Gerhard Fritsch

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"Die leere Mitte": Narrative Desire and Loss in *Moos auf den Steinen* and its Filmic Adaptation

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Critical response to Gerhard Fritsch's work often dismisses his earliest novel, *Moos auf den Steinen* (1956), as a naive, nostalgic portrayal of postwar Austria which constitutes the "Höhepunkt von [Fritschs] emotionale[r] Regression in die Welt des alten Österreich" (Wolfschütz, "Gerhard Fritsch" 5). The novel has long been regarded as an anomaly within his oeuvre on the grounds that its ostensibly traditional subject matter and narrative form stand in sharp contrast to the radicalism of his later works *Fasching* (1967) and *Katzenmusik* (1974).[1] However, a more nuanced approach to the dynamics of desire at work in the novel's seemingly innocuous narrative structure may reveal an altogether more subversive element indicative of a much more ambiguous stance towards Austria's Habsburg past.

This aspect of subversion in Fritsch's narrative strategy becomes truly apparent when the novel is compared with its 1968 filmic adaptation, directed by Georg Lhotzky. Described as "the only true Austrian film of 1968" (Dassanowsky 193), Lhotzky's adaptation was released at one of the lowest points in Austrian cinematic history when Austrian film production had reached its nadir in terms of both quantity and quality and was "finanziell ausgehungert […] und sowohl ästhetisch wie inhaltlich weit vom Zeitgeist entfernt und daher irrelevant" (Szely). Due to its warm public reception and "künstlerisch anspruchsvolle Filmsprache" (Rebhandl 22), *Moos auf den Steinen* became the avatar of New Austrian Film and "gilt als einer der wenigen Ansätze zu einer österreichischen Neuen Welle" (Fritz 268), a cinematic trend that, it is argued, combined for the first time in Austrian cinematic history commercial success with a certain level of artistic merit.[2]

Yet despite its break with the dominant strands of Austrian cinematic production such as the popular *Heimatfilm* and historical drama typified by Ernst Marischka's *Sissi* series,[3] Lhotzky's adaptation cannot be seen as an unproblematically oppositional production. Considering the film's position within Austrian cinema, Stefan Winterstein notes that *Moos auf den Steinen* was "weder dem Genre des Heimatfilms verpflichtet, noch internationalen Kassenerfolgen nacheifernd, weder konventioneller Spielfilm, noch auch avantgardistischer Underground" (233) and hints that this paradigm of New Austrian Cinema may not have freed itself entirely from the generic shackles of Austrian film. This suspicion is borne out by the film's plot structure which diverges significantly from that of the novel and, as I shall argue below, reconstitutes the dynamics

of desire to bring them into closer harmony with conventional constructions of narrative desire.

Narrative Desire

The term "narrative desire" is taken from Peter Brooks's psychoanalytic approach to plot, which posits desire as the central motivating force in narrative literature. According to Brooks, narratives not only tell of desire but in fact use the force of desire as a dynamic of signification (37), desire constituting "that which is initiatory of narrative, motivates and energizes its reading, and animates the combinatory play of sense-making" (48). In both versions of Fritsch's work, the dynamics of desire clearly fulfill this double function. Besides forming the central focus of the works' plots, narrative desire also serves to motivate and sustain the narrative by engaging the reader/viewer and facilitating his or her insertion into the matrices of desire. The enactment of these desires is further entwined with the works' preoccupation with the end of the Habsburg Empire since Austria's historical loss stands at the center of the erotic and socio-economic desires of the central characters and forms the constitutive absence around which their desires operate.

Critical studies of *Moos auf den Steinen* frequently refer to Claudio Magris's concept of the Habsburg myth. In his book *Der habsburgische Mythos in der modernen österreichischen Literatur*, Magris investigates the appeal of an idealized, stable Habsburg past to Austrians writing during the crisis and dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, and this has proven a highly congenial framework for those seeking to assess Fritsch's treatment of Austria's historical tradition. Within this debate, predominant critical opinion would have Fritsch's novel conforming to an almost embarrassing extent to Magris's definition of the Habsburg myth. Indeed, one critic goes so far as to declare that Fritsch was "in gewissem Sinne ein Opfer des habsburgischen Mythos" (Berger, "Die austriakische" 71). Critics have been keen to point out that the novel functions almost as a checklist of the key elements of the Habsburg myth, featuring the genre's stock characters, settings, system of values, and symbolism. Thus, for example, the figure of Baron Suchy-Sternberg can be slotted into the line of aging heroes deemed by Magris to be central to Habsburg literature—a literature he describes as "ein[e] wahr[e] Kultur des alternden Menschen" (65). Suchy corresponds to the myth not only because of his advanced years, "das bevorzugte Lebensalter für die Personen der österreichischen Literatur" (Magris 29), but also because he embodies its values: indecision, hesitancy, immobility, "Zurückhaltung und Maß" (Magris 27).

While critical opinion in this area commonly concentrates on the novel's content or thematic concerns,[4] Magris himself was keen to stress that the Habsburg myth could not be reduced to an "äußerliche thematische Verwandtschaft auf der Grundlage äußerer Kriterien, wie gemeinsamer Motive und Inhalte" but signifies rather "einen ganz bestimmten kulturellen Humus" (20). This unifying

aspect is to be found, Magris argues, in a common flight from reality, whereby "eine konkrete Gesellschaft zu einer malerischen, sicheren und geordneten Märchenwelt verklärt wird" (22). In his reading of Magris, Hermann Böhm equates this escape to an "Indifferenz der österreichischen Literatur bzw. österreichischer Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller zum politischen Geschehen und zur jeweiligen gesellschaftlichen Zeitsituation" (82). Thus the Habsburg myth, more than providing a set of thematic and symbolic categories, denotes "[eine] unbezwinglich[e] Sehnsucht und ein[e] Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit" (Magris 297) which serve as a substitute for a truly critical discussion of Austrian national identity, past and present.

In this respect, critical attempts to isolate specific thematic or symbolic tropes typical of the Habsburg myth in Fritsch's work are evidently limited in their scope and interest. Reading *Moos auf den Steinen* in light of the Habsburg myth pigeonholes it as "ein Werk der Selbsttröstung" (Magris 300) which seeks to compensate for historical loss by recourse to a cozy, mythologized past. A reading that takes into account the constitutive role of desire in Fritsch's novel and its adaptation, as well as the complex relationship of desire to the Habsburg myth in both, allows Fritsch's text to emerge as a far more interesting, ambiguous, and critical text than has hitherto been acknowledged.

