

Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the Interwar European Right

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In the interwar period, a movement emerged in Central Europe that formulated a particular concept of European unity. One of this movement's most prominent spokesmen was the Bohemian nobleman Karl Anton Prinz Rohan (1898-1975), a former officer in the Austro-Hungarian army who founded the Deutscher Kulturbund in Vienna in 1922. Two years later the Deutscher Kulturbund became the Viennese outpost of the much larger Fédération des Unions Intellectuelles, established in Paris to promote European cultural unity after the First World War. Rohan thereafter used the support of the Paris umbrella organization, spearheaded by the Austro-Japanese nobleman Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, to launch a magazine entitled *Europäische Revue*. Founded in Vienna in 1925, it never surpassed 2,000 paid subscribers; nonetheless its list included almost every leading political, religious, and philosophical thinker in the 1920s.

Rohan's most conspicuous and frequent contributors were figures of the intellectual Right, like the great Austrian playwright and essayist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, two particularly talented

Jewish disciples of the poet Stefan George, Karl Wolfskehl and Friedrich Gundolf, and a number of thinkers who were close to Latin fascist movements: Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Julius Evola, Giovanni Gentile, Jacques Bainville, and Marcel Déat. But there were also liberals (in the European sense) such as Alfred Weber and José Ortega y Gasset who contributed to Rohan's publication, together with avant-garde artists and architects like Le Corbusier and the longtime advocate of the Franco-German *rapprochement* of the post-World War Two period, Coudenhove-Kalergi. In our ideologically restricted age, it is hard to think of any magazine approximating the breadth of views published in every issue of the *Revue*.

Despite the variety of printed opinion, Rohan had a definite project in mind when he founded his publication. His postwar collection of essays, *Österreichisch, Deutsch, Europäisch* (1973), reveals his sympathy for the Habsburg monarchy. Rohan considered its dismemberment after the First World War a tragedy for Central Europe and for the continent as a whole. The monarchy, especially in the last century of its existence, had resisted both the "Jacobin model" of politics, illustrated by revolutionary France, and the administrative straitjacket of Prussian bureaucratic government. The monarchy was edging toward a federal structure after a

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temporary—and disastrous—flirtation with centralized bureaucracy following the suppressed national revolutions of 1848. It had also resisted the excesses of modern nationalism, which finally brought down the dynasty in 1918.

Habsburg rulers had tried to substitute for modern nationalist politics an updated medieval legacy, “a tradition that in contemporary Europe can find no equivalent.”¹ The Austrian dynasty represented the *imperium sanctum*, the imperial dignity going back to Charlemagne and then extending from the late thirteenth century onward into the early modern period, until Napoleon had finally called for the empire’s abolition in 1804. Still and all, those who venerated the Habsburgs as a dynasty saw in them the legitimate rulers of Central Europe and a dynasty with venerable roots in the medieval past. The emperor had also enjoyed a “paternal relation” to his subjects, a situation that had reached its zenith during the long reign of Kaiser Franz Josef in the second half of the nineteenth century. The loyalty bestowed on this patriarchal figure came from minorities rather than from the Austro-Germans, who largely favored unification with the newly formed German Empire. These minorities included Ukrainians living under Poles in Galicia, Croats who after 1867 had been assigned to the Hungarian part of the empire, and Jewish minorities everywhere, who viewed Franz Josef as a protector of their civil liberties. Like the Swiss republic, Rohan presented the monarchy as a force for unity amid national or regional diversity; he emphasizes that even the vengeful peacemakers at Versailles in 1919 had voiced concern about what would fill the role of the multinational regime that they had helped destroy. Very quickly the architects of the postwar order would notice that, contrary to Czech and Serb nationalist rhetoric, the *Vielvölkerstaat* (the state with diverse nationalities) had been something

quite different from the despised *Vielvölkerkerker* (a prison house of nationalities).²

Rohan also emphasized the unifying function of language and legal procedures in the Empire, characterized by the required use of German, outside the Hungarian administrative region created with the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. The German language requirement, which went back to the reign of the “enlightened” Emperor Joseph II in the 1780s, was not designed to impose German national identity. Rather its function was to assure the operation of a shared language in the courts, military, and in most of higher education. German, more specifically Austro-German (with its peculiar incorporation of French and Italian phrases), performed the same role in Central Europe as British English had done in the Indian Raj during the Victorian age. It also became equally the passport to professional and social success for otherwise culturally isolated ethnic groups. Reading the novels of Josef Roth, a Jewish, Germanophone author from Galicia who devoted his life after 1919 to restoring the Habsburg Empire, conveys the value of the aforementioned linguistic and culture exposure. Others of Roth’s background, and many Eastern European peasants, rose as German-speaking civil servants and teachers in the Empire. Still others went on to Vienna, Budapest, or Prague, all then imperial cities with large German populations, to distinguish themselves as men of letters, scientists, or academics. The Slovakian Thomas Masaryk, who became the postwar president of the Czech Republic, had been a professor in Vienna before the First World War. Despite his eventual decision to throw in his lot with the Allies against the Habsburgs, his early work defending Slavic national distinctiveness had been written in German. Masaryk, who came from a non-German peasant family, had risen in the Empire, which still embraced the prin-

ciple of “careers open to talent,” because of his ability as a cultural historian and because of his assimilation into the prevalent Austro-German cultural milieu.

