

## STAGING JÖRG HAIDER: PROTEST AND RESIGNATION IN ELFRIEDE JELINEK'S *DAS LEBEWOHL* AND OTHER RECENT TEXTS FOR THE THEATRE

In memory of Francesca Gibson and Christine Flude

A reader comparing the introduction to Elfriede Jelinek's first publication, the novel *wir sind lockvögel baby!* of 1970, with some of the authorial inferences and statements found in and about her recent works for the stage, *Macht nichts. Eine kleine Trilogie des Todes* (1999) or *Ein Sportstück* (1998),<sup>1</sup> might initially be tempted to conclude that Elfriede Jelinek's political vigour and critical voice had very much waned. For her first novel, Jelinek provided a 'gebrauchsanweisung' which encouraged the reader to take an active, interventionist part in her book and then to become empowered to effect protest outside the bounds of the law. 'sie sollen hergehen', the author advises, '& sich überhaupt zu VERÄNDERUNGEN ausserhalb der legalität hinreissen lassen.' She goads her potential readers not to bother reading the book at all if they feel they are not capable of counter-violence ('gegengewalt') and continues in what would for today's publishing market be a most unlikely vein: 'wenn sie aber gerade daran arbeiten jene massiven offiziellen kontrollen & organe zu unterminieren zu zerstören dann ist es unsinnig & verfehlt diese zeit für das lesen des buches zu verschwenden' (*lockvögel*, gebrauchsanweisung).

The 'Nachbemerkung' to *Macht nichts* shows little of this obvious protest and rebellion, and the author seems almost resigned by contrast. The third part of the trilogy is a monologue entitled 'Der Wanderer', in which Jelinek's own father is dramatized as the speaker. The author's father, a half-Jew, was spared the concentration camp thanks to his important work as a chemist.<sup>2</sup> If the actress figure of 'Erkönigin', the first part of the trilogy, is able to talk about the power she held over her public, the Wanderer character can merely reflect in a jumbled and melancholy way on his powerlessness. The informed reader recognizes the allusions to Steinhof, the mental asylum in which Jelinek's father ended his days, and to the persecution suffered by millions of Jews like him. The end of the trilogy is not angry in tone, however, nor is it intended to promote reconciliation. The lack of protest seems more credibly a sign of the author's frustration and resignation in the face of what she calls a 'levelling out' in modern society, a term that signals a state of affairs where the difference between persecutors and victims has long since disappeared:

das meiste bleibt unbegreiflich, wenn man meine privaten Obsessionen und die Geschichte meines Vaters nicht kennt. [. . .] Genau in dieser Deutungslosigkeit, in diesem Unbegreiflichen, an dieser Scheide zwischen Krieg und universellem Frieden, verschwindet der Unterschied zwischen Tätern und Opfern [. . .]. Die Aufdringlichkeit der jeweiligen Moderne, die alles nivelliert hat [. . .]: in ihr ist es auch unwichtig geworden, ob dieser eine Wanderer, als rassisch Verfolgter, für seine Verfolger als Naturwissenschaftler mit Buna und andrem Kunststoff hat arbeiten müssen oder ob er zu diesem Zeitpunkt schon tot gewesen ist, was eigentlich für ihn vorgesehen gewesen wäre. Es ist alles eins. Macht nichts. Die Autorin ist weg, sie ist nicht der Weg. ('Nachbemerkung' to *Macht nichts*, pp. 89–90)

<sup>1</sup> *wir sind lockvögel baby!* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1970), hereafter referred to as *lockvögel*; *Macht nichts. Eine kleine Trilogie des Todes* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999); *Ein Sportstück* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, 'Herkunft' of Elisabeth Spanlang, *Elfriede Jelinek: Studien zum Frühwerk* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften, 1991), pp. 1–15.

After further qualification of Elfriede Jelinek's statements on the efficacy of art or literature as a political medium, I shall consider the contribution made by the writer in the field of cultural resistance to right-wing nationalism in Austria. Jelinek's stance and her cultural response may thus be seen as a case study of the scope available to writers for political resistance in general. The term 'resignation' has a dual resonance in the analysis that follows. It refers to the growing expression of frustration and despair in the face of political developments which comes to the fore in Jelinek's writing, but it refers also to Jörg Haider's *actual* resignation as leader of the far-right party, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), in February 2000.<sup>3</sup>

There are certain parallels in the applicability of the term 'resignation'. Jelinek's writing expresses resignation but only as a textual strategy, an ironic provocation to the reader. Irony has been Jelinek's *modus operandi* throughout her work, and the title *Macht nichts* should be read as a punning injunction, implying both 'it doesn't matter' ('*es macht nichts*') and 'do nothing!' Jörg Haider may have resigned his post, but his too is a mock resignation. Many artists and political observers alike argue that Haider has merely withdrawn to Carinthia in order to reemerge to a more triumphant role in Austrian politics.<sup>4</sup> All Jelinek's writing is political, and some of it is politically feminist, but the all-pervasive concern throughout her work is with unmasking what she might term latent fascist structures and behaviour. Only a few of Jelinek's works could be described as direct responses to particular events or personalities. These are, for example, *Wolken. Heim* (1990), a response to German reunification, *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* (1997), a response to bomb attacks on Roma residents of the Burgenland in 1995, and two short satires on the Austrian politicians Kurt Waldheim and Jörg Haider, entitled, respectively, 'Präsident Abendwind' (1986) and *Das Lebewohl* (2000).<sup>5</sup> The second part of the discussion here will focus on the drama *Das Lebewohl*, a text which forms part of Jelinek's protest against Jörg Haider and against the new language and politics of nationalism in Austria today.

Meta-referential remarks by the author-narrator or by dramatic characters abound in Jelinek's texts. The reader of *lockvögel* reads with amusement: 'das soll kein ernstes werk sein wie so viele sondern mehr beschwingten karakters'. The narratorial voice promises a kind of holiday book, 'das sie gewiss nicht belasten wird

<sup>3</sup> After negotiations between the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) and the Socialist Party (SPÖ) broke down, Wolfgang Schüssel, leader of the ÖVP, invited the FPÖ to form a coalition government under his chancellorship. Haider's resignation can be seen as a tactical withdrawal in response to widespread unrest at the prospect of him becoming deputy chancellor. His deputy, Dr Susanne Riess-Passer, assumed both of these roles. At the time of writing (autumn 2000) Haider was still ostensibly confined to Carinthian politics, but of course was continuing to guide the national conduct of his party from behind the scenes.

