

**Working-Class Literature:  
Petzold's *Rauhes Leben***

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## Working-Class Literature:

### Petzold's *Rauhes Leben*

Working-class literature in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, as represented by Alfons Petzold, is contrasted with canonical literature by authors such as Hofmannsthal, Rilke, and Zweig. By viewing the socio-economic context in which both bourgeois and proletarian literature developed, it is possible to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the turn of the past century – and hopefully also of the present one.

*Das Leben ist stärker  
als das schönste Resümee.*  
(Max Winter)

Despite his forty-some volumes of poetry and prose, the proletarian author Alfons Petzold has been all but forgotten by literary historians. One work, however, his autobiography, has recently experienced a comeback, after being reissued in 1979.<sup>1</sup> First published in 1920, it is written from the vantage point of a person, “der ein Leben voll Unterdrückung und körperlicher Not hinter sich hat” (8). The subtitle, *Der Roman eines Menschen*, underscores the author’s intention not only of recounting his life but also of generalizing from it to present a picture of common humanity. If the primary title, *Das rauhe Leben*, can be translated “Raw Life,” a comparison along the lines of Lévi-Strauss’ concept of “the raw and the cooked” is not inappropriate.<sup>2</sup> When we compare Petzold’s autobiography with that of “elite” authors, such as Zweig, Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke, we find mutually exclusive accounts of life in Vienna around 1900, “raw” and “cooked,” so to speak.

Stefan Zweig was born in 1881, just one year before Petzold, and Zweig’s autobiographical account, *Die Welt von Gestern*, forms a primary object of comparison. Arthur Schnitzler was born in 1862, two decades before Petzold. Schnitzler’s autobiography, *Jugend in Wien*, can nonetheless serve as a foil for viewing Petzold’s work, particularly since both writers deal with their youth, the period of identity-formation. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, born in 1874, never wrote

an autobiography; but recent biographical work by Rieckmann discusses Hofmannsthal's societal attitudes, as evinced particularly in his essays. Rainer Maria Rilke (1875) is of the same generation as Hofmannsthal; and his poetry treats some of the same themes as Petzold's poetry, albeit from a very different perspective. Despite the contemporaneousness of these writers, my investigation confirms Gruber's conclusion that "there are few connections between the hermetically sealed world of bourgeois high culture and ... a proletarian mass counterculture" (Gruber 12).

A caveat is necessary, for first-person narratives are notoriously unreliable. Despite Petzold's alleged intent, "die Wahrheit so objektiv zu schreiben, wie es mir möglich ist" (8), personal memory is fallible and furthermore subject to stylization. Human memory is selective, and memories of the past tend further to be conditioned by comparisons with the present, i.e., the time of writing. Zweig addresses the problem in a foreword to his autobiography: "Ich betrachte unser Gedächtnis ... als eine wissend ordnende und weise ausschaltende Kraft" (Zweig 13). Schnitzler too, in his notes, engages in discussion of what it might mean, "meine Erinnerungen völlig wahrheitsgetreu aufzuzeichnen" (Schnitzler 324). If Zweig's and Schnitzler's problematization of the issue stands in contrast to Petzold's seemingly naive intent, that is part of the topic to be investigated. A writer's self-understanding may complement, contrast with, or even contradict the way he is understood by society. In any case, it behooves one to subject all autobiography to constant critical examination and to compare it with other kinds of evidence.

## **I. Work**

Alfons Petzold was born in Vienna in 1882 of parents who had emigrated from Saxony. His father was a saddlemaker, but after being expelled from Saxony for participating in the socialist anti-war movement in 1870, the family assumed a migratory existence. The senior Petzold suffered a prolonged illness and died when his son was 17. By that time the family's economic status had declined from the level of petite bourgeoisie to that of the proletariat. Alfons, a weak, rachitic child with curvature of the spine, read avidly; but he was forced to leave school at 14, the earliest permissible age, to help support himself and his parents. Therewith, he writes, "war

meine Kindheit zu Ende” (96). The Petzold family was a typical Viennese family, for, as a historian notes, “if children were needed for work at home, attendance at school was sacrificed” (Wegs 6). The young Petzold subsequently went from one job to another until ending up in the hospital with tuberculosis at age 26, which forms the conclusion of his autobiography.

Petzold’s mother had initially sought an apprenticeship for her 14-year-old; but the sickly boy was not able to meet the physical demands, nor was he emotionally equipped for the brutality and humiliations of the workplace. His various attempts to learn a trade, such as that of silversmith, shoemaker, mason, baker, or waiter, resulted in failure. The apprenticeships did not offer enough money for a person to live on, and the apprentices were treated as errand boys without being taught the trade. After two years of earning nothing and learning nothing, he gave up trying to learn a marketable skill. Commencing his working life as an unskilled laborer, his initial reaction to earning 5 *Kronen* a week was one of euphoria: “Langsam zog wieder ein Gefühl in meine Seele ein, das mir in meinen Lehrbubenjahren verlorengegangen war: ein Mensch zu sein!” (149). That sense of selfhood, however, was more in contrast to the past than it was a prognosis of the future.

During his ten working years, from age 16 to the onset of illness at 26, Petzold held over twenty different jobs. Some of them were factory jobs, often in small family-run businesses, which offer a view of life in working-class Vienna. For example, a shoe polish factory with four employees required the boiling of a turpentine-based chemical mixture, which led to the accidental death of the owner. That episode, like many others, is narrated with grotesque humor, and thus the tragic events never allow for the rise of sentimentality or pathos—with one exception, yet to be discussed. In another case, a box factory in a basement was infested by rats, which the owner stalked, shot, and stuffed. The taxidermic compulsion, as revealed upon his demise, stemmed from the fact that his child had died from being bitten by a rat.

The jobs illustrate the nature of work in Vienna in the early industrial era, where pre-industrial situations co-existed with ones involving the new technologies and structures. For example, Petzold’s job in a laundry, from 6 am to 7 pm, was solely to carry water from a pump in the courtyard to the five women doing the washing on the fourth floor, a wet job and very cold in

winter. The highest level of intellectual work was in connection with a machine-shop position that he got on the condition he tutor the owner's eight-year-old son, which turned out to be a disaster. Some jobs were seasonal or occasional, such as snow removal from the roofs of buildings. Another job that entailed climbing to great heights was at a window-washing agency; and Petzold relates a macabre incident in a hospital-and-monastery complex, in which the high vantage point offered a view of naked corpses in coffins.

Humor and self-irony is revealed in the narration of delivering cardboard boxes by means of a cart pulled by a dog:

An schreienden, mit den Händen herumfuchtelnden Leuten, an träge dahinschleichenden Lastfuhrwerken, kreischenden Kindern und bellenden Hunden sauste ich mit meinem irrsinnig gewordenen Hundefuhrwerk vorbei. (377)

The reader can imagine how that one ended! Another delivery job in a vinegar and wine factory entailed the carrying of heavy bottles up many flights of stairs. Such contacts with society were often humiliating, and the delivery boy received rough treatment at the hands of street urchins and house personnel alike. A totally anomalous and illegal occupation, when all else failed, was catching birds and selling them to a bird dealer.

