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Children of Vienna: Translation, Rewriting, and Robert Neumann's Legacy

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Abstract: This essay aims to bring attention to the complex intersections of language, translation, and exile through an analysis of the production and various reproductions of Robert Neumann's *Children of Vienna*. With this novel, first written in English in the fall and winter of 1945, Neumann wanted to direct attention to the plight of children in the destroyed cities of the former Third Reich and appeal for humanitarian aid from the British and American public. Why, then, considering its original intent as a call for action in response to an acute crisis, did the author retranslate his text almost 25 years later? In pursuing this question, I compare the different versions of the novel to illustrate the kinds of negotiations an author undertakes in a cultural translation of his own work. While the retranslation enables Neumann to stake out his authorial claim over the text and ensure his legacy, his continuous return to the text also allows him to negotiate past traumas. Indeed, in its heteroskopic address of audiences of differing cultures and generations, the text performs the unfinished business of the trauma of war and the necessity of continued collective engagement with the past.

Keywords: Robert Neumann, Children of Vienna, exile literature, Austrian literature, translation

Until recently, language switching and translation have received scant attention in the study of German-language exile literature. This is, at first, rather surprising. The condition of exile after all necessitates an utmost concern with multilingualism and acculturation. Yet, especially within German literary studies, writing in one's native language has long been considered the unquestioned norm, to the extent that the works of writers who fled the German-speaking countries during the Nazi era and chose to write in the language of their host

country are routinely excluded from the literary canon.¹ In addition, as Bischoff argues, limiting exile literature to work produced between the years 1933 and 1945 is also problematic, as it tends to ignore not only works not written in German, but also those written after 1945 (21).

German-language authors who were forced into exile during the Third Reich lost the connection to the language that was their tool, as well as the culture and community in which their work was situated. Intellectual networks, publication outlets, and readerships were no longer accessible. For many writers, exile signified a serious break in their literary careers; for some, it meant the end. Nevertheless, many did continue writing: Some did so in their native language and tried to reach their audience by either publishing with exile publishers such as Querido in Amsterdam, or having their work translated. Some turned to other forms, such as translation or journalism. And some began writing in the language of their host country.

Indeed, a surprising number of German-language authors became bilingual, while in exile during the Nazi era, to the extent that they could produce literary works in a second language: Jean Améry, Rose Ausländer, Alfredo Bauer, Ernst Bornemann, Elisabeth Castonier, Hilde Domin, Ruth Feiner, Hans Flesch-Bruningen, Erich Fried, Anna Gmeyner, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Yvan Goll, Mimi Grossberg, Michael Hamburger, Stefan Heym, Arthur Koestler, Jakov Lind, Lilo Linke, Klaus Mann, Peter de Mendelssohn, Frederick Morton, Hermynia zur Mühlen, Robert Neumann, Ernst Erich Noth, Felix Pollak, Anna Sebastian, Edith Simon, Hilde Spiel, George Tabori, Benno Weiser Varon, and Peter Weiss.² Of course, the degree, extent, and duration of language switching varied widely.³ Such “literary bilingualism” has existed since the era of the French Revolution, which, according to Lamping, marked the beginnings of modern exile literature (“Metamorphosen” 529). Indeed, recent studies have shown that language switching in exile was neither uncommon, nor was it unproductive.⁴ However, it is also clear that the work of exiled writers who wrote in multiple languages has not received adequate attention. Bilingualism, language switching, and translation do not easily fit within the boundaries of a national canon, and the prominence of a national-philological understanding of literary history within German literary studies has contributed to the marginalization and cultural forgetting of oeuvres that include multiple languages. Further, exile studies has traditionally been preoccupied with a historical, political, and sociological approach focusing on biographic and thematic studies.⁵

The reception of Robert Neumann might serve as an example of the forces behind such marginalization. A Jewish author from Vienna best known for his prewar parodies, Neumann fled to London in 1934 following the prohibition of his books in Germany by the Nazis and the bloody suppression of the worker’s

strike in Austria. Six years later, he began writing in English. *Children of Vienna*, Neumann's third book in English, has a long and complex history: First written in 1945 during Neumann's exile in London, it was translated into German in 1948 by Franziska Becker, Neumann's wife at the time, adapted for the stage,⁶ considered for a film version in 1951, again translated into German, this time by the author himself, in 1969,⁷ and finally republished as a revised German translation in 1974, just a few months before Neumann's death. The production and various reproductions of this text occupied its author over the last three decades of his life. For all the novel's success on its first appearance, we can see in Neumann's repeated returns to what Stadler calls his "geliebtes Sorgenkind" (236), as well as in the sheer amount of correspondence dealing with the text in his literary estate,⁸ that *Children of Vienna* somehow represented unfinished business to its author.

Neumann completed *Children of Vienna* in just three months in the fall and winter of 1945. The novel follows a group of six children, ranging in age from three to fifteen, who live in the ruins of Vienna immediately following the end of the Second World War. Neumann wrote the text to call attention to what he believed to be a humanitarian crisis, and his harsh depiction of the conditions in occupied Austria was quite radical at the time. The orphaned children must fend for themselves. They face hunger, cold, illness, and death daily. Dealing with the traumatic aftermath of air raids and bombings, of seeing their parents hauled off and murdered, of narrowly surviving internment in concentration camps, they prostitute themselves, steal, and swindle, they bury their pain and despair in alcohol and cigarettes. Neumann explicitly states in the beginning of *Children of Vienna* that it "is addressed to the men and women of the victorious countries" and that he wrote it "for the sake of the children of Europe" (5). But more than simply informing readers in Great Britain and the United States about the plight of the people in the occupied countries, Neumann intended *Children of Vienna* to spur these readers to action. He wanted them to recognize and respond to an acute European crisis.

