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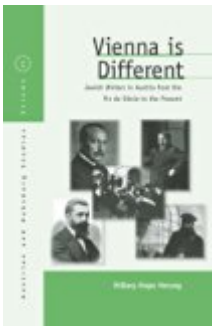
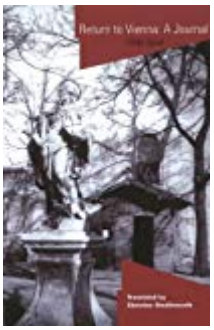


Hillary Hope Herzog. *Vienna Is Different: Jewish Writers in Austria from the Fin de Siècle to the Present.* Austrian and Habsburg Studies Series. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. 308 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-85745-181-1.



Hilde Spiel. *Return to Vienna: A Journal.* Translated by Christine Shuttleworth. Studies in Austrian Literature, Culture and Thought, Translation Series. Riverside: Ariadne Press, 2011. 128 pp. $19.50, paper, ISBN 978-1-57241-177-7.

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In 1946, journalist and writer Hilde Spiel made her first trip back to her native Vienna from England, where she had lived in exile for ten years. In Vienna, an old friend told her a story that Spiel called "blackly farcical." During the war, a Christian couple had hidden an elderly Jewish woman in their home. When the Jewish woman became gravely ill, they sent her to the hospital under the name of the Christian wife. She died a few days later, and the husband had no choice but to hold a funeral for his "wife," after which his wife spent the remainder of the war hidden in their apartment. Three months later, she was "restored to life by the victory of the Allies" (pp. 58-59); the Jewish woman remained buried somewhere in Vienna. This anecdote about the intertwined fates of Jewish and Christian Austrians crystallizes the complicated web of circumstances that Spiel encountered upon returning to Vienna. It also evokes the complexity of her own emotional relationship to the city and identity that she had left behind, buried, as it were, in the past: "Where my roots reach deep into the earth as nowhere else, I am a complete stranger, as disconnected in time and space as a ghostly visitor" (p. 36).

Originally published in 1968, ***Rückkehr nach Wien*** was recently translated into English by

Spiel's daughter, Christine Shuttleworth, as ***Return to Vienna***. The book is a powerful personal account of Spiel's return to the much-beloved city she left at the age of twenty-five. Although it takes the form of a diary, Spiel did not complete the text until well after she had returned to London. The result is what Jacqueline Vansant, in her afterword, labels a constructed "literary diary" that operates on various levels: it is at once a personal document of a conflicted emotional experience, a shrewd and nuanced account of life in postwar Vienna, and a sketch of a cross-section of Viennese society (pp. 120-121).

Born in 1911 to Catholic parents who converted from Judaism, Spiel spent the first two decades of her life in a vibrant and cosmopolitan cultural center. She attended the renowned and innovative Schwarzwald School, swam for the successful "Austria" team, and spent long afternoons among the literati in the Café Herrenhof. In 1933, she published her own first novel, ***Kati auf der Brücke*** (Kati on the bridge). Spiel's well-developed literary abilities are abundantly apparent in ***Return to Vienna***: each page generates a rich and detailed account of bittersweet memories and experiences. Sometimes, she grabs our attention with description. The residents of her former apartment building could be the cast of characters in a novel about the diversity of Viennese society. She brings to life a cheerful washerwoman with an abusive husband, an elderly Galician Jew, a ginger-bearded nobleman in a threadbare hunting outfit, middle-class Nazi sympathizers and Polish Jews, a dwarf, and a Nazi painter. At other times, she deploys her narrative skills to recount the capricious, often tragic, fates of the Viennese during the war, including her friend Peter Hammerschlag, who was deported to Auschwitz after mistaking a Nazi block warden for a black market cigarette peddler.

