

NEW DIRECTIONS IN GERMAN STUDIES

SISSI'S WORLD

The Empress Elisabeth in Memory and Myth



edited by MAURA E. HAMETZ
and HEIDI SCHLIPPHACKE

B L O O M S B U R Y

NEW DIRECTIONS IN GERMAN STUDIES

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- Vol. 22. *Sissi's World: The Empress Elisabeth in Memory and Myth*
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Sissi's World

*The Empress Elisabeth in Memory
and Myth*

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*Dedicated to women everywhere who, like Sissi, wish to shape
their own images and then leave them behind.*

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One Introduction: “Sissi”: The Convergence of Memory and Myth

Maura E. Hametz and Heidi Schlipphacke

“The record of every human creature must contain both light and shadow,” wrote Count Egon Corti in the preface to *Elizabeth, Empress of Austria*, the hagiographic biography he wrote in 1934 under the title *Elisabeth, “die seltsame Frau.”* Trying to capture the character of the “uncommon” or “odd” woman, he referred to the equally hagiographical description by Elisabeth’s lady in waiting Countess Fürstenberg, who sought to explain Elisabeth’s elusive and alluring beauty, writing, “Neither chisel nor brush can depict her as she really was, or that something about her which had such power to attract and captivate, for it was a thing peculiar to herself. She will live on in legend, not in history ...”¹ And in the nearly 120 years since her death, this remark has proved prescient. The Empress Elisabeth has lived on in memory and in myth and has retained her status as a symbol of beauty, grace, elegance, royalty, tragedy, romance, and even kitsch around the world. This collection explores the contemporary fascination with the Habsburg Empress and seeks to investigate why the Empress’s popularity has endured and why her image continues to resonate across diverse cultures. In fact, the chisel, the brush, the screen, the web, and even modern cityscapes offer reminders of the iconic Sissi and the legend of the Empress Elisabeth. From the gaiety and naïve beauty of Sissi captured on the silver screen by Romy Schneider in the ever-popular *Sissi* films of the 1950s to the solidly material, white, and mysterious Sisi sculpted in stone by

1 Egon Corti, *Elizabeth, Empress of Austria*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1936), preface. The original was published in German: Egon Corti, *Elisabeth: “die seltsame Frau”* (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1934).

contemporary artist Ulrike Truger,² the image of the Empress Elisabeth is both ubiquitous and ephemeral. Indeed, Sissi continues to be a cult figure inspiring "Sissimania" around the world.

The confusion and uncertainty surrounding the identity of the Empress even extends to debates over what she should be called. Sissi, the sobriquet used in this volume's title *Sissi's World*, is consciously chosen as an indication of the centrality of Ernst Marischka's 1950s cinematic depiction of the Empress to the construction of contemporary memory and visions of Elisabeth. However, since the Habsburg Empress appears in different contexts, periods, and places under a variety of names, each important in its disciplinary, artistic, cultural, or geographic context, each of the authors who contributed to this collection has chosen an appellation for particular reasons. The Empress figures in a variety of guises, among them Elisabeth, Elizabeth, Erzsébet, Sisi, Sissi, and Xixi. Some authors are quite specific in their use of a particular designation, like Susanne Hochreiter, who uses "Sisi" to refer to the discursive figure and "Elisabeth" to refer to the historic figure. Others name her according to sources, context, or circumstances. Likewise, other royal names, have been left to the convention chosen by the contributor (for example, Franz Josef or Francis Joseph).

The variety, range, and sheer volume of popular representations of the Empress demonstrate the worldwide fascination with her and reveal the paradoxes of her life, recalling contradictory perceptions of her image and reputation after her death, as she is remembered and constructed as an historical figure and as a legend. Yet little scholarly work has been dedicated to exploring the ways in which the Habsburg Empress is remembered and imagined, embodied and disembodied, recalled, revered, and constructed. What might be termed "Sissimania," the Sisi cult, or the Sisi phenomenon is evident even to the casual observer, but the study of its evolution and significance is nearly absent from scholarship. The articles collected in this volume explore the ways in which Sissi is remembered and represented and try to explain her relevance and longevity as a mythic, iconic figure in contemporary cultures around the world. A secondary impetus for the book, reflecting in particular the editors' experiences and perspectives as Americans, is to ask why the Empress, who generates such intense emotions and is worshipped around the globe, does not appear to resonate in North American culture and why she remains little known in the United States, despite American audiences' fascination with royals and the royal lifestyle. What, we ask, inoculates Americans against Sissimania?

2 Ulrike Truger's "Elisabeth" statue stands in the Lainzer Tiergarten at the Hermesvilla in Vienna.

Memory and Myth

The memory of Elisabeth springs from narratives about the Empress’s personal life as well as the mythical status of the Habsburg monarchy, in particular as represented in images of the emperor. Ancient Roman and early Christian traditions of veneration and mythic authority were cultivated from the consolidation of Habsburg imperial rule in the sixteenth century.³ The royal family also forms part of the national myth of the modern state of Austria, a “lieux de memoir,” a space mapped at the foundations of the nation that has been explored extensively by scholars since the publication of Pierre Nora’s seminal work on France.⁴ Emil Brix, Ernst Bruckmüller, and Hannes Stekel’s edited three-volume work *Memoria Austriae*, published in 2004 and 2005, sets the tone for these perceptions of the monarchy, particularly in the first volume on Austrian national identity dedicated to *Men, Myth, and Times*.⁵ Brix, Bruckmüller, and Stekel’s grounding of Habsburg images in this conception of national identity points to another reason for Elisabeth’s elusiveness in scholarship—the tendency to equate royalty with the power of male state authority. Admittedly, Elisabeth was the royal consort, and her claim to royal power lay in her marriage to the emperor; yet such a perspective is certainly based on the common association in the existing scholarship of men and maleness with political power. Elisabeth was the Empress and, as such, played a public role and faced considerable expectations to carry out the duties assigned to the ruling house. Yet she generally appears as merely a side note in historical accounts of the monarchy.⁶

The explanation for the veneration of and popular fascination with the Empress very likely resides in the interplay of myth and memory. She purportedly became involved in politics only once during the crisis with Hungary, but even this one presumed engagement has fed accounts of the Empress that underscore her feminine appeal. Narratives of the political vignette usually ground her ability to influence politics in her personal

3 On associations of the Habsburg emperors with ancient Roman, Hebraic, and Christian authority and classical iconography see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: the Habsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

4 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

5 Emil Brix, Ernst Bruckmüller, and Hannes Stekel, *Memoria Austriae*, vol. 1, *Menschen, Mythen, Zeiten* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 2004).

6 Pieter M. Judson’s magisterial *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), tends to focus on the institutions and lands of the monarchy rather than the royal house and its members. Hence, Elisabeth, as consort, receives little attention.

charisma.⁷ Memory (as holding a direct link to a past truth) and myth (as a distortion of the past) converge in the cultural work of “remembering” the Empress Elisabeth and identifying the source of her charisma.

