

- "Botstiber Institute Zuschuss" an Joshua Parker
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"DIETRICH W. BOTSTIBER INSTITUTE GRANT" AN JOSHUA PARKER, ANGLISTIK UND AMERIKANISTIK

In July 2017 the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies awarded an annual grant to Assistant Professor Joshua Parker (Americanistik) for the project *Blüten im Schnee: Austrian Refugees in Manhattan*.

This project promotes awareness of the historical relationship between Austria and the United States by collecting and translating short poetry by Austrian refugees writing in and around New York City during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The poems contextualize past and present responses to issues of asylum, reflect on the state of being stateless, draw parallels between the United States and Austria, and resonate deeply with our own contemporary geopolitical landscape. Many of the poems are by well-established authors and are currently out of print, and few have ever been translated from German into English for American readers.

While the poets whose work the volume collects have often been referred to as "exiles," the collection underlines their status and self-awareness as political refugees. It highlights their deep and continued emotional ties to Austria, which most saw and described as their home, their disorientation in accepting and confronting their new status, and their impressions of their new environment in the United States and specifically in New York, where most settled on first arriving.

The authors collected in the volume were, in every sense, a lost generation. They were thankful, as Hermann Broch wrote, "for a new page." With their books banned in German-speaking lands and the number of German-speaking Americans themselves dropping dramatically after the First World War, they were often left wondering, as Max Roden asked, "*Bin ich noch Hirt einer Herde,/ die sich in Worten ermißt?*" The question was troubling. Even if careers and dreams of such displaced persons were not always, as Roden worried, "*Blüten im Schnee*," their work often remained, Erich Fried wrote, a body of "*Gedichte ohne Vaterland*." Whether already famous or still unknown, as Georg Troller wrote, Austrian authors were all anonymous on reaching America. "*Und so stieg mit einmal in mir die Erkenntnis hoch, nein, der Horror*," he wrote, "*daß ich ja meine eigene Sprache gar nicht mehr besaß, ich der angehende 'Dichter.' Als hätte man einem Kicker das Bein amputiert*." It was "especially for writers that exile had been particularly painful," Bushnell writes. "Whereas musicians, scientists, architects, painters and many other categories of intellectuals were free – in theory at least – to continue to practise their professions when once established in their new world, writers with few exceptions could not. Their lifeblood was the German language and it was only within a German-speaking world that they, with few exceptions, could ply their trade." Stefan Zweig, in New York as his books were banned (or burned) in occupied countries, described feeling like an actor playing to an empty theater. But he remained, he wrote, a patriot of a foreign land.

"*Der Flüchtling leidet an Heimweh nach einem Land, das er nicht mehr seine Heimat nennen darf*," wrote Troller. "*Er befindet sich in einem Zwischenreich*." This intermediate space was often experienced as

bearing refractions of both lands. For Lore Segal, arriving in New York in 1951 after more than a decade in exile from her hometown of Vienna as a child refugee, Times Square was like nothing more than an over-**animated Viennese Christmas market.** “[...] *ja muß er sich die Dinge schandbar aus der Sprache seiner neuen Umwelt in die alte rückübersetzen! Sprache ist doch mehr als ein ‘System von Zeichen, das einer Gemeinschaft als Verständigung dient.’ Ist auch ein Netzwerk von Symbolen, von Assoziationen, von Sinnbildern au einem gemeinsamen Erfahrungsschatz,*” Troller wrote. This network of new memories associated with places, Segal imagined, is “the way our histories become charged thus upon the air, the streets, the very houses of New York, that makes the alien into a citizen,” on an island of comforts “surrounded on all sides by calamity.”

This project hopes to depict such a network, in active formation during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s for dozens of Austrian writers who found themselves both estranged from and comforted by notions of two lands. For the first time for an English readership, it offers a series of breathtakingly simple, open-handed and open-minded poems evoking the state of being stateless, a situation and status unfortunately all too common in our own time.

During his lifetime, Austrian aeronautical engineer and philanthropist Dietrich W. Botstiber (1912-2002) established a charitable fund, the Dietrich W. Botstiber Foundation. Among other goals it was established primarily to promote an understanding of the historic relationship between the United States and Austria. In 2007, the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies was founded to support Austrian-American studies through historical research. The Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies currently supports fellowships, seminars and academic research at the University of Minnesota, the University of New Orleans and Rutgers University. The BIAAS also supports programs of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York City. The Institute also implements its own program, such as the Botstiber lecture given by Former Austrian Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer at the Austrian Embassy on June 26, 2009.

Kontakt

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