<sup>4</sup> See the press reaction to Haider's resignation: for example, Isabelle Daniel, 'Der lange Marsch nach Wien', *News*, 3 March 2000. My article does not address the much debated subject of Haider and the FPÖ's electoral success. Possible explanations for some of the historical and economic reasons for the growing popularity and broad appeal of the FPÖ, and indeed for the collapse in support for the SPÖ, can be found in Harry Ritter, 'From Habsburg to Hitler to Haider: The Peculiarities of Austrian History', *German Studies Review*, 22 (1999), 269–84; Peter Thompson, 'Jörg Haider and the Paradoxical Crisis of Social Democracy in Europe Today', *Debatte*, 8 (2000), 9–22; and Slavov Žižek, 'Why We All Love to Hate Haider', *New Left Review*, 2 (2000), 37–45.

<sup>5</sup> *Wolken. Heim* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1990); *Stecken, Stab und Stangl*, in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl, Raststätte, Wolken. Heim. Neue Theaterstücke* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997), pp. 15–68; 'Präsident Abendwind', in *Anthropophagen im Abendwind*, ed. by H. Wiesner (Berlin: Literaturhaus Berlin, 1988), pp. 19–36, also published in a slightly longer version in *Text und Kritik, Elfriede Jelinek*, 117 (1993), 3–20 (references here are to the earlier publication); 'Das Lebewohl (Les Adieux)', in *Das Lebewohl, 3 kl. Dramen* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2000), pp. 9–35, first published in *Theater heute*, 5 (2000), 36–41. *Das Lebewohl* was first performed on 22 June 2000 by the actor Martin Wuttke as part of the regular Thursday demonstrations in Vienna against the new government. The play is to be premiered under Ulrike Ottinger's direction at the Berliner Ensemble later in 2000.

mit hoher politik grausamkeiten in der welt oder im inland' (p. 30). *lockvögel* is, of course, anything but an 'easy', apolitical read. As for *Ein Sportstück*, although the monologues and dialogues are nominally assigned to a number of figures, the voice and preoccupations of the author are discernible in many of the passages. The 'Frau' comments to the 'Sportler', and implicitly to the audience: 'Wir sind hier in einem Stück von einem Stück von einem Stück. Was möchtest du lieber hören? Möchtest du lieber ein andres hören? Dich zerstreuen?' (p. 115).

The submissive tone of Jelinek the author in her introduction to *Macht nichts* is itself 'performed' in *Ein Sportstück*, by 'Elfi Elektra' or 'die Autorin', the dramatic embodiment of the author.<sup>6</sup> The names of Stalin and Hitler have given way, she says, to those of Mladić and Karadžić, and these in turn are almost outdated.<sup>7</sup> It is time to welcome along those she calls the new 'heroes of history':

Bitte einen Applaus für all diese Herren, denn dies ist das erste und gleichzeitig letzte Mal, daß hier von ihnen die Rede sein wird, obwohl von mir in diesem Punkt eigentlich mehr Engagement zu erwarten wäre! So. Jetzt engagiere ich mich extra nicht! Diesen Applaus nehme ich mir aber, obwohl im Grunde sie ihn sich verdient hätten, die Helden der Geschichte, die doch heute beinahe schon vergessen sind, denn die neuen haben wir bereits hereinbekommen. (*Ein Sportstück*, pp. 11–12)

'Ich trete niemandem mehr entgegen,' the author character, Elfi, attests, 'schon gar nicht meinen Nachbarn in Österreich, die ihre Zahl auch nicht mehr zu erhöhen wünschen' (p. 12), but the entire play is, of course, an 'Entgegentreten', a confrontation with contemporary politics, with mass society and phenomena, and also in part a confrontation with Austria (as the last quip about its immigration policies attests). The play centres on themes such as guilt and complicity, conscience, and the role and power of culture as protest. The tennis players Achilles and Hector rebuke the author for charging money to see 'Ihren freisinnigen Protest', that is, the present play. 'Na, wenn die Leute dafür zahlen wollen, meinetwegen. . .!' (p. 132), Achilles comments in an ironic and more cynical answer to the question of material outlay for political illumination voiced in the 'gebrauchsanweisung' for *lockvögel*. There are fewer and fewer passages in Jelinek's writing that are not mediated by metaphor or are not linguistically convoluted, but read instead as direct and lucid appeals.<sup>8</sup> These passages approach the political essay in tone. The following demonstrates Jelinek's concern in the play with the question of conscience and guilt. The message here surely stands out to most readers or spectators of *Ein Sportstück*, not only for its straightforward style but also for its powerful definition of what it is to commit a 'crime':

Wer hat schon mit der Hand persönlich sechs Menschen erschlagen oder erwürgt? Niemand, so hätte ich noch vor ein paar Jahren gesagt. Heute weiß ich: viele von uns, die meisten allerdings als Schreibtischtäter, die lieber eingeschlafen sind, als ihren Dienst am Schreibtisch anzutreten und eine bestimmte Telefonnummer zu wählen, eine Unterschrift zu gewähren oder ein Protestgedicht zu verfassen. (pp. 162–63)

<sup>6</sup> The stage directions tell us: 'Die Autorin tritt hinkend und desolat wieder auf. Sie kann sich auch von Elfi Elektra vertreten lassen' (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 184).

<sup>7</sup> Radovan Karadžić was the Bosnian Serb leader and Ratko Mladić his commander-in-chief during the Bosnian conflict. Both are currently wanted for trial by the International War Crimes Tribunal.

<sup>8</sup> Jelinek makes ironic reference to the difficulty of her style when she acknowledges in *Ein Sportstück* via Elfi Elektra: 'Alle hören mir nicht mehr zu, weil ich mich beim Sprechen wehleidig winde wie in meinem Gymnastik-Einzelkurs mit der neuesten Selbstbaumusik' (p. 10).