The crucial function of desire may best be introduced through an examination of one of the texts' more marginal aspects, namely, the relationship between Jutta and Karl which exposes in miniature the interweaving of the Habsburg myth into the works' matrices of desire. Identified by Robert Menasse as one of the pillars of Habsburg ideology (79), the illusion of a harmonious relationship between ruling and ruled classes plays a significant role in the Habsburg myth which draws attention to the recurring motif of the "treuer Diener" and the "tiefe Liebe" between servant and master (Magris 58). This affectionate relationship becomes erotically charged in Fritsch's novel. In the friendship between Suchy's daughter and heir, Jutta, and the family's unofficial servant, Karl Bauer, a relationship that stretches back to their childhoods, mutual desire is both expressed and suppressed by means of historical role-play and the concept of chivalry. The intensity of their adolescent emotions is further impressed upon the reader who is informed that "damals waren sie sogar ineinander verliebt gewesen" (Fritsch, *Moos* 43).

The possible continuation of this desire into the narrative present is hinted at in Jutta's quoted monologue,[5] where she concludes her fond reminiscences of their shared childhood with the question "Und jetzt?" (43), questioning the potential viability of this relationship in the present. This element of nostalgia evokes parallels to Magris's conception of the Habsburg myth as a form of "Heimweh nach der Kindheit, nach den Düften und Farben, die jene Atmosphäre unauslöschlich dem Gedächtnis eingeprägt hatten" (20), and is further underlined by Jutta's wistful remark that "[d]amals gab es Hoffnungen, Freuden, man konnte ausgelassen sein. Man glaubte an etwas, wenn man auch nicht sagen konnte, an

was" (43). This longing for an idealized past, inextricably bound up with a desire that is both shared and unfulfilled, reinforces the illusion of hierarchical harmony propagated by the Habsburg myth. Yet at the same time, the reader is left with an overwhelming sense of loss arising from the class identity of the pair that renders impossible a revival of this childhood love in adulthood.

Lhotzky's film dispenses entirely with this element of desire, dismantling the erotic aspect of the relationship between Jutta and Karl and reducing it to a question of class difference. The filmic Karl (Johannes Schauer) is rendered a doubly unsuitable love-object for Jutta, firstly through the age difference created in the adaptation (Fritsch's Bauer is only a few years older than Jutta, while Schauer was in his forties when filming *Moos* but is clearly meant to look older still) and secondly through the process of "idiotization" to which this figure is subjected.[6] In stark contrast to the novel's portrayal of Bauer as a strong, honest, hardworking young man (40–41) who enjoys Jutta's confidence, the filmic Karl is a rather simple, intellectually underdeveloped figure. While Jutta frequently turns to the literary Karl for comfort and advice, his filmic counterpart is a character of limited linguistic competence whose discourse is mumbled almost unintelligibly and who receives little attention from the film's main protagonists.

Karl's change of status is underlined by the fact that the viewer of the film is given no insight into Karl's inner life. In the novel, narrated monologue is employed to convey Bauer's contempt for Mehlmann and to suggest his feelings for Jutta: "Er dachte nicht mehr daran, daß ihn der Dicke gestern Josef genannt hatte. Was war das auch wichtig. Er dachte nicht darüber nach, ob Jutta diesen Dicken wirklich heiraten würde" (41). Through this insight into Bauer's emotions, conveyed in his own idiom ("der Dicke"), the reader finds himself or herself aligned with Karl's desires and is made sensitive to the threat posed to his idealized childhood romance by Mehlmann's invasive presence.

This alignment finds no filmic equivalent in Lhotzky's adaptation, which consistently positions Karl as the object of the camera. Furthermore, the film's cinematography maintains a constant distance between the camera and this figure, portraying him through a series of medium and long shots, often from a high angle "looking down" on him from above. This combination of distance and superiority in height marks the viewer's introduction to Karl; the first shot of him, driving his cart through the village, is taken from such a height that he appears only as a small, insignificant element of the scene and of little interest to the spectator. The film's refusal to align the viewer's gaze with that of Karl or even to grant Karl full subjectivity renders him insignificant within the narrative's matrix of desire, as the lack of insight into his emotions reduces him to one-dimensionality, a caricature of the simple peasant. This reconstitution of the novel's dynamics of desire thus dismantles one of the cornerstones of the Habsburg ideology which sought to propagate the myth of a certain class equality underlying its strict social hierarchy (Menasse 76–77).

Developing Desire

Moving beyond this limited example, Peter Brooks's conception of desire as both subject matter and driving force of narrative finds wider relevance in the love triangle between Jutta, Petrik, and Mehlmann which plays a central structural role in the novel and film.[7] Brooks argues that "desire as a narrative thematic, desire as a narrative motor, and desire as the very intention of narrative language and the act of telling all seem to stand in close interrelation" (54), a claim that *Moos auf den Steinen* would seem to corroborate. In the triangular constellation of Jutta, Petrik, and Mehlmann, the erotic tension between the protagonists serves in both versions to drive forward the narrative by instilling in the reader/viewer the desire for resolution of the situation through the transfer and eventual satisfaction of desire at the level of the diegesis.

Following upon Roland Barthes's analysis of plot structures in *S/Z*, Brooks identifies in more detail the exact nature of desire awakened in the reader, defining Barthes's *passion du sens* as "both the passion *for* and the passion *of* meaning: the active quest of the reader for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and middle" (19). Of particular interest to Brooks is Barthes's "hermeneutic code." The typical narrative, Barthes argues, proceeds by posing an enigma and then working towards its resolution. Brooks's interest lies in the psychic implications of the *delay* between the establishment of the enigma and its resolution and he gives prominence to the "pleasuring in and from delay" experienced by the reader (103). Drawing on Freud's theory of desire as set out in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, Brooks compares the reader's desire for signification to the pleasure principle's search for the "gratification of discharge" (102), proposing that in fictional narratives the reader seeks relief from the tension engendered by unresolved or, in Freudian terms, "uncathected" narrative elements (Freud 240). The achievement of (narrative) discharge is, however, accompanied by a state of quiescence, the inorganic state towards which the death drive, working in concert with but simultaneously against the pleasure principle, strives. The delays of the narrative text are thus analogous to "the self-preservative instincts [which] function to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death […]. In other words, 'the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion.' It must struggle against events (dangers) that would help it to achieve its own goal too rapidly" (Brooks 102). Hence, narrative desire depends on the establishment and maintenance of a necessary degree of tension which must then be resolved in a way that is at once pleasurable for the reader while signaling the death of the narrative that had brought about that pleasure.

