

INTRODUCTION



The conquest of the air was being prepared here too, but not too intensively. A ship would now and then be sent off to South America or East Asia, but not too often. There was no ambition for world markets or world power. One was at the very center of Europe, where the world's old axes cross, words such as colony and overseas sounded like something quite untried and remote.

—Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*¹

The Habsburg monarchy, in Robert Musil's passage in *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930–43), is an ideal but unacknowledged empire in an almost timeless space. *Kakanien*, Musil's term for the *kaiserlich-königlich* (k. & k., imperial-royal) Austro-Hungarian monarchy, represents a distant dreamlike world, complete in and of itself, which unhurriedly moves through time. By describing a seemingly peaceful Slovakian village as “cowered between two small hills as if the earth had parted its lips to warm its child between them,”² Musil's eroticized metaphor not only looks patronizingly towards the lower lands on the Habsburg periphery but literally creates a colonial space within the boundaries of the empire. Stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the endless Ukrainian cornfields of Central Europe, the Habsburg realm—unlike Germany and France—possessed colonies within its own borders. Musil advances the view that Austria, as the peaceful center of Europe, has no need to compete in the colonial race with England, France, or Germany. The borders of the multiethnic state did not need to be crossed in pursuit of experiencing the foreign. The multicultural capital, Vienna, served many as the domain of the “inland foreigners,” whose seemingly threatening embodiment lay nearby.³ Ernst Bloch states that the perfect social utopia is characterized by the holding of individual freedom in balance through a state-sponsored order.⁴ Seen in light of this interpretation, Musil's reminiscences about the Austrian army and administration come very close to the timeless model of an ideal state that provides for peace and order in the state, yet also gives sufficient freedom to citizens in the Habsburg state.

Austria, arguably, never undertook colonization in the form of overseas settlements. But contrary to the historical reality in Central Europe, Austrian colonial

utopian narratives from the end of the nineteenth century are saturated with conscious and unconscious aspirations for an alternative social and spatial organization. This colonial discourse relates to the construction of an imaginary space, and takes precedence over any specific or overt program of dominating other ethnicities.⁵ As Musil's portrayal of "Kakanien" suggests, the Habsburg Empire was itself in the position of the "other," foreign or even uncanny when compared to the European colonial powers. However, the Austrian colonial utopian narratives contradict the ideology of the Habsburg myth, which portrayed Austria and her beloved emperor as harmonious, and too peaceful and unambitious to participate in vicious European colonialism.⁶

While the colonial utopias in this book tend to develop different rhetorical and narrative strategies, every text seeks to find solutions to the dire economic situation, fierce ethnic conflicts, and contested gender relations in the Viennese metropolis by creating visionary spaces in Africa and the Near or Far East. On the one hand, these colonial utopian narratives challenge the image of Austria as peacefully couched between Germany and Russia by projecting Austrian colonial fantasies abroad. On the other hand, these liberal utopian writers develop their own "transnational" discourse in which they rethink Europe precisely at a time when other European intellectuals were mired in the concept of "the nation" as something "transhistorical."⁷

In *Enlightenment or Empire* (1998), Russell A. Berman proposes a similar discourse on German colonialism in the wake of the Enlightenment. Berman presents two seemingly opposite strategies of addressing difference: Captain Cook's and Georg Forster's simultaneous, yet distinct, descriptions of their first contact with South Sea Islanders. For Berman, the contrast between the two modes—Cook's fact-oriented geometric cartography and Forster's humanistic, aesthetically informed philosophical universalism—is emblematic of the differences between an interested English and a *disinterested* German position within the colonial project. Cook's technocratic prose represents a form of instrumental rationality, whereas Forster's emphatic humanism reflects a possibility of emancipatory reason.⁸ I argue that the Austrian colonial imagination was, likewise, invested in liberal humanism emerging from the dire socioeconomic experiences in contemporary Vienna. Through their experiences as marginalized intellectuals within Austrian society, the utopian writers claimed to have a more empathetic and more humane colonial policy toward other fringe groups. This allegedly special position implies a critique of the instrumental rationality in British colonial policy. In this respect, Theodor Hertzka's imaginary colonization of Africa is proposed as a project of global enlightenment. But rather than merely an Austrian colonial imagination, Berman insists that actual experience was necessary to assess the nature of the colonial encounter; accordingly, he advocates paying close attention to the written records of German travelers abroad.