In the light of comments such as these that prick the conscience to do something, it might initially seem strange that Jelinek reacted to the coalition government of Jörg Haider's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs and the Österreichische Volkspartei by banning her plays from the Austrian stage.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it might be argued that it is particularly in Austria that her critical voice should be heard. However, Jelinek argues that to continue to allow her plays to be produced in Austria would be to endorse the political situation. She underlines a contrast between her stance and that of the revered Austrian actress Paula Wessely, who continued to be a favourite with the public through the Nazi years and even acted in propagandistic Nazi films.<sup>10</sup>

Ich kann auch nicht eine Paula Wessely dafür kritisieren, dass sie ein System, das abzulehnen ist, unterstützt und sogar trägt und dann dasselbe machen, wobei ich natürlich das Dritte Reich nicht mit dem vergleichen will, was wir jetzt haben. Ich will damit auf keinen Fall die Kolleginnen und Kollegen unter Druck setzen, das Gleiche zu machen, es ist eben meine persönliche Art des Protests. Die Hochkultur in den performing arts hat natürlich immer auch Repräsentationsfunktion. Indem sie kritische Hochkultur zulassen, gibt man den Machthabern die Chance, sich eine Toleranz zuzuschreiben, die sie andernorts vermissen lassen.<sup>11</sup>

Given the sometimes vitriolic criticism of Elfriede Jelinek as a 'Nestbeschmutzer' and the uneasy reception history of her plays in Austria, it is ironic that Jelinek should come to be pilloried by the FPÖ as a kind of 'Staatskünstlerin' in their local election campaign of 1995. The text of their posters was as follows: 'Lieben Sie Scholten, Jelinek, Häupl, Peymann, Pasterk. . . oder Kunst und Kultur?' and their motto, 'Freiheit der Kunst statt sozialistischer Staatskünstler'. Although her novel *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983) made Jelinek into a highly acclaimed writer and her 1989 novel *Lust* reached the bestseller lists, it was not until the 1990s that the Austrian stage acknowledged Jelinek's reputation as a dramatist by producing some of her plays at the Burgtheater under the theatre's German director, Claus Peymann, and at the Volkstheater under Emmy Werner. Most of Jelinek's plays have in fact been premiered on the German stage.

As the shortlist in the FPÖ poster campaign attests, Jelinek is by no means the only artist or intellectual who has been or indeed is being vehemently criticized in Austria today. Current budget cuts and debates about what should or should not be supported with public monies show clearly that the current ÖVP-FPÖ government is making it more difficult for alternative voices to be heard. For example, when the artist Christoph Schlingensiefel manages to stage an event such as his 'Big Brother'-style Aktion Container in the Wiener Festwochen, voices are also raised by conservative-minded members of the public as to the misuse of public funding, and

<sup>9</sup> See Jelinek, 'Meine Art des Protests', *Der Standard*, 7 February 2000, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Jelinek's play *Burgtheater* satirizes the Wessely-Hörbiger family of actors and takes issue with their account of their own activities during the Third Reich. For an account of this and an analysis of the play, see my 'Demythologising the Austrian "Heimat": Elfriede Jelinek as "Nestbeschmutzer"', in *From High Priests to Desecrators: Contemporary Austrian Literature*, ed. by Moray McGowan and Ricarda Schmidt (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 25-44. The monologue spoken by the 'dead' actress in 'Erlkönigin' (the first part of the *Macht nichts* trilogy) is clearly a continuation of Jelinek's dramatization of Paula Wessely, who died in May 2000.

<sup>11</sup> See Pia Janke's interview with the author, 'Tragödie und Farce in einem', *Der Standard*, 17 June 2000, supplement magazine, p. 1. Although Jelinek is careful here to uncouple historical fascism from contemporary nationalist movements, in her creative writing she does, of course, make productive and ironic analogies.

pressure is put on the organizers.<sup>12</sup> The current political regime is not the only one in Austria's history to have recommended emigration to artists and intellectuals who criticize their own country. In a collection of responses to the 'democratic fascism' of the Waldheim era, Michael Scharang quotes Erhard Busek, the ÖVP politician who was deputy mayor of Vienna in the late 1980s, sarcastically challenging intellectuals to 'ins Ausland fahren und erklären, warum Österreich doch so gut ist, daß sie hier leben'.<sup>13</sup> In her speech accepting the Heinrich Böll Prize for literature in 1986, entitled 'In den Waldheimen und auf den Haidern', Jelinek picks up the same theme and applies it to both the 1960s and to the Nazi persecutions of the 1930s and 40s:

In Österreich wird kritischen Künstlern die Emigration nicht nur empfohlen, sie werden auch tatsächlich vertrieben, da sind wir gründlich. Ich erwähne nur Rühm, Wiener, Brus, die in den sechziger Jahren das Land verlassen haben. Ich erwähne nicht Jura Soyfer, der im KZ ermordet worden ist, denn das ist zu lang vergangen und daher zu lang schon vergessen und, vor allem, vergeben, denn uns verzeiht man einfach alles.<sup>14</sup>

Jelinek's dramatic monologue *Das Lebewohl* is not the first of her dramas to have featured a leading politician as its protagonist. The idea of repressing the past or of claiming to have forgotten past events is an important theme in Jelinek's short drama 'Präsident Abendwind' (1986), a commissioned response to Nestroy's *Hauptling Abendwind oder Das greuliche Festmahl* (1862). Nestroy inverts the Romantic idea of the noble savage and portrays his natives as nationalistic and as aspiring to notions of diplomacy and civilization.<sup>15</sup> The cannibals' fixation on matters culinary and their thick Austrian accents are clear markers of Nestroy's satirical attack on Austria. In Jelinek's updated version of the satire, *Abendwind* describes himself as 'der Vorsitzende von dem Rat von die Vereinigten Pfitschiinseln', a clear parody of Kurt Waldheim's General Secretaryship of the United Nations. In the play Jelinek satirizes Waldheim's election campaign and above all his apparent amnesia about the war years, which he spent as a Wehrmacht officer. The cannibalism in Jelinek's version is a metaphorical reference not only to the 'swallowing up' of people by the Nazi state, but also to contemporary xenophobic attitudes and, above all, to the call by many in Austria to ignore or to counter foreign condemnation of Waldheim's

