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'Mein Wasser– Kur': The Culture of the Water Cure in Nineteenth Century Austria: 1800-1914

Water was a central element in nineteenth century Austrian tourist travel as thousands of people went on pilgrimages or travelled to lake and spa resorts to bathe and drink the waters. All shared the hope that the journey would result in some kind of transformative experience. At the beginning of the century pilgrims drawn from all social classes visited shrines endowed with sacred springs hoping that contact with their waters would bring them physical and spiritual renewal. In a similar frame of mind secular travellers visited the spas to 'take the waters' or bathe in the thermal springs. By the early twentieth century many features of both sacred and secular journeys had changed but the role of water and a belief in its prophylactic and therapeutic agency remained.

A feature of the practices associated with health and leisure tourism in nineteenth and early twentieth century Austria was the role played by water. Rooted in bathing and pilgrimage traditions of former days, the culture of the water cure was given a new focus by contemporary concerns with bodily and mental health. The curative powers of water were often also prescribed a 'return to nature' (Just, 1912), or voluntary subjection to the discipline of a given medical regime, in a way that supports Bryan Turner's claim that health functioned as a 'manifestation of the dialectic between order and chaos, purity and danger, responsibility and immorality' (Turner, 1996: 97). This essay examines the social and medical practices associated the prophylactic and therapeutic uses of water and their relationship to contemporary discourses concerning the maintenance of health. It will suggest that then, as now, such practices and the quests for mental and bodily health which they embodied, functioned as a kind of commentary on the cultural anxieties of the period and as a critique of the lifestyles and the social world of which they were an expression.

In central Europe the use of water for healing and pleasure went back to pre-Roman times when it was associated with religion and magic and even in the modern period, its use in the context of health and recreational tourism continued to evoke beliefs and practices linking it to the past. Romans public baths on sites where mineral springs had formerly been used for religious purposes. elsewhere Other wells and springs associated with healing were subsequently incorporated into the pilgrimage practices that continued to flourish at local, regional and national levels, and of which many have persisted into the present day (Nolan, 1989). As the Catholic Reformation of the early modern period and Habsburg piety brought new shrines such as Maria-am-Zell (dates) into existence,¹ small bathing places and other springs known for their curative powers began to develop into secular spas. Eyewitnesses like the British traveller Edward Brown, observed these often catered for all social classes.² (Brown, 1735: 21, 87). Some developed into pleasure resorts where the aristocracy, landless lesser nobility and rural gentry enjoyed brief, seasonal forms of urban sociability such as promenading, balls and theatres during the hot summer months.

By the second half **of the eighteenth century** growing scientific interest in the medical properties of the waters meant the benefits of resort life were justified in terms of health rather than pleasure. The growth of the spas was fed not just by the expansion of recreational tourism among

¹

² Mikoletsky, 1991

the aristocracy, but by the existence of particular attitudes to health and sickness and the discourses relating to health and medicine which sustained them (Payer, 1985). Spa literature of the early **nineteenth century** reveals the influence of a Rousseauian anti-urbanism combined with Romantic attitudes to nature and an espousal of the cultural values associated with the emergence of bourgeois lifestyles (Kaschuba, 1993; Sperber, 1997). In the last decades of the century concerns about 'degeneration' and its psychological effects were supported by the increasing number of men and women diagnosed as suffering from nervous disorders. Carlsbad, the leading Bohemian spa, attracted a particularly famous clientele including figures like Peter the Great and Goethe (Canz, 1980; Hickel, 1996).

In the early **nineteenth century** only established spas, bathing places and small towns and villages along the ancient pilgrimage routes were capable of accommodating the new influx of tourists. The fashion for 'taking the waters' encouraged the founding of spa colonies such as Marienbad. Others, like Bad Ischl, were redeveloped to accommodate the wealthy bourgeoisie now putting their leisure to productive use by combining the pursuit of health with a Romantic 'return to nature' in the spa park or by the lake.

