

EROS AND THANATOS IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNA

*Sigmund Freud, Otto Weininger,
Arthur Schnitzler*

The crisis of Jewish emancipation and assimilation was felt with particular acuity in turn-of-the-century Vienna. In 1895, political antisemitism attained its biggest electoral success when Karl Lueger, leader of the Christian Socialists, was elected mayor of Vienna. Although Emperor Franz Joseph, who was opposed to antisemitism, initially refused to confirm Lueger as mayor, he did confirm him in 1897, ushering in more than a decade of antiliberal rule in the city. Lueger's election had been preceded by a decline of political liberalism, with which Jews had historically identified, and the rise of the Austrian Pan-German movement, which under the leadership of Georg von Schoenerer had embraced racial antisemitism in its program in 1885. To be sure, in comparison to Schoenerer's racist fanaticism, Lueger's views were eclectic and opportunistic. His notorious remark "I decide who is a Jew" indicates his selective and cynical use of racial ideology. Lueger was also known for having several Jewish friends, and as a mayor he refrained from implementing anti-Jewish policies or retracting Jewish civil rights. His political ascent and eventual election were nevertheless a shock for many Jews in Vienna, and for good reasons. In 1897, they witnessed an openly antisemitic politician taking over the government of a city that had been a paragon of integration.

There was a higher concentration of Jews in turn-of-the-century Vienna than in the major German cities, with the result that artists, writers, and performers of

Jewish background played a prominent role in Viennese cultural life. Jakob Wassermann reveled at the omnipresence of Jews upon his arrival in the city in 1898: Jews were active in “the banks, the press, the theatre, literature, social organizations. . . . The court, the lower class and the Jews gave the city its stamp. And that the Jews, as the most mobile group, kept all the others in continuous motion is, on the whole, not surprising. Yet I was amazed at the hosts of Jewish physicians, attorneys, clubmen, snobs, dandies, proletarians, actors, newspapermen and poets.”¹ There are several explanations for the prominence of Jews in Viennese public life. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Vienna had seen an influx of Jewish immigrants from other parts of the Habsburg Empire. The Habsburg Empire was home to a variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups among which tensions increased in the course of the nineteenth century. Jews were often forced to choose between competing linguistic and political allegiances. Many opted for assimilation to German-language culture, and the Germanness of Vienna was part of its attraction for Jewish immigrants. Yet their own German identity remained precarious and ambiguous, predisposing Jews to become agents of cultural renewal. Vienna was a mecca for immigrants of all sorts, and the multiethnic and multicultural character of the city left its mark on Viennese Jewish identity: “The Germanness of Viennese Jews, who had for the most part arrived recently in the city, often from non-German speaking areas, was even more beset with ambiguity—and hence with creative potential—than that of Viennese Christians.”² While the rise of political antisemitism in Vienna did not pose an immediate physical threat to the Jews, it called into question their tenuous yet highly productive identification with German culture.

Vienna around 1900 also was a locale famously fraught with questions of sex and love. It was the birthplace of psychoanalysis, the place where Sigmund Freud and others formulated their revolutionary insights about the power of Eros in individual and communal life. In particular in his later work, in books such as *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud analyzes the role of erotic and aggressive drives in human culture and society. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), for instance, he argues that the same libidinal energy that propels individuals into love relationships helps constitute social bodies such as the church and the military. If deflected from the goal (intercourse) and the object (an individual of the opposite sex) of mature sexuality, libidinal energy can create lasting social bonds and become a glue of society. Freud’s theory of the social role of aim-inhibited or sublimated eroticism potentially supports an idea discussed throughout this book: that erotic love may spark social or political renewal. For if

1. Quoted in Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 172–73.

2. Steven M. Lowenstein, “Jewish Participation in German Culture,” in Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 3:313.

the sexual drive propels people into larger social units, it also remains stubbornly resistant to dominant social formations and thus a force of social change. The natural fate of the sexual drive is to become fixated on an individual and transformed into love, thereby promoting the formation of a couple, which according to Freud is inherently antisocial. The more passionately two people are in love with each other, the more indifferent they become to the larger social context in which they live. Since the dyad of the lovers is at odds with the demands of the group, erotic love potentially destabilizes society and forces it to reorganize itself along new lines.

In this chapter, I argue Freud himself did not pursue the implication of his own theory for Christian-Jewish love, about which he maintained a conspicuous silence. My examples will be drawn from *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), which Freud completed just around the turn of the century and which belongs to the “cultural” books mentioned above. Freud blurs therein the line between the normal and the neurotic by showing that the principles active in neuroses also govern everyday parapraxes such as slips of the tongue and lapses of memory. I will briefly discuss the book’s allusions to religious difference in love relationships and argue that they surface only in the form of symptomatic leftovers. The focus of this chapter is on two Viennese writers—Otto Weininger and Arthur Schnitzler—who rethink the connection between Jewishness and eroticism in ways that Freud’s work eschews. As in previous chapters, I am less concerned with conscious collaboration, reaction, or opposition than with discursive overlaps, intersections, and divergences. Although there are some known connections between these Viennese writers, these remain rather tenuous and difficult to ascertain.³ What I wish to show is that all three writers think through the crisis of Jewish assimilation in their reflections on sex, love, and death—and that it is Schnitzler, the literary author, who reinstates love as a model of Jewish-Gentile rapprochement.

Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* (*Geschlecht und Charakter*, 1903) is generally considered the first philosophical treatise on sexuality. Born Jewish, Weininger converted to Protestantism shortly after defending the dissertation on which *Sex and Character* is based. To today’s reader, the work reads like a compilation of misogynist and antisemitic stereotypes, a pseudoscientific speculation about the nature of sexual difference. Yet at the time of its publication, *Sex and Character* quickly became enormously influential, especially after its author in October 1903

3. Freud had read a draft of the dissertation on which *Sex and Character* was based before Weininger submitted it to the University of Vienna. Although Freud’s reaction was decidedly mixed—he would not recommend the dissertation for publication—the work’s affinities to his own are unmistakable; he later complained that Weininger had lifted the theory of bisexuality from him and his friend Wilhelm Fliess. As for Freud and Schnitzler, they read each other’s work and occasionally acknowledged the impact it had on their own, but they refrained from seeking each other’s personal acquaintance. Freud famously confided in a letter of 1922—written on the occasion of Schnitzler’s sixtieth birthday—that he had avoided a meeting out of fear of facing his double (*Doppelgängerscheu*). The relationship between Schnitzler and Weininger is the most difficult to grasp, since we have no record of encounters or interactions between them.

committed suicide in the room where Beethoven had died. Among the many modernist artists, writers, and philosophers who were influenced by Weininger are Ludwig Wittgenstein, Franz Kafka, Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, and James Joyce. My reading of *Sex and Character* focuses on the chapter on Judaism, which Weininger added after he submitted his dissertation and which grotesquely inflates the connection between Jewishness and sexuality. Weininger declares hypersexuality the quintessential Jewish (and female) trait and postulates that mankind needs to overcome sexuality and procreation to become truly liberated. As we shall see, this idea has dire implications for the project of Jewish emancipation.

The second half of this chapter is focused on a leading exponent of Viennese modernism, Arthur Schnitzler. The son of a Jewish laryngologist, Schnitzler studied and practiced medicine before he devoted himself exclusively to writing literature. Like Freud, Schnitzler was concerned with the duality of life and death, the hidden truth of dreams, and the psychological mechanisms of denial and repression. In different ways than Freud, Schnitzler explored the workings of the unconscious (or, as he called it, the “middle consciousness”) for the sake of social analysis and critique. He was a keen observer of the crisis of liberalism and the spread of anti-semitism in turn-of-the-century Vienna. In his novel *The Road into the Open* (*Der Weg ins Freie*, 1908), he depicts the many ways in which Viennese Jews responded to this crisis. The novel combines this social analysis with a love story between an aristocratic man and a woman from the lower middle classes, performing a crisscrossing of literary genres that reinstates Eros as a positive social force. As I will argue, Schnitzler’s recuperation of love as a model for Jewish-Gentile rapprochement has to be read against Freud’s resonant silence about and Weininger’s decided rejection of this model.⁴

Freud’s Resonant Silence

Jay Geller has tracked down the few yet significant references to Jewish-Gentile love in Freud’s *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, a book that reveals the hidden truth behind seemingly random slips of the tongue and other parapraxes.⁵ Almost all of the scenes in which Freud explicitly identifies individuals as Jewish involve intimate contact between Jews and Gentiles. These scenes show misgivings, fears, and other negative reactions to Jewish-Gentile love affairs: A woman has a dream about a child committing suicide by means of a snakebite. At the end of the dream analysis, she expresses apprehension that her brother might enter into

4. As mentioned earlier, the Habsburg Empire never mandated civil marriage, and the number of Jewish-Gentile intermarriages rose more slowly in Austria than in Germany. This is one of the reasons the topic of marriage did not become as central to the Austrian debates about Jewish assimilation—however, sex and love did, if in an indirect manner.

5. See Jay Geller, *On Freud’s Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 52–62.

a “*mésalliance*” with a “non-Aryan” woman.⁶ A converted Jew inadvertently calls his sons *Juden* (Jews) instead of *Jungen* (youngsters) in front of his antisemitic hosts (93). He evidently has regrets about his conversion, which was necessary to marry a Christian woman. A Gentile schoolteacher sends a letter meant for his brother to the Jewish girl he has been courting. In the letter he expresses his misgivings about the potential marriage, which therefore never takes place (223). Geller concludes that these scenes indicate how fraught and complicated Jewish-Gentile relations have become, and that Freud gestures at these complications in his depictions of Jewish-Gentile love.

Overall, however, Freud maintained a resonant silence about the subject of Jewish-Gentile sex and love. Even in the passage from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in which he most explicitly discusses the disadvantages of being Jewish in Austria, Freud remains evasive. He recounts his conversation with a male acquaintance who complains about the bleak prospects of his generation of the “race [*Volkstamm*] to which we both belonged” (9). The man expresses his hope for future recompense by citing, haltingly and incompletely, a line from Virgil’s *Aeneid*: he says (in Latin), “Let an avenger arise from my bones,” instead of “Let someone [*aliquis*] arise as an avenger from my bones” (9). In reconstructing the reasons for the misquotation, Freud finds out that the man fears that his female companion might be pregnant. Freud concludes that the man’s lapse expresses his conflicting desires to have progeny (who will avenge his generation of Jews) and to *not* have progeny (with this particular woman in this particular situation). However, Freud makes no attempt to learn more about the woman’s identity—we know only that she is Italian—or about the reasons for the man’s apparent hesitation to marry her. Freud’s account of the man’s story contains its own significant omissions and evasions. Tellingly, in the next example, which involves a man forgetting lines from a famous Goethe ballad, Freud (wrongly) surmises that the religious difference between the man and the woman he is courting might have caused his memory to lapse. Freud’s reference to religious difference as a potential marriage obstacle seems to be a symptomatic leftover, a displaced reminder of a problem left unspoken in his previous example.

