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## The Censorship of Literary Naturalism, 1885-1895: Prussia and Saxony

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SYMPOSIUM: THE CENSORSHIP OF  
LITERARY NATURALISM

The Censorship of  
Literary Naturalism, 1885–1895:  
Prussia and Saxony

GARY D. STARK

MUCH has been written in recent years about the emergence of modernist culture in *fin de siècle* Europe and the resistance it met from cultural traditionalists. The earliest clashes between traditionalism and modernism usually occurred in the legal arena, where police censors sought to uphold traditional norms against the modernist onslaught. How successful was the state in combatting emergent modernist cultural movements? Arno Mayer, in a recent analysis of the persistence of the old regime in Europe before 1914, maintains that: "In the long run, the victory of the modernists may have been inevitable. In the short run, however, the modernists were effectively bridled and isolated, if need be with legal and administrative controls."<sup>1</sup>

In Germany, the first stirrings of modern literature—if perhaps not yet of full modernism—began with the naturalists, also called the "realists," the "youngest Germans," or simply "the Moderns."<sup>2</sup> Naturalists

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1. Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981), 190.

2. Some literary scholars consider naturalism to be the beginning of literary modernism, while others see it as pre- or only quasi-modernist; still others interpret modernism as a conscious rejection of naturalism. Those who stress the many modernist features of naturalism include: Helmut Kreuzer, "Zur Periodisierung der 'modernen' deutschen

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clashed several times with the state between the mid-1880s and the mid-1890s. Yet the power of the censors and their adverse impact upon naturalism is often overestimated. In Prussia, the largest of the German states and the most important center of the naturalist movement, and in neighboring Saxony, center of the German book trade, censorship did literary naturalism little harm and perhaps considerable good. Mayer notwithstanding, the legal and administrative controls applied by Prussian and Saxon censors could neither bridle nor isolate the new literary current. On the contrary, censorship actually helped create new forums of expression for the naturalist movement, helped coalesce naturalist authors, and helped popularize their works.

Since drama was the preferred, and most successful medium of naturalist literature, let us begin there. Although conditions varied according to locality, in most Prussian cities and in Leipzig and Dresden, the two largest Saxon centers, all public theaters were subject to police censorship. Theater directors had to obtain prior approval for each dramatic work they intended to produce, and approval was denied if police believed the work would endanger public peace or security or would threaten the existing moral or political order. Any ban, however, could be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court (*Oberverwaltungsgericht*).

Between 1885 and 1895, local censors in Prussia and Saxony banned a total of nine naturalist dramas from their cities' public stages. Some of these titles were banned in one city only, while others were banned by authorities in several different localities. (See Table 1.) None of these bans seriously inhibited the development of naturalist drama in Germany, nor did the bans prevent the public from seeing such drama performed. There were three reasons for this. First, although local authorities could prohibit the staging of a work, the published text always remained readily available to interested readers. Second, many of these bans were issued not in the crucial theatrical centers such as Berlin or

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Literatur." *BASIS: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur* 2 (1971): 18-19; Günther Mahal, *Naturalismus* (Munich, 1975), 11; Roy C. Cowen, *Der Naturalismus: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich, 1981), 11; Albert Soergel and Curt Hohoff, *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit: Vom Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf, 1961), vol. 1; and Hans Schwerte, "Deutsche Literatur im wilhelminischen Zeitalter," *Wirrendes Wort* 14 (1964): 254-70. Those who take a more skeptical view of the relation between naturalism and modernism include: Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in *Modernism 1890-1930* (New York, 1976), 19-55; and Jost Hermand, *Der Schein des schönen Lebens: Studien zur Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt, 1972).

TABLE 1: DRAMAS

<i>Title</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Police Ban</i>	<i>Court Decision</i>
H. Ibsen, <i>Gespensster</i>	Berlin	banned 1887 (single private performance (not appealed) permitted Jan. 1887) public performances permitted 1894ff. banned 1889 banned 1889	
H. Sudermann, <i>Die Ehre</i>	Breslau Stettin Berlin Erfurt Kassel Berlin	permitted Nov. 1889 banned Nov. 1891 banned Nov. 1891 banned Oct. 1890	Interior Minister lifted ban Nov. 1890
H. Sudermann, <i>Sodoms Ende</i>	Kassel Braunschweig Berlin	banned 1891 banned July 1892 permitted Nov. 1890	
L. Fulda, <i>Das verlorene Paradies</i>	several provincial cities	banned 1890	
G. Hauptmann, <i>Die Weber</i>	Berlin Breslau Hanover Aachen Berlin	banned Jan. 1892 banned Oct. 1892 banned Aug. 1895 banned Sept. 1895 banned 1892	court lifted ban Oct. 1892 court lifted ban July 1894 court lifted ban Oct. 1896
L. Tolstoy, <i>Macht der Finsternis</i>	Berlin	public performances permitted 1900ff. banned	court lifted ban Mar. 1894 court lifted ban Dec. 1892
O. E. Hartleben, <i>Hanna Jagert</i> F. Holländer & H. Land, <i>Heilige Ehe</i> F. Held, <i>Ein Fest auf der Bastille</i>	Leipzig Berlin Berlin Berlin	banned Mar. 1892 banned Sept. 1892 banned Oct. 1894	(not appealed) court lifted ban Jan. 1896

