

Austrian Studies: the Second Decade

JUDITH BENISTON

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that *Austrian Studies* has been with me throughout my academic career. As an Oxford University doctoral student working under the supervision of Ritchie Robertson, I attended the launch event at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London in 1990, encountering Edward Timms there for the first time and duly purchasing a copy of *Vienna 1900*. As the years went on, I acquired more of the series and particularly treasure the ones that Ritchie gave to me, with congratulatory notes in the front marking the milestones towards the successful completion of my thesis and my lectureship at University College London. The Habsburg Legacy conference, which formed the foundation of the fifth volume, was my first international conference, and allowed me to glimpse my external examiner, Eda Sagarra, before facing her in my *viva voce* examination. It was also there that I first experienced the force of nature that was Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler giving a paper.

My more formal involvement with *Austrian Studies* began when my first ever book review appeared in the eighth volume and when Ritchie invited me to co-edit the tenth, *Catholicism and Austrian Literature*, with him. Having attempted to train me to reference properly as a doctoral student, he then taught me to edit. I still remember the terror of being asked my view of a submission without first knowing what he thought of it, and tried to learn from his incisive and constructive responses to each submission and his manner of dealing courteously (and if necessary firmly) with its author. When I think back to our working methods in the late 1990s, what has changed most is the means of communication. The many fat envelopes that went to and fro by mail, often containing typescripts annotated by hand, and the mini-disks on which final versions were received, seem to belong to an age far

removed from the present. A particularly large number of disks (some of which invariably corrupted in transit) landed in my pigeonhole, as I took over from Ritchie the task of editing the reviews section, continuing in that rewarding but time-consuming role for several years after the relaunch in 2003. Thankfully, the transition included not only a long list of ‘Reliable Reviewers’ and their specialisms but also an element of training, with the most valuable lesson being one of kindness – even if it occasionally involved asking a colleague to tone down particularly waspish remarks.

Plans for some form of continued editorial involvement on my part had tentatively been made in the late 1990s, just before Edinburgh University Press ceased to publish, and I had little hesitation in 2001 in either accepting the invitation of the MHRA to edit the relaunched *Austrian Studies* or inviting Robert Vilain to join me.¹ The OUP referee who was so scathing about the prospect of a journal edited by two Cambridge scholars would have been horrified to learn that the new editorial duo had not only both been at Oxford but also both written doctoral theses on (albeit very different) aspects of the *œuvre* of Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

I would characterize our approach as editors as a combination of continuity and gentle innovation that has been mindful of the changing nature of the academic world and of academic publishing. Certain continuities were easily maintained: the international community of scholars who had supported the journal in the 1990s seemed genuinely pleased to have it back, with the result that an advisory board of eminent colleagues was quickly reformed, and a relaunch event, generously supported by the Austrian Cultural Forum, was

¹ I am very grateful to Robert Vilain, now Professor of German and Comparative Literature at the University of Bristol, for reading a draft of this memoir and suggesting some improvements.

incorporated into a conference held at the University of Edinburgh. We continued with the thematic format, not least because there were a number of topics – beyond Hofmannsthal! – that seemed timely and were of particular interest to one or both of us.

After a lead time of almost two years, *Austrian Studies* 11: ‘Hitler’s First Victim’? *Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria*, appeared in 2003, contributing to the widespread re-examination of the ‘victim thesis’ that accompanied the work of the Austrian *Historikerkommission* [Historians’ Commission]. The Commission’s report into the seizure of property during the Nazi occupation, and related questions of restitution and compensation, was published in February of that year, and I was supported in writing the introduction by Robert Knight, the international member of the Commission. An innovation in this volume was that, thanks to Edward Timms’ good offices, we were able to include, in English translation, Dr Bernhard Stillfried’s memoir of Austria in the period 1938-1945. Although such testimonies are often termed ‘ego-documents’, the label seems particularly inappropriate here, as the author’s modesty meant that the Stillfried family’s importance in the history of Austrian resistance to Nazism only comes out fully in Robert Vilain’s introduction. Again with the mediation of Edward Timms, three years later we incorporated Ian Menzies’s memoir of growing up in Vienna between the wars into my personal favourite of all the volumes with which I have been involved: *Culture and Politics in Red Vienna* (2006). Evolving out of a workshop and exhibition held at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London, this volume makes a distinctive contribution to the study of interwar Vienna by placing at its heart the portfolio of fiftieth birthday tributes – literary, musical and artistic – that in 1924 was presented to the journalist and cultural politician David Josef Bach.

Between 2003 and 2010 Robert and I oversaw eight volumes, on topics as diverse as *Austria and France*, *The Austrian Lyric*, *Words and Music* and *Austria and the Alps*, and were joined at different points by four guest editors (Ritchie Robertson, Deborah Holmes,

Geoffrey Chew and Jon Hughes). By bringing in younger colleagues such as Deborah and Jon as editors and by providing extensive editorial feedback for early-career contributors, we hoped to build for the future and train our successors. Our approach to editing, in the days when 'Track Changes' was a new and wonderful thing, was genuinely collaborative, with every piece scrutinized several times by each of us, in the light of referees' reports, and long, caffeine-fuelled days spent sitting together in Oxford or Royston to proofread each volume.

Of course there were significant challenges, especially until the new publication arrangements had bedded down, and I particularly recall a set of cover proofs for 'Australian Studies'. Thankfully, the process ran more smoothly once Graham Nelson had taken on the role of production editor, cheerfully tackling everything from musical notation to a suicidal-looking stuffed marmot (see both in *Austria and the Alps*). In thematic volumes it is not always easy to marry robust quality control via peer review with a steady page count, but the MHRA, and especially its Honorary Treasurer David Wells, kept faith with the journal regardless of its early balance sheet. Those difficulties were alleviated by the switch to a less costly method of print production and, somewhat paradoxically, by the whole run from 2003 onwards being made available as part of the JSTOR Current Scholarship Program.

It pleases both Robert and me that the policy, instituted by the founding editors, of publishing in English, with quotations also provided in the original language, has continued to be upheld, despite the substantial amount of work it generates, as it maintains the journal's accessibility for a broad, interdisciplinary and international readership. Since we passed on the editorial baton in 2010, Robert has followed in the footsteps of Ritchie Robertson and gone on to serve as Germanic Editor of the *Modern Language Review*. I, meanwhile, returned to *Austrian Studies* in 2013 as guest editor for *Cultures at War: Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* and am gearing up to co-edit *Placing Schnitzler* in 2019. As W.E. Yates once wrote to me, *Austrian Studies* isn't a journal, it's a way of life.