates words of fire such as 'afame', 'comet', 'chased' and later on 'blaze' and 'kindled'. These words suggest that Irène has a brilliant – if, like fire itself, destructive – impact on those around her. Fire can also spring unexpectedly from place to place, making it difficult to contain. Irène seems to live without boundaries in the same way. In the descriptions of Irène, with her unfulfilled desire for something greater than what she has found in life so far and her lack of a specific *raison d'être* for the Communist cause, Gmeyner again seems to be reflecting a disillusionment with the attractions,

considerable though they may once have been, of revolutionary politics and presaging her own future devotion to a more grounded and domestic life. She also seems to be reflecting a view of human nature that is more complicated and nuanced than that proffered in her previous work. Irène's unfulfilled desire is perhaps a precursor to the interest in philosophy, syncretic religion, and spirituality that marks Gmeyner's later, English-language works.

Irène, in fact, is someone who has lost her faith – or at least claims to have done so. Here, too, ambiguity reigns. When, for instance, she rails against Catholicism, she could be attacking all such forms of belief and even arguing that religious belief is somehow alien to human beings:

There's nothing left of my Catholicism, Nadia, but a kind of devil worship. I believe in an International of incredibly sadistic and inventive devils. Quite apart from the base torments that human beings inflict on one another, they let themselves be plagued to death with ideas and thoughts foreign to them. Only one person in a thousand lives with an idea that really belongs to him and has its roots in him. Sometimes sterile relationships exist, a sort of onanistic titillation of the senses. (*Café du Dôme*, pp. 199-200)

But in making this argument she employs a biblical reference, 'devil' – one that recurs in various contexts throughout the novel, often in relation to Peter – and couples it with a favourite term of Communists, 'International'. By using both here, Irène simultaneously connects two great, if diametrically opposed, belief systems, each with fervent adherents. Ironically, she also conjures up images of hell, an odd thing for a non-believer to do.

At the same time, to add to the depths and elusiveness of her character, Gmeyner depicts her as drawn to Pierre, a man completely devoted to God. Gmeyner even has Irène probe the firmness of Pierre's faith by asking if he makes no protest 'Against Fate, against humanity, against God, or whatever you call it? Doesn't it all

seem to you disgusting and futile?' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 314). Her use of 'disgusting' and 'futile' echo her words in relation to Communism, when in the same breath she speaks of sexually transmitted diseases and plagues. Irène now seems to be comparing organised religion with Communism. In so doing, she makes both appear unsatisfactory and insufficient.

But with Pierre this argument then takes a surprising turn that calls into question whether Irène's words reflect Gmeyner's views. In presenting him, Gmeyner uses imagery that brings to mind the Son of God and even, at one point, directly points to the similarity between them. When Gmeyner describes Pierre, she employs terms involving light, just as she did with Manja. Like Manja, Pierre hears internal music, though for him it is a sign from God: 'It is impossible to describe. I hear wonderful music. Not all the time. But even when it no longer sounds in my ears, when alien noises seem to have drowned it, it is there all the same. And I know too that it is dark only for me, that the world is full of light' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 315). He describes a religious experience involving a vision of a burning tree: "It exalted me," he cried jubilantly, "it steeped the topmost branches of my soul in the glow, in the radiant light of God" (*Café du Dôme*, pp. 188-89). Even his own words resort to light, radiance, and God, as if they all go together, and when he lies dying, thus presumably drawing nearer to God, at least in his own mind, the narrator tells us, 'His face glowed' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 356). He sees dazzling light: 'The expression of gentle joy in his face increased to one of such burning ecstasy, such concentrated rapture, that it almost hurt to look at him' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 360). Pierre's wife describes him bitterly as 'Saintly' and says that 'All our friends said he had a head like a Christ' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 142). Yet, as Werner points out, Pierre is not a martyr: "Der 'stiff-and-starched saint', "the archangel from Chartres" (312) ist keine

messianische und keine Märtyrer-Figur: Er stirbt nicht im Kampf für seine Überzeugung, die er mit anderen teilte, sondern sein Glaube findet seinen eigentlichen Ausdruck erst im Tod' (*Illusionslos*, p. 249). He does not die for his beliefs, but rather dies representing them.

It seems to be important to Gmeyner in this novel to represent religious mysticism, if not organised religion, positively. We see this, for instance, in Pierre, who cites the medieval mystic Meister Eckehart and his belief in God 'Sunder Warumbe', God 'Without the Why' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 316).<sup>35</sup> Martin and Pierre are also linked characters: they supply the two positive images of religion in this novel – even if Martin's religion comes in the guise of a political cause. This is another sign pointing to the direction in which Gmeyner will later move with her art. Nadia, too, undergoes a change. At first, she does not believe in religion, let alone mysticism. She tells Irène that though she can no longer kneel before God, she is waiting to be filled up by Him again. By the end of the novel, she has been.

The close of the novel, in portraying Nadia's new attitude to the world, becomes almost mystical. Presaging thematic concerns found in her future work, Gmeyner here depicts how Nadia suffers a long illness that is like a symbolic death, and how, when she recovers, she is reborn and is no longer a ghost or spectre. Pierre's vision of the burning tree, the sign of God and eternity in which he took such joy (*Café du Dôme*, pp. 188-89), for her becomes a sign of something different: 'The glowing tree-top had its roots, not in the soil, but in the clouds' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 395). She sees herself, unlike Pierre, rooted in the earth. Her vision of God, her great

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<sup>35</sup> 'Alsus sôwirt der sun in uns geboren: daz wir sîn sunder warumbe und werden wider ingeboren in dem sue.' (Meister Eckehart, 'Predigt 41 Qui sequitur iustitiam, diligitur a domino, Beati, qui ersiunt, et sitiunt iustitiam: quoniam ipsi saturabuntur' in *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, ed. and trans. by Joseph Quint, 5 vols (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1958), II, pp. 285-97 (p. 293). See also vol. I, 'Predigt 5 b in hoc apparuit caritas dei in nobis', pp. 85-96 (p. 90).

symbol, is not a tree but a star. She has seen the star as a vision since her childhood, and now it brings her joy and peace.

The star, which was a sign of transcendence in *Manja*, here combines the physical world with what lies beyond. It literally helps Nadia to see everything in a new light: ‘There was a great stillness around her and a great brightness and the consciousness of being alone and yet a part of everything’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 396). The star is green and gold, combining a symbol of growth, harmony, freshness, and fertility, with one of supreme value. This vision of a star has made Nadia a part of the spiritual world. She has now found her own way to be comfortable with it and to worship.

In *Café du Dôme* Gmeyner seems to be moving simultaneously towards spirituality and away from organised religion. This novel employs more religious imagery and metaphor than did *Manja*. The kinds of symbolism present in *Manja* – such as the references to Greek myth and the constellation Cassiopeia – are wholly absent in this book, but religious similes and metaphors – such as calling a character ‘The Crusader’ – recur frequently.

Although Gmeyner’s father was of Jewish ancestry, she was raised in an assimilated Catholic household, so it is not surprising that her direct references to the Bible are to the New Testament and not the Old. This also explains why she called Chapter 14 of this novel ‘Grain of Corn’. In it Gmeyner deals with death and with the loss of faith. Gmeyner seems here, too, to be comparing the experience of exile to a kind of death and burial. She has Irène reject being likened to a grain of corn: ‘All this self-abnegation, this grain of corn idea, is merely an escape, a narcotic to deaden the fear of death. Are the people who believe in it weaker or stronger? Is it all nonsense?’ (*Café du Dôme*, p. 309). The self-denial that Irène attacks and that Nadia

claims is 'the most real thing in us' (ibid.) seems to echo a passage from St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians in which Paul explains resurrection:

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. [...] So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15. 35-44)

Irène initially cannot believe that death can be overcome "I'm not going to let myself be cheated," cried Irène. "I'm not going to let myself be sown like a grain of corn in the ground, only to find that I am buried" (*Café du Dôme*, p. 315). She sees the words of Paul as a trick and fears being taken advantage of. Man is not a seed to which God has given a body. And man is not so different from the animals, even if they, as Paul says, have different flesh.<sup>36</sup> To her there is no change to come, the dead will not be raised imperishable, yet Irène wants that to be so. By the end of the chapter, after arguing with Pierre about God, she finds her faith again. She is not a Catholic, but she no longer rails against fate and God:

But of a sudden Irène perceived not only the garish and the grotesque aspect of life, not only the lewd animal shapes of the monkey-terrace, but something undefined, bright and lovely, woven like the mellowing tones of gold in a faded Gobelin, into the vast indecipherable fabric of human destiny. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 318)

Paul's words obviously resonated with Gmeyner. In this same biblical passage

Paul also writes:

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<sup>36</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15. 39.

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. [...] There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written. The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15. 40-49)

Gmeyner repeatedly describes Nadia as earthly and Pierre as celestial. Nadia, in other words, represents the natural body and Pierre the spiritual. Although they are different in almost every tangible way, Gmeyner is here suggesting, as her words about splendour reveal, that one is not better than the other. Instead one necessarily complements the other, to form a whole. More important still, the message she wishes to convey would appear to be this: organised religion, like revolutionary politics, is not the answer. In essence, she appears to argue, it is not important simply to have faith, but important that that faith be personal and yet holistic.

In a similar way, though this time coupled with another instance of almost tragic irony, Gmeyner presents Pierre and Peter as counterpoints of one other. Pierre loves a flawed woman fully, is devoted to his beliefs, and dies bravely. Peter loves no one but himself, is a broken man, and betrays all around him for the sake of his own survival. In the end, they both get what they want from life. Even their names bear religious weight. Pierre is, of course, simply the French version of Peter, and the biblical Peter was the 'rock', as Jesus himself punningly says, upon which the Christian church was founded, 'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16. 18). It is thus perhaps also a deliberately ironic use of Christian

symbolism to make one of the Peters more devilish than saint-like and to link the other to the founding of a powerful institution that has survived through the ages.

Solitude is also a recurrent theme in Gmeyner's exile fiction. In *Manja*, it contributes to the title character's decision to commit suicide, for Manja cannot live cut off from her companions. *Café du Dôme* portrays and builds upon the isolating nature of life in exile. When Nadia first meets Martin, for instance, she says to him, 'Do you realise that you're the first person I've talked to for the last six months? I've spoken to a good many people, of course, on everyday matters, the concierge, shopkeepers, but one forgets how to talk to people really. Lord, how alone one can be in this town!' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 17). But whereas the disintegration of a community leads to Manja's death, in *Café du Dôme* it is community that saves Nadia. As the novel progresses, Gmeyner creates strong bonds of love and affection between her characters. Using Nadia again as a focal point, she creates a closely knit exile community. Nadia both unites the other characters who form this community and assumes a maternal role towards them: she mothers Irène when she is ill, even leaving Paris to do so; she comes to Pierre as he lies dying and tries to ease his death; she looks after Glebov as much as she works for him; she is the one who thinks to remove Thérèse's hat and find her a cushion when she collapses at her father's birthday party, who murmurs to Thérèse, massages her and calls for a doctor, and who alone can comfort Françoise when the young girl learns that Peter was only using her to escape France. Most tellingly, perhaps, it is also thanks to this community that Nadia recovers from Martin's death and Peter's betrayal:

Out of the darkness of those weeks of almost continuous unconsciousness shone out the resourceful, indefatigable, long unrewarded kindness of her friends, Françoise, Glebov, Madame Pétrin, Resi. Mingling at first with figures born of feverish dreams and nightmares, they had gradually become real and living. With

solicitous, ever-increasing, patient and cunning love these people had cared for her incessantly, calling her and eventually bringing her back to life. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 389)

Here Gmeyner contrasts darkness and light, dreams and reality, the dead and the living. These contrasts both emphasise the seriousness of Nadia's illness and represent the larger battle that was taking place during it: between good and evil, and between the will to survive and the desire to perish. Nadia does not want to live after learning that Peter is a traitor and that he helped lead to the death of her love, Martin. But her friends do not let her give up as Martin did; those for whom Nadia cared now care for her. It is because of the community that she created in exile that she feels compelled to return to the living.

Through this Gmeyner suggests that even in this atomised, fragmented modern world, where exile exacerbates the inevitable sense of alienation an individual must feel, a thread or a chain of human connection still binds people together and offers a means of overcoming the disorienting and even spectral experience of exile. This is the heart of the message that Gmeyner seeks to convey in this novel, in which she uses contemporary – modernist, if you will – narrative techniques to communicate a perhaps more timeless or at least traditional message about the importance of the human community.

A summary, perhaps even climactic, scene in the novel illustrates this well. After she has recovered from her illness, Nadia walks to the *Café du Dôme* and looks in on the 'living ghosts'. She longs to go in, but

even as her emotion, gentle as the gentlest of touches, sought to take hold of and comprehend every one of those frustrated lives, something within her uttered an imperious 'No,' and ruthlessly severed her from them. No, the purpose and objective of her search did not lie here. Not in the *Dôme*, not in flight into a world of illusion. (*Café du Dôme*, p. 391)

The repetition of 'No' and 'not' emphasise Nadia's vehemence. She walks away from the Dôme, and this physical act represents her emotional and mental departure from the past, from the 'world of illusion' the café represents for its exile denizens, and her determination to make a new life for herself. Gmeyner writes that everything is 'the same and yet different' (ibid.), that despite all that has happened to her, Nadia realises that 'everything was still going on, living on' (ibid.). She has come to realise that life is complicated and that one has to accept it for what it is: 'It was intense to the verge of pain, this love for the imperfect, for the hateful and the lovely world of to-day and to-morrow, always worth every sacrifice made by the finest human beings' (*Café du Dôme*, p. 396).

This is fundamentally, then, a novel of affirmation – of community, of humanity, of hope. It contrasts the living – i.e., those like Nadia who have come to terms with their new circumstances and their unavoidable fate – with those who represent a kind of death in life – i.e., the exiles who refuse to do what Nadia has done. To do so, it employs modernist techniques – aesthetic fragmentation, multiple narrative perspectives, a close examination of the characters' inner landscapes – but places them within a metanarrative that in essential ways builds upon the more realist, if also more lyrical, *Manja* and even upon the politically engaged dramas that preceded these two novels. With its predominant imagery drawn from nature and from religion alike, however, *Café du Dôme* signals not just a new phase in Gmeyner's life, but in her art as well. She no longer locates the solution to the alienation the individual feels in the modern world in leftist politics, but now instead finds it in the spirit and the heart. When she returns to writing late into her exile years, this message will grow more dominant in her work.

## *The Death and Life of Julian*

*The Death and Life of Julian*, issued by Regency Press in 1960, was the first published novel Gmeyner wrote in English and not in German. Although English was not her native language, she deploys it in this novel with nuanced understanding and a poetic feeling for words, mixing metaphor, rhyme, and repetition to lend further elements of poetry to her narrative. In fact, she uses language in this novel almost as allusively as a poet would. She thus displays a command of the English language as great as that of her native German in her earlier works.

The poetic and sometimes even lyrical nature of her writing manifests itself on the very first page of this story when she describes a moving and murmuring crowd as ‘like a dreaming beast’.<sup>37</sup> With this simile she suggests that a crowd, like a slumbering wild animal, can become dangerous when suddenly roused. Such an aversion to the madness of crowds runs like a leitmotif through the exile works of all three authors under discussion in this thesis and must surely stem from the horrifying experiences that drove them from their *Heimat*. That it appears in a story with a setting so distant from contemporary times suggests that the searing experience of exile was never far from Gmeyner’s mind.

Gmeyner takes as the topic of her return to writing the life of Julian the Apostate, the Roman emperor who lived from 331 to 363 AD and who is most remembered for his attempt to restore the worship of the gods of Greece and Rome and the Mysteries of Mithras and Eleusis after thirty years of Christianity as the state religion. Gmeyner begins her novel with Julian’s death and works her way backward through what she considers the most significant moments of his life, with the dying

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<sup>37</sup> Anna Morduch, *The Death and Life of Julian* (London: Regency Press, 1960), p. 7.

Julian acting as a spectator. At the end, once again circling back to where she began, she concludes her novel with Julian's death and his passing on to the afterlife.

This is no mere death, either, for this death brings with it divine revelation. The Julian of her novel ultimately realises that while fighting Christianity he was actually moving closer and closer to Christ. In form this corresponds to the type of tragic plot that Aristotle identifies in his poetics as 'recognition' – 'a change from ignorance to knowledge'.<sup>38</sup> A story set in classical times thus takes on a classical shape. In content it also signals Gmeyner's seemingly new-found but probably long-evolving views of spirituality and approach to religious belief. It is not, for Gmeyner, the way in which we worship that is important, but rather the way in which we live our lives and embody our faith in a Supreme Being.

Julian's interest in philosophy and desire for truth seem in keeping with Gmeyner's own personality. She describes him in terms that might as well apply to herself: 'the brilliant and ardent' who 'had wanted to drink from every source, clear and turgid, in his burning thirst for the truth' (*Death*, p. 11). In this novel Julian admires Alexander the Great not for his conquests, but because he longed to find the wisdom of the secret temples of the East. Julian vows that 'when I rule this great land all streams of wisdom will flow together. There will be knowledge, power and glory linked together as never before on earth' (*Death*, p. 25). Gmeyner also suggests that Julian was a man of great integrity. He appears honest, fair-minded, and just, as his actions once he is crowned emperor show:

There came the sweeping out of the stables. The punishment of the guilty, the dismissal of the dishonest and the superfluous: the cooks, the barbers and under-barbers who had lived on the fat of the land.

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<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, XI.2, trans. by S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 72. This is also found in other texts under section 152a of the *Poetics*. The term 'recognition' (ἀναγνώρισις/anagnorisis) is also translated as 'discovery'.

Those who had made out of the mint a source of private income, those who had hidden falsified coins in woods and caves. (*Death*, p. 92)

Here Julian punishes and dismisses the corrupt. Even though he is against Christianity, angry with Christian believers, and prolific in his anti-Christian writing, Gmeyner has him act somewhat as Jesus did in driving the money-changers out of his temple. His anger is righteous.

After his coronation, too, he declares that none of his subjects or soldiers who believe in Christ will be persecuted for their religious practices. In his speech he says:

Let us live as free men and those who wish to worship in the Christian churches let no one disturb them as long as they obey the law of the land and do not interfere with the right of every man to hold up his hands in worship of the loving Sun pouring His rays of divine bounty on good and evil alike. (*Death*, p. 91)

In this novel, if not in history, Julian is a magnanimous man who is able to overcome his own antagonism to Christianity and to treat believers in it with fairness.

Platonism, or perhaps a form of neo-Platonism, ‘which deeply influenced those Christians who had theological, theoretical or philosophical interests’,<sup>39</sup> also appears in this novel. As Pauliina Remes notes: ‘Broadly taken, in Platonism humanity can at the outset be seen divided into two things of entirely different sorts. One becomes actual or has a meaningful existence only in the body; these are activities happening in and through a body. The other is not essentially tied to the body; this is reason or the intellectual capacity that can function and exist separately from the body’ (Remes, p. 103). Plato also believed, as the historian of philosophy Anthony Gottlieb puts it, that ‘the soul was separable from the body, that it existed

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<sup>39</sup> Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), p. 2.

before birth and that it would definitely continue to exist after death'.<sup>40</sup> He further believed that while the soul was tied to a physical body during life, it led a defiled and inferior existence from which it needed to be 'purified' and 'freed from the shackles of the body' (Gottlieb, p. 145) and that 'the philosopher, in particular, should regard the whole of his life as a preparation for the blissful release of death' (Gottlieb, pp. 145-46).<sup>41</sup> In this novel, apparently reflecting such a philosophical belief, Julian tells his grieving friends not to mourn him but to rejoice 'every time the best separates itself from the worst' (*Death*, p. 13). For Julian, as it seems for Gmeyner, the soul is the best and the body the worst, and in death they are separated. Julian views his death as a return to his homeland, as a freeing from the chains of living and a return to the 'Source' (*Death*, p. 15), Apollo. This homeward journey in fact forms the basis of the plot of this book, which moves from the present, where Julian is dying in his tent, to a dream world where Julian's spirit is on a journey through his memories. Eventually these pictures stop, and Julian is left alone and reflective. He sums up the whole experience by saying: 'Shadows and meaningless echoes. Deeds of glory and deeds of shame, equally meaningless. Love and friendship, hatred and murder. Sweetness of earth and warmth of sunlight' (*Death*, p. 167). Julian, having relived both the good and the bad of his life, at the end essentially finds it all meaningless.

Gmeyner treats this self-reflection as part of the journey to enlightenment: 'The light into which he was gazing now seemed to take on human form as if a mantle were flung round the blazing lightness. Now face and figure, though radiant still, were human, beautiful and deeply familiar' (*Death*, p. 168). Then, in the remains of the ancient temple of Apollo, Julian sees 'the God in the light' himself (*ibid.*). 'Now the centre of the sun appeared to him as a disc, as a golden doorway leading into a

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<sup>40</sup> Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance* (New York and London: Norton, 2000), pp. 145-46.

<sup>41</sup> This concept also refers to Julian's Neoplatonism.

landscape of blazing glory and in the gateway the boy saw the God of light surrounded by his sun-angels, his arms raised in blessing' (*Death*, pp. 162-63). As in her earlier works, Gmeyner here employs light imagery – sometimes accompanied by images of fire or flames – to represent God or religious belief. When the twigs Julian has left on the altar catch fire, proving to him the truth of what he has seen, Julian turns firmly away from Christianity. But as the book is drawing to an end, Gmeyner gives a hint of what is to come by writing that 'a golden cross of light stood in the blue sky' (*Death*, p. 162). This golden cross, of course, suggests that Christianity and not pagan religion is at work here. Gmeyner reminds us that light is a sign of Jesus Christ as well.

Gmeyner links the two belief systems by repeatedly using images of light, fire, and sun to represent both Apollo and Jesus. By describing them both in the same terms, she implies that Jesus is present in every description and interaction of the 'God of light'. But Gmeyner never mentions Jesus by name and so never explicitly says that Jesus is revealed to Julian; she simply implies it. She describes the angel taking Julian on his 'homeward journey' (*Death*, p. 168) in terms of light and fire, and when Julian finally sees his 'Master' clearly the man is wearing a robe bound together by a 'golden girdle', and he is holding 'the seven stars'. In Revelation Chapter 1, Jesus is described thus:

Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (Revelation 1. 13-16)

Gmeyner seems to have lifted her description straight from here. When Julian looks up, 'he then saw the face under the blazing light-crown, the eyes which shone like suns in strength, gazing into his' (*Death*, p. 175) and then recognises the man before him. Julian cries out that he has been blind, that it is 'You, whom I hated!' (*ibid.*), and that he is undone and wishes to be swallowed by hell. As he has only ever hated Christ, and, as the description of the man is right out of the Bible, we know that it is Christ before him. When the man answers, 'Your hell is over, my son. Your hatred was for higher love, your suffering and hunger for fulfilment. It was I who looked at you, and whom you beheld in the sun-god's light. Be at peace. Rest long and when you wake you will journey on through the boundless realms of my father's house' (*Death*, pp. 175-76), this is made certain, for, of course, his father is God.

Tradition has it that Julian died crying 'Thou has conquered, O Galilean!',<sup>42</sup> and perhaps that is what inspired Gmeyner. Julian is, after all, called the Apostate because he sought to return Rome to the old gods and the old ways. But in her novel Julian finds Christ, if only in the afterlife. Perhaps, as she suggests, Christ did in the end conquer Julian, even if it took his death for him to realise it. For someone as spiritually minded as Gmeyner became in her exile, this would be only natural. It would also be a message of hope not out of keeping with her previous novels.

### ***A Jar Laden with Water***

Published originally in 1961 by Peter Davies, *A Jar Laden with Water* is a collection of six stories spanning different epochs and continents but joined by a common theme. Each story is about one person who lacks inner knowledge of the

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<sup>42</sup>Adrian Murdoch, *The Last Pagan: Julian the Apostate and the Death of the Ancient World* (Gloucester: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p. 8.

secret of life and one who is closer to 'Understanding'. In her Author's Note, Gmeyner calls these pairs 'eternal brothers': 'the one wanting to find the source of all being and serve it selflessly; the other, who follows his own desires, denying the very existence of such a source. Of course these two are met not only in the spheres of events but also inside every human being'.<sup>43</sup> She also writes that she began working on these stories at a time of great crisis and sorrow 'following thoughts and ideas and certain characteristic features of a personality who, as it then seemed, had vanished overnight', and that through writing this book she found 'a road to great happiness and exciting discoveries and a new meaning of happiness which I had thought shattered beyond all hope' (*Jar*, p. 9). Her writing, in other words, helped her deal with the death of her husband and rescued her from her loss. Her newfound interest in matters spiritual, however, may also reflect the inward-turning tendency exhibited in exile by all three writers under examination in this thesis. With each successive publication in exile, Gmeyner became increasingly interested in spirituality.

