Chapter Six

Summation

One of Austria’s most prolific and political writers, Jelinek is best known for her outspoken feminism and sharp criticism of capitalist patriarchy. Although openly admitting to a feminist agenda, Jelinek is primarily concerned in her writing with the material conditions of the working class in a capitalist society, paying particular attention to its effects on the position of women. Her works typically feature female protagonists who become victims of male-perpetrated abuse, such as domestic violence or sexual exploitation. Heavily influenced by the works of dramatist Bertholt Brecht, Jelinek often uses graphic depictions and crude, deliberately shocking language to lampoon cultural assumptions, conventions, and taboos.

Jelinek was born on October 20, 1946, in Muerzzuschlag, Steiermark, Austria. Raised in Vienna by her Romanian-German mother and Czech-Jewish father, Jelinek struggled under a rigorous schedule of academic studies and musical training. She was enrolled concurrently in a local parochial school and the Viennese Conservatory of Music, where she studied piano, organ, viola, and composition. While she was in secondary school, her father became mentally ill and was placed in a mental institution. Following her graduation, with distinction, from the Alberts gymnasium in 1964, Jelinek also suffered an emotional breakdown. During the two years following her collapse, Jelinek became
interested in writing. She continued to write while studying art history and drama at the University of Vienna, and while completing her study of the organ at the conservatory. In 1966 Jelinek received her first critical recognition and encouragement for her writing after submitting some of her poetry to the Austrian Society for Literature. In 1969 she received prizes for both poetry and prose at the Twentieth Austrian Festival of Youth and Culture in Innsbruck. After the publication of her first two novels – *Lisas Schatten: 7 Gedichte* (1967) and *Wir sind lockvögel baby!* (1970; *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*) – Jelinek was commissioned to write several radio plays, receiving the Radio Play Award of the West German War Blind in 1973. She moved to Berlin in 1972 and later lived for extended periods in Rome and Paris. Her involvement with the student and feminist movements as well as her affiliation with the Marxist Party led to Jelinek’s public break with bourgeois values, a process she chronicled in a series of essays published between 1970 and 1971. In 1974 she married Gottfried Huengsberg. Jelinek has received several awards for her work, including the Interior Ministry of West Germany award for best screenplay in 1979, the Heinrich-Böll award in 1986, and the Honorary Award for Literature of Vienna in 1989.

Although most of Jelinek’s novels are set in a fictitious rural Austrian village, her books typically are not concerned with regional characters or issues. Instead, Jelinek’s narratives use a variety of verbal images borrowed from the media, television, and comic strips to deconstruct societal myths of family, love, self-determination, and free will *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983; *The Piano Teacher*) chronicles the story of Erika Kohut, a shy, thirty-year-old piano instructor at the
Vienna Conservatory of Music. When a young student named Walter Klemmer shows an interest in her, Erika begins to rebel against her domineering mother, indulging in voyeurism and a sadomasochistic sexual relationship with Klemmer. When her emotional and physical demands become too extreme, Klemmer attacks Erika and leaves. In *Lust* (1989) Jelinek portrays the impossibility of female desire through the wife of a factory owner who is treated as property by her husband.

Jelinek’s work has often been described by critics as pornographic in nature, both generally and in discussion of particular explicit scenes in her texts. The common basis for a feminist critique of pornography is the notion that the heterosexual pornographic subject is almost without exception female and performs for a male gaze. Many feminists have been concerned by the apparent case with which pornography is digested in its various forms and have argued that its presence sustains a basic inequality between the sexes. They claim that pornography can never be justified, even in its lightest, most ‘harmless’ forms, simply because it represents the face of an inherently unequal sexuality.