Another reason Rohan favored the restoration of the Habsburg Empire was historic: namely, the way the German people were unified in the second half of the nineteenth century. The price paid for this achievement was the exclusion of Austria from the new German Empire, which Bismarck had engineered by 1871. A short war had been fought between the two major German powers in the summer of 1866, culminating in the victory of Prussian armies over the Austrian forces in Bohemia, thus removing the Habsburgs from the project of German unification. This made possible the Prussian domination of a German national state. The German Empire by its very presence—not to mention its erratic diplomacy under the last Emperor, William II—contributed to an already explosive international situation. In addition to Russian expansion into the Balkans and against Turkey, and the Franco-English attempts to build vast overseas empires, there were other factors that affected late nineteenth-century Europe: burning French resentment against Prussia for defeating France in a war on the way to German unification; and the rivalries between the two leading European (Protestant) powers, Germany and Great Britain. For Rohan, the path to European ruin, one that had become painfully obvious after 1945, might have been avoided if an organizational form other than a unified German state had been established in Central Europe. As a boy growing up near Prague, Rohan had noticed how readily the German minority had flown the black-yellow colors of Habsburg Austria. This flag flew more often than the black-white-red ensign of the *Kleindeutsche*, the German minority that favored a uniform German state.³

Rohan engages in a useful exercise in counterfactual history when he envisions

Habsburg Austria leading most of Europe’s German population into a federalized monarchy. This *Grossdeutschplan* proposed a power-sharing arrangement, whereby the German population would have enjoyed a continuing cultural and linguistic predominance. This bumptious, intensely nationalistic, Prussian-led empire would not have destabilized Central Europe nor lay the ground for the First World War. Rohan offers the startling information that until War’s end in 1918, 90 percent of Czech divisions fighting for the Empire remained loyal. In Bohemia a power-sharing arrangement between the Germans and Czechs might well have worked if the Empire had survived.⁴ The consolidation of a Czech state, into which the Slovaks were dragged along, in Pittsburgh in 1918, impacted disastrously on the German minorities in Bohemia and Moravia. Attempts to Slavicize these long-settled Germans backfired and led to the regrettable careers of political adventurers like Konrad Henlein, who later became Hitler’s point man among German residents of Czechoslovakia.

Rohan and likeminded thinkers were amply aware of the structural and historic problems of the Empire by the time of its collapse. Never does the prince deny that costly mistakes had been made by the Habsburgs in an earlier age, by playing off embittered nationalities against each other. Even less does Rohan hide the often clumsy attempts to root out national consciousness that had been characteristic of Austrian rule, especially under Prince Metternich in the early nineteenth century. It was this dapper Rhenish statesman and longtime Austrian chancellor who not only worked to suppress German national movements but who had also flippantly remarked that “Italy is at most a geographic expression.” Although married to a cultivated Hungarian, Metternich had once observed with something less than generous sentiments: “Beyond the Ringstrasse [in central Vienna],

one enters Eastern Europe.”⁵

Despite its inherited mistakes, Rohan believed the empire was not only reformable but also the precondition for maintaining unity in Europe’s heartland.⁶ Like others who were involved in what became the “Paneuropa” movement, this Bohemian nobleman, whose father had served in the imperial civil service, considered a restored Habsburg imperium integral to European consolidation. His eventual plan for a European confederation or for a federation of European states referred back to the lost but still retrievable opportunity to restore the empire. As late as the 1960s the Paneuropa movement appeared to operate with a dual purpose, albeit subordinating one to the another. Talk about a new age of European integration, in which Western nations would be aware of their common European civilization and would exhibit heightened political unity, was invariably accompanied by references to Otto von Habsburg, the now nonagenarian claimant to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