Like the pilgrims who had often preceded them, travellers to the spas embarked on a quest for some kind of transformative experience. The metaphorical equivalence between pilgrimage and tourism has been explored in a number of ways (MacCannell, 1976; Turner and Turner, 1978; Graburn, 1989; Reader, 1993). For Graburn, for example, modern tourism is a form of 'sacred journey', the antecedents of which are to be found in the pilgrimage journeys of traditional societies. As a form of escape from the everyday, tourism is functionally and symbolically equivalent to other institutions used to embellish and add meaning to our lives. Like pilgrimage it constitutes 'ritualised breaks in routine that define and relieve the ordinary' (Graburn, 1989: 19), transporting participants to the space of the non-ordinary 'wherein marvellous things happen', akin to the 'magic' of sacred places that differentiates the sacred from the profane (p. 21). Transformative spaces of this kind have been characterised as 'liminal', 'in-between' places, a concept derived from Arnold van Gennep's study of passage rites (1908) (V. Turner and E. Turner, 1978: 249-51; Shields, 1991, 83-101). The Turners for example, conceptualise pilgrimage as movement into and out of a discontinuity in social space (1978: 34-9), while Shields writes of journeys 'where a goal-sacred site', or a 'seaside Cure', is ritually presented as a life-changing experience (Shields, 1991: 84). The sharp distinction between pilgrimage goals and those of modern tourism recognised by Graburn (1989, 29-31) was rejected by Lepovitz in her study of Bavaria (1992: 123-4), pointing to the many traditional pilgrims whose motivation for travel at a time when medicine was largely ineffective, often included a search for a miraculous cure, and whose travelling behaviours supported 'the cultural history of popular travel' by contributing to the 'specific expectations about travel in the general population of a given society' (p. 124).

These comments are pertinent to the situation of **nineteenth century Austria** where many of the same conditions applied and the growth of the secular tourist industry was intimately linked to the widespread use of water-based cures among all sectors of society (Brown, 1735). The wealthy guests at the fashionable spas observed by the English author of *Pilgrimages to the Spas in Pursuit of Health and Recreation* may have differed from pilgrims in many respects (Johnson, 1841), but they too were voluntarily committing themselves to a change of regime, to a form of 'therapeutic breaking with the world', in the hope of achieving mental, spiritual and physical regeneration. Medical guides to the spas often cite the change of place and lifestyle involved in a spa visit as important elements in the treatment. 'Hope itself though often resting on fallacious and exaggerated

histories of cures, contributes much to the accomplishment of some marvellous recoveries. The severing of the chain which binds care round the human heart, and augments the sufferings and progress of disease, is no mean ally of the spas!' (Johnson, 1841: 2). So too was 'the sight of others worse off than themselves. Victims doomed to an early grave see recoveries going on all around and never despair' (p. 227).

The change from one mode of being to another was heightened by the ways in which the geographical space of the spa resort was distinguished physically from that of the everyday (Shields, 1991; Mansén, 1998), its distinctive nature marked out and 'framed' by the natural and architectural features of the site itself and the prevailing sense of peacefulness, contrived by carefully 'naturalised' and 'picturesque' landscaping, often contained within some form of spa park, the boundaries of which were marked out by pleasant walks and promenades. At the same time the boundaries of the space of the spa or resort were mapped out sociologically by the medical and social routines which characterised the place and the relative informality of the life prevailing within (Simmel, 1997: 51; Douglas, 1984). At the centre of the daily routines were the trips to the *Kurhaus* [pump room] and the springs, of which the Sprudel in Carlsbad constituted a dramatic sight in its own right.

By the early twentieth century, there were 140 officially-registered Austrian spas, of which 48 were in Bohemia and Moravia (von Diem, 1914). Many were modernised health resorts distinguished from each other by the nature of their waters, size, location, climate, social tone and the profile of the guests and the kind of recreational amenities that they offered (Steward, 2000). The larger spas, for example, were embellished with pavements, electric lighting, cafes, theatres, shops and libraries, the urban effect of which was offset by the efforts of the authorities to enhance the natural surroundings with promenades and walks which, by the end of the century were often carefully graded in order of severity and distance. There was no single pattern of development, although that adopted by Carlsbad constituted an important influence on others (Mikoletsky, 1991) and proximity to centres of population, or the new railway networks, favoured the rapid growth of certain resorts like Meran and turned Baden into a weekend pleasure resort for the people of Vienna. The entrepreneurial Südbahn (southern railway) company encouraged spa development in Styria, Carinthia and the Alto Adige (Prodi and Wandruszak, 1995) and, in the 1880s, developed the sunny coastal resort of Abbazia, initiating the start of modern mass tourism to the Adriatic.

