

**Arthur Schnitzler — ‘Einer der Modernsten unter den Modernen’:<sup>1</sup> The Significance of Schnitzler’s Associations with *das Junge Wien* for his Critical Reception in Vienna 1890-1900 as Documented in his Press Cuttings Collection.**

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*Abstract*

*My paper looks at the critical reception of Schnitzler’s works in Vienna from 1890 to 1931 as documented in his press cuttings collection. Although the focus of my doctoral study is the significance of the question of Jewish identity, Schnitzler’s associations with the Jung Wien literary group clearly played an important role in shaping the reception of his early works and this is the focus of my first chapter. By addressing the following questions, this paper will explore to what extent and in what ways the critical reception of Schnitzler’s early works *Anatol* and *Liebelei* was affected by his associations with the Jung Wien, and what, if any, impact this had on his subsequent critical reception: firstly, it will assess the role that Schnitzler played in the Jung Wien and the relative importance of the group for Schnitzler’s literary development; secondly, it will examine the significance of his being labelled a representative of both specifically modern and specifically Viennese literature; finally it will evaluate how, together with his identity as a Jewish writer, his links with the Jung Wien group were detrimental to the critical reception of his works in Vienna throughout his lifetime.*

This working paper will investigate how Schnitzler’s associations with the *Jung-Wien* group and his reputation as a writer of modern drama affected his critical reception in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century. It will focus on the critical reception of *Liebelei* and *Anatol* with a view to establishing whether Schnitzler’s identity as a member of the *Wiener Moderne* had a detrimental effect on how his works were received in the press. It will also assess how, if at all, their reception was further influenced by his Jewish identity. To date there is no study

of Schnitzler's critical reception that focuses specifically on the significance of his associations with *das Junge Wien*. All of the newspaper articles cited are taken from Schnitzler's collection of press cuttings, which is housed at the University of Exeter. It is probably the most comprehensive collection of items regarding his critical reception in existence. Together with its breadth, its particular value lies in the fact that it allows us to see exactly what Schnitzler knew about his own critical reception. Despite its obvious worth, the collection remains underused by academics working in the field of Schnitzler studies.

For twenty-first century scholars, fin-de-siècle Vienna has become synonymous with cultural achievement, and not only in the field of literature: even the briefest appraisal of the arts, philosophy and social sciences during this period reveals a wealth of accomplishments that are unparalleled in any other period of the city's history. It was a time of rapid change and instability when previously held beliefs and convictions were dismissed and disproved, and the city's inhabitants were bombarded with challenging new ideas and theories. One only has to think of Ernst Mach's *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (1885) or Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* (1899) to appreciate the extent to which conventional ideas were being challenged during this period.<sup>2</sup> The city's modern literary scene was dominated by writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Felix Salten, Richard Beer-Hofmann, and, of course, Arthur Schnitzler.<sup>3</sup> Often collectively referred to as *das Junge Wien*, they met at the Café Griensteidl. Writing about the importance of the *Kaffeehaus* to the *Jung-Wien* group, Gotthart Wunberg comments that 'man sollte die Rolle des Kaffeehauses nicht als anekdotische Zugabe werten. Ihr soziologischer Charakter hat viel mit dem der Gruppe zu tun, die sich dort zu treffen pflegte'.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout 1891 Schnitzler made repeated references to *das Junge Wien* and *Jung Österreich* in his diaries, including a list of all the people he considered to be a part of that

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<sup>1</sup> 'One of the most modern of the modern'. All translations into English are by the current author. Arthur von Gschmeidler, *Allgemeine Kunst-Chronik*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen* was first published in 1886, although it went largely unnoticed until its 1900 German reprint, which followed the publication of the 1897 English translation, and attracted considerable attention. For a brief discussion of Mach's ideas and their impact in the broader context of fin-de-siècle Vienna see Ursula Baatz, 'Ernst Mach and the World of Sensations', in *Vienna: The World of Yesterday, 1889–1914*, ed. by Eric Bronner and F. Peter Wagner (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), pp. 82–92.