Since all of the Austrian colonial narratives create visionary vacant spaces, one of the crucial topics this book will explore is the interrelation of the prevalent colonial discourse on race and utopian visions of space. Conquering space goes hand in hand with imaginary as well as scientific explorations of the world, with the representation of Austrian colonialism functioning as a symbol of human progress, but also denoting the continual proliferation of Western capitalism.⁹

Arguing against Berman's position that reason in German colonialism helped to emancipate people, Susanne Zantop attempts to reveal Germany's colonial legacy and imagination. In her book, *Colonial Fantasies* (1997), she elaborates on a kind of colonialism without colonies in the formation of German national identity. Interpreting historical, anthropological, literary, and popular texts, Zantop explores the imaginary colonial encounters between "Germans" and "natives" in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature, and shows how these colonial fantasies acted as a rehearsal for actual colonial ventures in Africa, South America, and the Pacific. Berman, on the other hand, questions whether such "hermeneutic or critical analyses of literary works are giving way to what are basically historiographical or even social scientific claims regarding empirical actions."¹⁰ He proposes that instead of prompting empirical colonialism, the extensive literature about colonial South America rather propelled German mass emigration to the Americas in the nineteenth century.

Opposing Berman's insistence on actual experiences, Zantop claims that it was "precisely the lack of actual colonialism . . . [that] created a pervasive desire for colonial possessions and a sense of entitlement to such possessions in the mind of many Germans."¹¹ That is to say, her collection of primary texts aims to set the stage for the appearance of German imperialism toward the end of the nineteenth century, whereas the present book seeks to illustrate that the aesthetic and political aims of the Austrian colonial imagination were very different than vying for an overseas empire. While building on Zantop's conceptual premises about the importance of colonial fantasies, in my analysis of a much smaller sample of Austrian utopias, I come to considerably different conclusions.

In the late 1990s, Zantop and Berman were among the few scholars who opened up the field of postcolonialism for German studies. The relative absence of postcolonial literature written by former colonial subjects in the language of the colonizers had delayed the discussion substantially in the wake of influential scholars such as Edward Said, Benedict Anderson, and Anne McClintock. The absence of overseas possessions made the Austrian situation even more complex. Still, several studies have focused on the relevance of postcolonial theory to the Habsburg Empire in the new millennium.¹² For Clemens Ruthner, the goal of applying this theory in this context could signify a paradigm shift, or at least a meaningful contribution to the globalization of Austrian studies, and in this way could inspire us to rethink the arbitrary boundaries of national literatures.¹³ In this respect, postcolonial theory, in its applicability to a historically, politically,

and linguistically unique situation in Central Europe, has certainly turned into an asset within the last decade.

One study that follows this line of argument critically is Robert Lemon's *Imperial Messages* (2011). With the aid of literary works by writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Robert Musil, and Franz Kafka, Lemon seeks to "demonstrate that far from promulgating Western imperialism, these texts subvert received notions of national and cultural identity and thus problematize the very practice of orientalism."¹⁴ Lemon shows how Austrian fin-de-siècle fiction challenged perceived power structures. Departing from Said's Manichean Occident/Orient paradigm, Lemon also questions whether German-speaking Austrians exercised colonial rule everywhere in the eastern part of the Habsburg Empire. The notion of colonial exploitation, after all, is difficult to reconcile "with the fact that just before the First World War the regions of Bohemia and Moravia enjoyed a higher per capita income than all but one of the provinces of Austria proper."¹⁵ Although the authors of his study frequently deploy orientalist motives, they "engage in self-critique rather than advance imperial hegemony."¹⁶ In summary, Lemon's book addresses the shortcomings of Saidian postcolonial theory, pointing out its failure to attend to the specific situation of Austrian history and literature. Like the works analyzed in *Imperial Messages*, the utopian narratives examined in *Tropics of Vienna* question the received notions of Austria's national and cultural identity. But while Lemon focuses on moments of self-criticism by three modernist Austrian authors, the fin-de-siècle writers of my study—even though they belonged to the same social class—still propagate possibilities for social change in their narrative utopias.

