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Literary Vienna in Berta Zuckerkandl's *Österreich intim*

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Berta Zuckerkandl, a journalist and a writer, famous for her Viennese salon, was friend with the most important people during the fin de siècle, including with popular writers such as Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan Zweig. In her memoirs, Österreich intim. Erinnerungen 1892-1942, *which she wrote during her exile in Algeria at the beginning of the 1940's, the author recalls her most important conversations, letters and events. This paper concentrates on the literary figures described in Berta Zuckerkandl's book. Besides the above-mentioned writers, Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth und Hermann Bahr are also taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is asked whether the simple analysis of the text is necessary in order to fully understand such a complex literary movement. I have come to the conclusion that, in this case, the historical and cultural contexts play a very important role and, therefore, should not be neglected.*

Keywords: *Wiener Moderne, literature, Austria-Hungary, salon, theatre*

1. Introduction

The Viennese Modern age has always played a significant role in the history of Austria and nowadays it is still considered to be a fascinating period, especially because of the work of many famous personalities in areas such as art, literature, medicine, architecture, music or philosophy. It was the turn of the century when Sigmund Freud had published his masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams* and established psychoanalysis. Other movements, such as *Secession,* made the Austrian metropolis famous abroad. The works of Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig and many others have gained recognition not only in Austria, but also worldwide. However, in this apparently peaceful and productive atmosphere, attitudes such as antifeminism and especially anti-Semitism started to gain more and more sympathizers, which eventually led to the unfortunate events from the first half of the 20th century.

Beginning with the 18th century, the salons, which usually belonged to well-educated Jewish hostesses, were an important meeting place for intellectuals. A century later, Josephine von Werthheimstein's villa was one of the leading salons in

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the Austrian capital. A similar liberal atmosphere existed also in Berta Zuckerkandl's salon, which played a crucial role in the establishment of the *Secession* (Lorenz 1995, 22). It is also considered to be the last significant salon in Europe (Schulte 2006, 13). Berta Zuckerkandl had contact with the most important personalities from Vienna and from other European countries, especially France. Her list of usual guests is impressive. Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel, Felix Salten, Raoul Auernheimer, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Egon Friedell, Thaddäus Rittner, Max Burckhard, Max Reinhardt, Hermann Bahr, Gustav Mahler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, artists from the *Secession* and the *Wiener Werkstätte* are just a few examples (Schulte 2006, 90). In the period between the world wars, her salon was one of the few meeting places, where people of different political orientations could gather in the same room (Schulte 2006, 212).

However, Berta Zuckerkandl was more than a wife, mother and hostess. She was a very active journalist, translator, secret diplomat and even a writer. Her memoirs, which she wrote during her exile in Algeria during World War II, were first published in 1970 with the title *Österreich intim* (Zuckerkandl 2013, 7). Her book, which contains many reproduced telephone or personal conversations, letters and descriptions of events and people, is a representation of the Viennese Modern Age and its most important personalities and events. Most of the people described were Berta Zuckerkandl's friends or persons who played an important role in Austria's cultural history. For instance, Arthur Schnitzler, Hermann Bahr, Gustav Mahler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt or Gustav Klimt appear in many chapters, being close friends with the author. Even though Berta Zuckerkandl was more an art than a literature critic, she was definitely a literature lover and, therefore, her memoirs contain an accurate portrayal of the Viennese literature at the turn of the century and between the two world wars.

2. The life and work of Berta Zuckerkandl

The author of *Österreich intim*, who was born in 1864, was the daughter of the journalist Moriz Szeps. Her father, who was a continuous source of inspiration for her, was chief editor of the newspaper *Wiener Morgenpost*, which began to have a liberal orientation under his guidance. In another book written by Berta Zuckerkandl, *My Life and History*, she describes in detail the friendship that her father had with the Crown Prince Rudolf. As a consequence, she was deeply influenced by both of them (Schulte 2006, 23). From an early age, Berta was surrounded by important personalities from Vienna, being raised in an intellectual atmosphere. She and her sister Sophie could not attend school, because there was no such opportunity for girls during that period. However, their father insisted that they should have a proper education. Szeps used to bring different tutors, some of them being his own employees. One of Berta Zuckerkandl's first encounters with the