On the surface, the concepts of memory and myth seem at odds with one another, but as Maurice Halbwachs argues in his seminal work *On Collective Memory*, all memory is collective—it is shaped and reinforced through the social framework in which the individual lives. In this sense, “[...] everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.”⁸ Charisma, too, relies on the collective and on notions of authority constructed around an individual. While Max Weber places charisma in the framework of a patriarchal structure, he insists that “charisma knows no formal and regulated appointment or dismissal.”⁹ To possess charisma, the individual must hold extraordinary personal qualities, but those qualities must likewise be validated by a group or community.¹⁰ So the question arises: how do we explain the phenomenon of Elisabeth, the particular combination of charisma and memory she embodies that has produced such a malleable and yet tenacious and ubiquitous Elisabeth myth?

It is a generally accepted idea in our post-postmodern age that temporal and spatial contingency are integral to the reshaping and reconstruction of collective memory, but this idea bears emphasizing in light of reflections on the repeated reconstruction of “Sissi” in diverse epochs and national and regional spaces. Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory*, published in 1952, might very well have been influenced by Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” written in 1940 and published in France in 1947, a work highlighting Benjamin’s messianic understanding of history as a concept that is only made meaningful through a vivid encounter with the present. Benjamin’s critique of historicism is central to the analyses of reconstructions and appropriations of Elisabeth contained in this volume. As Benjamin writes, “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize the past ‘as it

7 The legacy of this veneration in the Hungarian context forms an aspect of the analysis in Judith Szapor and András Lénárt’s essay in this volume. Elisabeth’s image in this respect is romanticized in fictionalized accounts including Allison Pataki, *The Accidental Empress* (New York: Howard Books, 2015).

8 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

9 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1112.

10 Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi explore Weber’s conception of charisma in their introduction to *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 4–6.

really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.”¹¹ Benjamin implicates the historians who represent past events and figures as if they were eternal and unchanging, comprehensible to each culture and epoch without consideration of the constraints of the present. He draws a link between the contingency of history and “fashion,” which always has “a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago.”¹²

Memory, history, and the present meld in Benjamin’s reflections on our understanding of historical events and figures, and his conception of time reminds us to view multiple iterations of “Sissi” across temporal and geographical borders similarly as “costumes” evoking the past in order to capture the *Zeitgeist* of the present. The essays in this volume reveal the preponderance of the present in such diverse reincarnations of “Elisabetta,” the Sissi statue in Trieste’s Liberty Square, discussed by Maura Hametz and Borut Klabjan, and Karl Lagerfeld’s fashion homage to Elisabeth in the 2014 film *Reincarnation*, as explored by Carolin Mailker.¹³ Each cultural product borrows from the past in order to reflect on the present. Each harnesses collective memory to make “social usage,”¹⁴ as Roland Barthes writes about the function of myth, of Elisabeth and to legitimize the present, harkening back to tradition to cement new narratives in the cultural imaginary.

Clearly, memory and myth are intertwined, as Halbwachs points out, as each not only recollects but also distorts the past. This distortion, the product of a “wish to introduce greater coherence,” seeps into understandings of the past that are harnessed to create a harmonious present.¹⁵ Barthes’s understanding of myth also emphasizes the linkages between memory and myth, a point that is salient for our analysis of Sissi’s many afterlives. For Barthes, myth in the bourgeois world distorts but does not completely suppress its historical origins: “However paradoxical it may seem, *myth hides nothing*: its function is to distort, not make disappear.”¹⁶ Myth is “a type of speech [...] a mode of

11 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 257.

12 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 263.

13 Karl Lagerfeld, *Reincarnation*, with Pharrell Williams, Cara Delevingne, Geraldine Chaplin, Lady Amanda Harlech, Baptiste Giabiconi, Heidi Mount, Caroline Lebar, et al. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO4-TV6Zckc> (accessed November 2, 2017).

14 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109.

15 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 182–3. This conception of memory is similar to that of myth as analyzed critically by thinkers like Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

16 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 121.

signification, a form" that is "not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message."¹⁷ The historical meaning is an "instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness" that can be called forth at will to produce an artificial naturalization of the object of representation.¹⁸

Barthes argues that myth in the bourgeois age represents history as Nature, and we are invited to read essentialism or a truth into the myth due to its recourse to a domesticated (impoverished) history.¹⁹ For example, for Barthes, the hair or full beard on the face of the popular Abbé Pierre, member of the French Resistance during the Nazi occupation of France, is linked in a complex relation of semiotics to the charitable characteristics of the historical figure Pierre who was seen as representing the soul of the nation; in this instance, History becomes Nature (hair/truth).²⁰ In contrast to representations of evil beardless figures, Pierre and other venerated bearded priests are not just symbols of masculinity but also of a visceral naturalness, organically linked to the earth and to lived communities outside the confines of the Church.

Barthes's example of Abbé Pierre's hair recalls the overcoded iconography of Elisabeth's unruly locks in multiple representations. The Empress's hair features prominently in Franz Xaver Winterhalter's alluring portraits of her, capturing intimate moments uncharacteristic of depictions of royalty. Here is the "visceral naturalness" described by Barthes, captured in enduring depictions of Elisabeth that seem to offer unfettered access to the "true" Elisabeth. The fetishized representation of Elisabeth's hair in the Winterhalter paintings and in numerous popular culture depictions of the Empress include, for example, the Empress Elisabeth Barbie doll, whose gorgeous mane is perfectly coiffed to signify a femininity and an accessibility that cannot quite be domesticated. These depictions offer an alluring, "forbidden" vision of the untamed wildness of the Empress who, by reputation, never submitted to the rigors and disciplines of court life but preferred intimate settings and the company of those outside of the court. The Winterhalter paintings remind us of the fetish function that is insinuated in many representations of the Empress's hair. As Olivia Gruber Florek points out, Elisabeth's hair, as a fetish, draws "attention to her sexuality while also denying access to the viewer."²¹ In her essay for

17 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 109.

18 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 118.

19 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 142.

20 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 48–9.

21 See Olivia Gruber Florek, "‘I Am a Slave to My Hair’: Empress Elisabeth of Austria, Fetishism, and Nineteenth-Century Austrian Sexuality," *Modern Austrian Literature* 42, no. 2 (2009): 3.

this volume, Florek shows how Winterhalter’s paintings of Elisabeth likewise reveal Elisabeth’s own interest in shaping visual representations of herself.

For the Viennese Sigmund Freud, writing in the last years of the Habsburg Empire and the early years of the First Austrian Republic, hair is a common fetish object, as it functions as a mask, hiding something and yet pointing to what is underneath.²² Reigning at a time in which the Habsburg Empire was heading towards its own destruction, “Sissi” with the wild hair represents both the vulnerability of Habsburg and, by extension, Austrian power, as well as the disavowal of this vulnerability. The abundance of hair in visual representations of Elisabeth, particularly in imaginative ones, suggests the status of a fetish. Like Freud’s fetish, through the lens of her hair “Sissi” signifies both the myth of transparent, “natural” nobility and castration (vulnerability) and its disavowal (power).

Reflections on Sissi’s negotiation of bodily constraint and naturalness appear in Beth Ann Muellner’s analysis of the corporeal nature of the displays in the Sisi Museum at the Hofburg Palace. Muellner notes that the shadows of the exhibit’s viewers are sutured onto the displayed artifacts of the Empress, such as items of her clothing and accessories of her toilette, creating a posthumous intimacy with her. This uncannily material and ethereal vision of Elisabeth in Vienna contrasts with the perspective of Sisi offered by the Gödöllő Royal Palace in Hungary, where Elisabeth is presented in a more tangible form, embodied as a horsewoman and a contributor to Hungarian political development. As Judith Szapor and András Lénárt demonstrate in their essay, Sisi becomes a metaphor for the Hungarian national experience of unity and disunity in the monarchy and a symbol of Hungary’s development vis-à-vis the Habsburg center of power in Vienna.

