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## **Pessimism in Progress: Hermann Sudermann and the Liberal German Bourgeoisie**

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**PESSIMISM IN PROGRESS: HERMANN SUDERMANN AND THE LIBERAL GERMAN  
BOURGEOISIE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

JASON J. DOERRE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2016

German and Scandinavian Studies

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JASON J. DOERRE

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents Jerome and Lucilla Schultz for  
inspiring my interest of the past.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like most dissertations, this one would not have been possible without the generous, caring support of many others. First of all, the continuous support provided by many friends and family members over the years enabled me to have made it this far. I will not forget the help provided by these people and I shall be forever grateful. I am thankful to all of the many educators over the years, who prepared me for this final stage of my *Lehrjahre*. As an undergraduate at Minnesota State University Mankato, Larry Witherell prepared me for the next stages of my studies, as he instilled in me an understanding of the importance of history. I am fortunate for having been an M.A. student at the University of Salzburg in Austria and Bowling Green State University Ohio, and I am likewise fortunate to have been trained by so many competent academics there. While completing my PhD studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst I am thankful to the whole section of German and Scandinavian Studies, as well as the DEFA Film Library for opening up to me new interests and opportunities. I owe much to the generosity of the William J. Fulbright Foundation, which enabled me on two separate occasions extended stays in Germany, providing me with the chance to teach for the first time, as well as complete research at the German Literature Archive in Marbach am Neckar, forming the backbone of this dissertation. At Trinity College in Hartford, where I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to teach, I am thankful to the Department of Language and Culture Studies, especially my two colleagues Johannes Evelein and Julia Assaiante-Goesser, from whom I have gained remarkable knowledge both in teaching, the profession, and life. Lastly, all dissertations need a committee. I am

especially blessed to have one that encouraged me with this project from start to finish. Susan Cocalis, my primary advisor during my PhD studies, guided me through thick and thin, past the exams, and through the dissertation writing process. Her advice and interest in my work was constantly a source of motivation for me. I am forever grateful. Andrew Donson's style of honest constructive criticism throughout the years helped me get to this point. Last but not least, I am thankful to Jon Olsen for agreeing to be a committee member. His generosity and kindness has been remarkable.

**ABSTRACT**

**PESSIMISM IN PROGRESS: HERMANN SUDERMANN AND THE LIBERAL GERMAN  
BOURGEOISIE**

May 2016

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Once ranked among the most internationally read authors at the turn of the nineteenth century, the name Hermann Sudermann (1857–1928) today has been all but forgotten. This dissertation frames the life and work of this once famous author in the context of the liberal German bourgeois milieu. Not only was Sudermann a liberal bourgeois, his works reflected the preferred styles, attitudes, and worldview of this social class. I argue that the rise and fall of Hermann Sudermann’s career, as it was inextricably connected to the fortunes of the liberal German bourgeoisie, mirrors the trajectory thereof. As the appeal of bourgeois liberalism waned from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth, so too did the reception of its author *par excellence*. With the end of his life in 1928, and then the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933, Hermann Sudermann and the legacy of the liberal German bourgeoisie came to an abrupt end. Most peculiar was that Hermann Sudermann had written about the decline of bourgeois liberalism for decades in advance of its collapse. This is part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, an affliction that affected many of his



contemporaries. Instead of emanating a persistently progressive force and survivalist spirit, the tendency was aestheticist withdrawal, and resignation to fate. Using his *roman à clef*, titled *Der tolle Professor*, as an entry point into the life work and worldview of Hermann Sudermann, this dissertation focuses attention on the representation of liberalism, the bourgeoisie, and pessimism.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER: THE LIFE AND WORK OF HERMANN SUDERMANN

#### IN CONTEXT

*Einmal sehr berühmt. Unheimlich berühmt. Man kennt heute diese Grade der Berühmtheit nicht mehr. Was aber an mir war, meine Stücke oder mein Bart, das ist mir bis heute unklar. Gemeinsam wurde daraus eine große Fatalität*  
— Hermann Sudermann, “Der Weg zur Unberühmtheit” (1925)

#### A. Introduction

After Hermann Sudermann’s death in 1928 one last round of praise circulated through the press in Germany, honoring an author whose long and prolific career spanned from the Era of Bismarck into the Weimar Republic; an impressive figure whose place in the history of German literature was thought to be solidified. As it goes, Hermann Sudermann has not retained a position in German literary history, and he remains today a largely forgotten figure of a bygone era. Already in his own day, the author saw the pool of his international fortune and fame all but dry up. He was “bewundert viel und viel gescholten,” just as Helena proclaims herself to be in the third act of the second part to Goethe’s *Faust*. If this was the case during his lifetime, posterity has perhaps even been crueler. Beyond the sporadic film adaptations of his works since his death, his name and work has vanished from the mainstream. Today the author’s onetime greatness only lives on

in the disappearing memory of East Prussia from where he came and about which he wrote. He is a forgotten author of an unremembered time and place.

This study of Hermann Sudermann is not about reviving the collective body of the author's works. Such resuscitation would require time, space, and resources that go vastly beyond the scope of this work. Rather, the intention is to contextualize this once influential figure in the world in which he wrote and lived in order to learn more about the class, culture, politics, ideology, and worldview of his milieu.

Through and through, Sudermann was a liberal bourgeois aesthete whose opinions and tastes were not unlike countless other Germans of the time. His vast, often times sensational popularity among the liberal German bourgeoisie indicates that his works were widely appealing to these circles, and his persona exerted influence beyond literature. It is therefore that I had set upon an examination into the life and work of the author in order to find out what Hermann Sudermann could reveal about the liberal German bourgeoisie. The results were more than I had anticipated. Not only did I find that he held the preferences, attitudes, and worldview of the liberal German bourgeoisie, but also that his life, work, and worldview matched a certain narrative arc of this class from the late nineteenth century into the Weimar Republic. The story that I landed upon is one of pessimism, fatalism, self-fulfilling prophecy, hubris, self-hatred, withdrawal, and a search for something greater. I argue that the rise and fall of Hermann Sudermann's career, as it was inextricably connected to the fortunes of the liberal German bourgeoisie, mirrors the trajectory of his social class. As the appeal of bourgeois liberalism waned from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so too did the reception of its author *par*

*excellence*. With the end of his life in 1928, and the end of the Weimar Republic that followed in 1933, Hermann Sudermann and the legacy of the liberal German bourgeoisie came to an abrupt end. Most peculiar, I found, was that Hermann Sudermann had written about the decline of bourgeois liberalism decades in advance of its collapse. This, I believe, is part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, an affliction that affected many of his contemporaries. Instead of emanating a persistently progressive force and survivalist spirit, the tendency was aestheticist withdrawal, and resignation to *Schicksal* or fate. At the end of his life, Sudermann saw himself as a passé author of a class that was vanishing in a sea of mass culture and mass politics. Perhaps he sums it up best himself, when he despairs in his diary on January 17, 1924: “Unermeßlich schwer, verlorenen Ruhm, verlorenen Gunst noch ein mal zu erobern. Und will es auch nicht mehr. Bin schon D’entre Tombe!” (Tagebuch VIII).

### **B. The Forgotten Life and Work of Hermann Sudermann**

The man who would go on to take German literature by storm in the late nineteenth century, was born 1857 in a small village, Matzicken, near the city of Heydekrug in the region known as the Memelland. Born into a petite bourgeois family that operated a struggling brewery, Hermann Sudermann felt at a young age the many financial anxieties of his parents, which he would later go on to chronicle in his first novel *Frau Sorge* (1887). In his 1922 memoir *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* he describes the humble place of his youth: “Auf diesem Gutshof kam ich zur Welt. Doch nicht etwa im Herrenhause. So hoch verstiegen sich meines Lebens Stern



nicht" (7). His father was a serious man, bearing those qualities of Max Weber's Protestant Work Ethic that were so central to the mindset of the middle classes in the nineteenth century. His mother, however, who lived to be centenarian, had a humanistic touch to her, and nurtured this side of her son. This duality of austerity and sensibility is a hallmark feature of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* and it formed the essence of the author Sudermann. Although it was not in the family budget, the young man was given a secondary education and then went on to spend several semesters at the Albertina University in the East-Prussian city of Königsberg. During this time he joined a fraternity or *Burschenschaft*, experienced the *Mensur* or student duell, had his first exploits in love, and made his first attempts at becoming an author. Seeing that this provincial eastern city was limited, the young Sudermann decided to try his stake in the metropolis Berlin where a man such as himself would be either made or broken.

In Berlin, Hermann Sudermann managed to register at the university and there he was allowed to take classes with some of the best minds that Germany had to offer. This opened up his intellectual horizon, but he also became drawn to politics at this time. As a young idealist, he looked away from the *Realpolitik* of Bismarck and was drawn to the socialist camp. He writes, "Daß ich ein roter Revolutionär war, ein Atheist, ein Materialist – ein 'Umwerther aller Werte' würde ich gesagt haben, wenn es so etwas wie Nietzsche schon gegeben hätte – und daß ich mich bereit fühlte, für die Erlösung des geknechteten Proletariats in Schmach und Tod zu gehen" (*Bilderbuch* 268). This makes it all the more strange that when hard times fell upon Sudermann, and his parents no longer had the resources to

contribute to his studies, it was the conservative author and Bismarck supporter Hans Hopfen who became his benefactor. Although Hopfen's support was limited, he managed to assist Sudermann in finding employment as a tutor in wealthy bourgeois homes, which assisted the young man to make ends meet in Berlin, thereby enabling him to continue his pursuit of a literary career.

With an interest in politics Sudermann would often visit the Reichstag to hear the debates, and eventually found employment as a newspaper correspondent. The tides finally turned in the early 1880s when he was given the responsibility of editor in chief of a newly printed paper by the (Rudolf) Mosse-Press, *Das deutsche Reichsblatt*, that was to be a mouthpiece for the Liberal Secession faction that included monumental figures of German liberalism such as Eugen Richter, Heinrich Rickert, Ludwig Bamberg, and Georg von Bunsen. As the compiler of the newspaper, and the author of much of the content, Sudermann had put his foot in the door to the world of publishing. This job not only enabled him to network, but he also got experience in publishing his own serial fiction for the liberal press. He remained in this position for two years before stepping down to work exclusively as a freelance author of fiction for the liberal press, writing stories for newspapers such as the *Der deutsche Reichsfreund* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which sustained him throughout the 1880s.

Although he had published several book-form novels and novellas in this decade, nothing caught on until his breakthrough in the world of drama in 1889 with his work "Die Ehre." An immediate success, this work would be one of the keystone texts that ushered in the wave of literary naturalism before the late

nineteenth century. From this point forward Hermann Sudermann had the celebrity, authority, and capital to launch his long and prolific career; he was a made man. This success continued throughout the 1890s drawing international fame, as well as a new attention to German literature that had not been seen since the first half of the nineteenth century. The best actors and actresses that Europe had to offer performed his works, and Sudermann was hailed as the next genius to come from the land of *Dichter und Denker*. Hanns Heinz Ewers recalls the fame and great expectations for the author at this time, noting that one journal, making comparisons of Sudermann to Goethe, wrote: "Früher warst *du der Mann*, jetzt ist's der Sudermann" (163). The author's name was soon an institution of the German stage, typically producing at least one drama every year, which were always anticipated with high fanfare, as well as financial successes if not always critically acclaimed. In addition to his literary work, Hermann Sudermann was also a public figure, and a staple presence among the various liberal bourgeois organizations in Berlin. In 1900 he spearheaded a political action against the passage of prohibitive legislation in the Reichstag, which was ultimately successful.

Marriage and home life proved difficult to the pampered celebrity, who generally spent a significant portion of the year travelling for work, at Europe's finest sanatoriums, and in the Mediterranean region. Despite a public battle with Berlin's fiercest literary critics that did more damage to the author's career than it was advantageous, Hermann Sudermann remained prolific and popular into the twentieth century. His lifestyle also afforded him an elegant villa in the affluent enclave of Berlin, Grunewald, as well as a luxurious manor estate at Blankensee

outside of the city. World War I was a turning point in the author's perspective and career, as it was for many of his contemporaries. Believing that German culture was under threat by allied forces, he lent his services to the German war effort, writing various pro-Axis texts and organizing numerous events. Just as the war awoke nationalist sentiments in the experienced author, Germany's loss brought over him a cloud of pessimism and depression. These feelings were only exacerbated when his wife Cläre of more than thirty years died in 1924. After this period Hermann Sudermann slipped into a stage of melancholy that lasted for the rest of his life. Notwithstanding, he managed to continue producing works of literature, including what he believed to be his magnum opus, *Der tolle Professor* in 1926.

At the end of his long and eventful life, he was honored around Germany first in 1927 on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and then the following year when he died. An obituary in the magazine *Tempo* assesses Sudermann's legacy on November 22, 1928:

Es ist für die heutige Generation schwer, sich zu jenen Quellen zurückzufühlen, aus denen seinerzeit die Wellen der Begeisterung für Hermann Sudermann strömten. Selten hat ein Schriftsteller solche Erfolge gehabt. Dramen wie Romane erlebten Aufführungs und Auflageziffern, die für Deutschland sensationell waren. Die Premieren waren Ereignisse, zu denen das Publikum in zitternder Spannung und Erregung ging. Wo ein Gerhart Hauptmann Schritt um Schritt sich den Boden der Anerkennung erkämpfen mußte, siegte Sudermann im Handumdrehen. Des Rätsels Lösung findet sich leicht, wenn man heute danach fragt, was dem modernen Leser am Werk des Verstorbenen noch wesentlich ist. ("Sudermann Bilder")

Not immediately did the name Hermann Sudermann leave the stage of fame. Already in his later years, film companies had paid the author considerable sums to film the author's works. Just as the most famous theater actors all around Europe had performed his works, now it was the most famous film actors filling the roles he created. Today the author is perhaps more known for the films that were adapted from his works than for his literature itself.

With his rapidly declining fame that already began during his lifetime, it is not surprising that scholarship about Hermann Sudermann and his work has been sparse. A look at any work of literary history written around the turn of the century will be sure to include a mention of the author as a part or representative of modern German literature. This, at least to some extent, has to do with the fact that the author had a notorious feud with the literary criticism establishment in Germany around the turn of the century. In a series of essays first published in the *Berliner Tageblatt* in 1902 under the title *Verrohung in der Theaterkritik*, Sudermann attacked what he believed to be a coarsening of literary criticism, targeting specific notable critics such as Alfred Kerr, Maximilian Harden, and Siegfried Jacobsohn. The backlash from these critics, as well as others, who felt the author was attacking their livelihood and trade, was immense. It is safe to assume that this impacted Sudermann's place in literary history negatively. A cursory glance at works of literary criticism or history from this time shows that the author had become something of a whipping boy, an easy target for all critics. Franz Werfel, a late defender of the elder Sudermann, points this out in open letter to the critic Willy Haas in 1927. He writes, "Es empört mich tief, wenn ich hie und da in

Theaterkritiken den Namen Sudermann als Synonym für reißerische Bühnenmach lese. Heute noch! Gibt es ein anderes Land, wo sich das tintenklecksende Nichts irgendeiner Provinzzeitung eine derartige Frechheit gegen einen großen Meister leisten dürfte?" (7).

