

# Wright, Brooke M.

## Ann Tizia Leitich: New Voice, New Woman Packaging America for Vienna

Faculty Mentor: Robert McFarland, Germanic and Slavic Languages

Throughout history, the literary works of female authors have been marginalized and many such works have been lost. The German and Slavic Languages department at Brigham Young University has devoted a great amount of time and energy to rediscovering and studying the art and significance of such texts. The 1920s works of Austrian journalist and novelist Ann Tizia Leitich are an important addition to this field of study.

In the early 1920s, Ann Tizia Leitich, a young, well-born woman from Vienna, left her native Austria for America. While living in America, Leitich wrote on American culture and people for the Viennese newspaper, *Die Neue Freie Presse* (*The New Free Press*) and also published a novel, *Ursula entdeckt Amerika* (*Ursula discovers America*). At this time, the American woman had a complicated reputation in Europe. She was the ideal of many European women striving for change and freedom, yet another segment of society tended to demonize the American woman and decry this imitation. As an Austrian woman living an American-style life in the United States, Leitich was particularly able to address misconceptions of the American woman. Through her writings, Leitich attempted to influence her Austrian readers' acceptance and emulation of the American woman.

Throughout the 1920s, Leitich's works were very well-received in Vienna. Additionally, she was one of very few, or possibly the only female Austrian living in America and writing for a large Austrian audience. However, Leitich has largely been forgotten in recent years. In order to research her opinions and her impact, I traveled to Vienna's city library where I not only found her 1928 novel, *Ursula entdeckt Amerika*, but also many of her 1920s newspaper articles, personal letters, and reviews of her works. The remainder of this paper will focus on the contents and significance of these items.

Leitich's journalism appeared in *Die Neue Freie Presse* from 1924 through 1928, and also in her 1926 collection of articles, *Amerika, du hast es besser* (*America, you've got it better*). Leitich often addresses men, assuring them that the American new woman does not present a threat to the traditional order of society. According to Leitich, women are simply asking that men realize that they are human beings with rights; motherhood and wifehood are secondary to this fundamental identity.

As she addresses women, Leitich changes her tone. To them, Leitich attempts to explain the reality, rather than the image of the new woman. While the commercialized image seemed only accessible to the young, thin, and educated, Leitich emphasizes that the American new women are women whose children are in school, who at 6:30 have dinner ready for their husbands, and who make apple pie and steak. They are all incredibly ordinary, but also "Grande Dame" (Leitich 72). In stressing that the American new woman is ordinary, yet amazing, Leitich is stressing to the masses that all can join the ranks of the enlightened and liberated new woman; physical characteristics, social status, lack of wealth or education, do not preclude this

development. European new womanhood focused on the young and attractive, while the European women's movement was supported almost entirely by teachers and academically educated women (Salomon 112). However, Leitich emphasizes that the American example has shown that such qualities are not prerequisites for true new womanhood.

In her 1928 novel, *Ursula entdeckt Amerika*, Leitich alters her focus and attempts to show European women how and to what extent they should emulate America. Ursula, Leitich's protagonist, is a young Austrian baroness who is impoverished by WWI and then immigrates to America. Like Austrian society in general, Ursula is skeptical about America, but gradually realizes that America has something good to offer her. She begins to pick up on some Americanisms, but also cherishes all things German and remains European at heart. It is Ursula's European identity that provides her with her greatest charm, attracts her future (American) husband and allows her to attain a very improbable happily ever after.

Studying these works reveals how Leitich is attempting to alter the European concept of the new woman ideal. Leitich adds depth to the understanding of the American woman and also questions European emulation of this ideal. While popular culture idealized the American woman, Leitich instead focuses on the combination of European and American culture. A combination of the true characteristics of both European and American society offers an excellent combination of strengths and sensibilities and is the new ideal. Women are to carefully glean the best from both cultures.

While her works are marginalized today, information from the Leitich archive in Vienna reveals how important she was to this 1920s cultural debate: the archive contains not only book reviews and letters from readers, but also comparisons of her works to those of Willa Cather and a letter of approval from the famed America-critic Stefan Zweig. As Austrians of the 1920s attempted to understand exactly who the American new woman was and how she would influence their society, Leitich's works were invaluable. By offering new insight and perspective on the characteristics of the new woman, Leitich was able to both soothe male fears and help her female readers understand how to accommodate both the traditional European and the new American woman within themselves.

As I researched and studied these works, my main task was to put Leitich's works in their historical context and thus better understand her important points. Although it was difficult to sort through her many articles and the boxes of memorabilia and letters on file in the Vienna City Library, this research has also given me an interesting perspective on the debate on the modern woman and her role in society. Leitich's writings have also helped me to ponder the merits, problems, and solutions of internationalization in a global world. They have given me a renewed and deepened appreciation for non-canonical literature.

#### Works Cited

Leitich, Ann Tizia. "An die Damen." *Amerika, du hast es besser*. Vienna: Steyermühl Verlag, 1926.

Salomon, Alice. *Kultur im Werden*. Berlin: Verlag Ullstein, 1924.