TABLE 2: PROSE

<i>Title</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Police Action</i>	<i>Court Decision</i>
E. Zola, <i>Nana</i>	Berlin	French original and German translation confiscated July 1882	ban of translation upheld; ban of French original lifted
E. Zola, <i>Pot Bouille</i>	Berlin	French original and German translation confiscated July 1882	ban of translation upheld; ban of French original lifted
W. Walloth, <i>Dämon des Neides</i>	Leipzig	confiscated June 1889, Walloth indicted	Walloth found guilty June 1890; novel is banned
H. Conradi, <i>Adam Mensch</i>	Leipzig	confiscated June 1889, Conradi indicted	Conradi died before verdict; novel is banned
C. Alberti, <i>Die Alten und die Jungen</i>	Leipzig	confiscated June 1889, Alberti indicted	Alberti found guilty June 1890; novel banned
P. Ernst, <i>Zum ersten Mal</i>	Berlin	Ernst indicted 1891	Ernst found guilty
S. Feldmann, review of "La fille Elisa" in <i>Freie Büchse</i>	Berlin	issue confiscated Jan. 1891, editors and author indicted	defendants acquitted Feb. 1891; ban lifted
H. Bahr, <i>Russische Reise</i>	Dresden	confiscated Nov. 1891	portion of novel banned, Dec. 1892
H. Tovote, <i>Der Erbe</i>	Berlin	confiscated Feb. 1892, Tovote indicted	Tovote acquitted Dec. 1892; ban lifted
H. Bahr, <i>Fin de Siècle</i>	Berlin	confiscated 1892, Bahr indicted	Bahr found guilty July 1892; novel banned

Leipzig, but in small provincial communities. Hermann Sudermann's *Die Ehre* and Ludwig Fulda's *Das verlorene Paradies* were prohibited in towns like Erfurt and Kassel, for example, but both enjoyed successful runs on the Berlin public stage.<sup>3</sup> Finally, when police in Berlin or Leipzig did proscribe a naturalist drama, the courts almost invariably overturned the action, usually within six months to a year. Judges reversed the Berlin bans of Sudermann's *Sodoms Ende*, Hartleben's *Hanna Jagert*, Hauptmann's *Die Weber*, and Held's *Ein Fest auf der Bastille*, while a Leipzig court overturned the police's ban there of Tolstoy's *Macht der Finsternis*.<sup>4</sup> The only naturalist drama successfully banished from Berlin's public theaters was the now forgotten *Heilige Ehe*, a plea for free love by the minor Friedrichshagen authors Felix Holländer and Hans Land.<sup>5</sup> Had the Residenz Theater bothered to appeal it, this ban too would probably have been overturned.

True, Berlin authorities were able to prevent any public performance of Ibsen's *Gespenster* until 1894,<sup>6</sup> and they kept *Macht der Finsternis* off the public stage there until 1900. Yet during that time, large Berlin

3. Heinrich H. Houben, *Verbotene Literatur von der klassischen Zeit bis zur Gegenwart: Ein kritische-historisches Lexikon über verbotene Bücher, Zeitschriften und Theaterstücke, Schriftsteller und Verleger*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1924), 1:203, 581; Joachim Wilcke, *Das Lessingtheater in Berlin unter Oskar Blumenthal (1888–1893): Eine Untersuchung mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der zeitgenössischen Theaterkritik* (Inaugural diss., Berlin, 1958), 59.

4. On *Sodoms Ende* see: Wilcke, *Lessingtheater*, 59–63; and Oskar Blumenthal, *Verbotene Stücke* (Berlin, 1900), 16–31. On *Hanna Jagert* see: Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 2:255–59; Wilcke, *Lessingtheater*, 63–68; Blumenthal, *Verbotene Stücke*, 36–42; Richard Grelling, *Streifzüge: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Berlin, 1894), 227–52; “Kunst und Polizei,” *Das Magazin für Literatur* 61, no. 50 (Dec. 10, 1892): 816–17; and Landesarchiv Berlin [hereafter cited as: LA Berlin], Pr. Br. Rep. 30 C/a—TheaterZ. On *Die Weber* see: Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 1:337–54; Grelling, *Streifzüge*, 253–63; Manfred Brauneck, *Literatur und Öffentlichkeit im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Rezeption des naturalistischen Theaters in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1974), 51–62; Hans Schwab-Felisch, *Gerhart Hauptmann: Die Weber* (Frankfurt, 1959), 243–54; and Staatsarchiv Potsdam [hereafter cited as: StA Potsdam], Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin C, Tit. 74, Th. 304. On *Ein Fest auf der Bastille* see: LA Berlin, Rep. 30 C/a; and StA Potsdam Rep. 30 Berlin C, Tit. 74, Th. 594. On *Macht der Finsternis* see: LA Berlin, Rep. 30 C/a; *Vossische Zeitung*, Apr. 19, 1901; and E. Pechstedt, “L. N. Tolstoj's Drama ‘Macht der Finsternis’ und die deutsche Theaterzensur,” *Zeitschrift für Slavistik* 13 (1968): 558–64.

5. Zentrales Staatsarchiv Merseburg [hereafter cited as: ZSta Merseburg], Rep. 77, Tit. 1000, Nr. 4, Bd. 2; LA Berlin, Rep. 30 C/a, Nr. H460.