My longtime friend Thomas Chaimowicz, a Salzburg classicist and part-time investment banker, had told me in the late 1960s that Paneuropa was just another name for monarchical restoration. But it was also one that offended otherwise receptive listeners to the idea of European integration. More than once the Hungarian Catholic philosopher Thomas Molnar has expressed to me his affection for the Habsburg dynasty and for Otto personally; nonetheless, Molnar has also voiced concern about Otto’s putative attempt to bury European national identities. A question that needs to be asked is whether any receptivity for a traditionalist idea of Europe remains among the critics of the current project for European unity. Has the idea dissolved on the traditional Right in view of the unmistakably antinational, anti-Christian direction in which the European Commission has carried out its work? Would it be

possible to rally European traditionalists to a less revolutionary integrationist project than the one that is now being practiced in Brussels? The Paneuropa spokesmen whom I met in Vienna in the 1960s were less eager to bring back the monarchy than they were to advance the Habsburg claimant in his possible bid for the presidency of a unified Europe. Did these Habsburg loyalists subordinate their monarchism and their plan for a non-leftist European unification to a particular cult of personality?

II

An even better known spokesman for interwar European unity than Rohan, who showed equally strong Habsburg sympathy, was Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929). A distinguished man of letters, and a member of the Austrian gentry, Hofmannsthal grew up in an exceedingly rich social world; it was also one that provided extensive contacts with such illustrious *littérateurs* as Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, and the Swiss-German biographer of Cardinal Richelieu and career diplomat, Carl Burckhardt. Whereas Hofmannsthal explicitly favored a “cultural counterrevolution” for interwar Europe, he also exhibited interest in some of the vexing political questions of the interwar period. His diaries, for example, recognize the value of drawing Europeans into a new political framework that would permit them to prosper without further strife.⁷ In the 1920s Hofmannsthal spoke frequently at the gatherings of the *Deutscher Kulturbund* that Rohan had been building in Vienna. In his addresses Hofmannsthal dwelled on the shared cultural legacy of the French, Italians, and Germanophone Central Europeans. Note that Hofmannsthal had running in his veins the blood of Austrian Jews, Bohemians, and Italians. He was a remarkable romance language scholar and a renowned German stylist. Many of his well-

known opera librettos are literary masterpieces, starting with his contribution to Strauss's "Rosenkavalier," in which one finds reproduced the Italianized Viennese German of the eighteenth century Austrian court.⁸

Hofmannsthal understood his appeals to "the will toward European unity" as being first and foremost a cultural loyalty. And like famous acquaintances of his—such as the French poet Paul Valéry and the Baltic German philosopher Hermann von Keyserling (1880-1946), both of whom hoped to build bridges between the French and German-speaking peoples—he focused his main interest on Western and Central Europe. The most widely distributed book dealing with this interwar European cultural idea is Keyserling's *Das Spektrum Europas* (1928), a text containing the memorable phrase, "all of Europe is of one spirit."⁹

Keyserling, who was a widely traveled thinker married to Bismarck's granddaughter, set up a "School for Wisdom" in the German city of Darmstadt in 1920. There he brought to lecture a motley assortment of European philosophers and creative artists, yet Keyserling seems to have admired ancient Indian theosophy more than he did the European thought of his time. Although sometimes criticized for unkind remarks about Jewish financial practices in his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, Keyserling was equally scathing in his comments about his fellow-Germans. Unlike Asians, whom he praised in an overly generalized way for their metaphysical bent, he found the Germans to be "matter-of-fact" and unimaginative.¹⁰ Despite his occasional verbal intemperance, the "Darmstadt philosopher" happily welcomed into his School for Wisdom even those groups he

castigated, and he expressed strong support for the projects of his longtime friend Hofmannsthal.

Essential to understanding Hofmannsthal's *Europavision* is a speech he gave at the University of Munich on January 10, 1927, entitled "Das Schrifttum als Geistiger Raum der Nation [Literature as the Spiritual Dimension of the Nation]." In this oration, prepared at the urging of the rector Karl Vossler, Hofmannsthal makes striking references to a "conservative revolution," one that he believes will be "of such magnitude that European history has not experienced anything of its kind until the present time. Its goal will be to form a new German reality in which the entire nation will participate."¹¹

The Munich speech calls for some examination, because of the resonance it had throughout Central Europe. Hofmann-



Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 1923.

sthal's invocation of a "conservative revolution" in Germany corresponded to the idiom of the interwar German revolutionary Right. In fact that interwar Right, which was nationalist and more or less receptive to Italian fascism but generally hostile to Hitler's movement, celebrated the Munich speech from the hour it was spoken. Nationalist spokesmen observed that Hofmannsthal had appealed to a specifically German national consciousness.¹² Significantly, the national sense to which Hofmannsthal appealed was cultural and linguistic rather than geopolitical. Contrary to misinterpretations, his address was not meant to fuel Austro-German revisionist passions after the military defeat of 1918. Although Hofmannsthal would have rejoiced if the pre-War map of Central Europe had been restored, he left political concerns out of his discussion of the Austro-German cultural legacy.