Literature often seeks to explore the buried side of the human mood with remarkable insight and the psychological critic hunts for such elements in literature. Psychoanalytic theory, which had originally analysed and describes neuroses and psychoses by drawing inferences of the sufferer’s sexuality, childhood experiences, emotional development and family relationship turned to literature to find similar observations in literary personae, Elfriede Jelinek in her attempt to depict the behaviour of man in a world of changing values and diversity of interest, has created a variety of abnormal characters. Their response
to external stimuli differs from what is considered normal and it warrants explanation. As such Jelinek’s fiction offers scope for psychological explication. This dissertation has analysed Jelinek’s abnormal character from a psychoanalytic perspective. This dissertation is an attempt which adheres to the assumption that when the behaviour of literary characters parallels the subjectivism of the human mind one can use modern psychological theories as tools for elucidating and interpreting a work of literature Freudian psychoanalysis and its variants are used in this interpretation. There therves stress the role of sexuality.

Chapter One titled “Introduction” traces the growth of Austrian Literature. It briefly introduces Elefriede Jelinek. It also traces the origin, growth and the significance of psychological criticism and defines the hypothesis of this research project and its significance. From the nineteenth century onward, Austria contributed some of the greatest names in modern literature. It was the home of novelists, and short-story writers like Adalbert Stifter, Arthur Schnitzler, Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig, Franz Kafka, Thomas Bernhard, Joseph Roth, or Robert Musil, Georg Trakl, Rose Auslander, Franz Grillparzer, Rainer Maria Rilke and Paul Celan. Famous contemporary playwrights and novelists are Elefriede Jelinek and Peter Handke, well-known essayists are Robert Menasse and Karl- Markus Gaub. Yet, it is hard to speak of an Austrian literature prior to that period. In the early eighteenth century, Lady Mary Worthy Montague, whilst visiting Vienna, was stunned to meet no writers at all. For all of Austria’s contributions to architecture, and having one of the most hallowed
musical traditions in Europe, no Austrian literature made it to the classical canon until the nineteenth century.

Elfriede Jelinek was born in Styria in 1946 to a mother of upper-class Catholic German and a father of proletarian Czech-Jewish descent. She grew up in Vienna where – commuting between her apartment in Munich and her house in the Austrian capital – she still spends a large amount of her time. Her unhappy childhood as the only daughter of elderly parents who were trapped in a bad marriage, the traumatic descent of her father into complete mental derangement when she was a teenager, and her mother’s extremely ambitious and controlling domination of her, have been – as Jelinek herself has stated in numerous interviews – the reason for many psychological problems, including a major breakdown when she was eighteen years old. According to Jelinek, the familial catastrophes and traumata were the motor and catalyst of her creativity, as she was able to gear the traumatic isolation during her mental illness into artistic productivity. However, the apparent intimate insights into her life and psychological make-up which Jelinek offers, which so frequently shape the media reception of her work, are deceptive. The self-portrait Jelinek presents to the press consists of an accumulation of repeated statements that present a constructed persona, an iconic representation rather than a “real” person. While Jelinek allows her readers some access to her biography within the tradition of the feminist credo where the private is always also political, the mythical totality attached to the author’s self-portrait is in fact nothing but a configuration of stereotyped utterances assembled by Jelinek herself. In this way, the author is able to present herself as a type rather than an individual, denying this
constructed self any self-importance and uniqueness. Her life, or the way she presents it to the public thus serves as the model for a biography shaped by its surroundings, as a symptom of and a reaction to society rather than an individual life story. In the same manner, while Austria is portrayed in Jelinek’s texts according to its specific history, politics, and culture, it can also be seen as a prototype of a society rather than as a specific case or situation. It features as the model for a hermetically sealed-off society, trapped in its own idyllic image based on the splendid past. In the case of Austria, what is buried underneath this seemingly harmonious traditional society is its horrific recent history, its collaboration with Nazi Germany and its substantial role in the Holocaust, which have been repressed in favour of an image that continues to give prominence to the representatives of its pre-war cultural “greatness.” What Jelinek exposes in her texts and that are replete with phrases from the media, popular and high culture, and bungled quotations derived from the literary and philosophical canon, is the dark underbelly of a society, the violence, suppression, and restrictions underneath the veneer of civilisation.