These stories, however, are always more than stories, as they force Spiel to grapple with the facts and implications of her friends' experiences in Vienna and her own departure and return. Her friend Stefan B. relates Hammerschlag's sad tale, but despite her sympathy for Stefan's precarious position during the war, Spiel finds herself unable to reconcile her hesitant feelings about him. While Stefan was ideologically opposed to the Nazis and sincerely concerned about the fates of Jewish friends, Spiel cannot help but bitterly acknowledge that, as a journalist under the Nazi regime, he profited while others perished. She likens him to a "small cog in the mechanism which kept the whole appliance working," revealing a dilemma that she struggles with throughout her time in Vienna (p. 57). While she feels genuine pleasure at revisiting old friends, her joy is counterbalanced by disgust when the husband of her family's former cleaning woman is reluctant to hand over the silver that belonged to Spiel's grandmother, who was deported to Theresienstadt and murdered. She is most vexed by the "in-between" cases of those who were not committed Nazis but remain blind to their small roles in upholding the regime, though she powerfully balances her anger at the Viennese who could have done more with a genuine sympathy for their circumstances and losses. Instead of trying to resolve her wavering feelings, she presents them openly, using her literary skill to illuminate the difficulties faced by those who returned to an impossibly complicated web of emotions.

Spiel's loyal Socialist friend Marie, whom she describes as "crude, affectionate, malicious, with a heart of gold," stays true to her nature in welcoming Spiel back home (p. 32). But other Viennese remain deeply absorbed in their own wartime suffering, envying her "escape" rather than acknowledging her forced exile, an attitude seemingly justified by her return in the privileged guise of a British army correspondent for the ***New Statesman***. The head waiter at the Café Herrenhof, a "master of dignified conduct" back when she was a regular customer, now fulfills a friend's prediction about the kind of reception returning Austrian Jewish émigrés would receive when he

tells her: “The Frau Doktor was right to leave. The air-raids alone--three times they set the whole city ablaze” (pp. 53-54).

Spiel explicitly tells her readers that the trip “blurred the borderlines” of her self-identification: it is impossible for her to renounce her Austrianness, but she also cannot return to her prewar perceptions of her country and her own national self-identification. Her struggle to come to terms with this ambivalence echoes that of Austrian-born writer and concentration camp survivor Jean Améry (Hans Mayer), who notably described what he had believed to be his deep bonds to Austria as nothing more than a “Lebensmissverständnis” (existential misunderstanding).[1] Yet Spiel’s detailed exposition of these “in-between” feelings contrasts sharply with her oblique approach to her Jewish self-identification, a topic that was surely as vexed and emotionally complex. Although she was raised Catholic, Spiel grew up in a milieu where Jewishness mattered: from the world of her Jewish grandparents, with whom she spent time as a child, to the Viennese café culture in which she was immersed as a young adult, to the offhand reference she makes to the importance of not seeming “Jewish” at the university (p. 16). Spiel did not address explicitly Jewish topics in her writing until many years later--she eventually considered her historical biography of Fanny von Arnstein (begun in 1957 and published in 1962) to be her most important publication.[2] But ***Return to Vienna*** reveals how Jewish difference nevertheless colored her earlier life.

Vienna is Spiel’s stage, not only as the city of her birth and her current destination, but also as her explicit frame of reference for outlining the terms of her self-identification. Yet her less frequent but no less evocative descriptions of Austria ***beyond*** the city limits provide an important and poignant physical and emotional backdrop. ***Return to Vienna*** opens and closes with rustic vacation memories. As her flight from London descends past the Vienna woods, she remembers her first efforts to ski on its gentle inclines. In the book’s final pages, she recalls hiking in the Tyrol with her father, vacationing with her family in Carinthia and the Salzkammergut, and skiing in the Alps, where “nothing could match the beauty of these landscapes with their white-encrusted trees, the dust thrown up by the powdery snow and the crackling of the ice, when we flew down the slopes and the cold clean air stung our cheeks” (p. 104). But the anecdote ends with the acknowledgement that this ideal rural landscape harbored vicious antisemitic stereotypes--“It was on the Schneeberg and the Rax, too, that the myth of the weakling, cowardly Jewish boy was invalidated, long before there were Palestinian terrorists.” The appeal of the landscape rested in part on the existential support it offered in the face of urban struggles: “In the difficult years between the wars, one did not need to despair of life, as long as the mountains promised consolation for poverty, lack of success, and the sorrows of love” (p. 105).