There were nonetheless passages that could not have failed to please his conservative revolutionary auditors. Such listeners did not likely miss Hofmannsthal's forays, which are reminiscent of Nietzsche's, against the "laxness, arrogance, and complacency of our learned philistines."¹³ Such snide allusions to the superficial show-learning of the Austro-German middle class were common among conservative revolutionaries; like the militant Italian fascists, they railed incessantly against bourgeois decadence and looked forward to a new social order that would be ushered in by a national revolution. Equally striking is Hofmannsthal's portrayal of a new creative type, whose "productive anarchy" offers hope for the European future:

Seeking and searching goes on everywhere; it surges through every word of the higher spiritual speech that goes on between us. It is like a giddy sensation under our feet; the sense of anticipation brings with it danger and deviation and injects surprise and questioning into every conversation; the anticipation fills the atmosphere with the sense that everything is constantly possible, with a rattling that portends the collapse of entire worlds, with the hollow approaching wind of an eternal tomorrow.¹⁴

Unlike German political activists of the 1920s, Hofmannsthal is speaking primarily about "culture" and the "process" by which it was being turned in a different direction. In view of his speech's historical importance, we might consider its concept of the "German nation" and "the Counter-enlightenment against the spiritual turmoil of the sixteenth century, which we are accustomed to designate under its two names, Renaissance and Reformation." Two considerations are essential for grasping the key terms.

First, the references to German national identity, except in the contemporary world of Teutonic Political Correctness, should definitely not be read as a defense of the founding ideas of the Third Reich.

The defenders of European unity in the interwar period placed strong emphasis on a "Europe of nations." Moreover, German thinkers of the time, including most on the Marxist Left, took pride in the cultural achievements of their nation, extending from the age of Goethe down to the Weimar Republic. To raise doubts about those achievements would have been regarded as pathological, like the multicultural politics of guilt that has gripped and is now eating away at the contemporary Christian West. Interwar European patriots like Hofmannsthal embraced a still recognizably nineteenth-century concept of the "nation" as a cultural-linguistic entity. This concept flowed out of the work of the eighteenth-century Baltic German historian and anthropologist Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who had associated nationhood with the antiquity of peoples and their capacity to create and preserve national literatures. In the following century Europeans who were struggling for political nationhood would cite examples of long-standing national cultural achievements as justifications for national autonomy. The idea of nations as primarily biological products, competing with each other would develop later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such thinking had little influence on Hofmannsthal or his circle.

Second, Hofmannsthal's Munich address holds up France as a model cultural nation. While across the Rhine, "the literature of the French defines national reality," among the Germans, there is only "Zerfahrenheit [distractedness]," leading to cultural confusion and an uncertain national identity. This for Hofmannsthal is a critical distinction between the two peoples. Thus, he says: "wherever a believed unity of being is present, it is possible to find reality. The nation, which is held together by an unbreakable web of the linguistic and spiritual, becomes a community of faith, wherein the totality

of one's cultural and natural life can be fitted together; a nation state of this kind appears as an inner universe and from epoch to epoch it serves as a sturdy counterpart to the German tendency toward distractedness."¹⁵ As a Catholic Francophile, Hofmannsthal refused to follow the German political Right by denigrating the French enemy from the First World War, while extolling everything German. He addressed the cultural gatherings that met in Vienna in French and German; and he wrote with bitter regret about the wars that had been fought between his German and Italian ancestors. He never lost sight of a European international perspective even while stressing the need for a new German national consciousness.

It might be helpful to distinguish this address from T.S. Eliot's even better known call for an Anglo-Catholic restoration in England. A certain superficial parallel springs to mind if one looks at Hofmannsthal's speech and then at *Christianity and Culture* (1939).¹⁶ Like his Austrian contemporary, Eliot appealed to the ideal of an integral Christian society, of the type that had existed, however imperfectly, in Europe's pre-modern past. But a certain discrepancy between them is clear. Although Eliot and Hofmannsthal were both equally concerned with social and religious fragmentation and while each favored monarchy, only one of them hoped to reestablish medieval Christianity. Although in a letter to Carl Burckhardt Hofmannsthal refers to the Catholic Church as "the only antiquity now remaining to us in Western civilization," this institution then becomes a "metaphor" for all "antiquities" in the modern age.¹⁷ His interpreter Hermann Rudolf explains that Hofmannsthal applies the term "antique" to the Greco-Roman as well as to the Christian legacy. In his more cheerful moments Hofmannsthal looked forward to a "new antiquity" as an anchor for uprooted intellectuals.¹⁸