Yet, personal reasons also propelled the writing of the novel. As Stadler convincingly argues, Neumann wrote *Children* while still very much under the shadow of his son Heinrich's unexpected death one year earlier.⁹ Having first grappled with this tragic loss in his journals, and subsequently composing *Robert Neumann Being the Journal and Memoirs of Henry Herbert Neumann Edited by his Father*, a book that draws on Heinrich's dairies, letters, and other writings and remains unpublished, Neumann began *Children* immediately upon concluding *Journal*. The same "Schreib-Impetus" (Stadler 240) of working through and coming to terms with a traumatic loss appears to underlie all of these writing-projects.

Neumann's British publisher was Victor Gollancz, who actively sought humanitarian help for Austria and Germany by appealing to British politicians in his books and newspaper articles. Gollancz also founded the aid organization "Save Europe Now" in the fall of 1945, which coordinated the delivery of food and books to Germany (Stocker 109–10). In Britain and the United States, the novel was widely and positively received and described as "ferocious," "grim and moving," "powerful," "impossible to forget," "strikingly brilliant," "brutal," "illuminating," "harrowing," "nightmarish," "bitter yet compassionate," "dramatic and compelling," "vivid," and "scorching" (S.n. 21.647).¹⁰ By and large, the British and American reviewers understood the novel as Neumann had intended it. The reviewer of the *Hartford Courant*, for example, deemed it "a searing indictment of the gratuitous cruelties of war, the stupidity of conquerors" and "a work of art that should stir to the depths of heart, soul and consciousness of every thinking American reader," and Miriam Spicehandler, writing for *Justice*, declared: "We cannot choose to ignore the fate of these children" (S.n. 21.647). The reception of the German translation just two years later, however, was markedly negative. In Austria¹¹ it was widely criticized, both for its use of language, which was described as devious, repugnant, unappetizing, muddled, and crass, and for its supposed historical inaccuracies.¹² Yet Neumann never intended to write a realistic portrayal of postwar Vienna, as is abundantly clear from the novel's prefatory note: "This book is fiction, with fictitious characters, in a fictitious setting which I call Vienna but which could be anywhere east of the Meridian of Despair" (*Children* 5). Indeed, *Children of Vienna* concentrates and intensifies traumatic experiences in scenes that can be called both nightmarish and hyper-realistic.¹³ Neumann's radical use of language – which includes code-switching, street vernacular, and colloquial syntax – provokes a realism that not only unsettled some early reviewers but also led them to treat, mistakenly, the novel as reportage. Such misunderstanding is indicative of one of the text's fundamental contradictions: The hyper-realism produced by Neumann's use of language, as well as its clearly identifiable geographic and temporal setting, lead readers to expect a documentary account of life amidst the postwar rubble.¹⁴ Further emphasizing this apparent realism is the novel's intent as an appeal for aid for a very real humanitarian crisis.

Considering this original intent, it is surprising that Neumann chose to compose a new translation of the text almost 25 years after the war was over. The hardships of the immediate postwar years had been replaced by considerable economic growth, stability, and affluence. The Allied forces had long left the countries they had occupied. And, moreover, a German translation of the book had already been published. I intend to shed light on this question by comparing the English version of the text with the second German translation from 1969

and analyzing the types of revisions Neumann made.¹⁵ The changes fall into three different categories: first, Neumann altered the place names; second, he made changes that further radicalize his use of language; and third, he added some new material in his portrayal of the Allied forces. Throughout my analysis of these changes, questions regarding Neumann's intent and audience will continue to play an important role. And although I argue that Neumann's revisions were an attempt to secure his legacy as an author and stake out a space for himself amidst the post-war literary scene, I also maintain that their effect goes beyond such a practical purpose. All three versions of the text subvert the conventional paradigm of perpetrator – victim – liberator. They question the capacity of language to communicate traumatic experiences and the extent to which art might provide comfort in the face of such experiences. Such issues are, of course, related. Neumann's stylistic innovations enact his rejection of conventional perspectives on guilt and blame. His new translation of 1969 and the radicalization of language that accompanies it not only make this questioning more poignant, but also allows for a dialogic space between author, text, and reader that was just as relevant in 1969 as it was in 1945 and, indeed, as it is today.

That the place names – the ways in which the novel is rooted within a specific temporal and geographic site – were problematic for Neumann from the very beginning, is clear when looking at the original manuscript of *Children*. Hand-written in blue ink on thin, loose pages of paper, the manuscript includes some, though not many, self-corrections and clarifications of spelling. There are frequent references that clearly locate the text within its specific historical moment – such as “Blockwart” and “Austrian Freedom Front” – as well as its geographical location – like “Rotenturm Street” and “Vienna.” Yet one finds that numerous corrections were made to some of these references: Where Neumann had at first written “High Street,” he crossed out this generic-sounding English name and replaced it with “Himmelpfort Lane,” a clearly identifiable street in the center of Vienna. He similarly changed “river” to “Danube river,” “the churchyard” to “Döbling churchyard,” and “the square outside the gutted church” to “St. Stephan's square outside the gutted cathedral” (S.n. 20.835).¹⁶ These revisions are a clear indication that Neumann wanted to ground his tale in a real setting, to make it specific and local. The effect for his British and American audience would have been one of foreignization – a deliberate inclusion of references unknown to his intended audience that mark the text as originating from another culture.¹⁷ When we consider Neumann's original intent for writing the novel, the strong grounding within its particular time and place makes sense. A cry for help in the face of a real humanitarian crisis will undoubtedly be more successful if the people portrayed – even if they are fictitious – are situated within a historically accurate setting.

