

PARALLEL ACTIONS. Freud and the Writers of Young Vienna
Special exhibition at the Sigmund Freud Museum, 23 March–31 December 2018
Opening: 22 March 2018, 19:00

In cooperation with the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography

Kicking off on 23 March, a special exhibition at the Sigmund Freud Museum explores the relationship between Sigmund Freud and the writers of the Young Vienna circle: *PARALLEL ACTIONS. Freud and the Writers of Young Vienna* reveals the influence of psychoanalysis on the work of the writers Arthur Schnitzler, Karl Kraus, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Felix Salten.

The relationships between psychoanalysis and literature in turn-of-the-century Vienna can be interpreted as a kind of “parallel action”: although the neurologist Sigmund Freud and the “neurotic artists” of Young Vienna with their explorations of the human soul pursued similar goals, there is barely any evidence of official alliances, with personal relationships remaining the exception. As the exhibition demonstrates, drawing on selected writings, works and letters, however, Freud’s theory had a major influence on the writers.

Freud was also a keen observer of his contemporaries’ work, if only from afar: In a letter of 1922, he told Arthur Schnitzler – one of the earliest readers of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, who also kept records of his dreams all his life – of his long hesitation in contacting him personally, explaining this hesitance with a “fear of finding my own double”. Karl Kraus, in turn, went down in the history of psychoanalysis as one of Freud’s fiercest opponents. In fact, the *Fackel* publisher’s statements and aphorisms reflect a profound understanding and long-standing appreciation of Freud’s theory, before his critical examination turned into polemic and criticism. Hugo von Hofmannsthal shared Freud’s fascination with the ancient world and mythological figures: his adaptations of the Oedipus and Electra themes can be interpreted as an examination of psychoanalysis. Felix Salten, the author of the anonymous *Josefine Mutzenbacher* and *Bambi*, whose articles for the *Neue Freie Presse* Sigmund Freud would read regularly, shared central themes with the protagonists of psychoanalysis ranging from adolescence to female sexuality. Living in the direct vicinity of Freud, it is likely that Salten and Freud knew each other before their first recorded meetings in 1926.

Historical cabinets as exhibition displays

Obtained specially for this purpose, historical cupboards that could also have furnished the authors’ private rooms and studies serve as exhibition displays: a Louis Seize cabinet, for example, is dedicated to Hugo von Hofmannsthal as the owner of 18th century furnishings. Each author is assigned his own item of furniture, in keeping with his sense of style, to present biographical details, documents and audiovisual content.

Centres of new intellectual departures: Freud’s Wednesday Psychological Society and Young Vienna

The birth of psychoanalysis took place during a time known as “Wiener Moderne” or “Fin de Siècle” that was a heyday of literature, art, music, architecture and philosophy, but which was also marked by profound social changes and conflicts. Like many other figures of Vienna’s intellectual avant-garde, the protagonists of this exhibition also united in formal or informal circles.

Starting in 1902, Freud rallied a group of medical men at Berggasse 19, soon to be followed by members of other professions, in order to discuss a wide range of topics from the vantage point of psychoanalysis: the Wednesday Psychological Society that was transformed into the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society (WPV) in 1908. As of 1890, a group of young writers calling themselves “Jung Wien” (Young Vienna), who engaged in introspection and portrayed feelings and moods, began to meet at Café Griensteidl – a short walk from Freud’s office.

Introspection and states of the soul – the core themes of the Young Vienna writers are very similar to the questions debated by Sigmund Freud at the Wednesday evening meetings. In the years after 1907, the members of the Wednesday Psychological Society also began increasingly to discuss literature and authors, giving great attention to the writer's life and any conflicts or traumatic events during childhood. Karl Kraus was fiercely critical of this psychopathographical approach, considering it inappropriate to lay the poet on the couch and reduce the artwork to the symptom of a mental disorder.

Hermann Bahr was one of the authors discussed by the Wednesday Society. A self-proclaimed spokesman and author of programmatic writings, he played a central role among the protagonists of Young Vienna and was personally invited by Freud to take part in the weekly discussion evenings at Berggasse 19. Another intermediary between literary circles and the psychoanalytic circle was the publisher and bookseller Hugo Heller. He participated regularly in the meetings of the Wednesday Psychological Society and the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society (WPV) and published several texts by Freud including the journal *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* founded by Freud in 1912. The many authors published by Heller and who held public readings in his art salon in Vienna's first district included Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Hermann Bahr.

Freud and literature

All his life, Sigmund Freud was an ardent reader: in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he described himself as a "book-worm" whose "favorite food is books". The literary style and elaborate structure of his writings was already recognised and respected by his contemporaries: in 1930 Sigmund Freud received the Frankfurt Goethe Prize, in 1936 the French writer Romain Rolland proposed him for the Nobel prize for literature. To illustrate theoretical concepts or to substantiate their relevance, Freud made reference to works of literature in many of his writings. Literature also served him as a starting point for theoretical deliberations. Published in 1907, the monograph *Delusion and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva* is Freud's most thorough literary interpretation. The *Gradiva* study also features the famous description of poets as "valuable allies" – nicely summing up the respect that dominated Freud's occasionally distanced relationship to writers and artists. In his essay "The Uncanny" from 1919 – one of Freud's most well-known and influential texts – Freud also performs a psychoanalytic interpretation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman*.