Within Fritsch's novel, the tension constitutive of narrative desire emerges largely through the disparity in emotion revealed to the reader through shifts in focalization. Thus the potential disharmony between Mehlmann and Jutta is hinted at in the reader's introduction to the former: "Da ist er wieder: Rotblond

und dick" (22). Fritsch's use of narrated monologue here to convey Jutta's opinion of Mehlmann is clearly at odds with the unrestrained enthusiasm for their planned marital union that he expresses a few pages earlier (13). This discrepancy is further connected to the novel's thematization of the Habsburg myth through Mehlmann's use of the antiquated k. u. k. greeting—"Er küßte ihr die Hand, weil sie ihm ihren Mund entzogen hatte" (23)—which places the Habsburg tradition in a substitutive role through which he seeks to compensate for his frustrated erotic desire. Thus the reader is presented with "a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration" (Brooks 103). The disparity between the couple's desires serves as a narrative motor, driving the narrative and its reader towards resolution.

The privileged insight into this less-than-harmonious relationship finds its filmic equivalent in Jutta's attempts to conceal herself from Mehlmann, seeking refuge from his advances in Karl's greenhouse. Here the film's *mise en scène* aligns the viewer with Jutta's perspective (as is frequently the case) since the camera remains at medium distance, simultaneously revealing Mehlmann's head, which bursts through the window hunting for Jutta, and the object of his search, who remains crouched in the lower right-hand side of the screen. While the absence of a point-of-view shot precludes any literal alignment of view, the shared knowledge of Jutta's concealed presence enables an identification with Jutta along epistemological lines. The "mutual implication of narrator and narratee" (Brooks 233) is transformed here into the complicity of camera and viewer in Jutta's deception of Mehlmann. This scene thus exposes the conflicting desires operating in their relationship while consistently aligning the viewer more closely with those of Jutta and consequently engendering desire in the viewer for the resolution of this tension.

The reader's desire for a satisfactory end to this problematic constellation of desire, the "quest for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and middle" (Brooks 19), is further strengthened by the development of the relationship between Jutta and Petrik in these opening sections. Here, tension builds as the development of the protagonists' desires and their plans to act upon them are conveyed to the reader, whose pleasure comes to depend on the consummation of Jutta and Petrik's emerging relationship. The insights into the inner lives of the figures range from subtle indications of potential desire to explicit statements of intention. To the former belongs Petrik's wish to communicate with Jutta through romantic statements: "Er hätte gerne etwas von der Kraft der Erde gesagt, oder davon, daß er nun spüre, wie auch dieses Schloß noch lebe und Kraft sei—aber er konnte dann seiner Begleiterin nur zunicken auf eine Weise, in der er all dies auszudrücken glaubte" (26–27). Petrik's recourse to this idealizing mystification of nature and the Habsburg Empire (in the form of Schwarzwasser) foregrounds the fact that his longing to return to a mythological ideal is inextricably linked to his erotic desire for Jutta.

The reader's anticipation is further increased by Petrik's explicit plans to kiss Jutta which are once again connected to Habsburg tradition, this time by his comparing their situation with a theatrical genre that enjoyed great popularity in, and is consequently often associated with, nineteenth-century Austria, namely, the operetta: "Als er wieder klar vor sich blickte, wußte er, daß er sie heute noch küssen werde […]. Er fühlte, daß seine Rolle in der Operette dieses Abends bedeutender wurde" (97). This clear statement of Petrik's intentions, combined with indications that they may be reciprocated,[8] connects him to the Balzacian heroes identified by Brooks as the "desiring machines whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire […], through scenarios of desire imagined and then acted upon" (39–40). The access which the reader is given to Petrik's inner thoughts not only tells of desire but further constitutes a driving force within the narrative of *Moos auf den Steinen*. Against this backdrop of suppressed yet mutual desire, the novel's structures of focalization raise the reader's expectations that this initial arousal of desire will result in its full satisfaction, consequently encouraging him or her to read on to the end of the novel for the moment of resolution in the form of sexual gratification.

Lhotzky's film provides equally tantalizing moments of desire, offering the "stimulation into a tension" (Brooks 103) which hints towards a future resolution of the love triangle in Petrik's favor. While the film as a whole contains an unconventionally high proportion of establishing long shots and medium shots which set the viewer at a distance from the profilmic events, those scenes depicting the growing intimacy between Petrik and Jutta are marked by a conspicuous preponderance of close-up shots and zoom movements. The scene depicting Petrik's rather welcome disruption of Jutta's quiet contemplation of nesting herons abounds with close-up shots of both characters where the camera zooms in and out, alternating between Jutta and Petrik. While these zoom shots cannot be aligned with the viewpoint of either character, suggesting instead the presence of a third party, this rather unusual use of zoom as a means of shot transition creates a tangible sense of intimacy between viewer and protagonists by seeming to locate the viewer-position as that of an observer within the represented world. Furthermore, it connects the characters visually with each other in advance of their physical meeting. The initial sense of tension, created by Jutta's unwillingness at first to reveal herself to Petrik, is thus superseded by a growing erotic excitement suggestive of a potential alteration to the existing dynamics of desire.

The setting of this developing intimacy against the background of childhood loss, however, places the protagonists' desire in a substitutive function. Thus the first indications of increasing intimacy coincide with Jutta's return to the *Jagdschloss*, a site of military aggression during World War II, where SS troops executed the two deserters whom Jutta and Suchy had been concealing. Here the development of their relationship in the diegetic present alternates with Jutta's flashback to the

final weeks of the war, to a time when the harsh reality of the situation invaded the idyll of Schwarzwasser. This flashback is conveyed primarily in the form of an auditory hallucination; the unmoving camera remains focused on Jutta in the diegetic present while the sound of marching, gunfire, screaming, and church bells are heard off-screen. Although this cacophony of sounds is undoubtedly evocative of the horrors of war, Lhotzky's decision not to synchronize sound and image has wider-reaching implications for our understanding of this scene within the film's treatment of historical loss.