6. LA Berlin, Rep. 30 C/a, Nr. G482; Lothar Hirschmann, *Das Berliner Residenz-Theater und das Neue Theater unter der Leitung von Sigmund Lautenberg, dargestellt aus der Publizistik der Zeit* (Inaugural diss.; Berlin, 1960), 72; Otto Brahm, *Kitrische Schriften über Drama und Theater*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Schlenther (Berlin, 1913), 105, 253; Otto Brahm, *Theater, Dramatiker, Schauspieler*, ed. Hugo Fetting (Berlin, 1961), 28–29; and W. H. Eller, *Ibsen in Germany 1870–1900* (Boston, 1918).

audiences were attending so-called private performances of both plays at the Freie Bühne, the Freie Volksbühne, and the Neue Freie Volksbühne, and the Tolstoy drama was being performed publicly in Leipzig.<sup>7</sup>

With the sole minor exception of *Heilige Ehe* then, Prussia and Saxony could not prevent interested citizens, particularly those in the capital cities, from reading or viewing any naturalist dramas. At most, authorities delayed the public staging of some major works for a few months, or forced dedicated theatergoers to attend the less convenient private performances.

German naturalist prose fared only slightly worse. The German Criminal Code identified both blasphemy and the distribution of obscene materials as criminal offenses. Any published matter police considered blasphemous or obscene could be confiscated and, with a court's approval, destroyed. If the court decided the author had knowingly produced and distributed something blasphemous or obscene, he or she could be fined or imprisoned.

During the 1880s and early 1890s, officials in Prussia and Saxony confiscated ten different naturalist novels, essays, or prose sketches, and attempted to prosecute seven of the authors. (See Table 2.) For the state, the outcome of these cases must have seemed disappointing indeed. The courts did not agree, for example, that Heinz Tovote's novella *Der Erbe* or Siegmund Feldmann's review of Goncourt's *La fille Elisa* was obscene, and ordered each released.<sup>8</sup> And while the judiciary did concur that early German translations of Zola's *Nana* and *Pot Bouille* contained obscene language and should be banned, it would not consent to banning the original French versions. (More decorous German translations of these two Zola novels were later permitted, and were widely sold in Germany.)<sup>9</sup> When a Dresden court ruled a five-page portion of Hermann Bahr's *Russische Reise* to be obscene, the section had to be removed from all remaining unsold copies of the book. But since from

7. *Gespenster* was performed by the Freie Bühne on Sept. 29, 1889, and by the Freie Volksbühne on June 12, 1892. *Macht der Finsternis* was performed by the Freie Bühne on Jan. 26, 1890, and by the Neue Freie Volksbühne during 1892-93. The ban on *Macht der Finsternis* in Leipzig was overturned on Mar. 16, 1894.

8. Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society 1880-1918* (London, 1973), 260; Paul Schettler, "Heinz Tovote," *Die Gesellschaft* 9 (Mar. 1893): 293; "Kunst und Polizei," 817; *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben* 2 (1891): 68-70, 129-30.

9. *National-Zeitung*, July 6, 1889; ZStA Merseburg, Rep. 77, Tit. 380, Nr. 7, Bd. 3. It was the Wohlfahrt and A. Schway translations that were banned; the later translations by Roderick Rode were permitted. (Staatsarchiv München, Pol. Dir. München, 3703).

the total printing of 1,500 copies only 355 remained, the decision had little effect.<sup>10</sup> (Bahr, who resided in Austria at the time, could not be prosecuted.) Equally inconsequential for German readers was the 1891 judgment against Paul Ernst. After Ernst's novella *Zum ersten Mal* appeared in a social democratic weekly, a Berlin judge found the story obscene and fined Ernst 100 marks. However, as the story had already appeared in a widely-circulated newspaper, the court was powerless to undo public exposure to it.<sup>11</sup>

The most successful prosecution of naturalist fiction in Prussia or Saxony occurred at the so-called Leipzig Realists trial. In 1889 authorities confiscated three novels recently published there by the Wilhelm Friedrich Verlag: Hermann Conradi's *Adam Mensch*, Conrad Alberti's *Die Alten und die Jungen*, and Wilhelm Walloth's *Dämon des Neides*, charging Alberti and Walloth with obscenity and Conradi with both obscenity and blasphemy. After a lengthy and widely publicized trial, the court found the authors guilty and ordered all remaining copies of the novels destroyed. But again, since three-quarters of the copies printed had already been sold, the decision had minimal impact upon the actual distribution of the works. Alberti was fined 300 and Walloth 150 marks for obscenity, although their publisher paid their fines for them. Hermann Conradi would also certainly have been found guilty of obscenity and blasphemy and would most likely have been imprisoned had he not died before the trial ended.<sup>12</sup>

The only other naturalist author successfully prosecuted in north Germany was Hermann Bahr, whose *Fin de Siècle* was ruled obscene by

10. Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 1:43ff.; Ludwig Leiss, *Kunst im Konflikt: Kunst und Künstler im Widerstreit mit der "Obrigkeit"* (Berlin, 1971), 129–30; and Morris Ernst and William Seagle, *To Be Pure: A Study of Obscenity and the Censor* (New York, 1928), 177–78.

11. Paul Ernst, *Jünglingsjahre* (Munich, 1931), 225–28; Karl A. Kutzbach, "Paul Ernst, früheste dichterischen Arbeiten," *Der Wille zur Form* 7 (Oct. 1961): 268–70; and Gerhard Schulz, "Naturalismus und Zensur," in *Naturalismus: Bürgerliche Dichtung und soziales Engagement*, ed. Helmut Scheuer (Stuttgart, 1974), 109–10.