Literary history is prone to being attracted to the latest trends and styles at the expense of others. What was deemed ten or twenty years before the cutting edge of the *avant-garde* and the hope for the new German literature in the new century was now not stimulating enough to include in a history of German literature. The fact is that some periods of history are more enduring than others. Unfortunately for the legacy of Sudermann, World War I had dug a canyon between that which was relevant before and that which was thereafter. Works such as "Sodoms Ende" (1890) that the authorities banned for their social provocations seemed frivolous in the decadence of the Weimar Republic. The strong female roles such as the individualist Magda in "Heimat" (1893) that once spoke to the *Frauenbewegung* or feminist movement in Wilhelmine Germany now seemed passé in comparison to the new woman type of the 1920s. The war had caused a rupture with the nineteenth-century bourgeois order of which Hermann Sudermann was still a part. The styles, the trends, the morals, the tastes had all seemingly passed the once ultra modern author by.

All of this serves to at least partially explain how Hermann Sudermann's reputation had drastically declined by the end of the Weimar Republic. Despite the speculation on how a prolific author of such vast popularity fell from fame, it is still a mystery why there has not been more written to date about Hermann Sudermann.

Nevertheless, it would be valuable to provide at this juncture an overview of the existing body of scholarship pertaining to this topic. The surprisingly scarce amount of scholarly interest in the author can be separated into three categories. The first of these consists mainly of the earliest print attention Sudermann received up to the opening of his estate in 1958. Because of his popularity during his lifetime, the majority of work about the man and author is relegated to this time period. An elementary search reveals that many pages of scholarly journals in this era were occupied with articles and reviews about the author. Abroad, Sudermann was read as a representative of contemporary German literature, which his arch-nemesis Alfred Kerr freely admitted (Sudermann, *Verrohung* 12), and the prominent Norwegian-born American literary scholar, H. H. Boyesen, named Sudermann's "Die Ehre" in 1895 the "most beautiful" work of German drama since "Minna von Barnhelm" (Punkat 183). But by the time Sudermann died, the scholarly attention he once generated had drastically diminished.

To be sure, there are some items from this early era that are still worthy of mention today. For instance, one study that provides insight through experience with the personal sphere of Hermann Sudermann is Irmgard Leux's *Hermann Sudermann (1857–1928): Eine Individualanalytische und Schaffenspsychologische Studie*. After Sudermann's death, Leux, a young musicologist, who was intimately involved with the author, along with his publisher Karl Rosner of the Cotta Verlag, was given authority to organize the documents of his estate for their archiving. Having earlier access to his personal papers than was provided for in the testament, along with the close personal relations with Sudermann, allowed Leux to produce

this early biographical analysis. Unfortunately, this work that was published in 1931 is severely outdated by pseudo-scientific methods of analysis, such as phrenology. Moreover, the nature of her personal relationship with Sudermann automatically raises questions regarding its integrity. Perhaps this work could be more useful today as a primary resource, or an account of the author by someone who knew him closely.

Another early work from the existing body of Sudermann scholarship that deserves mention is *Hermann Sudermann: sein Werk und sein Wesen* (1927). An all-encompassing assessment of Sudermann's oeuvre, this study thoroughly categorizes the author's works in terms of themes, genres and periods of Sudermann's career. Perhaps this monograph is most valuable because the author Kurt Busse was in personal contact with Sudermann while he wrote it, even though the two never appear to have had an association beyond that of the biographer and the subject of his craft. Still, this could indeed account for the partisan case he makes in favor of the author's legacy. On a similar note, Sudermann's publishing house Cotta commissioned this work; therefore one might speculate there was a motive for making a favorable case for the publisher's star author.

The second category of interest in Hermann Sudermann came in the post-World War II years when he was transformed into—as Paul Fechter put it—a “Balzac des deutschen Ostens” (18). At the hands of those interested in cultivating the memory and culture of those formerly German eastern territories lost after the war, Sudermann was elevated to the status of the premiere *Heimatlidher* (homeland poet) of the Memelland. Among Sudermann's prose works that



thematize East Prussia, such as *Katzensteg*, *Litauische Geschichten*, *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* and *Der tolle Professor*, were again put into print after 1945.

Moreover, these works were also reissued in anthologies that stressed the author's essentially East-Prussian character, and he was memorialized by organizations promoting the memory of East Prussia. The often times contentious opinions and political activities associated with these organizations raise the question whether all of this could have further adversely affected the author's reputation. Without doubt, Sudermann's life and work were far more multi-dimensional and complex than simply that of an East-Prussian *Heimatsdichter*. Indeed, the theme of *Heimat* is heavily represented in Sudermann's works, but his representations of East Prussia are far more critical than this body of literature concedes. True, however, is that Sudermann's body of works, with its descriptive realism, provides perhaps one of the richest sources for those seeking literary representation of this lost world.

Finally, the third category of critical and scholarly attention directed at Sudermann is the most recent scholarship to appear that has attempted to reassess or reframe the importance of the author. This era commenced in 1972 when a colloquium was held at the Berliner Akademie der Künste titled "Chancen für Hermann Sudermann," and some years later in 1978 when a Sudermann exhibit was held in the Schiller-Nationalmuseum curated by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach a.N. (Rix 7). Following these events, in 1980 the first and only edited compilation of essays about the author and his work appeared, *Hermann Sudermann: Werk und Wirkung*. The essays included in this edition, edited by Walter T. Rix, cover an array of topics, spanning various genres and periods of Sudermann's

career. This work is especially significant considering some of the essays make use of primary sources from his personal papers. Among the essays, one in particular, “Hermann Sudermann — eine politische Biographie,” stands out because it marks the first and only attempt at a biography of the author since Irmgard Leux’s in 1931. Although this compilation remains the best biographical source on Hermann Sudermann today, it is not without shortcomings. The most obvious among these is the lack of comprehensiveness, which the author admits. Some of the essays address a theme in Sudermann’s oeuvre, while others focus on one work, and still others pay attention to reception, while most works are given little or no mention at all. In the foreword Rix writes, “Eine Reihe von Dissertationen, von denen die meisten im Ausland erschienen sind, haben nach 1945 auf verschiedene Einzelaspekte hingewiesen, aber keine Änderung des statischen Bildes bewirken können. Noch immer liegt der umfangreiche Nachlaß Sudermanns im Deutschen Literaturarchiv in Marbach a.N. nahezu unausgewertet” (7). This leaves one guessing what the exact intention of this edition is. Aside from the biographical essay, all of the other essays are likewise focused on particular aspects; and furthermore, Sudermann’s static image has yet to be transformed. The responsibility for the latter does not rest upon the efficacy of this book, but rather on the fact that the amount of scholarship has remained as sparse as before, thereby hindering the intended reevaluation of the author and his work.

The overall dearth of more recent scholarly publications about Hermann Sudermann, however, does not speak for the quality of that which exists. Among the work to follow Rix’s 1980 edition, is a handful of articles in various journals and

other publications, several pamphlets and two book-length studies. The two most worthy of mention in this group are Cordelia Stroinigg's monograph *Sudermann's Frau Sorge: Jugendstil, Archetype, Fairy Tale* and Karl Leydecker's 1996 monograph, *Marriage and Divorce in the Plays of Hermann Sudermann*. The first of these is a look at how Sudermann's novel *Frau Sorge* exhibits many of the trends of the late nineteenth century, including that of *Jugendstil*. In doing so, Stroinigg finds meaning not in a classical text-immanent approach, but rather by contextualizing it in the aesthetic discourses of the time. The second study by Karl Leydecker does this as well, but among a broader selection of works. In analyzing Sudermann's dramas "in the context of a literary-historical and socio-historical framework," Leydecker shows how they relate to discourse concerning marriage in the *Kaiserreich*, and how they convey a shift from the Realist literary system (11). Relying on primary source material from the author's personal papers, Leydecker's monograph stands as the most nuanced work on Sudermann, as it takes into consideration the cultural-historical significance of the author. In addition to aptly demonstrating how Sudermann's works were relevant to discourses of his time, Leydecker aptly makes the case that this all happened while the realist literary system was disintegrating.

### **C. Pessimism in Progress: Hermann Sudermann and the Liberal German Bourgeoisie**

This dissertation is a reexamination of the life and work of Hermann Sudermann in the context of his social and political milieu, the liberal bourgeoisie. In doing so special attention will be paid to *Der tolle Professor* (1926), the author's late

*Schlüsselroman* that furthermore contains biographical elements. Considered by Sudermann to be his masterpiece, the novel presents a narrative that tells the decline of the liberal German bourgeoisie in the late nineteenth century. Although the novel, which was originally subtitled *Ein Roman aus der Bismarckzeit*, is set in the early 1880s, the reader notices at once that many elements of the Weimar Republic also appear. This is much like Georg Lukács's famous study of the historical novel from 1937, *Der historische Roman*, in which he contends that at the heart of this genre lies continuity between past and present. In *Der tolle Professor* Sudermann is looking back from the troubles of the Weimar Republic and from the perspective of an embittered bourgeois liberal. Professor Sieburth, the main character in the novel, is by the end disillusioned and withdrawn from bourgeois society, much like the author.

Chapter one of this dissertation will examine the origins of *Der tolle Professor*, as well as its reception. For a novel as important as this one there is conspicuously little that has been written about it. Much of this has to do with Hermann Sudermann's beleaguered reputation and diminished popularity by the 1920s. Unlike his dramas that seemed after the war to no longer hold relevance to culture and society, *Der tolle Professor* was initially received considerably favorably by the critics. Many believed that the author's legacy would endure with his works of prose that they considered to be classics. It is true that his *Litauische Geschichten* (1917) were celebrated for their realism and beauty in presenting the Lithuanian culture of his homeland. Some even spoke of a "Sudermann Renaissance" and a new wave of popularity through his works of prose. As much as *Der tolle Professor* was

favorably reviewed in the press after its release, little has been written since then about it. As an exhaustive effort to assess the liberal bourgeoisie and certain intellectual currents at the end of the nineteenth century, *Der tolle Professor* has similarities to Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924) that likewise addresses European intellectual history and different worldviews embodied in the various figures. In another sense, *Der tolle Professor* is a narrative of decline that could be compared to another one of Thomas Mann's novels *Buddenbrooks* (1901), which tells the story of the fall of a bourgeois family. Still, the setting and the rich description of university life in the *Kaiserreich* as well as that of the different political factions and the topic of authoritarianism in the novel call to mind Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* (1918). It is unfortunate that *Der tolle Professor*, unlike these works, has not maintained a place in literary history as it provides valuable perspectives that add to our understanding of the liberal German bourgeoisie, as well as to the overall literary output in the Weimar Republic.

Chapter two "The German Bourgeoisie and Hermann Sudermann: Bourgeoisophobia?" shifts focus to Hermann Sudermann's relationship to the bourgeoisie. Central to Professor Sieburth's conundrum in *Der tolle Professor* is his alienation from bourgeois society. The novel is replete with searing criticism of bourgeois culture and customs. I make the case that this unfavorable depiction of this class is an example of the author's bourgeois self-hatred that figures prominently in his life and work. This seems strange considering that Sudermann was seen at the height of his career as the author *par excellence* of the German middle class. Not only did his works represent bourgeois values and appeal to

bourgeois tastes, the author was himself insufferably bourgeois in habits and character. The peculiarity of Sudermann's self-hatred was not altogether unheard of among the bourgeoisie, but rather corresponded to a trend of aestheticism at the end of the nineteenth century. Anti-bourgeois sentiments are at least partially responsible for the tendency of withdrawal from public life that set in among the liberal German bourgeoisie around the turn of the century. With regard to Sudermann's animosity toward the bourgeois, it appears that the author disliked what he believed to be a rigid sense of morality and a general state of group think that pervaded this social class. Clearly, this hostility was informed by his understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, especially his concepts of the *Herdenmensch* opposed to the *Übermensch*, the duality of the Dionysian and Apollinian, as well as *Herrenmoral* versus *Herdenmoral*. With this particular interpretation of Nietzsche in mind, Sudermann's works often focused on an individual who is in an existential struggle with the collective, often times with little hope for victory. Still, the protagonist fights on until the end as is the case with Professor Sieburth and countless other Sudermannian heroes. This worldview, however, was more than just the author's art, but it also encapsulates his worldview. Sudermann believed that he was a great artist, an *Übermensch*, who was scorned by the critics and bourgeois society for his superiority—a victim of *Herdenmoral*.

The topic of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie has been the topic of a considerable amount of scholarship. Perhaps no other scholar has written so exhaustively about this social class as the historian Peter Gay. From 1984 to 1998 he

published a lengthy five-volume study on the bourgeoisie titled *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. Although this series sets out to analyze the middle class from a Freudian angle, focusing on love, aggression, and conflict, it comprises much more. In the work, Gay produces an incredible amount of examples and testimonies from bourgeois actors making it an indispensable source for any question pertaining to the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Most importantly this work arrives at an understanding of this class of people that admits its multifariousness, and slipperiness in characterization. Here Gay does well in providing a taxonomy of the various signifiers used to describe the concept of this social class. Beginning with the French term “bourgeoisie,” it contains different connotations than its English equivalent “middle class” or its German counterpart “*Bürgertum*.” Thomas Mann already in 1918 published an essay in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, whose purpose it was to demarcate the German *Bürgertum* from the French bourgeoisie. But even if there are national differences that must be taking into consideration regarding this terminology, all of these can be divided into subcategories. For instance, the *bourgeoisie* has its *haute*, *bonne*, and *petite* divisions, just as the middle classes consist of its upper, lower, industrial, educated parts. The German *Bürgertum* also sometimes referred to as the *Mittelstand* has its *Großbürgertum*, *Kleinbürgertum*, *Bildungsbürgertum*, *Besitzbürgertum*, and most peculiarly the *Beamten* or civil servant class that was wedged between the aristocracy and middle class. I have distinctly chosen not to differentiate between the terms “bourgeoisie,” “middle class,” and “*Bürgertum*” for the purpose of brevity and style. I do mention in this chapter some of the

subdivisions of the German bourgeoisie, but splitting and analyzing the different strata of this class is not the focus of this chapter. Sudermann does at times make use of the various nomenclatures for this social class, but he does not do so with great frequency. In his diaries, letters, and works he typically uses the general German terms *bürgerlich* or *Bürgertum*. Although the term *kleinbürgerlich* is used by the author with a certain degree of derision that can be discerned as a sign of self-hatred, considering that it describes his own familial background. Peter Gay has followed up with his massive work on the bourgeoisie in an abridged format in 2002 with his monograph *Schnitzler's Century: The Making of the Middle-Class Culture 1815-1914*. Using the Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler as a guide through the culture of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, Gay touches on many of the same subjects addressed in his earlier work. I argue that Schnitzler's contemporary, friend, and German rival Hermann Sudermann is also a rich source in understanding the bourgeois imagination, and that this has long been an ignored aspect of the author. Through much of his career he held a hostile attitude toward his own class, but this does not change the class to which he belonged. Even if the bourgeoisie is a loose body of people that easily evades positive description, it emerges, as Peter Gay argues, that they can be negatively described as not being a part of the aristocratic and proletarian classes. Needless to say, Hermann Sudermann was none of these and even as he gained much from shocking bourgeois sensibilities he never put himself apart from this class. The British intellectual Holbrook Jackson quotes the symbolist poet Arthur Symons to have quipped: "the desire to bewilder the middle classes is itself middle class" (134).