In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman identifies the synchronization of the visual and auditory channels as an integral component of conventional cinema's striving to cover over the "absent real"[9] with a simulated reality. By concealing the presence of the cinematic apparatus, which determines exactly what the viewer sees and hears, conventional film strives to restore an imaginary plenitude within the viewer who may then continue to believe that he or she is in control of the cinematic images (45). The incongruence of image and sound in the *Jagdschloss* scene, however, exposes the illusory nature of this mastery. Thus the sense of loss instilled in Jutta by the memory of her disrupted childhood is recreated in the viewing experience, encouraging the spectator to search within the structures of desire for compensation. Petrik's arrival on screen marks the end of Jutta's auditory hallucination and reinstates the synchronization of sound and image, consequently making good both the loss suffered by Jutta and the temporary sense of lack experienced by the viewer. The representation of desire in the form of Jutta and Petrik's developing intimacy comes to serve as a substitute for loss inflicted by the past, fulfilling a compensatory function which is replicated in the viewer's temporary loss of imagined mastery and the subsequent reinstatement of this illusion.

Ambition–"Armature of plot"[10]

The complexity of the relationship between the narratives' structures of desire and their treatment of the Habsburg myth is most obviously embodied in the figure of Mehlmann whose complex organization of erotic and socio-economic desires provides the impetus for narrative progression in both versions of *Moos auf den Steinen*. The mutual dependency of these desires is stressed throughout the novel, where his courtship of Jutta is inseparable from the ambitious renovation plans through which he seeks to gain social recognition and financial advantage. Thus, in both novel and film, Jutta becomes almost an extension of Schwarzwasser in Mehlmann's eyes, and the literary Mehlmann describes his desire for Jutta with the following words: "sie gefällt mir ausnehmend, ich erfahre, daß sie in einem alten Barockschloß da unten wohnt […] eine echte Baronesse." He further announces that they are to be engaged "obwohl dieses ganze Schloß Schwarzwasser nur mehr eine zerfallende Ruine ist" (13), thereby strengthening the suspicion that his "love" for her is bound up with specific socio-economic considerations.

The connection between economic and erotic desire is rendered equally evident in the filmic adaptation. The viewer's introduction to Jutta places her in a quasi-filial relation to Schwarzwasser, with Mehlmann referring to her as "die Tochter von dem Schloß." This description follows Petrik's question, "eine Blondine?," to which he receives the incongruous reply: "Nein, eine Baronesse!" The divergence between Mehlmann's socio-economic aspirations and Petrik's more conventional interest in Jutta's physical attractiveness is thus rendered explicit from the outset. The dominance of economic desire exposed in this conversation is further underlined by the visual background against which it is set: the camera remains at a low angle outside the car in which the protagonists are seated with the result that two-thirds of the screen is filled with the vehicle's Porsche logo. The visual dominance of this very modern signifier of prosperity makes clear the affluence already attained by Mehlmann and exposes his wish to display publicly the material manifestations of economic success. The juxtaposition of his expression of desire for Jutta with this ostentatious display of wealth further implies that the Habsburg tradition, with which she is connected through her (anachronistic) title, represents for Mehlmann merely another status symbol, a commodity to be acquired.

At the same time, however, this conflation of erotic and economic desire comes into conflict with Habsburg values, thereby increasing the reader/viewer's perception of tension within the narrative. In both novel and film, Jutta's refusal to consummate her relationship with Mehlmann leads to his committing an act of violence against her. In the novel, Suchy condemns this by invoking bygone standards of gendered behavior: "Zu meiner Zeit hat man sich entschuldigt, wenn man ein Wesen des anderen Geschlechts niedergeschlagen hat" (120). Furthermore, Mehlmann's intended renovation of Schwarzwasser is subjected to repeated criticism throughout both works as the execution of his plans would see the palace "gewaltsam konserviert" (164) and Petrik notes somewhat ironically that "er wird alles endgültig zerstören, wenn er es wieder aufstellt" (129). The paradox that Mehlmann's renovations will have a destructive effect is thematized in the film's depiction of the "Rundgang" he undertakes with Suchy and the architect Wöber; the latter not only destroys the peace with his loud (and largely unamusing) jokes but actually causes damage to the building as he violently removes fragments of crumbling stonework. The alternation of this scene with the intimate meeting between Petrik and Jutta in her secret room, where both display the utmost care when handling Jutta's childhood toys, reveals the two possible approaches to the conservation of the Habsburg legacy and highlights their antagonistic nature. On the one hand, the sexual attraction between Petrik and Jutta (with whose perspectives, as we have seen, the viewer is frequently aligned) serves to endow their careful and private preservation of the past with a positive value within the film's matrix of desires. Jutta's ultimate rejection of Mehlmann, on the other hand, goes hand in hand with a negative portrayal of

his socio-economic ambition and hints towards the unlikely fulfillment of either desire.

However, Mehlmann's ambitious plans not only tell of his desire within the narrative but also play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining the reader/viewer's desire for meaning. Brooks identifies ambition as one of the central catalysts of narrative desire, a "force that drives the protagonist forward, assuring that no incident or action is final or closed in itself until such a moment as the ends of ambition have been clarified through success or else renunciation" (39). He thus makes clear the independence of the reader's satisfaction from the fulfillment of desire within the narrative, as the former hinges purely on the resolution of tension and the establishment of the "retrospective meaning" promised him by the narrative's beginning and middle (66). Consequently, the reader/viewer of *Moos auf den Steinen* ironically experiences the satisfaction of his or her desire at the very moment when Mehlmann is forced to renounce his own ambitions. As a result, the viewer comes to regard the failure of Mehlmann's plans in an altogether more positive light, as the means by which the viewer's own desires for resolution are satisfied. Thus narrative "discharge" is predicated here on an acceptance of lack as the reader/viewer may only experience satisfaction through Mehlmann's recognition and acceptance of loss.

