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Transformations of the Magical Real: Ransmayr and Garcia Marquez

Christoph Ransmayr's *Die letzte Welt* [*The Last World*] (1988) opens with Cotta's arrival in the Black Sea town of Tomi. For seventeen days the Roman has been traveling the stormy seas aboard the *Trivia* to arrive in Tomi during this town's celebration of the end of a two-year winter. He pauses at the rusty bus stop on the shore to take down the schedule, and makes his way around the dilapidated buildings asking for news of Naso. Cotta's mission is to discover if the great writer Publius Ovidius Naso is indeed dead. As Cotta moves through the spaces of Tomi, the reader understands that the town's inhabitants embody the stories of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the town's cliffs and rocks reflect the imperial city of Rome. The citizens of this town live in the midst of a fantastic reality that anachronistically represents both modern Europe and Ancient Rome simultaneously.

As the story continues, the reader encounters a traveling film projectionist called Cyparis, who dreams of trees. At times this man finds his legs turning to roots and his heart developing rings. The rope-maker Lycaon escapes Tomi at night as he clammers around the surrounding cliffs on all fours in the form of a wolf. Then there is poor Battus who turns into a stone statue when he tries to project himself with the episcopo. The characters move in and out of human forms, their changes determined by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This strange setting, in which the limits between real and unreal blur, recalls the stylistic features of the magical realism of mid-twentieth century literature of Latin America.

In his analysis of *Die letzte Welt*, Herwig Gottwald briefly observes its thematic relationship to *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*], noting that time, fantasy, reality, technology and apocalypse stand out in both texts as the protagonists decipher their respective fictional surroundings. As the members of the Buendia family study the parchments left behind by the

mysterious gypsy Melquiades of *Cien años*, Cotta of *Die letzte Welt* gathers pieces of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that are strewn across the cliffs of Tomi. For Gottwald, this self-reflexive aspect of both novels defines them in part as detective fiction (Gottwald 24-25). Indeed, Garcia Marquez's novel resonates so loudly in Ransmayr's work that the parallels between the two narratives are unmistakable. By imitating Garcia Marquez's magical realist style, and reviving several of the Latin American novel's themes, Ransmayr locates his narrative alongside a postcolonial literature foreign to his native Austria. This study explores Ransmayr's embracing of this unusual literary parallel arguing that, through stylistic nuances most readily available in magical realism, the author is able to comment on late twentieth-century political developments in his homeland. In the first section I interpret the term magical realism and its relationship to Garcia Marquez's *Cien años*, then connecting it in the second section to Ransmayr's *Die letzte Welt*. Finally I examine the twentieth-century political and cultural commentary emphasized by the intersections between *Cien años* and *Die letzte Welt*.

I.

The geographical trajectory of the term magical realism documents its movement between Europe and the Americas to finally include novels arising from such different historical contexts as Salmon Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Toni Morrison's *beloved*. As it was first coined by the German art historian Franz Roh in 1925 to represent the post-Expressionist German art of New Objectivity, magical realism has come to signify such a wide array of artistic and literary creation that it has been denounced as unhelpful on more than one occasion. One of the most outspoken critics was Emir Rodriguez Monegal in his opening paper at the 1973 conference dedicated to magical realism, in which he compares the term with a labyrinth that lacks a center. Since then, two dominant opposing viewpoints have developed surrounding the term: magical realism either labels literature as primitivist, or elevates it through the categorization it endows on a cultural activity.

The term magical realism assumes an acknowledgment of the capacity for mimetic literary creation — for realism — at the same time as it recognizes imaginary elements — or magic. Not only are these two terms contradictory, but they also cast judgement on the cultural representation of the textual space: what may be magical from the perspective of one cultural group remains everyday reality for another. *Lo real maravilloso* — Alejo Carpentier's

version of the term as it relates to Latin American literature — especially highlights the judgmental qualities of this style. In Carpentier's influential prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, the Cuban author's claim that elements of the marvelous are inherent to Latin American space reveals this author's outside perspective on Latin American culture. By tracing the marvelous in Latin American literature back to the first European depictions of the New World, Carpentier situates this continent's literary production from the European perspective of awe, complicating the identity of the Latin American author as he or she attempts to create new literature that reflects his or her past.