Chapter two is titled “Neurotic Relationships”. Human beings are social animals and familial relationships play a vital role in the making or the being of human psyche. Relations at home are basic and most of the times controls ones attitude towards oneself and others. When this relationship is not healthy it raises numerous psychological aberrations. This chapter identifies and analyses the unhealthy relationship that exist at home and it affects the individuals in the select novels of Jelinek.
Jelinek describes in her works pathogenic and grotesque family and love affairs in *The Piano Teacher, Lust, and Wonderful Wonderful Times*. The novel *The Piano Teacher* is using the analytics of powers in Foucault’s terms, as the mother-daughter dyad their characteristics for a political state structure is similar. The concept of mother-figure as a patriarchy of opposing discourse gains more importance at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially since Sigmund Freud studies on the parental roles in growing up the child. However, the importance of the mother role in the life of the child is realized only since Jacques Lacan in their entirety seen in the maternal desire of the kruziellen factor in the identification constitutes child with mother. In contrast to Freud’s Oedipus complex Lacan believes in the father the representing agent of the breakup of the mother-child dyad, the father in Lacan’s Theory is only a reference point of maternal desire. The ultimate moment is that the mother’s desire is targeting a distant goal of the child and the child confronted with the fact that it is not the only object of her desire, thus a wider field was opened. These other partner, or objects that represent represents what the desire of the child institutionalized - the desire itself, the desire for a recognition that, although the mother behind, eventually lead to their must. In Elfriede Jelinek’s *The Piano Teacher* (1983), these objects are those of the mother targeted art (playing the piano her daughter, Erika Kohut) and that of the daughter coveted feeling of pleasure. Both instances raise many questions about the configuration of female identity(s) and the role of the mother in this formation. And this “band” is determined by the various power and control concepts connected and rounded. The whole plot of the novel comes from a vacillation between the superiority of the mother and the submission of
the daughter, as well as between the boundaries of art and pleasure. They expose a pathogenic, symbiotic relationship and evidence of gender and social relations that embedded deep into the postmodern world seem to be.

According to Freud, children of an early age desire sex with their parent of the opposite gender. They desire one of their parents sexually, and wish to kill their same-gender parent in order to have sole access and control over the desired one. These desires to love and to kill in the family are in Freud’s idea oedipal desires, and the phase in which the oedipal desires are present, as the pre-oedipal phase of the larger oedipal development. The oedipal phase is the moment that the authority of the child and the authority of the parent clash. The child must decide to accept or reject the father’s authority. Children, however, eventually abandon their oedipal desires and accept the authority of the parent. In the case of a young boy, he eventually accepts the authority of his father and abandons his sexual aspirations for his mother. The child thus accepts the incest taboo, and the oedipal conflict has been resolved. This post-conflict phase is called the post-oedipal phase. The male child, however, only accepts the incest taboo (and his father’s authority) for something in return. The male child thus only accepts the father’s authority over the mother because it benefits from the presence of both parents, or from parental union. Therefore, the male child can justify giving up its oedipal desires, because he is, in turn, protected and nourished by the parents. The Oedipus complex usually applies to young children in their earliest stages of social development. The original acceptance of the incest taboo is traumatic, in the Freudian sense. The male child’s first great desire (to be with his mother and kill his father) is crushed by the father’s authority, and the child learns to be
submissive. However, oedipal elements pertaining to incest and power can return, like the Freudian uncanny, at times when the oedipal contract is either in danger of or actually is being breached.