The effects of the Industrial Revolution were also making themselves felt, and Petzold describes the work in a bronze factory with a punch and stamp machine, whereby the noise was too great to allow for communication: "dieses gedankenlose Dasitzen, dieses Aufgehen des Körpers in einer Maschine" (204). Thoughtlessness was, however, at one's own risk and could result in the loss of a limb, or worse. There is no condemnation of the machine age, such as is often present in bourgeois literature; for a member of the proletariat had little reason to be nostalgic for the pre-industrial period. But there is a very real awareness of the danger, "die Angst vor der Heimtücke der Maschine. Bange stand ich nun vor der meinen, der ich eine blutgierige Mörderseele hineindichtete und vor deren Grausamkeit ich nie sicher sein konnte" (293).

His first encounter with a large factory was a dyeing works with 500 employees, whereby Petzold's job was to shovel coal all day, which one would certainly have wanted to combine with the water job! Petzold summarizes:

Monatelang ging ich nun den Trott, den Millionen von Brüdern und Schwestern mit mir schritten, schaute nicht links und nicht rechts und fragte nicht, ob dieses langsame Zermürben meines Körpers wirklich der ganze Sinn meines Lebens sei. Wie ein durch die Gewohnheit gegen seine Leiden abgestumpfter Gaul schritt ich gesenkten Kopfes weiter - und war froh, eine, wenn auch mager gefüllte Futterkrippe vor mir zu wissen. Des Morgens auf zehn Stunden vor die Maschine, abends nach einem kargen Nachtmahl ins Bett, wo ich nach ein paar Seiten Lektüre in einen todesähnlichen Schlaf fiel. (279)

The personal misery is relativized only by the recognition of its collective aspect. A chocolate factory, which employed 600 workers, was also very monotonous:

Nun aber war ich gleichgültig geworden, denn Tag für Tag gab es das gleiche zu sehen und zu hören, trottete ich an der Kette mit gesenktem Kopf wie ein blindes Roß, das nur ein Gefühl kennt: das der Peitsche! (354)

Petzold's work was to load sacks of chocolate products that weighed from 100 to 300 pounds. "Da es verboten war, sich beim Tragen helfen zu lassen, so fühlte ich mich nach beendeter Arbeit meist wie gerädert und oft vor Müdigkeit ganz teilnahmslos" (365). The anonymity and uniformity in the large factory, besides the conscious exploitation and ruthlessness on the part of management, seem to have made this job the worst in his career: "Es ergriff mich eine bittere Trostlosigkeit" (366). That paradoxically provided the backdrop for his development of political consciousness, as Petzold began to understand "die moralische Zersetzungsarbeit des Kapitals" (359).

Jobs, and the search for jobs, is the primary focus of the autobiography, just as it was the main content of his life. Without exception, the jobs offered only low pay for long hours of hard labor. The workday ranged from 10 to 14 hours; and even the average of 12 hours a day, six days a week, did not leave much free time. Money is the second most frequent topic, precisely because there was so little of it. The jobs paid variously from 5 to 14 *Kronen* a week, which yields an average of about 43 *Kronen* a month.<sup>3</sup> If more than a quarter of that, 12 *Kronen*, went for rent,<sup>4</sup> there remained 31. A modest meal in a restaurant near the workplace at noon cost 1 *Krone*; thus he could not do that every day and still have anything left for clothes and all other expenses. Even a low-paying job, however, was preferable to the alternative of joblessness and consequent homelessness. Before reaching that stage, let us view the living situation.

## II. Housing

The family moved very often, for living conditions were directly dependent on their financial situation. Although no exact chronology is offered, Petzold writes as follows: “Wir hatten wieder einmal die Wohnung gewechselt, vielleicht das zwanzigstmal seit meinem Austritt aus der Schule” (302). That was before the death of the mother in 1902, and he had left school in 1896; thus the time-frame for the twenty moves is only six years, yielding an average of three or four moves a year. The father had died in an institution for the terminally ill, which was hardly a desirable place; yet even there he had gained admittance only on the condition that he convert to Catholicism from his Saxon Protestantism, which had subsequently mutated to free thought. Petzold had an older female sibling, but nothing is narrated about her adult life other than that she did not live in Vienna.

The family was thus reduced to the boy and his mother, who lived together in one-room apartments, most often in the districts of Ottakring and Hernal. The living quarters were often dark, damp, and dirty, and there are vivid descriptions of the tenement houses and the back streets of Vienna. Petzold writes, “wir hatten unsere Kammer, in die nie ein Fünkchen Licht hereingeblickt hatte und an deren Wänden der Moder in dicker Schicht wuchs” (113). It was indeed “a dimly lit world,” as a historian notes (Wegs 92). On one occasion the Schmelz River in Ottakring overflowed; their apartment was among the thousands that were devastated, and many people lost their lives. At another time:

Die Kammer, die wir nun bezogen hatten, war ein ebenerdiges, feuchtes Loch, dessen Fenster auf einen düsteren Lichthof führten, wo nur Abfall, heruntergebröckeltes Mauerwerk und manchmal eine Ratte zu sehen waren. (248)

That type of misery, where “Luft in diesen Wohnungen das Teuerste ist,” is a well-documented fact (Winter 92).

Petzold’s mother worked wherever she could find a job, often as washerwoman, charwoman, or cleaning lady in public restrooms. They took in subtenants, the so-called “Bettgeher,” to sleep in their beds during the day. Later, when homeless, Petzold was himself a “Bettgeher,” renting a

bed for use only during the night. Personal possessions are not a topic in the autobiography, for the family had so few of them. Only once, when they won in the lottery, does Petzold talk about buying clothes, and even then in a second-hand store. What furniture they occasionally acquired always made its way, sooner or later, to the pawn shop when they needed money. Food, or the lack of it, is often a topic, and they ate horse meat and used coffee grounds six times over, when necessary. Illness was frequent, since the boy was sickly from birth, and his mother aged prematurely. The lack of adequate heating in winter exacerbated the problem, and disease was usually treated with home remedies.

Wenn ich so des Abends unserer Kammer zuschritt, wo die Mutter hungernd und steif vor Kälte auf mich wartete, indes auch in mir ein unstillbarer Hunger bohrte, wie beneidete ich die Menschen, die warm bekleidet und wohlgenährt scherzend und lachend in die hellerleuchteten Häuser traten, über denen in verführerischen Worten zu lesen war, daß man dort ausgezeichnet essen und trinken und sich überhaupt recht wohl fühlen könne. (186)

The relationship between mother and son is the one issue in the book where Petzold does not hesitate to express emotionality. The two were very close, and they helped each other to any extent possible; for they had only each other in life. Family ties were strong still in late nineteenth-century Vienna, and many studies show “a reverence for private family virtues over public ... values” (Wegs 78).