Unlike Eliot, Hofmannsthal was not

really reacting against the religious splits of the sixteenth century; and despite his remarks about the erosion of community, he also held up German Protestant traditions as an integral part of the German national culture. His own Catholicism was more about place than theology. As an Austrian, who had grown up within walking distance of both Vienna's Catholic cathedral on the Kärntnerstrasse and the imperial city residence, he understandably assumed the forms and "social manners [*Gesittung*]" which had shaped a Central European Catholic milieu.¹⁹

In obvious contrast to Eliot, the Austrian writer was not a transported and reconstructed descendant of American Puritans. While his paternal grandfather had been a Jewish purveyor to the Austrian army, Hofmannsthal had been raised in a world that was Austro-Italian Catholic, and he assumed that as his proper birthright. In short, he was not reacting against a culture that he had consciously left behind; nor was he embarked on a grand theological journey through life. In his address, he ridicules spiritual adventurers who, like Eliot, "try too hard and with excessive servility to bring their blood offerings to inherited orders" and those "spirits [of an extravagant romanticism] thirsting for the highest duties and commitments," without losing their driven character.²⁰

These driven, questing souls whom Hofmannsthal seems to be mocking included the addressees of his Munich speech. The Romantic Movement, he explains, emerged from the tumult of eighteenth-century German life and had thereafter defined German literary culture. But while this movement had created a "titanic struggle" over forms of self-identity, it had also produced "new cleavages" that had left the individual even further estranged from a true national community. The Enlightenment and the legacy of the French Revolution had both "aggravated the mentality of the solitary Ger-

man who had been abruptly torn away from custom and ancestral belief, and delivered to an orgy of rootless individualism." The task at hand was to bring the uprooted German individual out of his isolation and "apparent [but not true] spiritual order" "and lift him toward a new reality." This would begin to happen as the German literary world achieved "suitable linguistic forms" and as attempts would be made to forge deeper cultural ties between the literati and their conationals. Although this message is directed at the Germans and Austro-Germans, Hofmannsthal's words spoken to cultural and artistic dignitaries from elsewhere in Europe call for national communities, linking thinkers and poets to their peoples.²¹

Hofmannsthal saw nothing incompatible between his appeal to national solidarity and his project for a more closely unified Europe. From his perspective, which was not that of today's multiculturalists, only self-respecting peoples could appreciate the "spirit" that united them to other flesh-and-blood nations: thus they would see themselves as Europeans without having to abandon their identities as Germans or Frenchmen. The destruction of the empire in which he had grown up caused Hofmannsthal to view himself as an Austrian even more than as a Central European—or as a monarchist. It was in the aftermath of the Great War that he developed the idea, which he put into practice with the famed theater director Max Reinhardt, of presenting each year at Salzburg his rendition of the medieval mirror play, *Jedermann* [Everyman]. The announced purpose was to establish a closer link between Hofmannsthal's Austrian countrymen and their medieval literary and popular religious heritage.²²

Since Hofmannsthal's entire literary career featured attacks on what he dismissed as "ossified phrases" that dominated "an age of machinery and technically manipulated electioneering," lan-

guage in his mind became a path back toward community. The term *Daseinsführung* runs through Hofmannsthal's reflections about suitable linguistic forms.²³ It resembles the Platonic *agoge*, a way of life that requires the teaching of virtue and wisdom. This prescribed guidance of one's being would lead to happiness, but only if linked to settled and integrated human relations.

Because such a social context was now unraveling, Hofmannsthal stressed the need for a "counter-experience," as both an individual and social imperative. By "becoming reflective" the traditionalist could discover what was lost in the course of modernization. Paradoxically, an awareness of modern conditions would cause him to demand a new antiquity for those who had lost any trace of an "antique imprint."²⁴ Hofmannsthal placed his neo-Platonic concept of language in opposition to any purely functional understanding of it. Contrary to the view expressed by Thomas Hobbes, that words are the mere convenient handles that we assign to objects, Hofmannsthal viewed them as the building blocks of human associations formed over generations. Human communities depend on the customary use of words, in a form that conveys a sense of identity. It is not merely coincidence that today's German administrations and academic gatherings prefer English to their onetime national language. This practice betokens the death throes of a nation that has chosen to render itself extinct, as collective atonement for its Nazi past.

For Hofmannsthal and other Central Europeans who shared his concerns, the world arising from the First World War seemed out of joint. The war had shaken their society materially and politically, Hofmannsthal had emerged from that disaster impoverished and with a lost social status. He was also wracked by deteriorating health before dying relatively young. His sense of crisis was there-

fore something other than rhetoric that served a narrowly partisan end. Never did he try to relate his preferred set of values to the social causes of the hour. His sense of disconnectedness combined with the quest for continuity, as Rudolph observes, informed much of what he wrote.²⁵ Because the fixed points of an older society had been shaken loose, Hofmannsthal felt impelled to engage the problem of estrangement through his art.

