
Remembering Identity in *Die Welt von Gestern*.
Stefan Zweig, Austrian German Identity Construction and the
First World War

Nikolaus Unger

In 1941, Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) wrote his autobiography, *Die Welt von Gestern*, while in Nazi exile. Reflecting on his life, Zweig placed his personal experience of the First World War and the changes it brought about at the center of the work; for him it was the point where the world of yesterday ceased to exist and the present day found its beginnings. This paper hopes to shed light on the issue of memory in *Die Welt von Gestern* by taking a closer look at Zweig's particular construction of Austrian German identity before 1914, his actions during the opening months of the First World War, and finally the denial of these actions in his autobiography. By taking a deeper look into this particular inconsistency, this paper will show that Zweig reacted the way he did in 1914 because he was, in his own way, an Austrian German patriot – he saw a link between his cosmopolitan beliefs and his Austrian identity. This identity construction, which was more than the sentimental “gute alte Zeiten” identity characteristically ascribed to late Habsburg Austrian German middle class intellectuals, illustrates something important about early twentieth century Austria, namely the emergence of a separate and distinct Austrian German identity.

As a primary source, *Die Welt von Gestern* has come under heavy criticism for its historical inconsistencies as well as the circumstances, time and place of its production. Mark Gelber's “*Die Welt von Gestern* als Exilliteratur” argues that Zweig's work functions not as an autobiography, but rather as an interpretive swansong typical of the genre of German exile literature, in which the author tends to tailor the facts in order to lament an entire generation or epoch now lost.¹ Steven Beller's “The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of Fin-de-siècle Vienna” and Leon Botstein's “Stefan Zweig and the Illusion of the Jewish European” are both highly critical of Zweig's Jewish self-delusion with the Habsburg myth. Writing from the perspective of the Holocaust, these scholars tend to attack, rather than seek to understand, the text's inconsistencies and regard the work as a nostalgic depiction of the non-existent “gute alte Zeiten.”

It is easy to come to this conclusion given Zweig's circumstances in 1941; writing in exile about a home now forever lost, Zweig did use the medium of an autobiography to bemoan the turbulent inter-war period, the rise of National

Socialism and the loss of the “world of security” of his youth. Accordingly, many of the work’s historical inaccuracies emerge in his reflections on the warning signs after the First World War that he and his generation failed to recognize. Largely due to this intended perspective, Zweig’s inaccurate denial of his involvement in the nationalist fervor of August 1914 has proven especially exasperating to scholars. In *Die Welt von Gestern*, Zweig strongly renounces his sympathy for and participation in this phenomenon, writing:

Daß ich selbst diesem plötzlichen Rausch des Patriotismus nicht erlag, hatte ich keineswegs einer besonderen Nüchternheit oder Klarsichtigkeit zu verdanken, sondern der bisherigen Form meines Lebens...Außerdem hatte ich zu lange kosmopolitisch gelebt, um über Nacht eine Welt plötzlich hassen zu können, die ebenso die meine war wie mein Vaterland...So war ich gewissermaßen geimpft mit Mißtrauen gegen die Infektion patriotischer Begeisterung, und vorbereitet wie ich war gegen diesen Fieberanfall der ersten Stunde, blieb ich entschlossen, meine Überzeugung von der notwendigen Einheit Europas nicht erschüttern zu lassen durch einen von ungeschickten Diplomaten und brutalen Munitionsindustriellen herbeigeführten Bruderkampf. (*Die Welt von Gestern* 261)

Zweig’s correspondence with other Austrian and German intellectuals, as well as his published writings from the period, indicate that these statements are plainly false, an important point that has led scholars like Beller and Botstein to overlook Zweig’s entire account as a nostalgic and contradictory depiction of the past. While their criticism of Zweig’s prevarication has merit, this paper will seek to understand this inconsistency from a cultural historical perspective by returning to the period and exploring Zweig’s complex, ambivalent attitude toward the First World War.

Michael Stanislawski points out that the autobiographical genre presents the historian, as opposed to the literary critic, with the challenge of deciding how to use such inherently problematic texts as historical sources; he maintains that the specific context of these “individual constructions of selves” (14) must be the historian’s starting point for critical analysis of the text itself. Norbert Leser argues that *Die Welt von Gestern* presents scholars seeking to understand the work as a primary historical source with the hermeneutical responsibility of contextualization; he points out:

Ja, der in der Retrospektive Urteilende hat die Pflicht, alle jene Momente der Erfahrung und Weiterentwicklung, die die

Wirkungsgeschichte einer geistigen Produktion begleiten, in die Darstellung einzubringen und das Bild, das der Schöpfer von sich selbst und seiner Schöpfung hatte, dort zu modifizieren und zu korrigieren, wo es der einführenden, aber auch kritischen Aufarbeitung nicht standhält. (10-11)

Taking both of these points on board, this essay will compare Zweig's autobiographical account to his contemporary correspondence with other intellectuals, his published work from the period and Donald Prater's critical biography in order to evaluate and establish the validity of the information presented. Rather than investigate Zweig's work vis-à-vis the nature of the autobiographical genre, which has already been undertaken by both Gelber and Stanislawski², this essay will instead explore Zweig's inaccurate portrayal of his feelings and actions in the opening months of the war; it will endeavor to provide a factual comparison, holding passages written about the time around August 1914 against essays and letters from the time, in order to present a further primary source analysis and evaluation of the autobiography.

The Generational Perspective

Before 1900, several important events and movements contributed to a fundamental transformation in the cultural atmosphere of the Austrian German intellectual middle class. Politically and culturally, Austrian German liberalism played a central role in this change. The movement's drive to destroy the old social order and replace the rigid hierarchical system elicited converse effects within the rest of Habsburg Austrian society. During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, liberal destruction and emulation of the aristocratic class directly stimulated the emergence of classes from below. Liberal targets and goals such as their belief in a multi-national Austria united under the banner of German cultural hegemony, laissez-faire economic policies and the establishment of a modern economy, the desire to undermine the social position and privileges of the Catholic Church and even the desire to integrate Habsburg Jewry into society backfired, furthering social polarization.

