

# Ethics and Aesthetics in Jonas Lüscher's *Barbarian Spring*

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*The article claims that Jonas Lüscher's first novel titled Barbarian Spring follows a twofold program: it is a book with a strong moral and political message, and at the same time it is challenging literature's possibility to incite action. Therefore, the book stands within the tradition of the Enlightenment when it comes to educating the reader, and in a larger sense, believing in the social value of Bildung; yet, it simultaneously shows the limits of the Enlightenment frame by decomposing the linkage between moral knowledge and actual behavior. To pursue this twofold goal, the book intertwines traditional aesthetic forms with modernist goals, and demonstrates in the end the limits of applicability and fertility of both approaches in today's context and when – as the text suggests – consequentialist categories are applied. The text diagnoses the malfunctioning of the syncretism of Capitalism, Christianity, and the Enlightenment not only when it comes to issuing rules for moral behavior, but also when it comes to giving meaning to experience. Following this second possible purpose of literature – sense-making – the book examines literature's therapeutic possibilities, when therapy means the integration in or the creation of a coherent interpretational scheme.*

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Fifty years after the *Zürcher Literaturstreit*, Switzerland in 2016 has a new literary controversy: Jonas Lüscher and Peter Stamm are debating – not less vigorously than Emil Staiger and his opponents at the time – on the purpose, possible impact, and adequate evaluation of art (Lüscher, *Literatur*; Stamm, *Lieber*). Leaving aside the personal alliances (*pro/contra* Lukas Bärfuss) and idiosyncrasies of the two counterparts (both accusing the respective other as acting out of vanity), what remains is *grosso modo* the classical *l'art pour l'art-versus-littérature engagée* scheme that repeats itself with differing foci and contexts over time. Lüscher is taking the part of the committed intellectual; Stamm the part of the uninvolved, form-focused artist.

Lüscher's role and position in the recent debate seems to be in line with his first and hitherto only book *Frühling der Barbaren* (2013; *Barbarian Spring* 2014), which was received as book on the financial crisis respectively a book with a moral and political program. This direction in the reception so far is induced by the plot and setting of the counterfactual novel (high-stakes London city managers experiencing the consequences of England's national bankruptcy while on a luxury vacation in Tunisia) and by Lüscher's biography: Lüscher was educated as an ethics teacher for primary schools, and was pursuing a doctorate in Philosophy at the ETH Zürich with a project on Richard Rorty and the role of narration for capturing social complexity.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this article is to complement the existing readings by confirming that the book pursues a political-critical program, but that it is at the same time bringing into question the feasibility of such an approach. Diversely, in my opinion, the two most flagrant topics of *Barbarian Spring* are (a) its strong anti-capitalist message and its implicit incitement to act, and (b) its strong doubts about the possibilities of literature to influence social conduct and hence literature's impotence when it comes to inciting action. Describing these mechanisms will be the first part of my argument, which will be divided into two subsections (the first valuating the text's didactic aspiration and the second focusing on the novel's style). The second part will analyze the peritexts and the narrative situation. Besides the more directly political and moral dimensions, the book thematizes other purposes that literature can serve and which can be summarized – following one of the major motifs of the book – as therapeutic, defined as the integration into or the creation of a coherent interpretational scheme. Meaning and sense-making are the salient topics on this level. It is in pursuing a therapeutic program that ethics and aesthetics – according to the book's presentation – could coincide, insofar as narration can create the frame of reference for meaning and consequently also meaningful behavior. It is important to notice that while the book diagnoses and shows the consequences of the loss of a coherent universal framework and asks indirectly for remedy, it does not deliver a new framework itself.

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<sup>1</sup> See his profile on his publisher's webpage: <http://www.chbeck.de/trefferliste.aspx?action=author&author=140723067> (last access 8.12.2016). Research so far: Beck, Hofer-Krucker Valderrama, Kleinpass, Reidy.