In a different context, Eva Lezzi has suggested that Freud remained evasive about erotic attraction between Jews and Gentiles because the topic had become so overdetermined. Since the mid-nineteenth century, discourses about sexuality had become increasingly important and decoupled from questions of love, marriage, and procreation, especially with the development of the modern science of sexuality. At the same time, antisemitic discourses deployed more and more sexual imagery, for instance, by associating Jews with deviant sexuality and denouncing the

6. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 6:67 (Freud’s emphasis). All further citations of *The Psychopathology* refer to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

new science of sexuality as Jewish. Against this backdrop, Freud's relative silence about Jewish-Gentile love affairs becomes significant. Freud intentionally shunned the (usually antisemitic) equation between Jewishness and sexuality in favor of a universal theory of Eros.⁷

Weininger's Rejection of Eros

Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* cements the image of the effeminate Jew that had developed over the course of the nineteenth century.⁸ The book is notorious for portraying both women and Jews as hypersexual, materialistic, uncreative, slavish, and in every way the opposite of the rational, autonomous subject of Kantian philosophy. Weininger draws the analogy between Jews and women, which he bases upon their purported lack of an intelligible self and their susceptibility to external influence, in the thirteenth chapter of *Sex and Character*. As with many ideas of the book, the great popularity of this analogy does not reflect its truth or originality but the degree to which it was already entrenched in fin-de-siècle Viennese culture. Weininger's portrayal of Jews as infinitely malleable and devoid of essence spelled out what many thought—and wrote—after the process of Jewish emancipation and assimilation had created a new set of anti-Jewish stereotypes. Modern antisemitism replaced the traditional Christian image of the Jews as stubborn disbelievers who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah with new images that targeted assimilated Jews. The swiftness with which Jews adapted, or were said to adapt, to their non-Jewish surroundings came to symbolize the perceived threats of modern life, such as superficiality, abstraction, and instability.

There are two different arguments running through *Sex and Character*, corresponding roughly to its two parts. On the one hand, Weininger advances an innovative definition of a person's sex as relative—someone might be 40 percent feminine and 60 percent masculine—and as malleable—anyone can work to increase his or her own percentage of masculinity. Part 1 of the book, which draws on the empirical biology and psychology of the time, sets out to demonstrate this relativity in a variety of examples, including human bisexuality and intermediate sexual types. On the other hand, Weininger posits the existence of ideal types of masculinity and femininity, abbreviated *M* and *W*, which individual men and women may approximate to varying degrees but which they rarely if ever fully embody.⁹ Part 2 of *Sex*

7. See Lezzi, *Liebe ist meine Religion!*, 365–86. On connections between the science of sexuality and Jewishness, see also Christina von Braun, "Ist die Sexualwissenschaft eine 'jüdische Wissenschaft'? Säkularisierung und die Entstehung der Sexualwissenschaft," in *Preußens Himmel breitet seine Sterne . . . : Beiträge zur Kultur-, Politik- und Geistesgeschichte der Neuzeit*, ed. Willi Jasper and Joachim H. Knoll (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2002), 2:697–714.

8. On the history of this image, see also Ritchie Robertson, "Historicizing Weininger," 23–39.

9. On the different phases of Weininger's composition of the book and the works that influenced him, see Hannelore Rodlauer, "Fragments from Weininger's Education (1895–1902)," in *Jews & Gender*:

and *Character* provides an extensive taxonomy of the traits appertaining to *M* and *W*: *M* is conscious, active, logical, and capable of genius and morality; *W* is unconscious, passive, illogical, and talented and conformist at best. To be sure, the two parts of Weininger's argument, which he himself characterizes as "biological and psychological" and "psychological and philosophical," respectively, do not necessarily contradict each other.¹⁰ Yet there is an undeniable tension between the Platonic notion of ideal types and Weininger's actual theory of sexuality. Indeed, Weininger's insistence on the absolute opposition between *M* and *W* can be read as a mode of defense, an attempt to restore the clear distinction between men and women—and, by implication, between Jews and Aryans—that his own theory elides.

According to Weininger, the single most important feature of the woman and the Jew is their tendency toward matchmaking (*Kuppelei*). Matchmaking expresses a desire for fusion that manifests itself in a range of female behaviors, including sexual desire but also interest in romance novels and a general disposition toward impressionability and suggestibility. Matchmaking results in the creation of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) that subordinates the individual to the group, first and foremost the family, but also other types of communities that Weininger deems disorderly, anarchic, and formless. The only form of collectivity he valorizes is the state, which he defines like Rousseau as a voluntary association of free individuals who choose their own legislation (277). The Jewish and female propensity to conflate and connect what does not belong together, in contrast, threatens the boundaries that separate one individual from the other. In his chapter on Judaism, Weininger cites the alleged Jewish propensity to marry for money rather than love as one example of such arbitrary connectivity (281).¹¹

If Weininger at times seems to suggest that romantic love leads to better connections than money or sex, a closer look at his theory of love dispels this impression. In the chapter "Eroticism and Aesthetics," Weininger initially distinguishes between love, which he defines as male, and sexuality, which he associates with women. What happens in love is that a man projects his own values on something external, thereby proving his very capacity to posit values and act autonomously. Aesthetics, or the apperception of beauty, is proof of the human, that is, male, propensity to project self-ideals outward. After this valorization of love, however, Weininger begins to discover several affinities between love and sexuality, both of which are irrevocably tainted by their dependence on something material and particular. Love is an imperfect medium of human freedom because it reduces women to a means

Responses to Otto Weininger, ed. Nancy A. Harrowitz and Barbara Hyams (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 35–58.

10. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislaub Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5. All further citations of *Sex and Character* refer to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

11. Lezzi points out that the opposition between Jewish arranged marriage and Christian love matches had become a stereotype by then. See Lezzi, "Liebe ist meine Religion!," 363.

to an end, a screen onto which men project their own ideals. This argument is less protofeminist than it sounds.¹² For Weininger does not so much criticize the projection mechanism but its dependence on women, whom he deems unworthy of such a projection of value, or on anything material for that matter. In other words, he is less concerned with woman's reduction to an object than with man's dependence on such an object: "Instead of actively realizing the idea of perfection, love tries to show the idea as if it had already been realized. By the most subtle ruse, it pretends that the miracle has happened in the other person, but the fact remains that the lover hopes to achieve his own liberation from evil *without a struggle*" (221; Weininger's emphasis).

