



Literature in Vienna at the Turn of the Centuries

Continuities and Discontinuities around 1900 and 2000

EDITED BY ERNST GRABOVSZKI AND JAMES HARDIN

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Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

Edited by James Hardin
(*South Carolina*)

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CAMDEN HOUSE

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*Vienna, Graben, view of the Stephansdom around 1900.
Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv,
Austrian National Library, Vienna.*



*Vienna, Graben, view of the Stephansdom in 2001.
Photograph by Ernst Grabovszki.*

Introduction: Notes on Literature in Vienna at the Turn of the Centuries

Ernst Grabovszki

ONE WHO DEALS WITH *fin-de-siècle* Vienna is often confronted with clichés. Elisabeth Leinfellner-Rupertsberger sums it up:

Das Wien und mit ihm das Österreich der Jahrhundertwende sind zu einer Utopie im ursprünglichen Sinne des Wortes geworden, zu einem raum- und zeitlosen Mythos, einem Pandämonium mit mythischen Versatzstücken: dem guten alten Kaiser, der täglich seinen Tafelspitz ißt — so schon bei Josef Roth; dem weisen Ratgeber, Freud; der dämonischen Verführerin, Alma Mahler-Werfel; dem hauslosen Kaffeehausliteraten, Peter Altenberg; dem leutseligen Bürgermeister, der nur ein kleines bisserl antisemitisch ist, Lueger; und dem exilierten und in Österreich erst nach seinem Tod langsam bekanntgewordenen und schließlich in einer Apotheose verklärten Denker, Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹

Leinfellner-Rupertsberger presents the Austrian turn of the century in an ironic way as a patchwork of true but incomplete impressions, as a time that had to cope with a variety of political and social changes such as the collapse of the Habsburgian monarchy, the breaking apart of the “Vielvölkerstaat,” and the rise of nationalism.

The articles in this book aim to explore the contrasts and similarities of both turns of the centuries around 1900 and 2000 and to show how the aesthetics of literature and its historical background have influenced each other and how they have changed during a century. They seek to sound the continuities and discontinuities in Austrian literature, especially of literature in Vienna by highlighting the city’s role in the development of Austrian culture now and then. The contributors show how typical characteristics of the *fin de siècle* around 1900 are still observable in contemporary literature but also concentrate on the contrasts of the two time spans.

There is evidence that *fin-de-siècle* literature and culture in Austria enjoy popularity not only among scientists of literature but also among

readers for at least two reasons: first, the *fin de siècle* nowadays is frequently portrayed in transfigured, nostalgic form as a realm detached from historical fact, as an idyll of a seemingly prosperous time in all spheres of life. This is the reason, among others, why the German and Austrian publishing industry successfully publishes one book after the other on the Habsburg family.² It is characteristic of our time that Michael Kunze's and Sylvester Levay's musical *Elisabeth*, which sketches the life of the Austrian empress, became a major success at the Theater an der Wien from 1992 until 1998.³ TV-specials, exhibitions, and books were a direct result of this new popularity of the Habsburg empress and of Habsburg nostalgia in general. But this nostalgic image of Austria and of Vienna in particular is shattered when it is seen from another point of view in history: from 1907 to 1913 Adolf Hitler has been living in Vienna and it was there that he brooded on race and the "deutsche Welt-herrschaft."⁴

Second, Austrian literature around 1900 represents a climax, an unprecedented efflorescence in the country's literary history. Hermann Broch (1886–1951), Robert Musil (1880–1942), and Franz Kafka (1883–1924) are important not just in Austrian but in world literature. In the field of poetry Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) broadened forms of poetic expression by an unconventional application of traditional forms of verse and symbolism and by his comprehensive knowledge of foreign languages and literatures. Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) cultivated verse perfect in form and rich in imagery. After the turn of the century he devoted himself to drama and co-founded the Salzburg Festival. The most successful playwright around 1900 in Austria, Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), digested elements of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and exposed his figures to a tissue of reality and lie. Besides Hermann Bahr (1863–1934), Richard Beer-Hofmann (1866–1954), Peter Altenberg (1862–1919), and Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler belonged to a group of writers, "das Junge Wien," who represented a counterpart to German naturalism. Their works focused typical characteristics of *fin-de-siècle* literature, such as an atmosphere of downfall, decay, and melancholy.

