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# Much more than longing: Nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna

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Much More Than Longing:  
Nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna

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HIST 399: Senior Thesis

Dr. Schroeder

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## Introduction

The past is gone and nowhere else is such truth as apparent as in Vienna. Gone is Fin de Siècle Vienna: the jewel of the ancient and venerable Hapsburg monarchy. This was a paradise where tradition and modernity fused. “Fin de Siècle” is French for “end of the age” and particularly denotes the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, about a 25 year period from 1889 until 1914. Vienna during this time was the cultural and intellectual center of the German speaking world.<sup>1</sup> This was the city where Sigmund Freud developed psychotherapy, where great writers gathered like the “Young Vienna” and wrote over coffee in coffeehouses, theater flourished, and opera peaked under skilled composers like Gustav Mahler. The Vienna Secession explored new artistic expressions in the arts and architecture.<sup>2</sup> Fin de Siècle Vienna was where high culture excelled in every field from the arts to music to the sciences.

Fin de Siècle Vienna is gone, but it lives on in memory. The following twentieth century was hard on this Vienna. The Fin de Siècle culture faded with the outbreak of the Great War. The nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna may have begun with the end of the war, the dissolution of the Habsburg Dynasty, and the founding of the unpopular first Austrian Republic. However nostalgia for the 1900’s Vienna became publicly discussed with the onset of Anschluss, Second World War, and Holocaust. Today’s

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<sup>1</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986), 19-20.

Vienna is the capital of the Second Republic, Republik Österreich, but more importantly it is the modern city of museums, architecture, and art galleries that enshrine its turn-of-the-century past. The nostalgics that reminisce over Fin de Siècle Vienna are a diverse population: memoirists like Stefan Zweig recollecting in exile in the 1940s, academics, tourists, and residents of today who wander down modern Vienna's aged streets. In the twenty-first century nostalgia is the only way to experience Fin de Siècle Vienna. Through visits to modern Vienna, idling in coffeehouses, soaking up the architecture still standing, and reading memoirs and academic study alike, one can invoke the memory of the grand capital's past.

While much is known about Fin de Siècle Vienna, there has been little study of how it is understood in memory. These years of nostalgia are greater than the time period between 1889 and 1914 when this city actually existed. In spite of the considerable span of time and the diverse population of nostalgics, spanning several generations, there is limited academic understanding of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna. Up to this point nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is almost entirely built from the experiences of the male Jewish intellectual. This memory is superimposed on all people who lived in Fin de Siècle Vienna. However other strains go unconsidered, such as from the arts of the age evoking wonder. There is also nostalgia from academics who interpret Fin de Siècle Vienna as a primordial ground for modernity. There is more to this past in memory than meets first glance.

This study therefore seeks to expand our understanding of the memory and the nostalgia held for Fin de Siècle Vienna by using an up-to-date understanding of nostalgia. Supporting the advanced concept of nostalgia is the analysis of a selection of memoirs to give more voices to the firsthand experience of Fin de Siècle Vienna. My paper seeks to argue two points: one is conceptual in the understanding of memory study in history and the other is particular to the nostalgic experience of Fin de Siècle Vienna. Conceptually I argue for memory study, by way of the example from the nostalgia held for Fin de Siècle Vienna, that nostalgia is a central concept to understanding some memories of the past. Particular to Vienna, I argue that the nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is more than merely the experiences of male Jewish intellectuals. Rather the *nostalgias and memories* for Fin de Siècle Vienna hold different meanings and are drawn from a variety of sources thus giving different understandings of the memory of Fin de Siècle Vienna in the ages that follow.

### Historiography

Nostalgia is a largely under-studied concept in the field of memory history. Memory study is mainly focused on the recollections of traumatic events and their dealing with identity construction.<sup>3</sup> Nostalgia is fundamentally opposed to recollection of trauma:

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<sup>3</sup> Aleida Assmann, "EUROPE: A COMMUNITY OF MEMORY?," *German Historical Institute Bulletin*, no. 40 (Spring 2007): 11-12, <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu040/011.pdf>.

Almost anything from our past can emerge as an object of nostalgia, provided that we can somehow view it in a pleasant light. (This effectively eliminates from nostalgia's universe such grotesque possibilities as a 'nostalgia' for the ovens at Auschwitz or for the bomb at Hiroshima.)<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Fin de Siècle Vienna, trauma ended this time period with the start of the Great War. Then the Anschluss initiated nostalgia through the exile of many intellectuals.

Formal study of the nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a series of very limited and disconnected independent evaluations. The nostalgia for this period is often cited as the reason for a present day scholars to start their study of 1900s Vienna. Art historians such as Kirk Varnedoe wrote that the nostalgia invoked from the works of this age combined with the modernistic ambitions of intellectuals of the period inspired his own study.<sup>5</sup> Varnedoe oversaw the publication of *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, an art book derived from the Museum of Modern Art in New York's 1986 display of Vienna Secession works. He notes the Fin de Siècle period was a time when distinctly modern artistic style and content arose.<sup>6</sup> The Secession is remembered for breaking from tradition with the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (all embracing art form) and the style of Jugendstil.<sup>7</sup> With art history, nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a

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<sup>4</sup> Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), viii.

<sup>5</sup> Varnedoe specifically credits Carl E. Schorske's work as a source of inspiration. Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 19-20.

starting point for invoking the imagination for the time, but not really critically evaluating it.

