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Jour fixe Kulturwissenschaften
Donnerstag, 22. September 2011 / 16.00 Uhr
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Das Wien von Gestern: The City and its Jewish Writers in the period of the First Austrian Republic. A New Generation?

Anat Varon (Jerusalem)

The period of the first Austrian Republic is usually conceived as a period of great economical, social and political crisis. The republic itself suffers from the bad image of being 'A State that no one wanted', as Hellmut Andics called it. This may explain why so little research-work has been done so far on the cultural history of the First Republic.

In my dissertation work about the Austrian-Czech-Jewish poet and novelist Franz Werfel - who wrote some of his most important works in Austria of the First Republic - I try to offer a somewhat new approach to the period. I look at it not only from its post First World War crisis, but also from a perspective of redefinition and experiment - a time of a search and emergence of a new generation. One of the main aspects to this approach is to review the period from the point of view of the Generational Theory, much like it has been done with Weimar Germany (e.g. Helmut Lethen's study *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte*). In what way can we talk about New Generation of intellectuals in interwar Austria? And how this generational theory discourse - from Karl Mannheim to Aleida Assmann - helps us to understand the specific cultural history of the First Austrian Republic?

In my work I concentrate mainly on the field of literature, and here I follow to some extent Steven Beller's previous works on the subject of Austrian-Jewish intellectuals and their contribution to modern Austrian culture. Beller, has already pointed out that it was in this period of the First Republic that Jews were most prominent in the Arts and Sciences. But of course the main question still remains open, how do we define such a Jewish intellectual? Furthermore, how do we define a Jewish writer? Is there even a reason for us to use such a definition? I will address these questions while discussing the 'Beller-Gombrich debate' on this issue and its relevance to the period of the First Republic.

In my lecture I will focus on three Jewish writers at the time of the First Republic: Richard A. Bermann, Leo Perutz and Franz Werfel, as representatives of the New Generation of Jewish writers in interwar Vienna.

Anat Varon is a PhD student at the Hebrew University at the Center for Austrian Studies. Her dissertation entitled: *Dreimal Werfel, Dreimal Österreich: Franz Werfel and the Search for Identity in Vienna of the First Republic, 1918-1938*. She wrote her master-thesis on the topic of the Austrian-Jewish Identity of Stefan Zweig and Franz Werfel as Reflected in their works on the Prophet Jeremiah.