Austrian literature around 1900 centers on the role of the individual within a rapidly changing society. Science, especially psychoanalysis, likewise focuses on the individual. The term "psychoanalysis" was used for the first time in 1896 by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) when he was already forty years old.⁵ It is noteworthy that the publication date of Freud's *Traumdeutung* (translated as *The Interpretation of Dreams*) was indicated with 1900 although the book actually appeared in November 1899.⁶ Therefore, 1900 became a symbolic year as the beginning of the

age of increasing knowledge about man's psyche. It is typical of Freud's proceeding that he often referred to literature when he tried to explain his findings. Psychoanalysis and literature are closely linked to one another at this early stage of psychoanalytic research. Freud's probing of the human psyche, of spheres of life that had not been accessible up to that time finds a remarkable analogy in contemporary literature: in 1991 the novelist Gerhard Roth (b. 1942) took a *Reise in das Innere von Wien* (A Trip into the Interior of Vienna). In nine essays the author directs his attention to extraordinary, almost uncanny Viennese locations such as the "Narrenturm"⁷ (a lunatic asylum from 1853 until 1869) or the "k. k. privilegierte Hetztheater"⁸ (an arena in which animals were set on each other). He intends to take a look behind the metropolitan scenes as Freud did on a medical level when the latter brought his readers down to earth by claiming that every human being is not a rational entity but driven by subconscious forces. It is small wonder therefore that reviews of Roth's book often referred to Freud and that it was promptly stamped as "ein Reiseführer durch die Abgründe der österreichischen Seele."⁹ Roth's approach is almost archaeological: he describes parts of Vienna unknown even to native Viennese. In contrast to Freud, Roth's object of study is not the human being but the metropolis and its "subconscious" topography which allows the reader to unveil the connecting places between collective consciousness and individual fates and biographies of Jewish families, homeless people, or artists living in a mental hospital.

Austrian art around 1900 was referred to by several terms: "Wiener Moderne," "Neuromantik," "Symbolismus," "Impressionismus," and — most popular — "*fin de siècle*." The last term, coined in France during the 1880s, is ambivalent: it describes not only a general sentiment of decay but also of revolt which, according to Arndt Brendecke, derives from the tradition of "décadence" in France in the 1830s, "die die Sensibilitäten für die Zwischentöne der eigenen, auch seelischen Wirklichkeiten bis ins Äußerste zu schärfen suchte."¹⁰ The mentioned terms should make us aware of the fact that the turn of the century cannot be characterized as "ein einheitliches und homogenes Phänomen in der Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte,"¹¹ although certain tendencies toward uniting the arts become perceptible. The novelist, playwright, and essayist Hermann Bahr, one of the key figures of Viennese cultural life around 1900, stated that art, science, and religion fundamentally would be the same, a point of view that derives from Richard Wagner's and Friedrich Nietzsche's conception of an artist striving for the unity of nature, culture, society, and the individual.

If we further focus in on the most important characteristics of Viennese literature around 1900 we note the following:¹² it was first deeply influenced by the literatures of other European nations and thus must be studied in the context of western literature in general. A massive import of German, French, Italian, Scandinavian, and American influences preceded the “Wiener Moderne.”¹³ Nietzsche and Wagner influenced Austrian music and literature, Hermann Bahr tried to establish Vienna as a center of the “Moderne” by transferring central ideas and terms of the time into German such as the French “états d’âme” (Seelenzustände),¹⁴ and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1950) owed a lot to the analytic and linguistic philosophy of the Cambridge School, just to mention a few examples.¹⁵ Second, literature was closely linked with other arts such as music and graphic arts. The painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), for instance, became also known as a playwright (*Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* [1909, translated as *Murderer, Hope of Women*])¹⁶ although his plays have never been staged successfully. Beyond that, Vienna had become a center of modern architecture (Adolf Loos), painting (Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka), psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud), twelve-tone music (Arnold Schoenberg), medicine, philosophy (Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Wiener Kreis”),¹⁷ and national economy (Hans Kelsen). In the preface to the first volume of the *Moderne Rundschau* (1891), the most important periodical of the “Wiener Moderne,” the editors note programmatically:

Die moderne Literatur ist für sich allein, abgesondert von allen übrigen Ausstrahlungen des modernen Geistes nicht zu begreifen, nur vom Standpunkt der neuesten naturwissenschaftlichen, psychologischen und soziologischen Erkenntnisse, nur vom Standpunkt der fortgeschrittensten rechts- und moralphilosophischen, technischen, volkswirtschaftlichen, sozialpolitischen Anschauungen aus sind wir imstande, die künstlerischen Dokumente des großen Lebensprozesses der Gegenwart recht zu verstehen und nach Gebühr zu würdigen.¹⁸

In his widely acknowledged analysis of the literature of the Habsburgian empire, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der modernen österreichischen Literatur* (1963)¹⁹ Claudio Magris sketches a meticulously drawn picture of Austrian literature in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the preface to the new German edition of his work Magris tried to explain “wie eine Kultur sich bemüht, die Vielheit der Wirklichkeit auf eine Einheit zurückzuführen, das Chaos der Welt auf eine Ordnung, die fragmentarische Zufälligkeit der Existenz auf die Essenz, die historisch-politischen Gegensätze auf eine Harmonie, die sie versöhnen, wenn

schon nicht aufheben kann.”²⁰ In his opinion, Austrian authors of the nineteenth and even of the twentieth century turn to the past rather than taking up topical issues. Their “quälende Bindung an die Vergangenheit,”²¹ he argues, is not only a superficial frame of mind but inherent to their culture:

Der habsburgische Mythos ist also nicht ein einfacher Prozeß der Verwandlung des Realen, wie er jede dichterische Tätigkeit charakterisiert, sondern er bedeutet, daß eine historisch-gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit vollständig durch eine fiktive, illusorische Realität ersetzt wird, daß eine konkrete Gesellschaft zu einer malerischen, sicheren und geordneten Märchenwelt verklärt wird.²²

Magris’s notion of the mindset of the time is characterized by the authors’ longing for harmony within a chaotic surrounding: the dissolving of the Habsburgian empire was compensated for in literature, although, Magris claims, the continuity of Austrian tradition lies in the incessant revolt against this tradition. The playwright Joseph Schreyvogel (1768–1832), the novelists Adalbert Stifter (1805–1868), and Heimito von Doderer (1896–1966), and, above all, Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872) are said to have fallen ill with the Habsburgian myth due to their writings which Magris presents as unpolitical and detached from historical reality. If one agrees with Magris’s arguments it is small wonder, therefore, that such a characterization of Austrian literature of the nineteenth century and of the *fin de siècle* in particular leads to the aforementioned nostalgia in recent times.

Although Magris’s notion of the Habsburgian myth produced opposition (it is doubtful if there is a clearly defined corpus of “Austrian” literature at all; Magris only deals with German-speaking authors; he started from an unreflected notion of “myth”²³) it still is a major contribution to the discussion of Austrian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Beyond that, Magris’s work was influential for later studies such as Ulrich Greiner’s *Der Tod des Nachsommers* (1979)²⁴ which also characterizes Austrian literature as one immune to political and topical issues. In the 1990s, the novelist and essayist Robert Menasse (b. 1954) continued to foster this image of Austrian literature as a static rather than a dynamic art due to an aesthetic of social partnership.²⁵ In a series of lectures he had given at the University of Sao Paolo in 1981–82 Menasse departed from the hypothesis that the content related and aesthetic specifics of Austrian literature as well as the organizational aspects of literary life in Austria derive from a societal form of organiza-

tion, the so-called “Sozialpartnerschaft” (social-partnership)²⁶ which he characterizes by

kräftiges Wachstum, völliges Verdrängen der Umverteilungsfrage, dabei quasi lückenloser sozialer Friede und allseitige Zufriedenheit — schlager lässt sich wohl nicht beweisen, daß die gegenwärtige Epoche des Kapitalismus in der Sozialpartnerschaft dessen effektivste Organisationsform gefunden hat, daß also Österreich, was ihre Realisierung betrifft, innerhalb der Kapitalismen die absolute Avantgarde darstellt.²⁷