Although Gmeyner maintained that *A Jar Laden with Water* was very different from her earlier works, in fundamental ways that was not true. To be sure, it is the only one to date that deals explicitly with the search for a higher power and the secret to life. It is also her only collection of short stories. But the search for meaning in life marks all of her exile works, particularly her late, English-language works. Perhaps in reaction to the nationalist-racist creed of the Nazis that almost resulted in the extirpation of the 'Jewish race', she seems constantly engaged in a quest to find what unites humankind across racial, religious, and geographic dividing lines in the apparent hopes that the Platonic or neo-Platonic soul, which is everlasting, will in the

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<sup>43</sup> Anna Morduch, 'Author's Note', in *A Jar Laden with Water* (London: Peter Davies, 1961), pp. 9-10 (p. 9).

end prevail over the evils incarnate of this world, the worst of which she almost experienced first-hand.

Gmeyner takes the title of the book from a poem of Rumi as translated by R.A. Nicholson:

Be not thou a jar  
Laden with water  
And its lip stone-dry  
Or as a horseman  
Blindly borne a far  
Who never sees the horse  
Beneath his thigh (*Jar*, p. 6)

Rumi – or, to use his full name, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi – is commonly considered the greatest Sufi mystic and Persian language poet. Gmeyner explains the poem as follows:

As the work proceeded I became increasingly convinced that those who not only ‘talked about water’ but had drunk from it would understand those who had known the same experience, however sharply they might be divided by race, creed and environment; whereas those who only knew it from hearsay or denied its experience in the desert altogether would always be the enemies of those who clothed truth in a language different from their own. (*Jar*, p. 9)

Each story begins with an epigraph and each story except the last bears a title that refers to the one who is enlightened. Different races, creeds, and environments feature in these stories, but so do similar ideas. The linkage of these ideas through differing narratives creates in the end a collection of characters with the same experiences. Each story is capable of standing alone. Taken together, they impart a common message about God and belief.

The first story, ‘The King’s Goldsmith’, opens with another epigraph drawn from Rumi: ‘Becoming is a necessary condition for beholding the reality of anything.

Whether it be light or darkness until thou becomest it thou will never know it completely' (*Jar*, p. 11). The story concerns Lysimachos, a Greek warrior searching for enlightenment after the devastating loss of his brother in battle. Here, just as in the final story of this collection as well as in her previous novel, death sparks the desire for a deeper meaning and a search for the 'source'. It is no accident that the epigraph concerns darkness and light.

This story, though short, has an epic quality to it. It takes the form of a quest, such as Odysseus (or Ulysses) and Aeneas undertook. Emulating Ulysses, whose story he had listened to eagerly and repeatedly, Lysimachos builds a ship and sails to Persia. When he lands, echoing a scene in the *Odyssey*, he meets the daughter of Orastes, the cup-maker he has sought, and is led to him. Lysimachos, however, does not gain enlightenment until after he has returned to Greece, been convicted of treason, and been left to starve in a temple of Apollo, where he has nothing to do but think. On the last night of his life, Gmeyner writes, Lysimachos had a vision of Orastes holding a silver cup to his dead brother's lips: 'And while his brother drank, his own thirst was slaked and living water ran through his body, healing and cleansing' (*Jar*, p. 48). 'Living water' appears in Revelation 7. 17 and Genesis 26. 19.<sup>44</sup> With this phrase, Gmeyner subtly introduces Christian thought into a story set in the pagan world. Lysimachos had long wanted to know himself, but, as in *The Death and Life of Julian*, it took dying for him to do so.

Like Gmeyner's novels, this story is also cyclical and ends where it begins, in this case in Greece. Like her novels, it relies heavily on metaphor as well. It is thus not so different from *The Death and Life of Julian* after all. Both are set in antiquity, both treat death not as an end state but as a journey to enlightenment, and both have

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<sup>44</sup> The exact phrasing depends on the specific Bible cited – for example, in Genesis 'living' can also be called 'springing', depending on the particular translation.

strong Christian undertones. As in *The Death and Life of Julian*, Gmeyner uses images of light and fire to represent devotion, piety, God. Just as the Lord calls to Julian three times in a dream, so does Orastes deliver three blows to Lysimachos' breast. Orastes tells Lysimachos that he will wander through the sphere of the seven great angels, a reference to Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelations in the New Testament. There Jesus, like Julian's 'angel', is portrayed holding seven stars; those seven stars represent the seven angels of the seven churches. While Orastes is most likely referring to the Zoroastrian belief that at the centre of nature are seven spirits – at the forefront is Ahura Mazdā, the Wise Lord, who created six divine beings or archangels to help govern creation and who are the everlasting bestowers of good – the use of the word angel here offers another interpretation as well, perhaps referring to the Christianity to come.<sup>45</sup> Gmeyner suggests, as Rumi's lines indicate, that it is partly in the act of searching, of 'becoming', that one achieves such enlightenment.

The second story, 'The Landscape Painter', is set in China in the sixth century A.D. The epitaph with which it begins comes from a translation of Tao Te King:

There are my three treasures  
Guard and keep them.  
The first is pity  
The second frugality  
The third refusal to be foremost  
Of all things under heaven.

Tao Te King, or Tao Te Ching, meaning something like 'The Way of Power', though 'tao' is supposed to be an indefinable concept, is a work of Chinese philosophical literature from between the sixth and third centuries BCE. It presented a way of life

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<sup>45</sup> See the *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2006) on Zoroastrianism, pp. 1165-66, and on Amesha Spenta, pp. 39-40.

intended to restore harmony and tranquillity to a kingdom wracked by widespread disorder.<sup>46</sup>

This story concerns two brothers, Fang and Wang. The former, who lacks pity and frugality, wishes to be the foremost of the two. It soon becomes clear that, precisely because of this desire, he will never have understanding. The latter is quite the opposite. According to their grandfather, because he has tenderness and strength and the understanding of Tao, he will one day come to understand the words of the sage who said: 'Throw open the gates, put self aside, hide in silence and the radiance of the spirit shall come in and make its home' (*Jar*, p. 54).

Gmeyner similarly wants the reader to understand that one must look beyond the obvious to understand Truth. She uses painting as a vehicle to make this point. Early in the story Wang tells his brother that he learned about landscape painting by forgetting about the brush and the ink. Later, when Wang paints Golden Bells, with whom Fang is in love, Gmeyner describes how he looks at her, then closes his eyes and sees her in his mind's eye first as a child learning her first steps, then as the mother she will one day be, and finally as an old woman. His painting reduces her to tears; it shows her 'as she is and never knew herself to be' (*Jar*, p. 66). It is only by forgetting the ink, by not looking at the woman, and by concentrating on the spirit of someone or something and on what makes them what they are that Wang is able to understand a person truly. He achieves 'understanding' – that is, the desired state of enlightenment – in this way, something that eludes his brother to the very end of the story.

The third story, 'Bonhomme Jaquot', takes place in thirteenth-century France. Although it concerns battles among Christians, it begins with an epigraph from the

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<sup>46</sup> See *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, p. 1076.

celebrated Hindu devotional work, *Bhagavad-Gita*: 'However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is mine' (*Jar*, p. 75). The story itself follows the path of Brother Jules and Father Dominic through France as they hunt down Cathars, whom they consider heretics. After destroying Cathar churches, they lay siege to a castle housing hundreds of Cathars (Bonhommes), killing many of them.

Gmeyner clearly wishes the reader to sympathise with the title character, a Cathar. Like Wang and Orastes, Bonhomme Jaquot tells stories to emphasise a point and, like them, he is accused of always speaking in riddles. This, like the title of the story itself, is a sign that he is the enlightened one. In this story Jacquot cares for a woman who is insane and considered a witch, cures her, and forgives her when she betrays him. He also teaches children not to fear her but rather to understand her through her illness. He tells Pierrette, for instance, that the mad woman believes that in the empty basket she carries is her little girl: 'If you cannot see the little daughter of this mad woman in the empty basket, you will never see Montsalvat at Pentecost, nor will you ever find the blue grass. Take her hand now and the Lord will take yours when you need it' (*Jar*, p. 89).

Bonhomme Jaquot both teaches and acts with compassion, whereas Brother Jules, the conventional Christian, seems to lack that quality completely. In his diary he calls Jacquot 'evil' and the 'Prince of Darkness' and 'the satellite of Antichrist', suggesting that he, if not the devil himself, is closely connected to him. It hardly seems a charitable, Christian attitude. It also suggests a certain disconnection not only from enlightenment but also from reality. Jules shows himself to be intolerant, bigoted, and ready to demonise those with whom he disagrees. He is clearly never able, even at the end, to 'find the way back'. This is perhaps why the use of a passage

from an ancient Indian epic to open a story of medieval France, which seems out of place at the start, makes sense when one reaches its end, and Father Dominic and Bonhomme Jaquot tell Jules that: ‘Opinions are made by men. Doctrines are left behind. Those who pray are one. Those who know God are one. Take the key, brother, take it’ (*Jar*, p. 117). Bonhomme Jaquot is able to take this key. Brother Jules, however, is not. Death once again represents a journey home.

In this, as in the other stories in this work, Gmeyner seems to be telling us that it is not the religious doctrine that is important, but rather it is prayer and the unity with God, whatever one calls Him, that matters, that holds the key. The Cathar heresy, if indeed it was heresy, may also have appealed to her in a particular way. As Jonathan Sumption writes, ‘At its centre lay that profoundly pessimistic view of the world which characterises all dualistic teaching [...] All matter is evil and transitory, containing the seeds of its own destruction’.<sup>47</sup> Cathars did not have a sacramental priesthood as such. Instead, they had teachers and ‘exceptionally holy men’ they called Perfects (Sumption, p. 50). They attempted to ‘deny their humanity and become pure spirit’ (Sumption, p. 52). In this they seem almost to share Gmeyner’s apparently Platonist views of the superiority of the spirit to the flesh.

The fourth story, ‘The Tailor of Plotz’, takes place in Poland and Vienna between 1812 and 1848. Its epigraph is a quotation from William Law (1686-1761), an English spiritual writer whose later works were influenced by the German philosophical mystic, Jakob Böhme (1575-1624). (Böhme, about whom Gmeyner wrote an unpublished book, gained illumination through a ray of sunlight he saw reflected in a pewter dish.<sup>48</sup>) Law’s epigraph reads:

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Boehme, Jakob (1575-1624)’ in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Craig, 10 vols (London: Routledge, 1998), III, p. 799.

By love I do not mean any natural tenderness which is more or less in people according to their constitution, but I mean a larger principle of the soul founded in reason and piety which makes us tender, kind and gentle to all our fellow creatures of God and for His sake. (*Jar*, p. 120)

The story begins with the wedding of Janik, the tailor of Plotz, to Hannah and the reaction to it of his friend Michael. Like Lysimachos, Michael does not understand true piety, and, like Fang and Wang, he and Janik, though childhood friends rather than brothers, are opposites. Michael is a modern man who believes in money, technology, and advancement; Janik is a simple man who wishes to spend his life in study and trade. It is many years before they are in touch again. Hannah, now Janik's wife, dies in childbirth. Michael comes to Janik when he hears of Hannah's death, lays the blame at her doctor's door, and orders Janik to do something. After sending his friend away in hatred, thereby going against Law's principle of the soul, Janik loses his ability to pray. He has cut the link by which he had lived, and so he leaves his home, his family, his friends, and his way of life to seek out Michael and to beg his pardon, so 'that the rift may be mended which stops the wheel of the chariot and the Shekinah may rise again from the world of shells' (*Jar*, p. 150).<sup>49</sup>

It takes Janik years to find Michael, who has by now married into a Barony and has an unfaithful wife and an ugly son. When Janik walks in on one of Michael's parties, Michael is humiliated. He pretends not to know his friend and has him thrown out. Janik then regains the ability to pray and does so later in a small hotel room.

He gave thanks for the great peace and for the desolation which had taught him how poor a heart was which had lost this link, and how

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<sup>49</sup> 'Shekinah, 'dwelling' or 'presence' in Hebrew, denotes the presence of God in the world. The Shekinah is sometimes conceived as a bright radiance. There is an affinity between it and the Christian conception of the Holy Spirit, for 'both signify some forms of divine immanence, both are associated with prophecy, both may be lost because of sin, and both are connected with the study of the Torah' (*Encyclopedia of World Religions*, p. 993).

brave a man must be to remain human when the link was cut. For how could the healthy understand the sick, the handsome the ugly, the seeing the blind, but by sharing their fate? Now, having known that great dearth, his prayer could reach higher, could intercede and set free. (*Jar*, p. 156)

After this Janik comes to know Michael's son and his caretaker, Father Gregory, through a chance meeting in a park. The story ends with an excerpt from Father Gregory's diary. Writing after a silence of three days, he tells of Michael shooting himself, of Janik sitting by his bedside praying, and of his own feeling that while Michael never regained consciousness, Janik's pleading had been heard, for he felt a presence, perhaps an angel, and he 'thought for the first time of the Jew not as the one who killed our Lord, but of our Lord as a Jew when he walked on earth' (*Jar*, p. 164). The story ends in redemption, if not enlightenment. Gmeyner concludes with these words:

I was thinking what a sensation the suicide of the well-known banker would have caused and what headlines in the press it would have made. But there have been no papers for the last three days and no one knows when they will appear again and if, when they do, it will still be of interest. It is all very strange. I think I shall sleep tonight. (*Jar*, p. 166)

In simple acts of kindness, tenderness, and charity, reason and piety have prevailed, and in them Father Gregory finds respite. One is left to presume that Janik – and perhaps even, in death, Michael – has done the same. This ending reinforces Gmeyner's theme that love is a part of piety and thus a means to enlightenment.

The fifth story, 'The Mudfish', opens with this citation from Philo of Alexandria: 'They who offer themselves offer the highest of sacrifices' (*Jar*, p. 167). It is set in Calcutta in the 1880s, and its focal point, Manendrabat, or 'Mudfish' as his master calls him, is a religious devotee who has only ever been interested in complete

freedom and who has never been fettered by desires for women and gold as so many other men are. Through an English worker named Jim, his love Milly, and his workmate Jacko, Manendrabat is introduced to a world of pain, filth, and degradation completely outside his experience. Secure in his beliefs, he is drawn to them by their very lack of beliefs, and because of them his view of the world changes. Even his prayers change:

‘Mother,’ he prayed, ‘Once I asked you not to let me be drowned in the dark oceans of this world. I sacrificed lotus flowers and leaves to you. Now I sacrifice my heart’s longing for liberation. I ask no longer for it. I ask only for understanding of pain and the power to help. Siva of the blue throat, you who swallowed the poison that would have poisoned the world, give me understanding of pain and the power to help’. (*Jar*, p. 189)

Manendrabat is so affected by the downtrodden that his desire for freedom is replaced by a desire to understand pain, which he has never known, and to be given the power to help. Ultimately he is granted this prayer.

Milly is another character in search of something. She tells Manendrabat that ‘I’m in love with something I can’t get, or never quite, something that makes the world spin for a moment’ (*Jar*, p. 184). She wants to ‘fly up in a bridge of golden sparks and never come down any more’ (*ibid.*). Not only drawn to the light, she is also drawn to Mark 14 in the Bible, where a woman comes to Jesus with an alabaster box and pours all the ointment out of it onto Jesus’ feet. Milly feels that she is the only one who understands that the woman’s actions took ‘all the stench out of her life’ (*Jar*, p. 188).

Stabbed by Jim in a drunken rage, Manendrabat in dying comes to understand the ‘deep secret of immortality’ and to achieve the ‘state of Samadhi for which he had longed all his life’ (*Jar*, p. 200). Milly takes a bottle of perfume and in a symbolic act

pours it, as if it were the Biblical ointment, over Manendrabat's body. Afterwards, she notes, "Something's there that's never been there before – something new. ... The bridge of golden sparks" (*Jar*, p. 202). Milly has gained what she always wanted, the ability to fly toward the light, though in this case spiritually rather than physically. By the end of this story Manendebrat has gained something similar too. He has reached a goal that before he had only closely approached when in his Master's presence:

Three times during the day Sri Ramakrishna, in the middle of a sentence or in the very movement of dancing, had suddenly stood still almost without breathing, his hand on the shoulder of one of his disciples, and everyone who saw his face with eyes closed and lips parted could share, if not the whole unspeakable bliss of Nirvana, yet a glimpse and a glance at the highest goal of all life. (*Jar*, p. 167)

In the nobility and manner of his death, in offering himself as a sacrificial victim, Manendebrat has now perhaps both fulfilled Philo's words and reached Nirvana, the state of perfect peace of mind for which he strove. Nirvana is, of course, a state to which Buddhists refer as 'enlightenment'.

The final story, 'Room No. Twenty-Eight', takes place in present-day England. This story, too, opens with an epigraph that seems to bear little relation to the setting, but that builds upon the previous story. The epigraph comes from an introduction to Zen Buddhism by a Professor Susuki [*sic*]:

Then suddenly a sound knocks at the gate of consciousness, so tightly closed, and reverberates through the whole being of the individual. He comes out baptized in the fire of creation. He has seen the work of God in his workshop. (*Jar*, p. 205)

The story itself concerns Richard Warrington, a man who believes he is losing his mind after running over a drunk named Charles Lambkin. He seeks psychological

counselling from Dr Jack Morgan. The story ends after Warrington has said goodbye to Morgan outside the National Gallery with the words: 'Then, as it began to snow, he turned up his collar and walked home through the city streets to begin again' (*Jar*, p. 253).

Gmeyner thus ends this collection of short stories with a beginning. She has opened it with a man who seeks enlightenment after the death of his brother and now, coming full circle, closes it with two men who are led to enlightenment after experiencing the loss of others in two traumatic car accidents. Gmeyner seems to value such artistic symmetry. Her novel *Manja* begins and ends with characters gathered at a wall, *Café du Dôme* with Nadia drinking a *café crème* in a café on Bastille Day in 1936 and again in 1937, and *The Death and Life of Julian* with onlookers in Julian's tent coping with his death.

With the exception of this final story, every title has told us who in it is or will become enlightened – Orastes the King's Goldsmith, Wang the landscape painter, Bonhomme Jaquot, Janik the Tailor of Plotz, and Manendrabat the Mudfish. By contrast, the title of the last story refers not to a person but to a room in the National Gallery where Morgan and Warrington meet for the final time. In this room hangs Botticelli's painting of the Nativity, and it was here that Morgan gained enlightenment, and it is here where he explains what he has learned to Warrington, for Warrington is finally ready. When Morgan first looked at the painting, he thought the colours were rather poor, and it meant nothing to him, but then he sat down and made himself look at it:

I pictured the Florence of Botticelli, the meeting between him and Savonarola; the vision of Dante merging with that beauty-drunk, pagan world. I could feel that. It *touched* me. There is another exact word for you. Only then I saw the picture. It revealed itself, the sheer music of it, the reconciliation of all that had ever been Dante's vision of the

‘universe’s scattered leaves all bound together’. It was a crucial experience. I never went back on it. (*Jar*, p. 248)

Here enlightenment comes, in a way different from Wang’s, from art and specifically from painting. Now it is not the act of painting itself, but rather the act of looking more deeply at a painting and opening oneself to what it reveals that brings ‘understanding’. Here, too, we find the relevance of Professor Susuki’s dictum about seeing the work of God in his workshop. For Morgan this work of God is a painting; for Warrington it is Morgan himself. Morgan helps Warrington to find himself and thus to find God. For Gmeyner, perhaps, it is her art – that is, her writing – that allows her to seek God in her own personal workshop and thus to find herself in exile.

Throughout this book, Gmeyner has written extensively about love and love’s relation to God. In a letter thanking Morgan for his help, Warrington sums this up by writing:

As far as I remember you never talked to me about God or love or any religious matter, yet you have made me aware of the meaning of the word love in the gospel. Agape, caritas, the love that has no want. St. Augustine’s ‘videam me videam te’ is no longer an empty phrase. You have shown me all of this, and yet you have never given me more than a hint and no doubt you would consider all this too dazzling, far-fetched and verbose. (*Jar*, p. 243)

In these works of fiction Gmeyner seems to be trying to make the reader aware of exactly this – the meaning of love in the Gospels. It is significant, then, that she concludes with a quotation from Saint Augustine, whom Francine du Plessix Gray has termed ‘the major bridge between pagan and Christian thought’.<sup>50</sup> In a somewhat

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<sup>50</sup> Francine du Plessix Gray, ‘Foreword’, in Augustine of Hippo, *Selected Writings* (San Francisco: Harper/Collins Spiritual Classics, 2006), pp. i-xi (p. ix). In this same foreword, du Plessix Gray also notes: ‘It is ironic that Augustine, in his *Confessions*, traces the start of his tortuous journey toward God to his reading of two pagan authors, Cicero and Plotinus’. Arguing that he was ‘[c]onvinced by these sages to dedicate his life to the search for “an immortality of wisdom – Plotinus is, according to Paulinna Remes and others, the founder of ‘Neo-Platonism’ – du Plessix Gray adds: ‘Only through his

similar, though perhaps more expansive fashion, Gmeyner seems to be trying to make the reader aware of the universal nature of faith, though she never gives 'more than a hint'. Each story is about coming to an understanding, about finding the source of all being and serving it selflessly. This selflessness, for Gmeyner, is part of love. Although there is a strong Christian undertone in all the stories, Gmeyner seems to believe in the truth of something said to Father Jules – that doctrines are made by men and that all who love God are one. In these six stories she employs characters and settings of widely different religious beliefs, but she seeks to show that all must follow essentially the same path to reach enlightenment. It does not, in other words, matter exactly what beliefs these are as long as one responds to them and lives in the proper way. For all believers enlightenment brings with it new ways of seeing and understanding. As Warrington puts it 'The world has opened in a way I could never have imagined. Everything speaks to me which up to now was dumb' (*Jar*, p. 242).

This collection of stories seems to have arisen out of Gmeyner's own grief after losing her husband, for death plays a large role in each story, serving as both a journey to and a catalyst for spiritual awakening. Death led Lysimachos to begin searching for answers; death led the Chinese emperor to trick Fang into seeking out his brother Wang, the man who was able to lead him to understanding; death led Janik to act with hatred and to lose his ability to pray, and then it led him to regain those things; death freed Manendrabat, Milly, and Jim; the death of his wife led Morgan to reach enlightenment. Gmeyner writes:

The pattern of time immemorial, hidden in myth and fairy tale, the finding of the kingdom, the philosopher's stone, the alchemist's gold – all names for the one crucial experience, die, and become your true self. (*Jar*, p. 219)

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writings can we immediately witness the fusion of New Testament wisdom with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy' (pp. viii and ix).

In her earlier works, *Manja* and *Café du Dome*, exile was a form of death. Now, for Gmeyner death provides the truth that people seek, not least herself.

### ***No Screen for the Dying***

In 1964 Regency Press published *No Screen for the Dying*, an autobiographical account of the events that led up to Gmeyner's mother's death in September 1962. It chronicles Gmeyner's move from London to Edinburgh to be with her mother as well as the trials she underwent in caring for and ultimately losing her. At its heart *No Screen for the Dying* is about coping with death, but it also deals with spirituality and with the role that prayer, meditation, and belief in God and an afterlife play, not just for the one dying but also for the one watching another die. In this work Gmeyner supplements the spirituality she seems to have found in exile – the belief in the superiority of death over life, spirit over flesh – with a belief in alternate planes of existence and in the ability to communicate with spirits on one of those other planes.

In the opening of this book Gmeyner states that she is 'going to use a method directly opposed to the one usually employed by the writer. I am going to try and keep imagination at bay, and to avoid the re-arrangement of incident in order to create effects'.<sup>51</sup> She makes it clear that this book is intended to be a truthful and, she hopes, accurate relaying of a series of events. It is, therefore, an autobiographical account rather than a novel and so is restricted by real events and histories. Even so, it is no less a piece of literary work and can still be profitably examined as such. In an article on autobiography, Paul de Man points out that there is no decisive distinction between

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<sup>51</sup> Anna Morduch, *No Screen for the Dying* (London: Regency Press: 1964), p. 11.

autobiography and fiction. He argues that although autobiography may seem to depend on 'actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does' and may seem to belong to 'a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation, and of diegesis' than fiction, we cannot necessarily be certain that autobiography depends on 'reference, as a photograph depends on its subject or a (realistic) picture on its model'.<sup>52</sup> As de Man also writes:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (de Man, p. 920)

In other words, an autobiographer selects the incidents or materials from his or her life deliberately and with intent. He or she also chooses and presents these things in such a way as to make them fit into his or her overall plan for this work. This is certainly true of *No Screen for the Dying*. This book shares the stylistic techniques that Gmeyner employed in earlier books as well as the lyricism that characterised many of them. Her reliance on metaphor, her use of imagery, and even her selection of vignettes are obviously done, despite her demurrals, with great deliberation in order to shape and support the message she is trying to impart.

