

**Writing 1900 Workshop:
“Authorship, Authority, and Activism”
27 and 28 September 2024, Vienna**

Draft Programme

Friday, 27 September

Venue: Austrian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna



2-2.15pm: Welcome & Housekeeping

2.15-4pm: Session 1 – Setting the Scene: Authorship and Authority in Vienna

- Martin Anton Müller, “Arthur Schnitzler: Biographical Sources and their Audiences”
- Sandra Mayer, “A Writer in Search of a Political Subject (and Himself): Stephen Spender’s Literary Engagement with 1930s Vienna”

4-4.30pm: coffee break

4.30-6pm: Session 2 – Authors as Reluctant Celebrities: Persona, Politics, and the Public

- Lene Østermark-Johansen, “Bonding with the Bard? Henry James’s ‘The Birthplace’ (1903) as an Activist Text”
- Laura Scuriatti, “The Reluctant Celebrity: Virginia Woolf’s Preface to *Life as We Have Known It by Co-operative Working Women* (1931)”

Saturday, 28 September

Venue: Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage, Academy Campus, Bäckerstraße 13, 1010 Vienna (room 2D, 2nd floor)



9.30-11.00am: Session 3 – Writerly Authority Within and Beyond the Literary Medium

- Richard Hibbitt, “*Business is Business*: Octave Mirbeau’s Political Theatre”
- Emily Eells, “‘And I? May I say nothing, my lord?’: Authorship and Authority in the Oscar Wilde Affair”

11-11.30am: coffee break

11.30-1.30pm: Session 4 – The Artist as Activist in Transnational Spaces

- Stefano Evangelista, “Lafcadio Hearn Writing Japan at War”
- Philip Bullock, “Rachmaninov: The Authority of the Artist in Late Imperial Russia and the Interwar Russian Emigration”
- Gesa Stedman, “Transnational Writing, Feminism, Activism: Margaret Goldsmith”

1.30-2.30pm: lunch

2.30-4pm: Session 5 – Art and/as Activism in French Symbolism and British Decadence

- Clément Dessy, “Armenophilia and Symbolism: Political and Literary Activism in Fin-de-siècle France”
- Ana Parejo Vadillo, “Alice Meynell and Impressionism: Against Pollution”

4-5pm: rounding off and future planning over coffee and cake

Abstracts

- **Session 1 – Setting the Scene: Authorship and Authority in Vienna**

Martin Anton Müller, “Arthur Schnitzler: Biographical Sources and their Audiences”

Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931) is one of the most internationally renowned Austrian and Viennese authors and playwrights. This presentation highlights a dozen editorial projects aimed at making his biographical sources accessible in both digital and printed formats. The centerpiece of these projects is Schnitzler’s diary with over 16,000 entries and over 8,000 persons mentioned by name (<https://schnitzler-tagebuch.acdh.oeaw.ac.at>). Additionally, they include the recently completed digital edition of Schnitzler’s correspondence with fellow writers (<https://schnitzler-briefe.acdh.oeaw.ac.at>) and the 2023 printed edition of Schnitzler’s interviews, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. These works are addressed to three distinct audiences: the diary intended for posterity, the correspondence aimed at contemporaries known by name, and the interviews directed at the contemporary public. Particular attention will be given to the potential for digital connectivity between and within these projects, which allow for a comprehensive study of the authority of the writer.

Sandra Mayer, “A Writer in Search of a Political Subject (and Himself): Stephen Spender’s Literary Engagement with 1930s Vienna”

The cultural myth of fin-de-siècle Vienna as a vibrant birthplace of modernity and avantgarde artistic movements has tended to overshadow another formative Vienna myth: that of ‘Red Vienna’, the utopian vision of urban change and innovation carried by the Social Democratic municipal government between 1919 and 1934. Yet, the city’s progressive social reform programme to improve the living and working conditions of its working classes attracted many foreign visitors, among them young British leftwing writers and intellectuals such as John Lehmann, Naomi Mitchison, and Stephen Spender. For them, the city offered an ideal setting to stage and negotiate their (conflicted) authorial identities as politically committed writers, especially after the collapse of ‘Red Vienna’ and the rise of Austro-Fascism. For Spender, who had witnessed first-hand the excesses of Nazi terror in Berlin, his extended stays in Vienna between 1934 and 1936 amounted to a transformative experience: they marked a crucial stage in the writer’s politicization, but, even more importantly, it seems, in his personal life, resulting in a formative conflation of ‘outer and inner worlds’. The experience of political crisis was mirrored and augmented by a personal one against the background of a city where history was in the making, or, as it says in Spender’s long poem *Vienna*, where “The Place meets / The Time”.