The mechanism of “Sozialpartnerschaft,” that is, the avoidance of conflict between employer and employee, the consolidation of power within society, the concentration of political power in order to control social developments,²⁸ Menasse claims, can also be traced within Austria’s literary life, especially in the 1950s: this period he characterizes as lacking a generation gap between young and established writers. In contrast, the German “Gruppe 47,” founded in 1947, had the goal of promoting younger writers and became so influential that many of its members soon ranked with the best known German writers, such as Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, or Uwe Johnson. As to Austrian literature Menasse says, “wo es keine sichtbaren Zwischenräume mehr gibt, erscheint alles wie aus einem Guß, ein Block, monolithisch.”²⁹ Beyond that, even Austrian authors who became well known in the 1960s such as Peter Handke (b. 1942), Thomas Bernhard (1931–1989), or Barbara Frischmuth (b. 1941) and who became literary celebrities, above all in Germany, were paralyzed with the affects of social-partnership which Menasse further describes as the simultaneous existence of prosperity and poverty in economic resources both in the fields of politics, economy, and literature. The number of writers increased continuously in the postwar decades but the number of publishing houses, newspapers, or radio- and TV-stations who would have given work to these writers did not. Austrian writers were forced to publish their works in Germany, Menasse continues.

Magris’s, Greiner’s, and Menasse’s points of view meet reality only partially. There is evidence that from the mid-1970s on, Austrian writers started to develop a distanced and critical relation towards the Austrian state which derived from the writers’ attempt to create a social identity for themselves within the Austrian state.³⁰ Although the first (and until today, the last) writers’ convention in 1981 had on its agenda substantial issues such as social security for writers and further regulations of royalty payments, nothing substantive came of all the talk.³¹ The discussion of the specifics of Austrian in contrast to German literature became a favor-

ite issue within the academic community in the 1970s and 1980s. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler concluded that “Österreichs Literatur ist in ihrer Eigenständigkeit nur in bezug auf die politische und soziale Sonderentwicklung zu begreifen, nicht aber als eine Wesenheit zu konstruieren, die von vornherein sich als eine explizit österreichische zu offenbaren imstande wäre.”³² That is to say, Austrian literature differs from German literature by characteristics that are not inherent in literary texts but to external factors, such as the publishing industry, or writers’ associations.

In this connection it is useful to survey the development of the Austrian book market at both turn of the centuries in order to highlight not only the interdependence of the German and Austrian market but also to explain an important aspect of the aforementioned “soziale Sonderentwicklung.” As early as 1835, Franz Gräffer, a Viennese writer and bookseller, noted that great amounts of money are running abroad because books on philosophy, history, politics, etc. find no sale in Austria.³³ A great deal of the literary production actually was sold outside the national borders, although the Austrian book trade experienced an increase both in the establishing of relevant firms and in quantity of production and sale.³⁴ From 1859 until 1909 the number of bookstores, publishing houses, and libraries had quintupled in Austria; in Hungary the number was even eight times as high. Books had become easily available already in the 1850s: “Während im Jahre 1859 in Österreich auf 50 Tausend Einwohner eine Buchhandlung kam, hat heute jede Buchhandlung nur mehr ein durchschnittliches Publikum von 13 Tausend Seelen,”³⁵ Junker states. However, numerous Austrian writers such as Peter Rosegger (1843–1918), Rudolf Hans Bartsch (1873–1952), Karl Hans Strobl (1877–1946), Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, or Peter Altenberg published most of their books in Germany. The S. Fischer Verlag, founded in 1886 by Samuel Fischer in Berlin, had become the most influential publishing house in the German speaking countries around 1900 and played a key role in popularizing naturalistic authors such as Henrik Ibsen. By 1918, S. Fischer had published no fewer than thirty-five Austrian writers (among them the aforementioned Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal and Altenberg).³⁶ The reason for this situation is twofold: on the one hand, copyright protection in Austria was modest compared to other countries. Murray G. Hall states that Austria-Hungary did not participate in international copyright regulations due to home affairs such as national controversies,³⁷ whereas German publishers could grant protection against pirated editions and unauthorized translations. On the other hand, the trade regulation of 1859–60 made the book trade subject to licenses and certifications of

qualification. Last but not least, censorship proved to be an obstacle especially for Austrian publishers. Nowadays, censorship has been abolished and somebody intending to open a bookstore is not subject to a certification of qualification anymore. But the interdependence of the Austrian and the German book market is still of relevance: eighty percent of the books printed in Austria are exported to Germany. During the 1990s the annual turnover of book sales in Austria increased steadily.