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Wolfgang Müller-Funk argues that the distribution of dystopian and utopian Austrian novels written shortly before and after World War I is lopsided. Between 1870 and 1920, the dystopias presented in Alfred Kubin's *Die Andere Seite* (1909), Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss* (1926), and Joseph Roth's *Hotel Savoy* (1924) were highly acclaimed, while—with the exception of Herzl's *Altneuland* (1902) and Müller's *Tropen* (1915)—Müller-Funk cannot recall "any noteworthy utopian novels."¹⁷ The reason for his failure to notice the utopias by Hertzka, von Sacher-Masoch, and von Hellenbach might be found in the ambivalence of their genres. They constitute a special kind of representation; neither merely literary texts, nor just social theory, these narratives are, according to Phillip Wegner, "an in-between form that mediates and binds together these other representational acts."¹⁸ In accordance with Louis Marin's thesis, utopias are organized around a neutral discursive space that creates narrative energy and performative force.¹⁹ Hence, the present set of Austrian colonial utopias can be read as configurations or cognitive mappings of cultural space or history in the making. Keeping Marin's concept of utopia's neutrality, or "in-between space"²⁰ in mind, we can

interpret the fundamental notion of the otherness of space—prevalent in all Austrian colonial utopias—as unconsciously compensating for anti-Semitism in Vienna by projecting a positive wish-concept at an exotic distance. But as we will see in Herzl’s Palestine, or Hertzka’s Kenya, merely imagining vacant spaces does not necessarily take geopolitical realities into account. Instead, as Hans Christoph Buch reveals in his Frankfurt poetic lectures *Die Nähe und die Ferne* (1991), the underlying mechanism of most exotic (and utopian) narratives is projection: the relationship between the “foreign” and the “familiar” is dialectical, hence things near and things far collapse into each other.²¹ To illustrate such a dialectical movement, this book shows that through a process of inversions, hybridizations, and transgressions, Austrian colonial utopias conjure up an idealized image of Vienna projected onto a vacant colonial space. The present study also corresponds thematically to Ian Reifowitz’s *Imagining an Austrian Nation* (2003), an intellectual history that pivots around Joseph Samuel Bloch, a Jewish civic leader and the publisher of the *Österreichische Wochenschrift* (1884–1920). Reifowitz describes Bloch as an ardent advocate of a supraethnic Austrian patriotism at a time of soaring nationalism. A public intellectual, Bloch favored a federal model that sought to generate patriotism for the monarchy with the help of ethnic diversity. Suffice it to say, Bloch’s early version of *Verfassungspatriotismus*²² aimed to reform the institutions from within, and he opposed any Zionist solutions to counter contemporary anti-Semitism.²³ Similar to Reifowitz’s study, *Tropics of Vienna* discusses political, ideological, and gender issues relevant at the time in light of the ways they are addressed in the utopias it analyzes. Unlike Joseph Samuel Bloch’s plea for real civic reformation, the authors addressed in this study envision *fictional* social formations outside the confines of the Habsburg Empire.