Spiel’s preoccupation with Austria beyond Vienna is especially visible at the end of her trip, when she spends a day on the ski slopes. There she articulates most clearly her sense of belonging nowhere despite being home: to belong to the “real” Austria, she tells us, is to be like the ski instructors she encounters, who possess “the same unselfconscious manner, not feeling subservient or obligated either to one or the other, but just glad to be alive and living off of anyone who comes along.” Her continued and inevitable marginalization from her understanding of Austrianness is dramatically evident when she writes, “The good fortune of having such roots, of depending so little on outward circumstances, of trusting entirely to their own muscles of steel, their confident gaze and total accord with nature, may counterbalance our entire civilization, Proust, Picasso, Einstein, whoever it might be” (p. 108).

Spiel's unflinching confrontation with Austria in some ways parallels Ruth Klüger's in ***Weiter leben: Eine Jugend*** (1992; ***Still Alive***, 2001). Klüger was deported from Vienna to Theresienstadt and then Auschwitz in 1942, when she was eleven years old. Her book, which includes anti-nostalgic reflections on Austria and Austrians spurred by her first visit back to the city in 1988, garnered much praise. But Spiel returned to the city just four years after Klüger's deportation, and the rawness of her own and the country's postwar wounds lend a different shade to her account. Moreover, Spiel later returned to live permanently in the country that exiled her, a move she considered inevitable. Even if she never felt a secure sense of herself as an Austrian, Austria remained the familiar territory to which she was drawn to search for one.

As vexed as her relationship to Austria may have been, Spiel is right at home in Hillary Hope Herzog's meticulously researched and clearly presented ***Vienna Is Different***. Herzog elucidates how the writers she considers engaged to varying degrees with questions of Austrian and Jewish self-identification that shifted according to the social and political contexts of their times. Like Spiel, their works constantly evoke Vienna, a tendency Herzog successfully uses as a focal point for the questions of Jewish difference and Austrianness that they grapple with in their writing.

The book proceeds chronologically in four chapters that reflect significant political turns in Austria's history: the fin de siècle, the interwar years, the first decades of the Second Republic, and the mid-1980s on, a periodization that reflects the deep significance of political events for Jewish Austrians. Each chapter begins with a brief, well-informed overview of the period and the experiences of Jews in Austria during that time. In subsequent discussions of the authors of each era, Herzog combines detailed summaries of important secondary sources with her own analyses. She is mindful of the shifting political climates of each period and the personal politics of each writer, and she pays laudable attention to women writers, including, in addition to Spiel, Veza Canetti, Ilse Aichinger, Ruth Beckermann, Eva Menasse, and Elfriede Jelinek. To her credit, she also constantly and self-reflexively calls the definition of Jewish writing into question, particularly in her methodological decision not to make self-identification as a Jew an a priori criteria for including writers in the book. As a result, ***Vienna is Different*** is a lively, informative work that approaches questions of Jewish self-identification via a broad range of writers, not merely those who considered themselves, or whom others saw, as Jews.

The first chapter, "Fin de Siècle," covers familiar figures like Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Kraus, Theodor Herzl, Richard Beer-Hoffmann, and Felix Salten, but also includes a welcome discussion of the lesser-known Adolf Dessauer and his novel ***Großstadtjuden*** (1910, Metropolitan Jews). There is already an enormous body of work on these writers and their personal and political relationships to Jewishness. But Herzog provides a useful overview of some of the best scholarship and does not merely rehash old arguments. Her own analyses, including, for example, her original discussion of Salten's and Zweig's depictions of the Prater, are equally valuable.