12. Conrad Alberti, "Der Realismus vor Gericht: Nach dem stenographischen Bericht über die Verhandlungen am 23., 26., und 27. Juni 1890 vor der Strafkammer I des Königlichen Landgerichts zu Leipzig gegen Conrad Alberti, Hermann Conradi, Willi Walloth und deren Verleger," *Die Gesellschaft* 6 (Aug. 1890): 1141–1232; Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 1: 10–13, 106; Schulz, "Naturalismus und Zensur," 96–102; Paul Ssymank, "Leben Hermann Conradis," in *Hermann Conradis Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Paul Ssymank and H. Peters, 3 vols. (Munich, 1911–12), 1:clxxxix–cxxxix.



a Berlin court. Bahr was fined 150 marks and the second edition of his book was destroyed.<sup>13</sup>

Censors were thus able to have four novels and a five-page section from another withdrawn from the marketplace, but only after several hundred copies of each had been sold. Four naturalist authors were convicted for what they had written, but they were merely fined, not imprisoned, and in the end, only two of these actually paid their own fines.

It is possible, of course, that some naturalist authors, hoping to avoid prosecution, practiced self-censorship; in this way, the German censors may have exerted an indirect rather than direct influence over naturalist literary production. Specific instances of self-censorship are virtually impossible to document, however, in part because the process is likely to be a more unconscious than conscious one by the author. I have, at any rate, found no references to self-censorship, of a "Schiere im Kopf," by naturalist authors.

It was not only naturalist texts and their authors that concerned the censors in Prussia and Saxony. The state tried also to curb the activities of institutions such as publishing houses and private theatrical societies, which were crucial to the dissemination of naturalist literature. But here, too, the efforts of the authorities fell seriously short.

Wilhelm Friedrich, the publisher who had issued Conradi's, Alberti's, and Walloth's novels, was indicted along with his three authors at the Leipzig Realists trial. The Friedrich Verlag was to the early German naturalist movement what the Cotta Verlag had been to the age of classical idealism. Friedrich's authors included Zola, Michael Georg Conrad, and Karl Bleibtreu, and his firm published Conrad's journal *Die Gesellschaft* as well as the prestigious, pronaturalist *Das Magazin für Literatur*. In the end, Friedrich won acquittal by convincing the Leipzig court that he had sent Conradi's, Alberti's, and Walloth's final manuscripts to the printer without actually reading them. Legally speaking, therefore, Friedrich was not guilty of intentionally publishing anything blasphemous or obscene.<sup>14</sup> A year later, Saxon authorities indicted another prolific naturalist publisher, Pierson of Dresden, for issuing Bahr's *Russische Reise*. But like Friedrich, Pierson was acquitted.

13. Leiss, *Kunst im Konflikt*, 129; Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 1:42; Ernst and Seagle, *To Be Pure*, 177.

14. Alberti, "Realismus vor Gericht," 1141ff., 1156ff., 1201ff.; Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 1:12.

Perhaps fear of prosecution led some naturalist publishers to screen more carefully the works they issued. The Friedrich Verlag, for example, had refused to publish Conradi's earlier novel, *Phrasen*, until the author removed certain offensive material. Friedrich had also rejected the first draft of Conradi's *Adam Mensch* after his firm's lawyer alerted him to potential legal problems with the work.<sup>15</sup> Either to avoid prosecution in Germany or because they could find no German publisher willing to accept their manuscripts, some naturalists published their work abroad, usually in Switzerland. Thus Conradi had to have a Zurich publisher issue his series of prose sketches, *Brutalitäten*, while Frank Wedekind's controversial *Frühlings Erwachen* also appeared in Zurich because Wedekind's usual German publisher refused to accept it.<sup>16</sup> It is important to remember, however, that these works were published, and were available to the German reading public.

If the authorities could not thwart the naturalist publishers, neither could they do much to prevent the "free stage" associations (the *Freie Bühne*, *Freie Volksbühne*, and *Neue Freie Volksbühne*) from disseminating naturalist drama. Because these were private associations whose theatrical performances were open to members only, they were immune from the censorship that applied to public theaters. For this reason, and because it was so easy to become a member, these associations became crucial outlets for naturalist drama in Berlin and other cities.

Even though the first of these societies, the *Freie Bühne*, performed several key works that were still banned from the public stage (*Gespenster*, *Macht der Finsternis*, and *Die Weber*), Berlin police never interfered with its activities, probably because its membership was drawn from the respectable, educated middle class. But toward the *Freie Volksbühne* (FVB), which was founded in 1890 to bring naturalist drama to the socialist working class, the authorities were less tolerant. In April 1891, ten months after its founding, the Berlin Police President invoked the Prussian *Vereinsgesetz* against the FVB, declaring the theatrical society to be an association that "sought to exert an influence over public affairs." (Such groups were subject to closer police supervision than were harmless private clubs.)<sup>17</sup> Although initially overturned by a lower appeals

15. Ssymank, "Leben Conradis," clxxi-cxcx, cxlvi.

16. Ernst and Seagle, *To Be Pure*, 178; Artur Kutscher, *Frank Wedekind: Sein Leben und sein Werke*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1922-31), 1:234.

17. Siegfried Nestriepke, *Geschichte der Volksbühne Berlin. I. Teil: 1890-1914* (Berlin, 1930), 50-57; Brauneck, *Literatur und Öffentlichkeit*, 36-38; *Vorwärts*, no. 150 (July 1, 1891); *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, no. 11 (Jan. 8, 1892); and Franz Mehring, "Ein letztes

court, the police action was later upheld by a higher court in 1892. This apparent police victory over the FVB proved a hollow one, however; for while the organization was now required to report all its activities to the police, those activities continued unhindered. In practice, the FVB's new legal classification proved at worst a minor inconvenience, but hardly an obstacle to its development.

