

Artistic and Social Tensions in the Pages of *Ver Sacrum*
Künstlerische und soziale Spannungen in den Seiten von *Ver Sacrum*

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Vienna has for a long time fascinated scholars of history, art, politics and culture. A unique cultural hub at the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was a modern city and home to many well-known artistic masters. In the fin-de-siècle, Vienna was a bustling center for change, ripe with tradition yet teeming with modern ideas that paved the way for the internal clashes, tensions, and conflicts that permeated the city. Fin-de-siècle Vienna saw one of the most famous artistic separations in Austrian, if not European, history. Young, modern-thinking artists separated from their traditional and rigid forefathers to create the Secession movement in 1897. The group, Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, with Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Koloman Moser (1868-1918) at the helm, consisted of modern artists whose mediums ranged from painting to architecture, and their legacy would eventually include a museum, the Secessionsgebäude, and an art journal, *Ver Sacrum* (1898-1903).

In three essays, focusing on Gustav Klimt's controversial artwork, depictions of the naked body, and Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) contributions to the journal, this thesis explores the artistic and cultural tensions that permeated the pages of *Ver Sacrum* and demonstrates the journal's role in fin-de-siècle Viennese cultural creation. Using *Ver Sacrum* to study and understand fin-de-siècle Vienna, this thesis demonstrates how the journal was influenced by the tensions of modern Vienna and how, at the same time, it contributed to those tensions. Emphasizing the journal's recognition of and contributions to the artistic and social tensions which permeated fin-de-siècle Vienna, this thesis explores *Ver Sacrum's* significant place in the creation and understanding of Viennese art and cultural history.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Vienna in the Fin-de-Siècle

Vienna has for a long-time fascinated scholars of history, art, politics, and culture. A unique cultural hub in turn-of-the-century Europe, and as the growing capital city of the Hapsburg Empire, Vienna was a modern city and home to many well-known artistic masters. Known as the birthplace of psychoanalysis, the home of classical music, opera, and theatre, and a vital part of the avant-garde, modern visual arts community, Vienna in the fin-de-siècle was a bustling center for change, ripe with tradition yet teeming with modern ideas which paved the way for the internal clashes, tensions, and conflicts which permeated the city.

Austria was, at the time, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The “Ausgleich” or Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 reshaped the relationship between the two countries and allowed the people of both Austria and Hungary more political autonomy. The compromise brought Austria and Hungary together after years of a strained political relationship and hostility (Williamson Jr; Frank; Tihany). This system of government stayed in place until 1918. As the new century approached, however, this political system began to fail.

The study of fin-de-siècle Vienna is wide-ranging, and the scholarship explores many facets of the era. Carl E. Schorske’s field-defining book, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, examines the political and social tensions in fin-de-siècle Vienna through a series of essays on psychology, art, and politics; Alys X. George’s new and fresh work, *The Naked Truth: Viennese Modernism and the Body*, on the body as the core of fin-de-siècle cultural creation, has added to the interpretation of the tensions of the age. Robert Weldon Whalen’s *Sacred Spring and God and the Birth of Modernism in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, exploring how seemingly opposing

notions, namely modernism and religion, are deeply connected during this era, has added to the understanding of social tension and contradictory beliefs that are associated with the arts of the age. These books provide an understanding of the dichotomous atmosphere of fin-de-siècle Vienna. Though each scholar explores different aspects of the period – religion, the body, or psychology – they each understand that Vienna was an environment of instability, tensions, and uncertainty at the time.

Having lived through recent political changes and experiencing a political crisis, Austria's population was experiencing fear based on real upheaval. The people "acutely felt tremors of social and political disintegration" (Schorske xviii). Amid these tensions, thinkers like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) were bringing new ideas and concepts to the public and artists were creating more and more controversial pieces. "Historians...argue that Vienna's distinctive culture, its specific moment in time, its oddities and failings, gave rise to 'modernism'" (Whalen 3). Vienna's particular conditions of political instability and increasing cultural tensions created the conditions that allowed for new ideas, styles, and ways of thinking to come into existence. The people of Vienna, sensing this tension and fearful of the coming changes to their political system, also began to feel the continent-wide changes as ideas and talk of modernism reached the city.

Modernism

Modernism, which was sweeping through Europe at the turn of the 20th century, was just entering the Austrian Zeitgeist when the Secession movement began in 1897. New ideas of the self, of art, and of politics were becoming more commonplace; and a younger generation of thinkers was swiftly rising up to protest the traditions of those who had come before them. Major political and cultural cities throughout Europe saw modernism in art, thought, and culture

becoming a trend. Vienna, the capital city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was known as a cultural epicentre of Europe, and yet, as other countries began to embrace the changing cultural tastes, Austria remained steadfast in its traditional styles and art. Young artists in Vienna, spurred on by the traditionalism which swiftly moved towards censorship, embraced modernism and separated from the traditional ways of their predecessors.

The term “modernism,” which is vital to understanding the circumstances in which the Secession movement came about, can be used in many academic fields to mean many different things. History, art, thought, and other areas of study have their own use of the term modernism. While the term “modernity” is often used to discuss an era or time period, modernism usually refers to artistic, literary, or cultural trends (Waissenberger 9). Academic and critic Rita Felski says in her book *The Gender of Modernity* that the ambiguity of the term results from the fact that modernism has been used both as a generalized term to refer to various cultural, social, and philosophical trends happening at the same time period (Felski 12-13). While modernity refers to a time, modernism is usually associated with style or trend. European modernism was “understood as a range of internally contradictory aesthetic responses to modernity” (Björk 109). The dawn of a new and mechanical modern world brought with it tension and apprehension which infiltrated all areas of life, especially art.

The study of fin-de-siècle Vienna offers many different interpretations of modernism. Whalen discusses modernism’s origins as a reaction to the historically religious culture of Vienna. George argues that it was modernism that paved the way for the sharing of knowledge that put the body on display in Vienna at the time. For Heidi Hakkarainen, modernism is a reaction to political and economic alienation which manifested and transformed urban spaces and humour in Vienna. Schorske explores the “acutely felt tremors of social and political

disintegration” that made possible the enthusiastic acceptance of modernism in the traditional city of Vienna (Schorske xvii). What all these scholars agree on, despite exploring different facets of modernism’s influence, is that modernism was a reaction to something. Life in Vienna at the time was a complex, changing mosaic. Anxiety and tension prevailed and the introduction of modernism was both a result of and a reason for these tensions; as Robert Waissenberger says in his book on the Secession movement, “der Wiener ärgert sich tatsächlich und keinesfalls immer nur oberflächlich über das Neue” (Waissenberger 9). The new and ever-changing environment of fin-de-siècle left its people with distrust for their current political and social systems and with uncertainty about what would come.

Viennese modernism is at the center of Carl E. Schorske’s seminal work, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*. Published in 1981, Schorske’s definitions of modernism as it relates to fin-de-siècle Vienna are still cited in scholarly work on Vienna. Modernism, says Schorske, defines itself “not out of the past, indeed scarcely *against* the past, but in independence of the past” (xvii). Where other instances of “progress” have defined themselves in contrast to tradition, modernism requires a complete separation from tradition. Modernism is not about being the opposite or being different from the past, conservative traditions, but rather being entirely new, something with which people had never been confronted. That is what defined modernism: a completely new approach to art, culture, and life.

It is unsurprising that at the turn of the new and frightening century, as young artists in Vienna were being excluded from existing art circles, they in turn began to seek separation from their more traditional, old-school forefathers. If, as Schorske says, modernism is a “generational rebellion against the fathers and a search for new self-definitions,” and a “collective oedipal

revolt,” then the Secession movement can only be described as an art movement that grew out of and was propelled by modernism (Schorske xviii-xxvi).

Secession Movement

Fin-de-siècle Vienna saw one of the most famous artistic separations in Austrian, if not European, history. When, in 1897, conservative artists in Austria’s capital city refused to allow more modern art, which they considered to be obscene and unnatural, into the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the censored artists pushed back by starting their own art movement that same year, the Secession movement. The group, Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, with Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Koloman Moser (1868-1918) at the helm, consisted of modern artists whose mediums ranged from painting to architecture, and their legacy would eventually include a museum, the Secessionsgebäude, and an art journal, *Ver Sacrum*.

This “[spektakuläre Austritt] aus der Künstlerhaus-Genossenschaft” caused an uproar in Vienna and garnered international recognition, attracting artists and visionaries from across Europe, including from Germany and England (Waissenberger 9). The goals of the organization were to step away from the artistic nationalism that censored their art, become a part of the artistic exchange that had already begun in the rest of the continent, and grapple with the question of artistic Austrian identity in a new world of modernity (Waissenberger 10-11; Felderer et al. 13; Vergo 21-23).

The movement was founded with a question of identity at its core. What did it mean to be Austrian? What was Austrian art? From its founding in 1897 to its dissolution in 1939, the Secession movement was confronted with the question of Austrian identity. “Mit ihrer Selbstbezeichnung als *Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs* bekannte sich die Secession dazu, österreichisch zu sein, und wurde damit durch ihre Kunst in die schwierige und komplexe

Frage der Definition einer Nation miteinbezogen” (Felderer et al. 13). Having been refused entry into the national museum of art, the founders of the Secession were confronted with the dichotomy of being Austrian artists while also being banned from presenting their work to Austrians in Austrian art museums. The artists “engaged in critical reformulations or subversive transformations of their traditions that their own society perceived as radically new if not indeed revolutionary” (Schorske xxvi). The Secession movement shook Vienna’s cultural foundation. The revolutionary style and design of their work changed the face of Vienna, both physically through their contributions to Viennese architecture and metaphorically by taking a community steeped in tradition and offering them a new perspective. Similar to the art nouveau scene in France and the German Jugendstil, the Secession movement existed not as an antithesis of the traditional, realist art of the time, but as a completely new start; a purposeful step away from what had been done into a movement of innovation and creativity (Vergo).

Gustav Klimt, lovingly referred to as the “König” by his close circle in the Secessionist community, became the public face of the movement and, unsurprisingly, he also became the first president of the organization (Waissenberger 79). Klimt, born to a goldsmith and artisan, was one of seven children. His art earned a reputation for being controversial and “riddled with contradictions” (Whalen 74). His early works were for the most part realist portraits of aristocratic figures, a far cry from his innovative later work. Klimt was known throughout Vienna as an eccentric, often seen traversing the Viennese Innenstadt in a smock and sandals no matter the weather. His work took a drastic turn in the early 1890s when his father, brother, and lover all died within a year of each other. “Death had come over Klimt” (Whalen 79). His work developed after that – his University Paintings, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, were the object

of major criticism and backlash – and a few years later he was a driving force in the creation of the Secession.

In 1896, following the leadership of Klimt, a group of younger artists who objected to the “narrowness and provincialism” of the Künstlerhaus, attempted to get one of their own elected to a leadership position and failed. “The *Künstlerhaus* was riven into factions – ‘conservatives’ and ‘progressives,’ ‘traditionalists and ‘radicals’” (Whalen 112). These artists believed that each time should be allowed its own art and that all art should be allowed freedom. As their motto stated, “Der Zeit ihre Kunst – Der Kunst ihre Freiheit.” Given their frustrations with the way the organization was being run, being denied leadership in the organization, and not being allowed to display their less traditional works, these younger artists formed their own association, one which would not impede on the freedom of an art and a time: the Secession.

The Secession attracted a number of artists. Koloman Moser, a graphic artist, was a leading figure in the founding of the Secession and the creation of their art journal, *Ver Sacrum*. Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) was an Austrian-Moravian architect and designer. Born in what is now the Czech Republic, Hoffmann brought interior design, style, and architecture to the Secession movement. Otto Wagner (1841-1918) was a well-known and influential Viennese architect famous for his modern building techniques and aesthetic. Painter Maximilian Kurzweil (1867-1916) was a prominent and frequent editor and illustrator for *Ver Sacrum*. In 1909, Kurzweil became a professor at the Kunstschule für Frauen und Mädchen, offering women and girls more opportunities to contribute to the artistic identity of Austria. Josef Maria Olbrich (1867-1908) was an instrumental founding member of the Secession movement who designed their famous and controversial exhibition building, the Secessionsgebäude, and worked closely with Otto Wagner to help bring modernism to the cityscape of Vienna (Hakkarainen). Other

founding members of the Secession movement included Josef Maria Auchentaller (1865-1949), Adolf Böhm (1861-1927), Friedrich König (1857-1941), Maximilian Lenz (1860-1948), Carl Moll (1861-1945), and Ernst Stöhr (1860-1917), among others (Nebehay).

With the creation of the Secession movement, the founders saw an opportunity to spread their ideas about modernism and art through Austria and Europe. Their search for the meaning of Austrian identity and what Austrian art was was bigger than just the group of artists who disagreed with the traditions of their forefathers. These were questions that belonged to the nation, questions that imbued the lives of Austrians across the nation, leading to uncertainty and tension.

Ver Sacrum

The Secession journal *Ver Sacrum* was a monthly (and later bi-monthly) publication of art and literature that appeared between the years 1898 and 1903. Considered by the Secessionists to be the “organ” of Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, *Ver Sacrum* was a way for artists of Austria, mostly concentrated in the capital city of Vienna, to make themselves and their country a part of the conversation. Modernist art journals were common across Europe at the time, from Munich to Paris, as well as outside of Europe. Austria did not have a voice in this conversation on modernism, and the Secession movement, which prided itself on creating new traditions and art throughout Austria, saw an opportunity to “encourage, promote and propagate the nation’s artistic life and artistic independence” (Nebehay 24). In its anonymous and provocative foreword, *Ver Sacrum* advocated for transcending the special discourse surrounding “high” and “low” art, seeing “no difference” between the two and demanding instead that art be allowed to speak for itself, and the audience be allowed to come to their own conclusions (*Ver Sacrum*, I, i, 24-27). The journal’s title, *Ver Sacrum*, Latin for “Sacred Spring,” became

synonymous at the time with the revolutionary, evocative work the journal exhibited. “The [journal] was an original cultural enterprise in that it proposed new forms of design, illustration and editorial and typographic composition, which over the course of a few years codified a revolutionary expressive system” (Jobst 289).

In the introductory essay to *Ver Sacrum*, Max Burckhard (1854-1912) presents the readers of the journal with the Secession’s goals for their publication. It is not for personal or selfish reasons, says Burckhard, that the Secessionist artists separated from the traditional art communities, but for the sake of the art. The Secessionists set forth to preserve the freedom of art to grow and evolve in their journal.

Der Geist der Jugend, der den Frühling durchweht, er hat sie zusammengeführt, der Geist der Jugend, durch welchen die Gegenwart immer zur “Moderne” wird, der die treibende Kraft ist für künstlerisches Schaffen, er soll auch diesen Blättern den Namen geben im Sinnbilde des VER SACRUM. (*Ver Sacrum*, I, i, p. 3)

The goal of *Ver Sacrum* was to protect that youthful spirit of art and creativity and offer the space for modernism, the “triebende Kraft” of creativity to enter traditional Vienna.

With the goal of engaging the Viennese public with art in all its forms, *Ver Sacrum* produced a total of 120 issues in its six-year life. Secessionist artists provided a total of 471 drawings, 55 original lithographs, and 216 woodcuts to the journal (Brooker et al. 997). The journal was not widely distributed, and it never grew to international fame, circulating mostly in Vienna. The journal was unique in several ways including its binding and formatting. For the first two years of publication, 1898 to 1899, the journal’s dimensions were 29.7 by 28.8 cm. For the final three years, 1900 to 1903, the formatting changed to 26.5 by 25.5 cm. This unique, almost square formatting distinguished *Ver Sacrum* “amongst the burgeoning new European market of art and design periodicals” (Brooker et al. 995). From 1898 to 1899, the issues

consisted of loose papers in a folder, with the cover of each issue on the folder. From 1900 until 1903, each issue was bound with the cover, printed on the front of the binding. There is no indication as to why these changes were made in 1900 apart from the ever-changing publisher, printer, and blocker which, in 1900, became the responsibility of the Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, the Secession itself (Nebehay).

Each issue came in a Normal Edition and a Founders' Edition. There is limited information about the Founders' Editions, only that the latter were bound with higher quality material, had more ornate covers, included pages of transparent paper with vignettes, and were never sold commercially (Nebehay 32). On March 9, 2022, a rare set of the Founders' Editions of *Ver Sacrum* was put on auction at the Auktionshaus im Kinsky. The complete set was estimated to be worth between €35,000 and €70,000, though the final sale price has not been disclosed. Before this auction, there is no information about who would be in a position to receive any Founders' Edition issues of *Ver Sacrum*; they were never sold, only given. Austrian art dealer, art collector and author Christian M. Nebehay, who was a friend of many Secession artists, was a recipient of a *Ver Sacrum* Founders' Edition set. The physical descriptions here are based on his copies (Nebehay).

The price of *Ver Sacrum* varied drastically during its publication run. In 1898, single issues were sold for 2 Kronen, the currency of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the early 1890s, when they adopted the gold standard, until post-World War 1 (Jobst 289). A yearly subscription to *Ver Sacrum* in 1898 was 12 Kronen. Those prices could not be maintained, however, and a yearly subscription rose to 50 Kronen in 1899 and 400 Kronen in 1900. In 1901, it dropped again to 200 Kronen. The prices for the last two years of publication are not known.

Today, a complete set of Normal Edition *Ver Sacrum* would cost approximately €24,287 (Nebahay 32).

The journal lacked any consistent or transparent publishing practices in its early years. Each year the editors, both literary and artistic, changed. From 1900 until 1903, the Secession movement relied on different members of the movement to publish and edit each issue. Because each artist was donating their time, they were careful to rotate the publishing responsibilities.