As a result, Pan-Germanism, Christian Socialism and Social Democracy appeared in the form of mass political movements. Disillusioned with the liberal political system and the reign of the educated middle class, emerging Austrian German mass politics shunned liberalism's faith in reason, order, and progress and instead advocated a popular politics of emotion (Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècle* 119). Focused on the mass political mobilization of previously unrepresented social groups, these

political movements did much to both modernize and disintegrate existing Austrian German political society.

Emerging alongside these remarkable political changes, rapid technological developments enhanced Austrian German intellectuals' sense of living in a modern society, offering an escape from the distinctly unmodern nature of the political system and their increasing ineffectualness within it. Furthermore, scientific and intellectual innovation produced a climate of change that stressed the incompatibility of new values with the still extravagantly conservative mores of much of Austrian society, creating an unsettling environment for many of its intellectuals. Alongside the above-mentioned political developments, a positivist atmosphere of scientific progress and rapid technological change directly aided increased individualization within *Bildungsbürger* society, which Jacques Le Rider has labeled an "identity crisis" of individualism. Generally speaking, the cultural atmosphere of the Austrian German capital of Vienna featured "an unmistakable desocialisation of the individual" (Le Rider 4) between 1890 and 1910.

Modernism also contributed to this change, especially in its specific impact on Austrian German artistic and literary culture. Carl Schorske characterizes the emergence of modernism in late Habsburg Austria in terms of a broader social value shift, writing, "Here historical change not only force[d] upon the individual a search for a new identity but also impose[d] upon whole social groups the task of revising or replacing defunct belief systems" (*Fin-De-Siècle* xviii). This is particularly relevant to those involved with the arts. Scott Spector describes this modernism as a revolution of the consciousness leading to the production of new socially and historically disengaged cultural forms; an expression of discomfort rather than a harmonious reflection of *fin-de-siècle* modernity, it embodied a protest by intellectuals against what was happening around them (146). A closer look at who these intellectuals were, with a particular emphasis on literature, is in order.

Liberalism's failure to achieve a full and sustained social and political application in Habsburg Austria confronted two post-liberal generations of intellectuals: the generations of the 1890's and 1905. Authors of what H. Stuart Hughes has identified as the generation of the 1890's, intellectuals who were born in the 1850's and 1860's and reached maturity at about thirty years of age during this decade, directly participated in the cultivation of Austrian German literary modernity (18-19). Furthermore, their artistic achievements influenced the subsequent generation of 1905. This grouping included those born between the 1870's and 1890's, intellectuals who were old enough to share in the cultural transformation of the *fin de siècle* and yet young enough to go to the front during the First World War. As David Luft characterizes the generation of 1905, "what was new for those born

after 1870 was the centrality of ethical questions, the intersections of the problems of philosophy and literature, and the actual historical experience of their mature years”(14-15).

Let us look at a few brief examples. Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931) and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), all literary peers of Zweig, can be grouped under the generation of the 1890's. Raised in an environment that understood liberal values as self-evident truths, this generation's formative years coincided with liberalism's political heyday; many of its intellectuals reached maturity in the 1890's only to revolt culturally against the dry rational liberalism of their fathers. Since Zweig was significantly younger than these three intellectuals, let us also take into consideration the example of Robert Musil (1880-1942), who, like Zweig, can be included in the generation of 1905. Raised in the legacy of the generation of the 1890's and living after the height of liberal nationalism, these intellectuals saw the aesthetic as their starting point, sharing a cosmopolitan and distinctly apolitical concern for greater German culture.

The crisis presented by liberalism's failure greatly affected both of these generations. Their fathers' bourgeois attempt to imitate aristocratic aesthetic values and assimilate their political position failed with their inability to exercise real political change, directly resulting in the transformation of the aesthetic into an escapist refuge from the unfavorable reality of political society (*Fin-De-Siècle* 8). This phenomenon most impacted the earlier fin-de-siècle generation of writers, artists and architects: the generation of the 1890's. As liberals of the *Ringstraße-era*³, their fathers possessed a *Weltanschauung* based on traditional liberal values that they passed on to their sons through liberal faith in education. The failure of these values, which members of the generation of the 1890's saw in the changing world around them, elicited a generational rebellion against them; the younger generation sought instead to replace this defunct belief system with the pursuit of “die Wahrheit” as they understood it – in aesthetic terms (Csáky 142-43).

To the generation of the 1890's, concern with the changing world around them and the psychological aspects of humanity replaced the liberal concern with “Bildung und Besitz” prevalent among their fathers' generation (Schorske, *Thinking* 145-46). The examples of Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal provide a good illustration of this shift. The post-liberal political reality experienced by both authors undoubtedly contributed to their departure from the values of their fathers; after all, the decline of liberal political involvement and the incongruity of its values only substantiated Schnitzler's and Hofmannsthal's suspicions of it. As Schorske's work illustrates, the emergence of distinctly anti-liberal mass political movements further confirmed their doubts. A newfound concern with the instinctual and psychological, which they

explored through the aesthetic, helped them to understand their environment; the values of their fathers did not.

