

Representations of Everyday Life in Fin de Siècle Vienna

Tim Kirk, University of Newcastle

The major cities of eastern central Europe grew very rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century as the region caught up with economic developments elsewhere on the continent. The growth of Vienna was not as spectacular as that of Berlin or Budapest – each of which was compared with Chicago; but it remained the Habsburgs' imperial capital, and its leading political and economic role at the gateway to south-eastern Europe guaranteed its continued rapid growth. While scarcely half a million people lived in and around the city at the time of the 1848 revolutions there were some two million in the expanded greater Vienna of 1914, and it was still the fourth largest city in Europe.¹

The face of the city was transformed beyond recognition between the Gründerzeit and the Great War. The transformation of the built environment began with the removal of the walls during the 1860s, the construction of the Ringstrasse, and the incorporation of surrounding settlements into the city. The impact of urbanisation in central Europe also generated enormous social changes. Vienna's growth, prosperity and cultural dynamism rested on the city's ability to draw economic migrants of all social classes, not only from the city's immediate hinterland, but from all parts of the empire. By the later nineteenth century only a minority of Viennese (38.5 per cent in 1880) had been born in Vienna. Mass migration altered ethnic composition of the population. A number of minority communities grew up, reflecting the nationalities of the empire, among them Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians, Italians, south Slavs and Greeks. The largest single minority were the Czechs: by 1910 there were nearly half a million immigrants from Bohemia and Moravia (although not all of them were Czech speakers by any means), and a quarter of the working-class district of Favoriten was of Slav origin by the eve of the First World War. The Jewish community, concentrated in the city centre and the Leopoldstadt, had expanded rapidly as Jewish immigrants from the empire's eastern provinces settled in the city.²

Social and economic change also exacerbated inequality, impoverishing wage-earners and creating an underclass of the chronically destitute, while leaving the more well-to-do with more disposable income and leisure. The concentric rings of the city each

¹ See Renate Banik-Schweitzer, 'Berlin – Wien – Budapest. Zur sozialräumlichen Entwicklung der drei Hauptstädte in der Zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', in Wilhelm Rausch (ed.) *Die Städte Mitteleuropas im 19. Jahrhundert* (Linz, 1983) pp. 139-154.

² Michael John and Albert Lichtblau, *Schmelztiegel Wien*

reflected the historical development of Viennese society. The aristocracy had built their baroque town houses around the imperial palace in the inner city (inside the Ringstraße), and a service class of artisans, clerks and shopkeepers had also lived there, but as the First District had gradually become a commercial, financial and cultural centre, the old *Mittelstand* had been gradually displaced into the inner ring of manufacturing suburbs. With the growth of industry a new ring of suburbs grew up outside the outer *Linienwall* to house the large numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers who came to Vienna to work in the expanding textiles and clothing industries and in the new manufacturing sectors that emerged with the growth of the railways. Housing was perhaps the biggest single problem. Although housing became smaller and more cramped as property speculators and builders pared down construction costs it nevertheless failed to keep pace with demand from the increasing population. In 1890 fourteen per cent of the population were lodgers, and half of these rented a bed rather than a room in a working-class household which would often have only a kitchen and one other room, and there was little interest in housing reform on the part of the state or the middle classes before the turn of the century, when the first attempts were made by the city authorities, working with rich philanthropists to provide a limited amount of social housing with minimum building and hygiene standards for white-collar workers and the skilled working class. But ultimately the city, more than other central European cities, depended on rent taxes for much of its revenue, and this gave landlords more political clout than elsewhere and impeded any real solution to the problem of property racketeering that was at the root of the overcrowding problem.³

For the wealthier Viennese, no less than for their Parisian counterparts, this was the *belle époque* recalled by Stefan Zweig in *Die Welt von Gestern* (The World of Yesterday).⁴ The urban middle classes were fascinated not only by the scale and tempo of the new metropolis, but by its underside of poverty, criminality and (real or imagined) sexual licence. Social reformers and campaigning journalists documented the lives of the poor with a variety of political purposes in mind, but the representation of poverty and crime also provided a vicarious thrill for the bourgeois, whether in pulp fiction, boulevard journalism, or reportage. The titles of popular documentary promised reports from the 'dark heart' of the modern city, constructing the subaltern classes of the metropolis as a domestic other, in parallel with the exotic other of the European overseas empire. This paper draws

³ Renate Banik-Schweitzer, 'Vienna' in M.J. Daunton (ed.) *Housing the Workers. A Comparative History* (Leicester, 1990), pp. 107-148.