Publishers, Printers, and Blockers for <i>Ver Sacrum</i>, 1898 to 1903.			
Year	Publisher	Printer	Blocker
1898	Gerlach und Schenk, Vienna	Phillipp und Kramer, Vienna	Angerer und Göschl, Vienna
1899	E. A. Seemann, Leipzig	Issues 1-5: Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig Issues 6-12: Unknown, Leipzig	Unknown
1900	Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, Vienna	Adolf Holzhaus, Vienna	Graphische Union, Vienna
1901	Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, Vienna	Adolf Holzhaus, Vienna	Graphische Union, Vienna
1902	Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, Vienna	Adolf Holzhaus, Vienna	Graphische Union, Vienna
1903	Die Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs, Vienna	Adolf Holzhaus, Vienna	Graphische Union, Vienna

Table 1

The editorship of *Ver Sacrum* changed frequently. Each issue had a literary editor and an artistic editor, and more than one person often occupied these roles (Nebahay 28-29). Each issue's artistic contributions were edited to a constantly changing selection of members of the Secession. Because each piece of art was donated by the artists, they were never asked to

contribute too much of their time or resources and therefore, the artistic editors were constantly rotated (Nebehay 29-30). The size of the project and the attention it required were not the primary focus of the Secession and the journal’s contributors. Each editor, both literary and artistic, had many other commitments. “A group of enthusiastic amateurs and especially ones that changed with some frequency in the course of six years could not in the long run maintain the level achieved, particularly as not one was in a position to devote [their] whole energy to the magazine” (Nebehay 36).

Artistic and Literary Editors for <i>Ver Sacrum</i>, 1898 to 1903		
Year	Art Editor	Literary Editor
1898	Alfred Roller, Josef Hoffman, and Koloman Moser	Issues 1-6: Wilhelm Schölermann assisted by Hermann Bahr and Dr. Max Burckhard, Vienna Issues 7-12 and Sonderheft: Hermann Bahr and Dr. Max Burckhard, Vienna
1899	Friedrich König, Koloman Moser, J.M. Olbrich, and Alfred Roller	Issue 1: Joseph Maria Olbrech, Vienna Issue 2-6: Dr. Franz Zweybrück, Vienna Issue 7-12: E. A. Seemann, Leipzig
1900	Gustav Klimt, J.M. Auchentaller, and Otto Friedrich	Ferdinand Andri, Vienna
1901	J.M. Auchentaller, Adolf Böhm, Wilhelm List, and Koloman Moser	Committee of Artists in the Secession Movement, Vienna
1902	Leopold Bauer, Rudolf Jettmar, Ferdinand Schmutzer, and Leopold Stolba	Committee of Artists in the Secession Movement, Vienna
1903	Max Kurzweil, Koloman Moser, Alfred Roller, Leopold Stolba	Committee of Artists in the Secession Movement, Vienna

Table 2

Despite the lack of consistency in the editorial practices of *Ver Sacrum*, the journal was unique in its uniform style and design. Its “singular, unified aesthetic” distinguished *Ver Sacrum* from other avant-garde and Art Nouveau journals in Europe at the time (Brooker et al. 993). The

uniform aesthetic of the journal, which included the advertisement pages at the end of each issue, was a choice by the Secessionists, for whom art and style were intrinsic to the material design of *Ver Sacrum*. The consistency of design coupled with the unique shape and aesthetic of *Ver Sacrum* made this short-lived journal a symbol “used by modern-day Vienna to signify this extraordinary period” (Brooker et al. 1013). Despite this, the role of *Ver Sacrum* in understanding the artistic and social tensions of fin-de-siècle Vienna has been largely overlooked. *Ver Sacrum* stopped publishing in 1903 but the Secession movement lasted well into the 20th century, dissolving in 1939 after the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria by Germany.

Methodology

Situated in the literary and historical discussion on dichotomy and tensions in fin-de-siècle Vienna, the methodology for this project will be a close reading of *Ver Sacrum*, as well as an artistic and literary analysis of selected issues, themes, and contributors. With 120 issues of the journal, there is an extensive amount of material that could be covered. For this thesis, I have chosen three areas of focus which highlight the artistic and social tensions in *Ver Sacrum* and contextualize them in fin-de-siècle Vienna. By exploring how these themes, pieces, and issues contribute to the tensions and uncertainties, this thesis has centred *Ver Sacrum* in the scholarly conversation to develop a literary, cultural, and historical interpretation of the journal.

The term “Zeitschrift” will be translated to “journal” for this project. The reason for this translation, rather than the more common translation of “magazine,” is to bring terminology in line with periodical studies. Periodical studies can include journals, contemporary magazines, and more. The art journal *Ver Sacrum* should not be considered a magazine in the way that periodical studies examines contemporary magazines.

Given the modality of *Ver Sacrum*, understanding how to study a journal such as this is vital to the analysis. As a discipline, periodical studies is still in its early stages but it provides a useful framework for analyzing *Ver Sacrum* on its own merits and as a singular unit, focusing on how the journal as a whole exists in fin-de-siècle Vienna, rather than how the individual contributors, pieces, or issues exist in the pages of *Ver Sacrum* (Latham and Scholes; Ernst et al.; Powell).

Periodical studies emphasizes placing the periodical at the centre of analysis and drawing conclusions about the journal, the time, the place, and the people through the journal. Rather than placing the journal in the contextual circumstances, periodical studies foregrounds the journal, using it to understand the contextual circumstances in which it was produced. Looking at the periodical as an important piece of primary history, periodical studies underscores the significance of periodicals to cultural and identity creation. “We might start with only one assumption: that the periodical is valuable simply because it exists—because it once performed some desirable functions for some number of people—and set as our first conceptual task reaching some hypotheses on what those functions were” (Collier 109). Placing *Ver Sacrum* in a place of value simply because it existed and performed a function for the Secession raises the central question about how the journal informed the society in which it existed and vice versa. Periodical studies has been largely overlooked in Eastern European studies, especially German and Austrian Studies (Gleissner). Using periodical studies’ methodology to underscore *Ver Sacrum*’s place and involvement in fin-de-siècle allows for a fuller, all-encompassing look into fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Using periodical studies as a basis for analysis, the questions that inform the close reading of *Ver Sacrum* are numerous. Addressing the moment in which the journal appeared,

periodical studies is ultimately a study of a specific time and place by means of a publication. In this case, the analysis of *Ver Sacrum* will offer a look at the people and places who create, read, and interact with the journal (Alexander 29). By utilizing this methodology to explore the pages of *Ver Sacrum*, the analysis will allow for a detailed examination of the journal's content as well as its context – how and where it exists in time and space. This analysis will examine *Ver Sacrum*'s place in fin-de-siècle Vienna and emphasize the importance of the journal for understanding the artistic and social tensions which infiltrated the city at the time. This thesis will also demonstrate how periodical studies can and should be used in German and Austrian studies to further the scholarly discourse.

Chapter 2: Gustav Klimt and Controversy in *Ver Sacrum*

Introduction

In March of 1898, the third issue of *Ver Sacrum* appeared. This issue was different from the two previous issues because it was dedicated entirely to the work of the organization's president, Gustav Klimt. No other visual artists' works were present in the issue and it is unclear why this issue focused on Klimt and his art. Perhaps because of his position as president of the Secession, he was chosen as the first artist to have an issue dedicated to his work alone. Though this was the first issue highlighting one artist, it was not the last. Throughout the many published issues, artists were given their own issue of *Ver Sacrum* in which to display their work.

The twenty-four-page issue begins with a brief biography of Klimt and his family. The introduction emphasizes his importance and authenticity as a Viennese artist and the work for which he had just been commissioned, a piece for the University of Vienna Aula ceiling. The next six pages are taken up by works by Klimt, including "Entwurf für ein Deckengemälde 'Hygieia.'" These six pieces are either figure or portrait studies or sketches for future works, including a poster and one of the University ceiling paintings. Only one of these six images was created specifically for publication in *Ver Sacrum*, "Fischblut" (*Ver Sacrum*, I, iii, 6).

The next eleven pages include both a literary piece and accompanying art by Klimt. The literary piece is entitled "Symbolistik vor hundert Jahren" and discusses the symbolism and mysticism of art as a reflection of the world's beauty. This piece, written by Dr. Ricarda Huch (1864-1947), explores the future of painting and its role in the "Einssein" of the world (*Ver Sacrum*, I, iii, 7). The piece ends by suggesting that painting should expand to explore other arts such as music and poetry. Each page of this literary addition includes art by Klimt. There are

eight reproductions or fragments of Klimt's previous work, three studies, and two pieces created specifically for *Ver Sacrum*.

Page 19 includes a two-stanza poem by Rainer Maria Rilke which was taken from a work entitled "Advent" published in 1897 by P. Friesenhahn in Leipzig (Engel and Fülleborn 605). The poem, a story of small connections between two lovers in an "Abendgarten" interrupted by a mysterious presence, explores the assertion in the previous piece that art should expand into poetry. The accompanying piece of art by Klimt depicts a woman with a harp under the trellis described in Rilke's work. The next three pages of the issue are sketches, portraits, and studies done by Klimt. Finally, the issue's last pages are dedicated to the Secession's coming exhibition. It begins with a request from the President of the organization, Klimt himself, for readers to attend the exhibition.

Utilizing this issue and the piece "Entwurf für ein Deckengemälde 'Hygieia,'" this chapter explores the tensions and dichotomies expressed in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. By expanding on the scholarship of Klimt's work and the criticism he received, I bring *Ver Sacrum* into the conversation and determine how the journal is both a reflection of and responsible for social-political tensions and discussions about the function of art in fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Description

One of the pieces by Klimt in this issue of *Ver Sacrum* that has been of interest to many scholars is the sketch that would become a piece of public art titled *Medizin*. The piece, "Entwurf für ein Deckengemälde 'Hygieia,'" (Figure 1) is the original sketch of Klimt's famous ceiling painting *die Medizin (Fakultätsbild)* for which he was commissioned by the University of Vienna. The image depicts a naked woman suspended in the center of the piece. Her left arm is outstretched, reaching toward other figures who are shrouded in darkness. Her right arm is tangled in

darkness, partly behind her body. Her hair floats gently above her head as if drifting in water. Her head is tilted to her right and down, the left side of her neck is exposed and elongated. Behind her, the ethereally bright background engulfs her. Her skin is gentle, light, and unmarred. The gradated shading of the piece makes her skin the picture of unblemished softness.



Figure 1

In contrast to this perfectly untarnished woman, the right side of the piece is crowded and dark. Skeletal figures seem to swim in and out of focus, wisps of darkness oscillating around

their figures covering most of them. Visible beyond the dark smoke is an emaciated figure, his eyes sunken, cheekbones protruding, and mouth agape. To his left is a skull, the rest of its skeleton shrouded. The other figures are harder to make out. Many of them are facing away from the audience, their naked backs the only thing visible. One of these figures reaches a muscular arm out of the darkness seeking the floating woman's right hand. With his hand, swirls of dark shadows creep toward the woman's body. Her extended left arm disappears into the darkness and wisps of smoke curl around her midsection. The darkness appears to be reeling her in.

The perspective invites the viewer to gaze upwards at the floating woman and the swirling darkness. But the figure at the bottom of the sketch staring down at the audience does not invite any interference. This figure, from which it appears the darkness emanates, stands tall and proud. Her chin is lifted as she looks down her nose directly into the eyes of the viewer. Her dark hair and headdress shadow her face in severe harsh angles. The structured garment she wears emphasizes her shoulders and elongates her body, contributing to the ferocity of her character. It is out of these emphasized, structured shoulders that the darkness emanates. The smoky darkness rises, swirling, out of her figure, like smoke from embers. Her eyes, lined in black, stare ominously; the foreboding of her eyes is only heightened by the subtle image of a snake wrapping around her hands which she presents to the viewer.

The figure is Hygieia, the Greek goddess of health, cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene. Hygieia is a symbol of preventative medicine and protecting mental health as well as physical health. Her name and symbol are used in the medical field in many ways, including as the name of a medical journal. She was known in Greek mythology as a caretaker and helper of the injured, as well as the patron of snakes.

Criticism

“Hygieia” is a sketch for a ceiling painting commissioned by the University of Vienna in 1894. The Ministerium für Kultus und Unterricht consulted with the University faculty and invited the up-and-coming young artist Gustav Klimt to contribute paintings for the Aula (auditorium). He was tasked with creating three pieces for three of the four faculties, Philosophy, Medicine, and Law. During the time Klimt was working on this commission, he and his peers founded the Secession movement and with it, *Ver Sacrum*. His work on the commission spanned the entire life of *Ver Sacrum*, from years 1898 to 1904. With Klimt’s involvement in the Secession and his changing artistic style, the work he created for this commission was not what the Ministerium or the University faculty had expected.

Criticism and debate raged as the function of modern art in Vienna was debated by the public, the politicians, and the artists (Schorske 227; Whalen 73; George 117). “Critics accused Klimt of everything from incompetence to pornography” (Whalen 142). People were shocked and appalled by the piece, calling the column of bodies in the background an “Apotheose der Verkrüppelung” (George 117). The debate, which had up until the first showing of *Medizin* in 1901 remained primarily within the inner circle of the University and the Ministerium, grew to include everyone with an opinion and a voice. The agreed-upon theme for the ceiling paintings was “the triumph of light over darkness” and when the finalized sketch for *Medizin* was presented in *Ver Sacrum* 1901, that theme was largely missing (Schorske 227). Klimt’s subversion of the theme caused controversy and crisis and ultimately led eighty-three faculty members to sign a petition protesting the ceiling paintings and requesting the Ministerium to reject them. One professor, Professor Friedrich Jödl, stated that “We are not opposed to nudity or artistic freedom, we’re against ugly art” (Whalen 140). The crisis of the University paintings, as

Schorske put it, highlighted an intricate and timely conversation: the relationship between politics and culture at the dawn of a new century (Schorske 231; Flaherty 23; George 115–17).

This second iteration of Klimt's piece is in the sixth issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1901. Titled *Medizin*, this second draft contains far more detailed and precise imagery than "Hygieia." The two primary figures remain largely unchanged. The floating girl on the left of the page is clearer. Her facial features are more visible and gently shadowed by her hair which in this draft has more volume and visible strands. Klimt's addition of prominent pubic hair not included in his first draft stirred criticism among politicians and professors at the University of Vienna. It was not, however, the leading reason for the controversy and outrage that this piece sparked. The figure of Hygieia in *Medizin* is largely unaltered. Each element of her figure is more detailed and sharper than in the original depiction, but she remains steadfast in her crisp garments with the snake in hand, looking down on the viewer.

It is the right side of the piece which is home to the most change in this piece. The column of darkness from "Hygieia" is replaced by a column of writhing bodies. With over 20 bodies making up this column, from old, decaying men to babies nestled into their mothers, each figure apart from two are naked. Towards the center of the piece is a black robe-like garment which covers a fragile and emaciated figure of a woman. Her head and hands are the parts of her that are visible. To her proper left is a skeleton; its head faces to the right, facing the floating girl. The figure of most interest, however, is the naked pregnant figure at the top right of the page. She faces the center of the piece, with her head bowed and her left arm cradling her belling. This figure, the first of many pregnant women Klimt would display, was the cause of severe criticism, cost Klimt 30,000 Kronen, and nearly prevented his pieces from being displayed in the university Aula.

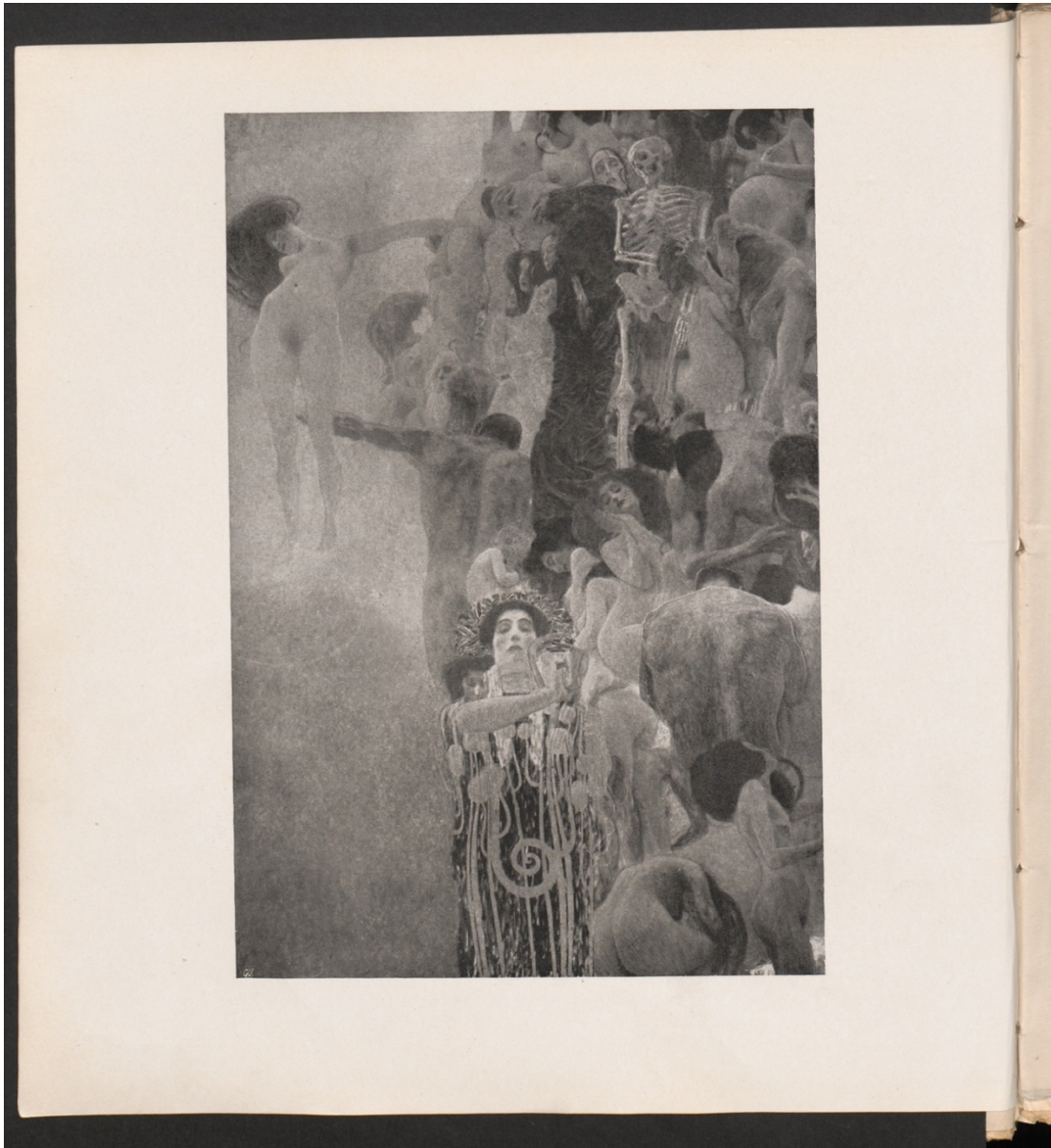


Figure 2

The public outrage which had sparked with the release of the first University painting – a partner piece to *Medizin* titled *Philosophie* – in 1900 was set alight with the second March 1901 issue of *Ver Sacrum*. When a finalized draft of *Medizin* appeared as the first image of this issue, the condemnation of the University paintings reached new levels, culminating in legal action taken against Klimt by the Staatsanwalt. Much of the criticism and public condemnation centred

on a figure not depicted in the “Hygieia,” a naked, pregnant woman in the top right corner of the sketch. Critics and politicians were outraged that Klimt would have the audacity to depict a figure which should be considered “pure” and protected in such an “obscene” manner.