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literary world was in 1880 during an international writers' congress, when her father made great efforts to invite also French writers to the event. The congress was indeed a great success and, to Moriz Szeps's pride, it was possible to make some steps in approaching French and Austrian literature (Meysels 1984, 21). Years later, her sister Sophie got married to Paul Clemenceau, the younger brother of Georges Clemenceau, the soon-to-be Prime Minister of France, and moved to Paris, where she also had a well-known salon and an admiring list of guests. Berta Zuckerkandl's admiration for the French culture lasted for the rest of her life and was undoubtedly encouraged by her close relationship with Sophie Clemenceau and her sister's new family. Being surrounded by her freethinking father, her husband Emil Zuckerkandl, who, besides being a successful doctor, was also a great lover of art and a supporter of women's right to study, and her sister Sophie, it does not come as a surprise that Berta Zuckerkandl managed to be friend with some of the greatest names in the Viennese culture. In the introduction to her book *My Life and History*, the author confirms the above-mentioned observations:

> First and foremost, because of the brilliant part played by my father in his country's affairs and in international politics, and also through my connections with so many outstanding personalities in European art, politics, and science, my life has been lived behind the scenes of much of the drama of the last sixty years of Europe's history (Zuckerkandl 1939, ix).

3. Literary figures in *Österreich intim*

Berta Zuckerkandl had lifelong friendships with many Austrian writers and some of them, like Arthur Schnitzler or Hugo von Hofmannsthal, appear frequently in her memoirs. For instance, she met Schnitzler for the first time in the soon-to-be writer's home. Although her first encounter with Schnitzler was far from successful and the young writer did not make a good impression, Berta Zuckerkandl admits to her sister that Schnitzler is indeed extremely talented. The premiere of his play *Liebelei*, which took place at the Burgtheater, was a great success and Schnitzler became suddenly one of the most admired writers in Vienna. In reality, only the fact that his play was performed at the famous Burgtheater was already a victory. This was the greatest dream of all Viennese writers, because this honor came along with many life-long advantages (Zweig 2013, 33).

Even the famous actor Alexander Girardi refused at first to play the old Weyring in *Liebelei*. Girardi was no newcomer on the stage, but he felt overwhelmed by Schnitzler's immense talent. In this case, like in many others described in *Österreich intim*, Berta Zuckerkandl was involved in this matter and made an encounter between Schnitzler and Girardi possible, in order to release the tension of the actor.

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Berta Zuckerkandl was not the only one who considered Schnitzler to be a miracle for literature. The philosopher Ernest Mach considered him to be Sigmund Freud's predecessor. Dreams have a significant role in Schnitzler's writings and according to the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel, Schnitzler's analyses could be an important research subject. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, shared these opinions. Schnitzler confesses to Berta Zuckerkandl that Freud told him in one of his letters that he was the real discoverer of psychoanalysis. Those who are familiar with Schnitzler's life and work already know that the correspondence between him and Freud is a fascinating chapter that proves once again that psychoanalysis and literature have more in common than it appears at first sight. Undoubtedly, for the author of *Österreich intim,* Schnitzler was not only a brilliant writer, but also a good friend. In fact, it was Schnitzler who advised Berta Zuckerkandl in the first place to start a diary that, according to him, would be able to reflect a whole era.

Many Austrian writers, although they gained fame and acknowledgment, remained at the end of their lives feeling unappreciated and deserted. Although one of the best examples in this case is Stefan Zweig, who ended up his life tragically, Hugo von Hofmannsthal was no exception. Without knowing the writer personally, Berta Zuckerkandl had the chance to read his play called *Jedermann*, which did not leave a good impression on her. The journalist considered Hofmannsthal's play to be superficial. However, after some years, she changed her mind and started seeing Hofmannsthal's writing from another point of view. More than that, she described him as being an absolute gentleman, even if he hated any kind of formalities, was always in a rush and was also completely unpredictable, which could be noticed also in his correspondence. Moreover, according to the journalist, his letters are some of the most fascinating in world literature.

