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William Grange

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, wgrange@unl.edu

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Theodor Lebrun and Industrial Comedy Space In Nineteenth Century Berlin

William Grange

The formation of the German Reich in 1871 was an occasion of unprecedented economic growth, accompanied by an equally conspicuous increase of both theatre construction and audience growth. One important aesthetic result, to paraphrase Hélène Cixous by way of Jacques Lacan, was "re-locating and un-making" the comic self in an alternative space of the Wilhelminian "Imaginary."¹ The victorious conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the collection of billions in war reparations from the vanquished French allowed the German economy between 1871 and 1890 to surpass that of France and soon thereafter that of Great Britain. The erstwhile Prussian capital of Berlin became the new Imperial capital and undertook an ambitious program of urban renewal, patterned in many ways after the one in Paris during the Second Empire. The literal re-locating of space involved the demolition of whole neighborhoods to make way for new construction. Boulevards were widened at the expense of street-side shops and businesses, while many new "upscale" housing structures appeared where formerly tenements had stood.

The inhabitants of these new, improved housing structures became members of a theatre audience that wanted a positive image of itself reflected onstage; as individuals, they were concomitantly conscious of their status as citizens of the newly unified German Reich. It was a "middlebrow" audience,² made up of business managers, real estate brokers, and professionals such as lawyers, accountants, bankers, and entrepreneurs.

William Grange is a faculty member in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Nebraska, teaching theatre history, European drama, and film courses. His published research has appeared in books Partnership in the German Theatre (Lang); Theatre in the Third Reich (Greenwood); Brecht Unbound (Univ. of Delaware); Comedy in the Weimar Republic (Greenwood), encyclopedias and scholarly journals such as Theatre Survey, Theatre Journal, New England Theatre Journal, Text and Performance, Thalia Germanica, Western European Stages, and 19th Century Theatre Research, among others. He was recently awarded a Fulbright Senior Scholarship Grant for 2000-2001 to teach courses in German theatre history and drama and also conduct research at the University of Cologne in Germany.

neurs—in other words, the audience which experienced the most significant jump in prosperity during the *Gründerjahre*, or “foundation years” of the new Reich.³ The German word for this audience is *das Bürgertum*, theatre-goers unattuned to, even disdainful of, “aristocratic” tastes; neither did they prefer intellectual subject matter. They also rejected previously popular “folk comedies” as beneath their newly won station in German life. Theatrical entrepreneurs sought new kinds of theatrical fare to please them.

The most significant of those entrepreneurs was Theodor Lebrun (1822-1895), who created an alternative space in German comedy, a space which survived not only the collapse of the Second Reich but expanded well into the two succeeding governmental regimes in Germany (the Weimar Republic from 1918 to 1933, and the Third Reich from 1933 to 1945).⁴ The implications of Lebrun’s work and the space he created became more apparent long after his passing from the German theatrical scene, as the Wilhelmine era and its successors came to inglorious ends. Yet Lebrun’s impact on theatre practice in his own day and on the German theatre of succeeding generations was substantial. Since his death in 1895, the tides of war and the confluence of political forces have reduced him to a cipher in the annals of theatre history. This essay surveys and evaluates for the first time in English or German the contributions of Lebrun, which were more than simply instances of long-forgotten theatre practice. They indeed constituted an artistic force of widespread, though to date neglected, influence and vitality.

Lebrun’s “alternative space” was the industrial comedy, a species of drama fit for an industrial age. The boulevard theatres of Paris in the Second Empire had been the mills where such comedies were first constructed; Lebrun’s Berlin of the Second Reich became the forge on which they were stamped out with German precision and regularity. German industrial comedies resembled Scribe’s plays to an extent, but Scribe’s works played for audiences comprised mostly of aristocrats; their plots tended to sustain dramatic tension throughout the play. They did not, as did the industrial comedy, depend upon tension created within individual situations, situations which render the central character psychologically immobile. His rigidity enhances the comic effect: “always the same doors open, and through them come ever more surprises and comic misfortunes” (Wilms 100). This central character in the industrial comedy almost always portrayed a happy, prosperous bourgeois whom superficial dilemmas cumulatively perplexed and humorously confounded. Yet this character, almost always a somewhat beleaguered father and oppressed husband, triumphed over his vicissitudes and remained a proud member of the Wilhelminian Establishment. He was a man like many in the Second Reich audience, making his way to the top by himself, under his own power, and society provided him with an honorable place within its midst. The industrial comedy’s structure derived in part from Kotzebue and in part from the French *comédie-vaudeville*, but it was a situation comedy first and foremost. Discoveries, reversals, and mistaken identities were its stock in trade, the basic materials of its dramatic content and the essentials of its identity as a comic genre. Its goal was the satisfied laughter of its audience; that is why it relinquished any attempt at pathos or “deeper