<sup>12</sup> Schlingensiefel's version of this popular docu-soap television programme involved voting on which immigrants to throw out of his container. Schlingensiefel's artistic methods of negative portrayal and irony show similarities with Jelinek's own and, of course, run the risk of being seen as promoting precisely the sorts of things he is criticizing — in this case, racism. The email responses to Schlingensiefel's 'Bitte liebt Österreich' event generated by the news magazine *profil* can be read in their web archives at: <http://forum2.telekurier.at/exports/profil/themen/container/index.shtml> and testify to the outrage experienced by some members of the public, particularly over the public funding of Schlingensiefel's art.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Michael Scharang, 'Diesen Staat kann kein Skandal erschüttern, denn er ist selbst ein Skandal', *Der Streit*, 32 (1987), 4–6 (p. 4). Some of the other targets were the sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka, the writer Peter Turrini, and the cartoon artist Manfred Deix.

<sup>14</sup> Elfriede Jelinek, 'In den Waldheimen und auf den Haidern'. Rede zur Verleihung des Heinrich-Böll-Preises in Köln am 2. Dezember 1986, *Der Streit*, 32 (1987), 36. The full speech is published in *Blauer Streusand*, ed. by Barbara Alms (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1987), pp. 42–44. Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener were both members of the group of avant-garde writers known as the 'Wiener Gruppe' which was active in the 1950s and 60s. Günter Brus is a writer and performance artist and is known mostly for his performances as a 'Wiener Aktionist' in the 1960s.

<sup>15</sup> See Johann Nestroy, *Sämtliche Werke (historisch-kritische Ausgabe)*, Stücke 38, ed. by Peter Branscombe (Vienna: Deuticke, 1996), pp. 41–79. See also Matthias Spohr, 'Hauptling Abendwind: Nestroys Entgegnung auf das kulturelle Umfeld der Pariser Operette', *Nestroyana*, 9 (1989), 17–21 on Nestroy's reversal of the idea of the noble savage as seen in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or Châteaubriand's *Atala* (1801). Nestroy's play is an adaptation of Jacques Offenbach's operetta *Vent du soir ou l'horrible festin* (1857).

candidature and then presidency (particularly from the United States). Abendwind and his politically astute daughter agree that his strategy should be to concentrate on eating foreigners until after he is elected: ‘Tu ich mich halt auf Ausländer schpezialisiern bis zur Wahl! Wern mich unsre Großjuhuer schon wollen. Seind immer dabei, wenns gegens Auslond geht! Mein braves Vulk’ (p. 23). Abendwind worries that he might eat a fellow countryman by accident but is quickly consoled by his daughter that the former could be passed off as a foreigner in disguise (or, to read this metaphorically, as having ‘foreign’ attitudes): ‘Geh’, says Otilie, ‘sei net so hopperdatschig! Sagst halt, der Inländer, den wir fressen tun, wär eigentlich ein verkappter Ausländer gwest und guat is und tan is’ (p. 24).

Parallels between Waldheim and Abendwind are quite easy to spot, as Jacques Lajarrige has noted. In the figure of Hermann, the would-be son-in-law courting Abendwind’s daughter, Lajarrige sees the ambitions of none other than Jörg Haider: ‘Hermann, le faux étranger à la manière du Arthur de Nestroy, courtise en effet Otilie et les voix de son futur beau-père. On ne peut s’empêcher de songer aux ambitions du FPÖ et de son leader ultranationaliste Jörg Haider ou aux slogans de ce dernier contre les immigrés et les minorités slovènes de Carinthie’.<sup>16</sup> It is certainly possible to see a Haider caricature in ‘Präsident Abendwind’, but in *Das Lebewohl*, the speaker is quite expressly Jörg Haider, the stage directions even referring to the speaker as the ‘Sprecher des “Haidermonologs”’ (p. 9, my emphasis).

Whereas the intellectual background of ‘Präsident Abendwind’ may be Viennese-Austrian, as well as French in the form of the intertexts of Nestroy but also, before him, of Jacques Offenbach’s operetta *Vent du soir ou l’horrible festin* (1857), in Jelinek’s satire on Jörg Haider, *Das Lebewohl*, the intellectual background is drawn from Greek mythology. I shall now discuss *Das Lebewohl* and explore some of the frictions and parallels between Jelinek’s text and her two intertexts, Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* and a text written by Jörg Haider on the occasion of his resignation from party leadership of the FPÖ.<sup>17</sup>

The crimes narrated in the *Oresteia* are the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytaemnestra and the latter’s murder by her son, Orestes, who thus avenges his father’s death. There are no such dramatic developments in Jelinek’s text, but the themes of guilt, vengeance, past crimes, reverence for the father or male principle and disregard for the maternal are clearly shared with its Greek precursor. Although the nature of neither the deed nor the crimes is made explicit, it is quite clear that Jelinek’s character has in mind the atrocities of the Holocaust when he first refuses to admit his own guilt or that of his father’s generation, then concedes this guilt. The speaker explains that they have apologized for these ‘abscheuliche, einmalige Verbrechen’ and have said ‘Nie wieder!’, but the sentiment progresses to one of regretful necessity and an implied sense of dignity in having carried the deed through: ‘und wenn wir jemand gekränkt haben, wir bedauern, aber haben wir

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Lajarrige, ‘Formation et appropriation d’un mythe: le cannibalisme et la littérature autrichienne de Nestroy à Jelinek’, *Cahiers d’Études Germaniques*, 26 (1994), 151–62 (p. 159). On Jelinek’s play see also Angela Gulielmetti, ‘Hauptling Abendwind und Präsident Abendwind. Nestroy und Elfriede Jelinek’, *Nestroyana*, 1/2 (1997), 39–49.