An occurrence that took place on the streets of Salzburg shows Hofmannsthal's popularity among people of all ages and social classes. A group of children was playing on their own improvised stage the play *Jedermann.* They knew the lines by heart and were full of joy and enthusiasm. The actor Alexander Moissi thought of this scene as the most beautiful confirmation that Hofmannsthal is indeed appreciated by a whole country. In the chapter *Das Salzburger Große Theater,* Berta Zuckerkandl describes a scene that took place in her house in Salzburg, where Hofmannsthal read the new version of Calderóns's *Großes Welttheater*. Some of the guests were Hermann Bahr, Josef Beer-Hofmann, Arthur Schnitzler und Felix Salten. After the first half of the lecture, Hofmannsthal became pale and lay down for a few minutes. However, he did not want to give up on his lecture and despite all the requests, he went on with his reading.

At the end of his life, Hugo von Hofmannsthal confesses to Berta Zuckerkandl that he does not find happiness in life anymore. Somehow, he anticipated his death. In 1929, his son Franzl committed suicide and soon after, Hofmannsthal passed away, too. Franzl von Hofmannsthal was not the only one who

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decided to end up his life. Heinrich, Ernest Mach's son, committed suicide in 1894 and Lilli, Schnitzler's daughter, took her life in 1928 (Green 1990, 7).

The author of *Österreich intim* has dedicated a chapter of her book to Stefan Zweig, one of the bestselling German-speaking writers at the beginning of the 20th century. Berta Zuckerkandl spoke to Zweig for the first time after she published in 1915 an article about the refugees that were expelled from Galicia. In her article, she wrote that the authorities should help the Jewish children from Galicia like they did the children in Belgium. The day after, she received a letter from Stefan Zweig and from that moment on, the two of them remained good friends. In her book, Berta Zuckerkandl confesses that it is hard for her to speak about Zweig. It is impossible for her to reveal intimate details from his life, because he would consider this as a betrayal. Besides being a very successful author, Zweig was not fond of the outside world, even if he knew this world as no one other. According to the author, there was no country, race or language that had not been part of his work. She considers Zweig to be a symbol for Austria's mission of bonding nations.

In the chapter dedicated to Franz Werfel, during a conversation with Berta Zuckerkandl that took place in 1931, the poet Werfel asks himself about the role of the poets and writers in general in society. For the readers, reading is nothing more than a time killer and surely not a reason for awakening or reflection. Somehow, the writer encourages society, instead of making a difference in the world through his writing. Werfel, born in 1890, was one of the poets who were deeply influenced by the changes that took place in Austria-Hungary. He had the misfortune to spend the precious years of his youth in crises and confusion. World War I, the decline of the empire, the revolution, the deprivation and the class conflict had left a mark on him. His doubts, his regrets, his feelings of confusion are reflected in his works. Berta Zuckerkandl considers him a great poet, who had a revolutionary beginning. His play, *Bockgesang*, is a symbol of the revolution and his novel, *Die Geschwister von Neapel*, proves once again that love and not a rule-based life can bring a family close together.

A somehow similar story belongs to Joseph Roth, whose writing is a portrayal of the glory of a lost era. A great admirer of the monarchy, Roth is the epitome of a whole generation that does not believe in the future anymore. For him, the monarchy with all its flaws represented a community where races or languages did not play any role. Indeed, Joseph Roth was a European of the 19th century, who has always fought for freedom and equality for all nations. Concepts such as tolerance and humanity have accompanied him during his whole life (Kesten 1949, 16). Vienna was also known for having a long tradition of maintaining peace among the different rival groups in the monarchy, but also for its social justice (Green 1990, 16), which is what Roth appreciated in the first place. Because of his admiration for the monarchy, Berta Zuckerkandl calls him the "bard" of the Franz Joseph era.