In this book, too, a certain circularity is present. Gmeyner calls *No Screen for the Dying* an end to a circle of twelve years.

Twelve years before, all life seemed to have ended when my husband died quite suddenly, his great life work unfinished. And indeed personal life has come to its end in some way and for a long time I felt I was just wheat in the soil of darkness not knowing whether anything

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<sup>52</sup> Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, 94 (1979), 919-30 (pp. 921-22).

would ever grow, just groping from day to day, following a call, an echo hardly more than a whisper. (*No Screen*, p. 83)<sup>53</sup>

As a result of Jascha's death in September of 1950, she began a search for truth and enlightenment that came to an end in September 1962 when her own mother died. Death was both a catalyst for Gmeyner and a moment of truth. These two deaths clarified her faith, intensified her love, and made her aware of guidance and 'a pattern of threads which, though closely interwoven with our own experiences, yet are a different order' (ibid.). Thanks to this twelve-year search, Gmeyner no longer believes that change will come by raising social and psychological questions in order to highlight suffering and injustice. Instead, as all of her English works show, she comes to feel that a greater understanding of the meaning of life and death leads to unity and the ability to tackle the large problems confronting humanity. This autobiographical work is devoid of the political thought that informed her dramas and was present in her first two novels. Exile and life without her husband clearly shifted her priorities to more personal and spiritual matters.

*No Screen for the Dying* draws together many of the changes that separated Gmeyner's later works written in exile from her earlier ones. In it Gmeyner shows the great breadth of her religious and spiritual knowledge by referring to many different concepts, teachings, and religious tracts throughout. This recalls *A Jar Laden with Water*, where she not only begins every short story in that work with an epigraph representing a different religious belief, but she also makes the main characters of each story practitioners of very different religions. In *A Jar Laden with*

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<sup>53</sup> Gmeyner first introduced what her character Irène called 'this grain of corn idea' in *Café du Dôme*. It is based on St Paul's explanation of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. 39. Irène, see pp. 129-30 above, was terrified of being cheated and feared that there was no afterlife. Gmeyner, too, seems to have struggled with this fear, which perhaps accounts for the new direction in which her interests and writing took.

*Water*, too, the influence of Jalal al-Din al-Rumi is apparent. *No Screen for the Dying* begins with a quotation from one of his poems as well:

Our speech and action  
Is the outer journey  
The inner journey  
Is across the sky. (*No Screen*, p. 6)

She follows this with a poetic meditation called ‘Look, Look Again’ from *The Book of Tokens* by Paul Foster Case, a book which presents twenty-two meditations based on ideas from the Tarot and Qabalah. Case’s is a book to which she refers several times during the course of her story.

It is, however, once again in the visual medium of art – and specifically in the pictures hanging on her mother’s wall – that we can perhaps see the best example of the breadth of Gmeyner’s beliefs:

There were pictures all along the wall, family photographs of myself as a young woman, of my sisters, of her grandchildren, Rafael’s Sistine next to my Father, children’s paintings beside photographs of teachers and personalities who had influenced her life. There was Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy who in earlier years had made a great impression upon her, Jogananda, an Indian Guru who had come to the West to teach self-realisation, and Shananda who is one of the inspirers of White Lodge, Mr. Beesley’s college in Speldhurst. (*No Screen*, p. 18)<sup>54</sup>

This tableau, made up of photos from Gmeyner’s childhood and pictures of family members as well as pictures of great thinkers and a painting of the Madonna, are a constant reminder of the importance that Gmeyner and her mother placed on family and religious thought and practice. ‘Rafael’s Sistine’, a reproduction of the Sistine Madonna, a painting by the Italian High Renaissance artist Raphael depicting the

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<sup>54</sup> Ronald P. Beesley, a mystic who researched the use of light, colour, and sound for healing, founded The College of Psychotherapeutics at White Lodge, near Tunbridge Wells, in 1958. For more information see the website of the Centre of New Directions, which is what his college became in 1991: <http://www.lightcoloursound.com/> [accessed 16 May 2008].

Virgin Mary, baby Jesus, and Saints Sixtus and Barbara standing on a bed of clouds, reminds the reader of Gmeyner's Catholic upbringing and Christian thought; perhaps not surprisingly, practising Christians play a large role in this book. But Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher who founded a school of thought known as 'Anthroposophy', obviously made an impression on Gmeyner and on her mother as well. In Steiner's doctrine Christ is a sun god who, in order to lead humanity out of a threatened relapse into 'the material', 'incarnated himself in a corporeality prepared for him by Zoroaster and Buddha'.<sup>55</sup> Steiner's revelations typically blur religious, scientific, and historical topics. Gmeyner, who made Christ a sun god in *The Death and Life of Julian*, used associations of light to represent him in *A Jar Laden with Water* as well.

In this book, she repeatedly employs light as well as love to represent spirituality or unity with God. Now she even explicitly links the two. On her train ride north, for example, she wonders:

Would I be strong enough to be faithful to the light and the teaching these years had brought without taking one step away from love, would I be over-whelmed by emotion and find myself drawn back into doubts, cut off and thrown back to my own inadequate resources? (*No Screen*, pp. 13-14)

Despite all her study, Gmeyner still feels 'inadequate' when it comes to her beliefs. She also fears that emotion will weaken her resolve and 'cut' her off from the love and light of God that she has spent years developing. She writes later that she believes 'that questions should not be answered too hastily, but slowly as truth dawns and the light grows' (*No Screen*, p. 21). Light and love are also for Gmeyner, as for her mother, signs of eternity as well as signs that life is not a thing in itself but simply

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<sup>55</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. by Erwin Fahlbusch and others, 5 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998-2008), I, (1998), p. 78.

a step on a longer path. Her mother, for example, ‘felt that it was her task to show people that there was no need to fear death and that indeed you could look forward to it, sure of welcome, safe in the knowledge of continuity in the light of the Love that holds the sun and the stars together’ (*No Screen*, p. 40).

The continuity of light seems to have been an important concept for Gmeyner. She often pairs her light metaphors and images with those of darkness. She also uses a number of metaphors about growth along with metaphors about being unable to see; presumably, she wishes to remind us that nothing can grow in darkness. On the first page of this book, Gmeyner writes: ‘I have been blind and now I see’, referring, of course, to John 9. 25, where Jesus heals a blind man who says these words to the Pharisees investigating the healing. Gmeyner fears darkness, and in the prayers she shares with us, darkness and the escape from darkness play a large role: ‘And before Thee [God] the shadows of the night/ Roll back/ And darkness hastens away’ (*No Screen*, p. 26); ‘Lead us, O Lord, from darkness to Light’ (*No Screen*, p. 27). She even ends this book by writing that lights have been kindled in many places and that the black stretches between them are dwindling and shrinking. On the last page she adds one final thought about darkness – and one final prayer:

One day the full light will break, here or there, not only for me – what good would that be – but for every living soul God has made.

‘Then shall the dreadful Darkness  
be revealed to the perfected vision  
As the flashing radiance of light limitless  
And from the fields of sin and punishment –  
Thou shalt pass  
Into wonderful freedom,  
Of my divine perfection.’ (*No Screen*, p. 84)

This final prayer ties together all the repeating imagery in her book: darkness, light, sight, and growth.

Gmeyner, as this final prayer suggests, came to believe in and take comfort from a combination of Christian and alternative religious thought. In this work she often couples a Christian text with one from a different religion, thus emphasising her belief that one doctrine cannot satisfactorily answer all of her many questions about the universe, such as ‘Where have I come from? Where am I going? And if I am going nowhere why have I come at all?’ (*No Screen*, p. 27). She offers this combination to the reader to help in times of trial. In this way the book builds on the introduction of meditation and prayer in *The Death and Life of Julian* and *A Jar Laden with Water*, but now it makes things more personal by letting the reader know that these are not prayers she has composed for fictional purposes, but prayers she herself has actually used. Here ancient Eastern prayer follows closely on Christian thought, and Gmeyner thus recalls what she wrote in *A Jar Laden with Water* – that it is not the doctrine that matters but the unity with God.

For Gmeyner her mother’s death was a moment of unity. She felt her mother was greater than just a single woman – that she instead represented all of humanity. When Gmeyner sets her mother free on her homeward journey, it becomes for her an almost literal moment of truth. While she acknowledges that there is an element of sadness to her mother’s death, too, for, after all, both she and all those who knew her mother are human, she also foresees a future where people will wear white robes of ‘higher festival’ when they are parted from their loved ones because ‘people have become deeply and clearly aware of the continued life of their loved ones, of great journeys into other spheres and greater worlds than ours’ (*No Screen*, p. 70). She here returns once again to the view that death is a journey and that there are other worlds and spheres besides our own.

Gmeyner clearly expects the reader to be sceptical of such accounts and, in fact, addresses such scepticism directly, for it is equally clear that she wants the reader to believe her. Gmeyner thus ends the book by discussing the many prejudices extant about mediums. She asks that those who search for the truth not be held back by labels: ‘What is a medium but one who stands in the middle, halfway between two words? There are many levels of mediumship and in the highest sense is not a medium just a mediator who brings knowledge through, which helps and redeems? And in that sense would we not all be proud to call ourselves that?’ (*No Screen*, p. 75). One would surmise from these words that Gmeyner sees herself as a medium, too, albeit an artistic one – a mediator between this spiritual world she has come to believe in and that of the sceptical readers she addresses in this work. She clearly, too, wishes to bring them knowledge that redeems. If nothing else, we can see in this the consistent thread that has run through her life and her work as an artist. Throughout, she has questioned received wisdom and in various ways has always sought, up to the very end, to change things and people for the better.

### ***The Sovereign Adventure: The Grail of Mankind***

The last of Gmeyner’s published writings,<sup>56</sup> *The Sovereign Adventure: The Grail of Mankind* appeared in print in 1970 and was republished in 1987. A work of non-fiction, it discusses and analyses various legends and literary tomes devoted to the quest for the Holy Grail. With this final book Gmeyner once again changes genre, moving from the fiction of her past to an almost scholarly work of research. Yet it

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<sup>56</sup> She left two unfinished books, *The Ox and the Falcon (The life story of Thomas Aquinas)* and *The Cobbler of Görlitz (Jakob Böhme)*, which never made it into print. Their subjects suggest that Gmeyner pursued her interest in theology and philosophy until the very end.

also retains certain elements that can be seen as early in her career as during her time as a dramatist. Its structure is symmetrical, broken down into three sections with three chapters in each, and these are framed by a prologue and an epilogue, leaving an impression of elegance and classicism.

*The Sovereign Adventure* represents the culmination of the religious study to which Gmeyner devoted herself after her husband died. At the same time, it contains some elements that mark all her work, and especially her work in exile. It also displays her interest in the universality of religion, in myth and symbolism (particularly of the religious kind), and in diverse schools of philosophical thought: 'When the Western world rediscovers the Grail,' writes Gmeyner in this book, '[...] it can show an ideal, ancient and contemporary, strong enough to unite the hidden forces of the subconscious with the highest experiences of the seeker and scientist, which can work as a leaven in a new alchemy for a world that is one'.<sup>57</sup> 'The world that is one' is a concept that underlies all of her exile works in English, growing more pronounced as time passes.

In her last book Gmeyner also introduces some themes we have not encountered before, such as bridges and bridge-building, but even those clearly flow from her interest in ancient history first seen in *The Death and Life of Julian* and *A Jar Laden with Water*, as well as a belief in the importance of art and the artist and in the importance of the spiritual quest. She writes, for instance, that 'The great artist, poet, painter, or musician has through all time been a bridge builder, a true *pontifex*' (*Sovereign Adventure*, p. 141). Julius Caesar once held the supreme Roman religious position of *pontifex maximus* (greatest bridge-builder). Today that title belongs to the Bishop of Rome, the Pope of the Universal and Catholic Church, the religion in which

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<sup>57</sup> Anna Morduch, *The Sovereign Adventure: The Grail of Mankind* (London: James Clark & Co, 1970), p. 191.

Gmeyner was raised. At the end of her life, however, she seems to have adopted a different form of universalist faith. Now Gmeyner puts man, not God, at the center of things physical and spiritual – and as the link between them. She writes: “Man is the bridge between two planes, a bridge whose pylons stand on different levels,” says Dr. Winkler. “Only when we understand and realize this as our existential position can we build the bridges to our fellow-men”. Then every contact, big and small, in everyday living as well as at the peak of creative thought and action, can be a Grail bridge of understanding, help and healing’ (*Sovereign Adventure*, p. 191).

In some ways, then, *The Sovereign Adventure* seems to sum up not just Gmeyner’s personal spiritual journey but also all that she wrote in English after *Cafe du Dôme* – and perhaps even from *Manja* onwards. Light recurs as a motif in this late, last work, as does the beauty and importance of art, and of living well in a certain way. Gmeyner here continues to espouse something that looks very much like neo-Platonist philosophy. Plotinus, the father of neo-Platonism, is reported by his biographer Porphyry to have uttered these words on his deathbed: ‘Strive to bring back the god in yourselves to the God in the All’ (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 2). One brings back that God through knowledge, which is what Gmeyner’s fictional characters in her late exile works constantly seek to do.<sup>58</sup> It is what Gmeyner, through both her exile fiction and non-fiction also strove to do. It was her way of coming to terms with the changes in her life that exile had wrought and also with the death that proved so pervasive in that life.

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<sup>58</sup> Pierre Hadot, in his book *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), writes: ‘For Plotinus, the relation between the sage and the deity is situated at two levels. First of all, the divine Intellect, in its relation to itself in terms of thought, identity, and activity, possesses the four virtues, conflated with its essence: thought (or prudence), justice, strength, and temperance. In this state, they are the transcendent models of wisdom, and the Intellect lives a life which is “supremely wise, exempt from faults and errors”. Since Plotinus believes the soul sometimes elevates itself, at rare moments of mystical experience, to a level which is higher than the Intellect, we also find features of the sage in the description of the One or the Good: absolute independence, absence of need, and self-identity’ (pp. 227-28).

## Conclusion

In exile Gmeyner changed as a writer. Not only did she successfully shift forms, from drama to the novel, and languages, from German to English, but the longer Gmeyner was in exile, the more the political focus of her youth also gave way to a spiritual focus. In exile, too, she ceased using her writing to draw attention to the oppressed in society, and the strong female voice in her early exile works *Manja* and *Café du Dôme* disappeared. So did the large numbers of characters, the changing perspectives, and the overlapping lives characteristic of her earlier works, for in exile she concentrated instead on ever smaller numbers of characters and more and more spiritually driven stories. Her later writing in English, which was motivated by a search for personal enlightenment, reflected her changing focus, moving from the collective plight of others to the fates of individuals – and, in the end, to her own fate and spiritual path. Tracing this evolution reveals that exile neither silenced her nor led to a decline in the quality of her writing. Instead it changed her outlook and thus altered what she hoped to achieve with her work.

The experience of exile clearly created a need in her to write something more ambitious than she had done before. For Austrian Jews such as Anna Gmeyner, even perhaps those seemingly so hyper-acculturated that they became, like most Austrians, Catholics, exile represented the end of the life and of the world they knew and the start of something different, something strange and unfamiliar. The abrupt change in Gmeyner's work seems almost physically to embody this change of milieu – this entry into foreign lands and cultures. As Heike Klapdor-Kops observes:

Radikal sollte Anna Morduch das rationale und historisch-politische Verständnis der Anna Gmeyner von Gesellschaft und individueller Existenz überwinden, um die geistigen Koordination von

Anthroposophie und orientalischer Mystik als wahr anzuerkennen. Die fundamentale geistige Neuorientierung muß aus dem Kontext des Exils verstanden werden: Emigration bedeutete für jeden unausweichlich materielle Unsicherheit, unruhiges Arbeiten an wechselnden Plätzen, psychische und physische Belastungen ertragen zu müssen.<sup>59</sup>

Gmeyner, who began her adult life as a social activist fighting to draw attention and sympathy to the injustices she saw everywhere around her, ended it as a writer interested in seeking the answers to the evil and oppression and racism still present in the world in a different realm – the spiritual. What she believed was important, and what she believed she needed to write down and publish, thus changed markedly in exile. Gmeyner came to see that social injustices cannot be corrected by activism (and activists) alone. At the end of her life she became convinced instead that man cannot solve the problems confronting humanity without the feeling of oneness that stems from spiritual enlightenment. For Gmeyner, in exile such solutions are found not in political action but in the spiritual quest. Nirvana comes not from the Marxist concept of the material but from the Platonic concept of the divine.

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<sup>59</sup> Heike Klapdor-Kops, “Und was die Verfasserin betrifft, laßt uns weitersehen” Die Rekonstruktion der schriftstellerischen Laufbahn Anna Gmeyners’, *Exilforschung*, 3 (1985), 313-38 (p. 333).

## Chapter Three: Lili Körber

My beginning did not match the life I was to have. One should start in a modest hut and end in a palace. I did it the other way: From the windows of my girl's room I had a beautiful panorama of Moscow with the golden domes of the churches. Today the only dome I see is that of the neighbor washing her window.<sup>1</sup>

### **Biographical Sketch**

The eldest of three sisters, Lili Körber was born in Moscow on 25 February 1897. Her parents came from what is now Poland, at that time divided between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Her father, Ignaz, a wealthy Jewish silk merchant, was from Tarnow and her mother, Jeanette, from Warsaw. The family converted to Protestantism when Körber was six years old. Her grandmother did not approve of the Körber girls learning Russian and, when Körber was three, sent the family a French governess, Jeanne Cartot, who raised the girls on French songs, philosophy, and revolutionary history. Körber grew up writing and speaking three languages.

Körber also grew up in a turbulent time. She lived through the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 and the Russian Revolution of 1905. In June 1905, when Körber and her family visited Germany, she was struck by the differences between the two countries:

Ich war erschüttert: keine Bettler, niemand lief barfuss und alle Kinder gingen in die Schule. Warum nicht bei uns? Die Dienstmädchen in der Pension – Potsdamer Privatstrasse – behandelten uns wie Kinder, nicht wie Fräuleins, auch in dem Geschäft, in dem Mama uns Kleider

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<sup>1</sup> Lili Körber, 'My Biography' (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 1.

kaufte, duzten uns die Verkäuferinnen. Mit Mama sprachen sie wie gleich zu gleich, ja, das war Europa, Kultur. Warum nicht bei uns?<sup>2</sup>

When they returned to Moscow, Körber convinced her parents to allow her to give up home tutorials and to attend a private girls' school instead. Half of her class was Jewish. This school's progressive teachers encouraged their pupils to oppose the current regime. The girls read poets who described the misery of the masses, wrote essays with titles such as 'Die Bedeutung des Ideals im Leben eines Menschen', and, when they were supposed to sing the Tsarist hymn 'Gott erhalte den Zaren', sang instead 'Gott begrabe den Zaren'. Years later Körber still remembered her geography teacher, Danil Nikolajewitsch Kaschkarow, speaking against the United States of America because 'diese Amerikaner hatten den Indianern ihr Land gestohlen und die Neger zu Sklaven gemacht' (ibid.).

With the outbreak of World War I, Körber suddenly found herself unwelcome in her school because she was the daughter of a 'feindlicher Ausländer'. Her father was charged with espionage and incarcerated among common criminals in the Butyrki jail before being deported. Körber, her sisters, and her mother fled Russia for Berlin, a city Körber did not find to her liking. When her teacher dubbed her 'diese kleine Russin', Körber reacted thus:

Russin? Die Russen hatten uns doch als 'feindliche Ausländer' verfolgt. So ist es mir das ganze Leben gegangen: für die Russen war ich auch in den Putilow-Werken 'Genossin Ausländerin', für meine deutschen Freunde eine Russin. ('Meine Biographie', p. 4)

The family soon moved to Zurich to await the end of the war and their hoped-for return to Russia.

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<sup>2</sup> Lili Körber, 'Meine Biographie' (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 2.

Because of the October Revolution, however, the Körber family did not return to Russia. Körber finished her schooling in Lausanne instead and began her university studies in Bern. She continued these studies first in Geneva and then in Vienna. She found Bern difficult because she did not speak the right dialect, Geneva difficult because she had financial hardships, and Vienna difficult because she thought her Viennese professors too conservative and her classmates too cold. She completed her education in Frankfurt in 1923, writing a dissertation on the lyric poetry of Franz Werfel.

After receiving her doctorate, Körber returned to Vienna, where her family was now living, and began to write articles, stories, and poetry for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* while her father supported her financially. She began contributing to other newspapers in Vienna and in Germany, Czechoslovakia, France, Switzerland, and Poland as well. Having become active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she was also soon exchanging manuscripts and debating politics in various Viennese coffee houses with friends such as the writers Stefan Pollatscheck and Trude Richter,<sup>3</sup> while her apartment on Laudongasse became a popular meeting point.<sup>4</sup> Körber summed up the life she had made for herself in Vienna this way: 'Endlich hatte ich Fuss gefasst und eine Heimat gefunden' ('Meine Biographie', p. 7).

In 1930 Körber returned to Moscow as part of a writers' delegation. Trying to improve its image abroad, the Soviet Union had also invited such politically sympathetic authors as Johannes R. Becher, Karl Schröder, and Anna Seghers. On

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<sup>3</sup> Stefan Pollatscheck (1880-1942) was an Austrian Jewish Socialist who also wrote for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and who published several novels in the 1930s, his greatest success being *John Law. Roman der Banknote* (1936). He died in exile in England. Trude Richter (1899-1989) is a pseudonym for the Communist writer Erna Barnick, a German university friend of Körber's from Frankfurt, who became the first secretary of the 'Bund Proletarisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller' and a political activist both in the Soviet Union and in the GDR.

<sup>4</sup> 'Lili Körber', in Christa Gürtler and Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager, *Erfolg und Verfolgung. Österreichische Schriftstellerinnen 1918-1945* (Salzburg: Residenz, 2002), pp. 247-49.

this trip Körber noted improvements and progress since the time of the Tsar. Beggars had disappeared, all children now went to school, and workers in her hotel, no longer servile, addressed her now as 'Bürgerin' or 'Genossin' rather than the 'Barynia' or 'Gnädige' of old. On the other hand, the shortage of goods and food was terrible, and trained workers were few, so that highly-paid American 'Spezen' or specialists had to be imported to bring American methods and ideals to Soviet manufacturing and to train a future generation of Russian engineers. The Russian comrades, confident that this would all change, repeatedly told her to wait until the Five-Year-Plan was finished.

This trip aroused Körber's interest in the attitude of the workforce towards the new regime. As part of a delegation, however, she had little opportunity to find out for herself if the proletariat agreed with the revolutionary dictatorship. The only way to satisfy her curiosity, she decided, was to become one of them. So she went to Leningrad to work in the Putilow tractor factory, which she chose because it had made a name for itself in the 1905 revolution.

Out of her experiences as an unskilled drill press operator there, she wrote the 'Tagebuch-Roman' *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag*. Published by Rowohlt at the end of 1932 in Berlin just as Körber embarked on a lecture tour across the Soviet Union, Holland, and Austria, it sold out in a few weeks. She ended her tour in Berlin, in mid-January 1933; her publisher Ernst Rowohlt had invited her there to discuss the reissuing of her bestseller. While she was in Berlin, Hitler was appointed Chancellor.

The rise to power of the National Socialists prompted a second book.<sup>5</sup> Published in 1934 by Richard Lanyi in Vienna, like her previous novel it too sold out within a few weeks. Once back in print, it remained on the bestseller lists for months,

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<sup>5</sup> I will be quoting from the 1984 edition republished under the title, *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz*.

until a judicial decree caused all unsold copies to be confiscated. Because Körber was now unmarketable in Germany and Austria, her novel was reprinted in Switzerland.

Körber's next book, *Zwischen Mann und Kind*, was an apolitical love story about a Viennese doctor and the widow of a Kapellmeister.<sup>6</sup> Although it is often cited as having been published in the *Prager Tagblatt* in 1935,<sup>7</sup> exact bibliographic details about this novella are not actually known. Ute Lemke points out that no such work appears in the *Prager Tagblatt* that year or any other,<sup>8</sup> and that there is no evidence to suggest it was published elsewhere, though there is evidence that Körber tried to get it published in a variety of newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Lemke believes that it was not written until at least 1936, after Körber's book *Eine Jüdin* had been banned in Germany the previous September or October, and sees it as a reaction to finding her work prohibited. It can now be found in Körber's literary estate in Frankfurt.