Royal patronage was an important influence on the fortunes of spas like Marienbad, favoured by the Prince of Wales as a venue for combining the mortification of the flesh with international diplomacy. At the other end of the social scale tiny village bathing establishments such as those of the Ultental or Ratzes in the south Tyrol still catered primarily for local pilgrims, peasant farmers and small tradesmen and their families from nearby towns (Oberthaler, 1997). Some spas, such as Rohitsch-Sauerbrunn in Styria, continued to be patronised primarily by the families of the lesser nobility and senior bureaucrats (Klenze, 1875: 560), but expansion changed the social tone of the more fashionable places like Roncegno and the big, cosmopolitan spas of Bohemia and Meran (Kos, 1991). Describing the social life of aristocratic Carlsbad one guidebook observed that the present-day visitor reading of :

the open-air fetes, the balls, and the nightly illuminations given by the distinguished guests, where all were welcome... may naturally feel tempted to regret the change in the social life of Carlsbad, when he finds his days bound by rigid rules, and himself but a unit of a crowd of health-seekers, who, from their very number and difference of station and nationality, are

debarred from that free social intercourse which doubtless most would desire if it were possible...all now must feel themselves strangers in this vast throng, and be content to devote themselves to the business of the hour, and to seek their enjoyment amid their own particular circle (Merrylees, 1894: 29).

Of the 'vast throng' many now came more for the social life and recreational facilities than the medical facilities. One guidebook reminded readers that Karlsbad is not supposed to be a pleasure resort. 'The object of all the visitors is, at least ostensibly, the restoration of health that has broken down under the stress of society functions, or political life, overwork or study, or the cares and worries inseparable from the existence of great financiers' (Palmer, 1903: 127). Some visitors found the atmosphere of the large spas overpowering or the company undesirable. Of Bad Ischl, the holiday residence of the Emperor Franz Joseph, the Bavarian poet Karl Stieler wrote 'the company is not entirely in unison with this youthful freshness of scenery...Nobility and monied aristocracy vie with each other in ostentation and the desire to obtain consideration; the hurry to shine is sometimes so boisterous that it drowns the wonderful calm that breathes inimitable among this scenery' (Stieler, 1874: 84). Commercialisation brought new types of guests:

For these the trombones play, for these the golden rubbish of the shop is stored...The resident inhabitants are in some measure under the influence of these elements...They partake not only of the cash, but of the nature of the visitors, and so arises a sorry mixture of rural manufacturing natures, of summer industry and winter sloth. (Stieler: 84-5).

Emily de Laszowska commented on 'that odious class - rich Jews who always run after the court like moths round a candle and who manage to infuse irritation and discomfort wherever they are' (Laszowska, 1896, p. 271). Those who wished to distance themselves from this kind of company retreated to more exclusive and less frequented spots where they could escape from the rigours of work and stressful tempo of everyday life.

Water was an important attraction in all the Austrian resorts, enjoyed as part of the scenery like the waterfalls of Bad Gastein, or used for boating and bathing, a pastime combining hygienic, therapeutic and pleasurable functions (Eder, 1995). Lakeside resorts grew in popularity as the middle classes escaped from the towns to rest, relax, and recuperate in the pleasant surroundings of the Wörthersee, or Bad Vöslau near Vienna, where the playwright Arthur Schnitzler swam in the 'tepid springs' during the summer holidays (1971: 26). His family also spent leisure time at the Aussee in Styria, a resort which was popular with a number of other writers and artists, including Gustav Klimt, his companion Emilie Flöge and her family (Griesmer, 1996). Here Schnitzler experienced the darker side of Romantic *Naturphilosophie* for 'as I looked down onto the dark waters from the terrace of the Seewirt Hotel, for the first time I felt something I like to call Nature-horror. Forever associated with the place where I experienced it, it had a more lasting effect on me than that first Nature-delight, felt in the Thalhof garden in Reichenau' (Schnitzler, 1971: 26).

References to spa resorts as 'romantic' places often implied more than a Rousseauian adulation of the scenery, reinforcing perceptions of them as liminal spaces, 'outside the ordinary'. Still structured overtly by many of the social conventions and rituals that governed normal life, such as the daily *corso* [promenade], the sense of distance from the everyday world which they promoted encouraged patterns of interaction which fell outside the normative conventions and performative codes governing everyday behaviour (Shields 1991: 75). William Fraser Rae noted of the young women who frequented Franzensbad, which specialised in female disorders, that:

[W]hat strikes one as unusual is the independent manner in which they conduct themselves. At home they would probably object to go alone into a restaurant or cafe, and order dinner or refreshment; while at Franzensbad every restaurant and cafe is chiefly frequented by ladies who appear to be quite at their ease. Franzensbad is the watering place most closely resembling the “Adamless Eden” which had been represented on stage (1888: 68-9).