Steven Beller's "The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of Fin-de-siècle Vienna," focuses on the recollection of the Jewish experience in Fin de Siècle Vienna. Notably he looks at Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday*. Published in 1942, it is perhaps the best known primary source of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna. Beller asserts that Zweig has been held as the standard interpretation for what it means to be nostalgic for Fin de Siècle Vienna.<sup>8</sup> In Zweig's memoir he outlines topics that may be considered subjects of nostalgia: *Kaffeekultur*, a fondness for coffeehouses and the social gatherings in them, *Politics* usually pertains to favoring conservative Habsburg rule, and *Vienna as a multi-national center of cultural exchange*, a place for intellectual and cultural peers and their creative works.<sup>9</sup> Beller asserts the relevance of the memoir in spite of its rosy depiction of a harsh time for many. Fin de Siècle Vienna was overcrowded and is also noted for educating less savory individuals such as Adolf Hitler. He notes that Zweig's work reveals some of the horrors of the age, "[Zweig] 'golden age of safety' included by his own admission, a vast traffic in

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Beller, "The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of Fin-de-siècle Vienna," *Jewish Social Studies* 96, no. 2 (Winter 96): 38, accessed January 28, 2014, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandra Starr, "Trapped in a Golden Age," *American Scholar* 77, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 10, accessed January 28, 2014, Academic Search Premier.



exploited humanity."<sup>10</sup> Beller asserts that the Vienna nostalgia is misplaced. It is focused more on the innovations than the contributor's, which was the Jewish intellectual class.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately this short article in *Jewish Social Studies* argues that nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a Jewish intellectual's phenomenon and as a useful contrast to reality.

Nostalgia as a contrast to reality is the preferred use for the concept of nostalgia in most historical study. Focus has been more on the debauchery of the age or the social problems present in Fin de Siècle Vienna and Europe during this period.<sup>12</sup> Phillip Blom argues that nostalgia for this period is a misunderstanding of what actually occurred, "Today, the period before the outbreak of the First World War is often regarded as idyllic: the time before the fall, the good old days...shattered by the forces driving it inexorably towards disaster."<sup>13</sup> His focus of *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914* is to depict the first decade of the twentieth century as accurately as possible. In Blom's effort to depict Europe's uncertainty, he asserts that nostalgia for this time should not exist, "To most people who lived around 1900 this nostalgic view with its emphasis on solidarity and grace would have come as a surprise."<sup>14</sup> Blom does not really argue against any other historian about nostalgia, but rather asserts that the idea of nostalgia is an absurdity produced after-the-fact by wistful thinking. To Blom, his greatest

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<sup>10</sup> Beller, "The World of Yesterday Revisited," 40.

<sup>11</sup> Beller, "The World of Yesterday Revisited," 52.

<sup>12</sup> Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914*, 2.

interest and main arguments are centered on depicting Pre-Great War Europe with the upmost realism and accuracy.<sup>15</sup> The concept of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is asserted as an inconvenience to the regular historical study of the period.

Nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna has also been evaluated by the children of Jews exiled from Vienna due to the Anschluss. For these writers, notably not historians, nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is looking at their own family history and their cultural identity as exiled Austrian Jews. Leo Spitzer, a literary critic, was raised in Bolivia where a vibrant refugee culture was steeped in nostalgia for 1900s Vienna. The adults of this group had watched the decline of Vienna after the Great War and were forced to flee with Nazi takeover. Spitzer argues that nostalgia was formed less by the place reminisced about, but rather formed from the traumatic break from a time and place in a person's life.<sup>16</sup> His experience of his parents' nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is intermingled with his nostalgia for his childhood in Vienna, but more so tied to Bolivia and the exile community he grew up in.<sup>17</sup> The main purpose of Spitzer's article is not so much an exact study of nostalgia, but rather going through his own recollections of the past and coming to terms with the nostalgia his family collectively developed.

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<sup>15</sup> Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe, 1900-1914*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Leo Spitzer, "Rootless Nostalgia: Vienna in La Paz, La Paz in Elsewhere," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 19, no. 3 (2001): 6, accessed February 14, 2014, Project MUSE.

<sup>17</sup> Spitzer, "Rootless Nostalgia," 17.

Marjorie Perloff grew up in post WWI Vienna; her family escaped Nazi persecution by moving to America. She is a poetry scholar in the United States today. In "Seductive Vienna" she argues that a large part of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna was founded because of the decrease in cultural and intellectual production under the regimes that followed the Habsburg monarchy.<sup>18</sup> She notes that Austrian Jews in Vienna had served as patrons and contributors to the cultural and intellectual development of Fin de Siècle Vienna and continued in exile, "...those refuges that managed to escape the Nazis continued to be attracted to Viennese culture, with its ideals of *Bildung*, *Wissenschaft*, taste, and connoisseurship in the arts."<sup>19</sup> The ideals of Fin de Siècle Vienna were perpetuated in foreign lands due to the exiled nostalgics. Perloff writes also of her parents and grandparents who reminisced over Vienna as well as her own tourist experiences. In her comparison of these two nostalgic sources, she finds that the tourist experiences are largely an idealized simulation of a world that never was. Coffeehouses today fill not with intellectuals like in her parent's stories, but rather places like Café Sabarsky serve tourists gawking at a past gone.<sup>20</sup> Concluding Perloff asserts that the Vienna held in nostalgia does not match up with the Vienna that actually bore witness to the turn-of-the-century.

