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Susanne FrÖ¶hlich. *Strichfassungen und RegiebÖ¼cher: Kulturpolitik 1888-1938 und Klassikerinszenierungen am Wiener Burg- und Volkstheater.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996. 119 pp. 49 DM (paper), ISBN 978-3-631-49083-9.

Reviewed by Robert Vilain (Royal Holloway, University of London)
Published on HABSBURG (January, 1997)

Censorship in the Austrian Theatre, 1888-1938

Susanne Froehlich's short book tackles a very large task. She links a wide range of complex and subtle areas of inquiry, compressing together a history of the Austrian censorship laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a summary of the Christian Socialists' and Social Democrats' cultural politics in the period from 1918 to 1938, a skeleton history of two of the most important theatres in Vienna (the Burgtheater and the Volkstheater), and selective analyses of how censorship affected no less than six major dramatic works by Grillparzer, Anzengruber, Raimund, Nestroy, Schnitzler, and Goethe. To attempt a scholarly synthesis of so many weighty topics is probably to bite off more than anyone can reasonably expect to chew in a mere 119 generously spaced pages, but Froehlich has made a start.

The book takes as its premise the idea that the theatre mirrors issues in contemporary society and politics–not only on a textual level, in that dramatists soak up these influences when writing, but also on the levels of dramaturgy, production, and performance. It argues that political or religious propaganda requires the distortion of drama, even (and especially) of the classic repertoire, for the purposes of suppressing what it judges to be subversive or inimical ideas and ideologies. Froehlich shows how, from the seventeenth century until the end of the Second World War, Austrian theatre was subject to regular and intrusive censorship (and she argues that this was continuous, despite the lifting of censorship from 1926 until 1934, because ingrained habits were not easily lost, whatever the legal technicalities).

From its foundation until the end of the monarchy in 1918, the Burgtheater in particular was an instrument of the court, the church, and the army, and the censors were forbidden to pass any play that might be considered "harmful to state, religion and morality" (an instruction issued by Maria Theresia, quoted on p. 18). *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, was banned after a performance in 1777, since the Empress deprecated plays in which "burials, cemeteries, crypts and other such sad spectacles appear" (p. 19).

It was Franz Karl Haegelin's memorandum of 1795, however, that systematized the censorship rules with a view to preserving the integrity of the three areas of state, church, and morality, and it did so by banning the depiction of an extraordinary range of character-types, situations, rhetorical expressions, and vocabulary, as well as the voicing of opinions that might encourage any religious doubt or questioning of the status quo. These guidelines were made into law in 1850 after relatively minor changes by Alexander Freiherr von Bach. Most notable here is the inclusion of a clause prohibiting anything that might promote "enmity between nationalities, social classes and religious communities" (p. 23). Reforms in 1903 by Ernest von Koerber established an advisory committee, and also required the censors' increased sensitivity to social questions, specifically drawing their attention to the fact of rapid social change at this period. Censorship of print media was officially abolished on 30 October 1918, but this did not apply to the theatre. Nevertheless, Froehlich documents (albeit sketchily) an ap-

parent liberalisation of the regulations for theatrical censorship, too–a decree of January 1919, for example, contains the instruction "plays in which problems of even the most awkward kind are treated may not be proscribed" (p. 26)–and notes the view of Schober, the chief of police, that the 1850 laws ought to be abolished.

Froehlich's summary of the censorship regulations up to the end of the First World War is, frankly, rather bland, skating over a good many interpretative difficulties. She does not mention, for example, the fact that the 30 October decision of the National Assembly to abolish censorship was initially regarded as ambiguous, and that its non-extension to theatre (and, for that matter, film) was established only after a test case in December 1919, when the reactionary view of the Lower Austrian provincial government prevailed. The changing relationship of the censors with the police is not always clear. The effect on the transition to systematized censorship regulations on the death of Joseph II in 1790 is ignored: this is arguably the point at which political functions came to dominate the more general ethical and educative purposes of censorship that held sway in the Enlightenment period. For a considerably more subtle–yet still brief–summary, this reviewer would recommend chapter 2 of W. E. Yates's excellent *Theatre in Vienna: A Critical History, 1776-1995* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Yates also covers other aspects of Froehlich's ground with admirable thoroughness and precision.