This paper looks at *Vienna* (1934) and Spender’s short story “Two Deaths” (dedicated to his two lovers at the time, Muriel Gardiner and Tony Hyndman, respectively) as literary explorations of writerly identity and authority that ultimately struggle to align art and action, the personal and the political. Blatantly autobiographical, they reflect Spender’s deep-seated ambivalence about the writer’s socio-political responsibility, the relationship between literature and politics, as well as his own sexual identity and class background. Looking back, in his 1951 autobiography *World Within World*, Spender bemoans the artist’s failure to effect real political change, blaming the “half-and-half action of people divided between their artistic and their public conscience” (197). By that time – partly in response to this perceived failure, I argue – he had started cultivating an authorial persona that combined the roles of chronicler, mediator, and networker, replacing the conflict between artist and propagandist with that between artist and public figure.

- **Session 2 – Authors as Reluctant Celebrities: Persona, Politics, and the Public**

Lene Østermark-Johansen, “Bonding with the Bard? Henry James’s ‘The Birthplace’ (1903) as an Activist Text”

In 1897 Henry James took out a lease on Lamb House in Rye in order to set up a proper architectural framework for his writing within easy reach of London, yet also away from the hectic buzz of the perpetual dinner parties and receptions in the metropolis. The property has now become a National Trust monument, a writer’s house museum, commemorating James and his extensive oeuvre. Since the late 1880s, in such texts as *The Aspern Papers* (1888), ‘The Death of the Lion’ (1894) and ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ (1896), James had been much preoccupied with the writer’s effects, with his afterlife, with celebrity culture and the lionizing of the writer in London society. His 1903 novella ‘The Birthplace’, expanded from a 6,000-word piece into a lengthy 22,000 words, satirized the nineteenth-century cult of Shakespeare’s Birthplace in Stratford by questioning the experience offered by a visit to a writer’s museum. What do such institutions sell in terms of a tourist’s experience, what do visitors expect to gain from a modern recreation of a sixteenth-century interior with merely a very spurious claim to having been the place where the Bard was born? Where is the writer himself in posterity’s commercialized and myth-ridden re-creation of his life, James seems to ask in his witty and pointed satire on contemporary Bardology, yet no doubt also intending his text as the modern writer’s criticism of fin-de-siècle fan culture, centering on the author’s person rather than his writings.

Laura Scuriatti, “The Reluctant Celebrity: Virginia Woolf’s Preface to *Life as We Have Known It by Co-operative Working Women* (1931)”

In 1931, when *Life as We Have Known It by Co-operative Working Women* was published, Woolf could be considered a celebrity within the British intellectual and cultural system, and it is partially for this reason that Margaret Llewelyn Davies asked her to write a preface for this important book, which is a collection of short autobiographical pieces by members of the co-operative. While the pieces are informed by a positive and empowering enthusiasm, and offer accounts of hard lives that have gained meaning and security through political engagement, Woolf’s preface is reluctant in many ways: it presents an uncertain account of the genre of the book, which is judged to be not “literary”, and a sceptical authorial posture with respect to the significance of political engagement and life writing. In my paper I will interrogate Woolf’s posture in relation to her status of a public intellectual, comparing it with the authorial posture in *Three Guineas*, and will also assess the fraught relationship between celebrity, life writing and feminist politics.