With the use of magical real styles by mainstream authors and the canonization of traditionally marginalized magical real narratives, scholars have developed new ways of referring to fiction that combines history and fantasy.¹ Due to the complications surrounding the term it is important to emphasize that Ransmayr's novel specifically reflects the particular style and thematics of *Cien años de soledad* and not all "magical real" novels. Parallels with *Cien años* abound in *Die letzte Welt* like Garcia Marquez's town Macondo, Ransmayr's Black Sea setting is portrayed as chaotic, overrun by nature, governed by strange laws that include character metamorphosis, anachronism, and finally apocalyptic destruction. Many of these elements are anticipated in the final scene of *Cien años*, in which the last member of the Buendía family, who has been born with a tail, is devoured by ants:

Herido por las lanzas mortales de las nostalgias propias y ajenas, [Aureliano Buendia] admiró la impavidez de la telarana en los resales muertos, la perseverancia de la cizaña, la paciencia del aire en el radiante amanecer de febrero. Y entonces vio al niño. Era un pellejo hinchado y reseco, que todas las hormigas del mundo iban arrastrando trabajosamente hacia sus madrigueras por el sendero de piedras del jardín. Aureliano no pudo moverse. No porque lo hubiera paralizado el estupor, sino porque en aquel instante prodigioso se le revelaron las claves definitivas de Melquiades, y vio el epígrafe de los pergaminos perfectamente ordenado en el tiempo y el espacio de los hombres: *El primero de la estirpe está amarrado en un árbol y al último se lo están comiendo las hormigas*. (Garcia Marquez 324)

1 Jeanne Delbaere-Garant suggests alternative terms for magical realism: "psychic realism," "mythic realism" and the "grotesque." Other proposals have been "mythic realism," "miraculous realism" and "shamanic realism" (Linguanti 3).

[Wounded by the fatal lances of his own nostalgia and that of others, he [Aureliano Buendia] admired the persistence of the spiderwebs on the dead rose bushes, the perseverance of the rye grass, the patience of the air in the radiant February dawn. And then he saw the child. It was a dry and bloated bag of skin that all the ants in the world were dragging toward the holes along the stone path in the garden. Aureliano could not move. Not because he was paralyzed by the horror but because at that prodigious instant Melquiades' final keys were revealed to him and he saw the epigraph of the parchments perfectly placed in the order of man's time and space: *The first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants.* (Rabassa 419-20)]

The merging of man and animal, the deciphered text that reveals reality, and the solitude of the last Aureliano in this pre-apocalyptic moment all serve as precursors to *Die letzte Welt* in which metamorphosis and natural infiltration spell the limits of human existence. The natural phenomena that destroy both Macondo and Tomi — the storm and the avalanches — also eliminate what these two towns represent: Macondo, a symbol of Latin America, founded with the hopes of constructing an ideal society; and Tomi, representative of political resistance towards the authoritarian government. Written texts define both realities, as characters seek to understand their surroundings through remnants of written words. Indeed the interpretation of language becomes an obsession for both Aureliano in the passage quoted above and Cotta: these characters believe that the answer to the essence of human existence lies in the texts that they analyze. However, the project overwhelms them, as the prescription in the parchments comes true and Macondo is obliterated, and Cotta cannot piece together the remnants of Naso's work to prove that the author is still alive.

Again and again, elements in Ransmayr's plot remind the reader of *Gen anos*. As Echo sheds her scales to reveal her feminine beauty; as Pythagorus pushes away the myriad snails that envelope the menhirs engraved with Ovid's words; as avalanches repeatedly roll through Tomi's landscape and Cotta loses his sanity in his desperate attempt to unravel the Ovidian text; as Procne and Philomela fly away transformed into birds, the text echoes the magical reality of Macondo and the unfortunate Buendia family. The anachronistic intertwining of eras reveals nuanced stylistic techniques in both novels that question the truth of historical accounts.