## Didactic aspiration vs. uselessness and dangerousness of literature

Rarely is there as clear a message in modern and postmodern literature as in *Barbarian Spring*. The characters are grouped in sharp antagonisms, and are the embodiments of morally charged stereotypes which can immediately be deduced from their names. The reader witnesses the obscene self-celebration of global capitalism in a 250.000-pounds wedding of London stock-traders at a luxury resort in Tunisia, and later the brutal implosion of parts of this same system when Britain goes bankrupt overnight, leaving the former filthy-rich wedding guests to face living without privileges, through the eyes of Preising (“Preis” in German means “price”), a Swiss industrial magnate who *in loco* gets invited to the wedding by the groom’s mother Pippa Greyling, an English teacher. Preising’s Croatian-German business executive is called Prodanovic, rooted in the Croatian verb *pròdati* (selling) (Hofer-Krucker Valderrama 48, note 31). The most eye-catching exponent of London city traders explains the background of his nickname Quicky: “[Q]uick trigger finger. That’s why they were all so hot for me: the army, the firm and the bank” (Lüscher, *Barbarian* 90). Quicky worked as a mercenary in Iraq before becoming a businessman. The military analogy together with its implicit moral judgment is called to mind on more occasions. Watching the English traders at the pool, Preising states that, “Even in this state of near-nakedness [...] they all looked like they were in uniform” (30). During the wedding, “People drank themselves into a stupor as though it was their duty, and went into the palm grove to throw up like they were executing some preordained plan” (88). The Brokers operate as an unconscious, strength-following mass, and not as single individuals who act on one’s own responsibility: “These young people were conditioned to hang on every word uttered by any confident speaker [...]. It didn’t matter to them who was speaking or what they were saying, it was all about the attitude of the person delivering the message” (86).

The sharp antagonism, with which the text works, is grouping the characters in agents and non-agents, whereby the second group is indirectly supporting the first group’s actions by not opposing resistance. The exclusivity of this split is emphasized by alluding to but not working with other traditional antagonisms like Orientalism: calling to mind the orientalist categories (passion, irrationality, hospitality, etc.) but not using them underlines the universal propagation of capitalism: Preising’s Arab business partners are described in exactly the same terms

as their occidental counterparts, whereby recklessness and egotism combined with a talent for quick decision-making are the prevalent characteristics. Saida Malouch – her name blatantly makes reference to Edward Said – the owner of the resort and daughter of Preising’s business partner in Tunisia, remains level-headed and cool-blooded after Britain’s bankruptcy: “It was time to act” (94). Orientalist features are used by orientals to sell their product (the *1001 Nights-Resort* “was modelled [...] on what market researchers thought a first-class tourist to Tunisia might imagine when he pictured a typical Berber settlement”; 25). The universality of capitalism is also emphasized by the fact that “Daghfous” – the name of the family which would like to take over the Malouch family business but instead gets themselves swallowed – is one of the most widespread names in Tunisia, whereas *Malouch* (Moloch) provides the text’s moral evaluation: The world (Orient and Occident) is a global Moloch!<sup>2</sup> The novel, therefore, is not part of the orientalist discourse and neither ostensibly of its postcolonial deconstruction,<sup>3</sup> but plays with the orientalist tradition to underline its message, which is claiming the totality of global capitalism and moral corruption and the impotence of the humanist tradition in front of these facts.

The second traditional antagonism that proves neglectable in front of the more powerful division in agents and non-agents is the antagonism between the brute money-making business and high culture. S(t)anford Greyling, the groom’s father and Pippa’s husband, a sociology professor, impersonates the academic elite with its wish for distinction that turns out to be only façade because Sanford is searching “adventure” (44), driven by a death wish,<sup>4</sup> and “acting like a teenager” (47) just like the London City trader telling about her Porsche-adventure on German autobahns, where “only her amazingly sharp reflexes, honed by all those hectic hours on the trading floor, [...] had enabled her to cheat certain death” (39). Sanford refers the story to Preising “with his professional hat on” (39), but further on ends up having sex and making wedding plans with Miss Porsche (106–109).