- **Session 3 – Writerly Authority Within and Beyond the Literary Medium**

Richard Hibbitt, “*Business is Business*: Octave Mirbeau’s Political Theatre”

On 28 November 1888, the French author and journalist Octave Mirbeau (1848-1917) published an article in *Le Figaro* entitled *La Grève des électeurs*, which can be translated as *The Voters’ Strike*. Mirbeau’s political activism is well known: starting from a libertarian position with a personal stance characterised by atheism and pacifism, in the 1880s he became more interested in anarchism. Mirbeau argues in *La Grève des électeurs* that universal male suffrage allows the dominant class to trick the electorate into accepting the status quo: in Mirbeau’s terms, ‘they choose “freely” their own predators’. He ends by urging voters to stay home and go on strike.

Mirbeau is also known for his strong support for Alfred Dreyfus in the 1890s, his criticism of colonialism in the novel *The Torture Garden* (1899), and his criticism of antisemitism in *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1900). He is less known today for his plays, such as *Les Affaires sont Affaires*

(*Business is Business*) in 1903, a trenchant satire of rapacious capitalism premiered at the Comédie-Française. This paper will focus on Mirbeau's intervention in the theatre as an example of his political activism, placing it in the context of his anarchist views and investigating the relationship between Mirbeau's work as an author and his work as a journalist. To what extent was the theatre suited to the dissemination of his political views – and to what extent did it simply reinforce the status quo that he despised?

Emily Eells, “‘And I? May I say nothing, my lord?’: Authorship and Authority in the Oscar Wilde Affair”

Wilde's response to the conviction of gross indecency – ‘And I? May I say nothing, my lord?’ – was a plea to be allowed to have a say, *de profundis*. But he was left literally speechless by the judge who sentenced him to two years' imprisonment with hard labour.

The question of voice and authority will be the focus of this paper on how the 1895 trials and subsequent incarceration of Wilde became a *cause célèbre*. I will concentrate on two different, but curiously related, reactions to the Wilde affair: its reception in France and its literary legacy. Starting with a detailed study of the trial reports in the Parisian press, I will analyze how news spreads, sometimes being distorted into fake news in the process. I will also consider how the Wilde affair has been rewritten in various literary genres, again with special attention to French material such as Robert Badinter's 1995 play *C.3.3.* and Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*. My objective is to show how Wilde's trials in court and tribulations in gaol have given voice to the defense of homosexuality.

- **Session 4 – The Artist as Activist in Transnational Spaces**

Stefano Evangelista, “Lafcadio Hearn Writing Japan at War”

The late nineteenth-century writer Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) is often characterised as an ‘interpreter’ of Japan because of his sympathetic, well-informed portrayals of Japanese culture and society and because of his role in introducing Japanese literature and folklore to the West. In fact, however, his works also performed important diplomatic and political functions at a time in which Japan experienced an unprecedented period of transition: after the country's enforced opening to global trade in the mid-century, Japan embarked on a process of modernisation and ‘enlightenment’ (that is, the adoption of foreign customs and technologies), which affected not only its domestic society but also its geopolitical relations with foreign powers.

In this fast-changing landscape, Hearn's job as Professor of English at Tokyo Imperial University entailed a political dimension, inasmuch as he trained young men who belonged to the Japanese cultural and political elites, many of them pursuing further studies and careers abroad. In this respect, Hearn was therefore an active agent in the formation of modern Japan. And yet his writings are suffused with a nostalgia for Old Japan, an impossible desire to preserve a traditional way of life that he saw vanishing around him.

This paper explores an overlooked aspect of Hearn's authorship: his representations of Japan at war. Hearn experienced at first-hand the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and he died shortly after the start of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Hearn understood that these conflicts were crucial in shaping Japan's new global identity, and wrote about both of them in essays as well as letters. I will focus in particular on how Hearn uses conflict to construct his authorial persona, and how he negotiates acts of interpretation and political intervention in his analyses of Japanese militarism and colonial ambitions.