The blandness of Froehlich's summary is perhaps the result of an inappropriate pitch for the level of her overall discussion. It is preceded by a chapter entitled "What Is Propaganda? " (pp. 13-16) that is positively banal in places. The kind of readership at which a volume in the *Beitraege zur neueren Geschichte Oesterreichs* is aimed surely has no need of explanations for the term "propaganda" that consist merely of undigested quotations from Langenscheidt's dictionary, Brockhaus, and *Das Moderne Lexikon* (p. 13). Equally superfluous is Froehlich's account of what "Klassiker" means: "In theatrical jargon, "classics" are successful plays that are performed over and over again and are really timelessly modern [*eigentlich zeitlos modern*]" (p. 15). Unless this common-or-garden definition of "classic" is in some sense problematized, refined, or harnessed to the analysis of how the individual propagandist operates, for example, it serves little useful purpose in a book of this type. There is widespread discussion at present of the notion of "the canon," which might usefully have fed into a more interesting interpretation of "classic" drama.

Altogether tighter is the presentation of how the cultural politics of the First Republic, the debates of the Christian Socialists and the Social Democrats, the "Kulturkampf," and the eventual development of the "Staendestaat" after 1933 affected theatrical life. The Viennese theatre was in an ambiguous position, subject to highly imprecise censorship regulations that amounted, it seems, to the encouragement of self-censorship. By 1934 Vienna had lost its control over the regulation of the theatres to the Austrian state. There was a general ban on plays that might cause unrest (Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, for example) and still a high degree of sensitivity to religious matters. Froehlich aptly illustrates the degree of intrusiveness by quoting a note of Robert Musil's to the effect that the word "Theologie" had been cut from Faust's "Studierzimmer" monologue (p. 42)! The ambiguity of the situation is most tellingly shown by the fact that anti-Semitism was an important ideological component of the "Staendestaat" programme, although Jewish writers were not officially (that is, by law, on paper) forbidden. Schnitzler disappeared from the programme of the Burgtheater in 1936, for example (see also pp. 32-33 and pp. 70-71 for accounts of the *Reigen* affair of 1921). Froehlich is sensitive to the parallels in cultural thinking between pre-Anschluss Austria and National Socialist Germany (in particular with the encouragement of the Volksstueck), and ends this chapter by quoting the extremely important point made by Ernst Krenek that the Austrian regime risked "seriously compromising the intellectual independence of Austria from the Third Reich *and thereby one of the most important prerequisites for political independence*" (p. 45, emphasis mine).

Between this summary of cultural and political background and the six samples of censored plays that form chapter 5 are interpolated summary histories of the Burgtheater and the Volkstheater. They are efficient and clear, marking out the changes in policy motivated by the personalities of new directors, and Froehlich is particularly good on the measures taken in both theatres in the 1930s (most notably by Hermann Roebbeling in the Burgtheater) to improve the finances and get "bums on seats," as the modern idiom has it. But by this stage (well over half-way through the book) one feels a little frustrated with summaries of background material, however well presented, and this reviewer felt distinctly that Froehlich had lost sight of the point. The book is entitled *Strichfassungen und Regiebuecher*, and its subtitle promises investigation of the links between cultural politics and theatrical performance. The real substance of the book, the area in which the originality of Froehlich's