significance." The first industrial comedy to establish a workable and imitable pattern for subsequent production was *Mein Leopold* (My Leopold) by Adolphe L'Arronge,⁵ L'Arronge wrote it in 1873, and Theodor Lebrun premiered it in Berlin's Wallner Theater the same year.

Before a detailed discussion of Lebrun can begin, however, the Wallner Theater itself deserves some mention. The Wallner's founder and namesake Franz Wallner (Franz Seraphim Leidersdorf, 1810-1876) had premiered *The Demi-monde* by Alexandre Dumas fils' under the title *Pariser Sitten*, or "Parisian Morals," in 1855; Wallner went on to become one of Berlin's most successful managers through the 1850s and 1860s,⁶ and by 1865 he was able to build the elaborate new structure which bore his name. The structure paradoxically led to Wallner's decline as a manager, for its cost outstripped Wallner's ability to maintain it. The Wallner was located in the Raumstrasse area, which municipal authorities wanted to upgrade, and the lot on which it stood covered nearly 20,000 square feet; zoning officials had assigned that much square footage to Wallner because the lot faced a plaza at which several streets were to meet. In the end, construction costs overran Wallner's original estimates by a multiple of three, due not only to the building's excessive size but also its interior opulence—far too opulent, some newspaper accounts reported, for the kind of clientele Wallner had always accommodated (Klotz 109). Corinthian columns had no place in a site of popular entertainment, some reported, and the front façade of the building was altogether too imposing. Statues of vague classical ancestry stood atop the roof points, while inside the building pretentious caryatids supported balconies, and halls led to arcades surrounding the main floor auditorium. The stage itself featured elaborate technologies and the building was so impressive that the city decided to name the street outside Wallner-Theater-Strasse.

Wallner rapidly went bankrupt in the new theatre because powerful forces well beyond his own control and far outside his beautiful building were rapidly changing his audience. In 1869, Wallner leased his theatre to a man more in touch with the new age dawning in Berlin: Theodor Lebrun. Lebrun began searching for plays that would attract, cultivate, and retain a broader, more affluent audience. An enormous growth in population with ample disposable income was generating demand for a new kind of comic space in Berlin, and Lebrun, with a keen eye for box-office realities, concluded that these audiences differed markedly from the ones Wallner had so faithfully served. These audiences wanted a species of drama that addressed and reflected their newfound station in life. This audience resembled its bourgeois counterpart in England of a century earlier in its requirement for plays that "reinforced pride in a system that [had] allowed middle-class businessmen to achieve key positions in the social structure by earning money" (Londrè 56). Middle-class preferences and middlebrow taste carried weight in Imperial Berlin, for despite the city's governmental importance as Reich capital, it was never a city culturally dominated by the government. The noble families of Prussia tended to stay on their estates and did not involve themselves much in Berlin (Klotz 152).⁷ Audiences were thus less exposed to "patrician" tastes than they were in



Theodor Lebrun as he appeared in 1873, when he premiered *My Liepold* by Adolphe L'Arronge.

Vienna; they were the *Bürgertum*, precisely the audience Lebrun wanted to attract.