This mobilization of frutrated erotic and socio-economic desire in the service of the reader's pleasure emerges further through the role of thwarted desire in the works' storylines and in the system of values created around the Habsburg myth. Thus in the film, the failure of Mehlmann's plans runs parallel to the promise of Jutta and Petrik's sexual fulfillment: as they plan their elopement, Jutta comments: "er wird ein anderes Schloß renovieren." The mutually exclusive nature of Petrik's and Mehlmann's desires and the unequivocally positive value attributed to the former, along with the final scene's overall atmosphere of optimism, encourage the viewer to regard Mehlmann's failure as an unambiguously positive outcome in the sense that it facilitates Jutta and Petrik's satisfaction. Here, the resolution of tension in the context of Petrik and Jutta's relationship serves to compensate for Mehlmann's loss, allowing the viewer to enjoy the satisfaction of the end unhindered by the threat of lack.

In the novel, Mehlmann equally realizes the futility of his plans in the final pages of the text, renouncing his desires in light of Petrik's death: "Die Beute gehört seit drei Tagen ihm, dem Sieger Mehlmann, aber sie ist nichts. Er begehrt sie nicht mehr. Nicht das Schloß und die Zukunftspläne, die sich realisieren ließen, und nicht Jutta, auch sie begehrt er nicht mehr" (285). To a certain extent, the explicit resolution of all desires created around Mehlmann throughout the course of the narrative may correspond to Brooks's account of narrative endings, for it is through Mehlmann's renunciation that the novel's previous events receive the retrospective meaning desired by the reader. However, the lack and loss upon which this "meaning" is founded are foregrounded in the novel. Mehlmann

qualifies his decision with the comment "die Welt ist leer, gespenstisch leer […], sie ist leer" (285). The reader is thus placed in a paradoxical relation to the narrative since the moment of resolution, which for Brooks guarantees narrative meaning, is not only predicated on the non-fulfillment of Mehlmann's desires within the fiction but also fails to make good the lack that is the very product of this resolution. We might approach the problem of lack and its relation to the structures of narrative desire in both works by returning to the level of plot, where Brooks's theory once again points us to a more nuanced reading of novel and film.

Perverted Routes of Desire

In Brooks's analysis of the mechanism of plot, which connects narrative desire to Freudian concepts of the pleasure principle and the death drive, particular emphasis is placed upon the progression towards the end. The reader's desire for signification and resolution of tension, discussed above, is contradictorily combined with an awareness of the "paradox of narrative plot," whereby the reader's "consumption" of the plot inevitably leads to its diminishing (Brooks 52). Thus "narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end" (52), an end that, following Brooks's argument, is comparable to the return to an inorganic state which Freud identified as the object of the death drive. This desired end, the anticipation of which moves the narrative forward, must, however, be the "right death, the correct ending" (Brooks 103). Just as humans seek a return to an inorganic state in an appropriate manner and at a proper time, so the narrative must reach a satisfying conclusion through a series of necessary delays. Hence every narrative is constantly marked by "the danger of reaching the end too quickly, of achieving the im-proper death" (Brooks 104). Plotting thus establishes itself as an essential component of narrative, its nature and sequence ultimately shaping the reader's desires and determining the creation of signification. Given the formative function of plot within the structures of narrative, it is significant that this aspect of the novel undergoes the most radical transformation in the filmic adaptation, and it is at this level that we must seek to understand the complex treatment of loss in both works.

Having constructed a rather traditional triangular constellation of desire between Jutta, Petrik, and Mehlmann—and with it a certain degree of tension to drive forward the narrative—Fritsch departs from the well-trodden path of conventional narrative desire, challenging the reader's expectations of satisfaction through a premature (and partial) fulfillment of desire. Up to this point, about two-thirds of the way through the novel, the plot appears to follow narrative conventions, working through the problem established at the outset with the promise of a "meaningful" and "proper" end: the substitution of the sensitive Petrik for the avaricious Mehlmann as Jutta's fiancé and heir to Schwarzwasser. Yet in the course of the novel, it becomes ever more doubtful that the reader's hopes will be satisfied. As the narrative progresses, the plot veers away from

traditional structures and consequently subverts the expectations previously raised in the reader, most significantly in the development of Petrik and Jutta's relationship. Following narrative convention,[11] this love story should develop slowly over the course of the novel to reach its climax and resolution at the end of the narrative, thus offering the "summing-up, the coming to completion of a fully predicated, and readable, sentence" identified by Brooks as requisite for the gratification of the reader's desires (96).

However, this moment arrives prematurely in the novel when Petrik and Jutta elope at the halfway point. The passages describing this episode comply in their portrayal of love with traditional literary concepts of romance to such a degree as to almost border on cliché: the relationship is linked, somewhat hyperbolically, with idealized images of nature. Petrik's thought that "die Welt war so leer ohne Jutta" (154), for example, is closely followed by "die Sonne hat die Welt verlassen" (159).[12] These traditional elements, however, lose something of their established currency in the context of the novel's plot since the premature satisfaction of the protagonists' desire eliminates one significant aspect of the reader's desire for the end.

This ostensible short-circuiting of narrative desire and the consequent denial of a timely satisfaction for the reader is coupled with a diegetic denial of fulfillment. The narrator insists upon the "pure" nature of their love and the relationship remains unconsummated, the night "unversehrt und geheiligt" (166). Thus the conventional routes of desire are perverted on the level of both content and form. The refusal to satisfy the libidinal drives of the characters converges in this instance with what seems to be a premature satisfaction of the reader's desire, which thereby loses its power as a motivating force of plot. Indeed, in light of the narrator's insistence on the young couple's chastity, it appears highly problematic to interpret this passage as offering any real resolution of desire. Jutta and Petrik's romantic encounter in some ways constitutes a premature "ending" in the development of narrative desire; yet it is an ending robbed of its expected force *as* an ending by the protagonists' sexual abstinence.

In this aspect, the novel's plot may be seen to reverse the "contradictory desire of narrative, driving toward the end which would be both its destruction and its meaning" (Brooks 58). Drawing heavily on Freud's theory of desire, Brooks argues that the drive towards "discharge" motivated by the reader's desire for meaning finds its paradoxical concomitant in the death drive, for the reader's drive towards the pleasure of the ending is always inevitably a drive towards the disappearance of the narrative (50). However, it is evident that both elements of the reader's desire are perverted within *Moos auf den Steinen* since the reader is denied both the pleasure of narrative "discharge" and the "postcoital quiescence" (Brooks 51) conventionally supplied by the end of the narrative which refuses here to disappear or "die" at the appropriate moment.