Herzog's introduction to Vienna between the world wars outlines the shifts in the boundaries of antisemitism over time, along with how these overlapped with the cultural and political atmosphere and affected Jews in Austria. As she rightly points out, "Austrian identity was in need of reinvention, given that what it meant to be Austrian had changed so radically" (p. 106). However, she does not always illuminate the subtleties of that reinvention. While she balances her discussion of Zionism with a welcome mention of the "Catholic cultural revival" in which some Jews participated, she neglects to mention that Catholic culture in-

fluenced writers like Herzl and Salten even before that time. This duality is worthy of exploration, since it suggests that "Jewish" writing could combine seemingly contradictory elements. And while her overview of Schnitzler's literary treatments of antisemitism in such works as ***Der Weg ins Freie*** (1908; ***The Road to the Open***, 1923***)*** is detailed and apt, omitting works that did not deal explicitly with Jewishness, like ***Fräulein Else*** (1924; ***Fräulein Else: A Novel***, 1925), forecloses the possibility that they may have implicitly addressed that topic. Overall, however, her discussions of her subjects are admirably nuanced, as when she shows how Salten remained rooted in traditions of European thought despite his self-professed Zionism.

Herzog notes the turn to more "authentic" Jewish representations, via myths, legends, archetypes, and rituals, in the works of Zweig, Joseph Roth, and Beer-Hofmann, explaining how they used this prevailing theme to express a "heightened sense of Jewish identity" (p. 93). This turn entails not only positive Jewish references, but also critiques of assimilation and the promotion of an authentic Eastern European Jewish culture as the best counterbalance to typical denigrations of "***Ostjuden***." Zweig's works in particular indicate that this change occurred in response to the shattering of Austrian Jews' easy "European self-conception" after the end of World War I and the collapse of the dual monarchy (p. 125). By considering authors whose texts and popularity varied widely, Herzog shows how vastly different depictions of interwar Vienna all connect to Jewishness: Hugo Bettauer satirically revealed how quickly Vienna would transform into a provincial backwater in the absence of Jews; Veza Canetti's fiction offered a more realistic critique of social ills; and Elias Canetti depicted the city as a space of social conflict.

This chapter does, however, have some minor gaps. Herzog's discussion of Kraus would have been strengthened by referencing Paul Reitter's analysis of his contradictory and controversial rhetoric in ***The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*** (2008). Omitting a discussion of Hofmannsthal's place in interwar Jewish writing because of his conservatism misses an opportunity to broaden the discussion of how the absence of Jewishness also shaped the culture of this period. As Abigail Gillman's ***Viennese Jewish Modernism*** (2009) makes clear, Hofmannsthal engaged with Jewish difference at varying stages of his career, even in works that did not necessarily contain Jewish topics.

The book's next chapter moves deftly from a general description of the conditions in post-World War II Austria to the specifics of the literary output of Austrian Jews, which had by that time greatly diminished. The painful truth of how little Austrians did to ease the return of formerly exiled residents renders Herzog's discussion of Friedrich Torberg and Spiel all the more powerful. As she notes, Jews were expected to return as "Austrians," not as Jews, and the widely accepted myth of Austria as "Hitler's first victim" delineated the boundaries according to which returning exiles could express their sense of alienation in their writing. This era of political consensus demanded a taboo on discussions of the wartime roles of Austrians, and was also characterized by a general reluctance to discuss political events with painful repercussions. Yet writers, not politicians, first grappled with the miserable terms of the return of Jews to Austria. As Herzog puts it, "Their texts and memoirs express again and again the sense of being a stranger on familiar ground" (p. 185).

The ways each writer dealt with these issues varied greatly. Torberg considered himself first and foremost a "torchbearer" of Jewish literature in Austria, his phrase itself a reference to Kraus's esteemed journal ***Die Fackel*** (The torch) (p. 214). After he returned from exile in the United States, Torberg's ***Tante Jolesch*** (1975; ***Tante Jolesch: Or, the Decline of the West in Anecdotes***, 2008) stories

provided fodder for Austrians seeking a painless nostalgic reflection of the "lost world" of Austrian Jews. Torberg also avoided open political discussions in his anti-Communist journal, ***Forum***, which was funded by an organization linked to the CIA. Many condemned Torberg for pandering to conservative forces seeking to suppress Austria's Nazi history, but Herzog remains true to the thread of her book by focusing on his attempts to position himself as the heir to an illustrious past of Jewish writers. Despite his flaws, she argues, Torberg "played a crucial role in reinserting a Jewish presence into Austrian literature during the Second Republic" (p. 203).