The somewhat narcissistic yearnings of the *Bürgertum* were analogous to those of audiences in eighteenth-century London who attended Lillo's *The London Merchant* and Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, seeking a more refined likeness of themselves. That likeness had appeared on Second Empire stages in Paris; it was the *pièce bien fait* (the *wohlgemachtes Stück*, or "well-made play") of Scribe, dazzling audiences with "tricky, but essentially mechanical" reflections of itself in scores of plays.⁸ Berlin audiences had seen Scribe and Labiche plays, but adaptations of them remained too "French" for Germans. They admired Labiche's fast-paced, agreeable affability and appreciated Scribe's craftsmanship. Lebrun's goal was to develop a German Labiche who could generate satisfied laughter in his audience absent any hint of political or social discussions sometimes present in Scribe.⁹ He could not have presented plays of political or social significance even if he had wanted to, because theatre managers operated in what today would

be regarded as an intolerable atmosphere of "prior restraint." The Berlin police had historically been authorized to keep close watch on all theatre productions and to guard against any criticism, overt or implied, of four protected institutions: the court, the military, the government, and the family. When Berlin became the Imperial capital of the Second Reich, police powers remained in place and were subsequently enlarged under Bismarck's *Sozialistengesetz*, or Socialist Law, of 1878. The intent of that law was to suppress political activity by socialists, and it had what we would today term a "chilling effect" on theatre artists. The law authorized local police to ban public assembly of "Socialists, Social Democrats, or Communists," or of anyone else who seemed suspicious; it restrained the publication and/or distribution of printed matter deemed objectionable; it encouraged the censorship of plays; it denied employment in the public sector to any "socialist agitator," thereby restricting job opportunities to any artist who might be considered unorthodox (Craig 147). Such policies stimulated the growth of a drama concentrating on bourgeois life and its new-found economic significance, a drama that justified the behavior it flatteringly presented.

Lebrun knew what his audience demanded and what the government would allow. Germany was becoming a mass society, and Lebrun realized that if he could assemble a product with a broad appeal to an ever-increasing market, the potential for monetary return was enormous. The product he had in mind was a comedy combining both escapism and felicitous self-mockery. He began his regime at the Wallner with plays by Roderich Benedix (1811-1873)¹⁰ and Gustav von Moser (1825-1903),¹¹ whose comedies bespoke a more sophisticated outlook than the rustic local comedies previously in the Wallner repertoire. Benedix and von Moser had a feel for the middle class audience and for middle class taste, but Lebrun was nevertheless looking for a "break-through" playwright.

He found him in the unlikely person of the aforementioned Adolphe L'Arronge, who in fact had worked periodically as a collaborator with von Moser. L'Arronge was a professional musician, and when Lebrun "discovered" him he was musical director of Berlin's Kroll Opera. Lebrun's premiere of L'Arronge's *My Leopold* in 1873 was so stupendously successful that it continued to run for years afterwards, performed thousands of times in scores of productions all over Germany. Its central character was a prosperous parvenu named Gottlieb Weigelt, a tradesman *cum* entrepreneur whose business had expanded to include several employees and ownership of an apartment building. His success had made him oblivious to the profligacy of his wastrel son Leopold, who in many ways embodied the "new Germany," that is, the Germany based on materialism, luxury, conspicuous consumption, and pretentiousness. Leopold Weigelt personified tendencies toward those values and embodied the antithesis of the thrifty Prussian artisan found in earlier comedies.

The thrifty Prussian, however, appears in *Mein Leopold* as the administrative magistrate Heinrich Zernikow, who is an example of the dutiful *Beamter* (civil servant)

of which pre-unification Prussia was once proud. Zernikow and his devoted wife Natalie live modestly in Gottlieb Weigelt's building with their three daughters, one floor above Weigelt,¹² where in the opening scene the family is celebrating father's birthday, having presented him with a new judge's robe. Zernikow finds it altogether too extravagant, but his wife Natalie insists that he wear it in his next court session. The Prussian state, she furthermore insists, should be ashamed of itself for failing to supply its "best and most intelligent civil servants" with appropriate official attire. Into the Zernikow apartment stroll a series of Berlin character types, including an impecunious pianist (whom the Zernikow daughters find dashing attractive); their cheeky maid; an impertinent washerwoman; and finally, their landlord Gottlieb Weigel, who appears uninvited at the party and boorishly seeks Zernikow's assistance with a legal matter.