‘Eden’ in a different mode was exemplified by the legendary ‘bathgirls’ of the past and tales of the flirtatious ‘Kurschattens’ [Cure Shadows] and ‘Sprudel Kavaliers’ [Sprudel cavaliers] (Hickel, 1996: 17). The Bavarian poet Karl Stieler remarked of holidays in the country that ‘[L]ove-making is the chief occupation of tourists, it is just the time of year when a man is disposed to seal his fate, and also young ladies always play an important part during the season’ (1874: 158) (Figure 1). For many women a visit to a spa or resort represented the only way in which they could meet men outside their own limited family and social circle. Shlomo Aleichem’s epistolary novel *Marienbad* (1911), a story of romantic entanglements among a group of Polish Jews, included a marriage broker among its characters. The darker currents of resort life were depicted in Arthur Schnitzler’s play *Das Weite Land* (1910), set in Baden, and his short stories which take place against the background of the lakes of the Salzkammergut. Among the most famous romantic attachments formed while ‘taking the waters’ were those of Goethe, including his trip to Marienbad at the age of seventy four, where he fell in love yet again. A lonely, melancholy Alma Mahler began her affair with the architect Walter Gropius in the woodland walks of Tobelbad, where Felix Sacher-Masoch had met ‘Frau von K’ (Hafner, 1979). A small Carpathian spa was the setting for meeting of the protagonists of Sacher-Masoch’s novel, *Venus in Furs*, reputedly based on his relationship with Fanny von Piskor whom he met in Baden.

Certain elements in spa life in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were analogous to those of pilgrimage in a scientific and technological age (V. Turner and E. Turner, 1978: 39). Like the revivalist and politically orientated Marian pilgrimages of the 1890s, initiated by the right-wing Viennese cleric Heinrich Abel (Boyer, 1995: 119, 464) they could be interpreted as a kind of ‘meta-social commentary’ on the nature of contemporary existence (V. Turner and E. Turner, 1978: 39).² Such events functioned as critiques of the urban lifestyles of which they were part, and from which they also represented a form of escape. This was particularly true of the more ‘severe’ forms of cure and ‘irregular’ medicine which became fashionable in many Austrian spa establishments.

The medical regimes structuring spa life were centred initially around the internal and external uses of the mineral waters. Improved understanding of, and respect for, their effects on the bodily system led to greater caution in the way they were used. In **the mid-eighteenth century** the chief spa physician of Carlsbad, David Becker, began the regulation of their internal and external consumption allied to the introduction of controlled forms of exercise and diet. Patients for whom the waters were deemed unsuitable, such as those suffering from acute inflammatory disorders of the kind aggravated by the Carlsbad waters, were often denied treatment or sent elsewhere. In the **nineteenth century** specialised use of the waters contributed to the rise of particular spas, influencing the profile of their guests. Bad Gastein for example, was prescribed for nervous complaints and the disorders of old age, attracting retired generals and high officials suffering from overwork. Some spas were used for recuperation after a debilitating cure (**course of treatment**), generating networks which were increasingly refined by the work of the medical topographers studying the relationships between climate and disease.

These developments were supported by the administrative improvements of the previous century when cameralist doctrines encouraged the government to support policies aimed at increasing the population of the country and making it more productive (Rosen, 1953). These included attempts to improve the general health of the people through bathing and the drinking of the mineral waters: Maria Theresa supported scientific attempts to analyse and classify the waters, while Joseph II encouraged their economic development. The 'policing' of health meant that spa physicians had to be qualified doctors. Spas were licensed by the Ministry of the Interior (responsible for public health) and their commissioners appointed by the government's chief medical officer. Relatively meagre state salaries gave physicians an active interest in developing and publicising their waters since their income was supplemented by 'presents' from the grateful patients whose testimonials and tributes, like those of grateful pilgrims, adorned the walls and walks of spas like Carlsbad.