As the Staatsanwalt became involved in the debate, the severity of public outrage intensified, leading to the confiscation of that issue of the *Ver Sacrum* by local authorities at the direction of the Staatsanwalt. This draft of *Medizin*, which included the pregnant figure, was grounds for legal and legislative action “to investigate a charge of offending the public morality and modesty” (George 117). While the Bezirksgerichte ultimately dismissed this investigation as baseless, public opinion had been formed.¹ The public criticism prompted the University to back out of the commission and Klimt to repay the 30,000 Kronen advance he had received (Vergo 61). After considerable discussion, the University faculty decided that the piece would ultimately be displayed on the Aula ceiling (George).

Scholarship

The “Entwurf für eine Deckengemälde ‘Hygieia’” is the subject of very little scholarship. Scholars pass over “Hygieia” in favour of the later, controversial final draft appearing in *Ver Sacrum* three years later in 1901. The discussion of this piece includes a few effective and reliable interpretations, all of which emphasize the tensions and friction between art and politics.

Most of the scholarly discussion about this piece is based on the severe criticism Klimt received from the University paintings, with *Medizin* bearing the brunt of this criticism. The scholarship on the piece begins with that first display of the sketch at the Secessionsgebäude and in *Ver Sacrum* in 1901 when debate about the University paintings reached its peak. There is

¹ Klimt’s later works like *Hope I* (1903) and *Hope II* (1907-08) took this debate to the center of the canvas, using the naked pregnant woman as his main figure.

very little mention of the original draft published three years earlier in March of 1898 (Schorske; Vergo; Whalen; George). Scholarship on Klimt's *Medizin* overlooks its first ever appearance in the journal. Perhaps the innocuous page three display, unaccompanied by literature or discussion, does not prompt many questions, but for a piece which has become the center of much discussion, debate, and scholarship about the relationship between culture and politics both at the time and since, the omission of the piece's first appearance is noteworthy.

The examination of *Medizin* is vast and much of it focuses on the criticism and conversation it sparked in fin-de-siècle Viennese political and artistic circles. Interpretations emphasize how it subverted the theme approved for the ceiling paintings. Rather than creating an intricate example of "the triumph of light over darkness," (Schorske 227) scholars highlight how *Medizin* visualized "the suffering in life, the finality of death, and the unwillingness to accept the idea that every birth is merely a death sentence" (Marlowe-Storkovich 231).

Schorske's discussion of *Medizin* and the University paintings highlights the friction between the University's expectations and Klimt's response to the theme. His exploration of the University paintings delves into the tensions between politics and culture. The distinctly fin-de-siècle discussion of art and politics and their relationship to each other is at the center of his analysis of this piece. He sees the figure of Hygieia as a mediator between death and life, light and darkness. "[Hygieia] confronts the beholder frontally, imperiously, as though forcing from us a recognition of the existential vision behind her" (Schorske 240). The figure of Hygieia, he argues, compels the viewer to confront the friction and tensions in themselves, just as she forced the politicians and professors to confront their discomfort with the exposed and provocative column of bodies behind her.

Like Schorske, Whalen sees *Medizin* as a “surreal image, a hallucinatory vision” (Whalen 79). The writhing background is interrupted by the skeleton figure which Whalen sees as death. In the completed *Medizin*, the skeleton figure is far more prominent. It is shrouded in a blue veil. The blue stands out against the warm tones of the rest of the piece, highlighting the skeleton’s importance to the piece. In the “Hygieia,” the skeleton’s presence is significant because it is one of the only clear figures in the smoky darkness. The figure of Hygieia in the foreground, says Whalen, is a priestess, the goddess of healing and snakes. Her presence plays less of a role in Whalen’s argument. “*Medicine* is a hallucination linking ‘mythic healing’ to death” (Whalen 80). Though his discussion on *Medizin* is short, he emphasizes its ethereal, dreamlike quality which, he argues, is a theme in much of Klimt’s work.

Other scholars discuss how the piece is a representation of the stages and development of life. Hygieia’s “miraculous healing powers” (Vergo 58) are the only thing which can prevent the inevitable journey through life (Flaherty; Marlowe-Storkovich). In 1901, Ernst Stöhr wrote about the exhibition during which *Medizin* was first introduced. “Zwischen Werden und Vergehen spielt sich das Leben ab, und das Leben selbst auf seinem Wege von Geburt bis zum Tode schafft jenes tiefe Leiden, für das die wunderthätige Tochter des Aeskulap, Hygieia, das lindernde und heilende Mittel gefunden hat” (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, ix, 163). Though there is no cure for this condition of death, says Stöhr, it is Hygieia who can bring some mild comfort, a healing salve.

Since Schorske’s discussion of tensions and contrast between culture and politics, life and death, with Hygieia as the mediator, the scholarship on *Medizin* has remained largely unchanged. The assertion that the piece emphasized the development of life, the search for salvation from death, and Hygieia as the only remedy to life’s outcome is a widely agreed upon

interpretation of the piece. The theme of medicine which is central to the piece (it was created to represent the medical faculty at the University of Vienna) is widely understood as the condition of life. In 2020, however, George's book on the naked body and its representation and use in fin-de-siècle Vienna brought a new discourse to *Medizin*. George explores *Medizin* through the lens of the medical, clinical use and depiction of working-class women in art in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Her discussion focuses on the politicization of the expecting mother which was sparked in Vienna by Klimt's depiction and steadily rose as the First World War made possible the legislation and control of reproduction and the working woman's body (George 119).

Analysis

The interpretations of *Medizin* are compelling. Expanding the scope of the scholarly conversation to account for the piece's inclusion in *Ver Sacrum* highlights the points made by scholars over time. The tension between life and death seeking salvation from the goddess of health is evident in *Medizin* as well as in "Hygieia" and represents the tensions in the journal. This scholarly interpretation is straightforward and offers insight into the theme of medicine and the subversion of the theme of light overcoming darkness. The interpretations provide insight into Klimt's artistic process, his changing styles, and the criticism he faced. The search for salvation from illness and death is prominent in the background of the image. The sickly bodies reaching out, desperate for the healthy, floating body and seeking any sort of preservation from the inevitable.

And yet, this scholarly interpretation overlooks the foreground, the imposing, menacing strength of Hygieia herself. Her presence as a healing, comforting salvation from death opposes the persona she inhabits in the piece. Her figure is not a comforting figure; she shows no signs of salvation. Her angular strength does not lend itself well to the interpretations most scholars have

taken. She has turned her back on the figures. Death is among them and though they might reach out for her, she has left them behind. Klimt's almost femme fatale version of her contradicts the classical depiction of Hygieia as well as the interpretation that many scholars have taken (Trckova-Flamee).

Klimt's Hygieia, rather than being a figure of deliverance to the writhing bodies behind her, appears to be the source of a darkness which is overtaking those bodies. They inhabit the darkness that she creates, seeking to contaminate the clean, sanitary innocence of the floating woman. Where the goddess should invoke images of cleanliness and health, instead, she infests the page with darkness, contributing to a feeling of tension and opposition displayed in the piece. The viewer is apprehensive of the figure of Hygieia. She does not welcome the viewer, she does not turn to help the innocent, she leaves the darkness to take over. The darkness flowing from her is neither clean nor healthy. As the darkness thickens, so does the column of bodies weaken. Hygieia looks down on the viewer and dares them to help. Her outstretched hand, wrapped in the sign of aid, the snake, is a barricade. The viewer is not welcome. There is no help coming to rescue innocence from the darkness, to rescue life from death.

This piece displays a conflict, a tension which is embedded in its very title: "Hygieia" or *Medizin*. The mythological figure whose role it is to keep her people clean, safe, and healthy is no longer trusted to undertake her role as protector. Her presence is juxtaposed by her inability or unwillingness to fulfill her role as caretaker. Hygieia, the being previously relied upon to keep the people safe, has turned her back on them, standing by as life reaches its inevitable conclusion. The goddess of health is looking down upon them and letting the world tear them apart. These themes of despair and mistrust, tension and opposition are central to Klimt's work and contributions to *Ver Sacrum*. The creation of the Secession was necessary because of the

tensions and juxtapositions in fin-de-siècle Vienna. The old was not ready to accept the new. Klimt and his peers, as one side of the dichotomy, created a movement and a journal which reflected their experiences with the tensions and anxieties of the time. The themes in *Ver Sacrum*'s art and literature reflect its creation, the old, reliable authority turning its back on the people, the young and the innocent as they reach out for acceptance. At the same time, by giving space to unpack and express the tensions and dichotomies, the journal contributed to the growing uncertainty and public debate over whether the “new” should even be allowed to exist in the “old” spaces. Images throughout *Ver Sacrum*, from different years, different artists, and in different styles, depict similar uncertainty. The perception of being left in the dark, stuck in the in-between, being pulled and pushed spans the journal's pages.

Other Instances in *Ver Sacrum*

Tension and dichotomy are present throughout the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. Among the themes which are represented in these tensions is the theme of power and authority contrasted with helplessness. This theme is often associated with religious imagery as it is in a piece by Otto Friedrich (1862-1937) from the March 1902 issue of *Ver Sacrum*. This work, which appeared on page 47, is part of a collection of pieces with orange, fire imagery. Along with many other examples, this piece is representative of the artistic discomfort and uncertainty present in *Ver Sacrum* throughout its publication.

This triptych, Figure 3, has two smaller sections surrounding the focal point of the piece. The main figure is a monk. In black and white, his head is bowed with his arms folded over his midsection. His long, hooded robe drapes over his shoulders and down his body. The light in this piece emanates from the bottom right of the piece and shines on the monk's face and front body.

His back body is entirely in darkness. Surrounding his head is a halo of light indicating his pious holiness and securing him against the nearby dangers.



Figure 3

The light in the piece is coming from the smaller segment on the left side of the page. At the bottom of that section is a blazing fire originating from what appear to be books which are stacked at the bottom of the section. Orange flames rise from the books and rage across the background of each segment of the piece. The right segment depicts the tongues of the flames,

bright orange devouring the horrified faces of people at its mercy. The faces of the fire's victims are shadowed by the curling smoke and blackness. They are sinking to the ground, cowering away from the fire's burn. In front of them, the monk stands, protected from the fire by his halo of light, his back to the victims, ignorant to their pained cries for help. With his head bowed and eyes closed, he appears to be praying. His prayers are not reaching those who need help.

In this piece, Friedrich depicts a fracture between what Catholicism promises and what those who pray actually experience. Despite their prayers and cries for help, the monk is turning his back on the people. As the society around him cries out for help in desperate times, the monk turns his back, bows his head, and closes his eyes. He is warmed by the burning books as his prayers protect only him. With this depiction, Friedrich illustrates the tensions between belief in a higher power and the realities of life. Like "Hygieia," Friedrich's monk is no longer a source of deliverance for his people, but rather, he has turned his back on them, protecting only himself.

The Catholic imagery Friedrich displays in this piece is not uncommon in *Ver Sacrum*. Some Christian representation in the journal includes depictions of churches, pietàs, and the crucifixion. Austria's religious connection, specifically to Catholicism, was a widely discussed topic as debates over the relationship between culture and politics rose at the time (Vergo; Whalen; George). With discussions of "morality and modesty" at the center of this debate, Austria's Catholic connections played a significant role in the public discussion of art. The tensions which Friedrich displays in this piece highlight and reflect the religious tensions Vienna was facing at the time.

To further illustrate the pervasive theme of tension and dichotomy in *Ver Sacrum*, the following figures (Figures 4, 5 and 6) have been included. Figure 4 depicts "Empedokles" by Maximilian Pirner (1854-1924) from the tenth issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1899. Empedocles was a

philosopher who believed in cosmogony, the philosophy that all that exists is made up of the four elements (Gregory). The piece exhibits the philosopher standing above the image of a naked, vulnerable woman who is at the mercy of the elements which seem to be rising to overtake her.

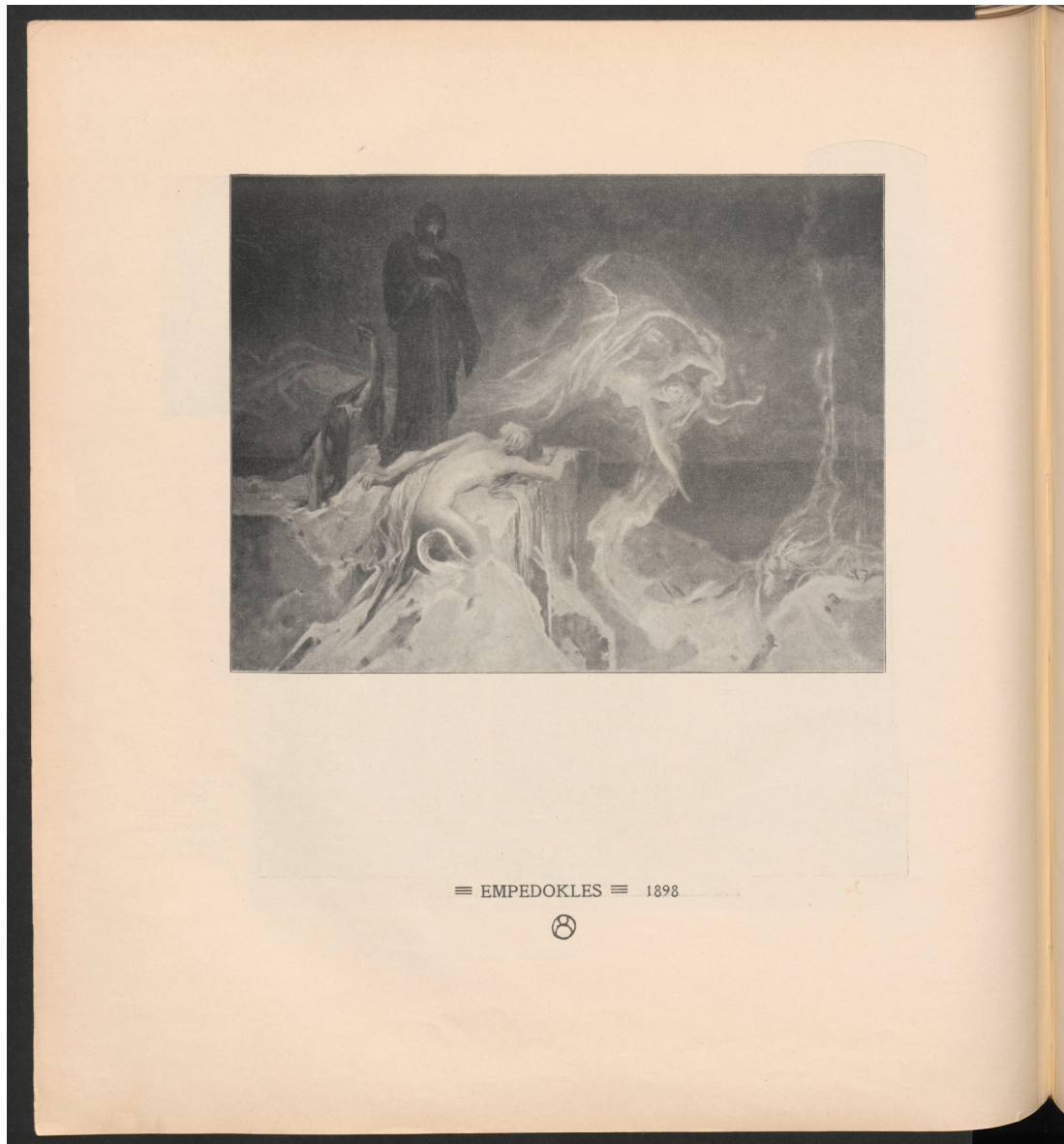


Figure 4

Empedocles stands, looking down upon her, his darkness not affected by the rising flames. The opposition and tension of the tall, dark, cloaked figure and the bright, naked, sprawled woman bring contrast and contradiction to the page. The tensions depicted here are both visual and

metaphorical. Using Schorske's interpretation of the youthful female body as a metaphor for hope and new beginnings (discussed in detail in Chapter 3), this young girl represents that optimism while the dark looming figure of Empedocles represents the old, traditional ideas of the past stifling that hope.



Figure 5

Figure 5, “Die Königin und der Page” by Friedrich König from the second 1899 issue of *Ver Sacrum* shows the push and pull of the queen, the monarch, cringing away from a subject on

his knees. He reaches to her, seeking help, and she pulls away. Her hands push away his shoulders, she tugs her dress from under him to escape. At the same time, the woman, no matter her position or power, is never safe from the grasping hands of any man. She is seen as something to be won and taken, not someone who has power and choice. The dichotomy here is two-fold. It shows a desperate citizen seeking salvation from his queen while she tries to escape his clutches. No matter how much he begs, she is unwilling to offer him her help. Instead, she cringes away from those in a lower position than her. At the same time, this piece depicts a power struggle between a man and a woman in power in a world where women have no power. Despite her status, this woman is not immune to the grasping hands of men below her status.