Weigelt is also a "Second Reich" type *sine qua non*, a walking parody of the Second Reich's "self-made man" benefitting from postwar expansion during the *Gründerjahre*. In addition to being fairly well off, he is barely literate (though he boasts of his leather-bound collection of Schiller and Goethe, "the former in cowhide and the latter in pigskin"); add to that touches of brutishness and greed and a full helping of over-indulgence towards his son Leopold. In this instance, Weigelt wants Zernikow to help him evict a poor family occupying a shanty on his property so that he may install a stable, where Leopold may keep a horse and impress everyone as a gentleman of leisure.

The next two acts humorously chronicle a series of Weigelt's misadventures over a period of two years, and by the play's final act he is a broken but contrite man. Forced to liquidate all his assets in order to pay off his son's debts, he works alone at his cobbler's bench. Through an act of benevolent subterfuge on the part Zernikow's daughter, he becomes reconciled with his own daughter, whose kindly husband has been supporting Leopold in America. Leopold, it turns out, is coming back to Germany a fully repentant prodigal for a reunion with his father. L'Arronge's Gottlieb Weigelt was like many men in Lebrun's audience, and the self-identification he provided explains much of the play's popularity. Weigelt had "graduated" into unprecedented prosperity by his own bootstraps, though sustained by public policy and aided by easy credit terms. The Second Reich honored him with status and property, though he was at times assailed with misfortunes—but none of them ever seriously threatened his life and all of them resolved happily.

Lebrun presented several imitations of *My Leopold*, but none of them matched the popularity, the commercial success, nor the extraordinary audience appeal of the original. Lebrun realized by the early 1880s, however, that he needed a new model, not just a re-tooling. As if on cue in a well constructed industrial comedy, a young actor in his company named Franz von Schönthan presented him with a script he and his brother had written titled *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen* (The Rape of the Sabine Women). Franz von Schönthan (1849-1913) was an Austrian aristocrat who dabbled in acting after an obliga-



Theodor Lebrun as he appeared shortly before his death in 1895.

tory stint in the Hapsburg navy. The play he and his younger brother Paul von Schönthan (1853-1905) had written turned out to be a comedy so popular that it remained in the repertoire of the Wallner long after its 1885 premiere, and indeed became a staple in the repertoires of scores of other theatres throughout the German-speaking world.¹³ *The Rape of the Sabine Women's* popularity exceeded even that of *My Leopold*, and though Schönthan (sometimes with collaborators and at others by himself) went on to write more than forty other plays, few approached the popularity of this one. On the basis of its success, Schönthan retired from acting and assumed the role of genteel squire, residing in several sumptuous residences and chateaus all over Europe.

The comedy's central character is Martin Gollwitz, a small-town school teacher who dreams of fame and fortune as a playwright. He has spent years writing a play based on early Roman history, titled *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. The comedy thus does not employ the traditional play-within-the-play convention found in many industrial comedies but rather evokes a kind of primordial *Verfremdungseffekt* by creating a play-outside-the-play.¹⁴ Gollwitz is about to forsake his dreams of a playwrighting career

when the head of a touring theatre troupe comes to town, offering to produce the play. Gollwitz is delighted, but he must hide the fact from his wife, who on moral grounds is very much opposed to the theatre as an institution. Complicating the entire undertaking is a love interest between the Gollwitz daughter and one of the troupe's actors. When Gollwitz finally sees his play produced he is disgraced, because even he must acknowledge that the play he wrote is awful. He also perceives that his wife has been right all along—the theatre is a dangerous waste of time. The subplot involving the Gollwitz daughter also ends happily—at least for the Gollwitzes, if not for the theatre profession generally. The actor agrees to give up his artistic ambitions and settle down with a steady job.