Robert Musil, however, presents a different facet of this bourgeois crisis of liberal culture. Raised in the liberal tradition and exposed to the revolt of the generation of the 1890's, Musil did not concern himself with the resentment of his father's liberal values or the modernism of Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal and Bahr: the existential problem of humanity was his main concern (Schorske, *Thinking* 152-53). For Musil and other intellectuals of his generation, the continuity of High German culture and the predicament of liberal intellectual thought replaced an interest in national political involvement. His generation appreciated and assimilated the important cultural accomplishments of their predecessors and understood their values as a point of departure (Luft 15-17). Since they reached early adulthood during the *fin de siècle*, the generation of 1905 experienced the crisis of individualism with the generation of the 1890's as their guides. The crisis of liberalism affected both of these generations and each cultivated a response that was distinct, yet linked. Reflecting on this overall phenomenon and highlighting the intellectual links between the generation of the 1890's and 1905, Musil writes:

Aber es ist richtiger, statt von Generationsstil von Stilgenerationen zu sprechen...Um 1900 glaubte man, daß Naturalismus, Impressionismus, Dekadenz und heroischer Immoralismus verschiedene Seiten einer neuen Seele seien; 1910 glaubte man bereits,...daß diese Seele ein Loch war, von dem eben nichts als die Seiten wirklich sind; und heute sind von der ganzen Generationsseele nichts als ein paar Einzelseelen übriggeblieben. (838)

Musil's observations help to illustrate the connection shared by the generation of the 1890's and the generation of 1905.

Overall, these brief examples help reveal the post-liberal intellectual paradigm operating among Austrian German *Bildungsbürger* intellectuals around the turn of the century. Sharing a background rooted in liberalism and confronted with its failure, intellectuals like Bahr, Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal, Musil and Zweig developed intellectual responses to the problem that were individual, but connected.

Alongside the crisis of liberalism, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche also contributed to this transformation in the cultural atmosphere of the Austrian German intellectual bourgeoisie. His poignant anti-liberal message corresponded with *Bildungsbürger* dissatisfaction with the liberal atmosphere of late 1870's Austria. Largely due to their relevance opposite Austrian German liberalism, Nietzsche's ideas

enjoyed their first reception in Vienna and not Berlin. As William McGrath's work shows, the thoughts on Nietzsche's philosophy discussed and disseminated through the *Pernerstorfer Circle*⁴ and the subsequent *Leseverein der Deutschen Studenten Wiens*⁵, altered the way in which many of its members, who would later become influential Austrian German thinkers, understood their own culture. Nietzsche's early philosophy helped these intellectuals break apart the bonds of liberal cultural tradition, directly bringing about the personal and social evolution of a modernist response to their situation. Each of these individuals embraced Nietzsche's ideas, creating a remarkable intellectual legacy; as these ideas spread throughout *Bildungsbürgers'* social and cultural thought, they helped redefine the values of the entire class. The conscious choice made by these people to question and reject the rational values of liberalism in favor of a newfound focus on the irrational Dionysian, not only came to define their generation, it directly stimulated an intellectual trend that the generation of the 1890's and 1905 both inherited.

Overall, the emergence of alternative cultural forces to Austrian German liberalism, in both political-technological and artistic-literary forms, coupled with its failure, created an environment in which Austrian German intellectuals of the generation of the 1890's and 1905 became increasingly concerned and preoccupied with cultural, social and personal identity in the changing world around them.

The Case of Stefan Zweig

Let us look then at the specific case of Stefan Zweig. Born in Vienna in 1881 to a Jewish Austrian German family and raised in the intellectual legacy of his father's steadfast liberalism and the revolution brought about by the generation of the 1890's, Zweig shared a modern, cosmopolitan and distinctly apolitical concern for greater Central European German culture common to the generation of 1905. Zweig's Jewish heritage also played an important role in the formation of his *Weltanschauung*.

Jacob Golomb classifies Zweig as a *Grenzjude*⁶, or "marginal Jew," within Austrian and Viennese society (159); While Zweig had many of these characteristics, the characteristics Golomb attributes to *Grenzjuden*, it is important to note that in contrast to other examples of this classification, Zweig did understand Judaism as central to his personal situation and *Weltanschauung*. His social relationships, most notably with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) and Martin Buber (1878-1965), reveal a close proximity to other Jews, particularly those involved with Zionism. Yet despite cultivating a remarkably close friendship with Herzl on the basis of Judaism, he was no Zionist⁷. Zweig persistently rejected numerous requests by his Zionist friends to express his views on the "Jewish question" in print and he intentionally downplayed

the importance of his Jewish heritage in public (Stanislawski 122-28). This position remained consistent before the First World War.

However, the reality of the war made many Jews reconsider their views. Approached by Buber for a written statement on his position on the “Jewish question” during the war, the cosmopolitan Zweig remained unwilling to commit to organized political nationalism of any kind, including the Jewish variety (Stanislawski 123). Indeed, their wartime correspondence reveals much about Zweig’s perception of his own Jewish identity. In a letter from 8 May 1916, he notes, “Es belastet das Judesein mich nicht, es begeistert mich nicht, es quält mich nicht und sondert mich nicht, ich fühle es ebenso wie ich meinen Herzschlag fühle, wenn ich daran denke, und ihn nicht fühle, wenn ich nicht daran denke” (*Briefe an Freunde* 66). As Zweig elaborates in a letter from 24 January 1917:

[...]Daß ich die Diaspora liebe und bejahe als den Sinn seines Idealismus, als seine weltbürgerliche allmenschliche Berufung. Und ich wollte keine andere Vereinigung als im Geist, in unserem einzigen realen Element, nie in einer Sprache, in einem Volk, in Sitten, Gebräuchen, diesen ebenso schönen als gefährlichen Synthesen.
(*Briefe an Freunde* 68-69)

While the crisis of assimilation faced many of Zweig’s Jewish contemporaries, he opted neither for conversion to Christianity nor identification with the Zionist cause. Instead, he found solace in a cosmopolitan humanism fully compatible with his own agnostic understanding of his Jewish heritage and his generational background; the strong objections of his Zionist friends did not sway him.

The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche also played a prominent role in Zweig’s pre-1914 *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, Nietzsche’s anti-national concept of the “good European” is particularly significant. Nietzsche writes in Aphorism 475, “Der europäische Mensch und die Vernichtung der Nationen,” in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*:

Der Handel und die Industrie, der Bücher- und Briefverkehr, die Gemeinsamkeit aller höheren Cultur, das schnelle Wechseln von Ort und Landschaft, das jetzige Nomadenleben aller Nicht-Landbesitzer, – diese Umstände bringen nothwendig eine Schwächung und zuletzt eine Vernichtung der Nationen, mindesten der europäischen, mit sich: so dass aus ihnen allen, in Folge fortwährender Kreuzungen, eine Mischrasse, die des europäischen Menschen, entstehen muss...