⁴ Stefan Zweig, *Die welt von Gestern*

on crusading journalism from the socialist press of fin-de-siècle Vienna, which were then collected and re-marketed in book form for a wider readership, in order to examine one of the many facets of the city's representation of itself to itself. This material is located in the broader context of a new genre of urban reportage that sought to examine urban life and the problems of urbanisation in a more constructive way than is evident in the anti-modernism and anti-urbanism of many contemporary texts.

Text and Context

Industrialisation and urbanisation coincided with rapid increases in literacy in central Europe. There were an estimated 20,000 readers in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, and some 300,000 in the 1820s. Although their reading habits were changing – from reading the Bible and a handful of other books many times to reading many books, and seeking out new publications, readers were still very much a small minority and books hard to come by, even in larger towns. Newspapers and periodicals, too, began to appear in the late eighteenth century, but reached a very limited readership and often had an ephemeral life span. In contrast with western Europe and other parts of Germany, there was no periodical press in Austria before the 1740s. The first learned journal of any significance, *Wienerische gelehrte Nachrichten*, appeared for three years in the 1750s, and *Die Welt*, appeared in 1762, counting Joseph von Sonnenfels among its contributors, and a number of similar papers were founded in the 1760s; but the development of the press in Vienna lagged some half a century behind Hamburg.⁵ Although there were newspapers in the coffee houses of Biedermeier, and although there were many readers to each copy of a newspaper or periodical readers, circulation figures were low and the total number of readers small. On the eve of the 1848 revolutions there were 79 periodicals in the Habsburg Empire, 50 appearing in the German crown lands, 35 of them in Vienna, and three of them daily. In the empire as a whole there were 19 political newspapers in 1847. The situation was changed dramatically by the 1948 revolutions. Some 300 new publications were established in Vienna alone, among them 86 daily papers. Few survived: Windischgrätz closed down all but the official *Wiener Zeitung* in October, and the interior ministry reintroduced censorship and regulation in December. Nevertheless in 1852 there were 14 daily newspapers in Vienna. Regulation and censorship

⁵ Andrea Seidler and Wolfram Seidler, *Das Zeitschriftwesen im Donauraum zwischen 1740 und 1809. Kommentierte Bibliographie der deutsch- und ungarischsprachigen Zeitschriften in Wien, Preßburg und Pest-Buda* (Vienna, 1988)

were relaxed with the political liberalisation of the 1860s. A new press law came in to force in 1863, and there was further relaxation in 1868.⁶ The trade in printed books was similarly held back by regulation and censorship, and those who wanted to trade in books were directly and deliberately impeded by the state, which explicitly sought to limit the extent of the book trade. As Norbert Bachleitner has noted, Austria already had the reputation of a land without books in the eighteenth century, and although restrictions on book sellers were lifted by Joseph II, restrictive measures were quickly re-imposed, and apart from a brief liberal spell under the French occupation and in 1848, the development of the Austrian book trade – like that of the press – was impeded by censorship and regulation. The relative underdevelopment of the press and publishing sector in Austria was compounded by relatively low rates of literacy in Austria: even at the end of the nineteenth century around a third of the population was estimated to be illiterate, and although levels of literacy were higher in the western provinces, many of Vienna's recent immigrants were from country districts in the east where education was less sophisticated and literacy levels lower. The liberals of the 1860s brought changes to the book trade. Licenses for book dealers became easier to obtain from 1860, and although printed matter was still regulated, there was a shift of emphasis from 1862 from preventive censorship to the post-publication suppression or withdrawal of texts deemed seditious, pornographic or blasphemous: much fiction and journalism was unaffected by the remaining restrictions. There had already been some relaxation of the laws restricting the peddling of printed material.⁷ Nevertheless the press and the book trade remained relatively underdeveloped in Austria, compared with other parts of central and western Europe.