Gen años connects dreamlike episodes with elements of Latin American history, creating myths out of historical events, a strategy comparable to that of *Die letzte Welt* in which the myths recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* become

"real" inside of the fictional narrative. *Cien años* describes the death of Remedios the Beauty who flies away with a family bedsheet; a trickle of blood that flows from Rebeca's bedroom to the family home several blocks away announces the death of Arcadio Buendia; each of Coronel Aureliano's seventeen illegitimate children cannot remove the ash in the form of a cross on their foreheads. These imaginative incidents occur inside a narrative that also recounts history: from prehistoric, Biblical times to colonial encounters, the Wars of Independence and United States imperialism. The "hundred years" of the novel becomes mythical time, as Garcia Marquez's tale participates in *Boom* literature's project of myth production by incorporating more recent historical events to demonstrate their cultural impact on the inhabitants of Latin America.

Historical documents as real accounts are questioned from the first pages of *Cien años* in which Garcia Marquez moves from a reworking of Biblical stories—for example, the Edenic founding of Macondo—to then borrow diary entries from the European conquerors. A playful example of this mixture of myth and history is the allusion to Christopher Columbus's observation that the "gente con cola" [people with tails] live on the next island over (Columbus 13). Columbus's tails appear in the ancestral line of Buendia family who are cursed with the deformity of a piglike tail, a creation that is thought to develop from familial inbreeding, linking Columbus's fantasy with an apocalyptic end for Latin America.

II.

While Garcia Marquez manipulates source texts such as the Bible and the chronicles, Ransmayr embeds Ovid's *Metamorphoses* inside the historical account of this author's exile and skillful allusions to twentieth-century Europe. There is a special temporal exploration that occurs in both works, one that alludes to both fictional and historical pasts, simultaneously entwining these texts in contemporary reality. The pig-tail in Macondo refers to a historical account that then leads to the woes of the Buendia family, who are finally extinguished after the birth of the last tailed Buendia member. In *Die letzte Welt*, Ovidian metamorphoses lead to the author's exile because of the Roman perception of these mythical accounts as historical truths and, as such, subversive to the governmental authority.

The work most associated with Ovid is arguably his *Metamorphoses*, and as *Die letzte Welt* sets out to blur the limit between real and imaginary, the

choice of Ovid as a main character is especially appropriate. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* revises myths, Ransmayr reinterprets historical events in order to comment on twentieth-century Europe. In addition, aspects of the character Ovid — Naso in *Die letzte Welt*— correlate with authors in the late twentieth century who spurred conflict with the post-War Austrian state. In his fictionalization of Ovid's exile, Ransmayr emphasizes political parallels with the twentieth century, highlighting contemporaneous analogies through the use of anachronism.

Naso's interpretation of Rome leads to his exile, but his knowledge of unsavory aspects of high Roman society is revived in his exile home of Tomi. In Tomi's carnival festivities, costumed inhabitants personifying Roman gods and political leaders — or the "Wahnbilder einer untergehenden Welt" [insane images of a sinking world] — reflect the Rome of its mythology before the emperor introduced "Vernunft" [reason] (93). The carnival, with its celebration of Naso's anti-Roman stories and dramas of "archaische, unbandige Leidenschaften" [archaic, boundless passions] (93), depicts Rome before the authoritarian state, living a reality now relegated to the level of the mythic imaginary. A mockery of Rome (and contemporary Europe) is evoked here, along with an irreverence on the part of the inhabitants that is lacking in Garcia Marquez's Macondo.

Historical Roman figures and gods, which are represented in stone reliefs and statues, come alive in Tomi during the carnival parade. Here, in the transformative world of Tomi, stones and statues change into human figures in a revival of a past, which Rome would rather leave as statues and forget. Tereus imitates the god, Phoebus, and Battus even wears a fake nose in imitation of Naso (95). Although within the confines of Rome, urban planners have attempted to hide and forget the past in representational monuments, Rome's past is revealed in Tomi's carnival, as well as in Naso's elegies, stories and dramas.

The Roman past is an obviously stylized reality that combines imaginary elements with Enlightened European concepts such as "Vernunft." Ransmayr treats myth with reverence in his representation of the power of literature to resist insecure authoritarian government. While Garcia Marquez explores the production of a Latin American cultural identity in the evocation of mythical elements, Ransmayr questions a cultural heritage that denies its citizens a voice, drawing critical connections between Ancient Rome and modern Europe.