Petzold’s father, before his death, had had bouts of drinking, and for a time his mother did too. Alcoholism was a common problem among the lower classes; and bed-renters, for example, had no place to go but the tavern between work and bedtime. Petzold himself did not drink excessively, but he often mentions the problem in connection with fellow workers. Upon discovering his mother’s addiction, he writes insightfully on the presumable causes:

Ich sah sie alle vor mir, diese armen hilflosen Sklaven einer Leidenschaft, die diesen schillernde Wunder vorgaukelt und nichts hält von allem, was sie verspricht. Ich sah sie tiefer sinken als die Tiere und sah sie zum Bett der Mutter herüberwinken. Ich hörte ihr einladendes Geflüster: Komm, schließ dich uns an, auch du brauchst das, was wir vom Alkohol erhoffen: Vergessenheit, Kraft für die alten, verbrauchten Knochen, einen Ersatz für das Glück, um welches uns das Leben betrog. Komm, der Alkohol wartet ungeduldig auf dich! Sieh, er hat Säcke voll Ruhe, Kisten voll

Vergessen und Kasten voll der seltsamsten Freuden für dich. Und er verlangt so wenig für seine Schätze. Seine Gaben sind auch uns Armen zugänglich, obwohl viele Reiche nach seiner Gunst streben. (180)

The ignominious death of his mother when Petzold was twenty years old was devastating to him, both materially and emotionally. When unemployment hit, times were hard. The writer again notes the shared suffering:

War es ein Trost, daß es hunderttausend Arbeiterfamilien so ging wie uns? Die waren oft noch schlechter dran als wir, denn nicht selten steigerte eine große Kinderschar die Angst vor Hunger und Obdachlosigkeit.... In den vielen, vielen Zinshäusern der Vorstädte waren die Wohnungen, Gänge und Stiegen erfüllt von dieser Angst, sie schwebte stets als dunkle Wolke über dem Leben des Arbeiters. ... Heimatlos! Oh, was ist das für ein harmloses Wort gegen das: Arbeitslos! (301)

Petzold was out of work for months, and there were no reserves on which to fall back. When he could not pay the rent, he lost the apartment and, on a winter night, ended up at a “Massenherberge,” a cheap public hostel. The description of that experience is horrendous: “Was ich erblickte, war eine so furchtbare Orgie der sozialen Not, wie ich sie nie geahnt hätte” (331). It was a filthy bug-infested place with sick and hungry people of both sexes and all ages sleeping virtually in a heap with no sanitary facilities. The next night, after having spent his last money looking in vain for work during the day, he went to a “Wärmehalle,” homeless shelter. Since only 200 of the 1000 people waiting outside could gain admittance, he was, very literally, left out in the cold.

Remembering a small announcement in the newspaper, “Ein Obdachloser auf einem Misthaufen erfroren” (186), Petzold decided to go underground. Together with an acquaintance, he joined the people who descended at night into the sewage tunnels under the city.

Es waren Arbeitssuchende wie ich, aus der Strafanstalt eben Entlassene, seit Monaten Obdachlose, von der Polizei Gehetzte. In vielfacher Variation hallte das eine Grundthema an mein Ohr: großstädtisches Proletarierelend. (339)

They ate and slept on the concrete floor along the underground canal, ascending in early morning to look for jobs, eat in a soup kitchen, and scavenge the garbage at public markets for food. Max Winter has described this phenomenon, which he experienced as an investigative journalist. Since many of the tunnels were not high enough to allow one to stand upright, one had to crouch or

crawl; “der Mensch als Regenwurm” is no metaphor (Winter 34). Of course it was dark and cold, and the odor and filth were nearly overwhelming.

When the job opportunities improved, Petzold resumed his life as a laborer. One of his last jobs was in a terra cotta factory sanding plaster statues, and the constant heavy dust in the air hastened the onslaught of tuberculosis, the “proletarian disease” (Wegs 19).

Was hält der Arbeiter nicht an Schmerzen und Übelkeiten aus, bevor er sich fügt und zugibt, daß er krank ist und abtreten muß! ... So siechen die Menschen in den vielen tausend Betrieben der Industrie vor ihrer Maschine und Werkbank dahin, schleppen sich fiebernd, hustend herum, im Innern die fressende Krankheit, nach außen Gesundheit heuchelnd, um nicht auf die Straße geworfen zu werden. (422)

The description of life in the public hospital puts it only one step above that of the public sleeping quarters. “Die großen Spitäler Wiens waren für mich die Stätten ärgsten Grauens und furchtbaren Elends” (436). The hospital, “der Versammlungsort der Sterbenden” (444), released him after four weeks; and his landlady kindly allowed him to resume his bed in her kitchen, where he nearly died.

### III. Literature

The chapter that describes Petzold’s work in the factory sanding statues is entitled, with ironic quotation marks, “Wiener Kunst”; and that leads to the topic of art and literature. Given the working and living conditions, it is amazing that literature could arise at all. Petzold’s writing has none of the sophistication and finesse of canonical works, but it does reveal the strength of lived experience. Although he began writing poetry early on, all of his publications came after 1910, that is, after his recovery from tuberculosis. “Recovery” is itself a wonder, and the autobiography stops just short of a fairy-tale-like ending. Petzold’s poetry was “discovered” by a wealthy patron through someone who had heard him read at an *Arbeiterbildungsverein*. That patron, an actor at the Hofburgtheater, appeared when Petzold was on his death bed, and the patron arranged for and financed his stay in the famous tuberculosis sanitarium, Alland. The unusualness of that type of ending merits comment later.

Going back to that youthful poetry, which had such unexpected consequences, we see the young boy as an autodidact, reading and writing whenever possible. He was especially attracted to imaginative literature, and he characterizes his interest as a “Neigung zu allem Mystischen, Unirdischen und Sagenhaften” (70). Despite encouragement from his mother, he did not do well in school, and twice he had to repeat a grade. At a time when the family was still solvent, Petzold’s mother sent him to a monastic boarding school for three years. The authoritarian structures were highly offensive: “Sie [die Lehrer] hofften uns durch Gebete und andere geistliche Übungen zu bessern und uns zu braven, geduldigen Lämmern für Staat und Kirche zu machen” (63). That coincides with other reports of schools as “detention centers rather than learning centers” (Wegs 76). With the natural instinct of a child, Petzold seems to have learned the ropes early on:

Noch dumpf und ungeklärt, noch unbegriffen und nicht bestimmbar rang sich in mir die trostlose Erkenntnis empor, daß der größte Teil alles Schönen und Edlen nur Schein ist, eine wundervolle Lüge, die wie eine Seifenblase zerbricht, wenn der Alltag sie berührt. (58)

It was that “Alltag” that later took over his life and nearly eclipsed the imaginative part of his personality.

Although he wrote poems and stories as a child, the first explicit mention of poetry is around age 15.

Um diese Zeit entstand mein erstes Gedicht. Es war eine Lobeshymne auf den groß Volksdemagogen Doktor Karl Lueger. Ich glaubte in meiner jugendlichen Unschuld und Verblendung und in vollständiger Unkenntnis sozialer wie politischer Tatsachen im Antisemitismus die Heilslehre für uns Arme zu erblicken. (11)

Two years later, he had revised that position. One sees Petzold as a self-critical individual, constantly questioning the values he had internalized from society:

Aus dem ehemaligen Klosterschüler und späteren Antisemiten war ein ebenso dummer und blindwütiger Schreier gegen den Klerikalismus geworden. (206)

After intermittent experiments, he found his true voice:

Eines Abends war es mir gelungen, in einigen Versen das Leid und die Freude eines Arbeiters, wie ich es war, schüchtern und spröde zum Ausdruck zu bringen. (206)

It was the voice of the worker-poet, where he could speak from experience, and that proved to be very powerful.

His reading material as a youth, besides the “Hintertreppen-literatur,” consisted of the classics, such as Goethe, Schiller, Brentano, Lenau, and Heine. Reading was his “altes, bewährtes Mittel, das Gleichgewicht der Seele wenigstens teilweise zu bewahren” (353). Working at the large factory in his early twenties, he wrote as follows:

Es war meine größte Sorge, geistig nicht auch zu versumpfen und mich ein wenig von dem Arbeitstier zu unterscheiden, das nach der schweren Arbeit nur einen Gedanken hat: Schlaf und Futter. (366)

Since reading itself was the desideratum, there seems to be little concern or even awareness of the conventionality of the reading material.