The ability to take action of the mentioned groups is further highlighted by their counterpart: the text ridicules and judges Preising’s incapability to take decisions by paralleling his problems with deciding about closing or not closing “the second-to-top button of his shirt”

<sup>2</sup> My gratitude goes to Katharina Schillen for her Arab skills and help with name-research, and to the reviewers for constructive critique.

<sup>3</sup> Although, Laura Beck’s brilliant talk gives an example of how fruitfully postcolonial theories can be applied to Lüscher’s book.

<sup>4</sup> As the trip to the Berber cave dwellings proves (58–59).

(40), and compensating or not compensating for the loss of a camel driver's herd by giving him 15,000 francs. Preising's "agonized wrestling was cut short by Saida, who [instead took action] [...] and told the chauffeur to drive on" (24). The text's moral judgment is also made clear via the comments of the frame-I-narrator on Preising's conduct regarding the camel driver scene ("Preising could always find reasons for not taking action"; 23) and the I narrator's comment on Preising's behavior more generally ("Preising wasn't inclined to give too much thought to greater or higher things, or at least he wasn't willing to do anything more than just think about them, and certainly wasn't prepared to shoulder the responsibility that came with them"; 67).

Preising tries to circumvent guilt and responsibility but has to face the fact that his firm is using Dinka children to assemble pieces – a fact that he comments by "maintaining a contemptuous silence" (130). The moral message is overly clear: one can be guilty by being a spectator! Choosing the hot theme of child labor is a strategy to direct the reader's emotions: the topic is so absolutely morally wrong that the implied author can implicitly count on the abhorrence of the reader. When some of Preising's business partners elaborate on "what a delicate subject child labor was [...] Much more problematic than your average do-gooder might like to think" (7), then it is clear to the reader on which side s/he has to stand. None of the characters in the embedded story qualifies for identification, and the novel's cartoonish experimental arrangement does not allow ambivalence. The reader's self-assurance lies in filling the gap: in not being either of the stereotyped characters, and therefore, in not acting without thinking properly and in not finding excuses for non-action, consequently, in embracing the novel's morality, which follows the Christian *caritas* code and the Enlightenment code of taking responsibility for one's decisions.

This didactic strand is further underlined by the "novella" (Novelle) genre.<sup>5</sup> Kleinpass traces the features and transformations of the Novelle genre by making reference to Goethe's and Heyse's poetic theory represented in *Barbarian Spring*, and sees one of the differences between the genre-convention and Lüscher's version in the lack of a *Tugendideal* (ideal of virtue): the world, according to Kleinpass, has become inscrutable for Preising (35) and Hofer-Krucker Valderrama states, that Preising experiences the confusion and complexity typical of globalization (49). I do not agree. I think the text – beyond Preising's distor-

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<sup>5</sup> Unluckily, this gets lost in the English translation which does not reference the genre after the title like in the German original.

tion, and primarily via the frame-I-narrator's valuation of Preising's account – denounces every recourse on incomprehensibility very clearly as evasive move: Preising uses overly complex constructions to skip responsibility but his entanglement in guilt is crystal-clear. Otherwise, Preising's non-acting – his “disconcerting irresponsibility” (Kleinpass 34, my translation) – would not classify as *unerhörte Begebenheit* (outrageous occurrence) in the Goethean sense.<sup>6</sup> The *Tugendideal*, which is lacking in the text, must be embodied by the reader.

However, Kleinpass is right that the novel – and this is where the metafictional self-deconstruction of the text begins – marks the middle-class intellectuals together with their enlightenment ideal of *Bildung* as useless in today's context. Consequently, this applies to the novel itself: the moral message is overly clear, yet literature's potential to incite action is not equally evident. The text challenges a direct causal connection between reading literature and social conduct, between moral knowledge and actual behavior, and underlines this by showing the uselessness and unpredictability of literature's impact.