One of the most immediately apparent changes Neumann made in the 1969 German translation is the elimination of clearly identifiable place names. Thus, “St. Stephen’s Cathedral” (*Children* 10) becomes “Sofienkirche” (*Kinder* 10), “Rotenturm Street” (*Children* 16) becomes “Lilienstraße” (*Kinder* 15), “Theresienstadt Camp” (*Children* 16) “Karimmenstadt” (*Kinder* 15), “Oswiecim” (*Children* 20) “Kolkowka” (*Kinder* 18), and specific references to “Austria,” “Vienna,” or the Danube are either turned into generic designations such as “the river” (*Children* 25; *Kinder* 22) or left out completely (*Children* 22; *Kinder* 20). As a result, the events of the text appear uncoupled from their location, further emphasizing what Neumann states, now in an actual foreword rather than in the brief note of the English version: “Es kann aber auch ein anderer Keller gewesen sein anderswo, es kann jeder Keller gewesen sein überall, damals Anno fünfundvierzig, jenseits von dem Meridian der Verzweiflung” (*Kinder* 5). Thus, the revised text can be understood as representative, as one location and one story that stands in for many war-torn and bombed-out cities and many untold stories, perhaps even as a parable. Yet unless we forget the title of the novel, the tension between fiction and reality remains and the clearly identified setting of Vienna forms a stark contradiction to the fictitious street- and church names Neumann employs in the text.

Yet this change also makes sense when one considers Neumann’s new audience and intent for the 1969 translation. No longer written for the purpose of social activism, the novel was now meant to tell a bigger, more general story about the effects of war and its aftermath on the civilian population. In a letter to Manès Sperber from February 2 1969, Neumann called his new translation “entaktualisierend()” (S.n. 21.857). And indeed, when *Die Kinder von Wien* was published by Piper in 1974, its reviewers largely understood it as such. They described *Kinder* as “moralische Allegorie,” “realistisches Märchen,” “Fabel,” “Kunstgebilde,” and “Mahnmal” (S.n. 21.647). It thus appears that Neumann achieved his goal of finally making his “‘international’ am weitesten verbreitetes Buch” (S.n. 21.861) available to a German audience.

While the changes in place names are obvious, the most drastic revisions are to the language itself. Neumann’s use of language in the English version is already unorthodox. Short, often fragmented sentences, colloquialisms and slang, occasional German and Yiddish expressions, omission of punctuation, and dropped articles and prepositions define the language of the characters and the narrator alike. The result is an illusion of the realism and immediacy of direct speech, with its rough-tongued rhythm and lack of formal polish. Neumann’s new translation, however, allows for an even further radicalization that problematizes language as an effective means of communication. It mixes German with English to an extent that is not possible in the English text. Expressions

brought by the British and American occupying forces such as “boy,” “bloody,” and “kill” (*Kinder* 50, 62) do not have the same effect in the original, where they are simply parts of English sentences. In the German version, they present jarring instances of code-switching, during which a speaker shifts mid-sentence from one language to another. Neumann employs such code-switching throughout the German text, at times quite heavily, contributing significantly to the radical language through which characters express their thoughts and communicate with each other. Other linguistic techniques that add to the provocative nature of Neumann's language in the new German translation include the subversion of normal sentence structure (for example, placing the past participle earlier in the sentence), the frequent omission of words such as conjunctions, prepositions, helping verbs, or pronouns, the stringing together of multiple words to form compounds [for example, “Heilwieheiterdenngschwind” (*Kinder* 23–4)], and a greater emphasis on colloquialism through the use of Austrian dialect (for example, “wie wenn” instead of “als ob”), including the ambiguous use of “is” and “a” instead of “ist” and “ein,” which can be interpreted as either English or Viennese dialect. Together, these techniques result in a language that is imbued with the rhythms and sensations of a street milieu, yet is a highly deliberate construct. The immediacy invoked by this is compounded by Neumann's change of the novel's grammatical tense from past in English to present in German.

Correspondence from around the time Neumann undertook the new translation sheds some light on how important it was for him to revise the language of the text. In the already quoted letter to Sperber, he wrote only briefly about *Kinder*, but his focus clearly was on the new version's language, which he described as “Phantasiesprache” and “Kauderwelsch” (S.n. 21.857). And in a letter later that year to Ernst Klett he called Becker's 1948 translation for *Querido* “grausig()” and complained that he had no say in it at the time (S.n. 21.861). Thus, the 1969 translation allowed Neumann to retake agency over his own text: “Ich habe das nun selbst zu machen versucht,” he writes to Klett (S.n. 21.861). And indeed, the reviews of *Kinder*, many of which were not published until just after Neumann's death in January 1975, were largely positive, and many praised Neumann's radical use of language. In a lengthy review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, K.H. Kramberg wrote that the novel “wird wahr durch die Sprache,” and Christine Nöstlinger, writing for *Die Welt*, suggested that Neumann “hat eine Sprache erfunden, in der das ungeheure Unmaß von Not und Hunger und Krankheit und Verzweiflung gesagt werden kann” (S.n. 21.647). Nöstlinger recognized that Neumann's language need not be “realistic” in order to express “die ganze Wahrheit” (S.n. 21.647). Indeed, the purpose of his “Kunstsprache” is “die Inszenierung einer durch und durch zerstörten Kommunikation bis hin