The novella deals with the theme of family as Martha, a widow of a Viennese conductor, finds herself torn between her duties as a mother of three and her affection for a doctor, Albert Gessler. This novel is a fairly conventional love story and seems to be a step back from Körber's more political works. Although Hertling believes Körber indirectly exposes certain aspects of Nazi ideology in this novel,<sup>10</sup> Lemke captures the essence of the novel well when she writes:

Die Darstellung der Frau entspricht hier dem herkömmlichen Bild, ganz im Gegensatz zu den anderen Romanen und Feuilletons von Lili Körber, wo die weiblichen Hauptpersonen vom Mann unabhängig sind, meist keine Familie haben und einem Beruf nachgehen. Sprachlich erinnert diese Wiener Roman – auch daß er in Wien spielt, unterscheidet ihn im übrigen von den anderen – an Lili Körbers erste Feuilletons in der *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Offenbar war die Autorin durch

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<sup>6</sup> See Viktoria Hertling, 'Lili Körber', in *Deutschsprachige Exilliteratur seit 1933*, II, ed. by John M. Spalek and Joseph Strelka (Bern: Francke, 1989), pp. 447-60 (p. 450).

<sup>7</sup> See Hertling, 'Lili Körber', p. 459, footnote 8, Yun Jung Seo, p. 132, Stäglin, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> This author came to the same conclusion after looking through issues of *Prager Tagblatt* from 1935.

<sup>9</sup> See Lemke, p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> Hertling, 'Lili Körber', p. 450.

das Verbot ihres Deutschland-Romans zutiefst verunsichert. (Lemke, p. 159)

Körber had just learned how difficult it was to get published under the new Fascist regime and this novella reflects her attempt to conform.

Early in 1935, after receiving a copy of a Japanese translation of her book about Russia, she had decided to travel to Japan and then to China. The next year she published a book about her travels under the title *Begegnungen im Fernen Osten*. Körber's second book about the Far East, a novel called *Sato-san, ein japanischer Held*, followed immediately after.

When German troops marched into Austria on 12 March 1938, Körber decided to emigrate. She left Vienna on 19 March for Switzerland, where she briefly lived with friends. There the editor of the Swiss social-democratic daily *Volksrecht* asked her to report on her last few days in Vienna. She moved to Paris and sent him her manuscripts weekly. *Volksrecht* published the novel *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* in fifty-seven instalments from 1 March to 25 April 1939 under the pseudonym Agnes Muth, which she adopted to protect her parents, who were still in Vienna.

This novel assured Körber a modest material existence. In Paris she also worked as a free-lance journalist for the *Pariser Tageblatt*, translated some works of Alfred Adler, and planned a children's book. Her long-time partner, Erich Gruvé, joined her illegally in Paris that summer and in the autumn moved with her to Lyon. Gruvé, a Jewish German-Austrian, had been brought up in Berlin and had earned a doctorate in Freiburg. By June 1933 he, his father Arthur Goldschmidt, his brother Werner, and his sister Nadja had all lost their jobs because of the new racial laws. In the hopes of circumventing these, Arthur had the family name changed to Gruvé.

When that did not help, he, his wife, and his children fled to Paris. Erich, however, moved instead to Vienna and lived there illegally. While he and Körber most likely knew each other previously, it was only now that they became friends and then romantically involved.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of a new law of 1 September 1939, all German men in France between the ages of 17 and 65 were taken into protective custody and transported to internment camps. Gravé was interned in the Saint Servant camp until the French capitulation in June 1940. After the Armistice the inmates were to be surrendered to the Nazis, but the commander of Gravé's camp released the prisoners before they arrived. Gravé walked and hitchhiked to Lyon, where he and Körber were married in August 1940.

In Lyon they worked at odd jobs – she gave private lessons, and he worked on a farm helping with the harvest<sup>12</sup> – and otherwise attempted to live frugally. Through one of Körber's Russian journalist friends, they came into contact with the American Emergency Rescue Committee and obtained two visas for endangered anti-fascists. The couple travelled to Lisbon where they boarded the *Serpa Pinto*. Arriving in New York on 23 July 1941, a little over a month after they had left Lisbon, they were met by representatives from refugee assistance committees and from the International Socialist Struggle League, who helped the newcomers find a room and provided them with an eighty-dollar grant. Körber used fifty dollars of this grant to buy a typewriter.

After fleeing the horrors of Europe, Gravé and Körber could not relate to the Americans who had not yet been drawn into the war and who ~~did~~ not seem affected by it. For Körber, this was unconscionable. In an interview with Gabriele Kreis on 13 May 1980, Körber even refused to talk about it:

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<sup>11</sup> See Lemke, pp. 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> See Hertling, 'Lili Körber', p. 454.

‘Über meine Eindrücke über Amerika möchte ich nicht sprechen.’

Hat sie je darüber geschrieben, sie, die Spezialistin für Reiseberichte?

Nein.

Amerika war keine Reise. Amerika war Exil.<sup>13</sup>

Körper found it difficult to continue her literary career in the United States. Her novels had never been published there, which meant she had no contacts to approach, she had not mastered English, and there was no place in the American market for her political writing. Needing a paying job to survive, Körper taught Russian at the Berlitz School of Language and worked in the quality department of a brassiere factory, which meant she also had little time to devote to her writing. The latter:

gab ihr den Antrieb, die Geschichte der amerikanischen Gewerkschaften und ihrer Gründer – russische Juden, deutsche Sozialisten und Emigranten aus Irland – zu studieren. Ihnen gelang es nach vielen Kämpfen die Herrschaft des Big Business in Schranken zu halten.<sup>14</sup>

In 1949 Gravé underwent an operation on his back. Inspired by his difficulties, Körper decided to train to be a nurse. When asked why she replied, ‘Es war das Gefühl, daß man in diesem Beruf wirklich etwas tun kann, daß man gebraucht wird’ (Kreis, ‘Lili’, p. 13). She spent the next decade in nursing, while Gravé became a clock cleaner and from time to time wrote technical reports for the US government in the field of economics. As Kreis comments, ‘Als Schriftstellerin wurde Lili Körper nicht mehr gebraucht’ (ibid.).

Needed or not, Körper continued to write. She even published in the New

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<sup>13</sup> Gabriele Kreis, ‘Lili Körper – Leben und Werk’, in Lili Körper, *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz* (Mannheim: Persona, 1984), pp. 5-13 (p. 10).

<sup>14</sup> Lili Körper, ‘Lili Körper’s Biographie’ (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 8.

York *Volkszeitung*, a daily German-language organ of the Socialist Labour Party, in the Swiss *Volksrecht*, and even in the Parisian *Gavroche*. As the years passed, she turned from articles to poetry, but she never gave up writing.<sup>15</sup> As she told Lisa Kahn, despite all of her other jobs in exile, she considered herself always a 'hauptberuflich' writer.<sup>16</sup>

Her first novel written in exile was not, however, about something she herself was then experiencing. Instead, it was about the Soviet Union in the 1930s under Stalin. *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland* depicts a love triangle involving a young Communist called Mascha, a Bulgarian comrade called Michail Miranow, and an American engineer called Frank Morris. The *Neue Volkszeitung*, an anti-Nazi German-language newspaper in New York, published it serially from 5 December 1942 to 9 October 1943 in weekly installments. The Viennese *Arbeiter-Zeitung* published the first four installments of the novel from 9 to 30 November 1949, but Soviet occupation forces prohibited further publication. Writing to the American academic John Spalek, Körber explained:

Probably I could have found a publisher after Stalin's death, but I was completely taken by my new job and I am unfortunately a little bit passive. I can only say that it is the best thing I have written. Only an author who has suffered as a child for the Martyrdom of the Russian people could write this story.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1940s Körber attempted to break into the American literary market with a semi-autobiographical novel written in English called *Farewell to Yesterday*. She based this partially on her experiences living in a typical New York brownstone

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<sup>15</sup> 'In der deutschsprachigen New Yorker Presse, vor allem im *Aufbau*, werden hin und wieder Gedichte von ihr gedruckt, als "Füller", was sie selber abschätzig vermerkt', Gürtler and Schmid-Bortenschlager, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Kahn, ed., *Reisegepäck Sprache: Deutschschreibende Schriftstellerinnen in den USA 1938-1978* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979) p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> Lili Körber, letter to Professor John Spalek, 26 November 1980. See Guida-Laforgia, p. 24.

building on 76<sup>th</sup> Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenue near Broadway, whose owners were a Jewish family from Berlin whom Körber and Gravé had known previously in Europe. Körber could not, however, interest a publisher in this novel. After her retirement from nursing in 1959, Körber tried again. This, her last substantial literary work, a novel titled *Call Me Nurse*, depicts six months in the life of twenty-year-old Lilian and her first experiences after passing her exams to be a 'Visiting Nurse'. This too was not published.

Körber continued to write throughout her exile years. She produced short stories, mostly about her experiences as a nurse, though these too were never published; she prepared poems for two anthologies published<sup>18</sup> by Mimi Grossberg,<sup>19</sup> and she kept a diary, as she had done all her life. Körber never returned to Europe. She stayed with her husband in Manhattan until she died of leukaemia on 11 October 1982.

She burned her journals shortly before her death. As Hertling, who received her entire literary estate a few years before her death, put it:

Was bleibt, sind ihre Bücher und unveröffentlichten Manuskripte, die eine Schriftstellerin mit Humor und Temperament, künstlerischer Phantasie, sozialkritischer Parteilichkeit und einem ungebrochenen Mut zur Meinung zeigen – trotz allem. (Hertling, 'Lili Körber', p. 459)

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<sup>18</sup> *Kleinkunst aus Amerika: Gedichte, Chansons, Prosa von in Amerika lebenden Autoren*, ed. by Mimi Grossberg (Vienna: Europäischer Verlag, 1964), *Österreichisches aus Amerika: Vers und Prosa*, ed. by Mimi Grossberg (Vienna: Bergland Verlag, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Mimi Grossberg (1905-1997) was an Austrian poet, lecturer, editor, and writer who went into exile in New York City, became a milliner, and was involved with the exile organisation the Austrian Forum.

## Travel Writing

Written in the first person, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* and *Begegnungen im fernen Osten* combine historical detail with personal anecdote, culture with politics, fact with fiction. By using this narrative technique, Körber signals, as Christa Gürtler and Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager argue,<sup>20</sup> that she has sided with Bertolt Brecht against Georg Lukács in the debate among Socialist authors over formalism and realism versus Expressionism and other forms of ‘new reality’.

Written in diary form, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* begins on 1 July and ends on 30 August 1931. As in Joseph Roth’s works, the narrator in this novel, though named Lili Körber, is not necessarily the author.<sup>21</sup> Her date of birth, for instance, is 1907, ten years after Körber was born. But, as Yun Jung Seo explains, this novel otherwise resembles a record of actual events:

obwohl die Geschichte der drei Darsteller, Lili, Ralph und Viktor fiktiv ist, sind der Alltag im Betrieb und die Erzählung über die Arbeiterinnen authentisch geschrieben.<sup>22</sup>

In a letter to Herta Wolf, Körber’s husband confirmed its authenticity: ‘Der Rote [!] Alltag beruht auf ihren [Lili Körbers] eigenen Erfahrungen aus dieser Zeit. Das Buch ist authentisch. Das Tatsachenmaterial nur in Tagebuchform organisiert und präsentiert’.<sup>23</sup>

The diary form offers a convenient means to structure this lightly fictional work. More intimate and thus more personalised than either a traditional third- or

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<sup>20</sup> See Gürtler and Schmid-Bortenschlager, p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> See Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity: Fragmentation, Culture, and Identity in Joseph Roth’s Writing in the 1920s* (London: Maney, 2006), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Yun Jung Seo, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Herta Wolf, ‘Lili Körber – eine Emigration in die Vergessenheit’, in *Eine schwierige Heimkehr. Österreichische Literatur im Exil 1938-1945* ed. by Johann Holzner, Sigurd Paul Scheichl and Wolfgang Wiesmüller (Innsbruck: Willy Verkauf-Verlon, 1991), p. 287.

first-person narrative, it blurs the line between fact and fiction. The two main male characters in the novel, the capitalist Ralph and the Communist Viktor, nevertheless play symbolic roles, personifying the differences between West and East. At the beginning of the novel Körber is drawn to Ralph; at the end she moves away from the American and the ideology he represents:<sup>24</sup>

Ich bin anders geworden. Heute brauche ich einen Mann, der etwas schafft, nicht nur Geld verdient. Einen Baumeister der neuen Welt. Mit Ralph streife ich endgültig meine alte Haut ab.<sup>25</sup>

This fictional journey recapitulates Körber's own intellectual journey up to this time.

*Begegnungen*, by contrast, is a travelogue. Divided into two principal parts, Japan and China, it concludes with a short epilogue set in Birobidjan, the capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Soviet Far East. Each part details Körber's impressions of the places she visited, the events she took part in, and the groups of people she met. Lacking chapters, its sections are denoted by descriptive headings such as 'Erste Begegnung mit Japan' or 'Das Lied der chinesischen Fischer'. The narrative perspective changes as the book progresses too. It begins with a first-person narrator, and then, in some later sections, the presence of the 'Ich' becomes almost non-existent. The section titled, 'Die Chinesen boykottieren Herrn Himamura', for instance, unfolds mostly from the perspective of Mr Himamura, a Japanese merchant sent to Shanghai by his employer. Successful in Tokyo, in Shanghai he is barely making do because the Chinese refuse to enter his shop. His ethnicity is the reason:

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<sup>24</sup> A similar love triangle will form the plot basis of her later work in exile *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland*. There, too, the main female character is torn between the love of a man with shared socialist ideology, Michail Miranow, and an American specialist who represents western luxury, security, and capitalism. Then, too, does the female protagonist choose socialism over capitalism.

<sup>25</sup> Lili Körber, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag: Ein Tagebuch-Roman aus den Putilowwerken* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932), p. 142.

Also nicht nur in Europa werden anständige Menschen, oft harmlose, friedliche Bürger verdächtigt und als Aussätzige behandelt, weil sie einem bestimmten Volke angehören. Und weil sie so behandelt werden, produzieren sie plötzlich Abwehrprodukte: zusammen mit dem Minderwertigkeitsgefühl treten Ueberheblichkeit, Hass und Hurrapatriotismus auf.<sup>26</sup>

Here Körber enunciates one of the central themes of her book.

In her tenth section about Japan, Körber adopts the perspective of Fukorono, a Japanese student. A now-omniscient narrator describes their first meeting as follows:

Seitschi Fukorono erhob sich und schlenderte zur Bank, auf der die Frau sass. Sie war hässlich wie alle Weissen: eine grosse Nase, die Augen graugrün wie Spülwasser, gelbes Haar, gekraust wie Filz. Trotzdem grüsste Fukorono lächelnd und nahm auf der Bank Platz. Sie schlug nicht die Augen nieder, wie es eine Japanerin getan hätte, im Gegenteil, sie blickte interessiert drein. Und mit der Unverfrorenheit europäischer Frauen fragte sie ob er Student sei, was sie an seiner schwarzen Uniform doch erkennen musste. Es war klar, sie wünschte mit ihm bekannt zu werden. Vermutlich war diese Europäerin eine amerikanische Touristin, die Anschluss suchte. Umso besser: er konnte sich gleich im amerikanischen Englisch üben. (*Begegnungen*, p. 119)

This distanced narrative perspective here serves two purposes. It enables Körber to suggest how a character from a very different culture perceives someone very much like her imagined reader, and it subtly highlights the differences between an overtly patriarchal society, one in which a woman cannot even look men directly in the eye, and the perhaps more covertly patriarchal Western society. By fragmenting her narrative in this way, Körber can view – or at least purport to view – Japanese and Chinese culture both from a Japanese and Chinese perspective and from her own.

Körber employs similar narrative techniques in both books. Her first descriptions of the Putilow factory floor, which in actual fact must have been both

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<sup>26</sup> Lili Körber, *Begegnungen im Fernen Osten* (Budapest: Biblos, 1936), p. 260.

noisy and dirty, are almost poetic, turning a mundane sight into something almost painterly:

Blanke Maschinen geben die Spiegel ab und auch die Musik. Das ist ein Brausen um die Wette – so ein mächtiges Orchester hat nicht einmal der Zar gehabt! Die Tänzer – schlanke Stähle – drehen sich mit Blitzesschnelle, stampfen sich ins Eisen hinein, daß Metallfunken nur so aufsprühen, schälen von den Blöcken und Hebeln mutwillig das braune Kleidchen herunter, ihre glitzernden Silberkörper bloßlegend...  
(*Eine Frau*, p. 9)

So, in a different and more pastoral way, does her description of her first encounter with Japan:

Es war früh am Morgen. Leichter Nebel lag noch um die kleinen Gärtchen, die kleinen Reisfelder, die Hügelchen, die Häuschen. Der schwarzuniformierte Beamte psalmodierte die Stationen. Bei jeder sprang ich auf und bei jeder winkte er mich wieder auf meinen Stiz zurück. Endlich war ich so weit. Ein alter Wasserträger wies mir den Weg. Ich ging durch eine Allee zwischen hohen blühenden Bäumen, zwischen rieselnden Glyzinen, bog auf eine Strasse. Wie weisser Schnee lagen die Kirschblüten auf den Gartensträuchern.  
(*Begegnungen*, p. 21)

She also makes much use of metaphor and simile, such as when she also writes in the opening paragraph of her book about Russia, 'die Kopftücher der Arbeiterinnen glühen wie Lampione' (*Eine Frau*, p. 9) or closes her book with 'Das Rattern des Motors klang mir wie ein Abschiedsgruß unseres Betriebes' (*Eine Frau*, p. 239). In addition, she frequently introduces into her text Russian, Japanese, or Chinese words, which she then translates into German. This lends a further touch of the exotic and the scholarly to her stories, as does her balancing of long descriptive passages with long historical passages.

Although travel writing set in the Soviet Union was more common, Körber still managed to create something new and distinctive in this genre as well. In the

1920s writers such as Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, Egon Erwin Kisch, Stefan Zweig, Frida Rubiner, and Clara Zetkin had all published accounts of their visits to the Soviet Union. David Turner explains the tradition of left-wing intellectuals travelling there thus:

There was international interest in the social experiment of the Soviet Union, but it was particularly keen in the Weimar Republic, which was itself struggling to come to terms with a new political system, which had already tasted revolution and soviet forms of government, and where the possibility of renewed revolution was not yet discounted. For many radical intellectuals therefore a visit to the Soviet Union was also a means of defining their own political position.<sup>27</sup>

What distinguishes *Eine Frau* from these other works is its concern with the female experience of everyday life in the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> As Lemke writes:

Was den *Roten Alltag* von anderen Rußland-Reiseberichten unterscheidet, sind nicht neue Informationen oder überraschende Entdeckungen, es sind vielmehr die Stimmungsbilder aus Betrieb, Kantine und Familie, die man in den anderen Berichten nicht findet. (Lemke, p. 94)

In this work, in other words, political and social issues become subordinate to – or are at least viewed through the prism of – the feminine and the familial.

This difference did not, however, please everyone. Critics leveled their criticism predominantly at Körber's feminist perspective, arguing that her book was too female-centred, that its female voice, female interest, and female-focused descriptions made it difficult for males to identify with it. Seen as too sentimental,

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<sup>27</sup> David Turner, "Überwältigt, hungrig, fortwährend schauend." Joseph Roth's Journey to Russia in 1926', in *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect*, ed. by Helen Chambers (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1991), pp. 52-77 (p. 52).

<sup>28</sup> When discussing the reception of *Eine Frau*, Lemke writes: 'Immer wieder wird der *Rote Alltag* als Frauenbuch bezeichnet, womit zunächst gemeint ist, daß eine Frau über Frauen für Frauen schreibt' (Lemke, p. 97).

too, it was therefore judged inferior to male writing.<sup>29</sup> Emil Kläger, for example, reviewed Körber's book – and female writing in general – with biting sarcasm:

Aber vielen Reportageromanen von Frauen, die jetzt zahlreich werden, ergeht es bei redlichem Eifer ganz unerwartet. Ihre Neugier wird gleich vom Anbeginn von besonderen Einzelheiten angelockt, verführt, verschleppt. Die Details erregen sie, wenn sie fremdartig sind, und die großen Tatsachen, die sie aufspüren, über die sie reportieren sollten, sehen sie eigentlich kaum. So passiert es wirklich, daß eine zum erstenmal revolutionäres Neuland betritt und ihr gleich ungefähr die Frage auf den Lippen brennt: Wie ist es hier mit der Liebe und was bekommen die Kinder überhaupt zum zweiten Frühstück? Gewiß ganz interessante Details. Doch die ungeheuerlich großen Tatsachen der Revolution, die bleiben irgendwo, ganz fern, hoch über ihnen.<sup>30</sup>

It is, however, precisely these 'very interesting details' and Körber's feminine feeling for the texture of everyday life that add power to this work and separate it from the many others written about the Soviet Union at the time. Perhaps this is why, on the whole, book reviewers and literary critics of the day treated her book favourably, commonly describing it as original, observant, witty, and fluently written.<sup>31</sup> Newspapers such as the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* and *Berliner Tageblatt* also praised it for its informativeness, its objectivity, and its substantial importance. Some critics even saw her focus on the feminine as positive. Paul J. Bloch, for instance, stressed that Körber explores a still unexplored field in Soviet life, that of the woman: 'Man sieht in vielem tiefer, weil Lili Körber als Frau schreibt und viel von den Frauen berichtet'.<sup>32</sup>

Körber's concentration on the reality of the life of women in the Soviet Union serves not only to explore, as Bloch pointed out, a still unexplored field, but also to

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<sup>29</sup> See Lemke, pp. 95-104.

<sup>30</sup> Emil Kläger, 'Erlebte Bücher von Frauen', *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, 31 July 1932, quoted in Lemke, p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> See Lemke, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> Paul J. Bloch, 'Reportagen durch den Alltag', *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 10 September 1932, quoted in Lemke, p. 97.

force the reader to consider life in Germany or Austria in a new light. As Hertling explains:

Aus der Perspektive einer Frau beobachtend, betont Körber, wie sich bereits aufgrund qualifizierter Arbeitsmöglichkeiten das Selbstbewußtsein der Frauen gehoben habe. Den Lesern ermöglichte diese authentische Beschreibung des 'roten Alltags' einen erkenntnisfördernden Vergleich zu dem in Deutschland bekannten 'grauen Alltag'. (Hertling, 'Lili Körber', pp. 448-49)

Körber, for instance, describes a visit to an abortion clinic, where she speaks to patients as well as doctors and then gives a detailed account of the abortion procedure. In the Soviet Union of the day, abortion was readily available and recourse to it frequent, even as it was then illegal and thus presumably rarer in Germany and Austria. Körber is clearly sympathetic to the Soviet approach. In general, too, in this book she expresses admiration for what the Soviet Union has achieved through its revolution and for the dedication of its people to making its Five Year Plan successful. She often contrasts these achievements with the corresponding failures of the capitalist West. Years later, with perhaps a heightened sense of irony, she called her first book, 'Eine Hymne auf das rote Rußland!' (Kreis, 'Lili', p. 7).

But even then she was not completely starry-eyed about Soviet-style Socialism. It soon becomes evident in this work that there are some Soviet things she does not care for. These include the cramped housing conditions, where communal dwellings seethe like anthills, 'Ameisenhaufen' (*Eine Frau*, p. 47), and the Russians' lackadaisical bathing habits – they bathe, she tells us, only once a week and otherwise just wash their hands and face – which she considers a sign that 'der Russe [...] noch unbeleckt von europäischer Zivilisation ist' (*Eine Frau*, p. 39). She also describes the party purges as disagreeable, 'unsympathisch' (*Eine Frau*, p. 44). Such an understatement suggests a certain sympathy toward Communism, although, when

Kreis asked her in 1980 if she had then been a Communist, Körber replied emphatically that she had not:

Nein, nie. Wohl aber – wie so viele Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik – Sympathisantin der Entwicklung der russischen Gesellschaft zum Sozialismus. Aber damit sei es spätestens nach der Machtübernahme Stalins vorbei gewesen. Ihre Stimme schwankt zwischen Bitterkeit und Wut. (Kreis, 'Lili', p. 7)

But, whatever the case, in this, her first novel, Körber singles the Soviet Union out for praise less for its own merits than to highlight what she feels are the weaknesses and failings of Germanic Europe.