In his reflections on collective memory, Halbwachs argues that the concept of “nobility” is associated with a notion of uniqueness and particularity that makes it impossible for a noble to be “reduced to function; he cannot become a simple instrument or a cog-wheel, but is rather an element or component of the very substance of the society.” The noble, then, preserves and maintains the “living force of

22 For Freud the fetish is the product of the disavowal of castration. It both represents the phallus in its denial of castration and the lack itself. Hence it both assuages and feeds castration anxiety. Freud refers to the woman’s “Schamhaar,” the curtain that reveals “it” is not there. Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 11: 152–153.

tradition."²³ This conception of nobility continues to be associated with quality rather than quantity, and with an enduring interest in the past, a past that has purchase in the realm of the social rather than in the modern professional sphere. This view of nobility offers perhaps an explanation for why "Sissi" is such an alluring cypher for the meeting of contemporary concerns with tradition. As a member of the nobility, she embodies *in essence* a tradition that is perceived as unshakeable, as particular and persevering.

Elisabeth represents the transition in conceptions of gender and femininity that began in the European Enlightenment. The emergence of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century ushered in the "naturalization" of ideal modes of femininity. As Sylvia Bovenschen has shown, the shift from extended to nuclear families in the wake of industrialization limited the available activities of women to the family sphere, in essence domesticating women.²⁴ The ideal bourgeois woman was not concerned with fine dress or the rigid social rules of the court. Rather, she was natural and pure, unable to dissemble. "Sissi," then, could be understood as the ideal conflation of these two seemingly contradictory ideals: of nobility/quality and of natural and modern femininity. She combines the pedigree of the aristocrat with the unformed naturalness of the ideal modern woman.²⁵

Perhaps for this reason it becomes particularly difficult to decide whether "Sissi" is traditional or modern, conservative or subversive. Is she the free spirit who purportedly helped broker the dual monarchy with Hungary and who consistently fled the Viennese court, embarking on trips to Gödöllő Palace in Hungary, Miramar Castle in Trieste,

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- 23 Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 128–9. The premodern period assigned "a singularly concrete and particular physiognomy" to noble families, communities based on blood. Modernity, Halbwachs explains, brings with it the functionalization of society in which the particular is deemphasized in the name of efficiency. Hence, the "noble class has for a long time been the chief upholder of collective memory.... In the commercial and artisan classes, and in the top strata of the bourgeoisie, the person becomes indistinguishable from his task, profession, or function that defines him" (*Ibid.*).
- 24 Sylvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979).
- 25 The concept of performed naturalness and the ideal female monarch is parodied in Ernst Marischka's 1954 film *The Story of Vicki* (*Mädchenjahre einer Königin*, Austria, Erma-Produktion, 1955) that features Romy Schneider in the role of the young Queen Victoria. It was released one year prior to the first *Sissi* film. In one scene, the court etiquette teacher coaches Vicki in presenting herself "naturally." Schneider/Vicky consistently laughs at the irony of performing naturalness and remarks that she gets the most praise when she moves her arms as unnaturally as possible.

and southern locales such as Corfu and Madeira? Or is she rather the “caged bird” who was obsessed by the ideal of beauty with which she was associated, exercising compulsively and engaging in exhausting cosmetic and dressing rituals? Or is she the “Mater Dolorosa,”²⁶ a persona recently highlighted in the Viennese exhibit of that name at the Hofburg?

The exhibition narrative for “Mater Dolorosa” presented Elisabeth as a mother so tender that the traumatizing death of her first child Sophie, at the age of two, served as the catalyst for Elisabeth’s reserved relationship to her two subsequent children, Rudolph and Gisela. The exhibit picks up on conservative and traditional interpretations of Elisabeth. Overwhelming maternal feelings, we are invited to believe, and not her desire to be free of the chains of a traditional gender role, forced her to create distance between herself and her second- and third-born children. The “Mater Dolorosa” persona attributed to Elisabeth in some myths recalls George Mosse’s considerations of gender and nationality in modern Europe. In *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Mosse argues that the image of masculine beauty in which passions are stoically contained (informed by the German classicist J.J. Winckelmann’s “quiet simplicity and noble grandeur,” the ideal qualities of Greek statuary)²⁷ came to represent modern Europe beginning in the eighteenth century. Women, he points out, “furnished the national symbols like Germania and Marianne. But these female symbols were, as we have seen, sedate rather than dynamic. They stood for immutability rather than progress, providing the backdrop against which men determined the fate of nations.”²⁸ From this perspective, the “Mater Dolorosa” represents the past of the empire; the figure looks backward, reminding us of the losses forged by the movement of time. In this role, Elisabeth appears as “sedate rather than dynamic.”

For Mosse, the stereotypical embodiment of manliness was modeled on an ideal of male beauty born in the eighteenth-century Greek revival, while the image of woman in German or English national iconography was frequently fashioned after traditional portrayals of the Virgin Mary. Yet the paradoxes of Sissi lie in her ability to evoke both the mater dolorosa of the Anglo-Saxon tradition and the dynamism of

26 For a description of the Mater Dolorosa exhibition, see “‘Mater dolorosa’: Sonderschau zeigt Kaiserin Sisi als trauernde Mutter,” *Vienna Online*, November 26, 2015. Available at: <http://www.vienna.at/mater-dolorosa-sonderschau-zeigt-kaiserin-sisi-als-trauernde-mutter/4533144> (accessed November 2, 2017).

27 J.J. Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969), 22.

28 George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 23.

figures of the ancient world, the Greek and Roman goddesses at play in the Mediterranean. As Carolin Maikler demonstrates in her essay in this volume, Sissi's flight to her Palace Achilleion on Corfu in the Mediterranean served as inspiration for Karl Lagerfeld's fanciful fashions that imagine her in motion, and his sartorial engagements with Sissi reflect the shifting fashion and gender ideals of both the 1990s and our current decade. In contrast, as Christiane Hertel demonstrates in her contribution, Ulrike Truger's statue "Elisabeth" embodies the dialectic of constraint and movement that characterized Elisabeth's life in Vienna from which she constantly yearned to escape. Via a reflection on the alternately fluid and hard material of wax used in Madame Tussaud's exhibitions of royal cult figures, Kate Thomas's essay in this volume beautifully encapsulates these contradictory perspectives on Sissi and the difficulties posed to those who try to capture her in effigy.

Sissi embodies the lost sister, daughter, mother, and lover to the nostalgic. To her fans, she figures as the friend of the downtrodden. Indeed, during her life Elisabeth was a figure who represented the minorities of the empire, uniting the rural and urban populations and overcoming the provincialism associated with many of the Habsburg lands outside of the major cities of Vienna, Budapest, and Prague. She appeared to complicate the boundaries between center and periphery. She was admired as a champion of the nations within the empire and a protector of the weak in a monarchy that was itself admired as a symbol of supra-national political unity.²⁹ Hungarian scholar John Lukacs observed that at the time of her death, "The entire Magyar nation mourned her: she had liked the Magyars and was immensely popular among them."³⁰ In Cracow, she was publicly mourned in ceremonies and in poetry as a symbol of municipal solidarity and sympathy, and in recognition the city made a "pact of attachment" to the Habsburg monarchy.³¹ At the same time, as Larry Wolff notes, Elisabeth's assassination became "a public sensation in which the theatrical, artistic, and poetic values of fin-de-siècle Cracow pervasively influenced and transmuted the representation of journalistic reality."³² This reception in Cracow, a city which the Empress had never visited, reflected the aura of public sensation that surrounded the Empress.