Death and Disappointment

While this episode may represent only a partial reduction of the reader's desire, still leaving certain elements of tension unresolved in order to preserve something of this motivating force, the random death of Petrik one hundred pages later destroys any hopes the reader may have had that the novel will reach a satisfying and "proper" end. This unexpected twist in the narrative, which occurs almost fifty pages before the end of the novel, has a profound effect on both the events that follow at the level of the diegesis and on the dynamics of plot. This is not merely because the novel refuses to resolve the love triangle in a predictable way. It is also because even Petrik's death is not the end of the narrative[13] and the conventional convergence of the death of a major character with the end of the plot also fails to materialize. The narrative end is situated beyond both the failed sexual union of Jutta and Petrik and beyond Petrik's death, which severs the ending of the narrative from the two events which, in the texts on which Brooks bases his theory, provide the models of fulfillment at the level of the diegesis that satisfy the reader's desire for the proper end.

The incomplete fulfillment of the reader's desire is further underlined by the following chapters' repeated insistence on loss; various manifestations of lack serve to highlight the failure of desire to cover over the wounds of the past. In addition to the inevitable centrality of loss during and following Petrik's funeral, lack equally finds its expression in the injuries sustained by Suchy. His involvement in the road accident necessitates the partial amputation of his left leg (265). Similarly, the mysterious disappearance of the innkeeper Kovacz, who leaves behind the contents of his home without explanation, generates a deep sense of loss in the Russian soldier Wassilij who feels abandoned, "[b]etrogen und grenzenlos allein in diesem fremden Land" (302) and puts an end to Suchy's fantasy of spending his remaining years in the inn's garret.

Encumbered by a deep sense of lack, the novel's protagonists seek to return to the imaginary safety of the past; the novel's final chapters manifest a pronounced element of stasis and regression. Jutta's forced optimism in the penultimate chapter where she attempts to convince herself that "nichts zerstört war, daß auch der Tod letztlich nichts zerstört hatte, denn unversehrt war ihre Liebe" (306) is contradicted by the formal aspects particular to this section which create an overriding sense of stasis and call into question the illusion of a possible progression into the future. The impression of immobility is achieved primarily through Fritsch's use of repetition, according to which entire sentences and phrases are repeated over and over again within the space of a short passage. The repetitive nature of the narrative is particularly obvious in the description of Petrik's funeral in which the ritual nature of the event is emphasized by lexical and syntactic repetitions: "und Mehlmann trug den Sarg […]. Er trug einen Sarg […]. Und Karl Bauer trug den Sarg […]. So trugen sechs Männer […] den Sarg"

(280–81). With this repetition, which clearly lacks the therapeutic value often attributed to religious rituals, Fritsch allows a sense of stasis to pervade the entire section, slowing the pace of the narrative to a near standstill.

This repetition is further mirrored in Lichtblau's description of Vienna as "kein guter Ort," repeated no less than four times in one page (288) and in Suchy's interior monologue from his hospital bed in Vienna which alternates with the funeral scenes. Notable within these monologues is the recurrence of certain motifs, in particular "der Nebel," viewed by Karl Schimpl as a symbol for uncertainty, a "Bild des Vergessens" (41), which dominates many of Suchy's sentences and paragraphs: "Jutta wird aufrecht durch den Nebel gehen. Aufrecht bis Zuletzt. Bis auch sie der Nebel überwältigt. Und vielleicht, vielleicht gibt es ein Land hinter dem Nebel" (287). While passages of this kind function as a means of emphasis, highlighting the uncertainty of the future and the negative contrast of the city with the idyll of Schwarzwasser, they have an equally important effect on the progression of the narrative: the repetition of certain symbolic motifs creates an atmosphere of stasis that seems to confirm Jutta's claim that all life has ceased after the death of Petrik (275).

Indeed, Fritsch not only creates a sense of stasis within the narrative present but further suggests a certain regression or retreat into the past. This is explicitly articulated in the narrator's description of Suchy and Lichtblau living "in dem Lande, in dem sie ihre Toten eingeholt hatten" (305). "Sie waren eingezogen in ihr Vaterland, das sie sterben gesehen hatten und doch unsterblich war" (304), the narrator writes, and this retreat into the past would appear to testify to the eternal nature of the Habsburg Empire which lives on in spirit in its representatives. This sense of regression also manifests itself on a formal level in the frequent use of the pluperfect tense in the novel's concluding chapters. Thus the meeting between Schallerbach, Lichtblau, and Mehlmann is narrated retrospectively by Schallerbach, shifting the action from the narrative present into the past—albeit the recent past: "Da war also Lichtblau bei ihm gewesen. Und Mehlmann hatte ihn begleitet" (294). This retrospective narrative, along with the reader's removal from the narrative present, gives a clear impression of a narrative stuck in the past which, following the death of one of its central characters, cannot find its way into the future. Here it is particularly significant that a meeting with Schallerbach should be narrated in this way since Schallerbach is a representative of the urban press and modern Austria; his busy office in Vienna unites two of the novel's negatively connoted emblems of modernity: the city and the press.[14] The narrating of this episode in the pluperfect thus suggests a disconnection between modernity and the present. We leave the present "behind" and in fact never return to it in the narrative, for this is the final passage involving Schallerbach, Mehlmann, and the city.

This atmosphere of stasis and regression may thus be considered to function as a critical reworking of the Habsburg myth. The role of this myth as a form of

regression through which postwar Austrian society sought to compensate for the gap left by the Habsburg Empire, a "Flucht aus einer turbulenten Gegenwart" (Magris 290), finds its reenactment in the flight of the novel's protagonists into an imaginary world isolated from the reality of modern Austria. However, the context within which this retreat is placed leaves exposed the lack which it attempts to conceal—the wounds of the past remain open and unhealed. The repeated denial of satisfaction within the novel suggests that while the Habsburg past, spatially represented by Schwarzwasser, has disintegrated, no modern substitute can fill the gap which it leaves behind. Recourse to a mythologized Habsburg past is thus revealed as a deeply inadequate defense mechanism that leaves the reader with an overwhelming sense of loss.