Much of the landscape surrounding Tomi recalls Roman as well as twentieth-century European architectural structures. The multiple representations inherent in the cliffs of Tomi reflect the compound realities evoked in *Die letzte Welt*. As twentieth-century and ancient cities converge, Ransmayr comments on the unchanging quality of human existence. The most striking image of the intricacies of the Black Sea setting is the cliff that evokes a Roman opera house. Cotta describes this stone structure as he sits with Echo at a bay just underneath this architectural wonder:

Das Seltsame an dieser Felswand war aber nicht ihre beängstigende Größe, es waren die quer über ihre gesamte Ausdehnung verlaufenden Vorsprünge, Gesimse, Balkone und Balustraden aus Urgestein, die den Rängen eines von hangenden Sträuchern und Grasbüscheln überwucherten Zuschauerraumes glichen. Als Cotta zum erstenmal in den Schatten dieser Felswand getreten war, hatte er sich plötzlich in die von Pliisch und Ebenholz verdunkelte Weite jener monumentalen Oper zurückversetzt gefühlt, die der Imperator aus parischem Marmor hatte errichten lassen, um sie dem Volk von Rom zur Feier des Jahrestages irgendeiner Schlacht zu übergeben. (159-60)

[The eerie thing about this cliff, however, was not its alarming size; it was the jutting cornices, balconies, and balustrades of ancient rock that covered its entire expanse, turning it into an auditorium, its tiers overgrown with hanging shrubs and clumps of grass. The first time Cotta stepped into the shadow of this cliff he suddenly felt himself transported back to the monumental opera house—a darkened world of plush velvet and ebony and parmaizo marble—that the emperor had built as a gift to the people of Rome for the gala anniversary of some battle or other. (Woods 119)]

Cotta's experience of the cliff conflates the Black Sea environment with Rome and then again with contemporary European cities. In fact, for Cotta the structure appears man-made, even Roman-made, as a symbol of the glory of Rome. Here the cliff is overgrown with plants reflecting a dilapidation of the opera house in Cotta's mind. Built by the emperor, this opera house represents an artistic triumph of the city of Rome — and again an anachronistic reference to twentieth-century European opera houses —, now covered in shrubs and grasses and overlooking the natural wonder of the Black Sea. In this architectural analogy, Ransmayr unifies the manmade with the natural, a structure of an authoritarian emperor with a creation of nature. The analogy is further extended through the use of the opera house rather than a Roman architectural structure. Modern European sophistication

is associated with Ancient Roman barbarism: the European opera house, symbol of a refined urban art form, is equated with a Roman theater built to commemorate a battle. Through the image of the cliff, Ransmayr ushers up questions of civilization and barbarity and the significance of art in contemporary and ancient authoritarian regimes.

The landscape around Tomi recalls manmade architectural designs in other instances as well. Lycaon's evening escapades over the cliffs as a wolf take him on a labyrinthine trip "über Treppen, durch Korridore und Speicher" [over steps, through corridors and lofts] (173). Later, Cotta again visits the cliff at the "Bucht der Balustraden" [bay of the balustrades] and climbs through its "Erker" [bay windows] and balconies (176). Cotta notices that the "Glimmer-schiefer" [glimmering slate] looks like a cracked roof (84). Roofs of the city and natural roofs in the environment around the Black Sea are repeatedly paralleled. Roman immigrants to Tomi hope to escape Augustus and the "Marmor" [marble] of their past by sleeping under the sky or in ruins or caves (125).

The stone that creates the grandiose architecture of Rome, the rocks that form the cliff of balustrades and balconies at the bay near Tomi, the monoliths that surround Naso's residence in Trachila, the pebbles that Deucalion and Pyrrha throw into the water and the stone statue that Battus becomes — all of them relate to the concepts of time and immortality of the work of the architect, of nature, of the author and of humanity. Cotta realizes his organic relationship with the stones of Tomi and feels he is petrifying like the cliffs (189). Other characters move in and out of the state of motionless statues and animate, breathing humans. Echo turns to stone briefly while she recounts the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha; Battus becomes petrified permanently after playing with the episcopo. Finally, Cotta dreams of architectural structures created out of people who have been turned to stone (221).