Tropics of Vienna is neither a history of imperial politics nor a discussion of Austria’s economy or its cultural institutions in the aftermath of the great recession in 1873 (*Gründerkrise*). Instead the book examines a set of narrative utopias that point to an imaginary imperialism. *Tropics of Vienna* outlines a conceptual framework within which the late nineteenth-century authors worked before the onset of modernism. In this respect, *Tropics of Vienna* not only assesses the aesthetic achievements of the individual utopias but draws attention to the narratives’ articulation of moments of imaginary cultural collisions. The aim is to carve out a synchronic historical slice to compare and contrast colonial utopias all written by Viennese intellectuals between 1870 and 1900 with an outlook on how this discourse developed in the twentieth century. These writers shared comparable cultural backgrounds and similar professional inclinations (e.g., publishing and politics). I have applied psychoanalytically informed insights without attempting to “analyze” the authors themselves or Viennese culture at large, especially concerning the relevant gender and sexuality issues. Still, it was important to tease out moments in which the texts produce rather than reflect the colonial and utopian discourse of their time. In this sense, as Wegner puts it,

the Austrian colonial utopias can be read as “more akin to travelers’ itineraries, or an architectural sketch, tracing an exploratory trajectory, a narrative line that, as it unfolds, quite literally engenders something new in the world.”²⁴ It is the imaginary colonial space that ultimately encourages the reader to play with alternatives, trying out variations and permutations imaginatively before possibilities became fixed by history itself.

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Unlike Germany in the 1880s, the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not participate in overseas imperialism. In fact, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the only European power that did not possess colonies and, at least officially, did not seek to obtain any.²⁵ As a corollary, the Habsburg monarchy is rarely mentioned in the extensive literature on the subject of nineteenth-century imperialism. Nevertheless, following the spirit of the time, Austria-Hungary did pursue expansionist projects, primarily in Southeastern Europe (Bosnia-Herzegovina).²⁶ The Habsburg Empire’s role in Central Europe was exceedingly complex and contradictory. Alexander Honold describes its geopolitical situation in the following terms:

To be sure, contained within the *Kakanian* multiethnic structure, there were quite a few nations and ethnicities that experienced the Habsburg regime as the apparatus of political, economic, and cultural oppression, which was not so different from that experienced in colonial relationships; the well-known phrase ‘ethnic prison’ alludes to this. Yet, this system of supranational affiliations was not in a position to effectively suppress partisan nationalism and insurgencies, and therefore had to adjust far more to fundamental opposition than was the case for other imperial powers.²⁷

Considering the supranational structure of the Habsburg Empire, the foray into the Balkans cannot easily be compared to the colonialism of other European powers, although conditions on the periphery of the Habsburg Empire resembled in some respects the oppressiveness of a colonial setting. This line of argument will be elaborated in Chapter 1 through a reading of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novella *Der Kapitulant* (1870), and his colonial utopia *Paradies am Dniester* (1877), both of which are set in the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Von Sacher-Masoch, the controversial author of the erotic novella *Venus in Furs* (1877), is little known for his distinctive political utopianism. In contrast to von Sacher-Masoch’s usual portrayal of fierce ethnic conflicts as a form of natural determinism within the paracolonial space of Eastern Europe, the conflict in his utopian story *Paradies am Dniester*, I argue, is a prerequisite for his discussion of a utopian pan-Slavic community in Eastern Europe. With *Paradies*, von Sacher-Masoch propounds a colonial utopia, suspended in fantasy by being displaced within the insurmountable spatial limitations of Europe. Although the utopia addresses the practical political problems of his time, and although

von Sacher-Masoch sets his narratives in Eastern Europe, he is motivated by a utopian conception of a new order that covers all of Europe. He disassociates the characters in his novella from a limited and limiting reality to allow them to act out in an imagined space what is not possible in reality, so that the fictional conversation substitutes for the real. In his utopia *Paradies am Dniester*, he creates a discourse on utopian space that delivers its message by being suspended in fantasy, thus denying the spatial realities and political limitations of Eastern Europe.

