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David S. Luft. *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 257 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-49647-4.

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Eros as Metaphor

A substantive body of excellent literature exists on Viennese modernism, and a scholar wading into this terrain today should be lauded for his intrepidity. With a nod to the towering achievement of Carl E. Schorske in particular, David Luft returns to this artistic and intellectual hotbed in his *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna.*[1] Focusing on Otto Weininger (1880-1903), Robert Musil (1880-1942), and Heimito von Doderer (1896-1966), Luft groups these seminal figures together around their use of the erotic as a metaphor for understanding their turbulent times. Luft attempts to direct our attention away from the best-known men of the era– in particular Freud–toward other voices that helped give shape to the distinctive culture we associate with fin-de-siÃ¨cle Vienna. His interest in Doderer, for whom there is a dearth of scholarly literature in English, is particularly noteworthy.

Let me summarize Luft's argument. Philosophical irrationalism and scientific materialism characterized the liberal *GrÃ¼nderzeit* culture of Vienna, clearly distinguishing it from Berlin. Weininger, Musil, and Doderer, all products of this conflicted Austrian culture, drew on Nietzsche- and Schopenhauer-inflected thought as well as the scientific theories of their day to criticize society, caught in a "period of political defeat and intellectual crisis" (p. 4). Luft homes in on the most important works associated with each author–*Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903), *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930-43), and *Die DÃ¤monen* (1956) respectively–to argue that these writers deserve particular attention for their critiques, which they articulated primarily by way of their treatment of sexuality and gender.

In his introduction, Luft attempts to delineate the aspects of a particular Austrian liberal ideology, influenced by the French and English Enlightenment and the German humanism of the early nineteenth century. The generation that came of age in the 1900s (as opposed to Freud or Schnitzler, who came of age during the heyday of Austrian liberalism) was profoundly aware of competing anti-scientistic and scientific trends. Perhaps as a result, these men were drawn to alternative ideologies such as political Catholicism, pan-Germanism, and National Socialism. Luft somewhat cryptically refers to them as the "generation of 1905" (pp. 6, 21), employing a classification he used in an earlier book, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture, 1880-1942* (1980). There he borrows this categorization from H. Stuart Hughes in order to describe the generation that became creatively active around the time of the Russian Revolution. In line with recent historiographic currents, which tend to downplay the disjunctures of Austrian history, Luft argues that continuities characterize the period spanning the late Habsburg Monarchy, the First Republic, the Austrian Corporate State, the AnschluÃ? to the Third Reich and the early Second Republic. This underlying assumption provides the methodological rationale for lumping together these three authors, who reached intellectual maturity under strongly divergent circumstances. I wonder whether the stress on continuities has not done too much to displace the dispensation that emphasized the radical breaks of history: Weininger, Musil, and Doderer emerge from a joint culture only to a limited degree (indeed, Weininger was dead by 1905).

In chapter 1, Luft further distinguishes Austria's fin-de-siÃ¨cle from Germany's. He vacillates between claiming an idealist lineage for the bourgeoisie's high regard for *Bildung* and denying the influence of German idealism on the upper classes. His emphasis on the scientific-materialistic aspect of Viennese culture is appropriate; however, his effort to separate the Austrian from the German intellectual atmosphere is continually undercut in his own account. The influx of German ideas is evident here as well as in numerous biographical incidents he relates in later chapters. Also, Luft's claim that the late Ni-

etzsche and Schopenhauer rather than the sober Hegel were more attractive to artists will hardly come as a surprise to students of the era. In this context, the discussion of misogyny and sexuality rehearses well-known elements of the cultural climate. That sexuality should figure prominently in the reflections of male writers around 1900, Luft maintains, is not due to any special power Austrian feminists may have been able to assert or the greater visibility of women in the public sphere. While this point is well taken, Luft does not develop any alternative explanation for the piqued interest in female sexuality and femininity, and for the dismay with which the former was perceived. His historical and intellectual overview ends, for this reason, somewhat blandly: "Women and the feminine served as symbols of kitsch and escape from reality, but they were also threats to masculine rationalism" (p. 41).