Rome's grandiose image of itself created by the government in its architectural structures becomes destabilized when these structures are connected to the volatile reality of Tomi and the humanity that resides within it. When cliffs that imitate Roman opera houses combine with dreams of architecture built up out of human bodies, the significance of the representation of the urban architecture is transformed. Roman architecture becomes a piece of a whole picture, rather than the dominant authoritarian symbol it strives to represent. Tomi takes the greatness of Rome apart, stone by stone. Humans as stone, writing on stone, nature on stone all deconstruct the meaning of the urban architecture. No wonder that at the end of the book

the stones come falling down in avalanches. Stone structures can no longer stay as one because the Rome that holds them together has been toppled by the creation of the author. Rome in its representation and Rome as an urban space have both fallen apart.

III.

The disintegration of Rome is reflected in the cruel interpersonal relationships represented in *Die letzte Welt*, as human interaction degenerates into savagery. Ransmayr chooses a German Nazi soldier, who has escaped to this Ancient Roman town of Tomi on the Black Sea, to repeat the phrase "Der Mensch ist dem Menschen ein Wolf [man is a wolf to man] (266). This character, Thies der Deutsche [Thies, the German], comes to Tomi horrified by his own role in the War, and this memory of human suffering in the Nazi concentration camps forms his attitude towards the human. Through Thies' comment on human savagery, Ransmayr weaves the atrocities of Nazi death camps into the tapestry of the narrative. A participant's memory resurrects a mass slaughter like the ruthless killings in the massacre by the banana company — Garcia Marquez's fictionalized version of the United Fruit Company² — in *Cien años*. The myth-construction that Garcia Marquez underlines with this incident finds a parallel in Ransmayr's latent depiction of twentieth-century Austria.

Garcia Marquez recounts the massacre of thousands of workers by the banana company and its subsequent denial by both the authorities and the residents of Macondo, portraying a workers' rights movement that surrenders after being brutally suppressed by the company. The inability to organize successfully follows the characters' lack of communication skills. The word "solitude" appears not only in the tide, but also on almost every page of *Cien años* reminding the reader that the Macondo experiment fails because of a lack of solidarity among its inhabitants. Even in the final pages of the novel, when Aureliano sees his baby nephew being devoured by ants, he feels nothing for the child. Instead he is paralyzed "porque en aquel instante prodigioso se le revelaron las claves definitivas de Melquíades, y vio el epígrafe de los pergaminos perfectamente ordenado en el tiempo y el espacio de los hombres" (Garcia Marquez 324) ("because at that prodigious instant

2 The description of the banana massacre in *Cien años* reflects similar events with the United Fruit Company in Colombia in 1928. See Catherine LeGrand for a historical interpretation of United Fruit in Colombia.

Melquiades' final keys were revealed to him and he saw the epigraph of the parchments perfectly placed in the order of man's time and space," Rabassa 420). Each of the members of the Buendia family is in some way unable to relate with others — from the first Jose Arcadio's Latin gibberish to Ursula Buendia's private blindness; each member maintains his or her own personal solitude.

The deficient relationships between characters in *Cien años* evolves into a stern critique of Latin America: a society that cannot progress. The stunted artistic expression — from Amaranta who constantly weaves and unweaves her shroud, to the Aurelianos of the family who make litde gold fish, melt them down and then re-sculpt them — reflects a stagnation, a constant return to the present and an inability to enter modernity. The character who witnesses the banana company massacre, Jose Arcadio Segundo, has been confined in a basement room for most of his life, therefore raising doubts as to his ability to understand reality outside of the house, and to his sanity when he voluntarily returns to his confines to recommence his attempts to decipher the gypsy's mysterious pergaments. Jose Arcadio does not know how to relate to others, nevermind argue convincingly against the banana company's actions. He can merely join the Macondo residents and "forget" the incident.

Of course, such apparent "forgetting," which logically could not possibly have occurred, has actually happened all too frequently, forcing citizens into silence all over the world. The denial of mass killings resonates dramatically with events in Austria of the 1980s regarding the Holocaust, and it is through this chilling parallel that Ransmayr's use of magical realism moves far beyond the generic definitions discussed by Gottwald. While events in *Cien años* provide a critique of contemporary Latin America, Ransmayr uses Ovidian metamorphoses to condemn Austrian antisemitic sympathies.