Indeed, in the years immediately following, the FVB expanded rapidly, growing from fewer than 2,000 to nearly 8,000 members by 1895. That year, alarmed by the increasingly pronounced Social Democratic orientation of the FVB leadership and membership, the Berlin police again intervened. The socialist theatrical society, police charged in April 1895, had accepted so many members that it could no longer be considered a closed, private association. Since its performances had, in effect, become open to anyone who wished to attend, it would henceforth be treated as a public theater and could perform only works approved by the police.<sup>18</sup> Yet even this second legal triumph for the police hardly represented a serious blow to the naturalist movement. For by 1895-96, following the Social Democratic party's repudiation of literary naturalism as decadent, bourgeois, and nonsocialist, the FVB had almost completely abandoned the heavily naturalist repertoire of its early years and was now staging exactly the same classical works (Lessing, Goethe, Schiller) as the public, censored theaters.<sup>19</sup> When the FVB had been most naturalist (1890-92), it was most free; when police curbed its freedom, it was no longer naturalist.

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Wort im Sachen der Freien Volksbühne," *Die Neue Zeit*, Dec. 24, 1892. See also my "La police berlinoise et la Freie Volksbühne: Une étude de l'intégration socialiste," *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, forthcoming.

18. StA Potsdam, Rep. 30 Berlin C, Tit. 74, Th 24 and Th 1100; Nestriepke, *Geschichte der Volksbühne*, 140-42; Brauneck, *Literatur und Öffentlichkeit*, 45-47; and *Vorwärts*, no. 93 (Apr. 21, 1895).

19. On the de-naturalization of the Freie Volksbühne, see the comments by Franz Mehring (who was Chairman of the organization from 1893 to 1896) in Mehring, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12: *Aufsätze zur ausländischen Literatur: Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Thomas Hohle, Hans Koch, and Josef Schleifstein (Berlin, 1976), 270, 272-74, 288, 291-93, and Mehring, "Proletarische Ästhetik," *Volksbühne* 2 (Oct. 1893): 8-9. Also Julius Türk, "Die Tätigkeit der Freien Volksbühne," *Volksbühne* 8 (Apr. 1894): 10-13; Cecil W. Davies, *Theater for the People: The Story of the Volksbühne* (Austin, Texas, 1977), 45-46; Vernon L. Lidtke, "Naturalism and Socialism in Germany," *American Historical Review* 79 (Feb. 1974): 29, and Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1985), 142-50. For a complete list of the dramas performed by the Freie Volksbühne, see John Osborne, *The Naturalist Drama in Germany* (Totowa, N.J., 1971), Appendix II.

It was, rather, the Neue Freie Volksbühne (NFVB) that assumed the role of leading outlet for new naturalist drama in Berlin after the FVB distanced itself from the naturalist movement. Founded in 1892 when Bruno Wille, Wilhelm Bölsche, Julius Hart, O. E. Hartleben, and other bourgeois naturalist authors seceded from the FVB in protest over the latter's increasingly politicized, Socialist direction, the NFVB between 1892 and 1895 premiered new dramas by Johannes Schlaf, O. E. Hartleben, and Carl Hauptmann. Works by other prominent naturalists (Gerhart Hauptmann, Tolstoy, Max Halbe, Ibsen, Ludwig Fulda, Arno Holz, and Hermann Sudermann) were also featured regularly in the NFVB repertoire. The April 1895 police decree against the FVB applied also to the NFVB. After briefly suspending its performances while the decree was (unsuccessfully) appealed through the courts, in November 1896 the NFVB revised its charter and tightened its membership requirements enough to enable it to regain its earlier status as a private, uncensored dramatic society and to resume its activities as before.<sup>20</sup> In short, state attempts to block the "free stage" movement as a naturalist outlet proved fruitless.

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In retrospect, lame efforts to censor literary naturalism in Prussia and Saxony did more to advance the movement than to stifle it. The activities of the censors indirectly aided the dissemination of naturalist literature in several ways: First, they induced the formation of several important new literary forums or outlets. The Freie Bühne, for example, was founded in 1889 primarily as a way of avoiding the police censorship that applied to the regular public theaters. Julius Hart, one of the founders, maintained that the creation of the Freie Bühne was "above all a way of rapping the nose of the police censor."<sup>21</sup> A year later, the founders of the Freie Volksbühne likewise announced they were creating their association to sidestep police censorship and bring the new literature to the people. As Bruno Wille explained, "the public performance of dramatic works in which the revolutionary spirit lives usually runs aground on capitalism, which doesn't regard such works as very

20. Lidtke, "Naturalism and Socialism," 22–28; Nestriepke, *Geschichte der Volksbühne*, 25–28, 34–35, 58–68, 139, 144–45; Davies, *Theater for the People*, 38–43, 50, 53–54; Brauneck, *Literatur und Öffentlichkeit*, 37–48, 64–65; StA Potsdam, Rep. 30 Berlin C, Th. 1104.