These qualifications notwithstanding, the demand for reading material had increased sharply by the turn of the century, not least as a consequence of the expansion of education. Following a period of stagnation in the first half of the nineteenth century, reflecting the social and economic backwardness of the Austrian empire, the number of enrolments at all levels increased rapidly after the 1848 revolutions. Before 1848 there were only two universities of any significance in the western part of the monarchy: Vienna, and Prague, tertiary technical education was limited but expanded during the first half of the nineteenth century with the opening of polytechnics or similar institutions in Prague, Vienna and the provinces (Graz, Krakow, Lemberg, Pest, Milan, Venice and Trieste.

⁶ Kurt Paupié, *Handbuch der österreichischen Pressegeschichte 1948-1959. Band I: Wien*, (Vienna, 1960, pp. 1-4).

⁷ Norbert Bachleitner, 'The Politics of the Book Trade in Nineteenth-Century Austria' in *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997) pp. 95-111.

Secondary education was seen as a purely functional matter of educating sufficient numbers for careers in the civil service, the church or the professions. Obligatory primary education had been introduced in the eighteenth century, but anything more than basic skills for the majority of the population was still seen not only as unnecessary, but as positively undesirable. This changed with the liberal reforms to the education system begun in 1848, and continued for the most part in the 1850s – despite the ‘counter-revolutionary’ politics of the decade – as the government sought to reform the state apparatus. The number of pupils in secondary education quadrupled between 1850 and 1900 from some 25,000 to almost 96,000, and had increased to over 140,000 by 1910. At the same time the number of students enrolled in tertiary education increased from 3,709 in the academic year 1856-7 to 23,068 in 1910. The proportion of all 11-18 year olds in secondary education in Austria on the eve of the First World War was 30.5%, smaller than that in Switzerland, Germany and Norway, but comparable England, France, Italy and Belgium. The rate of enrolment in higher education increased very rapidly, overtook that of Germany, and was one of the highest in Europe during the last twenty years before the First World War. Primary school attendance varied considerably, according to the level of social and economic development, but in Lower Austria – as in Upper Austria and Bohemia – most children were attending primary school by the 1820s. In 1880 two thirds of Austrians over the age of six were literate (compared with over 80% of those over eleven in Prussia and England), and in 1910 83.5% of all Austrians over eleven were literate. Rates of literacy also varied considerably, however, and remote provinces such as Galicia in the East and Dalmatia in the south had much lower levels of literacy.⁸

As a consequence of these educational advances there was a buoyant market for all kinds of printed matter. Alongside official papers such as the *Wiener Zeitung* and the conservative press that had survived from the *Vormärz* there was now a lively liberal press in the broadest sense, popular Catholic papers, and finally, during the 1890s, a party political press, which included newspapers such as the *Arbiter-Zeitung* founded by the Social Democratic Workers’ Party in 1889. In addition there was a thriving local press, and the beginnings of a recognisably sensationalist genre whose pages were dominated by advertising and scandal. After the turn of the century such ‘boulevard papers’ as the *Österreichische Kronenzeitung* appeared in ‘Berlin format’, i.e. as tabloids. Two large firms dominated the newspaper business in Vienna: the Elbemühl concern which owned a

⁸Gary B. Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria 1848-1918* (West Lafayette, Indiana, 1996), pp. 1194.

number of papers, including *Das Fremdenblatt*, the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Wiener Mittagszeitung* and *Das Illustrierte Wiener-Extrablatt*. Steyermühl owned *Neues Wiener Tageblatt* and the *Konstitutionelle Vorstadtzeitung*. Other papers were associated with banks, including the liberal *Neue Freie Presse*, *die Presse* and *die Morgenpost*.⁹

If the relaxation of press laws and censorship stimulated the expansion and increasing diversity of the press and publishing, commercial interests were an even more powerful impulse, serving a massive popular market for the sensationalist journalism of the new tabloid newspapers (*Boulevardblätter*) such as the *Österreichische Kronen-Zeitung*; and for genre fiction: *Hintertreppenromane* or ‘back stairs’ novels, which as often as not were hawked from door to door by *colporteurs*.¹⁰ Popular press and pulp fiction alike fulfilled a number of functions, it has been argued, providing an escapist substitute for real adventure or romance for the lower classes, while at the same time helping them to come to terms with their circumstances.¹¹ Literary taste was not determined by class or status, however: mistresses read the serial novels purchased by their maids, and working-class Social democrats enrolled for self-improvement through courses run by the Social Democratic workers’ Party.

