

Vienna's Feuilletons from 42nd Street:

Culture and Civilization in Ann Tizia Leitich's *Amerika, du hast es besser* (1926)

Rob McFarland

Brigham Young University

In the title of his feuilleton article on the front page of Vienna's influential *Neue Freie Presse* on January 31, 1925, the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig warned his Viennese readers about the impending "Monotonisierung der Welt" (Monotonization of the World). According to Zweig, a giant wave of American mass-produced schlock, insipid radio music, and mechanized philosophy was in the process of overwhelming and destroying Europe's ancient and beautiful culture:

Von Amerika kommt jene furchtbare Welle der Einförmigkeit, die jedem Menschen dasselbe gibt, denselben Overallanzug auf die Haut, dasselbe Buch in die Hand, dieselbe Füllfeder zwischen die Finger, dasselbe Gespräch auf die Lippen und dasselbe Automobil statt der Füße. . . Schon ist Rom, der Genius der Nüchternheit, unterwegs, um Europa, das letzte Griechenland der Geschichte, von der Tafel der Zeit auszulöschen.¹

This terrible wave of uniformity comes from America, giving every person the same thing: the same overalls on your skin, the same book in your hand, the same pen in your fingers, the same conversation on your lips, and the same automobile instead of your feet...Already Rome, that genius of efficiency, is well on its way to wipe away Europe, that final Greece of history, from the chalkboard of time.

Just as the art, science and beauty of classical Greece had come to its end at the hand of Rome's technology and unfettered greed, so Europe was in danger of

sinking in a wave of America's ubiquitous and culturally mediocre material products. A few weeks after Stefan Zweig's dystopic call to arms, another Viennese writer responded with a defense of America and a challenge to Austria's intellectuals:

Amerika...ist mehr als Wallstreets Dollarjagd...Amerika, das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten des Reichwerdens, wie es in den Europäischen Märchen vorkommt, ist mehr oder weniger eine Sache der Vergangenheit; aber Amerika, das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten in der Evolution des Menschengeschlechtes mag wohl eine Tatsache werden.²

America is more than Wall Street's dollar chase...America, as it is portrayed in European fairy tales--as the land of unlimited opportunities for getting rich--is more or less a thing of the past. But America, the land of unlimited opportunities for the evolution of mankind: that may well come to pass.

While so many of her fellow European writers, like Zweig, either naïvely celebrated the mechanical wonders of Henry Ford's factories or made paranoid forecasts of American jazz music squelching out Europe's symphonies and concertos, the author of those lines, Ann Tizia Leitich (1891-1976), contended that America is much more than an ideological projection space for Europe's hopes and fears. As the American correspondent for Vienna's influential *Neue Freie Presse* newspaper, Leitich chronicles the complexity and power of the United States from a specific, personal and intimate perspective. In this article, I will argue that Leitich counters the popular interwar perception of Europe as a beautiful, doomed culture that is under attack by a soulless but powerful American civilization. Focusing on her appropriation of Oswald Spengler's dichotomy between civilization and culture, I will explore Leitich's concept of a cultural syncretism that combines artistic beauty and economic power in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Ann Tizia Leitich was in a unique position to understand and write about

the potential connections between European culture and American vitality. Like so many members of the Viennese *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle class) of her era, Leitich grew up in an artistically rich environment. She studied history, graduated with a highly respectable degree, and started a career as a teacher. Leitich also began to experiment with journalistic essay writing in the tradition of Theodor Herzl, Betty Paoli, Hermine Cloeter, Felix Salten and other Viennese writers who contributed to the development of the Viennese feuilleton, the highly mannered essay form adopted from Paris.³ Feuilleton articles typically appeared “unter dem Strich” (under the line) on the front page of Vienna’s newspapers: under a bold border that separated them from the headlines, lead stories, and other business of the day. The art of the feuilleton, as it was practiced (and criticized) in Vienna,⁴ was the ultimate arbiter of bourgeois taste: each essay was written from the perspective of an amused, piqued, or playfully reproachful writer who made unapologetically subjective remarks about cultural events, politics, human habits, travel destinations, and the foibles of her or his fellow Viennese citizens from all walks of life. Leitich absorbed the fine details of feuilleton writing and eventually crafted her own essays after the manner of the Viennese masters. In spite of her budding literary career and her dignified teaching position, the end of the First World War and the subsequent dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire contributed to a personal crisis and changed the course of her life. Two weeks short of qualifying for a pension as a teacher, the thirty-year-old Leitich resigned from her position and joined a group of young German and Austrian women who were traveling to the United States to work as domestic servants.⁵ She liked her employers but could not tolerate the degrading domestic work. She eventually got a job at an insurance company in Des Moines, Iowa, and also signed up for university classes. The college graduate from Austria found herself surrounded by much younger students who, according to her accounts, could beat her at basketball but couldn’t keep up with her excellent grades in English grammar.⁶ In September 1922, she left Iowa and joined the masses of young women moving to New York City in search of their fortunes.⁷ In spite of her long working hours,