zur Sprachlosigkeit" (Stocker 118), through which language itself – or rather, its failure as a means of communication and empathy in the wake of the horrors of war and the trauma of the Holocaust – becomes the very subject of the text. Although much of the narrative is relayed in the form of dialogue, this dialogue does not – as is typical – convey interpersonal communication. Instead, characters speak past one other, almost as if they are holding parallel monologues rather than engaging in the give and take of conversation, and sentences trail off in fragments. *Die Kinder von Wien* performs the failure of language as a means of communication and empathy in the wake of the horrors of war and the trauma of the Holocaust.

We see this failure played out in an exchange between Jid, one of the six children, and Hosea Washington Smith, an African-American army chaplain from Louisiana, who has come to distribute reeducation pamphlets that contain poetry:¹⁸ "Zu was reimt es sich? (...) Zu was ist das gut? (...) Zu was will es schön sein?" asks Jid (*Kinder* 82). In the face of such questions, Smith struggles to explain poetry. Overhearing their exchange, Ate, who, before the war ended, was an exemplary member of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, joins the conversation; she wants to recite a poem she knows: "Über allen Wipfeln ist Ruh, in allen Gipfeln spürest du die Reihen fest geschlossen SA marschier die toten Brüder die Rotfront und Reaktion in unsern Reihen mit" (*Kinder* 83). Ate's "poem" can easily be identified as a mishmash of Goethe's "Ein Gleiches," one of the most recognizable poems by the most "German" of all poets, and the "Horst-Wessel-Lied," a Nazi party hymn.¹⁹ In the child's error, Neumann reveals poetry as not some transcendent truth but earthbound expression. This moment illustrates not only the extent to which Nazi propaganda has infected some of the children's minds, but also how the Nazis appropriated German cultural heritage for their own political gain. Indeed, it shows how the world – even Goethe's language – is in ruins in the wake of Fascism.²⁰ When Curls, yet another child, recites "Ein Gleiches" correctly, this evocation of the pinnacle of German culture produces only silence among the children. This is not the silence of awe but rather an empty, inexpressive silence. Hollow and meaningless, poetry – and the culture it signifies – fails to account for the trauma they have experienced.

Contrary to most German-language writers who assiduously avoided the Holocaust in the years immediately following the war – I'm thinking here of the authors of the *Gruppe 47* – Neumann acknowledges the Holocaust and its enduring traumatic effects. Textual examples can be found throughout *Kinder*. For example, upon hearing a barrel organ playing a melody outside, Jid describes: "Schönebluedonau. Das hat man im Lager gespielt, auf dem Lautsprecher, damit man den Krach nicht hört (...) Sie haben geschrien und geschrien und man hat nicht gehört. Nur gesehen hat man: sie schrein" (*Kinder* 82). This

brief evocation of the horrors of the concentration camps shows that the traumatic events they have experienced not only endanger the children's physical well-being, but also threaten their very humanity. Neumann's use of a broken and damaged language to convey trauma comes across more strongly in the 1969 German translation, in which he employs a more radical and experimental language in comparison with the 1945 English version. Thus, the two changes I have discussed thus far – the elimination of clearly identifiable place names and the revisions to the language of the text – are here intricately connected. Despite Neumann's insistence in *Kinder* on the representative nature of the events depicted, the traumas the text portrays are rooted in a temporal and geographic specificity that the reader immediately understands to be the Holocaust. Indeed, Neumann's *Sprachkritik* in his references to well-known cultural products by the likes of Strauss and Goethe places him squarely within an Austrian intellectual tradition that came to characterize much of the literary production of the twentieth century.

By asking "What is poetry, indeed, what is culture good for? What meaning can poetry have after state-sponsored genocide?" Neumann anticipates Adorno's famous formulation that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). *Die Kinder von Wien* addresses this moral-aesthetic quandary by continually subverting the very idea of poetry as whole: stitching together a Nazi hymn and lines from Goethe, renaming "Ein Gleiches" "Horstwesselgedicht" (*Kinder* 83), as Curls does, and declaring the Atlantic Charter a poem. The Atlantic Charter is a recurring motif in the novel, but it is here, recited by Jid as a "poem" (*Kinder* 84), that Neumann draws our attention to its failed promise. A policy document signed in August 1941 by Roosevelt and Churchill, the Atlantic Charter laid out the Allies' goals for post-war Europe. Article six, which is the one Jid quotes most extensively, proclaims that "after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny," the Allies "hope to see established a peace (...) which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want" ("Atlantic"). By including the Atlantic Charter in an exchange about poetry that reveals art's uselessness, Neumann calls our attention to what the children really need: "freedom from fear and want." The failure of the Allied forces to deliver on the promises of the Atlantic Charter is underlined when Jid remarks: "Es reimt sich nicht" (*Kinder* 85). The text here alludes to the meaning of the German phrase "einen Reim auf etwas machen": Of course, the Atlantic Charter does not rhyme in the sense that it is not a poem, but it also does not make sense to someone like Jid. Neither poetry nor the Allies' policy statements hold any meaning or give any promise to the children. Through repeated quotations from and references to the Atlantic Charter, Neumann directly addresses the audience of the 1945 English version of the novel. By juxtaposing the prom-

ises made in the Atlantic Charter with the abysmal living conditions portrayed in the text, he reminds the British and the Americans that they have failed to meet their obligations toward the countries they defeated, effectively widening the circle of moral responsibility.