If one might apply the term “the politics of cultural despair” less censoriously than the way it was intended by its German émigré inventor, Hofmannsthal, and to a lesser extent Rohan and Keyserling, exemplified that stance.²⁶ Their hope for a new “European idea” was predicated on the expectation that if those who shared their sense of a lost world could be brought together in creative interaction, some good might result from this collaboration. Such figures felt repugnance for “democratic” politics. They associated this sign of the times with technical manipulation and public administration, both of which they viewed as necessary tools of popular control. They considered the democratic state an artificial invention that had come from anti-traditionalist elites. They further traced this newfangled regime back to the liberal bourgeoisie, which had wrested power from an older government run by social estates (*Ständestaat*).

Our subjects would not have agreed that what they really deplored were the beginnings of mass democratic administration. Neither the social disintegration nor the managerial politics they bewailed was necessarily a function of an older liberalism. It was largely a product of the twentieth century, shaped by the effects of universal suffrage and immigration and the insatiable demand for “social services.”²⁷ But for Hofmannsthal and his circle, the breakdown of communal structures was ascribable to the political dominance of a bourgeois urban society, and

its attendant institutions. In their pinpointing of liberalism as the cause of later social problems, they shared the critical perspective of nineteenth-century conservatives.

This “conservative” orientation should not be confused with a predisposition toward established institutions. Unlike the eminent historian Richard Pipes whom I once heard style himself a “conservative because I believe in institutions,” the Central Europeans under consideration would not have identified with institutions in general—and certainly not with modern democratic ones. In accordance with the structural conservatism defined by German-Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, they held to a situational understanding of traditionalism. They embodied “a politically, socially, and culturally expressed style of thought that arose in a particular sociological and historic context and which developed in immediate contact with a historically vibrant past.” The practitioners of this “conservative thinking” were explicitly defending the seignorial, pre-modern structure of an older Europe that had come under attack.²⁸ Mannheim argues that such thinking is inseparable from the situation from whence it had come; similarly it is hard to generalize about the political vision of our Central European subjects without focusing on its specific point of reference in the past. A certain “unity of being” was present in the minds of these traditionalists even if they considered the world to which it related as falling apart before their eyes.

III

Do the lessons of Hofmannsthal and his circle have anything substantive to teach present-day “conservatives”? Their teachings may in fact apply no longer if Carl Schmitt was correct that “a historical truth is true only once.” Today’s Western societies are more fluid and more adminis-

tered than the Central Europe of the interwar period, and this is doubly true for the older society that Hofmannsthal sought to return to. The trends he dreaded have continued to go forward, and in a far more decisive way than he could have imagined. The once defining institutions of human society, and certainly bourgeois modernity, have become moving targets for educators and public administrators. Heterosexual families, gender roles, national identities, and traditional Western moral and religious beliefs are all positions that the European Commission is trying to weaken or dismantle, while building a “global society.”

Jacques Attali, longtime advisor to former French socialist president François Mitterrand and a frequent advocate for expanded power for the UN and the European Union, furnishes in his utopian novels a detailed picture of the Western progressive agenda. In *Une brève histoire de l'avenir* (2006), Attali confidently sketches the new reality that awaits us. World governance and the redistribution of consumer goods will become our fate together with “nomadism,” as more and more non-Western populations come to occupy the European continent.²⁹ The intended effect will be the end of Western prejudice and the extirpation of Christian clericalism (yet presumably not Islamic theocratic pressures).

While such smug, untroubled predictions might upset an old-fashioned bourgeois Christian, today these views generate fame and book sales for their politically influential authors. Is it therefore possible to generate a “counter-experience” that would initiate change of a more traditionalist cast? Whatever the answer to this speculative question, critics such as Hofmannsthal can help clarify how we got to where we are. Their complaints about politics as technique, with the endless repetition of “ossified phrases,” such as human rights and anti-fascism, allows us to grasp how our own

managed society has come about. The invasion of language by ideology, masked as matter-of-fact communication, according to Hofmannsthal, made us receptive to the spread of “scientific” control.