In many respects the third chapter of this work, titled “Hermann Sudermann and German Liberalism: An Ideology in Crisis?” is a continuation of the preceding chapter. At the beginning of *Der tolle Professor* Sieburth is pigeonholed by his colleagues as one who should be slave to the cause of liberalism at the university. However he might adhere to the liberal belief in freedom, Sieburth’s philosophy is more individualistic than they imagine. When he is alienated from the influential liberal bourgeois circles in Königsberg he surprises everyone (even himself) when he makes a Faustian pact with the other side. In the case of Hermann Sudermann, it seems that he was persistently aggravated, bored, and alienated by bourgeois liberal politics, swearing off liberalism numerous times throughout his career. Nevertheless, his literary enterprise owes everything to bourgeois liberalism, and even if he was perpetually dissatisfied with this ideology, he died a lethargic supporter of perhaps the greatest liberal politician that Germany produced in its first liberal democracy in the 1920s: Gustav Stresemann. By this time, an age of ideology, liberalism was not at all an exciting worldview, but rather one of passionless rationality.

This was not always the case with Hermann Sudermann. As a young opponent of Bismarck’s authoritarian grip, he found in the 1880s his heroes in the lions of the Liberal Secession, especially Eugen Richter. These inclinations eventually resulted in his employment for the liberal press, and even after fortune allowed him to work as an independent author of fiction, one can easily recognize still the liberal worldview in his works even if he took issue with being labeled as a liberal. When fame and fortune came to him in the 1890s, he sympathized with the

social democrats, and with World War I and its aftermath he moved to the right toward a national liberal stance. Sudermann's *freisinnig* or liberal character and pattern of thought made unconditional loyalty to a political ideology not possible for him. It is therefore that he was often dissatisfied with bourgeois liberalism. But yet he remained a bourgeois liberal. As one obituary written by a fellow liberal put it, "Daß er einst freisinniger Zeitungsschreiber war und entschieden freisinnig blieb, als er die Tagespresse verlassen hatte, soll ihm nicht vergessen werden" (Levy, "Sudermann in der Politik" 1).

In examining Hermann Sudermann in the context of German liberalism this study frames the life and work of the author in a new light. Liberalism has been among the most vibrant topics of historical analysis concerning Germany since the World War II. A cursory glance at the corresponding body of scholarly literature shows a field in which the larger questions of German history are debated, namely the crisis of German liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century. After 1945 historians preoccupied themselves with locating the origins of the humanitarian disaster that stemmed from the rise of the Third Reich and many looked to liberalism for answers. Throughout the course of Germany's long nineteenth century, the spirit of liberalism played a large role at all pivotal moments, from the era of the French Revolution, the *Vormärz* period, 1848, the *Gründerzeit*, the *Jahrhundertwende*, to the First World War and the Weimar Republic. The fundamental problem, however, is grasping what this "-ism" actually represents. Like all ideologies, liberalism has been subject to change and influence in its historical actualization, thereby making a satisfactory definition difficult. Jonathan

Knudsen writes, "We understand increasingly that liberalism historically consisted of a loose family of ideas which could be creatively combined in a local and often idiosyncratic manner. This has been one reason for the continuing debate over 'true liberalism'" (111). Lothar Gall describes the term "liberalism" as a nebulous signifier, stating, "Der Begriff Liberalismus selber ist zunehmend unschärfer geworden und dient als – oft ganz willkürlich verwendetes – Etikett für die unterschiedlichsten politischen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Kräfte, Ideen und Forderungen" (162). Such a loose body ideas existing under one heading will inevitably be a cause for debate. One apparent conflict is the discrepancy in meaning of the "-ism" between historians and literary scholars. Famed American literary critic Lionel Trilling argues, "If liberalism is [...] a large tendency rather than a concise body of doctrine, then, as that large tendency makes itself explicit, certain of its particular expressions are bound to be relatively weaker than others, and some even useless and mistaken" (x-xi). The appropriate method in critically approaching this concept, according to Trilling, is to separate what he calls the "primal imagination" from the "particular manifestations" (xv). In approaching the life and work of Hermann Sudermann I use the term in the sense of the "primal imagination" of liberalism, but I have sought to back up this idea with "particular manifestations" found in the author's oeuvre and biography.

Lionel Trilling's prescription for this problem, however, is no simple task, and one arrives at the same problem in trying to construct the "primal imagination" of liberalism. Jean Cesaire, for example, identifies four or five different layers to liberalism in its abstract form. He argues that it is first a doctrine that presents itself

more or less in opposition to the idea of state control. On another level, it corresponds to a philosophy that emphasizes individualism, freedom, optimism, reason, and one that moves toward, as Max Weber put it, “Die Entzauberung der Welt.” Thirdly, it is less of an ideology as it is a tendency that, when observed in a particular historical context, is a practice. This practice, Cesaire claims, constitutes a world of itself with “ihren eigenen Grundsätzen, Moden und Künsten, ihrer eigenen Literatur und Diplomatie, ihren eigenen Gesetzen, Umtrieben und Listen” (143). Lastly, liberalism can be indicated by its hallmark features in various categories:

Im politischen Bereich die parlamentarische Demokratie; in der Wirtschaft der aus kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen bestehende industrielle Kapitalismus; in sozialer Hinsicht der Aufstieg und die Machtausübung der Bourgeoisie; kulturell die Freiheit des Denkens und der Meinungsäußerung; in der Moral der Individualismus; auf internationaler Ebene das berühmte Nationalitätsprinzip; im religiösen Bereich ein von Land zu Land unterschiedlicher mehr oder weniger heftiger oder gemäßiger Antiklerikalismus. (134)

While Cesaire focuses on liberalism as a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*, others such as the British sociologist and politician, L.T. Hobhouse, conceptualize liberalism in Hegelian fashion, stressing it as a collection of Western ideas with a *telos*, beginning in classical antiquity and arriving at the modern state. In his 1911 treatise on this concept, titled *Liberalism*, Hobhouse specifies various turning points of this “-ism” as expressions of the notion of liberty as they unfolded in European history, such as, civil, fiscal, personal, social, economic, domestic, local, racial, national, international, and political liberties (v).

In comparison to other ideologies, liberalism, as it represents a pastiche of ideas, developed over time; therefore it does not consist of a static *Weltanschauung*. This too must be considered when defining Hermann Sudermann's system of thought as "liberal." The historian J. Salwyn Schapiro locates the beginnings of liberalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the feudal system began to erode in Europe. Nevertheless, over the course of the nineteenth century it became the dominant ideology (20–21). Although I have attempted to sketch out the larger meaning and foundation of liberalism, it is the state of affairs in Germany from circa 1880–1928 that this dissertation addresses. In his seminal study of German liberalism, co-written with David Blackbourn, historian Geoff Eley, citing the historian Wolfgang Mommsen, writes that in this era, "Liberalism implies the dismantling of internal and sometimes external obstacles to competitive private enterprise, a free market in land as in all other commodities, the judicial equality of citizens before the law, the separation of Church and State, an appropriate body of commercial law, an emphasis on talent rather than birth, and some commitment to representative government" (76). The liberalism in Germany, argues the Blackbourn and Eley critique of the *Sonderweg* thesis, was not radically different from that in Britain and France, as this theory would have it. This narrative suggests that Germany did not experience a bourgeois revolution as did other Western countries; Eley and Blackbourn insist otherwise. The *Sonderweg* view of German history is by no means new and can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Blackbourn and Eley 3). I point out in the chapter about Hermann Sudermann and bourgeois liberalism that Hermann Sudermann himself purported a *Sonderweg*

narrative about the decline of German liberalism. It was nonetheless after the horrors of the Second World War that this question gained particular scholarly attention. In the aftermath of the Third Reich, many were quick to diagnose the problem of Germany with the dearth of a viable liberal culture such as that in other Western countries. This, they argue, is exactly what could have thwarted the great historical tragedies of the early twentieth century.

In light of this paradox, scholars have sought to pinpoint where German liberalism went awry. In their bibliographic essay on scholarship concerning the questions of German liberalism, historians Konrad Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jones identify specific periods of German history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that have been hotbeds of interest, such as the revolutions of 1848, the imperialism of 1900 to 1914, and the failed republicanism 1919 to 1933, as well as thematic areas of interest such as the nationalism of the Bismarck Era, authoritarianism in the Wilhelmine years, and expansionism leading up to the First World War (2). Within these periods and themes, many historians have sought to locate turning points where the liberalism of Sudermann's early years changed. The corresponding body of literature shows that there is no dearth of works focusing on academics, economists, and politicians—such as Gustav Stresemann, Lujo Brentano, Max Weber, and Walther Rathenau<sup>1</sup>—that prove points about German liberalism

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<sup>1</sup>See James Sheehan. *The Career of Lujo Brentano: A Study of Liberalism and Social Reform in Imperial Germany*. Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1966; Henry A. Turner. *Stresemann and the Politics of the Weimar Republic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962; Wolfgang Mommsen. *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890–1920*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984; Schulamit Volkov. *Walther Rathenau: Weimar's Fallen Statesman*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2012.

through their biography. The biography of author Hermann Sudermann is no less revealing than these figures in regard to the course and culture of German liberalism.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation I have titled “Cultural Pessimism: Hermann Sudermann, the Liberal German Bourgeoisie, and the Spirit of Decline.” In it I identify a particular trait that emerges in the life and work of the author that I believe corresponds to the worldview of the liberal German bourgeoisie in the late nineteenth century: pessimism. If professor Sieburth in *Der tolle Professor* is optimistic about the trajectory of his career, by the end of the novel he is disillusioned with society, politics, and his profession. This novel is not a liberal narrative of optimism and social climb, but rather one of decline. In many ways, I argue that Professor Sieburth’s doom and gloom mirror that of the author in the time that he wrote the novel. Although Hermann Sudermann was never one to miss an opportunity to tell his rags-to-riches stories of his *petit bourgeois* upbringing and his struggle to stardom, he spent the rest of his career seeing this fame and fortune recede before his eyes. He spent his final years disillusioned with the fact that he no longer had the bourgeois audience that lifted him to great heights, and that there was a new mass culture that was not reconcilable to his nineteenth-century tastes. The despair that Sudermann felt over the decline of his career was not separate from his belief that the health of the German nation was in peril after its loss in

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World War I. For him German history from the late nineteenth century to the Weimar Republic was a story of political, social, and cultural decline, just as he tells in *Der tolle Professor*. This is his *Sonderweg* narrative.

In this chapter I maintain that Hermann Sudermann's pessimism, which was held by many of the same class and political convictions, is a symptom of a self-fulfilling prophecy that contributed to the inefficacy of bourgeois liberalism in an age of extreme ideology. I believe that this is markedly different from other so-called *Sonderweg* interpretations of German intellectual and cultural history at the end to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that purport Germany never established the liberal institutions and traditions of other Western powers, which ultimately led to the tragedies of Verdun and Auschwitz. I believe that the pessimism held by Sudermann and his ilk is a paradox of liberalism. While the common connotations of this "-ism" are optimism and progress, I contend that many liberal actors were in fact pessimistic and were convinced of cultural and social degeneration. This I do not believe is an essentially German trait that thwarted the blossoming of a liberal culture. Instead, regarding the nebulous "-ism" of liberalism, I invoke the Tolstoy principle: "Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Modernity was disrupting nineteenth-century bourgeois liberalism across Western societies, and each of these families reacted in their own way and developed peculiarities. Certain intellectual and cultural patterns of the German variety made it more prone to cultural pessimism and aestheticist withdrawal.

This chapter seeks to add to the body of scholarship that presents the peculiar nature of liberal German bourgeois culture. Of this, two works in particular



are deserving of some consideration. Fritz Stern's 1961 *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* is an analysis of thinkers from the middle of the nineteenth century to the Third Reich that he argues are symptomatic of a cultural sickness that plagued Germany, intensifying, and culminating in the Third Reich. These prophets of cultural doom, according to Stern, above all blamed aspects of modernity for what they regarded to be the source of ill. Liberalism, to them, was the face of modernity from which all facets of modern life sprung such as parliamentary politics, Manchesterism, materialism, and lack of a great political leader. Liberalism was the source of hindrance for the coming of a national religion. Stern argues that this form of cultural criticism found its greatest expression in Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, "who deepened the attack on modernity by a radical reinterpretation of man and who concluded with a pervasive pessimism concerning the future of the West" (xvi). To be sure, the cultural criticisms of the time that attacked bourgeois liberal culture and lectured on its damaging capacity to "Germanness" were not few. One of the three thinkers upon whom Stern focuses his study, Julius Langbehn, receives some attention in chapter four of this dissertation. Cultural pessimism is no stranger among other nations, and bourgeois self-hatred is a pervasive feature of the bourgeoisie in general. The 1890s in which Langbehn thrived, saw an international popularization of this train of thought. The influence of Nietzsche in the turn against modern man, and the deepening of pessimism is something to be considered. Nietzsche's philosophy was spread deeply through bourgeois German culture (and German culture as a whole) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hermann Sudermann's own works, as I argue

throughout the dissertation, were highly inspired by this philosophy. But if Hermann Sudermann was in turn a cultural influence of bourgeois German culture at this time, the Nietzscheanism that his works transmitted to the public was highly diluted to fit the tastes of the day. Stern argues that the form of cultural criticism that resulted in Nazi ideology denied liberalism of its philosophical premises: “Man is not primarily rational, but volitional; he is not by nature good nor capable of perfectibility; the politics of liberal individualism rest on an illusion; evil exists and is an inherent aspect of human life; positivistic science and rationalism are divorced from reality and at best only partly valid; the idea of historical progress is false and blinds men to the approaching catastrophes of the twentieth century” (xviii). This understanding of liberalism is one of an ideal type, abstracted from practice. Certainly, any one of these philosophical premises might describe one historical figure’s liberalism, while not corresponding to that of the other. Sudermann, for instance, was pessimistic of about all of these ideas; nevertheless, he did not relish in seeing this pessimism confirmed. I believe that what is provided in this dissertation will show that these perceived “illiberal” tendencies were not necessarily anathema to liberalism.