Although the novel portrays Smith essentially in a sympathetic light, the end of the text becomes increasingly critical of the Allies and their true motives in occupied Vienna. Reverend Trueslove, Smith's superior, formulates the Americans' goal as: "We have come as conquerors, all right, but we stay as educators" (*Children* 205). He reminds Smith of the four "lessons" they need to teach "these people here" (*Children* 204): that Nazism is a crime, that crime does not pay, that if the people are given too much food, they might not learn their "lesson," and that the American way of life must be preserved (*Children* 205). Unaffected by their individual fates, Trueslove variously expresses disgust and indifference about the children's physical and psychological suffering. Indeed, whereas Trueslove's entire moral system revolves around an us-versus-them mentality, Smith subverts such differentiation between victim and perpetrator. Standing in for the ideal reader who has undergone a transformation from naïve bystander to compassionate savior, he comes to realize that there is "no difference to be seen between those slain by Nazi bullet or Allied bomb, (...) no difference between German plague or Russian or Polish plague, (...) no difference for a soldier (...) if he froze to death or died of hunger in the winter of tyranny or in the winter of liberation" (*Children* 211). This passage forms one of the novel's most explicit critiques, implicating the Allied forces in the ongoing trauma of post-war Europe. A Jew whose family was murdered in concentration camps, Neumann was no Nazi apologist. Rather, he subverts the conventional paradigm of German perpetrators and Allied liberators to focus instead on the innocent victims of both. Amid the 1945 controversies and debates about reeducation and collective guilt, Neumann urges his British and American audience to remember their moral obligation toward those who are most innocent: "did they (ask for it)? Did Yizchok Yiddelbaum ask for it? Did Eve Kaltenbrunner or what's her name ask for it? Did the kid with the balloon belly?" (*Children* 208–09).

The above passages are all from the 1945 English version of the text. If we compare these pages with the new German translation of 1969, we discover that Neumann added new material in the later version to give his critique of the Allies more force. For example, the first lesson Trueslove recites is, in the English version, simply "Nazism is Crime" (*Children* 205). In the new German translation, however, Trueslove expands this to "National Socialism hat vielleicht seinen guten Kern gehabt – das ist meine ganz private Meinung – Bollwerk gegen Bolschewismus und all that, gewiß – aber was Hitler und sein Gang daraus gemacht haben, war ein Verbrechen" (*Kinder* 176–77). Trueslove tempers his

critique of National Socialism in the German version of the text. He no longer states unequivocally that it was an atrocity, but instead allows for a good, valuable side of Nazism. By putting these words in Trueslove's mouth, Neumann employs language to criticize the Allies' moral relativism. Trueslove goes on:

Gerechtigkeit ist Gedächtnis. Wehe, wenn wir vergessen. Diese Menschen hier liegen jetzt vor uns auf den Bauch, aber wie wir mit ihnen zu tun bekommen haben, sind sie noch aufrecht gestanden und waren Mörder. Einmal ein Mörder, immer ein Mörder, Reverend (...) Und diese hingestreckten potentiellen Mörder – Gedächtnis! – haben nicht nur durch Zufall am Anfang von diesem Krieg einen Vertrag gemacht und waren Partner von jenen anderen Mördern – einen Steinwurf von hier! – die infolge von demütigenden Verkettungen heute unsere Alliierten sind. Ich wälze mich auf meinem Bett, Reverend, Nacht für Nacht, und stelle mir die furchtbare Frage: Haben wir vielleicht das falsche Schwein geschlachtet? (*Kinder* 178–79)

Trueslove here equates the Nazis and the communists by employing the word "murderers" to describe both,²¹ and asks whether the Americans should not have entered the war on the side of the Nazis in order to defeat the communists, underlining the cynicism inherent in political maneuvering that is unconcerned with moral responsibility or individual lives. Yet the full force of Neumann's criticism only becomes apparent at the end of the novel, when one of the Russian soldiers who have come to take away the children's most prized possession – the flushable toilet – employs some of the exact same words as Trueslove: "(...) Gerechtigkeit ist Gedächtnis. Wir dürfen nicht vergessen, unter euch waren Mörder. Und wir dürfen nicht vergessen, daß einen Steinwurf von hier – eine, wie soll ich sagen? – eine demütigende Verkettung, daß gewisse Leute heute unsere Alliierten sind" (*Kinder* 189–90). By having Trueslove and the Russian express the same sentiment using almost the same words, Neumann equates the two. He further emphasizes their similarity, as well as their status as representatives of the American and the Russian occupying forces, through their diction. Of all the characters in the novel, Trueslove and the Russian are the only ones who express themselves in mostly whole and eloquent sentences, with few colloquialisms.

