

Brigitte Spreitzer is a professor of Germanistik at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz. For the fall 2010 semester, she was a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, teaching in the Department of German, Scandinavian, and Dutch. She also gave a lecture (auf Deutsch), "Österreichische Autorinnen und die Psychoanalyse in der Wiener Moderne." Later, she spoke with *ASN*.

BRIGITTE SPREITZER'S psychoanalytic theory of art

Interview and photo by
Thomas Schmidinger

ASN: How did you get interested in literature?

BS: I was born in the Austrian mountains in Krakaudorf, a small village in Upper Styria. I think that this is an important detail of my biography, because in a small village in the mountains of Styria you cannot do very much. You have to think and read, and that's what I did until my eighteenth birthday. Then I went to Graz with my books. I decided to study Germanistik and Romanistik. But Romanistik, the French language, became less important for me, because after a few semesters they wanted me as a student assistant in Germanistik—the section for medieval German literature. I was very young at this point and hadn't even finished my studies. That's how I learned about the University from the inside. Then I wrote my master thesis on homosexuality in the Middle Ages. I was very young—still stuck in adolescence, I would say today—and I wanted to provoke my chair a little bit.

ASN: Why? Was he homophobic?

BS: No, but of course he was very traditional in his point of view. He worked on Oswald von Wolkenstein, and I had worked for many years on his edition of all the documents mentioning Oswald von Wolkenstein. That was a very big work, and it was a hard and fundamental work. You learned all the tools for a real medievalist. For my dissertation I continued with this interest, but I just had to do something very different. I began with the work on medieval homosexuality and continued with writing about the imaginations of the evil, history of mentality, Foucault and all this. This was very important for my intellectual development. Of course, I was always interested in modern literature, too. Maybe that is characteristic of me. I always have to go beyond the boundaries. I don't like this sectionalism: old literature, modern literature, and so on. So after my dissertation I got the opportunity to work in a project on *Wiener Moderne*. It was an interdisciplinary project where several faculties of the University were involved: phi-



losophy, history, literature, etc.—seven different departments altogether. I worked on the part of female Austrian writers from 1880 to 1930, the classic period of modernity. Feminism was always very important to me, and my point of view is feminist. The result of this work that lasted five to six years was my habilitation, *TEXTUREN. Die Österreichische Moderne der Frauen*, published by Passagen Verlag. The whole "Studien zur Moderne" series that came from the project was published there. The project gave me my first scholarly contact with psychoanalysis. One chapter of my book was about the reception of psychoanalysis in *Wiener Moderne* by feminist writers.

ASN: Tell us about your present position at the University of Graz and your work here at the University of Minnesota.

BS: In Graz I'm a professor of German literature. I'm habilitated for the whole period, so I can teach both medieval literature and modern literature. But I only have a 50% appointment. Here in Minnesota I offered to teach a course on the reception of Tristan from the Middle Ages to modernity, but they were more interested in my modern themes. So I taught a course on female Austrian writers of the *Wiener Moderne*. That was a four-credit course for undergraduates.

ASN: And you're a Visiting Fulbright Professor?

BS: No. I'm part of a bilateral exchange program between the University of Graz and the University of Minnesota.

ASN: So there are also professors from Minnesota who teach in Graz?

BS: Yes, but it doesn't have to be 1:1. They try to find people who will go to Graz, but that does not always happen. And the program is not only for literature departments. It's generally open for the whole University. Evelin Maierhuber in Graz and Evelyn Davidheiser in Minnesota are responsible for that program.

ASN: Let's talk about your research on psychoanalysis. Many people consider psychoanalysis to be antifeminist. How did you come to connect your interest in feminism with psychoanalysis? And what connects psychoanalysis with the Wiener Moderne and especially female writers?

BS: First of all, you cannot think of modernity without Sigmund Freud. That would be impossible. You don't have to be a psychoanalyst to think so.

ASN: I completely agree, but for many feminists he still has a very bad image.

BS: That may be, but you can't ignore him. Perhaps he was an antifeminist. I thought so when I wrote my habilitation, but I don't think that any more. When I wrote my habilitation I was only a literary scholar. If you isolate his writings about women and look at these writings from today's perspective, you can get very angry, as I did. But studying *Wiener Moderne* made me realize that during his lifetime it was usual to think like that. I don't want to defend him, but this was his cultural context. It was usual to think like that. Maybe his oft-mentioned phrase about women as a dark continent is just a confession that he doesn't know the psychology of women. For my own development it was important to study this theory from a more practical point of view. After my habilitation, my son was born and I stopped working at the University for some years to become a psychotherapist. I didn't choose the hardcore version of psychoanalysis.

ASN: What school of psychotherapy did you choose?