Leitich somehow found the time to return to her earlier attempts at writing feuilleton-style articles. In 1923, Leitich debuted as a feuilletonist and correspondent for the *Neue Freie Presse* and several other German-speaking newspapers. Her articulate, personal reflections were immediately popular among her readers in German-speaking Europe. Through the hundreds of feuilletons, articles, film reviews, literary reviews, and travel reports that she wrote, Leitich became one of the most important arbiters of the reception of America during the inter-war period. She met with European and American politicians, writers, artists, and movie stars. Even the president of the newly created Austrian Republic counted himself among her loyal readers. Leitich's unique viewpoint as a feuilletonist was shaped by a number of factors. Her adventuresome and curious nature took her from the deserts of Arizona to the jazz clubs of Harlem. She came incredibly close to her subjects, not satisfied to draw conclusions until she had chatted in the kitchens with housewives, cooks, maids, and nannies, or talked until late into the night in front of a fire in rustic mountain cabins to hear the stories of pioneer families.

Not so much a reporter or critic as a cultural mediator, however, Leitich also tried to make connections between the exquisite sensitivity of European bourgeois aestheticism and the can-do practicality of American idealism. Her approach to this cultural connection can be seen in a series of essays that she published in Vienna in 1926. Following advice given to her by none other than Stefan Zweig, Leitich selected a series of her newspaper articles and titled the book *Amerika, du hast es besser*,⁸ alluding to the first line of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "Den Vereinigten Staaten" (To the United States), in which the poet praises America's lack of history and the country's enviable shortage of "verfallene Schlösser," "unnützes Erinnern," and "vergeblicher Streit" (crumbling castles, useless remembering, and futile strife). In the very first essay that was printed in *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Leitich reports about watching a total solar eclipse from the top of a Manhattan skyscraper. Such an event, Leitich explains, is a perfect way to show off the wonders of America's technological landscape:

Nirgends . . . bot sich das Bild der totalen Sonnenfinsternis am 24. Januar besser dar, als vom Dach eines der Riesen von Newyork-Manhattan. In grünlich bleichem Geisterschein . . . reckte sich um uns, unter uns rätselhaftes Gemäuer, Steinkolosse, die noch vor kaum einer Viertelstunde, stolze, tatenberedte Türme gewesen.⁹

Nowhere . . . could you see the spectacle of the total eclipse on January 24 better than from the roof of one of the giants of New York's Manhattan. In greenish, pale, ghostly light . . . walls stretched around us, below us, stone colossi that only fifteen minutes before had been proud, dynamic towers.

In the darkened cityscape of the eclipse, New York's man-made wonders turn into castles and stone pinnacles. In this strange setting, Leitich is struck by the way that Americans greet the solar eclipse with an outpouring of new technology, a response that she compares with what the response might have been in Europe. As she explains the difference, Leitich makes a careful semantic differentiation between the terms *Zivili- sation* and *Kultur*:

Da dies das Land nicht nur der größten Wißbegierde und Sensationslust, sondern auch der größten Zivilisation—nicht zu verwechseln mit Kultur—ist, so rückte man dem Phänomen mit einem wahrhaft überwältigenden Aufgebot an Teleskopen und Binokeln, Kameras, Kodaks jeder Kategorie und Größe . . . an den Sternleib heran.¹⁰

Because this is not only the land of the greatest curiosity and lust for sensation but also the land of the greatest civilization—not to be confused with culture—people approached the phenomenon with a truly overwhelming assortment of telescopes and binoculars and cameras, Kodaks of every kind and size.