29 Adam Kożuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: The Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Interwar Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 10–11.

30 John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 120.

31 Larry Wolff, "Dynastic Conservatism and Poetic Violence in Fin-de-Siècle Cracow: The Habsburg Matrix of Polish Modernism," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 746–8.

32 Wolff, "Dynastic Conservatism and Poetic Violence," 755.

The fascination with Elisabeth began in her lifetime, and she might be referred to as one of the earliest modern cult figures. She was pursued by the press, by photographers, by admirers, and by critics, both inside and outside court circles, wherever she appeared, from Vienna to Corfu. As Alice Freifeld has argued, Elisabeth defined the “celebrity monarch,” and “she filled the public sphere with the glamour of a new monarchism and gave royalty a human face.”³³ Kate Thomas’s essay treats this fascination, but relates it to a charismatic vision constructed “from below,” a cult of personality involving both the object of adoration and the adoring public.³⁴ Thomas illustrates how this fascination, emerging as it did during Queen Victoria’s reign, is linked to the veneration and memory of the twentieth-century icon Princess Diana.

Since Elisabeth’s death more than a century ago, artists, sculptors, writers, playwrights, poets, and screenwriters have been trying to capture and convey what they perceive as her essence. Public monuments to her memory dot cityscapes across former imperial lands, and images of her grace parks, open spaces, and squares to this day. In 1903 Austrian Alois Riegl, a father of the modern discipline of art history, argued in a manner that foreshadows Benjamin’s understanding of history that historical monuments did not have an intrinsic eternal value, but rather only a “present value.” He saw them, particularly in Hungary, as the product of national egoism.³⁵

The symbolic meaning and value of historical monuments in the Habsburg lands were recognized even while the Empress was alive. As the architecture in the late monarchy sought to capture the ethnic uniqueness of lands of the empire, often articulated in particular political and national ideologies through language policies and practices, so, too, did public monuments express the “architectural polyglotism” of the Habsburg empire and its royal family.³⁶ This nationalist perspective and its manipulations and historical distortions are highlighted in Szapor and Lénárt’s explanation of Elisabeth’s appeal in Hungary and in Hametz and Klabjan’s examination of her shifting popularity in

33 Alice Freifeld, “Empress Elisabeth as Hungarian Queen: The Uses of Celebrity Monarchism,” in *Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegories, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*, ed. Laurence Cole and Daniel Unowsky (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 139.

34 On “Constructing Charisma from Below,” see Berenson and Giloi, “Introduction,” 10–13.

35 Ernő Marosi, “National Monument and Museum Affairs: Musealization of the National Monuments,” in *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Revisited*, ed. András Gerő (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 91–2, 111.

36 On the “language” of Habsburg architecture, see Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6–10.

Trieste in Italy. Part of the fascination with Sissi certainly stems from her reputation as a sympathetic yet tragic figure whose assassination has been seen to mark the first rattle of the death throes of the Central European empire. The memory of the Empress, celebrated throughout the empire after her assassination in September 1898, enhanced her international renown and appeal, rendering her a sympathetic figure and the heroine of a tragedy; she was interpreted as a symbol of the empire struggling in hostile seas, against enemies within and without.

Elisabeth/Sissi and Nostalgia

After Elisabeth's death, statues erected in her memory in Habsburg lands were designed to frame her in particular political or cultural contexts. Even today, more than a century after her death, she appears in various poses from regally seated to standing upright, and in myriad forms from young maiden to enigmatic sphinx. From these roots in the late years of the empire, the Habsburg myth sprouted in the interwar period following the dissolution of the empire and the eclipse of the monarchy. This period saw the emergence of literary and historical works that stirred popular imagination³⁷ and reflected nostalgia for what appeared to be the "golden years" of empire.³⁸ The Habsburgs' passage into the history books contrasted sharply with the violent fate met by the Romanovs and the hereditary rulers of the Ottoman empire, allowing the Habsburg legacy to emerge in a particularly nostalgic light and dissociating the Habsburgs, at least to some extent, from the bellicose and disruptive nationalist and political discourses of the interwar years. In addition, for the post-World War I Austrian state, civic institutions and social elites found imperial imagery a more solid foundation for the construction of a national identity than ethno-nationalist discourses which relied on supra-national Germanness.³⁹ Thus, the period between the two wars nurtured the romanticized visions of the Habsburg monarchs, particularly Franz Joseph and Elisabeth, perspectives on the monarchs that have endured to the present day. Romanticized, reverent images of Franz Joseph and Elisabeth are the most common trope of Habsburg representation in exhibitions today, as Susanne Kelley shows in her essay, both affirming the enduring

37 For an excellent overview of literary responses to Elisabeth during her life but especially during the early years after her death, see Carolin Maiker, *Kaiserin Elisabeth von Österreich: Die Entstehung eines literarischen Mythos 1854–1918* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011).

38 On the construction of the Habsburg myth in the interwar period, see Kożuchowski, *Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, 3.

39 Peter Thaler, *The Ambivalence of Identity: The Austrian Experience of Nation Building in a Modern Society* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001), 2.

symbolic power of the Habsburgs in Vienna and “introducing” them to American audiences.

Despite the frayed fabric of the empire, instability and disillusionment in the interwar period led to nostalgia based on distorted memories of the peace under Habsburg rule and unification under the monarchy. This sense of an empire led by its royal sovereigns, who embodied the unification of all peoples in its realms, was enhanced in the interwar period by the incessant march of racial regimes, nationalist dictatorships, and ethnic violence after the monarchy’s demise.

The empire’s collapse no doubt played a role in the Empress’s emergence as a popular icon, beloved by people across the social, political, and cultural spectra. In the interwar period and the decades following, the Habsburg state’s disappearance from the territorial and political map facilitated the recrafting of the royal family members in the public imagination as non-threatening representatives of a bygone era of relative peace and stability. The Habsburg monarchy also has an aura of dignity and splendor and evokes as well a sense of pity for its ignoble end and the collapse of the realm.⁴⁰ While Franz Joseph is remembered as the epitome of the monarchy and the leader of the Habsburg realms, the memory of Elizabeth is less distinct and more flexible.⁴¹ Franz Joseph was the head of the Habsburg *state*; but Elisabeth, as consort and as a woman, appeared as the head of the Habsburg nation(s) as a very real but much more oblique representative of the Habsburg monarchy, playing a more sympathetic role for peoples throughout the empire. The oblique references to authority in images of the monarchy after its demise are instrumentalized, as Fei-Hsien Wang and Ke-chin Hsia show, in representations of Sissi in China. In China beginning in the 1990s, the Sissi myth has been appropriated to resonate with socialist values on the one hand; on the other hand the successful use of her image for consumerist ends is evident in commodities from vacation packages to sanitary napkins.

