



Raimund von Hofmannsthal

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Raimund von Hofmannsthal

'Mr Raimund von Hofmannsthal' (supplementary obituary), *The Times*, 26 April 1974, 20f–g



RAIMUND VON HOFMANNSTHAL was a man of incandescent aesthetic feeling, and his vision of life was profoundly coloured by the personality and poetry of his father, Hugo, particularly by his nostalgic historical imagination. Raimund was not himself a creative artist, but he venerated art and artists, particularly musicians, beyond other men. His view of society was of a piece with this: he saw human beings in aesthetic and emotional terms – society, the great world, was, to him, a stage, a pageant, a dream or a nightmare, but seldom a realistic spectacle of humdrum everyday life.

His imagination was shaped by Mozart and Austrian baroque and neoclassicism, with the nostalgic glances towards it of Richard Strauss and writers and composers of the late nineteenth century. Anything that evoked that world – buildings and gardens, nature embellished by man (as in his own house in Zell), the styles of singers and players and conductors, the relationships of human beings, social gatherings, public and private pleasures, every manifestation of life, beauty and enjoyment afforded by human culture – affected him intensely, and he communicated his feelings to his friends with spontaneous enthusiasm or indignation in his charmingly pronounced, exceedingly expressive English.

RAIMUND VON HOFMANNSTHAL

He was Austrian through and through, an American citizen, but his love of England was a [20g] central force in his life. He lived here with his beautiful English wife, at some material cost to himself and his family, because England seemed to him the embodiment of a quiet, honourable, humane existence, above all of a civilisation singularly free from violence, hysteria, meanness and vulgarity. He may have viewed the English and English life through a haze of uncritical admiration, but then it gave him great pleasure to admire, to praise, to discover wonderful virtues or extraordinary peculiarities in men and situations.

He seemed to have before his eyes an ideal vision of a royal court of unimaginable splendour, ruled by a divinely inspired princely artist, and he tended to romanticise the lives of all those of whom he was fond, which brought many of them much comfort.

His capacity for enhancing life was extraordinary. Virginia Woolf once said about someone that when he talked to one, one felt more intelligent, nicer, wiser, kinder, better dressed, more attractive – one's spirits rose. Living in a different milieu, Raimund had something of this effect on his friends. He was a delightful companion, a generous host, an ideal guest, with a gay and unwounding wit, who understood and valued art and love and human society and personal relations above the values of public life. He was a warm-hearted and loyal friend and those who loved him will miss him irremediably.

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