Chapter 2 focuses on the utopian narrative *Insel Mellonta* (1883) by the philosophically inclined politician Lazar Baron von Hellenbach, which he wrote shortly after von Sacher-Masoch's stories were published. In *Insel Mellonta*, a highly educated German aristocrat is shipwrecked and stranded in the Indian Ocean near a coral island, where natives come to his rescue. The ensuing story of an idyllic, dreamlike existence in the South Sea is interrupted by a volcanic eruption that causes the island to disappear into the ocean. What is more, the entire island society turns out to be merely the protagonist's dream. At first glance, von Hellenbach's socially emancipated *Insel Mellonta* appears to be a classic liberal utopia, but its intricate narrative structure undermines this simple categorization as von Hellenbach merely "utilizes" the utopian genre to bring his theological philosophy to a broader audience. Like the other Austrian utopias, von Hellenbach's narrative is steeped in the contemporary debates about colonialism and thrives on inversions, hybridizations, and transgressions of the dominant discourse. *Insel Mellonta* illustrates the extent to which the utopian narrative, even without the "real" experience of the encounter between Polynesians and Europeans, was informed by the real conflicts of the heterogeneous population within the multiethnic Habsburg Empire.

Similar to von Hellenbach, Theodor Hertzka, who will be discussed in Chapter 3, sought to revitalize Central Europe through a projected utopian encounter with exotic cultures in the empty space of East Africa. Hertzka's utopia *Freiland* (1890) emphasizes enlightened universal values and rationality, and proposes to suspend the opposition of town and country through basic democratic land reforms and revised zoning laws. Hertzka aims to create a cheerful society inhabited by young and healthy homeowners coming together to form a productive community. His vision of a new civilization in Africa coincides with nationalism and the surge of anti-Semitism in Vienna. But as I will show, Hertzka goes beyond mere cultural critique of fin-de-siècle Vienna and applies scientific reasoning to social problems to put forth a viable transnational alternative in Africa through radical land reforms and the establishment of a globalized economy.

Theodor Herzl, the topic of Chapter 4, once contemptuously remarked that he regarded Hertzka's *Freiland* as a tall tale.²⁸ This statement is surprising when one compares Herzl's Zionist utopia *Altneuland* (1902) to *Freiland*, with which it shares many themes. Yet while *Freiland* enjoyed popularity only at the time of its publication, *Altneuland* would become the world-renowned manifesto of

Zionism. In this chapter, I examine how Herzl combines the cosmopolitanism of the German Enlightenment with the secular nationalism inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder and Adolf Fischhof.²⁹ *Altneuland* diverts the “Jewish question” away from social and religious issues toward the concept of the “Jewish nation” in an imagined empty space of Palestine.³⁰ *Altneuland* depicts the future Jewish state as a communal utopia. He envisions a new cooperative society rising in the Land of Israel that utilizes science and technology to develop the land. He includes detailed ideas for the future state’s political structure, immigration policies, fundraising, diplomatic relations, social laws, and the relationship between religion and the state. The main goal of Herzl’s utopia becomes the founding of a new and autonomous state in Palestine. Herzl’s vision for the Jewish people represents a homecoming to another (contested) space after a long period of diasporic movements. Underscoring formal, narrative, and semiotic qualities of Herzl’s *Altneuland*, my analysis of the novel sees his Zionist vision as a reflection of fin-de-siècle Vienna. The idea for the novel congealed while he was working as a journalist in Spain, England, and Paris. His sojourns abroad helped him to give voice to the sense of alienation he had experienced as a Jew in Vienna. In other words, I will argue that Herzl’s Zionist project in Palestine emerges as a sublation of his experiences abroad.

