

Preface

A chief motive for undertaking the following investigation into the existence of transatlantic networks and (the role ascribed to) the perception of Vienna and Austria by North American visitors in the more than three decades between the end of World War I and the 1950s was the awareness of the remarkable number of North Americans residing temporarily in Central Europe after the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. This phenomenon has so far received only insufficient attention, and thus it seemed worthwhile to examine the role of Americans as observers and mediators of information about the development of the societies in the successor states after the collapse of the monarchy and the ensuing fragmentation of the erstwhile multinational country. The grave economic and political problems in the region related in the accounts of more than a dozen foreign correspondents who provided reports for North American newspapers and magazines was of interest to a considerable segment of the American readership, despite the official policy of American isolationism in the 1920s, following the decisive intervention of the USA in World War I.

The cataclysmic political changes in Central European societies, which after the end of the war experienced years of turmoil and revolution, attracted the close attention of professional journalists, whose transfer and appointment to European capitals was facilitated by the favorable exchange rate of the dollar during the 1920s, indicative of the increased relative wealth of the USA. The observation of the poverty and the threat of starvation to urban populations in the region also inspired philanthropic initiatives, which quite a few of the key foreign journalists advocated. At the same time these journalists were largely unaffected by the straits experienced by the local residents and were able to live relatively comfortably, enjoying what they regarded as very remarkable, namely the continuing devotion of the people of Vienna and Austria to music and the arts, despite their considerable economic difficulties and a series of serious political and social challenges in those years. The numerous reports of the journalists and the more private, but often equally detailed accounts of writers – fledgling or already established – who included Vienna and Austria in their European travels, provided in their correspondence and in literary texts, painted a complex though

largely homogenized picture of the region. In conformity with the mechanisms observed by social psychologists and discussed by “imagologists,” these fictional or non-fictional representations focused on particular – often stereotyped – features attributed to the inhabitants and societies of Central Europe. In order to comprehend the dominant facets of the images of the Central European scene and its people this study will thus draw on the insights of the practitioners of “imagology,” that well-established branch of general and comparative literature studies, who over the last fifty years have made use of the terms and frames of reference of social psychologists.¹ Imagologists have shown how, in the perception and presentation of encounters with individuals in different cultures, the tendency to generalize from isolated incidents and to draw, with little or no prior examination, inferences from traditional sources of information, predominates in fictional and non-fictional texts, and how everything that is unfamiliar is assessed from an ethnocentric position. Studies of the role of prejudices by social psychologists have also demonstrated that undesirable phenomena inside one’s own culture are often projected onto foreigners (or members of minorities inside an inhomogeneous large group) and have stressed the interconnections between predominantly favorable “auto-stereotypes” and frequently negative “heterostereotypes.” But investigations of travel literature have also found evidence of the apparent desire to find elsewhere the altogether “other,” which stands out against the everyday and commonplace of one’s own culture, and of the readiness to homogenize and romanticize distant locations and their inhabitants.² These alternative

¹ See the groundbreaking essays by Hugo Dyserinck from 1966 onwards, and the studies of his former disciple Joep Leerssen, especially his article “The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey,” *Poetics Today* 21,2 (2000), 267-90, and the handbook Leerssen edited together with Manfred Beller, *Imagology: the Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Character. A Critical Survey*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. The relevance of imagological studies has also been indirectly confirmed by the seminal impact of Benedict Anderson’s significant demonstration of the construction of collective identities and of seemingly venerable national traditions in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York, 1983.

² See e.g. James Buzard, “A Continent of Pictures: Reflections on the ‘Europe’ of Nineteenth-Century Tourists,” *PMLA* 108 (1993), 30-44.

trends seem to be evident in the representation of Vienna and Austria in twentieth century factual accounts and fictional texts.

Many of the North American professional observers, who often spent several years in their posts there, and a remarkable number of other sojourners became well acquainted not only with their peers but especially with groups of native residents. They established such close ties to certain social circles, made up of intellectuals and artists in the city of Vienna, that tracing the complex networks of relationships involving friends from both sides of the Atlantic merits thorough analysis.

Vienna was also the destination for hundreds of American and other Anglophone medical graduates who attended special advanced courses at the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna organized by the American Medical Association of Vienna. Their extended sojourns also enabled these visitors to benefit from the rich and diverse cultural offers of the city.

Several of the social circles in which the transatlantic sojourners were included were created by demographic developments in the late nineteenth century which had brought many Jews from Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary to the imperial capital. It is well known that these newcomers to Vienna provided essential contributions to the flowering of literary and musical culture as well as to achievements in the humanities and natural and life sciences. But their cultural background also fostered relationships with a number of arrivals from overseas. It held special appeal for a significant number of transatlantic visitors who were themselves acculturated descendants of Jewish immigrants to the USA and naturally shared religious affiliation as well as other interests with their Central European contacts (e.g. Louis Untermeyer and Ludwig Lewisohn, and many members of the medical profession). This fact later was to have important consequences when the political developments in Germany in the 1930s threatened the very existence of the Jewish elite in music and the arts generally, and prompted an exodus of the persecuted minority from Germany to neighboring countries, especially to Austria, where an Indian summer of Central European culture lasted for a few years. The networks established in the preceding two decades were also of paramount significance when the First Republic came to an abrupt end with the catastrophe of the *Anschluss*. Careful examination of

the fortunes of those fleeing from persecution yields abundant evidence that the transatlantic personal ties established earlier in the century helped these refugees from Central Europe to find a safe haven in the USA, which was otherwise reluctant to admit members of this large endangered group.