Sunrise on the Second Republic

Departing from the ultimately pessimistic atmosphere of the novel, Lhotzky's film strives to conceal the gap left by the Habsburg Empire, relocating the resolution of the love triangle to the film's conclusion in order to achieve the maximum level of satisfaction for the spectator. This relief of tension follows a scene depicting the invasion of modernity—in all its destructive power—into the sanctuary of Schwarzwasser when Jutta's secret room is discovered and occupied by a group of raucous revelers. Seeking refuge from the party downstairs, Jutta escapes to this private space, only to find it violated by several guests who scream, shout, and grimace at her entry. Jutta's deep sense of alienation engendered by this intrusion finds its expression in the jerky shot transitions that follow her entry into the room. Here, in contrast to the film's otherwise unobtrusive cinematography, the camera cuts rapidly among close-up shots of the guests' contorted faces and the skewed angle of the shots contributes further to the confusion and disorder of the scene. The silence that accompanies Petrik's arrival, along with the visible expression of relief on Jutta's face, once again posits him as capable of compensating for her loss. He returns to her the sense of security violated by the revelers.

The viewer, too, is offered satisfaction in the form of a timely relief of tension, bringing about the "gratification of discharge" sought throughout the narrative. In time-honored fashion, the film's unequivocal resolution of its romantic complications takes the form of a kiss between Petrik and Jutta, the representation of which contrasts greatly with the novel's efforts to de-eroticize their love.[15] The repositioning of this embrace at the end of the narrative works alongside a complex symbolic network to produce pleasure within the viewer and to align this positivity with the film's thematic concerns. Thus the loud and aggressive atmosphere of the party is replaced by a calmer depiction of the morning-after; Lhotzky employs color (for the only time within an otherwise monochrome film) and music to create a sense of calm, easing the tension established in the previous scene. The harmonious unification of past and present, evident in the k. u. k. fancy-dress costumes still worn by the guests, is underlined by the introduction

of contemporary music into the film, as one of the guests plays a guitar melody reminiscent of Bob Dylan. In contrast to the novel, where modernity is associated with "der lauten Hektik der Zeit" (Berger, "Die austriakische" 72) and the past is presented as a time of peace, quiet, and calm, the selection of music within the film would seem to attribute very different values to both.[16] The dissonant and almost slurred music of the majority of the film, provided by maverick Austrian pianist Friedrich Gulda, contributes greatly to a sense of unease and tension because its volume exceeds that of the conventional background music and frequently overpowers the diegetic sound. In contrast, the ballad played as the guests awake has a peaceful, calming air, and yet is clearly linked to popular culture. Its "contemporary" nature finds clear expression in its integration into the diegesis since, unlike Gulda's music, it is played on-screen by one of the guests and thus placed firmly in the narrative present.

Guy Rosolato's theory of film music, in particular his assertion that "music finds its roots and its nostalgia in an originary atmosphere, what might be called a sonorous womb" (Kalinak 37), points towards its potentially comforting role: it offers the subject the possibility of an imaginary return to the protection of the womb. Conceiving of music as the imaginary fusion of mother and child, Rosolato contends that "the deployment of harmony and polyphony can perhaps be understood as a succession of tension and release, of unity and divergence of parts, which arrange themselves into chords, which are then resolved into their simplest unity. It is thus the dramatization of these separated and reunited bodies that harmony supports" (Kalinak 37). According to this model, the introduction of euphonous music at this point in the narrative offers the viewer/listener a return to the sanctuary of the womb, making good the loss instilled by the jarring polyphony of the film's extradiegetic music. The connection of this returned plenitude to an aspect of contemporary culture consequently encourages a more positive reading of modernity. The film suggests that modernity, in its less aggressive aspect, may offer an alternative to the gap left in Austrian society by the Habsburg Empire, allowing both past and present to exist in harmony with one another.

The harmonious unity of past and present is further evident in the Sleeping Beauty motif which results from the film's sudden shift into color. The unnatural aspect of the colors, perhaps heightened by their unexpected appearance after over an hour in black and white, lends a fairy-tale air to the final scenes of the film; previously somber aspects now appear in an almost Disneyfied glow. This is particularly manifest on the lovers' return to Schwarzwasser: sleeping guests gradually awake from their slumber, moving slowly and serenely in contrast to the hectic and at times aggressive revelry of the previous evening. This switch into color as a formal endorsement of the film's message is equally apparent as the lovers leave behind the black-and-white palace and drive into a bright and colorful landscape, the warm, golden colors of which herald the dawn of a new era full of potential and hope. Through this symbolism, the restored lack

of the protagonists is located within the wider context of postwar Austria and the complex relationship between modernity and Austria's Habsburg legacy is worked through to produce an ultimately optimistic outcome.

The relocation of the resolution of erotic tension to the hours of sunrise, made possible only through the switch into color, gains significance when considered in the context of the novel. The literary equivalent of this scene—Petrik and Jutta's temporary elopement—is set against the backdrop of a sunset, clearly highlighting the impossible nature of their love. The repeated references to the "rötlich-gelben Schein der Sonne" (157) and the narrator's insistence that "die Sonne hat die Welt verlassen" (159) suggest, at the very beginning of their relationship, that it is destined to remain unfulfilled.

Moreover, we are reminded once more of the representative function of their relationship within the works' treatment of Austrian national identity. Both novel and film contemplate their union against the backdrop of Austria's borders with Slovakia,[17] clearly linking their fate with that of post-Habsburg Austria: "Sie saßen lange auf dem äußersten Rand ihres Vaterlandes und sahen hinein in die andere Welt, die vor gar nicht lange Zeit noch zu diesem Vaterland gehört hatte" (157). Within the novel, a refusal to fully satisfy their desire combines with a distinctly somber atmosphere to place the focus primarily on historical loss and the uncertain status of postwar Austria. Narratorial comments such as "ihr Vaterland war ungeschützt. Es lag hinter ihnen. Eine riesige Wiese voller Herbstzeitlosen" (157) create a matrix of contradictory values around the collapsed empire, at once implying its enduring "timeless" quality while highlighting its relegation to a past that is temporally "hinter ihnen." In contrast, the film's conclusion encourages an unequivocally positive consideration of the recently-imposed boundaries. The cut between the shot of the lovers' Hollywood-style kiss and the image of a watchtower, bathed in golden colors and presented in soft focus, depicts the Iron Curtain in a romantic light against which the lovers' union appears to transcend any politically-imposed divides. Thus the satisfactory fulfillment of desire within the film is connected to a sense of optimism regarding the position of postwar Austria. In its romanticized portrayal of the new borders, the film presents the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire not as an end to be mourned but rather as a new beginning, placing emphasis not on the sun setting on the Habsburg Empire but rather on its rising above the Second Republic. In contrast to the novel's recourse to regression, then, Lhotzky's film successfully posits desire as a sufficient substitute for the loss suffered by postwar Austria; its focus on the possibilities offered by the present serve to suture over the void left by the Habsburg Empire.

