

Schwarz, Agatha, Ed. *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe : the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its Legacy*. University of Ottawa Press, 2012. Pp. 344 & ePub ebook.

Reviewed by Zsuzsanna Varga, University of Glasgow

The volume under consideration here offers an interesting addition to the relatively small but impressively varied output of the University of Ottawa Press, which largely focuses on humanities and social sciences in the main language areas. As scholars attempting to publish works about Czech and Hungarian cultural matters often discover, most established publishing houses shy away from volumes offering to attract supposedly limited attention, while, ironically, scholars and students interested in Central European matters often complain about the paucity of modern scholarly sources on the cultural and intellectual history of the region. By providing a series of thoroughly researched articles on some aspects of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the fin-de-siècle, Agatha Schwartz's carefully edited volume helps to fill a gap in Central European studies.

But what exactly is Central Europe? The fact that geographical terms, apparently objective and self-explanatory, but in reality ideologically-laden, historically changeable and often elusive, have been a subject of constant redefinition in the last twenty years. The territory whose culture -- literature, sports and cultural history, intellectual and social history-- these essays examine, has been notoriously frequently redefined, and even now, non-specialized audiences often expect a detailed explanation of its whereabouts. For social and political scientists, the countries concerned would be impossible to be discussed in the same volume, as for them, the most self-explanatory and helpful definition is still a simple binary division between Eastern Europe and the Western one. The concept of Central Europe, first appearing precisely around 1900, re-emerged as a powerful organising principle after the fall of Communism, although many would argue that omission of the Balkans and Romania from some definitions of Central Europe, in turn, creates as many problems as it offers to resolve. As a compromise, the term East Central Europe has been recently brought back to use, most prominently, by the the four volume *History of the Literary Cultures East Central Europe*, edited by Marcel Cornis Pope and John Neubauer (2007) which discusses cultural and literary history of territories falling between Germany and Russia.

Schwartz's volume opted for a relatively unproblematic definition of the term 'Central Europe,' defining it as the Dual Monarchy at the turn of the century, and the choice of the timeframe carefully sidesteps the complications forced on the scholar by post-1945 political events. It is time and place – the turn of the century and the Dual Monarchy – that provide the cohesion to the volume's otherwise somewhat disparate essays. The collection grew out of a conference that took place at the University of Ottawa in May 2008, with the participation of scholars from North- America and Europe. In retrospect, it is somewhat difficult to define the conferences's core intellectual enquiry. There are several recognizable themes underlying the essays: gender, modernity, psychoanalysis and historical legacy are the key motives which bring together the essays that cover a range of disciplines. As Schwartz quotes Norman Stone in her detailed and closely argued introduction, it was 'in Vienna that most of the 20th-century intellectual world was invented' and the other major cities in the Monarchy did not only receive and accept modernity, but also participated in its cultural reproduction at home, and, significantly they also redirected it towards the major cultural centers.

The themes of gender, modernity and representational practices are examined in a range of traditional and more recently emerging disciplines. Several essays discuss literary works mostly only known to experts in the field, such as Helga Thomson's elegant essay on Grete Meisel-Hess's fiction, or Marcin Filipowicz's informative narrative on misogyny in Czech modernist poetry. Another fascinating group of essays concerns psychoanalysis, with an emphasis on women analysts' contribution to the discipline (see, for example, Anna Borgos's contribution) whilst another on less-well-known Hungarian analysts (J. Edgar Bauer and Ferenc Erős). The historical studies of Jewish salonières give a welcome addition to existing studies mostly focusing on women of Berlin,

exemplified by the work of scholars such as Emily Bilski and Emily Braun. It can only be hoped that such work is continued about salons in other parts of the Monarchy, especially from a comparative perspective. The part of the collection with arguably the most popular appeal consists in the two chapters that concern visual cultures: Jill Scott's study on the mythological symbolism of Klimt's *The Kiss* and its hidden agenda of redefining masculinity and rewriting the painter's identity into the social fabric of artistic life in fin-de-siècle Vienna is by far the most closely argued and elegantly presented piece of the collection, while Susan Ingram's study of the Dual Monarchy's self-representation at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago provides a truly comparative perspective in the field of cultural memory studies. Judit Szapor's essay on the cult of Sissi appears to be a perceptive first study of a possible larger project on the role of the symbolic potential of the Queen consort in the era of nascent mass culture. The volume raises two particularly important perspectives for students of cultural history and memory. One stems from our comparative instincts. It is probably the consequence of the region's notorious multiplicity of languages that comparative studies, whether it is the study of the Monarchy's center in comparison with its relative peripheries, or that of the regional centers within the Monarchy, are comparatively absent. Indeed, one of the regrettable legacies of the Monarchy's disintegration is that most scholars can competently examine only one of its constituent parts. We can only hope that new generations will be able to do thorough comparative examinations, for instance, on the influence of French symbolism on Hungarian and Croatian poetry -- the country, incidentally, whose art and writing are completely absent in this volume, and so are references to Pozsony/Pressburg/Bratislava or to Transylvania. Again, we can only hope that such studies are currently in preparation.

The other niggling question is the place and role of such volumes in the field of current Anglo-American academia. Central Europe, as the volume defines it, does not overlap with current structural units in the teaching of humanities. Language and literature departments are still organized on the basis of individual languages (for instance, German or French), while less-taught languages, such as Hungarian, find (occasionally unwelcoming) homes in language conglomerates such as Slavonic studies. The recently established discipline of area studies, on the other hand, generally focuses on social science and contemporary or history. Dual Monarchy studies, which has the potential for becoming a fascinating new development, would be a difficult fit with either of these structures, although as several essays in the volume (foremost Jill Scott's study) contend that the intricate connections between politics, the history of science, and literary and visual arts were a deeply felt reality for many cultural agents. It is therefore all the more appreciated that the University of Alberta has offered home to such an institution under the name of Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, and it is further hoped that similar institutions will soon be established in the United Kingdom.