.so soll man sich nur ungescheut als *guten Europäer* ausgeben und durch die That an der Verschmelzung der Nationen arbeiten: wobei die Deutschen durch ihre alte bewährte Eigenschaft, *Dolmetscher und Vermittler der Völker* zu sein, mitzuhelfen vermögen. (original emphasis 319)

In light of these ideas, a strikingly Nietzschean influence begins to emerge in Zweig's biography, and especially in his career choices between 1904 and 1914.

Much of Zweig's writing exhibits a clear affection for Nietzsche and there is little doubt that he functioned as an intellectual role model for Zweig. Despite a wealth of material which clearly indicates Zweig's preoccupation with the philosopher, the subject has yet to be adequately researched. However, that need not deter a brief look here. Zweig's 1904 doctoral dissertation provides the most pertinent example of his early fondness of Nietzsche. In "Die Philosophie des Hippolyte Taine," Zweig discusses the Nietzschean ideal of "authentic existence" in the relationship between "Art with Life" (Golomb 162). Nietzschean themes also emerge in Zweig's thirty year correspondence with Romain Rolland (1866-1944), as well as much of his own writing. Zweig frequently referred to Nietzsche as "Prinz Vogelfrei," a name coined by Nietzsche most likely about himself in *Idyllen aus Messina* (1882), and "den Ersten Europäer." Furthermore, he would later include a biographical essay on Nietzsche in the second volume of his *Die Baumeister der Welt* series. Published in 1928 in *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, Zweig's essay on Nietzsche admiringly refers to the philosopher as "Der Don Juan der Erkenntnis" and "Der Erzieher zur Freiheit" in its section titles.

Given his generational background and his experiences as an Austrian German Jew in late Habsburg Austria, it is reasonable to conclude that Zweig would have found Nietzsche's vision of Europe as a spiritual homeland extremely attractive. In retrospect, these ideas may have influenced Zweig's decision to strive for this "good European" ideal after the completion of his doctorate in philosophy in 1904. By looking closely at Nietzsche's writings on Jews and his understanding of Europe, strong Nietzschean parallels within Zweig's formative *Weltanschauung* emerge.

Nietzsche's concern for German culture, his anti-nationalist stance and open disdain of virulent anti-Semitism would have been attractive to an intellectual in Zweig's particular situation. While Robert Holub points out that Nietzsche's precise stance on the "Jewish question" cannot be clearly distinguished because of a wide range of contradictory writings, attitudes and actions, the philosopher's distaste for the radical type of anti-Semitism practiced by his brother-in-law and a sympathetic attitude towards the Jews and their history, especially in regards to his ideas on Europe, characterizes a good deal of Nietzsche's published writings. This

is particularly important considering the anti-Semitic environment that Zweig called home before 1914. Nietzsche's philosophy, especially his diagnoses and prognoses of a Western culture and civilization whose growth and development made Jews into victims despite their participation in it, presented itself as a means with which *Grenzjuden* could approach the identity crisis presented by assimilation. While Zweig did not suffer from an acute Jewish identity crisis, he still lived in an environment hostile to Jews, which made his Jewish heritage an issue. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Nietzsche's ideas influenced Zweig, if sometimes almost subliminally, in his development of a response to his own set of "identity crises" as a Jewish Austrian German *Bildungsbürger* of the generation of 1905.

Let us look closely then at a few examples of Nietzsche's writings on the Jews and his understanding of Europe opposite the particular case of Stefan Zweig. Nietzsche focuses on the "Volke Israel" in *Morgenröthe* (1881) and writes:

Zu den Schauspielen, auf welche uns das nächste Jahrhundert einladet, gehört die Entscheidung im Schicksale der europäischen Juden... Sie haben selber nie aufgehört, sich zu den höchsten Dingen berufen zu glauben, und ebenso haben die Tugenden aller Leidenden nie aufgehört, sie zu schmücken. Die Art, wie sie ihre Väter und ihre Kinder ehren, die Vernunft ihrer Ehen und Ehesitten zeichnet sie unter allen Europäern aus. (181)

Zweig may well have noted this passage and found its ideas important, especially considering the contemporary atmosphere of anti-Semitism that many of his fellow Austrian Germans cultivated. Even though he traversed primarily Jewish social circles and lived in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, Zweig's autobiography indicates that he encountered anti-Semitism often enough to realize it was prudent to avoid those who propagated it. Zweig remarked in *Die Welt von Gestern* that he frowned upon the anti-Semitic and traditional *Burschenschaften* while at the University of Vienna because they came to university not to study, but rather to use the experience as a springboard to a better social standing later in life (80).

Zweig's dislike of these groups contains an echo of Nietzsche. In Aphorism 348 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche discusses European scholarship, addressing the importance of logic and reason in Jewish culture, remarking:

(Nebenbei bemerkt: Europa ist gerade in Hinsicht auf Logisirung, auf *reinlichere* Kopf-Gewohnheiten den Juden nicht wenig Dank schuldig; voran die Deutschen, als eine beklagenswerth deraisonnable

Rasse, der man auch heute immer zuerst ‚den Kopf zu waschen‘ hat. Überall, wo Juden zu Einfluss gekommen sind, haben sie ferner zu scheiden, schärfer zu folgern, heller und sauberer zu schreiben gelehrt: ihre Aufgabe war es immer, ein Volk ‚zur Raison‘ zu bringen). (original emphasis 266-67)

Given his father’s commitment to liberalism and his experiences in turn-of-the-century Vienna, this passage may well have held a great attraction to Zweig. After all, Nietzsche’s philosophy offered self-confirmation and empowerment in an increasingly anti-Semitic environment that devalued Jews because of their racial background. Moreover, the mentality of Austrian German liberalism, that of Zweig’s parents, clung to reason as the cornerstone of its *Weltanschauung*. In many ways, this did not disappear in the younger generations that followed; on the contrary, this faith in reason filtered down to influence both the generation of the 1890’s and that of 1905. Zweig certainly recognized this in Nietzsche.