If love points to the possibility of human freedom, any concrete form of love necessarily betrays this possibility. This is why Weininger ultimately retracts his initial distinction between love and sexuality: "Both the sexual drive and love are attempts to realize the self. The former seeks to perpetuate the individual through a physical likeness, and the latter to perpetuate individuality through its mental image. But only a man of genius knows a love that is entirely devoid of sensuality, and he alone seeks to beget timeless children in whom the most profound essence of his mind expresses itself" (222–23). I would argue that the "love that is entirely devoid of sensuality" is an ideal that remains unrealizable even in Weininger's mind. Weininger wants to detach love so radically from an object that it becomes impossible. It is thus only consistent that he in the end recommends understanding—rather than love or sex—as the basis of the ethical male-female relationship, although he never develops this idea in any detail (307). Instead, he ends the book with an appeal to humankind to overcome sexuality in order to achieve true emancipation, fully cognizant of the fact that this would end the human species. Weininger is so opposed to sex and love because they sabotage the possibility of human self-creation and self-perpetuation; neither in biological procreation nor in mental reproduction do we determine our origin and destination. Weininger in effect equates spiritual immortality with biological death.

Weininger can be said to anticipate here the distinction between life and death drives Freud made in his later life—or more precisely, he creates a gendered and racialized version of this distinction. Weininger defines sexuality as the urge to conjoin individual elements into greater entities—what Freud will call Eros or the life drive—and freedom as the ability to reduce such entities once again to separate elements—what Freud will call Thanatos or the death drive. Throughout *Sex and Character*, Weininger associates freedom and morality with the drive to isolate, distinguish, and disentangle. The figure of the great loner who disavows all affective ties to others and who looms so large in *Sex and Character* is evidence of Weininger's obsession with monadic individuality. So is the celebration of the prostitute, who is the opposite of the mother and the embodiment of the life-denying principle

12. David Luft, for instance, reads Weininger as a protofeminist who critiques man's reduction of woman to an object. See his *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna: Weininger, Musil, Doderer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. 59–65.

(208), as the only lover appropriate for the genius. What Weininger calls freedom is the ability to sever all emotional bonds and to disrupt the chain of procreation. In his mind reproduction and parenting are a form of fusion with other human beings that prevents the self-perpetuation of the individual monad. Physical procreation does not transcend mortality, because instead of producing individuals it reproduces the species, which is doomed to perish over time and therefore does not truly transcend time (197–99). The same is true of mental procreation insofar as it depends on a physical object or medium. Weininger's ideal type of man, the autonomous, self-legislating human being postulated in Kant's moral philosophy, renounces Eros and embraces Thanatos.

What are the implications of these ideas for the project of Jewish emancipation and assimilation? As Steven Beller has argued, Weininger's views on Jews and Judaism belong in the tradition of "intolerant liberalism," a political outlook that favored a quid-pro-quo model of Jewish emancipation.¹³ According to this model, the granting of civil and political rights to Jews depended upon their integration into the social majority and, ultimately, the disappearance of Jewish difference. Weininger's call for the Jews to "overcome" their Jewishness evinces a belief in the individual's right to and capacity for self-determination that is liberal at its core. His demand that Jews who have successfully "overcome" their Judaism should receive full recognition by the Christian majority is consistent with liberal tenets: "On the other hand, a Jew who would have overcome, a Jew who would have become a Christian, would have every right to be taken by the Aryan for an individual and no longer to be judged as a member of a race that he has long since transcended through his moral efforts" (282). If Weininger subordinates the claims of race to the transformative power of morality, this understanding is once again well within the parameters of his time. Around 1900 the liberal model of Jewish emancipation had become infused with racial ideas that blended rather uneasily with liberalism's Enlightenment heritage. The prominent Viennese Jewish liberal Theodor Gomperz, for instance, believed in the existence of inherited racial characteristics while insisting on the individual's capacity for self-transformation.¹⁴

Weininger's idea of Jewish self-overcoming certainly resonates with this tradition of "intolerant liberalism." However, it is important to note that he clearly distinguishes such self-overcoming from the historical phenomenon of Jewish assimilation. In the one instance in which he actually uses the verb "to assimilate" (*assimilieren*), Weininger draws on the then-popular image of the parasite to denounce

13. Steven Beller, "Otto Weininger as Liberal?," in Harrowitz and Hyams, *Jews & Gender*, 91–101. Allan Janik similarly views Weininger as an advocate of Jewish emancipation in "Weininger's Vienna: The Sex-Ridden Society," in *Vienna: The World of Yesterday, 1889–1914*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and F. Peter Wagner (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 43–62; here 47.

14. As Beller sums up, "In his belief that individuals could overcome even their racial heritage and that political liberalism should defend their right to do so, Gomperz was typical of liberal thought in the Vienna of 1900" ("Otto Weininger as Liberal?," 96).

assimilation as a passive-aggressive behavior that subdues others and thwarts their desire for freedom. This assertion is meant to differentiate Jews from women, in whose pure passivity Weininger still sees a rudimentary redemptive potential:

Woman is matter, which *passively* assumes any form. In the Jew there is undeniably a certain *aggressiveness*. . . . He actively adapts to different circumstances and requirements, to any environment and any race, like a parasite that changes and assumes a completely different appearance with any given host, so that it is constantly taken for a new animal, even though it always remains the same. The Jew assimilates to everything and thereby assimilates everything to himself. In so doing he is not subjected by the other, but subjects the other to himself.