Spa medicine formed a large part of Austria's 'medical marketplace' (Gijswijt-Hofstra, Marland and de Waardt, 1997: 10-11). Many patients and physicians continued to be indebted to the **eighteenth-century** beliefs about health and disease which supported the diagnosis of conditions such as poor circulation and imbalance of the nervous system for which spa medicine is still considered helpful in many parts of central Europe (Payer, 1990). Medical guides to the spas reveal a continuity with the popular almanacs, manuals and articles of the previous century, which advised readers that mental and physical health depended on the maintenance of a correct balance within the bodily system itself, and between the body and its natural and social environment (Broman, 1996: 110). The influential Swiss physician Samuel-August Tissot (1728-97) advocated a lifestyle characterised by a Hippocratic 'moderation in all things' including exercise, an open-air life, early rising, early nights and attention to the excretory and respiratory processes, all of which became features of Austrian spa regimes (Tissot, 1772). Tissot attributed the nervous diseases and afflictions suffered by many men of letters and the aristocracy to the disordering effects of their life-styles, a theme which constituted a persistent and moralising vein in popular works offering guidance about health.

A spa 'cure' became accepted as the short-term remedy for the effects of a morally and physically unhealthy urban life including aristocratic dissoluteness, luxurious tastes and immoderate behaviour of the kind described by C. W. Hufeland in his *Die Kunstheit, das menschliche Leben zu verlängern* [The Art of Prolonging Human Life] (1797) (known as the *Makrobiotik*) which recommend a country life for its ability to give 'that disposition which is contrary to the passionate, overstrained and eccentric; and the more so as it removes us from the dissipation, corruption, and worthlessness of the town, which tends always to nourish the passions' (p. 17). For the 'enjoyment of pure, sound air, simple and frugal food; daily and strong exercise without doors; established regularity in all the vital operations the beautiful prospect of simple Nature; and a frame of continual peace, cheerfulness and serenity, by which these means are diffused throughout the mind – what sources of vital restoration!' (p. 217). This fitted in well with the cultural values espoused by many of the middle classes, the *bürgerliche* virtues of reverence, discipline, simplicity and the avoidance of excess which, like their travel behaviours, played a part in the formation of their social and cultural identities (Broman, 1996: 111-12; Kaschuba, 1993; Sperber, 1997). Disregarding this kind of advice could lead to the symptoms of *ennui* besetting the Parisian lady described by John Macpherson:

her appetite fails, her digestion is languid, her nervous system is exalted; she gives an endless deal of trouble to her doctor who can do little for her, and who in despair sends her to some spa. There her habits are changed in every way; she has to get up early in the morning for her waters, or her bath; she leads a comparatively simple life in the open air ... can you wonder if she returns to Paris cured? (1873: 13).

The waters of Carlsbad were particularly recommended for disorders induced by deficiencies of lifestyle and environment particularly 'vicissitudes of climate, excessive gluttony and high living, immoderate potation of strong liquors, violent exercise of the body, intense thought, and an anguishing state of the mind', the effects of which on the moral character of the sufferer were indicated by the 'living picture which every morning presents itself at the Sprudel', namely the traits listed by Carlsbad's chief physician Dr Carro, 'de mysanthropie, de despoir, de pusillanimité, les transition soudaines de l'esperance à l'abattement, de la mélancholie à l'exhaltation, y sont innombrables' (Granville, 1837: 53-6). The opposition between an idealised, healthy, 'purifying', 'natural' existence, 'framed' by the medical routines and constraints of spa life, and an unhealthy, 'polluting', 'artificial', urban existence, conducive to immoderation, excess and bad character remained a theme of medical guides to the spas until the last two decades of the **nineteenth century**.