In terms of Pan-German nationalism and Zweig’s own Austrian German bourgeois identity, Nietzsche’s idea of the “good European” offered an enticing alternative. After all, Nietzsche’s aversion to ethnic German nationalism and his vision of the new Europe were both relevant to Zweig’s time period and situation. In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), Nietzsche denounces German nationalism with a particular emphasis on its racial anti-Semitism. He writes:

‚Keine neuen Juden mehr hinein lassen! Und namentlich nach dem Osten (auch nach Östreich [sic]) zu die Thore zusperrern!‘ also gebietet der Instinkt eines Volkes, dessen Art noch schwach und unbestimmt ist, so dass sie leicht verwischt, leicht durch eine stärkere Rasse ausgelöscht werden könnte. Die Juden sind aber ohne allen Zweifel die stärkste, zähste und reinste Rasse, die jetzt in Europa lebt; sie verstehen es, selbst noch unter den schlimmsten Bedingungen sich durchzusetzen...sie verändern sich, *wenn* sie sich verändern ... nach dem Grundsatz ‚so langsam als möglich!‘ Ein Denker [Nietzsche selbst], der die Zukunft Europa’s [sic] auf seinem Gewissen hat, wird, bei allen Entwürfen, welche er bei sich über diese Zukunft macht, mit den Juden rechnen ... als den sichersten und wahrscheinlichsten Faktoren im grossen Spiel und Kampf der Kräfte. Das, was heute in Europa ‚Nation‘ genannt wird und eigentlich mehr eine res facta als nata ist (ja mitunter einer res ficta et picta zum Verwechseln ähnlich sieht-), ist in jedem

Falle etwas Werdendes, Junges, Leicht-Verschiebbares, noch keine Rasse, geschweige denn ein solches aere perennius, wie es die Juden-Art ist: diese ‚Nationen‘ sollten sich doch vor jeder hitzköpfigen Concurrenz und Feindseligkeit sorgfältig in Acht nehmen! (original emphasis, 201-202)

In regards to these ideas, Zweig shared a common view with Nietzsche. Zweig grew up in an Austrian German culture that he understood as his own; on account of his generational background, he felt himself integrated and assimilated into greater German culture. Furthermore, Zweig’s understanding of his own Austrian German identity did not include the racial slant Nietzsche derides. Zweig saw pan-Germanist anti-Semites and *völkisch* racial theory as incompatible with his own understanding of both his country and himself. Given Zweig’s fondness for Nietzsche’s ideas, this overlap cannot be coincidental.

Zweig’s *Weltanschauung* matched up with Nietzsche’s vision of the new transnational European man remarkably well. Therefore, it seems likely that Zweig’s professional decision to focus more on translating works from other languages into German rather than producing original poetry may have been, to a certain extent, due to Nietzsche’s ideas. Zweig consciously chose the job of organizing and editing, as well as stimulating other writers with his criticism and advice, as his new artistic *modus operandi* after earning his doctorate in 1904; it was the beginning of what would become his future role as a European man of letters as well as a translator and mediator of foreign writers to the German *Sprachraum*. While many factors undoubtedly influenced this decision, Nietzsche’s impact should not be underestimated.

In translation and mediation, much of Zweig’s work between 1904 and 1914 focused on the Belgian writer Émile Verhaeren (1855-1916), a poet unknown in Germany and Austria, with whom Zweig shared a steadfast belief in Whitmanesque humanism as well as a close friendship. It is through his extensive ten year cross-cultural exchange project with Verhaeren that Zweig sought to realize, in his own life, Nietzsche’s “good European” ideal. He explored and expressed the cosmopolitan and European components of his *Weltanschauung* through their personal and professional relationship.

The generational influence of Hermann Bahr, whose work during the *fin de siècle* with *Jung Wien*⁸ facilitated the cultivation of cultural modernity in Austria, helped Zweig to develop an understanding of his own Austrian German cultural identity that corresponded with his “good European” goal; the two were not mutually exclusive. Zweig first contacted Bahr in 1904, sending a copy of a selection of Verhaeren’s

poetry that he had recently translated and published. Fast becoming close professional friends in the period between 1909 and 1911, Zweig sought to bring Bahr into his Verhaeren cultural project in 1910, indirectly asking Bahr if he would lecture on the Belgian in order to further Verhaeren's introduction into the German cultural Sprachraum. (Zweig, *Briefwechsel* 21-22) In 1913, Zweig urged Bahr to write his autobiography so that he could also incorporate him into his European cross-cultural mission; as with his introduction of Verhaeren in Germany and Austria, Zweig saw in Bahr the Austrian German cultural icon that he could take to other European cultures. Zweig fostered his Austrian German identity, an essential component of his *Weltanschauung*, through his relationship with Bahr.

These are, in many ways, ideal examples of the way in which Zweig put many intellectual contemporaries on a pedestal in order to use their ideas as a vehicle for his own ideals. As Leon Botstein suggests, "Despite immense fame, success and wealth, Stefan Zweig seemed to lack the self-confidence to argue his own views directly, at length, about man, history and the life of the mind" (65). To Zweig, the national poet of Belgium seemed like a better vehicle to deliver the message of new poetics and the relationship of art to everyday life than himself. Not surprisingly, a similar phenomenon occurred in his professional relationship with Bahr. Using Bahr as a medium, Zweig saw the opportunity to present a unified vision of the Austrian German cultural sphere to other non-German speaking European cultures. However, these imagined characteristics, which attracted Zweig to both authors, were his own idealized vision; their actual temperaments were really quite different. In choosing other intellectual figures as a mouthpiece for his own cosmopolitan and "good European" ideals, Beller and Botstein argue that Zweig betrays a lack of self-confidence emblematic of *Grenzzjuden*.

