



ILCEA

Revue de l'Institut des langues et cultures
d'Europe, Amérique, Afrique, Asie et Australie

16 | 2012

La culture progressiste à l'époque de la guerre froide

The Research Project 'Cold War Discourses. Political Configurations and their Contexts in Austrian Literature between 1945 and 1966'

*Das Forschungsprojekt ‚Diskurse des Kalten Krieges. Politische Konfigurationen
und deren Kontexte in österreichischer Literatur zwischen 1945 und 1966‘*

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ilcea/1451>

DOI: 10.4000/ilcea.1451

ISSN: 2101-0609

Publisher

UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Printed version

ISBN: 978-2-84310-232-5

ISSN: 1639-6073

Electronic reference

Stefan Maurer and Doris Neumann-Rieser, "The Research Project 'Cold War Discourses. Political Configurations and their Contexts in Austrian Literature between 1945 and 1966'", *ILCEA* [Online], 16 | 2012, Online since 04 July 2012, connection on 22 March 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ilcea/1451> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ilcea.1451>

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Das Forschungsprojekt ‚Diskurse des Kalten Krieges. Politische Konfigurationen und deren Kontexte in österreichischer Literatur zwischen 1945 und 1966‘

Stefan Maurer and Doris Neumann-Rieser

- 1 The Research Project *Cold War Discourses. Political Configurations and their Contexts in Austrian Literature between 1945 and 1966*, initiated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Günther Stocker, who has done extensive research on the subject (Stocker, 2009a; Stocker, 2009b), resides at the German Department at the University of Vienna, and is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) (P 22579-G20).¹ It reaches for the detection and description of forgotten political literary works in Austria, because until now research on Austrian fiction and literature of the post-war-era of the Second Republic has above all focused on an apolitical body of literature (Fritsch, 1963, p. 358). This has been caused by the supposition that, in general, Austrian writers and readers of this period refused to broach the issue of hot as well as of Cold War itself, although this political and historical background was to a great extent appreciable to them. But in fact there exists a variety of political Austrian literature that is widely forgotten nowadays and never had the chance to be canonised.
- 2 The main research interest of the project is directed at a special segment of literary production in post-war Austria: political fiction and literature, that refers to the historical backgrounds as well as rhetorical and narrative elements of discourses concerning the Cold War. Thus a major issue of the project is the systematic ascertainment of rhetorical strategies and discourses that appeared in the literary field of post war Austria. The goal of the project is the identification of topoi, narrative patterns and topics concerning Cold War discourses, as well as the understanding, how

these were used and relocated within the chosen sample of novels, plays, novellas and other genres of fiction.

- 3 It is a fact that the bigger part of Austrian authors avoided political subject-matters for different reasons: some wanted to evade their former own political attitude or relationships either with Nazism or Communism; others refused political movements in general. Many well known texts of this period confined themselves to the depiction of individual feelings and the existential experience of mankind (McVeigh, 1988, p. 134). This is proven by apolitical texts, such as the novel *Die Dämonen* by the most famous writer of this era Heimito von Doderer (1896–1966), which is set in the period between wars (Fritsch, 1963, p. 361). Another important figure of Austrian literature, Alexander Lernet-Holenia (1897–1976) pointed out, that the new-born Austrian republic had simply to continue from the point, where it was disrupted by the dreams of the mad man Hitler.² This effort for continuity was distinguished through “Wiederherstellung”, “Vergangenheit” and reference to Habsburgian monarchy (Scheichl, 1986, p. 39). Recent and contemporary political occurrences were suppressed by means of an intense concentration on an autonomous national identity, established after World War II. The Austrian left established isolation from West Germany in political and cultural matters (Kroll, 2007, p. 270), which was mostly defined through the attempts to conceal the complicity about the start of Second World War, the efforts concerning the state treaty, political independence and also an official “Österreich-Ideologie” (“Austria-ideology”) (for ‘österreichisches Kulturbewusstsein’, cf. Kroll, 2007, p. 329).
- 4 As the exiled Austrian novelist and journalist Hilde Spiel (1911–1990) points out, by the outbreak of the Cold War, those, who spoke of coexistence and dialogue between East and West, were denounced and publicly attacked by the convinced opponents of Communism and were declared as fellow-travellers or crypto-communists (Spiel, 1976, p. 67). Under the circumstances of the emerging Cold War political writing put the author in jeopardy and did pose a risk to him (Tausig, 2005, pp. 90–154; Seeber, 2006, p. 99). The polarization between east and west had proceeded by spring 1946, to the degree that consent between the occupying forces in Austria began to crumble. Since in Austria there had been already established anti-Communist attitudes, especially by the propaganda of the Nazis, and the USA provided massive financial support through the European Recovery Program (ERP), this caused the Austrian government to decisively identify with the West (Bischof, 1995).³ The onset of the Cold War became “one of the most important factors influencing cultural life in Austria” (Mitchell, 1996, p. 70).
- 5 The Austrian audience of the late 1940s and 1950s searched for entertainment and apolitical contents in literature, theatre and movies and the Austrian readership probably wanted to experience something different from their problems of everyday life, such as the reconstruction work, the occupation and paternalism by the Allies, the political differences among Austrians in context of de-nazification, possible communist putsches or the fear of a possible third world war and, total annihilation by the atom bomb.⁴
- 6 Actually the supposition of existing research on Austrian fiction of the Cold war period applies to the historical context, but drawn to the apolitical aspect, researchers often neglected to perceive a multitude of forgotten political literature, that addresses issues of the Cold War directly. The research on the political confrontations and their contexts in the period of early Cold War in Austria is mainly limited to historical science, focusing at best on aspects of the propaganda methods and cultural activities