Conclusion

The dynamics of desire in the novel and its filmic adaptation offer two very different means of coming to terms with the loss induced by the end of the

Habsburg Empire. The implication of the works' diverging plot structures may be further elaborated in light of Brooks's assertion that plot activates both

> the drive to make the story of the past present—to actualize past desire—and the countervailing pressure to make the history of this past definitively past: to make an end to its reproductive insistence in the present, to lead the [subject] to understanding that the past is indeed past, and then to incorporate this past, as past, within his present, so that the life's story can once again progress. (228)

This working through of the past in order to incorporate it—in an appropriate form—into the present is evidently achieved within the film, as the final shot of Schloss Schwarzwasser clearly demonstrates. Here the camera focuses on the steps leading to the palace on which are strewn the discarded garments of the guests who have returned to their contemporary clothing. This powerful image of casting off the past makes reference to a comment made by Petrik at an earlier point in the film when he is confronted with the decaying ruin of the *Jagdschloss*: "man müsste eigentlich jetzt über diese Treppe in Samt und Seide hinaufgehen." The metonymy of the "Samt und Seide," which provides the link between the two scenes, renders manifest the transformation of the initial metaphor of a resurrection of former Habsburg glory. The resulting "same-but-different" metaphor reveals the ultimate "meaning" of the narrative, suggesting that the Habsburg past may play a part within contemporary Austrian society while warning that a return to, or attempted revival of, this era is not only undesirable but also impossible. This progression of Austria's "life story," enabled by the relegation of the Habsburg tradition to the past, is further cemented by the film's closing words in which Suchy urges the younger generation to turn their back on the past and "Lasst wachsen das Moos, […] spielts Wirklichkeit, Kinder." This final reference to the film's title gives retrospective significance to the work as a whole, as moss functions here to conceal the void left by the Habsburg Empire, enabling the past *qua* past to live on in the present in a hidden form beneath the surface.

Conversely, the failure of the novel's protagonists to progress beyond the grips of the past, mirrored by the stagnation of the plot and its inability to move forward, reveals a deeply critical stance towards the instrumentalization of the Habsburg myth in postwar Austria. The continuation of the plot long after any conventional element of narrative desire has been eliminated functions, alongside the repeated evocation of a wish to return to the sanctuary of the past, to reveal a society trapped within its own historical legacy. Just as the novel fails to progress after the death of Petrik so, it is implied, Austria remains fettered to the Habsburg past, unable to "make an end to its reproductive insistence in the present" (Brooks 228). This criticism of the restrictive nostalgia at work in postwar Austrian society is patently at odds with the depiction of Fritsch as an "Österreich-Mythолog[e]" (Berger, "*Überschmäh*" 59) which has long held currency within Austria's critical

establishment. A critical reassessment of Fritsch's first novel can thus expose it as "Traditionskritik anstelle von Traditionsverklärung" (Böhm 80), whereby the invocation of the Habsburg myth consistently fails to conceal the void at the center of postwar Austrian society.

Notes

1. Albert Berger, for example, comments on Fritsch's "Bewußtseinswandel vom Österreich-Mythologen zum Zeitkritiker" ("*Überschmäh*" 59), while Hans Wolfschütz claims to trace Fritsch's literary development "von der Verklärung zur Aufklärung" ("Von der Verklärung").

2. For further comment on the foundational role of *Moos auf den Steinen*, see Schlemmer 13.

3. Three films comprise the series: *Sissi* (1955), *Sissi–Die junge Kaiserin* (1956), and *Sissi–Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin* (1957).

4. A notable exception to this critical tendency is to be found in Hermann Böhm's comparative reading of *Moos auf den Steinen* and *Der habsburgische Mythos*.

5. I draw here—and throughout this article—on Dorrit Cohn's typology of narrative perspective set out in *Transparent Minds*. Cohn's narrated monologue shares several characteristics with *erlebte Rede*: conveying a character's thoughts in the third person, using the character's idiom, and omitting all verbs of perception, thus blurring the boundaries between the character's inner life and the external events of the narrative, "fusing outer with inner reality" (103).

6. Bauer is not the only figure to undergo this process; his female counterpart, Kathi, is equally transformed from a loyal servant and integral part of the family to a senile old lady whose presence is more of a burden than a blessing.

7. This triangular constellation finds its visual depiction in the film's *mise en scène* as the three protagonists line up on the palace stairs, Mehlmann initially placed in the middle forming the linking point between the characters, only to be relegated to the margin of the group as Jutta moves forward to greet Petrik.

8. Jutta's favorable opinion towards Petrik is repeatedly conveyed by narrated monologue at various points leading up to this episode (see 23, 52, 85).

9. The term "absent real" has its origin in Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier*, which posits absence as the dominant characteristic of cinema (63).

10. Brooks describes ambition as "an armature of plot which the reader recognizes, and which constitutes the very 'readability' of the narrative text" (39).

11. Brooks identifies narrative conventions as an essential component of a "transindividual and intertextually determined desire as a reader, including […] expectations for, and of, narrative meanings" (112).

12. The absence of Jutta referred to here is her playful game of concealment which separates her from Petrik for a matter of minutes.

13. Petrik's death occurs on p. 262 of 307 pages.

14. Helmut Bartenstein connects both the city and journalism to the negative attributes "laut," "schnell," and, most importantly, "modern" (119).

15. Stefan Alker notes that Petrik and Jutta are at pains "die Liebe als gänzlich unkörperliches Glücksempfinden zu leben und einander so wiederum fern bleiben" (80).

16. For further comments on the "Lärm/Stille" opposition in *Moos auf den Steinen*, see Schimpl 196–97.

17. Interestingly, the bordering country is never named directly, contributing further to a mythicized conception of "Altösterreich."

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