Although he had few friends and no outside encouragement, occasionally he met someone with similar interests in the workplace or at the library. Together with those acquaintances he attended the theater, where they could get a “Stehplatz” on Monday evenings for 50 *Heller*; “aber auch die zu ersparen war nicht immer leicht” (231). Once they even put on an amateur theater performance of Schiller’s *Don Carlos*. They frequented a *Volkssängercafé*, attempting to make contact with popular entertainment artists. Petzold succeeded in selling a few of his “Couplets,” rhymed verse for musical accompaniment, and once he was even paid to recite some of his poems. One of his stage plays was also performed; but since he could not afford the cover charge in the coffeehouse, he watched it through the garden window.

However much he sought acceptance in such circles at the time, a short time later he realized that popular entertainment was not for him. His rejection characterizes the nature of the undertaking:

So hatte ich es doch weiter gebracht als bis zum Volkssängerdichter, der die arme, geschundene “Wiener Gmütlichkeit” und das goldene Wiener Herz immer und immer wieder ausschroten muß, um den Beifall einer gedankenlosen Menge in Bier- und Weindunst zu erzielen. (287)

What drew him away from the entertainment business was the development of political awareness, to which we now turn.

#### IV. Politics, Religion, and Sexuality

Petzold's introduction to socialism came when a colleague at work invited him along to a meeting of the organization *Jugendliche Arbeiter*. Petzold was bowled over by what he heard:

Artur teilte mir auch bereitwilligst mit, was er vom Sozialismus wußte, und es entstand eine neue Welt vor meinen Augen: ein Mensch unter den Menschen sein zu dürfen, kein Zugtier unter Zugtieren, welche Offenbarung! Ich fühlte, wie meine Seele stolz wurde auf ihr Menschentum, wie sie dieses Bewußtsein gleich einem Edelstein mit sich trug. Ich bekam einen neuen Inhalt, einen inneren Reichtum, der mich gleich sein ließ mit jenen, welchen Geburt oder ein Glücksfall adelige Namen, Würden und Reichtümer geschenkt hatte. Mein früheres Leben fiel wie Schutt zusammen, und ich baute, mein eigener Baumeister, Stein auf Stein zu einem neuen Bau, der mir allein gehörte. (283)

Artur was Jewish; and Petzold's youthful anti-Semitism gave way to respect and friendship in this case and others. The new sense of meaning in life endured, and Petzold began to educate himself in political issues. He became politically active on the side of the Social Democrats in the pre-election campaign of 1901; but he was arrested together with other "agitators," and he lost his job because of it.

Some time later at another factory with intolerable working conditions, Petzold learned how the hierarchical structures prevented interpersonal communication and demanded "skrupelloses Aufgehen im Dienst der Firma" (362). Petzold befriended a socialist worker named Löwi, also Jewish; and when Petzold asked him why the workers did not strike, the friend responded as follows:

Löwi erklärte mir das so: "Das ganze System, nach dem die Firmeninhaber über uns schalten und walten, ist zum Teil eine Folge dieser Angst vor einem Streik, ist eine Schutzmauer vor dem revolutionierenden Klassenbewußtsein des Arbeiters. ... Der Direktor weiß, daß der fortwährende Wechsel der Arbeiter einem intimen Meinungs-austausch, einem Besprechen ihrer sozialen Lage entgegensteuert, weil diese sich dabei doch immer mehr oder weniger fremd bleiben, und daß es ihnen bei dieser Vermischung von alten und neuen Elementen kaum möglich ist, ein einheitliches Entgegentreten zu erreichen." (363)

Such strategies for the prevention of solidarity among employees were indeed effective, and most workers were politically apathetic. Löwi continued with his interpretation of management's stance:

Dabei rechnet man nicht zuletzt mit der furchtbaren Notlage, die gewöhnlich auf dem neueingetretenen Arbeiter lastet und die ihm verbietet, an einem Streik teilzunehmen. Er hat bis vor kurzem Hunger gelitten, vielleicht bittere Kälte erduldet oder war obdachlos gewesen und hatte Schulden zu bezahlen, die in dieser Zeit gemacht wurden. Jetzt auszutreten? Zu streiken? Und wieder zu hungern? Ja, mein Lieber, der Hunger hat schon viele schweigen gelehrt, auszuharren, wie schwer das Joch auch war, unter das sie sich zu beugen hatten. (363-4)

Then, as now, the system has a strong incentive to block perception of its operations.

In yet another factory, Petzold met Schindler, “ein fanatischer Sozialist, welcher Weltanschauung er mit religiöser Schwärmerei anhing” (420). Petzold maintained a critical distance to that form of universal sympathy for suffering humanity:

Ich konnte dieses Mitleid nicht verstehn und wollte es nicht verstehn, denn ich haßte diese Welt, in der ich bei elf- und zwölfständiger schwerer und ungesunder Arbeit hungern mußte, mir nicht die kleinste Sonntagsfreude vergönnen durfte. (421)

Petzold was still a teenager at the time, and he tried out various political and religious stances. We see him as a critical, reflective individual:

Die religiösen Bedürfnisse der Kinderzeit waren eingeschlafen, und so bemühte ich mich nur manchmal, den Rätseln des Daseins mit dem Verstand beizukommen, und dies weniger aus der Sehnsucht nach einer Weltanschauung als aus Neugierde. (282)

There is no mention of national identities, although Petzold must have come in contact with Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and other immigrants in the workplace.

Perhaps discouraged by politics, Petzold’s interest seems to have waned. In any case, he turned again to religion; one can say “again” because he had always been interested in the mystical and transcendental side of life. His religion was not of any institutional variety, for his youthful experiences with the Catholic Church had been too bitter to allow for any repetition. Influenced rather by acquaintances such as Schindler and a man he had met underground, Petzold tried out a form of primitivizing Christianity. His later distance to this phase of his development is evident in the tone of irony with which it is narrated:

Seit kurzem nun waren wir zum Erstaunen und Spott unserer Kameraden richtige Jesuleute geworden, lasen die Bibel, sahen in der lebendigen Nachfolge der

Evangelien das einzige Heil und beglückten uns durch das Gefühl irdischer Erniedrigung. ... Wie die Urchristen wollten wir leben, demütig, gütig, voll werktätiger Liebe zu allen Wesen und in freudiger Ruhe an dem goldenen Zukunftsreich der Menschen ganz bescheiden mitbauend. (384)

That phase was apparently short-lived, since it stands in obvious contradiction to his political consciousness. A more enduring source of quasi-religious beliefs was his reading material. Petzold seems to have modeled his belief system on his favorite authors, and his religion emerged as a type of Tolstoian humanism, as expressed in his later poetry.

An acquaintance once commented that his poetry lacked “Liebe” (220); and the topic of sexuality is conspicuous by its absence in the autobiography. The probable reason is that sexuality was taboo as a topic in lower-class circles. Petzold mentions the onset of sexual awareness: “Als ich zwölf Jahre alt war, regte sich zum ersten Mal mein geschlechtlicher Sinn” (84); but his occasional later references to the opposite sex are harmless. We cannot know what really went on; but it seems plausible that there was very little to be concealed. He writes in another context, “daß Liebe ein Luxus ist” (334); and with working twelve hours or more a day and no adequate housing, there was perhaps no time or energy or privacy for much of a sex life. That coincides with a historian’s conclusion that “the majority of working-class families led sexually abstemious lives” (Wegs 125). Reflection on sexual identity and gender roles was perhaps, like “love,” a “luxury” of the more leisured classes.