The collapse of the Habsburg Empire coincided with the end of World War I in a firmly modern age, characterized not only by the triumph of individual nations over the imperial state, but also by the advent of technologies of mass destruction and the arrival of a new feeling of precarity. The sense of imperial loss and the crumbling of the empire led to the emergence of “Habsburg nostalgia,” a perspective on remembrance that has emerged in academic discourse in recent years.⁴²

40 Kożuchowski, *Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, 162.

41 Kożuchowski, *Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, 147, on Franz Joseph as the epitome of the monarchy.

42 See Heidi Schlipphacke, ed., special issue on “Habsburg nostalgia,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014).

Nostalgia, as defined by Svetlana Boym, is an “historical emotion” and the affective mode of modernity, an experience of loss of place, of homesickness, that ultimately becomes “a disease of the modern age.”⁴³ What we might call Habsburg nostalgia appears in a number of essays in this volume and manifests not only in Austria but throughout the former Habsburg territories and beyond. Coined as a medical condition in the late seventeenth century, nostalgia was associated with the experience of distance from the homeland (originally suffered by seventeenth-century Swiss mercenary soldiers). Jean Starobinski,⁴⁴ Boym, and others point out that nostalgia has become a much more complicated affective state in modernity, a period in which the Western subject feels almost ceaselessly “out of time and place” vis-à-vis his or her origins. Indeed, as Boym makes clear, modern nostalgia is as much about the longing for a different time, “the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams,” as it is about the longing for a homeland.⁴⁵ The desire to return to what is perceived as the endless time of childhood, an experience of time characterized by play rather than by the “homogenous” (Benjamin) time of the modern capitalist clock, is ubiquitous.⁴⁶ The nostalgia for a lost empire is reflected not only in the myriad literary and artistic representations of Elisabeth, but also in souvenirs, popular culture products, and exhibitions dedicated to Franz Joseph and Elisabeth. In this volume Susanne Kelley and Beth Muellner both reflect on the ideological and affective functions of exhibitions—what might be called “musealization”—focusing on Elisabeth and Franz Joseph.⁴⁷

In the German and Austrian context, the concept of nostalgia can be linked to ideas of *Heimat* or homeland, that is, an idealized connection to a place of origin.⁴⁸ In Joseph Roth's 1938 novel *Die Kapuzinergruft*, the character Trotta, born in Vienna but whose ancestral home is Spiolje (in today's Serbia), reminisces that *Heimat* was stronger at the periphery than in the center of the empire before its demise.⁴⁹ As Trotta describes it, Franz Joseph was at his most popular and most powerful far from the center of Vienna, at the outskirts of the empire. Indeed, we often

43 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic, 2001), xvi, 7.

44 Jean Starobinski, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 81–103.

45 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

46 For a more detailed discussion of the vicissitudes of Habsburg nostalgia, see Heidi Schlipphacke, “The Temporalities of Habsburg Nostalgia,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 42, no. 7 (2014): 1–17.

47 On the concept of “musealization,” see Marosi, “National Monument and Museum Affairs,” 89.

48 For a compelling overview of the concept of *Heimat*, see Elizabeth Boa, *Heimat—A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000).

49 Joseph Roth, *Die Kapuzinergruft* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1985).

associate *Heimat*, love of home, with national identity, but what do we make of the love of empire?⁵⁰

The nostalgia for a pre-national entity suggests a certain skepticism vis-à-vis the idealized concept of the modern national "citizen." Perhaps, the Habsburg nostalgic muses, the promised rights of the citizen fall short in their lived form. If a sense of unity is gained in the realization of the modern nation, the nation likewise marks the loss of the less mechanized imperial sense of time and place. As Franz Kafka teaches us in his narrative "The Chinese Wall" ("Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer") (1917), the Emperor is both the center of the empire and always too far away from his subjects to be truly relevant.⁵¹ Habsburg nostalgia, manifested here as Sissi nostalgia, is surely informed by a modern skepticism about the promise of the nation for former "subjects" both at the center and the margins of the ever-changing empire. Nostalgia is also squarely placed within conceptions of the "modern" associated with western Europe and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

One of the earliest posthumous biographies of Elisabeth, *The Martyrdom of an Empress* (1899), written by an anonymous friend later to be revealed as Marguerite Cunliffe-Owen, set the tone for laudatory treatments of the Empress that insist on Elisabeth's sweet nature and sense of justice and equality by depicting her as a modern woman in her habits and political outlook, possessed of a saintly nature and the spirit of a martyr.⁵² The biography also highlighted the Empress's renowned mysterious and ephemeral qualities, her attempts to escape public scrutiny, and her difficulties with court life and responsibilities that provided the fodder for tantalizing revelations and conspiratorial theories in subsequent biographies and popular treatments of her.

In the English-language literature, these earliest accounts were followed by works based on well-known reports about the Empress, for

50 Two of the most famous literary figures associated with Habsburg nostalgia are the authors Joseph Roth and Stephan Zweig, both Jews from the former Habsburg territories who waxed nostalgic about the multiethnic state. Indeed, Steven Beller reminds us that many Jews idealized the Habsburg Empire as a response to the rise of anti-Semitism. See Steven Beller, "The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of Fin-de-siècle Vienna," *Jewish Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (1996): 37–53.

51 Franz Kafka, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," in *Beschreibung eines Kampfes: Novellen, Skizzen, Aphorismen aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1983); for an English language edition, see Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzner, trans. Tania Stern and James Stern (New York: Schocken, 1995).

52 Marguerite Cunliffe-Owen, *The Martyrdom of an Empress* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899). This vision is portrayed throughout the text, but is mentioned specifically on pp. 35–7.

example Elizabeth Sprigge's *The Raven's Wing*, published in 1940 and inspired by Katriona Sprigge, an acquaintance of the Empress.⁵³ Later works recount series of vignettes that aim to reproduce aspects of the Empress's life that imagine her to be a deeply modern, perhaps even feminist, figure. For example, Elisabeth famously sported a tattoo, a sign of rebellion against not only the court but also against traditional gender roles. She loved, as is well known, hounds, horses, and the hunt.⁵⁴ The Empress Elisabeth's obsessions with exercise and diet have been mentioned in studies of food, history of medicine, and leisure. She was also enamored of modern technology and purportedly introduced a modern toilet system into the Hofburg. The fictional representation of Elisabeth as a metaphor for Austria, representing both its strengths and weaknesses, is the subject of Anita McChesney's essay in this collection, in which she shows how Empress Elisabeth represents Austria for a cross-section of twentieth-century Viennese residents in Lilian Faschinger's novel *Vienna Passion (Wiener Passion)* (1999). McChesney highlights how in Faschinger's text individual memories of Elisabeth construct the national vision vis-à-vis perceptions of ideal femininity. Elizabeth Black's essay likewise examines the transposition of Sissi in time and across class boundaries, as she is imagined on the stage and the screen as an entrapped and barely relevant representation of a dying monarchy in Jean Cocteau's *The Eagle Has Two Heads (L'Aigle à deux têtes)* (1943 and 1948, respectively).