<sup>17</sup> Jörg Haider, ‘Glücksgefühl nach bangen Stunden’, *News*, 8 March 2000. Jelinek mentions Walter Jens’s translation of Aeschylus together with the Austrian *News* magazine in her acknowledgements. See *Aeschylus: Die Orestie*. Eine freie Übertragung von Walter Jens (Munich: dtv, 1981).

nicht Recht? [. . .] Wir wagten, die Tat, die wir ersannen, auch auszuführen' (*Das Lebewohl*, pp. 13–14).

There are precedents for using the *Oresteia* in the cause of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, notably in Peter Stein's production of 1980 in Berlin, where the German audience were reminded of 'where they live and breathe, what kind of guilt and terror lies buried at that place, [. . .] Germany, in the age of prosperity'.<sup>18</sup> Jelinek's use of the *Oresteia* material can be read in the same vein, although her concern is not with Clytaemestra's guilt but with the character and significance of the Orestes figure as an analogy for Jörg Haider. Jelinek sees part of Haider's political motivation as seeking some kind of retribution for the postwar condemnation of his own father, an early member of the NSDAP in Austria when it was still illegal.<sup>19</sup> She therefore has her dramatized Haider-speaker echo Orestes, saying: 'zugrunde richtet mich jetzt dein Wort, Vater! Ich räche dich, dem Morgenwind vergleichbar. Und jetzt weht auch schon ein anderer Wind. Spürst du, Vater, wie er weht?' (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 30).

It is not the case that Jelinek has been deliberately prompted into offsetting Haider's *Auseinandersetzung* with his father with her own literary engagement with her father, as there are signs of Jelinek's fictional reworkings of her father's biography in many of her earlier works.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, there is a striking contrast between the lives of these two men, and especially between the treatments each received in and from the Third Reich. In addition to providing a fictional voice for her dead father in the monologue 'Der Wanderer' (*Macht nichts*), Jelinek, or 'die Autorin', also addresses her dead father in the play *Ein Sportstück*, where she expresses an internalized guilt over his death, or 'murder' in the asylum: 'Und ich habe selber dabei mitgemacht, als mein Papa umgebracht worden ist. [. . .] Papi. Du sollst jetzt bitte auftreten und mir einen Vorwurf machen. [. . .] Bitte, da ist dein letztes Bettzeug aus dem Irren-Haus, ich habe dafür gesorgt, daß nachgewaschen wurde, damit es immer wieder durch nichts nichts Mord bezeugen kann' (*Ein Sportstück*, pp. 184–85).<sup>21</sup> These expressions of remorse have no parallel in Aeschylus, whereas Euripides in his *Orestes* portrays the hero as much more troubled over his murder of his mother. In fact, the frenzied rhetoric of Jelinek's speaker arguably has more in common with the 'mental collapse' of Orestes in Euripides than it does with

<sup>18</sup> John Chioles, 'The Oresteia and the Avant-Garde: Three Decades of Discourse', *Performing Arts Journal*, 45 (1993), 1–28 (p. 23; emphasis in original).

<sup>19</sup> See Pia Janke, 'Tragödie und Farce in einem'. This view of Haider is voiced in recent biographical writing on Haider. See, for example, Christa Zöchling, *Haider: Licht und Schatten einer Karriere* (Vienna: Molden, 1999). Melanie A. Sully argues that 'whatever the assessment of Haider's grasp of history, it is clear that he had a built-in mechanism which rallied to the defence of the fathers from the war generation. [. . .] The rehabilitation and passionate defence of the NS fathers was deeply ingrained in many of Haider's background' (*The Haider Phenomenon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 135).

<sup>20</sup> Spanlang cites an early *Erzählung* entitled 'Erschwerende Umstände oder kindlicher Bericht über einen Verwandten' which deals with her father's choice, 'entweder zu sterben [. . .] oder für die Kunststoffindustrie des Deutschen Reiches zu arbeiten' ('Erschwerende Umstände', p. 109, quoted in Elisabeth Spanlang, *Elfriede Jelinek: Studien zum Frühwerk*, p. 10). See Elfriede Jelinek, 'Erschwerende Umstände oder kindlicher Bericht über einen Verwandten', in *Das Lächeln meines Großvaters und andere Familiengeschichten erzählt von 47 deutschen Autoren*, ed. by Wolfgang Weyrauch (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1978), pp. 106–11.

<sup>21</sup> The production in Berne in September 2000 chose to highlight this particular aspect with the father being present on stage as a kind of St Sebastian figure. Indeed, the much reduced text focused strongly on the autobiographical elements of the text.

the 'Aeschylean onslaught of supernatural ἐπιτύχει', even though there is no central act of matricide at the heart of Jelinek's text.<sup>22</sup>

What inspiration, then, does Jelinek take from the theme of matricide in her intertext? There are passages in *Das Lebewohl* which may be drawn from Aeschylus and which centre on Orestes' design to murder his mother: 'Rache für den Vater! Rache! Tötet das Land, tötet die Mutter' (p. 26), or which bemoan women's cunning. The following passage conflates Orestes' anger over his father's treatment at the hands of women (or more specifically his wife) with the fictional Haider's irritation at being succeeded by a woman (Dr Susanne Riess-Passer): 'Er hat die Unzucht im Hause ertragen nicht lang, doch nun verlaß ich das Haus, ich geh, die Buhlschaft, sie bleibt ihm. Riess-Passer, Frau Dr. Riess für mich. Mutter! Wir sind Zeugen gewesen, wie die Frauenlist des Landes meinen Vater verriet, das Land: eine Frau. Kleine dicke Frau. Kleine dicke Frau, reich und böse. Das Land besiegt: eine Frau. Ich niemals besiegt: von einem Mann' (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 27). Although there is no physical murdering of women, there is perhaps a metaphorical murder or erasure of the feminine in the misogynist tone of the speaker's words. The dramatized Haider is in good company with Orestes, of whom Gilbert Murray has said: 'there are not many tragic heroes with such an extreme anti-feminist record.'<sup>23</sup> The speaker professes amazement at his successor's ability to speak so authoritatively but then criticizes her for merely reproducing his own words. In this point, Jelinek underlines psychoanalytic theories that women are forced to emulate men's words in order to have any kind of access to language and to the powerful institutions and structures of the symbolic order:

Schöner Knabe, schau du einmal her, wie souverän dies Weib in der Pressekonferenz agiert! Diese Frau! Hätt ich gar nicht von ihr gedacht. Ist es nicht einfach super, wie sie spricht? Umgarnt mit dem Netz der List schon das Volk, sie spricht, sie spricht, vollkommen frei spricht sie, doch was sie sagt? Es ist egal. Nicht ist es, was Apoll befahl, es ist nichts, was irren könnte, es ist überhaupt nichts. Es ist von mir zwar, doch es ist nichts. Wenn ich es sage, ist es anders. Wenn sie es sagt, ist es nichts. (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 20)

In an interview, Jelinek has explained her interest in the *Oresteia* as a text that marks the progression from matriarchal to patriarchal society. Indeed Bachofen, Freud, and more recently Cixous have all used the *Oresteia* as an illustration of this premise.<sup>24</sup> Cixous underlines how Aeschylus's text signals the victory of the name of the father over the blood ties of the mother. It is the purging of his name that must take precedence. If Freud saw Aeschylus's text as signalling an advance in civilization, then both Cixous and Jelinek are concerned with deconstructing and thus questioning the nature of this civilization. Cixous's recent theatre-based work has concerned itself with 'an understanding of history as a struggle between competing economies, described as "masculine" and "feminine"',<sup>25</sup> and one could see Jelinek's text as exploring another angle or stage in the sexual economy. Jelinek

<sup>22</sup> Euripides, *Orestes and Other Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). For an account of the different treatment of Orestes by Euripides, see John R. Porter, 'Madness and Συνεστis in *Orestes*', in John R. Porter, *Studies in Euripides' Orestes* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 298.

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert Murray, 'Hamlet and Orestes: A Study in Traditional Types', in *Ritual and Myth: Robertson Smith, Frazer, Hooke, and Harrison*, ed. by Robert A. Segal (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 309–33 (p. 317).

<sup>24</sup> See Simon Goldhill, 'The Influence of the *Oresteia*', in Simon Goldhill, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 93–99.

<sup>25</sup> Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 4.



argues that there is a sublimated homosexuality in Haider's following. She characterizes it as follows:

Das Schwache, Fremde, das, was 'nicht zu uns gehört', wird ausgegrenzt oder vertrieben. Nicht zufällig hat Haider ja einen ehemaligen Olympia-Abfahrtsieger [Patrick Ortlieb] ins Parlament geholt. Er arbeitet, wie alle faschistoiden Bewegungen, mit dem ästhetischen Körperkult, mit dem homoerotischen Männerbund, der sich im Sport manifestiert, es ist sozusagen der erlaubte sexuelle Akt mit dem braungebrannten jungen [...] 'Führer', der huldvoll seine Gunst gewährt.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than the chorus of Old Men, of Slavewomen, or Furies in the three respective parts of Aeschylus's trilogy, Jelinek chooses to form a chorus of adoring 'schöner Knaben', dressed, she requests, either in 'kindlichen, pludernden Spielhöschen' or in Lederhosen, who listen reverently and strew rose petals over the speaker. They are the visible, though mute, addressees of the monologue which is peppered with references to them, such as: 'eure Tränen sinds, ihr Knaben' (p. 17), or, 'Mitarbeiter, Knaben, Kameraden' (p. 18), and they are praised by the speaker as follows: 'Ich mußte miterleben, wie meine Familie, meine Familie, die Schönen, die Guten, Gescheiten, die vor Blondheit Strotzenden, von brutal Gewalttätigen in Mitleidenschaft gezogen wurde. Doch meine Leidenschaft gilt viel mehr noch euch, Burschen, ihr Herrlichen, Guten' (pp. 16–17; italics indicate phrases, words or word roots taken from Haider's own text). Surrounded by his adoring, faithful disciples, the speaker takes on the air of a divine force, referring to himself as 'mich Götterlieblich' (p. 16), or 'der liebe Herr, bin ich' (p. 33). This overblown rhetoric is mirrored in the text Haider himself wrote after his resignation as party leader and hence as vice-Chancellor of Austria (Haider, 'Glücksgefühl').

The sensitive reader must find Haider's diary entry text quite remarkable in tone even without having read Jelinek's parodic reworking of it in *Das Lebewohl*. There are passages that, perhaps unwittingly, suggest a sense of superiority, self-importance, even of a divine calling to fulfil an ineluctable destiny. After the press conference at which Jörg Haider announced his decision, it would appear that the leading lights in the FPÖ went back to Susanne Riess-Passer's home to continue their discussions. Consider the following account of Riess-Passer's comportment and of the emotional reactions of Haider's political companions:

Denn hätte ich dabei *in die Runde geblickt* und *die Tränen* in den Augen vieler *meiner langjährigen Mitstreiter* gesehen, *wer weiß, ob ich nicht schwach geworden wäre*. [...] Vizekanzlerin Susanne Riess-Passer [agiert] ganz souverän, und ich hatte Freude, ihr zu assistieren. Ich tat es umso lieber, weil ich wusste, wie sehr sie mir eigentlich *Vorwürfe* wegen meiner Entscheidung machen wollte, aber ihre *Disziplin* und ihr *Intellekt akzeptierten das nicht Verhinderbare*. [...] Wir beschlossen, noch bei Susanne Riess-Passer *privat zusammenzukommen*. *Einige meiner Getreuen* waren mit dabei. (Haider, 'Glücksgefühl nach banger Stunden'; italics indicate phrases, words or word roots subsequently used in Jelinek's text.)

To myself, and doubtless to others, Haider's attitude to his successor comes across as avuncular and patronizing. Riess-Passer is the only colleague who merits being referred to by her first name only, a special treatment which some will justify as gentlemanly: 'Böhmendorfer aus dem Bett. Susanne machte sich Sorgen wegen des Justizministers. Auch ich habe mit Michael Krüger gesprochen, dessen

<sup>26</sup> Volker Oesterreich, 'Ironie unter der Straßenwalze', interview with Elfriede Jelinek, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 27 Feb. 2000. The homophile appeal is arguably also present in Euripides' *Orestes*, where the bond between Pylades and Orestes is foregrounded.