Documenting the City

One of the most popular genres among urban readers at the turn of the century was literature and reportage that dealt with the city itself; that revealed and reflected it to the people who lived there. This was certainly the basis of a number of modernist novels, where the city is deliberately presented not merely as a stage set or backdrop for the action, but a spectacle and almost a protagonist; but, of course these ‘textures of modernity’ were anticipated in the indispensable urban fabric of the realist and naturalist literature that had gone before. The modern metropolis, no less than the nation itself, had become too vast by the turn of the century to be more than an ‘imagined’ community, whose inhabitants were mainly newcomers, with narrow daily routines that scarcely took them to other parts of the city. Urban identities, the composite image of the city were constructed for them by the texts and images they encountered, just as they were for visiting tourists. Newspapers,

⁹ Paupié, *Handbuch*, pp. 26-32.

¹⁰ Tim Kirk, ‘Popular Culture and Politics in imperial Vienna’ in Malcolm Gee, Tim Kirk and Jill Steward (eds), *The City in Central Europe: Culture and Society from 1800 to the Present* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 159-174.

¹¹ See for example Maria Tichy, *Alltag und Traum. Leben und Lektüre der Dienstmädchen im Wien der Jahrhundertwende* (Vienna, 1984).

guides, timetables and directories provided routes, addresses, and times and places of events and performances, furnishing people with the basic data for a mental map of the urban infrastructure. They added to the countless words the literate metropolitan needed every day for orientation, familiarising its citizens with its geography and culture.¹²

Beyond this, however, the self-image of the city was embellished by specific genres of journalism and reportage, documentary and fiction, which introduced the city's inhabitants to the local culture or peculiarities of quarters they did not know and would never visit, and introducing the urban 'other', defined in terms of class, ethnicity or sexuality to a suburban readership. There were various ways of approaching this investigative journalism, and its objectives varied from writer to writer. Daniel Spitzer, for example, a journalist and former civil servant from a Moravian Jewish immigrant family, regularly published his humorous Vienna walks (*Wiener Spaziergänge*) in the *Neue Freie Presse* from 1865 to 1892. [Illustration from WstLA] His observations of urban life both in the centre of the city and the suburbs helped to construct and reconstruct images of the changing city for his readers among the Viennese middle classes just as the literature of travel and tourism created images for outsiders.¹³ The art critic Ludwig Speidel's prolific publishing career also embraced observations not only on the city's artists and intelligentsia, but the city itself, its monuments, (unstaged) spectacles and landscapes.¹⁴ Erwin Egon Kisch is perhaps the best known Austrian among the then emerging genre of 'roving reporter'.

One of the most ambitious publishing projects of the period was Hans Ostwald's series *Großstadt-Dokumente* (City Documents). The 51 volumes of social and cultural reportage were widely known both within and outside Germany at the time, as were the authors who contributed to the series. Ostwald himself wrote five of the volumes himself, including the first: *Dunkle Winkel in Berlin*. Although they have been used relatively little by cultural historians since their publication shortly after the turn of the century, they have recently attracted the attention of a number of researchers for a variety of reasons. Most recently it has been argued that the volumes, which appeared during the formative years of sociology as an intellectual discipline, exercised considerable influence on the Chicago school, which adopted the 'hallmark' approach of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*: the

¹² Cf. Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1996)

¹³ Christa Gaug, 'Situating the City: The Textual and Spatial Construction of Late 19th-century Berlin and Vienna in City Texts by Theodor Fontane and Daniel Spitzer', Ph.D. University of Texas at Austin, 2000.

¹⁴ Joachim Schreck (ed.): Ludwig Speidel, *Fanny Elßlers Fuß: Wiener Feuilletons* (Vienna, 1989)

exploration of urban milieus.¹⁵ German sociologists on the other hand were less convinced: the volumes do not conform to scholarly conventions, and the style is journalistic – albeit of a superior *Feuilleton* quality – rather than academic. Most of the volumes can be ascribed to one of three approaches to the city. Some deal with urban ‘types’, e.g. bohemians, aristocrats, criminals; others deal with institutions of modernity or urbanisation, and especially leisure, and there are volumes on bars, theatres, department stores, sport and so on. Many of the remainder deal with urban social problems and the institutions through which they are regulated, and generally deal with problematic issues or social groups that were demonised in the popular press or a source of anxiety to middle-class readers: poverty, and the underclass, crime, prostitution, and homosexuality. (Magnus Hirschfeld’s *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* was the third volume in the series.) One of the most striking features of the series as a whole, and of many of the individual volumes, was the positive attitude to urbanisation and the city, and to modernity in general.