Counterintuitively for speakers of English, she refers to Americans as having the

“greatest civilization” as they immediately turn to a variety of different technological objects to aid them in their experience of the eclipse. She immediately qualifies her claim by adding that one should not confuse “Zivilisation” with “Kultur.” In English, the two terms overlap: what in German is referred to as a “grosse Kultur,” for example, can be translated into English as a “great civilization.” But for Leitich’s German-speaking readership, *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* serve as shorthand to describe a fundamental difference between the sensibilities of a “cultured European” and those New Yorkers standing on top of a building with all of their technological gadgets.

By making a careful distinction between the terms *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*, Leitich is not only pointing to a semantic difference between English and German but also to a discussion that had played out in the minds of German-speaking Europeans across the Old World for hundreds of years. In the eighteenth century, the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant was troubled by several ideas of his French contemporary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Civilization, Rousseau claimed, alienated humans from their original, natural, and unspoiled state and forced them into artificial, degenerate societies. Kant, on the other hand, argued that degenerate societies are not caused by the process of civilization but by the human tendency to be satisfied with basic outward material prosperity. In order to move beyond mere material civilization, humans need art, science, and moral instruction, which allow them to reach the realm of culture.¹¹ In the nineteenth century, both the Austrian Empire and the German Reich defined themselves as belonging to a *Kulturvolk* and sought to legitimize their institutions and identities through a connection to “true” German culture and its literary, artistic, philosophical, and musical manifestations. The term *Zivilization*, on the other hand, increasingly became a derogative shorthand term for French decadence and English mercantilism.¹² In its effort to unify the German people into one cultural and ethical nation, Prussia styled itself as a new incarnation of Greek culture, with Berlin as the “Spree-Athen” (Athens on the river Spree) that stood in stark opposition to France’s embodiment of Roman civilization.¹³ In Vienna, Theophil

Hansen designed the Austrian parliament building, located on Vienna's prominent Ringstrasse, to fulfill Kaiser Franz Joseph's vision of the Austrian Empire as the legitimate heir of Greek culture.¹⁴

The borders between the terms *Zivilization* and *Kultur* are not only national. The advent of the industrial revolution in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Europe brought about the increasingly visible contrast between the rural countryside and the rapidly expanding urban landscape. In his 1887 foundational sociological text *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society), Ferdinand Tönnies takes the concepts of culture and civilization and develops them into two different social systems: whereas *Kultur* is equated with the "Gemeinschaft des Familienlebens und des Landes" (community of family life and of the land), the "Steigerung zur Großstadt" (boom of cities) creates a "Gesellschaft" (society).¹⁵ Not only did the urban environment itself come to be seen as the realm of civilization, but so did the people associated with the city. Even though European Jews sought to stay connected to their own "Gemeinschaft" (community) as they assimilated into European society,¹⁶ the work of late-nineteenth-century anti-Semites like Wilhelm Marr tied Judaism to the intrusive, culture-destroying elements that Spengler later equated with *Zivilisation*, connecting Jews to the Romans, to the city, and to the practices of usury and speculation.¹⁷ The cosmopolitan city, with its mix of races and international influences, becomes, in the words of the early twentieth-century cultural critic Richard Korherr, "ein Krebs am deutschen Volkskörper"¹⁸ (a cancer on the body of the German people), a deadly, invasive contagion from without.

In order to explain Leitich's specific intercultural project, it is important to place her writings into the context of a larger twentieth-century intellectual discussion about Europe's cultural crisis and America's role in the fate of Western civilization. As the legacy of the German "Kulturvolk" unraveled in the wake of the First World War, many Germans and Austrians saw themselves—as Leitich did—in the throes of a devastating cultural crisis. The victory of the American, English, and French forces was seen as the destruction of culture by the forces of

civilization. In 1919, the German freelance intellectual Oswald Spengler published the first volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*¹⁹ (translated in English as *The Decline of the West*).²⁰ In this volume, Spengler uses the terms *Zivilization* and *Kultur* to explain Europe's political and cultural crisis and the dominance of American technology and industry. All of the great cultures of the world, he claims, follow a natural progression and share a similar fate. Spengler sees the history of the world as

das Bild einer ewigen Gestaltung und Umgestaltung, eines wunderbaren Werdens und Vergehens organischer Formen. . . . Es gibt aufblühende und alternde Kulturen, Völker, Sprachen, Wahrheiten, Götter, Landschaften, wie es junge und alte Eichen und Pinien, Blüten, Zweige und Blätter gibt.²¹

the image of an eternal structuring and restructuring, an astounding rising and falling of organic forms. . . . There are blooming and fading cultures, peoples, languages, truths, gods, landscapes, just as there are young and old oaks and pine trees, blossoms, twigs, and leaves.