A second considerable work that establishes a *Sonderweg* narrative of German culture is Hans Kohn’s 1960 *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation*. In this study, the author takes a *longue durée* look at the rise of nationalism in Germany to demonstrate that German culture developed dangerous tendencies that intensified over time resulting in Wilhelminism and Hitlerism. According to Kohn a turning point in the long nineteenth century was the political ascension of

Bismarck, whose “cynical contempt for parliamentary liberalism and his insistence on authoritarian leadership kept the German middle class from active participation in government and precluded its growth to political maturity and responsible thinking” (6). I believe that this examination of the life and work of Hermann Sudermann contradicts the assertion that there is a causal link between liberal defeat at the hands of Bismarck and the tragedies of the twentieth century. His vivacious opposition to the Chancellor during his days working with the liberal press is just one example of how the liberal middle class participated in politics. There was some disillusionment during the era of Wilhelm II to be sure, but Sudermann’s opposition to the so-called *Lex Heinze* via the Goethe-Bund in 1900, which will be treated in chapter three, is further example of how the liberal spirit carried on. During World War I liberals were willing to put ideology aside under the circumstances in Germany, just as Sudermann did when he vehemently defended Germany’s plight. Aside from a handful of liberals in all belligerent nations who were pacifists, what nation’s liberals did not display jingoistic positions? After all, the great American progressive Teddy Roosevelt was a war hawk. Aside from the teleological argument of the rise of German nationalism to Nazism, and the exaltation of other Western nations at the expense of the Germans, Kohn does, like Fritz Stern, point out some peculiarities of the liberal German bourgeoisie that are useful in understanding this class, but also apply to the main actor of this study. He writes, “The Germans easily succumb to the strange fascination which words such as *Schicksal* (fate) or *Verhängnis* (doom) exercise upon them. These are both words that are used as a matter of course in their scholarly writings and among the general

public. They convey an untranslatable overtone of inevitability” (7). This observation is correct, and with regard to Hermann Sudermann, this dissertation could have focused on the idea of *Schicksal* in his life and works alone. Pessimism was something that developed into a recognizable trait among the liberal German bourgeoisie from the mid nineteenth century after the failed Revolution of 1848 and the popularization of Schopenhauer’s philosophical pessimism to Nietzsche and beyond. This pessimistic worldview lays the ground for German realism and *Realpolitik* that dominated at the end of the nineteenth century. If this is a characteristic that might be seen as peculiarly German, the same must be said about Anglo-American self-determination, French *joie de vivre*, and Russian suffering. In each of these national generalizations both the good and the bad can be listed, and the same is true for German realism. There is an ethical side to pessimism that is too often ignored.

The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation I have titled “No place to call *Heimat*: Hermann Sudermann, the Liberal German Bourgeoisie, and the Tumultuous Twentieth Century.” In this chapter Hermann Sudermann is contextualized in the wild first three decades of the twentieth century. From the trend of aestheticism that ushered in a wave of withdrawal among the liberal German bourgeoisie, to World War I that problematizes the actions of many including Sudermann, to the 1920s when bourgeois culture was rapidly losing its once dominant stature, these years were decisive for this class. In this chapter, I look at the end of *Der tolle Professor*, as Sieburth finds himself alone, alienated by all political movements, his profession, and the influential bourgeois society; he is by all definitions a man with

no home. In his last years, Hermann Sudermann also found himself homeless in many respects. In a personal way, he lost his mother and wife during the Weimar Republic, which drove him into a deep depression from which he never recovered. Spiritually, Sudermann was crushed by Germany's loss in the war, which was exacerbated as his homeland in East Prussia was severed from Germany. In a world that had been drastically altered in the four years of belligerence, he found that the audience for his work had all but evaporated. No longer was there demand for the liberal worldview espoused in his works, or his bourgeois tastes. If Sudermann and his contemporaries had once bewildered the bourgeoisie with their rebellious works, a new *avant-garde* informed by the war that had forever changed the world and rendered the work of the previous generation *passé*. Let there be no doubt that bourgeois liberalism still wielded power in this era, but I believe that its once vast influence over nearly all aspects of society was precipitously receding to other ideologies that were able to outperform it and capture the mind of the rising generation. In this chapter I provide examples of how Sudermann firmly held on to his rigid liberal-bourgeois outlook, as the world around him was changing. When he died in 1928 he no longer understood the world, and it likewise no longer understood him.

## CHAPTER II

### HERMANN SUDERMANN'S *DER TOLLE PROFESSOR* IN CONTEXT

*Was mich belangt, so gibt es nur eines noch, worauf mein Hoffen sich zu richten wagt, daß der Roman, der mein Lebenswerk vollenden—ich wage nicht zu sagen “krönen”—soll, so wie er geplant war, so wie sie ihn kannte und als mein Bestes ahnend ehrte, nicht im Fragment stecken bleibe, sondern zu einem ihrer und meiner würdigen Ende kommt. Weiter will ich nichts mehr vom Leben*

— Hermann Sudermann, letter to Irmgard Leux, 26 December 1924

#### **A. Der tolle Professor. Ein Roman aus der Bismarckzeit (1928)**

Hermann Sudermann's 1928 novel *Der tolle Professor* traces the downfall of the young Professor Sieburth, whose Faustian ambition of attaining Immanuel Kant's professorship at the Albertus University of Königsberg, or more familiarly referred to as the Albertina, leads to his ultimate demise. Sieburth, who was mysteriously appointed to the university at a young age, is a controversial figure from the start of the novel, which takes place in Bismarckian Germany at the end of the *Kulturkampf* in the early 1880s. His preoccupation with new philosophical trends in the late nineteenth century, and his dearth of publications, cause the traditional faculty to receive him with reserve, but the liberal bourgeois faction at the university and in larger community in Königsberg do not hesitate to claim him as their own. Sieburth's troubles begin with the practice of his philosophy, which is characterized by a disavowal of traditional bourgeois folkways and morals, and an idealization of individualism. A subplot in the novel is Sieburth's influence on the

impressionable student Fritz Kühne, who uses this philosophy to achieve an individuality free from the strictures of the collective.

The liberal bourgeois milieu at the university and in the community that seeks to claim Sieburth as one of their own cannot tolerate the libertine ways of the young professor, nor can the rigid codes of conformity accept his individualism. Living true to his philosophy of personal pleasure, Sieburth transgresses certain societal norms and eventually finds himself ostracized from the dominating liberal bourgeois circles. Fearing that his ambition of attaining Kant's professorship would be hampered without support, he enters into a Faustian pact with the conservative camp: he would publicly support their candidate in the local election in return for their support for the desired promotion. After making the bold step toward his objective, Sieburth is faced with a philosophical quandary: was he justified in his Machiavellian machinations for his personal gain, or did he compromise his individualism by selling himself and his philosophical project in a *quid pro quo* with a faction he reviled? As the alienation in Königsberg society wears on the academic, he eventually is called to Berlin to find out his fate regarding the professorship. In the German metropolis he withstands a rigorous interview process with the bureaucrat responsible for promotions, and Sieburth realizes his perceived mission of occupying the professorship in which Immanuel Kant revolutionized Western philosophy. Sieburth's triumph, however, is undermined when it is revealed to him that it was not his will to this position of power that procured for him the position. The Minister Director allows the professor a glimpse into the evaluations for promotion from the Albertina. Among the unanimous recommendations that he not

receive the professorship was the same conservative faculty member whom he had assisted during the election. In fact, the recommendations from his university had no actual bearing on the process. Unbeknownst to Sieburth, the father of a young man he once tutored had leverage with the royal family, and, in gratitude, orchestrated the promotion. The notion of agency or individual will to action had all been an illusion in a world in which one's fate is determined behind closed doors by the powers that be.

Professor Sieburth returns to Königsberg to assume his new position but finds that his victory had done nothing to change his isolated position. If anything his triumph had further provoked the *ressentiment* of the community who believed that he was unworthy of such an honor. Now with not even the possibility of turning to the conservatives, Sieburth finds himself more alienated than ever. The professor decides that his mission has been accomplished and that it is no longer necessary to live among those who will never understand his philosophical message. With his final act of free will in choosing the *Freitod* (suicide), Sieburth reclaims his agency. Fritz Kühne is designated executor of Sieburth's testament, which instructs all manuscripts of his writings to be burned. While sorting through his belongings, several faculty members take notice of the originality and significance of his unpublished works and realize that their opinions of him had been unjust. The loyal Kühne, however, dutifully follows instructions, denying those who had not understood Sieburth in his lifetime access to his philosophical enterprise posthumously. Still, the seed of these untimely ideas already had been planted in the disciple Kühne, who will go forth as a living expression thereof.



### **B. Der tolle Professor within the Oeuvre of Hermann Sudermann**

When one looks at the whole corpus of Sudermann's works, *Der tolle Professor* (1926) is probably the most singular of all. It is not a sensational theater piece like his "Die Ehre" (1889), with which he made his fame and fortune, nor is it an idyllic novella about love like those in his collection *Die indische Lilie* (1911), nor can it be considered a *Bildungsroman* such as *Frau Sorge* (1887) or *Das hohe Lied* (1908). *Schlüsselroman* is the genre ascribed to it by most reviewers, and this is probably the most accurate description. Still, it also functions as a historical novel; the subtitle "Roman aus der Bismarckzeit" especially highlights this aspect. It is of course not the first time that Sudermann played with the genre of historical novel—his novel *Katzensteg* (1890) takes place amidst the Napoleonic Wars. Alan Corkhill draws attention to the multi-generic characteristic of *Der tolle Professor*, pointing out that it carries aspects of the campus novel as well as a "Unterhaltungs-, Heimat-, Zeit- und Tendenzroman" (17).

Despite the unique quality of the novel in general, as well as in the oeuvre of the author, it still carries the signature traits of Hermann Sudermann's craft. The most striking of these is the novel's setting in East Prussia. Nearly all of his works are set in East Prussia or Berlin—the former even more so than the latter. Among those major works that take place in East Prussia, there are several that play out in the most important East-Prussian city Königsberg. Immediately, Sudermann's plays "Heimat" (1893) and "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" (1903), which also are set in the provincial East-Prussian city, come to mind. In both of these plays, just as in *Der tolle Professor*, the parochial, hypocritical nature of the city's inhabitants sets up the

melodramatic conflict in the narrative. Professor Sieburth makes several forays outside of Königsberg in the novel, but never does he step on any uncharted territory for the author. An excursion to the outer-lying parts of the Samland region meticulously reproduces the landscape, culture, flora and fauna of the area. This sort of *Heimatliteratur* (homeland literature) is especially reminiscent of his first novel *Frau Sorge*, which pays particular attention to the natural surroundings in rural East Prussia, but also of his most famous work of this sort, *Litauische Geschichten* (1917). *Litauische Geschichten* are an homage to Sudermann's region of birth that depict natural inhabitants of this region and its sublime beauty. Sudermann, who from the 1890s to the 1920s brought depictions of East Prussia's Junkers to the stages of Germany, also does not fail to include this class of people in *Der tolle Professor*. A great number of his plays, such as "Fritzschen" (1896), "Johannisfeuer" (1900), "Die Raschhoffs" (1919), presented life on the East Elbian Junker manor estates in theaters all across Germany and the world, but the many editions printed of his prose works such as *Jolanthes Hochzeit* (1892), *Es war* (1894), or *Die indische Lilie* (1911), ensured that readers far and wide got a glimpse into the world of this peculiar German social class.

As already mentioned, the suffocating social experience in Königsberg has been thematized in a number of his works, but the figure who is seeking an escape from his or her condition, or has come back after escaping, is central to the typical protagonist in a work of Sudermann. Already in "Die Ehre," the protagonist Robert Heinecke has just returned to his family's working class conditions in Berlin after years of working in the South Seas on a coffee plantation. In *Es war*, the main

character comes back after fleeing to South America after an ill-fated duell. Reversely, Sudermann's "Heimat" sees Magda returning home after having made a name for herself as an opera diva, only to leave again. Likewise, the protagonist in novel *Katzensteg* returns at the outset of the novel to the oppressively small-minded village of his birth, leaving again as soon as his mission is complete. Sieburth, in *Der tolle Professor*, ventures from the provincial Königsberg to Berlin in order to secure for himself his perceived destiny of attaining Kant's professorship, only to be faced with the realization in Königsberg that he cannot change the pettiness of its citizens so he seeks a permanent escape. Fritz Kühne, at the advice of Sieburth, also abandons East Prussia in favor of the inner German Reich, where the ceiling for greatness was higher.

The theme of love in the oeuvre of Sudermann functions both as an escape and as the downfall of his heroes and heroines. Sieburth is presented with two choices in the pursuit of a suitable partner: a pragmatic marriage based on social expectations or one of passion and free will. Shunning what is prescribed to him, the libertine Sieburth seeks his own satisfaction leading him to break taboos. Taboo relations are at the center of his early *fin-de-siècle* drama "Sodoms Ende" (1890), in which a debauched artist is engaged in a love affair with a wealthy and married woman. In "Fritzschen" the concept of infidelity is once again thematized, but this time the stakes are higher when a young officer crosses boundaries with a senior officer's wife and a mismatched duel awaits the main character. In Sudermann's "Es lebe das Leben" (1902), a love affair within the circles of conservative party politics threatens the marriages, lives, and political future of those involved. Furthermore,

Sieburth's exploitation of his landlady's daughter Helene, echoes the objectification and misuse of the young inexperienced Lilly Czepanek by a series of men in Sudermann's *Entwicklungsroman* from 1908, *Das hohe Lied*.

The tragic stories of prophets and heroes have a prominent place in the works of Sudermann. Sieburth, like these figures, also has something to give to the world, but fate does not allow it. The tragedy "Johannes" (1897) depicts the biblical figure's holy mission to distribute his message, but sealing his fate in the process. Another work "Teja" (1896), for example, is about a hero from the age of the *Völkerwanderung* or migrations (376–800 AD) right before battle and imminent doom, as well as "Die Lobgesänge des Claudian" (1914) which is also set in this dark age of European history. The era of the Gothic reign in Europe is the area of specialization for another faculty member in *Der tolle Professor*, as well as that of the famed author and one-time faculty member of the Albertina, Felix Dahn, who popularized this subject in historical fiction with his epic novel *Ein Kampf um Rom* (1876–1878). In contrast to the heroes of Sudermann's historical dramas, however, Sieburth chooses at the end to withdraw himself and his prophetic philosophical work by choosing suicide and burning his works. This is much like the protagonist Boloslav in his novel *Katzensteg* who uncovers evidence for the truth he is seeking, but seeing that the hoard does not want to be enlightened, he burns it and returns to the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars to meet his fate. The comparisons between *Der tolle Professor* and other works by Sudermann are infinite, and would not fit within the scope of this study; however, more comparisons will be given in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Still, we can discern from such perfunctory examples

as these provided that Hermann Sudermann, due to the manifold references to his oeuvre, likely had in mind his *magnum opus* when conceptualizing *Der tolle Professor*.