Be that as it may, Zweig's pre-war *Weltanschauung* matured to contain the combination of Austrian German identity, humanism, faith in the grander European cultural scheme, and a fair share of naïveté between 1904 and 1914. At home in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Zweig's education and early professional experience took him across Europe and beyond. Living outside the realm of practical politics because of his family background, education and profession, Zweig concentrated the bulk of his activities on the cultivation of an apolitical, transnational, European aesthetic ideal based on the Austrian German liberal tradition in which he was raised and the cultural legacy of the generation of the 1890's. Ultimately, he considered himself an Austrian German and saw no problem with the fact that his publisher and a sizable portion of his audience were Reichsdeutsche, not Austrian.

On the other hand, the Nietzschean "good European" goal of his early adulthood is also important. Zweig's extensive travels to Belgium, France and

England, in addition to his work introducing Verhaeren to the German speaking world, directly contributed to the formation of a distinctive European understanding of his own Austrian German identity. Rooted in Austria, Zweig sought to mediate between different European cultures in the spirit of Nietzsche and the humanist tradition of Erasmus; and before 1914, this was all too possible. However, the First World War would test this unique *Weltanschauung*.

Kriegserlebnis

Speeding back from Belgium on the Orient Express on the eve of war, Zweig found it difficult to escape the wave of nationalism descending over Europe; the intense excitement for war so common in August 1914 ensnared many Jewish intellectuals, including Zweig (Rozenblit 42-43). Upon his return to Vienna, Zweig's first impulse was to drop everything and join the war effort. In a letter to his publisher, he echoed many of the patriotic sentiments common throughout Austria and Germany at the time:

Ich bin noch zuhause – wir haben einen Überfluß an Menschen und da läßt man vorläufig die Unausgebildeten (Landsturm!) beiseite...Aber wenn es länger dauert komme ich dran und freue mich, obzwar ich als gemeiner Soldat dienen mußte. (*Briefe* 13)

Found unfit for military service, he remained eager to serve Austria and managed an assignment in the Imperial War Archives. There, Zweig polished up official press releases and sketched inspiring military accounts from the front, directly contributing to the Austrian government's propaganda machine. Although his enthusiasm for service would later change, Zweig's actions clearly illustrate his commitment to Austrian German identity in the early years of the war.

Despite claiming to have been silent in *Die Welt von Gestern*, Zweig did indeed write during this period of initial enthusiasm. Two essays appeared in the *Neue Freie Presse* in August 1914: "Ein Wort von Deutschland" on 6 August 1914 and "Die schlaflose Welt" on 18 August 1914. Both articles celebrated the 'Schwertbruderschaft' of the Austro-Hungarian alliance with the German Empire, with the second article serving to moderate the views of the first. Zweig's third and most important article from this period, "An die Freunde im Fremdland," published on 19 September 1914 in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, served as an open letter, bidding farewell to his friends in enemy countries.

These writings are important precisely because of his later disdain for and the

denial of these actions in *Die Welt von Gestern*. The thoughts echoed in these three late 1914 essays corresponded with his firm belief in his own Austrian German identity and these views also found their way into Zweig's interaction with other intellectuals. However, it is important to remember that this patriotism is not altogether surprising considering the context and time in which he wrote these essays.

Zweig's commitment to his own Austrian German identity manifested itself most bluntly in "An die Freunde im Fremdland." Zweig writes:

Wir sind die Gleichen nicht mehr wie vor diesem Krieg, und zwischen unserm Gefühl steht das Geschick unserer Heimat. ... Daß deutsch meine Sprache war und französisch die eure, war nur ein schöpferischer Reiz unserer Gemeinschaft, in stetem Vergleichen wurden wir stolz, eigene Werte zu empfinden und die fremden zu bewundern ... Das ist nun vorbei, ihr Lieben, vorbei, so lange Brüder meiner Sprache und der euren in Waffen sind...was in mir deutsch ist, überflutet mein ganzes Empfinden ... Heute ist das Maß verwandelt und jeder Mensch nur wahr durch Gemeinsamkeit mit seiner Nation. Meine eigene Sache ist jetzt nicht mehr, ich kenne keine Freundschaft, ich darf keine kennen, als die des ganzen Volkes, meine Liebe und mein Haß gehören mir nicht mehr zu ... Und diesen Haß gegen euch – obzwar ich ihn nicht empfinde – ich will ihn doch nicht mäßigen, weil er Siege zeugt und heldische Kraft ... Erwartet darum nicht, ich würde, so sehr ich mich euch verpflichtet fühle, euer Anwalt sein! Ehret mein Schweigen, wie ich das eure ehre, wie ich selbst schweigen würde ... Das Schweigen wahre uns unsere Freundschaft! (42-46)

Zweig's letter elicited the response of his long time French friend Romain Rolland in the form of a letter consisting of one simple line, "Ich bin unserm Europa treuer als Sie, lieber Stefan Zweig, und ich verleugne keinen meiner Freunde" (Rolland 70). Rolland's words rattled Zweig. After a lengthy discussion, Zweig conceded that an increasing awareness of the seriousness of the situation had transformed his initial patriotic-national euphoria into silence:

Wo es Krieg gilt, müssen wir – ich schrieb es ja auch [in "An die Freunde im Fremdland"] – meiner Meinung nach schweigen ... Von mir selbst will ich nichts schreiben: ich bin wie verstört von den Geschehnissen! Alles was ich mir an Arbeit vornahm ist

unterbrochen, meine Nerven gehorchen mir nicht mehr. Ich habe viele Freunde im Feld, hüben und drüben...von meinen liebsten Menschen wie Verhaeren weiß ich kein Wort!!! (*Briefe* 18-19)

Increasingly lost in the collapsing world of security around him, Zweig became completely ineffectual. Unable to shed his patriotic zeal and be a “good European,” Zweig focused on the only thing he could change: his attitude towards the war.