Elisabeth is imagined both as a protector of the weak and as a model of beauty and modern civilization, embodying modernizing elements of the monarchy in its missions for the peoples of the empire. In these respects, she is viewed as a Greek goddess in the population's midst, a reputation furthered by her attention to classical beauty, her cultivation of the arts, particularly the classical arts, and her well-known affinity for Ancient Greece. Elisabeth loved to escape to Corfu and her Greek palace Achilleion, which forms an important backdrop for Maikler's essay on Karl Lagerfeld's fashion stagings at this site. The emphasis on the Empress's beauty and charisma in fashion circles and her enduring influence on style traverse the globe, as Wang and Hsia demonstrate in their examination of Sissi in China. In addition, the essays by Maikler, Florek, and Wang and Hsia offer insights into the Empress's links to modernity and feminism. Her status as a model of contemporary taste and as a modern icon of beauty and grace are reflected in the range of Sissi kitsch objects and memorabilia, from the Sissi Barbie doll to Sissi commemorative tea tins.

53 Elizabeth Sprigge, *Raven's Wing* (New York: Macmillan, 1940).

54 See John Welcome, *The Sporting Empress: The Story of Elizabeth of Austria and Bay Middleton* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975).

The Empress Elisabeth has also been tied to particular roles in different geographic contexts. For example, *The Sporting Empress* highlights her love of nature, open air, and sport in the context of sojourns in England and her relationship with Bay Middleton.⁵⁵ English-language novels tend to use the Empress’s relationship with Middleton as a means to write England into Sissi’s story. In these tales Sissi often plays the role of romantic foil who ultimately loses out to heroines of minor English nobility who triumph in capturing Middleton’s heart.⁵⁶ As Kate Thomas shows in her contribution to this volume, Sissi’s reception in the British context dovetails with the British perception of royalty, in particular with regard to the mythic image of Elisabeth’s contemporary royal, Queen Victoria.

If Sissi went to the United Kingdom to ride, she traversed Europe in her peregrinations as well. On the continent, tourists are beckoned to the Sisi Straße (Sisi’s road), a “cultural route” or tourist itinerary that traces Elisabeth’s paths, winding from the Unterwittelsbach mansion in Aichach, Bavaria to the Achilleion Palace in Corfu.⁵⁷ Tourist associations and tourism boards invite eager Sissi fans to walk in Sissi’s footsteps and tout Sissi/Sisi sites scattered throughout Central Europe. These travel packages capitalize on popular nostalgia, the memory of the Empress, and the romance of the Habsburg monarchy. The popularity of Sisi’s road marks the Empress as an iconic figure; tourists tracing her footsteps become pilgrims paying homage to her memory. But along the path, visions of the Empress are complicated and conflictual, and her legacy is uncertain and, as Hametz and Klabjan demonstrate in their essay on Elisabeth in Trieste, highly contingent with regard to time period and circumstances.

Social scientists appear to be endlessly fascinated by Sissi’s psyche. As Elisabeth’s life coincided with that of the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, it is tempting to utilize his methods in trying to understand her. Her death in 1898 coincides not only with Freud’s work on dreams, but also with his research on hysteria. It is truly surprising that there is no major case study of Elisabeth that diagnoses her as a hysteric in Freudian/Charcotian terms. Freud was treating his famous patient “Dora” in Vienna around the time of Elisabeth’s death, and the Empress’s poetry, the stories about her body obsessions and retreats from the public certainly invite an analysis of Elisabeth as an “hysteric”

55 See Welcome, *The Sporting Empress*.

56 Barbara Cartland, *Stars in My Heart* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1973) and Daisy Goodwin, *The Fortune Hunter: A Novel* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014). Goodwin has been translated into Spanish, Italian, and German.

57 Sisi’s Road—a Cultural Route (website). Available at: <http://www.sisi-strasse.info/en/home.html> (accessed July 10, 2016).

who represses her sexual desires. In a book purporting to get behind the myth of Elisabeth and Franz Joseph, the Italian Daniele Casini, a specialist in psychological literature and philosophy, teamed up with Guendalina Rossi, a psychiatrist, to construct a psychoanalytic dialogue and then to present a psychoanalytically informed anamnesis of the Empress Elisabeth and Franz Joseph to identify their illnesses and suggest proper treatment.⁵⁸ However, the medical maladies of the historical personage await further scrutiny in studies beyond the purview of this book.

The iconic image of the Empress of today can be traced to the figure portrayed by Romy Schneider in the 1950s *Sissi* film trilogy directed by Ernst Marischka and explored by Heidi Schlipphacke as movies that offer a complex (both straight and queer; historical and allegorical) engagement with post-fascist memory and aesthetics.⁵⁹ These post-World War II films, created at the beginning of the Cold War and reflecting western perspectives on femininity and domesticity typical of the 1950s, set the standard for the images of Sissi that predominate today. The first film of the trilogy, *Sissi*, premiered in 1955, the year of the signing of the post-war Austrian constitution ("Staatsvertrag"). The second and third films, *Sissi: The Young Empress* (*Sissi: Die junge Kaiserin*) and *Fateful Years of An Empress* (*Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin*), also starring Schneider, followed on the heels of the first, in 1956 and 1957, respectively. Screenings of these films attracted amongst the highest volume of filmgoers in German and Austrian history, and they remain among the most popular films in both countries; indeed, *Sissi* is still screened every year around Christmas on German and Austrian public television.

One key to the immense popularity of the films is the emergence of Romy Schneider as star. While the actress famously later said that "Sissi sticks to me just like cream of wheat," the fresh-faced daughter of actress Magda Schneider (who incidentally plays Sissi's mother in the films) captures the charisma of the Empress, transforming it into a captivating vision of Sissi in the imagination of a post-World War II public. And just as Sissi stuck to Romy, Romy stuck to Sissi after 1955. Ask a German or Austrian how she envisions Elisabeth, and she will describe Romy Schneider. Schneider's embodiment of the Empress, the blend of imperial nostalgia and modern femininity that Romy/Sissi perfected in the film, resonates not just in Europe, but globally, as Wang and Hsia show in their essay about the popularity of "Xixi" in modern China.

58 Daniela Casini, *Sissi & Franz: Dentro il mito* (Trieste: MGS Press, 2000).

59 Ernst Marischka (dir.), *Sissi* (Austria, Erma, 1955); *Sissi: Die junge Kaiserin* (Austria, Erma, 1956); *Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin* (Austria, Erma, 1957).

Of course, other films and theatrical productions about the Empress were made: Marischka produced a highly successful musical in the 1930s that was the source for Josef von Sternberg’s Hollywood version *The King Steps Out* (1936). More contemporary representations of the Sissi narrative were made in Germany, but these were not particularly successful.⁶⁰ Michael (Bully) Herbig’s animated parody *Lissi und der wilde Kaiser* of 2007 had more resonance (selling some 2.8 million tickets in the German-speaking countries), but its popularity cannot be compared to that of the Marischka films. Indeed, Herbig’s parody probably resonated precisely because of its clear citations of the Marischka films and the Romy/Sissi vision of the Empress that is one of the few universal pop culture references in Germany and Austria.⁶¹ Schneider’s reprisal of the Sissi role in Luchino Visconti’s 1973 film *Ludwig II* is both an homage and an exorcism of sorts, as Visconti’s Romy/Sissi both embodies the figure Marischka created and joyfully sabotages her in scenes in which Elisabeth teases her cousin Ludwig and muses critically on the various ways in which she functions as a projection screen for the subjects of the empire.⁶² This camp version of Sisi and the visions of her sabotage staged for the audience’s delight is at the heart of Susanne Hochreiter’s essay, which reveals the many ways in which Sisi’s character has been parodied and transformed on stage and screen. As Hochreiter’s contribution demonstrates, the narrative that venerates the Empress as a queer icon challenges convention and resonates across a variety of social groups, revealing a complex nexus of sex, gender, visibility, and society.