### **C. Entstehungsgeschichte: Origins of *Der tolle Professor***

Although the novel first came to print in 1926, only two years before his death, the concept was born decades beforehand when Hermann Sudermann was himself still a student at the Albertina in Königsberg. In his 1922 memoirs, *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, Sudermann writes about the time he was at the university in Königsberg, thereby divulging to his readers his next major literary undertaking:

Von meinen Lehrern schweige ich. Denn auf mich wartet seit vierzig Jahren ein Roman "Der tolle Professor," in dem die meisten von ihnen eine Rolle spielen. Ich darf deshalb ihre Namen nicht an die Wand nageln. Wenn mir das Schicksal noch ein Jahrzehnt der Arbeit beschert und die Hexe, die sich Bühne nennt, gewillt ist, mich aus ihren Klauen zu lassen, soll er nicht ungeschrieben bleiben. (229)

Indeed, thirty-seven years before publicizing this project during the years of the Weimar Republic, Sudermann makes mention of this conceived novel by its title in his diaries on May 18, 1885. About a conversation he had with his friend Ludwig Fulda, Sudermann notes, "Vormittag bei riesenhafter Hitze im Schloßgarten [Heidelberg] Also sprach Zarathustra gelesen. – Abends über die Molkenkur zum Geisberg wobei ich ihm die Fabel des 'Tollen Professor' erzähle. Er ist hingerissen. Ich muß sie übrigens aufschreiben" (Tagebuch I). In December of 1908, Sudermann's letter correspondence with his wife indicates that he was once again

preparing to begin work on this project. On December 3, 1908 he writes to his wife Cläre: “Liebes Herz, ich spinne schon am nächsten. Ganz ungewollt, wie durch ein geheimes Muß haben die Gedanken einen bestimmten Weg eingeschlagen. Und der führt zum ‘tollen Professor’. Ich will an die Bühne denken, aber der ‘tolle Professor’ ist da und redet immerfort dazwischen. Die Zeit der Muße mag ihm immerhin geschenkt sein, denn es werden ja mit Vorstudien Jahre hingehen, ehe ich ihn schreiben kann” (*Briefe* 247). Even before he actually began working on this idea, it seems that it carried more meaning for Sudermann than did his other works. His expectation of having years of preparation before the novel would come to fruition, shows that his “toller Professor” was conceived to be his capstone work. This idea, it seems, had for him a mystical nature to it; he writes about it as if his authoring this work is destiny. On December 6, 1908, he again writes to his wife about his work: “Die schwersten Bücher sind mir gerade leicht genug, und alles steuert auf den ‘tollen Professor’ los” (*Briefe* 247).

After the novel was published in 1926, there were still many readers from the same generation as Sudermann, who could not only relate to the conditions described some forty years earlier in the university atmosphere of Bismarckian Germany in the 1880s, but who shared the same experiences as the author at the Albertina, and who could identify the real-life basis for characters in the novel. One such critical reader issued an open letter to Sudermann in the *Vossische Zeitung* that prompted a response from the author of *Der tolle Professor*, explaining to some extent the autobiographical, historical, *Schlüsselroman* nature of the work. The author of the letter, a Dr. J. Levy—no stranger to Sudermann having had a public

exchange with Sudermann on account of the depiction of forty-eighters in his play “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates,” which will be discussed later—wastes no time identifying the character of Sieburth in the novel as none other than his old acquaintance Richard Quäbicker, former professor *ordinarius* for philosophy at the Albertina. He writes:

Verwundert geradezu verblüfft; denn Ihr “toller Professor”, Sieburth benamset, einstweilen Extraordinarius, aber mit der Hoffnung auf den Lehrstuhl Kants, ist kein anderer als mein alter Freund Quäbicker, dessen “Welt als Weib und Gedanke” sich mir in der Kulturkampfzeit bis in tiefste Tiefen offenbarte. Mit welcher Meisterschaft haben Sie sein Konterfei gemalt! Seine geistige Selbstständigkeit, die Erhabenheit über herrschende Lehren und über herrschende – Moral, seine überquellende Sinnlichkeit und schließliche Wandelbarkeit der Gesinnung, die Neigung zur Paradoxie, die Selbstironie und Zerrissenheit. Es ist alles dem Leben abgelauscht, und die Entwicklung, wie sie sich nach meinen Königsberger Jahren in Sieburth-Quäbicker vollzog, bis zu seinem großen Ekel und zum Selbstmord, es ist so anschaulich und glaubhaft dargestellt, wie es der beste Film nicht bildhafter vermöchte. (Levy, “Sudermanns ‘Toller Professor’”)

According to an official history of the Albertus University of Königsberg in the nineteenth century, a professor extraordinarius Richard Quäbicker was called to Königsberg from Breslau in 1874, achieved the promotion to professor *ordinarius*, and died on May 31, 1882 (Prutz 235). Sudermann’s answer to the open letter from Dr. Levy, came with an article titled “Mein ‘Toller Professor:’ Eine Antwort auf den offenen Brief” on November 7, 1926 in the *Vossische Zeitung*. In the response, the author of *Der tolle Professor* provides the biographical background information

about the historical figure Quäbicker and the inspiration for writing the novel.

Sudermann tells:

In meinem zweiten Semester hörte ich Psychologie bei ihm [Quäbicker], gerade so wie der junge Studiosus [Kühne], dessen Geschichte nebenherläuft. Dann habe ich eine Nacht mit ihm durchlumpt, nachdem er mich mit zwei Kumpanen in einer Kneipe der Altstadt aufgelesen hatte. Wir landeten, wie das in Königsberg so üblich war – Sie wissen –, morgens um sechs schwer betrunken in einer Fleckbude. Und damit haben meine persönlichen Beziehung zu ihm ihr Ende erreicht. Aber das große Erlebnis blieb in mir sitzen.

Considering that Sudermann contemplated this novel for over forty years, eventually turning it into his *magnus opus*, shows the magnitude that this single experience must have had on the author. Sudermann credits this experience and Quäbicker for this capstone on a prolific career: “Ihm [Quäbicker] verdanke ich, daß ich, endgültig ausgereift, dieses Buch zu schreiben vermochte, das ich den Worten Jean Pauls zum Trotz: ‘Die Menschen und die Gurken taugen nichts, sobald sie reif sind’, für mein bestes halte” (“Mein ‘Toller Professor’”).

Richard Quäbicker’s curious history, however, presents a concept that is more than worthy for a novel, and, as Dr. Levy points out, not even “der beste Film” could produce such a story as Sudermann presents it. Some time after Sudermann had made his way to Berlin, much like Sieburth’s student Kühne in the novel, he read of Quäbicker’s rise and fall. He writes, “Nach etlichen Jahren, als ich schon Reichsblattredakteur war, las ich mit Freuden, daß er [Quäbicker] den Lehrstuhl Kants bestiegen hatte, und vier Wochen später mit um so größerer Erschütterung



von seinem freiwilligen Sterben" ("Mein "Toller Professor"). It appears that just as Sieburth makes a pact with the conservative party to support their election efforts in return for their support in his pursuit of a promotion, Quäbicker had also committed a similar social sin that led him to taking his own life. Sudermann explains, that it was a newspaper article that "broke his neck" within the Königsberger society, and that if one looks for election proclamations in the Königsberger newspapers of 1881, as he claims to have done while doing research for the novel, Quäbicker's name will appear in support of the conservative candidate ("Mein "Toller Professor").

Hermann Sudermann's diaries suggest that he was meticulous in completing research for *Der tolle Professor*, which included extensive readings of various philosophical works in order to create Sieburth's philosophical system, consultations with experts, and archival visits. In the late year of 1923, Sudermann traveled to Königsberg in order to find whatever traces were left of the deceased philosopher Quäbicker. On December 31, 1923, Sudermann began crafting the philosophy of his Professor Sieburth, while studying the two short works that Quäbicker had completed before his death. Sudermann notes in his diary, "Abends still für mich Feier Jahresschluß, indem die beiden Bücher Quäbickers vornehme, der Grundstoß aller Arbeit in den nächsten 2 Jahren werden sollen. Entwickle seine Weltanschauung, die der meinen angepaßt werden muß. So kann ich doch vor meinem Ende ein einzig Mal ich selber sein." Not only is the mad professor Sieburth a replica of Richard Quäbicker, but also a reflection of the author—a synthesis of the two. Resemblances of Sieburth to Sudermann's own biography and worldview will

be subject matter treated in later chapters. For now it is only important to establish this work as bearing the characteristics of a *Schlüsselroman* and that the life and work of the author abound throughout the novel. As his response letter in the *Vossische Zeitung* on November 7, 1926 states, his own experience with Quäbicker, much like that of the student Fritz Kühne with Sieburth, spurred the idea for the *Der tolle Professor*. In this sense, Sudermann's own autobiography is not confined to one figure in the novel, but rather is present in both the student and the teacher.

In his article, Hermann Sudermann writes about a chance encounter with Quäbicker's former landlady in Königsberg years before writing the novel provided him with insight into the life of the philosophy professor. According to the account, this woman knew more about Quäbicker than any person in the world and he was even allowed a look into the room that the professor had occupied. While they were in the room, she suddenly threw herself on the sofa and began to sob. Sudermann writes, "Erstaunt war ich nicht, denn daß hier eine Liebe festsaß, die den Tod überdauerte, war längst zu erkennen gewesen. Ich tröstete so gut ich konnte, und da erst erfuhr ich die Geheimgeschichte des Verstorbenen, deren Hüterin sie war. Oder wenigstens so viel davon, als ihr unverwickelter Sinn hatte erfassen können" ("Mein 'Toller Professor'"). It is impossible to determine whether or not this background-story actually happened or to identify how much of it is melodramatic embellishment, but his diaries verify that his research led him to attempt tracking down the professor's former lover and her children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Diaries, 14 March 1924.

A look into Sudermann's diaries in the years leading up to the publication of his masterpiece shows that he went to great lengths in order to construct a plausible philosophical system for the figure Sieburth. Almost daily he explored a new work of modern philosophy in order to find just the right formula for his Professor Sieburth. Names appear such as Rudolf Jhering's *Der Zweck im Recht*, Theodor Lessing's *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen*, Fritz Mauthner's *Geschichte des Atheismus*, Max Nordau's *Sinn der Geschichte*, Friedrich Paulsen's *System der Ethik*, Raoul Richter's *Der Skeptizismus in der Philosophie*, Georg Simmel's *Einleitung in der Moralwissenschaft*, Ludwig Stein's *Sein und Dasein*, Hans Vaihinger's *Philosophie des Als Ob*, Wilhelm Windelband's *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Wilhelm Wundt's *Ethik*, and Theobald Ziegler's *Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des 19. Jahrhunderts*. All of these show that Sudermann was determined to understand the philosophical milieu of Germany at the end of the nineteenth century in order to produce an effect of verisimilitude in his figure Sieburth, but also to further explore some of the philosophical dimensions that are important to the philosophy of his character such as morality, ethics, and the dialectical history of philosophy. These efforts were so extensive that it became tedious for the author who notes on May 1, 1924 in his diary, "Dort bleibe nachm. u. Abends und lese u. arbeite fleißig, sodaß keine Zeitversäumnis entsteht. Jeden Tag bringt neue Erkenntnisse, aber Roman wird dadurch nicht reicher" (Tagebuch VIII). Frustrated, the author writes on July 20, 1924 in his diary, "Kann für meinen Helden kein eigenes System schmieden" (Tagebuch VIII). Part of the problem is that Quäbicker's philosophical system did not match Suderman's worldview. He records this difficulty in his diary on August

12, 1924, “Erkenne Qu’s [Quäbicker’s] ethische Lehre und den Riß darin. Aber von der Ethik, die ich ihm unterlegen will, himmelweit entfernt” (Tagebuch VIII).

Sudermann, however, was not only looking at philosophy for inspiration but also to literature. Matching his Professor Sieburth up to some of the great figures of world literature, noting on May 15, 1924 in his diary: “Neues: Faust als Don Juan, da beides zusammengehört [...] Libertine des Geistes” (Tagebuch VIII). He follows this up writing the next day, “Dorian Grey [sic.] gelesen. Ekelhaft, aber voll feiner Bemerkungen. Mit dieser Art Geist könnte mein Sieburth nichts machen” (Tagebuch VIII). In the mind of Sudermann, Professor Sieburth was going to have his place in the pantheon of great figures of literature.

Sudermann’s quest to make *Der tolle Professor* into his masterpiece led him also to seek outside advice on his work. His daughter gave him her advice on the society women (*Schicksalsschwestern*) because of her acquaintance with social circles in the university city of Göttingen.<sup>3</sup> The philosopher and university professor Ferdinand Jakob Schmidt examined the part of the novel concerning the “Großer Hegelianer” who is based on the real life philosopher and former holder of Kant’s professorship at the Albertus University of Königsberg, Karl Rosenkranz.<sup>4</sup> But most of all it was his wife Cläre, also a published author, who assisted by proof reading and offering suggestions concerning style and themes. Throughout his prolific career Cläre had filled the role of his assistant with these tasks and one can only speculate how much this must have contributed not only to the quality of his works

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<sup>3</sup> Diaries, 18 February 1925.

<sup>4</sup> Diaries, 2 June 1926.

but also their quantity. It came then as both a personal and professional blow to the author when on October 17, 1924 Cläre died from heart failure. Hermann Sudermann was devastated by this loss. Their marriage had not been easy and Cläre had suffered greatly from her husband's fame and devotion to his craft. But other factors such as Sudermann's infidelity and her turn to alcoholism led their marriage to the brink of collapse. Bringing with her three young children from a previous marriage, the union of the already famous Hermann Sudermann and Cläre Lauckner seemed doomed from the start and divorce seemed inevitable throughout the early years. His often times volatile temperament and her withdrawal, along with busy schedules, resulted in them spending much time apart during their marriage. By the 1920s it seemed as though their marriage had reached a balance and a degree of contentment. Therefore, the death of Cläre in 1924 put severe emotional strain on the author of *Der tolle Professor*, which in turn impacted the progress of the work. The conviction that this work had otherworldly importance not only for his own legacy but also as a work of art in itself kept Sudermann working on this novel that was to be his best work. He explains in a letter to a friend on December 26, 1924, "Was mich belangt, so gibt es nur eines noch, worauf mein Hoffen sich zu richten wagt, daß der Roman [*Der tolle Professor*], der mein Lebenswerk vollenden – ich wage nicht zu sagen 'krönen' – soll, so wie er geplant war, so wie sie [Cläre Sudermann] ihn kannte und als mein Bestes ahnend ehrte, nicht im Fragment stecken bleibe, sondern zu einem ihrer und meiner würdigen Ende kommt. Weiter will ich nichts mehr vom Leben" (*Briefe* 329). This objective, however, seemed threatened with Sudermann's state of mind, his advanced age, and the passing of

friends and family on a more frequent basis. On March 9, 1925 after learning of the death of an acquaintance, he writes in his diary, "Jeden Tag hat seinen Toten. Und ich muß leben. Muß! Roman muß fertig werden" (Tagebuch VIII).

Sudermann's state of depression following Cläre's death was prolonged and he was never able to find a healthy balance of mourning and melancholy before his own death four years later. One can only speculate how this affected the worldview espoused in *Der tolle Professor*, as well as his last two novels *Die Frau des Steffen Tromholt* (1927) and *Purzelchen* (1928). It is safe to assume that Sieburth's turn to extreme fatalism in the second half of the novel was at least in part influenced by the author's altered state of mind. The diaries show that his writing process suffered from the loss of his wife. On November 27, 1925, Sudermann addressed an entry to his wife taking stock of what he had all accomplished that month. He writes, "Mein Sieburth hängt in der Luft ohne dich. Wie ist Alles gleichgültig geworden – Erfolg, Mißerfolg [...] was schert [sic.] das mich das alles noch, seit du dich nicht mehr mit mir freust und mit mir sorgst!" (Tagebuch IX). The depression that Sudermann experienced had certainly to do with regret stemming from the belief that he had taken Cläre for granted in their marriage. However true this might be, considering his philandering and his at times volatile temperament, his adulation for her took on unhealthy proportions after her death. His next novel *Die Frau des Steffen Tromholt* is a testament to their difficult marriage and an admission of guilt in not having rightfully appreciated his wife during their marriage of over thirty years. On July 29, 1926, Sudermann again addresses his deceased wife in a diary entry. He writes, "Der Monat ist ausgenützt, wenn er mich auch nicht viel vorwärts brachte. Der 'Tolle

Professor' ist druckfertig gemacht, und deinem Lebensbilde gegenüber habe ich Gewissensruhe" (Tagebuch IX). This was only the momentary illusion of coming to some "peace of mind." Finally, on September 17, 1926, a diary entry indicates that his *Toller Professor* had been completed after forty years in the making: "Heute, 23 Monate nach Clärens Tode, erscheint mein Roman" (Tagebuch IX). Some major setbacks in the years preceding its publication threatened its completion, but the author was able to finish the work, which is perhaps the most multidimensional piece of his oeuvre. There is no doubt that Hermann Sudermann had a drive to create that is only found among artists. Just as it was Sieburth's perceived mission to attain Kant's professorship before departing from this world, Sudermann was determined to transform his last ideas into works of literature.