The two sections in which Trueslove and the Russian disparage their ally are absent in the English version of the text. The 1969 German translation thus reveals Neumann's more critical stance toward the Allies, especially the Americans. Further, emphasizing the Allies' preoccupation with each other allows Neumann to allude to the power struggles of the Cold War. These aspects come across more strongly in the new German translation, in which Neumann made significant changes to the Russian soldier's speech at the end of the novel. In the English version, the speech depicts the Soviets as liberators, focuses on their

magnanimity toward the native population, and harshly condemns the tyranny of the Nazis. In the new German translation, the Russian hardly speaks about the Nazis at all. Instead, he complains about the Americans – how they are unfairly dividing the city, taking the least destroyed houses and best amenities, and how the Soviets are treating the native population much better than the Americans. Sentiments such as “Wir müssen euch und uns vor ihnen schützen” (*Kinder* 190) again betray an us-versus-them mentality just like the one expressed earlier by Trueslove, yet here the lines are drawn differently: The Soviets are on the side of the Austrians and have to protect them from the brutal ways of the Americans.

The changes Neumann made in his portrayal of the Allies in the 1969 German translation have the overall effect of emphasizing their cynicism, hypocrisy, and infighting. Condemnation of the Nazis, though still present, moves into the background in comparison to the English version. The English text does allude to the tensions that will escalate into the Cold War, which, by the end of 1945, were already foreseeable (Stadler 241). Yet, clearly, by the time he finished the new German translation in 1969, Neumann’s perspective of the events of 1945 and their ramifications for the following decades was quite different. It is also possible that Neumann felt compelled to make these changes because his audience and intent had changed. In 1945, he wanted to appeal to the British and American public to help the poor, starving children in the countries they had just defeated. Portraying the British and American occupiers in a critical light may have been ill-advised. But Neumann’s potential audience for the new German translation had, in large part, actually lived through the very events the text portrays and, indeed, was aware of the important position of politically neutral Austria during the Cold War.

Neumann’s novel asks questions about guilt and responsibility that would come to shape the subsequent half-century of intellectual debate in Germany and Austria.²² In this sense, although it was originally written in English and addressed an English-speaking audience, the text is actually a very “German” book – the traumas with which it deals were produced by, affected, and cast a long shadow over German and Austrian society. In its setting among the ruins of post-war Europe, its bleak tone and outlook, its preoccupation with emotional pain and trauma, it can even be considered an example of *Trümmerliteratur* in the vein of Wolfgang Borchert. Why then return to it 25 years later?

Neumann essentially had three literary careers: He first found overnight fame upon the publication of his book of parodies *Mit fremden Federn* in Vienna in 1927, and the subsequent volume *Unter falscher Flagge* in 1932. Upon his decision to begin writing in English in 1940 while in exile, he became a well-established “English” author and his six novels published in English were widely and

positively reviewed (Dove, "Almost" 93).²³ When he returned to the continent to settle in Swiss Locarno in 1958, he attempted to reestablish himself as a German author.²⁴ The lack of literary recognition and marginalization he experienced during this third career caused him great pain. His prewar and exile works were largely forgotten and unknown, and he found it difficult to gain entry into the contemporary literary scene, which was dominated at the time by the *Gruppe 47*. His writing revolved mainly around radio and TV-plays, newspaper articles, and polemical works. He also began writing erotic literature during the 1960s in order to improve his financial situation, even though he was aware of the fact that it would likely hurt his reputation as a serious author (Wagener 201).

Neumann's outsider position is expressed in his polemical writings against the *Gruppe 47*, which he forcefully criticized for its – in his opinion – naïve belief that a new start after the Nazi era was possible, its exclusion of exile and prewar authors, and its reluctance to deal with the Third Reich and the continued existence of fascist ideology (Wagener 202–03). Describing himself as "einen amüsierten Beobachter aus der Provinz" and "jenseits des Literaturbetriebs" ("Spezis" 39), he attacked the group's "literarische() Ignoranz," "enthusiastischen Konformismus," and "Mangel an Courage" ("Spezis" 35–36). Clearly, though, Neumann was not happy about his outsider position. Wagener accurately evaluates Neumann's polemical attacks against the *Gruppe 47* as "ein Sichwehren gegen das eigene Unbeachtetsein, gegen die Isolation als Schriftsteller, gegen die offizielle Nichtanerkennung, gegen die Abstempelung als gestrig" (207) and concludes: "Fraglos litt Neumann an seinem Mangel an Erfolg (...) und er litt an dem Fehlen öffentlicher Anerkennung" (208).

It is helpful to keep this context in mind when evaluating Neumann's 1969 translation of *Children of Vienna* as the author's attempt to reestablish himself and stake out his place among a new generation of post-war German and Austrian writers. The new translation allowed Neumann to rectify those aspects of the first German translation that he was dissatisfied with, especially the language, replacing the "grausige" translation of his ex-wife with his own, calculated "Kauderwelsch." Indeed, in response to Ernst Klett's concerns about finding an audience for the novel – a concern Neumann shared – he emphasized the need for "eine gültige Übersetzung" of this, his internationally most well-known novel, for his collected works (S.n. 21.861). Neumann was 72 years old at this time and had dealt with numerous serious health problems over the course of the previous few years. Thus, the concern about his collected works and valid translations was perhaps an effort to ensure control over his legacy. The new translation also allowed Neumann to respond to his Austrian critics from 1948, who had complained that the novel was written for America, that the experience of emigration had led to a distorted, grotesque portrayal of Vienna, and

even that Neumann had “left” Austria “um ungehindert von Hitler, die reinere Luft der englischen Freiheit zu atmen” (S.n. 21.647). By radicalizing the novel’s language and emphasizing the story as representative and universal, Neumann directly addressed the two main points of criticism launched against him by the Austrian reviewers of the 1948 German translation.

