



Stephen Eric Bronner, F. Peter Wagner, eds. *Vienna: The World of Yesterday 1889-1914*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997. xiii + 279 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-03987-2.

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'Vienna 1900' Revisited

The title of this fine collection contains interesting ambiguities. It is explicitly borrowed from Stefan Zweig's well-known memoir on pre-First World War Vienna (and pre-war Europe). The nostalgic overtones so much present in Zweig's account are not to be found here; this is not yet another elaboration on the myth of 'Vienna 1900.' However, the allusion powerfully reminds us "that [this] myth is still with us. It has become part of our historical consciousness" (p. xiii). Instead of denying the reality of the myth, the editors have provided a suitable framework for a series of contributions intent on illuminating some of the many intriguing aspects of that cultural constellation; a kind of critical fascination sets the tone for most of the essays included here.

By way of introduction, editor F. Peter Wagner provides a general historical overview entitled "Retrospectives on an Empire and its Capital." Although in compressed form, this excellent synthesis sets the general context for the ensuing fifteen contributions; it will be particularly useful for readers not well acquainted with the specificities of Austrian history. Apart from Wagner's piece, the editors have abstained from offering a general introduction on 'Vienna 1900,' relying instead on the dialogue between individual contributions. Their aim has been "to strike a balance between popular and lesser known topics to provide an overview laced with empirical examples." (p. vii) While this aim has no doubt been achieved, one may regret the absence of a general assessment of the cultural significance of *fin de siècle* Vienna that would complement F. Peter Wagner's historical introduction—all the more because the "inexhaustible" (p.

vii) character of the general topic has made several omissions inevitable. A discussion, above all, of the meaning for contemporary culture of the seminal achievements of turn of the century Vienna, as a major "archaeological site of postmodernism," would have been welcome. But perhaps the editors wanted precisely to move beyond the logic of such general assessments and to offer space to studies combining an interest in specific topics with an implicit or explicit awareness of the transdisciplinary demands of any serious inquiry on 'Vienna 1900.'

The volume is divided into four main sections: "Viennese Society and Its Life-World;" "Vienna and the Experience of Modernity;" "A Capital of Literature;" "Vienna and the Political Crucible." It goes without saying that, although much ground has been covered, the overview is far from exhaustive. As the editors point out, this would have been impossible anyway.[1] However, the topics chosen do focus on some of the central problems and figures pertinent to the delimitation of the period. Most important, the interdisciplinary composition of the volume makes it possible to do justice to the complexities of 'Vienna 1900,' thus helping to avoid the all too frequent simplistic or unilateral views. One of the crucial peculiarities of the cultural and intellectual Viennese climate, as has been stressed by Edward Timms,[2] is the fact that there was a complex web of relations between different political, cultural and scientific circles, thus ensuring an astonishing dynamics of intersection and cross-fertilization.

The first section provides some essential coordinates for a characterization of Vienna's public sphere around the turn of the century. Fritz Hackert writes about

“Cafes, Feuilletons and Cabarets in Vienna 1900,” offering a useful synthesis of a familiar topic. Ruediger Wischenbart’s short, but very insightful piece deals with the important subject of immigration, drawing attention to the often overlooked fact that by 1910 “not even half the ‘city folk’ (forty-eight percent) were actually born in Vienna” (p. 36). The topic of immigration (Wischenbart draws interesting parallels to the present day situation) stresses the other side of Vienna’s cosmopolitan modernism and provides an apt framework for a discussion of the dynamics of identity central to the cultural context under consideration.

