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## Reviews

Heidi Hakkarainen, *Comical Modernity: Popular Humour and the Transformation of Urban Space in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna*. *Austrian and Habsburg Studies* 23. New York: Berghahn, 2018. 280 pp.

One of my favorite cartoons reprinted in Heidi Hakkarainen's new book *Comical Modernity: Popular Humour and the Transformation of Urban Space in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna*, appears on page 118. It is a two-paneled image. The top, "Wien—vor der Verschönerung," depicts a beautiful park scene, with dozens of well-dressed strollers beneath tall, lush trees and the old city walls and hazy skyline of the capital on the far horizon. On the bottom, "Wien—nach der Verschönerung," we see just five figures, each in a different state of distress beneath six bare tree trunks, a harsh sun overhead and the city—bereft of its medieval wall—starkly outlined on the empty plain just behind them.

I love this cartoon for many reasons, but especially because, for anyone with even a passing familiarity with urban park restoration, it is immediately comprehensible. By making light of "beautification" and then passing judgment merely on the one aspect everyone agrees is atrocious—that it is quite a bit worse to stroll beneath harsh sunlight than beautiful trees—the cartoon is magnanimously inclusive, inviting empathy from all its viewers. A Viennese glancing at this edition of *Kikeriki* displayed in a street stall, or pulling it from her mailbox, or sitting beside a man reading it on the train, would know exactly what this picture is about. That is the magic of great cartoons.

Yet, as Hakkarainen argues, satirical magazines (*Witzblätter*) are about so much more than the single amusing caricature. Rather, the ability to use humor as a mode of conversation and comment, especially about the greatest

changes affecting everyday life in the hubbub of the urban metropolis, is the very lifeblood of the satirical magazine in the modern era. To be humorous and jolly, absurd and outlandish, to make even the strangest, oddest, cruelest, or most unapproachable parts of life seem comprehensible, even intimate or quaint—these are the qualities that modern satirical magazines best exemplify. And such magazines reveal, writes Hakkarainen, “hints about mental patterns and experiences [of what it is like to live in the midst of the maelstrom of modernity] that have otherwise been left out of the documentation” (10).

Hakkarainen’s book focuses on the sorts of quotidian experiences brought about by the new urban environment of the middle and late nineteenth century—strolls in denuded parks, say, or encounters with police patrols or foreign tourists or ladies wearing the newest fashions or indeed, with any of the myriad tiny interactions with the urban landscape and its denizens that are commonly left undocumented by larger social histories. Cities changed enormously from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century, a fact that is often discussed in history books but still nearly impossible for anyone alive today to fathom. Taking Vienna as her case site—a wise choice, since in the nineteenth century the Habsburg capital underwent an urban reconstruction second only to Paris—and three of its widest-circulating satirical magazines (*Der Figaro*, *Der Floh*, and *Kikeriki*) as her main material, Hakkarainen sets out to understand “what aspects of the transforming city were either seen or portrayed as comical or as targets for satire; how humour was used as a way to understand and negotiate change in the everyday environment, and to create meanings and identities in a situation when earlier spatial and social relations were falling apart” (2). As she describes it, “the rebuilding of the city shook the old spatial and social structures and brought into existence a new urban community that created and consumed popular culture” (5).

This is Hakkarainen’s main argument: that popular culture, and especially the liminal cultural space inhabited by satirical magazines (neither high-nor lowbrow), can give us one more scholarly framework through which to understand the vast and amorphous yet startling and undeniable phenomenon called modernity. Unfolding across five chapters, each focused on a broad theme that Hakkarainen sees reflected in the pages of *Der Figaro*, *Der Floh*, and *Kikeriki*, the book walks readers through the major cultural events and trends of late nineteenth-century Vienna. It is an exciting tour. Chapter 1 di-

scusses both the strict censorship laws employed in the *Reichshauptstadt* and the concomitant freedoms that came with the massive expansion of the city with the razing of the medieval fortifications. As Hakkarainen writes, on the one hand, “the censors were afraid of what kinds of dangerous thinking, criticism or new ideas the humorous *Witzblätter* might stimulate in their readers” (26), yet on the other, “ridicule of the City Council [during planning for the Ringstrasse] reveals the significance of the humorous-satirical magazines as a forum for internal debate within the bourgeoisie” (46). Chapters 2 and 3 continue Hakkarainen’s argument about the *Witzblätter* as sites of transgression and debate and about the intersection of various types of urban tensions, like those between personal freedom and neo-absolutist governance, and between the memory of Viennese gardens and the immense muddy construction site that seemed to engulf the city. (Hakkarainen has a fascinating section on jokes about the lack of shade in Vienna during its decades-long reconstruction, in which my favorite image appears.) Finally, chapters 4 and 5 focus in on the question of “knowing” (the origin of the German *witz*, which comes from *wissen*, and the English *wit*) the city—its ins and outs, its distinctive characters, its new class and gender dynamics, its appearance in the eyes of tourists and outsiders. As Hakkarainen writes, “Because tacit knowledge of the city was crucial for belonging to the city, jokes about misinterpretations and errors functioned as a strategy for inclusion and exclusion” (201).

As in any book of this kind (Hakkarainen is not on the hook for this), the reader is left wanting to see far more of the primary source material than can obviously be reprinted in an academic monograph. But what Hakkarainen does include is delightful, and turning a page to find a reprinted cartoon invariably gives a little burst of fun and excitement. And by the end, Hakkarainen’s argument—that satire reveals a deep and nuanced account of the modern urban experience—is convincing. As Vienna transformed over the nineteenth century, so did its citizenry, and the city they bequeathed to the twentieth century was one of the most dynamic in the history of the world. Knowing just a little more about how it got there, and about how those who lived there thought humorously about it, is an important contribution to historical scholarship.

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