Her sojourn in the Far East, by contrast, provided Körber with the opportunity to observe an unfamiliar and exotic culture. She reports on it dispassionately, writing, for example, such clinical, almost anthropological sentences as this:

So verteilt der Japaner das, was ein weisser Mann bei einer Frau sucht, auf mehrere weibliche Wesen: Erotik verlangt er von der Oiran, geistige Kameradschaft von der Geisha, Haushalt und Nachkommenschaft bleiben der legitimen Gattin überlassen. (*Begegnungen*, p. 47)

Körber goes onto compare these three roles for women in more detail, and explains the lack of rights women, in particular married women, have under the law in Japan. Typically, however, she offers no opinion on this. In other words, here as elsewhere in her early work she does not allow her feminism to overwhelm her reporter's instinct for objective analysis.

Critics received this book well, too. Olga Gruvé<sup>33</sup> wrote in a review in the *Pariser Tageblatt* that Körber 'ist Schriftstellerin und Journalistin zugleich', adding 'Sie ist der Typ des Schriftstellers, den unsere Zeit braucht, den diese Zeit selbst

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<sup>33</sup> Olga Gruvé, who would later become Körber's mother-in-law, was a novelist as well as a feature writer first in Berlin and later in exile in Paris.

hervorgebracht hat. Dies ist das Geheimnis ihres Erfolges, ihrer Beliebtheit, ihrer literarischen Bedeutung'.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland***

Before going into exile Körber wrote two political novels, *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* (1934) and *Sato-san, ein japanischer Held* (1936). In *Eine Jüdin* Körber broke with the structure of the traditional novel form and used instead a combination of what Hertling calls 'Dokumentarismus und traditioneller Erzählform' ('Abschied von Europa', p. 119). In this novel she combined biographical fiction with documentary material such as handbills, newspaper reports, and official announcements. To this she added essayistic passages on the meaning of Jewish writers, artists, and intellectuals in German history, on Zionism, and on the cultural differences between the French and the Germans. She then wove together this combination of journalistic and novelistic threads to create a tapestry portraying the political, economic, and psychosocial development of Germany from summer 1932 until April 1933. Körber thus seems to have been an early exponent of what has in recent years come to be called 'faction' – a marriage of fiction and fact. As Irmela von der Lühe explains:

Der mit unterschiedlichen Strategien der neusachlichen Avantgarde arbeitende Text will antifiktional und antipsychologisch Ereignisnähe und literarische Realitätstüchtigkeit garantieren; und zwar in Reaktion auf Ereignisse und auf Realität, die selbst schon alle Illusionen zerstört hatte, so dass sich die Mittel der Illusionskunst von selbst verboten.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Lemke, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> 'Zum Andenken', pp. 67-68.

In *Eine Jüdin*, Körber also combines a number of different narrative techniques. As in *Begegnungen*, she includes the modernist practices of multiple perspectives and stream of consciousness narration. Changes in syntax and punctuation make these internal monologues recognisable. Körber also uses ellipses as a means to fragment both thoughts and sensory feelings and to break up the narrative flow. Periodically, too, in asides that sound almost conversational, the narrator seems to address the reader directly, as when, describing the nurse Kathi, she wonders '(warum Krankenschwestern immer blond und zart sind?)'.<sup>36</sup>

The dominant focus, however, is always on Ruth Gompertz, a young Jewish actress married to Arnold Borchardt, an ambitious Aryan engineer. Ruth's personal experiences recapitulate the larger societal changes occurring at the same time in Germany under National Socialism. As Hertling explains:

Ruth ist sowohl eine individuell gezeichnete Mittelpunktfigur und 'Heldin' als auch Teil eines größeren sozialen Kontextes, wodurch sie innerhalb des Figurenensembles als Subjekt und Objekt der historischen Ereignisse erscheint. Solchermaßen schafft Körber ein differenziertes Faschismusbild, das politische, ökonomische und psychologische Elemente berücksichtigt. ('Abschied von Europa', p. 119)

Like Canetti in *Die Schildkröten* and Gmeyner in *Manja*, Körber uses everyday details and personal anecdotes to depict the nature of Nazism and its effect on society. Ruth's sister's children are exposed to anti-Semitic remarks in school, while, thanks to laws prohibiting Jews from working, Ruth herself loses her job at the theater and her brother-in-law Walter his at the hospital. Her housekeeper, Frau Müller, who begins (but does not end) the novel as an energetic and optimistic woman, breaks down after the arrest and torture of her son. Arnold is promoted after

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<sup>36</sup> Lili Körber, *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz* (Mannheim: Persona, 1984), p. 27. Although the reprinted edition that I cite here has a different title, textually *Die Ehe* is identical to *Eine Jüdin*.

a Jew above him is fired, but then loses the promotion after it is discovered that he is married to a Jewess, an event that causes Arnold to turn from Ruth as a result.

Flight arises as both an option and a solution. When Ruth's sister and family decide to emigrate to Palestine, they beg Ruth to come with them. But Ruth does not go. She cannot imagine leaving Arnold. More important, as an actress she cannot imagine abandoning the German-speaking world. Instead, she clearly feels Jews are bound up in that world and belong there:

Wie sie mit Deutschland verbunden war, Herrgott, wie sie verbunden war! Die Sprache – nie würde sie in einer anderen Sprache denken können! Die Sprache, die sie tausenden Menschen auf der Bühne nahegebracht hatte! Die Gestalten aus hundert Büchern, die Kinderheitseindrücke, der Lebensrhythmus. Konnte man sich in der Fremde einleben? War das möglich? (*Die Ehe*, p. 197)

In the end Ruth chooses the ultimate option: she kills herself. Her suicide recalls Walter Gabriel's in Gmeyner's novel *Café du Dome*. Although she could live without her husband, she could not live without her work. It is that important to her:

Sie muß die Schulter ducken – so – empört, beleidigt und doch ängstlich, daß sie ihre Stelle verliert. Empört, beleidigt und stumm. So wie Walter. So wie alle Juden [...] Wenn der Arierparagraph kommt, muß sie fort von Theater. Es wird ihr fast schlecht bei dem Gedanken. Das kann nicht sein, nein, es kann nicht sein. Was soll sie dann noch mit ihrem Leben anfangen? Ohne Arnold, ja, ohne Arnold kann sie leben, wenn sie auch sehr unglücklich wäre, aber ohne Theater – unmöglich. (*Die Ehe*, pp. 54-55)

The staccato prose rhythm, the repetition of certain adjectives ('empört, beleidigt') and even phrases ('ohne Arnold') capture and convey Ruth's emotional anxiety and turmoil. She is torn between her ideals, her ambitions, and her hopes and the reality of the institutionalised anti-Semitism and hate that has gradually come to envelop her: Her choice in the end is more in character than it first seems. Life without her chosen

career appears to her to be no life at all. Exile in this sense becomes the easy way out – a conclusion that will take on a certain irony for Körber herself later in her life.

In *Ruth*, Körber has created a character who violates Nazi ideals of womanhood. She is Jewish, she has a mind of her own, and she does not want to stay home and tend to children, cooking, and church. Here, too, *Ruth's* story is representative of a larger phenomenon. By 1929 Germany

had over 2,500 women physicians, 300 women lawyers, and even a few dozen women judges and professors. University enrolments augured well for the future, since women comprised just under a fifth of the university student body. White-collar office jobs were being taken over, it seemed, by independent young women.<sup>37</sup>

Within months of Hitler's ascension to power, however, female doctors and civil servants began to lose these jobs. The number of women teachers in the nation quickly fell by 15 per cent. Women professors, school administrators, principals, educational consultants, and supervisors (even in girls' schools) were dismissed, as were, soon thereafter, women lawyers. Under the Nazis, though women continued to work in roughly the same numbers as before, they found themselves channeled more and more into badly paid jobs considered suitable for women.<sup>38</sup> *Ruth Gompertz* clearly stands for this group – and particularly for those who tried to resist this segregation into 'women's work'. This novel must have struck a chord with the public, for it sold out quickly in Austria and, in general, received a positive response from critics, who frequently drew parallels between it and Lion Feuchtwanger's *Die Geschwister Oppenheim*.<sup>39</sup> With the authorities, however, the chord it struck was clearly discordant; they banned this novel first in Germany and soon thereafter in

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<sup>37</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See Lemke, p. 116.

Austria. It was then published in Switzerland and also translated into Polish and Hungarian. Despite its popularity, it did not reappear in print for fifty years, until Persona brought it out under the title *Die Ehe der Ruth Gompertz*.

### ***Sato-san, ein japanischer Held***

*Sato-san*, published by Ludwig Nath in Vienna shortly after *Begegnungen*<sup>40</sup> in 1936, was one of the books issued by the Lesergilde book club, which Nath had established together with a former active Social Democrat, Alois Piperger, who had become unemployed after the party was banned in 1934. Like Körber's previous works, it combines reportage with fiction. In this novel, too, extended essayistic passages interrupt the narrative flow with factual historical, political, and religious background as well as cultural observations about Japan and China. Körber also uses documentary material such as newspaper articles here, but this time with a twist. In *this* novel most of these articles are fictional and concern the fictional Sato-san. On the surface they resemble the factual material found in *Eine Jüdin* or in Körber's two earlier travelogues, but now they are purely the product of her artistic imagination.

*Sato-san* differs in other distinct ways from the books that came before it, too. For one thing, Körber wanted it to be humorous. She seems to have felt that there were too many grave books written about the problems of the day, and she wanted to do something quite different. She did not wish to minimise those problems, but instead to highlight them through alternative means. To deal with such serious and even morbid matters as extremist political ideology, war, and racism, she now employs irony, absurdity, and parody. As Lemke notes, she exaggerates for effect:

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<sup>40</sup> Lemke points out the similarities between Körber's descriptions in *Begegnungen* and the experiences of the two main female characters, Ellinor Grey and Dr Alice Brumm. See Lemke, p. 146.

Mit den Mitteln der Übertreibung nimmt sie die menschlichen Unzulänglichkeiten aufs Korn, zeigt sie die Schwächen der Helden, die so sehr im Kontrast zu ihren Aussagen stehen, ohne sich jedoch mit dem politischen System auseinanderzusetzen. Der Roman ist amüsant zu lesen, auch ohne den Kontext näher zu kennen. (Lemke, p. 149)

But to know the context is to deepen the message and to heighten the effect of the use of humour in this work, for part of this novel's artistic value lies precisely in the amusement it offers. Indirection becomes a function of its art.

Even the title of this book is somewhat misleading. In her previous work, *Eine Jüdin*, for instance, the focaliser is more or less eponymous – Ruth Gompertz is the German Jewess of the title – and fully the main character, even if the narrative point of view varies. *Sato-san*, however, is only indirectly about the title character who plays a secondary and mainly passive role. His presence is often less palpable than faintly perceptible in the background. He appears in the *Vorspiel* when he is being arrested and again briefly at the end of the book when he escapes from prison. Otherwise Sato-san is present only in the sense that he is frequently referred to and discussed.

On the other hand, as the title suggests, he is 'a Japanese hero'. This conceit runs like a steady current throughout the text. Yet, although he is widely considered the 'Held und Retter des Vaterlandes',<sup>41</sup> what exactly makes him heroic is never explicitly stated. The more we read about him, the more exaggerated such praise begins to appear and the more sarcastic.

Throughout the novel, too, he is referred to as the 'ausgezeichnete Mann':

Er lebte sehr zurückgezogen mit seiner Gattin, aus einer alten Samuraifamilie, und seinem Söhnchen, ein musterhafter Vater und

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<sup>41</sup> Lili Körber, *Sato-san, ein japanischer Held* (Vienna: Ludwig Nath, 1936), p. 11.

Ehemann, so daß er den Beinamen, 'der ausgezeichnete Mann' bekommen hatte. (*Sato-san*, p. 99)

For the Japanese, it seems, his excellence stems not from his leadership qualities or actions he has undertaken as one might expect of a political figure and hero, but rather from his supposedly being a good father and husband. Sato-san is clearly meant to be a parody of Adolf Hitler. Sato-San, for instance, proclaims that he wants to help 'nur dem kleinen Mann' (*Sato-san*, p. 22), to save 'das bodenständige Handwerk' (ibid.), and 'Im übrigen plant er eine straffe Regierung, eine Annektion Chinas und einen Krieg gegen die Sowjets' (*Sato-san*, p. 23). If one changes the annexation of China to the annexation of Austria, then these words begin to sound much like Hitler's. Like Hitler, too, Sato-san has been imprisoned for plotting against the government. While in prison he writes 'Mein Werden und Wollen', part memoir and part exposition of a new political ideology:

Es war ein gründliches Werk, in dem er seine Vergangenheit verherrlichte und die Linie für die Zukunft festlegte, seine Weltanschauung auseinandersetzte und der ganzen Welt gute und schlechte Noten austeilte; ein männliches Werk, das mit Kraftausdrücken nicht sparte und Werturteile nicht erst umständlich mit wissenschaftlichen Beweisen untermauerte. (*Sato-san*, p. 252)

This clearly is meant to recall Hitler's famous prison-work, *Mein Kampf*.

Sato-San even has his own propaganda minister, Hidekitschi, who explains his political ideology to Ellinor Grey, the central figure of the book, as follows:

'Die nationale Bewegung,' sagte er, 'welche für die hohe geschichtliche Mission Japans in Asien eintritt und die individualistische und materielle westliche Kultur ablehnt, kämpft nur mit legalen Mitteln. Ihr Ziel ist nach außen und innen eine starke und unabhängige Friedenspolitik, und – ihrer Verantwortung in dieser Beziehung stets gegenwärtig – verlangt sie eine großzügige Aufrüstung, die allein den Frieden garantieren kann; ebenso die Anerkennung ihrer berechtigten Ansprüche auf alle jene Länder, wo

blutsverwandte Asiaten noch nicht ihrer Unabhängigkeit unter der Führung Japans gewonnen haben. Doch haben die Nationalen stets die Gewaltmethoden ihrer Gegner verschmäht, sie brauchen diese Mittel nicht, da sie wissen, daß Blut zu Blut findet. Deswegen verurteilen sie auch all das, was vermutlich alsbald durch den Mund der Zeugen gegen Sato-san ans Tageslicht gebracht werden wird.' (*Sato-san*, p. 116)

There are clear parallels here to Nazism. They include a policy of peace while simultaneously preparing for war and plans for expansion and conquest under the guise of helping those with a blood-relationship. This concept brings almost inevitably to mind that of the Nazis' 'Blut und Boden'. Körber's warnings about Japanese imperialism proved prescient, for the Second Sino-Japanese war broke out just a year after her book. Hidekitschi's physical inadequacies also remind us of Goebbels, who had a deformed right leg.

The adventures of Sato-san and his followers, however, essentially form only a secondary strand in the novel. The focus instead falls on two women, Ellinor Grey and Dr Alice Brumm, an American and an Austrian journalist, and on two Japanese men, the painter Ikawa and the propagandist Hidekitschi. Grey and Brumm have come to Japan to follow Sato-san's trial, which Grey calls the 'Monsterprozeß'. As in Körber's earlier works, the principal female characters in this novel are independent women with careers. Although neither is Japanese, Japanese women in very much more subservient positions will eventually come to play key roles. Those who appear weak to Western eyes in the end prove strong.

Körber also explores cross-cultural relationships through the ultimately doomed love affair between Ikawa and Grey. For Körber, this love story was an important part, but hardly the whole, of her novel. As she herself put it:

Diese Doppelhandlung ist in eine Reportage über Japan eingebettet – denn das Romanhafte genügt uns nicht, wenn wir ein Buch über den

Fernen Osten in Händen halten, wir wollen auch etwas über Land und Leute erfahren. (Lemke, p. 138)

Körber, in other words, wanted her book not simply to entertain but also to foster a deeper understanding of Eastern culture.

Her objectives with this ambitious novel are thus manifold. She has written a political satire, created a love story filled with cultural misunderstandings, and crafted a novel of political intrigue. The ending seems happy, but it is not. This ultimately is not a hopeful book, for it suggests that we are destined for difficulties unless we can find a bridge that permits differing peoples and points of view to interact harmoniously. If the experiences of Grey and Ikawa are any guide, Körber seems to posit that that will not be easy, if it will be possible at all.

The reception of this book was for the most part positive, though there are rumours that the Japanese Embassy in Vienna took issue with it.<sup>42</sup> This, too, is ironic, for though the novel is set in Japan, it is really about the Jewish experience in Germany and Austria. One might well wonder whether, in a way reminiscent of both Canetti and Gmeyner, Körber is arguing in this work that the Jews who felt themselves embedded and acculturated in Germanic society might simply have deceived themselves, for the Aryans around them, as Ruth Gompertz came to realise, clearly and dangerously now considered them as foreign a race as the Japanese.

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<sup>42</sup> Although both Hertling and Kreis mention this, Lemke argues that, because there are no sources to corroborate this story, it is most likely just legend. See Lemke, p. 149.

## *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß*

On 23 April 1938 the first installment of *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* appeared in the Swiss social-democratic daily *Volksrecht* in Zurich.<sup>43</sup> This novel, one of the first literary responses to the events taking place then in Austria, begins on 12 February 1938, the day Schuschnigg met Hitler in Berchtesgaden, and continues chronologically until it ends on the first day of Körber's exile in Switzerland on 19 March 1938. Using techniques she had employed previously, Körber creates something new in her oeuvre. Like *Eine Frau*, this is a first-person narrative in diary form and, like *Eine Jüdin*, it concerns mostly fictional characters dealing with actual events. As in previous works, Körber incorporates newspaper articles and text from radio broadcasts, from political pamphlets, and from official reports, all of which lends authenticity to this novel: 'An den Zeitungsständen sah ich die Montagsblätter mit großen Hakenkreuzen versehen. [...] Sonst standen lange Berichte über die gestrigen Anschlußfeiern, Seyß hatte im Rathaus feierlich Hitler begrüßt und den Artikel 88 des Vertrages von St. Germain, in dem von Anschluß die Rede ist, außer Kraft gesetzt'.<sup>44</sup>

What differentiates *Eine Österreicherin* from her previous works is the narrator, Agnes Muth. She is both the main character and the pseudonym under which Körber published her novel, signifying that the novel is the diary of a real person. But Agnes is clearly not Körber. She is the Catholic, twenty-year-old daughter of a metal worker who never went to university and who works as a stenographer in a Jewish-owned publishing house in Vienna.

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<sup>43</sup> It was republished in novel form in 1988, and for the sake of simplicity I will refer to the novel and not the serial form.

<sup>44</sup> Lili Körber, *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* (Munich: Verlag Christian Brandstätter, 1988), p. 110.

There are, to be sure, some biographical similarities between the two. For example, Körber did briefly work in a Jewish publishing house – one belonging to Arthur Goldschmidt in Berlin – when she had to take a break from her studies for financial reasons.<sup>45</sup> The experiences of Agnes's fiancé Fred and his family are also reminiscent of what the Jewish Goldschmidts – who became the Gravés – had gone through in Berlin earlier in the 1930s. Finally, Körber, like Agnes, fled Vienna by train to Switzerland, leaving Gravé behind to follow.

Still, even if the narrator is far more fictional than that in *Eine Frau*, Körber's personal experience is entrenched in this book in a way that it was not in *Eine Jüdin*. Agnes is neither Jewish, like the heroine in *Eine Jüdin*, nor politically engaged like the heroine in *Eine Frau*. Nevertheless, Körber, who in general employs little symbolism in this book, seems to have chosen the narrator's name purposefully. 'Agnes' is a Latinised version of the Greek adjective 'agnos', which means 'full of religious awe' and, by extension, 'chaste, pure, holy'. It became associated with the Latin word 'agnus' which means 'lamb' and which has an overtly Christian connotation as in 'lamb of God' or 'Agnus Dei'. 'Muth' is clearly a version of 'Mut', which means 'spirit' or 'courage' in German. In this novel, then, 'nomen est omen'.

Agnes is an honourable, decent, and industrious working-class woman who wants to enjoy life and love but is unable to do so because of a changing political and cultural climate. She is no anti-Semite, either. She is engaged to a Jew, and she works for a Jew. Although her brother, Franzl, is an active revolutionary Socialist, she remains an outsider to both groups, Jews and Socialists alike, and thus she is able to serve as an almost objective observer of both. As the novel progresses, however, the rise of National Socialism compels her to take a more active political role – she

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<sup>45</sup> See Lemke, p. 33.

hides illegal pamphlets in her coal bin, relays messages, and later helps destroy documents for her sister-in-law Mitzi and the illegal Socialist party – and to be more concerned with the position of Jews in Austrian society.

Fear and violence pervade this novel, but Agnes is not, at first, their object. By removing her narrator from direct political involvement and the Jewish faith, Körber is able to portray the horrors of the time from a slight distance. As Hertling explains:

Sie [Agnes] ist hellhörig für die Reaktionen verschiedener Bevölkerungsschichten [...] Sie schildert die Ahnungslosigkeit der apolitischen Intellektuellen, die Ohnmacht des etablierten jüdischen Besitzbürgertums, den Haß der überzeugten Nazis sowie das Kriechertum und den Opportunismus der Denunzianten und Mitläufer.<sup>46</sup>

By placing Agnes both in the middle and outside of colliding political movements and by making her subject to neither racial or religious strictures, Körber creates in her a vehicle to depict the mounting horrors that will culminate in the Holocaust with a dispassionate yet, as Hertling notes, sensitive eye.

This narrative technique is surprising, for one might have expected an *engagé* writer like Körber to have placed her narrator more overtly in the Socialist or progressive camp. In the interwar period, after all, Austria was divided into three main political movements: the Social Democrats, the Christian Socials (which Dollfuss merged with the Fatherland Front in 1933), and the National Socialists. The Social Democrats represented not only Socialism and the interests of the working class ‘but also the progressive, emancipatory, modernist and anti-clerical agenda of Austria’s erstwhile liberal forces’.<sup>47</sup> Until the civil war in 1934, during which, as

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<sup>46</sup> Viktoria Hertling, ‘Bereitschaft zur Betroffenheit: Neuste österreichische Prosa über die Jahre 1938 bis 1945’, *German Studies Review*, 14 (1991), 275-90 (p. 277).

<sup>47</sup> Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 218.

Körber describes in this novel, the Karl-Marx-Hof was the object of artillery fire and which ultimately led to the banning of the Social Democratic Party on 16 February, Austrian Jews voted almost entirely for the Social Democrats. They had no reasonable alternative, for both of the other parties were strongly anti-Semitic in ideology and in policy. After the crushing of the Social Democratic Party, the now illegal Socialist movement still drew support, in particular from the working class and certain sections of the unemployed, but it also 'could count on higher than average support from intellectuals, many but by no means all of whom were Jews'.<sup>48</sup>

It is the particular art of *Eine Österreicherin* that it shows how politics came to affect every aspect of Agnes's life without making her, as the focaliser, political herself. Every entry in the diary includes a political discussion, debate, observation, reaction, or thought. An argument between Agnes's tenant, Frau Doktor Valentina B., and Agnes, for instance, serves to dramatise the larger political background at the time. Valentina points out that in 1933 seventeen million Germans voted for Hitler in a free election. She grants that the Germans were economically ruined and expected improvements from the Nazis but argues 'das beweist nur, daß ein großer Teil des deutschen Volkes bereit ist, Freiheit gegen Brot einzutauschen' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 28). Agnes disagrees and replies that the Germans felt their pride was hurt by the victorious powers in the Treaty of Versailles and that, while no Nazi, she understood that: 'wenn die Leute schließlich eine Wut haben und sagen, sie hätten keine Lust mehr, eine Kolonie Italiens zu sein' (*ibid.*). Here, in a single wry anecdote, Körber captures and encapsulates a large part of the appeal of Nazism in Austria. She does this again and again throughout this novel.

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<sup>48</sup> Helmut Konrad, 'Support for the Corporate State and National Socialism in the Socially Weaker Groups, 1934-1938', in *Austria in the Thirties: Culture and Politics*, ed. by Kenneth Segar and John Warren (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1991), pp. 48-66 (pp. 48-49).

In this novel, in fact, most supporters of the Nazis express the view that they would make great gains if the Nazis were in power and got rid of the Jews. As Steven Beller explains:

Austrian national ambivalence allowed the phenomenal economic success of Hitler's Germany to have a powerful effect on the thinking, and loyalties, of ordinary Austrians. Psychologically, spiritually almost, Hitler's Third Reich was a far more impressive and 'uplifting' spectacle than Schuschnigg's homespun Ständestaat. The Austrian government could brag about the strong schilling, but the austere fiscal and financial policies involved provided little in the way of economic growth or new jobs. Unemployment remained near 20 per cent in Austria while it fell precipitously in Germany. (Beller, p. 225)

As if to prove Beller's point, businessmen in this book hope for better deals by eradicating their Jewish competitors, students wish to institute quotas and take away clients from Jewish attorneys and physicians, and, as Agnes's former schoolmate, Friedl, puts it, once Hitler comes, 'Da läuft der Karren wieder, da gibt's Arbeit, und alle Juden müssen raus' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 33). The promise of an economic upturn is too heady to resist.