Figure 6

The twelfth issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1899 is dedicated to Ernst Stöhr's art and poetry and contains many images which display tension and dichotomy in this issue. This untitled image which spans two pages shows a naked, stooped man staggering towards death, flanked by someone who appears to be Hygieia. Her tall form, billowing dress, and snake companions show strength and surety in the presence of the skeletal death as she steers the man forward. Again, the

goddess of health is escorting humanity into death's clutches. The accompanying poem, also by Stöhr, reflects the inevitable, isolating march toward death. "Zwischen Tod und Wahnsinn" says Stöhr, "Vorwärts! Kein Erbarmen, / Kein Wahl!" Without any other choice, this figure must march, as long as there is breath in his lungs, his life, and the agony that comes with it, belongs to him. This excerpt also reflects that inescapable tension between life and death. Stöhr's morbid expression, both literary and artistically, emphasizes the uncertainty and fear associated with that dichotomy.

Conclusion

While Klimt's work in *Ver Sacrum* is vital to his development as an artist and has proven to have far-reaching effects on the social and political discussion of fin-de-siècle Vienna, the importance of his work in the development and themes of *Ver Sacrum*, as an entity of its own, must also become a part of the scholarly discussion. Though it was an image in *Ver Sacrum* that initiated the public outrage surrounding Vienna, the journal has largely been left out of the scholarly discussion of *Medizin* and the resulting social-political crisis.

Overlooking the importance of Klimt's contribution and work in the journal prevents us from understanding the full scope of *Ver Sacrum*'s participation in and reflection of the social tensions Vienna was experiencing. By analyzing Klimt's work in *Ver Sacrum*, it becomes clear that it was not Klimt alone who saw the tension and friction in Vienna. Other artists and contributors to the journal were also representing these tensions. The creation of the Secession movement by Klimt and his peers was a reaction to the fracture in cultural circles. Their exclusion from the artistic community was both a reaction to and a representation of the tensions of the time. *Ver Sacrum*, an entity that grew out of this tension, continued to add to the friction. As the world around them fractured and debated and raged about the art they were creating, the

artists of *Ver Sacrum* were reflecting back to them the world they lived in. The art they made reflected the world they saw and that world was full of contradictions, dichotomies, and opposition. Friedrich's monk, one who dedicated his life to religion, has turned his back on the fires that consume the world. His departure from typical, worldly life has left him without a care for those who suffer in flames behind him. As he is protected by his piety, the world around him burns. Klimt's "Hygieia" took those contradictions and dichotomies and presented them to the audience she looked down upon. The reflection of tensions that "Hygieia" presented to the Viennese public caused outrage and discomfort. The piece, meant to be a mirror to society of the futility of salvation, only succeeded in adding more discomfort to the shaky foundation of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Chapter 3: The Naked Form and Opposition in *Ver Sacrum*

Introduction

The naked body is represented in *Ver Sacrum* every year in almost every issue. From innumerable contributors throughout the journal's life, the naked body is explored thoroughly and completely. Fin-de-siècle Vienna's preoccupation with sexuality, the human body, and women's roles in society which scholars have explored extensively is illustrated and exhibited perfectly in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. The ever-contradictory and opposing representations of the naked form in the journal give further insight into that fin-de-siècle fascination with nudity in all forms and uncovers the tensions held in the minds of the artists of *Ver Sacrum*.

While the examples of the nude body in *Ver Sacrum* include all people of all ages and all purposes, the fixation on the female body is evident throughout the journal's six years of publication. With contradictory views on the female body and purpose, a fixation on young girls, and a dichotomous perspective on female morality, as well as a unique view of the aging naked form, nudity in *Ver Sacrum* exposes the internal tensions, uncertainties, and opposition the journal's contributors experienced in themselves.

Instances of Nudity in *Ver Sacrum*

There are 304 depictions of the naked form in *Ver Sacrum*. In all 12 issues in 1898, including the special edition (Sonderheft) there are 65 pieces which display the nude form. The 12 issues of 1899 have 63 pieces depicting nude figures. In 1900 there are 47 instances. In 1901 there are 49. The 24 issues in 1902 contain 57 depictions of the naked body. The final year of publication,

1903, has the fewest with 23 instances of the naked body in its 25 issues, both normal and special editions.

This accounting of the nude form relies on a set of specific criteria. Firstly, no non-humans were counted; cyclops, or sphinxes who are unclothed were not included. Secondly, all images of babies were disregarded. Children and young people were counted but infants and babies who appeared with their mothers or as cherubs were not included. The final factor that had to be considered when compiling the list was the definition of nudity. In the end, I concluded that women whose garments were below their breasts and any depiction of men with either nothing or very little covering their genitals or buttocks would be considered nude. At the time, social discourse and scandal surrounded many depictions of the nude form in art. This discourse has been considered in determining the parameters of what will be seen as nudity in *Ver Sacrum* (Whalen 142; George, 117). These parameters also helped identify themes and patterns of nudity in the journal.

Portrayals of men without their chests covered were almost entirely images of ancient figures, Greek and Roman soldiers, gods, or heroes. These figures are not considered on this list of nude images, however; the ancient hero theme is common in *Ver Sacrum* and deserves more attention than can be given here. There are three other categories into which the examples of male nudity fall throughout *Ver Sacrum*'s publication.

The first category shows the figures as boys rather than men. They are depicted as young figures whose pose, colouring, and attitude evoke stereotypes of femininity. The second, more frequent category, is haggard, poor, unhealthy men. These images appear in darker paintings and sketches. These figures are emaciated, starving, and desperate to escape the darkness of their worlds. This is the most common depiction of the nude male form in *Ver Sacrum* and is often

seen in images which depict humanity desperately seeking salvation. The third category into which the male nude falls is studies. This is also a category for the female nude and consists of artists' sketches and examinations of the naked form. Many of these sketches focus primarily on one aspect of the body. Many pages will have one completed nude sketch surrounded by the artist's area of focus. For example, the extremities, arms, legs, and hands, or a closer examination of the buttocks or shoulders are often depicted in these studies.

Over 200 of the 304 naked images in *Ver Sacrum* are female. Similar to the depictions of the male nude, the categories into which the nude images fall are important in understanding the purpose and use of the nude form in *Ver Sacrum*. The depictions of the naked female body have more categories than those of male nude images. The five categories into which these depictions fall include studies, ethereal beings frolicking in nature, damsels in distress, femmes fatales, and objects to be desired and seen.

The first category, studies, is similar to the studies of men but with more emphasis on the delicate aspects of the female form. Many studies focus on women's hands, breasts, waists, and hair. While the male studies are angular and shadowed emphasizing their muscular, strong features, the female studies are soft and gentle, often depicting women in sensual, open poses and artfully positioned to capture the curves of their bodies. The second category depicts women as ethereal creatures who frolic, dance, and dream in nature. Most of these instances portray groups of women dancing, swimming, or sleeping together in nature. These pieces usually have a haze of light over the images. The lines are gentle, with a lot of light shading. The category of the damsel in distress is predictable. These images have darker themes and colouring with the only light reflecting off the smooth curves of the woman's body. These images also portray a man or creature standing over the women or preventing them from escaping their circumstances.

This category, while a typical depiction of women at the time, is very representative of many tensions and dichotomies in *Ver Sacrum*. The third category of the femme fatale depicts women towering above male figures. Male submission, as opposed to female dominance, is the focus of these images. The femme fatale stands tall and proud while the man cowers below. These images show either physical or psychological domination of the women over the men. Finally, the least common but exceptionally significant category is that of the naked female body as an object. Women in this category are being looked upon by other figures in the piece, mostly men. Similar to the category of the damsel in distress, these images portray both men and women, although rather than the men saving the woman, the men are merely watching them. With no other purpose or significance except to be looked upon, these pieces often display the women's figures as the only fully bare figure on the page. Those men who look at her are fully clothed and often occupied with other tasks and purposes.

Notably, there is no specific category for depictions of young girls. This is because most depictions of the naked, feminine form appear in the form of young girls, girls who are in the midst of or have not yet reached the age of puberty. The portrayal of prepubescent girls in art at the time was not uncommon. Freud would later assert that female children were harbourers of "polymorphous perversity," a sexual desire that they seek to explore and fulfil as children (Gilman 338; Freud). Authors, poets, and artists explored this fascination which Freud's *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905) used to place blame and deviance on young girls, rather than the men who sexualized them. This characterization of the young girl as depraved for experiencing sexuality stems from the cultural discourse of female and childhood sexuality, itself a projection of male fantasy that then became intrinsic to the cultural and social understanding of sexuality in fin-de-siècle Vienna, asserts Gilman:

The relationship between male projections of female sexuality and the realities of female sexuality is... [important] in understanding the dominant phantasies concerning the female. The seductive child, the lower-class female are both figments of the masculine imagination of turn-of-the-century Vienna, yet because they were articulated through works of art they became central metaphors for sexuality in Viennese society (Gilman 360).

The consistent and dominant portrayal of female childhood sexuality in the social discourse and artistic interpretation in fin-de-siècle Vienna only contributed to the continued social discourse and portrayal of young girls in the media at the time. The age of the girls depicted in nude images in *Ver Sacrum* comes into play in every category of nude depictions, each of which is made up of primarily young, prepubescent girls. The only mature, naked, female forms which appear in the journal are pregnant women who are still quite young. Though it is impossible to discern how old the subject of each piece is, it is clear by their unblemished skin, soft curves, and often undeveloped bodies, that these are young women, if not girls.

Examples of Nudity

When choosing the two pieces to illustrate the categories discussed above, I chose to highlight two categories, depictions of the femme fatale and of the woman as an object. These two categories, femme fatale and women as objects demand a more in-depth description and analysis. The two images below, Figures 7 and 8, illustrate how these categories are depicted in *Ver Sacrum*. Figure 7 is a fragment by J.M. Auchentaller that appeared in the seventh issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1901. This piece, though immediately eye-catching, does not at first appear to include nudity. At first, the woman depicted in this piece is almost invisible, the eyes drawn first to the man in distress. Upon closer inspection, however, the lower half of the female can be seen on the proper left side of the piece. She is naked apart from a transparent, draped fabric which hangs from her hips.

This complex and chaotic image immediately draws the eye to the horrified face of a man in the bottom right corner of the piece. His eyes are wide, with a gaping mouth and eyebrows

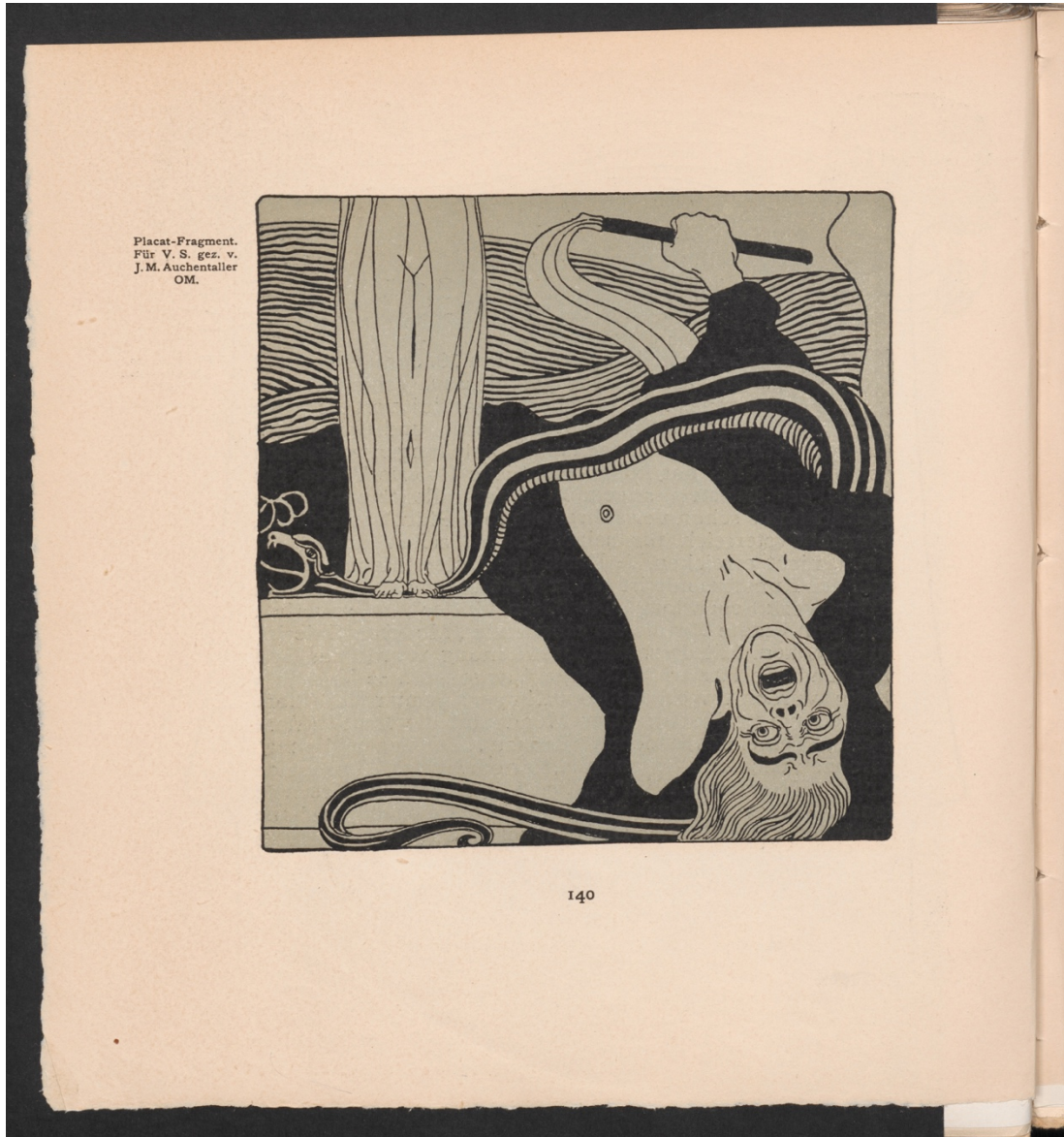


Figure 7

drawn together. His face is lined with fear and tension, hair falling softly from his head. The man's proper left arm hangs over his head and his right arm reaches up towards the rest of his body and clutches a black rod with three white ropes or ribbons attached. The man is lying on his back on a white platform, his upper body falling off the edge. He is wearing what appears to be a

black dressing gown or house coat. The coat is falling off his shoulders, leaving his chest bare. A black and white, striped snake curves around his body, its tail by his left shoulder, its body snaking around his right shoulder and across his torso. The head of the snake is on the left side of the page; its neck is trapped under the bare feet of a woman. The woman, noticeably small compared to the man and the snake, stands with her feet together, naked except for the transparent robe which pools on the platform below her feet. Her body is cut off at the waist, she extends past the top of the page. Her gentle, flowing existence is contradicted by her feet stepping on the neck of the snake, dominating it as it wraps its body around the terrified man. The background of the painting consists of curving black and white lines below blank space.

This piece is an example of the category of the femme fatale. The woman is not even pictured in her entirety, yet she still seems entirely in command of the piece and the situation in which the man finds himself. She does not cower from the snake, nor does she reach to help the man. Her control of the snake is evident by her comfort and stillness while stepping on its neck with her bare feet. She is not afraid of the creature. The woman, despite her slight figure and gentle curves, is dominating the man who is noticeably larger, more angled and muscular, and who carries what could be a type of weapon. It matters not that this man is physically larger and more equipped with a weapon to defend himself than the woman who has nothing but her sheer cover, because he is still at the mercy of a snake which responds to her; she is still forcing his submission; he is still horrified.

The piece below, Figure 8, by Ernst Stöhr was first published in 1898 in the first Sonderheft of *Ver Sacrum*. These special editions appeared once in 1898 and three times in 1903. This Sonderheft reproduced pieces which had been displayed at the Secession's second exhibition in late 1898. This piece entitled "Das Weib" shows a rowboat on a calm body of

water. In the distance, dark mountains rise into a starry sky. Two people are in the boat, a man and a woman. The man is seated. He is dressed nicely, his suit is crisp and unwrinkled, not a hair out of place. He is holding the oar, presumably having rowed the two out into the water. He is leaning back on his



Figure 8

right elbow, relaxing, and looking up at the woman. The naked figure of the woman is drastically different from the man. She is standing precariously on the rowboat's prow. Her posture is stiff

and poised. Her feet are together with her toes pointed out. Her arms are close to her sides, her shoulders are down, and her chin is raised. She stands like a statue. She has no purpose in this piece except to be viewed. Her purpose is the same as a statue. To be beautiful, interesting to look at, and still.

This image is representative of the final category of nude depictions of women. Women as objects to be looked upon. She has no purpose here besides the purpose designated to her by the man. Her existence is reliant on the eyes of men. While the man exists to look at her, he also has the purpose of rowing the boat. He is not one-sided or superficial. She, however, is the picture of what “Das Weib” should be, an object to be looked at.

These two representations of women are prominent in *Ver Sacrum*. The contradictory tone of these categories exemplifies the internal tensions the artists had surrounding women’s roles and their power. One category explores the power which women have over men and their ability to bring men to their knees, both literally and figuratively. The other category emphasizes the woman’s role as something for which men to gaze upon. The question of who women are, from the male perspective, is central to these nude images and is a question that the artists cannot answer.

Scholarship

Scholarship on nudity and the naked body in fin-de-siècle Vienna is a growing area of research. Schorske’s groundbreaking work on the culture, politics, and psychology of fin-de-siècle Vienna largely glosses over the tendency towards nude art at the time, focusing instead on the psychology of sexuality which imbued Freud’s Vienna (Gilman; Spector Person). His discussion of nude artwork focuses primarily on the “Oedipal revolt” of young artists against the traditions of their forefathers, highlighting the themes of rebirth and regeneration (Schorske 217).