#### **D. Rezeptionsgeschichte: Reactions to *Der tolle Professor***

By the time *Der tolle Professor* was published in 1926 Hermann Sudermann's literary stardom was one that had drastically declined during the years of the Weimar Republic. Already one year before in 1925, Sudermann wrote an editorial piece for newspapers titled "Der Weg zur Unberühmtheit," in which he once again took exception with what he perceived to be harsh treatment from the critics, as well as his increasing difficulty in finding theaters willing to stage his works. Writer Ludwig Marcuse responded to Sudermann's piece in an article in *Das Tagebuch* also titled "Der Weg zur Unberühmtheit." In it the author states that by publicly stating that the critics have ruined his career, Sudermann confirms the actual damage

afflicted to his reputation and legacy. Marcuse explains the decline of Germany's former star dramatist,

Weil Sudermann mit Eitelkeit und Mode zu erklären versucht, was mit seinen Theater-Requisiten eben nicht zu erklären ist; weil er Ursache und Wirkung vertauscht; weil er die entscheidenden Impulse des geistigen Lebens der Gegenwart nicht kennt. Sudermann ist so unberühmt geworden, weil er so berühmt gewesen ist. Weil Sudermanns Glanz so falsch war, deshalb ist auch sein literarisches Schatten-Dasein so falsch. Will er die letzten Ursachen seines sicherlich so ungerechten Ignoriertwerdens finden, so suche er sie in seinem ehemaligen, zu unrechtbestehenden Ruhm. Die eine Mode zog die andere nach den herrschenden Gesetzen der Massen-Psychologie nach. Daß er diesen Zusammenhang in seiner Autogramm-Sammlern nicht gestörten Zurückgezogenheit immer noch nicht erkennt, beweist von neuem, wie berechtigt seine Enthronung war; wie wenig er ist "de notre siècle." (Marcuse 1311)

Marcuse's opinion regarding Sudermann's lost honor and fame seems somewhat harsh, but there is also some truth in what he writes. Sudermann had done his reputation no favors when he provoked critics in 1902 by publishing a series of newspaper articles that formed a critique of theater criticism, which he titled *Verrohung in der Theaterkritik. Zeitgemäße Betrachtungen*. Although he did make some valid points about how a new style of criticism had taken shape around the turn of the century that seemed to display a more ruthless tone than ever before, it was imprudent on his part and he quickly became the whipping boy of the critics. He carried his feuds with many notable critics such as Maximilian Harden, Siegfried Jacobsohn, and Alfred Kerr with him to the bitter end. For instance, on December 3, 1926, upon learning of Jacobsohn's death, he notes in his diary, "Siegfried Jacobsohn



+ „Ein Feind weniger“ (Tagebuch IX), and on October 31, 1927, after reading about Harden’s death, he writes, “Ohne Leid, ohne Freude sehe meinen Todfeind, diesen Schädling an deutschem Wesen, in die Grube fahren” (Tagebuch X). This irascibility and begrudging character only made matters worse for him and, like his professor Sieburth, he was convinced that he was misunderstood and sabotaged by the philistines who conspired to make a career by damaging his legacy. In 1927 Sudermann’s publisher Cotta wished to have a portrait painted of their decades-long bestselling author in honor of his seventieth birthday. He notes in his diaries on August 18, 1927, that he suggested instead of the painting an essay contest concerning the theme “Sudermann und die Presse,” which was rejected.

While Hermann Sudermann believed that he was crowning his career with a masterpiece, even his trusted publishing house Cotta had become skeptical of their author’s relevance by the time *Der tolle Professor* was ready for publication. This is illustrated by the fact that they insisted that the first edition consist of no more than 12,000 copies, a mere fraction of the number that his earlier works had reached.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Cotta pressured Sudermann to remove some of the more risqué scenes in the novel, which did not sit well with the author.<sup>6</sup> In the end, declining fame had produced unfavorable conditions for the success of the novel at the time of its publication. Although the author believed that this was his best work, and he actually chose to be buried with it, *Der tolle Professor* never surpassed the success of his other works from the time when he was Germany’s rising literary star such as

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<sup>5</sup> Diaries, 7 June 1926.

<sup>6</sup> Diaries, 12 December 1925.

his novels *Frau Sorge* (1887) and *Katzensteg* (1890), as well as his early plays “Die Ehre” (1889) and “Heimat” (1893). Indeed, to many he was no longer “de notre siècle.”

Despite his “Weg zur Unberühmtheit,” the appearance of *Der tolle Professor* in 1926 was met with fairly positive reviews. Those who read the book realized that this novel was considerably different from the typical Sudermann melodrama and that it was a lot more than a love story. Friend and contemporary Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler perhaps best sums up *Der tolle Professor* in the context of Sudermann’s career in his diary on November 7, 1926: “Lese Sudermanns Roman ‘der tolle Professor.’ Bei aller Geschmacklosigkeit und gelegentlichen Verkitschtheit – wie viel Talent hat dieser Mensch – gemessen an 90 Prozent seiner unverschämten und unfruchtbaren ‘Kritiker.’ This sentiment echoed some other authors who had sympathized with Sudermann’s alienated position with the press. In an article titled “Zur Ehrenrettung Sudermanns,” the author Franz Werfel writes about Sudermann’s unfavorable position in Germany’s literary world in honor of his seventieth birthday: “Es empört mich tief, wenn ich hie und da in Theaterkritiken den Namen Sudermann als Synonym für reißerische Bühnenmach lese. Heute noch! Gibt es ein anderes Land, wo sich das tintenklecksende Nichts irgendeiner Provinzzeitung eine derartige Frechheit gegen einen großen Meister leisten dürfte?” (7). Many of his contemporaries still remembered his impact on the landscape of German literature, but it was clear by the time that *Der tolle Professor* was published that Sudermann’s legacy had been permanently damaged by hostile literary criticism.

In contrast to many of his other works, *Der tolle Professor* was received with considerable praise in various newspapers and journals. Even though the treatment of *Der tolle Professor* in the press was more or less positive one should note that the attention it was paid was notably diminished in comparison to his work in the preceding decades. This overall lack of publicity is a plausible explanation for its obscurity in comparison to other Sudermann works—even those that were not so positively received. The culture critic for the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, Thekla Merwin, praised Sudermann's intellect for writing such a demanding book. She tells, "Leicht hat es sich Sudermann in diesem Buche nicht gemacht. Hinter dem Romanschreiber, der zu erzählen weiß, steht ein beachtenswerter Intellekt, der sich auf dem Gebiete des abstrakten Denkens umgetan hat – auch hierin unserer oberflächlichen Generation von Aesthetiken ein bewundernswertes Beispiel." The years of preparation and research found recognition among the readership, but so too did the time he took in attempting to achieve his masterpiece with this work. *Die Welt am Abend* ran a highly praising assessment of the novel on October 6, 1926. The article begins, "Die hohe Literatur hat einen neuen Adepten: Hermann Sudermann [...] Es ist fast erschütternd, wie er, der ein langes Leben lang den bücherfressenden Moloch mit rührseligen Schauspielen und routinierten Provinzromanen gefüttert hat, an diesem späten Wendepunkt alle Kräfte zusammenrafft – Handwerkserfahrung, Kenntnisse, Scharfblick – und ein Bekenntnisbuch schreibt wie diesem 'Tollen Professor,' der eben bei Cotta erschienen ist." This article recognizes that this late work stands out among other works in Sudermann's oeuvre. The article concludes with the following words: "Im ganzen: von Sudermann

und für Sudermann als literarische Leistung erschütternd. Erschütternd allerdings noch in anderem Sinn. Denn Sudermann, wächst er auch über sich selbst hinaus, bleibt doch Sudermann.”

The name Hermann Sudermann carried with it certain connotations. For some—especially the critics—associations that came to mind were melodrama, kitsch, *Modedichtung* [trendy literature], and obsolescence. Critic and author Doris Wittner had this to say about the state of Hermann Sudermann’s reputation as *Der tolle Professor* was released: “Bewundert viel und viel gescholten, Rufer im Streit, als die Lex Heinze drohte, wegen seiner Kritik der Kritik vielfach befehdet. Doch immer Gegenstand lebhaften Interesses bis weit in die Weltkriegszeit hinein, ist Hermann Sudermann in den letzten Jahren etwas in Vergessenheit geraten” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 72). Despite this apparent decline in popularity, Sudermann was not entirely removed from the landscape of literature in the Weimar Republic. To be sure, his dramas had become passé by the 1920s, with new trends and styles such as expressionism, Sudermann’s nineteenth-century techniques, which dominated the stages of Germany for so many years, were no longer in demand. Nevertheless, many of these works were brought back to life when they were adapted to film throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It is ironic that it was the newest medium of art in film that used material that the theater had discarded. Even so, the author of *Der tolle Professor* still had won some recent praise for his prose writing. Upon his death in 1928, a small memorial service was held at the Klosterstraße Theater in Berlin, where the stage and film actor spoke of a “Sudermann-Renaissance.” A report about the service in the *Deutsche Allgemeine*

*Zeitung* stated, “Diese Wiedergeburt Sudermanns im kritischen Urteil kommt augenscheinlich mehr dem Epiker als dem Dramatiker zugute” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Zeitungsanschnitte zum 70. u. Tod,” folder 8). During World War I he published a series of novellas titled *Litauische Geschichten* that were met with some critical success, but they took on a new dimension after the war. One reviewer of *Der tolle Professor* noted that the *Litauische Geschichten* demonstrated “eine neue Steigerung seiner Prosaunst” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 68). As the title suggests, the stories all take place in Lithuania and provide rich pictures of the people, culture, and landscape as they existed prior to the upheavals of war that changed the region and eventually cut it off from Germany. This is not to mention their storytelling quality that has a mystical aspect packed into the form of the nineteenth-century genre of the *Dorfgeschichte*. Franz Werfel went so far as to call this collection a “Meisterwerk der deutschen Literatur [...] mit wirklichen Göttern und Urgestalten, [...] eine Gegenwarts-Mythologie (7)” The geographical separation of East Prussia from Germany after the war and the political loss of Lithuania made this region in the postwar years an object to sentimentalize, and Sudermann, whose works were primarily set in this region, and whose realistic prose harkened back to the “good years” before the war created a recipe for nostalgia. It was this nostalgia for an irretrievable past and region that helped to solidify Hermann Sudermann as the great writer of East Prussia. Moreover, by the time that *Der tolle Professor* was published, a new post-expressionist turn to realism in the form of new objectivity had become a trend in the Weimar Republic.

It is not surprising then that the setting of *Der tolle Professor* and the author's impeccable ability to capture the culture, people, places, landscape, and nature of East Prussia was a point of praise for reviewers—especially those with a connection to this region. The literary historian and critic Paul Fechter had this to say about Hermann Sudermann's literary affinity to East Prussia in 1957: "Er sieht das Land und die Wälder, das Haff, die Felderweiten und die stillen Herrenhäuser um sich, deren Ruhe und einfache Selbstverständlichkeit, ohne daß er es bereits ahnt, immer mehr Zentrum seiner Lebensvorstellung und damit seiner Sehnsucht werden" (12). More so than any of the many other characteristics, motifs or themes in *Der tolle Professor*, the *Heimatsdichtung* (regional literature) aspect is the feature for which it has been mostly remembered. This can be seen in a reprint of the novel some fifty years later in 1978, in which the publishing house Langen-Müller altered the subtitle "Ein Roman aus der Bismarckzeit" to "Roman aus dem alten Königsberg." Although Sudermann had more often than not used the familiar setting of his homeland for his works, it was not until the years of the Weimar Republic that his work became defined by its regional specificity. An examination of the reviews of *Der tolle Professor* proves this. One critic proclaimed that even just a sample reading of the novel shows "daß der Nestor der ostpreußischen Dichter hier seiner Heimat ein neues Denkmal gesetzt hat" (Sudermann MSP Collection, "Der tolle Professor," 56). The *Kölnische Zeitung* acclaims the literary landscape portraiture in the novel: "Von hohem dichterischen Glanz sind die Bilder von der ostpreußischen Küste, namentlich die dramatische bewegte Schilderung einer Wanderdüne" (Sudermann MSP Collection, "Der tolle Professor," 67). This description refers to Sudermann's

depiction of the *Kurische Nehrung* or *Kurisches Haff* (Curonian Spit or Curonian Lagoon), a landmark of natural beauty and a cultural symbol in East-Prussian culture. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* writes, “Sudermann schildert da unter anderem ein großes Essen der “Ostpreußischen Landschaft,” die zu den besten Schilderungen gehört, die Sudermann überhaupt in seinem Leben geschrieben hat” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 55). These complimentary passages could nearly be considered revisionist, considering the years of harsh criticism that the author had received. This praise, however, functioned as a double-edged sword in the context of Hermann Sudermann’s legacy. On the one hand it rescued his reputation from near oblivion before his death, but on the other hand it pigeonholed him into the label of *Heimatsdichter*, turning his once international fame into a regional specialty. It is doubly unfortunate for him that the culture of this region would be de-territorialized fifteen years after his death in 1945, as people of this region were displaced from their homeland after World War II and German culture erased from the region. A *Heimatsdichtung* about this region after 1945 was only relevant for the memories of those who experienced this vanished world.

Hermann Sudermann’s depiction of the Albertina, and German university culture in the era of Bismarck in *Der tolle Professor*, also caught the attention of reviewers. To be sure, Sudermann’s own experience and memories as a student in Königsberg around this time constitute the *Schlüsselroman* aspect of the novel, and readers were quick to pick up on the author’s realistic portrayal of the cultural life in Königsberg and at the university. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* reported, “Daß Sudermann mit ein paar Strichen sein Königsberg zeichnen kann, wird man glauben.

Diese Studenten, diese Spießler, diese Professoren – es ist alles so echt, daß man es jeden Augenblick fühlt, so sieht die Wahrheit aus” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 55). The *Kölnische Zeitung* praises the work’s real-life representation of the atmosphere at the university in the 1880s: “Ein gewaltiger Stoff ist in den Roman hineingezwängt. Mit dem Geschick des tollen Professors ist eine höchst anregende Schilderung der Universitätsverhältnisse und einzelner Professoren und Studenten verflochten – ein schablonenhaftes Zerrbild entwirft Sudermann dabei von Korpstudententum. Darüber hinaus sucht der Dichter ein allgemeines Bild der Geistesströmungen der ‘Bismarckzeit’ zu geben” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 67).