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<sup>18</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "Seductive Vienna," *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 2 (2003): 222, accessed January 28, 2014, doi:10.1353/mod.2003.0043.

<sup>19</sup> Perloff, "Seductive Vienna," 222.

<sup>20</sup> Perloff, "Seductive Vienna," 230.

Mathew Finch looks at Fin de Siècle Vienna nostalgia as modern Austrian identity construction with an understanding of Vienna as a "Lieu De Mémoire." He critically reviews "Traum und Wirklichkeit," a noted museum display of Fin de Siècle Vienna in the mid-1980s, as well as various other tourist promotions of Fin de Siècle Vienna. Finch notes Vienna of today uses nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna to create an identity that can appeal to modern mentalities. "By bridging the gap between the present and the pre-1938 past, Vienna bypassed difficult questions of historical reasonability under the Nazi regime."<sup>21</sup> The Jewish intellectual in Fin de Siècle Vienna, particularly articulated in Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday*, and their nostalgia are central to modern Austrians. In creating this larger Austrian identity, Finch argues that individual voices were used to identity formation.

### **A Modern Understanding of Nostalgia**

The concept of nostalgia has developed considerably from its original medical diagnosis by Johannes Hofer. He coined the term for homesickness found prevalent amongst Swiss mercenaries abroad in the seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> The understanding of nostalgia has since passed out of physical and psychiatric conceptions, becoming more

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Finch, "Official History, Private Memories: 'Vienna 1900' as LIEU DE LIEU DE MÉMOIRE," *Central Europe* 2, no. 2 (2004): 113.

<sup>22</sup> Krystine Irene Batcho, "Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept.," *History of Psychology* 16, no. 3 (2013): 166, accessed February 3, 2014, doi:10.1037/a0032427.

than just a case of detrimental homesickness.<sup>23</sup> Today, nostalgia is a complex, multi-field concept that draws its research from psychology, sociology, literary analysis, and marketing. As a concept nostalgia is more than the definition: “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or some past period or irrecoverable condition.”<sup>24</sup> The dictionary definition only covers the general understanding of a concept that takes into account what causes nostalgia and how nostalgia is expressed.

First, homesickness needs to be struck from the main understanding of Fin de Siècle Vienna nostalgia. Nostalgia as it has been understood since at least 1948, has not considered homesickness as one of the central ideas of the concept. This is because the concept of “home” is a broad term and too vague for even the vaguest of descriptions:

In the literature the concept of ‘home’ usually has been used in its widest sense to indicated former surroundings, circumstances, or conditions to which the individual has become to some degree habituated... Thus the term ‘home’ is used to mean any part of, or even all of, the environment circumscribed by a dwelling, a neighborhood, a town, or even an entire state or nation.<sup>25</sup>

Also as it shall be soon shown, many nostalgics for Fin de Siècle Vienna cannot claim this Vienna as their home. Not all nostalgics are Viennese.

Nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a multi-faceted complex topic that spans several generations, is multi-national, and is drawn from a variety of different sources.

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<sup>23</sup> For a history of the development of nostalgia consult: W. H. McCann, "Nostalgia: A Review of the Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (1941): 165-166, accessed February 6, 2014, doi:10.1037/h0057354. and Batcho, "Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept."

<sup>24</sup> "Nostalgia," Merriam-Webster.com, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia>.

<sup>25</sup> McCann, "Nostalgia: A Review of the Literature," 174.

In order to address this complexity several key concepts of nostalgia from the advanced academic understanding must be outlined. The central idea is experience. How a nostalgic is exposed to Fin de Siècle Vienna must also be considered in better understanding the nostalgia held for Fin de Siècle Vienna. In addition to articulating the relevant recent research done on the concept nostalgia, this research shall be applied in the context of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna.

Nostalgia study in the twenty-first century has focused on how nostalgia is developed in a potential nostalgic. Divided by degrees of exposures allows for the convenient categorization of individuals. At its simplest it draws lines along firsthand encounter or secondhand encounters. *Personal nostalgia* is nostalgia brought on by the desire to relive or the reminiscing over a past that particular individual lived, sourced from their firsthand experience.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Fin de Siècle Vienna, this constitutes people who lived in Vienna for some duration between 1889 and 1914. All other forms of nostalgia come from secondhand experiences. The most immediate is that of *Collective Nostalgia*, a form of nostalgia that is developed from exposure to one's cultural history, "*Collective nostalgia* originates from a group experience, such as stories passed down within in a family, or learning from books or mass media about one's cultural

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<sup>26</sup> Barbara B. Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin De Siècle Effect," *Journal of Advertising* 16, no. 4 (December 01, 1992): 13, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4188854>.

heritage."<sup>27</sup> In the context of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna, *collective nostalgia* can be developed by the descendants of the Fin de Siècle Viennese. Leo Spitzer and Marjorie Perloff draw their identity from nostalgia so they can be considered collective nostalgics. The remaining nostalgics, those who never lived in Fin de Siècle Vienna and have no cultural heritage to tie back to Vienna at the turn-of-the-century fall under *Historical Nostalgia*. This group looks back on a period of time as to being idealic and a desirable past to live in.<sup>28</sup> The sort of individual that longs for the "good old days," but was not present for the time in question. Such people who fit the class of historical nostalgics include Kirk Varnedoe, enamored tourists, and of course myself. For Fin de Siècle nostalgics of the historical subcategory are often exposed to Vienna's past through novels, memoirists, academic studies, art, and tourism.<sup>29</sup> They construct, or perhaps better stated fabricate, a memory of Vienna at the turn-of-the-century that they cannot identify with, but wish to fit into.