As brilliant as Schneider’s performance was in the Visconti film, it has seemingly had no sway over the iconic status of her earlier performance in the Marischka films. More successful in recent years has been the musical interpretation of the Sissi story, commissioned by the Vereinigte Bühnen Wien (VBW), which premiered in Vienna in 1992 and has been viewed by millions around the world, becoming the most popular German language musical ever produced.⁶³ The story of the Empress’s life, revived in Vienna twice in 2003 and 2012, has thrilled audiences across Europe and in Asia, in Tokyo, Seoul, and Shanghai. As we write this, the musical continues to tour, with engagements

60 Christoph Böll (dir.), *Sissi und der Kaiserkuss* (Maran Film/Calyppo/KG, 1991); and the 2009 German and Austrian public television joint production of *Sisi* (dir. Xaver Schwarzenberger, ZDF/ORF).

61 Michael “Bully” Herbig (dir.), *Lissi und der wilde Kaiser*, herbX film, 2007.

62 Luchino Visconti, *Ludwig II* (Mega Film/Cinetel/KG-Divina Film, 1973).

63 Based on the libretto “Elisabeth” by Michael Kunze and Sylvester Levay (Vienna, 1992).

scheduled throughout Germany in 2018.⁶⁴ While the success of the musical awaits scholarly interpretation, it is the story and music of the interpretation that seem to create the magic for audiences rather than the actors themselves. No contemporary performer has emerged to take Schneider's place as the revered Sissi.

Sissi in North America?

In our research on the reception of "Sissi," we have asked repeatedly why it is that this beloved figure has not traveled across the Atlantic to North America as she has to Asia. How is it that the Empress is relatively unknown in a country that fetishizes royalty while lacking any of its own? Persistent promises of an American Sissi film have failed to materialize. Iconic beauty "Catherine Zeta Jones will play the Empress Sissi," reported Mexico's *El Universal* in January 2008. Tom Hanks, according to the story, would star as Franz Joseph. A quick internet search offers several stories in Spanish and German reporting, according to sources in Paris, that Lilly Berger would produce the project linked to Time Warner and Disney on the fiftieth anniversary of Marischka's *Sissi* trilogy. A Hungarian culture site picked up on the theme, providing further details that the project would be filmed on location in Austria, Hungary, Italy, and India, and that filming was set to start in autumn 2009 but was delayed by a writers' strike.⁶⁵ Since 2009, no further mention of the promised romantic costume drama has surfaced, and the purported project does not appear to have left an imprint on American film circles, if it was ever a real project at all.⁶⁶

These were not the only rumors of a phantom Sissi film project. In her honors thesis at Smith College in April 2000 Kristin Kniss reported that British actor and director Sir Richard Attenborough planned to make a new "Sissi" film, with the lead to be played by Catherine Zeta-Jones. Kniss reported that filming was to begin in December of 2000.⁶⁷ These rumors from around the globe of the production of a Hollywood blockbuster portraying the Habsburg royal couple testify to the idiosyncratic and central place that Sissi holds in Europe, Latin America, and parts of Asia, where she is remembered as a great beauty and a tragic royal akin to a nineteenth-century Princess Diana.

64 Sissi: das Musical über Liebe, Macht und Leidenschaft (website). Available at: <http://www.sissi-musical.com/> (accessed November 7, 2017).

65 Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Hollywood 'Sisi' Film in the Making." Available at: <http://www.culture.hu/main.php?folderID=1085&articleID=266029&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed February 13, 2008).

66 We thank Kim Berner for investigating these reports and finding them to be mere speculations or rumors.

67 Kristin Kniss, "The Origin and Development of the Legend of Empress Elizabeth, 1859–2000," MA Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 2001, 9.

In the early part of the twentieth century, many Americans shared the European veneration of the enigmatic Empress and made pilgrimages to sites associated with her. In 1917, American writer John Stoddard was inspired to write poetry celebrating Elisabeth’s life upon seeing her “troubled marble face” on the statue in Merano, Italy. “Seated by the river, [i]n a robe of spotless white” Sissi’s “lovely face illumined [b]y the evening’s tender light”⁶⁸ are lines that offer the vision of an angel channeling holy light, recalling the tragic fate of the beautiful Elisabeth. And while the statue, erected in 1903, still stands today in Empress Elisabeth Park in Merano, it can hardly be called a pilgrimage site for contemporary Americans. Sissi is largely absent from American imaginations, and those who do stumble across her do so at one of the many sites dedicated to Elisabeth’s memory in Europe.

Allison Pataki’s historical novels, *The Accidental Empress: A Novel* (2015) and the most recent *Sisi: Empress on Her Own* (2017), both *New York Times* bestsellers, have raised the Empress’s profile for American audiences in recent years. But the book jacket for *Sisi: Empress on Her Own* assumes an ignorant readership, an American audience being introduced for the very first time to the historical figure at the center of the “sweeping and powerful novel,” that “tells the little-known story of Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary, the Princess Diana of her time, a dynamic heroine during the Golden Age of the Habsburg Empire.”⁶⁹ It is jaw-dropping that in 2017 the story of Elisabeth of Austria, who has fascinated fans across the globe for the last century and a half, is identified as “little-known.”

The Habsburg Empress’s failure to resonate with North American audiences is also surprising given the prevalence of images of central European princesses in popular fairy tales, particularly of Cinderella and her famous castle, immortalized by Walt Disney. Even in the post-war period, perspectives on the Habsburg monarchy have failed to capture American audiences. Despite its star-studded cast (the film starred Bing Crosby) and spectacular scenery (of the Canadian Rockies) and costumes that contributed to its garnering prestigious award nominations, Paramount Pictures’s *The Emperor Waltz* (1949)⁷⁰ is barely remembered.⁷¹

68 John L. Stoddard, “The Statue of the Empress Elizabeth. Meran,” in *Poems* (Chicago: Geo. L. Shuman & Co., 1917), 211–12.

69 Allison Pataki, *Sisi: Empress on Her Own* (New York: Dial Press, 2017).

70 Billy Wilder, dir., *The Emperor Waltz* (Paramount Pictures, 1949). The film depicts the true story of an American salesman’s attempt to sell a gramophone to Emperor Franz Joseph, offering an enjoyable mash up of American capitalist brashness with Habsburg ritualized etiquette.

71 Thank you to Joseph Patrouch for his observations on the use of the Canadian Rockies to depict the Alps. In 1949, the film received Academy Award nominations for Best Costume Design and Best Music, as well as a Writers Guild of America Award nomination for Best Written American Musical.