BS: It is called Katathym-Imaginative Psychotherapy (KIP), founded by the German psychotherapist Hanscarl Leuner. It is also called Guided Affective Imagery. In this method, the client describes his imageries, guided by the therapist, and the descriptive language the client uses helps the therapist to understand the client's subconscious. This process is similar in some ways to my profession as a literary scholar. But of course KIP is also based on psychoanalysis, so this practical use of psychoanalysis changed my view of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis.

ASN: How did you come to the topic of Anna Freud as an unfulfilled poet?

BS: I came back to academics in 2007 after several years of education as a psychotherapist, and it was important for me to connect the two sides of my education. This worked because KIP works with clients' imaginations and the oral texts they produce. As a therapist, I have to analyze them. And, of course, literature also comes from people's imaginations. I decided

I wanted to intensify my work on symbols. That led me to Anna Freud. When I worked on my habilitation I read Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography of her. There I learned that Anna wrote poems. When I came back I was certain that someone would have edited and analyzed them by that time, but I was wrong. I think the reason no one has attempted this is that you must have a background in both disciplines. You have to be educated in literature and in psychoanalysis to understand and connect them. Anna Freud is a lynxpin. When I saw that nobody had worked on her poetry, I started with that right away.

ASN: What part of your research have you done in the US?

BS: I did the first step. I went to the Library of Congress and looked through all the papers to verify that Young-Bruehl saw all the texts. I think she did (with a few exceptions). So I copied all the poems and other texts. The next step will be to obtain the permission of the Anna Freud literary estate to publish it.

ASN: So you plan a critical edition?

BS: Yes, but not just a critical edition. I would like to analyze and interpret it. That's what I did in my talk for the Center for Austrian Studies: I analyzed these texts from a psychoanalytic perspective.

ASN: Your talk was an examination of Anna Freud's lecture "Schlagephantasie und Tagtraum," the lecture she delivered when she was accepted as a member of the "Psychoanalytische Vereinigung." What's interesting about that text?

BS: Ever since her schooldays Anna Freud wrote poetry. The majority of her preserved poems and drafts of prose are from the period after 1918, when she started her analysis with her father. Anna Freud's poems are not very innovative from an aesthetic perspective. That could be a reason why the study of literature hitherto ignored her. I am not predominantly interested in them from an aesthetic point of view, and I am not primarily using them as biographical source material, as Young-Bruehl did. I am interested in them for a completely different reason. In showing and theorizing the process from private imagination (daydreams) to written texts intended for a reader, Anna Freud develops, in fact, a theory of art. To put it simply, the girl in her "Fallbeispiel" (herself, as we know now) can abandon satisfaction through dreaming and substitute the social activity of writing instead. My previous research shows that the psychoanalyst Anna Freud gradually replaced the poet Anna Freud—a development pushed by her father. Sigmund Freud showed the tendency to interpret Anna's writing as backsliding into a childish neurosis. One of the most explosive questions is: Does the drainage of the Zuiderzee—as Sigmund Freud metaphorically called the work of psychoanalysis—also empty the pool where the poet gets his inspiration? ❖

Graz institutes combine to research Jewish migration

Since the discovery of the Americas at the end of the 15th century, the Americas have been a place of refuge and a symbol of hope for people from all over the world, and especially from Europe. Political freedom, religious and cultural tolerance, and economic opportunity, real and imagined, have formed the bedrock of the so-called "American Dream." These images have been for the most part associated with the United States, but the countries in both North and South America have provided a new home for millions of people. Among the migrants were numerous Jews, who, motivated by a number of factors (including a need to escape from persecution), embarked on their journey towards the Americas.

In the spring of 2011 Wallstein publishers (Göttingen, Germany) will release *Nach Amerika nämlich!*, edited by Ulla Kriebnernegg, Gerald Lamprecht, Roberta Maierhofer, and Andrea Strutz. The volume is the product of a joint research project between the Center for Jewish Studies and the Center for the Study of the Americas at the University of Graz, Austria. A lecture series of the same title, based on the project research and

the published book, will be held at the University of Graz in the summer semester of 2011. The project and the lecture series show how two fields of research—Jewish studies and Inter-American studies—are able to approach the same theme from differing viewpoints and form such a vibrant collaboration.

The lecture series is designed to both familiarize students with the topics addressed and make this very complex of theme approachable to the general public. It will address various aspects of Jewish migration into the Americas in the 19th and 20th century and tackle different factors of migration and their impact on the individual as well as society with the help of concrete examples. The reading of and conversation with Martin Pollack, the author of the "hot off the press" book *Kaiser von Amerika – Die große Flucht aus Galizien* (Wien: Zsolnay 2010) (Emperor of America: The great flight from Galicia), will be a highlight of the lecture series.

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