Experience is the most significant force in the formation and articulation of nostalgia. Factors like gender and nationality dictate a particular individual's experiences, but do not necessarily dictate one's own nostalgia.<sup>30</sup> This discovery is very significant to nostalgia held for Fin de Siècle Vienna. In consideration of experiences, it

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<sup>27</sup> Faye Kao, "An Exploratory Study of Collective Nostalgia," *Advances in Consumer Research* 40 (2012): 514, accessed February 6, 2014, Business Source Premier.

<sup>28</sup> Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin De Siècle Effect," 21.

<sup>29</sup> An example of a novel nostalgic for Fin de Siècle Vienna is Robert Musil's *A Man Without Qualities* according to Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> McCann, "Nostalgia: A Review of the Literature," 170.

is not logically inducible to assume then that all male Jewish intellectuals were necessarily nostalgic. Further it cannot be presumed that the nostalgia held by this particular class can be exported to the rest of the possible personal nostalgics for Fin de Siècle Vienna. The concept of nostalgia articulated in other fields suggests more depth than previous study of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna. It compels further inspection of new nostalgic sources and experiences. This runs counter to the view articulated by Matti Bunzel who asserts the experiences of Fin de Siècle Viennese culture are exclusive to Jewish intellectuals and Viennese Jews.<sup>31</sup> At the very least the male Jewish experience of nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a starting point for expanding understanding.

### Sources of Nostalgia

Being that exposure is central to nostalgia; its sources are how memory is crafted. Not all sources necessarily come from the exact period one longs for. The American scholar Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* published in 1980 is a source of nostalgic experience: the invoking of wonderment for Vienna's past modernity.<sup>32</sup> It is not about nostalgia, it does not make any formal arguments about the nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna. Instead its essays look at the various aspects of modernity in Vienna at the turn-of-the-century. Its time of publication places it after

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<sup>31</sup> Matti Bunzl, "The City and the Self: Narratives of Spatial Belonging among Austrian Jews," *City & Society* 8, no. 1 (1996): 68-69, accessed February 11, 2014, doi:10.1525/ciso.1996.8.1.50.

<sup>32</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 227.



most primary nostalgics would have passed and before historical nostalgics were inspired by mid 80s museum displays of 1900s Vienna. One such exhibit was the 1985 *Traum und Wirklichkeit: Wien, 1870-1930* (Dream and Reality) in the Wien Künstlerhaus.<sup>33</sup> Many historical nostalgics have the sources of museums, academic writing, memoirs, and tourist promotions to draw up their conception of nostalgia.

While nostalgia can be expressed in a multitude of forms, usually the most clear is found in memoirs. A memoir is a constructed remembrance of life and thus more readily prone to nostalgia because it comprises of what its author chooses to remember. This study will evaluate four memoirs for the purpose of seeing what kind of firsthand experiences can invoke nostalgia and separate it from just the memory of the time in an individual's life in Fin de Siècle Vienna. The first, Stefan Zweig's *Die Welt von Gestern* (*The World of Yesterday*), is a foundational work in the articulation of Viennese nostalgia. The comfortable upper class male Jewish intellectual's life Zweig depicts in his memoir is considered the standard for the Fin de Siècle Viennese nostalgic. The other three memoirs are from Alma Mahler, Leon Trotsky, and Adolf Hitler. These primary sources were chosen because of their easy access in translation, the relative fame of their authors, and because the three of them represent a broad spectrum of people living in Vienna at the turn-of-the-century. Alma Mahler was a socialite whose social circle was the Fin de Siècle cultural and intellectual elite. Leon Trotsky was a foreign member and

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<sup>33</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design*, 16.

political activist in the Viennese intellectual scene. Lastly Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is evaluated for his memory of Vienna. Hitler's memoir can be used to study the young and poor artists coming in from the countryside who were trying to join the Fin de Siècle cultural and intellectual elite. All these individuals hold two key qualities in common: they were all present and witnessed Viennese culture at the turn-of-the-century.

### **Stefan Zweig and *The World of Yesterday***

Stefan Zweig is perhaps the best known individual to express *personal nostalgia* for the turn-of-the-century. *The World of Yesterday* is devoted to the lament of the disappearance of a united intellectual Europe due to the two World Wars:

But paradoxically, in the same era when our world fell back morally a thousand years, I have seen that same mankind lift itself, in technical and intellectual matters, to unheard of deeds, surpassing the achievement of a million years with a single beat of tis wings.<sup>34</sup>

Written in fondest recollection, Fin de Siècle Vienna for Zweig's memory was akin to paradise, "When I attempt to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up, prior to the First World War, I hope to convey its fullness by calling it the Golden Age of Security."<sup>35</sup> He depicts a pre-war Vienna, as well as much of Europe, as a gem lost and crushed beneath the contention of nations and Nazi jackboots. His memoir was completed in exile because of his Jewish ancestry. Overcome with lament for the

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<sup>34</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), xxi.