For Preising, literature is a topic for small talk: “Books are a wonderful ice-breaker” (Lüscher, *Barbarian* 28) and apparently this seems to work for establishing contact with Pippa (28); citations from canonic texts “tended to crop up a lot in social situations” (76). Literature, as far as Preising is concerned, is a vehicle for intellectual narcissism. Once the situation heats up in the resort, Preising saves the poem that Pippa recites at her son's wedding but not Pippa, and he is also “ignoring some desperate guests who made a grab for the door handles” (124–125) of the only available car, in which Saida and Preising leave the scenario. Against this background, saving the poem (69) becomes the sentimental gesture of an egoist who is trying to cover his inhumanity by staging his devotedness to art, a gesture of striking similarity to the real-world middle-class intellectual's horror in front of the destruction of Palmyra and the simultaneous human indifference and reference to complexity when it comes to taking action and helping the people who live there.

Pippa really seems to have believed in the Enlightenment's idea of progress via formation, but this former faith of hers is clearly marked as naïve given the sharp contrast with reality. The topic of the poem *The Axe Handle* by Gary Snyder, that Pippa wants to recite at her son's wedding, is formation by emulation: “When making an axe handle /

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<sup>6</sup> Goethe famously defines “Novelle” as type of text structured by one central outrageous event or conflict – the “unerhörte Begebenheit” (outrageous occurrence).

the pattern is not far off.' And I say this to Kai [my son] / 'Look: We'll shape the handle / By checking the handle / Of the axe we cut with'" (70). The poem itself draws the analogy between the shaping of an axe handle, the shaping of society, and the shaping of literature: "Pound was an axe / Chen was an axe, I am an axe / And my son a handle, soon / To be shaping again, model / And tool, craft of culture, / How we go on" (70). Applied to her son, Pippa reflects: "It was obvious that in shaping her axe handle, she's taken some duff measurements. [...] In any case, she was adamant that reciting a poem at his wedding wasn't going to change a thing" (71–72).

As far as the novel goes, Pippa is right and wrong about the capacities of literature for engineering reality. Presumably, she did not succeed in shaping her son, and as she has foreseen, reciting the poem at her son's wedding turns out to be a disaster (84–88). However, there is a striking example of how literature actively and decisively contributes to the formation of actuality in the novel:

In an attempt to get Preising's attention again [during their adventure trip to the Berber dwellings], Sanford served up the tale of the traditional Tunisian wedding feast. This basically consisted of a roasted camel with couscous. But the camel, which was cooked whole, was supposedly prepared in the refined manner of a Russian *Matroschka* doll, being stuffed with a whole sheep, which in turn was stuffed with a goat stuffed with a bustard stuffed with a dozen quails, each of which had been stuffed with barberries and dates. Preising was skeptical. He had the feeling he'd heard this story, or something very like it, somewhere before, and in the context of a joke, what's more. (53–54)

This does not stop Preising from using the story on his account "to impress some of the young people [at the wedding]" (89). "Quicky, who had a sharp mind but a very poor knowledge of literature, and who'd only half-listened to Preising's story the night before, was able to reel off the entire recipe for roasted camel verbatim, entrancing his audience with the prospect of an authentic Tunisian feast" (121). The infuriated mass of former rich parvenus subsequently puts the recipe in action, substituting several missing ingredients with dog-puppies, which requires the murder of their owner Rachid, and the flames for the roasting set the whole resort on fire. The recipe that Sanford sells as Berber folklore is a passage (without counterpart in real life) from T. C. Boyle's novel *Water Music*. Therefore, parts of Boyle's fictional text become reality in *Barbarian Spring*, evidencing that literature *can* form reality but one cannot foresee in what way: instead of a just society one might end up with a roasted camel!



