

Teaching Austria

© Modern Austrian Literature and Culture Association

VOLUME 2, 2006

Dream and Reality: Turn-of-the-Century Vienna – With On-Site Field Trip

Anne Close Ulmer
Carleton College

During the 2005-2006 academic year, I had the opportunity to try out a new, expanded format for a course I had taught before. The class focused on the culture, literature, history, architecture and music of Vienna around 1900. Readings and discussion were in German, with a prerequisite of our fourth-term Intermediate German class. We have a small department, and a small pool of German students, so we find it difficult to require sequential courses beyond our initial language sequence for our upper-level offerings. However, most of the students in the course had participated in one of our term-long overseas seminars, which meant that they had spent 10 weeks in Germany living with families or other students; this greatly increased their comfort level with the language.

Carleton operates on a trimester calendar, with each trimester equivalent (in class minutes) to a semester: the first trimester begins in September and ends just before Thanksgiving; the second begins in early January and runs through early March; the third starts near the end of March, and runs through early June. Students take three courses per term, and the work load is intense. There are advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement. Among the advantages are the variety of classes, the opportunity to take 9 courses in an average year, and the possibility of more students participating in term-long off-campus programs in areas outside their major, since they are dedicating only 1/12 of their terms to the project. One often-mentioned disadvantage of our calendar is the lack of time for revision of papers. The structure of the winter-break seminar encourages the writing and revision of lengthy papers.

The 6-week winter break in Carleton's academic year makes programs like my field trip possible. Students signed up for my fall-term course on Vienna knowing that there was a two-week winter-break field trip associated with it, and also knowing that they would have to register for the winter-term follow-up course. The field trip and the follow-up course each counted as one-half of a regular Carleton course.

The first class resembled my previous on-campus offering. We looked at

- the historical and political background of Vienna
- the *Ringstrasse* and its buildings
- architecture (especially Adolf Loos and Otto Wagner)
- music (especially Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss)
- art (in particular Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka), and
- Peter Altenberg, Karl Krauss, Arthur Schnitzler, and Sigmund Freud.

Intertwined with these figures were some discussions of the coffeehouse milieu in which much of the creative effort of the time took place. Students read most of Carl Schorske's *Fin de siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, of course, and Peter Vergo's *Art in Vienna 1898-1918*. At the beginning of the course I assigned a book in English, Fredrick Morton's *A Nervous Splendor*, to give students unfamiliar with the period a quickly accessible sense of the flavor and cast of characters in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Our primary text was Wunberg's *Die Wiener Moderne*, augmented by additional literary works and several films (see Appendix).

Here are some of the readings we covered, in approximately the following order (most are short pieces from *Die Wiener Moderne*, ed. Wunberg):

- Stefan Zweig, “Die Welt von Sicherheit”
- Felix Salten, “Elisabeth”
- Hermann Bahr, “Osterreichisch”
- Robert Musil, “Kakanien”
- Adolf Loos, “Die potemkische Stadt”
- Arthur Schnitzler, “Antisemitismus in Wien” and “Leutnant Gustl”
- Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Der Tor und der Tod”
- Bruno von Bettelheim, *Freud and Man’s Soul*
- Sigmund Freud and Schnitzler, on dreams
- Hofmannsthal, “Prolog zu *Anatol*”
- Schnitzler, “Anatol”
- Freud, “Hypnose”
- Excerpts by Bahr, Altenberg, Karl Krauss, “Die demolierte Literatur”
Hofmannsthal, “Chandos-Brief”
- Short clips from essays by Ernst Mach, Otto Weininger, and Kokoschka.
- Kokoschka, “Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen.”

The last part of the course focused on the visual arts and architecture, followed by music (Mahler’s “Kindertotenlieder,” Schönberg’s “Das Buch vom hängenden Garten”), and the Strauss/Hofmannsthal collaboration, *Der Rosenkavalier*.

We viewed several films throughout the term. The best of these, which really framed the course, was *Vienna, the Mask of Gold*, by Michael Frayn, available at no cost from the Austrian Cultural Forum. We screened the first of the three Sissi-films (with Romy Schneider); *Vienna 1900* (the Museum of Modern Arts exhibition from 1986); *La Ronde*; a filmed version of Schnitzler’s *Anatol*; two short documentary films on Otto Wagner and Josef Hoffmann, and one on the life and work of Egon Schiele (these were also from the ACF); the library purchased *Bride of the Wind*, a feature film that worked beautifully within the context of the course, since many of our primary figures played roles in the film; and finally *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Students had known from the outset that they needed to select a research topic to pursue in Vienna and to develop into a longer paper. At the end of fall term we devoted two classroom hours to their thumbnail presentations of these topics. Halfway through the fall, in preparation for their talks, students had handed in annotated bibliographies (in German). Their

presentations were about ten minutes long, in German, and proved to be lively and interesting.