<sup>35</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 1.

second destruction of Europe with the breakout of the Second World War, Zweig completed his memoir and took his own life in Brazil on February 23, 1942.

Zweig's memoir attempts to capture the spirit of the age, his growing up years, by depicting the lifestyle, social climate, and cultural activities he remembers fondly.<sup>36</sup>

In doing so, he establishes what nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is about: a paradise for the cultured:

It was wonderful to live here, in this city which hospitably took up everything foreign and gave itself so gladly; and in its light air...it was a simple matter to enjoy life. Vienna was, we know an epicurean city; but what is culture, if not to wheedle from the coarse material of life, by art and love, its finest, its most delicate, its most subtle qualities?<sup>37</sup>

He also points out the optimism of the age, for the sciences flourished at the turn-of-the-century in Vienna with their advancements in psychology, sociology, medicine, and

other fields.<sup>38</sup> The spirit of the age also carried stability; Zweig asserts that the

Habsburg rule spanning for centuries had adjusted Vienna's temperament as a city

towards intellectual pursuits, "...unsullied in its old glory, the capital [Vienna] had

remained, the treasure of the court, the preserver of a thousand-year-old tradition."<sup>39</sup>

Fin de Siècle Vienna for Zweig was both his childhood home and foundation for his life of culture.

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<sup>36</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 12.

In this secured environment, Zweig notes several key aspects of Fin de Siècle Vienna that were worthy of reminiscence. Foremost in Zweig's memoir was his friends and fellow intellectuals. His social life in Vienna was culturally charged, "A fever had come over us [Zweig and his *Gymnasium* classmates] to know all, to be familiar with all that occurred in every field of art and science."<sup>40</sup> Firmly Zweig expressed that the life of contemplation and arts was central to life in Europe and in this loss he laments the lost lifestyle.<sup>41</sup> Zweig recalls his life in Vienna at the turn-of-the-century to be completely directed towards advancing knowledge and fostering creativity.

In his nostalgia Zweig also reminisces about what he did in Fin de Siècle Vienna. With cultured peers, Zweig idled hours in coffeehouses and advanced his understanding in many matters:

Perhaps nothing has contributed as much to the intellectual mobility and the international orientation of the Austrian as that he could keep abreast of all world events in the coffeehouse, and at the same time discusses them in the circle of his friends.<sup>42</sup>

For Zweig, the Viennese coffeehouse was more than a place of gathering. It was an integral part of Viennese life. Time in the coffeehouse was a foundation for intellectual life:

...it must be said that the Viennese coffeehouse is a particular institution which is not comparable to any other in the world...every guest can sit for hours on end,

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<sup>40</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 65-66.

<sup>42</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 40.

discuss, write, play cards, receive his mail, and, above all, go through an unlimited number of newspapers and magazines.<sup>43</sup>

Zweig depicts the ideal life of the coffeehouse attendee as a cultured, inquisitive, and read individual idling their hours over coffee, reading, and collective study.

In Fin de Siècle Vienna performance was larger than life. The production of great works made and those involved are elevated as the pinnacle of cultural excellence:

For the Imperial theater, the Burgtheater, was for the Viennese and for the Austrian more than a stage upon which actors enacted parts; it was the microcosm that mirrored the macrocosm, the brightly colored reflection in which the city saw itself, the only true *cortigiano* of good taste.<sup>44</sup>

For Vienna the stage was the world. Performing arts were a common passion among many Viennese citizens. The arts of Fin de Siècle Vienna were depicted by Zweig as a religion and the Viennese its close and devoted adherents:

When the 'old' Burgtheater, in which Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* was first given, was torn down, all of Vienna's society was formally and sorrowfully assembled there; the curtain had hardly fallen when everybody leapt upon the stage, to bring home at least a splinter as a relic of the boards which the beloved artists had trod; and for decades after, in dozens of bourgeois homes, these insignificant splinters could be seen preserved in costly caskets, as fragments of the Holy Cross are kept in churches.<sup>45</sup>

Performances in theater and opera for Zweig's nostalgia were the golden points of his memory of Fin de Siècle Vienna. In Zweig's memory, the life of thought and witnessing cultural brilliance was mankind's highest calling.

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<sup>43</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 16.

Another subject of Zweig's nostalgia deals with *who* was gathered in Vienna at the turn-of-the-century. Beyond Zweig's school friends and coffeehouse peerage, he notes the celebrities of Vienna: great writers, actors, directors, composers, and the geniuses of other fields. An example is that he writes of the excited meeting of the legendary Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a brilliant young writer.<sup>46</sup> Almost every individual in Zweig's memoir named is that of a genius of some art or another—ranging from Viennese greats such as the “Young Vienna,” a writing group functioning on regular coffeehouse meetings, to brilliant composers such as Gustav Mahler. Zweig's childhood and academic years in nostalgic memory paint a vibrant, richly cultivated life in Fin de Siècle Vienna.

### **Alma Mahler and *And the Bridge is Love***

Wife of the great Viennese conductor Gustav Mahler, Alma Mahler was a noted socialite amongst the highest socio-cultural circle of Viennese society. Alma Mahler is most noted for her multiple affairs with high profile artists of Fin de Siècle Vienna such as Oskar Kokoschka and Gustav Klimt. She married three times total, the second marriage to Walter Gropius and later the novelist Franz Werfel. Ultimately the reason for her exile from Vienna was to follow her Jewish husband Franz Werfel.