While *The Rape of the Sabine Women* has become one of the most successful of all comedies ever written in German, its historical significance rests in the space it created for managers who presented it and facsimiles of it under Kaiser Wilhelm II, later during the Republican period, and throughout the Third Reich. Industrial comedies of note following L'Arronge and Schönthan were those by the now almost completely forgotten Felix Philippi, Julius Pohl, and Eduard Jacobsohn. The most remarkable of Wilhelmine playwrights, however, were Oskar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelburg, both of whom worked for Lebrun at the Wallner in the 1870s and went on to run theatres themselves in Berlin.¹⁵ Oskar Blumenthal (1852-1917) was originally a theatre critic for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a newspaper with the widest readership among theatre-goers in Wilhelmine Berlin. His partner Gustav Kadelburg (1851-1925) was one of the first actors Lebrun hired when he took over the Wallner, and by the 1890s he and Blumenthal were writing comedies that were among the German-speaking theatre's most frequently performed plays.¹⁶

When the Wilhelmine Reich collapsed in the wake of military capitulation and the Kaiser's abdication in 1918, the republic which succeeded it instituted an altogether new set of operating principles for German theatre culture. At that critical juncture in German history, the alternative space Theodor Lebrun had created figured prominently as a refuge for several German theatres. The German Reichstag, or parliament, declared in 1919 that provincial court theatres were henceforth to become state theatres. A socialized theatre culture would, idealistic left-wing government officials hoped, insure that theatre in Germany would remain a preserve of uplift and correction, much the "moral institution" Schiller had advocated (Institut 694). Yet the Reichstag had placed the onus of socialism's expenditures on local governments, "despite the fact that local government was virtually bankrupt" (Peukert 137).

In order to finance their operations, and sometimes in order merely to survive, newly socialized theatres turned to the market-oriented, "reified" industrial comedy as never before in order to attract audiences; as a result, the industrial comedy enjoyed its zenith of popularity.¹⁷ There was a subsequent geometric expansion of the industrial comic space throughout the Weimar Republic; over 900 such comedies premiered from 1919 to 1933, far outnumbering the premieres of all other genres combined. Dozens

were performed more than a thousand times in one season alone, and the numbers of their performances over the life of the Republic were in the scores of thousands. In the Weimar Republic, no longer was the "Lebrun paradigm" merely a commercial triviality; in many cases, it became the German theatre's lifeblood.

After the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the industrial comedy continued its run during the Third Reich—although within much tighter constraints. Many of the playwrights creating industrial comedies in the Weimar Republic, like their predecessors L'Arronge, Blumenthal, and Kadelburg, had been Jewish. They were responsible for what the Nazis termed the "civilized filth of Jewish comedy," which they equated with the "Jewish physics" of Albert Einstein and the "Jewish psychology" of Sigmund Freud. Nazi cultural policy thus initially aimed to rid German theatre of any Jewish influences,¹⁸ which according to one Nazi cultural authority had done "enormous damage to the integrity of the German people" by exposing "life-sustaining values" to "cheap, easy laughter" (Best 54). The dilemma Nazi authorities soon confronted, however, was that German audiences actually *preferred* the cheap, easy laughter of the Lebrun paradigm, so playwrights and theatre directors in the Third Reich came under enormous official pressure to produce "politically correct" comedies that also attracted an audience. Many of the comedies created under the Nazis were thus poured directly from the industrial comedy mold.¹⁹ More than 2,000 new plays premiered during the Hitler dictatorship, and nearly sixty per cent of them were comedies (Bundesarchiv 169). One was titled *Eintritt frei* ("Free Admission"), which must have attracted a large number by its title alone!²⁰

After World War II and throughout the Cold War period, German theatres largely ignored the industrial comedy, a commodity which was by then dismissed as a "commercial triviality," even though the first play on a German stage after the fall of the Third Reich was Schönthan's *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (on May 27, 1945 in Berlin's Renaissance Theater). After the second unification of Germany in 1991, however, the enormous costs associated with it have caused theatres once again to examine the comic space of Theodor Lebrun. Several theatres have presented *Mein Leopold* and variants of *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, and many are considering productions of industrial comedies for the future. If the German theatre faces another crisis of survival in the coming years (as some have predicted), it would do well to call again upon Theodor Lebrun and his legacy.

Notes

1. "Wilhelminian" is a term derived from two of the three Second Reich Emperors, Wilhelm I (reigned 1871-1888) and Wilhelm II (reigned 1888-1918). "Wilhelminian" is analogous to "Elizabethan" or "Victorian" in English.