The depiction of the university in *Der tolle Professor* struck many of the reviewers as being so realistic that they could identify the actual people upon whom Sudermann based the figures in the novel. This subject was addressed in Dr. J. Levy’s open letter to the author in the *Vossische Zeitung* and Sudermann’s subsequent response. Not only did Levy recognize the Sieburth-Quäbicker connection at the heart of the novel, but he was able to recognize resemblances in other figures as well. Taking issue with the passage in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* that Sudermann did not wish to advertise the names of those professors at the university because he had still planned to write the *Schlüsselroman*, Levy writes, “Aber, Herr Sudermann, wenn Sie im Bilderbuch Ihrer Jugend die Namen Ihrer Lehrer nicht an die Wand nageln wollten, weshalb verschweigen Sie auch jetzt alle Namen, bis auf den einen Ueberwegs, der schon tot war?” (“Sudermanns ‘Toller Professor’”). The ease with which informed readers were able to identify the figures in the novel hardly made



the disguise of their fictional names worthwhile. Levy goes on, picking out Friedrich Althoff as the basis for the Ministerialdirektor in the novel, philosopher Karl Rosenkranz as the “Großer Hegelianer,” philologist Ludwig Friedländer as the history professor who wrote about life in the Roman Empire, and Julius Otto Ludwig Möller as the progressive political candidate. The professor Hildebrand in the novel and his lovely wife, to whom Sieburth is madly drawn, has also a real-life basis, according to Levy. He writes that the discretion used in masking their true identity is understandable because the scandal that Sieburth causes this couple is “für den bürgerlichen Ruf nicht allzu zuträglich.” Levy praises Sudermann’s biographical accuracy in re-creating these figures in *Der tolle Professor*: “Und wenn doch wirklich einer zweifelte, wie wäre es ihm nicht nachgeholfen durch Ihre Hinweise auf die Kulturkämpferische Bismarckverehrung des Professors, auf seinen und ihren Münchener Ursprung, auf ihr katholisches Bekenntnis, auf den alten Adel der jungen Frau? Es sind Felix Dahn und seine Frau Therese, geborene Freiin von Droste-Hülshoff.” Felix Dahn (1834–1912), a former university professor at the Albertina, and famous author of literature set in the age of the *Völkerwanderung* (Migration Period, 376–800 AD), was a major proponent of the *völkisch* movement and an opponent of literary modernism. The inclusion of this married couple, and Sieburth’s transgressions against the sanctity of their marriage, might have been to take a final swipe at this figure and generation. With his *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, Sudermann already had some condescending words to say about Dahn, when he tells about his reason for leaving Königsberg for Berlin: “Die enge Provinzhauptstadt konnte als Wirkungskreis für mich fortan nicht mehr in Frage kommen. Für Männer

wie Felix Dahn und Ernst Wichert<sup>7</sup> mochte sie gut genug sein. Ich hatte Pflicht, mir ein größeres Königreich zu suchen" (232). In any case, the literary stardom that Sudermann achieved during the pinnacle of his career far exceeded that of Felix Dahn.

Despite the similarities between Sudermann's figures and the real-life people listed, Levy does not hesitate to nitpick what he believed were inaccuracies and what he found unconvincing about their representation. Even though the letter appears to be amicable, it apparently annoyed Sudermann, who wrote in his diary on October 29, 1926 after reading it: "Offener Brief Dr. Levys an mich in der Voss [*Vossische Zeitung*], Kritik des "Tollen Professors" in liebenswürdigste Form gekleidet. Will ihm antworten" (Tagebuch IX). In his response to Dr. Levy's letter in the *Vossische Zeitung* on November 7, 1926, Sudermann acknowledges to a degree his decipherment of the *Schlüsselroman* aspects: "Was die anderen Gestalten des Romans betrifft, deren Urbilder Sie zu erkennen glauben, so gibt es nicht viel für mich zu leugnen. Ich habe es auch nicht nötig, denn ihre Bilder sind mit wärmster menschlicher Teilnahme ausgemalt" ("Mein 'toller Professor'"). Nevertheless, he denies Levy's suggestion that he used Felix and Therese Dahn in creating the Hildebrandts in the novel, saying that if there is any resemblance in them it must have been subconscious. In fact, he claims that another German author stood as the influence for this figure, although he of course fails to mention any name.

Furthermore, Sudermann claims overall to have resisted the generic conventions of

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst Wichert (1831–1902) was born in East Prussia and studied law at Königsberg, becoming a lawyer and later a judge. In his spare time Wichert was a prolific author of fiction, publishing numerous plays and novels.

the *Schlüsselroman*, but the memory was inerascible. He writes, “Aber es war mir unmöglich, vergessen zu machen, daß jedes der Lehrfächer seinen Vertreter hatte, der, wenn er selbst von noch mitlebenden nicht zu erkennen war, doch in alten Vorlesungsverzeichnissen jeder Zeit aufgesucht werden kann. Und so wird dieses Odium wohl an mir haften bleiben” (“Mein ‘toller Professor’”). In this passage Sudermann appears to take the position of author as a martyr. It was not uncommon that the author felt this way, especially when he saw his works panned in the press over the years. It is therefore not surprising that his response to critics seemed defensive out of reflex. But the position Sudermann assumes here strikingly mirrors his protagonist Sieburth, who also had something to teach the world but instead of being welcomed he was rejected. Likewise, Sudermann believed that he had this parable in *Der tolle Professor* to bequeath the world before his death, even if the critics would crucify him for it. This, however, does not appear to be the case because most critical reviews have more or less positive things to say about the novel.

One aspect of *Der tolle Professor* that seemed timely for critics was the era in which it is set: the 1880s in the Age of Bismarck. In the mid 1920s of the Weimar Republic, the era in which Germany was led by the great nineteenth-century historical figure must have seemed especially distant. Although only a little more than forty years separated the novel from the setting, the world had been irreversibly altered by technology, world war, politics, and social change. If one is allowed to assert that the speed of historical change occurs at different paces in varying eras, then this was a time of rapid transformation. The 1880s and the young

German Reich must have also been remembered in the 1920s by those who experienced it with a degree of nostalgia. Not only were those still around aged by 1926, but they had also witnessed the high expectations for what was supposed to be “Germany’s century” fall flat due to the lost war. Even for those left liberals who once considered Bismarck the “Verderber des deutschen Bürgerstolzes,” he was still successful in attaining Germany its place in the sun among the other European Empires. The strong, successful statesmanship of the Iron Chancellor who forged the German nation-state with “blood and iron,” was a far cry from the chaos of parliamentary politics in the Weimar Republic and the national humiliation via the Treaty of Versailles.

Whether one appreciated him or not, Bismarck was a large part of the German experience in the late nineteenth century, as well as in *Der tolle Professor*. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* highlights the influence of this historical figure even on the intellectual currents of the time: “Der Riesenschatten des großen alten Mannes liegt auch über den geistigen Strömungen des Reiches in diesen achtziger Jahren, da der Roman spielt” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 55). The use of Bismarck in the novel, however, perplexed some readers, who could not pinpoint exactly what the author felt about the Iron Chancellor. Sudermann had been for decades the star author of bourgeois liberalism and to adherents of this ideology it was understood that Bismarck was the *bête noire*. Sieburth’s anti-Bismarck rhetoric to his students in the first half of the novel seems to support the opinion of the left liberal camps. Nevertheless, Sieburth’s position shifts on this subject with the circumstances. Critic Doris Wittner drew attention to this curiosity in her review of

*Der tolle Professor*. She writes that he mocks the political parties of the left and right, “indem er heute mit der Linken, morgen mit der Rechten ging, Bismarck erst als engstirnigen Junker und Thyranen in Grund und Boden schimpfte und ihn dann als Bahnbrecher der Demokratie und Einiger Deutschlands in der Himmel hob” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 72). Dr. J. Levy also addresses the slipperiness of the immanent political ideology of the novel in his open letter. He writes,

Es wird schon sein, daß Ihr “toller Professor” zum guten Teil Schlüsselroman ist und darum die engeren Landsleute besonders fesseln wird, vielleicht auch Widerspruch hervorrufen, links wie rechts. Denn geschont wird keine der Parteien, die eine gehechelt, die andere gezeißelt, und wenn Sieburth zuerst über Bismarck “Kreuzige” ruft, um zuletzt “Hosianna” anzustimmen, so wird doch der Hohn über das liberale Bürgertum wettgemacht, durch die Satire auf das feudale Junkertum, und das Lob für den alten Obrigkeitsstaat in das absprechendste Urteil verkehrt durch die Mittel, denen der tolle Professor letzten Endes den Lehrstuhl Kants verdankt. Also mag es bei dem sanft in Erinnerung gebrachten Wort, das dereinst scharf angefochten worden ist, hier sein Bewenden haben: Der Dichter steht auf einer höhern Warte als auf der Zinne der Partei.” (“Sudermanns “Toller Professor””)

Perhaps Levy’s last words in this passage capture the true meaning of the illusive ideology in the novel: Sudermann did not want his work to be tied to the political fortune of one party or the other. This is no radical gesture, because throughout the ages many artists have avoided becoming too associated with politics for the fear that their art will be forever tied to the politics of the day, thereby losing the quality of timelessness. Furthermore, it was a key character trait of Sudermann to resist being labeled or categorized. Whether it was being branded a naturalist, a liberal, or

a conservative—even social expectations in marriage and family life—the author resisted any form of imposition or encumbrance. In his response to Levy’s open letter, Sudermann confirmed this thought, telling, “ich bin Gott sei Dank ein freier Mann, der Linken so gut wie der Rechten gegenüber” (“Mein ‘toller Professor’”).

“Mit einer ungewöhnlichen Belesenheit in Werken der Philosophie,” writes a reviewer in the *Rundschau der Deutschen Tageblatt* on October 17, 1926, “überrascht Sudermann in diesem Roman.” Indeed, many of the themes familiar in the works of Sudermann are also present in *Der tolle Professor* continued to hold some attraction for readers. But there are other aspects that make it stand out. One topic that appears to stand out among the initial round of reviewers is Sudermann’s use of philosophy in the novel. The literary historian Erich Jenisch, in an article that was printed in the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* on October 6, 1926, highlighted that the figure Sieburth aptly shows the transition from a philosophy at the German universities that was deeply rooted in metaphysics to one that corresponded with the *Zeitgeist* of realism in the 1880s. This passage is represented in the history of German philosophy with a turn away from Hegelianism, which was dominant at German universities in the early and mid nineteenth century, to Schopenhauer’s pessimistic realism in the decades following the failed revolution in 1848. With this in mind, another reviewer describes Sieburth as “ein Libertiner von Format, ein immer glühender Feuer und Freigeist, den es stärker zu Schopenhauers Pessimismus als zu der damals alleinseligmachenden, alle preußischen Katheder beherrschenden Lehre Hegels hinzieht” (Sudermann MSP Collection, “Der tolle Professor,” 56). Still, in the forty years between the time at which the novel takes

place and the publication date of the novel much had changed in the field of German philosophy. If the turn away from Hegel towards Schopenhauer was considered unorthodox, other world events and intellectual paradigms had influenced philosophy at the universities and the German collective consciousness at large that must have made Hegelianism seem ancient by the time of the Weimar Republic. In trying to locate Sieburth's philosophical home, another reviewer looks past the philosophy of Schopenhauer and looks to the philosophy that it in turn spawned. The most significant offspring to arise in this era is none other than Friedrich Nietzsche. A reviewer from the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* takes note of the similarities between the professor Sieburth and Friedrich Nietzsche, who, by the 1880s when the novel is set, had been carrying out attacks on Western philosophy with his works for about a decade. Drawing attention to the parallels, the author of the article writes: "Der Name Friedrich Nietzsche steht hier mit vollem Nachdruck, wie er offenbar diesmal hinter Sudermanns Schaffen gestanden hat. Nicht in dem Sinne, daß Sieburth irgendwie ein Nachbild des Philosophen von Sils-Maria wäre! Aber so wie dieser Sieburth muß ein räumlich ferner, geistig naher Verwandter Nietzsches ausgesehen haben. In jene Jahre mußte er – das macht Sudermann zwingend deutlich – zugrunde gehen" (Sudermann MSP Collection, "Der tolle Professor," 68).

Despite the fact that *Der tolle Professor* did not fare poorly in its critical assessment, it was more than likely the reason for him not receiving an honor that many thought he deserved: an honorary doctorate from the Albertina. In 1926 Sudermann must have been among the most accomplished still-living students of the Albertina, but an honorary degree was conspicuously withheld. Wilhelm Matull

writes that “obwohl ‘Der tolle Professor’ für viele seiner Zeitgenossen nicht nur in der Hauptfigur, sondern auch in seinem Hintergrund leicht zu entschlüsseln war und deshalb ‘in der guten Gesellschaft’ manches Naserümpfen hervorrief und wohl auch nach Auffassung Josef Nadlers die Verleihung der Ehrendoktorwürde der Albertina unmöglich gemacht hat, ‘seine beste Menschenstudie in Erzählerform’” (174). For Sudermann, the honorary doctorate from the Albertina had been a cause for bitterness and provocation for some time. It is clear that even before he actually wrote *Der tolle Professor*, Sudermann was aware that it had the potential to stir some outrage. In his diary on September 16, 1917, the author notes a visit from a friend, and some unconfirmed talk about the possibility of him receiving an honorary degree from the Albertina. He writes, “Es scheint, daß Königsberg mir den Ehrendoktor präpariert Meineswegen. Wenn mir nur der ‘Professor’ erspart bleibt!” (Tagebuch V). It is interesting that he was so cognizant of the repercussions that this still hypothetical novel could have. But later diary entries prove how much the prospect of such an honor actually meant to him, leaving little room for speculation about whether or not the novel’s depiction of the Albertina carries Sudermann’s spite on account of this matter. In an entry dated May 24, 1921, it becomes clear that by this time he was becoming anxious by the fact that he had not been honored by his alma mater. He writes, “Zum Schluß platze mit meinem Zorn über die ausgebliebene Ehrendoktor heraus, der heute Lovis Corinth verliehen wurde! Bande! Bande!” (Tagebuch VI). Here he assumes that the committee responsible for issuing such prizes was in conspiracy against him, much like he thought about the critics. Even more insulting was that his friend Hugo Scheu took it upon himself in



1922, in honor of the author's sixty-fifth birthday, to lobby the university for the title on Sudermann's behalf. Instead, the university awarded Scheu the honorary doctorate. In a letter to Cläre Sudermann from February 1922, the insulted author vents his anger: "Ein großes Kuriosum hab' ich Dir zu vermelden: heute las ich in der 'Voß', daß die philosophische Fakultät in Königsberg dem Generallandschaftsdirektor Hugo Scheu den Ehrendoktor verliehen habe. Ist das nicht zum Schreien? Statt meiner mein Freund, der sich für mich einsetzt" (*Briefe* 314). And on August 15, 1923, a rival author, Arno Holz, was awarded the honorary doctorate by the Albertina. Clearly offended, he records his thoughts in his diary, "Arno Holz hat von der Königsberger Fakultät den Ehrendoktor erhalten. Neue Demütigung. Wie verachtet muß ich sein, daß meine Hauptprovinz mir das anzutun wagt!" (*Tagebuch VIII*).

