

# *Contested Passions*

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SEXUALITY, EROTICISM, AND GENDER  
IN MODERN AUSTRIAN  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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& Raleigh Whiting

AUSTRIAN CULTURE

# Vorwort der Herausgeber /

## Foreword by the Editors

CLEMENS RUTHNER + RALEIGH WHITINGER

The foundation and point of departure for this collection of articles was the annual conference of the Modern Austrian Literature and Culture Association (MALCA) in April 2007 at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, under the organization of the editors and the Wirth Institute of Austrian and Central European Studies. While most of the articles are based on papers presented at that conference, others augment the collection – some published elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> others solicited after the conference.

From early on, as the conference organizers considered the general theme for the contributions, a major “contender” was “sexuality, eroticism, and gender” – with more than one good reason. While fin-de-siècle Vienna blossomed as a major hub of cultural activity in Central Europe with a dazzling diversity of influential discourses on the themes in question, the topics of sexuality, eroticism, and gender resurfaced again after the historical caesurae of 1934, 1938, and 1945 in a variety of media as a provocative element of culture’s insistent questioning and contesting of that era’s hypocrisy in matters of sex, politics, and history, its *Lebenslüge* of political innocence, victimhood, and moral propriety.

Indeed, Austrian sexuality in the entire “long” twentieth century seems “bracketed” by two cultural high-points of provocative interaction. At one century’s turn there is the emergence of the two collegial friends – in some ways “Doppelgänger,” many might claim – Arthur Schnitzler and Sigmund Freud as high-profile writers and thinkers in the context of sexual issues, caught up in their own complex network of influences and debate involving contemporaries such as Otto Weininger or Karl Kraus, and the legacy of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. At the next century’s

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the conference papers not included here were published in *Modern Austrian Literature* (MAL), e.g. Anja Gerigk, “ Erotische Strukturen – epistemologische Modernität: Zum gattungsgeschichtlichen Ort von Doderers *Strudlhofstiege*,” MAL 41.1 (2008): 23–42; Lorraine Markotic, “Melancholy and Lost Desire in the Work of Marlen Haushofer,” MAL 41.1 (2008): 65–92; Olivia Gruber Florek, “‘I am a Slave to My Hair’: Empress Elisabeth of Austria, Fetishism, and Nineteenth-Century Austrian Sexuality,” MAL 42.2 (2009): 1–16.

turn there are the provocative works of Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek as a leading exponent in the use of sexual, even pornographic elements to question her culture's cherished narratives of romance and politics. The topic of Austrian sexuality studies thus seemed ideally suited to attracting articles both to the ongoing vigorous discourse on writers and artists long notable for their contention with conventional views on the sex of love and politics, and to the awareness of more neglected or newly emerging writers who might be included in the teaching and research on Austrian culture's contribution on this broad and important theme.

Having made this choice on an overarching theme for the conference, those involved found themselves richly rewarded, as a glance at the roster of articles indicates, with many established scholars continuing their contributions along with new voices – all adding to the context of possible influences and comparisons involving a variety of authors and media. Not only well-known writers such as Schnitzler (Meyer; Samstad; Schumacher), Kraus (Huber), Hugo von Hofmannsthal (A. Eder), Robert Musil (Müller-Funk; Hüsch; Spencer), and Hermann Broch (Fetz) are covered, but also a stimulating list of authors and works that, although not yet as extensively researched, are indispensable for a broader survey of the topics: the Slavicist and anthropologist Friedrich Salomo Krauss (Burt), the psychoanalyst Otto Gross (Hochreiter), the journalist and author Egon Erwin Kisch (Patka), as well as women writers such as Helene Druskowitz, Maria Janitschek, and Grete Meisel-Hess (Schwartz), whose contention with the sexuality and gender discourse of their day calls for our attention.

Early Austrian modernism is rich in writings on sexual relationships and bourgeois "double morality," in the literary works of Peter Altenberg and Schnitzler, in Kraus's anthology of essays entitled *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität*, or in Weininger's popular "gender philosophy" in *Geschlecht und Charakter* and in the range of echoes, variation, and contention that his 1903 sensation called forth – as evident in several of the articles included here. Important too is the scandal around the anonymous *Josephine Mutzenbacher* novel of 1906 (cf. Ruthner), which appears as the peak of an iceberg of uncomfortable societal topics around 1900, be it prostitution or pedophilia. The same years see the flourishing eroticism in the art works of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Alfred Kubin, the beginnings of academic and amateur sexology (apart from Freud, for instance, the aforementioned F. S. Krauss, or Hugo Bettauer), and also the activities of Rosa Mayreder, spanning her theoretical writings such as *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* (1905) and *Geschlecht und Kultur* (1923), and other voices of the early women's movement.