One of the author's closest friends and in the same time one of the most popular figures in her book is Hermann Bahr, the "pope" of Austrian literary

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criticism (Le Rider 1997, 13). The first conversation with Bahr in Berta Zukerkandl's memoirs takes place in 1892, three years after Bahr left Wien for Paris, where he had the opportunity to experience great things. He mentions Zola, the impressionists, Dostoyevsky and Stendhal. After these years spent abroad, he compares Vienna to a cemetery. At first, Berta Zuckerkandl tends to agree with him. All the great institutions in Vienna are disregarded and, therefore, the quality of the events is a far cry from the early days. The opera is completely neglected, the Burgtheater does not seem to care for the German literature anymore and the Künstlerhaus promotes only untalented artists. However, she still has two great hopes. Science, especially natural sciences and medicine, and the Viennese operetta seem to flourish. Thanks to artists such as the composer Johann Strauss and actor Alexander Girardi, who she considers to be Austrian wonders, there is still hope for the Viennese culture.

Berta Zuckerkandl has been a friend to Hermann Bahr for forty years, until his death. She appreciates him for his spiritual energy. He used to read everything he could find, from novels to plays, essays, journals, philosophical works and he had a great desire to participate in the world and be in the same time productive. She was not the only one who praised the literary critic. In *Österreich intim,* the philosopher Ernest Mach said once about Bahr that he was a philosopher, a journalist, a poet, a freethinker and a mystic. He gathered around him a group of talented writers like Richard Beer-Hofmann, Peter Altenberg or Arthur Schnitzler, who were soon to be called "Jung-Wien". Of course, "Jung-Wien" and Bahr, their 'prophet' were everything but common. They had to face a lot of criticism, especially from the famous Karl Kraus, the founder of *Die Fackel* (Meysels 1984, 64). The theater and the 'Wiener Moderne' in literature and art were his life. He fought for a new Austrian art that could stand up to Europe (Widder 1963, 28). No wonder that Berta Zuckerkandl and Hermann Bahr had been friends for so many years. They shared the same view on Austrian culture and, of course, literature, striving for its flourishing and international recognition.

4. Synchronic and diachronic interpretation of *Österreich intim*

After a short presentation of synchrony and diachrony in linguistics and literary studies, I will analyse Berta Zuckerkandl's memoirs and especially the literary milieu from both perspectives, emphasizing the importance of diachrony in this particular text.

4.1. Synchrony and diachrony in linguistics and literary studies

Even if discussions about the problem of synchrony and diachrony were approached by some of the most important linguists of the 19th century, it was Ferdinand de

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Saussure who defined and distinguished the two terms. Synchrony refers to the language at a certain moment in the history, while diachrony indicates the evolution and the changes of the language throughout history (Negrescu-Babuș 2013, 68). For Saussure, synchrony and diachrony are two different areas of study and he separates the historical linguistics from the descriptive linguistics (Corniță 2001, 43). He also accentuates the importance of the synchronic perspective. This eventually led to a static perspective in the study of linguistics. Later on, the Prague school of linguistics affirms that there are no boundaries between the two methods. Eugen Coșeriu also approaches this problem in his book *Sincronia, diacronia e historia* (1958). According to Coșeriu, the synchronic and diachronic linguistics are not contradictory, the synchronic linguistics being a part of the diachronic linguistics. The language is in a continuous change, but this change does not damage the language. On the contrary, it renews the system. This is why the language exceeds the synchronic state (Corniță 2001, 44-45).

The distinction between synchrony and diachrony plays a significant role in the literary studies, too. In this case, diachrony refers to the development of the text, the historical context and the reconstruction of the story. In other words, it refers to the real world of a historical author, the world that hides behind the text. The synchronic perspective does not take into account the historical context or the development of the text, but pays attention to the text itself, its structure and its characteristics. In the last decades of the 20th century, discussions about a third instance, namely the importance of the reader, began to preoccupy the literary scholars. First of all, it has to do with the impact that the text and its literary form have on the reader. This would be the synchronic perspective. The diachronic perspective refers to the relationship between the world of the text and the present world of the reader (Naumann 2004, 51-52). According to Anthony F. Campbell, "... both approaches are legitimate; both approaches are necessary" (Campbell 2004, 66). In *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship*, Hans Walter Gabler criticizes the fact that the text is mostly seen as a synchronic and a static system, distinguishing the terms "book" and "text". The text existed long before the book, it has been read and changed multiple times before publication. Therefore, the two terms should not be misinterpreted (Gabler 1984, 306).