21. Julius Hart, "Die Entstehung der 'Freien Bühne': Persönliche Erinnerungen von Julius Hart," *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* Jg. 24, vol. 1 (1909/10): 291–92.

profitable, or else on police censorship. These obstacles do not exist for a private association."<sup>22</sup> Hundreds of Berliners joined the Freie Bühne or the Freie Volksbühne simply to see a performance of *Die Weber* when it was still banned from the public stage, but purchasing a season membership often exposed these theatergoers to the rest of the associations' naturalist repertoire as well. The free stages also helped loosen police censorship over the regular theaters. Once the associations proved that questionable works like *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, *Gespenster*, *Die Weber*, or *Macht der Finsternis* could be successfully performed without creating a disturbance or unduly offending the audience, both the censors and the courts were more inclined to permit these works on Berlin's public stages.

Berlin censors also played unwitting midwife to the birth of two new literary journals devoted to naturalism. In conjunction with the founding of the Freie Bühne, in which he was instrumental, the publisher Samuel Fischer created a weekly journal entitled *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*. This journal, which published the texts of new naturalist dramas and serialized many naturalist novels, quickly surpassed *Die Gesellschaft* as the foremost outlet for German naturalist authors. And when police began pressuring the Freie Volksbühne to drop the educational lectures it held for its worker-members before each performance, the association decided to replace the talks with a house literary journal, *Die Freie Volksbühne*, which was distributed to all association members and sold to nonmembers. As the foremost historian of the Freie Volksbühne observed, it was "only out of necessity that [the association] came up with the idea for its own journal; one can almost be grateful to the police for having created this necessity."<sup>23</sup> Both journals became important new outlets for aspiring naturalist writers, and provided them a source of income.

A second way censorship inadvertently aided literary naturalism was by helping to coalesce and consolidate the nascent movement, lending it a unity and identity it might not otherwise have possessed. By characterizing and treating many different antitraditional authors in a similar way, as members of a distinct coterie or clearly identifiable movement, the state accustomed both the public and the writers themselves to see literary naturalism as a coherent, internally integrated intellectual pha-

22. Wille, "Aufruf zur Gründung einer Volksbühne," *Berliner Volksblatt*, Mar. 23, 1890.

23. Nestriepke, *Geschichte der Volksbühne*, 31; Davies, *Theater for the People*, 33.

lanx.<sup>24</sup> Police harassment of one naturalist author often evoked sympathy and support from the others and generally heightened their sense of solidarity and their awareness of common literary interests. As the censors, authors, and public came to view attacks upon an individual writer or work as an attack upon the naturalist literary school in general, the naturalist movement acquired a more distinctive public identity and gained more unity.

The Leipzig Realists trial illustrates well this process of collective identification. At the outset, the public prosecutor declared his hope that the trial would, as he put it, “fumigate this young-German hornets’ nest.”<sup>25</sup> By trying the three authors and their publisher together rather than individually, the state treated—and encouraged the public to regard—all four defendants as an undifferentiated group. In the press and public mind, they were quickly labeled the “Leipzig Realists” even though Walloth, for one, never considered himself part of the realist school.<sup>26</sup> Two of the defendants did much to reinforce the popular image of the trial as a sweeping attack upon an entire literary style. Conradi’s lawyer spent much of his time defending what he called the “world movement” of realism that was sweeping all branches of art,<sup>27</sup> while the publisher Friedrich hoped to draw in other, more prominent naturalists and transform the proceedings into a “Monsterprozess” against the whole naturalist school. Friedrich encouraged men like Michael Georg Conrad to denounce their own works to the Leipzig prosecutor and to ask to be indicted alongside Conradi, Alberti, and Walloth.<sup>28</sup> (Conrad politely, and wisely, declined.) After the trial, Friedrich distributed a long *plaidoyer* comparing the Leipzig Realists trial to the famous 1835 ban against all authors and publishers of the first Young German movement; he also likened it to the French realist trials against Baudelaire and Flaubert in

24. Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism*, 270; Schulz, “Naturalismus und Zensur,” 93–94.

25. Quoted in Wolfgang Heine, “Das Leipziger Autodafé: Unjuristische Glossen eines Juristen,” *Moderne Dichtung* 1 (1890): 566.

26. In Heft 4 of his unpublished autobiography, “Lebensrätsel eines Wiedergeborener,” Walloth says he “never belonged to ‘Die Realisten.’” (Handschriftenabteilung der Stadtbibliothek München, Nachlass Wilhelm Walloth, L1538.)

27. Alberti, “Realismus vor Gericht,” 1181.

28. Manfred Helle, “Der Verleger Wilhelm Friedrich und das ‘Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes’: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Verlagsgeschichte des frühen Naturalismus in Deutschland,” *Archiv für die Geschichte des Buchwesens* 16, no. 4 (1976): 1155.

1857.<sup>29</sup> Other sympathetic observers referred to the trial as “a judgment against naturalism” and called the authors “martyrs for the realist cause.”<sup>30</sup> Hostile critics, conversely, saw the verdict as a welcome defeat for the new trend of artistic realism.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of *Sodoms Ende*, the individual features of the case likewise became subordinate to the larger issue of its naturalist context. The first censor to read Sudermann’s play called it “hyperrealistic” and declared that “this naturalist *Richtung*” was unsuited for the public stage. The second police reader expressed serious reservations over Sudermann’s “continual, most pronounced naturalistic treatment” of the subject matter (“sein Stoffes vielfach recht stark naturalistisch aufgetragen hat”).<sup>32</sup> When the theater director inquired as to the specific reason the play was banned, he was told by the Police President simply that “die ganze [*sic*] Richtung passt uns nicht.”<sup>33</sup> Liberal journalists like Maximilian Harden quickly labeled the ban of *Sodoms Ende* nothing less than a declaration of war on naturalism, even though, strictly speaking, Sudermann (according to Harden) had little in common with other naturalist authors.<sup>34</sup> Conrad Alberti, just convicted in Leipzig, immediately wrote Sudermann, whom he had never met, to express his sympathy and solidarity. Alberti promised to arrange for the banned work to be performed by the private Verein Deutsche Bühne, of which he was a cofounder. “All we authors, whatever literary *Richtung* we belong to, must stand together in so far as it concerns fighting the bureaucracy’s power to encroach on our interests,” Alberti told Sudermann.<sup>35</sup>