of the occupying forces (e.g. Karner, 2002; Rathkolb, 1997; Mueller, 2005). But even the work of Austrian Historians on that subject is, to quote the cold war historian Günter Bischof, insufficient in comparison to that of Historians of other countries (Bischof, 2010, p. 271). For literature, the evidence is even worse: Only a few case studies concerning literature exists, mainly about Cold War-institutions, especially about the magazin "FORVM", first published in 1954 by the most famous Austrian Cold Warrior Friedrich Torberg (1908–1979) (Tichy, 1995, pp.183–234; Corbin, 2008). Like "Der Monat" in West Germany or "Preuves" in Paris it was financed by the CIA and was part of the cultural Cold War.

- 7 In the field of Austrian literary studies, the topic of Cold War is definitely a desideratum, because in Post War Austria there were actually working quite a few politically engaged and committed intellectuals, who wrote essays, articles in newspapers and periodicals, but also fiction, that referred to conflicts caused by the Cold War directly, such as the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. Although the conflicts of the Cold War exceeded the borders of the small country, they influenced its social and economical, political and medial history to a high extend.
- 8 Only a few Austrian writers re-migrated after the war from other countries, but some of them, especially those, who were affected by Communist-ideology, were politically active and hoped to influence Austrian political development in view of Austrian-national, democratic and socialistic politics (Kroll, 2007, pp.299–312). Among these belonged for example the poet, translator and journalist Hugo Huppert (1902–1982) and the most important public figure of the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) Ernst Fischer (1899–1972), who had returned from the Soviet Union and was part of the temporary Austrian government of Federal President Karl Renner as Minister of Education in 1945.
- 9 Intellectuals such as Robert Neumann (1897–1975) disapproved Communism, but he also kept his distance from the anti-communist Cold War attitude, which was common among Austrian intellectuals. The best known Cold Warriors were the writer Hans Weigel (1908–1991), who worked for radio stations and newspapers of the US occupation force, and also the former mentioned Friedrich Torberg. Together Torberg and Weigel were responsible for the banishment of Bertolt Brecht's (1898–1956) plays on the Austrian stages until the beginning of the 1960s (Palm, 1984; Tausig, 2005, p. 118). Furthermore there were many artists, who employed the cultural and financial support of the western Allies and therefore joined the interests of one superpower to a certain degree, like Ingeborg Bachmann (1926–1973), the crew of comedians around Helmut Qualtinger (1928–1986), Milo Dor (1923–2005), and Reinhard Federmann (1923–1976). Besides the already mentioned Robert Neumann, Rudolf Geist (1900–1957) and Hermann Schreiber (b.1920) tried to remain distant from the conflict between Capitalism and Communism and kept unrepresented within the canon of Austrian literature.
- 10 In reality it is hardly possible to categorise the artists and even their works definitely. In post-war Austria the distribution networks had been destroyed and had to be reconstructed; often by the aid and patronage of the Allies. Also the interconnection with the international literature market had to be established yet (Lunzer, 1984). In an article Milo Dor spoke of a 'paper curtain', that affected economic, legal, and political matters of bilateral cultural contact between Austria and the GDR, that continued until shortly before the end of the occupation period in 1955 (Mc Veigh, 1996, p. 481).