By studying the development and decline of the world's great cultures, including ancient Egypt, the classical world, the Indian/Hindu culture, the Arabian/Muslim culture, Chinese culture, and the "Abendländische Kultur" (culture of the West), Spengler strives to create a universal morphology that shows the similar growth and death patterns of human cultures. Just as the great culture of ancient Greece eventually became the decadent metropolitan and technological civilization of Rome, the life spans of all great cultures end with the telltale signs of civilization:

Der Untergang des Abendlandes, so betrachtet, bedeutet nichts geringeres als das *Problem der Zivilisation*. Eine der Grundfragen aller höheren Geschichte liegt hier vor. Was ist Zivilisation, als organisch/logische Folge, als Vollendung und Ausgang einer Kultur begriffen? Denn jede Kultur hat ihre eigene Zivilisation. Zum ersten Male werden hier die beiden Worte . . . als

Ausdrücke für ein strenges und notwendiges *organisches Nacheinander* gefaßt. Die Zivilisation ist das unausweichliche *Schicksal* einer Kultur. . . . Zivilisationen sind die äußersten und künstlichsten Zustände, deren eine höhere Art von Menschen fähig ist. Sie sind ein Abschluß; sie folgen dem Werden als das Gewordene, dem Leben als der Tod, der Entwicklung als die Starrheit, dem Lande und der seelischen Kindheit, wie sie Dorik und Gothik zeigen, als das geistige Greisentum und die steinerne, ver- steinernde Weltstadt.²²

The decline of the West, in this regard, means nothing less than the *problem of civilization*. This forms one of the basic questions of all advanced history. What is civilization but an organic-logical consequence, a consummation and completion of a culture? For every culture has its own civilization. For the first time, these words are combined here . . . as expressions of a strict and necessary organic sequence. Civilization is the inevitable *fate* of a culture. . . . Civilizations are the most extreme and most artificial conditions that an advanced mankind is capable of producing. They are a conclusion, they are the completion that comes after development, they are the death that comes after life, the rigidity that follows growth, the dottering senility that follows spiritual youth, and, as the Doric and Gothic ages show us, they are the petrifying stone cities that grow out of a life once led close to the land.

The very heart of the decline of Western civilization, then, is the process whereby a vibrant, traditional, organic culture becomes increasingly dominated by an overpowering urban culture. Spengler sees the films, sports, and urban diversions of American mass culture as catering to the same metropolitan ennui that marked the decline of classical civilization, for they represent

die Ablösung intensivster praktischer Denkarbeit durch ihren

Gegensatz, die mit Bewußtsein betriebene Trottelei, die Ablösung der geistigen Anspannung durch die körperliche des Sports, der körperlichen durch die sinnliche des “Vergnügens” und die geistige der “Aufregung” des Spiels und der Wette, der Ersatz der reinen Logik der täglichen Arbeit durch die mit Bewußtsein genossene Mystik: das kehrt in allen Weltstädten aller Zivilisationen wieder. Kino, Expressionismus, Theosophie, Boxkämpfe, Niggertänze, Poker und Rennwetten—man wird das alles in Rom wiederfinden und ein Kenner sollte einmal die Untersuchung auf die indischen, chinesischen und arabischen Weltstädte ausdehnen.²³

the replacement of intensive, practical mental work with its opposite: willful laziness, exchange of mental exertion for the corporeality of sport, the exchange of physical exertion for the sensation of “amusement,” the exchange of intellectual exertion for the “excitement” of games and gambling, losing the pure logic of everyday work by deliberately indulging in mysticism: all of this can be seen again and again in the metropolises of all civilizations. Movies, expressionism, theosophy, boxing matches, negro dances, poker and betting at the racetrack: you could find all of that in Rome, and experts really should undertake a broader study of the Indian, Chinese, and Arabic metropolises.

