

## Agnes Bernauer

FRANK DAVEY

(from *Popular Narratives, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991*)

Augsburg, city of Augustus, keeps rebuilding its losses and memories. I had dinner at the Agnes Bernauer Restaurant because it had posted a menu of Bavarian game. Augsburg, birthplace of Brecht, is twenty-five minutes from downtown Munich where the hotels cost two to three times more. With the menu my waiter brought an English translation of the history of Agnes Bernauer. Augsburg, birthplace of the Holbeins, has preserved or reconstructed almost every one of its Renaissance houses, churches and guildhalls. The fountains, unfortunately, are boarded up in winter. The Agnes Bernauer Restaurant is located in several small rooms of a sixteenth-century building, each room decorated with traditional Bavarian hunting emblems and with stuffed game birds, foxes, marmots and the head of stags and bear.

I was traveling to the annual Canadian Studies conference at Grainau in the Alps south of Munich. Many of the spectacular medieval guildhalls of Augsburg were painstakingly rebuilt after being damaged by World War II bombing. The Fuggerei, built in the fifteenth century by the wealthy merchant house of Fugger, was the world's first subsidized housing project, and is operated today by the Augsburg city government. I had flown to Europe a week early to be a speaker for our embassy in Brussels, but nothing had been arranged and now I was a train traveler in southern Germany. A small portrait of an attractive young woman in medieval dress marks the signboard and menus of the Agnes Bernauer Restaurant.

The Agnes Bernauer that is remembered in the Agnes Bernauer Restaurant is the daughter of a thirteenth-century tavern keeper. Augsburg, home of Rudolf Diesel, was once one of the most important towns in Roman Germany. The remembered Agnes Bernauer is beautiful, pious, graceful and modest, and manages to be so while serving the tables of her father's tavern. My alternate plan for this week had been to stay in Paris, but because of the trial of the Hamadi brothers there were troops with machine-guns on each streetcorner. In

medieval and early Bavarian times Augsburg was the German trade centre for Italy and the Mediterranean. The older churches of Augsburg offer many Madonnas. The alternate Agnes Bernauer remembered by the city of Augsburg is the daughter of a barber is but less suitable for a wild-game restaurant. My hotel room features a duvet and a colour TV. At a jousting tournament the only son of the Duke of Bavaria, met and fell in love with Agnes. For those who prefer philanthropy, there is also a very fine restaurant in the Fuggerei. In many German folk tales the peasant girl is shown to have virtues the upper classes cannot equal.

On the street between the restaurant and the town centre the power & light company features maps and photographs of Augsburg before, during and just after the aerial encounters of the war. Not far away are the foundations of a Roman temple. I am also the cousin of a young man whose Halifax encountered shrapnel over Dusseldorf and crashed with him into the Black Forest. The Duke forbade his son and Agnes to marry but they may have already done so. I ordered slices of wild hare sauteed in red wine. Agnes is remembered at the Agnes Bernauer restaurant as cheerfully serving her father's tables and later praying a great deal for god's guidance. During the writing of the Augsburg Confession, Luther could not appear publicly in Augsburg because of death threats from various noble families. Two or three years after the clandestine marriage of the prince and Agnes Bernauer, she was murdered by his family and her body thrown into the Danube.

The story of Agnes Bernauer implies a critique of the morality of medieval power. The prince is sometimes portrayed as more appreciative of her piety than of her exuberant beer-bringing beauty. My waiter at the Agnes Bernauer was very helpful but under the circumstances I would have preferred a waitress. This year the Grainau conference is focussing on communications. The Augsburg town hall was gutted by bombs and only in 1984 was replication of the inlaid floors and baroque ceilings completed. The beauty of Agnes Bernauer is also portrayed as more simple and natural than that possible within the baronial class. In the lower town, the medieval workshops that were enabled by canals that brought water-power from the Lech River are still intact. The city has reopened the canals which were covered in the nineteenth century and built several new water-wheels. At Grainau I

spoke on the fragmentation of the literary audience in contemporary Canada, and later took a long walk with an elderly Austrian scholar who had first learned English as a POW near Montreal. Perhaps because of my limited German, I read the sign at St. Anna's church to say that Luther had lived there during the drafting of the Confession.

The name of Agnes Bernauer occupies an ambiguous position in the quest for justice and for market-share among Augsburg restaurants. Augsburg, birthplace of Mozart's father, re-opened those numerous canals to celebrate the ingenuity and prosperity of its medieval workers. If you seek to dine alone in an Augsburg restaurant, you may have difficulty being seated. In one of the small rooms of the Agnes Bernauer a group of male diners are singing traditional Bavarian drinking songs. After repeated resistance to baronial authority, in 1276 Augsburg became a free city. Everywhere I walked I felt haunted. As we looked at the bomb-damage photographs displayed by the power company, a German friend who teaches Canadian Studies at the university assured me that the main Messerschmidt factory had been close by. One or more of us can dine out on innocence. Agnes would have only one or two opportunities for social mobility. This unusual restaurant commemorates a saintly heroine of the class struggle. Elsewhere you may read of my visit to Augsburg's very silent seventeenth-century synagogue.

We do our best to construct violence as other, as a part of princely power, as a special circumstance, as an absence on the beer-tray. The wild hare I was served at the Agnes Bernauer was one of the best meals of my life. Dachau is a fifteen-minute journey on the rail line between Augsburg and Munich, but most trains follow a slightly different route. The prince obliged his father to build a chapel in Agnes's memory at the site of her murder. A subcamp of Dachau was built just outside Augsburg to help supply the Messerschmidt factory with fortunate workers, but my friend may not have known of them. Every visitor should spend extra time exploring the cobbled squares and promenades of a very special city. The extent to which we still rely on some humanizing urge in women. Another route from Augsburg, my hosts did note, leads through Landsberg. Yes, the stylized portrait of on the Agnes Bernauer signboard suggests a generic role. Later events will show how futile. Then there is the Duke's son, who in the story at least survived, remarried, and the various

roles the spiritual beauty of Agnes has continued to offer him. I recall the restaurant as having been on Frauentorstrasse but perhaps it was Prinzregentstrasse or Ludwigstrasse or maybe Fuggerstrasse. Grainau is the largest annual Canadian Studies conference outside Canada.