2. Summary

Austrian avant-garde literature is nowadays considered an integral part of German literary history. Focusing on the avant-garde's early stage of the 1960s, the thesis seeks to look into (a) the conditions which gave rise to the progressive literature in the Austria of that time, and (b) its concrete manifestations in the works of the young authors.

The opening part explains the origins of such a radical approach to form and content across literary genres. After 1945, Austrian culture and arts did not face the uncertain choice of literature in Germany, where another parting of the ways came in 1947, with the fundamentally different approaches between the West and the East. In Austria the initial debate was more efficient: the official policies clearly aimed at re-establishment of the modern and stable values as presented by the Austrian interwar great story-tellers such as Robert Musil and Hermann Broch. These efforts, however, were soon to become counterproductive. The conservative, and cumbersomely obsolete policies of the grand coalition between the social democratic SPÖ party and the newly established ÖVP party failed to provide fertile land for young authors, who grew up in the 1960s. It was these authors in particular who felt that the cultural and political atmosphere was extremely rigid, and that the literature could not fulfil their expectations. Another factor important to them was the still-prevailing negative fallout from World War II. People discredited by the war, among them those once welcoming the "Anschluss", or annexation of Austria to the Nazi Germany, now easily engaged in the political and cultural life. The political circumstances made it impossible for any literary experiment in Austria to win official support.

For this reason, the avant-garde with the 1950s "Wiener Gruppe" around Hans Carl Artmann, and more importantly with the 1960s "Grazer Gruppe" had a vigorous start and an unfailing urge to break through and provoke, often to absurdity.

Following the rather isolated initial attempts at progressive literature in the 1950s, the avant-garde grew into a mighty and confident tool for the experimental authors of the 1960s and early 1970s. Surprisingly, it was not Vienna but Graz, Styria, that became their capital. After the "Forum Stadtpark", which even today hosts leading exhibitions and performances of all kinds, was founded by Austrian authors and artists in 1959, Graz became a mecca for young writers unable to establish themselves, often for financial reasons, on the rigid literary market.

A very important figure to the "Grazer Gruppe" (e.g. Peter Handke, Wolfgang Bauer, Barbara Frischmuth, Michael Scharang, Gert Jonke, Gerhard Roth, and Klaus Hoffer), Alfred Kolleritsch was entirely open to young authors from the very start, enbaling them to publish in the *manuskripte* literary magazine, which has existed since 1960. The revue played an indispensable role in this respect, as it made a major impact on cultural life both at home and abroad. The focus was on manuscripts, that is, texts that had not been printed before. Despite the very diverse linguistic tools employed by the individual authors, a basic distinction in their works can be made between the aesthetic, or linguistically experimental line (e.g. Handke, Bauer, and Frischmuth) and the less abundant, politically motivated, or social-realistic line (e.g. Scharang, and partly Turrini).

The lingustically experimental line largely drew upon the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1921) and later *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) totally changed the attitude of many authors to the linguistic representation of reality. It was no more the language as such that mattered, but its concrete usage. In his plotless *Spoken Plays* (*Sprechstücke*) from 1966, Handke approaches the language along Wittgensteinian lines as a collection of elementary propositions, which are either true or false at a specific moment. Only an aggregate of several true elementary propositions constitutes a correct portrayal of reality. Moreover, it must be assessed completely apart from the extra-linguistic reality.

The second line was represented by the leftist, critical social-realist authors around the *Wespennest* magazine, who aimed at politically committed literature. Their ways of targetting the audience were logically very different from those of the „experimenters".

The next part of the thesis is a direct and detailed comparative analysis of works by the two best-known representatives of the "Grazer Gruppe", namely Peter Handke and Wolfgang Bauer.

A highly prolific writer, Peter Handke, broke 1966 onto the literary scene with radical formal experimentation in the *Spoken Plays* (*Offending the Audience*, *Prophecy*, *Self Acussation*, and the most famously *Kaspar*), where he uses language solely as material to build his own reality, manipulate the man and totally contradict the drama. Handke also made his name through the narrative innovations in the novels *Hornets* (1966) and *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (1970). Written in in the *nouveau roman* style, the novel *Hornets* disregards the chronological unfolding of the story, makes frequent shifts in the narrative perspective and leaves the interpretation over to the reader. In *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* Handke aimes at a rare insight into the mind and inner life of the schizofrenic

Bloch, who strangles a woman for no apparent reason to hide away later in a border town without being really bothered by the reality of his possible seizure. Describing the character's disturbed perception, Handke became a forerunner of the "new subjectivity" (Neue Subjektivität) approach, which was interested in the inner life of the character, and took root in Germany of the 1970s with authors like Hermann Lenz or Peter Schneider.

Wolfgang Bauer made his debut in the early 1960s with dramas of the absurd inspired by the existentialism of Eugène Ionescu (*Der Schweinetransport*, 1961) and Jean Paul Sartre (*Batyscaphe 17-26 oder Die Hölle ist oben*, 1961; in Czech put up in 2009 as part of a stage reading at the Na Zábradlí theatre, Prague).

In 1962-63 Bauer shocked by a radical experiment with the genre of drama in his *Mikrodramen* (*Microdramas*), which deride and disdain the Aristotle's drama principles. These short plays also revealed Bauer's predilection for surrealist and playful confusion between reality and fiction, as well as his inclination to grimly overturn facts and various clichés. The same approaches were to be used his "neo-realist" dramas *Party for Six* (1964), *Magic Afternoon* (1967), and *Change* (1969), where all the characters are left to lose and later rediscover their identities, the plays providing a slightly existentialist and social-critical view of the society. However, it would be an oversimplification to judge them along such lines as for Bauer, they were only attempts to treat a more realistic subject matter and try out something new.

It was a common goal of the avant-garde to more or less provoke and shock the audience in order to radically confound their expectations. The authors strived to actively engage the readers in their works by demostrating that reality may be grasped by highly unconventional means—whether through lingustic experiment or by burlesquing established literary forms (e.g. Gerhard Roth's "anti-crime" novels). It is even in their later writing that both Handke and Bauer often handle an already existing literary form by overthrowing it and manifesting their own approach to it.

The thesis concludes that despite the post-1945 attempts at its conservative stabilization by the state authorities, the Austrian literary scene saw vigorous emergence of a new generation of authors who were unencumbered by the past and whose radical potential of understanding literary creation reached its peak in the 1960s. Notwithstanding the relative decrease of this potential in the 1970s, the authors managed to make a strong impact on Austrian literature as well as on its reception abroad. The efforts of the early avant-garde came to a climax in 1973 with foundation of the Graz Authors' Assembly (GAV, Grazer Autorenversammlung), which distanced itself from Vienna as a symbol of discredited politics,

and from the Austrian PEN Club. The year 1973 thus marked the official establishment of the avant-garde, crowning its victorious campaign on the Austrian cultural scene.