approach to the period has its best chance to emerge, is surely intended to lie in the explanation of how and why censorship mechanisms in the service of various types of propaganda actually affected performances of classic drama. The two theatre histories contribute very little to this–and since Froehlich herself comments on p. 75, for example, that "between 1932 and 1938 the Volkstheater remained for the most part a theatre of unpolitical entertainment," it is not wholly surprising. There is plenty of scope for integrating a historical account of theatrical development into an analysis of the theory and practice of censorship–looking, for example, at possible tensions between the artistic community and politicians' or bureaucrats' demands–but, with the exception of two paragraphs on p. 54, nothing is made of this. This exception concerns Alfred Berger's view of the importance of the "Regisseur" (producer/stage director). He is responsible not only for the overall artistic shape of the production on stage but also for cuts and dramaturgical modifications, thus able to anticipate the censors' requirements *and* able to undermine political interference by using costume, design, and the subtleties of individuals' performance. Froehlich tells us that "Berger attempted this in his Shakespeare productions, amongst others" (p. 54): but Froehlich does not elaborate. Some idea of how Berger used production to refine or angle themes and content would be an interesting way of approaching this elusive but important aspect of the topic.

The same disappointment must be registered with the individual play analyses. Of Anzengruber's *Der Meineidbauer* we learn that the cuts in the 1892 production are not due in the main to political propaganda (p. 87); likewise, regarding the 1916, 1931, and 1934 productions of Raimund's *Der Alpenkoenig und der Menschenfeind*, "the censor's cuts were moderate" (p. 90) and "not much was cut" (p. 93); in the case of Nestroy's *Der boese Geist Lumpazivagabundus*, "what is striking is the rarity of cuts by the producer or censor" (p. 93) in 1909 and 1930. In each case Froehlich gives details of some of the cuts that were made (and despite her general conclusion about the play by Raimund, there are some very interesting political alterations to the songs detailed here, pp. 87-90), but does not contextualize them. There is on the whole very little attempt to integrate the background material with the case studies, with the exception perhaps of the often-illustrated deletions of references to church and religion.

Without some degree of ongoing cross-reference between the summary sections and an explanation of *how* the line-by-line, scene-by-scene censorship of individual plays is a product of (or runs counter to or is a more subtle business than, etc., etc.) general cultural politics, the intellectual armature of the book is significantly weakened. Grillparzer's *Koenig Ottokars Glueck und Ende* was potentially an explosive play right from its composition in 1824, and particularly in the first few decades of the twentieth century, dealing as it does with the beginning of the rise of the Habsburgs in Austria. Froehlich looks at the original censored copy of 1825, used until 1876, and many of the cuts and changes are obviously made in order to defuse the potential slights to component parts of the Empire as well as in conformity with the ban on religious and supposedly immoral language. Yet there is a considerable degree of ambiguity in the alterations to passages praising and criticizing the two principal royal and imperial protagonists. The censors seem not to have had a clear line on the degree of support for Ottokar himself that was acceptable, and even a line that hymns the Habsburgs' eternal dynasty is removed. Froehlich notes (of the censors' motivation) in one and the same paragraph that "no negative light should fall on Ottokar or Rudolf" and that "the all-too-positive tinge that Grillparzer gave Ottokar is reduced" (p. 82) without investigating the overall effect of such apparently contradictory censorship. The problem is simply that there are two kings, and because the boost given to one of them leaves the other weaker in comparison, it risks infringing the censorial precept that kings and kingship itself should not be criticized on stage. But this is the kind of problem investigation of which might help establish how thorough, consistent, or logical censorship of the Viennese theatre in the period actually was–and thus ultimately to proceed toward establishing how effective it could be. Finally, the production statistics given on p. 113 treat only those productions of *Koenig Ottokar* after 1891 (and thus have nothing to do with the production that the text examines), yet there is no attempt to look at the differences in censorial interventions in the other periods whose cultural politics Froehlich has spent such a large portion of her book outlining.

Despite these serious reservations, the subject-matter of Froehlich's work is extremely important, and this book is a coherent and thought-provoking initial approach to it. Only a book that raises the major questions as thoroughly as this one has done can provoke the kind of critique that this reviewer has felt it necessary to make of its execution.

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Citation: Robert Vilain. Review of FrÖ¶hlich, Susanne, *Strichfassungen und RegiebÖ¼cher: Kulturpolitik 1888-1938 und Klassikerinszenierungen am Wiener Burg- und Volkstheater.* HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

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