In stark contrast to Torberg's understanding of himself as the quintessential Jewish "torchbearer" in Austria, Aichinger remained a postwar outsider. Raised by her Jewish mother after her Catholic father abandoned the family, Aichinger was classified as a ***Mischling*** by the Nazi regime. She and her mother survived the war in Vienna, but her grandmother and other relatives were murdered in concentration camps. Aichinger was the first writer in Austria to depict the concentration camps, in ***Das vierte Tor*** (1945, The fourth gate); her experimental novel ***Die größerer Hoffnung*** (1948, The greater hope) deals with the persecution of Austrian Jews. Aichinger's and Torberg's works of the 1940s found neither critical acclaim nor significant audiences at the time of their publication. Nevertheless, as Herzog emphasizes, their early attempts to write about the past would serve as an important foundation for subsequent Jewish writers.

In the context of the lukewarm reception of these publications, Spiel may have been wise to delay publishing her account of her return to Austria in 1946. But Herzog makes it clear that Spiel explored the terms of the alienation expressed in ***Return to Vienna*** more deeply in her novels and dramas. The motif of the Doppelgänger in works like ***Lisas Zimmer*** (1965, Lisa's room) and ***Anna & Anna*** (1988) elucidates Spiel's inconclusive feelings about her Jewish origins as it blurs the contours of any fixed Jewish self-definition. In this chapter, Herzog makes excellent use of her strategy of including writers who did not necessarily self-identify as Jews. By comparing the works of Spiel, Torberg, and Aichinger, Herzog shows how engagement with Jewish difference, rather than any degree of Jewish self-identification, best reveals the vicissitudes of Jewish writing and its place in the broader context of Austrian literature.

The discussion of more contemporary writers in the final chapter of the book is framed around two significant political events: Kurt Waldheim's 1986 election as president of Austria (along with the subsequent uproar about his wartime activities) and the election of the xenophobic ***Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*** (Austrian Freedom Party), led by Jörg Haider, which was part of the federal government coalition in 2000. Both events drew an international spotlight onto Austria's reluctance to deal openly with its Nazi past, from which emerged the more self-conscious examination of issues of Jewishness and Austrianness that characterizes the Jewish writers explored in the chapter. These writers have no unified ideology, but rather share a political commitment that figures prominently in their work. In addition to helpful overviews of the writings of Robert Schindel, Doron Rabinovici, and Robert Menasse, Herzog provides welcome information on Ruth Beckermann, Eva Menasse, and Elfriede Jelinek--another author whose Jewishness remains up for debate. Herzog convincingly argues that the concerns about identity politics in Jelinek's writing justify her inclusion among the other more easily identifiable Jewish writers that she discusses.

The fact that Vienna still looms large for these writers does not mean that they write about the city only in homage to their predecessors. One of the most insightful aspects of Herzog's survey is her attention to the continued importance of Vienna as both a physical space and an imagined

Jewish space. But she might also have pointed out that Jewish Vienna is defined by its relationship to the rest of the country. Urban imaginings were only one of the ways that Austrian writers mapped their Jewish self-definitions; when Spiel frames her return to Vienna with the Alps, the Salzkammergut, and the Vienna woods, she exemplifies how the urban/provincial divide enabled a number of writers to articulate the terms of Austrianness and Jewishness. Overall, however, this informative work successfully probes the engagement of an impressive range of writers with both their own self-identifications and Vienna. Sensitive and nuanced, it will serve scholars and others as the go-to guide for exploring issues of Jewishness in Austrian literature.

Notes

[1]. Jean Améry, "Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?" in ***Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*** (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977), 86.

[2]. Letter from Hilde Spiel to Marion Berghahn, September 21, 1987, Nachlass Hilde Spiel, cited in Waltraud Strickhausen, "'Fanny von Arnstein oder Die Emanzipation': Das jüdische Leitbild der Biographin Hilde Spiel," in ***Hilde Spiel: Weltbürgerin der Literatur***, ed. Hans A. Neunzig and Ingrid Schramm (Vienna: Zsolnay, 1999), 33.