- 11 An example for this political literature, which will be analysed within the course of the project, is the extensive novel *Das Himmelreich der Lügner* (Federmann, 1959) by Reinhard Federmann. The title alludes to the Soviet Union, which is experienced as a great ideological disappointment by the main protagonist Bruno Schindler. The novel shows thus the hopes of left intellectuals, who often expected a Communist state to be a Heaven on earth, and their frustration, when they conceived, that the ideology is wrong. The novel shows not only the history of this main character, but also those of his different friends and acquaintances. They represent different types of pre- and post-war attitude in Austria. It is essential to know the possible types of conduct in this society to understand the different reactions to and of the participants and events of the early Cold War period.
- 12 Another example is a novel that illustrates political events from a retrospect perspective, *Kurz nach 4* (Becher, 1957) by Ulrich Becher (1910–1990). At this time of the night the protagonist is sleepless, thinking about his past: his childhood in Vienna, his fight in the Spanish Civil War, as well as his imprisonment in the concentration camp of Mauthausen, when he realises a real shadow of the past haunting him. The reflections on his life causes the protagonist to give interpretations of the capitalistic and communistic powers and states, the political parties in Austria, as well as the political and social assumptions and attitudes of Austrian people.
- 13 The novel *Der Kartonismus* (Henz, 1965) by Rudolf Henz (1897–1987) addresses the part that arts and letters played in the cold war in a satirical way, which is eminent, considering the “Congress for Cultural Freedom” and his promotion of abstract art and music: The plot follows a young artist, who gets captured on the Border of the “Vollkommene Volksrepublik” (“Perfect People’s Republic”) and has to invent a new form of art, that’ll prove the supremacy of communism. He comes up with “Kartonismus”, the modelling of figures with cardboards.

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NOTES

1. Further information about the project is available on the homepage: < <http://germanistik.univie.ac.at/kk-diskurse>>.
2. "In der Tat brauchen wir nur dort fortzusetzen, wo uns die Träume eines Irren unterbrochen haben, in der Tat brauchen wir nicht voraus-, sondern nur zurückzublicken." (Lernet-Holenia, 1945)
3. An Example for the perception of the US as the only savior from starvation after the war: The Soviets tried "in den Österreichern eine Aversion gegen den kapitalistischen Westen, insbesondere die Vereinigten Staaten, wachzurufen, ohne deren Hilfe – möge auch in der anfänglichen UNRRA – und später in der Marshall-Plan-Hilfe, nicht ausschließlich Selbstlosigkeit die Gaben zubereitet haben – wir verhungert wären". (Walden, 1963, p. 443)
4. This may become obvious by the fact that the cabaret artists around Helmut Qualtinger were very popular, but their cabaret shows were not politically critical, but mostly entertaining (Klaffenböck, 2004, p. 132).

ABSTRACTS

The paper is about a research project, dealing with political fiction and literature in Austria in the period of the early Cold War, undertaken at present at the Department of German Studies at the University of Vienna by a research group, which is made up of a principal investigator and two Ph.D students. The essay will include information about current and existing research on that subject and highlight the need for further academic engagement, especially in linking the problem with research on Cold War fiction in an international context.

The lecture will also outline the main topics and research questions of the project, as well as the methodological approach. Finally some examples out of the sample of analysed primary literature will be presented.

Der vorliegende Aufsatz beschäftigt sich mit einem Forschungsprojekt über politische Literatur in der Zeit des frühen Kalten Krieges, das derzeit an der Universität Wien von einer Forschungsgruppe, neben dem Projektleiter bestehend aus zwei DoktorandInnen, durchgeführt wird. Er beinhaltet die Darstellung des Forschungsstandes, der eine eingehendere wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit dem Thema nahelegt; vor allem auch in Hinblick auf eine internationale Kontextualisierung der Forschungsfrage.

In diesem Aufsatz wird auch die wichtigsten Themen, Fragestellungen und die methodische Vorgehensweise des Projektes erläutert. Abschließend werden noch einige Beispiele aus dem Ensemble der zu analysierenden Primärliteratur vorgestellt.

INDEX

Schlüsselwörter: Kalter Krieg, Österreich, österreichische Literatur, Kommunismus, Antifaschismus

Keywords: Cold War, Austria, Austrian literature, communism, antifascism

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