In every great historical culture, urbanization, emigration, and modernization eventually cut off the *Volk* from its culture, and a new civilized mass emerged. America’s political and economic rise, in Spengler’s mind, signaled the approaching end of European culture. Throughout history, the new *Weltstädte* (world-class cities) and their masses formed degenerate races that were similar in their city planning, in their technology, and even in their physiognomy. As Spengler concludes in a footnote: “Man beachte die auffallende Ähnlichkeit vieler Römerköpfe mit denen heutiger Tatsachenmenschen amerikanischen Stils”²⁴ (Just consider the conspicuous similarity between so many Roman heads and the

modern fact-mongers of the American variety).

Although Ann Tizia Leitich uses the terms *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in her article about the solar eclipse in Manhattan and in many other comparisons of Europeans and Americans, she ultimately rejects the basic teleology of Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Instead, Leitich reappropriates the terms as she develops a much different concept of cultural evolution and regeneration. In "Dollar und Ideale" (Dollars and Ideals), a set of articles written in August 1923 and included in her collection *Amerika, du hast es besser*, Leitich specifically addresses the American phenomenon vis-à-vis Spengler's dichotomy between civilization and culture. She talks about the follies of the American idea of beauty, which often ends in the worship of luxury instead of any deep, meaningful aesthetic discovery. The American woman, she claims, has taken over the role of the seeker of beauty, funded with hard-earned money from her husband. "Daß sie oft Luxus für Schönheit nimmt, ist nicht so sehr ihre Schuld, als eine Folge jener verzeihlichsten aller Sünden, Jugend. Der Jugend dieser Kultur."²⁵ (The fact that she often mistakes luxury for beauty is not so much her fault, rather it is a result of that most forgivable of all sins, youth. The youth of this culture.) Though Leitich admits that luxury, as the height of civilization, has displaced beauty, the pinnacle of culture, she ultimately rejects Spengler's notion of culture as a rare, momentary golden era that eventually dies off at the hand of civilization. America has, out of necessity, bolted ahead in civilization, far beyond its very rudimentary culture:

Der Amerikaner hat in wenigen Jahren, durch die Konstellation von glücklichen Umständen, in der tätiger und unbeugsamer Pioniergeist nicht die kleinste Rolle gespielt, die Zivilisation der alten Welt überholt und eine Zivilisation geschaffen, die so gewaltig ist, daß sie, fast möchte ich sagen, der übrigen Geistigkeit ein wenig über den Kopf gewachsen ist.²⁶

In a very few years, through a constellation of advantageous circumstances and with the help of an indomitable

pioneer spirit, Americans have surpassed the civilization of the Old World and created a new civilization that has grown so voraciously, one could almost say that it has grown beyond the mental and spiritual capacity of its founders.

For Leitch, American culture is merely experiencing the follies of youth, spending too much time and energy creating a material basis for a deeper, more mature culture that will develop at a later time. To illustrate the relationship she sees between America's current *Zivilization* and its potential *Kultur*, Leitch remembers weekends in Iowa, where people would regularly offer to take her for a ride in their shining new cars. The dreary utilitarian architecture and dusty landscapes they passed on these drives were depressing to Leitch, but she was amazed at the fact that these middle-class and working-class Americans could drive on their own, in affordable cars. Here, Leitch's reappropriation of Spengler's terms becomes evident. She posits that America's culture—art, music, architecture, and a sensibility for beauty—would come later, and when it did come, it would be built on the base of a civilization that created livable working conditions and affordable luxury for more classes of society than ever before. In her explanation, she invokes the figure of Henry Ford:

Der größte Fabrikant Amerikas . . . hat in allen seinen Fabriken und Büros die Fünftagewoche, zu acht Stunden den Tag, und er ist es gerade, dem es durch stramme Organisation und weitsichtige Geschäftspolitik möglich war, so billige Fahrzeuge auf den Markt zu bringen, daß der Besitz eines Automobils in den Bereich der Möglichkeit für jeden gerückt wird, was in den weiten und, wie ich oben sagte, oft so trostlosen Flächen Amerikas von unschätzbarem Wert ist, zugleich ein Fingerzeig in die Zukunft der Kultur, aufgebaut auf einer Zivilisation, welche die Luxusprivilegie der besitzenden Klasse zum Gemeingut aller macht.²⁷

The greatest industrialist in America . . . introduced the

five-day week into all of his factories and offices, at eight hours per day, and he, of all people, is the exact same man whose staunch organization and farsighted business policies allowed him to put so many inexpensive automobiles onto the market that automobile ownership has now entered the realm of possibility for everyone. In the wide and— as I said above—desolate spaces of America, this development has been of inestimable value, and it also points toward a culture of the future, a culture built on a civilization that has taken the luxuries of the privileged few and made them available to everyone.

