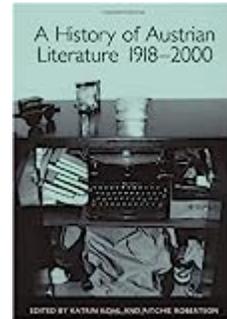




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Reviewed by Ulrike Nichols (Independent Scholar)

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Continuity and Rupture

Continuity and rupture emerge as the two terms that define Austria's twentieth-century literary, cultural, and political tensions, but in the face of these experiences, can one speak of a continuous Austrian literature throughout the twentieth century? The articles in this volume engage in a fruitful dialogue that reveals how difficult it is to reconcile these concepts. They examine various attempts by writers, politicians, and cultural officials either to focus on a rupture or insist on a continuous Austrian history that took a few "difficult" turns. The volume's historical introduction provides the non-specialist with a guide to the key events of Austria's eventful twentieth century: from the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire with the end of the First World War to the political success of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) under Jörg Haider in 1999-2000. Whatever the shape of the narrative that one prioritizes in understanding literature in its relationship to these events, however, Austria changed as its literature changed, and the great strength of this volume is to show how it happened.

The articles can be divided up in two larger periods: 1918-45 and 1945-2000. The ends of the two world

wars mark the beginnings of the First and Second Republics, upon which the literary contributions reflect. The collection's starting point is the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, which was accompanied by a socio-economic crisis as well as sociocultural and psychological disturbances. The later writings of Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Rainer Maria Rilke, Karl Kraus, Karl Schönherr, and Robert Musil reflect this rupture either by thematizing the period before the First World War or by bringing "collective and political concerns strongly to the fore" (p. 50). While the contributors agree that the end of the First World War constituted a great disturbance, the end of the Second World War gains more prominence in the anthology because it took nearly until the turn of the millennium to re-evaluate Austria's role during this period. The authors consider the cultural implications of the upheavals and a pattern emerges that alternates between noting the loss of former literary quality due to the emigration of many writers during the Second World War (Musil, Joseph Roth, Hermann Broch, and Stefan Zweig) and the gains of new literary forms and expressions that emerged with new generations of writers (Thomas Bernhard and Elfriede Jelinek, among others) in

the second half of the twentieth century.

Despite the caesuras created by the wars, however, in many of the essays 1938 emerges as the most important rupture, the effects of which arguably lasted beyond the end of the war. Germany's annexation of Austria sealed tendencies such as antisemitism and the conservative values of the *Ständestaat*, such as the "belief in the Fatherland, in universal Catholicism, in German nationalism and Austrian culture" (p. 97) that had been growing during previous decades. For example, Judith Beniston describes the formation of the Österreichische Kunststelle in 1934, which promoted a "Catholic-patriotic agenda" (p. 44) and supported plays that followed that program. This sort of activity points out the difficulty in isolating continuity from rupture, insofar as via the promotion of a quite traditional manner of thinking, simultaneous but alternative views of country and the culture were systematically eliminated: "Directors, performers and backstage staff were sacked; repertoires were purged of plays by foreign, Jewish or left-leaning writers ... and legislation ordering the 'Aryanization' of the theater-going public came into force in November 1938" (pp. 46-47).

The status of 1938 as a turning point, however, is not always clearly discernable and was often overshadowed by broader Austrian perceptions. The authors largely agree that the German occupation in 1938 was not as unwelcome to many Austrians as they made it seem after 1945. As Dagmar Lorenz points out, "[t]he 1943 Moscow Declaration had validated the concept of Austrian victimhood, which became the basis for postwar historiography and informed the Austrian collective memory" (p. 185). The notion of Austrian victimhood enabled Nazi sympathizers to keep public positions and led to a return to prewar themes in literature such as the Habsburg myth or the theme of *Heimat*. Andrew Barker notes the tendency in the 1930s to "move away from the representation of contemporary reality" (p. 114) as enabled by subgenres such as the *Heimatroman* or history plays or novels. Remarkably, exactly these two genres also provided literary refuge after the war, creating an uncanny continuity from the 1930s to the 1950s. As Austria did not mark a *Stunde Null*, Austrians tried to ignore the deep cultural rupture that had begun in 1938. Those few writers who did address the war and suffering tended to live abroad, such as Ilse Aichinger, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Paul Celan.

In dividing the twentieth century into the periods before and after 1945, articles focus on drama, prose,

and poetry, respectively, usually comparing with corresponding pieces. So Judith Beniston analyzes "Drama in Austria, 1918-1945" while Juliane Vogel addresses "Drama in Austria, 1945-2000." Similarly, Ritchie Robertson and Anthony Bushell attend to prose writings pre- and post-1945. The volume's articles, however, cover far more than literary development. The editors understand the term literature in its widest sense and include articles on publishers and institutions (Murray G. Hall), cabaret and film (Janet Stewart), and popular culture (Joseph McVeigh). Hence, the volume is a truly interdisciplinary and fine example of comprehensive scholarship. The anthology illustrates that the political and cultural cannot be separated. Even poetry, which at first sight seems to be "least determined by political territory" (p. 128), is shaped by its cultural and political context. The organization of the essays into literary genres is compelling because it illustrates how the tension of rupture versus continuity affects all writers and genres. The result is a collection of essays that critically assess the effects of historical repression (continuity rather than confronting the rupture). Yet, precisely this development was crucial for the emergence of Bernhard and Jelinek, who have often been denigrated as "Nestbeschmutzer" for their powerful social critique (p. 236). Encounters with narratives of continuity were also essential for the younger generation of writers (and filmmakers) who began to re-evaluate Austria's victim status, the life of Jews in post-war Austria, racism, and the new multiculturalism in the last decade.

The latter development confronts Austria again with a multitude of cultural backgrounds that the Habsburg Empire had "struggled" with. While the *Ständestaat* linked "old Austrian culture" to German nationalism, recent developments reveal that Austria, like all other western European countries, has now become a new home to immigrant writers. Allyson Fiddler's account of film, music, and prose in this New Austria uncovers concrete social tensions arguably best summarized with the last words of Denis Mikan's novel *Emil*: "in die Fremde heimkehren" (p. 281). Austria is not necessarily a welcoming home, but the reasons for its hostility can at least be expressed and transformed into art. Literature thus continues to serve as a tool for communication and negotiation of social situations. None of the political ruptures could change its importance as a mirror of society, especially since the function of the "special Austrianness" in immigrant literature can be understood as the need or opportunity to provide a critical alternative to dominant Catholic culture.

To return to the question with which we started, how are we to understand the concept of Austrian literature in light of the problems of continuity and rupture? Taken together the essays in this volume support the idea that the collective forgetting of Austria's more complex role during the German occupation supported a myth of continuity, arguably *because* of the deep political rupture. In addition, many exiled Jewish Austrian writers chose not to return to Austria and largely avoided the theme of the Third Reich in their writings. While these facts are not necessarily new, the examples of writers who emigrated, committed suicide, or were killed reveal that for many individuals the *Anschluss* posited an end rather than a mere

disruption. The interpretation of this "event" has been complicated throughout the postwar period; only in recent years has Austria's victim status been re-evaluated.

The value of this volume is to illustrate how literature survived all the ruptures and, despite its participation in the production of an Austrian myth, served as a tool of political reflection and critique, ranging from Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930) to Robert Menasse's "Die Vertreibung aus der HÄ¶lle" (2001). Literature found expressions for the ruptures (most profoundly perhaps in the poetry of Celan) while ensuring the continuity of cultural production.

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