Geoffrey C. Howes

New Book Outline (to Berghahn Books):

Where Such Ailments Are Rampant: The Representation of Madness in Austrian Fiction

Table of Contents and proposed chapter outline

Introduction

Why this book is important here and now: growing general interest in mental illness, partly in light of new findings in neurology. Staking out the topic: this book is not about authors who suffered madness, nor about art as an expression of madness. It is about the social function and dysfunction of madness as represented in a variety of fictional texts from 1840 to 1990. Theoretical considerations: bio-cultural approaches vs. social-constructivist approaches. This book proceeds from bio-cultural assumptions and also applies Arno Gruen’s concept of the Insanity of Normality (1987), which distinguishes between socially acceptable and socially marginalized pathologies.


Austria’s self-image as a breeding ground for madness. Historical reasons for and reflections of this, from the Narrenturm (Fools’ Tower, an asylum built in Vienna in 1784) to recent films (e.g., Dog Days by U. Seidl). Recent attempts to illuminate this problem: Erwin Ringel’s The Austrian Soul [1984] and Stephan Rudas’s Austria on the Couch [2001]. The prevalence of madness as a theme in Austrian literature.

Chapter Two: Patrons and Clients: Patterns of Representing Madness in Austrian Fiction.

Introduction to the main texts under consideration: F. Grillparzer, The Poor Fiddler (1848); A. Schnitzler, Flight into Darkness (1931); R. Musil, The Man Without Qualities (1930, 1932); Ingeborg Bachmann, The Book of Franza (ca. 1966); Werner Kofler, Ida H. A Case History (1978); Thomas Bernhard, Wittgenstein’s Nephew (1982); Norbert Gstrein, Someone (1988). Plots and relevant themes will be worked out in terms of “patron” and “client” structures (non-clinical advocates and the afflicted persons they advocate for). Other writers will be considered for comparative delimiting of the book’s aims (P. Altenberg, J. Roth, E. Jelinek, C. Lavant, G. Roth, B. Schwaiger, P. Rosei, and additional texts by T. Bernhard).

Chapter Three: The Attractions of Madness.

Instances in Austrian culture in which madness seems like an attractive alternative to normal life or repressive social structures; utopian possibilities of madness; theories of Foucault, Felman, Deleuze and Guattari, Sass, Szasz, and Gruen. The attractions of madness as represented in the seven main texts under consideration: the shaky empathy of the narrator in The Poor Fiddler; escape from socially incited fears in Flight into Darkness; self-expression (Moosbrugger) and megalomaniacal ideation (Clarisse) in The Man without Qualities; self-determination and flight to freedom in Franza; escape from oppressive institutions into informal community support in Ida H.; philosophical and cultural solidarity in Wittgenstein’s Nephew; madness as a refuge from outside intruders in the Tyrolean tourist economy of Someone.

**Chapter Four: The Repulsions of Madness.**

The ultimate aporia of utopian conceptions of madness: madness itself cannot create the social connections necessary for a correction of society. The breakdown of communication between patrons and clients: isolation and death in *The Poor Fiddler*; murder and suicide in *Flight into Darkness*; imprisonment and schizoid separation in *The Man without Qualities*; exile and suicide in *Franza*; erratic behavior and withdrawal in *Ida H.*; the end of friendship and death in *Wittgenstein's Nephew*; murder and arrest in *Someone*. The insufficiency of patrons’ efforts and of social and medical institutions is not only intrinsic, but is partly a function of the inscrutability of madness itself. Critique of Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s romanticization of madness.

**Chapter Five: “Hell is Not Interesting, It Is Terrifying.” Bleak Conclusions.**

The fictional representations discussed are not mainly concerned with nosological results or clinical outcomes: they follow the logic of madness itself, as opposed to the logics of social, institutional, and medical interventions or therapies, in its interactions with those interventions. The consequences of this logic go beyond anti-psychiatric discourses against institutionalization and medicalization, which rely on an image of madness as created or at least repressed by the agents of imposed normality. Instead, the failures of social and institutional responses to madness are also an ineluctable function of the complex individual socio-genetic-neurological conditions that constitute madness. The one thing that would be worse than traditional and more-recent cultural and social responses to madness would be mad clients who were “free” of the sometimes ham-handed involvement of their patrons, and even the often deeply flawed medical and legal institutions that try to control or help them, with such imperfect results. As demonstrated in these fictional texts, that freedom (the attraction of madness) would put the mad even farther away from social integration, the absence of which is the fundamental tragedy of madness (the repulsion of madness).

*Email from Berghahn Books, 10/28/13*

Adam Capitanio <adam.capitanio@berghahnbooks.com>

Tue 10/29/2013 5:07 PM

Dear Geoff,

We have reviewed your book proposal and would like to obtain the full manuscript for peer review and further consideration. When it’s ready, please email an electronic copy of the manuscript, along with any image or other supplemental files, to me at adam.capitanio@berghahnbooks.com. You should also send a hard copy to our US office at 20 Jay Street, Suite 512, Brooklyn, NY 11201. In order to save paper and shipping costs (for both you and us), please consider printing double sided.
Please let me know if the expected delivery date remains the same as on the initial book outline.

Best,

Adam

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