Such linguistic distortion and the rule of bogus experts are indeed the prerequisites for something that has just been revealed at the University of Delaware, where entering freshmen have been pushed into a sensitivity course—aimed at making them accept their hidden homosexual identities, and pushing them into rejecting the uniquely “bigoted” white race. What is most appalling about this exercise in self-hate is not that crazy intellectuals have promoted such a plan but that so little objection to it was heard from tens of thousands of students or their parents. The indoctrination became an issue because a handful of campus activists concerned with academic freedom raised their voices against it. In what is a more advanced stage of the denatured society that arose on the ashes of an older civilization, heterosexual Euro-Americans allow themselves to show no pride in their past. In fact they seem to be quite indifferent to being collectively insulted on behalf of what is no longer theirs. When I learned that my students in the humanities had no idea of the languages in which the Bible had been composed, and that their public school teachers had been apprehensive about mentioning “Western religions,” I jumped immediately from the “politics of cultural despair” into the “politics of cultural shock.”

Our traditionalists never underestimated the problems that their historical situation had bequeathed to them. In this respect they were light years ahead of those self-styled American “conservatives,” who celebrate the supposed continuities in our political society. Such a practice seems strange indeed to those of us who are not impressed by the extent of the continuities that we are asked to

celebrate. Our own experience should lead us to think that the forebodings of our interwar subjects may have been justified. Hofmannsthal left it to others to talk about how far we have come or to relate the status quo to an allegedly unbroken tradition of human civilization.

Like our Central European representatives of “cultural despair,” intelligent, young Europeans I have met, like the Flemish nationalist Paul Belien, the German historian Karl-Heinz Weissmann and the Swedish philosopher, Jan Olof Bengtsson, are not in denial about our “crisis situation.” In conversation with me, such European traditionalists have stressed the need for coping more effectively with the dangerous forces of change that have been set loose. Europe and more generally the West, they argue, must be freed from the multicultural administration and the post-Christian leftist indoctrination that is presently besetting us. All lawful means must be weighed to achieve this end, and unless the besetting crisis can be resolved, there is no way to restore or purify the culture. Such spokesmen for the past echo what Hofmannsthal called “true politics [*wahre Politik*]” and what Carl Schmitt styled the “challenge of the exception.” They understand that what is needed are more than verbal ornaments designed for electoral campaigns. These young traditionalists see themselves engaged in a struggle for civilization.

One can to some degree find our present concerns foreshadowed in the writings of Rohan and Hofmannsthal as expressed in the *Europäische Revue*. There one notices that these figures eventually stopped believing that what they did would lead back to pre-modern political conditions. Mannheimian conservatism became for them an exercise in historical reflection rather than a path into the future. Were these figures alive today, they would probably be standing with

those whom the multicultural press in Europe considers “the extreme Right,” that is, with those who are resisting the invasion of Europe by Islamicists and the administrative enablers of this transformation. And they would take their activist stand as traditional Europeans—and not as outraged feminists or proponents of a religion of global democracy. Our European subjects out of the past might also be endorsing those expressions of European cultural traditionalism found in such magazines as the *Salisbury Review*, the Dutch *Bitter Lemon*, the German *Sezession*, the Austrian *Neue Ordnung*, the Italian online publication *Ekpyrosis* (www.ekpyrosis.it) and the French *Catholica*.

The transitional figures whom we have depicted pointed beyond the totalitarian horrors of the last century to our own administrative tyranny and egalitarian fixations. The future they warned against has come to pass and that memorable line that their poet-friend Rilke wrote in his *Duineser Elegien*, that “every muffled turning-about of the world brings forth the disinherited” describes the fate of our age as well as theirs. In an existential sense the rising generation of European traditionalists is linked to its predecessors of the interwar years. The challenge of the present Europe is different in kind from the Nazi threat—or from the need to withstand Soviet invasion that characterized the Cold War and which brought forth leaders like Konrad Adenauer. Our own crisis reveals another face, that of the social and cultural disintegration that Hofmannsthal lamented when he looked at Europe in the 1920s. European traditionalists should find more in common with him and other interwar exponents of the “politics of cultural despair” than with the generation of European leaders and journalists who addressed the danger of Soviet Communism.