In his foreword to the new translation, Neumann provocatively asks: “Wozu eindeutschen, überhaupt?” (*Kinder* 5). By repeatedly using the awkward and unusual term “eindeutschen” instead of “übersetzen,” he calls our attention to the fact that this version is indeed not only a translation, but rather a text that has been made German. This puts *Die Kinder von Wien* in an unusual position as far as translations go. Translation theory today, instead of measuring a translation by its linguistic fidelity to the original, emphasizes the value of translation as an “intercultural transfer” (Bassnett 132), an act of rewriting that must account for its specific time, place, and audience. Yet by making *Die Kinder von Wien* German, Neumann has in essence translated a very German book, which he wrote for an English-speaking audience, back into German.

The back-and-forth movement of intercultural transfer is mirrored in the mixing of languages Neumann employs throughout the text. He claims that the language of the characters in the original version is not English, but a deliberately constructed street language, an argot employed by the author to capture a world and a moment in time that existed only briefly: “Für die Gestorbenen ein Denkmal in diesem Buch – vielleicht am besten auch ein Denkmal für die Sprache von den Gestorbenen?” (*Kinder* 5). Perhaps Neumann’s 1969 translation should not be understood as a Germanization in the sense of intercultural transfer – after all, the cultural content of the text was already specifically German. Neumann’s audience, however, has changed – it is neither the one of the English version, nor is it the one of the first German translation. Thus, the new translation, in addition to correcting the inadequate 1948 translation and responding to its critics, also addressed a new generation of readers. The readers of Neumann’s *Die Kinder von Wien* in 1974 included a new generation of Germans and Austrians that had no direct experience of the events described in the novel. Not only that, but the cultural discourses of 1970s Germany differed immensely from those of the 1940s. During the 1960s, the Eichmann trial in Israel, the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, and the debate surrounding the statute of limitations for capital offenses all contributed to a heightened awareness of the war crimes perpetrated by ordinary Germans, leading the younger generation to confront their parents, criticize their (in)actions, and demand accountability. Thus, the “transfer” Neumann’s translation undertakes can perhaps be better understood as intergenerational rather than intercultural. No longer a call to action in the face of a humanitarian crisis, Neumann’s new translation is a monument for the

dead and their language, and the process of its writing an act of memorialization. It is a work of art that both speaks beyond language and exists as language.

The very process of writing is here, of course, a way to deal with pain and suffering, which in turn recasts the memory of trauma into its memorial. Thus, Neumann's continuous work in writing and rewriting *Children of Vienna* can perhaps also be understood as his unceasing attempts to come to terms with his son's premature death. In this sense, the book forms a kind of monument and its many iterations perform the act of memorialization, a struggle against forgetting. Indeed, Neumann himself noted in his 1963 autobiography *Ein leichtes Leben* that, in 1938, he had helped his son plan his second novel: "'Ten Little Niggers' sollte er heißen – handelnd von der Flucht von zehn Kindern aus der Stadt Wien; und da ich dies niederschreibe, ist mir, daß vielleicht einiges aus diesem Plan in meine 'Children of Vienna' geflossen ist" (499). In the manuscript of *Children of Vienna*, its original title is crossed out: "The Nigger Children of Vienna" (S.n. 20.835). The traces of personal loss are indeed embedded in this text.