Nowadays, it is hard to investigate a literary text in only one of these two manners. Most of the time, the problem arises whether the text should be at first analysed at a synchronic or a diachronic level. Every text has its own characteristics and, according to these characteristics, a certain approach is more suitable for each text. However, the idea of completely separating the two approaches is hard to imagine.

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4.2. The diachronic perspective on *Österreich intim*

Even though literature takes up many pages in Berta Zuckerkandl's book, in almost every chapter dedicated to one of her writer friends, the discussions approach many other subjects. With Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, literature and theatre are inseparable, since most of their plays were staged. Franz Werfel and Joseph Roth were inevitably connected to the glory and prosperity of the old monarchy, both of them being nostalgic about the lost era. With Stefan Zweig there is no direct dialogue in *Österreich intim,* but the author asks herself what could be the reasons behind Zweig's eternal contradictions. As she previously stated, he is indeed a man of the world, because he seems to have experienced everything a man can experience in a lifetime. Hermann Bahr, Berta Zuckerkandls's close friend, is dedicated not only to the literary world, but he is involved in everything Austria's culture has to offer. All of them were connected to every aspect of Vienna's life and, in the same time, with other famous Viennese personalities, who did not belong to the literary world. For instance, in the same evening and in the same room, Gustav Mahler, Max Burckhard, Gustav Klimt and Hermann Bahr have gathered in Berta Zuckerkandl's salon. A composer, a theatre director, a painter and a literary critic were sitting at the same table, speaking about subjects that mattered to all of them. From literature to art, medicine, politics, everything was of great importance for them.

Although the events and the characters are very accurate and the book itself offers a very interesting insight into the world of Viennese literature, Berta Zuckerkandl's descriptions require more than just an attentive reading. A good knowledge of the historical and cultural background is a necessary start. Her memoirs were written over the course of many years, not only in the period when Vienna was still the capital of a flourishing monarchy, but also during World War I and afterwards, when Austria became a republic. The 19th century, which aspired to be "the best of all worlds", like Stefan Zweig remarkably described in his autobiography (Zweig 2013, 20), was replaced by a century dominated by violence, hate and racism. Undoubtedly, these changes have left a deep hole in the life and inevitably the writing of authors like Franz Werfel and Joseph Roth, who, after 1918, illustrated in their works regrets and doubts regarding the new century. Of course, consequences were the hardest to handle for Jews, who, at the beginning of the 20th century, were inevitably struck by a more or less severe identity crisis (Le Rider 2013, 156). Without acknowledging the fact that many of the Austrian writers were of Jewish origin, that they had to struggle with anti-Semitism and hate, their work and actions are hard to understand. Moreover, there is a reason why this period is called "Wiener Moderne" and the group of writers surrounding Hermann Bahr was named "Jung-Wien". They came up with new perspectives that were most of the time criticized by the traditional and patriarchal Viennese society, which was still reticent when it came to innovation and freethinking.

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It is also important to mention once more that the memoirs were written during Berta Zuckerkandl's exile in Algeria at the beginning of the 40's. Therefore, as a Jewish woman, a journalist and a declared pacifist, the author was probably influenced by the current events and by the fate of her beloved ones. Even if the turn of the century had many flaws, as she repeatedly stated, it is very probable that she remembered the events and the persons in her life in a nostalgic way, regretting somehow the complicated, but still memorable years of freedom. As stated in the introduction of her book, introduction written by Theresia Klugsberger, Berta Zuckerkandl left Austria in 1938 right after the 'Anschluss' and went to Paris. In 1940, she arrives in Algeria and she remains there for five years. She returns to Paris and dies shortly after. It is not hard to imagine that Berta Zuckerkandl's life was very agitated at the time. It is also important to mention that her book appeared for the first time almost thirty years after.