This newfound commitment to being silent in the face of personal and intellectual turmoil affected his relationships with his professional friends; his writings placed him in the “no man’s land” between the patriotic national camps of the German Richard Dehmel and the Belgian Verhaeren, alienating him from the latter. Their friendship, which had meant so much to Zweig in the decade preceding the war, suffered badly because of the war.

Like Zweig, Verhaeren became caught up in much of the patriotic enthusiasm at the war’s beginning and published several attacks against Germany in the press (Prater 74). Although Zweig was genuinely concerned about Verhaeren’s whereabouts and situation, a real friction appears in the correspondence between Zweig and Rolland, who knew of Verhaeren’s whereabouts, regarding the Belgian. In a letter to Zweig on 24 November 1914, Rolland updated Zweig on Verhaeren’s status, writing, “Übrigens gehören Sie, um die Wahrheit zu sagen, nicht zu seinen besten” (Rolland 110). This rift grew by early 1915. In a letter to Rolland on 23 March 1915, Zweig writes:

Ich las Verhaerens Worte...Unsere Zeitungen haben sie reproduciert. Ich las die Stelle, wo er mich öffentlich verleugnet (“ich habe dort Freunde gehabt, jetzt sage ich mich von allen los”) und las sie ohne Schmerz. Wenn er wahrhaft so fühlt, daß er jeden einzelnen Menschen, der deutsche Sprache spricht, als seinen Feind empfindet, dann war die Beziehung zwischen ihm und mir ja gelöst nicht nur aus nationaler sondern aus menschlicher Dissonanz. Sie wissen, wie sehr ich ihn geliebt habe – wie einen Vater, wie einen Meister – und doch kann ich jetzt nicht trauern, weil ich überhaupt nicht fähig bin, persönliches, eigenes Leiden jetzt so stark zu empfinden in dieser Zeit des Mitleidens für Alle und mit Allen. (*Briefe* 57)

Strange because of the ten year importance of Verhaeren to his *Weltanschauung* and European vision of cross-cultural exchange, Zweig’s reaction shows that his international cultural outlook based itself heavily on his firm commitment to his own

Austrian German identity. In this time of turmoil and crisis, it was to his Austrian German roots that he retreated for a sense of community and support. The reality of his situation and his own inability to continue to be a “good European” left him feeling powerless and miserable.

A similar break occurred with Hermann Bahr. As we have already seen, Zweig sought to incorporate Bahr into his pre-war campaign for European cultural exchange. Much like with Verhaeren, a major rift appears to have developed over their different points of view on the war. In a letter to Bahr on Christmas Day, 1914, Zweig writes:

Ich schreibe Ihnen heute ohne Anlass, um Ihnen nur dies zu sagen: dass ich Ihr Schweigen ehre und liebe. Ich weiss bis zu welchem leidenschaftlichen Masse Sie ein Bekenner sind und wie es Sie innerlich drängen muss, einer Zeit wie dieser Ihr Herz zu sagen. Und ich verstehe Ihr Schweigen. Wir alle, die wir an ein Europa geglaubt haben, sind in diesem Kriege irgendwo an der Wurzel unseres Fühlens getroffen. Meine Freude an allen Siegen ist trüb, weil ich das Blut liebe, mit denen sie gekauft sind, nur meine Trauer, meine tiefe unendliche Verzweiflung über die Vernichtung meines höchsten geistigen Ideals – der europäischen Versöhnung – echt und grenzenlos. (*Briefwechsel* 42-43)

In light of this letter, it is not surprising that Zweig would have felt extremely disenchanted by Bahr’s *Kriegsseggen*, an overtly nationalistic collection of essays published in 1915; while Zweig confided his deepest feelings of inner turmoil over his personal response to the war, Bahr replied somewhat haughtily:

Schönsten Dank, lieber Stefan Zweig, für Ihren Brief, aber über dies alles müßten wir einmal reden! Ja wenn ich nur einmal mit R. Rolland reden könnte! Er, und Ihr alle, stellt es euch viel ärger vor als es ist – morgen wird Europa wieder da sein. – Daß ich gar nicht so schweigend bin, wie Sie denken, wird Ihnen bald ein kleines Büchl zeigen. (Original emphasis, Zweig, *Briefwechsel* 45-46)

It seems as though the circumstances surrounding Zweig’s cooling towards Bahr corresponded with those of Verhaeren: the emphasis on the need for intellectual silence as a response to the war. Unfortunately, Zweig’s commitment to silent protest left him isolated from intellectuals who did not agree, and overcome with a deep

feeling of powerlessness.

Conclusion

All in all, the First World War tested the Austrian German composition of cosmopolitan liberalism mixed with aesthetic humanism that Zweig had developed in the preceding two decades. (Steiman, "Agony" 102) Facing the incongruity of the "good European" component of his *Weltanschauung* with the reality of the war, Zweig turned wholeheartedly to his Austrian German identity for support.

