

**Agatha Schwartz: *Shifting Voices. Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca, 2008. pp. 280, illus.**

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The changing and controversial period of the turn of the century, which involved the destabilization of coherent (national, social, class, gender, etc.) identities and autonomous subjects, has proved to be a particularly fruitful era for gender-focused research. What makes the book of Agatha Schwartz special is its geographical scope and comparative view. Women's movements and women's literature are discussed in the context of the major social, industrial and cultural changes, the intellectual and art movements of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was a place and time where and when women faced the possibilities and limits of independent existence and active participation in culture, involving tensions between traditional and modern gender roles both for women and men. Women with intellectual or creative ambitions stepped out of the private sphere, while they could not (or did not even want to) completely abandon their traditional female roles, either. Thus they found themselves in a kind of a liminal, mediating role between being outsiders and active participants in public spaces.

Changing roles were preceded and followed by changing ideologies and ideals. Lively debates were generated along different ideological commitments, published in a set of treatises, essays, and fictional works. These texts reflect upon and generate change at the same time. The discourses of literature, politics, or psychoanalysis intertwine; the different representations, literary and "extra-literary" views of gender roles mutually influence one another.

Schwartz, who is of Hungarian origin from Vojvodina (now a region of Serbia) and currently the director of the department of modern languages and literatures at the University of Ottawa, explores these textual and extra-textual relations and phenomena of changing women's roles. Her work can be placed between the fields of literary, social and women's history, with some background and references on feminist theory (mostly Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity and Lichtenberg Ettinger's Matrix-theory), literary theory (Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*), and psychoanalysis (with references to Freud, Lacan, and Sándor Ferenczi).

Since the book is addressed to an English-speaking audience for whom the theoretical apparatus may be familiar but the discussed authors and texts are mostly unknown, it is inevitable that Agatha Schwartz had to provide a lot of introductory information on the socio-historical context around the formation of the texts and also to provide a synopsis of previous research on the subject. As the author declares, however, the book is not supposed to be a history of women's movements, but the analysis of – fictional and nonfictional – texts. "I am more interested in a discussion of the essays produced by the most outstanding feminists in Austria and Hungary and, particularly, of women writer's fiction" (11).

The seven chapters are structured basically along the different issues: political rights, education, profession, sexuality, and the city. After outlining the historical context and the theoretical background of the book in the Introduction, the first chapter provides a review of the feminist discourse and the antecedents of first-wave feminist movement in Austria and Hungary. Schwartz discusses the essays of Marianne Hainisch and Irma von Troll-Borostyáni in Austria and that of Antonia De Gerando's in Hungary, who raise the issues of basic inequalities regarding women's paid work, political rights, access to education, the moral double standard, or prostitution. In a parallel manner, she analyzes and compares the novels

of the Austrian Julie Thenen, Franziska von Kapff-Essenther and Minna Kautsky and the Hungarian Stefánia Wohl, all of whom discussing similar issues of women's emancipation. In this early period of the 1880s-90s, radical feminism was not yet existent in Hungary; what is more remarkable is a patriotic tone of Hungarian female writers, suggesting that women's education is necessary for the nation's survival. A characteristic feature of the discourses is that they tend to internalize some traditional views while arguing for equal rights – which might be both a narrative strategy and a transitional state of their roles and opinions, a phenomenon of hybrid voices that the author connects with Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*.

The second chapter discusses the development of the bourgeois women's movement along its major issues: education, suffrage, sexual equality, marriage, and motherhood. Essays by Troll-Borostyáni, Hainisch, Grete Meisel-Hess, Auguste Fickert are presented from the Austrian side, and those of Rózsa Schwimmer, Szikra (Mrs. Kálmán Teleki), Sarolta Geöcze and Szidónia Wilhelm from Hungary. It might be surprising that there were no formal links between the Austrian and Hungarian women's movements at that time, but instead, both of them maintained more connections with the German women's movement.

The next chapter explores the interaction between feminist, misogynic, and viriphobic (man-hating) discourses. The author introduces the influential "philosophy" of Otto Weininger and Paul Möbius and the replies of Meisel-Hess, Mayreder, Troll-Borostyáni, and the Hungarian Mrs. Pál Veres and Margit Kaffka. She also presents "viriphobic" authors like Helene von Druskowitz, Elsa Asenijeff, and Renée Erdős who (or whose fictive characters) argue for an alternative female space, or even for a separation from patriarchal society, a question that has not lost its relevance even today.

The fourth chapter explores the issues of women's education and professions, and the phenomenon of the "New Woman" as represented in women's fiction. The reader can get closer to the typical characters of female doctors, teachers, and artists in the novels of Troll-Borostyáni and Meisel-Hess and the less successful heroines of their Hungarian contemporaries like Kaffka, Anna Szederkényi, Terka Lux, and Emma Ritoók. The plots illustrate generational gaps, individual conflicts and transitions, with usually failed private life, with the female characters mostly represented as either asexual beings or as ones who fail to find an equitable relationship – suggesting that stereotypes and reality cannot be clearly separated.