Schorske's discourse about nude art focuses only on Gustav Klimt's catalogue. Many of the nude pieces he displays and discusses come from *Ver Sacrum*, including "Nudas Veritas" and "Fischblut," both of which appear in the third issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1898, the issue dedicated to Klimt's art. He also discusses *Medizin* and *Philosophie*, the two University paintings which caused continuous scandals for Klimt and the Secession, both of which were originally published in *Ver Sacrum*. His discussion of these two pieces, both of which contain nudity, revolved around the University painting scandal. Schorske's exploration of this scandal, like many other scholars, investigates social discourse surrounding the pieces themselves and does not examine or analyze the nudity in the pieces.

Similar to Schorske's tendency to use Gustav Klimt as a prototype for all art and artists in fin-de-siècle Vienna, much of the scholarship on naked bodies focuses on Klimt's work, looking at his portfolio as a standard representation of nudity in art at the time. Some scholars believe that "all the decisive and remarkable artistic happenings, the great successes, failures, and scandals, revolve around [Klimt's] work" (Sármány-Parsons 223). With their primary focus on Klimt, they use his work and the criticism that came with it as a basis for understanding the artistic themes and social conversations at the time. Although Klimt's work is relevant and reflective of those social and political discourses, examining only his work leaves much unexplored. The social and political reaction to Klimt's work can be effective in exploring the social reaction to nudity and the naked body as seen on the canvas in fin-de-siècle Vienna, however, using Klimt's oeuvre as the sole evidence for why and how artists displayed the naked body is limiting and misrepresentational (Schorske; Sármány-Parsons).

In more recent years, scholarship on nudity and the naked body has increased. Research on the naked form is vast but some major themes appear in most of the scholarship. Scholarship

with a focus on the portrayal of women in art often explores the fin-de-siècle tendency towards nudity in lower-class women and fashion and design in upper-class women. This approach towards nude art is drawn from the far more researched area of female sexuality and “stereotypes of childhood sexuality [and] proletarian sexuality” in Vienna at the time (Gilman 338). The nude art studied through this lens amplifies that women immersed in upper-class society will be fully clothed in the latest fashion, treated as people, while women who live outside of urban life will be exhibited nude, treated as objects of male fantasy (George; Sármany-Parsons; Gilman). Though there is significantly less research on the nude male form, the research that does exist focuses on the portrayal of the grotesque and ugly (Simpson). With a fascination for the macabre the artists of turn of the century Vienna began looking at the body, no longer as an immaculate, beautiful thing, but rather as a piece of science. With the growing field of medicine permeating the cultural and artistic world, artists’ interest in the decay of the human form infiltrated their work. This is especially true in the case of Klimt and his mentee, Egon Schiele (1890-1918) (George; Timpano; Blackshaw).

The exploration of the emaciated, differently shaped, or “the grotesque” body is among many prevalent themes of scholarly discourse surrounding the naked body in fin-de-siècle Vienna research. Gemma Blackshaw’s 2007 article “The Pathological Body: Modernist Strategising in Egon Schiele’s Self-Portraiture” explores and highlights the effects of the modern city on the body and explores the way art depicted this deterioration of the naked body under the pressures and requirements of their modern society. Kathryn Simpson’s article “Viennese Art, Ugliness, and the Vienna School of Art History: the Vicissitudes of Theory and Practice” explores the antisemitism ingrained in the grotesque portrayals of bodies, looking not only at the weathered and malnourished nude image but also many portraits. Other themes of study on the

naked body in turn of the century Vienna explore the importance of the medical field, either as an influence for the artist or as an examination of cultural discourse at the time (Blackshaw; George). Until recently, this medical interpretation of the naked body has primarily focused on men.

Alys X. George's 2020 book *The Naked Truth: Viennese Modernism and the Body* takes the research on the naked body a step further, recovering "the forgotten history of the human body in Viennese modernism" (George 4). Highlighting the voices of marginalized groups, specifically women, George explores the use and purpose of the naked body in art and culture in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Through this exploration of the importance of class and politics as well as gender and gendered expectations, George re-evaluates the way scholars have viewed cultural creation in fin-de-siècle Vienna. By challenging Schorske's conclusion that it was the self-conscience *homo psychologicus* (psychological man) at the center of this vibrant cultural moment, George places the "*homo physiologicus*, the physiological human being" at the center of cultural production (George 4 and 18). Rather than placing the works and ideas of Freud at the center of discourse creation, she places the growing medical field and the body at the center of fin-de-siècle cultural production.

George's third chapter "The Patient's Body: Working-Class Women in the Clinic" outlines how medical research used women's bodies for their own purposes and highlights the stark contrast between art requested by others versus art requested by the subjects themselves. The physicians who commissioned pieces of nude women used their bodies to extract knowledge. George also gives voice to long-overlooked thinkers. She includes the voices of women, like Marie Pappenheim (1882-1966) and Ilka Maria Ungar (1879-1911), who shaped the fin-de-siècle Vienna's understanding of the body and wrote provocatively and from experience

about the female body, pregnancy, abortion, and self-loathing (George 120–27). George utilizes marginalized voices and focuses on the marginalized bodies of colour, of women, and of the middle class in order to expand understanding of fin-de-siècle past the well-known voices of men in positions of privilege. Her exploration of the patient’s body is an in-depth analysis of working-class women’s bodies becoming objects from which to learn and study. Her discussion of Klimt and Egon Schiele’s pregnant women studies as well as the normalization of the use of the female body in medical films, texts, and medical journals explores how women “whether sick or healthy, [were] nothing but dogs” (George 154). This exploration of the naked body as seen through art, especially those of working-class women and children, provided a new lens through which to explore the creation of culture and discourse surrounding the naked body in art in fin-de-siècle Vienna. George’s discussion exposes the intrinsic connection between the body and aesthetics which, she concludes, shaped modernism in fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Analysis

The scholarly work on the naked body in art in fin-de-siècle Vienna has many facets. Each of the scholarly conversations explores different angles of the cultural representation of bodies and their purpose at the time. The cultural discourses represented in the scholarship and at the turn of the century are evident in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. In the examples of nudity above, previously analyzed, I examined the categories of nude images which exist in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*, here I analyze the following three pieces, Figures 9, 10, and 11 in terms of scholarship. The following images are just some examples of how the scholarly analysis of the naked body can be seen and applied to nude art in the journal. I selected these images both because they are excellent representations of the scholarly conversation on the naked form and because they effectively illustrate the styles, themes, and trends in journals throughout the years.

Figure 9, “Frühlingstriebe” by Maximilian Lenz, depicts at least 24 young, naked girls in a field of grass and trees. At the center of the page is a large tree. Its branches extend throughout the top of the image, disguising the girls in the background. The branches of the tree

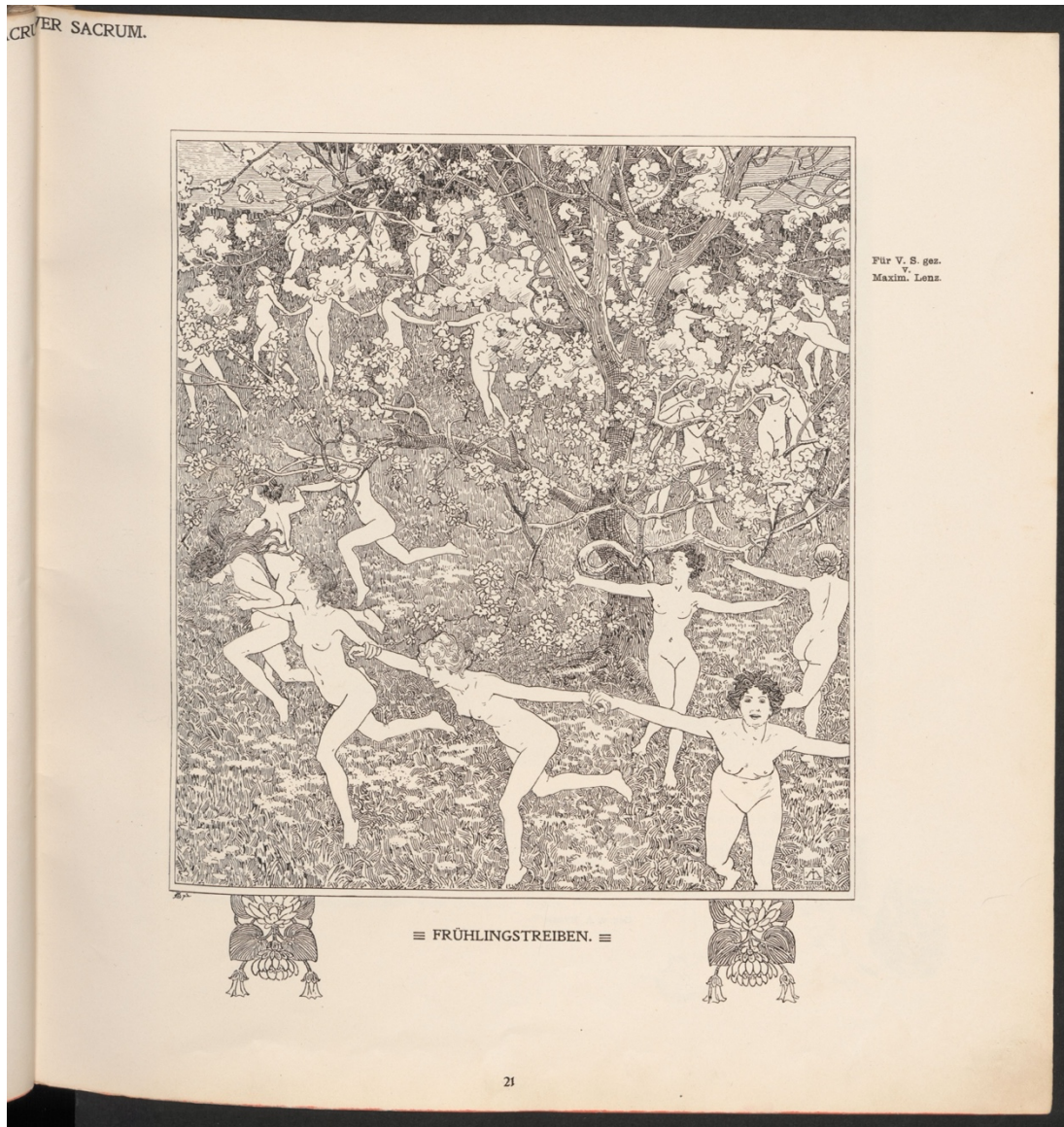


Figure 9
are blossoming. Small, bright flowers bud across the trees' new, spring branches. Behind the tree, the field extends towards a dark space which might be more trees. The horizon beyond gives way to a bright, cloudless sky.

The focus of this image is on the eight girls in front of the trees. Six of these girls grasp each other's hands as they dance beneath the tree. The chain, beginning on the right and extending off the left side of the piece, is made up of six girls forming a chain as they leap forward with their left legs, their right legs pushing them off the ground behind them. All but one hold their heads high, chins in the air. The girl with her head down is the third in the chain, at the far left of the piece. Her eyes face the earth and her hair flows above her as if she's lowering her head to gain momentum. The other two girls in the foreground are different from the rest. One has her back to the front of the audience, her proper right arm extending off the page as if she's completing the chain made by the other six girls which extends off the right of the page. The last girl stands right in front of the tree's trunk. Her arms are spread wide as she raises her eyes toward the sky. She steps forward on her left leg, lifting her right and popping out her left hip. Other chains of girls are visible through the tree branches giving the appearance of a ritualistic gathering of young women.

The piece illustrates Schorske's exploration of hope and regeneration through depictions of "nubile," "virginal waif[s]" (Schorske 84 and 217). Though Schorske's wording leaves much to be desired, his meaning is clear. Through depictions of young, naked, prepubescent girls, Secession artists explored themes of hope, regeneration, and new beginnings, in direct contradiction to their exploration of the female form as the oppressive femme fatal, as seen in Figure 7. The title of the piece brings to mind a new birth. The beginnings of spring, as the season changes and the first plants begin to sprout, the girls shed their winter clothes, join hands, and rejoice in a new season. Giving the impression of a festival or ritual to welcome the new spring, the piece evokes similar feelings of new beginnings, regeneration, and hope which Schorske related to Klimt's exploration of "femaleness" (Schorske 223). Like the Secessionists

when they revolted against their artistic forefathers, so too are these girls revelling in the new season of their lives.

The title of the piece invokes the journal's title, *Ver Sacrum*. The springtime imagery which we see in the recreation connects to the goals of the Secession movement and its art journal. The spring imagery, the thawing of winter leading the way to blooming buds, can be viewed as a metaphor for a rebirth of art, and the girls as a metaphor for art. As the new flowers find a home in a new season so will art find its new age. As the Secessionsgebäude advertises, the artists of the Secession and those who appear in *Ver Sacrum* believed in the freedom of art and artists and the rebirth of art when one season ended. As their motto states: "Der Zeit ihre Kunst – Der Kunst ihre Freiheit." The dancing girls are pure and not corrupted by the winter that preceded the spring, just as the art is not to blame for the changing times. This piece by Maximilian Lenz illustrates Schorske's argument well and through this lens, the naked girls as a metaphor for art finding its new season is a reasonable conclusion.

Figure 10, "Die Schlafenden" by Josef Engelhart (1864-1941), depicts three naked women dozing under a tree by a stream. The tree on the left side of the page stretches its branches wide across the top of the piece, the leaves providing shade to the grassy field below. Behind the tree, flowing across the top of the page is the stream. Sun reflecting off the surface of the river lends the piece a shining quality to the piece. In the top right corner of the piece, just beside the river, sits another figure. From the distance, it is difficult to discern whether this figure is a man or a woman, but the angles and shadows on the figure give the impression of a muscular, male figure. The distance and size of this figure make it difficult to discern however, he appears to be leaning forward on his hands as if he is sneaking toward the sleeping figures in the piece's foreground. He is a voyeur in this piece.

The light reflecting off the water gives the piece a hazy quality. Nothing is in particular focus except for the bodies of the three girls sleeping below the tree. The focus of the piece lies on the three figures in the foreground, right below the tree. Slightly to the left of the center, these girls rest peacefully. Starting with the girl in the back and going clockwise, the first girl lies with her feet towards the river. She lies on her proper right side, her left arm lifting to cover her face,

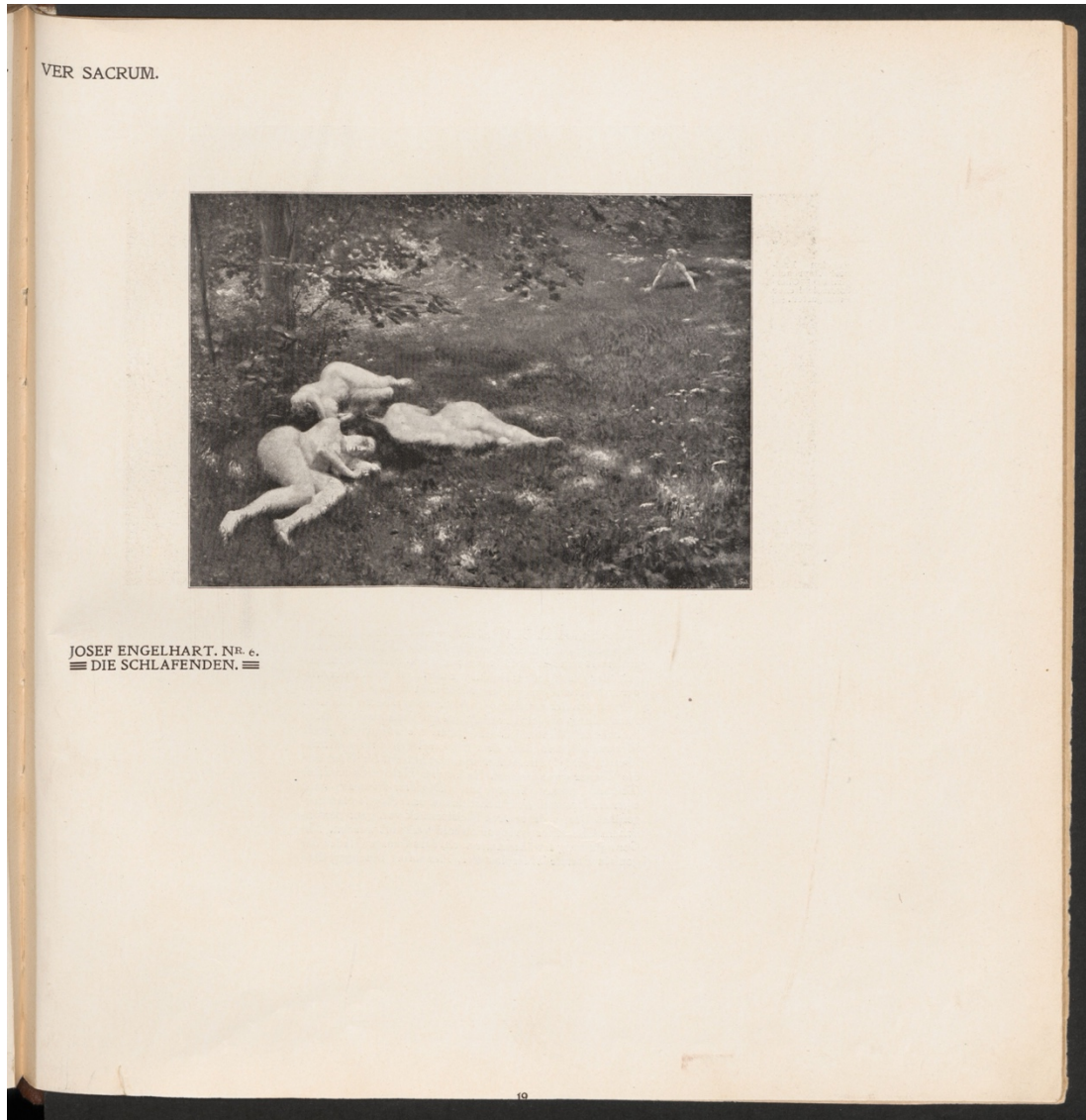


Figure 10

leaving her torso exposed. To the right of her, another girl sleeps. Her back is facing the viewer, her legs reaching towards the center of the piece, feet to the right. She sleeps with her arms tucked into her chest, leaving her whole back body visible. Her head is obscured behind the head and hair of the third girl. This girl is the only one whose face is visible. Her face, which faces the right side of the page, is relaxed and peaceful. Her hair flows around her head, creating a dark halo which blends in with the grass. Her head rests on her left arm and her right arm is cradled towards her chest, covering her breasts. Her bent legs extend to the bottom left corner of the page. Each girl's body is bright, curved, and unblemished.