> The object of scholarly and critical analysis and study—as opposed to an author's object of publication, and a general public's reading matter—is not the final product of the writer's art alone, but beyond this, the totality of the Work in Progress. It is an assumption that follows from the theoretical premise that the work of literature possesses in its material medium itself, in its text or texts, a diachronic as well as a synchronic dimension. (Gabler 1984, 325)

According to the above-mentioned quotation, the conditions in which a book was written and its stages of creation are of great importance. The first events and discussions described in the book took place at the beginning of the 1890's. The author wrote the book almost fifty years later on a foreign continent, far away from many people she was close to. If her ideas may seem idyllic in some cases, like for instance in the chapter dedicated to Max Burckhard, when she highly praised the art, literature, music, philosophy and sciences in Austria and also stated that Austria had a leading role in the European modernization, the distance in time and the pressure of war may be an explanation. Even her own words, "der Rückblick zeigt" (Zuckerkandl 2013, 56), indicate the fact that her image of Austria is a retrospective view. Therefore, this view may have suffered changes throughout the years.

The memoirs contain some interesting insights into the writers' life and work. The problems that Arthur Schnitzler had with his father at the beginning of his career, because the latter did not want to believe in his son's talent and insisted that he should go on working as a doctor, the success of his play *Liebelei*, Hofmannsthal's grief after the loss of his son, his recognition as a writer among all people in Austria, Stefan Zweig's reticence towards the outside world and his contradictory personality are just a few examples. The author mentions Joseph Roth's novel, in which the Austrian army with its diversity of languages and races is wonderfully described. She also considers his novel to be a psychological

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masterpiece. However, the name of the novel is not mentioned. At the end of the book, in the section dedicated to the notes, it is said that the mentioned novel is probably *Kapuzinergruft*, the sequel of the novel *Radetzkymarsch*, probably also the latter. The reader does not know exactly what masterpiece the author is talking about. She also does not mention anything about the Jewish identity of most of the writers, about their difficulties at the beginning of the 20th century, difficulties that influenced their writing. There are many aspects which are missing from Berta Zuckerkandl's memoirs and this should not be a surprise. She portrays her figures as she remembers them, she shares her thoughts on different subjects and events and describes the world as she has seen it. After all, the subtitle of her book is called *Erinnerungen 1892-1942*. But, for a detailed analysis of the Viennese literary phenomenon, the need for more knowledge cannot be denied. The context is in this case a key role for understanding Berta Zuckerkandl's memoirs. Undoubtedly, "diachronic and synchronic methods do not exclude each other, but are complementary for a full understanding of the texts. Most scholars will agree: both are useful and necessary" (Vermeylen 2003, 95). However, the same author adds up later the following observations:

> I am convinced it is logical and necessary to start any biblical study by considering the text as it is at a synchronic level and to explore its structure, its internal moves, its evocative potentialities and its literary connections, before asking any questions about its literary history, and not the contrary. (Vermeylen 2003, 96)

Indeed, this is no biblical text, so the differences are explainable. However, in this case, a good alternative would be the exact opposite of the above-mentioned strategy. Before exploring the structure and the internal details of the text, one should refer first to the historical context. The fate of Austria at the turn of the century and until the second world war, the literary milieu, the identity problems of Austrian Jewish writers, the society's restrained approach to innovation are information that everyone should be familiar with before exploring the text at all levels. Of course, this perspective depends on each text and the approached subject.

4. Conclusion

In *Österreich intim*, the number of characters and the diversity of the discussed topic are impressive. Psychoanalysis, medicine, literature, architecture, art, theatre, fashion, politics, everything seems to be familiar to the author and every important figure in Austria's fin de siècle seems to have been a guest in Berta Zuckerkandl's famous salon. No wonder she has gathered so many stories and has been a part of so many events throughout the years. Even if her name is rarely mentioned when it

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comes to 'Wiener Moderne', because, after all, her books were published and have gathered acknowledgement rather late and she was mostly known for her career as a journalist and for her salon, she was a keen observer of Vienna's life. Her friendship with some of the greatest Austrian writers is described in her memoirs and, therefore, some new aspects of the work and life of these writers were brought to light.

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