Basic biographical facts

Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931)

Arthur Schnitzler grew up the son of a doctor in Vienna's second district, studying medicine in Vienna. He made his first literary efforts during the early years of his studies. After initially working as a junior doctor at Vienna's General Hospital, as of 1888 he began assisting his father Johann at the general outpatient clinic. Following Johann Schnitzler's death in 1893, he opened a private practice and increasingly devoted himself to writing. The successful performance of *Flirtation* at the Burgtheater in 1895 was his breakthrough as a playwright and he soon ranked among the most performed German-language dramatists. Only in his controversial works did Schnitzler express his opinions on contemporary questions of social policy and social conditions. He remained sceptical and opposed to the public propaganda of the First World War. Schnitzler married twice and had a daughter: as a child, Lili (born in 1909) was tutored by Anna Freud at Berggasse 19 for a few months. She took her own life in 1928. In the last years of his life, Schnitzler concentrated above all on film and narrative. He died at the age of sixty-nine on 21 February 1931 following a brain haemorrhage.

Karl Kraus (1874–1936)

Karl Kraus was born in the small Bohemian town of Jičín and moved to Vienna with his family in 1877. Kraus published theatrical and literary reviews while still at grammar school. In his “Theater der Dichtung” [Theatre of Poetry] he recited from a wide range of different authors, performing throughout the German-speaking world. Kraus, a wealthy man, donated the revenue from this work. In 1899, the year in which he founded *Die Fackel*, he left the Jewish community and was baptised a Catholic in 1911 – his godfather was Adolf Loos. Twelve years later he left the church – in protest against the performance of a play by Hugo von Hofmannsthal at Salzburg’s Kollegienkirche. Although Kraus believed that man’s domain was the mind while that of woman was sexuality, he himself enjoyed the company of intellectual and artistic women. He firmly rejected the institution of marriage. His reaction to the outbreak of the First World War was silence: the next issue of *Die Fackel* did not come out until December 1914 after a five-month hiatus. In the years from 1915 to 1922, he assimilated the experience of war in his mammoth opus *The Last Days of Mankind*. That Kraus also responded to Hitler’s take-over with silence – as he had said he would – brought him a great deal of incomprehension and criticism. Karl Kraus died of a cardiac embolism in Vienna on 12 June 1936.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929)

Hugo von Hofmannsthal grew up in wealthy circumstances in Vienna. After cutting short his law studies and doing voluntary military service, he graduated in Romance philology. Despite his Jewish ancestors and his uneasiness about Catholicism at an early age, he later came to identify increasingly with the Catholic culture of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. He lived in a little baroque mansion in Rodaun and an apartment in Vienna and had three children with his wife Gertrude. A reactionary conservative, Hofmannsthal welcomed the outbreak of war in 1914 like the vast majority of Austrians. He was thus deeply affected by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Two days after his son Franz committed suicide on 13 July 1929, just before setting off for the funeral, Hugo von Hofmannsthal died of a brain haemorrhage in his study in Rodaun.

Felix Salten (1869–1945)

Born Siegmund Salzmann in Pest, Hungary, Felix Salten moved to Vienna with his family in the first weeks of his life. At the age of sixteen, he dropped out of grammar school. The beginning of his literary work and his friendship with the writers of Young Vienna – particularly Arthur Schnitzler – were a crucial turning point for Salten. Another of Salten’s important friends was Theodor Herzl, whose Zionist ideas he supported. Married to a Burgtheater actress, he had two children. In 1909 Salten, who had lived in the immediate vicinity of the Freuds at Berggasse 13 prior to the First World War, moved into a villa in Vienna’s Cottageviertel. His lavish lifestyle was a constant source of financial straits, and he was unable to cash in on the subsequent world fame of *Josefine Mutzenbacher* and *Bambi*. During the First World War, Salten did his military service working for the foreign office’s newspaper. Initially welcoming the outbreak of war, disillusionment began to predominate after 1917. From 1927 until 1933 he was Schnitzler’s successor as president of the Austrian P.E.N. Club. His books were banned in 1935, and in 1939 he was able to leave Vienna with his wife and flee to Switzerland, where he died in 1945.

The special exhibition runs until the end of the year and is a coproduction with the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography as part of the “Young Vienna. Nature *plus X*” series of exhibitions involving various institutions from Vienna and Salzburg between March 2018 and April 2019.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a booklet.

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Curated by Daniela Finzi

Collaborators: Simone Faxe and Fabio Zoccola

A cooperation of the [Sigmund Freud Museum](#) and the [Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography](#)

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