The protagonist of *Lust* Hermann gets a substitute gratification in subjugating and dominating his wife. He considers his wife as one of his labourers he wants to dominate. Hermann uses sex with his wife to convince himself of his power. The conflation of sex and power is nothing new. We can go as far back as biblical narratives, and think of Eve’s role as temptress. The temptress or seductress, in fact, is a historical staple in visual and literary arts. She might go by other names: the femme fatale, the spider woman, even the tease, but her power always comes from her sexuality and sex appeal. And, often, that power has historically been characterized as dangerous. By dominating his wife by and ‘conquering’ her physically Hermann feels adventurous. For him sexual power ultimately is a kind of social power. This means that sex and sex appeal are merely conduits or means to achieve power or success in other spheres of life (employment, politics, and celebrity). The sexual desires he pursued just as obsessive as the operating profit maximization. As the job he wants during sexual intercourse, ‘performance’, ‘show’, its ‘measures, the size of his member, its potency and amount of his seed’. His sexual instinct confirmed Hermann his identity. Actually, the director lays claim to diversity in the choice of sex partners; went earlier to the brothel and held swingers parties. By social circumstances – the spread of the HIV virus – he is forced to confine himself to his wife, he categorically rejects using a condom. Hermann considers his seed as too valuable to them with to make contraceptives ineffective. Sex is for him no
pleasure or partnership; the woman’s body only means self-satisfaction. His wife Gerti is treated like a slave. Hermann considered Gerti as a commodity which he has acquired.

Chapter three is titled “Female Masochism”. Female masochism is relatively a new term in psychology. Masochism is often associated with men. But it can also be found among women. The term ‘masochism’ originally referred to sexual perversions and fantasies in which sexual satisfaction is obtained through suffering, through being beaten, tortured, raped, enslaved, and humiliated. This chapter analyses Erika Kohut, the protagonist of Elfriede Jelinek’s famous novel *The Piano Teacher*, who exhibits sadomasochistic characteristics. Masochism is a natural urge in women; epitomizes women’s oppression under patriarchy; is an empowering form of sexual experimentation; does not exist. Current approaches to masochism draw on disparate vocabularies—political, medical, therapeutic, philosophical, and aesthetic—whose underlying tenets are often strikingly at odds. Moreover, female masochism is not just an academic topic but a subject attracting ever more attention in the media. The novel *The Piano Teacher* also contains graphically-delineated descriptions of sadomasochistic sexuality, rapes, self-mutilations, voyeurism, and deviations. Her style of writing really shows the power of the ruthless descriptions of bloody realities.

Both self-mutilators and eating-disordered individuals come from dysfunctional homes with a very controlling mother and usually absent father. They often have a history of trauma. They are depressed and obsessive, attached to their mothers, who discourage attempts at emancipation. The symptoms serve
the purpose of keeping them as little girls with negative feelings toward menstruation, sexual maturity, development, and femininity in general. These symptoms comprise self-destructive behaviour in the service of removing sexual thoughts, temptation, and activities.

Erika’s neurotic personality, her sadomasochistic perversion and twisted personality are the consequence of her pathological upbringing and her internalization of the patriarchal/capitalistic ideology. Her pursuit of musical achievement doesn’t bring her the happiness and autonomy she had expected, rather, the system’s rules and restrictions have strangled her life and created in her psychological problems. Jelinek’s writings are sexually bold and explicit. Written in a detached tone, her novel *The Piano Teacher* also contains graphically-delineated descriptions of sadomasochistic sexuality, rapes, self-mutilations, voyeurism, and deviations. Her style of writing really shows the power of the ruthless descriptions of bloody realities.

Chapter four is titled ‘Pornography an Exposition of Sexuality’ studies how Jelinek uses pornography as a tool to expose male and female sexuality. Jelinek in some quarters is violently attacked for exposing sexual realities nude in her writings. In reality Jelinek uses pornography as a means to show the world bare realities that exist in family and among family members, which is considered a taboo to discuss or present, especially as a female writer.

Sexuality is inherently different for women and men. Most men tend to see sex as something they can never get enough of, and seek, at some primal level, to disseminate their seed as widely as possible. Most women see sex as secondary in importance to intimacy, physical closeness, and commitment. Men
tend to be able to separate sex from love, eros or romance; whereas women tend
to equate the two. Men tend generally to be less discriminating or monogamous
in pursuing sexual satisfaction; while women tend to be far more selective and
focused exclusively on one particular sexual partner at a time. For most females,
sex is mainly about relationship and procreation first, and pleasure and sexual
satisfaction second. For the majority of men, these priorities are reversed.
Certainly, there are exceptions to these tendencies; and, in some cases, role
reversals. But, for the most part, psychologically, the significance of sexuality is
archetypally different for females and males, which is one fundamental source of
friction and misunderstanding between the sexes.