## Not a matter of style

*Barbarian Spring* dovetails an overly clear moral message with serious doubts about the possible impact of literature as a whole, apart from which form literature uses to pursue this educational goal. The form *Barbarian Spring* deploys is an intertwining of traditional forms with modernist goals: the conservative narrative styles, due to their anachronism, are not causing the consequences they were intended for in the enlightenment tradition (educating the reader directly), but they create disturbance and display the text's artificiality (and attempt to educate the reader indirectly).

The novel has two I-narrators: Preising, who is telling about his business/holiday trip to Tunisia, and the frame-I-narrator, another patient in Preising's psychiatric clinic who functions as the editor of Preising's story. Preising's very peculiar way of presentation is an exposition of bourgeois narration: his old-fashioned, mannerist way of talking is commented on and ridiculed as early as page one by the frame-I-narrator: "À propos, for heaven's sake! – that was one of his affectations, larding his speech with archaic turns of phrase he knew full well nobody else used anymore" (1). His frequent use of antiquated terms accompanied by French particles ("his wife, *très charmant*"; 15) and his excessive use of hypotaxis is typical for the narration in the tradition of the nineteenth century: the style seems a parody of Thomas Mann, whose *The Magic Mountain* with its topos of the clinic as refuge out of time and space might well be a pretext for *Barbarian Spring*. Ronald Speirs comments on the poeology of Mann and other non-modernist writers during the Third Reich:

[M]ostly they employed a mixed mode of fiction, well established in German literature since the Enlightenment, one which incorporated realistically observed detail into various types of didactic or exemplary narrative. Their common aim was to defend humanity against its despisers, and to offer some vision of hope, however precarious, to set against the fear on which tyranny depends. (Speirs 165)

This seems to be Preising's approach: he tells the frame-I-narrator a story to prove his point (1) and to implement a didactic program ("You could never be sure whether Preising's stories were true or not, but that wasn't the point. What mattered to him was the moral of the story."; 10). His statements are an (inauthentic) enactment of humanism and the Enlightenment's hope in moral progress by cultural education. When Pippa voices misgivings on whether or not to recite the poem at her son's wedding, Preising tells her with great pathos:



['T]his poem goes way back in time, into the history of many generations, and also points the way forward to future generations. It reflects,' he continued, getting into his stride, 'the Great Chain of Being. One day, your son will become a father himself, and when he does, he'll think back on your words. It's really important, this poem. Pippa, you have to recite it this evening'. (72)

As I have shown above, this framework – even if it were not corrupted as in Preising's case who uses *Bildung* to click with other people – is marked as outdated and does not apply to today's society: Preising "knew next to nothing about the relationship between grown-up children and their parents" (72).

Preising's pseudo-message together with his conservative style serves, beyond its speaker's intent, the modernist goal of defamiliarization and alienation. The reader, like the frame-I-narrator, stumbles over certain words and constructions of Preising's presentational mode, unmasks Preising as an intellectual snob and takes the Brechtian critical position in front of this overly artificial character. However, this is not all: the reader also deconstructs the Brechtian goal, which is still in the Enlightenment tradition of believing that awareness incites actual acting. The text strikingly shows that knowledge or awareness is not enough to act because in Preising's case, action is not incited by knowledge: once Preising has learned that his company is based on child labor, he does nothing; as he does nothing in front of the camel driver's despair although he knows well what should be done. The novel decomposes the Enlightenment's linkage of progress of knowledge with progress of justice, especially when seen from a consequentialist perspective hence when judging the consequences of an action or non-action and not the agent's intent. This can also be shown via Pippa's disillusionment, Sanford's opportunism, and, when all of these strands are put together, the implicit self-reflexive prognosis of the impact of the novel *Barbarian Spring* on social conduct. Pippa's cultural-educational intent may be authentic but she attains no results. Sanford's moral sense and his sociological and psychological knowledge about the behavior and desires of men his age gets promptly substituted with new interpretations that suit and sustain his behavior and desires (108–109). The reader may be alienated (and therewith *ex negativo* know what s/he should do), but will that change anything in the real world according to the text's own prognosis?