2. The term "middlebrow" denotes audiences who were moderately, but not overly cultivated.

Lawrence Levine in his *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988) provides an excellent explication of the suffix "-brow" in uses that adumbrate theatrical taste, though the usage here to describe German audiences does not exactly parallel Levine's description of American audiences during roughly the same time period. Levine posits highbrow culture in late nineteenth-century America, for example, as a conspiracy by a Eurocentric elite who favored grand opera in foreign languages. Lowbrow entertainments like vaudeville and music hall in English, on the other hand, Levine valorizes as gladsome exercises in "diversity."

3. *Gründerjahre* is one of those an idiomatic phrases in German which, like *Biedermeierzeit* before it, is nearly impossible to translate with its full connotation of a certain nineteenth-century social and political milieu. The *Gründerjahre* comprised the "expansionist era" of the Second Reich, a period of about two decades after 1871, years marked by rapid industrial expansion, real estate speculation, and a transformation of traditional values. English equivalents might be "Gay Nineties," the French "belle Epoque," or the Italian "Risorgimento."

4. The Republican era in German politics began 9 November 1918, when Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated. It ended 30 January 1933, when Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor of the Republican government. 30 January is most often the date cited as the beginning of the Third Reich, though officially Hitler did not become *Führer* (Leader) of the nation until President Hindenburg's death in 1934. Hitler's regime remained in place until the German surrender in May of 1945—though theatres had ceased operation in Germany on 1 August 1944.

5. Adolphe L'Arronge (Adolf Aronsohn, 1838-1908) was the adoptive son of actor-manager Eberhard Theodor L'Arronge (Eberhard Theodor Aronsohn, 1812-1878), from whom the son apparently learned a great deal about the business end of theatre and the technical side of playwriting. The elder L'Arronge was still active, in fact, when his son submitted *My Leopold* to Lebrun.

6. Wallner topped the success of *The Demi-monde* one month later when he reversed Dumas *fils'* chronology and presented *Camille* (titled in German *Die Dame mit den Camelien, oder Eine neue Magdalena*, or "The Lady with the Camelias, or A New Magdalen"). Both productions ran to sold out houses for months, and both featured Wallner's wife Agnes (1826-1901).

7. On this point it is instructive to compare Berlin with Vienna, whose theatre had long benefited from the involvement of the Hapsburgs. Though a Berlin "royal theatre" had been in operation since 1786, its company did not receive the same royal patronage as its Viennese counterpart, the Burgtheater. Instead, the Berlin "Königliches Schauspielhaus" was leased to the actor-manager Carl Theophil Doebbelin (1727-1793) under a patent ("Generalkonzession") for spoken drama within the Prussian capital. Doebbelin and his employees enjoyed no other state protection; indeed their contact with the state or with royal authority and prestige was limited to the time spent performing in a state-owned building, the Komödienhaus am Gendarmenplatz, formerly home to a French-language troupe.

8. "One goes to the theatre for amusement, not for instruction or correction," Scribe had precisely observed, "[and] what most amuses one is not truth but fiction. The theatre is therefore rarely the direct expression of social life, but rather the inverse expression." In Eugene Scribe, *Oeuvres Complètes de Eugene Scribe*, ed. E. Dentu. Paris: Levy, 1874, Vol. I, xxiv).

9. Some of Scribe's plays dealing with controversial religious or political subjects found their way into opera libretti; among the more notable are *A Masked Ball* (originally titled *Bertrand et Raton*) by Giuseppe Verdi, *The Jewess* by François Halevy; and *The Huguenots* by Giacomo Meyerbeer.

10. Benedix had been on German stages since age twenty, singing tenor parts in opera. He became the director of the Frankfurt am Main Municipal Theater in 1855 and went on to administer theatres in Leipzig and Cologne. In those theatres he wrote comedies based on the models of Scribe and Labiche which seemed most appropriate for the companies he administered, and at the time of his death at age sixty-two in Leipzig he had written over 100 comedies. Among their titles were *Der bemooste Haupt* ("The Mossy Head," 1861), *Die zärtlichen Verwandten* ("Kissing Cousins," 1866), and *Die Hochzeitsreise* ("The Honeymoon," 1868). Benedix also wrote a fascinating novel about life in the German theater titled *Bilder aus dem Schauspielerleben* ("Scenes from an Actor's Life").