Many sick people found their hopes unfulfilled by conventional spa regimes or orthodox medicine and sought relief in more irregular treatments, of which the best known was that associated with the peasant lay-healer Victor Priessnitz (1799-1851) whose version of the 'cold-water cure', or hydrotherapy as it became known, became associated with the mountain village of Gräfenberg in Austrian Silesia. A fervent admirer hailed him as a 'second Hippocrates...one of the most astounding geniuses of this or any other age' who 'has done more to, ameliorate, both physically and morally, the condition of mankind, perhaps more than any other man since the dawn of Christianity' (Claridge, 1842: 3). Priessnitz's story followed the pattern of the 'conversion' narratives often associated with unorthodox practitioners who lacked formal medical training (Gijswijt-Hofstra, 1997). Claiming to have worked out the principles of his system of natural healing based on a belief in the natural healing power of cold water when he treated himself for a chest injury using cold water compresses, Priessnitz also drew on observations of injured animals, references to which were common in the originating legends associated with spas (as in the case of Karlsbad). He viewed illness in a traditional way, as the result of impurities and imbalances within the bodily system, stemming from poor food, suppressed perspiration, unwholesome air and emotional distress. His techniques therefore focused on the removal of obstructions to the circulation, and the cleansing of the system through the expulsion of noxious, stale fluids and their replacement by good or fresh ones through the drinking of at least twelve glasses of water daily to flush the body and clean the bowels and kidneys. Sour, highly spiced and unwholesome foods along with tea and coffee were forbidden, although one patient commented that more attention to quantities would have speeded up the process of the cure (Claridge: 55-6).

The patients, mostly central European, came from across the social spectrum and included a high proportion of young men suffering from syphilis (Graham, 1844:10). By comparison with life in more orthodox establishments, that of Gräfenberg was relatively austere for although patients enjoyed fresh air, exercise and rest amid bucolic surroundings, the amenities were minimal and reading, writing and intellectual effort were forbidden (Claridge: 142). 'Incurables' were refused treatment, but stayed in nearby Freiwaldau where gambling was also available. An official investigation into accusations of 'charlatanism' vindicated Priessnitz's methods and led to Gräfenberg's official recognition as a spa. After his death, Priessnitz's influence persisted through the activities of his disciples, particularly Wilhelm Winternitz (1834-1917) of the Vienna Medical School, a supporter of natural healing. His hydrotherapy clinic at Kaltenleutgeben outside Vienna attracted an international clientele, including the ailing wife of Mark Twain. Specialising in circulatory, rheumatic and nervous disorders, the Winternitz cold-water therapy required serious commitment from its patients. Lasting at least six weeks, the regime entailed an early morning plunge into a stream at a temperature never exceeding 10°C, followed by a steep uphill run to a meadow for some Swedish gymnastics and another cold plunge, then a hot shower and breakfast. If necessary more cold plunges were prescribed, together with massage for arthritic joints, special diets and various kinds of naturopathic medicines (Dolmetsch, 1992: 221-2).

Support from members of the powerful Vienna Medical School could transform the fortunes of a spa. The Moravian spa of Luhatschowitz benefited from the recommendations of Johann von Oppolzer, another supporter of natural healing. From the 1860s onwards however, just as the School appointed its first chairs in balneology, hydrotherapy and climatology (Lesky, 1965: 300-1),³ the use of water alone became less important as greater attention was paid to hygiene and climate, particularly in treating tuberculosis and other pulmonary complaints. Traditional spas now competed

with the *Luftorte* [air resorts] like the Semmering or Zakopane in the Polish Tatra, where the ‘pure air’ encouraged the building of sanatoria. By the end of the century most regimes supplemented bathing and drinking with ‘graduated walks’, fashionable diets of milk, whey or grapes, gymnastics, naturpathic remedies, electrical treatments, bicycling and sunbathing, which was a feature of Arnold Rikli’s establishment at Veldes (Zupanic-Slavek, and Toplak, 1998). All of which came to play a part in ‘modern’ versions of natural healing.

In the last two **decades of the century** there was an intensification of the desire to ‘return to nature’ including a renewed interest in natural healing exemplified in the cult of Kneippism. Pastor of the Bavarian village of Wörishofen, Father Sebastian Kneipp’s version of hydrotherapy, combined with traditional elements of natural healing philosophy and a brisk attitude to the sartorial fashions of modern life, was popularised in his *Meine Wasserkur* [My Water Cure] (1887). Like Priessnitz, Kneipp attributed his belief in the curative powers of cold water to his experiences as a consumptive youth when he benefited from the advice of a book on cold bathing. ‘Water’, he declared, when properly applied was ‘capable of curing every curable disease’ and of directly attacking the root of the evil ‘which mostly proceeds from insufficient hardening and bracing of a system’ (Kneipp, 1893: 9), an idea going back to the **seventeenth century** (Corbin, 1994). Diseased systems were to be purified by bathing alternatively in hot and cold water or through the exposure of particular body parts to cold water (often administered with a watering can), and the use of herbal remedies. A dry, simple and nourishing diet, free from spices and condiments and including fruit rather than wine or beer, was best. An appropriate bodily temperature should be maintained by avoiding the use of flannel or wool next to the skin and overheated and under-ventilated rooms.

