# *Vanishing Vienna: Modernism, Philosemitism, and Jews in a Postwar City* by Frances Tanzer (review)


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## Modern Era

Frances Tanzer. *Vanishing Vienna: Modernism, Philosemitism, and Jews in a Postwar City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024. 264 pp.

Jewish studies scholarship on Vienna and Austria has undergone nothing less than a "cultural turn" in recent decades, as the focus has shifted almost entirely from traditional political and social histories based on archival source research to more theoretical and sometimes downright ethereal discussions of identity, performance, (in)visibility, erasure, difference, and memory. It is into this (by now) convoluted field that Frances Tanzer's new book treads, examining Jewish Austrians in the fields of modernist art and popular entertainment from the interwar to postwar periods, including their emigration and partial return, from the vantage point of antisemitism, philosemitism, visibility, and erasure.

The book is essentially based on Tanzer's dissertation, and at fewer than 220 pages, including the notes and bibliography, makes for light reading (in a positive sense). It is divided into two "acts" focusing on the Nazi and postwar periods, respectively, and comprises altogether five chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The bibliography is sizeable and commendably includes a range of secondary literature from both the fields of Jewish and Austrian studies as well as some archival and primary sources.

Tanzer begins with the insightful, if hardly novel, premise that—given the enormous role that Jews played in the development of modern and popular culture in Vienna—the persecution, expulsion, and murder of Jewish Austrians represented nothing short of a "brutal self-amputation" (xii), which led to a schism of Austrian culture between Austria itself and an exilic Austrian culture overseas, especially in the United States. The introduction charts—more originally—an interesting cultural shift after 1945 whereby Jewish-coded cultural spaces of the interwar period, like coffeehouses and cabaret theaters, were recast as the very embodiment of Viennese or Austrian culture. This, in turn, represented a strategy to explicitly distance these spaces from German culture, which postwar Austria was naturally keen to pursue.

Chapter 1 picks up the established finding of recent cultural historians (most notably Laura Moworitz and Elana Shapira) that "Aryanization" in Nazi Austria was not merely material, but immaterial, too. For instance, the work of modernist artists like Gustav Klimt or Egon Schiele, which was often patronized by Jews and/or used Jewish models, was essentially de-Judaized and reinterpreted as part of a Nazi German cultural universe. Chapter 2, by contrast, explores how Jewish emigrants themselves conveyed their cultural work into exile, with cabaret performances in Tel Aviv, Bogota, and New York contributing to a perception of Vienna as quintessentially cosmopolitan and, hence, anti-Nazi, a view that would (although this was not the intention of the artists) serve the construction of a "normative Austrian cultural canon and national identity" after 1945 (55).

Chapter 3 unfortunately opens by perpetuating the often-invoked Austrian "victim myth," namely, the notion that Austrians saw themselves as victims of National Socialism after 1945. This narrative has been thoroughly debunked by Peter Pirker, who points out that the proliferation of Nazi values after 1945, including antisemitism, was not evidence of self-victimization but of continued perpetration. Tanzer unwittingly showcases the fallacy of this narrative when she cites an antisemitic neo-Nazi rally in postwar Salzburg as an example of how Austrians saw themselves as "victims" of National Socialism (101), an argument that makes little sense but is unfortunately still widespread in Austrian historiography. The chapter proceeds to show how Jewish artists were selectively invited to return to Vienna after 1945 insofar as they were recruited to help rebuild Vienna's cultural life, but without recognition of their Jewishness or their suffering under Nazi rule.

Chapter 4 claims that postwar Austrians attempted to harness a de-Judaized modernism to underline Austrian culture as part of European culture, which Tanzer portrays as a cynical strategy of non-Jewish Austrians, even though this cultural argument was already being made by Jewish writers like Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig before 1945. Chapter 5 discusses the return of a small number of cabaret artists after 1945, whose work now served as a space to engage, even if subtly, with the crimes of National Socialism and the widespread absence of Jews in postwar Austria. The conclusion points to the problematic reception of Carl Schorske's groundbreaking work on Viennese modernism but unfortunately does not discuss the veritable avalanche of academic and public engagements with Austria's Jewish cultural history that have followed in the half century since.

As indicated from the outset, Tanzer has entered a saturated field of scholarship, yet still manages to make an original and important contribution. Most laudable is the fact that she takes Jewish engagements with Austrian culture seriously *as* Austrian culture, thus finally operating on a discursive level beyond the outdated narrative of "Jewish assimilation" that has predominated in the field for decades. Meanwhile, her discussion of the complex relationship between antisemitism and philosemitism, especially as the one morphed into the other following the Holocaust, is intriguing and will hopefully serve as inspiration for more in-depth studies in future.

The work unfortunately does sometimes trade in tendentious or simply false claims, for example, that "Jews were hardly mentioned in public discussion" after 1945 (p. 2 and elsewhere). Aside from historiography showing otherwise (for example, Béla Rásky's recent work), a quick search on the database of the Austrian National Library for the use of the term *Juden* in newspapers between 1945 and 1949 yields tens of thousands of results. Such fallacies, of which there are several, evidently owe to Lisa Silverman's debatable premises, which are cited throughout the endnotes.

Indeed, the book works best when Tanzer focuses on specific source materials and tangible historical events rather than abstract claims about nebulous cultural constructs like "Austrian" or "European" culture. Where it does so, for example,

in close readings of postwar cabaret pieces by stars like Stella Kadmon and Georg Kreisler, the book holds fascinating insights and contributes an important perspective on the transformations of Austrian culture through and beyond National Socialism.

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Tobias Brinkmann. *Between Borders: The Great Jewish Migration from Eastern Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. 318 pp.

Appropriately, historian Tobias Brinkmann and Oxford University Press used the word "migration" in the title of this book, announcing that it deals with the entirety of the process by which women and men living in one place found themselves on the move to someplace else. The fundamental matter addressed in this book involves the totality of the process, from emigration—leaving one place—and immigration—arrival to another place. In addition, the book makes the mechanisms that connect these two, the means of getting out and getting in, organic to the analysis.

*Between Borders*, as evidenced in the title and the book's content, does not center the United States. It surely appears and takes up a good deal of the analysis. As the destination of choice for Jewish migrants, both desired and achieved, it obviously loomed large. But, rightly, Brinkmann asserts that to understand its pull and the means by which migration to America took place requires a global analysis. He drives home the point that the United States existed in a complex web of migration options and destinations and that "the Great Jewish migration from Eastern Europe" can only be understood in a worldwide perspective.

One of the most notable achievements here involves Brinkmann's analysis of the modes of transportation, which depicts the links between railroad and steamship lines and highlights the importance of their development and articulations with each other. He describes, as no scholar of Jewish history before has, the rise of transoceanic shipping as a big business that made the owners of the lines, many British, French, German, and Russian Jews, key players in stimulating and facilitating the migrations, from point of origin to point of destination.

This has been parsed out previously by primarily European historians of migration and some scholars of US immigration, but Jewish historians have mostly fixed their attention on the conditions that afflicted the Jews and sent them out on their journeys. Brinkmann has expanded our understanding of Jewish migration with his focus on this matter. He also provides a detailed explication of the role of global Jewish help organizations, something heretofore mentioned in the literature but rarely examined as deeply as here.

*Between Borders* will take a place of distinction in the extant scholarship on Jewish immigration in the transformation of the long nineteenth century.