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Gendered Re-Membering in Lilian Faschinger's *Wiener Passion*

As a fictional autobiography, a picaresque can be seen as an act of re-membering – and thereby creating – a self through narrative. Since the protagonist moves on a vertical axis through society, her/his story also reflects the cultural history of the time in which the narrative is set. In her most recent novel, *Wiener Passion*, Lilian Faschinger re-appropriates the picaresque genre to explore specifically Austrian notions of female identity. To do so, she re-visits the cultural history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, offering a perspective from the margins.

The main body of *Wiener Passion* constitutes the autobiography of Rosa Havelka, a Bohemian serving maid. The episodic plot is structured around Rosa's quest for a position, first as a maid and later as a mistress, in which she can achieve the personal satisfaction and "inner wealth" which will come from fulfilling her "destiny" to serve, a concept which proves ultimately to be an unattainable ideal. As schoolgirl, maid, asylum inmate, prisoner, mistress and wife, Rosa is repeatedly compelled to perform predetermined, subordinate roles. Only when she is condemned to death for murdering her husband to save a young woman from rape does Rosa question her own submissiveness and the "God-given" social order.

In analyzing this novel, I draw on Judith Butler's performative theory, a model of identity construction which closely mirrors that found in picaresque narrative. Butler advocates "subversive repetition" of identity-determining norms in order to cause local disruptions in the normative system. This emphasis on subversion sheds particular light on the feminist appropriation of the picaresque in *Wiener Passion*, which subverts "traditional" picaresque devices such as the master-servant pattern and the morally ambivalent protagonist, as well as employing Butlerian notions of "dissonance," "hyperbole," "proliferation" and "internal confusion" to expose gender as a patriarchal social construction devised to keep women in subordinate positions.

As first-person narratives, picaresques can be seen as identity performatives on the part of their respective (fictional) narrators. Rosa kills her husband in an attempt to destroy repressive, identity-determining norms, but in fact, it is through narrating and re-membering her own life-story that she finally approaches a self-constructed identity. The protagonist's retrospective narration of her experiences according to her own agenda can be seen as a "subversive repetition" of her whole life. Rosa's story is structured in the picaresque mode, portraying her life as a series of constructed performances, and exposing in the process the social and political ends served by raising an Austrian girl to be meek and submissive, revealing also the part played in that normative oppression by Catholic church, state, family, and Austrian general public. In this endeavour, the novel questions "traditional" notions of Austrian cultural history by subverting quintessentially Austrian motifs such as Freudian analysis, the iconic Empress "Sissi"

and the legendary composer Schubert. Meanwhile, a frame narrative set in 1990s Vienna deconstructs assumptions of “progress” in gender equality over the past century.