Wörishofen attracted many invalid priests and monks who mingled with the rich and famous, including Crown Prince Joseph of Austria, as they hardened their systems by walking barefoot on ‘dewy grass’ or new-fallen snow. ‘Barefooted and bareheaded, Baron Rothschild was seen promenading every evening in a meadow near the railway stations, to the wondering admiration of the gaping crowd of *Curgäste* who daily enjoyed this quite abnormal spectacle of Croesus *sans bottes!*’ (de Ferro, 1893: xxxii). Despite the ridicule attracted by the system, Kneipp associations, desirous of spreading the message of *So Sollt Ihr Leben* [So Shall You Live] (1889), were soon established in a number of places, including the strongly Catholic areas of the Vorarlberg, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Graz, as members offered holistic treatment to those wishing to recover not just their bodily strength, but also that of mind and spirit.⁴ The forty-five members of the Vienna section of the Austrian Kneipp Association [*Österreichischer Kneippbund*] made weekly outings into the countryside equipped with sandals and watering cans (Nowotny, 1997: 551-2).

Kneipp’s charismatic presence was one reason for his success. ‘[T]he secret of his power lies in the eyes, looking out at one as they do from the shadow of those prominent brows’ (de Ferro, 1893: xx). Another was the attention which he paid to the individual nature of each case. Equally important however, was the moral symbolism inherent in the use of cold water and the *Pfarrer*’s emphasis on the need to ‘harden the system’, the latter evoking connections with earlier fears about masculinity (Corbin, 1994; Mosse, 1996), as well as notions of temperance and asceticism and effectively reinstating the relationship between morality and health. ‘Hardening’ regimes contrasted markedly with the hedonism implicit in the advertisements for holidays and cures in the sunny southern climate and warm waters of the Italian lakes and the Adriatic (1988). The growing commercialism of such places also contrasted with the cheapness and simplicity of life in Wörishofen although even the humble *Pfarrer* found himself subjected to the same entrepreneurial forces for not only did he appear on postcards (Figure 2), but as his translator recorded, his ‘name has become a household word throughout Germany and Austria: his photograph is displayed in every shop-window; and ‘Pfarrer Kneipp’ bread, coffee, and linen are everywhere advertised by wide wake speculators who seek to make capital out of his popularity (de Ferro, 1893: xvi).

The Kneipp cult was reinforced by a widespread culture of nature and interest in natural healing that was often linked to an interest in body culture and life reform shared by people from across the social and political spectrum (Konig, 1990; Feuchtner, 1992; Planert, 2000). These included the Empress Elizabeth who was known for her obsession with slimming, sport, gymnastics and spa treatments. Kneipp himself was highly critical of fashionable and constraining clothing of

the kind criticised by the supporters of *Reformkleider* (free-flowing female garments worn without corsets as their foundation) (Kneipp, 1890; Naumburg, 1901; Houze, 2001). Clothing influenced by these ideas was eminently suitable for the relative informality of resort life. Photographs of Emilie Flöge on holiday by the Aussee show her wearing garments designed for her by Gustav Klimt (Fischer, 1992: 90). These were similar to the fashion-wear subsequently sold in the Karlsbad shop of the Wiener Werkstätte. Worries about the harmful effects of modern life were symbolised for many by the pollution and discomforts of the urban environment. According to Max Nordau the 'inhabitant of a large town...is continually exposed to unfavourable influences which diminish his vital powers far more than what is inevitable. He breathes an air charged with organic detritus, he eats stale, contaminated, adulterated food; he feels himself in a state of constant nervous excitement' (1895: 35). It was often impossible to avoid the contaminating and debilitating effects of urban life even when on holiday. Mark Twain described the Hallstättersee as a '[B]eautiful lake in a cup of precipices' but its 'surface [was] littered with refuse and sewer contributions [despite which] men swim in it' (cited in Dolmetsch, 1992: 105).