Another institutional characteristic of Austrian literary life deserves mention, namely the formation of the “Grazer Autorenversammlung” (GAV) in 1972, a group of writers who defined themselves as a counterpart to the PEN-organization in terms of aesthetical and ideological views.³⁸ Austrian authors of the younger generation such as the members of the “Wiener Gruppe” (H. C. Artmann [1921–2000], Konrad Bayer [1932–1964], Friedrich Achleitner [b. 1930], Gerhard Rühm [b. 1930], Oswald Wiener [b. 1935]), or of the “Forum Stadtpark” in Graz (Peter Handke, Barbara Frischmuth, etc.) were not given access to the conservative Austrian PEN-Club although their efforts in renewing Austrian literature were undisputed. As a result, international recognition was impeded for many of these young authors. The founding of the GAV should help to increase publishing opportunities and should serve as a representation of Austrian writers’ interests. Also for the PEN-organization, the year of 1972 marked a turning point: The Austrian president of which, Alexander Lernet-Holenia (1897–1976), resigned from his function protesting the bestowal of the Nobel prize of literature to Heinrich Böll (1917–1985) who then was the president of the international PEN. The poet Ernst Jandl (1925–2000), founder of the GAV, took the opportunity to attack the elitist practices of the Austrian PEN organization and unsuccessfully strove for an acceptance of the GAV as a second and autonomous PEN organization. But the GAV soon had to show authors of international reputation such as Peter Handke, the playwright Wolfgang Bauer (b. 1941), or Gerhard Roth and took its stand in politico-cultural discussions during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the importance of the GAV has declined in the 1990s and the differences between the two groups now appear to be more academic than real. The latest turn of the century is also marked by a significant break: Austria’s joining the European Union, the process of European integration and, consequently, further challenges with regard to immigrants and their integration in Austrian society.³⁹ It is striking therefore that Austrian and Viennese literature at both turns of the century dealt and deals with political issues. This is not to say that contemporary Austrian literature is all about politics, but it is true that Magris’s and Grei-

ner's notion of an unworldly literary tradition often proves to be wrong. In his latest novel, *Das Vaterspiel* (2000, *The Father Game*), Josef Haslinger (b. 1955), for instance, tells the story of Rupert Kramer, son of an Austrian minister and Social Democrat, who kills time working out a computer game that aims at annihilating a virtual father. In November 1999 Kramer is called to New York to help his old flame Mimi hiding her grand-uncle, a former Nazi living in the cellar of a house at Long Island. Kramer, who hates his corrupt father, falls prey to an inner conflict of political responsibility and friendship. By depicting the fate of a Jewish, a Lithuanian, and an Austrian family Haslinger does not confine the continued existence of National Socialist thought, the problem of collective guilt and of generation gaps to the Austrian territory but makes it an international affair.

At both turns of the century authors had (and have) a special liking for discussing Austria's identity. Since identities mostly are not visible they depend on materialistic symbols in order to become perceptible. Such symbols represent significance and are able to create social communities whose members are linked to each other by means of a general idea, an ideology, language, or even by the press, for instance.⁴⁰ Such a symbol creating identity and a sense of togetherness was Emperor Franz Josef I. reigning from 1848 until 1916. He was the last living icon who could generate to some extent a feeling of solidarity within a multinational territory. After his death Austrian identity gradually disintegrated and this break actually was the beginning of the monarchy's end.⁴¹ Karl I., the emperor's grand-nephew, became emperor in 1916 and was the last monarch of the Habsburgian empire.