Her memoir *And the Bridge is Love*, was published in 1959 after she had lived several years in the United States and had obtained U.S. citizenship. Further it was

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<sup>46</sup> Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 47.

written when she was much older, in her late 60s, after her third and final husband's death in 1945. Based on her memoir perhaps her nostalgia became more apparent when she visited Vienna in 1947 to sort out property. She found her home destroyed and Vienna a bombed out landscape, "Vienna was hell for me. The Opera, the Burgtheater, St. Stephen's—everything lay in ruins."<sup>47</sup> At this visit, Mahler denotes a clear divide between her present situation and her Fin de Siècle Vienna. In the rereading of her letters recovered from her destroyed home after World War II, she knew that the Vienna that she had lived in, Fin de Siècle Vienna was gone, "...now and then I would sit at the piano playing the last of my printed songs, which had been sent to me from Vienna. How beautiful my world had been then!"<sup>48</sup> She ends concluding that through reminiscing she feels as though she brings the memories of the people she loved to the present through her life.<sup>49</sup> This memoir served for Mahler as a nostalgic's record from title to finish.

Mahler articulates considerable nostalgia in *And the Bridge is Love*. As a socialite, she of course held her social group, many talented artists, writers, and other creative individuals, in high regard. All throughout her memoir Mahler names famous people, many being considered her friends, she came in contact with: Arnold Schönberg, Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, various members of the Vienna Secession, Sigmund

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<sup>47</sup> Alma Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 299.

<sup>48</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 304.

<sup>49</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 308.

Freud, and others. She also reminisces over her regular attendance of theater performances and concerts often in the company of her friends.<sup>50</sup> In essence, Alma Mahler's social life and activities made her fit in as a central member of Fin de Siècle Vienna culture.

Notably what is not mentioned is her note of the politics of the age. This topic never really enters her memoir. Nor does she mention Kaffeehauskultur. She does say she visited Café Central, but that was in 1918, outside the window of this study.<sup>51</sup> Her seldom mention of coffeehouses fit a common lack of a particular experience. Most women were not a part of Kaffeehauskultur. Marjorie Perloff points out her that her mother never went to the coffeehouses—it was a male social activity.<sup>52</sup> Thus Mahler's life fits into a woman's experience of the age and her nostalgia reflects such difference.

Alma Mahler may not have directly contributed to Fin de Siècle culture in Vienna, but she was a devoted patroness of the arts and promoter of culture, especially after her time in Fin de Siècle Vienna. She promoted Gustav Mahler's work after the Second World War, particularly in the seeing his pieces played in major United States venues in California and in New York.<sup>53</sup> Maintaining an active social life, Alma Mahler continued both meeting and corresponding with her friends from her New York home.

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<sup>50</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> Perloff, "Seductive Vienna," 230.

<sup>53</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 300.



Her life in exile became permanent in the United States, yet she still arranged her life around a Fin de Siècle Viennese mentality of a cultured life:

I went to concerts with the Schermans, and my name, as well as my evident delight in music, won me new musical friends. Thanks to them, I have been privileged to attend Philharmonic rehearsals and hear the outstanding performances of old and new masterworks...<sup>54</sup>

Mahler's life in New York was a continuation of the life she led in Fin de Siècle Vienna.

Both her social life and private life were centered on the remembrance and enshrining of the past. Her apartment in New York, where she spent her last years invoked nostalgia for herself and her friends, "Books line it from floor to ceiling: the German classics that Max Burckhard gave me as a girl, Werfel's works in all languages, the works of all the friends I have made over the years..."<sup>55</sup> Her memories were expressed in physical space, conveyed through the objects that she collected over the years. Fin de Siècle Vienna may have disappeared, but for Alma Mahler it remained in her heart. The age represented a cultured and happy life amongst her many friends, which memories decorated her life in the years that followed. Alma Mahler's experience as a part of the social aspect of the intellectual and cultural elite fits the criteria of nostalgia.

### **Leon Trotsky and *My Life***

Leon Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, spent some time in Fin de Siècle Vienna after escaping from his escorts taking him to a Siberian prison. He and his family lived

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<sup>54</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 306.

<sup>55</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 307.

in Vienna from 1907 until 1914 before leaving at the start of the Great War.<sup>56</sup> *My Life* was written in 1930 while he was living in Turkey after being chased out of the Soviet Union. Trotsky's experience and circumstance in Fin de Siècle Vienna is noteworthy because he came from outside the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was a revolutionary, and ultimately had chosen the city as a secure place to raise his children in their early years.<sup>57</sup> The most important note about Trotsky's memoir is that it is the work of a life-long revolutionary envisioning a socialist world.<sup>58</sup> His autobiography seeks to address his life step-by-step in inspiration for revolutionaries.<sup>59</sup> With this mentality, nostalgia perhaps may not be the primary focus of Trotsky's memory.

For Trotsky, Vienna was a crossroads—a place where he was able to keep up with the development of Marxism. He was able to meet with members of the German Social Democratic Party and participate in the Austrian Social Democratic Party.<sup>60</sup> In his socio-political relations with these socialists, Trotsky was mostly displeased, "I was surprised to find that these educated Marxists were absolutely incapable of applying Marx's method as soon as they came to the big problems of politics, especially its revolutionary turns."<sup>61</sup> Trotsky often voices frustration with the socialists in Austria

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<sup>56</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1931), 236.