Chapter 5 serves as an epilogue that gives an outlook on the development of Austrian colonial utopias in the first decades of the twentieth century. First, I discuss Robert Müller’s modernist novel *Tropen: Der Mythos der Reise* (1915), which envisions the global fusion of the human races. I contend that Müller’s self-reflexive exoticism not only sheds a critical light on categories, such as “alterity” and “difference,” but also complicates the common understanding of exoticism as a distressed imagination that produces wishful images to compensate for an alienated view of one’s self and reality. Müller’s vision of amalgamation arises from his sensitivity to the confrontational tensions among and within the ethnic groups, and his awareness of the “exotic” strangeness of the various nationalities comprising that heterogeneous Habsburg Empire. Since the ambivalent incorporation of foreign cultures is an aesthetic feature of these literary Austrian colonial utopias, Müller’s redefining exoticism in *Tropen* can be seen as a modernist appropriation of Austrian colonial discourse.

The second half of Chapter 5 discusses the work of Joseph Roth, one of Austria’s most revered interwar novelists, and his critical views of the Habsburg legacy. It might seem counterintuitive to look to Roth in a study on Austrian colonial utopias, considering that he is known as a twentieth-century *realist* writer. Nevertheless, like no other author of his generation, it is evident that Roth reflects on the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire in the aftermath of World War I in his historical novels *Radetzky marsch* (1932) and *Kapuzinergruft* (1938). For him, the essence of Habsburg is not the center but the periphery, a place he populates with subaltern protagonists trying to tackle the windmills of modernity and

never quite coming to terms with the loss of the empire. Moreover, in a lucid and sobering fashion, his seminal essay “Juden auf der Wanderschaft” (1927) addresses Hertzka’s and Herzl’s utopian concepts. Roth undertakes to “demystify” Habsburg nostalgia as he does not see Zionism or a facile acceptance of East European Jews within a Western host culture as a viable solution to their plight. As a keen historian, Roth does not make his fiction a nostalgic utopia, as some of his critics have claimed, nor does he portray Galicia as a place of perennial social injustice. I maintain that instead of embellishing the past, Roth’s writings mediate historical truths about the empire’s marginal communities through fiction. That is to say, Roth’s fiction is neither a backward-oriented utopia nor an insipid portrait of Eastern Europe as a place of despotism and social injustice. Rather than embellishing the past, he claims that his writings turn reality into “a higher form of truth” to convey the history of the empire’s marginal communities in a mythical way. Put differently, Roth engages allegorically with history; he does not merely yearn for a paradise lost, but delivers a critique of contemporary culture in his writings.

Notes

1. “Man bereitete die Eroberung der Lüfte vor, auch hier; aber nicht zu intensiv. Man ließ hie [*sic*] und da ein Schiff nach Südamerika oder Ostasien fahren; aber nicht zu oft. Man hatte keinen Weltwirtschafts- und Weltmachtsehgeiz; man saß im Mittelpunkt Europas, wo die alten Weltachsen sich schneiden; die Worte Kolonie und Übersee hörte man an wie etwas noch ganz Unerprobtes und Fernes.” Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, ed. Adolf Frise, vol. 1 (Reinbek, 2005), 33. [All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.]
2. “das Dorf zwischen zwei kleinen Hügeln kauerte, als hätte die Erde ein wenig die Lippen geöffnet, um ihr Kind dazwischen zu wärmen.” Musil, *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, vol. 1, 33.
3. Alexander Honold, “Peter Altenbergs *Ashantee*: Eine impressionistische cross-over Phantasie im Kontext der exotischen Völkerschauen,” in *Grenzüberschreitungen um 1900: Österreichische Literatur im Übergang*, ed. Thomas Eicher and Peter Sowa (Oberhausen, 2001), 137.
4. See Ernst Bloch, “Freiheit und Ordnung: Abriss der Sozialutopien”, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt, 1959), 2:551.
5. See Russell A. Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture* (Lincoln, 1998), 3.
6. See Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (Vienna, 2000). For Magris the characteristic element of the Habsburg myth is the “patriarchal and paternal closeness between the ruler and his subjects, who are deeply enamored of and devoted to their monarch,” 44.
7. According to Ernest Gellner, the predominant European discourse on “nation” and “nationalism” in the nineteenth century was “about entry to, participation in, identification with, a literate high culture which . . . is to be compatible with the kind of division