The six volumes that dealt with Vienna have attracted rather less attention.¹⁶ Although fewer were published than originally planned, and there is perhaps too little material for the systematic comparison of the two cities that was once a part of the project’s agenda, the Vienna volumes do reflect the themes and approaches of the series as a whole. Two are essentially volumes of campaigning journalism by Max Winter, who was already well-known for similar pieces that appeared in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Others dealt with women, sport, the aristocracy and criminals, reinforcing existing or emergent stereotypes recognisable to those who lived and worked in the city. There was of course a long-standing tradition of depicting city types, especially hawkers and traders, and others who were very visible on the streets, established in Paris and London in the eighteenth century, and imitated in contemporary Vienna, a city which was increasingly perceived as an ethnic ‘melting pot’ (*Schmelztiegel*) for the Habsburg Empire.¹⁷ The description of types satisfied a craving for order through taxonomy: the professional intelligentsia of

¹⁵ See Peter Fritzsche, ‘Vagabond in a Fugitive City: Hans Ostwald, Imperial Berlin, and the Großstadt-Dokumente’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994) pp. 385-402; Dorothy Rowe, *Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, 2003); Dietmar Jazbinsek, Bernward Joerges and Ralf Thies, ‘The Berlin “Großstadt-Dokumente”. A Forgotten Precursor of the Chicago School of Sociology. (Schriftenreihe der Forschungsgruppe “Metropolenforschung” des Forschungsschwerpunkts Technik – Arbeit – Umwelt am Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (n.d.).

¹⁶ Stefan Riesenfellner, *Der Sozialreporter: Max Winter im alten Österreich* (Vienna, 1987); Ralf Thies, *WienerGroßstadt-Dokumente: Erkundungen in der Metropole der k.u.k. Monarchie* (Berlin, n.d.)

¹⁷ Cf. David Gray ‘Gavarni’s population Parisian reproduced’ in Malcolm Gee and Tim Kirk (eds), *printing, publishing and urban culture in the modern period* (Aldershot, 2002) pp. 48-70 Michael John and Albert Lichtblau, *Schmelztiegel Wien - einst und jetzt. Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart von Zuwanderung und Minderheiten. Aufsätze, Quellen, Kommentare* (Vienna, 1993)

researchers and academics that was emerging in the late nineteenth-century with the expansion of education and the establishment of new universities and research institutes was bringing order through classification not only to the physical universe and the natural world with its multiplicity of plants, animals and environments, but also to human society.

I

Accordingly, city types – and types within types – were a recurrent feature of both contemporary journalism and in popular social documentary such as the *Großstadt-Dokumente*, in some cases more explicitly than others. Alfred Deutsch-German's *Wiener Mädel*, for example dealt explicitly in female stereotypes, such as the prostitute, the Jewish woman (*Leopoldstädterin*), an innocent 'suburban' girl and so on, depicting a range of different kinds of women reminiscent of the spectrum of Vienna society in Schnitzler's *Round Dance*.¹⁸ A similar range of types is present, albeit not always so explicitly both in the other Vienna volumes and in the series as a whole.

The construction of human categories was an important element not only of contemporary sociology, but also in the emergent disciplines of anthropology and ethnology. Ethnologists were mapping and cataloguing the diversity they found in overseas European empires, and also closer to home in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and there is often something of contemporary ethnological methodology in the way the authors of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* approach the inhabitants of the city. In 1891 Paul Goehre, one of the earliest practitioners of social reportage published an account of three months as a factory worker and apprentice, investigating the living conditions of the urban poor, and a conservative newspaper was prompted to observe that Europeans were better informed about the living conditions of 'half –savage' African tribes than the lowest classes in our own societies. August Bebel cited the observation in his introduction to Adelheid Popp's account of growing up as a working-class girl in Vienna, adding that this was 'a completely new world' for the upper classes of a society so proud of its Christianity and civilisation. Books and *Feuilleton* articles made the educated public aware of social distress in ways that the sheer existence of the working class or their occasional protests failed to do.¹⁹