Gesundheitszustand ihn in den nächsten Wochen ans Bett fesseln wird' (Haider, 'Glücksgefühl'). In Jelinek's text, the respect women and mothers are due is relative to that of men: 'Verehren soll jeder Vater und Mutter, doch mehr den Vater' (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 13), and the 'family values' promoted by the Freiheitlichen are rendered with terminology redolent of the 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' rhetoric of the Third Reich: 'Die Mutter, das Land, den Herd, das verehren wir und schützen wir, wir sind vom besten Zuschnitt' (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 29).

Haider's use of phrases such as 'Einige meiner Getreuen' or 'ein Glücksgefühl nach bangen Stunden' is somewhat archaic, not to say religious in places, and Jelinek's satire indeed posits him as a redeemer figure.<sup>27</sup> The essayist Franz Schuh has commented on the 'christologische Moment' in the debate about Austria's political 'resurrection', and asks rhetorically, 'Hat er [Jörg Haider] sich nicht seit eh und je als Erlöser gesehen?'<sup>28</sup> In keeping with the pseudo-religious tone of his text, Haider styles himself as a kind of martyr, a martyr to the hateful, left-wing press, in particular to the television journalists of the *Zeit im Bild* news programme:

*Drei linke Journalisten* ließen sich so über mich aus, dass der Hass nur tiefend aus dem TV-Gerät herausquoll. Damit hatten sie nicht gerechnet. Das Objekt ihrer hasserfüllten Begierde war ihnen abhanden gekommen. Worin soll da noch ihr journalistischer Lebenssinn bestehen? An niemandem mehr würden sie linksideologischen Hass und menschliche Niedertracht der Gutmenschen so gezielt ausleben können wie an mir. (Haider, 'Glücksgefühl nach bangen Stunden'; italics indicate phrases, words or word roots subsequently used in *Das Lebewohl* by Jelinek.)

Haider's act of self-sacrifice is one in the face for the press and, by his implication, a service to his fellow citizens, or 'Gutmenschen', who will now be spared their vitriol. Apart from a few examples of archaic and elevated language in Haider's text, however, the general tone of the language is everyday, in keeping with the 'day-in-the-life' genre in which it is written. What makes it so useful for Jelinek's purposes is that it is full of the kind of cliché that characterizes politicians' rhetoric and of the trivial and banal details to be expected in a diary text. Jelinek's linguistic methodology in *Das Lebewohl* aims at a kind of alienation effect: by embedding Haider quotations in the predominant register of pathos from her Greek intertext, she aims to make the politico-speak of Haider and others seem even more laughable and banal (Janke, 'Tragödie und Farce in einem'). 'Als Landeshauptmann bin ich dabei', the speaker explains, 'und kann mithelfen, ein gutes Team zu schaffen, brennen laß ich jetzt schon das Scheit! Es brennt ja, seit ich den Schoß verließ der Mutter' (*Das Lebewohl*, pp. 25–26). The juxtaposition in the same sentence of words such as 'Weib' and

<sup>27</sup> The two other short dramas in Jelinek's collection, *Das Lebewohl*, 3 kl. Dramen, are entitled *Das Schweigen* and *Der Tod und das Mädchen II*, and together the collection may be seen as paralleling the three movements from the Beethoven sonata to which Jelinek alludes in her subtitle. The movements of Beethoven's Sonata in E flat op. 81a, 'Les Adieux', are entitled 'Das Lebewohl (Les Adieux)', 'Abwesenheit (L'Absence)', and 'Das Wiedersehen (Le Retour)'. The sonata was dedicated to Archduke Rudolph, who in 1809 went into exile to escape the siege of Vienna by the French. The sleeping princess of Jelinek's final drama is to be read as Austria and the prince who awakens her as Jörg Haider.

<sup>28</sup> Franz Schuh, 'Unglückliches Österreich: eine Innenansicht', in *Österreich: Berichte aus Quarantainen*, ed. by Isolde Charim and Doron Rabinovici (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 19–32 (p. 27). Although Haider certainly appeals to the values of faith and religion along with those of the family and the nation, I am uncertain as to whether a religious dimension has been a strong component in creating his popularity. Nevertheless, this hint of religious symbolism in Haider's rhetoric invites comparisons with that of Adolf Hitler. Ian Kershaw has convincingly demonstrated the role played by religion in Hitler's rhetoric and in creating the 'Führer myth'. See Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), especially Chapter 4, 'The Führer versus the Radicals: Hitler's Image and the "Church Struggle"'.

‘Pressekonferenz’, or ‘Team’ and ‘Scheit’ promotes a comic alienation, as does the anachronism of a mobile phone: ‘*Meine Familie hat mir ermutigende SMS übers Handy geschickt, die Blonden, Guten. Druck und Zweifel: weg! Fort! Freß ich mein Neugebornes, die Bewegung jetzt? Oder später? Nein, sie ist stark. Keine Bewegung mehr, keine ohne mich*’ (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 18).

A constant feature in Jelinek’s writing, puns and wordplay are put to good if sparing effect, too, in *Das Lebewohl*. The *Zeit im Bild* reference becomes an opportunity for the speaker to stress that their ‘time’ will come and that they are ‘in the picture’: ‘Laß es dir sagen, das Bild bleibt, die Zeit geht, doch wir sind im Bilde, schon lange, schon immer. Die Zeit wird auch noch unsere werden, bitte warten Sie!’ (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 22–23). Jelinek takes Haider’s own idiom, ‘Wir Freiheitliche sind einfach aus einem anderen Holz’ (Haider, ‘Glücksgefühl’), and turns it back on her ‘blockhead’ Haider-speaker to comic effect: ‘*Wir sind aus einem anderen Holz. Der Kanzler schien beruhigt, als ich dies sagte. Er schlug an meinen Kopf: ein andres Holz*’ (*Das Lebewohl*, p. 28). Aeschylus too provides Jelinek with archaic textual material for rather contrived punning. The verb ‘einschirren’ (‘schirren’, ‘anspannen’, to harness) allows a sideswipe at the subservient role of women: ‘*Mein Vater noch ganz im Joch des Leidens eingeschirrt, das Geschirr wäscht die Frau, ganz klar, sie ist gut drauf und hoch motiviert*’ (*Das Lebewohl*, pp. 33–34).