<sup>3</sup> In her work *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic 1815–1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Barbara Jelavich comments that 'Arthur Schnitzler [...] is perhaps the most representative writer for the period', p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> 'One should not judge the role of the coffee house to be an anecdotal extra. Its sociological character has a lot to do with that of the group that was in the habit of meeting there'. See Gotthart Wunberg and Johannes J. Braakenburg, 'Einleitung', in *Die Wiener Moderne: Literatur, Kunst und Musik zwischen 1890 und 1910*, ed. by Gotthart Wunberg and Johannes J. Braakenburg (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), pp. 11–79 (p. 19).

group.<sup>5</sup> However, Andrew C. Wisely comments that *das Junge Wien* was ‘less a literary movement than an assembly of great minds’, which ‘in less than two years [...] began to wear on Schnitzler’s nerves’; a fact Wisely attributes to the polarization of the group into ‘coolly distant friends and those whose reviews Schnitzler would find unfair and vindictive’.<sup>6</sup> Hermann Bahr was undoubtedly an important figure in the development of *das Junge Wien*. As owner of the *Deutsche Zeitung* since 1893 and co-founder of *Die Zeit*, he was well positioned to publicize and promote *die Wiener Moderne* in both Vienna and Berlin, and he undoubtedly deserves recognition for helping Austrian literary Modernism develop a distinct identity, as well as for ensuring that its writers’ works received the profile and recognition they deserved. However, although the establishment of the *Jung-Wien* group owes much to Hermann Bahr, it is important to recognize that he was not the movement’s founder. This is a common misapprehension that he himself encouraged during his lifetime and which has passed into subsequent scholarship, Peter Sprengel and Gregor Streim commenting that ‘der von Bahr selbst geschaffene Mythos, er sei der Gründer des Jungen Wien und der modernen österreichischen Literatur gewesen, wurde von Literaturgeschichten oftmals übernommen und begegnet gelegentlich auch noch in neuesten Arbeiten’.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that during this period Schnitzler was regarded as one (if not the) leader of the *Jung-Wien* group. Consequently, his contemporary critics labelled him as a representative of Viennese Modernism.<sup>8</sup> This was not a role that Schnitzler chose. At best *das Junge Wien* offered him a forum to read his works and exchange ideas with other writers. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that he wished to be regarded as their spokesperson.

In Vienna, many critics viewed Schnitzler’s associations with Modernism and the *Jung-Wien* group in a wholly negative light. One critic, writing for the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, labelled him disparagingly as one of Vienna’s ‘Stirnlocken- und Kaffeehaus-Literaten’, a description that also displays blatantly anti-Semitic overtones.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that many Viennese critics did not welcome the presence of the *Wiener Moderne* in the city’s

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<sup>5</sup> This list is reproduced in Wunberg and Braakenburg, *Die Wiener Moderne*, p. 14. See also Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch 1879–1892* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), pp. 318–20.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew C. Wisely, *Arthur Schnitzler and Twentieth-Century Criticism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Bahr’s self-created myth’ that ‘he was the founder of the *Jung-Wien* group and of modern Austrian literature, was often accepted into histories of literature and one still occasionally encounters it in the most recent studies’. Peter Sprengel and Gregor Streim, *Berliner und Wiener Moderne: Vermittlungen und Abgrenzungen in Literatur, Theater, Publizistik* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1998), p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> W. E. Yates supports this claim, writing that ‘it was in fact Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal who were generally recognized as the leading creative figures of the “Jung Wien” group’. See W. E. Yates, *Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal, and the Austrian Theater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> ‘One of Vienna’s ringleted coffee-house literati’.

theatrical scene. The same critic writing for the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* accuses Vienna's Modernist writers of trying to emulate their German counterparts, criticising 'wie sie derzeit in Wien zu Dutzenden als "Deutsche Dichter" herumlaufen'. He also attempts to undermine any suggestion that Schnitzler might be a talented writer by asserting that 'es ist gegenwärtig nicht schwer ein "modernes" Schauspiel zu schreiben'.<sup>10</sup>

It was not only the critics, but at times also the audience that were reluctant to accept the new modernist drama that was being performed in their theatres. It is hard to overestimate the significance of the theatre to fin-de-siècle Vienna. Yates writes that 'in a city celebrated for its theatrical culture, it was natural that modernism ('die Moderne') was launched in the theatre'. He dates its beginnings as the 'Ibsen week' in April 1891.<sup>11</sup> However, in the decade that followed it seems that the audience was not yet ready—was not yet modern enough—for Schnitzler's plays. Interestingly, in his article for the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* on 2 December 1893, following the *Deutsches Volkstheater* première of Schnitzler's *Das Märchen*, the critic Richard Specht holds his fellow critics partially responsible for the negative reception of Schnitzler's early work, writing: 'Ein neuer Dichter sollte begrüßt werden; würden sie ihn grüßen? Sie haben ihn nicht begrüßt. Und sie waren von vornherein entschlossen dazu. Und daß die Kritik ihnen dabei half, ist das jämmerlichste daran.'<sup>12</sup> He believes that the critics had a responsibility to act as intermediaries between Schnitzler and his audience.

