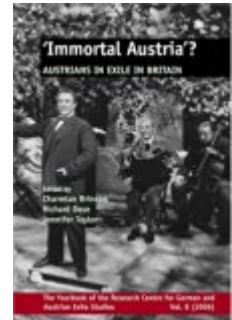


Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove, Jennifer Taylor, eds.. *'Immortal Austria'? Austrians in Exile in Britain*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. xiii + 215 pp. \$64.00, paper, ISBN 978-90-420-2157-0.



Reviewed by Jonathan Kwan

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The cover photograph of this essay collection, featuring the tenor Richard Tauber in the film *Heart's Desire* (1935), is replete with ironies. Tauber is singing in a "typical" Viennese *Heuriger* surrounded by folk musicians (though they are not in the traditional format of a Schrammel Quartet) and an adoring public. In the film, Tauber describes the place: "A *Heurige*, typical Vienna. An old winegarden where the people of Vienna amuse themselves. A few tables under the trees, a little music, everyone's so happy, the new wine, a spring night, a beautiful woman--and this is *Heurige*" (p. 105). It is important to remember that at the time of the film's making, Tauber had already experienced a physical attack in the streets of Berlin due to his Jewish background, and within three years would be forced out of Austria, eventually to take up British citizenship in 1940.

Here are two contradictory yet co-existing aspects of an exile's (or perhaps more correctly a refugee's) experience.[1] First, an intense nostalgia is often felt for the forsaken homeland, often coupled with a need to replicate the missing envi-

ronment somehow. For many Austrians, such longings were associated with classical music (in Australia, the chamber music series *Musica Viva* was founded by a Romanian-Viennese émigré), coffeehouses (for example, Shanghai had a *Café Wien* decorated in *Jugendstil*), and organizations to promote an independent Austria (the Austrian Centre in London is a good example).[2] But which "Austria" were they promoting? The clichéd stereotype of *gemütliches* Vienna, or the possibility of a progressive, socialist (even communist) country, or perhaps some other idealized image?

The second aspect of an exile's life in 1930s and 1940s Europe was the reality of exclusion, expropriation, expulsion, and extermination in the former homeland. Vienna was notorious for its antisemitism, particularly evident when Adolf Hitler--of course, a native Austrian himself--and his troops marched in greeted by enormous, welcoming crowds on April 2, 1938. Can the imagined *gemütliches* Austria be reconciled with the realities of the 1930s and early 1940s? How could the two apparent spectrums--sentimental attachment

to the homeland and exclusion from this homeland--coexist?

In the editors' introduction to this collection of English and German essays, the contrast between the imaginary and the real is highlighted and constitutes a red thread that runs through many of the essays (p. ix). Vienna was prone to mythologizing, with its musical and cultural traditions, monumental architecture, and old world atmosphere. As Anthony Grenville notes in his succinct and judicious overview of Austrian immigration to Britain, 90 percent of refugees were Jews, most of whom were from the middle class. A disproportionate number came from Vienna and had long assimilated into life in the old imperial capital. They attempted to reproduce this life in northwest London with café society, regular music-making, and intellectual discussion. It is astonishing that even after all the discrimination and persecution, many Austrian Jews continued to hold onto the idealized image of Austro-German cultural assimilation described by Steven Beller elsewhere.[3]

The book is divided into three sections: "Austrians in Exile," "Representations of Austria," and "Austria Revisited," though many essays deal with two or more of these themes. Near the beginning of the book, contrasting essays on notable exiles/refugees Stefan Zweig and Elias Canetti demonstrate two different responses to exile. Zweig, a cosmopolitan Viennese with Jewish roots, originally believed that life in England would help his work. Over the course of time, however, as Europe rapidly descended into war, he became increasingly depressed and experienced a severe crisis in 1937. It is unclear whether his life as an exile in England or the general state of affairs in Europe was to blame, or both. In 1939, he noted in his diary "that I am so imprisoned in a language which I cannot use" (p. 42). Tatiana Liani's essay calmly plots Zweig's increasing disillusionment and eventual suicide in Brazil. Significantly, one of Zweig's last books was an attempt to recapture

a lost world, the mythical Vienna of the fin-de-siècle.[4]