The Frieie Volksbühne, when pressured by the authorities, deliberately identified its fate with that of the naturalist movement and, like Alberti,

29. Wilhelm Friedrich, *Literatur und Strafgesetz: Verteidigungsschrift aus den Realistenprozess* (Leipzig, 1890). Portions of this rare work are reprinted in Paul Victor, “Execution an einem Buch,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, Jan. 9, 1898.

30. F[ritz] M[authner], “Das Obscön vor Gericht,” *Deutschland* 1, no. 41 (July 12, 1890): 683; Kasimir Edschmid, “Staatsanwalt, Dichtung, Unzucht, Freiheit,” in his *Die doppelköpfige Nymphe: Aufsätze über die Literatur und die Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1920), 68–78.

31. Maximilian Schlesinger, “Das jüngste Deutschland vor Gericht,” *Monatsblätter, Organ des Vereins Breslauer Dichterschule* 16, no. 10 (Oct. 1890): 156.

32. Quoted in Wilcke, *Lessingtheater*, 59–60.

33. Blumenthal, *Verbotene Stücke*, 16.

34. Harden, “Das verbotene Sodom,” *Die Gegenwart* 38, no. 44 (Nov. 1, 1890): 286.

35. Alberti to Sudermann, Oct. 22, 1890, in Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar [hereafter cited as: DLA Marbach], Cotta Archiv, Nachlass Sudermann, VI, 46, Bl. 2.

tried to rally all naturalist writers. In 1892 the court ruled that although the Freie Volksbühne was not a political association, as police contended, it was an organization that sought to influence public affairs and as such must submit its membership rolls to the police. Bruno Wille condemned the decision as “nothing less than a judgment against naturalism” and warned other supporters of the movement that they might be the police’s next target. All free-thinking defenders of the new literature, he proclaimed, must rally together to oppose such harassment.<sup>36</sup>

A third service police rendered to literary naturalism was to help advertise and popularize the movement. Given the controversial nature of naturalism and the German educated public’s interest in literary life, police bans or attempted bans inevitably generated much public attention. Such publicity could either benefit or undermine the work of the censor. As sociologist Kai Erikson has noted, agencies of control such as censors seek to enforce certain social norms by defining and punishing deviant behavior. When the state acts against deviants, in this case literary deviants, it is attempting to delineate clearly just how far the norms extend, to establish a boundary between where conformity to the norm is required and where diversity or deviance is permitted. Norms retain validity only if they are regularly invoked and their violation punished. Each time the community or its agent censures deviant behavior, it reaffirms the authority of the violated norm and reasserts the dividing line between permissible and impermissible behavior. But to be effective, acts of censure must be known to the community; the more widely publicized the punishment of deviant behavior is, the more the norm in question is reinforced.<sup>37</sup> Thus, when victims of censorship received wide public attention (especially writers like Alberti or Bahr, who were actually convicted of violating established norms and who later boasted of their punishment), it may ultimately have worked to the advantage of the censors—who, after all, wanted the public to be aware of what norms could and could not be violated with impunity. In cases where the censors are reversed by the courts, however, widespread publicity has the opposite effect: Here it helps erode traditional norms more rapidly, because it publicizes the fact that the norms are no longer enforce-

36. Wille, “Die Justiz als Kunstrichterin: Glossen zum Urteil des Oberverwaltungsgerichts über die ‘Freie Volksbühne,’” *Allgemeine Theater-Revue für Bühne und Welt* 1, no. 3 (May 8, 1892): 5.

37. Kai Erikson, “Notes on the Sociology of Deviance,” *Social Problems* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1962): 310.



able. Since the Prussian and Saxon censors were overruled by the courts far more often than they were upheld, their meddling in literary life may well have helped enfeeble the very norms they sought to reinforce.

The public attention invariably generated when dramatic performances or novels were banned in Prussia and Saxony could also heighten the public's demand for the censored work. As one scholar has eloquently put it, a police ban often drags into the glaring light of day little known works that might otherwise have slumbered forever in the literary shadows.<sup>38</sup> Extensive publicity surrounding an act of police censorship always had the potential of turning an unknown censored author into a celebrity, a fact that escaped few naturalist writers. Wilhelm Walloth, one of the defendants at the Leipzig Realists trial, noted in his memoirs that "scandals make the best advertisements" and that "nowadays authors can penetrate (*durchdringen*) [the market] only when they become involved in some scandalous political or sexual affair."<sup>39</sup> At the trial, the prosecutor presented evidence that Walloth, and perhaps also Alberti, had deliberately made their novels as risqué as possible in order to attract attention and increase sales.<sup>40</sup> After their conviction, the otherwise sympathetic critic Fritz Mauthner complained that too many "young-German" realists actually rejoiced when their works provoked a police ban.<sup>41</sup>

One such author may have been Hermann Sudermann. When he learned of the ban of his *Sodoms Ende*, Sudermann wrote his mother that "if anything were still lacking regarding my popularity, it is this brutal police decree." People had been coming up to him in the theater and on the street to congratulate him and express their envy; every day he received dozens of requests from theaters across Germany wanting to perform the banned work. "You can hardly imagine the excitement this ban has created in the theatrical world," he boasted; "in Vienna, Rome, and London they are writing newspaper editorials about it, American journalists come to interview me, and artists come to sketch my portrait." If the ban were not overturned, Sudermann believed he stood to make a tidy profit on the sale of the play's printed text.<sup>42</sup> While the

38. Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 2:7.