But Körber has not lost her sense of irony despite her experiences in writing this novel and her headlong flight to Switzerland beforehand. When, for instance, the Nazis do come into power, people like Friedl complain that the Germans have taken over, which is not what the Austrian Nazis had in mind. They become as unhappy with the new turn of events as with the old. Friedl's husband Walter does not even get a new office, as she had expected. It goes instead to 'lauter Piefkes!' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 122).

Agnes's sister-in-law, Mitzi, an active Socialist, stands in opposition to Friedl. Walter, Friedl believes, deserves great things at the expense of others, in particular the Jews, whereas Mitzi wants nothing more than what she has earned. Friedl is happy to

see Austria annexed in order to gain small improvements to her life, whereas Mitzi wants Austria to remain free. Friedl ultimately proves a coward and threatens to report Agnes to keep Agnes from reporting her. Mitzi, on the other hand, is shown repeatedly to be a strong and brave woman. As a resident of the Karl-Marx-Hof, she braves artillery fire; she is active in the underground movement; and she stands resolute when her husband flees to Switzerland and she is left behind with their son without a passport in Vienna. Her last words to Agnes before Agnes flees are, 'nachgeben tun wir net!' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 130). Her objective and apolitical narrator notwithstanding, it is through scenes like these that Körber makes clear where her sympathies lie.

Like Canetti and Gmeyner in their first exile novels, too, Körber details Nazi depredations and atrocities. As in the novels by those authors, these depredations increase as time passes. Körber vividly renders the unsettled and uncertain times where neighbours report on neighbours, where it is dangerous to be caught holding the wrong political pamphlet, where Nazis rally and march through the streets, where a couple cannot hold hands in public because they are of mixed race, and where the number of brown shirts, swastika-wearing citizens, and graffiti and slogans such as 'Juda verrecke' and 'Ein Volk, ein Reich' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 23) constantly increases. Agnes herself eventually dons a swastika in order to avoid persecution when out in public. She writes, 'Es geht heute in Österreich wie auf einem untergehenden Dampfer zu, die Menschen kämpfen um einen Platz im Rettungsboot und werfen einander ins Wasser' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 10). The ones being thrown overboard are, of course, the Jews. Agnes writes that 'Diese kleinen Gemeinheiten der Nazi waren fast noch schlimmer als die großen' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 124).

Despite these actions, the Jews in this novel remain for the most part passive in the face of Nazism. This has led Lisa A. Bilsky to argue that 'the narrative repeatedly pits Jews against Socialists' and that 'her depiction of Jews reproduces many of the same misconceptions and biases that helped pave the way for National Socialism'.<sup>49</sup> Bilsky further argues that Körber provides stereotyped views of workers and Jews, where 'The workers are held up as heroes to be admired, whereas the Jews are presented as, at best, objects of pity' (Bilsky, p. 10). She bases this argument on the portrayal of the Brenner family, which she believes represents the Jewish bourgeoisie as a whole. Because Agnes is critical of their politics, their lack of sympathy for the workers who are suffering under the repressive policies of Schuschnigg, and their desire for a Jewish daughter-in-law, Bilsky concludes:

Körber sees a cooperative effort between Jews and Socialists as the most effective way to combat Fascism. The novel criticizes the Jews for failing to recognize their own best ally in the fight against the Nazis, namely the Social Democrats, but it does not take into account the numerous ways in which Social Democrats alienated Jewish voters in the past. By relentlessly privileging a Social Democratic viewpoint, the novel thus undercuts the author's own political vision. (Bilsky, pp. 10-11)

But Bilsky forgets that the novel also shows Jews such as the journalist Alice Brenner as active in the illegal Socialist movement. Agnes also commends working-class Socialists for actively fighting fascism. They are, she writes, the only ones doing so: 'Nur die Arbeiterschaft hat sich gegen die Naziflut fest und widerstandsfähig erwiesen' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 74). Körber praises all those who actively resist and criticises those who sit passively by and let Hitler take over.

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<sup>49</sup> Lisa A. Bilsky, 'Pitting Jews Against Socialists: Lili Körber's *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß*', *Germanic Review*, 70 (1995), 9-14 (p. 13).

Bilsky also finds fault with the portrayal of Fred Brenner because he appears to be a weak character:

Throughout the narrative Fred is described as someone lacking initiative and political conviction. His reaction to the threat of an *Anschluß* is to withdraw into depression. In his unwillingness or inability to make plans for the future, he is made to stand for a large segment of the Austrian Jewish population. This portrayal of a segment of Austrian Jewish society may be accurate, but it must be noted that Körber gives no parallel example of workers who are indecisive or overwhelmed by the events. (Bilsky, p. 11)

This statement is only partially true. Initially Fred lacks initiative and political conviction. Many Jews – especially those who were not politically active – could not at first comprehend that they had become objects of persecution simply by virtue of who or what they were. After the German invasion Fred changes and becomes more assertive: ‘Nun begann Freds Meinung plötzlich in der Familie mitzuzählen, vielleicht, weil er ruhiger war als die anderen’ (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 116). When he learns that he and Agnes are not allowed to marry, his reaction is ‘gleichgültig’ (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 119), and he immediately begins to plan for their emigration. He is also calm in the face of the liquidation of his father’s law firm. Körber thus portrays Fred as a man who struggles with inexplicable persecution and ultimately becomes stronger for it.

Bilsky also believes Dr Loewy is portrayed as pitiable, benevolent, and short-sighted because he does not flee Austria when contacts abroad recommend that he do so. But at the very outset of the novel, Dr Loewy is described as ‘der couragiersteste Wiener Verleger’ (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 7) because he prints books regardless of whether they are in favour in Germany or have been shunned in Austria for Socialist leanings or sympathies. He is clearly a man who stands by his convictions. When the controversial writer Hegner offers to cancel his contract, Dr Loewy replies, ‘Wenn die

kommen, dann habe ich sowieso nichts zu lachen. Ich habe ja in Kulturbolschewismus gemacht. Und wenn ich zugrunde gehen soll, dann mit einem anständigen Buch' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 13). This is not a pitiable character or a weak one because he failed to flee when the opportunity arose, but rather one who bravely continues his work for as long as he can fully knowing what the consequences might be. With hindsight we know that flight was the best option for the Jews if they could escape, but at the time, as Körber shows, they still felt hope after Schuschnigg's speech on 24 February in which he declared that Austria had reached the limit of concessions to Germany and stated, 'Bis dahin und nicht weiter!' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 41). With the planned plebiscite, it even then seemed that Austria might still remain free of Nazi Germany. As the journalist G. E. R. Gedye remembers:

By his bold blow to save Austria in announcing the plebiscite, Schuschnigg had arrested the wave of emigration which was about to set in from the doomed country. Trunks had been left standing half-packed, money sent abroad recalled and the early *émigrés* had even returned to throw themselves whole-heartedly into the fight for independence. By failing to order resistance to the invader, Schuschnigg believed he was avoiding the shedding of blood. But by doing so he deprived his most devoted supporters, those who for years had exposed themselves in the fight against Nazism, of all warning – even of a few hours – in which to seek safety in flight.<sup>50</sup>

After the invasion, Dr Loewy knows what is coming. He gives Agnes 100 schillings 'zur Erinnerung an mich!' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 114) and three days later is taken from his office by two storm troopers led by his former and embittered employee, Herr Winkler, who has now come into some power thanks to being a longtime Nazi.

Agnes even sees heroics in the actions of orthodox Jews. When berated for provoking people because of the way he is dressed, an Orthodox man replies, 'Man

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<sup>50</sup> G. E. R. Gedye, *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London: Gollancz, 1939), p. 300.

hat uns zweitausend Jahre verfolgt, und wir haben's überstanden. Wir werden auch noch den Hitler überstehen' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 24). He appears to Agnes worthy of praise, for she writes in her diary:

Sie leben noch immer im Alten Testament und sind felsenfest überzeugt, daß der Herrgott sie aus der Gefangenschaft herausführt und ihre Feinde vernichtet. Und alles Leiden, das man ihnen zufügt, beugt ihre Seele nicht, denn sie fühlen sich eins mit dem Allerhöchsten, und ihre Peiniger sind für sie nur die Plage, derer sich der Herr bedient, um sie zu züchtigen. (ibid.)

Characters such as Dr Loewy who continues to print, Alice who continues to write, and the caftaned Jew who continues to live his life faithfully even when his very way of dressing offends, do in their own ways put up resistance. To be sure, Agnes can be critical of Jews. In an argument with Fred, for instance, she criticises rich Jews, as opposed to Jews like Dr Loewy who work ('arbeiten') as Mitzi and Franzl do:

Ihr denkt nur an euch. Wenn Hitler nicht den Antisemitismus auf seinem Programm hätte, dann hätte ihr nichts gegen ihn! [...] Dein Vater hat immer bravo geschrien bei der Schuschniggrede, und was hat er schließlich gebracht außer der Absage an den Antisemitismus? Keine Freiheit und gar nichts. (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 55)

But this is criticism of those who could have done something, especially those with money, but who instead sat by idly and did not even concern themselves with Austria's increasing lack of freedoms.

For the most part, Agnes's critiques of the Brenner parents are based on class, not on religion. She knows that the Brennens wanted a different sort of girl for Fred: 'Sie möchten für ihren Fred, der auf der Hochschule studiert hat, etwas "Besseres", mit Geld. Sie haben oft versucht, ihn mit Mädchen aus seinen Kreisen zusammenzubringen' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 6). Alice tells Agnes that her mother

feared, 'daß du das Messer beim Essen in den Mund steckst und so' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 91).

In *Eine Frau* and *Sato-san* cultural differences ended relationships. In *Eine Jüdin* political ones do. In *Eine Österreicherin* a class divide separates Agnes from the Brenners, but it is not enough to sever her relationship with Fred. As the novel progresses, Agnes changes her view of the Brenners. Agnes comes to admire their composure and recognises how dangerous life has become for them. When listening to Fred and his father discuss the liquidation of Dr Brenner's law firm, she comments, 'Ich finde, daß die Juden doch viel Haltung haben, mit welcher Gelassenheit sie auf durch Jahre angesammelten Besitz, selbst auf ihre Existenzbasis verzichten!' (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 120). For Körber class divisions appear to be surmountable, while cultural and political divisions do not. Implicit in this, then, is the notion that culturally Jews are no different from Austrians.

This novel, though outwardly concerned with political developments, also has a large domestic element. Agnes, for instance, describes listening to Hitler speak on the radio while taking in her laundry. Put off by his shouting, she turns the radio off, but she cannot escape that easily:

Durch das offene Fenster höre ich den Hitler fürchterlich schimpfen: 'Minderwertige Schwindler, Völkerbetrüger und Kriegshetzer.' Damit meint er die ausländischen Journalisten. Er will, daß England und Frankreich der Presse verbieten, an Deutschland Kritik zu üben. Ich nehme etwas Persil und löse es im heißen Wasser auf, schlage es mit einem Küchenlöffel zu Schaum. (*Eine Österreicherin*, p. 21)

Her choice of 'schimpfen' in this passage is typical and telling. The verb means 'to rant' and 'to bluster' – two qualities often associated with Hitler – but it can also mean 'to scold'. This aspect or nuance of the verb is something that, like washing

powder, seems more associated with house-bound women than with powerful men. Even Körber's use of domesticity carries political overtones.

The ubiquity of Hitler and Nazism also runs like a foundational theme through this novel. Ultimately, Agnes does escape them, but only by giving up her home, her family, her friends, her country, and her culture. It takes exile to set her free.

The women in this novel also reverse the common gender roles of the time. They earn their living, participate in politics, and make their way in mainly male domains. Valentina is in the hard sciences, Alice in journalism, Mitzi in politics. Only Agnes has a perhaps more traditionally female job as an assistant to a powerful man in a softer profession (publishing). Here again, Körber uses the domestic domain to make a political point. In the world she presents in the novel, women appear to be anything but the Nazi ideal – mothers at home dedicated solely to Kinder, Kirche, and Küche. But this leads to a kind of tragic irony. In this novel, Valentina, Alice, and even Agnes are all forced to flee. In the end, these women earn no special dispensation because of their gender. Their Jewish connections or professional activities or political persuasion prove more important than their femininity.

### ***Ein Amerikaner in Rußland***

Körber's first major work published in American exile was *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland*, a serialised novel that ran in the *Neue Volkszeitung*, a social-democratic exile newspaper in New York, at the end of 1942. This novel reverts to the use of a foreign culture to illustrate a political point. Her works set in her own familiar milieu – Germany and Austria – were ingrained with personal experiences; her personal or at least authorial presence was palpable. In *Ein Amerikaner*, by contrast, the omniscient

narrator, who lacks an identity or personality, does not interact with the reader. Körber also splinters the points of view, so that the reader sees things from multiple perspectives – those of Mascha, Michail, Frank, and Lilian, Frank's ex-wife. In Chapter IV, where the perspective changes to that of workers in a factory, the reader even sees Frank and Mascha through their eyes. Without any direct interaction between narrator and audience, the reader remains detached from the story. In this novel the emphasis is on the broader political and social points Körber wishes to make. Her characters become not personifications of the narrator but means to an end. The narrative technique resembles that used in her works on the Far East. Now even Russia has become foreign to her, at least for narrative purposes.

Unlike Körber's previous works, this novel is not an immediate reaction to something she has just lived through. Instead, looking back to a country she has not seen in a decade and writing in the midst of World War II, she revisits the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s. Gürtler and Schmid-Bortenschlager believe two events – the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the death of friend in a concentration camp thanks to Nazi-Soviet cooperation – inspired Körber to write this book:

Konkreter Anlaß für das Buch ist – neben dem Hitler-Stalin Pakt – die Nachricht von der Auslieferung des führenden KPÖ-Mitglieds Franz Koritschoner, den Lili Körber persönlich gekannt und geschätzt hat, an die NS-Behörden durch die Russen, was zu seinem Tod im Konzentrationslager führt. (Gürtler and Schmid-Bortenschlager, p. 254)

Franz Koritschoner died in June 1941 in Auschwitz.

On the surface, then, as in *Eine Frau*, this novel puts Western capitalism and Eastern Communism in opposition to each other. Deeper down, though, perhaps affected by the death of her friend, Körber here begins to question rigid ideological adherence to certain ways of organizing society and government. As with the other

two authors under discussion here, the Holocaust and the exile experience clearly had an impact on Körber's psyche and surely contributed to a distinct change in authorial outlook and point of view without at all diminishing the literary skill with which these new views and insights were expressed.

In this exile work it is the Russians who are personally devoted to and defined by a political creed, Communism, while no Westerner views him or herself through such a prism. Throughout the novel the Soviets seek to convert the Westerners to Communism and want to learn from them how best to achieve revolution abroad, while the Westerners do not in any way reciprocate. Ultimately, in this novel it is the Communists who are shown to be narrow-minded, jingoistic, and intolerant. Warning against a strict adherence to a political cause, Körber seems to be moving away from a belief in political ideology.

Even its title signals a change. Up until now the names of those of her novels that began with *Ein* referred to female main characters – Lili in *Eine Frau*, Ruth in *Eine Jüdin*, and Agnes in *Eine Österreicherin* – but here the focus is on a male character, Frank Morris. Yet the majority of the novel is told from the perspective of the main female character, Mascha, Morris's interpreter. Like the central characters in Körber's previous works, Mascha is both independent and career-minded. When, for instance, Ludmilla, her mother, tells her that she will not rest easy until her daughter is safely married, Mascha replies, 'Ich brauche gar keinen Mann', sagte Mascha und gähnte ostentativ, 'ich komme auch allein durch'.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, when Frank does not wish to leave her because she has been ill and is alone, she tells him 'Sorge Dich nicht um mich',<sup>52</sup> and sends him on his way.

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<sup>51</sup> Lili Körber, *Ein Amerikaner in Russland*, *Neue Volkszeitung*, New York, 5 December 1942 – 9 October 1943, 13. Fortsetzung, column 7.

<sup>52</sup> Schluss, column 4.

As in *Sato-san*, the title-bearer is more referred to than visible. Frank does not even make an appearance until the third chapter. But, in contrast to *Sato-san*, Frank does play a significant role in the plot. Although the novel unfolds primarily from the perspective of the Russian Mascha, it is, as its title suggests, at bottom about an American man in Russia. This dichotomy creates an underlying tension throughout the novel between surface appearance and deeper reality.

Formally, *Ein Amerikaner* is a political novel built upon a romantic love triangle. The central character, the heroine, Mascha, must choose between Michail Miranow and Frank Morris. Frank, an easy-going American engineer in the Soviet Union as a specialist worker, falls in love with Mascha and considers staying there for her. Michail, a committed Bulgarian Communist who worked with Lenin, pushes Mascha away and is eventually arrested, convicted, and executed for being a counterrevolutionary. Although the life Frank offers Mascha in the West is tempting, ultimately Soviet Communism wins out. Committed to the Party, Mascha cannot accept any other way of life.

Wassiliew, one of Mascha's colleagues at the factory, explains the difference between Communism and capitalism by drawing stark, simple contrasts in the way in which the adherents of each react to situations that cry out for redress:

Da fährt einer im Auto, sagen wir, im Regen fährt er, und auf der Strasse sieht er einen Menschen in zerrissenen Schuhen – was muss er dabei empfinden, wenn er nicht jedes Gefühl für Gerechtigkeit verloren hat? Oder: er lebt in einer schönen Wohnung, voll Sonne, mit Badezimmer und Telephon, und er weiss, andere verkommen in Kellern. Muss ihn nicht Scham ergreifen, wenn er Gewissen hat?<sup>53</sup>

To Wassiliew, to be a Communist one must have a sense of justice, a desire to help the less fortunate, and a feeling of shame when one is more fortunate than others. He

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<sup>53</sup> 28. Fortsetzung, column 5.

also believes that capitalists lack these very qualities. Later, the character Alexi repeats such sentiments when explaining to Mascha why a Soviet could never be happy in the United States, telling her that ‘wir sind hier von dem Gefühl durchdrungen, an dem Bau einer neuen Welt mitzuhelfen’, and asking the rhetorical question, ‘Arbeiten nur um des Verdienstes willen – ist das nicht langweilig?’.<sup>54</sup> Körber clearly still admires the ideals Communism espouses, but no longer its reality.

Körber is, however, equally critical of capitalism. She repeatedly depicts her example of Western capitalism, the United States, negatively. Her two female American characters, Lilian and Eveline, are, for instance, both selfish and arrogant. Neither they nor Eveline’s husband have any political convictions at all other than not wanting to be Communist. Körber struggled to understand Americans when she first arrived, for in her eyes they lacked the political interests and convictions she had been used to in Europe. Even later in exile, she noted: ‘Ich bejahe die Tendenz der Amerikaner, das Leben zu vereinfachen, nicht nachzutragen, Verluste und Niederlagen mit einem “forget it” zu überwinden. Allerdings kann übermäßiger Optimismus auch zu einem Vietnam führen’ (Kahn, p. 66). She consistently reflects this conviction in her portrayal of the Americans in this novel.

But her depictions of her characters, even the Americans, are never entirely free of nuance. The character Mascha, for instance, serves as a foil both to the other Communist characters and to the Westerners, often playing a kind of devil’s advocate role. For example, in her discussions with Wassiliew about the differences between Communism and capitalism, she tries to convince him that he is being too narrow-minded, that there are other points of view and other truths. He responds by saying, ‘Natürlich, es gibt noch eine andere Wahrheit, die der Kapitalisten. Aber das ist eine

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<sup>54</sup> 31. Fortsetzung, column 6.

Ausbeuterwahrheit – Schatten’.<sup>55</sup> For Wassiliew, as well as for the other Communists, the capitalist point of view by definition has no merit. Communists can clearly brook no other opinions but their own.

With Frank, by contrast, Mascha offers only the standard Soviet line. Her contradictory statements seem to be Körber’s way of emphasising the malleability of the ideologically-minded. Körber also portrays the Soviet Union as guilty of precisely those things for which the Soviets find fault with the West. She appears to be arguing that an unthinking and unquestioning adherence to ideology, any ideology, is insidious, for it determines, if not obscures, reality and blinds its adherents to their own hypocrisies and failings.

Although the majority of the Soviet characters scoff at Western democracy – ‘Zum Teufel mit der bürgerlichen Demokratie’<sup>56</sup> – and capitalism, this does not stop them from desiring the comfortable life the Americans have in Russia. Their Communist state has not provided them with all that they want. When celebrating 1 May, Mascha overhears some women discussing Frank’s group of friends: ‘Wie diese Ausländerinnen angezogen sind! Ach Du meine Güte! Die im blauen Kleid hat sogar ein Muster auf den Schuhen!’. In a statement laden with irony, the woman’s friend replies, ‘Wenn wir mit unserem Fünfjahresplan fertig sind, werden wir noch viel schönere Schuhe haben’.<sup>57</sup>

The main American character, Frank, is both the namesake of the novel and its linchpin. He serves as the vehicle by which Körber offers her criticisms of a strict adherence to a political ideology. He is kind and generous, good to all those he comes across: he offers to help Mascha forge a letter to try to get Michail out of the country on one of his first meetings with her; he brings his gramophone to her apartment so

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<sup>55</sup> 28. Fortsetzung, column 7.

<sup>56</sup> 1. Kapitel, column 4.

<sup>57</sup> 15. Fortsetzung, column 5.

that she, her mother, and Katerina can enjoy some music they would otherwise not have the opportunity to listen to; he provides Katerina with expensive wedding presents – two geese – and he even tries to befriend the men working in the factory. Such actions make Frank appear honourable and munificent. By creating a character both likable and admirable, Körber encourages the reader to take his criticisms seriously. When discussing the Pioneer meeting with Mascha, for instance, Frank comments:

‘Wenn ich an die Kinder im Speisewagen denke,’ fuhr er fort. ‘Dieser Kleine war ja sehr drollig. Aber was für Menschen daraus werden.. Erbarmungslose, fanatisierte. Und dieser Hass gegen Andersdenkende! Das führt dann zu solch entsetzlichen Dingen wie diese Prozesse’.<sup>58</sup>

Körber repeats this assertion – that the Communists promote hatred against those who think differently, that they can be pitiless with regard to others, and that they can fall into fantasy – in other places in the novel as well. When Mascha ends her relationship with Frank and tells him to return to America for there is no hope for a future for them, she reminds him of the young Pioneers and asks him if he could live with a son like Iljuscha Weinstein. This causes Frank to ponder exactly what having a committed young Communist as a son would mean:

Er als Vater eines Iljuscha Weinstein! Eines kleinen Weltverbesserers, dem man ein billiges Weltbild eingehämmert hatte und der ihn, Frank, womöglich noch als Bourgeois verachten würde. Er müsste schweigen und es hinnehmen, oder einen Kampf um die Seele seines Kindes aufnehmen, der hier, in diesem Milieu, nur gegen ihn entschieden werden konnte.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 32. Fortsetzung, column 6.

<sup>59</sup> Schluss, column 4.

To Frank, a Communist is a stary-eyed idealist – a ‘Weltverbesserer’ – but one with a limited view of the world and at the same time intolerant of other perspectives. Though an idealist himself, he clearly wants no part of a *kleiner Weltverbesserer*. Frank is not out to change the world. His ideology-free altruism stays on a personal level, which Körber seems to suggest is now the right one.

Frank, on more than one occasion, also criticises Mascha, and through her the Communists, not just for having little understanding of the rest of the world but also for making false assumptions: ‘Ihr lebt hier hinter einer chinesischen Mauer und seht die Welt so, wie sie Euch passt’.<sup>60</sup> Mascha, for example, assumes Eveline is nothing more than a beautiful ornament on Charles’s arm purely because Eveline is well-dressed and elegant. When she expresses shock to learn that Eveline is a respected photographer who has won many awards for her work, Frank responds saying ‘Wie Du Dir das Leben vorstellst!’.<sup>61</sup> Blinded by her own prejudices, she has formed her opinions of the other woman on a purely superficial basis. Similarly, she is surprised when Frank openly admits that his father is a successful businessman. She expects him to be embarrassed to admit that his father is a capitalist and not to be proud of his father’s hard work and success. She asks Frank whether his father’s refrigerator factory often has strikes, assuming that it must, and has difficulty believing him when he says no: ‘Wir bezahlen unsere Arbeiter gut, manche machen 30 bis 40 Dollars pro Woche, haben ihren eigenen Wagen und sind zufrieden’.<sup>62</sup> How can workers in a capitalist country possibly be content? Frank offers a different view of the United States and Americans, which only emphasises how little the Communists know about the rest of the Western world.