The many depictions of sleeping, naked girls in the pages of *Ver Sacrum* depict girls in a similarly vulnerable position. Utilizing George's interpretation, the naked bodies of women and girls become objects from which the viewer gains something. They are being viewed, without their permission, as objects of interest, something to be examined. As George's interpretation posits, the female body became nothing more than a tool for learning; women had the feeling of being nothing more than animals. Their purpose existed only in how useful they could be to the viewer of their most intimate, exposed moments (George 154). These sleeping girls are being viewed in their most vulnerable and unsuspecting moments. They have no idea that they are being witnessed. Their privacy and unguarded rest are being intruded upon by being perceived, just as women were being intruded upon in George's interpretation of the naked body as a medical patient by being nothing but an object to be viewed. In contrast, the man in the distance is similarly exposed, he doesn't appear to be clothed as he creeps towards to the sleeping figures. He is offered distance and privacy by the artist. From a distance, he is not the spectacle of the piece. Observation does not make him vulnerable; he is not intruded upon in his pursuit of these figures. The sleeping girls, however, are not afforded that luxury.

The image below, Figure 11, by Klimt is one among 15 Klimt sketches in the sixth issue of *Ver Sacrum* in 1901, depicting all types of naked bodies, from infants to the elderly. This image depicts an old, emaciated, decrepit man. The man has no strength, he lies on his proper left side, his body weak. His arms reach to cover his face and head. His bald head and ear are the only features visible behind his clasped hands. Each of his angular joints protrudes painfully

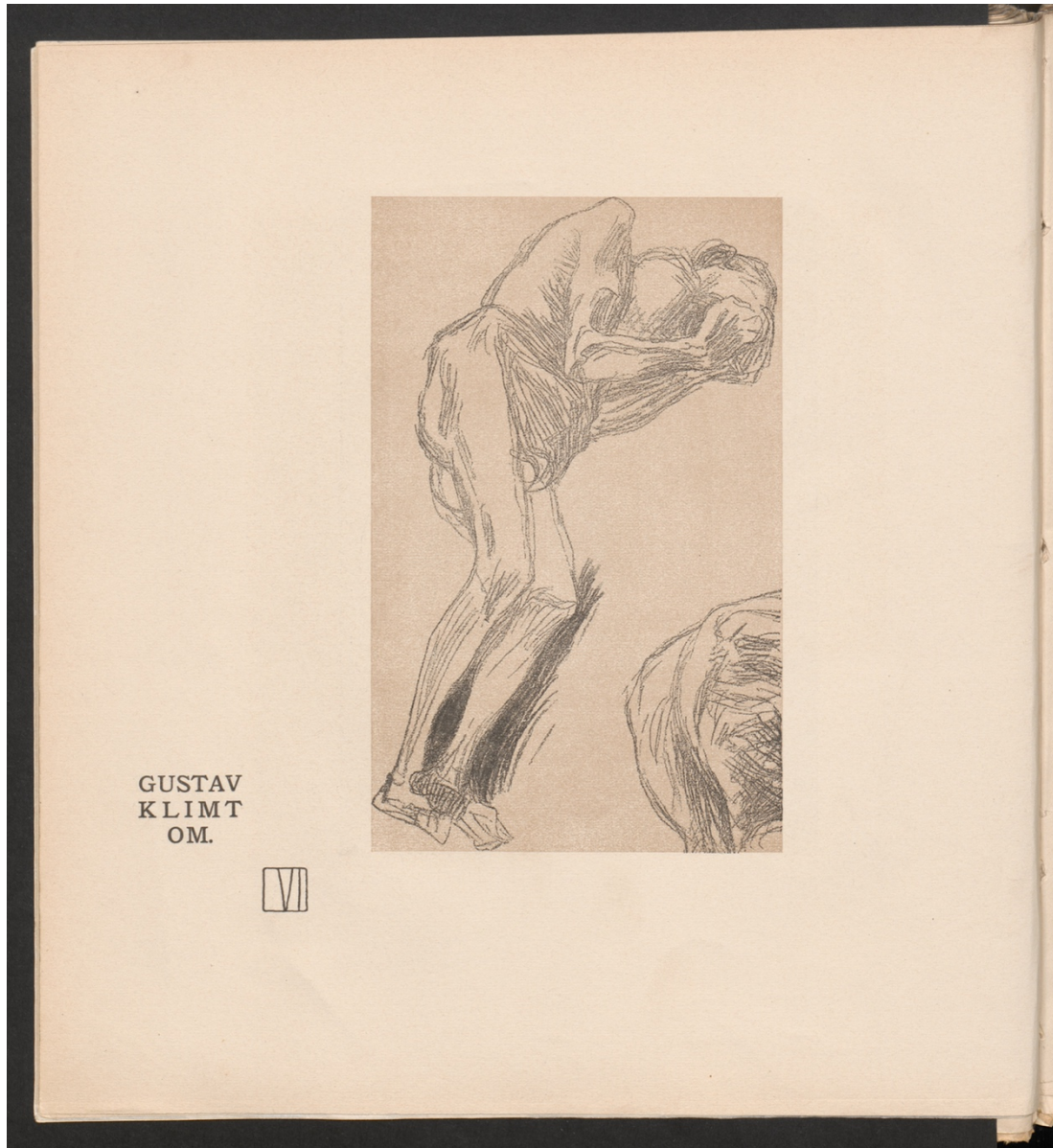


Figure 11

from his body. His wrists, his elbows, his shoulders, and his knees, all jut out as if seeking to escape the confines of his skin. The visible skeleton beneath his skin extends throughout the figure but is most obvious in the man's pelvic and hip bones. With barely any fat on him, his pelvic structure is almost completely visible beneath his transparently thin skin. His bony legs extend towards the bottom left corner of the piece where his feet twist together painfully, as if he's trying to curl in on himself, escaping the outside world. His stomach is the only thing which appears to be anything but bone. The skin hanging off his belly gives the illusion of fat while shadowing his chest and genitals from view.

The bottom right of the piece is home to an unintelligible shape. Shadowed and angular, this shape appears similar to the virile, muscular figures of men in many stronger depictions of men in this set of sketches by Klimt. This emaciated, broken figure highlights Blackshaw's interpretation that depictions of nude men often called attention to the ways the modern world beat down the bodies of these men (Blackshaw 390). The detrimental effects modern city life had on the body are emphasized in Klimt's work.

This series of 15 sketches portray the cycle of life, including sketches of babies, young girls, virile men, and finally the elderly. This representation of aging is not a positive one. While some artists might display age through portraits of the old and the wise, Klimt chooses to represent aging through this image of a depiction of a weak, tired old man. His body and spirit have failed him. The interest that Vienna had in seeing the decrepit and feeble body as it ages is compounded by the later works of Klimt's protégé, Schiele, whose nude pieces were even more contorted and emaciated. As George explains, Ilka Maria Ungar's poem "Leben der Armen" explores this despair and decaying body; it opens with the gruesome image of "the body of the destitute, expectant mother as a coffin" (George 125). Ungar wrote extensively about the

experience of lower-class women at the time, emphasizing the hopelessness and desperation of mothers. The life of the poor, the life of the proletariat in this modern Vienna is having a detrimental effect on the body, not only for women and children, but also for men as is seen in Klimt's sketch. There was no interest in portraying dignity in death, only in presenting the realities and weaknesses that come with it. The modern world has broken down and beaten the body by the time it reaches its final stage.

Conclusion

The naked bodies portrayed in *Ver Sacrum* are vast and varied. Ranging from metaphors for objects to hope, strength to decay, and dominator to fragile, the representation of the body is a fusion of the fear, fascination, horror, and fantasy being felt by the artists of *Ver Sacrum* and the people of Vienna. The nude images in the Secession journal are representative of this dichotomous preoccupation with the naked form.

Existing in the same journal, the consistently contradictory representation of the nude form displays transparent tensions in how artists of the Secession view the naked form. Reflecting the societal interest in sexuality and the naked body, *Ver Sacrum* displays the nude form as a tool for learning, as an object for viewing, as a vassal for our ultimate demise, and as a figure of dominance. With a particular interest in the exploration of young girls' nude forms, the artists of *Ver Sacrum* explore the widespread contradictions surrounding female and childhood sexuality. The exploration of young girls as a metaphor for new beginnings, purity, and hope contradicts the depictions of them as dominators. It contradicts the cultural representation of the sexually deprived proletarian young girl which Freud strengthened with his harmful case study Dora, in which he blames his patient's devious sexuality for her employer assaulting her, as well as his theories on sexuality (Spector Person; Gilman; Freud).

The constant and perpetual contradictions women faced at the hands of the male imagination in fin-de-siècle Vienna are drawn into the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. The dichotomy between young girls being observed in their most intimate state alongside their role as innocent representations of hope; the clash of female sexuality being seen as depraved and yet the constant sexualization of their forms; the tension between young and old, virile and decaying, femme fatale and damsel in distress. The constant contradictions, opposition, and disagreement about what a woman represents, what naked bodies represent and how they are viewed, all from the perspective of men, are taken from the minds of fin-de-siècle Vienna and carried over into the Secession journal where the naked form became immortalized in its art and “thus became the sexual phantasies, or nightmares, of an entire society” (Gilman 360).

The nude form is very prevalent in *Ver Sacrum*. With 304 pieces depicting naked bodies through six years of publication, there is much research yet to do. George’s 2020 book opened a door for new research and scholarship in the field. Exploring the way artists depicted the body is vital to understanding the body’s place in cultural creation at the time, because, Gilman contends, it was the immortalization of the body in art which impacted the cultural conversation around nudity and sexuality. With such an abundance of nude art George’s conclusion that the body was a contributing factor to culture creation is a good and necessary one. The scholarship on nudity in art shows that the artists who were contributing to *Ver Sacrum* were influenced by the world around them and the world around them was influenced by their art.

Chapter 4: Rainer Maria Rilke and Disagreement in *Ver Sacrum*

Introduction

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was a consistent literary contributor to *Ver Sacrum*. His literary contributions to the journal included poems, essays, and plays. For the first four years of publication, Rilke was one of the most prominent and familiar literary voices in *Ver Sacrum*. With nine contributions, only one other author contributed more than Rilke: Wilhelm Schölermann (1865–1923), who contributed ten literary pieces to the journal. Rilke contributed four pieces in the first year of *Ver Sacrum*'s publication. In issues three, four, and nine of 1898 were three of Rilke's poems. The first part of his essay "Über Kunst" appeared in the November 1898 issue. Notably, his untitled poem in 1898's third issue appears directly after the essay discussed in a previous chapter titled "Symbolistik vor hundert Jahren." This essay by Dr. Ricarda Huch explores how art reflects the natural world and emphasizes the importance of joining visual art and literary art, specifically poetry (*Ver Sacrum*, I, iii). In 1899, the second and third part of the essay "Über Kunst" was included in issues one and five. In 1901, his 13-page essay "Ein Prager Künstler," the last essay he would contribute, concerned the Prague artist Emil Olrik (1870-1932), a close friend of Rilke's, and was accompanied by Olrik's visual art. Rilke's final contribution to *Ver Sacrum* took up the entire 21st issue in 1901. Comprised entirely of Rilke's "Drei Spiele," this issue is devoted to three small scenes titled "Vorfrühling," "In herbstlichen Alleen," and "Winterseele" and includes visual contributions by five Secessionist artists.

By placing “Drei Spiele” back into its original context in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*, it becomes clear that the tensions Rilke explores in the plays are mirrored by the art and the artists. The tensions about which Rilke was writing are present in the contradictory and dichotomous pieces accompanying the plays. In its context, “Drei Spiele” becomes an example of those tensions in action. The contradictory understanding of the stories and by extension, modern life, this issue in *Ver Sacrum* displays the social tensions both in fin-de-siècle Vienna as a whole and in the Secession art journal.

Scholarship

The name Rainer Maria Rilke is intrinsically connected to 20th-century art and poetry. His influence on later thinkers, his quotability, and his deep connection to art and artists in the early 1900s make him a compelling subject of study. Scholarship on Rilke is vast and varied. With a large catalogue of published works of poetry, fiction, drama, and more, scholars have an abundance of material to examine and interpret. Exploring Rilke and his response to the modern world, scholars agree that Rilke’s work turns inward, looking at the internal life of humanity as a way to understand the ever-changing world around him. His writings document his search for spiritualism in a time of secularism, internal dialogue in a time of outward expression, and connection to the natural world in a time of increasing industrialization (Chamberlain 79; McElvoy). This vibrating tension permeates Rilke’s work, not only in theme but also in style, grammar, and rhythm (Hodakowska; Rose 70-71).

Often described as a “hermit” (Metzger and Metzger 1), Rilke spent his early career writing poetry and learning about art, both formally through education and informally through acquaintances (Freedman 21–34). He quickly gained a reputation as a mystic and aestheticist,

“wanting to inject beauty into writing, into life” (McElvoy 41:30). Hannah Arendt, who wrote about Rilke in 1930, believed that Rilke was, like others at the time, very much concerned with nothingness. She explored the sense Rilke brought to his work that writing is in vain but not without meaning; he was writing without hope for a favourable outcome, but he was writing with hope for something, with a “gratitude for being” (Björk 102). This is the internal struggle which Rilke presents, not only in the way he writes but also in what he writes.

One definitive study of Rilke’s life and work is the 1996 book *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke* by Ralph Freedman. This extensive biography of Rilke chronicles his life from a young, aspiring poet to one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. Through this critical biography of Rilke’s life, Freedman explores how “this tortured man” created an inner aestheticism despite the struggles he faced (Freedman vii). Where Freedman’s focus is Rilke’s life, in her 2022 book *Rilke: The Last Inward Man*, Lesley Chamberlain centers Rilke’s poetry as she explores Rilke’s life, work, and reception through the inner world he created in his art. With poetry as the protagonist, Chamberlain argues that the introspection in Rilke’s work was a way for him to understand the changing modern world around him. “[Rilke] built his own castle and let no one in” (Chamberlain 222). Living in a world that lacked spirituality and inward contemplation, Rilke used his art to create what he perceived was lacking in his world. It is only in his art, asserts Chamberlain, that Rilke found meaning, attempting to bring a transcendence back to the modern, materialistic world. In a world of collapsing spirituality, Rilke encouraged introversion.

Rilke’s involvement in the art community during the turn of the century is an area of much study. Rilke was deeply connected to the art community throughout his early years. As a young man, Rilke spent much of his years in Prague, Munich, and Berlin attending art exhibits

and taking courses on art history. His later marriage to sculptor Clara Westhoff (1878-1954) as well as his early art criticism and writing have cemented Rilke's relationship to the visual arts as integral to his life and poetry (Metzger and Metzger 264). Despite his interest and enthusiasm for the arts and crafts movement, Jugendstil, and the Munich Secession movement, all of which shared similar styles and beliefs as the Vienna Secession, in an 1897 letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1937) (a consistent companion and mentor in Rilke's early years) Rilke expressed his distaste for the Vienna Secession movement and art community. He didn't see Vienna as a city conducive to true art and literature, believing Vienna to be "superficial and plebeian" (Metzger and Metzger 266). It was not long after Rilke spoke of this dislike of the Viennese Secession that he first contributed to *Ver Sacrum*. Rilke's attention and work moved outside of the Jugendstil and Secessionist world, focusing his attention on artists like Rodin, whose work could never be defined by one movement or style (Bridge 150-52). But the influence and styles of his early art inspiration can be noted in his later works through his exploration of life in a new, modern world (Webb 122).

Rilke's connection to the art world intensified during his time in Worpswede, an artist colony near Bremen and his later working relationship with Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) in Paris. He first visited Worpswede for five weeks in September of 1900. After his marriage to Westhoff in early 1901, he returned to Worpswede and lived there for about six months (Houston 333). Rilke's time in Worpswede was short-lived. He soon left his wife and child to work with Rodin, whom he deeply admired at the time, for nine months in 1902 (Bridge 151). His connection with the world of visual arts decreased significantly after his time with Rodin.

Rilke's contributions to *Ver Sacrum* are not frequently addressed in scholarship on the poet. His work with the Secession journal is either overlooked or mentioned in conjunction with

his art criticism and essay on Emil Olrik. While his essays from *Ver Sacrum* are explored to better understand Rilke's place in the art world, his "Drei Spiele" are mentioned only in lists of his dramas and plays. "The Plays of Rainer Maria Rilke" by John Robert Locke, a 600-page dissertation published in 1973, includes descriptions, interpretations, and translations of all of Rilke's dramas, scenes, and plays. Part VI of this list is dedicated to "Drei Spiele" and "Die Blinde." "Die Blinde" is an altered version of "Winterseele," the third play in "Drei Spiele," which appeared in the book *Das Buch der Bilder* in 1902 (Locke 374). For this reason, "Die Blinde" is discussed in conjunction with "Drei Spiele." Locke interprets "Drei Spiele" as "a single movement towards the same double theme: the nature of inner reality and how a human being can come to understand it" (Locke 378). By looking at the three plays together, Locke sees the integral connection between them. Each play, says Locke, explores the inner life of the characters and shows how they each come to understand that inwardness. Locke cites "Vorfrühling" as the beginning of this inward understanding, "In herbstlichen Alleen" as the moment when hope for a higher level of understanding is born out of loss, and "Winterseele" as the development of the power of inner sight through survival.