Perhaps these considerations help to answer Wegs’s well-posed question: “Did families accept their lot apathetically, collapse in despair, or meet the challenge with resourcefulness and thereby limit the impact of scarcity?” (Wegs 64) How did families survive the living conditions in which “alles Persönliche ist ausgelöscht”? (Winter 92) Throughout we see Petzold’s search for “respectability” in a nonsuperficial sense, for “respectability was a defense against anomie, dehumanization, and disintegration of personality” (Wegs 34-5). Sources of self-esteem—or lack thereof—is indeed an important question.

## V. “Raw” and “Cooked”

If Claude Lévi-Strauss deploys the concepts “raw” and “cooked” to characterize the dichotomy between nature and culture, my adaptation of the terms is metaphorical to an even greater extent. Lévi-Strauss writes:

The conjunction of a member of the social group with nature must be mediatized through the intervention of cooking fire, whose normal function is to mediatize the conjunction of the raw product and the human consumer, and whose operation thus has the effect of making sure that natural creature is at one and the same time *cooked* and *socialized* (Lévi-Strauss 336).

Lévi-Strauss worked with the myths of “primitive” societies, and he found that myths are like fires, mediating the contact between the subject and the physical world. Without fire, meat decomposes; but with too much fire, it burns. Between those two extremes, society attempts to strike a balance; the “cooked” meat is more easily digestible than “raw” meat (life), but it also loses some of its “naturalness.”

Roland Barthes has undertaken an analogous structural analysis of the myths of developed societies. The dominant culture in the Western world today—as it was a century ago—is bourgeois. “All that is not bourgeois is obliged to *borrow* from the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois ideology can therefore spread over everything” (Barthes 139). The way that this “anonymous ideology” or “public philosophy” represents itself is what Barthes calls “myth.”

Everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. ... [That is] the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world. (Barthes 140-1)

In contrast to bourgeois myth, “the speech of the oppressed is real. ... He has only one [language], always the same, that of his actions” (Barthes 148). To the extent that the oppressed person is drawn into the net of the dominant culture, his or her language is presumably compromised. Thus, “the wise thing would of course be to define the writer’s realism as an essentially ideological problem” (Barthes 137). If language, at its core, is a problem of representation, how much more problematic it is when it concerns a writer’s self-representation. Such levels and intents must be borne in mind in considering the forms of self-representation of the authors here.

Stefan Zweig begins his autobiography with a discussion of “das goldene Zeitalter der Sicherheit” (Zweig 14). In contrast to the insecurity of Petzold’s young life, Zweig felt “Verhaspeltsein in Sicherheit und Besitz und Behaglichkeit” (Zweig 42). Such a nostalgic view of childhood and of the pre-war era as a whole is conditioned in part by a contrast to later events. Although they were born at virtually the same time, Zweig’s autobiography continues thirty years longer than does Petzold’s; and Zweig published his account in 1941 during the horrors of the Nazi regime. Of course one sees the past through the eyes of the present; yet there are many objective contrasts as well. In general, Zweig presents a broader view of the times than Petzold, since Zweig’s socio-economic status and education fostered a greater awareness. As he writes: “Nur wer früh seine Seele weit auszuspannen gelernt, vermag später die ganze Welt in sich zu fassen” (Zweig 78).

Zweig was born in Vienna into a wealthy upper-middle-class Liberal Jewish family. His father was a big industrialist from Moravia, and his mother came from a “good” family in Italy. Class consciousness was ever present:

Dieses ständige Klassifizieren, das eigentlich den Hauptgegenstand jedes familiären und gesellschaftlichen Gesprächs bildete, schien uns damals höchst lächerlich und snobistisch. ... Erst viel später ist es mir klar geworden, daß dieser Begriff der “guten” Familie ... eine der innersten und geheimnisvollsten Tendenzen des jüdischen Wesens ausdrückt. (Zweig 25)

The sense of tradition was strong also in Arthur Schnitzler’s family, which too was Jewish and liberal. The father, a medical doctor, had emigrated to Vienna from Hungary, and his mother too came from a family of wealth and prestige. “Es versteht sich von selbst, daß ... der Snobismus, die Weltkrankheit unserer Epoche, ausnehmend günstige Entwicklungsbedingungen vorfinden mußte,” he writes in regard to Vienna (Schnitzler 18). The young boy thus enjoyed what he calls a “Frühbildung” (Schnitzler 48).

One of the few things that the boys--Petzold, Zweig, and Schnitzler--had in common is their dislike of school, and it is evident that the authoritarian structures permeated all levels of society. Zweig notes, “daß der Staat die Schule als Instrument zur Aufrechterhaltung seiner Autorität ausbeutete” (Zweig 51); and education included “vor allem die Pflicht vollkommener Fügsamkeit”

(Zweig 51). Yet there are class differences, at least in the parental attitudes if not in the children's perceptions, for European educational systems were "elitist" (Wegs 75). Zweig writes, "daß ich nach der Volksschule auf das Gymnasium gesandt wurde, war nur eine Selbstverständlichkeit"; further, "daß ich an der Universität studieren sollte, war im Rate der Familie von je beschlossen gewesen" (Zweig 44, 117). Zweig and Schnitzler both completed their university degree, Zweig in philosophy and Schnitzler in medicine, like his father.

Schon als kleiner Bub hatte ich den Traum genährt, Doktor zu werden wie der Papa.  
... In ernsterem Sinne freilich wirkten das Vorbild meines Vaters, mehr noch die ganze Atmosphäre unseres Hauses von frühester Jugend auf mich ein. (Schnitzler 93)

All of that stands in great contrast to Petzold, who had neither role models nor the opportunity to go to school beyond age fourteen. That fate was regarded by the bourgeois as bad enough to be used as a threat to a misbehaving schoolboy:

Noch als Gymnasiast wurde uns ... gedroht, man werde uns aus der Schule nehmen und ein Handwerk lernen lassen - die schlimmste Drohung, die es in der bürgerlichen Welt gab: der Rückfall ins Proletariat. (Zweig 51-2)

The importance of childhood training is recognized by Schnitzler:

So gab es kaum einen unter meinen Schulkameraden, ... der sich nach einer anderen Richtung entwickelte, als sie schon in der jugendlichen Seele mehr oder minder bestimmt angedeutet war. Und man fühlt es erst ganz, welch schweres, in gewissem Sinn unlösbares Problem die Erziehung bedeutet. (Schnitzler 51)

Another common element, not surprising among budding authors, is a love of reading, and all three of the writers mention books that impressed them as a youth. Because of the availability of time and material, Zweig and Schnitzler read more widely and more of the then-contemporary literature than Petzold. Zweig elaborates on his youthful enthusiasm for the recent publications of the day, such as those by Hofmannsthal, Rilke, George, Nietzsche, Hauptmann, Strindberg, also Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Valéry, and Zola. None of those writers is mentioned by Petzold, whose reading material was the traditional classics. The newest literature Petzold read, already in his mid-twenties, was poetry by Dehmel and Liliencron, which was loaned to him by a friend.

Given such limitations, it is small wonder that proletarian poetry does not display the innovations of the avant-garde.