(289; Weininger's emphasis)

Jewish self-overcoming thus has little to do with the historical experience for which the term *assimilation* had by then become established—namely, the process by which Jews adopted the language, appearance, and customs of their non-Jewish surroundings. Weininger's rejection of Jewish assimilation as commonly understood explains the surprising turn at the end of the chapter on Judaism. There he suggests that the Jew, whom he deems fundamentally lacking in genius, might become the greatest genius of all, the religious genius. That is, to overcome Jewishness means to surpass and renew the majority culture rather than merely adapt to it. The founder of a new religion, who traverses the abyss of skepticism and nihilism before he arrives at religious belief, embodies this idea of self-overcoming. Rather than the gradual replacement of one tradition by another one, Jewish self-overcoming is a radical departure from all existing traditions and beliefs. It is a leap into newness—or into death. For from Weininger's views on freedom it follows that the only way for Jews to truly overcome Jewishness is to embrace death. Without speculating too much about the reasons for his own suicide, of which we have very little documentation, I wish to point out that suicide is a logical consequence of the ideas developed in his book. Weininger, who in a footnote in *Sex and Character* mentions that he is of Jewish descent, might have imagined becoming a true Aryan and a true man by killing himself. His suicide might have been an attempt to realize his own ideal of freedom as a form of thanatotic striving.¹⁵

Schnitzler's Affirmation of Eros

Arthur Schnitzler's literary oeuvre explores the many ways of Eros, often with an eye toward social contexts. Schnitzler achieved his breakthrough in 1895 with

15. On the notion of Weininger's "philosopher's suicide," see also Peter Kampits, "Otto Weininger und das Sein zum Tode," in *Otto Weininger: Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Jacques Le Rider and Norbert Leser (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1984), 167–77.

Flirtations (Liebeleien), a play about love, betrayal, social class, and gender roles. *Flirtations* features a prototypical “sweet girl,” a young woman from the lower middle classes, involved in a relationship with an aristocratic man. Schnitzler’s most controversial play, *La Ronde (Reigen)*, written 1895–96), consists of ten dialogues between two lovers, one of whom will be shown with a new sexual partner in the next dialogue. Linking members from different social classes in a sexual chain, the play exposes the power asymmetries between them. Schnitzler’s emphasis on the social contexts in which sex and love take place allows him to compare different forms of social ostracism. One of the few works in which he explicitly addresses the situation of the Jews, *Professor Bernhardt* (1912), links the discrimination against Jews and the sexual victimization of women. The play recounts the verbal attacks and legal incriminations suffered by a Jewish doctor after he prevents a Catholic priest from entering the hospital room of a dying girl. The “crime” of Professor Bernhardt is his compassion for a girl who has been abandoned by her lover and suffers medical complications after a back-alley abortion.

Four years earlier, Schnitzler had published a novel widely regarded as a key literary document of Jewish life in turn-of-the-century Vienna, *The Road into the Open*. Gershom Scholem called it the first novel of aesthetic merit “that described and put up for general discussion the crisis of German-speaking Jews in its Viennese form, and it did so with astonishing acuteness and freedom from prejudice.”¹⁶ Yet from its first publication, critics have chided the work for falling into two different parts that represent two distinct literary genres: a romance and a social novel. The protagonist Georg von Wergenthin, a Gentile baron and dilettante composer, mostly socializes with Viennese Jews of various backgrounds and worldviews. Georg’s conversations with his Jewish friends and acquaintances provide a detailed picture of the Jewish reactions to the decline of liberalism and the rise of political antisemitism around 1900. We meet Zionists, socialists, overassimilated parvenus, and old-fashioned liberals, none of whom are openly privileged by the narrative. For instance, Leo Golowski, a proud Zionist likely modeled on Theodor Herzl, appears just as authentic and likable as his sister Therese, a radical socialist who rejects the idea of separate Jewish politics. Overall, *The Road into the Open* shows the impasses of assimilation without suggesting a genuine alternative. The writer Heinrich Bermann, often thought to be the author’s double, speaks perhaps the most authoritative words on the matter when he disparages Jewish hopes for full integration into Austrian society while rejecting Zionism as a “purely extraneous solution to a highly internal problem.”¹⁷

16. Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem: Jugenderinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 61.

17. Arthur Schnitzler, *The Road into the Open*, trans. Roger Byers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 182. For the original German, see Arthur Schnitzler, *Der Weg ins Freie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1990), 235. Further citations from these editions will be included

What do the novel's reflections on Jewish identity in times of crisis have to do with its major story line, Georg's love affair with Anna Rosner, a young Catholic woman from a lower middle class family? Many critics have answered, "Very little," and this is why the novel is ultimately a failure. Although the love affair structures the plot—Anna and Georg meet at a social gathering and fall in love, they travel to Italy when Anna gets pregnant and separate after their child dies shortly after delivery—these events seem to have little bearing on the sociopolitical issues discussed in the book. In what follows I offer a new interpretation of the novel's bifurcation by reading it with and against Weininger's *Sex and Character*. I do not claim that Schnitzler consciously responded to Weininger. Schnitzler does not mention *Sex and Character* in his diaries at all before the publication of *The Road into the Open*, and refers to Weininger's work only rarely and cursorily after that.¹⁸ This is quite striking, given that Weininger's work became a *succès de scandale* almost immediately upon its publication in 1903. Yet even if Schnitzler had not read *Sex and Character* when he was writing *The Road into the Open*, he almost certainly had heard it referred to by friends and acquaintances. As I will argue, Schnitzler and Weininger to some extent agree in their construction of Jews and women as nonautonomous and unable to determine their own fate. However, Schnitzler exposes the corresponding idea of the male Gentile as free and self-determined as the product of wishful thinking and, even more important, he uncovers the reality of a quasierotic exchange between Jews and Gentiles.