What truly concerns Ransmayr is the Austrian response to the Holocaust, especially this country's reaction to World War II during the final decades of the twentieth century. The political veneer of late twentieth-century Vienna, that strove to conceal and forget the Nazi past, informs the depiction of Rome in *Die letzte Welt*. Austria's reaction to its Nazi past differed from Germany's: whereas in Germany guilt was acknowledged, post-War Austria always denied its role in Nazi antisemitism, portraying itself rather as Hitler's first victim. Antisemitic discourse was restricted to private conversations; the topic of the Austrian past was subject to censure. Post-War Austria developed an official political environment of compromise on the national parliamentary level which quieted radical voices, until 1966/67 in which the Austrian People's

Party (ÖVP) gained an absolute majority and the political balance shifted in favour of the conservatives. With this change, a wave of active criticism was sparked among the Austrian intelligentsia and reinforced by the publication of the anthology *Aufforderung zum Mißtrauen* (1967) by Gerhard Fritsch and Otto Breicha (Landa 13). This era also saw the marked increase in the production of "Schocktheater" ["theater of shock"] on the Viennese stage and television — a theater that sought to provoke the audience through its theme and content by playwrights such as Peter Turrini, Helmut Qualtinger, Wolfgang Bauer, Harald Sommer, Peter Slavik, and Felix Mitterer.

Qualtinger's *Der Herr Karl*, aired on television on November 15, 1961, represents the "typical" Austrian as a pro-Nazi opportunist, creating a heated discussion among the Austrian public. Qualtinger was accused of "Nestbeschmutzung" ["dirtying the nest"], a label that he did not carry alone. Among others, Peter Turrini, Elfriede Jelinek and Gerhard Roth were also blamed for their negative depictions of Austria and its society. Indeed Turrini's first two plays — *Rozznjogd* (1971), which incorporates the audience in a garbage heap, and *Sauschblachten* (1972), which compares people with pigs and has a boy sacrificed as one — both created scandals. Turrini's *Die Bürger* (1982) even inspired a parliamentary debate.

The year of *Die letzte Welts* publication, 1988, fifty years after Austria's occupation by the Third Reich, was marked by several events including the staging of the play *Heldenplatz* written by the leading Viennese author Thomas Bernhard.³ In the 1980s, Austria contended with an antisemitism that came into discussion during the "Waldheim Affair" in 1986 — the discovery of Kurt Waldheim's Nazi past as he campaigned for the Austrian presidency —, and was reflected in the late nineties by the rise of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party.⁴ The debate and outrage inspired by the production of Bernhard's play becomes a culmination of the previous scandals sparked by the "Schocktheater" of the 1960s and 70s. In particular, one speech of Bernhard's play, published in the news magazine *Profil* before opening night, incited fierce debate among the Viennese:

3 The scandal created by Bernhard's novel *Holzfüllen* [*The Woodcutters*] (1984) caused outrage among the Viennese not unlike the problems encountered by Ransmayr's *Naso* in Rome.

4 See Reisingl and Wodak for an in-depth analysis of antisemitic sentiment in post-War Austria.

Die Zustände sind ja wirklich so
 wie sie achtunddreißig gewesen sind
 es gibt jetzt mehr Nazis in Wien
 als achtunddreißig
 jetzt kommen sie wieder
 aus alien Löcher heraus
 die über vierzig Jahre zugestopft gewesen sind
 du brauchst dich ja nur mit irgendeinem zu unterhalten
 schon nach kurzer Zeit stellt sich heraus
 es ist ein Nazi [...]

[The situation is now really
 like it was in thirty-eight
 there are now more Nazis in Vienna
 than in thirty-eight
 now they are coming again
 out of all the holes
 that were stopped up forty years ago
 you only have to converse with one of them
 in just a short time you will find out
 he is a Nazi [...]]

Politicians and journalists reacted defensively to Bernhard's play, one columnist from the *Neuen Kronenzeitung* drafting as many as six scathing columns before opening night. As the curtain closed on the opening night of Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* the divided audience applauded and booed simultaneously for forty-three minutes (Wodak 114-19).

