

Schwartz, Agatha. *Shifting Voices. Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-siècle Austria and Hungary*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. 278 pp. ISBN: 9780773532861 hardcover, \$80.00.

Reviewed for Women in German by Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger

Agatha Schwartz has made a remarkable contribution to feminist scholarship by shedding light on the writings of women who lived in Vienna, Budapest, and other Eastern European cities of the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire during its final decades. Most of the women found in Schwartz's book had been marginalized or completely silenced after WWI and during the Nazi era. The appendix lists Schwartz's painstaking compilation of approximately 100 women poets, authors, and playwrights (e.g., Elsa Asenijef, Rosa Mayreder, Helene von Druskowitz, Auguste Fickert, Else Jerusalem-Kotányi, Emma Ritoók, Margit Kaffka, Terka Lux, Anna Tutsek, Zseni Várnai), their short biographic data (some of it was no longer recoverable), and titles of their vast literary output – fiction, non-fiction, and theoretical texts.

The fin-de-siècle era in the Dual Monarchy was a politically turbulent, culturally rich, and, for the bourgeois women, socioculturally exciting period during which the bourgeois women's movement flourished and celebrated important achievements ("Introduction," 11-16). It is thus not surprising that many women used their talents to further their cause. Women abandoned their role as the "bearers of meaning" and became the "makers of meaning" by participating "in the creation of a discourse of their own" (8). Their writings dealt with, reflected, and refracted the sociopolitical and sociocultural needs of their time: "the transformation of gender roles," the "re-designing of the standard of femininity and masculinity," and "a shift in power relations between the sexes" (195). Schwartz explains that fin-de siècle feminism and women's fiction has a "utopian dimension" that "implies a transformation of the existing reality... [and] therefore has a revolutionary potential... [Nevertheless], all of these narratives bear witness to the persistent dominance of a patriarchal social structure and its value" (200).

The fictional and non-fictional texts that Schwartz studies in her book present a dynamic interplay of both feminist and traditional or conservative voices that echo the time's feeling of crisis, including the crisis of identity. In order to separate the interwoven but differing voices, and to interpret and make sense of their co-existence, Schwartz skillfully applies Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, Sigrid Weigel's notion of double focus, and the psychoanalytic concept of intersubjectivity. She states that the "attempt to define and construct intersubjectivity as a timely alternative to the existing patriarchal subject-object relations runs like a leitmotif through both the theoretical and fictional texts, in Austria and in Hungary" (199) and demonstrates quite convincingly how the co-existence of the feminist and traditional voices supports the women's political and cultural struggles.

The study is divided into seven chapters, each of which is devoted to a topic or theme that makes it possible for the reader to encounter several texts more than once. Schwartz thoughtfully selected her themes and topics according to their significance with respect to the sociopolitical endeavors of the various bourgeois women's movements or to the intellectual discourse of the time, such as access to higher education for women, misogynist discourse and viriphobia, and aspects of desire and the moral double standard on female sexuality. The scholar also devotes a chapter to theoretical writings by activist women such as Rosa Mayreder, Marianne Hainisch, Grete Meisel-Hess of Austria, and Rózsa Schwimmer and Szidónia Wilhelm of Hungary. And in her final chapter, she examines several novels with regard to one of the central topoi of modernity, the city.

Despite the fact that (I dare say) most scholars of German-speaking literature do not read Hungarian, Schwartz's study pushes open the door to the literary world of Austro-Hungarian women. *Shifting Voices* is an excellent resource. It is solidly researched, well-written, and thus an eminently important book that deserves to become a staple in European women's literature seminars on Modernity (i.e., comparative literature studies, German studies, East European studies, cultural studies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire).

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