¹⁸ Alfred Deutsch-German, *Wiener Mädel* (Vienna, 190X), *passim*

¹⁹ 'Wir seien über die Lebensbedingungen der halbwilden afrikanischen Völkerschaften besser unterrichtet als über die unserer eigenen untersten Volksschichten'. The observation was recorded by August Bebel, in his introduction to Adelheid Popp's 'Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin', cited in Josef Weidenholzer, 'Mündliche Geschichte – kritischer Forschungsansatz oder politische Fluchtdroge?' in Gerhard Botz and Josef Weidenholzer, *Mündliche Geschichte und Arbeiterbewegung. Eine Einführung in Arbeitswesen und Themenbereiche der Geschichte ,gesichtsloser' Sozialgruppen* (Vienna, 1984) pp. 39-51. Here p.47.

Max Winter was perhaps the best-known investigative journalist of this kind in imperial Vienna. He was born near Budapest in 1870, but grew up in Vienna. He was elected as a Social Democrat to the Reichsrat in 1911, and became deputy mayor of Vienna in 1919. His first articles appeared in the *Neues Wiener Journal* in 1894, and began writing for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in 1895. His reports dealt not only with Vienna, but with other industrial regions as well, not only in the industries of the German crown lands (in the heavy industries of Styria for example), but in Bohemia and Moravia (glass and textiles) and in the countryside (among hop-pickers). Much of his reporting was from Vienna itself, where his practice was to share the experience as far as possible with the homeless or the bed-lodgers (*Bettgeher*), or to get himself a job in the trade he was investigating, experiencing conditions rather than being shown round as an outsider, and participating in conversations rather than simply hearing reports.²⁰ (This method of undercover reporting, which required both direct and indirect deceit, has been compared with the methods of the post-war German journalist Günter Wallraff.)

Winter explicitly set out to demythologise Vienna, and specifically to challenge the comfortable clichés that were gaining currency as the city re-invented itself for the increasingly important tourist industry, quaint images of the good-natured, light-hearted Viennese in a Biedermeier world of wine, waltzes and *Gemütlichkeit*. Winter's first volume of collected journalism for the Großstadt-Dokumente series was ironically entitled *Das goldene Wiener Herz* (Vienna's hearts of gold) in reference to the city's comfortable self-image. (*Das schwarze Wienerherz* was published later, to drive the point home.)²¹ It set out not only to present an alternative picture of the cultural capital of central Europe by drawing attention to poverty and deprivation, but to provide a detailed and thorough critique of the city's shortcomings in addressing social problems. The collection brought together accounts of conditions in a maternity home, of night shelters for the homeless, and of Christmas in the poorhouse, all of which (or similar pieces) had been published separately in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* between 1896 and 1903. Winter's account of a night shelter was echoed in similar pieces on Berlin and Prague, the latter by Erwin Egon Kisch.²²

Homelessness is the dominant theme of Winter's second contribution to the series, *Im unterirdischen Wien*, in which he gives an account of his experiences as an accepted

²⁰ Cf. Reisenfellner, *Sozialreporter*, pp.1-6, where some of the issues arising from this method of investigation are discussed.

²¹ Max Winter, *Das goldene Wiener Herz* (Vienna, 3rd impression 1905); Helmut Strutzmann (ed.) *Das schwarze Wienerherz: Sozialreportagen aus dem frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1982)

²² Erwin Egon Kisch, REF

member of groups of homeless people or ‘city tramps’ (*‘Stadtstreicher’* rather than *‘Landstreicher’*.) He describes their inventive attempts to find shelter, and refuge from the police among the ovens of the suburban brickworks where many Czech immigrants were employed, and in the effluent canals underneath the city. Again, Winter’s own political agenda is very clear: to embarrass the interior ministry, the regional government of Lower Austria (*Statthalterei*) and the city authorities (*Magistrat*) using modern tactics of agitation, such as encouraging the homeless to try and provoke a mass arrest. Winter’s own participation and experience made his journalism more persuasive: the books of collected reports were reprinted several times, and thereby reached a much wider readership than that of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, (where he was largely preaching to the converted) enabling him to embarrass the authorities all the more easily.