During this period Schnitzler published two of his most significant early works, his cycle of seven one-act scenes *Anatol*, and his play *Liebelei*. The latter sees Christine, a poor violin player's daughter from the *Vorstadt*, fall in love with Fritz, who is her social superior. The play ends in tragedy when Fritz is killed in a duel after his affair with a married woman is revealed. Having given his life for another woman, Fritz's relationship with Christine is cruelly exposed to her as little more than a flirtation. In *Anatol*, too, Schnitzler takes male-female relationships as his central theme. Each scene sees Anatol in conversation with a current or former lover, and in five of the seven scenes there is also dialogue between Anatol and his friend Max.

*Liebelei* was premièred on 9 October 1895 in Vienna's Burgtheater. The play's performance was a significant marker, both in the history of the Burgtheater and in Schnitzler's career, Yates referring to it as 'the production that signalled the breakthrough of

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<sup>10</sup> 'How at present they are running around Vienna in their dozens as "German writers"'; 'Currently it is not difficult to write a "modern" play.'

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

indigenous modern drama'.<sup>13</sup> Its arrival had been awaited with much interest, as the première of *Das Märchen* in the Deutsches Volkstheater in Vienna two years previously had met with considerable criticism in the press and the play was taken out of the theatre's repertoire after the second performance. Critics had commented on Schnitzler's relationship with Adele Sandrock, who at the time was a member of the Deutsches Volkstheater company. They alleged that it was only thanks to this relationship between playwright and actress that *Das Märchen* was performed at all.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, *Liebelei*'s première was a success and the applause was so great that Schnitzler had to appear on the stage after every act.

Max Burckhard agreed to stage *Liebelei* within two days of having been given it to read by Schnitzler, who at the time was living in the same building as the theatre director. Schnitzler had read *Liebelei* to Hofmannsthal and Salten on 14 October 1894, and they had advised him to offer the play to the Burgtheater: 'Nm. las ich Loris [Hofmannsthal] und Salten Liebelei, die zu meiner Ueberraschung [*sic*] sehr gefiel. Ich solle außer einigen Wendungen nichts ändern, Burgtheater einreichen'.<sup>15</sup> It was undoubtedly a risk for Burckhard to agree to the play's performance. Schnitzler's associations with the *Wiener Moderne* meant that the inclusion of *Liebelei* in the theatre's repertoire was seen as a break with tradition. Not only was this the first time that Schnitzler's work had been performed in the Burgtheater, but he was also the first of any of the *Jung-Wien* circle to have their work accepted there.<sup>16</sup> In his diary entry for 16 October 1894, Schnitzler notes with frustration that Hermann Bahr concluded that *Liebelei* was more suitable for the Raimundtheater than the Burgtheater, without having even read the play: 'Nm. Bahr bei mir, dem Hugo vom Stück gesprochen; er auch schon mit Burckhard. —Charakteristisch—ohne Stück gelesen zu haben, findet er es fürs Raimundth..<sup>17</sup> In spite of Bahr's reservations and those of Adolf von Sonnenthal, who

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<sup>12</sup> 'A new author ought to be welcomed: would they welcome him? They did not welcome him, and were determined not to do so from the start. That the critics helped them in this process is the most deplorable thing about it'.

<sup>13</sup> W. E. Yates, *Theatre in Vienna: A Critical History, 1776-1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 180. For an interesting, if necessarily brief, overview of the significance of *Liebelei*'s Burgtheater première and its critical reception as documented in Schnitzler's Collection of Press Cuttings, see W. E. Yates, 'Schnitzler und die Sprachkrise: Wort, Wahrheit und "Liebelei"', in *Arthur Schnitzler im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. by Konstanze Fliedl (Vienna: Picus, 2003), pp. 212–26.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Butzko, *Arthur Schnitzler und die zeitgenössische Theaterkritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> 'This afternoon I read *Liebelei* to Loris and Salten, which to my surprise they liked. They said apart from a few phrases I should change nothing and submit it to the Burgtheater'. All quotations from Schnitzler's diaries are referenced by the volume and date of entry. Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch 1893–1902*, 14 October 1894.