One important parallel between Schnitzler and Weininger is the connection they establish between death and freedom. The title of Schnitzler's novel, *The Road into the Open*, has rich connotations, including the project of Jewish emancipation: on some level, every character in the book longs to be free. However, only the Christian, aristocratic Georg actually achieves a sense of freedom. The view of the open road on which the novel ends, and which stands for the many possibilities Georg sees before him, is the result of two deaths that, taken together, tear him out of the chain of procreation. On the first pages, we learn that the recent death of his father instilled a sense of freedom in Georg. The period of mourning has alienated him from his friends but also freed him from burdensome social obligations. The novel's beginning also hints that the dead father will not, as in the Freudian narrative, survive as a symbol and enable Georg to become himself a father or in another way usher in a new epoch in his life. Rather, there is a sense of circularity and repetition that undermines any idea of progression. For

parenthetically in the text, with the page number in the English translation followed by the page number in the German edition in italics, as here (182/235).

18. Schnitzler mentions Weininger four times in his diaries. On each of these occasions, he briefly reports either that he discussed Weininger with someone else or that someone else was reading Weininger. See Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch*, ed. Werner Welzig et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981–), 1:124 (January 31, 1910); 2:57 (August 18, 1913); 3:15 (January 31, 1917); 7:21 (February 13, 1920).

instance, when Georg reminisces about his father, he thinks first about an episode during which he, Georg, “had not really worked again for a half year or longer” (3–4/7). The word “again” intimates that unproductive periods are nothing new in Georg’s life and will probably recur in the future. At the end of the novel, Georg recuperates a similar sense of freedom after accepting the death of his newborn son. Interestingly, it was never death itself that posed a threat to Georg but rather the contingency of this particular death; he is haunted by the physician’s remark about the low probability of the complication his son suffered during delivery. The pure accident that is his son’s death calls into question the purpose of individual existence and the possibility of self-determination. Significantly, the child’s death ceases to trouble Georg when he learns to reinterpret contingency as necessity, and statistical probability as personal fate.

Another important parallel between Schnitzler and Weininger is that they associate freedom with men and Gentiles, and the lack thereof with women and Jews. This is where the two different genres of the novel—the romance and the social novel—come together. *The Road into the Open* construes an analogy between Georg’s love affair with Anna Rosner and his friendship with Heinrich Bermann, the Jewish writer whose keen-witted self-analyses and observations about Austrian society help sharpen Georg’s views and, as some critics claim, gradually lead him to a better understanding of the Viennese Jews. Heinrich is connected with Georg’s love life both in Georg’s mind and in the narrative sequence.¹⁹ These seemingly accidental connections, which are skillfully woven into the textual mix of dialogue, free indirect speech, and third-person narration, point to a deeper analogy between the novel’s two most important subsidiary characters, as well as between two types of relationships. At the end of the book, neither relationship seems to have a future. Georg and Anna’s child is dead, and the plans for the opera on which Georg and Heinrich had begun to collaborate—an obvious allusion to the German Jewish cultural “symbiosis”—have gone nowhere. Both relationships are further marked by a distinct power differential between the partners. They initially create new connections between different classes or religions, but ultimately fail and leave the weaker partner in a state of helpless dejection. In the last pages of the novel, Anna and Heinrich are depicted in strikingly similar terms as incarnations of passivity and paralysis: Anna “remained behind, standing with limp arms, her eyes closed” (291/374), and Heinrich “just stood there, stiff, motionless, pale, as if extinguished” (296/381).²⁰

19. For instance, Heinrich is first mentioned as the purported fiancé of Else Ehrenberg, with whom Georg has had a flirtatious friendship ever since they were teenagers. And when Georg reminisces about the party where he first got to know Anna better and lets the guests pass before his inner eye, he thinks of Heinrich just before he thinks of Anna. A moment later, this mental association materializes when Georg runs into Heinrich just after he has left Anna’s house.

20. Norbert Abels perceives the analogy between Heinrich and Anna, both of whom suffer from Georg’s lack of responsibility toward them. See Abels, *Sicherheit ist nirgends: Judentum und*

These representations of Anna and Heinrich—the woman and the Jew—as lacking selfhood, agency, and freedom could be directly out of Weininger. However, in contrast to Weininger, Schnitzler exposes these images as the products of a particular—and profoundly biased—mind. *The Road into the Open* shows how Georg obtains a sense of freedom by distancing himself from his female lover and his Jewish friend. Throughout the novel Georg is happiest when realizing that he is not fully committed to any woman, including Anna. And at several important junctures, Georg experiences sudden feelings of freedom and self-assurance when faced with Heinrich's dejection. When we see them together for the first time, in a conversation about Heinrich's obsession with his father and his ex-lover, Heinrich's departure inspires a sense of elation in Georg: "Georg watched him with sympathy and revulsion at the same time, and a sudden, free, almost jubilant mood came over him in which he saw himself as young, carefree, and destined for the happiest future" (43/59).²¹ It remains unclear what exactly causes Georg's rather abrupt mood change; he simply seems to feel free once he realizes that Heinrich is not free. Similarly, Georg can accept the death of his child once he is confronted with Heinrich's pronounced inability to come to terms with death. Heinrich fears that his lover, an actress with whom he had a falling-out because he suspected her to be unfaithful, may have committed suicide, and he distracts himself with long tirades against philosophy, religion, and morality. It is over and against Heinrich's critique of any attempt to categorize human experience that Georg recuperates a sense of inner and outer coherence:

Georg had the feeling that Heinrich was only trying to achieve one thing with all his talking: to shake off any responsibility for himself toward a higher law, by recognizing none. And he felt, as though in a growing opposition to Heinrich's astonishingly drivelling behavior, how in his own soul the picture of the world, which had threatened to crumble to pieces for him a few hours ago, began gradually to come together again. Until now he had rebelled against the senselessness of the fate that had struck him today, but now he began vaguely to suspect that even that which seemed to him a tragic accident, had not descended on his head from out of nowhere, but that it had

Aufklärung bei Arthur Schnitzler (Königstein im Taunus: Athenäum, 1982), 137. Yet like most other critics, Abels ultimately puts more emphasis on the analogy between Georg and Heinrich rather than on that between Anna and Heinrich. Jacques Le Rider argues that the closeness between Georg and Heinrich indicates the concomitance of the crisis of masculinity and the crisis of Jewish identity, and the lack of adequate responses to these. See Le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, trans. Rosemary Morris (New York: Continuum, 1993), 180–83. On the crisis of the ethical self in Vienna, see also Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: A Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 207–37.

