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Sissi's World: The Empress Elisabeth in Memory and Myth.

Edited by Maura E. Hametz and Heidi Schlipphacke. New Directions in German Studies 22. New York/London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. xiv + 393 pp. \$130.00.

Sissi's World considers the elusive Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, exploring her continuing popularity and resonance across diverse cultures. The book consists of two sections comprising fourteen essays. "Memory" examines "physical representations of Elisabeth...as a historical figure [that] reimagine her...in time and space"; "Myth," treats "depictions of Elisabeth [that] reconfigure [her] in the modern world" (23). Contributors hail from Austria, China, Hungary, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States, representing a range of disciplines including art history, literature, history, popular culture, as well as film, tourism, and fashion studies.

In their introductory essay, the editors note that the historical Empress' frequent absences made her an empty signifier, affording space for the construct Sissi, a figure "reimagined," "reconstructed," or "reconfigured" across time and space (23). The essays assign Sissi multiple, seemingly conflicting personas: as an inspiration for artistic or cultural production, as an individual associated with or inhabiting real or imagined spaces, as an object of cultural appropriation and economic exploitation, and as a model of empowerment and agency.

Most contributors examine Elisabeth/Sissi as a source of artistic inspiration. In "Encounters: Ulrike Truger, Elisabeth—Zwang—Flucht—Freiheit, 1998/99," Christiane Hertel examines Truger's three-in-one sculpture embodying Elisabeth's flight from imperial constraints, noting ironically that flight can also represent constraint. Olivia Gruber Florek's "Empress Elisabeth and the Painting of Modern Life" focuses on Elisabeth's photograph collection of the Parisian *démimonde* and its influence on Wintherthaler's famous portrait, positioning Elisabeth as a producer of culture who "shap[ed] her own representation" (138). In "Karl Lagerfeld and the Elisabeth Myth," Carolin Maikler discusses a photography book and a short video in which fashion designer Lagerfeld presents Elisabeth in love with both Achilles and Franz Josef, depicting the empress' agency while exploiting her to market Lagerfeld's current fashion lines. Kate Thomas' "Fat, Thin, Sad: Victoria, Sissi, Diana and the Fate of Wax Queens" focuses on the public consumption of royal female bodies as pop culture icons, suggesting that the nonstop public gaze caused these women to "[lose] their singular selves in service of imperial multitudes" (350).

Two contributors examine the German *Sissi* films starring Romy Schneider (1955-57) through the lens of queer theory. Heidi Schlipphacke's "Melancholy Empress: Queering Empire in Ernst Marischka's *Sissi* Films," a revision of her 2010 article in *Screen*, pinpoints the films' subversion of the conventions of regressive *Heimatfilme* through queering class, nationality, and gender, offering post-World War II audiences escape from guilt and "suspension of mourning" (242). In "Sisi: A Double Reflection on a "Queer Icon," Susanne Hochreiter aligns the *Sissi* films with drag performances such Michael Herbig's *Sissi* parodies. The films employ camp and parody, enabling Sissi to reject heteronormativity, assert autonomy, and exercise control over her body.

Two essays examine works loosely based on Elisabeth. Anita McChesney's "Imagining Austria: Myths of 'Sisi' and National Identity in Lilian Faschinger's *Wiener Passion*" applies a postcolonial lens, positing a semi-factual, semi-mythical empress that unifies an imagined community. In "Cocteau's Queen: Sissi Between Legend, Spectacle, and History in *L'Aigle à deux têtes*," Elizabeth Black demonstrates how the film, based loosely on Elisabeth's life,

renders a royal assassination as an act of agency.

Several essays examine Elisabeth's association with place. Beth Ann Muellner's "The Remains of the Stay: The Corporeal Archive of Empress Elisabeth in the Hofburg" and "Sisi in the Museum: Exhibits in Vienna and the US" by Susanne Kelley, consider Habsburg exhibits in Vienna. Muellner discusses visitors' complicity in the Sissi myth using Muellner's experience of the Sissi-Museum and visitors' comments about it on social media. Kelley compares the contents and public-relations campaigns of Habsburg exhibits in Vienna and the United States, noting that the exhibits downplayed Elisabeth in their contents while exploiting her in their PR materials. In "Sisi Redux: The Empress Elisabeth and Her Cult in Post-Communist Hungary" Judith Szapor and András Lénárt trace the renovation and touristic exploitation of Elisabeth's hunting castle in Gödöllő in the service of a Hungarian imagined community. In "A Place for Sissi in Trieste," Maura E. Hametz and Borut Klabjan tie Trieste's Elisabeth statue to the city's envisaged past and future, noting "[Elisabeth's] imagined role as a protector of all [Adriatic] peoples" and the touristic value of Trieste's Habsburg past (104). Farther afield, "Sissi, the Chinese Princess: A Timely and Versatile Post-Mao Icon" by Fei-Hsien Wang & Ke-Chin Hsia highlights the People's Republic of China. There the filmic Sissi "effectively morphed" into the Chinese Princess Xixi, the "perfect pitchwoman for a crass but also unscrupulously imaginative consumer culture" (209).

The book's contents are well written and engaging. However, the generally high quality of the essays is occasionally marred by factual errors. For instance, St. Elisabeth is not the patron saint of Hungary (24); the *Patrona hungarica* is the Virgin Mary. Additionally, there is no St. Matthias Basilica in Buda (44); this is possibly a conflation of the church popularly known as the Mátyás-templom in Buda with the Szent-István-bazilika in Pest. Finally, the Hungarian word *mulatság* means 'fun, amusement,' not a party in which "[e]very Hungarian believes that he is in heaven and that all angels are gypsies" (243).

Sissi's World is an engrossing examination of a beloved figure in the German-speaking world. Contributors demonstrate how Elisabeth's flight from the restrictions of the imperial court, social constraints, and heteronormative gender conventions afforded space for the seemingly universally applicable, "decontextualized fantasy" Sissi (209). Sissi continues to represent a *tabula rasa* onto which individuals and nations can project evolving conceptions of national, regional, ethnic, and gender identities. Readers will enjoy this foray into Sissi's world, "within which [they will] travel with great pleasure" (24).

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