All three boys loved the theater, which, with variations, was a primary form of entertainment for all social classes except the truly indigent. Zweig talks about the “‘Theatromanie’ der Wiener” (Zweig 33) and regularly attended premier performances. New at the time were the plays by Gerhart Hauptmann and operas by Richard Strauss, to which the young boy had unlimited access. Schnitzler, who went on to become a dramatist, was introduced to the theater practically at birth.

Am stärksten wurde meine Neigung zur Theaterspielerei jeder Art ... durch ziemlich häufigen Theaterbesuch, und dieser wieder durch die vielfachen ärztlichen und freundschaftlichen Beziehungen meines Vaters zur Theaterwelt gefördert.

(Schnitzler 27)

Exposure thus began much earlier and was, above all, much more frequent than for Petzold. A specific point of comparison is the development of realistic and naturalistic theater at the time. The revolution in the arts around 1900 was something that Zweig not only observed but in which he also participated:

Wir fanden das Neue, weil wir das Neue wollten. ... So spürte unsere Generation ... daß mit dem alten Jahrhundert auch in den Kunstanschauungen etwas zu Ende ging, daß eine Revolution oder zumindest eine Umstellung der Werte im Anbeginn war. (Zweig 60-61)

The way in which this filtered down to the level of mass culture is documented by Petzold. A *Volkssängerdirektor* told him that the *Volkssang* lyrics Petzold was trying to sell should be more “aktuell.” The director gave the aspiring young artist the advice cited below, whereby the dialect stands in humorous contrast to the propriety of elitist endeavors:

Do muaß ma net allani an Spiritus habn, sondern a a Nasn zween an Aktuölln, was so an an Tag in da Luft liegt. Sö müaßn d’höchere Politik verstehn, wia da Luega. (254)

[Da muß man nicht allein Intellekt haben, sondern auch eine Nase für das Aktuelle, was an einem Tag so in der Luft liegt. Sie müssen die höhere Politik wie der Lueger verstehen.]

Subsequently, Petzold bought a cheap newspaper every day and read the political section, of which he understood very little. Meanwhile, the avant-garde artists were creating something new of which Petzold had no awareness.

The coffeehouse was ubiquitous, but there were large differences among the various types. Petzold notes the variety, commenting: “Gibt es doch in Wien für jedermann ein Kaffeehaus” (Petzold 269). Whereas Petzold recounts rough and vulgar scenes in coffeehouses that provided light entertainment for working-class patrons, Zweig regarded the coffeehouse as a place for reading foreign-language newspapers and holding intellectual discussions: “Aber unsere beste Bildungsstätte für alles Neue blieb das Kaffeehaus” (Zweig 56).

Sexuality, while physically the same for all, had very different societal restrictions and interpretations in the various social classes. Zweig articulates an attitude that is implicit in Petzold’s work: “Dieses Erwachen der Pubertät scheint nun ein durchaus privates Problem” (Zweig 86). Zweig nonetheless goes on to write thirty pages on the changes in sexual mores of his time, from the Victorian morality of the nineteenth century to the greater freedom in the early twentieth. Schnitzler, moreover, seems to make up for whatever the other authors leave out in terms of explicitness. He narrates his exploits with confidence and even bravado, from his first encounter with a “süßes Mädel” to later “Eroberungen” (Schnitzler 113, 143).

Friendship is certainly a common topic, important to young people. Whereas friendships for Zweig and Schnitzler provided opportunities for bonding with like-minded people who offered mutual support and productive competition, for Petzold it was much more restricted. All friendships were short-lived because of the instability of the job situation and housing. “Arbeiterfreundschaften sind oft so kurz wie die Liebe der Eintagsfliegen” (Petzold 422). Adult friendships for Zweig and Schnitzler were with prominent people, which offered opportunities for publication and recognition, of which Petzold, of course, had none.

If “love” is a “luxury,” as Petzold wrote, so also is “nature.” Frequent in bourgeois literature, including that by Zweig and Schnitzler, is an account of strong experiences with nature, particularly in connection with travel. Petzold, in contrast, tells a different story. While

convalescing from tuberculosis, friends invited him along on an outing to Dornbach. The fresh air and beauty of the landscape were very soothing until the park where he was sitting was taken over by wealthy patrons. He realized, “auch diese Landschaft gehörte dem Reichtum” (Petzold 474). Childhood for Zweig and Schnitzler lasted longer than it did for Petzold. Children in wealthy families did not have to work but could instead enjoy the free time to a much older age. Working-class children, like Petzold, “were, in effect, young adults with little opportunity to engage in an adolescent culture” (Wegs 104). In contrast, Zweig writes: “Ich war jung und hatte darum noch nicht das Gefühl der Verantwortung. ... Der Tag hatte vierundzwanzig Stunden, und alle gehörten mir” (Zweig 119). There is little if any mention of housing or food, presumably because such matters were the responsibilities of the parents, who provided their children with a carefree young life.

Zweig published a piece in a newspaper at the age of seventeen, and his first volume of poetry appeared when he was nineteen, which earned him a response from Rilke. He also talks about the excitement, at age nineteen, of having a prose piece accepted by Theodor Herzl, feuilleton editor of the *Neue Freie Presse*. Schnitzler lists twenty-three dramas that he had written by the time he had completed the *Gymnasium*. Although infinitely more interested in literary and aesthetic matters than in socio-political issues as a youth, in retrospect Zweig notes a change in the latter area:

Eine merkwürdige Umschichtung begann sich in unserem alten, schläfrigen Österreich vorzubereiten. Die Massen, die stillschweigend und gefügig der liberalen Bürgerschaft durch Jahrzehnte die Herrschaft gelassen, wurden plötzlich unruhig, organisierten sich und verlangten ihr eigenes Recht. (Zweig 78)

Hofmannsthal too is aware that the elite culture of and for whom he was writing comprised a very thin level at the top. Referring to his generation, which allegedly inherited from its forefathers “hübsche Möbel und überfeine Nerven,” he writes:

Wir! Wir! Ich weiß ganz gut, daß ich nicht von der ganzen großen Generation rede. Ich rede von ein paar tausend Menschen, in den großen europäischen Städten verstreut. (Hofmannsthal 171)

Rilke, according to Zweig, certainly belonged to that group, for “alles Vulgäre war ihm unerträglich,” and he possessed an “ästhetischen Sinn für Vollendung” (Zweig 170). From that standpoint, the young Rilke often wrote about members of the lower class, such as beggars, derelicts, and the handicapped. Given below is one of his poems from *Das Buch der Bilder* (1906):

*Das Lied des Bettlers*

Ich gehe immer von Tor zu Tor,  
verregnet und verbrannt;  
auf einmal leg ich mein rechtes Ohr  
in meine rechte Hand.  
Dann kommt mir meine Stimme vor  
als hätt ich sie nie gekannt.

Dann weiß ich nicht sicher wer da schreit,  
ich oder irgendwer.  
Ich schreie um eine Kleinigkeit.  
Die Dichter schrein um mehr.

Und endlich mach ich noch mein Gesicht  
mit beiden Augen zu;  
wie's dann in der Hand liegt mit seinem Gewicht  
sieht es fast aus wie Ruh.  
Damit sie nicht meinen ich hätte nicht,  
wohin ich mein Haupt tu.

(Rilke, *Werke* I:204-05)

The so-called *Erlebnisdichtung* perhaps always entailed stylization. Nonetheless, “experience” played a different role for the originators of the genre, Goethe and the Romantics, than it did for later poets. Rilke, in a poem such the above, does not pretend to be speaking from experience; rather, he is impersonating a voice of someone, in this case, a beggar, who is very different from himself. Whether that “pretense” is convincing is a matter of debate.