In his “Weininger’s Vienna: The Sex-Ridden Society,” Allan Janik pursues a rather problematic effort to rescue Weininger as a major intellectual and philosophical figure of our century. The author’s main argument is that “the standard account of Weininger’s thought—and with it our picture of Old Vienna—stands in drastic need of revision” (p. 58). Janik’s starting point is the assumption that the familiar negative view of Weininger—notably in such influential accounts as those by Schorske or by LeRider[3]—is fundamentally biased in that it doesn’t put Weininger’s work in the right historical perspective, that of the intellectual and scientific paradigms of his own age. This historicist thrust provides the ground for a useful contextualization of Weininger’s theories, particularly in their relation to the work of Cesare Lombroso. In the end, one may not be convinced of the need for a reevaluation of the traditional critical assessment of Weininger; but there is no denying that Janik’s complex and knowledgeable line of argument offers much food for thought.

The section is rounded out by Kurt Jacobsen’s “Escape from the Treadmill: Education, Politics, and the Main-springs of Child Analysis,” an instructive account of the beginnings of child analysis. This informative essay falls somewhat outside the chronological limits of the collection. It is Jacobsen’s assumption, though, that the flourishing of child analysis in the inter-war period cannot be properly understood if it is not traced back to developments that took place in turn of the century Vienna, in the context of the formation of psychoanalysis.

The second section of the volume (“Vienna and the Experience of Modernity”) aptly opens with a piece on the key figure of Ernst Mach (Ursula Baatz, “Ernst Mach and the World of Sensations”). The conclusion that Mach stood “in the doorway opening on a new world” (p. 92) failed, however, to convince me. The author himself is at pains to account for Mach’s inability to accept the ma-

ior discoveries in the domain of physics made around the turn of the century, although he himself had in some ways influenced them. While Mach’s importance for the science, philosophy, and aesthetics of the fin de siecle cannot be overestimated, one can hardly see why an understanding of this historical relevance requires the problematic assumption of a present day significance.

This section also includes essays on “Viennese Laughter: Freud’s Jokes and Heine’s Wit,” by Sander L. Gilman; “Opera and Hysteria: *Elektra* and *Erwartung*,” by John Bokina; and “Images of an Age: Reflections on the Correspondence between Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky,” by co-editor Stephen Eric Bronner. Bokina’s piece on the two operas by Strauss and Schoenberg clearly falls short of keeping its promise: the author refrains from drawing any substantial conclusions, resorting instead to a vague pronouncement on alleged parallelism between 1900 and our own turn of the century. Both other pieces offer more. Bronner draws an interesting parallel between Schoenberg (the “conservative revolutionary”) and Kandinsky (the avantgardist), along the implicit lines of Peter Buerger’s useful distinction between modernism and avantgarde in his influential *Theory of the Avantgarde*.^[4] Sander Gilman in turn, as one would expect from an outstanding specialist on Jewish identity,^[5] offers an illuminating account of the context of Freud’s work on jokes, against the background of the search for an identity based on the refusal of the “hidden language” of the Jews and the establishment of a new, universal language, the scientific discourse of psychoanalysis.

The section on literature focuses on three of the most important figures of the period: Robert Musil (“A City ‘Under Glass’: Vienna in Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*,” by Cornelia Blasberg); Karl Kraus (“Karl Kraus and *Die Fackel*,” by Harry Zohn), and Hermann Broch (“Hermann Broch’s View of the Fin de Siecle,” by Paul Michael Luetzeler). Cornelia Blasberg, the author of an important book on Musil,^[6] provides an interesting account of Musil’s distanced relation to Vienna. Of particular relevance is Part III, an insightful analysis of the cinematic character of the non-mimetic discourse of Musil’s novel. Harry Zohn’s essay on Karl Kraus is little more than a cursory overview of “the man and his work,” providing yet another synthesis of generally well-known facts and problems and adding very little to Zohn’s previously published work on the editor of *Die Fackel*. The essay by Paul Michael Luetzeler, the editor and biographer of Broch, is full of interesting perspectives on an author whose critical favor has been receding. One may, how-

ever, regret that the critical assessment sketched in the final paragraph is not carried out in more detail, perhaps due to limitations of space. As is, the essay cannot avoid a somewhat descriptive bias. One wishes that central insights, such as allusions to the mainly autobiographical orientation of the celebrated essay on “Hofmannsthal and His Time,” or the observations on the most problematic aspect of Broch’s method (“purely deductive in nature,” proceeding with logical consistency from an initial diagnosis of cultural decay [p. 195]), might have been carried a bit further.