21. Imke Meyer, one of few critics who have explored the connections between Schnitzler and Weininger, points out that both thinkers focus on the indefinable, malleable, "contagious" aspects of Judaism, which lead to paranoid projection mechanisms. Schnitzler analyzes such projection mechanisms, for instance, in *Leutnant Gustl*. See Imke Meyer, *Männlichkeit und Melodram: Arthur Schnitzlers erzählende Schriften* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2010), 158–60.

come to him from a predetermined, but dark path, like something remotely visible that approached him from far down the road, and which he was accustomed to calling necessity.

(236/302–3)

Georg's characterization of Heinrich recalls Weininger's comments on the Jewish "free thinker" (283) whose secular, materialist worldview is said to manifest the same lack of autonomy as Jewish religious orthodoxy. In Georg's mind, Heinrich's denial of the existence of higher laws shows only that he cannot come to terms with his lover's suicide, that he remains dependent on her. Against Heinrich's lack of self-determination, Georg sets an understanding of his child's death as a necessary and meaningful event in his life. This acceptance of death is not an act of mourning, which would enable the mourner to reinvest his libidinal energies and thereby overcome loss. Georg does not work through the death of his child by fashioning appropriate substitutes; rather, he affirms this death as the precondition of his own freedom. If anticipation of the birth of his child has previously inspired in Georg a vision of an endless genealogical chain encompassing himself, he now experiences his severance from such a chain as liberating. He remembers "the vague consciousness of standing in the continuous chain that stretched from ancestor to offspring, held fast by both hands, to have a part in the universal human destiny. Now he suddenly stood detached again, alone. . . . Now he would be able to go into the world freely again, like before" (238/305). Georg ultimately finds freedom in solitude and a sense of finitude.

Georg's distantiation from Heinrich culminates in the final passages of the novel, in which he imagines how Heinrich will commit suicide by plunging from a tower at the top of a carousel winding up in spirals. The image of the carousel leading to a tower serves throughout the novel as a metaphor for freedom in the negative sense, that is, a limitless and debilitating freedom. As the cemetery wall and the house in which Anna gave birth—the last reminders of Georg's ties to her—give way to a panoramic view of the landscape, Georg contemplates the advantages he has over Heinrich:

He knew that [Heinrich] could not be helped. At some time he was surely destined to throw himself from a tower he had ascended in winding spirals; and that would be his end. But Georg was well, and quite satisfied. He made the decision to use the three days that remained to him as intelligently as possible. The best thing would be to spend them alone somewhere in a beautiful, quiet landscape, to rest up and collect himself for new work. He had brought the manuscript of the violin sonata with him to Vienna. He wanted to finish this before anything else.

[Heinrich and Georg] went through the gate and stood out on the street. Georg turned around, but the cemetery wall blocked his view. In a few steps he again had an open view of the valley. Now he could only guess where the little house with the

grey gable stood; it was no longer visible from here. Over the red and yellow hills which enclosed the scene the sky descended in a faint autumn glow. In Georg's soul there was a soft farewell to many joys and pains, which he could hear, as it were, dying away in the valley he was now leaving; and at the same time, a greeting from unknown days which sounded toward his youth from the far-off expanses of the world.

(297/240)

The reader, however, has reason to distrust Georg's confidence in himself and his future. Georg's conviction that he will soon complete his new violin sonata, for instance, seems overly optimistic in view of the fact that he has not completed a single piece of music throughout the novel. As many critics have noted, *The Road into the Open* disrupts the logic of progression that characterizes the *Bildungsroman*. There is in the end no indication that Georg has undergone any kind of moral or spiritual development. If he has secured a position as a conductor in a provincial orchestra, this is only proof of his adaptation to the institutions of bourgeois art, not of a deeper correspondence between society's demands and his own artistic aspirations. Schnitzler, who famously introduced the interior monologue into German literature in his 1900 novella *Lieutenant Gustl*, marshals modernist literary techniques to alert the reader to the possibility of Georg's self-delusion. Georg is privileged by the narration in that he is present most of the time and able to articulate his thoughts in interior monologue and free indirect speech, yet he is also the only character criticized by the narrator, at least indirectly. While the narrator does not comment on the Jewish characters and lets them express their social anxieties and existential uncertainties in an almost unmediated fashion, he evaluates Georg's behavior by presenting it from both internal and external perspectives.²² This technique helps expose Georg's sense of freedom as an idea, a fantasy perhaps, which Georg can sustain only by distancing himself from Jewish and female others.

This reading goes beyond the widely shared view that Schnitzler supplements individual with social psychology. Of course, this aspect is also present in *The Road into the Open*: Schnitzler suggests that in a society characterized by misogyny and antisemitism, women and Jews face greater obstacles on their paths toward self-determination. But his critique of the ideology of freedom is even more provocative. By drawing an analogy between a Gentile's uneven friendship with a Jewish writer and his love affair with a woman from a lower social class, Schnitzler advances a critique of Weininger's biased concept of freedom. Whereas Weininger hypostatizes social stereotypes in his conception of moral autonomy as male and

22. An outside judgment of Georg occurs, for instance, through the sudden intrusion of an external perspective. The passage on the disrupted chain of procreation, for instance, concludes with a certain hesitation, likely spoken by the narrator, about Georg's self-proclaimed sense of freedom: "Could he really?" (238/305).

Aryan, Schnitzler exposes a similar idea of freedom as the product—and possibly a delusion—of a particular, socially situated mind.