Rilke’s work has been interpreted as an aesthetization and spiritualization of poverty. The poet defended himself against such charges at the time by claiming “the legitimate impartiality of artistic expression”:

So habe ich auch das Gewissen rein von jedem Vorwurf, eine Ausflucht zu begehren, wenn ich für mein Gedicht, den Begriffen 'reich' und 'arm' gegenübergestellt, die berechnete Unparteilichkeit des künstlerischen Ausdrucks ganz und gar in Anspruch nehme. (Rilke, *Briefe* 331)

A modern critic writes: "Just as 'apolitical' behavior becomes of necessity 'political' in this turbulent age, so too 'impartiality' vis-à-vis rich and poor is in fact partiality for the rich" (Schwarz 67). Then, as now, an allegedly "apolitical" stance serves to mask conservative attitudes reinforcing the *status quo*.

Lack of experience with his subject matter is one problem that Petzold did not have. His knowledge of poverty and hardship was first-hand, and his poetry reveals the strength of lived experience. Given below is one of the few poems (dating from circa 1900), that Petzold included in his autobiography:

*Der Krüppel*

Schleicht da einer die Straße entlang,  
Mühselig, schleppend ist sein Gang;  
Kann kaum seine Füße bewegen,  
Muß wie ein Wurm sich winden und regen,  
Blickt alle Gesunden trübselig an:  
Ein verkrüppelter Mann.

Vor Wochen noch stand er beim Amboßstein  
Und glühte Eisen in Eisen hinein,  
Bis ihn die Transmission erfaßt,  
Die ihm die schaffende Hand zerpraßt,  
Und er auf der Klinik lag und sann:  
Ein verkrüppelter Mann.

Sein Herr, bei dem er den Arm verlor,  
Sprach mit dem Bittenden vor dem Tor:  
"Mann, das kann hier jedem geschehn,  
Ich kann doch nicht hinter den Leuten stehn.  
Es war halt vom Schicksal ein dummer Streich.  
Schade um Euch".

Und gibt ihm zehn Kronen den Monat; zur Not  
Entgehn die Kinder dem Hungertod.  
Doch weil sie ewig hungrig sind,  
Sein Weib vom nächtlichen Näh fast blind,

Muß er an Straßenecken stehn  
Und um das kupferne Mitleid flehn.  
(Petzold 285-86)

Petzold's paired rhyme, in contrast to Rilke's cross-rhyme, gives an unwanted impression of naiveté, which is accentuated by the relative regularity of the tetrameters. Further, the narrated content is too large for the format. Above all, the black-and-white narrative stance leaves no room for ambiguity. There are thus good reasons why Petzold's poetry is not included in anthologies, nor his name in literary histories. However much his poetry may be lacking in sophistication, it does possess an "authenticity," which Hofmannsthal, among others, often found absent in refined literary discourse. The debilitating effects of consciousness and self-consciousness are documented in Hofmannsthal's poetry and in his essays such as "Age of Innocence" and "Ein Brief."

However mutually exclusive they may be in real life, Rilke's artistry and Petzold's experience seem to supplement each other for the literary critic; and the historian would certainly want to look at both to arrive at an accurate assessment of the times. The exclusive focus on elite culture, as has been the case, serves only to reflect the value system of the investigator, as Petzold clearly understood:

Ich kann nicht schmutzige Knechtschaft, Armut, Verachtung, Spott und Hohn als gerechte Weltordnung ansehen und überlasse diese Weltansicht jenen Philosophen, die in ihr die rechtliche Anerkennung ihrer Macht über andere Menschen sehen.  
(Petzold 9)

## **VI. Proletarian and Bourgeois Literature**

We know from other sources that Petzold was released from the tuberculosis sanitarium after two years, and although recovery was only partial, he lived for another twelve years. While at the sanitarium, he married a fellow patient, who, however, died within three years. His second marriage was a happy one, and he had three children. His first publication was in 1910, and it was followed by many other volumes of poetry and also three novels. Petzold received literary recognition and financial support that made his later years relatively comfortable. He died in 1923 at the age of forty.

Petzold could have included this success story, “from rags to riches,” in his autobiography; the fact that he did not, however, is revealing. If he had, his “novel” would embody the teleology of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. A story of poor-boy-makes-good would have vindicated the existing conditions and detracted from the social causes of the misery portrayed. Petzold’s recovery from tuberculosis and his emancipation from the ghetto would, of course, not have been possible without assistance from mainstream bourgeois society. But since such assistance is highly exceptional, Petzold chose to end his autobiography at the point where his fate was shared by many others. In contrast to the “exemplary” individual portrayed in the *Bildungsroman*, Petzold’s focus on the collective aspect gives meaning to his subtitle, *Der Roman eines Menschen*.

Autobiography is itself a bourgeois genre, just as individualism is a bourgeois concept, stemming from the Renaissance and Reformation. As Sloterdijk, citing another critic, notes: “Individualistischer Anspruch und Stil sei ein Grundsatz allen bürgerlichen Lebens” (Sloterdijk 23). Petzold’s autobiography, in contrast, emphasizes shared experience. A critic comments on the distinctive feature of a proletarian autobiography, in contrast to a bourgeois one:

Solcherart gesellschaftlich gewendet, erweist sich die Autobiographie als Antiroman. Nicht mehr durchschreitet der Held die verschiedenen Kreise einer Welt, um dadurch seine Seele zu finden und sich zur Persönlichkeit zu bilden, sondern er wird durch eine feindliche soziale Umwelt getrieben, die ihn physisch und geistig langsam vernichtet. (Witte 41)

The difficulty of explicating the difference only illustrates the need for the development of criteria for viewing proletarian literature. Encapsulated in bourgeois society, as many of us academicians are, it is not easy to think beyond bourgeois notions and honestly view the “Other.”

Petzold’s poetry and prose fiction would require a separate investigation. His literary production--like much of working-class literature--appears to be highly traditional. It must, however, be viewed historically within its own context. A critic characterizes the genre of *Arbeiterdichtung* before the First World War as follows:

Jede künstlerische Production ist eingebettet in den historischen Ablauf. ... Wendet man diese Einsicht auf die Arbeiterdichtung an, so müßte proletarisches Kunstschaffen ohne die Reflexion der eigenen Position innerhalb der

Kunstgeschichte zwangsläufig zu einer unkritischen Übernahme bürgerlicher Traditionen und Übernahme von Teilen der bürgerlichen Ideologie führen. (Rüden 65)

We must be wary of projecting bourgeois values onto other classes that may or may not share them. Rather than any “trickle-down” model, I would propose starting at the other end of the scale and seeing how proletarian values are expressed in conjunction with--or opposition to--the value system of the dominant culture. The hierarchy of values might first include food, housing, and other items necessary for survival, and from there up to “luxury” problems such as sexuality and self-esteem. Such an investigation might reveal the historic nature of private feelings. In any case, new criteria must be developed for viewing proletarian literature on its own terms, in the context of its origins and intended purposes of the time.