Winter’s journalism has been rediscovered as a generation of critical historians have taken issue with the image of fin-de-siècle Vienna as the glamorously decadent cradle of European artistic and intellectual modernity.²³ Some of the most striking of these reports are those dealing with his work as an extra in the opera house in 1902, and as a scene shifter in the Burgtheater in 1908 – not least because they deal with the everyday experience of ‘cultural producers’ in enterprises that helped make fin-de-siècle Vienna what it was. The account of Winter’s experience of three months as an extra at the Vienna opera appeared in 1902 under the title ‘Realities from the World of Make-Believe’. The main problem here was the uncertainty of the work: extras were casual workers (or enthusiasts) who were brought on for operas when those who had rehearsed the ‘mass scenes’ failed to turn up. These reserves fell into two categories: those who had been present during the scene, and who had a brass token entitling them to wait in the theatre, and those who had to wait outside. Selection was on the basis of personal patronage, and Winter was left in the salon of the refused after quarrelling with the supervisor. For those turned away this had meant a three-hour wait for a possible wage of a crown for the evening. As Winter himself discovered this barely covered his tram fare and a comparatively luxurious meal of two pairs of sausages and a beer, so that he ended up on the first night making a loss of 12 Heller. Clearly, theatre workers were not the most destitute of Vienna’s poor, and the wages of extras might often be only part of a livelihood, but they shed something of a different light on high culture: Carmen, for example was a favourite in the waiting rooms at the opera because of its crowd scenes. Anything by

²³ See among others Hubert Ch. Ehalt, Germnot Heiß and Hannes Stekl (eds.), *Glücklich ist, wer vergißt...? Das andere Wien um 1900* (Vienna, 1986); Wolfgang Manderthaler and Lutz Musner, *Die Anarchie der Vorstadt. Das andere Wien um 1900* (Frankfurt, 1999).

Wagner was unpopular because of the sheer length of the performances. The end of Lohengrin at around 11 o'clock is greeted with a sigh of relief among the ranks of the extras. (No comment is made on the audience's reaction).²⁴

Some years later Winter performed another stint in the theatre after talking himself into a job by (falsely) claiming previous experience in Karlsbad. He describes work that is long and hard but is not badly paid. Stage workers get 100 Crowns a month and are then thrown back 42 to 44 Crowns on a daily basis. If they are sick they lose the daily supplement, but the theatre provides medical care. The problem is that rehearsals frequently last much longer than planned, and workers are expected to stay out of a sense of loyalty and commitment. The actors are themselves, Winter notes, are far from workshy, but they have their moment of stardom as compensation, and derive their satisfaction from that, while the people behind the scenes feel that their goodwill has been exploited, or at best bought with a bit of rounding up of their wages.²⁵ And the concern is not only with the exploitation of cultural producers: a day spent with a *Kolporteur* hawking pulp fiction on the doorsteps of working-class suburbs is replete with indignation that people can be sold gothic horror and bodice rippers as literature, and pay far more for classic works in instalments than they would in a bookshop.²⁶ (Better still, no doubt, they might take advantage of the libraries and classes offered through the Social Democrats' educational programmes).

Social reportage offers the cultural historian a source of representations of everyday life, but is not without its own original intended readership and agendas (implicit or explicit, political or otherwise). Max Winter's journalism, and the extended corpus of 'city documentation' within which it was reissued and directed at a broader section of the population than the author's own party faithful was scarcely compromised either by the author's disguises and deceptions or by his political engagement (which – in so far as it was not obvious – was well-known). Rather it offers insights not only into the everyday experience of the Viennese but also into the cultural and political tensions of the period. Felix von Salten's volume on the aristocracy for example is less the celebration it might have been in the hands of some of his contemporaries than a clever analysis of the problems and shortcomings of the empire's ruling class. To that extent Winter and the

²⁴ Max Winter, 'Wirkliches aus der Welt des Scheins: Ein Vierteljahr Aushilfsstatist in der Hofoper' *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 25 March 1902, pp.6-7.

²⁵ 'Coulissenschieber im Burgtheater' in *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 13 November 1908, p.8; 20 November 1904 p.8.

²⁶ 'Wer liest die Schundromane? Ein Tag Kolporteur und Expeditior', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 7 May 1905

other contributors were testing the receptivity of readers to issues in contemporary cultural politics that might not otherwise be articulated in a similarly popular and accessible way.