Austria's official silence concerning responsibilities for the War is a situation reflected in Ransmayr's novel. Bernhard, with his play, made connections that many Austrians were not prepared to accept. The playwright conflated the Burgtheater commemoration⁵ — a symbol of Vienna's nineteenth-century modernization project that included a new respect for the common man — with Hitler's speech during the *Anschluss*, along with the

accusation of antisemitic sentiment among the Viennese. Links between positive and negative aspects of the past are connections to which neither the Viennese government of the 1980s nor the Roman Augustan government of the novel will concede.

While Vienna bears the history of antisemitic sympathies, for Ransmayr's Rome the past to be forgotten is one of transformation and metamorphoses. Indeed, Ransmayr's fictional version of Ovid inspires much the same fierce outrage and support for his reading in the Roman theater as Peter Turrini, Helmut Qualtinger, Thomas Bernhard and others for their outspoken plays. When Naso reads from part of his *Metamorphoses* in a downtown Roman cabaret — an allusion to the *Wiener cabaret* of the post-War era—, the Roman city officials recognize the audience's laughter and applause as directed at them, as Naso has hidden their names in palindromes and spoonerisms (Ransmayr 56). In reaction to this insult, one senator forces an end to the performances, calling on the authorities to prevent the prospective audience from entering the theater. Rome wonders about Naso's poetry — "Was war das für eine Dichtung, die eine solche Gewalt zu provozieren vermochte?" [What kind of writing was that, that was capable of provoking such violence?] (57) — as his writing evokes both a violent response from the government and a curiosity in the audience. The Roman government has Naso's books burned and his house ransacked in order to destroy all remnants of the author's work (139); the author's family and friends are denied a passport to visit Naso in Tomi (131). Along with this intense reaction on the part of the government, Naso gains fame in Roman society. Even the lower classes learn his name (58). Through the scandals and his subsequent exile, Naso finally becomes "Roms Dichter" [Rome's poet] (235).

The similarities between this episode and the "Schocktheater" scandals leave no doubt as to the reason for the anachronisms presented in the narrative: Ransmayr shows the constancy of human cruelty as he also highlights contemporary atrocities. As the Frieslander Thies declares that "Der Mensch ist dem Menschen ein Wolf," he also alludes to Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* in which the psychoanalyst reflects on human savagery. The individual values one's neighbor only to the extent that he or she can be exploited. Freud observes that man is a "savage beast to whom consideration towards his own kind is something alien" (65). Indeed, the novel emphasizes the negative unifying characteristics of all humanity. Thies' participation in the concentration camps has shaped his condemnation of the human race as wolf-like. Since the inhabitants of Tomi think Thies may have brought the

5 Opening night of *Heldenplatz* was scheduled for November 4, 1988 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Viennese Burgtheater, a connection noted by Gottwald especially in relation to the "Heldenplatz-Skandal" (14). However, the title and content also allude to the Nazi occupation of Austria fifty years previously. *Heldenplatz* also the name of the square where Hider first spoke to the enthusiastic Austrian masses, spotlights the existence of Nazi sympathizers in contemporary Austria.

expression with him from Rome, man as wolf comes to define the twentieth-century European as well as the Ancient Roman and the resident of Tomi. The muting of both Naso and Thomas Bernhard, as both fictional and real authors expose the atrocities of their governments, illuminates a savagery inherent even in what is considered civilized society.

Through the magical real, Ransmayr's wolf-like man in *Die letzte Welt* seems to respond to the human isolation exemplified in the personal solitudes of the Buendia family in *Cien años*. Both novels emphasize the destructive power of humanity and the constant drive for individual advancement despite the damage this can cause. Modernity does not take hold in Latin America because of the inability of its inhabitants to create relationships with each other; the muting of authors who criticize contemporary Austria will only lead to repeated destruction and the further unravelling of civilization. Magical realism underscores these ironies by portraying verisimilitudes as fiction: the fantasy suddenly becomes all too real as the reader encounters an entire society that forgets a brutal massacre, or a town that turns to stone in its encounter with modernity. With further modernization, humanity will confront a hardening of the soul if savage instincts are not countered. This petrification and solitude can only lead to an apocalyptic end.

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