<sup>16</sup> Renate Wagner and Brigitte Vacha, *Wiener Schnitzler-Aufführungen 1891–1970*, Studien zur Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 17 (Munich: Prestel, 1971), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> 'This afternoon Bahr, who had talked to Hugo about the piece, visited me; he had already seen Burckhard—typical—he found the piece suitable for the Raimundtheater without having read it.' Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch 1893-1902*, 16 October 1894.

had been the Burgtheater's temporary director for a brief period following the resignation of Adolf Wilbrandt in 1887, Burckhard resolved to stage the play at the Burgtheater.<sup>18</sup>

Despite *Liebelei*'s success, some critics still speculated as to the shock and indignation that the play might invoke amongst the more traditional members of the Burgtheater audience. In an article published in the *Montags Revue* on 14 October 1895, the critic Alfred Freiherr von Berger writes:

Mancher alte Burgtheaterbesucher dürfte die Aufführung eines derartigen Stückes im Burgtheater geradezu als Scandal empfunden und sich entrüstet gefragt haben, durch welchen Zufall sich dieses Vorstadtstück auf die Bühne verirren konnte, auf der Schiller und Grillparzer heimisch sind.<sup>19</sup>

Berger's reference to Schiller and Grillparzer demonstrates the extent to which the Burgtheater was still associated with traditional drama. It is therefore unsurprising that *Liebelei*, the first play in Viennese dialect to be performed in the Burgtheater, created a few waves amongst audience and critics alike. Yates refers to 'the tension between innovation and conservatism' that he describes as characteristic of the 'artistic ambience of Vienna' throughout Burckhard's time as director of the Burgtheater.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Burckhard's decision to champion modern and realist drama meant that he met with considerable opposition throughout his tenure.<sup>21</sup> During this period, Schnitzler was also vulnerable to those same tensions, and Yates claims that this in part explains why *Liebelei*'s 'daring modernity met with a predictably mixed reception'.<sup>22</sup>

Many of Schnitzler's contemporary critics saw *Liebelei* as confirmation that his main topic was the plight of the *süßes Mädel*. In her biography of Schnitzler, Wagner presents Christine as the very epitome of the various fictional embodiments of the *süßes Mädel*:

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<sup>18</sup> Adolf von Sonnenthal had been concerned about the nature of the play's contents, convinced that Christine and Mizi's unaccompanied visit to Fritz would lead to a scandal. See Vacha and Wagner, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> 'Many old Burgtheater visitors may have felt the performance of such a piece at the Burgtheater to be an absolute scandal, and have wondered in outrage through what accident this *Vorstadt* piece could have strayed onto the stage that is home to Schiller and Grillparzer.'

<sup>20</sup> Yates, *Theatre in Vienna*, p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> A number of critics writing for the Viennese right-wing press objected to the inclusion of works by Modernist writers in the *Burgtheater* repertoire. In an article published in the nationalistic paper *Vaterland* on 11 October 1895 the critic writes: 'Es läge also wieder einmal die Frage nahe, ob und wie weit das Burgtheater die Moderne Production—das heißt diejenige, die sich selbst so nennt und ihre Ausschreitungen als ein Postulat des Zeitgeistes hinstellt – berücksichtigen soll.' 'So we arrive again at the question of whether, and to what extent, the Burgtheater should consider the modern production—that is to say those which call themselves modern and make their excesses a prerequisite of the Zeitgeist.'

<sup>22</sup> Yates, *Theatre in Vienna*, p. 180.

‘Dieses “süße Mädel” stammt aus der Vorstadt und ist eigentlich schon von Nestroy in die Wiener Literatur eingebracht worden, es kulminiert in der Christine der “Liebelel”.’<sup>23</sup> Ellen Butzko suggests that this reputation remained with Schnitzler throughout his career and that subsequently critics were often reluctant to see his works as anything other than variations on this theme. She cites Felix Salten’s article, written to mark Schnitzler’s fiftieth birthday and published in the *Neue Rundschau* in 1912, which certainly seems to support this claim: ‘Von der Liebe sprechen alle seine Bücher.’<sup>24</sup>

Schnitzler started writing *Anatol* in June 1888 and finally finished it in November 1891. Five of the acts were published prior to the 1893 publication of the *Anatol*-cycle. Despite the intervention of Hermann Bahr on Schnitzler’s behalf, *Anatol* was rejected by Fischer on several occasions before eventually being published in 1893 by the Bibliographisches Bureau in Berlin.<sup>25</sup> Even this was only made possible thanks to Wilhelm König lending Schnitzler the five hundred marks that were necessary to secure the publication.<sup>26</sup>