While the scholarship on "Drei Spiele" is limited, the themes and tropes of the plays are common in Rilke's work and can be compared with many of his early poems, including "Sehnsucht," "Der Schauende," and "Herbsttag." Howard Roman's "Rilke's Dramas: An Annotated List" offers an eight-page, succinct list of Rilke's plays which contains a paragraph for "Drei Spiele" providing publication details for the plays and compares the themes in them to other works by Rilke, the poems "Sehnsucht" and "Der Schauende" (Roman 207). Both poems were written in early 1901 for a collection called *Das Buch der Bilder* and utilize storm and nature imagery to explore overcoming suffering. In "Der Schauende," Rilke expresses his belief

that to be defeated by the world is to be moulded by it and to overcome that defeat, one must turn inward and seek inner power through poetry (Metzger and Metzger 61–62). As Lesley Chamberlain asserts in her book, Rilke’s interest is in the inner life of his characters (Chamberlain 26). This is also clear in his use of seasonal changes which he utilizes in “Drei Spiele” as well as his 1902 poem “Herbsttag.” Like Rilke’s “Herbsttag,” “Drei Spiele” utilizes themes of the changing seasons to express maturation, growth, and a turn towards inward reflection as the seasons change (Wolf 20).

The scholarship on “Drei Spiele” is limited to comparisons and brief analyses. There is no discussion of the illustrations which accompanied the plays in *Ver Sacrum* or their place in the journal. Decontextualizing the plays allows scholars to compare and equate them easily to Rilke’s other works without considering the voices of the other artists who contributed to the initial publication of “Drei Spiele.”

Rilke in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*

The first November 1901 issue of *Ver Sacrum*, issue 21, is dedicated to Rilke’s three plays. The issue contains illustrations and decorative borders by five artists to accompany Rilke’s pieces. The title page and a closing page are both illustrated by J.M. Auchentaller. The illustrations are in orange and consist of leaves, clusters of blossoms, and berries. The 20-page issue contains primarily nature imagery, both in the art and the literature. Following the title page is a two-page, two-sentence introduction by Rilke, illustrated by Wilhelm List (1864-1918). It is through our finite deeds, says Rilke in his introduction, that our infinite desires are reflected. “Aus unendlichen Sehnsüchten steigen / endliche Thaten wie schwache Fontänen, / die sich zeitig und zitternd neigen. / Aber, die sich uns sonst verschweigen, / unsere fröhlichen Kräfte zeigen / sich

in diesen tanzenden Tränen” (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 354-55). The “Drei Spiele” contain similar themes, that through pain, meaning can be found; without suffering, we do not truly live. The introduction is accompanied by stylized illustrations (Figure 12) that, when placed side by side as they would be seen in the journal, create a symmetrical pattern. In white, orange, and black, the illustrations are made up of curving lines. At the bottom of each page is a black pattern that looks like two swans facing away from one another. Above them are lines of orange which connect and create swatches of orange on both pages. Above the swans’ heads and in front of the orange are Rilke’s words, immediately grabbing the attention of the reader. Growing out of the top of the words are 12 swirls of black, six on each page first growing up and to the left of the page and then, on the next page, up and to the right.

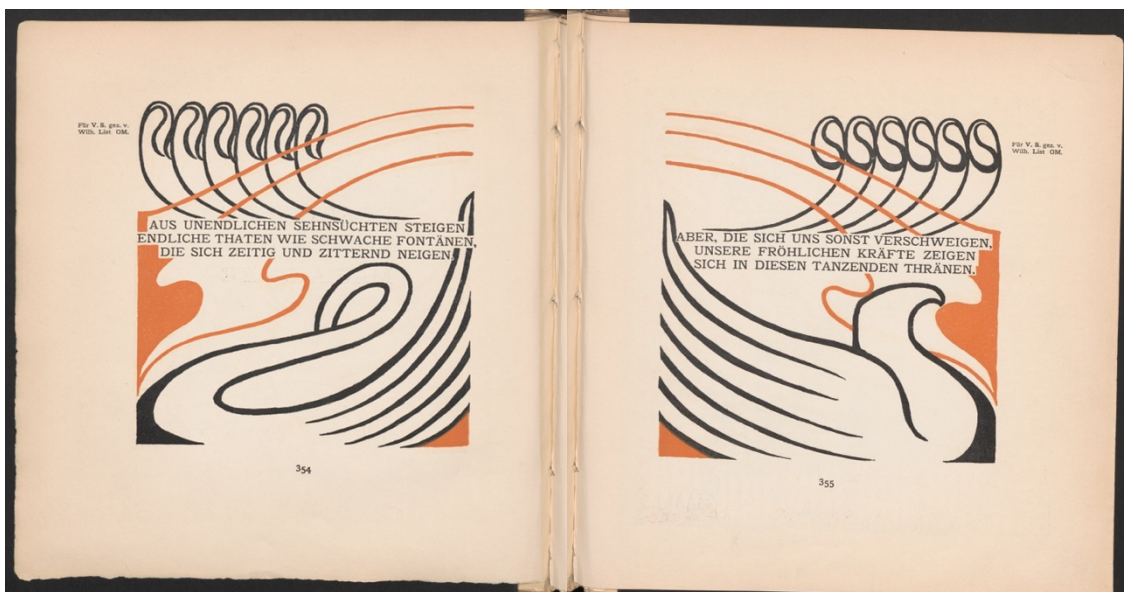


Figure 12

The rest of the issue is taken up by the “Drei Spiele.” The plays share similar stylistic elements, creating a cohesive, united piece. Each play is written in iambic pentameter with a loose rhyming scheme. Though not strict structural elements, the meter and rhyming add rhythm and movement to the pieces. The setting for each is a conversation between a man and a woman.

Though the first play is more conversation-based than the other two, they all are written as dialogues between two people. Finally, none of the plays have any specific stage direction or scene description. None of these plays have ever been professionally performed (Locke 374).

The next page, page 356, is devoted to the first of three illustrations to go along with the three plays, Figure 13. This piece, by Secessionist and founding member of *Ver Sacrum*



Figure 13

Koloman Moser, depicts two figures, a woman drawn in black and wearing a black gown and a page drawn in white and orange and wearing a white shawl with orange patterns. The woman is on the left side of the page. Her head is held high, but her gaze is lowered to the ground, neck tilted and extended to her left. Her hair is black, blending into the border. Her gown, in the same, formless black as her hair, leaves her clavicle and shoulders bare and extends past the edge of the piece. Her face, neck, and hands are the only visible parts of her. The same colour as the background, her face is defined by black lines that make up her features. Her hands, below her midsection, clutch the fabric of her dress. She leans gently backwards as if resting against the illustration's border, creating distance between herself and the page.

The page stands across from her. The only piece of him that is black is his eye which is downcast. He leans forward, drawn to the woman as if coming in from the piece's borders. His skin, like the woman's, is the same colour as the page itself but in contrast to the woman, his hair and clothing are orange. Unlike her, his clothing is not an empty abyss of black but rather a white, flowing shawl with a circular orange pattern. The piece's background is made up of small, white diamond shapes on a black background. The whole piece is bordered by similar shapes, large white diamonds connected by a white thread and surrounded by white squares containing orange circles, all placed against a black background.

This piece is followed by the first of the "Drei Spiele," "Vorfrühling." The first page of "Vorfrühling" has the same border as the illustration by Moser. The next two pages are bordered by symmetrical orange diamonds on both the right and left sides of the text. All the borders, also by Moser, frame Rilke's words.

The play follows a conversation between two characters, "Die schwarze Herzogin" and "Der Page." This play is three pages long and explores the relationship between the duchess and

the page. Beginning with a discussion of the page's quiet reservations, the duchess tells the page that he is constantly dreaming and asks if he is ill. The page responds that he was often ill as a child and in that illness, he found happiness. "Doch weiss ich, dass mich meine Fieber freuten; / in ihnen lernte ich die Dinge deuten, / noch eh ich wusste, was die Dinge sind" (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 357). Through his suffering, says the page, he found happiness in things before he even knew what those things were. Through the course of the play, we learn of the death of the page's mother. When the duchess asks if she resembles his mother, the page responds that he sees his mother in the love he holds for the duchess. The piece ends with the duchess asking if the page dreams of her. He responds, shocked, that he dreams only of her nearness and expresses that he hears the echoes of her long after she has left his side.

Das ist: als müsst' ich Eures Liedes Spur,
wenn noch die warme Laute leise wellt,
entdecken in den halbverhallten Saiten
und langsam den verlassnen Klang durchschreiten,
der hinter mir zerfällt... (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 359).

This play expresses tensions like Moser does in his piece, but where Moser's tension comes from the push and pull of the duchess and the page, the tension in the scene is more internal. The internal tension on the page is brought out by his conversation with the duchess. Throughout the play the page discusses how, despite his illness, he found joy, despite his loss, he found connection, and despite his loneliness, he found nearness. Rilke explores the power of the page to overcome the complexities and tragedies of his life. The play uncovers the page's ability to see "ein zweiter Sinn" in his life, recognizing his own ability to feel joy and love despite his suffering (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 357).

The title of this piece, “Vorfrühling,” recalls the theme of spring and new life which permeates *Ver Sacrum* as a whole. This theme is embodied in the page whose youth and optimism allow him to see the joy in life. When the older duchess tells him that he dreams too much, he responds that he doesn’t see his optimism as dreaming but rather as musings for what might come tomorrow. He is in the springtime of his life, new and alive, he sees promise and optimism in every struggle.

The tensions depicted in the play take place inwardly. Rilke, the inward poet, offers readers a place where they can see the inner dichotomy of life expressed outwardly. Through the connection between the duchess and the page, Rilke brings the internal struggles into the daylight and proves that no person is alone in overcoming them. In contrast to this, the piece by Moser displays an external tension. The push and pull between people, colours, and patterns all indicate a struggle between two external forces, in this case, the duchess and the page. This direct contrast between the visual art and the literature here adds another layer of dichotomy and tension to the issue. The reader is forced to reckon with two different perspectives in the same scene and is confronted with the question of who is to be trusted. The dichotomy between written and visual art is seen in the relationship between the play and its accompanying artwork and contributes to the tensions the issue evokes in its readers.

The next six pages are comprised of illustrations by Alfred Roller (1864-1935), another founding member of *Ver Sacrum*. His illustration and borders for the second play, “In herbstlichen Alleen,” have the same colour pallet as Moser’s work. His illustration on page 360 comprises two faces. Though it is unclear whether the faces are male or female, I will be discussing them as a man and a woman, based on several factors. First, the bottom face has long eyelashes and a gentle curve to her nose while the upper figure’s face is harder, more angular,

and with deep-set eyes. This, along with the other two images reflecting the characters in the play, leads me to the conclusion that the bottom face is that of a woman and the top face of a man.

The man faces upwards, his chin extended towards the sky, eyes shut. The woman bows her head and also has her eyes closed. Their faces are white with black detailing. In front of them, falling orange leaves decorate the page and hide them from direct view. The piece's



Figure 14

background is black with white and orange lines creating swirls to the left, in front of the man's head. To the right, behind the woman's head, is a complex design of black and white swirls, dots, circles, and other shapes which give the illusion of a mind whirling with thoughts. The whole piece is bordered by black, stylized shapes, which evoke the natural imagery of water droplets or leaves.

The following five pages are bordered by designs which Roller extracted from his first illustration. The first page of "In herbstlichen Alleen" has the same border as Figure 14, which surrounds two columns of orange and white shapes on the right and left sides of the text. The background of each border is orange with white lines, similar to the left-side background of Roller's illustration. Above the title of the play are four squares with the same design. The following four pages of text have the same orange and white border, with the final page including eight squares of design at the bottom of the page.

The play itself is a conversation between "Der junge Mann" and "Das Mädchen." This play has less dialogue, focusing instead on the internal struggle and discussion each character is having with themselves. When one character speaks to the other, the other rarely responds. The play tells the story of two lovers who are at the end of their relationship. The young man explains that their love has died and that they no longer know each other. The girl responds that he has never heard her when she speaks to him and that those who lose love have never really felt it in the first place. Though they speak the same words to each other as they did in their springtime, says the girl, now, in their autumn, they speak more quietly, they speak like the dead.

The young man sees their old feelings as feelings of springtime, youthful feelings of infatuation which, as they grow, they lose. Now that they have lost this relationship, they must find themselves in this new phase in life. "Du bist wieder dein. Ich bin wieder mein. / Und jedes

ist anders als zuvor” (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 364). Once they have left behind their love, their relationship, that is when they discover who they have become. Each has been forever changed by their time together and finally, they belong to only themselves.

The play ends with the only direct communication between the two. The girl asks where the young man will go now that their relationship has reached its autumn. The young man replies that he will go “Von Sinn zu Sinn,” believing more in his destiny than ever before (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 364). He doesn’t know where his life will lead him, but he knows that he will go further alone than he could with her.

Nur weiss ich: Wunder und Weh
kommen von anderswo.
Es ist alles nicht so,
wie man meint:
Man weint sich nicht in ein Leid hinein
und lacht sich nicht in ein Seligsein
und wärmt sich an keiner Verwandtschaft.
Und was du schaust
und erbaust,
liebst und verstehst:
ist alles Landschaft,
durch die Du gehst
(*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 364-65).

As the young man sets out on this journey through the world, from one sense to another, he knows that there is something out there that makes him feel and that he must discover it on his own. This play tells the story of tensions between two lovers whose paths are diverging from each other. Their loss of love for one another opens the door for them to discover themselves. Their separation from each other encourages and nurtures their connection and understanding to themselves. For these young people, at least for the young man, discovering themselves is worth the loss of their relationship. The autumnal imagery of the art and the title emphasize the end of

their relationship. Autumn represents the arrival of death as the summer comes to an end. It is a metaphor for the death of their relationship and the arrival of their own maturity.

The piece of art which accompanies “In herbstlichen Alleen” compliments the metaphors and meaning in Rilke’s play. Rilke’s young man is looking towards his future, head held high, ready for the joy and pain and connection life will give him. Similarly, Roller’s young man holds his head high. He looks towards a vast sky of possibilities, the autumn of his relationship behind him. Rilke’s girl, on the other hand, is plagued with questions about the past and the future. She is uncertain and apprehensive about what will come. Roller’s girl looks down with her eyes closed as if she is frightened to see what lies ahead of her. Behind her is a chaotic whirl of shapes, questions from the past and about the future that torment her thoughts. Unlike Moser’s interpretation of Rilke’s play, this artistic rendition by Roller does mirror Rilke’s words. While the audience is not confronted with a choice of whom to believe, they are confronted with the clashing characters and their diverging paths. This poem explores the journey toward maturity. One character looks forward to the future and to the world he has yet to experience. The other character looks back at the past questioning her choices and fearing what is to come. Rilke lays out this uniquely human experience in a scene about the loss of one relationship and the beginning of a new adventure.

The final illustration, Figure 15, appears on page 366 and depicts two women in black, orange, and white. This piece accompanies the third play, “Winterseele” and is illustrated by Ernst Stöhr. It is different from the other illustrations by not including both characters from Rilke’s play, instead depicting two women, a blind girl and another woman, who could be the mother described in the play. Like the other two pieces, this illustration contains a drawing by the artist and a border surrounding it. Unlike the other two illustrations, this is a much darker

piece. The only white on this page is the faces of the two women. The face on the bottom looks up, her eyes closed, her head tilted back, and her neck elongated. Above her, the face of the other woman appears over her, looking down at her. This woman's head is the only piece of her seen in the illustration apart from her hair. Both women's hair is black and flows around their heads in contrast to their pale skin. The bottom woman's hair blends into the darkness surrounding her. The rest of the illustration is covered in swirls of blackness with streaks of orange. Giving the illusion of flowing fabric, the blackness swallows the sleeping girl. Above her, the orange fabric flows around the woman looking down on her. A swirl of that orange fabric comes down from above and cradles the sleeping woman's head. Surrounding the whole piece is a border of light, the same colour as *Ver Sacrum's* paper. Outlined in a single line of black, the border holds a cluster of small sketches which resemble stars or snowflakes or sparks.

The five pages of text which follow are framed with illustrations by Stöhr. The first page has the same border as the illustration above, the black outline and small sketches flowing to the right. The page also has four small rectangles which show depictions of mountains in orange. The next two pages each have ten small illustrations which show fire, waves, earth, stars, and clouds. The final two pages have four and six rectangles, respectively, that depict earth, fire, and air. One small rectangle on each page depicts the face of two women, one with dark hair and closed eyes, the other with light hair and open eyes. The last page also has six small, orange diamonds at the close of the scene.

