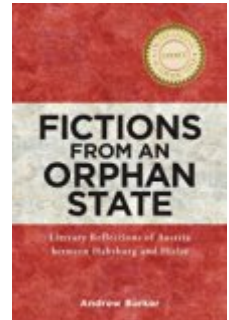


Andrew Barker. *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler.* Rochester: Camden House, 2012. 205 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57113-531-5.



Reviewed by Andreas Lixl

Published on H-German (April, 2014)

Commissioned by Chad Ross

Andrew Barker's literary monograph, published in the Camden House series Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture, offers keen criticism of interwar authors and oeuvres spanning widely divergent outlooks on Austrian life, literature, and politics. Barker presents an accomplished array of authors ranging from fin de siècle radicals to conservatives and cultural critics, including Karl Kraus, Andreas Latzko, Ernst Weiss, Arthur Schnitzler, Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth, Soma Morgenstern, Alois Vogel, Marie Frischauf, Anna Seghers, as well as "blood and soil" champions like Albert Paris Gütersloh and celebrated *Heimatlidhter* like Heimito von Doderer. *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler* illuminates fascinating literary and historical landscapes stretching from the empire's eastern province of Galicia to central Europe and from red Vienna to the postwar republic. The transnational foci and cross-cultural reach of *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler* make Barker's study a

significant contribution to central European literary and intellectual history.

The author, an emeritus professor of Austrian studies at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, contextualizes the interpretive framework of *Fictions from an Orphan State* in a postscript that traces the distinctions of German and Austrian literatures as follows: "In 1878, Richard Wagner published an essay posing the deceptively simple question '*Was ist deutsch?*' ('What is German?'). It was indisputably a pivotal question at the inception of the small and vulnerable Austrian republic, born out of the rubble of a great empire that originally elected to name itself '*Deutsch-Österreich*.' The often overlooked literary reflections of what transpired there in those two short decades before the 'German Question' was seemingly put to rest by Hitler's annexation of the first Austrian Republic into the 'Thousand Year Reich' have formed the stuff of this book" (p. 175).

The author's well-informed analysis of Austrian prose writing in the twentieth century probes

deep into the fascinating, yet uncanny "afterglow" of Habsburg's multicultural empire that flamed out in 1918, and stranded its German-language authors in central Europe amidst rising tides of unemployment, fascism, and civil war. Barker's "Preamble: A Cold Sun" succinctly summarizes Austria's conflicting literary, cultural, and political identities that resulted in bloody civil clashes, and ended in annexation by Germany in 1938. The author documents the twisted social and literary trends of the ill-fated republic. The study makes it "manifestly clear" that a distinctive body of Austrian writing emerged after 1918 that focused specifically on central European affairs in the aftermath of World War I. The synthetic structures of Barker's interpretations rest on literary, cultural, and historical analyses, starting with chapters entitled "Soldiers' Tales" and "The Habsburg Legacy," followed by an excellent discussion of fascist and *antifa* narratives focusing on Austrian novels published primarily in the 1930s. The book's most engaging chapter is entitled "Charting February 1934" and traces socialist, realist, and conservative portrayals of Austria's short civil war by Karl Kraus, Anna Seghers, Friedrich Wolf, and Alois Vogel. The last chapter, "Finis Austriae?," outlines the emergence of a specifically Austrian sense of cultural identity that found expression in nostalgic novels and satirical tirades that expose the multicultural tensions of the Danube Monarchy. This Austrian brand of humanism and Enlightenment expressed by conservative writers like Joseph Roth and Ernst Weiss stood in sharp contrast to ethnocentric notions of Austrian literature and culture popular among Heimato von Doderer and other traditionalists during the early decades of the Cold War.

Overall, Andrew Barker's work provides excellent entry points to literary and cultural debates focusing on Austria's struggles with modernism and democracy in the first republic. Where the presentation falls somewhat short relates to the author's reluctance to articulate broader horizons in his portrayals of central Eu-

ropean life and letters that shaped modern Austrian literature into a "very distinctive body of writing" in the period 1918-38 (p. 1). Nevertheless, the author's eloquent essays offer fascinating road maps for comparative research into Austrian modernism to show "how much literary life there was beyond the bounds of Weimar and Berlin" (p. 1). This reviewer strongly recommends *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler* as a great contribution to our historical understanding of modern Austrian literature and culture.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Andreas Lixl. Review of Barker, Andrew. *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2014.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37742>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.