If contemporary Austria is concerned with political developments which touch the composition of national identity — the most important aspect of which is the mentioned process of European integration — it is necessary to analyze the outcome of this issue. With regard to the turn of the century around 1900 it becomes obvious that language was — and still is — an integral aspect of identity: The struggles for an equality of other languages within the monarchy⁴² were only the symptom of an attempt to define not only national borders but also cultural delimitations in order to create an adequate setting for political self-determination. This process of political, social, and mental disintegration was reflected in literature, too. In his trilogy *Die Schlafwandler* (1931–32, translated as *The Sleepwalkers*) Hermann Broch shows the decay of moral and values of German bourgeois society from 1888 until 1918. In his long novel fragment *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930–43, translated as *The Man Without Qualities*) Robert Musil (1880–1942) depicts

Habsburgian Austria facing the First World War as the utopian country of “Kakanien.” Musil’s protagonist, Ulrich, is indeed a man without qualities, in other words, his identity is not of an undivided nature but it is split up and fissured and does not allow him a coherent view of the world. Consequently, a reality which has become a contradiction in terms — in this case: which experiences a radical change — requires a contradictory figure, someone who is not able to reach his goals in life. For him, even the work of art as an expression of purity and indestructibility has become obsolete. It is obvious that Musil’s novel is highly influenced by the philosophical discourse of his time. The Wiener Kreis and the philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach (1830–1917) to whom Musil had dedicated his dissertation, serve as the philosophical background of Ulrich’s split character: Mach’s formula of the “unrettbares Ich” comes to life in the shape of Ulrich who represents the disintegration of an era.

In contrast to Musil’s utopian country of Kakanien, contemporary authors have labeled Austria as “Quarantanien,”⁴³ as a country which is put (or which has put itself) under quarantine: The establishing of a new government in February 2000, that is the replacement of the coalition of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ) and the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) by the right-wing coalition of the ÖVP and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) caused dissonance within the member states of the EU.⁴⁴ The governmental participation of the FPÖ became the stumbling-block for numerous Austrian artists to protest heavily against the conservative political climate.⁴⁵ It was generally noticed that the FPÖ had used negative images of foreigners living in Austria not only during the election campaign but continuously attracted attention by statements which hardly differed from Nazi vocabulary. In his contribution to the volume *Österreich: Berichte aus Quarantanien* which reflects the situation of Austria after the election, the novelist Robert Schindel (b. 1944) seeks an explanation for the result of the election sketching the characters of Vienna’s inhabitants: “Der Wiener ist Zuschauer von Beruf,”⁴⁶ Schindel states, which not only means that the Viennese feel well while watching others’ misfortune indifferently. His statement also implies that the Viennese inhabitant is not willing to behave adequately when danger of any kind arises. Helmut Qualtinger’s (1928–1986) and Carl Merz’s (1906–1979) play *Der Herr Karl* (1961, *Mister Karl*),⁴⁷ shows such a character. Karl is a petty bourgeois and opportunist to the bone. He has lived his life despite changing political rulers and unlucky private circumstances in order to get away as lucky as possible. Both Schindel and Qualtinger, the latter vividly remembered

for his impersonation of Karl on TV and on stage, present a stereotype, of course, and in view of this it is difficult to unfold the real traits of the native Austrian and Viennese, if there are any at all. In other words, in what ways do the inhabitants of Vienna differ from those of Berlin, London, or Rome?

The statement “Es gibt ein Bild über das Wienerische, das zum Klischee verdichtet ist, ein Bild, bei dem Gemütlichkeit und Höflichkeit, Untertanengeist, Raunzer- und Querulantenentum, vorauseilender Gehorsam, Titelsucht und Autoritätshörigkeit Inhalte und Konturen bestimmen,”⁴⁸ was a starting point for the psychoanalyst Harald Leupold-Löwenthal’s (b. 1926) lecture on stereotypes of the Viennese. He shows historical and fictional figures who are closely connected to the city’s history and whose traits are characterized as typical Viennese: “Der liebe Augustin,” for instance, a homeless folksinger and bagpipe player who is said to have lived during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) and who escaped death despite of having spent one night in a plague-grove: “Man könnte meinen, daß ihn das Wunder des Überlebens zu einer Leitfigur der Wiener machte, die auch stolz auf ihre Überlebenskunst sind.”⁴⁹ Leupold-Löwenthal further shows that the image of the Viennese as a do-nothing which is nothing but another cliché stems from German travel literature and that even Friedrich Schiller has coined this stereotype. With regard to Gerhard Roth’s methodological approach to lay bare a topography of the “subconscious” metropolis it would be necessary here to dig below the surface of clichés and stereotypes. Leupold-Löwenthal finally comes to the following conclusion:

Was einem als Psychoanalytiker aber *auffällt*, wenn man sich mit der Wiener Realität von heute konfrontiert, ist die Tatsache, daß alles, was da so phantasiert und in der Phantasie erlebt wird, nicht existiert! Sind und waren die Wiener wirklich Wiener oder waren und sind sie “*Wiener Darsteller*.”⁵⁰

Judging the Viennese character in such a way might arouse the suspicion that Vienna even nowadays is the capital of Kakanien instead of a real existing state. However, a discussion of both stereotypes and real images of a society touches a sphere of identity this society was given or has given to itself. Schindel’s dealing with the Viennese character proves that a lot of contemporary authors bring into play the national or local character when discussing Austrian identity.

The contemporary discussion on Austrian identity was stimulated when Kurt Waldheim was elected president in 1986. Josef Haslinger’s essay *Politik der Gefühle* (1987) tries to catch the mindset of Austrian

politics and society at the end of the 1980s. The notion of a “Politik der Gefühle” signifies a politics being reduced to the ethics and aesthetics of publicity and sales promotion, as Haslinger puts it, a politics that purposely uses rhetorical strategies and patterns in order to address people’s emotions rather than to present a logical line of reasoning. Haslinger intends to explain why Kurt Waldheim was elected president of Austria in spite of his Nazi record known prior to his election. Waldheim’s election, the author claims, was the result of giving a new interpretation to his past by presenting him as the victim of defamation. The mobilization of emotions which also took advantage of the “zweite Gefühlslage, mit der die Waldheim-Wahlwerbung sich verbünden konnte,” namely anti-Semitism⁵¹ made it possible that he became a sympathetic person, although the chances of being elected president seemed to be poor at the beginning of the election campaign:

Hier wird, mit wenigen Worten, alles umgedreht. Opfer, soviel ist inzwischen klar, ist immer Kurt Waldheim und alle, die sich mit ihm identifizieren sollen. Menschenjagd seinerzeit war Pflicht, deren Kritik heute ist Menschenjagd.⁵²

Waldheim, one might add, had become president because of the intended misinterpretation of history — was he the unconscious *Herr Karl* of the 1980s?

In perusing contemporary Austrian literature one realizes that the political essay is a popular literary genre among writers. But also within theater topical issues are taken up. What started with Johann Nestroy’s (1801–1862) provocative plays containing topical allusions to grievances within state and society in the nineteenth century was continued by Schnitzler who portrayed anti-Semitism in *Professor Bernhardt* (1912), or Ödön von Horváth (1901–1938) whose *Kasimir und Karoline* (1932) shows the affects of economic crises on human relations. The preoccupation with Austria’s past during the Nazi period reached its climax with Thomas Bernhard’s (1931–1989) staging of *Heldenplatz* in 1988, shortly before the author’s death in 1989. In the play, a misanthropic professor Robert Schuster fumes and forms his views on contemporary politics after having returned from Oxford to Vienna and deplores the survival and continued existence of National Socialistic thought. Fifty years after Hitler’s proclamation of Austria’s annexation to Germany at the Heldenplatz, the Schuster family assembles in Vienna on the occasion of Josef Schuster’s funeral, Robert’s brother. Josef, chased away by the Nazis and invited back to his professorial chair in the 1950s by the mayor of Vienna, finds his last resort in committing suicide. His life had become