Preising's doctor has difficulties in diagnosing his pathology: it is not the "common depression" (10) of the frame-I-narrator, "Yet in our inability to see ourselves as capable of taking action we were alike" (10). A possible reason why Preising's pathology is so difficult to diagnose is that Preising's pathology is the normal mental condition of most of the

novel's presumable readers (and the present commentator): educated and living in capitalist societies, with a moral consciousness yet incapable of acting, reading novels while elsewhere people are suffering, and in doing so actually thinking of themselves as serving humanity. Preising ends his story (which culminates in assisting the massacres in the resort, the arresting and presumable death of Saida, and the Dinka children assembling pieces for his firm) with "Come on, [...] Supper should be ready" (132). Laura Beck reads Preising's pathological prudence as a comment on Switzerland's neutrality. I think this can be enlarged: the clinic might as well be the Christian West, the fortress of Europe, the cradle of Enlightenment that goes to supper while clearly knowing that millions suffer – this because of various reasons, but connected via our disinterest and thereupon within our frameworks by our guilt.

As previously mentioned, the moral message gains clarity by taking a critical stance in front of the possibilities embodied by the characters; but at a second level, the novel suggests a familiarization with the characters, whether that be Pippa's disillusioned faith in education, Sanford's opportunism, or Preising's lethargic intellectual vanity. While clearly knowing what should be done (and thereby taking the critical stance), it is more likely that the reader will find excuses for non-action (and therewith fall in the category of "Preising"), find new elaborations for pursuing personal gain (the category of "Sanford"), or embrace defeatism (the category of "Pippa"). Yet, will this new awareness to be one of these three characters change anything?

The displaying of intent against consequences (the strong moral drive together with serious doubts about its impact) is a possible key to the "wrong-question(s)-enigma" that frames the text: "No,' said Preising, 'you're asking the wrong questions' (1); 'Look here,' he said, 'I'll prove it to you. À propos of which, I'll tell you a little story [...] with a moral to it' " (1–2). Additionally:

So, what had been the point of all this – this sad story full of tragic coincidences? It was a tale with no didactic purpose to it. Preising seemed deeply downcast by his own story [...] "So what was the point of your story then?" I pressed him, mercilessly. Preising's response seemed pregnant with some secret knowledge on his part, yet also a deep anxiety about what he knew. "Once again, you're asking the wrong question," he said. (132)

Besides being a veritable conundrum for generations of literary scholars, on a formal account it is an elegant possibility to have it both ways: to set the agenda of engaged or moral literature while challenging the feasibility of such an approach and avoid one-sided answers.

## Therapy and the creation of coherence

Hofer-Krucker Valderrama interprets Preising's narration as redirection activity (49). I agree but would emphasize the role of the frame-I-narrator in this evaluation: it is the frame-I-narrator's comments that set the moral tone by dropping the keyword "responsibility," and therewith suggest from the start to read Preising's narration as manoeuvre of exculpation: "Now, I realized straight away that, even with the first sentence of his story, Preising had effectively succeeded in absolving himself of all the responsibility for the events that subsequently unfolded" (Lüscher, *Barbarian* 4). But who is this I-narrator who stages Preising's account, and what are his reasons for telling?

Details on his background can be easily overlooked because they are presented *en passant* in a very few lines at the height of Preising's apocalypse-narration:

In effect, what Preising was presenting me with here was a variation of the by-now familiar theme of "Where were you when Britain went bankrupt?" Latterly this genre had taken over from the earlier "Where were you on 9/11?" [...] Incidentally, my two answers to the respective questions were: sitting in front of a portable TV in the boardroom of a haulage firm in Bayreuth, where all the staff had gathered to watch the tragedy unfold; and watching a flat-screen TV in the cafeteria at the University of Lucerne [Britain's bankruptcy]. (99–100)