When describing America's most recognizable technological breakthrough in the post-World War I era, Ford's rationalization of the production of automobiles, Leitich comes close to Kant's Enlightenment-era model, seeing a future American culture that rises above the incomplete, inferior realm of purely material pursuits.

As a vital, wealthy *Zivilisation*, Leitich claims, America will not only develop its own version of *Kultur*. In "Dollar und Ideale," she maintains that some of the impulses in the United States also have the potential to bring about a cultural regeneration in Europe. Leitich discusses her experience with Americans who, in spite of their visceral post-World War I mistrust of Austria and Germany, are so easily motivated to gather together food, money, and clothes for needy European families. In this idealism she senses a newly emerging culture, something far beyond the stereotypes perpetrated by the pessimistic Central European critics with whom she corresponds. Speaking of her interactions with her American neighbors and coworkers, she explains:

Diese Leute wissen nichts von Europa und sie interessieren sich auch im Grunde gar nicht dafür. Es ist ihnen wesentlich fremd. Ihre Kultur, obwohl aufgebaut auf Europas alter Kultur, ist die Kultur einer zukünftigen Ära, eine Kultur in ihren ersten Anfängen, mit großartig angelegtem Grundriss und vollständig verschieden von der Europas, zumindest von der des

Vorkriegseuropas. Dies wissen wir nicht, wenn wir herüberkommen, und es nach und nach lernen, heißt den Schlüssel erlangen zum Verständnis dieses riesenhaften und so wunderbar souveränen Landes. Dabei darf man nie vergessen, daß es große, grundlegende Striche sind, die wir wahrnehmen, und nicht das Filigranwerk tausendjährigen Bemühens.²⁸

These people know nothing about Europe, and for all intents and purposes they are really not interested in Europe. It is fundamentally foreign to them. Even though their own culture is built upon Europe's ancient culture, theirs is the culture of a future era, a culture that is just at its beginning stages. It does have a magnificently laid foundation, but it is completely different than Europe's culture, or at least that of prewar Europe. We do not know this fact when we first come over here, and in order to understand this giant and wonderfully sovereign land, we must learn about it bit by bit. At the same time, we cannot forget that we are witnessing broad, basic strokes, and not the delicate filigree work that arises from millennia of effort.

In most of her writings, Leitich remains skeptical enough—even when she is lionizing the new American culture—to distance herself from the American idealism that she is reporting about. But, in “Dollar und Ideale,” she lets herself overcome this distance long enough to recognize the potential benefit that the new American culture could have for Europe. She becomes, at least in this article, an American apologist:

Anfangs erschien mir was diese Menschen sagten, von meinem blasiert-skeptischen europäischen Standpunkt aus, so unendlich naiv, aber nach und nach begann ich die Kraft dieser Ursprünglichkeit zu erkennen und zu bewundern, und sie erschien mir wie ein Licht über dem Abgrund. . . . Wenn man aus der blutenden Zerrissenheit Europas nach Amerika kommt, so Todmüd

des ewigen nutzlosen und tödlichen Haderns der Nationen, des kreichenden Feldgeschreis der Parteschlagwörter, die ins Mark der Menschen greifen, des gegenseitigen wölfischen Zerfleischens, dann fallen Worte, die von der Universalität der Idee sprechen, auf dankbaren Boden.²⁹

At first, from my blasé, skeptical European standpoint, the things that these people said seemed so endlessly naïve. But little by little I began to recognize and to appreciate the power of this primordial state, and it shone like a light over an abyss. . . . When you come to America out of the bloody turmoil of Europe, so weary from the incessant, useless, and deadly bickering of nations, tired of the shrieking battle cries of party slogans that penetrate to the marrow of your bones, exhausted from seeing people tear each other apart like wolves, then you are fertile ground for words about universal ideals.