Writing in 1929, Otto Schinnerer emphasized the considerable critical attention the work attracted, highlighting the positive reviews that it received in papers such as Vienna’s *Fremdenblatt* and *Die Gegenwart*.<sup>27</sup> In fact, there are a total of twenty-five articles in Schnitzler’s press cuttings collection regarding the Bibliographisches Bureau publication of the *Anatol*-cycle. Amongst the most positive is that written by Karl Kraus for *Die Gesellschaft*, in which Kraus claims that Schnitzler ‘gehört zu den bedeutendsten Talenten Jungösterreichs’.<sup>28</sup> Part of this article is reproduced in Offermanns’s notes for the 1964 edition of the play, and he comments on the favourable nature of the article in comparison with some of Kraus’s later remarks regarding Schnitzler, especially in his 1897 essay ‘Die demolierte Literatur’.<sup>29</sup> This reflects Kraus’s change in attitude towards *Jung-Wien* writers during the 1890s. The cycle was not performed as a whole until eighteen years after its 1893 publication, although four of the seven individual acts were performed in the 1890s.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘This “süßes Mädel” comes from the suburbs and has actually already been introduced into Viennese literature by Nestroy. This figure reaches its peak in *Liebelel*’s Christine.’ Renate Wagner, *Arthur Schnitzler: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> ‘All of his books talk about love.’ Felix Salten, *Neue Rundschau*, 23 (1912), p. 636, cited in Butzko, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> For publication details see Reinhard Urbach, *Schnitzler-Kommentar zu den Erzählenden Schriften und Dramatischen Werken* (Munich: Winkler, 1974), pp. 139-41.

<sup>26</sup> See Wagner, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Otto Schinnerer ‘The Early Works of Arthur Schnitzler’, *Germanic Review*, 4 (1929), 153–97 (p. 153).

<sup>28</sup> ‘He is one of *Jungösterreich*’s most eminent talents.’ The article is published in *Die Gesellschaft: Monatsschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Sozialpolitik*, 1893.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Schnitzler, *Anatol: Text und Materialien zur Interpretation*, ed. by Ernst L. Offermanns, Komedia 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964), pp. 180–81.

It is interesting to note that even as early as 1896 Schnitzler was seen as representative of a specifically Viennese literature, as is clearly suggested by the reference to him as an *Urwiener* by the critic writing for the *Literarische Gesellschaft* in Leipzig following the 1896 première of the first scene in the *Anatol* cycle, *Die Frage an das Schicksal*. Similarly, two years later following the November 1898 *Raimundtheater* performance of the fifth *Anatol* scene, *Abschiedssouper*, the critic writing for the *Wiener Zeitung* clearly identifies the play as having specifically Viennese qualities:

Wie anders wirkt dieser Wiener Poet! Schnitzler ist eine eigenartige Schriftstellergestalt. Er hat Wiener Menschen in die Welt gesetzt, ihnen Esprit und Laune, tiefe Schmerzeslaute und jauchzende Lustworte gegeben. [...] Diese Art modernes Wiener Stück gehört Schnitzler als Begründer.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the reviews of the *Anatol* scenes that were performed in the 1890s and early 1900s demonstrate an acute awareness of Schnitzler as a specifically Viennese writer and of his works as possessing specifically modern characteristics. For example, in a review of the January 1900 performance of *Die Frage an das Schicksal* in Vienna's Josefstädter Theater, published in the city's *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the critic comments with reference to the seven *Anatol* scenes: 'In allen weht eine ermüdende Dekadenzluft [...] In ihnen ist ein merkwürdiges Gemisch vom Vergangenen und Zukünftigen, aber freilich dabei mehr erschlaffender Zweifel als vertrauende Hoffnung. Echtes fin de Siècle! Sie sind prickelnd interessant, sie gehen auf die Nerven.'<sup>31</sup> The necessarily limited scope of this working paper means that there is not room for a full discussion of the significance of Schnitzler's identity as a specifically Viennese writer. Suffice it to say that it caused considerable controversy throughout his lifetime, especially from right-wing critics who objected to a Jewish writer representing Austrian literature.

In conclusion, it seems that Schnitzler's reputation as a writer of modern drama had a detrimental effect on the critical reception of his early works in Vienna. At times this was compounded both by his associations with the *Jung-Wien* group, and his Jewish identity, leading him to claim in 1917 that he was 'der am meisten beschimpfte Dichter deutscher

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<sup>30</sup> 'What a different impression is made by this Viennese poet! Schnitzler is a peculiar sort of literary figure. He has brought Viennese people into the world, has given them wit and temperament, deep cries of pain and gleeful shouts of pleasure [...] This sort of modern Viennese play belongs to Schnitzler as its founder.'

Sprache’—a claim that is certainly supported by the mass of virulently anti-Semitic cuttings contained in Schnitzler’s press cuttings collection.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘An air of tiring decadence blows through all of them [the seven *Anatol* scenes]. There is a strange mixture of the past and the future in them, but there is certainly more weary doubt than confident hope with it. Typical fin-de-siècle! They are tingling with interest, they work on the nerves.’

<sup>32</sup> ‘The most slandered writer of the German language.’ Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch 1917–1919*, 13 December 1917.