Carleton's fall term ends just prior to Thanksgiving. On November 29, students flew in to Vienna, and we met by pre-arrangement at a hotel near the Museum district, where I had arranged living accommodations. Carleton students come from all over the country, so it saved them money to fly from their own part of the country. The College had awarded me a budget of \$20,000. Out of these funds I had to cover students' rooms, funds to pay for the main meal of the day, and all tickets and entrance fees to museums, etc., as well as my own airline ticket and room. I also paid the entrance fees to the various museums, and purchased two weekly traffic passes that covered the subways, streetcars and buses, so students could move freely – and legally – around the city. Students were expected to pay for their own transportation to Vienna and for breakfast and one other meal daily, as well as pocket money. The meal money was dispersed at the college, in dollars, and students were responsible for budgeting it. They were very thrifty, choosing to buy breakfast ingredients at a nearby grocery and eating it in the hotel, rather than going to a coffee house for breakfast. I suspect they lived on kebabs for dinner. As far as I know, nobody ran out of money before the end of the two weeks.

Some students arrived several days prior to our arranged meeting time, and familiarized themselves with the city. The rest showed up at the hotel on time (I had provided them with maps and information as to how to get from the airport to the hotel.) We had an initial dinner at a nearby restaurant.

The structured part of the program began the next day, with a tour of the Ringstrasse led by Dr. Inge Lehne, a highly knowledgeable teacher and scholar with whom I had had the pleasure to work on a previous ten-week program in Vienna in 1986. Students had previously read Carl Schorske's discussion of the buildings around the Ring, as well as the critical comments by architect Adolf Loos (who dismissed Vienna as a "Potemkin City."). At my request, Dr. Lehne gave her tour in German. From the very beginning I was amazed and delighted to find that the group was speaking German virtually all of the time, at least when I was nearby (and, from what I was told, often at other times). Thus the course, which was not focused primarily on language, turned out to be very beneficial for the students' fluency. I think this came about because so many of these students had participated in an early term-length German program.

Here is a list of activities we did as a group:

- the *Ringstrasse* tour
- a tour of the Parliament
- the new (and fabulous) *Leopoldmuseum* (with an amazing array of Klimt, Schiele, and other artists)
- two buildings designed by Adolf Loos, his *Haus am Michaelerplatz* and *Café Museum*
- the *Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien* (more Klimt, Schiele, and the apartment of Adolf Loos)
- the *Karlskirche*
- the Belvedere, in particular the *Österreichische Galerie*
- the *Sezession*, with the Beethoven Frieze and the two Otto Wagner houses on the *Naschmarkt*
- the *Museum für angewandte Kunst* (where we were able to see some original issues of early Secession publications)
- the *Jüdisches Museum der Stadt Wien* (which had a fascinating exhibit on Gustav Mahler)
- the oldest church in Vienna, the *Ruprechtskirche* (open only for a few hours weekly—it is worth the trouble to schedule a visit for those hours)
- Otto Wagner's *Postsparkasse* and *Karlsplatz* station
- the *Museum der Modernen Kunst* (MUMOK)
- the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*
- the Sigmund Freud Museum (with a really worthwhile guided tour)
- the *Albertina* (which fortuitously was featuring a fabulous Egon Schiele exhibit, "Leben und Tod")
- the *Nationalbibliothek* (which was exhibiting the original score of Mozart's Requiem, in honor of the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth); we saw the elegant display hall, complete with globes and immense tomes, as well as the research section, where some students purchased library cards that allowed them to do research
- the *Haus der Musik*, an interesting interactive museum I learned about from the music major in the group
- *Schönbrunn*
- the *Christkindlmarkt* (we saw a LOT of these Christmas markets, since our trip fell in early December)
- the *Hundertwasserhaus* (and *Kunsthau Wien*, for those who chose to go)
- Café Landtmann and Café Central
- Early on we paid a visit to the *Schnitzelwirt* restaurant in the Neubaugasse (great value and good food), and a useful locale for hungry students on a budget.

Clearly this list includes a number of activities here that do not directly pertain to turn-of-the-century Vienna, among them the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, the MUMOK, and the *Hundertwasserhaus*. I nevertheless thought it important for the students to see these, as they are part of the texture of a great city. We ended the official part of our Vienna trip with a festive meal at a *Heurigen* in Hietzing, capped off by each person bringing a small gift (that cost less than 10 Euros) for one other person. Students had at least one entirely unstructured day to do research, and others found additional time between scheduled events. Students made their own arrangements for further travel or return to the United States.