A further effect of the conflation of linguistic registers is to enhance the madness of the text and its speaker. The short, clipped phrases and exclamations and the frequent rhetorical questions reinforce the themes of power and of camaraderie in the path towards victory (‘wir haben gefochten, und jetzt dürfen wir feiern den Sieg’, *Das Lebewohl*, p. 12). The speaker’s monomaniac, paranoid egotism (‘Keine Bewegung mehr, keine ohne mich’, p. 18) reaches its climax in the final lines of the monologue as his speech becomes more and more frantic and self-centred. His plea for justification and acknowledgement becomes crazed and juvenile as he calls out to his father and mother. The egotism seems to become pathological, an impression created by the frequency and positioning of the word ‘ich’ as the regression and breakdown are accomplished not merely in the subject matter but in the text’s syntax:

Die Freiheit vertreib: ich, das Dunkel seh gar nicht: ich [. . .] In den Spiegel schauen können will: ich auch mich. Zögern will nicht auch: ich. Mein Vater sein will auch: ich. Sag nicht Mutter! Sag Vater! Sag nicht Mutter! Sag Vater! Und zieh dein Schwert! [. . .] Alle niedermachen will auch: ich. [. . .] Die Freiheit sein will auch: ich. Vaters Kind sein will auch: ich. Sags Mutter, sags Vater, sags Mutter, sags Vater. Sag ich. Sag doch: ich! Die ganze: Zeit! (*Das Lebewohl*, pp. 34–35)

By putting the sentence subject, ‘ich’, in the final position and by repeating the same sentence structure over and over again, Jelinek both replicates something of the emphasis of the poetic syntax (‘und jetzt dürfen wir feiern den Sieg’) and heightens the sense of egotism. The separation of the subject from the verb phrase by a colon underlines this egotism, while assisting the actor in achieving the kind of non-naturalist delivery that Jelinek seeks.<sup>29</sup> The final word, ‘Zeit’, breaks the pattern and

<sup>29</sup> Excerpts from the street performance by Martin Wuttke can be heard on Jelinek’s own website: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/elfriede/>. For the playwright’s demands of actors and her understanding of the theatre, see for example: Elfriede Jelinek, ‘Ich möchte seicht sein’, in *Gegen den schönen Schein: Texte zu Elfriede Jelinek*, ed. by Christa Gürtler (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1990), pp. 157–61, or Elfriede Jelinek, ‘Sinn egal. Körper zwecklos’, in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl, Raststätte, Wolken. Heim. Neue Theaterstücke* (Reimbek: Rowohlt, 1997), pp. 7–14.

spoils the cadence, but it returns the monologue to the real threat of the Haider phenomenon, that is to say to the advent of a new political or post-political era. The playwright comments on this 'Zeitenwende', saying: 'Es ist vielleicht ein hochtrabender Ausdruck, zu pathetisch, aber es ist etwas geschehen, dass niemand von uns für möglich gehalten hätte. Dass gerade in einem der Täterländer die extreme Rechte wieder an die Macht kommt.'<sup>30</sup>

The speaker's mythological counterpart, Orestes, is absolved by the goddess Athena and by the court which hears his crime. Jelinek chooses a marked contrast to her intertext at this point and leaves her Haider-speaker in a state of madness, of temporary exile and political limbo. As for the function and purpose of Jelinek's text, it would seem to echo the purpose of Greek tragedy. Simon Goldhill describes Greek tragedy as:

an event that places the tensions and ambiguities of a rapidly developing political and cultural system in the public domain to be contested. What is more, the *Oresteia* itself ends [...] in the centre of the democratic *polis* of Athens, its law-court. The play speaks to the *polis*. The *Oresteia* is in the full sense of the term a *political* drama; and awaits your — our — verdict. (Goldhill, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia*, p. 21)

Jelinek's dramatic monologue *Das Lebewohl* is a contribution to the 'polis' of Vienna and Austria, even if it was performed outside on the Ballhausplatz and not inside the Burgtheater. As the dramatist points out, even today, the theatre can be seen as 'ja im Allgemeinen ein Ort, wo der Staat sich repräsentiert' and where political discussion can be promoted. Jelinek's self-imposed ban thus signals anything but political resignation: 'Ich muss [meine Sprache] ihnen entziehen, um sie erhalten zu können. Das klingt sicher pathetisch, aber: Da ich also nicht gehen kann, können wenigstens meine Stücke weggehen, um woanders (hoffentlich) irgendwie zu wirken' (Jelinek, 'Meine Art des Protests'). In September 2000, the month *Das Lebewohl* was published, the European Union's 'wise men' adjudicated and asked the fourteen 'Furies', or EU member states, to lift the diplomatic sanctions placed against Austria after the formation of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. At the time of writing, Elfriede Jelinek has not yet lifted her own ban. She is one of many artistic and intellectual 'furies' who will continue to plague Jörg Haider, whether this is in the alternative theatrical venues of Austria, its mainstream theatres, the stages of other countries or, of course, in the published forms of her texts.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Pia Janke, 'Tragödie und Farce in einem'. Jelinek calls the electoral victory of the far right 'vielleicht das Ende des Politischen überhaupt. [...] das Politische, das darin besteht, daß Menschen sich über etwas verständigen, einander zuhören, Vorschläge einbringen, diskutieren, und dann wird abgestimmt', see Jelinek, 'Moment! Aufnahme! 5.10.99', in *Österreich: Berichte aus Quarantainen*, ed. by Isolde Charim and Doron Rabinovici (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 100–109 (p. 105).

<sup>31</sup> I am grateful to the British Academy for a grant enabling me to undertake research towards this article.