It is impossible to determine which position he held in the haulage firm. What is sure is that someone with a practical job in Bayreuth decided to go to Lucerne. Choosing a small university out of one's own region most presumably coincides with wanting something specific there. The University of Lucerne had only three departments until 2016 (*Barbarian Spring* was published in 2013): Theology, Cultural and Social Studies, and Law. The Law school includes a Center for Transport Law,<sup>7</sup> but the fame of the University lays in its research in theology and social ethics.<sup>8</sup> The text leaves open what the frame-narrator was doing at the University of Lucerne, but transport law does not integrate as good with the rest of the text as theology: next to judging Preising as irresponsible, the frame-I-narrator comments several times on the cynic behavior of the bankers, who declared money "released

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unilu.ch/fakultaeten/rf/institute/kompetenzstelle-fuer-logistik-und-transportrecht-kolt/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unilu.ch/fakultaeten/tf/institute/institut-fuer-juedisch-christliche-forschung-ijcf/>

the potential to achieve great things. Yet this greatness was mostly measured in terms of the square meterage of living space in Cape Ferrat” (67). There are several recourses on Christian imagery in the text (e.g. Rachid’s name, which means “who has the faith,” the recurrence of purgatorial fire, etc., see Kleinpass 34) and the frame-I-narrator feels responsible for the text’s unity and clarity, which can be seen from his repeated corrections of Preising’s accounts (see Lüscher, *Barbarian* 84, 88). It could even be assumed that Preising, together with his whole story, is an invention of the frame-I-narrator. But for what reason?

Next to his presumed studies in Theology, the only other thing that is known about the frame-I-narrator is that he lost his child. The reader discovers this when Preising tells the I-narrator that Pippa lost her second child:

“For someone like me, who never had kids [...] it’s hard to imagine what it means to lose a child. You, though, [...] know only too well what it means.” No, actually, I didn’t. Preising was mistaken. Just because you’ve experienced something, it doesn’t mean that you know what it means. [...] Some things are so senseless that there is no point in trying to give them meaning. (33)

This fictitious rejection of trying to give meaning is an analogon of Preising’s impossible but necessary “moral of the story.” It is plausible to presume that one of the “wrong” questions that the frame-I-narrator is asking (and which initiate the text) is the question for meaning and the “why.” When facing existential aporia like the loss of an innocent child the problem of theodicy is not far off. The frame-I-narrator’s fixation with global justice and his moral evaluation of Preising might as well be his redirection activity. Preising tries to distract himself from his own guilt, while the frame-I-narrator tries to distract himself from the absence of guilt – and sense. Literature and narration, traditionally, have not only been connected with moral education but also with meaning. Sense arises by integrating punctual experience into a coherent narration (Taylor). Following the frame-I-narrator: experience in itself is nothing. Only interpreted experience is meaningful, and interpretation is possible only in reference to a larger framework. What *Barbarian Spring* diagnoses is the incongruity of the traditional frameworks – Enlightenment and Christianity – with today’s experience: it is impossible to generate a meaningful and successful story by reference to one of the two. This can be due to a problem inherent in the framework itself (as in the case of theodicy) or due to the incongruity of different frameworks: the Enlightenment’s ideal of *Bildung*, as presented in the novel, has become an attitude

(Preising), capital (Sanford), or useless because without impact (Pippa) when confronted with the reality of neoliberal capitalism. The same is true for the more genuinely Christian or metaphysical framework: the apocalypse in *Barbarian Spring* is not to be followed by salvation (Hofer-Krucker Valderrama 45). Emblematic is the Bible reference at the end of Preising's account: "English tourists could be seen walking down the dead-straight road across the desert like latter-day Israelites leaving Egypt" (125). The biblical quotation works as a joke, not as carrier of meaning.

Preising's quest for the "moral of the story" and the frame-I-narrator's quest for meaning are both presented as pressingly needed yet presumably idle. Both choose narration as the royal road to achieving their goals but get hampered by the multiplicity of frames: *Barbarian Spring*, although imagining Britain's bankruptcy, is not showing the bankruptcy of capitalism but the bankruptcy of Christianity and the Enlightenment as frames of reference when connected with capitalist society.