After the upheavals that begin with the *Anschluss* of 1938 and its brutally abrupt termination of early modernism and extend through the slow recovery from the historical turmoil of the National Socialist era after 1945, the Second Republic has fostered a ferment of art works in various media that seem to express the “other side” of Austrian conservatism. These works became a political weapon in the struggle for social change – or perhaps a symptom of the “return of the repressed,” be it bourgeois pornography or the Nazi past. The full range of this artistic activity – for example, the *Wiener Aktionismus*, Hermann Nitsch’s *OrgienMysterienTheater*, the surge of films by directors such as Franz Novotny, Kitty Kino, Michael Haneke, or Ulrich Seidl, the male eroticism of writers such as Heimtoto von Doderer, or the feminist writings of Ingeborg Bachmann, Marlen Haushofer, Elisabeth Reichardt – eluded even the wide net cast by the conference’s invitation, with specific single examples having to stand for a variety of trends: the offerings on Albert Drach (Gross; Lorenz), for example, or on the queer writing of Josef Winkler (Babka), the dramas of Werner Schwab (Samstad; Doppler), the novels by Gerhard Fritsch (Hackl), H. C. Artman’s oeuvre (Kunzelmann), and of course the contributions on Jelinek (Lorenz; Nickenig; French).

In all this, a varied selection and analysis of the discourses on sexuality, eroticism, and gender in Austrian literature and culture was encouraged, with a view to crosscurrents and interconnecting traditions, interdisciplinary approaches from different perspectives – hence the stimulating set of reflections on the context of the “Mayerling scandal” (Arens), on the sexualization of “half-Asian” alterity in the medical and anthropological discourse of the Habsburg era (Strohmaier), on the “eroticism” in the art of Klimt (Kilpatrick; Whalen) and Adolf Loos (Gafijczuk), on the long-overlooked elements of continuity in attitudes from the Nazi years to the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s as reflected in the media (F. X. Eder), on female roles and sexuality in films of the Austrofascist years (Dassanowsky) and of our day (Doppler), or on the body art of VALIE EXPORT (Hallensleben). Similarly broad and diverse were the heuristic questions suggested and adopted through these contributions, constituting the following roster, which might guide the reader as it guided the contributors:

- How are sexuality and gender represented in specific cultural media such as Austrian literature, theater, film, and the arts? What is the *Stellenwert* of the eroticized/gendered body in the genres mentioned?

- ▶ What is the function of eroticism within Austrian literature/culture at a given period of time? What are the implications for the construction of gender?
- ▶ What connections or discontinuities, respectively, exist between the (social and cultural) *history* of sexuality in Austria and its cultural representations?
- ▶ How are the title categories of “sexuality,” “eroticism,” and “gender” used as topoi for Austrian society, culture, and identity? How are these three categories politicized or used in political rhetoric? What are the underlying power relations?
- ▶ What connections exist between, on the one hand, the academic, artistic, and political interest in sexuality and, on the other hand, emancipation movements at a given period?
- ▶ What are the relations between academic, medical, legal, and philosophical discourses on sexuality, and its cultural representation (e.g., eroticism, pornography) in Austrian literature/arts/culture?
- ▶ To what extent does (Catholic) religion inform the cultural representation of sexuality in Austria?
- ▶ What connections exist between cultural discourses on sexuality and constructions of otherness, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism in Austria?
- ▶ In which ways are alternative sexualities and other taboo categories (e.g. prostitution or pedophilia) represented in Austrian literature, arts, and culture?
- ▶ Do sexual subcultures affect the cultural mainstream and majority norms (e.g. morality, gender, canon)?
- ▶ Since sexuality is not only *discursive*, but also *performative*: how does this category affect Austrian literature, drama, film, the arts?
- ▶ What is the societal position of pornography in Austria and its relation to canonized literature and the arts? What boundaries are drawn between eroticism and pornography?
- ▶ Why (and how) has Austria developed a specific “culture of the scandal” which makes a certain strategic use of sexuality/eroticism as provocation (e.g. in theater and film premieres, gallery openings etc.)?

These questions were offered without intention of imposing a prescribed notion of what sexuality *is* – be it Freudian, Marcusean/Frommian, Foucauldian, Bataillan, Lacanian, Butlerian, or whatever. Rather, the multiplicity of

methods was welcome, and contributors were encouraged to develop their understanding of the subject matter through the works they were analyzing. Clearly, some answers to the above questions can be provided only on the basis of case studies and “snapshots,” and less on a general level. Thus the resulting compilation does not constitute a comprehensive survey of how issues of sex, gender, and eroticism developed in Austrian culture from the late nineteenth century to recent decades. But it does provide students, teachers, and researchers with new perspectives on writers of widely accepted significance while also calling attention to works and writers that “fill in gaps,” so to speak, opening the view to possible new comparisons, nuances, contrasts.

In this array of loosely connected and chronologically arranged contributions, the recurrence of thematic echoes involving Schnitzler, Weininger, Freud, Musil, or Jelinek proved inevitable, and the new perspectives on others refreshingly welcome, while at the same time many gaps still remained, as in the cases of Altenberg, Bettauer, Mayreder, Doderer, Thomas Bernhard, Nitsch, and Haneke. Nevertheless, the editors hope that their volume will foster scholarly endeavors to fill those gaps and proceed in the fascinating field of Austrian sexuality studies.

Finally, thanks are due to our colleagues without whose patient intellectual, logistical, and financial support neither the conference nor the publication of the contributions would have been possible: above all, the Modern Austrian Literature and Cultural Association, the Wirth Institute and the University of Alberta, Edmonton, the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York, and Peter Lang Publishers, and of course the enthusiasm of the contributors and their faith in our project. We are grateful as well to Ellen L. Hawman and Joseph F. Johnson for their valuable work and advice in compiling the index of names for the volume.

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