The concluding section centers on politics: Manfred Steger deals with “Victor Adler and Austrian Social Democracy 1889-1914;” Jutta Landa offers a biographical account of the peace activist Bertha von Suttner (“Progress in Peace: Bertha von Suttner”); the nationalities question, arguably the main force ultimately leading to the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, is aptly synthesized by Norbert Leser from the point of view of Austro-Marxist theory (“The Austro-Marxists and the Nationalities Question”); and, finally, Steven Beller,[7] provides with his essay “A Tale of Two Cities: Herzl’s Vienna; Hitler’s Vienna” a fascinating comparative account that most appropriately rounds up the volume. Beller follows the trajectory of those two disparate characters, and is able, both by parallelism and by contrast, to forcefully root them in the common cultural and political ground of turn of the century Vienna. The comparative perspective allows a wealth of new insights on the very complex interrelationship of Zionism and anti-Semitism.[8]

It is inevitable with collections of this type that an ideal balance between the choice of subjects and the range of the different contributions should be very difficult to obtain. All the more so as this volume was designed “to meet the needs of differing publics ranging from those with extensive knowledge of the city and the period to others less versed in the literature” (p. viii). I am not completely sure if this combined desideratum has proved beneficial. True, the volume as a whole, as I tried to make clear, represents not only a highly informative, but also at times innovative and even provocative contribution, and can be recommended as an excellent introduction to vital figures and problems in the period. However, the final impression is somewhat unbalanced: while many of the essays provide new insights and try to present new research results in a problematizing manner, others seem to be content with a simply descriptive or synthesizing strategy. From my position I cannot fully judge of the specific interests and presuppositions of an American or an English-speaking public,

but I cannot help wondering whether the avowed desire to meet the needs of a general public has not sometimes been carried a bit too far.

One final note. It has been some time since I last read a volume so much in need of careful typographic revision. Indeed, the number of misprints, most conspicuously (although not only) affecting German words and names (even Hofmannsthal does not escape appearing twice as “Hoffmansthal”) is greater than what one has lately become accustomed to tolerate. A few factual errors (Mach’s *Analysis of Sensations* is listed as having been published in 1866, instead of 1886 [p. 84], “Alfred” instead of “Arthur” Suttner is listed on p. 223), should also not have slipped through the final revision.

Notes:

[1]. That even one thousand pages would not have been enough is well documented by much more voluminous collections, such as the one edited by Juergen Nautz and Richard Vahremkamp: *Die Wiener Jahrhundertwende: Einflüsse. Umwelt. Wirkungen* (Vienna: Boehlau, 1993); 2nd edition, 1996.

[2]. Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

[3]. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Jacques LeRider, *Le cas Otto Weininger: Racines de l’anti-semitisme et l’anti-feminisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982). Enlarged and revised German translation: *Der Fall Otto Weininger. Wurzeln des Antifeminismus und Antisemitismus* (Wien: Loecker, 1984)

[4]. Peter Buerger, *Theory of the Avantgarde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[5]. See, for example, his *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin-de-Siecle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995), reviewed on HABSBURO October 2, 1996.

[6]. Cornelia Blasberg, *Krise und Utopie der Intellektuellen. Kulturkritische Aspekte in Robert Musils Roman ‘Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften’* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1985).

[7]. He is the author of several distinguished books: Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989);

Herzl (London: Peter Halban, 1991); and the recent *Francis Joseph* (London: Longman, 1996), reviewed on HABS-BURG March 5, 1997.

[8]. This topic is explored in great detail in an important recent book by Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien: Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Muenchen: Piper, 1996).

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