The title of the book *Barbarian Spring* is followed by a definition by Franz Borkenau put before the main text: "What is barbarism in actual fact? It is not the same thing as cultural primitivism [...] It is a state in which many of the values of an advanced civilization are present, but without that social and moral coherence which is the prerequisite for a culture to function rationally" (0). The question is: Who are the barbarians? Reidy is right in stating that the word "barbarian" never occurs in the text, but only in the peritexts (160). Without the Borkenau-quotation one might be tempted to attribute the term to the brutalization of some of the Londoners after the crash – using the word then in its ostracizing and self-assuring function – but with the given definition by Borkenau the answer can only be that barbarism describes the current state of affairs: it is the syncretism of unrestrained capitalism and Enlightenment or Christianity which does not "function rationally," which lacks "coherence."

In *Barbarian Spring*, the society whose value-system is based on Christianity and the Enlightenment but whose praxis is capitalistic is diagnosed with something very similar to depression: it has become incapable of understanding itself as an agent, and it has lost the experience of meaning, with a cure (active substance and method of application) yet unknown. The Borkenau-citation goes on: "But it is precisely for this reason that 'barbarism' is also a creative process: once the overall coherence of a culture is shattered, the path lies open for a renewal of creativity [...] There is no historical basis for believing that the end result will be some tabula rasa" (0). There is neither any "historical

basis” for believing that there was ever a Golden Age of Coherence, nor that it might ever become real. The state of coherence itself is Utopia. However, following Wolf Lepenies’s *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, this would be the place of literature and narration: imagining a cure. Literature, to function as therapy, would have to lift itself up to the level of frame working.

However, this is not what *Barbarian Spring* does; it stops with the diagnosis. *Barbarian Spring*, notwithstanding its clear moral message, evaluates the probability that literature can induce this sort of action as pretty dim: awareness is not enough to actually start acting, and this also counts for the awareness to live in Barbaria.

Lüscher’s book takes a more humble and sceptic stance than its author. Involved literature does not necessarily have the consequences which are intended. Still, in the book’s evaluation the ostensibly uninvolved counterprogram could be subsumed under Preising’s category.

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## Etika in estetika v romanu *Pomlad barbarov* Jonasa Lüscherja

Ključne besede: literatura in etika / švicarska književnost / Lüscher, Jonas: *Pomlad barbarov* / etika in estetika / didaktičnost / terapevtskost / družbeni angažma

Prispevek analizira prvi roman Jonasa Lüscherja *Frühling der Barbaren* (2013) in ugotavlja, da roman razvija dva koncepta: ima izrazito moralno in politično sporočilo, istočasno pa izziva potencial književnosti, da bralca spodbudi k dejavnosti. Roman se uvršča v tradicijo razsvetljenstva, tako v ožjem smislu, saj gre za vzgajanje bralca, kakor tudi v širšem, saj tematizira družbeno vrednost »omike«, vendar pa istočasno opozarja tudi na meje razsvetljenske drže, ko razgradi vezi med moralnim védenjem in dejanskim vedénjem. Pri razvijanju teh dveh konceptov roman prepleta tradicionalne estetske oblike z modernističnimi idejami in prikaže meje uporabnosti in plodnosti obeh pristopov v sodobnem kontekstu, zlasti glede na posledice. Besedilo diagnosticira nepravilno delovanje sinkretizma med kapitalizmom, krščanstvom in razsvetljenstvom, in sicer ne le tedaj, ko gre za vzpostavljanje pravil moralnega vedenja, temveč tudi tedaj, ko gre za osmišljanje izkušenj. Roman upošteva postopke osmišljanja kot drugo možno funkcijo književnosti in pri tem preverja njene terapevtske zmožnosti, pri čemer je s terapijo mišljena integracija in kreacija koherentne interpretacijske sheme.

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