Canetti, on the other hand, embraced exile life. As detailed in Anne Peiter's essay, he felt an added responsibility towards the German language in light of contemporary events and his Jewish beliefs. For Canetti, to be Jewish meant a form of exile, thus his current physical conditions now reflected this reality: "Zuhause fühle ich mich, wenn ich mit dem Bleistift in der Hand deutsche Wörter niederschreibe und alles um mich herum spricht Englisch" (p. 54). How different this sentiment is from Zweig's despair at his alienation from the German language! Perhaps this is why Canetti's work seems so much more modern than Zweig's. The embrace of exile is a well-worn theme in literary modernism--James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway are obvious examples. Despite his comfort with exile life, as Peiter notes, Canetti retained some faith in universal humanity and this faith took the form of loyalty to the German language.

How representative, then, were these two contrasting responses to exile? One aspect of Canetti's life can be found throughout many essays in the book--namely, a multicultural, multilingual upbringing. Born in Bulgaria to a Sephardic Jewish family, he spent his childhood in England, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. He studied in Vienna and lived there for much of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the remainder of his long life was spent in London and then Zurich. How "Austrian" was Canetti or other such famous émigrés as Karl Popper, Ludwig Mises, Ludwig Wittgenstein, or Friedrich Hayek--none of whom, unfortunately, are treated in this volume? What about the filmmaker Alexander Korda, who was born in Hungary, then spent time in Vienna and Berlin before moving to England? Or the writer Eva Ibbotson, who was born in Vienna, spent only a few years there and then from the age of seven lived in Britain?

Many of the essays only make passing references to life as an Austrian exile in Britain. Deborah Vietor-Engländer's essay on Ibbotson is more about the personal and aesthetic reasons for the fairytale, dream world of Vienna in Ibbotson's work than any real reckoning with exile life. Similarly, while Colin Beaven provides a useful introduction to the work of the largely forgotten cabaret artist George Kreisler, the links between Kreisler and Britain are tenuous at best. Brigitte Mayr and Michael Omasta's essay on Social Democrat, film critic, and children's author Fritz Rosenfeld mostly concentrates on his interwar film criticism, published in the Austrian socialist newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, while his writings during his time in England, from 1939 to his death in 1987, are only cursorily noted.

Among the most cosmopolitan of the exiles and the most influential purveyors of the Austrian (mostly Viennese) myth were the filmmakers. Christian Cargnelli traces the career of Paul Stein, who directed the films *The Song You Gave Me* (1933), *Blossom Time* (1934), *Heart's Desire* (1935) and *Waltz Time* (1945). As a jobbing filmmaker, Stein had already worked in Berlin and Hollywood before arriving in Britain to take advantage of the British government's promotion of the home film industry. The Vienna he portrayed was pure Hollywood, often with Tauber in the main role. Yet, as Tobias Hochscherf highlights in a more general essay on central European émigré filmmakers, there were some contrasting viewpoints, notably the British production *Land without Music* (1936), again with Tauber as the protagonist. Austria is represented in the film as an aggressive country, repressing its music-loving neighbor, the mythical duchy of Lucco. In his essay, Hochscherf also notes the effects of British and German government policy on filmmaking, in which the British were promoting an independent industry while wary of the many émigrés, and the Germans under Goebbels were busy ensuring that this crucial propaganda tool was *judenrein*.

Two Austrian writers, Hermynia zur Mühlen and Hilde Spiel, portrayed Austrian history in the form of historical novels. They form the focus of Andrea Hammel's short essay. Spiel is the best known of the two and her book *Die Frücht des Wohlstands*, completed in 1943 but only printed in 1981, stressed the Jewish contribution to Austrian history. Hermynia zur Mühlen, whose communist background is not mentioned in the article, presents a picture of nineteenth-century Austria through the eyes of a Bohemian aristocratic family. To some extent, both sang a familiar lament for the lost world of the monarchy and believed that a new country could be built on the basis of old Austrian (but not German) traditions.