## VII. Reception

The publication of *Das rauhe Leben* in 1920 elicited a response by a writer of no lesser renown than Hermann Broch. Broch wrote a review of the book for the journal *Moderne Welt* in 1921, in which he commented as follows:

Als Dichter der gemarterten Kreatur darf er [Petzold] für seinen Stoff, der für sich selber spricht, Respekt fordern: wer Klage erhebt für den Erniedrigten und Beleidigten, soll und muß gehört werden. Und mit dem gleichen Respekt ist dieses Buch zu lesen. (Quoted in Exenberger 133)

Petzold’s autobiography was, however, not well received by the Socialists, who, by the 1920s, had developed their own organization and hierarchy which excluded the truly impoverished elements of society. Further, the quasi-religious stance that Petzold articulated in his poetry separated him from the political activists of the time.

If Petzold was not political enough for the Socialists, he was too political for the Fascists; and with the rise of Austrofascism his book was to experience a different fate. A new edition of the book appeared in Graz in 1932, and it was heavily edited. Censorship continued and was intensified in the subsequent editions of the book, of which there were, surprisingly, five more (in 1940, 1941, 1947, 1948, and 1964). It was not until the 1979 edition that the original 1920

version was restored. The intent of the censorship is clear, since the book was not compatible with the then-dominant ideology. But what exactly did the Nazis find so objectionable about the work? Further, why did the falsified versions persist through six editions over forty-seven years before correction? The first of these questions is more easily answered than the second, although the second has greater implications for the present time, namely after the official demise of Fascism.

In comparing the various editions, Exenberger made the following discovery: “In den Ausgaben 1932 bis 1964 finden sich einige hundert, oft gravierende Textänderungen” (Exenberger 135). According to his report, the Nazis expunged all references not only to socialism but also to the plight of the worker. All favorable references to Jews, of which there are many, were obfuscated or removed. Petzold’s critique of the Church, religion, and education was not allowed to stand, and, of course, his anti-militaristic stance had to go as well. Beyond these obvious manipulations to suit Nazi ideology, a critic in 1932 made a point that may help to explain the longevity of the falsified versions. That critic, Otto Koenig, writing for the journal *Bildungsarbeit*, saw the revisionists’ intentions “als das Rauhe Leben Petzold im Geschäftsinteresse des Verlages einem spießberisch-bürgerlichen Lesepublikum sympathischer zu machen” (quoted in Exenberger 137). In 1964, nearly two decades after the end of the war, society was still willing to accept the tainted version for the sake of market value.

Three decades later, in the present day, there is little reason to suppose it would be any different. At least one voice of protest has, however, arisen. The contemporary Austrian dramatist, Felix Mitterer took an interest in the topic, and he wrote the screenplay for a film based on the book.<sup>5</sup> Mitterer commented on it as follows in an interview:

Ich wollte einen [Film] machen, um einmal das Arbeitermilieu zu zeigen, denn das Wien der Jahrhundertwende ist schon ein Klischee - Jugendstil und Kaffeehäuser und Künstler und schöne Welt. Da habe ich diesen Roman gefunden; das war ein Arbeiterdichter. ... Der ist in dem Milieu aufgewachsen. Der hat das so gut beschrieben, daß ich nichts Eigenes recherchieren mußte. (Hassel 300)

The film was produced by ORF in 1987, and it aired on Austrian television.

To condense a five-hundred-page book into a ninety-minute film requires, of course, a lot of editing. Yet the film remains faithful to Petzold's text and accurately portrays the central scenes in the book. It shows the death of the father in a hospital, the brutality of the journeymen toward the young apprentices, a machine accident in a large factory, the long lines in front of a soup kitchen, the life of the men in the underground tunnels, the proletarian clientele in a coffeehouse, the protagonist's shyness in sexual matters, and the callousness of bourgeois society with the exception of the people who stepped in and saved his life. The film is very realistic--grim, one might say; and it would be unthinkable on US-American TV. It embodies a pathos not present in Petzold's text, but it would not be characteristic of Mitterer either; the pathos and sentiment are more likely the creation of the film director for the sake of appeal to the audience.

Mitterer is not alone in this endeavor. Books such as *Glücklich ist, wer vergisst...?* attempt a

radikale Korrektur und Differenzierung des Bildes von der Vergangenheit ... durch die historische Analyse der Strukturen einer Gesellschaft in der Krise, des "Fin de Siècle" Wien. Der historische Vergleich der Jahrhundertwende mit der Gegenwart zeigt die Dynamik des gesellschaftlichen Wandels, der nicht nur Kunst und Politik, sondern vor allem auch die Sphären der "primären Erlebniswelt" (Familie, Erziehung, Schule, Sexualität, Wohnen etc.) betraf. (Ehalt 9)

Observers of culture such as Botstein draw an analogy between Austria and America at the turn of their respective centuries of glory. He sees the two countries and centuries as analogous in the disparity between the wealth and privilege at the top and the poverty and deprivation at the bottom, where minorities, immigrants, and unskilled workers are virtually eclipsed from consciousness and history. Rather than history without issue, history is used to view and assess the present.

If one asks why Mitterer chose to make the Petzold film, an answer might be found in his sociopolitical stance, as evidenced in his writings. Mitterer often focuses on the disenfranchised elements in contemporary society and portrays that world on stage, "eine Dritte Welt eigentlich, die neben uns in Europa existiert" (Hassel 302). Since his dramas often deal with present-day social conditions, one can deduce from the Petzold film points of intersection that Mitterer sees

between the world of ca. 1900 and the world of ca. 2000. I believe Mitterer is saying that besides—or beyond—differences in ethnicity, race, or gender, the widespread socio-economic differences form the basis for the polarities in our culture today. But the last word belongs to Petzold:

Meine Verbitterung, mein Ekel am Leben, mein Haß gegen diese verfluchte Gesellschaftsordnung, die mein leibliches Elend auf dem Gewissen hatte, meine Verachtung vor ihren Gesetzen stiegen von Tag zu Tag. ... Die Menschheit teilte sich mir in zwei Lager. Das eine, viel kleinere bestand aus den Reichen, den Mächtigen. ... Hatten sie Barmherzigkeit, fühlen sie Milde für ihre enterbten Brüder und Schwestern in dem anderen Lager, aus dem der Gestank bitterster Armut eine gewaltige Wolke schuf, die kein Sternen- und Sonnenlicht durchließ? ... Sie trieben im Gegenteil ihr fluchwürdiges Tun auf die Spitze, ihre Lebensäußerungen wurden immer raffinierter, ihr Luxusbedürfnis kannte keine Grenzen mehr, ebenso ihre Gier nach allerletzten Sensationen. Um diese zu befriedigen, ließ sie nicht mehr Hunderte für sich zugrunde gehen, sondern Tausende und aber Tausende von uns Rechtlosen opferten sie flackernden Blickes hin. (469-70)

It is not a question here of registering retrospective moral indignation, but rather of attempting to arrive at an accurate assessment of the times. It is left to the reader to detect points of intersection between the previous turn of the century and the present one.

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## Notes:

<sup>i</sup> Quotations in my text are taken from this edition, and references are given simply by page number.

<sup>ii</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>iii</sup> Wegs cites figures for the average annual income in various occupations. Skilled workers earned 1945 *Kronen* a year, shoemakers earned 1040 or less (Wegs 29). Even that is high in comparison to Petzold's annual income of 516.

<sup>iv</sup> Wegs's oral interviews reveal a "rule of thumb" that rent took about a week of the father's monthly wages. Working-class families with higher incomes "paid about 18 percent of their income on housing" (Wegs 43). Petzold, near the bottom of the earning scale, paid about 28 percent of his income on housing.

<sup>v</sup> Felix Mitterer, *Das rauhe Leben*, I would like to express my gratitude to ORF and to the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York for making the film available to me.