Instead of seeing European culture as a culture in irreversible decline, she describes the possibility of a regeneration brought about by the emerging American culture. Spengler, Marr, and their heirs saw the dominant historical culture as exclusive from other cultures and constantly under attack by other culturally inferior forces. Leitch, on the other hand, sees the emerging culture as containing solutions for the very problems that always plague European culture:

Man sieht es wie ein Wunder Gottes an, daß hier Deutsche und Franzosen, Engländer und Türken, Böhmen und Ungarn, Russen und Juden, Italiener und Jugoslawen friedlich mit- und nebeneinander leben, arbeiten und streben im Lichte des Menschheitsideals der großen Republik. Kooperation!³⁰

You feel like you are witnessing a miracle from God when you see the German and the French, the English and the Turks, Hungarians, Russians, and Jews, Italians, and Yugoslavs living here with one another and beside one another, working and striving

in the light of the humanistic ideals of this great republic.

Cooperation!

While the most refined “Filigranwerk” (delicate filigree work) of European high culture is, Leitich admits, far beyond the grasp of Americans, the vitality of some of the country’s first, broad, crude cultural impulses— cooperation, education, idealism—have immediate and dire importance to Europe.

Leitich’s early adventures and mishaps in the homes, trains, offices, and streets of the United States taught her to appreciate the country’s vitality, financial stability, and optimism. But more than that, her sojourn in the New World also taught Leitich how to grapple with the European cultural crisis and to see Europe’s relevance to America’s development as a mature nation. On October 10, 1924, Leitich wrote an article called “Damenbrief aus Newyork” (A Lady’s Letter from New York), later included in *Amerika, du hast es besser*, in which she glances back to the lost “Paradies” of pre-war Europe:

Das sind die Tage, da ich mit dir, liebe Gabriele, und Medela, deiner schönen, kastanienbraunen Stute, über die holprigen . . . Pfade fuhr. . . Als uns die Bauern sahen, hielten sie die Arbeit an und rissen die Hüte vom Kopf: “kezet esokolom”— Küß die Hand. Denn das war Anno 1913. Wie unendlich lange her—und doch nur elf Jahre!³¹

Those were the days when I rode with you, beloved Gabriele, and your beautiful chestnut mare Medela, over the stony pathways. . . . When the peasants saw us, they stopped their work and tore the hats off of their heads: “kezet esokolom,” Hungarian for “I kiss your hand.” For that was anno 1913. How endlessly long ago, but really only eleven years!

Only eleven years ago, Leitich reminds the fictitious recipient of her letter and her many real readers, she had been floating through the idyllic life afforded her by Austria’s old imperial order (and by an even older feudal system). As a daughter of Vienna’s *Bildungsbürgertum*, Leitich had benefitted from belle époque class

privileges, a paradise that was now irrevocably lost: “Freilich, vielleicht erscheint es nur mir so unwirklich lange, die aus dem Paradies der Vorkriegszeit über die Trümmer dieser zehn Jahre in Europa gesprungen ist und mitten hinein in den Jahrmarkt des modernsten Lebens, der Amerika ist.”³² (Of course, maybe it only seems so surreal and long ago to me, one who has hurled herself out of the paradise of the prewar era, past the rubble of these last ten years, straight into the carnival of that most modern life that makes up America). The glories of the old European social order seem farther away to someone who left postwar Europe and escaped the daily reminders of a world gone down in ashes. But more than just mere distance from her old surroundings, it is the American “carnival of that most modern life” that has removed Leitich from her paradise now lost. To describe her American surroundings, she carefully chose the word “modernst”—most modern—as she explains:

Ich sage “modernst” denn für eine Weile nun, bis das betäubend Neue durchschossen wird vom dem edlen Saft des Alten da drüben— das nur vorübergehend getrübt—eine Weile werdet Ihr von uns zu lernen haben, sind wir Euch voraus: in Jugend, in Glauben, in Disziplin, in Freiheit—damit meine ich Gott bewahre nicht die politische und nicht die soziale, aber ich meine eine innere Leichtigkeit, die einen in das Leben beißen läßt wie in einen Apfel, und die es daher viel gründlicher bezwingt.³³

I say “most modern” because for at least the next little while—until the numbing newness is shot through by Europe’s noble nectar of age, clouded as it may be at the present moment—for a while you will have to learn from us, for we are ahead of you: in terms of youth, faith, discipline, and freedom. God help us, I’m not talking about political or social freedom, but the inner lightness that allows you to bite into life as if it were an apple, and therefore get the most of it.