hopeless because his fear of moving back to Oxford outweighed his confidence of finding a second home in England: “Der Vater hat sich vor Oxford gefürchtet / [...] Wien ist ihm verhaßt gewesen / aber in Oxford hätte er nichts mehr gefunden / das ihm vertraut gewesen ist / auch in Oxford hat sich alles verändert,”⁵³ his niece complains after the funeral. Beyond that, his wife labored under the delusion of hearing the clamor of the masses hailing Hitler’s words at Heldenplatz. For her, Vienna had become a haunted place to live at, and finally she ended up at the mental hospital of Steinhof. Bernhard’s play was a catalyst for the discussions on the National Socialistic past in the political field.⁵⁴ While the former chancellor Franz Vranitzky characterized Austria as a victim *and* a perpetrator during the Second World War in a parliament speech in 1991, he declared himself in favor of Austria’s taking moral responsibility for the Nazi collaboration on the occasion of a state visit to Israel in 1993. The most recent sign for this sense of responsibility is the establishment of a “Beauftragten für Restitutionsfragen” by the mayor of Vienna in 2001 who is in charge of returning unlawfully acquired property and means.

In his poem *wien: heldenplatz* Ernst Jandl takes up the same motif as Bernhard and explores the language-related dimension of the Nazi assumption of power by unmasking predications devoid of substance, the inhumanity of words and deeds expressed in a language that does not seem to refer to any meaning. The poem reads as follows:

der glanze heldenplatz zirka
versaggerte in maschenhaftem männchenmeere
drunter auch frauen die ans maskelknie
zu heften heftig sich versuchten, hoffensdick.
und brüllzten wesentlich.

verwogener stirnscheitelunterschwang
nach nöten nördlich, kechelte
mit zu-nummernder aufs bluten feilzer stimme
hinsensend sämmertliche eigenwäscher.

pirsch!
döppelte der gottelbock von Sa-Atz zu Sa-Atz
mit hünig sprenkem stimmstummel.
balzerig würmelte es im männechensee
und den weibern ward so pfingstig ums heil
zumahn: wenn ein knie-ender sie hirschelte.⁵⁵

There is no need to look up this poem's vocabulary in a dictionary because most of it simply does not exist. The words have detached themselves from a reality that is not able to cope with language or, more clearly, that has misused language in order to propagate inhumanity.

These preliminary notes make obvious that literature cannot be regarded as an art form detached from everyday life, and scientific, societal and technical progress. Literature rather has become an integral part of the scientific and social life, and it has done so already at the *fin de siècle*. As a consequence, a view on literature and on history may sharpen our notion not only of literary works but of the arts as a whole.

What makes the turns of the centuries around 1900 and 2000 comparable? Some aspects have already been mentioned such as the discussion of Austrian identity at both turns of the century on diverse discursive levels. The reception of foreign authors and the dealing of Austrian writers with foreign literature is another example which not only holds for the literature around 1900 but also for contemporary literature: Peter Handke's early reading of William Faulkner (1897–1962) and Feodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881),⁵⁶ his and Friederike Mayröcker's (b. 1924) preoccupation with the French novelist and playwright Marguerite Duras (1914–1996),⁵⁷ are just a few examples. Beyond that, many Viennese (and of course Austrian) authors take an active part in translating foreign literature into German, such as Peter Rosei (b. 1946), Barbara Frischmuth, Raoul Schrott (b. 1964), Martin Amanshauser (b. 1968) or the late H. C. Artmann and Ernst Jandl.⁵⁸

The comparison of different turns of the century in different countries makes clear that the mentioned feeling of decay was not only typical for the Viennese mindset. It should not come as a surprise that works of French poets such as Charles Baudelaire's (1821–1867) *Fleurs du mal* (1857) which became influential because of its mixture of impressionist and symbolist elements have enriched the literature of other countries. France, and Paris in particular, was a center of attraction for the novelist and essayist Stefan Zweig (1881–1942). After having finished his studies of German and Romance philology at the universities of Vienna and Berlin he visited the French capital. The image he depicts in his reminiscences is characterized by juvenile light-heartedness and the impression that this metropolis does not know any differences between skin colors or societal classes: "Paris kannte nur ein Nebeneinander der Gegensätze, kein Oben und unten."⁵⁹ It is not for nothing that he speaks of a *Welt von Gestern* (1944, translated as *World of Yesterday*) when he wrote these *Erinnerungen eines Europäers* close to the end of his life. Recalling the years before the First World War Zweig characterizes them as "das gol-