

Lilian Faschinger



Biography

Lilian Faschinger was born in Austria in 1950.

Since her 1983 debut, *Selbstausslöser: Lyrik und Kurzprosa*, Faschinger has written three novels, two radio plays, two short-story collections, a book of poetry, and several translations. In 1990, she won the Austrian National Award for Literary Translation. Her novels *Magdalena the Sinner* and *Woman with Three Aeroplanes* have been published in English.

She has been a writer-in-residence in the United States at Dartmouth College, Deutsches Haus of NYU, and Washington University.

Faschinger lives in Vienna.

Identity through imagination: an interview with Lilian Faschinger.

Introduction

Lilian Faschinger will be familiar to many Yearbook readers as the special guest at the October 2002 Women in German conference. A love of mobility and an intermittent need to escape the patriarchal atmosphere of Austria have led her to take advantage of every opportunity to travel, including lecture tours and periods as writer-in-residence at various universities. During her first Canadian reading tour, in October 2001, she was kind enough to agree to the following interview, which took place at Queen's University, Kingston.

Born and raised in postwar, provincial Austria, the young Lilian Faschinger was frustrated by the oppressive atmosphere, lingering fascist attitudes, and widespread discouragement of female self-expression in her homeland. Literature, both in English and in German, was a source of inspiration and escape for her. A high-school exchange year in Connecticut in 1969 (during which she acquired a US high-school diploma) cemented her love affair with the anglophone world and its culture. Returning to Austria, she took a degree in English and History followed by a PhD in medieval English literature at the University of Graz. While working there as a part-time lecturer in English, she also made a name for herself as a literary translator, in particular with a translation of Gertrude Stein's monumental experimental novel *The Making of Americans*, which

garnered for Faschinger and her collaborator Thomas Priebisch the prestigious Austrian National Prize for Literary Translators.

Lilian Faschinger has been a free-lance writer since 1992 and has received several prizes and grants for her work. Since publication of her first original book in 1983, she has penned four novels, a handful of plays, and several volumes of short stories and poetry. Her novels especially are characterized by imaginative construction, biting wit, and a challenging narrative style.

Best-known among Faschinger's oeuvre is her 1995 novel *Magdalena the Sinner* (*Magdalena Sunderin*), which has been translated into sixteen languages so far (seventeen, if US and British English are counted separately!). It tells the story of Magdalena, a feisty, if breathtakingly naive young Austrian who embarks on a pan-European quest for true love and her own identity. Not only does every love affair turn sour, but her treatment at the hands of various men turns her into a serial murderess. The bulk of the novel comprises Magdalena's confession/life-story, as told to an Austrian country priest whom she has first kidnapped, gagged, and tied to a tree.

Also featured prominently in the interview is Faschinger's most recent novel, *Vienna Passion* (*Wiener Passion*, 1999). This work chronicles the trials and tribulations of Rosa, a Bohemian serving maid in fin de siècle Vienna. Interpolated is a story of our own times: an unlikely love-affair between the Afro-American Magnolia, visiting Vienna to study for the role of Anna Freud in a musical, and her hypochondriac, mother-fixated singing teacher Josef. Further topics explored in the interview include Austrian identity, feminism, literary influences, identity through narrative, the picaresque, modes of women's oppression, writing as therapy and as survival, reader reactions, and Faschinger's current and future projects.

Interview

Ellie Kennedy: Frau Faschinger, welcome to Canada! After several years in Paris, with spells in the US and elsewhere, you recently set up home in Vienna. Magdalena, the protagonist of your highly successful novel *Magdalena the Sinner*, refers to Austria as: "the homeland where I never felt at home." Where, if anywhere, do you feel "at home"?

Lilian Faschinger: I don't feel at home anywhere. My options are to stay in my own country and to feel like a stranger, or to go abroad, where one is also a stranger, but where the feeling of alienation is not as painful because it is natural. And that is why I have sometimes preferred to live elsewhere. But since you ask me where I feel at home, I would say in writing. Through writing one can create or recover a home, and only when I'm writing do I truly feel at home.

Your novels exhibit a pronounced love-hate relationship with Austria. Magdalena, for example, hates Austrian society but loves the pastries! What do you love and hate about Austria?

My attitude toward Austria is ambivalent. That country has its positive aspects, and when one has traveled as much as I have, one realizes that other nations have their own problems. I keep returning and now, after many years away, I am once again living in Austria.