Framed within these borders is the third and final play, "Winterseele," depicting a conversation between "Der Fremde" and "Die Blinde," the play tells the story of a woman's experience of going blind and learning to live in perpetual darkness. The play begins with the stranger asking the woman how she feels about talking about her blindness. She expresses that

she is not the same person she was before. The girl she used to be died with her eyesight and has become a stranger to the woman she is now. But, she says, it was hard in the early days of her blindness. The girl reflects on the times she used to call to her mother, begging for daylight, for storms, for colours, begging to see anything. “Ohne mich. Wie kann es denn ohne mich Tag sein?” (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 369). Her desperation to be who she used to be is palpable in her words. She feels like an island with no way to connect to the people she used to know or the

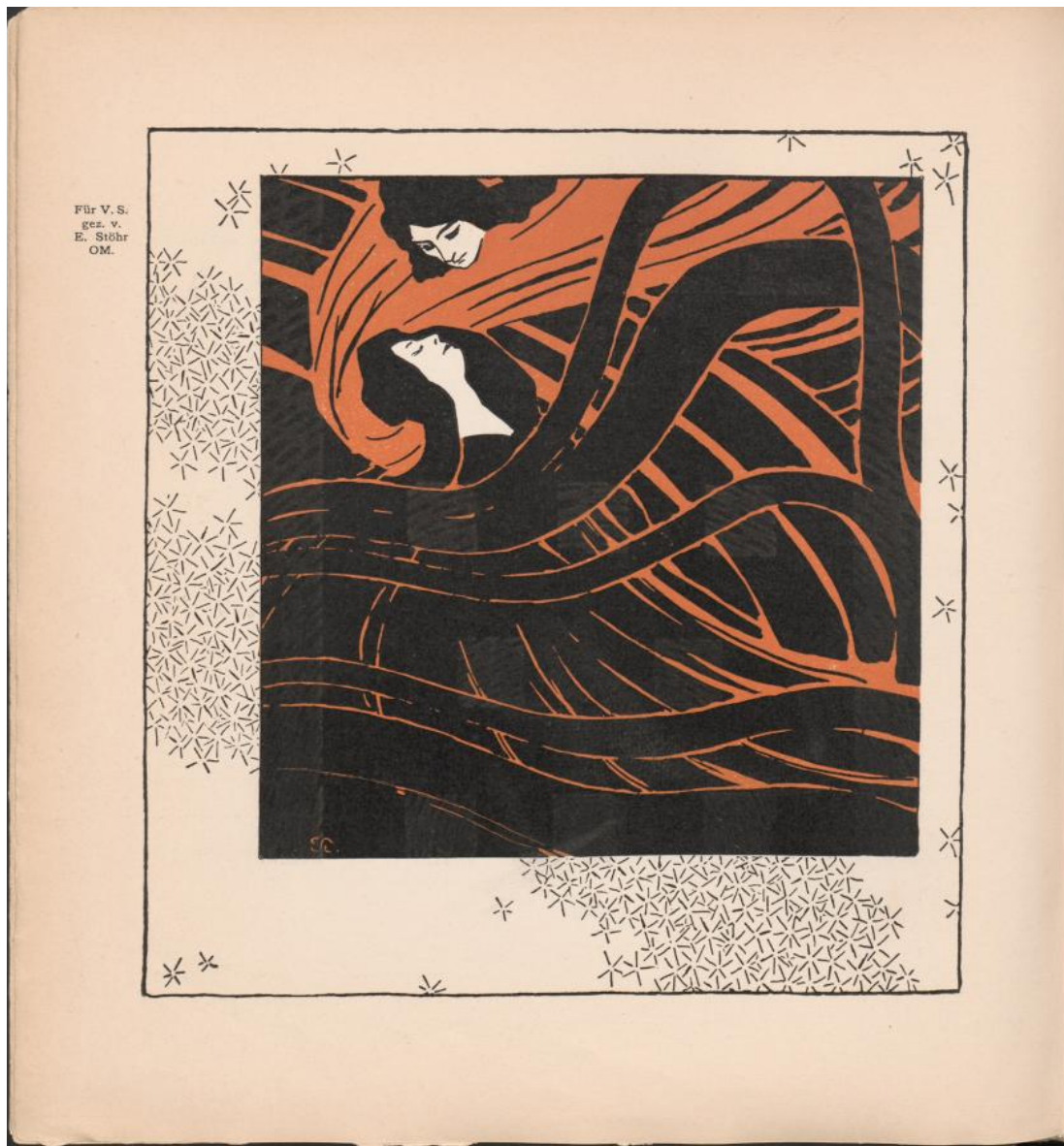


Figure 15

person she used to be. For years, says the blind girl, she did not know how to go about living without her sight. But then her body forgot what her eyes had seen. She learned to walk through life blindly with her feet on the floor and her heightened senses translating colours to scents and sounds to stories. The inevitability of death finding others will never reach her, she says, because who she used to be has already died and she was reborn. “Und der Tod, der die Blicke wie Blumen bricht / findet meine Augen nicht...” (*Ver Sacrum*, IV, xxi, 371). From her blindness, the girl has developed a new way of seeing the world, to see past the materiality of the world, and into the inner world inside herself.

Here Rilke once again shows that despite life’s struggles, we can find peace in ourselves. Like “Vorfrühling,” this piece explores the inner tensions of loss and how humanity can find beauty despite suffering and with that discovery, death loses its power over humanity. The metaphor of the title, “Winterseele,” like the other two plays, reflects the changing season of the girl’s life. She compares the loss of her sight to a death which she overcame. Rilke compares spring to birth, autumn to maturation, and here winter to death. This death, however, is not permanent. This death, just like winter, leads to a new birth, a new spring.

Stöhr’s illustration does not portray the two characters in the scene as the other artists did. Instead, Stöhr depicts the blind girl and her mother. This illustration, though reflective of the blind girl’s experience when she was young, does not express her growth by the end of the scene. Stöhr’s piece focuses on the dark nights during which the young girl cried for her mother to bring her the light. The blind girl in his depiction is surrounded by swirls of black, impenetrable by the light surrounding her mother above. She appears pale and still, almost dead. While Rilke’s blind girl leaves behind her old, dead self in favour of an inward life, Stöhr’s blind girl is trapped forever in the darkness. The reader is confronted here with Stöhr’s choice to focus on the first,

tragic piece of the girl's story rather than her overcoming her past. It is up to the reader to determine which story is the truth: can we overcome the obstacles life throws at us through the cultivation of our inner world, as Rilke expresses; or is the modern world a place of perpetual darkness that traps us in its clutches and holds us captive in time? The issue ends with the same illustration as the title page by J.M. Auchentaller.

Conclusion

Despite being an amalgamation of five artists' works, visually, the issue is cohesive and functions as one piece of art. In a letter to Axel Juncker from January 1902, Rilke bemoaned the issue of *Ver Sacrum*, stating that the artwork attached to his "Drei Spiele" was "schrecklich" (Rilke 799). This issue would be Rilke's last contribution to *Ver Sacrum*. Rilke's disapproval of the work done by the Secessionist artists adds another layer of tension to this already contradictory issue.

The contradictions in the issue exist in both the literature and the visual art. Each artist's piece displays tension in different ways, whether internal or external, direct or indirect. Rilke portrays the tensions of life in a far more positive light than the artistic contributors. In each of his three plays, Rilke explores how, despite the hardships and suffering of the modern world, human beings find ways to exist joyfully. Whether through connection with others, external exploration, or internal growth, people will find a way to be resilient. Reading these three plays outside of their contextual framework can bring an understanding of Rilke's optimistic outlook on struggle but it cannot put that optimistic outlook into context with other artists of his time. Without the visual contributions and its home in *Ver Sacrum*, "Drei Spiele" does not hold the power of resistance of a thinker who refuses to fall into pessimism.

The tensions of the fin-de-siècle are represented in this issue of *Ver Sacrum*. This issue reveals that it was not just the old world resisting the new world's search for control of social discourse, but it was also the new world's thinkers challenging and opposing each other in figuring out what was true, what mattered, and how to live in their new world. Thinkers and artists who shared the belief that every age should have its art and that every art should be respected did not band together in perfect agreement. There was not one, uniform "new" art that everyone could get behind. This issue of *Ver Sacrum* exemplifies the internal tension among these modern thinkers.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

By centring the Secession journal, *Ver Sacrum*, in this thesis, it is evident that the fin-de-siècle artistic and social tensions that permeated Vienna are featured prominently in its pages. The themes, issues, artists, and motifs explored in the past three chapters uncover the tensions and dichotomies which surround the journal and its contributors.

The goal of *Ver Sacrum* for the Secessionists was to offer a place for the driving force of creativity, modernism, to exist without being impeded by the traditionalism of Vienna. Through the journal's six years of publication, the Secessionists were able to accomplish this goal. The pages of *Ver Sacrum* were a place where art was allowed to flourish and grow, change, and evolve. It was not impeded by traditionalism, nor was it censored by authority. It caused commotions and discussions among the traditionalists and the artists who contributed to the journal. The Secession wanted this journal to be an important piece of artistic freedom and that it was.

Research on *Ver Sacrum* has until now been minimal, limited to the journal as a source for works by artists and writers during fin-de-siècle Vienna. Chapter 2 of this thesis explored Gustav Klimt's revolutionary style and his leading role in the Secession and in *Ver Sacrum*. While scholars have used Klimt's work in the journal to highlight tensions in Vienna's social and political scenes, by placing Klimt back into his context, Chapter 2 shows that it is not just Klimt, but the whole journal, that highlights, explores, and creates those tensions. Artists like Otto Friedrich, Maximilian Pirner, Friedrich König, Ernst Stöhr, and others also contributed pieces to *Ver Sacrum* that exhibited themes similar to Klimt's.

Klimt's work caused outrage and controversy among the Viennese public. His notoriety and the public nature of the University paintings made Klimt the public face of this artistic debate. Those other artists were also exploring and pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable at the time as well, but Klimt's public image has overshadowed their presence; as a result, their works in *Ver Sacrum* have been overlooked, despite the similarity in theme to Klimt's "Hygieia" (Figure 1) and *Medizin* (Figure 2). The tensions between the authorities and the journal emphasize Schorske's claim that modernity was not going against the past but creating something entirely new. The Viennese were faced with new and provocative art and their uncertainty towards it caused tension between them and *Ver Sacrum*.

The themes of power and authority are prominent in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. The theme that presents itself in "Hygieia" and *Medizin* – the helpless seeking salvation from an authority who has turned its back on the people – is not unique to Klimt. *Ver Sacrum* is full of artists exploring this theme. Otto Friedrich's monk (Figure 3) turns his back on his parishioners as they reach towards him, seeking absolution. Maximilian Pirner's "Empedokles" (Figure 4) stands over the embodiment of hope and new beginnings and watches as the old world destroys her. Friedrich König's queen (Figure 5) pushes away the arms of her begging subject. Her position of authority does not protect her from the presumptuous hands of men, nor does it indicate her willingness to bring safety to her people. Ernst Stöhr depicts the inevitable march toward death. Figure 6 reflects the ever-present unknowable journey through life which leads to only one destination. The reflection of fear and uncertainty this piece portrays indicates Stöhr's deep connection to the tensions reflected in Klimt's most controversial pieces. By centring *Ver Sacrum* in an examination of these themes, that feeling of uncertainty and tension among the Secessionist artists who contributed to the journal is exposed. Placing *Ver Sacrum* in the

discussion of these tensions offers insight into these universal feelings and tensions, proving that though Klimt was revolutionary, he was one among many.

The preoccupation with the naked body and sexuality is a frequently explored area of study in the history of fin-de-siècle Vienna. With research on the nude form in artistic and social discourse creation and in Freud's understanding of sexuality, the fin-de-siècle dichotomous understanding of the body and sexuality has become an important piece of Viennese history and culture. The many depictions of the naked body in the pages of *Ver Sacrum* lay bare the internal tensions faced by the journal's contributors. The controversy surrounding Klimt's contributions to *Ver Sacrum* and the themes of tensions between authorities and their subordinates exemplifies the friction felt between artists and those in authority. At the same time, an exploration of the portrayal of the naked body in the journal shows that the tensions in *Ver Sacrum* were not just external. They were not just between the Viennese people and the journal but among the artists themselves.

Chapter 3 explores the contradictory and discordant representations of the female body in *Ver Sacrum*. The journal's contributors used the bodies of young women to represent both the damsel in distress and the femme fatale. In Figure 7 J.M. Auchentaller depicts a small, delicate female figure standing naked over a large, armed man. In his depiction, the girl has all the power. He represents her as the femme fatale with the power to control snakes and the ability to bring men to heel. It is precisely her nude form that gives her this power. It does not matter that the man is armed with a whip; her naked form is enough to overthrow this man. Conversely, *Ver Sacrum*'s contributors also showed the female body as an object from which the viewer would gain something as well as a figure of hope and new beginnings. Ernst Stöhr's "Das Weib" (Figure 8) puts its title figure on display. She stands, naked in front of a fully clothed man. She is

his entertainment. She has no purpose outside of her worth for him as a viewer. The contradictory fashion with which *Ver Sacrum* viewed the female body reflects the dichotomous understanding of women at the time. Women were seen as both innocents who required protection and devious degenerates whose debased sexuality could corrupt good men.

Ver Sacrum artists also saw aging bodies as decrepit and fragile, signifying the toll life has taken on the old. Klimt's sketch of an emaciated old man (Figure 11) displays the artist's understanding of the consequences of life in this modern world. Age no longer comes with wisdom and poise; now, in the modern Vienna of Klimt's time, age comes with weariness and emaciation. These depictions of the naked form illustrate the internal struggles and tensions *Ver Sacrum* artists were faced with. Their understanding of women's positions and purposes was dichotomous and oppositional. They saw the body as a sign of new life and hope, but also as a sign of decay and fragility in the modern world. By examining the many instances of nudity in *Ver Sacrum*, the internal, dichotomous perception of the naked body is uncovered and Vienna's preoccupation with the nude figure is brought to light in a new form.

Chapter 4 explores Rainer Maria Rilke's contributions to *Ver Sacrum* and demonstrates how the Secession movement and the journal were not immune to the artistic tensions of fin-de-siècle Vienna. While Chapter 2 shows tensions between *Ver Sacrum* and the public, and Chapter 3 displays tensions the artists had within themselves, Chapter 4 shows interpersonal tensions in the pages of *Ver Sacrum*. While the journal prided itself on being a cohesive and unified group with a cohesive and unified aesthetic, that did not always lead to cohesive and unified feelings among its contributors, or even an understanding of each other's work and their meanings.

Rilke disliked the artwork that was presented with his plays. The artists who contributed did not all understand what he was trying to convey. Where Rilke emphasized hope and strength

through struggle, the artists saw only the pain. While Rilke's characters learned and moved forward, the artists' characters were stuck in their struggles. The unity in the issue comes only from the aesthetics of it, not the themes or interpretations of those themes. The friction between the artists and the writer in this issue proves that the tensions so prominent in the pages of *Ver Sacrum* did not leave the Secessionists and the journal's contributors untouched. The tensions of fin-de-siècle Vienna infiltrated every issue and every page of *Ver Sacrum*, and the unity of the movement and its journal did not prevent those tensions from permeating the journal.

By placing *Ver Sacrum* at the centre of analysis, this thesis has shown that even those revolutionary figures who challenged authority separated themselves from their forefathers and paved the way for modernism in Vienna were not immune to the tense environment and uncertainty of the time. The themes in the art and literature of the journal offer insight into those tensions and provide a perspective from which to expand the scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna.

The scholarship on Klimt's University paintings and the public outrage which stemmed from them, the scholarship on nudity, the body, and sexuality and the uncertainty and dichotomy which permeated the social discourse surrounding it, and scholarship on Rilke's work and life as an inward-looking poet all reveal the same strained and tense atmosphere. This thesis has exposed that atmosphere in the pages of one art journal. Though the scholarship has overlooked *Ver Sacrum*, the journal proves what the scholarship asserts. The tensions of fin-de-siècle Vienna are both on display in and perpetuated by the pages of *Ver Sacrum*.

The scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna has largely ignored *Ver Sacrum*. Focusing on Secession artists, themes in their work, or social and political tensions, the artistic history of the time has to a large extent overlooked a comprehensive primary source. The pages of *Ver Sacrum* not only offer insight into the Secession movement or its artist, but they also offer insight into the

artistic and social discourse of the time. Many of the contributors to the journal were living in Vienna in the fin-de-siècle and were influenced by the discourses in the city. The Secession movement which was instrumental in fostering modernism in Vienna and responsible for the journal was influencing those discourses.

The journal contains art, literature, criticism, and more. With such a variety of subjects, *Ver Sacrum*'s comprehensive nature presents scholars with an abundance of material. Research on the many themes, tropes, and symbols in the journal would enrich the field of fin-de-siècle Vienna scholarship. Chapter 3's focus was on nude representation in the journal but also raises questions of gendered representation in *Ver Sacrum*. Though that could not be covered comprehensively in this thesis, there is an imperative for further research on the dichotomous representations of gender in the journal.

Each of the 120 issues of *Ver Sacrum* contains a multitude of worthy topics for further research. The first 1901 issue of *Ver Sacrum* is made up of a calendar of the coming year with accompanying art pieces. The final 1901 issue consists entirely of sheet music from various composers and musicians. Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the topic of music, these unusual issues merit closer examination. The journal frequently discusses the exhibitions put on by the Secession and gives first-hand accounts and criticism by Secession artists and writers. Each of these areas offers scholars an abundance of material still unresearched and unexplored.

One main concern of the Secession movement and their journal was to understand what it meant to be Austrian in the fin-de-siècle. Even though this thesis did not highlight the theme of identity, a deeper exploration of the journal's contributions to Austrian identity is called for.

How did *Ver Sacrum* understand Austrian identity? Did the journal influence what it meant to be Austrian?

Many art and design periodicals have been used in periodical studies to create a modernist historical narrative of European design culture at the turn of the century. *Ver Sacrum*, however, has remained outside of this narrative, being utilized as a supplementary source for research. Future research on the journal could bring *Ver Sacrum* into conversation with other periodicals in Europe in order to better situate its role in modern European design and art circles as well as its role in contributing to European social discourses.

This thesis has examined *Ver Sacrum*, and in three essays explored how themes of tension, dichotomy, and contradiction manifest in its pages. Periodical studies has yet to be thoroughly utilized in German and Austrian studies. By bringing *Ver Sacrum* into focus using periodical studies methods, this thesis has shown how German and Austrian studies can benefit from periodical studies methodologies. These approaches can be employed to explore the numerous artistic and design journals in the German-speaking world that are not being explored to their full potential. By focusing its attention on this long-overlooked journal, *Ver Sacrum*, this thesis offers and encourages new avenues of research for understanding modern, artistic and cultural tensions in fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Periodical studies encourages centring the periodical to create an understanding of its creators, readers, and critics. Employing this methodology, this thesis has emphasized *Ver Sacrum*'s role in studying and understanding fin-de-siècle Vienna. The journal was influenced by the tensions of modern Vienna and, at the same time, it contributed to those tensions.

Emphasizing the journal's recognition of and contributions to the artistic and social tensions

which permeated fin-de-siècle Vienna, this thesis has shed greater light on *Ver Sacrum*'s significant place in the artistic and cultural life of Viennese society.

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