

**Frank Stern, Barbara Eichinger.** *Wien und die jüdische Erfahrung 1900-1938: Akkulturation - Antisemitismus - Zionismus.* Wien: Böhlau Verlag Wien, 2009. XXV, 529 S. ISBN 978-3-205-78317-6.



**Reviewed by** Marsha Rozenblit

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In this volume, Frank Stern and Barbara Eichinger present 29 scholarly articles about the experience of Viennese Jews and their participation in high and popular culture in the interwar period. Originally given at a conference at the University of Vienna in 2007, these articles reflect the complicated nature of Austrian and Jewish identities as well as the cultural creativity of Austrians of Jewish origins in the 1920s and '30s. At the same time, many of the articles reveal the deep impact that post-modern cultural studies have had on scholarship. They remind us that Jewish identity was not fixed, not essential, but rather something that emerged in the context of interactions, performances, or processes. They correctly note that there was nothing inherently Jewish in psychoanalysis or in the music of popular song writers of Jewish origin. At the same time, the vitality of Austrian culture in the first four decades of the twentieth century is unimaginable without the creativity of men and women for whom Jewishness may only have been something they felt when associating with other Jews, or when the antisemites reminded them, or when

they lived in exile from Austria after the Anschluss.

Like most volumes that begin in conferences, the articles in the collection are of uneven quality. Some of the articles are merely descriptive, informing the reader about synagogues and rabbis, emigrants to Palestine before 1938, feminist activists, or Austrian Jews who wrote music for Hollywood movies. Others are far too theoretical, in this reviewer's opinion, leaving the reader wondering what the author was trying to argue. Such is the case with Sander Gilman's essay on Mahler, Kraus, and Richard Strauss' *Salome*. Even more theoretical and incomprehensible is Karin Stögnér's study of the relationship between antisemitism and misogyny which focuses almost entirely on theoretical concepts of sexual othering and attributes both hatreds to the crisis of male identity and sexuality at the turn the century. Unfortunately, it never gets beyond Adorno and Horkheimer to deal with Vienna.

Many of the articles, however, provide interesting insight into the identities of Viennese Jews even if they differ on the parameters of that iden-

tity. Eleonore Lappin judiciously employs unpublished memoirs and questionnaires by American and Israeli Jews of Austrian origins to argue that interwar Austrian Jews quickly came to terms with the new Republic and developed an identity as politically Austrian, culturally Viennese, and ethnically Jewish, although Jewish ethnicity had little cultural or religious content. Indeed, Jewish ethnicity meant an awareness of belonging to a Jewish Schicksalsgemeinschaft, an awareness induced by antisemitism, and also having mostly Jewish friends, something some people realized only in retrospect. Interestingly, Jews gave Socialism the role formerly played by Emperor Franz Joseph as the guarantor of Jewish security. Even in the authoritarian Ständestaat after 1934, Jews felt loyalty to the state, hoping it would protect them from the Nazis. Their love of Austria, Lappin argues, made many Jews underestimate antisemitism; they broke with Austria only after the war, when Austria did not admit responsibility for its role in the Holocaust and pitied itself for its wartime experiences. In exile, Jews lost their Austrian identities and strengthened their Jewish identities. Albert Lichtblau's insightful analysis of Austrian antisemitism and Jewish response concurs with Lappin's study. Jews from Austria now living in Israel or America, he notes, do not remember having suffered personally from antisemitism before the Anschluss. Their experience, however, must have been more significant than they remembered, because most of them had mostly Jewish friends and lived in a private, Jewish world.