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<sup>60</sup> 32. Fortsetzung, column 5.

<sup>61</sup> 32. Fortsetzung, column 7.

<sup>62</sup> 5. Fortsetzung, column 1.

In this novel, too, religion plays a larger role than it had in Körber's pre-exile works. Frank, for instance, uses a debate over religion to point out what Communism does not provide. By denigrating religion, by believing it to be an oppressive force and the opiate of the people, he argues, the Soviets have lost something vitally important:

Aber was wäre die Menschheit ohne den Glauben an etwas Höheres? An einen gerechten, gütigen Gott? Und wie sollte jeder Einzelne von uns den Tod seiner Nächsten ertragen und selbst in Frieden sterben, wenn er nicht an ein Nachher glaubte, an eine unsterbliche Seele? Was kann Marx einer Mutter bedeuten, die ihr Kind verloren hat? Blech ist das alles für sie, der dialektische Materialismus und das übrige. Nur die Religion kann ihr helfen.<sup>63</sup>

Ideology, in his view, is not enough.

The religious belief of one and the lack of it in the other also illustrate the differences not just between the two characters but also between the two competing systems. Frank often compares Mascha to an angel. He does so again in his last glimpse of her: 'Er sah ihrem weissen Engelskittel in der Sonne leuchten'.<sup>64</sup> She, in contrast, leaves him without such a last look. Bidding him to live well, she walks away, refusing to let the tears in her eyes fall as she heads to life on a collective farm. This focus on religion shows a shift in Körber's writing. While previously she addressed the issue of being Jewish in a Nazi country, she did not actually delve into religious belief; she simply highlighted the Nazi persecution of Jews. Now, writing in exile, she begins directly to address faith, though in this case Christianity, not Judaism, and to pit it against atheism. In her later exile writing religion continues to gain prominence, as seen most clearly in her characters' prayers to God.

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<sup>63</sup> 32. Fortsetzung, columns 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Schluss, column 6.

In this work, Körber reaches out to her main audience which is still, in her mind, a German-speaking and literate one. Many of her intended readers had surely fled Europe because they were Jewish and were, like her, politically engaged. Although Körber has now come to believe that being too politically engaged is dangerous, she remains nevertheless equally critical of those who have no political interests whatsoever. While the ideals of Communism obviously appealed to Körber still, in writing this novel she had clearly come to recognise that the reality of Stalin's Soviet Union did not live up to those ideals. In fact, it now seemed all too similar to another noxious form of political belief and societal organization. Soviet Communism divided the world into two hostile camps and demanded complete and unquestioning commitment and devotion to its camp and a similarly dedicated hatred of the other. Indoctrination in this creed began young:

Im politischen Leitfaden ihrer Schulzeit hatte sie [Mascha] gelernt, dass es auf der Welt nur zwei feindliche Lager gäbe, und wer dem einen angehörte konnte das andere nur aus ganzer Seele hassen. Dazwischen standen ein paar unentschiedene Intellektuelle, die aber schliesslich entweder für die Revolution gewonnen wurden oder zum Feinde überliefen. Danach konnten auch die Menschen in den kapitalistischen Ländern nur Genossen sein oder 'Hetzer zum Interventionskrieg gegen die Sowjetunion'.<sup>65</sup>

The Nazis had taken a similar approach and demonstrated how devastating such a blind commitment to a doctrine could be for those who, like the Jews of Germany and Austria, fell into the 'feindliche Lager'. Körber, now in exile, is clearly reacting to this shattering experience in this novel. As before she is using one exotic setting – in this case the Soviet Union seen now in a new light, just as she had previously used Japan – to depict events closer to her home. Never again would political engagement play the same prominent role in her works as it had previously.

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<sup>65</sup> 15. Fortsetzung, column 4.

## *Farewell to Yesterday*

Not much is known about the genesis of *Farewell to Yesterday*. It was written in the 1940s and is thought to have been finished in 1949. Never published, it can now only be found in Körber's literary estate in the exile archive of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt am Main. Its very title suggests that she is trying to break with her past. That it is written in English and intended for an English-speaking market further emphasises this. For all its novelties, however, it remains a novel that contains all the strengths that Körber had displayed in her German-language fiction.

Unlike *Ein Amerikaner*, which looked back to a country she had not visited in years, *Farewell* is a response to Körber's first few years as an emigrant in New York. In it she writes thinly disguised fiction about the first building she and Gravé lived in, about their first landlady, and about the experience of going from being successful and well-established in a career in Europe to struggling through menial jobs simply in order to pay rent in America. The novel's two main characters, Genia, a former concert pianist, and Robert Schicht, a Viennese paediatrician, are recognisable as Lili and Erich. Genia in particular shares a great deal of biography with Körber. For example, New York is Genia's second experience with exile, for she had first been forced to flee Poland because of the Russians. Genia, too, has attended a girls' boarding school in Lausanne. Still, though Körber's experiences and difficulties lie at the heart of her writing here, they do not intrude heavy-handedly into her narrative. Instead, her novel takes a socio-critical look at the exile experience, balancing its strains and struggles with a sense of gratitude for being free from the horrors of Europe, as well as a large measure of guilt at having escaped. Although in a few places Genia is reduced to hopelessness and depression, overall she displays little

self-pity. This was characteristic of the author as well. As she wrote to Ulrich Weinzierl on 14 October 1981, 'Über meine Emigration ist nichts Besonders zu sagen, ich habe keine Schwierigkeiten gehabt'.<sup>66</sup>

English was Körber's fourth language, which she did not begin to study in earnest until she arrived in the United States. An English-language novel was thus an ambitious undertaking and shows how committed Körber was to trying to continue her career and not to fall silent in exile. In some places, to be sure, Körber's English is less than perfect. She confuses some expressions, such as calling a hot water bottle a 'hot bottle',<sup>67</sup> and resorts to occasional Germanicisms, such as writing that 'his dark brown hair stood in disorder' (ibid.). Still, the overall quality of her English is very good.

In this novel, too, Körber makes great use of metaphor, irony, and humour. Her English prose can also be as evocative in its descriptiveness as her German prose was when describing Japan or the Putilow factory floor. When describing Genia touching a piano for the first time since going into exile, Körber writes:

Her fingers ran over the keys like the Polish rebels against the Czar's hordes, and her heart rushed with them to storm with all the oppressed, betrayed people of the Bastille of tyranny; there were in that song enthusiastic shouts from the fighters, and cries of indignation against injustices done by men and by life, which let the hungry starve, chain the freedom loving, humiliate the proud, give pianos to those who do not need them and compel women to wash the socks of other women's husbands. When the song ended – it was not really an end, but a breaking off, Genia crossed her hands on the piano lid, leaned her head on her hands and cried. (*Farewell*, p. 29)

These pathetic and yet almost bathetic echoes of the Europe she has lost – from Virgil's *Aeneid*, with its famous lines 'parcere subiectis et debellare superbos' (VI,

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<sup>66</sup> *Österreicher im Exil: USA 1938-1945. Eine Dokumentation*, I, ed. by Peter Eppel (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1995), p. 362.

<sup>67</sup> Lily Körber (Grave), *Farewell to Yesterday* (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 108.

853) ('spare the downtrodden and subjugate the proud'), to the French Revolution to imperial Russian history – are powerfully strung together here, betraying the strong emotions her loss arouses in her.

Stylistically, this novel mingles elements found in Körber's earlier, German-language works. *Farewell's* straightforward plot follows two years in the life of Genia and Robert, who after fleeing Vienna for France must now try to adjust to exile in New York. As in *Ein Amerikaner*, the narrator is omniscient, and neither addresses the reader directly nor displays any particularly distinct personality. In this novel, too, Körber employs shifting points of view. Although the novel is written in the third person and predominantly from Genia's perspective, it begins and ends from two others. The entire first chapter reflects the point of view of Mrs Sussman, leading the reader initially to believe that she will be the main character. Not until the second chapter does it become clear that it is Genia around whom the novel revolves. We thus first view Genia initially through the prism of Mrs Sussman's critical eyes. But Körber uses humour to warn the reader not to base her perceptions of Genia on Mrs Sussman's by writing, for example, such things as, 'She [Mrs Sussman] had learned by long experience, that the best way to deal with tenants was to pay no attentions [*sic*] to their protests' (*Farewell*, p. 4), and 'forgetting that her own place of birth was not so far from that of her new tenants, she added: "Folks who want to pay as little as possible but make demands as if they were millionaires"' (*Farewell*, p. 9). The humour here serves a dual purpose, for it also alerts the reader to Mrs Sussman's lack of compassion.

The novel ends with a conversation between two other minor characters, Mrs and Mr Armstein, who after congratulating Genia on her successes and Robert's discuss how they always knew that Genia would 'get along' (*Farewell*, p. 249) in

America. By presenting Genia through another character's eyes, Körber once again distorts the predominant perspective. The parallelism of opening and closing the novel with the point of view of minor characters serves as a kind of prologue and epilogue to the main dramatic work. In a musical sense – and this is a novel about a musician – the novel unfolds almost like a movement in a sonata, with an introduction, an exposition, and a coda.

The change in the representation of politics in this novel from those that preceded it is particularly striking. Unlike previous works set in countries other than Austria, in this book of fiction Körber does not examine the politics or political history of the foreign country in which she now finds herself. Politics are not completely absent here, but such political discussions as do occur look mainly towards Europe, such as, for example, when Genia rails against what happened there and describes what led to her flight from it:

People are afraid of losing [...] things and that's the reason why the Nazis managed to become the rulers of Germany. Few Germans cared for racial superiority, but they cared for their job; so they endorsed the Nazi movement; or if they did not endorse it, at least they tolerated it. The majority of men all over the world feel indifferent about injustice which does not concern them personally. They are paying for it now.  
(*Farewell*, p. 48)

Like characters in Körber's earlier works, Genia here speaks out against apathy and the tolerance of evil. But now Körber shies away from encouraging political activism or promoting left-wing ideology. Her writing is anti-fascist, but nothing more. She seems to be moving further and further away from her previous, politicised outlook.

Genia is, however, in some ways still an archetypical Körber female character. Like Körber's other heroines, she is independent, hard-working, and strong-willed. As Robert puts it, 'He knew that Genia would do as she pleased whatever he might

say' (*Farewell*, p. 20). Genia presents a contrast to her husband, adjusting to life in New York far more quickly than he does. She is also the dominant character in their marriage, and it falls to her to carve out a life for them, just as it seems to have done for so many married women in exile. Robert remembers that upon arriving in New York 'I saw my world gone to pieces and everything seemed meaningless to me' (*Farewell*, p. 238). It was Genia who took charge and found them a place to live and work for herself to pay for food and rent, and it was she who gave him a 'a good shaking up' (*ibid*), which encouraged Robert to 'look away from the past, to think of the little contribution I might still be able to make – perhaps as much as in earlier days' (*Farewell*, pp. 238-39).

But, unlike Körber's previous female characters, Genia subordinates herself to her husband. In order to continue his career in paediatric medicine, Robert needs to learn English and to pass a medical exam. Genia takes on the role of bread-winner and accepts menial jobs in order to allow Robert to take classes and study at home. In the evening she even helps him with his studies, for he is slow to learn English and repeatedly fails his exams. Körber details the financial difficulties and psychological strain that comes from this undeserved but inescapable social degradation. Even when their fortunes change and life begins to improve for them, Genia still puts her husband before herself. Although she has a chance to become a piano teacher, and resume a life with music, she does not pursue it because she believes Robert will need her to act as a nurse and secretary once he sets up his medical practice.

The effect of this subordination is the crumbling of what was once a 'good' (*Farewell*, p. 196) marriage. Genia comes to feel 'exploited' (*Farewell*, p. 71) and weighed down both by the strain of their poverty and having to support Robert financially and academically as well as by the strain of having to adopt a traditional

female role as housekeeper while he spends his day in relative luxury and relaxation at home. Genia becomes attracted to the much younger and more light-hearted Lino, who brings 'a touch of brightness' (*Farewell*, p. 156) to her life and energises her. Ultimately, it becomes clear that exhaustion is at the root of Genia's unhappiness. She is too tired to support Robert in the way she feels he needs and too desperate for support for herself:

Of course, a man who is not successful requires more careful attention, more encouragement and approval than one who gets it from the outside world. She had failed to give it to him. She was too tired, too busy with the little things of life, too much in need of being comforted and encouraged herself. And there was nobody who could help her to carry on: her mother and sister were far away, her other relatives probably murdered in Poland; all the friends dear to her heart were scattered over the world. Mrs. Davidson was a good woman, but quite naïve, Olink too young; the nurse, whose tragic problems had led her to forget her own – the nurse, had gone soon after Christmas. (*Farewell*, p. 196)

But Körber ends the novel on a happy and hopeful note. Genia and Robert resurrect their failing marriage as Genia loses her attraction for Lino. Even so, the reality of exile and the strain it puts on marriage is in this book made very clear.

Körber uses other narrative means to highlight the strains of the exile experience as well. Robert's former success in Vienna, for instance, stands in contrast to his constant failures throughout the novel, 'For a man who had helped others all his life but had never asked any favor for himself it was a real martyrdom to dance attendance and take advice from a stranger. He learnt that whoever is in need of money cannot expect to be treated according to his age, his educational background and his experience in life' (*Farewell*, pp. 132-33). These two lines could just as easily describe Körber or Gravé in America.

Throughout the novel music recurs as a motif. Art means more to Genia, as it did to Ruth Gompertz, than anything else. When looking at a piano, Genia thinks that 'Not even her mother's or Robert's features were dearer to her than these white and black keys' (*Farewell*, p. 28). This recalls Ruth's statement that she could live without Arthur but not without the theatre. Körber then writes, 'She stretched out a hand whose knuckles and nails were begrimed with dust and touched a key' (*ibid*). This image is striking, for Genia had lived a life of luxury in Europe, where she was supported by her father and brought up with maids, and is 'not accustomed to do hard work' for she 'studied music' (*Farewell*, p. 17). Yet here she stretches out a begrimed hand to touch the piano keys. The dirt and the cleaning up after others are her present, while the piano represents her past and what she has lost.

Körber further emphasises this disconnect between past and present by contrasting beautiful music to menial tasks. When she works as domestic help for Mrs Berg, for example:

Bach's first prelude would be quite suited to the washing of diapers. The handling of the vacuum cleaner in the living room, and the mopping of the floors in the bathroom and in the kitchen would require something soothing: she hesitated between nocturnes by Chopin and Grieg's piano concerto in A-minor. By the time she had reached the fifth floor and rung the bell she had decided on Grieg. (*Farewell*, p. 21)

By setting classical music in opposition to diaper-washing, vacuum-cleaning, and floor-mopping, Körber pits uncommon beauty against common squalor and well-wrought art against unskilled labour. Eventually, Genia cannot even imagine the music because reality is far too grim for flights of fancy: 'After all it was a profanation to play Bach in one's head washing Mr. Berg's socks' (*Farewell*, p. 23).

At the beginning of the novel Genia keeps a job she despises in order to be near the piano and to play it when no one is there to listen, even though this act invariably reduces her to tears. Körber uses this scene to presage a change in circumstance, for the next time Genia plays a piano it is for an appreciative audience of friends. Now they are the ones reduced to tears by the beauty of her playing, which takes them out of the flat they are sitting in and the remembrances of home in Russia and France. At the very end of the novel, Genia is able to play a piano whenever she wants for Robert and is, at the recommendation of friends, given pupils to whom she can teach piano. Like Körber, Genia has lost her career, but also, like Körber, she is unable to turn her back on it. Whenever the opportunity arises, she returns to her art.

The loss of one's career in exile is a recurrent theme in this novel. Female characters like Genia and Vera Muriaviov, who was a doctor in France, give up their careers in the United States to enable their men try to resume them. Throughout the novel, with Genia's support, her husband works towards his dream of returning to paediatric medicine, and by the end of the novel he is successful. The artist Lino, in a slightly different way, spends the novel trying to break into the American art market while working as a cashier, dish-washer, shoe-shiner, and at a variety of other jobs. He, too, finds success by the end, whereas the best that Genia can achieve is to teach her art to others rather than practice it herself. Körber, then, seems to imply, as Guida-Laforgia puts it:

There is no escape for women artists. Even when they have a profession which is not strictly linked to language or local culture, as that of musician, painter or sculptor, they submit themselves to the atavistic blackmail the sexist society silently imposes upon them. (Guida-Laforgia, pp. 25-26)

Körber explores the psychological strains of struggling to live in exile, or, as she puts it, of being ‘guilty of the greatest crime on earth – poverty’ (*Farewell*, p. 38) in other ways as well. Guilt, for example, is a major theme in this novel: guilt over surviving, guilt over escaping, guilt over adjusting to a new life. Genia is obsessed by the ‘vision of friends in Europe starving or being tortured to death’ (*Farewell*, p. 149).

Guilt over surviving and nostalgia for the life one has lost are common feelings among those who escaped the Holocaust. For Körber, it becomes clear in this novel, the only way truly to overcome these feelings and to adapt to life in exile is to put the past behind one – to forget about one’s history, one’s former culture, and one’s former ties. Of the characters who live happily in America, she writes:

What made adaption much easier for them than for other refugees was that most of them, looking at the ocean, never let their thoughts dwell on the fact that behind this horizon and behind other horizons there was Europe; or if it occurred to them, they turned their backs. There was not about them the atmosphere of exile which the Russian emigrants had not lost in twenty-five years. These German men and women had thrown their pasts away, keeping only the language; and even this was mixed with English words. (*Farewell*, p. 127)

Yet she cannot do this herself. As Robert says, ‘We don’t want to begin a new life. We’ve come to America to die a decent death’ (*Farewell*, p. 135). In so saying, Robert – and through him the author – explicitly connects exile with death, a theme that, as we have seen, recurs in the other works discussed in this thesis as well. In other words, Körber, too, believes that exile for those unable to turn their backs on Europe and throw away their pasts becomes a kind of death.

## Exile Becomes Permanent Emigration

After the war ended Körber and Gravé stayed in New York. Exile turned into permanent emigration, yet Körber never felt at home in her adopted land. In an article published in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in 1949, Körber wrote:

Die Sache ist die: sie brauchen uns heute weniger, denn Europa erholt sich. Und sie sind dort all zusammen, in ihrem Land, in ihrer Wohnung, mit ihren alten schäbigen, aber doch vertrauten Möbeln. Sie haben Wurzeln. Wir sind Strandgut. Keine Amerikaner, aber auch keine Europäer mehr. Nicht Fisch und nicht Fleisch. Vielleicht sind sie es, die uns darin stören, in diesem Lande ganz heimisch zu werden.<sup>68</sup>

This sense of loss of both *Heimat* and *Identität* – now they are no longer Europeans, but not yet Americans either; they are neither, as she writes, fish nor flesh – is apparent in all her writing from the United States. In her second English-language novel in exile, *Call me Nurse*, for example, Körber writes about a character considering returning to Europe: ‘To go back to her native country would not help; she was out of contact with all the friends of her youth and probably too changed by life in the States to be accepted’.<sup>69</sup> Körber felt she had been in New York City too long to return to Europe, yet she did not feel American and could not leave behind her European sensibilities.

Similarly, despite trying to create a new life for herself in America as a nurse, she could not leave behind her need to write. She continued periodically to publish articles in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, though as the years went by she published less and less. Still, she acted as an American correspondent for that newspaper, tackling topics

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<sup>68</sup> Lili Körber, ‘Post aus Europa’, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 31 July 1949, column 3.

<sup>69</sup> Lili Körber, *Call me Nurse* (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 155.

ranging from the dating habits of Americans and Europeans, published on 16 November 1950 in 'Amerikanisches Rendezvous', to more serious topics such as the political debate revolving around medical care. In 'Amerika und die "sozialisierte Medizin"', published 20 October 1949, Körber explains to a European audience the history and current American antagonism, or what she calls 'Blitz und Donner',<sup>70</sup> towards 'socialised medicine', making it clear she believes the main reason for this is greed and capitalism. In 'Post aus Europa', she focuses on communication between Europe and emigrants in America after World War II and the sense of shame felt by those who survived and escaped along with a feeling of rootlessness and a loss of 'Heimat'.

Körber did not give up writing fiction in exile, but neither did she regain the recognition that she had had before going into exile. She continued to write short stories and even published a Christmas story in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* called 'Der echte Rembrandt' on 25 December 1958, but most of her exile writing remained unpublished and can now only be found in her literary estate. Some of these works are written in German and some in English; most are about Körber's nursing experiences. The same characters and stories recur in several of them. 'Solidarität für immer' and 'The Kidney Stone', for instance, share the main character Shapiro and tell the same story of how Körber gets into trouble with the head nurse when making his bed. Some parts in fact seem to be translations of each other. For example in 'The Kidney Stone' she writes:

We appreciated him the more because of the two men on either side of him. On the right side lay dark eyed Angelo who started to moan whenever a nurse passed his bed: 'Oh dio mio, I am dying.' And on the left side we had Janek who gave us more trouble than anyone else

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<sup>70</sup> Lili Körber, 'Amerika und die "sozialisierte Medizin"', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 20 October 1949, column 2.

on the ward. He did not like the cooked vegetables – the diet for his jaundice – and he had his wife bring him doughnuts hidden in her brassiere. When the nurse and the doctor explained to him that fat stuff was poison for him, his yellow face twisted into a smile and he said unbelievably: ‘How can anything that my wife cooks hurt me!’<sup>71</sup>

This reads very like ‘Solidarität für immer’:

Seine Qualitäten wurden noch besonders durch das Benehmen seiner Bettnachbarn unterstrichen. Rechts lag der stöhnender Angelo - d.h. er stöhnte nur, wenn eine Schwester an seinem Bett vorüberging ‘O Dio mio, ich sterbe...’ – und links Janek, ein ganz unmöglicher Bursche. Das gekochte Gemüse, seine Gelbsuchtdiät, schmeckte ihm nicht, und er liess sich heimlich von seiner Frau doughnuts bringen, die er gierig verzehrte, wenn er sich unbeobachtet glaubte. Auf die Vorstellungen der Schwestern und des Arztes, dass fettes Zeug für ihn schädlich sei, grinste er über sein ganzes gelbes Gesicht und sagte: ‘Wie kann mir etwas schaden, das meine Frau gekocht hat!’<sup>72</sup>

The striking difference between the two stories lies not in the language in which they are written, but that in the English version Körber refers to biblical stories, and in the German she does not. In *Farewell to Yesterday*, Körber writes, ‘Mentioning God was the way, she [Genia] thought, to talk to an American’ (*Farewell*, p. 21). Given that God is largely absent from her German writing, but very present in her English writing, one cannot help but wonder whether Körber felt this way as well and therefore included such references to make her work more appealing to an American market, or if it is simply a reflection of the adaptation to her life in the New World and of a groping for something to replace her previous political convictions. In ‘The Kidney Stone’ she writes, ‘As a child, the Good Samaritan had deeply impressed me and aroused in me the desire to follow his example’ (‘Kidney Stone’, p. 3). In her only other full-length English language novel, *Call me Nurse*, there are many biblical

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<sup>71</sup> Lili Körber, ‘The Kidney Stone’ (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Lili Körber, ‘Solidarität für Immer’ (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29), p. 2.

references and many prayers to God. In this, as in other things, her politico-spiritual journey recalls and even to a certain extent replicates those of Canetti and Gmeyner.

*Call me Nurse* is itself simultaneously an autobiographical account of her nursing experiences and a novel about a twenty-one-year-old woman named Lilian Grill. Characters found in her short stories, Isaac Shapiro and Miss Griffon, appear in this novel, as do some of the same scenarios as well. As in 'Solidarität für immer' and 'The Kidney Stone', the narrator gets into trouble because of the way she makes Shapiro's bed. As in 'The Kidney Stone', Miss Griffon tells a coloured nurse, 'I really don't know why people find fault with the Ku-Klux-Clan. When I worked down South a few Ku-Kluxers came to the hospital with gifts for the patients. Very nice and helpful people' (*Call me Nurse*, p. 60). As in 'Ein schweizer Uhrmacher in Harlem', a patient dies while being bathed by the narrator, and the narrator is then accused of stealing her expensive rings. There are, however, some small differences between the stories and the novel. For example, in 'Ein schweizer Uhrmacher in Harlem', the patient is the mother of a Swiss watchmaker, whereas in *Call me Nurse* she is the wife of a Swiss 'Chocolate King'. Overall, though, her short stories and her novel are very much the same.