Even more important, Schnitzler's interweaving of a love story and a social novel allows for a conception of Jewish assimilation in which Eros has a place. *The Road into the Open* construes Jewish-Gentile interaction as a quasierotic exchange, an alternative to Weininger's model of radical Jewish self-transformation or self-annihilation. Against Weininger, Schnitzler rehabilitates the idea of love as a model of social interaction in general and Jewish-Gentile rapprochement in particular. While Weininger wants to sever all emotional ties between individuals, Schnitzler suggests that such ties are effective even where they are disavowed. The love story told in *The Road into the Open* spills over into the social novel and, among other things, charges Jewish-Gentile relations with affect. As one of the characters puts it, Jews are prone to fall in love with Georg: "An unequalled conqueror of hearts. Even Therese is infatuated with him. And recently Heinrich Bermann; he was almost comical. . . . Well yes, a handsome, slender, blond young man; Baron, Christian, German,—what Jew could resist this magic" (253/323–24). This comment is of course meant sarcastically, but it also contains some truth. Georg's interactions with his Jewish friends, both male and female, frequently have an erotic tinge. He flirts with a number of Jewish women, and there are distinctly homoerotic overtones in his encounters with Leo in particular.

This returns us to the question of why Schnitzler chose for his novel such a hybrid form, a combination of two literary genres. As Abigail Gillman has argued, the formal hybridity that characterizes Viennese Jewish modernism at large has a special function *In the Road into the Open*. It is part and parcel of an "aesthetics of detachment" by which Schnitzler avoids taking a clear political stance or offering a "solution" to the "Jewish question."²³ In a letter to the Danish critic Georg Brandes, Schnitzler explained his decision to give Georg a non-Jewish mistress: "I finally had no intention of proving anything, neither that Christians and Jews don't get along, nor that they are able to get along—I wanted rather to represent, without bias, people and relationships I have observed (whether in the outside world or in fantasy makes no difference)."²⁴ Schnitzler's wariness of facile allegorization is well justified. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the racialized discourses of the turn of the century, literary representations of Jewish-Gentile love stories are prone to become commentaries on the compatibility or incompatibility of the "races." Schnitzler avoids this by analogizing Georg's faltering love affair with Anna and his uneven friendship with Heinrich without collapsing the one into the other. He

23. Abigail Gillman, *Viennese Jewish Modernism: Freud, Hofmannsthal, Beer-Hofmann, and Schnitzler* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 107–19. According to Gillman, Viennese Jewish modernism constitutes "a coherent Jewish countertradition" (178), marked by a preference for hybrid forms and for genres of memory.

24. Quoted in Gillman, *Viennese Jewish Modernism*, 113.

chooses a bifurcated structure that allows for a cross-pollination of literary genres and other kinds of boundary crossings. Georg constantly moves between public and private spheres, between romantic tête-à-têtes with his Catholic mistress and political discussions with his Jewish friends.

The Road into the Open construes connections between the social and the erotic throughout. If differences in social power define love relationships, love also energizes social interaction, and in particular Georg's interaction with his Jewish friends and acquaintances. Schnitzler pictures Georg's mind as a porous structure that is infiltrated by the thoughts and feelings of others. Images flow freely from one mind to another, and in the process change Georg's perception and understanding of the world. In fact, nothing characterizes Georg more than the trait Weininger explicitly labels Jewish and female: susceptibility to the influence of others. At one point Heinrich says of Georg: "Nothing like that would ever have occurred to you in your life, if you hadn't been associating with a character like me, and if it weren't sometimes your way, not to think your own thoughts, but rather those of someone else who was stronger—or weaker than yourself" (296/380). One of the novel's central images, the carousel (*Ringelspiel*) that spirals up to a tower, shows that Heinrich has a point here. In the Prater amusement park, where Heinrich and Georg see a giant Ferris wheel and take a ride on the roller coaster, Heinrich concocts the image of the carousel rising up to a tower (40/55), an image that Georg picks up and elaborates throughout the novel. At the end of *The Road into the Open*, Georg pictures what he believes to be Heinrich's certain future demise as a fall from just such a tower while rejoicing in what he imagines to be his own open and happy future (297/381). A related image helps Georg recuperate a sense of meaning and coherence after his child's death. As Georg compares his own experience of death with Heinrich's, he pits the purposeful movement along a path, which signifies necessity, against the movement of a fall "out of nowhere," which signifies the *Zufall* or contingency of death (236/302–3.). In other words, Georg borrows from Heinrich the terms in which he articulates his own sense of freedom. He is indebted to his Jewish friend for the very image by which he distances himself from him.

Georg's subconscious exchange with others is also erotic in that it is a source of his creativity. Something happens along Georg's path, something he has not planned or premeditated. The few moments of his artistic productivity we witness spring from scenes of love or friendship, such as when Georg composes a song during his flirtation with another (possibly Jewish) woman. This is why the two dominant readings of Georg as either an incorrigible antisemite or a Gentile who gradually comes to understand his Jewish friends equally miss the point. More than exposing Georg's ideological biases or depicting his inner development, *The Road into the Open* shows that he has always already been interacting with Jews in a manner he cannot fully acknowledge. This is the most important effect of the novel's bifurcation and the point in which Schnitzler most clearly differs from Weininger. By incorporating a love story into his social commentary, Schnitzler rehabilitates

Eros as a mode of interpersonal connection, with implications for Jewish-Gentile rapprochement. While Weininger can accept Jewish assimilation (or what he terms “self-overcoming”) only as a form of suicidal striving, Schnitzler depicts assimilation as a mutual, quasierotic exchange across open boundaries. In so doing, Schnitzler brings two central concerns of turn-of-the-century Vienna together: the crisis of Jewish assimilation and the contemplation of the role of Eros in individual and social life. His suggestion that the Gentile man is most dependent on his female lover and his Jewish friend when he declares his independence is an ingenious response to Viennese antisemitism (and misogyny).