11. Gustav von Moser was an officer in a Prussian Jäger battalion for thirteen years before he began his playwriting career. He wrote over fifty successful comedies, often with collaborators, much as Scribe and Labiche had done. The most popular of them were *Der Veilchenfresser* ("The Lilac Eater," 1874), *Der Bibliothekar* ("The Librarian," 1878), and *Krieg im Frieden* ("War in Peace," 1881).

12. Gerhart Hauptmann parodied the Prussian administrative magistrate in his "social comedy" *Der Biberpelz* ("The Beaver Coat") in 1890—but Zernikow precedes Hauptmann's, named Wehrhahn, by about twenty years. Zernikow is mindful of his obligations to the state, while Wehrhahn is often simply a mouthpiece for reactionary political sentiment.

13. The appeal of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* has puzzled critics of the German theatre for decades. It has been pilloried as farcical nonsense by nearly everyone who considers himself a "serious" observer of drama and theatre history, everyone from the great Otto Brahm, founder of the Freie Bühne, to Hermann Westecker, the Nazi "authority" on what was the best in "legitimately German" comedy. *Rape's* popularity among audiences remained unabated through the Wilhelmine years, the First World War, the upheavals of the Weimar Republic, and the terrors of the Third Reich. It was one of the few unscathed survivors on the German theatrical landscape after World War II, for the first play to be performed anywhere in Germany after the collapse of the Hitler dictatorship and the conclusion of hostilities was *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, in Berlin during July of 1945.

14. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, or "alienation effect" as it is sometime translated, is a concept central to the theories of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). It posits an impact on audience members which sharpens their rational faculties and enables them to make critical political assessments. Brecht hated plays like *The Rape of the Sabine Women* and said so on numerous occasions.

15. The most successful of playwright-producers was L'Arronge. In 1883 he purchased the Friedrich-Wilhelmstädtisches Theater and transformed it into the Deutsches Theater. This theatre building is important in German theatre history first as the home of Otto Brahm (1856-1912), but subsequently as the main enterprise of Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), who took over owner-

ship in 1906. Oskar Blumenthal acquired such wealth as a playwright that he was able to build his own theatre in 1888, for the purpose of premiering and presenting exclusively both his own plays and those he wrote with others. He named it in honor of the great eighteenth-century playwright, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). Otto Brahm also ran this theatre, but not as a comedy showplace. He staged an "Ibsen Cycle" at the Lessing, the first manager to do so anywhere in Germany, along with a retrospective of plays by Arthur Schnitzler, another controversial playwright he had championed during his lease of the Deutsches Theater.

16. The "German-speaking theatre" during the 1890s extended beyond Central Europe to include Milwaukee, Wisconsin, whose Pabst Theater had a German stock company which between 1885 and 1911 presented over 530 productions, many of which were American premieres of Blumenthal and Kadelburg comedies.

17. The "reification," or "commodification," of culture and cultural products is a Marxist commonplace in the "critical theory" of Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). The term appeared initially in the 1923 treatise *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (History and Class Consciousness) by György Lukács (1885-1971), who used "reification" (*Verdinglichung*) as a convenient, easily-identified pejorative for social/cultural transactions, which in capitalist society, as Karl Marx phrased it, "take on the fantastic form of a relation between things." Its pejorative connotation enjoys wide use in Marxist-based criticism to this day, even though György Lukács had employed it to advocate now vilified "socialist realism" as an alternative to reification.

18. This process was the infamous *Entjüdung* ("de-Jewification") of the German theatre, which was effected by the Propaganda Ministry's work rules, which made possible the proscription of contracts issued to Jews and those whom the Propaganda Ministry considered "politically unreliable."

19. The most frequently staged play in the Third Reich was *Wenn der Hahn kräht* by August Hinrichs. It had 187 separate productions during the Third Reich and was performed over 10,000 times by August 1, 1944, when Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels ordered the closure of all German theatres.

20. Lommer and Scheu's *Eintritt frei* premiered at the Berlin Tribüne Theater on May 2, 1937 and went on to be produced in forty six other German theatres. The most successful comedy of the 1936-1937 season was Jochen Huth's *Die vier Gesellen* ("The Four Bachelorettes," about four young women looking for husbands), with over 650 performances.

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