Philip Bullock, “Rachmaninov: The Authority of the Artist in Late Imperial Russia and the Interwar Russian Emigration”

My studies have emphasised Rachmaninov’s fundamental sense of disinterestedness – a corollary, perhaps, of his late Romantic aesthetics. According to such a view, the archetypal genius exists outside of society, politics and the concerns of the everyday. However, a more careful reading of biographical sources suggests a rather different account of Rachmaninov’s life and works. In this paper, I will trace two periods of his life, asking how he positioned himself vis-a-vis the societies in which he lived and worked. In the first part of my talk, I will consider his activities in late Imperial Russia, when his musical celebrity allowed him to take up a leading position as Vice President of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, administering an important branch of the state’s cultural policy and intervening in a number of important social questions. Then, I will consider his fate in emigration, when he soon established himself as a leading global piano virtuoso and prominent member of the emigre community. Here, I will draw on evidence that shows how much he deployed his public celebrity and private wealth to support indigent emigres whose situation was less secure than his own. Even though he generally avoided any public commentary on questions of politics, his life illustrates how closely he followed – and intervened in – social questions.

Gesa Stedman, “Transnational Writing, Feminism, Activism: Margaret Goldsmith”

The transnational feminist writer, economist and anti-fascist Margarete Goldsmith has been largely forgotten, except for a few specialists of early-twentieth-century literature who come across her as one of Vita Sackville-West’s lovers. My paper seeks to redress this balance. Rather than focusing only her biography as a journalist, translator, and activist mediator, however, I will also concentrate on her 1930s novels, some of which were written in German, and some in English, to tease out how her activism translated to the page. Her interests were diverse, evidence of which can be found in her many non-fiction books, all of which were published in English. They range from historical biography to tracing the earliest history of lesbianism. But it is in her novels that she explores effectively how feminism, anti-fascism, and economic tensions lead female characters to move beyond their social constraints, thus questioning their own role and engaging with political movements of the time.

- **Session 5 – Art and/as Activism in French Symbolism and British Decadence**

Clément Dessy, “Armenophilia and Symbolism: Political and Literary Activism in Fin-de-siècle France”

Parisian literary circles and the Symbolist movement are generally associated with a definition of art for art’s sake, hermetically separating politics from aesthetics. However, the Dreyfus Affair showed how Symbolist writers, and even some magazines such as *La Revue blanche*, could take part in political debates without abandoning their ideal of beauty and artistic pleasure. A lesser-known case of symbolist political engagement is illustrated by the engagement following the massacres of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire. A key figure in the Armenophile movement was Pierre Quillard, who also wrote and directed one of the first symbolist and mystical plays at the Théâtre d'Art in the 1880s: *La Fille aux mains coupées*.

His later involvement in Symbolist journals such as *Le Mercure de France* included the promotion of Armenian authors and the translation of Armenian stories. He later founded the journal *Pro Armenia* to champion the Armenian cause. In this paper, I will consider how Symbolist writers after Quillard were persuaded to defend Armenians in the columns of their

journals, and how their political engagement can help us redefine the fin-de-siècle version of art for art's sake.

Ana Parejo Vadillo, “Alice Meynell and Impressionism: Against Pollution”

In *Dark Ecology* (2016), Timothy Morton argues that our challenging climate crisis requires accepting that there is no escape from the consequences of pollution. In his view, our future lies in considering how we will co-exist with the plant world past the era of the Anthropocene, in which we currently live. While he speaks for a post-postmodernist age, one finds writers of the 1890s thinking in similar ways about life in *fin-de-siècle* cities.

In *Decadent Ecology and British Literature and Art* (2022), Dennis Denisoff suggests that British Decadence has not been part of ecological studies because ‘from the start of the cultural phenomenon, decadence has been associated with the urban, the culture, the artificial, and, not infrequently, with the insincere’ (Denisoff 4). In this paper, I suggest instead that, in fact, what has been occluded is how ecological thinking was part of the way in which decadent writers wrote of metropolitan life. A closer attention to environmental politics in decadent writing reveals the coexistence of an environmental consciousness and the already polluted as writers asked for a paradigmatic shift in urban politics towards recycling and sustainability.

In this talk, I focus on the poet and essayist Alice Meynell, who in her newspaper articles for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, wrote about London’s ecological crisis in two ways. First, her writings documented the damage made by industrial pollution. Secondly, she used pollution as the brick and mortar of her impressionistic writing. The articles would be published in book form in *Impressions of London* (1898), to accompany etchings by the painter William Hyde. In my talk I want to re-frame impressionism as a form of dark ecology that asks us to challenge the dark beauty of 1890s London.