America is not only modern but also “modernst” because it lacks any sort of

relationship to the history that could moderate its “numbing” newness. For a while, Leitich’s addressee Gabriele and other European readers can learn from America’s constant stream of novelties. But the intercultural learning, as Leitich pointed out earlier, is not a one-way dynamic. America’s “most modern” status will only last for a while, until it has been permeated by the “noble nectar of age” that will come from Europe, a nectar that is not in irreversible decline but only “clouded for the present moment.” In her many popular articles about the cities, people, and phenomena that she encountered in the United States, Ann Tizia Leitich gradually deconstructs Oswald Spengler’s (and Stefan Zweig’s) mutually exclusive categories of an American *Zivilisation* and European *Kultur*. In the process of developing her image of the United States, she tries to find the specific technological and institutional forces that were refining the rough, pioneer-spirited *Zivilisation* into an American *Kultur* where genius, beauty, delicate emotion, and intellectual nuance could thrive.

¹ Stefan Zweig, “Die Monotonisierung der Welt.” *Neue Freie Presse* (hereafter *NFP*) January 31, 1925. 3.

² Ann Tizia Leitich. “Auf der Jagd nach einem ‘Job’ in New York,” *NFP* August 7, 1923, 8. This article also appears in Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl, 1926. 29-41.

³ For an excellent, concise discussion of the development and aesthetic project of the feuilleton, see the introduction to Eckhardt Köhn’s 1989 book *Straßen- rausch: Flanerie und kleine Form; Versuch zur Literaturgeschichte des Flaneurs bis 1933* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1989), 7–15.

⁴ For a discussion of the specifically Viennese development of the feuilleton, see Hildegard Kernmayer, *Judentum in Wiener Feuilleton (1848–1903): Exemplarische Untersuchungen zum literarästhetischen und politischen Diskurs der Moderne* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998). See also Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵ Erich Korning, “Ann Tizia Leitich, die Wienerin . . .,” unpublished biographical sketch, most probably written in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Korning was Leitich’s husband. The sketch is in the possession of the Leitich family.

⁶ Ann Tizia Leitich, “Ein Wort für Amerika. Noch einmal ‘Monotonisierung der Welt.’” *NFP* March 25, 1925. 2. This article also appears in Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl, 1926. 50-58.

⁷ Ann Tizia Leitich, Letter to Leitich from Mrs. Gray at the Equitable Life Insurance Company office, Des Moines, Iowa, October 6, 1922, Teilnachlass Ann Tizia Leitich: ZHP 432: 3.6/3.7, Vienna City Library.

⁸ Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl Verlag. 1926.

⁹ Ann Tizia Leitich, “Finsternis in Newyork,” *NFP*, February 20, 1925, 10. This article also appears in Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl, 1926. 7-11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Immanuel Kant, “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht,” in *Rechtslehre: Schriften zur Rechtsphilosophie* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1988), 205–6.

¹² For a discussion of the differences between the French and German ideas of civilization and culture, see Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979), 2.

¹³ See John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 193–94.

¹⁴ Franz J. Weissenböck, et al., *Das österreichische Parlament* (Vienna: Parlamentsdirektion, 2000).

¹⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1922), 238–39.

¹⁶ Noah Isenberg, *Between Redemption and Doom: The Strains of German-Jewish Modernism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 12–15.

¹⁷ Wilhelm Marr, *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanentum vom nicht confessionellen Standpunkt aus betrachtet* (Bern: Costenoble, 1879), 9–18.

¹⁸ Richard Korherr, “Berlin: Die neue Weltstadt,” *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 6 (March 1930): 366.

¹⁹ All Spengler quotes in this article are taken from the following edition: Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1923). The following English translations of Oswald’s work are mine.

²⁰ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. C. F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1926).

²¹ Spengler, *Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1: 28–29.

²² Ibid., 42–43. The emphases are Spengler’s.

²³ Ibid., 122.

²⁴ Ibid., 461.

²⁵ Ann Tizia Leitich, “Dollar und Ideale,” *NFP* September 4, 1923, 12. This article and its continuations also appear in Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl, 1926. 59-68.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Leitich, “Dollar und Ideale,” *NFP*, August 31, 1923, 8.

²⁹ Leitich, “Dollar und Ideale,” *NFP*, September 1, 1923, 11.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ann Tizia Leitich, “Präludien: Damenbrief aus Newyork,” *NFP*, October 12, 1924, 28. This article also appears in Ann Tizia Leitich, *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl, 1926. 81-87.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.