

Olaf Berwald & Gregor Thuswaldner, eds. *Der untote Gott: Religion und Ästhetik in der deutschen und österreichischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2007, 249 pp. ISBN 978-3-412-00806-2, €24.90

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Olaf Berwald and Gregor Thuswaldner have edited an intriguing collection of essays to bring to light the discussion of religion and aesthetics in German and Austrian literature of the Twentieth Century, and also perhaps to encourage more scholarship in this productive area. While public opinion maintains that Europe, and especially the German-speaking world is secularized and “post-Christian”, these essays belie this commonly held belief. The fourteen German-language essays in this volume contain multiple examples showing how religion, the search for identity, and existential questions reside in both popular and lesser-known texts, across genres and across the ages. The title, which may be translated, *The God Who Is Not Dead*, acknowledges Hegel and Nietzsche, but questions the assumption that modern culture has lost its sense of the sacred and no longer serves a transcendental purpose. As Berwald and Thuswaldner assert, God’s hold on cultural memory is stubborn. The literary scholars who authored these essays find manifold representations of religion, faith, and God to be fundamental elements of writing in the Twentieth Century; their exploration of the intersections and contradictions make it clear that God can not be “made” dead through the endless repetition of that cliché. (5)

In the brief introduction, the editors demonstrate that religion, as a topic and as an illustrative tool for literary analysis, is growing in importance in the German-speaking world. Citing the *Spiegel* bestseller lists of recent years, interest in the German Pope, Benedikt XVI, and recent writings of intellectuals such as Terry Eagleton and cultural philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, the volume contends that there is a collective need to come to grips with religion and religious discourse; With that as their charge, the

essayists show how religious themes inhabit the literary imagination. A telling moment in nearly every essay occurs when the author acknowledges that the religious theme or question of the text has seldom been explored, or has been routinely dismissed by scholars. Throughout the Twentieth Century, questions of religion have remained essential to German-language literature, but this has been little reflected in literary criticism. The goal of the book, to reveal the many-faceted aesthetic and religious themes coexistent in the literature of the past century, make it a valuable resource for German Studies.

Although the editors do not discernibly divide the book into sections, it is possible to categorize the essays by period, nation and discussion topic to guide the selective reader. Six of the essays are concerned primarily with pre-1945 texts, while the majority address texts from 1945 through the present; nearly all of the essays use philosophy or literature that predates their chosen texts as a foundation. Eight of the fourteen essays focus primarily on texts or developments of literary importance in Germany; the others spotlight Austrian authors or ideas. As might be expected, the range of themes engaged by the fourteen authors is great, but it is possible to see them in three distinct groups: *Heimat*, the issue of homeland and identity; theology and religion embedded in the text; and existential questions of present, past and future. The collection balances nationality, topics and time to give a broad representation of meaningful discussions ranging from the Torah to the New Testament, and from social and psychological implications of ethics to aesthetics of rituals and identity in the Twentieth Century.

The first chapter by Peter Höyng takes a new look at the lyric poetry of Avraham Ben Yitzhak through the author's very loss of *Heimat* (homeland) as a Jew who was eventually forced into exile in Jerusalem and compelled to rely on God and the roots of Jewish tradition. Williams Collins Donahue explores the overlapping of old and new worlds, focusing on the portrayal of the church and the relevance of religion in modernity in the works of Canetti's *Die Blendung* and Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis*. Maurizio Pirro analyzes Ludwig Derleth's poetry and its rhetorical paradoxes. While Christoph Holzhey looks at religion, sexuality, science and mysticism in Robert Müsil's early texts. Co-editor Olaf Berwald's essay takes up the literary and artistic theories of Carl Einstein. The sixth and seventh essays round out the first half of the book with their focus on Alfred Döblin; Ursula Kocher's essay highlights the central role of religion in Döblin's work, while

Hal Rennert explores the correspondence between Döblin and Wilhelm Hausenstein in the context of their ethical self-understanding and their literary and publishing activities immediately following World War II.

David Smith's close reading of murder in Marlen Haushofer's novel, *Die Wand*, tackles the ethical and theological questions raised by the death at the end of novel and the price of freedom in this new world. The essay by Martin A. Hainz focuses on the theodicean problem beginning with Leibnitz, which becomes more acute in the context of Germany in the Twentieth Century; Hainz extends his discussion across genre using poems, theology, philosophy and particularly the texts of Günter Anders, Christine Lavant and Alexander Kluge. Co-editor Gregor Thuswaldner looks at Thomas Bernhard's texts and discusses how his characters cannot remove themselves from God, even as the text explicitly criticizes Catholicism. The tenth essay searches for contemporary religious drama in Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein* and Werner Fritsch's *Wondreber Totentanz*. The essay's author, Sinead Crowe, finds that Fritsch responds to idealistic or nostalgic impulses rather than taking a living church into consideration, whereas Strauß' play represents an earnest search for moral and spiritual orientation in today's world. (189) The examination of rituals in Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund/Drachenblut* is the work of Andrew Wisely's essay; what society gains and loses in the adoption of the *Jugendweihe* ritual, for example, forms the backdrop for Hein's treatment of a life of loneliness, brokenness and boredom in a secular age.

Although they are not set apart, the final two essays differ from the rest of the volume as they overtly address ongoing public debates regarding the "other" and memory. The first of these two essays uses texts from Gertrud Kolmar and Emine Sevgi Özdamar as the point of departure for the discussion of the nation, reflecting the contemporary images of the loss of *Heimat*; Kamakshi Murti's essay, called, "What is the plural of *Heimat*?" represents an investigation into the search for female identity within Jewish-German and Turkish-German traditions. In the final essay, Abigail E. Gilman examines Vienna at the end of the Twentieth Century, looking at monuments, museums and memoirs specific to the Jewish faith in the city—what remains, how it remains, and how it is celebrated—in art and cultural installations as well as in the literary imagination of bestselling books.

For the German reader, this essay collection represents a wealth of welcome interventions into both well-known and need-to-know texts of the past century; some chapters include detailed textual readings, while others

sweep through various genres to discuss an author's identification with or intellectual connection to religion or religious failure. The volume opens up various lines of inquiry into texts that have the intersection of faith and life as a core component, questions that heretofore have been confined to footnotes, if they were mentioned at all; indeed, the wide range of discussions long deferred makes for a volume rich in complexity, with connections and associations to be drawn even among dissimilar essays.