

Austrian Studies 20 (2012)

REVIEWS

with best myths
+ contradictions!
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Gilbert

Sadly, Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler did not live to see the publication of this impressive and often gripping study of his greatest footballing love. As Austria's foremost 'Heimitist', he would have been tickled to learn, assuming he did not already know, that in Heimito von Doderer's novel *Die Dämonen* the tacky figure of Szindrowits, director of the publisher 'Pornberger & Graff', was based on the real-life Rapid functionary Leo Schidrowitz, the Jewish founder of Vienna's 'Institut für Sexualforschung'. After surviving the war in Brazil, Schidrowitz returned to Austria, renewed his links with Rapid, and from publishing porn went on to author the classic *Geschichte des Fußballsportes in Österreich* (1951). Truly, football is more than just a game.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ANDREW BARKER

Contested Passions. Sexuality, Eroticism, and Gender in Modern Austrian Literature and Culture. Ed. by CLEMENS RUTHNER and RALEIGH WHITINGER. Austrian Culture, vol. 46. New York, Bern, Berlin, Brussels, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Vienna: Peter Lang, 2011. 464 pp. €68.30. ISBN 978-1-4331-1423-6.

This comprehensive, thematically focused *Längsschnitt* through the modern Austrian canon comprises thirty essays in English and German, partly originating in the 2007 Modern Austrian Literature and Culture Association conference at the University of Alberta. Theoretical parameters for approaching these interrelated themes in such a historically and generically wide range of material are sketched in the editorial foreword, which sets a rigorous standard of enquiry. It would be unrealistic to expect collective consensus given such a broad scope on controversial themes, and inevitably not every contribution answers the editorial questions about the gendered body, the history and politics of sexuality, eroticism and gender in Austria, and their symptomatic importance for other cultural discourses and critiques of Austrian society. Questions of gender and women's status are framed historically by Katherine Arens (on 'Mayerling: The women's story'), by Alexandra Strohmaier (on Sacher-Masoch and ethnography), by Robert von Dassanowsky (on the legacy of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* in depictions of women and sexuality in Austrofascist film), and by Franz X. Eder (with statistics to document the transition of public discourse on sex from the Nazi period to the sexual revolution of the 1960s). Wolfgang Hackl sets his close reading of Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* against the novel's reception, Anna Babka persuasively uses post-colonial queer theory to broaden her empathetic interpretation of a novel by Josef Winkler, while Bernhard Doppler's rather descriptive piece on religion and pornography in Werner Schwab and Ulrich Seidl draws analogies to the 'religious codes' of sexual excesses in Lars von Trier's films. Judith Butler is an authority for many, but while some papers examine early theorists like Friedrich Salomo Krauss (Raymond Burt) and Otto Gross (Susanna Hochreiter), Weininger is cited ubiquitously — for example by Wolfgang Müller-Funk in a redundant excursus in his essay on Musil's *Drei Frauen*, before more pertinently making reference to colonial discourse and to Joan Riviere's conception of 'Weiblichkeit als Maskerade'. In a finely balanced reflection

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on *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, on the other hand, Sebastian Hüsich turns the dialectic of 'Wirklichkeitssinn' and 'Möglichkeitssinn' into an 'Erotologie', with some acknowledgement of Kierkegaard. Other papers eroticise their subject rather heavy-handedly, whether with psychoanalytic categories (Dariusz Gafijczuk on Adolf Loos) or with an irrelevant prurience (Bernhard Fetz on Broch), whereas the evidence of H. C. Artmann's sexual/textual practices, it is persuasively argued by Heide Kunzelmann, is central to his 'erotische Poetologie', which differentiates him from others in the *Wiener Gruppe* and aligns him with Barthes and Bataille. Similarly, Markus Hallensleben applies divergent definitions of the body (*Leib/Körper*) to VALIE EXPORT's *avant-garde* photographic and cinematic 'Körperkonfigurationen', to explore her series of performative juxtapositions of the self's corporeality and urban space 'between gender and grammar'. Yet the impression remains — as with the artistic residue of much conceptual art — that such documents of short-lived performance are a vehicle for a theoretical orthodoxy about eliding boundaries, for which gender is somewhat tangential. The centrality of these themes in Austrian culture, however, justifies revisiting familiar ground — from Klimt (Robert Whalen, Ross Kilpatrick), Weininger and Kraus (Martin Huber), Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (Antonia Eder), Schnitzler's *Der Sohn* (Imke Meyer) and *Reigen* (Katrin Schumacher, Christina Samstad), Musil's 'der andere Zustand' (Malcolm Spencer) to Jelinek — but also invites questions about depictions of the sex industry (Marcus Patka) and of lesbianism (Agatha Schwartz), and about the symptomatic significance of pornography, from the notorious classic *Josefine Mutzenbacher* and its reception (Clemens Ruthner) to the strategic critical function of pornographic elements in Jelinek's work. Dagmar C. G. Lorenz sees the latter's novels and Albert Drach's *Untersuchung an Mädeln* complementing each other in their transparency — Drach focusing on male gratification and domination, Jelinek on the 'female experience of being violated and depersonalized', but this examination of Drach's 'network of collusion' that replaces a victim/perpetrator polarity hints at its wider societal diagnosis. This is echoed by Annika Nickenig, for whom voyeurism in Jelinek disconcertingly symbolises the position of witness among Austria's 'unschuldige Täter' (to use Ruth Wodak's phrase), but who also sees the 'excessive' descriptions as a reminder of the Nazis' contempt for 'Menschenmaterial'. Lorely French, on the other hand, focuses on speech acts and metalanguage in Jelinek's *Über Tiere*, citing Roland Barthes. It is unfortunate that Ruth Gross's reading of Albert Drach's *Untersuchung an Mädeln*, which dwells so closely on that novel's opening sentence, itself begins with a poorly written first sentence, which was overlooked in proof-reading — in what is generally a very well-edited and thought-provoking volume.

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

GILBERT CARR