<sup>57</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 230-232.

<sup>58</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, vi.

<sup>59</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, ix.

<sup>60</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 206.

<sup>61</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 207.

who were not as inclined to applying Marx's teaching. They were all theory, no revolution.

Trotsky participated in the culture of Fin de Siècle Vienna as a politically oriented writer. He published a Russian paper *Pravda* as well writing various articles printed in *Kievskaya Mysl*.<sup>62</sup> Trotsky firmly establishes himself as an active intellectual of high regard. Additionally he participated in Kaffeehauskultur; the coffeehouse was where Trotsky often met with fellow Marxists:

It was Hilferding [Austrian Marxist] who first introduced me to his friends in Vienna, Otto Bauer, Max Adler, and Karl Renner. They were well-educated people whose knowledge of various subjects was superior to mine. I listened with intense and, one might almost say, respectful interest to their conversation in the 'Central' café.<sup>63</sup>

With Trotsky's writing and coffeehouse meetings, he establishes himself as an active participant in Fin de Siècle Vienna intellectual culture.

Through a participant, Trotsky is not necessarily a nostalgic; he is mostly indifferent to the particular location and culture of Vienna. He explains his choice of moving to Vienna in 1907 as being because of acquaintances and Vienna's politically permissive environment, "At the period, my closest contacts were with German political life, but we could not settle down in Berlin because of the police. So we made

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<sup>62</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 232.

<sup>63</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 207.

Vienna our home.”<sup>64</sup> Ultimately for Trotsky Vienna was a place he lived and worked for seven years. Fin de Siècle Vienna was a temporary place of stay due to circumstance. When that circumstance changed he left Vienna with no particular attachment to the city in his memory beyond the denotation of time spent there.

### **Adolf Hitler and *Mein Kampf***

To consider Adolf Hitler as a possible nostalgic using his memoir is not to consider the genocidal fascist dictator of the Third Reich, the man often personally attributed to ending Vienna’s turn-of-the-century flair with the annexation of Austria by Third Reich.<sup>65</sup> *Mein Kampf* was written before his rise to power in 1924 while in prison for causing political disruptions in Bavaria.<sup>66</sup> Hitler’s account looks at what aspects of Vienna were significant to the hopeful student coming from the countryside to study in the grand city at the turn-of-the-century. While his memoir/manifesto was written for the intent of stating his purpose and goals for the German people, he writes considerably of his time in Vienna as a poor artist. Fin de Siècle Vienna left an impression on Hitler’s memory, but Hitler did not have fond memories of his time in Vienna. Even writing from prison, the second chapter to *Mein Kampf* is titled, “Years of Study and Suffering in Vienna.” When of thinking of his time in Vienna he writes,

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<sup>64</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 205.

<sup>65</sup> Stefan Zweig devotes an entire chapter in his memoir to describing the “barbaric” Hitler and the National Socialists. Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, 358-389.

<sup>66</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), Preface.

“Even today [1924] this city [Vienna] can arouse in me nothing but the most dismal thoughts.”<sup>67</sup> Blatantly not nostalgic to say the least.

The part of Fin de Siècle Vienna that is fondly remembered, that Hitler could not enter, was the arts. Hillary Herzog, a historian, notes that Jews for being a minority in the empire, and even in the city of Vienna itself, contributed a disproportionately large amount to the high culture of the capital.<sup>68</sup> Naturally Hitler would be bitter about being denied entrance into high Viennese culture and frustrated over the high amount of Jewish participation in the culture he was barred from.<sup>69</sup> This denial and his rough life in Vienna show Hitler was present for Fin de Siècle Vienna, but was not nostalgic for a world he was denied access. He states that he held numerous expectations of Vienna:

To me Vienna, the city which, to so many, is the epitome of innocent pleasure, a festive playground for merrymakers, represents, I am sorry to say, merely the living memory of the saddest period of my life.<sup>70</sup>

Hitler’s experience mirrors the pattern of many young aspiring artists who came from the various corners of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is to say, that Hitler perhaps expected his time studying in Vienna to be a peak of his life. Additionally he came into Fin de Siècle Vienna a pro-German nationalist according to his memoir.<sup>71</sup> Thus

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<sup>67</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> Hillary Hope Herzog, *“Vienna Is Different”: Jewish Writers in Austria from the Fin De Siècle to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 58.

<sup>70</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 15.

Vienna's multinational and cosmopolitan cultural aspects were more mixed than perhaps Hitler anticipated.<sup>72</sup> The monarchy and its stabilizing myth that held the empire politically united also was distasteful for Hitler. He saw the myth as a frail cohesive force reigning in a patchwork of nations.<sup>73</sup> Hitler came to view Fin de Siècle Vienna as the capital of a dying nation—drowning in decadence and overrun by corrupting foreign culture.

Kaffeehauskultur was certainly an aspect of Vienna Hitler was familiar with, however he was a passive participant. He mentions that he went to coffeehouses to read newspapers.<sup>74</sup> He really does not write much of coffeehouses other than he was a frequent attendee. Never does he mention any social interaction, so it can be presumed he did not deem intellectual debate over coffee as a significant memory. Thus it can be concluded that Hitler was not a true socio-cultural participant in Kaffeehauskultur.