Apart from their regular reports and articles on the initial grave difficulties of the First Republic after 1918 and the passionate struggles and fierce political confrontations between left and right and, in the late 1920s and 1930s, between Nazi supporters and the representatives of the government, the American journalists covering the region in the course of time also composed popular histories and general chronicles (e.g. John Gunther, William Shirer, James Vincent Sheean). Through these publications they contributed to a significant element among the diverse discourses prevalent in that period. Some of these journalists also wrote guidebooks and travelogues, which furnished further material for the construction of the image of Austria in North America. At a later stage, they and their peers among the professional writers also produced reminiscences, memoirs and detailed autobiographical accounts of the ambience in which they had resided (e.g. Louis Untermeyer, Wright Morris). Apart from the “life writings” based on their witnessing dramatic changes in the region, several journalists and professional authors also fictionalized their own experiences, drawing not only on their autoptic impressions but also on material provided by their peers, additionally making use of the diaries of friends to which they had access. Inevitably, in their rendition of the complex political and social panorama they also relied on clichés, and stereotypes readily available in texts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g. W. C. Williams). And in some cases enterprising authors produced fictional representations of the core region of Central Europe without any first-hand impressions, thus anticipating impressions before they had experienced the country themselves and constructing fictional panoramas built on limited material shored up with heterostereotypes, a phenomenon which merits investigation with methods derived from studies of intertextuality and from the realm of imagology (Anita Loos, Hugh MacLennan, Joseph Freeman).

By considering these diverse types of texts the following study may appear to be akin to the interests of New Historicists. Yet its focus is

clearly rather on the identification of individual relationships and perceptions than on the discovery of general structures of discursive formations and modes of knowledge acquisition shaping the representation of historical conditions in the era between the two World Wars.³

Since the late 1940s quite a few biographies of the American foreign correspondents who resided in Austria and interacted with their Austrian friends have appeared (e.g. biographies of John Gunther and William Shirer, two seemingly exhaustive monographs on Dorothy Thompson). Likewise, substantial biographies of American writers who spent some time in Vienna and Austria and were inspired to depict urban or rural landscapes of the region have been published; prominent examples are biographies of William Carlos Williams, Thomas Wolfe, Thornton Wilder and Kay Boyle. But the details of the sojourns of these authors and their responses to encounters in the region often receive only limited attention from their biographers, though their exposure to the cultural landscape of Austria arguably had an impact on their creative work, engendering important literary texts.

Similarly, several important studies exploring the lives of their Austrian contacts have appeared, though understandably the relationships they maintained with their American friends are not central issues (e.g. in the three monographs on Eugenia Schwarzwald), and the development of transatlantic networks of friends is not investigated. Meanwhile the pertinent correspondence of a number of writers has been published. Examples include early selections from the letters written by John Peale Bishop, Thomas Wolfe, and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and recently by Malcolm Cowley. The literary papers of several of the journalists and of the major writers are now more easily accessible through digitization, and detailed inventories, catalogues and helpful Finding Aids are available (e.g. for Dorothy Thompson, John Gunther, Louis Untermeyer, William Carlos Williams, Wright Morris, H.D., Hugh MacLennan, Kay Boyle, Thornton Wilder, Joseph Freeman). Thus it seemed a timely endeavor to study the papers of many of these American

³ Cf. the extensive literature on New Historicism since Stephen Greenblatt's groundbreaking essays in the 1980s, and articles by Louis Montrose. Cf. some collections of essays, e.g. *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veesser, New York: Routledge, 1989.

visitors in order to reconstruct the relationships with the Austrians they met and to assess and reveal the density and importance of these connections.

As far as the representation of Vienna and Austria by American mediators is concerned, a provisional survey of the non-fictional accounts and the short stories and novels produced by Americans showed that they were often composed on the basis of general reports rather than from first-hand observation, which naturally suggested the choice of the methods and insights of imagology for their analysis. Like the average visitor to foreign countries, the newly arrived journalists tended to draw on guidebooks and widely-held images, and to use mediated knowledge concerning the composition and character of the target society. They were willing to echo narratives and reports they had read. Having arrived with certain expectations, they were ready to confirm these images by paying attention to the ways in which their experiences would corroborate commonly held views.

The totally unexpected metamorphosis of many Viennese after the *Anschluss* into rabid Nazis posed considerable difficulties for American observers as it proved that widely-held assumptions were wrong, and the end of the terrible carnage of World War II and the ethnic cleansing of neighboring regions of apparently implicated German speaking minorities in East Central and Eastern Europe demanded a fresh look at the overall panorama. Soon after the beginning of the occupation of Vienna and Austria the breach between the victorious Allies occurred and the Cold War began, with the line of demarcation, the Iron Curtain, first dividing the part of Austria occupied by the Soviets from the other provinces, and, after the Austrian Peace Treaty of 1955, separating Austria for several decades from the other former crownlands of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The grim realities of the situation prompted revisions of the literary image of the region, which ostensibly gained new momentum after Graham Greene's capturing, in his film script and novel *The Third Man* (1949), the eerie atmosphere of the capital city dominated by black market racketeers and controlled by sinister agents. But the traditional positive image of Austria, adopted and disseminated by many of the visitors in the interwar years, gained new currency with the musical version and the filming of the story of the exiled Trapp family in *The Sound of Music* in the late 1950s and 1960s.