Hertling believes that Körber wrote *Call me Nurse* in the 1960s after she retired from nursing. Just as *Der Palankin* was both the last and the most upbeat of Canetti's exile works, *Call me Nurse* is the most light-hearted of Körber's works. Written in the first person, the novel begins in the present tense and then moves to the past as the narrator reminisces about young love, how she got into nursing, and her first nursing experiences. It then moves back to the present. These changes in tense and time add to an image of frivolity, lending emphasis to the picture of Lilian as one who has trouble concentrating on the tasks she is given because of her active

imagination. A superior, Stucky Stefanelli, tells her that 'The trouble with you is that you have *too much imagination*. You are full of inspirations, and all your inspirations are *wrong*' (*Call me Nurse*, p. 82).

Her narrator is often lost in tangential thoughts. When listening to a nurse named Miss Belsky, for instance, Lilian, overcome by her kindness, efficiency, and use of language, concludes that it is a 'pity' that this woman is 'wasting herself in an old age home' and that she should instead be an ambassador to a difficult country in need of a first-rate diplomat or have a seat in the United Nations. She then goes on to

picture her getting up to answer a speaker from an iron-curtain country; I picture her in uniform and cap, talking quietly and to the point, without letting herself become emotional by interruptions and objections. If anyone she would be able to smooth out misunderstandings between nations and bring majorities and minorities together. (*Call me Nurse*, p. 26)

But when Lilian hears herself being dismissed, she realises that while thinking about the United Nations she has missed out on her instructions. These slips into fancy highlight both Lilian's distinctive personality and her youth.

Körber also uses Lilian's over-active imagination to humorous and atmospheric effect. For example, when describing what it is like to give refreshments to the inhabitants of a nursing home, the narrator compares the scene to a childhood visit to a farm where she was allowed to feed the chickens:

As soon as we stepped into the yard with the basket full of grain the smart ones came running and after the first handful had been thrown over their feathered heads even the dumb ones understood, jumped down from their perches and stopped gossiping or making themselves busy about nothing, just like housewives. With greedy haste they rushed forward, pushing one another with their wings, but not daring to venture too close to the source of nourishment because previous experience had told them that they risked getting their neck broken. Occasionally a particularly proud bird – generally a cock – pretended not to care and waited until a grain rolled far enough to reach him.

Here, instead of the basket with grain I carry the tray with the milk and chocolate-containers and a bag of wholewheat crackers, but the sensation I produce is the same. (*Call me Nurse*, pp. 13-14)

This is not the metaphor for such a home that normally springs to mind. But anyone who has visited such a home and seen its denizens line up in their wheelchairs as mealtime draws near will appreciate the originality and the aptness of this comparison. This is why she goes on to describe herself in this role by saying, ‘I feel just like the hired girl on the farm, a queen without parliament to restrain her power; the power to grant the grain to her subjects or to walk away with the basket, spreading disappointment and frustration’ (*Call me Nurse*, p. 14).

Lilian Grill shares many of Lili Körber Gravé’s experiences. But she appears younger, more hopeful, more idealistic, and less affected by the cruelties in her life. She is perhaps the girl Körber imagined she might have become had she grown up in the United States. Although her family fled Europe, Lilian is portrayed as an all-American girl brought up in Rochester, New York. She is thus chronologically a generation removed and spiritually a continent away from the author. Lilian, who takes up nursing after a setback in a music career, views the work idealistically and even compares herself to Florence Nightingale:

I take a flash-light and make my round, picturing myself as Florence Nightingale, the first nurse, who organised an infirmary in the Crimea war. Back home I saw a print showing her slim and graceful in her long dress; it was in the middle of the last century when there were no flashlights; she had to walk around with a lantern, not as handy, but somehow more poetic. The soldiers called her “The lady with the lamp.” A beautiful profession, when you get used to it, you can do something for other people and feel yourself important. (*Call me Nurse*, p. 16)

Yet she gives this work up to get married. Although there is a suggestion at the end of the novel that she might come back to nursing later, there is no sense that her

particular career is also her great calling. Unlike Ruth and Genia, who cannot bear to be without their careers, or Agnes or Mascha, who cannot bear to live without their ideals, Lilian dispenses with her chosen profession so quickly that she does not even give notice to her employers. One day she simply stops going to work.

Lilian differs from Körber's other heroines in other ways as well. She is not, for example, politically minded. Like Körber's previous novel in exile, this one lacks a political element and particular historical background or contemporary factual detail. Lilian does not even discuss what is in the newspaper or on the radio. To create such an innocent, apolitical protagonist with so many similarities to the author herself suggests that Körber, too, has now moved completely away from a focus on the political.

Previously, Körber used the details of everyday life to emphasise the political points she wished to make, but now uses them to experiment with the traditional novel form set in a distinctly female realm. Although this novel lacks the complexity of her previous exile works, it nevertheless exhibits some of the characteristics of what one critic has termed 'late style' – a sense of either being out of time and place or else of discovering a new place. As Edward Said put it:

This is the prerogative of late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Edward W. Said, *On Late Style* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 148. Cf, for instance, the conclusion of Edward Rothstein's review of Edward Said's book *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* in *The New York Times* of July 16, 2006: 'Late style, Said suggests, expresses a sense of being out of place and time: it is a rejection of what is being offered. But listen to Beethoven or Strauss or Gould: the music is more like a discovery of place. That place is different from where one started; it may not even be what was once expected or desired. But it is there, in resignation and fulfillment, that late works take their stand, where even exile meets its end'.

Its apparent simplicity suggests not a loss of artistic power but, like Canetti's *Der Palankin*, of a coming-to-terms with one's fate at the end of one's career. For whatever reason – weariness, maturity, a coming-to-terms with exile – she chose at the end of her career as a writer to set politics, guilt, and nostalgia aside and tell a simple, human, American story instead.

## Conclusion

Lili Körber had never wanted to emigrate permanently. In a letter dated 4 February 1941, for example, written while she was making arrangements to get a visa to travel to New York, she wrote, 'Daß wir auf ewige Zeiten in den USA bleiben, glaube ich nicht...' ('Abschied von Europa', p. 122). In a letter written not long after, though, on 10 April 1941, she also acknowledged the possibility that this would be a journey of no return: 'Wir haben so viel zu tun and sind so strapaziert, daß ich für Seele wenig Zeit habe. Auf dem Schiff werde ich dann reichlich Zeit haben, mich über die vielleicht ständige Trennung von allem, was mir lieb ist, zu kränken' (ibid.).

Körber was characteristically clear-sighted and realistic about things. When, for instance, Hertling asked if she regretted her exile in the United States, Körber responded in a letter dated 13 March 1981: 'Es kommt im Leben immer anders als man plant, und zum Schluß sagt man sich: "Es war doch gut, daß ich damals..."' ('Abschied von Europa', p. 126). This lack of bitterness finds its echo in *Farewell* where, despite many hardships, her characters exhibit a sense of gratitude to America for taking them in and keeping them safe. For example:

'I am deeply moved by your kindness,' she [Genia] began. It occurred to her how often she had repeated this sentence since they had come to America. 'We have been helped all the time by almost everybody we

met,' she said. 'Even the baker, a country-man of mine, chooses the biggest rolls for me.' (*Farewell*, p. 243)

Still, Körber never managed to feel completely at home in the United States. She clearly felt that, as she wrote in 'Post aus Europa', she and emigrants like her were 'Keine Amerikaner, aber auch keine Europäer mehr. Nicht Fisch und nicht Fleisch'.<sup>74</sup> In her case, this loss was even more acute. Exile in New York may have saved her from Nazi Europe, but it took away everything that she had done with her life. There were no more continent-spanning lecture tours, no more best-selling editions of her books, and no more great travel adventures. Her career as a writer was essentially over.

To be sure, she continued to write in exile, and even in exile her humour, her sense of irony and drama, and her artful employment of simile and metaphor are all still apparent, but the personal approach that had marked the earlier works written in her home milieu disappears. The narratorial voice that once engaged directly with the reader now steps back and keeps its distance. The strong presence of the author fades.

Although the artistic content for the most part remains just as high, the political convictions that propelled her earlier works also find no place in her writing in exile. Political engagement had failed her, and she came to doubt the certainties of her youth. As Guida-Laforgia tells us in an endnote, John Spalek was very clear about Körber's change in political thought: 'He was sure that Lili Körber by the end of her life was confused about Socialist ideology'.<sup>75</sup> Körber came to look back to her first novel, *Eine Frau*, with horror, or so she claimed in an interview with Kreis in 1980: 'Hier, mein erstes Buch. Wenn ich es lese, zerspringe ich vor Wut, daß ich es geschrieben habe. Eine Hymne auf das rote Rußland! Ich habe damals nicht

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<sup>74</sup> 'Post aus Europa', column 3.

<sup>75</sup> Guida-Laforgia, p. 144, endnote 5.

übersehen, was da wirklich geschieht' (Kreis, 'Lili', p. 7). According to Lemke, Erich Gravé wrote to her in a letter dated 28 March 1989: 'Lili war eine Sozialistin. Sie hat aber nie einer bestimmten Partei angehört. Daher ist es nicht möglich, ihr ein Abzeichen anzuheften. Sie hat für die Wiener Arbeiterzeitung geschrieben, ohne der österreichischen Sozialdemokratischen Partei anzugehören' (Lemke, pp. 70-71).

The feminism that marked her earlier works disappears in exile as well. Although her main protagonists remain women, in the writing she did later in exile her female characters subjugate themselves to their husbands. They set aside their careers in ways that earlier characters like Ruth Gompertz were unwilling to do. In *Eine Frau* Körber spoke against the oppression of women, arguing that though the lack of equality for women in Germany was not as visible as it was in Islamic countries where women wore veils, women were nevertheless still impeded by invisible veils:

Wenn auch der Schleier unsichtbar sei, er bestünde doch. Er ist aus den ungerechten Gesetzen gewoben, die das Leben der Frau drosseln, dem niedrigen Lohn, der noch geringer ist als der des männlichen Arbeiters, dem Eherecht, das die Frau dem Manne unterwirft. (*Eine Frau*, pp. 67-68)

But in exile she was in a way forced by circumstance to don such an invisible veil herself. Although Gravé was obviously a supportive and sensitive husband, or he would not have allowed her to use most of their grant money to buy a typewriter when they first landed in New York, Körber nevertheless went from being a bestselling author with a PhD to a woman who worked in a brassiere factory and then as a nurse in order to support herself and her husband. Exile had necessitated a change of roles, forcing her into a kind of subservient position in her marriage and her life that she had not experienced before.

History is full of tragic ironies, such as when writers, ignored in their own lifetimes, enjoy a posthumous flowering. Hertling believes Körber burned her journals shortly before her death because she had lost hope. Her years in American exile were marked by bouts of depression and feelings of isolation.<sup>76</sup> Hertling records that her journals contained many entries such as 'Leben so sinnlos...sehr depresst...müde...Leben hier ekelhaft...kein Ausweg' ('Abschied von Europa', p. 126). Nevertheless, as Hertling points out: 'Doch trotz des häufigen Gefühls, von ihren Lesern vergessen zu sein, fehlt ihrem künstlerischen Schaffen selbst in den späten Jahren die resignierende Verbitterung' (Hertling, 'Lili Körber', p. 458). Körber's poem 'Amerika, Amerika', which reflects the longing for something lost and never to be regained felt so powerfully by many women writers in exile, perhaps tells us why:

Ich sitze zwischen zwei Stühlen,  
 Der alten und neuen Welt,  
 Dort bin ich mit meinen Gefühlen,  
 Doch hier verdien' ich mein Geld.

Dort schrieb ich glühende Verse  
 Und sang 'Zur Freiheit, zum Licht!'  
 Hier spiel' ich auf der Börse  
 Und höre den Baseballbericht.

Oh neue Welt, die mir mein Ich zerriß,  
 Mein Selbstbewußtsein und mein Selbstvertrauen,  
 Du bist wie ein nicht passendes Gebiß,  
 Doch ohne Dich könnte ich nicht kauen.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Viktoria Hertling, 'Abschied von Europa. Zu Lili Körbers Exil in Paris, Lyon und New York', *Germanic Review*, 62 (1987), 118-129 (p. 126).

<sup>77</sup> Lili Körber, 'Amerika, Amerika' (1949, Deutsches Exilarchiv 1933-1945, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., EB 2005/29).

## Conclusion

Though many of the émigré novels can only be read today as documents on the exile, it is undeniable that they also include the finest works of German literature of the 1930s and 1940s.

– Jean Michel Palmier<sup>1</sup>

Despite the recent increase in scholarship on the subject of the female experience in exile, there is still much to be done. Although exile scholars now have at their disposal an abundance of broad, general overviews of the circumstances and fates of displaced women writers, a dearth of scholarship that considers specific literary works in an individualised fashion still exists. This is especially true of those female writers who have only recently been ‘rediscovered’, such as the three under discussion in this thesis. Correcting this lacuna is important, for, as Elaine Showalter explains:

Scholarship generated by the contemporary feminist movement has increased our sensitivity to the problems of sexual bias or projection in literary history, and has also begun to provide us with the information we need to understand the evolution of a female literary tradition. One of the most significant contributions has been the unearthing and reinterpretation of ‘lost’ works by women writers, and the documentation of their lives and careers.<sup>2</sup>

It is precisely the purpose of this thesis to unearth and reinterpret the ‘lost’ works of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber and thereby to contribute to ‘understanding the evolution of a female literary tradition’. By examining the works, and by documenting the lives and careers of these women, we can gain greater insights into the experiences common to female artists in exile after the Second World

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<sup>1</sup> Palmier, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1977), p. 8.

War and the challenges they faced in leading their lives as women, as wives and mothers, and as writers.

While the course of each individual life is invariably unique, there are nevertheless some universal truths to the experience of life as a writer in exile. As J. M. Ritchie observes:

Exile means loss of the homeland and loss of the language, loss of the roots in the language which any author has from birth, loss of the living stream of the language in which the author lives, loss of the public for the author's work; in fact it is only too easy to see the whole question of language and exile in terms of loss.<sup>3</sup>

The lives of the three subjects of this thesis bear out the truth of this assertion. Though each encountered the loss of language and homeland in different ways, each felt it deeply. Deprived of their roots, of the living stream of their language and culture, and of their publics, each floundered to a greater and lesser degree in exile. None, however, immediately ceased to write or suddenly grew silent in exile; instead, each struggled to overcome her losses and to continue her life as an artist. These three authors not only went on writing in exile to a greater extent than has been realised, they also showed a capacity for self-renewal and change. Their exile writing reflects this capacity in the new styles they adopted, in the new subjects they explored, and in the new techniques they employed.

The basis of this self-renewal and change lay precisely in the sense of displacement, uprootedness, and disorientation common to all exile experience. In the case of these three highly assimilated and highly cultured writers, the severing of the connection to their *Heimat* was felt particularly acutely. Yet, despite the sense of dispossession that their exile engendered, despite a feeling that real life still lay

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<sup>3</sup> *German Exiles*, p. 281.

somewhere near the Ringstrasse in Vienna, they all struggled to overcome the barriers they faced and to continue as artists, and simultaneously as supportive wives and independent women, in their new and culturally strange surroundings. That none met with the kind of success that certain other exile writers did in such surroundings should not detract from their achievements in either the domestic realm or the literary world.

‘Women's writing’, Elaine Showalter argues, ‘is not determined by biology, anatomy, or psychology. It comes from women's relation to the literary market place, from pressures to live public and private lives, from literary influence’.<sup>4</sup> Women, as I have shown in this thesis, in their relation to the marketplace and in the pressures to live both public and private lives, faced particular hardships and challenges in exile that most of their male counterparts did not. But, as Showalter implicitly posits, to focus purely on the gendered experience in exile runs the risk of ignoring or slighting the literary output of women who were first and foremost writers and artists. Such a focus thus also runs the risk of overlooking the significant contributions these three authors made to the twentieth-century literary canon. This is why in this thesis I have not sought to compare the female exile experience to the male or to place it within a particular racial, psychological, or even theoretical context. Instead I have sought to examine the lives and works of three women in exile, each Viennese by inclination and culture and Jewish by background, each at once similar and dissimilar in their biographies and their *oeuvres*, more broadly and holistically. I have premised my approach primarily on the view that their later works are worthy of more study than they have so far received and that such an examination also has things to tell us about the relation of women in exile to the marketplace; about the particular pressures on

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<sup>4</sup> Karen J. Winkler, ‘The Literary Tradition of Women: Q&A with Elaine Showalter’, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 55, Issue 31, 10 April 2009, B12.

women in exile to place their private ahead of their public lives, and about the literary and other influences on their work. These three women were, after all, accomplished, secure, and successful writers in their homeland for good reasons. That, through no fault of their own, they grew obscure in exile should not be allowed to detract from the value of their work.

It is thus particularly unfortunate that their later exile work, unlike their pre-exile or early exile work, has been subject to hardly any critical scrutiny. These works merit more attention than they have so far received, for in exile these three women continued to create art and through this art to teach us about the female experience in exile. They did not, as many scholars have argued, grow silent or lose their voices in exile or never again attempt to write once in exile. While the quality of their exilic work may have been uneven, a criticism that can be levelled at virtually every prolific author's record, the stereotype that it declined overall in exile is simply not true. As I have shown, each of these women continued to write skilfully well into their exile years, but with a different voice, a different focus, and even a different language from that which had made her famous in the pre-war years.

If one were to judge solely by the amount of scholarship in recent years devoted to the three authors discussed in this thesis, one might easily conclude that Veza Canetti has become the best-known and most-reprinted of them. (It perhaps does not hurt that her husband was a Nobel-prize-winning author.) She was also, it seems safe to say, the one who struggled the most with the loss of her familiar surroundings in exile, the one who most visibly pined for the world of yesterday. Where Körber managed, even in the midst of depression and despair, to maintain a certain light-hearted outlook and Gmeyer to wax ever more philosophical and spiritual, Canetti clearly found it more difficult to leave her past life behind.

In exile she could not find the distance from the horrors of the Anschluss that Körber seemingly managed to achieve – and that Gmeyer had experienced only from afar. But this pain, which courses through her late exile work, also animates it and gives it its power and its compelling force. In *Die Schildkröten* she expresses the anguish that the change in political circumstance brought to her and to those like her in Austria along with the pain of being forced – in fact, of having no other choice but – to go into exile, which is further reflected in her later descriptions of her life in England. At the same time, her exile works show a capacity for renewal, for she overcame her initial dislike of English life enough to make lighthearted fun of it in *Der Palankin*, even adapting an English form, the Whitehall farce, for that very purpose. This suggests that toward the end of her life, like the other two authors under examination in this thesis, she at least came to terms with her new place of residence and her life in exile, even if she continued to regret the loss of the life she had been forced to leave behind.

Anna Gmeyer may seem, by contrast, like an outlier in this thesis. After all, she left Vienna before the other two authors and well before the Anschluss; in a reversal of the pattern common to the other two, she stopped writing and then began again late in life; and she published successfully in English in her land of exile. Her late work, too, spurned the exile experience in favour of ancient history and modern spirituality, and it shows not just a change in topic but also her experimentation with different modes and forms. One can also see over the course of her work as a whole a gradual if continual shift from politics to religion. An exile work, *Café du Dôme*, stands at mid-point in this process and as such demarcates the turning point. In her subsequent writing in exile, politics vanish and personal concerns rise to the fore.

Gmeyner is thus, in a sense she had surely not envisioned, a bridge-builder herself, for she forms a bridge between the other two authors under discussion here. Despite her differing biographical and personal path, her evolution as a writer shows distinct similarities to the others'. This suggests that certain commonalities underlie disparate-seeming female and literary exile experiences and provide the reason, the bridge if you will, to link these three authors within a single thesis. As Anja Schmidt-Ott notes:

Gmeyner changed her preferred genre in exile, possibly because most dramatists assumed that in exile the market and effective scope for drama was even smaller than for prose. Gmeyner, however, also radically changed her style; her novels are more lyrical, and follow the established traditions of narrative. They are spiked with expressive fantasy as well as more detailed observation of motives and emotional backgrounds than her earlier, more radical dramas allowed.<sup>5</sup>

Such a change of style and focus on domestic matters also marked Canetti's and Körber's late exile works. Like Gmeyner, each also turned to more established traditions of narrative, though in Canetti's case this turn did not occur until the end.

For Lili Körber, as for the other two authors under discussion here, there may well have been an element of necessity in such a change of theme, style, and approach. Viktoria Hertling explains it this way: 'Das Exil beraubte sie der Möglichkeit, die literarischen Formen zu verwenden, die bisher Grundlage ihrer künstlerischen Produktion gewesen waren'.<sup>6</sup> If she is correct, then exile acted as something like a thief in the night, robbing not just Körber but each of these women of the basis of their art, which lay in the culture they knew best and in which they had felt so embedded until forced into exile. It was the loss of this culture that became the

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<sup>5</sup> Schmidt-Ott, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> 'Abschied von Europa', p. 123.

catalyst, the force, which prompted and probably even compelled the change in their art, just as it did in their lives.

In Körber's case it moved her away from the journalistic novels and the novelistic journalism of her pre-war period and turned her toward more traditional modes of fiction. It was also in exile that Körber wrote what she considered her best piece of work, *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland*. Unlike all the books she published before it which rely heavily on the familiar and the contemporary, *Ein Amerikaner* takes place in a country she had not visited in ten years and in a period of time long after she had left. This, together with the lack of authorial identity, makes it the least personal but most imaginative of her works. It is as if in exile she began to try to put some distance between her past and her present. After this she not only attempted a new style and new genre of writing, but also, like Gmeyner, turned to a new language of expression. Writing in English represented a complete change and break from her past. Her focus and themes now moved decisively away from the political and towards the domestic.

In all three authors one can see that the first works written in exile – *Die Schildkröten*, *Manja*, and *Ein Österreicherin Erlebt den Anschluß* – look backwards at the immediate, life-altering events that sent the authors into permanent exile and sought somehow to explain them through fiction. Their next works, *Café du Dôme*, Canetti's initial exilic stories in *Der Fund*, and *Ein Amerikaner in Rußland*, then form a set of markers that signals that significant changes in perspective have occurred. In these works, as in their future works in exile, all three authors now seek through their art to leave their past lives behind and to come to terms with their present.

The explanation for this very likely lies in an observation that Andrea Hammel makes about Gmeyner, for this could as easily apply to Canetti and Körber as well:

'As National Socialism was closing the usual spaces for politics, it was absolutely necessary to find new ways for political expression. Anna Gmeyner's alternative discourse of motherhood, childhood and everyday life embodies this reconfiguring of the notion of politics under extreme conditions' (*Everyday Life as Alternative Space*, p. 121). Each of these three authors used this 'alternative discourse' as the focus of her writings till the end of her life as a writer. Outwardly the works of all three look very different. Upon closer examination, however, the similarities emerge more clearly, and it is these similarities that give us insight into the larger commonalities of the authorial experience in exile.

All three literary lives, in fact, provide abundant and telling evidence of the ways in which exile interrupted many promising and indeed once successful literary careers in the German-speaking world. From these biographies, then, we can derive some general lessons about the exile experience, for it is in precisely this way that they serve as case studies for the larger exilic experience. As Irmela von der Lühe notes:

Das deutschsprachige Exil der Jahre 1933 bis 1945 gilt Frühwald<sup>7</sup> als eine "kulturell-politische Modell-Epoche", an der sich insbesondere die historische Anthropologie und mit ihr neue Methoden und Paradigmen kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung erproben ließen. Das Exil zwischen 1933 und 1945 als "Kulturepoche" mit Modellcharakter verweise seinerseits zurück auf eine fast zweihundertjährige neuzeitliche Entwicklung, die mit jenem zu Ende gegangen sei, und stelle zugleich Erkenntnisse bereit, die zur "Bewältigung des modernen Exils", das heißt der gegenwärtigen und für die Zukunft zu erwartenden Migrationsströme genutzt werden könnte.<sup>8</sup>

A close examination of their exile works also adds support to von der Lühe's notion that a model epoch in German-language literature ended with the mass

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<sup>7</sup> Professor Wolfgang Frühwald.

<sup>8</sup> 'Und der Mann war oft eine schwere, undankbare Last', p. 45.

movement of many Jewish artists, both male and female, into exile. The loss to the German literary canon must be immense. The works, like the lives, of these authors therefore deserve to be preserved and remembered and studied, for the literature they produced in exile, just as before exile, was nothing if not enriching. In this thesis, I have sought to contribute to the preservation, the remembrance, and the study of the literary legacy of Veza Canetti, Anna Gmeyner, and Lili Körber, for to rediscover their 'lost' works is both to uncover and to encounter works of considerable literary merit.

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