After coming into Vienna and failing to gain entry into Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Hitler perhaps lost interest in Fin de Siècle Vienna culture. He was not enamored with the cultural products of the age.<sup>75</sup> Most primary nostalgics talk about particular artists, architects, musicians, and actors. Additionally mentioned were works produced while they were present in Vienna. Granted Vienna had a proud cultural

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<sup>72</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 41.

<sup>75</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 58.

tradition, most personal nostalgics particularly note the creativity of their age. Mahler writes about the creativity of her husbands, lovers and friends. And Zweig wrote about his colleagues like Hofmannsthal and other living legends. Granted Hitler's memoir has an obvious political agenda, he still does not speak much of anything "new" in Vienna. His greatest interest was in architecture—particularly he held admiration for the grand buildings lining Ringstraße.<sup>76</sup> Hitler favored the more conservative cultural expression of the age. Further he tried to operate within the very traditional academic framework. A situation which judged his talent unfit for painting. Regardless of his actual ability in art or educational pursuits, Hitler was pursuing his ambitions within a framework that Fin de Siècle Vienna was not remembered for by either personal, collective, or historical nostalgics.

### **Personal Nostalgia and Memory Observations**

From these four memoirists it can be observed that in many cases *personal nostalgia* for Fin de Siècle Vienna is in part based on reminiscing over one's participation in aspects in Fin de Siècle culture. Zweig and Mahler display nostalgia and were connected to the culture, even if how is a point of difference. Zweig as a writer was participating actively; he contributed directly to the culture through poetry and books. Mahler was not necessarily a direct contributor, but was nevertheless fully immersed in the Fin de Siècle culture. She was in contact with direct participants such as her first

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<sup>76</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 19.

husband as well as her many friends such as Max Burkhard, Gustav Klimt, and many others. She was a muse to some of these greats in Fin de Siècle Vienna, most notably Oskar Kokoschka.<sup>77</sup> Zweig too talks of the many important contacts he had and good friendships he maintained in Vienna. Based on the observations that Hitler reminisced little over his Viennese social life and that Trotsky was dissatisfied with his Austrian contacts, it seems that some degree of enjoyment from social life is a common trend amongst personal nostalgics.

Participation does not necessitate nostalgia. Trotsky played a role as a writer, coffeehouse regular, and socialist activist, yet he does not articulate nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna. Hitler, another non-nostalgic, meanwhile articulates little depth in his participation in Fin de Siècle culture. Alma Mahler meanwhile served mostly in the capacity of a muse and close observer of the age's cultural expressions. Being an active member of Fin de Siècle culture is a possible indicator as shone with Zweig, but not a guaranteed nostalgic. Further study of other possible primary nostalgics would be required to confirm the importance of social life and cultural participation as determining experiences that trigger *personal nostalgia* for Fin de Siècle Vienna.

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<sup>77</sup> Mahler, *And the Bridge Is Love*, 78.



## Conclusion

As it has been shown, nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is a much more complicated concept than merely longing for the Vienna at its cultural peak. The reasons for nostalgia and how people become nostalgic are diverse. Personal nostalgics miss their friends and social environment—be it across a table over coffee or in a theater on opening night. The nostalgics that never saw Fin de Siècle Vienna are nostalgic for very different reasons. For collective nostalgics, like Leon Spitzer and Marjorie Perloff, nostalgia is a source of family history. Today's Austria constructs its national memory based on succeeding Fin de Siècle Vienna's ideals. In academics, nostalgia sprouts from the modernity that Fin de Siècle culture cultivated. As time marches further from the early twentieth century, how Fin de Siècle Vienna will be remembered will expand. Already it includes friendships, national identity, and awe for its creativity as sources. The population of nostalgics will (if it already has not) outnumber the population that actually experienced Vienna at the turn-of-the-century.

In review of people who lived in Vienna at the turn-of-the-century it has been shown that not all are necessarily nostalgic. Additionally, the experiences that invoke nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna are not uniform amongst those of *personal nostalgia*. The uniting factor of nostalgia drawn from firsthand experience is involvement with the high culture of the age, but as Leon Trotsky shows, this participation does not necessarily invoke nostalgia later in life. Since *personal nostalgia* is drawn from

experience and that there exists personal nostalgics who are nostalgic for different reasons, already proven by just the memoirs of Mahler and Zweig, then it stands that the memory of Fin de Siècle Vienna is incomplete. This incompleteness is not due to the loss of sources over time, but rather to a lack of research. There are more questions yet to be addressed. Is Fin de Siècle Vienna, a cultural and intellectual period, held in *personal nostalgia* outside of the elites who took part? Are there political divides along nostalgia? Also there are more memoirists and writers to consider.

Fin de Siècle Vienna, an age known for its brilliance, has a dulled memory. This memory of Fin de Siècle Vienna is not at risk of being forgotten. But for being such a major aspect of Viennese history, it is vastly under considered. Nostalgia as a historical concept is neglected. In the case of Vienna, more people identify with the nostalgia than any other aspect of Fin de Siècle Vienna. In other fields nostalgia is understood to be a complicated concept that reveals how some people come to terms with the past. This study has argued that nostalgia for Fin de Siècle Vienna is more than reminiscing. Alma Mahler devoted her last years in life to promoting the memory, Austrians today derive an identity from this time period, and the exiled Stefan Zweig committed suicide over what could only be revisited in his nostalgia. Perhaps nostalgia is more than a term, rather a driving force in people's lives, a desire for an unforgettable past.

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