39. Walloth, "Lebensrätsel eines Wiedergeborener," Heft 6.

40. Schlesinger, "Das jüngste Deutschland," 157.

41. Mauthner, "Obscön vor Gericht," 683.

42. Hermann to Dorothea Sudermann, Oct. 28, 1890, DLA Marbach, Cotta Archiv, Nachlass Sudermann, XVI, 139, Bl. 10.

police ban was under appeal, German audiences took a renewed interest in Sudermann's earlier drama, *Die Ehre*, which began playing to packed houses again. When the ban of *Sodoms Ende* was finally lifted, large crowds naturally streamed to see it as well.<sup>43</sup>

Edvard Munch, the Norwegian painter, was another suddenly catapulted to celebrity because of an attempt to censor an exhibition of his paintings in 1892. Without knowing much about him, the Verein Berliner Künstler invited Munch to exhibit his work at the association's headquarters. But when members of the Verein saw Munch's daring, impressionist canvasses, most were shocked and outraged; the exhibit was denounced in the conservative press as "an orgy of naturalism [*sic*]." After a stormy debate, the Verein voted to close the exhibit after only a few days. Overnight Munch became a sensation within the German art community and was immediately invited to display his work in Munich, Düsseldorf, and Cologne, where interested collectors began purchasing it. The scandal in Berlin suddenly opened up important new doors for Munch and brought the public acclaim and commercial success so long denied him.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Hermann Bahr later boasted that his fame as a writer began to grow when police confiscated his *Fin de Siècle*, a book he admitted was rather cheeky and audaciously marketed ("dreiste Erzählungen, frech boulevardierend").<sup>45</sup>

Publishers, too, appreciated the commercial value of a ban and knew how to capitalize on it. The S. Fischer Verlag published the texts of all the dramas performed by the uncensored Freie Bühne, covered them in bright red dust jackets with the prominent inscription "Accepted by the Freie Bühne," and placed them in every Berlin bookstore.<sup>46</sup> After Hartleben's *Hanna Jagert* was finally released for the public stage, Fischer, in conjunction with the premier performance, issued a special printed edition of the drama containing both the original police ban and the Supreme Administrative Court's reversal of it.<sup>47</sup> Whenever a work like Tovote's *Der Erbe*, Tolstoy's *Macht der Finsternis*, Hauptmann's *Die Weber*, or Held's *Ein Fest auf der Bastille* was first banned then later

43. Blumenthal, *Verbotene Stücke*, 23.

44. Ragna Stang, *Edvard Munch, der Mensch und Künstler* (Königstein, 1979), 90–94; Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 49–54.

45. Bahr, *Selbstbildnis* (Berlin, 1923), 257.

46. Harry Young, *Maximilian Harden, Censor Germaniae: The Critic in Opposition from Bismarck to the Rise of Nazism* (The Hague, 1959), 18.

47. Houben, *Verbotene Literatur*, 2:259–60.

released, a large and curious audience was virtually assured. The same was true of works banned in some cities but not others, such as *Die Ehre*, *Das verlorene Paradies*, or *Gespenster*; the well-publicized bans elsewhere undoubtedly boosted attendance in cities where the works could be performed.

State intervention in literary life thus had unintended consequences opposite of those intended: It indirectly fostered the literary movement the censors hoped to inhibit, and may well have helped subvert those cultural norms the censors sought to uphold. One observer believed censorship seriously contravened Prussia's broader political interests as well. Maximilian Harden, in an 1891 article prompted by the ban of *Sodoms Ende*, charged that Prussia's crude attempts to censor artistic endeavors were angering and alienating the rest of Germany. South Germans were coming more and more to resent Prussian insensitivity toward high cultural ideals, causing strains within the Reich. Prussian censorship policies, Harden warned, were driving writers, intellectuals, and segments of the educated middle class away from the established order into the arms of the Social Democrats. In short, through censorship the state was undermining rather than strengthening its political foundations.<sup>48</sup>

While Harden vastly overstated the case, it is hard to deny that in Prussia and Saxony, attempts to censor literary naturalism proved not only futile for the most part, but also counterproductive. Censorship there continually ran aground on the rocks of a resolute and fairly independent judiciary that frequently overturned the police's actions and freed censored works. Each failed attempt at censorship, in turn, only further advanced the naturalist cause. Perhaps it was the Prussian and Saxon censors Karl Kraus had in mind when he wrote: "Die Skandal fängt an, wenn die Polizei ihm ein Ende macht."<sup>49</sup>

48. Harden, "Weg mit der Theaterzensur," *Der Kunstwart* 4 (1890/91): 56a-57a.

49. Karl Kraus, *Beim Wort Genommen* (Munich, 1955), 45.