One theme of Kneipp's teachings was particularly in tune with an anxiety most keenly felt by members of the elite and educated classes, as he declared 'the effeminacy and degeneration of men have reached a very high pitch. Weakened and weaklings, bloodless and nervous individuals, sufferers from the heart or digestion are now almost the rule; the strong and vigorous have become the exception' (Kneipp, 1893: 9-10). A concern with 'effeminacy' and 'degeneration' was the theme of Nordau's popular book *Erwartung*, [Degeneration] (1892) in which he wrote about the enervating psychological and physical consequences on the upper classes of an ill-disciplined urban life oriented towards self-gratification (Söder, 1991). 'The effect of a large town on the human organism offers the closest analogy to that of the Maremma, and its population falls victim to the same fatality of degeneracy and destruction as the victims of malaria' (Nordau, 1895: 35). Many of the symptoms of degeneration, 'nervous irritability', 'sexual psychopathy', 'neurasthenia', and 'hysteria', were evident in those frequenting 'the highways of fashionable watering places' (p. 7), men as well as women. Various defined, these were all central elements in the medical, psychological and sociological discourses of the period and were complaints for which a *Badekur* was often the prescribed treatment (Berger, 1910; Steiner, 1964). Alma Mahler, for example, was sent to Tobelbad to recover from the nervous state to which the frustrations of marriage had brought her. Treatment consisted of going barefoot, bathing in hot springs, wearing 'a horrible night gown', a diet of lettuce and buttermilk and walks in all weathers (Keegan, 1991: 181).

Concerns of this kind were bound up with anxieties not just about the nature of masculinity and femininity (Mosse, 1986: 81), but also with class and race (Nordau, 1895; Gilman, 1991). One writer who was particularly sensitive to the gendered and racialist implications of the rhetoric of degeneration, expressed most clearly in Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* [Sex and Character] (1903), was the consumptive Jewish writer Franz Kafka, who was deeply influenced by the *Naturheilkunde* movement and made persistent attempts to harden his body. His friend Max Brod recalled their youthful pilgrimages into the forests around Prague where they tried to unite themselves with nature by swimming 'in the forest streams, for Kafka and I lived then in the strange belief that we hadn't possessed a countryside until a nearly physical bond had been forged by swimming in its living, streaming waters' (cited in Anderson, 1992: 76), a practice which was expressive of the symbolic function which water continued to play in the collective psyche.

At the beginning of the **twenty first century**, when the stresses of modern life and a concern with mental and corporeal well-being has led to a boom in the spa trade, it is possible to look back to the role of 'the water cure' in the cultural history of Austria before the First World War, and to see analogies with our own situation. By the turn of the century advances in medicine meant that the transformative function of 'taking a cure' was less concerned with that of bodily renewal, and more with that of mental regeneration, although for some sick people, the traditional associations of water with healing and renewal, remained a symbol of hope. The 'culture of the water cure' in the **nineteenth century**, and the discourses which surround it, stand, not just as a strand in medical or tourist history but as a commentary on the complexities and anxieties of the time, as a critique of 'civilisation and its discontents'. At the same time they point to ways in which the health tourism of the modern age, manifested in the current proliferation of spa establishments, with names like 'Bliss', together with the New Age therapies and holistic philosophies with which they are associated, stand as commentary upon our own.

Notes

1. This essay deals only with the Austrian territories of the Habsburg Monarchy as distinct from those of Hungary, recognised as such under the *Ausgleich* of 1867 when it was granted independent status.
2. Another form of pilgrimage were the visits made by Polish patriots to the spa of Zakopane which they made into a cultural 'shrine'. Luhatschowitz performed a similar kind of function for Slovak intellectuals (Steward, 2000, 117-119).
3. There was a longstanding interest in 'natural healing power of nature' which was supported by the reluctance of the medical faculty to prescribe pharmaceutical remedies that might mask the symptoms of disease. This was part of the reaction against 'therapeutic chaos' of the former days of 'heroic' medicine and the unsystematic prescription. Carl von Rokitansky asserted that only sympathy between men could overcome the inherent suffering of life (Lesky, 1976; Johnston, 1972: 225-7).
4. The moral aspects of Kneippism were in tune with some aspects of the social Catholicism of the 1880s and 1890s as in Spain, for example, where the moral value of hydrotherapy still figured in spa publicity although no longer in medical textbooks (Rodriquez, 1998).

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Comment [J.1]:

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Jill Steward (2001) University of Northumbria

Illustrations

Figure 1. 'Boating'. A. von Ramberg. (Schmid and Stieler, 1874: 163). Courtesy of the Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Figure 2. 'Gruss aus Wörishofen'. Postcard. Author's collection.