The subject of the fifth chapter is how sexuality and female desire are represented in women's fiction. The most typical problem written about is the moral double standard and its consequences on female sexuality – including hysteria or domestic violence (about which Austrian authors seem to be more open). The rare and subtle subject of lesbian love can be found in the narratives of Janitschek, Meisel-Hess and Kaffka. The genre of diary is also characteristic of the era, with a narrative deconstructing (while also vindicating) a unified subject. The protagonists of the analyzed novels often get through personal crises, including addictions or suicide (as in the works of Vera, Else Jerusalem-Kotányi, or Elsa Asenijeff). A strong scientific interest in female sexuality, particularly in hysteria is prevalent in the era in the work of psychiatrists and later psychoanalysts, and these theories appear in some novels as well represented by the characters (as in Ritoók or Kaffka). Schwartz also uses the psychoanalytic concepts of Freud, Ferenczi, Lacan and Kristeva as a theoretical background for her analyses, and seems to most identify with the so-called Matrix-theory of Lichtenberg Ettinger. (The "Matrix", draws the repressed feminine and the pre-Oedipal into the realm of the Symbolic.) Schwartz uses the term for the analysis of a novel of Grete Meisel-Hess. Her gendered reading shows the utopian, revolutionary potential these narratives carry (especially those of Szikra, Mayreder and Meisel-Hess) whose influence reaches beyond the literary sphere.

The sixth chapter shows some narratives that represent a backlash against feminist thought, internalizing conservative gender norms or at least revealing ambivalent attitudes towards women's emancipation. At the same time, these narratives written by Janitschek, Szikra, and Renée Erdős, use the tool of irony or give voice to different viewpoints and ways of life through their different characters, producing a heteroglot narrative. The outcomes of these novels are dominantly conventional, but they still leave a space for alternative identifications for the reader.

The focus of the last chapter is the motif of the city, with a discussion of novels representing women's presence in public urban spaces, the female *flâneur* as an emblematic figure of modernity who nevertheless does not yet feel completely confident in these spaces (cf. Györgyi Horváth's study on the female *flâneuses* of Kaffka's novel *Állomások* (Stages)). ("Köszalónők a régi Budapesten. Társadalmi térhasználat és női művészlét". In: Virág Varga – Zoltán Zsávolya (eds.): *Nő, tükrök, írás*. Ráció, Budapest, 2009.) The novels of Szederkényi, Lux, and Szikra depicting Budapest and those of Janitschek and Meisel-Hess depicting Vienna or Berlin as the truly free metropolis, represent different approaches to the city, which can be considered both as a place of moral decay and decadence criticized by the narrators, but also a source of fascination. The city itself is often portrayed as feminine, an organic body exposed to the male desire and gaze. Lux's novel (*Budapest*) is exceptional in this regard since here the protagonist is equated with the city, manifesting her female point of view.

The brief conclusion of the volume is followed by short biographies of the authors discussed, and a bibliography of Hungarian fin-de-siècle women writers, but unfortunately there is no bibliography provided for the Austrian writers.

On the whole, I missed some more original interpretations and analyses in the book. Mostly it reviews the selected texts and points out some significant motives, and the applied theories are not always built into the analysis in an organic way, but in many cases somewhat didactically attached. The interpretation of the texts mostly follows thematic lines, while the literary works could bear more remarks about narration or style. Also, the comparative approach between the Austrian and Hungarian social processes and texts could be more articulated. The author is a bit lost in reviewing the texts, which is partly understandable, but the reviews sometimes tend to substitute for the overall and in-depth conclusions. At the end of the third chapter, for example, speaking about the interaction of feminism and viriphobia with misogyny, after presenting a set of essays, she concludes that it can "broaden our understanding of the many faces of modernity" (96), a very compact statement that would require more exposition. Or, here is another example from the Conclusion: "This study has shown that various discourses other than feminism (such as [...] psychoanalysis, eugenics, or socialism) influenced the production of the texts in question" (195-96). In fact, these very interesting and complex interrelations between the diverse social and intellectual trends and women's movements and literature are mostly described by general statements.

Woman appears as the Other both symbolically and practically in all fields of contemporary culture from psychoanalysis to philosophy and literature. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century brings about remarkable changes in this sense, too. Robert Musil puts it in a very graphic way in his essay "The woman of yesterday and tomorrow": "Woman has got tired of being the ideal of man who does not have a real power for idealization anymore; so she decided to figure out herself as her own image of desire. [...] Woman does not want to be an ideal anymore. She wants to create ideals herself." The New Woman seems to both destabilize and at the same time vindicate an autonomous subject through mediations, "horizontal and vertical" transitions between outsidership and participation, separation/isolation and multiple (familial, professional, social or activist) attachments, working "against and within" (Teresa de Lauretis: "Habit Changes." *differences*, 1994, 2-3). The New Woman thus contributes to

the expansion of limits and expectations in society and art and, putting it in more general terms, to the deconstruction or blurring of the very dichotomy of Subject and Other.

A lot of issues raised in the book have not lost their relevance today, for, as the author points out, although the most essential inequalities between the sexes have ceased, the latent preconceptions and prescriptions of “proper” spheres and roles for women are still influential. Agatha Schwartz has created a useful and informative handbook elaborating a very rich material, in which she clearly has not meant to produce brand-new theoretical or philological innovations, but she does render a well-structured and -interpreted overview of a special social-historical situation as women experienced it.