There are two types of pornography: obscenity and held pornography. It
has been expressly acknowledged that sex and obscenity are not tantamount to
each other. Therefore although all obscene materials is sexually explicit, not all
forms of sexually explicit speech are necessarily obscene. While working on her
novels, Jelinek discovered that writing a feminine pornography was not possible,
for the linguistic patterns or phrases that are used to describe erotic experience
are male-dominated. In Jelinek’s mind trying to write about female erotic
experiences. She does not only expose the language of sexuality as male
dominated but also exposes male-female relationships and sexual pleasure as
male dominated. Jelinek’s oeuvre as a whole is often categorized by her
detractors as pornography, and many of her works other than Lust do contain
pornographic elements Jelinek’s appropriation and subversion of the genre of
pornography in this chapter on Lust as a paradigmatic text because it does not
contain other generic elements, but is rather almost exclusively “pornographic.”
In their eagerness to defend Jelinek from charges of pornography, many scholars have claimed that *Lust* is a repudiation of male pornography, and have failed to take seriously just how indebted Jelinek is to the Western tradition of literary pornography, in particular that of the Marquis de Sade.

In *Lust* Jelinek, disrupts the imaginary identification between the reader and protagonist an important element of moral pornographic writing. While Jelinek takes over many of the other elements of the pornographic narrative, such as the language of obscenity, the endless repetition of the sexual act, and the permanent erection of the man, her transformation of two of the most important pornographic conventions, the voyeur figure and insatiable female desire, does indeed result in Carter’s “moral pornography”. Through her simultaneous use and transformation of pornographic techniques, Jelinek becomes precisely the type of moral pornographer as terrorist or sexual guerrilla, especially in her depiction of female sexuality.

Chapter five is titled “Technique as Discovery” presents the role play given to music in most of the novels. Jeleniks herself a leading pianist uses music as a character in her novels with each. The second part of this chapter analyses Jelinek’s language and her peculiar use of it to discover the psychological patterns of her characters. Then conscious of the human mind is presented through language and other innovative methods of presenting the psychic realities of her character. The concept of the unconscious with which this chapter is discussed is more or less the Freudian one proposed by Jacques Lacan, that the unconscious is structured like a language.
The language of psychosis corresponds to the language of the primary process, in that what differentiates this language from others is what makes it less of a language than they, for it treats words not as words, but as things, or as images in a dream. These laws are at work in the construction of the unconscious texts. It is not a language which is entirely that of the unconscious, but which shares much of its characteristic grammar. The relation between literal and figurative language within the unconscious texts can be seen in the fact that wherever metaphors occur, they frequently turn out to be concrete - they have come to life. In accordance with Freud’s early comments on the role of words in dreams, that in the unconscious texts, metaphors work in both these ways, and no indication is given as to how to take them. This characteristic is one of the most consistent across Jelinek’s novels. It varies in strength according to the tone and subject of the text, but nevertheless occurs in each. Apart from using the unconscious texts Elfriede Jelinek being a pianist is familiar with the aspects of music employs music in her works.

As a writer, Jelinek is preoccupied with language and form and is often seen as contradicting cynically any justification for political and social engagement. For Jelinek, language is the instrument of her critical art, her own language, and that of her literary predecessors. The recognition of Jelinek’s work is based on both social relevance and artistic merit. This psychoanalytical study of her select novels have revealed some of the dark areas of human nature and how environments especially domestic environment can make or mar a person’s psyche. Her novels present good examples for studying the source of deviant behaviours of one’s fellow human beings and understand them better. By opening
up the dark recess of the human mind Jelinek presents the pathological behaviour in men and women. She is also one of the pioneer female writers who have taught the writing community that pornography can also be used with an agenda other than sexually arousing the readers and making certain crucial matters that lie latent in man-woman relationship and are potentially decisive. She has also, using pornography caught up with the myriad facets of human sexuality without any inhibition. Scholars who wish to do research on Jelinek can make a worthwhile study on the innovations she has adopted in her novels.