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Katya Krylova. *The Long Shadow of the Past: Contemporary Austrian Literature, Film, and Culture*. Camden House, 2017.

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Abstract

Review of Katya Krylova. *The Long Shadow of the Past: Contemporary Austrian Literature, Film, and Culture*. Camden House, 2017.

Keywords

Austria, post-Holocaust, post-Waldheim

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In 1986, it was publicly revealed that Austria's president, Kurt Waldheim, must have known about war crimes committed during his time serving in the German *Sturmabteilung* (the paramilitary of the Nazi party) as a staff officer during World War II. Outcry, both within Austria and from abroad, compelled Austria to confront its Nazi past and its responsibility relating to crimes of the Holocaust. In *The Long Shadow of the Past: Contemporary Austrian Literature, Film, and Culture*, Katya Krylova examines the ongoing implications of what came to be known as the Waldheim Affair. From films made before the Waldheim Affair to more recent examples of how artists are using public spaces in Austria to comment on and remember the persecution of Austrian Jews, Krylova focuses in particular on the function of remembering, forms of nostalgia, and the threat of forgetting. As the author convincingly argues, the trauma of Austria's past is still an open wound, as demonstrated by decades of Austrian writers, filmmakers, and artists who seek to make visible Austria's complicity in the Holocaust.

The introduction to Krylova's study provides the context for the work she examines in each of the five chapters. Austria's process of confronting its complicity in the atrocities of the Holocaust follows a very different trajectory than that of Germany, as Krylova carefully and clearly explains. Motivated by US and British public denazification campaigns, West Germany went through an active postwar process of confronting its role in perpetrating the Holocaust. Austria, however, falsely declared that it had been the first victim of Nazi aggression when Germany annexed Austria in 1938 to create a larger Nazi state. The post-Waldheim era finally led to a number of important public initiatives in Austria that began taking steps toward confronting the past, including Chancellor Vranitzky's formal recognition in 1992 of Austria's complicity in the Holocaust. In addition to passing a law in 1993 to allow those stripped of their citizenship during the Holocaust to regain it and establishing a restitution fund for victims of the Holocaust in 1995, other public memorials, such as the Holocaust Memorial (Vienna, 2000) were created. This delayed confrontation with the past collided with right-wing politics in Austria, and Krylova documents how the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, and the war in Bosnia led to restrictive immigration laws in 1993. Similarly, waves of refugees coming into Austria during the 2015 refugee crisis led to a right-wing, anti-immigrant backlash. Even as Austria began and continues its significantly belated recognition of its complicity in the Holocaust, right-wing social political movements continuously threaten to reenact the past, including ongoing anti-Semitic attacks. As Krylova notes, quoting the Austrian writer Doron Rabinovici, the past is not past in Austria.

In the subsequent five chapters, Krylova uses a convincing and elegant theoretical apparatus for analyzing three films by documentary filmmaker and artist Ruth Beckermann; Anna Mitgutsch's novel *Haus der Kindheit* (*House of Childhood: A Novel*, 2000); Robert Schindel's novel *Der Kalte* ('The Cold One,' 2013); the documentary film *Totschweigen* (Erne and Heinrich, *A Wall of Silence*, 1998) and Elfriede Jelinek's drama *Rechnitz* (*Der Würgeengel*) (*Rechnitz [The Exterminating Angel]*, 2008); and several recent public memorial projects in Vienna by artists such as Ulrike Lienbacher, Maria Theresia Litschauer, Karen Frostig, and Beckermann. By drawing on the work of contemporary theorists such as Aleida Assman, Svetlana Boym, and Linda Hutcheon, as well as classic works by Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, Krylova creates a framework that considers the various nuances to memory and memorialization. In her study of Anna Mitgutsch's *Haus der Kindheit*, for example, Krylova uses Boym's terms from *The Future of Nostalgia* to differentiate between "reflective nostalgia" and "restorative nostalgia," demonstrating how the attempts of the novel's protagonist to restore his childhood home in Austria, stolen from his family during the Holocaust, do not provide emotional closure. Similarly compelling is Krylova's reading of recent memorial projects in Vienna. This includes Litschauer's *transkription* ('transcription,' 2010), comprising an inscribed glass panel placed in front of a *Blut und Boden* 'blood and soil' sculpture from the Nazi era mounted on the outer wall of a 1920s-era apartment block. This interventionist work of art includes text on the glass panel describing the statue and the fate of Jewish families who lived in the building during the Holocaust, as well as two bright white brackets around the statue. Even though the name Adolf Hitler was removed from the plaque under the statue in the immediate aftermath of WWII, Litschauer's installation forces the viewer to consider what has been "bracketed out" by leaving the statue in place. This intervention causes a seemingly meaningless statue to reappear, as it were, and resurfaces a history that was hidden or disguised.

The myth of Austria's innocence in the Holocaust continues to fuel right-wing politics and anti-Semitism to this day. In agreement with Adorno's essay, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" ("What is Meant By 'Working Through the Past'?"), Krylova asserts that it is therefore more appropriate to speak of confrontation with the past, rather than as something that can be mastered or overcome, as the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* 'working through the past' suggests. The works by the writers, filmmakers, and artists in this study demonstrate that confronting the past is a continuous process in the present, rather than something that, with time, can be put to rest.

The Long Shadow of the Past offers a valuable overview of Austria's confrontation with its past in the post-Waldheim era, demonstrating with clear and insightful readings of literature, film, and art how the Nazi past continues to cast a

shadow on the present. Krylova is able to draw connections among cultural products that have not yet been considered together, demonstrating how text and image are separately and together powerful forms of political, social engagement, as well as necessary voices for remembering a past whose remaining eyewitnesses will soon disappear. Importantly, the conclusion to this study opens up other avenues of study by suggesting further reading and viewing, especially the writers and artists of the third postwar generation, who continue to confront Austria's Nazi past and complicity in the Holocaust. Krylova's excellent and well-written study illuminates an important historical, social, and cultural era in Austria for all cultural studies students and scholars, while also motivating scholars and teachers of Austrian culture to a greater engagement with Austria's post-Holocaust legacy.

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