For American audiences, Austrian identity, if it is acknowledged, remains tied to romantic, cinematic visions of the “governess Maria” in *The Sound of Music* (1965), a film that portrays the escape of the Von Trapp singers from the Nazis in 1930s Salzburg in a fictionalized journey across the Alps into Switzerland.⁷² This image of Austria was surely rooted in the desire on the part of both the Austrian state and the Americans to distance the Second Republic of Austria from its Nazi past. The film reiterates the portrayal of Austria as Hitler’s “first victim” and as a site of anti-Nazi resistance and makes the country’s World War II history more palatable to worldwide audiences.⁷³

Young Americans may be introduced to the Empress in *Elisabeth: The Princess Bride, 1853* published in 2003 as the fourteenth book in Scholastic Press’s Royal Diaries series.⁷⁴ In the book, readers meet a highly fictionalized Elisabeth and follow her through her courtship and marriage to Franz Joseph, recounted as the “most dramatic moment in Sisi’s life.”⁷⁵ Author Barry Denenberg interestingly admits that he was drawn to the “enigmatic and enchanting Empress” while writing the fictionalized diary of an Austrian Jewish émigré escaping Hitler to the United States.⁷⁶

In adult fiction published in England, France, and Germany, Elisabeth appears as a tragic beauty, a misunderstood royal, or an enigmatic woman involved in romance and intrigue.⁷⁷ The penny novels play on Elisabeth’s well-known attempts to avoid the formalities

72 The film creates its own mythic Austrian landscape. Salzburg is near the German, not the Swiss, border, and its mountain scenes were actually filmed in Bavaria. Robert Wise, dir., *The Sound of Music* (20th Century Fox, 1965).

73 Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, “Beyond ‘The Sound of Music’: The Quest for Cultural Identity in Modern Austria,” *German Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 289–90.

74 The series of twenty books was published by Scholastic Press, Inc. from 1999 to 2003. It was relaunched in 2013 with the reprinting of the “diaries” of Anastasia and Marie Antoinette.

75 Barry Denenberg, *Elisabeth: The Princess Bride, 1853* (New York: Scholastic, 2003), 146.

76 Denenberg, *Elisabeth*, 146. His research on Austria in the 1930s was for *One Eye Laughing, the Other Weeping: The Diary of Julie Weiss, Vienna, Austria to New York 1938* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2000), published in the Dear America series of thirty-six books from 1996 to 2004. His description of Elisabeth, designed for a young audience, encapsulates the myths of her life and memory at the turn of the twenty-first century: “Her extraordinary beauty, which was legendary, was complimented by her independent spirit and liberal political philosophy: characteristics of a woman born ahead of her time. She paid a dear price for her nonconformist ways,” 146.

77 In France, Sissi is the subject of a four-volume series of youth books written by Christine Féret-Fleury recounting her life from infancy to her engagement at Bad Ischl. She also appears in the illustrated French children’s series *Grandes*

of court life, her horsemanship, and reputation as a friend of the common people.⁷⁸ Recent novels in English reflect their authors’ personal sympathies with the Elisabeth story, sympathies that are often inspired by familial or ethnic ties to the former Habsburg lands or by travel and encounter with the Sissi myth promulgated in museums and exhibitions throughout Central Europe and around the world.⁷⁹

In light of the overlapping, intertwining, and yet distinctive understandings of the concepts of memory and myth presented in this volume, we have organized it in two sections. The first section, “Memory,” includes essays that emphasize physical representations of the Empress that attempt to capture her as an historic figure and then reimagine her place in time and space. The second section, “Myth,” includes essays that explore depictions of Elisabeth in which the Empress is represented through the lens of reconstructed visions that themselves often serve to reconfigure Sissi in the modern world.⁸⁰

There is, of course, much scope for future research. Some areas of research less popular with respect to current analytical frameworks and therefore not well represented in this volume cry out for further examination. For example, the monarchy has enjoyed a reputation as a staunch protector of Catholicism, a trait that has served as a basis for a distinctive Austrian national identity and, particularly in the wake of World War II, as an element of differentiation between Austrian and German state identities when Austrians sought to distance themselves from their role in the crimes of Nazism.⁸¹ Understandings of Habsburg relations to the Church and piety have played a significant role in conceptions of country and nation within the various geographical contexts

figures de l’histoire written by Patricia Crété and published by Quelle Histoire. The volume *Sissi*, published in December 2016, joins treatments of other famous historic figures, including such women as Marie Curie, Coco Chanel, and Marie Antoinette. German-language books depicting the life of Sissi range from popular historiographies to children’s books to coloring books and a graphic novel.

78 For example, Cartland, *Stars in My Heart*, a romantic Cinderella story of a young English girl who discovers herself to be Elisabeth’s (illegitimate) half-sister and finds her prince charming in an English lord while impersonating the empress on an official visit.

79 For example, Pataki’s *The Accidental Empress* is a fictionalized account of the Empress’s life from July 1853, just prior to her meeting Franz Joseph, to June 1867, the Hungarian coronation of Elisabeth and Franz Joseph in Budapest, with emphasis on her relationship with the Hungarians and Count Gyula Andrassy. The book was inspired by a visit to Schönbrunn Palace and sparked by her interest in her family’s Hungarian heritage. See Pataki, *Accidental Empress*, 480–88.

80 We acknowledge that the essays cannot be neatly fit into these two categories but that all bridge both categories as well, recalling Barthes’s overlapping definitions of memory and myth.

81 Thaler, *Ambivalence of Identity*, 59–60, 138–39.

in the former empire.⁸² The Empress's role as consort in upholding the faith and in representing Catholicism throughout the realm affected and continues to affect the reception of her in the contemporary world. In light of the resurgence of Catholicism in Central Europe in the wake of the Soviet collapse, this would no doubt offer a fruitful avenue for research. Of particular interest in this context, for example, might be the ways in which her memory must also be associated with Elizabeth of Hungary or Elizabeth of Thuringia, the thirteenth-century queen canonized in 1235 and the patron saint of Hungary. The sainted Elizabeth, associated with works of public charity in favor of the poor and hungry, with the followers of St. Francis of Assisi (particularly in terms of the love of nature) and even with the symbol of the rose, was herself the subject of studies in the Empress's lifetime that extended to her diet and relationship with German and Adriatic nobility (on her mother's side) as opposed to Hungarian royalty (on her father's side).⁸³ Thus, comparisons of the Empress to remote, historical figures might be as relevant to understanding the vitality of the Elisabeth myth as comparisons to contemporary figures such as Lady Diana.

The essays collected here nevertheless offer key points of access to what we call "Sissi's World," the diverse constellation of consumer objects and cultural works that refer, whether directly or indirectly, to the Empress Elisabeth. Taken together, these cultural artifacts reflect an affective excess or remainder that is channeled into representations of Sissi. Sissi, it seems, is able to embody and contain our wayward emotions, be they identificatory, fetishizing, idolatrous, nostalgic or ironic. In light of the precarity of life in what Ulrich Beck calls the "global risk society," Sissi likewise serves as a vessel for nostalgic ideologies.⁸⁴ A specter who haunts a good deal of the world, a wax figure, a beautiful, melancholy friend, the discursive construct "Sissi" has created her own form of cultural empire, one within which, we must admit, we travel with great pleasure.

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82 On "Pietas Austriaca" and "Pietas Habsburgica" in the geographic context, see Marie-Elizabeth Ducreaux, "Emperors, Kingdoms, Territories: Multiple Versions of the 'Pietas Austriaca'?" *Catholic Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2011): 280.

83 For a brief account of the life and associations of St. Elizabeth, see "St. Elizabeth of Hungary," *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05389a.htm> (accessed July 5, 2017).

84 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992).

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