1. Karl Anton Prinz Rohan, *Österreichisch Deutsch Europäisch* (Bodensee, 1973), 6-7. 2. *Ibid.*, 12-14, 18-26. 3. *Ibid.*, 26-45. 4. *Ibid.*, 34. 5. An English-language biography that plays up this unsentimental side of the great Austrian statesman is Alan Palmer, *Metternich: A Biography* (New York, 1972), especially 285-286. 6. *Österreichisch Deutsch Europäisch*, 46-53; see also the sketches of Rohan in *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932: Ein Handbuch*, edited by Arnim Mohler and Karlheinz Weissmann, sixth edition (Graz, 2005), 140-42, 493-94; and *Lexikon des Konservatismus*, edited by Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing (Graz, 1996), 463-65. 7. One of the best short studies of Hofmannsthal the artist is Hermann Broch's *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit: Eine Studie* (Munich, 1964). For a defense of Hofmannsthal as a literary teacher of his nation, see Ernst Robert Curtius "Hofmannsthals deutsche Sendung" in *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 22.29, 117-27. 8. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt, 1980), *Reden und Aufsätze 1925-1929*, vol. 3, 213-15. 9. Hermann Graf von Keyserling, *Das Spektrum Europas* (Berlin and Stuttgart, 1928); note also the comments made by Hofmannsthal on this work in *Reden und Aufsätze*, 226. 10. See the first volume of Keyserling's *Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen* (Darmstadt, 1823); and the biographical entry in the German Wikipedia, which stresses Keyserling's well-known hostility toward Hitler and the Nazi regime. 11. *Reden und Aufsätze*, 41. 12. On the reading of Hofmannsthal's speech among the conservative revolutionary activists, see *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932*, 94-96, 121, 226; and Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1957). 13. *Reden und Aufsätze*, 30. 14. *Ibid.*, 32. 15. *Ibid.*, 27; In a study of Hofmannsthal's cultural conservatism, Hermann Rudolf in *Kulturkritik und konservative Revolution* (Tübingen, 1971), 211-19, reads into the Munich address an "unjustified" tirade against the French. Although an apt comparison is also drawn between this speech and one that Hofmannsthal had delivered twenty-five years earlier, dealing with Beethoven and the need for "binding" communal identity, the presentation of the later address as an attack on the French people is entirely forced. Rudolf's interpretation of the 1926 address can be ascribed to his effort to validate a certain stereotype of the "conservative revolutionaries," as anti-democratic precursors of the Third Reich. In Hofmannsthal's case this stereotype is doubly questionable, since his connection to the political activists in question was indirect and sporadic. 16. See T. S. Eliot's *Christianity and Culture: The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (New York, 1949); and "Tradition and Orthodoxy," *American Review*, 2 (March 1934), 513-28.

17. See Carl J. Burckhardt, *Briefwechsel mit Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, edited by Carl J. Burckhardt (Frankfurt am Main, 1966), 227. See also Theodor Heuss, "Zum Gedenken: Hugo von Hofmannsthal" in *Der grossen Reden. Der Humanist* (Tübingen, 1965), 178. 18. *Kulturkritik und konservative Revolution*, 131-44. 19. This view of Hofmannsthal's cultural Catholicism is presented by his longtime friend and early interpreter Rudolf Borchardt in "Rede über Hofmannsthal" (Berlin, 1910). 20. *Reden und Aufsätze*, 35. 21. *Ibid.*, 13-23. 22. *Ibid.*, 183-89; and the letter to Burckhardt in *Briefwechsel*, 100, describing the need to create an Austrian national theater that would function independently of "publicity and the force of the market." 23. A noteworthy attempt to place these inter-subjective concerns into the context of the crisis of bourgeois modernity while looking at Viennese society a hundred years ago is Carl E. Schorske's "Schnitzler und Hofmannsthal: Politik und Psyche im Wien des Fin de siècle," *Wort und Wahrheit* 17 (1962), 367-81. 24. This problem of the cultural conservative who wished to construct a "new antiquity" for those without an "antique imprint," is the theme of Hannah Arendt's "Rede vom 'Klassizismus' in Hofmannsthal" in *Sechs Essays: Schriften der Wandlung* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1948), 50-52. 25. *Kulturkritik und konservative Revolution*, 136. An archaic usage that pervades Hofmannsthal's cultural commentary is *Welthaftigkeit*, a term that refers to the reality of being communally situated. 26. A key text for Rudolf and others of his generation of postwar German historians who have treated the "anti-liberalism" in Hofmannsthal and other traditionalist German critics as spiritual enablers of the Third Reich is Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair: a Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1974). The German edition of this work, *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr*, (1963 [1961]) may have exercised an even more far-reaching influence than the English edition, which came out two years earlier. 27. The fact and effects of liberal discontinuities is a recurrent theme of my book, *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (Princeton, 1999), especially 30-48; for a contrary view, see James Kalb, "Stalking the Therapeutic State" in *Political Science Reviewer* XXXV (2006), 380-414. 28. See Karl Mannheim, "Das konservative Denken" in *Wissenssoziologie*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Berlin, 1964), 408-508, and more particularly 422-25. On the epistemic preconditions for "conservative thinking," see Helmut Schelsky's incisive essay, which typifies the vast body of untranslated German material on conservative thought, "Ist die Dauerreflexion institutionalisierbar?" *Auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit* (Dusseldorf-Cologne, 1965), 250-75. 29. Jacques Attali, *Une brève histoire de l'avenir* (Paris, 2006).