Without a doubt, the zealous and naïve enthusiasm of August 1914 must have been quite embarrassing to Zweig with the benefit of hindsight. As he wrote in *Die Welt von Gestern*, comparing his generation's experience of the outbreak of the Second World War to that of the First:

Die Antwort ist einfach: weil unsere Welt von 1939 nicht mehr über so viel kindlich-naïve Gläubigkeit verfügte wie jene von 1914. Damals vertraute das Volk noch unbedenklich seinen Autoritäten; niemand in Österreich hätte den Gedanken gewagt, der allverehrte Landesvater Kaiser Franz Joseph hätte in seinem vierundachtzigsten Jahr sein Volk zum Kampf aufgerufen ohne äußerste Nötigung, er hätte das Blutopfer gefordert, wenn nicht böse, tückische, verbrecherische Gegner den Frieden des Reichs bedrohten. (257-58)

Written in 1941 by an intellectual who saw his homeland forever changed by National Socialism, and the ideal of Europe in which he believed ravaged by man's unthinkable inhumanity to his fellow man, Zweig's words echo the personal embarrassment and resentment of an idealistic man who regretted not being able to see the writing on the wall. Furthermore, the passage betrays Zweig's true feelings in August 1914: identification with those who felt that Austria and Germany had been innocently attacked. Looking back, it is reasonable to conclude that Zweig was discomfited with his earlier thoughts and actions, especially his blind faith in his country and ignorance of the human and psychological costs of the ensuing catastrophe. Indeed, this view would fit with Zweig's own conception of history. As Lionel B. Steiman points out:

Wenn Zweig sich spezifisch geschichtlichen Themen zuwandte, waren hauptsächlich persönliche Impulse am Werk. Das Interesse, das ihn an diese Werke band, entsprang mehr seinem Bedürfnis, sich

mit zeitgenössischen Problemen zu befassen als mit denen eines vergangenen Zeitalters, welches das angebliche Subjekt seiner Studie darstellte. Einerseits suchte er in der Vergangenheit nach Hoffnung und Rat für die Gegenwart, andererseits versuchte er darin Trost und Eskapismus zu finden. (“Begegnung” 101)

In light of this, it is important that we recognize the reasons behind Zweig’s inconsistent account in *Die Welt von Gestern*. Only once we contextualize Zweig’s thoughts and actions in August 1914 can we truly appreciate the reasons for the denial of these actions in his autobiography – principally the failure of the “good European” component of his *Weltanschauung* in the face of war. It is sensible to conclude that Zweig’s turn toward his Austrian German identity for support in a time when his European vision became increasingly unrealizable was not something that he would later be particularly proud of, especially considering Zweig’s perspective when writing in exile in 1941.

In conclusion, this particular inconsistency of *Die Welt von Gestern* must be understood from this point of view; Zweig was not merely lamenting the loss of the non-existent nostalgic “gute alte Zeiten,” but instead reflecting on the very personal tragedy through which he lived. While it is easy to understand why many scholars would be critical of his hesitation to admit his true patriotic feelings and actions, especially in light of his ardent turn to pacifism and silence, it is reasonable to conclude that Zweig was also all too aware of this contradiction.

Taking this into account, Zweig’s outright denial only further emphasizes his awareness of the failure of his own pre-war *Weltanschauung* in the face of the First World War, a painful reality that he consciously chose not to acknowledge in his autobiography. Only by contextualizing *Die Welt von Gestern* and qualifying the information it provides can we truly understand Zweig’s motives and recognize the work as both a legitimate primary historical source and an important and rich source of cultural narrative from this period, despite its biographical shortcomings.

University of Warwick

Notes

¹According to Gelber, “*Die Welt von Gestern* ist in mehreren selbstverständlichen Hinsichten Exilliteratur: Der Text wurde von einem Exilanten in der Fremde produziert, er entstand während der Zeitspanne der Deutschen Exilliteratur, um den Begriff “Exilliteratur” als Epochenbezeichnung anzuwenden” (148).

² Both Gelber and Stanislawski examine Zweig's autobiography with the broader perspective of the autobiographical genre as their investigative starting point.

³ Before the Austrian German liberals came to widespread political power, they won control of the Habsburg capital, Vienna, and embarked on a plan of urban reconstruction, finally winning support from the Emperor to tear down the city's fortification and in its place construct a massive ring shaped boulevard. Demographically composed of lawyers, doctors, academics, the medical profession and journalists, the liberals initiated massive building works, constructing a new opera house, Imperial theatre, new section of the Imperial palace, new parliament, city hall and university. The result was extraordinary; the Ringstraße became a symbol of the entire *Bürger* value system and evolved into a visual manifestation of liberalism. For further information see Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna*.

⁴ Originally formed during their *Gymnasium* days in 1867, the group was composed of students who, because of their largely nouveau riche *Bildungsbürger* family background, faced the political and social crises of nineteenth century Austrian liberalism. Its members included Victor Adler (1852-1918), Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), Engelbert Pernerstorfer (1850-1918), Sigfried Lipiner (1856-1911), Richard von Kralik (1852-1934), Heinrich Friedjung (1851-1920), Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) and Max von Gruber (1853-1927).

⁵ In 1872, the members of the Pernerstorfer Circle, then in their second year of university, joined a politically oriented university organization: the *Leseverein der deutschen Studenten Wiens*. Founded in December 1871, the group had been established "to adhere to and represent the German character of the University of Vienna at every opportunity" (McGrath, *Dionysian Art* 33-34). Prominent intellectual figures, such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Georg von Schönerer (1842-1921) and Karl Lueger (1844-1910) joined this group and its subsequent permutations, further spreading the influence of Nietzsche's Austrian reception.

⁶ Zweig and his family had lost their religion and tradition but had not yet been fully absorbed into secular Austrian German society. Typically, Jews of this social type lacked an identity, rejecting any kinship with the Jewish community while at the same time being rejected themselves by non-Jews.

⁷ For a thorough examination of Zweig's relationship to Zionism, see Mark H. Gelber, "Stefan Zweig und die Judenfrage von heute."

⁸ After extensive travels throughout Europe and firsthand participation in the advent of literary modernism in Paris and Berlin, Bahr sought to bring about the same artistic revolution in his native Austria. With Bahr as its leader, the *Jung Wien* group consisted of Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann (1866-1945) and Felix Salten (1869-1945); its members introduced literary impressionism to late Habsburg Austria and helped cultivate modernity in the arts. With this goal largely completed by 1900, the group dissolved and Bahr moved away from impressionism toward a newfound emphasis on the emerging artistic strength of the Austrian German provinces.

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