Yet I would argue that Neumann's return to his text is not only a form of catharsis, but also performs, in its address to later generations, the unfinished business of the trauma of war and the necessity of continued engagement with the past. Neumann confounds overly simplistic paradigms that we – in the face of complex and uncomfortable questions about guilt and responsibility – all too often rely on. Thus, not all the Allied forces were the liberators they asserted to be, for whereas they may have brought physical freedom from Nazi oppression, they did not bring "freedom from fear and want" as the Atlantic Charter had promised. Similarly, not all Germans and Austrians were perpetrators; some are also victims, such as Ate, an exemplary *Bund Deutscher Mädel*-member still spewing Nazi propaganda, who was exploited in the brothels and mental institutions in which she was forcibly detained. Neumann expands the boundaries of what it means to be a victim here – not to lessen the pain of those who suffered and died at the hands of the German war machine, but to expand our range of empathy. Indeed, by confounding overly simplistic notions of perpetrator, victim, and liberator, Neumann demands an empathetic response to trauma through and beyond language. In opening up this space for dialogue between author, text, and reader, he urges the same kind of continuous engagement with the experience of trauma that he enacts through the production and reproduction of his own text. The questions with which the texts ask us to engage – questions about humanity amidst unbearable suffering, about guilt, responsibility, morality, empathy, and compassion – go beyond the specific historical circumstances that gave rise to them. They remain unanswered and perhaps unanswerable as well. And that, indeed, is the point. It is only in the endless moment of empathy with the other – a process, not an end point – that we rediscover our shared humanity.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Bischoff's introduction to the volume *Sprache(n) im Exil* for a useful overview of the historical problems and current state of research. See also Benteler; Lamping, "Metamorphosen"; and Utsch, "Sprachwechsel" on these issues.
- 2 Although this list cannot be comprehensive, I have here attempted to include all such writers of literary texts I have encountered in my research. Kucher's essay focusing on language switching by Austrian exile writers ("Sprachreflexion") and Strickhausen's bibliography of English-language publications of German and Austrian exile writers have been the most helpful in compiling this list.
- 3 See Kucher, "Balance" and "Sprachreflexion."
- 4 See, for example, the work by Address, Jung, Kucher, Lamping, and Utsch.
- 5 On the problems and inadequacies of scholarship on multilingual exile writers, see Kilchmann; Lamping, *Literatur* and "Metamorphosen"; and Utsch, "Sprachwechsel" and "Übersetzungsmodi." See also Kremnitz's call for a corrective of our understanding of national literatures.
- 6 Four American newspapers, including the *New York Times*, announced the planned production of *Children of Vienna* in January 1948 for March of that year (S.n. 21.647). The play was adapted by Neumann himself and, as Stadler notes, was likely written simultaneously with the novel (237). The typescript of the play can be found in Neumann's *Nachlass*, which is housed in the collection of manuscripts and rare prints in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (ÖNB). All references to materials from Neumann's *Nachlass* are noted in the text by ÖNB call number. My archival research, which was instrumental in the writing of this article, was made possible through the financial support of a Franz Werfel-Fellowship from the *Österreichischer Austauschdienst*.
- 7 Although the new translation was not published until 1974, Neumann clearly indicates in correspondence with Manès Sperber and Ernst Klett from 1969 that he has completed it (S.n. 21.857 and 21.861). See also Stadler 255.
- 8 As Stadler notes, the papers and correspondences related to *Children of Vienna* are "unvergleichbar größer" than that of other works (236).
- 9 See Stadler 238–40.
- 10 The reviews are collected – largely in chronological order – in six folders in the ÖNB.
- 11 Not many, but a few Austrian and Swiss reviews of the 1948 translation published by Querido can be found in the ÖNB. There are no German reviews, confirming the fact that exile publishers had virtually no avenues to distribute their German-language books in Germany during this time.

- 12 The reviewer of *Neues Österreich* described Neumann's diction as "abweigig(), oft auch abstoßend() und unappetitlich()" and the novel's form as "(k)raus und () kraß" (S.n. 21.647). The same review understood itself as a "(n)otwendige Korrektur eines verzerrten Bildes von Wien und seiner Jugend" (S.n. 21.647). It is striking that the two Austrian reviews, especially when compared to the British and American ones, were quite concerned with the kind of image the novel portrays of the city of Vienna, its culture and traditions, and its inhabitants.
- 13 F.C. Weiskopf, writing for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, described the novel as a "nightmarish fairy tale with super-realistic features" (S.n. 21.647).
- 14 Indeed, Neumann was frustrated with the apparent marketing of *Children* as a documentary. See Stadler 244.
- 15 The first German translation from 1948 largely follows the English text; hence, while I refer to it occasionally, I do not analyze it in depth.
- 16 In a personal conversation, Stadler clarified that he was mistaken in attributing some of the corrections of the manuscript to Neumann's wife (see Stadler 246). The corrections were actually all made by Neumann himself. Thus, Stadler's original assessment that this manuscript dates from before 1948 is incorrect (246).
- 17 See Venuti, who introduced the terms "foreignization" and "domestication" in translation studies.
- 18 Smith repeatedly compares himself and his difficult life to the children and their circumstances: "Ich hab mich hochgearbeitet von – nein, nicht von Nichts, von viel tiefer unten als Nichts hab ich mich hochgearbeitet bis dorthin wo ich jetzt bin. Man glaubt, es kann nicht so schwer sein in der American Democracy" (*Kinder* 121). Through such statements, Neumann draws an analogy between the inequalities produced by slavery and segregation in the US and the aftermath of the war in Europe. Like the children, Smith is subordinate to white hegemony.
- 19 Ate recites the first four lines of Goethe's famous poem – although she mixes up "Gipfeln" and "Wipfeln" – and then switches to a somewhat mixed up version of the "Horst-Wessel-Lied." In *Children of Vienna*, Ate recites the poem in German (one of the few moments in the entire novel when German is utilized for more than a word or two), but does not confuse "Gipfeln" and "Wipfeln."
- 20 See also Weinzierl 199.
- 21 In *Childern of Vienna*, Neumann writes: "Once a killer, always a killer. Or do you mean because they are beaten to the ground just now, and live as they live?" (207). "Killer" is used only to refer to the Nazis; the references to the Soviets are completely absent.

- 22 Although it is important to note here that, having for many decades portrayed itself as Hitler's "first victim," Austria lagged behind Germany in confronting its Nazi past. Public debates about Austria's participation in Nazi crimes did not begin in earnest until the so-called *Waldheim-Affair* of the 1980s.
- 23 Dove gives numerous reasons for Neumann's language-switch to English. He notes the great material and psychological pressures to assimilate, Neumann's distress at being classified as an "enemy alien" and trauma stemming from his internment, and the poor prospects of his work appearing in German ("Gift" 110).
- 24 I propose that, after Neumann's "Austrian" and "English" careers, one might consider this third phase his "German" one. Living in Switzerland, he largely wrote for a German, not Austrian, audience. He published in German newspapers and magazines like *Konkret*, *Die Zeit*, *Tribüne*, and *pardon* and wrote commentaries for many German radio stations. His most important publisher during this time was Desch, in Munich, and his new translation of *Kinder* was published by Piper.

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