When students reconvened at the College at the beginning of winter term, we had one organizational meeting on the first official class day. During that day we agreed upon the succession of talks to be given in the second half of the term. Each student was responsible for turning in a paper halfway through the term, thus ensuring that all would have a solid draft due at the same time, and giving me time to suggest revisions. They were encouraged to come in for consultations as often as they liked prior to handing in their paper, and some also submitted materials via e-mail, for on-line comments.

After midterm break, we met regularly for three hour-long meetings per week, for student presentations. After some consideration, I decided that these talks could be presented in English, partly because that meant that non-German-speakers could attend the talks. I put together a poster, and distributed copies on various bulletin boards around campus, and one student in the class posted the list to a web site. (See attached poster.)

Each talk was the result of a revision of the initial paper.)This in itself is a luxury at our institution, since the compressed term generally leaves little or no room for revisions.) Each class lasted an hour, with students expected to speak for about thirty to forty minutes, leaving ample time for discussion and snacks. I baked something for the first session, and after that each speaker contributed baked goods for the subsequent speaker. The talks covered a broad range of topics, and the resulting discussion was invariably lively – not just because students wanted to talk about the intersection of the material with their own particular topics (though of course that was important), but because the two weeks in Vienna had given all of them a broad interest in the city and the background to talk about it with considerable sophistication.

Somewhat to my surprise, there actually were visitors at many of our class sessions. One of my colleagues in German attended virtually every presentation; the head of our office for Off-Campus Studies came whenever she had time. And on one memorable occasion, most of the faculty members

of the music department came to hear one of their students speak on Gustav Mahler (one of them even cancelled his own class to attend her presentation).

On the last day, we did a de-briefing and evaluation of the program. When asked what they saw as the primary virtues of this structure of interlocked courses with an intervening field trip, one biology major compared it to a biology lab course. Students can read about a topic, and find it moderately interesting, but when they arrive in the lab they are fascinated by the hands-on experience. Vienna was the lab portion of the course. We are hoping that this argument may help us convince the people with the purse strings that it is worth the investment for the College to fund more programs like this. Presently the College supports two winter-break programs in an average year, which means no department can rely on being able to offer one on a regular basis. We would love to offer such a course regularly, every second or third year; for students and for teachers, it is one of the best learning experiences available.

Appendix

1. Texts

Bettelheim, Bruno. *Freud and Man's Soul*. New York: Vintage, 1984.

Morton, Frederic. *A Nervous Splendor: Vienna 1888/1889*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980.

Schorske, Carl E. *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York: Vintage, 1981.

Vergo, Peter. *Art in Vienna 1898-1918: Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and Their Contemporaries*. London: Phaidon, 1975.

Wunberg, Gotthart, with Johannes J. Braakenburg, eds. *Die Wiener Moderne: Literatur, Kunst und Musik zwischen 1890 und 1910*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981.

2. Films

Anatol (dir. Otto Schenk, 1962).

Bride of the Wind (dir. Bruce Beresford, 2001).

La Ronde (dir. Max Ophüls, 1950).

Der Rosenkavalier (dir. Paul Czinner, 1962).

Sissi (dir. Ernst Marischka, 1955).

Vienna 1900 (produced Metropolitan Arts Inc. with the Austrian Press and Information Service, the Austrian National Tourist Office, and Lufthansa; narrator: Stephen Toulmin, 1986) (In conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art exhibition "Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture and Design" [1986]).

Vienna, the Mask of Gold (dir. Michael Frayn, BBC, 1977).



Dream and Reality: Turn-of-the-century Vienna

DATE	SPEAKER	TOPIC
Feb. 8, 2006	Kate Potvin	Franz-Josef and the Revolution of 1848
2/10	Seth Lippincott	Crown Prince Rudolf, politics, death
2/13	Jayne Johnson	Gustav Klimt and the women in his life
2/15	Erika Shadduck	Adolf Loos: Architect or Social Critic?
2/17	Anna Zimmer	Berta Zuckerkandl - "The most marvelous and witty woman in Vienna."
2/20	Nick Kilburg	Egon Schiele: Facets of truth
2/22	Rachel Flamm	Gustav Mahler and Viennese Identity in his Music
2/24	Sara Tapsak	Freud: Death and Literature
2/27	Jane Larson	Kokoschka and Alma Mahler's Influence
3/1	Becky Dernbach	The Jews in Vienna
3/3	Seth Goodspeed	Karl Kraus
3/6	Seth Fowler	The Coffeehouse Culture in Vienna
3/8	Emily Johnson	Peter Altenberg

All talks to be given at Carleton College,
 Scoville 102. Monday and Wednesday
 from 9:50-10:50 a.m., Friday from 9:40-10:40 a.m.