Other essays go behind the representations and delve deeper into the actual experience of exile and the return to Austria after the war (though the returnees were a minority; most Austrian emigrants decided to remain in Britain after the war). Renate Feikes's essay is the only one, apart from Grenville's introductory overview, that deals with the institutional realities of immigration. The Viennese émigré doctors (of whom the overwhelming majority were Jewish) did not find the process easy, either coming to Britain or returning to Austria. Feikes documents the reluctance of the British Medical Association to permit too much competition for medical jobs in Britain. The essay outlines how, upon return to Austria, former émigrés encountered little expectation that they would get their old jobs back and that, despite welcoming words, only minimal efforts were made to reintegrate them into the profession.

Charmian Brinson's exposition of Russian-born *Wahlösterreicherin* Eva Priester's life provides a general trajectory for many politically active exiled Austrians through the course of the war and the subsequent return to postwar Austria. Priester, a committed communist, was very involved in the main London-based émigré organizations, the Austrian Centre and the Free Austrian Movement. She wrote articles for the *Zeit-*

spiegel, the Austrian Centre's weekly newspaper, and began work on a two-volume Marxist history of Austria, which was published shortly after the war. In all of these works, she continually distinguished Austria from Germany, often presenting an unrealistic rosy image of her chosen homeland. One example was the historical pageant staged during the war entitled "Immortal Austria," which presented a number of scenes from Austrian history that highlighted the positive side of relations between Britain and Austria. When Priester returned to Austria, she was faced with the realities of wartime collaboration, minimal anti-Nazi resistance, and marginal electoral support for the communists.

In the final essay, Anthony Bushell outlines the attitudes of various literary and cultural journals to the return of exiled Austrians. In general, the exiles were met with indifference, sometimes even with typical Viennese grumbling. This attitude is internalized by some returnees, the distinguished architect Clemens Holzmeister issuing a veiled apology: "Mir ist es immer gut gegangen, Euch allen aber schlecht" (p. 202). This indifference towards former émigrés can be contrasted with impassioned, heartfelt pleas for the return of Austrian soldiers. Novelist and satirist Robert Neumann, the subject of Maximiliane Jäger's contribution to this volume, experienced a similar, negative reception of his immediate postwar literary works. The linguistically experimental *Children of Vienna* (1946) was praised in the English-speaking press but denigrated by Austrian reviewers as lacking understanding.

In fact, throughout the book, the Viennese (and Austrians in general) do not come off well. Generally supportive of Hitler, in many respects more rabidly antisemitic than the Germans, when the war was lost they grumbled about how difficult the war was and how much easier life as an exile must have been. Barely a thought was spared for the discrimination, expropriation of property, and large-scale murder before and dur-

ing the war, even though Mauthausen, a large concentration camp, was located barely twenty kilometers from Hitler's hometown, Linz. Jennifer Taylor's essay on Bruno Adler's wartime radio show *Kurt and Willi* focuses on its value as propaganda; an alternative approach would have been to place the figures within the traditions of Central European comic figures. In the figure of Willi there are hints of Svjek but also premonitions of the archetypal Austrian, Helmut Qualtinger's and Carl Merz's "Herr Karl." Unfortunately for the exiled Jews, many "Herr Karls" lived in the dreamland of *gemütliches*, cultured Vienna. A famous line in *Die Fledermaus* (1874), the Viennese operetta *par excellence*, extols the virtues of selective amnesia: "Glücklich ist, wer vergisst, was nicht mehr zu ändern ist." The best essays in this book perform an important task in trying to recapture the changing experience of everyday life as an Austrian exile in wartime Britain: the idealized image of the homeland and the attempt to recreate its atmosphere, the strain and difficulties as well as adjustments and gratitude in the host country, and, for a few, the sobering return to postwar Austria.

Notes

[1]. In a recent lecture, part of a conference held on September 4, 2007, and sponsored by the Leo Baeck Institute of London, Peter Pulzer preferred the terms "emigrants" or "refugees" to "exiles," as the latter terms contains a possible hint of volition.

[2]. A book is scheduled for publication on the Austrian Centre. Marietta Bearman, Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove, Anthony Grenville and Jennifer Taylor, eds., *Out of Austria: The Austrian Centre in World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007). A German edition was published in 2004.

[3]. Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). A notable book on Vienna and its Jews, which provides valuable background to the interwar period, has recently

been reissued: Robert Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4]. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

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