In the following chapters, Luft draws out how sexuality and gender became metaphors for "thinking out" human experience in the late liberal culture of Vienna (p. 42). Chapter 2 is devoted to Otto Weininger and his polarizing *Geschlecht und Charakter*. It treads in the footsteps of Stephen Toulmin and Allan Janik, Jacques le Rider, Chandak Sengoopta and others to argue against any overhasty dismissal of the young Weininger's misogynist and anti-Semitic treatise. Admitting circularity in Weininger's reflections, Luft patiently disentangles the knotted strands. Adumbrating the German words Weininger employs for an English-speaking audience, Luft is at pains to salvage the admirable aspects of Weininger's thinking apart from coarse prejudice. Here Luft explains the puzzling phrase, "the grammar of gender," which surfaces earlier on in the text (p. 3). Establishing a distinction between masculine (M) and feminine (F), Weininger distinguishes between ideal-typical Woman and Man; however, he is not always able, Luft shows, to separate empirical reality from ideal typologies. In his effort to save aspects of the less distasteful Weininger, Luft may be overstating his case. He interprets him as a peculiar Kantian defender of sexual autonomy. Weininger is even metaphorically beatified: "Weininger displayed many of the qualities of the saint, struggling with his own sinfulness, but he also felt the responsibility to behave as a savior figure" (p. 86). Here Luft participates in a central aspect of the "Weininger Renaissance" he condemns, namely the tendency to explain the author's work with reference to his biography.

Luft's strongest chapter, "Love and Human Knowledge," draws on his earlier work to deal with Robert Musil. Having argued in 1980 for the German and European influences on Musil, he revisits the modernist's *oeuvre* to highlight the specifically Austrian elements of Musil's work; Musil still seems greatly influenced by German modernism by the end of this account. Elucidating Musil's reflections on the role of the artist in modern capitalist society, Luft explains the author's effort to outline an erotic realm as an extension of the realm of reason, an arena of feeling about which the creative individual is capable of speaking lucidly. In his writing on sexuality, Musil attempted to put into practice an ethical openness that defied rigid social convention. Musil, Luft writes, believed in "a resexualization of human experience that was grounded in a more inward eroticism and a more erotic inwardness" (p. 112). Interweaving historical commentary, the writer's various essays and prose works, and the dauntingly complicated *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Luft adroitly highlights the writer's resistance to any cultural rigidity and summarizes the role of gender in Musil's utopian "other condition." The intellectual historian once again identifies the fictional characters with the author. However, this does not detract from the merits of this section, which is indispensable reading to anyone looking for a detailed introduction to Musil's life and works.

In the concluding chapter, "Sexuality and the Politics of the Fascist Era," certain blanket assertions at the outset strike a discordant note. Concerning Doderer, Luft maintains he was "an authentic storyteller about his world." I am not quite sure what that means, although authenticity also surfaces as a positive quality attributable to the project of Musil–who became "a thoughtful person about the neuroses that plagued him" (p. 137). Doderer's "resistance to modernity brought with it considerable ideological and political dangers," Luft continues a little later, "but he gradually developed a distinctive view of sexuality and human experience." (p. 139) I will admit to being unclear as to what the author of the book has in mind with this odd subordinating clause. Although Luft makes no bones about Doderer's flirtation with National Socialism, certain passages have an apologetic tone (pp. 151, 156, 160). Luft is most deft when juxtaposing the author's life against larger historic-political upheaval. Moving from Doderer's first publication, *Die Bresche* (1924), on to his typoscript of *Die DÃ¤monen* of 1937, then to the author's final published version in 1956, Luft argues that Doderer's sexual obsessions transmuted into a larger concern with social reality and political ideologies as seen from the perspective of everyday life. While Luft's discussion of Doderer's "apperception," a mode of experiencing and reflecting on the world that the writer derives from Leibniz, Kant, and others, does not cover new ground for those familiar with German-language work

on Doderer, it is an admirable attempt to make this author of voluminous tomes accessible to a wider English audience.[2]

A shortcoming of this otherwise interesting book may be its alluring title, which is not clearly defined within its pages. Platonic eros is at the heart of Weininger's conception of love and Musil's "andere Zustand." However, in Doderer something more mundane seems to be at issue. Furthermore, while Luft is at pains to define certain key concepts, such as "liberalism" or "scientific materialism" in his introduction, he does not cover his term "inwardness." Considering that "interiority" and "inner emigration" play such significant roles in German culture, I would have liked to read more about what precisely Luft means. With "inwardness" he seems to have in mind at first a variant of Freud's unconscious; later, the word seems to account for a certain apolitical attitude on the part of a writer. In the conclusion, where the similarities and differences between the authors are briefly noted, Luft mentions the disintegration of Austrian bourgeois society, to which the three authors reacted. One could argue, however, that it was the continuity of the bourgeoisie that provided the fertile humus for Doderer's post-war success and his conservativism. Luft also claims to have presented "three accounts of nineteenth-century rationalism and individualism" (p.183). As he himself shows in this skillful portrait of the time, the upheaval of the late teens and twenties separates the thought-world and culture of Otto Weininger and Heimito von Doderer. While the former can still be seen as reflecting on the century just passed, the latter belongs to the twentieth century.

Notes

[1]. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siÃ¨cle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[2]. See, for example, Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's introductory essay in Martin Loew-Cadonna, ed., *Heimito von Doderer, 1896-1966* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), pp. 7-34.

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