Virtually all the articles that deal with identity admit that Jews socialized almost entirely with other Jews, but some present a different picture of Jewish and Austrian identity than Lappin or Lichtblau. In her study of Jewish women who studied at the University of Vienna, Harriet Freidenreich argues that most of these educated women had virtually no identity as Jews, as Germans, or as Austrians. Most of them, coming from highly assimilated families, regarded Socialism as their

Heimat, and they did not feel at home in interwar Austria, although they did feel at home in "Red Vienna" and in Viennese culture. Thus they were not "ethnically Jewish" or German or Austrian. They were outsiders as Jews and as women. Jewishness was something private shaped by antisemitism and association with other Jews. One could argue, of course, that university-educated women were a small and atypical group of Viennese Jewish women. In her study, Michaela Raggam-Blesch reminds us that Jewish ethnicity was "situational". Jewish women may have been doubly excluded as Jews and as women, but at the same time they were an integral part of Viennese bourgeois society. Jewish identity emerged only in the context of Jewish social circles or in the experience of antisemitism, especially in the Nazi period. Before that, Jews hardly felt antisemitism, probably because they mostly associated with other Jews. Of course Jewish women of Galician background were always more conscious of their Jewishness, either because they were closer to the world of Jewish tradition, or because both antisemites and other Jews regarded them as more "Jewish".

The articles discussed so far assume that even if situational, Jewish identity was somehow real and measurable. Klaus Hödl insists that Jewishness was not a fixed, essential category, but rather something in constant flux. Moreover, he takes issue with the very notion of acculturation as a useful concept. After all, acculturation implies that Jews with a fixed identity adopted the fixed culture of the dominant group, when in fact Jews participated in and helped create the larger culture. Hödl proposes that scholars should focus on the ways that Jewishness was "performed" in the spaces in which people from differently imagined cultural spheres interacted. As an example, he does a close reading of a case in which a Jewish woman dressed as the Christ-child at a costume ball during carnival, 1899. Rather than seeing this incident as an example of total assimilation, Hödl interprets it as a comic attempt to put on a Chris-

tian identity without conversion, to show identity as something external, and to neutralize the danger of Christian conversionary activity. In addition, such behavior derived from the tradition of cross-dressing and anti-Christian role-playing, traditionally part of the Jewish festival of Purim which falls during carnival season, and was thus a Jewish act. This is a most suggestive reading, but one cannot generalize from such incidents to understand Jewish society as a whole. Historians should not do literary-style readings alone. They still need to accumulate large quantities of evidence.

Some of the most interesting articles in this collection deal with people of Jewish origin who contributed to high and popular culture in Vienna, who wrote modernist literature and composed avant-garde music, as well as those who wrote the kitschy songs and Heimat-operettas that created Viennese and Austrian clichés. Especially interesting are Karin Wagner's piece on the "moderate" Viennese musical modernists, members of the *Junge Kunst* in the 1930s, who wrote modernist Jewish music in America; and Birgit Peter's article about theater historian Helene Richter, actor Adolf von Sonnenthal, songwriter Gustav Pick, and the composer Hermann Leopoldi, who wrote the song, "Klein aber mein: Jeder hat ein Vaterland", the unofficial theme song of the authoritarian Ständestaat (1934-1938). Most of these pieces demonstrate that Jews were central to the definition of Austrian identity in the first four decades of the twentieth century. These articles, as well as Hanno Loewy's study of the writer Béla Balázs, Sandra Goldstein's analysis of David Vogel's Hebrew novel, *Married Life*, and Wolfgang Müller-Funk's discussion of Joseph Roth and Soma Morgenstern, also show how Jewish writers translated the Jewish experience into the dilemma of alienation in modernity. Only Bettina Riedmann's study of Arthur Schnitzler grapples with the personal dilemma of identity. Schnitzler, Riedmann concludes, was a Jew, a German, and an Austrian. He felt intense *Stammeszugehörigkeit* to the Jew-

ish people, but he was a German writer, not a Jewish one, and a person with an Austrian Heimat, but no Austrian patriotism in the inter-war period. Unlike Freud, who in response to Austrian antisemitism declared he was no longer a German (or an Austrian), but only a Jew, Schnitzer knew he was all three. After all, people do have plural identities.

Frank Stern and Barbara Eichinger should be commended for this suggestive and important volume of essays.

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