## CHAPTER III

### THE GERMAN BOURGEOISIE AND HERMANN SUDERMANN:

#### BOURGEOISOPHOBIA?

*Die Bourgeoisie ist in keinem Lande sehr erfreulich. Der Nationalcharakter kann ihre spezifischen Eigenschaften mildern oder noch mehr ans Licht treten lassen.*

— Kurt Tucholsky, "Die Glaubenssätze der Bourgeoisie"

#### **A. Introduction: *Der tolle Professor* and the German Bourgeoisie**

In its entirety, *Der tolle Professor* is a scathing indictment of the small-mindedness of the German bourgeoisie. Not only are the members of this class portrayed as intolerant to all that does not fit their rigid standards, but in a provincial city such as Königsberg in the 1880s, there was also an element of self-surveillance. At any given moment Professor Sieburth is being watched to make sure he does not commit any transgressions against the moral codex of the caste. Punishment for such infractions was ostracism, which in a remote city such as Königsberg, was akin to solitary confinement. To avoid social isolation one was to conform to the prescribed codes of behavior and repress feelings, opinions, and behaviors that could lead to any kind of deviation. Maintaining *Bürgerlichkeit* meant doing so in its totality. One was to follow a bourgeois profession, belong to bourgeois social circles, subscribe to a bourgeois *Weltanschauung*, follow bourgeois social practices, and of course enter into a bourgeois marriage. Sieburth's unwillingness to forgo his free will and individuality to bourgeois standards sets up the conflict that results in his alienation and withdrawal from society. His growing

awareness leads him to conclude that he stands as an *Übermensch* above the herd and its trivial affairs—a conviction that leads him to part ways with this world.

### 1. Sieburth and the Philosophy of Ethical Life

After arriving at the Albertina University of Königsberg, Sieburth earned some disapproval from his colleagues on account of his perceived flamboyance and independence *vis-à-vis* tradition and custom. He is confronted with this reality when the sage of the university, the Great Hegelian, calls on him for a *tête-à-tête*. This scene in the novel is a coming together of opposites as the two hold diametrically opposed worldviews. On the one hand there is Sieburth who belongs to the new wave of philosophical thought in Germany, and on the other hand there is the Great Hegelian who, as the name suggests, is part of the old tradition of Hegelianism that dominated philosophy departments for a sizeable portion of the nineteenth century. Even though their systems of thought do not align, the ageing philosopher finds it his duty to impart some wisdom upon the younger libertine colleague. Hesitantly he asks, “Sehen Sie, Kollege, Sie sind Anfang der Dreißig. Sie sind, wie man mir gesagt hat, materiell unabhängig – in bescheidenen Verhältnissen zwar, aber das ist vielleicht ein doppeltes Glück. Warum zögern Sie noch immer, in die sittliche Einheit einzutreten, die sich Ehe nennt?” (134). In one of Hegel’s key works, *Philosophie des Rechts*, the term *Sittlichkeit*—often translated as “ethical life”—encompasses marriage, the essential ethical relationship, which brings forth families that compose the content for the form of the Hegelian state (*Phil. of Right* 360). Hegel’s detailed description of this structure—often thought to be a direct portrayal of

Prussia in Hegel's time—in many ways offers a blueprint for bourgeois life in the nineteenth century. In his advice to Sieburth, the Great Heglian presents the concept of marriage, or as he puts it, "sittliche Einheit," as an existential rooting in bourgeois life. The Hegelian faith in the institution of marriage was firmly rooted in German society in the mid nineteenth century. Peter Gay points out that the most significant dramatist in Germany at this time, and poetic voice of the bourgeoisie, Friedrich Hebbel (1813–1863), wrote in his epic *Mutter und Kind* (1856), "Only married life makes a human being wholly human" (*Naked Heart* 97). Sieburth responds to this suggestion by giving his understanding of a "sittliche Einheit" as a coming together of two spirits that have the ability to sanctify one another, and that he has not yet found such another spirit. Immediately after giving this reason he is struck by a feeling of remorse ("Gewissensbiß"), because the name of a woman passes through his mind, which poses the perfect opportunity for such a "sittliche Einheit." This fleeting sensation of guilt is a sign that the bourgeois code of morality has been planted within Sieburth, even if it is his philosophical purpose to overcome it. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes, "Man has all too long had an 'evil eye' for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his 'bad conscience'" (531). The repression of this sensation of guilt is Sieburth's will to be freed from what Nietzsche calls "bad conscience" and follow his "natural inclination." The feeling of guilt, however, disappears when the thought of another woman, his true desire, floats through his mind. What Nietzsche describes as the "noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another" (*Genealogy of Morals* 493), Freud conceptualizes in his model of the

psyche. The two opposing women that appear in Sieburth's mind represents a surfacing of the subconscious conflict of two drives within him, with one representing the notion of "ought" and the other his impulse. This divergence of interests is emblematic of the struggle between Freud's superego and id, with the ego attempting to mediate between the two opposing forces. While Sieburth's superego casts its spell of guilt onto him in order to push him towards the "sittliche Ehe," his id presents him with his desire, which for him is the stronger impulse.

Upon answering, however, Sieburth's does not satisfy the Great Hegelian, so the elder philosopher articulates clearly his warning to the younger colleague: "Es gibt wohl trockene Gesellen, denen die Ehelosigkeit *keine* Gefahren bringt . . . Womit ich natürlich nicht auf Kant hinzielen möchte, der außerhalb jedes üblichen Maßstabes steht . . . Zu diesen gehören gerade Sie, wie ich weiß, durchaus nicht. Im Gegenteil, man sagte mir, daß Sie Ihre Freiheit in vollen Zügen genießen. [...] Und unsere Kollegen – oder vielmehr deren Frauen – den die sind ja in solchen Fällen der eigentlich Gerichtshof – lassen sich diese – wie soll ich es nennen? 'Wildheit' wäre zu viel – bleiben wir also bei 'Willkür' – mit einer ungewöhnlichen Nachsicht gefallen" (135). In this reason given by the Great Hegelian, he admits the existence of "natural inclination" and warns against underestimating the power of drives, and the inescapability of surveillance by the guardians of Victorian morality. This scene presents the point where Sieburth's long decline begins, even though he does not yet realize that the choice given is one between existence and destruction.

## 2. Sieburth and the Bourgeois Salon Life of Königsberg

Sieburth's standing in the social circles of Königsberg is not perilous from the start—in fact it is quite the opposite. However, early successes in navigating the dangerous waters of the bourgeois milieu encouraged in him a dangerous confidence that eventually becomes unsustainable. Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand describe salon life as an integral part of bourgeois living in late nineteenth-century Germany. They write, "Im Zentrum dieser Wohnpaläste steht wie im Barock und Rokoko der Salon. Alles ist auf das Gesellschaftliche zugeschnitten: auf das Sehen und Gesehenwerden. Hier lebte man, tanzte, machte Konversation, schloß Geschäfte ab" (*Gründerzeit* 23). In Berlin, for example, the salon life was vibrant and specific to various stratifications in the bourgeoisie (e.g., *haute bourgeoisie, Bildungsbürgertum*),<sup>8</sup> but in a small city such as Königsberg, which had approximately 150,000 inhabitants at the time, the options were more limited. In *Der tolle Professor*,

Das Haus der Großkaufmanns Follenius galt mit Recht als eines der ersten und gastfreisten in der gastfreien Stadt, und die Zierden der Universität gingen von alters her darin aus und ein. Mit einer gewissen Auswahl freilich. Follenius gehörte als Sohn und Erbe eines alten Achtundvierzigers naturgemäß zur Fortschrittspartei, und darum geschah es, daß von den Universitätslehrern nur diejenigen bei ihm verkehrten, die den neuerdings sehr regsam sich gebärdenden reaktionären Umtrieben mit entschiedener Ablehnung gegenüberstanden. (67)

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<sup>8</sup> See: Dolores Augustine, "Arriving in the Upper Class: the Wealthy Business Elite of Wilhelmine Germany." In *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the early Twentieth Century*. Eds. David Blackbourn and Richard Evans. New York: Routledge, 1991.

The center of the bourgeois social scene in the provincial city was open to those who passed the standard of holding a liberal middle-class worldview; independent thought, therefore, was not welcome. The theme of free thought and pressures to conform to the collective becomes the main criticism that Sudermann levels at the liberal German bourgeoisie. Sieburth, however, stands above the mediocrity of the bourgeois salon milieu in Königsberg not only in his intellectual capacity, but also in his personal style. The other men to be found among the Königsberger bourgeoisie are described as boring and all alike: “Und Männer in allen Schattierungen äußerer Weltfremdheit. Neben Fräcken von jeglicher Form der langweilige Bratenrock mit der blumigen Samtweste. Neben weißer Schleifenkrawatte und gesteiftem Kragen das mehrfach gewickelte Halstuch, von den Spitzen der Vatermörder biedermeierisch überragt” (72). Ironically, the judgmental attention paid to superficial detail concerning the personal style of members of the bourgeoisie here seems to be characteristic of bourgeois snobbery. Sieburth, by contrast, stands out among the rank and file of this class even though he is more of a social climber than a natural bourgeois salon type: “In diesem Kreise galt Sieburth als elegant, und er legte Wert darauf, diesem Rufe gewachsen zu sein. Je weniger er seine proletarische Herkunft verbarg, desto mehr wünschte er, sie durch seine Erscheinung vergessen zu machen. Auch seine Redeweise hatte er weltmännischem Wortgefüge sorgsam angeähnlicht, und niemand war je in der Lage gewesen, ihn in Gesellschaft auf irgendeiner Derbheit zu ertappen” (72–73). Once again, the influence of Nietzsche is glaringly apparent in this conflict of interest. In his work *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche levels an attack on Christian morality, which forms the basis of bourgeois

ethical life. Nietzsche notes that the belief in equality before God has degenerated man over centuries into a kind of lesser class of humans. Modern man was for Nietzsche by the 1880s “a smaller, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something eager to please, sickly, and mediocre has been bred, the European of today—” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 266). For him, group think, conformity, and collective-minded action was something to be overcome. Professor Sieburth, however, does not consider the power of these herd instincts, or rather overestimates his ability to maintain free will independent of group pressures. Initially he is successful in doing so, impressing the salon women with his philosophical knowledge, and even finding favor as the confidante of the salon hostess Marion Follenius.

The married pair Follenius are typical of the *haute* bourgeoisie, economic bourgeoisie or *Großbürgertum* in the early years of the German Reich. The wealth accumulation among this class reached levels that were comparable in peer states such as England and France; one major difference, however, was the speed of this rise after the unification of Germany in 1871. Historian David Blackbourn writes, “Perhaps the most important point about the economic bourgeoisie as a whole in Germany, compared with those countries [England and France], was the relative speed of its emergence as a social and economic force, which was linked to the explosive character of German industrialization” (*German Bourgeoisie* 7).

Sudermann describes Follenius as a “stämmig behäbiger Mann Mitte Vierzig, dessen ostpreußische Herbheit allerhand Bildungsreisen wie auch die langjährige Vertretung des weitangesehenen Handlungshauses in Berlin wohltuend abgeschliffen hatten. Dort war es ihm sogar vergönnt gewesen, in den Salons des



Tiergartenviertels eine gewisse Rolle zu spielen" (67). On one level Follenius would have been exemplary of class standards at the time by virtue of his well-rounded interests. The mention of "Bildungsreisen" demonstrates his interest in knowledge and cultivation; his association with the most well-known merchants shows his savvy for business affairs; and the presence among the salons of the Tiergarten district—commonly associated with the banking class at the time—shows a proper attention to social appearance. This holy trinity—financial prudence, personal cultivation, and social standing—had been a guide to bourgeois living, and was reflected in some of the major works of literature of the long nineteenth century such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795–96) and Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855). This outward appearance of industriousness, culture and harmony, however, covered up the discontents lurking below the surface. The high value placed on education, refinement, and profitability makes it seem that the calculating rationality of bourgeoisie would produce a strained relationship to *Eros*. But, as Peter Gay suggests, this is not necessarily the case, and, "Being human, the bourgeois—at least the male of this unfortunate species—craved sexual satisfaction, but he could not merge his sensuality with affection" (*Bourgeois Experience*, "Gen. Intro." 36). The crowning achievement of Follenius' role among the Tiergarten salons was "daß er schließlich mit einer vielgenannten Schönheit am Arm, die sich um seinetwillen von ihrem ersten Gatten, einem Musiker von weitverbreitenem Rufe, hatte scheiden lassen, in die strengere Luft des preußischen Ostens zurückkehrte" (68). This kind of hypocrisy or *Doppelmoral* among the bourgeoisie became a major theme at the turn of the century, but in the early 1880s the

literature of the decade-old German Reich was still dominated by bourgeois realism that did little to represent what was happening beneath the surface of expected middle-class norms. This is indicative of the stress placed on the morality of appearance, even if things were not always as they seemed. For a man such as Follenius with wealth and influence scandal was to be avoided, but his stature allowed him a certain degree of latitude. About the social reactions to Follenius' moral transgressions, Sudermann writes, "Das Gemisch von Ehrerbietung und Entrüstung, mit dem die stets gierige Phantasie der biedereren Provinzialen diesen Roman in Empfang genommen hatte, verflüchtigt sich allgemach, und übrig blieb ein mildes Lächeln des Respekts, der durch das Gefühl weitherzigen Verzeihens nur noch größer wurde, zumal der neu sich entfaltende Glanz des Hauses ihm täglich frische Nahrung gab" (68). Within this bourgeois society of Königsberg, then, one's social station determines the degree to which one is obligated to abide by the norms. But the stakes remained high for others, and Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1896) serves as a testament to the severe penalties the less powerful had to pay for infringements on moral order.

Although the Great Hegelian stresses in his warning to Sieburth that the wives of Königsberger society function as the moral authority, it was also they who were judged harshest for infractions. Therefore it was necessary for personal preservation that the bourgeois wives internalize the codes of ethical living. The double standard in moral expectations between the sexes is represented in the behavior of the married pair Follenius. While her husband was allowed the leeway to satisfy his desires outside of the so-called "sittliche Einheit," she was compelled to

maintain their marriage, uphold their position as the center of bourgeois life in Königsberg, and quietly ignore her husband's infidelity. Sudermann writes, "Marion Follenius, die einst mit dem gefeierten Gatten – kaum minder gefeiert als er – die halbe Welt durchgeflogen hatte, saß nun gebannt in diesen Erdenwinkel, dessen eingeengte Sitten und umständliche Manieren anzunehmen sie eifrig bemüht schien, war eine sorgsame Ehefrau, eine hingebende Mutter und lenkte daneben – gleichsam mit dem kleinen Finger – die Geselligkeit der oberen Kreise so anmutig und selbstverständlich, daß sogar die beiden Exzellenzen, die Gattin des Oberpräsidenten und des Kommandierenden, sich an ihr Beispiel nehmen konnten" (68). The internalization of bourgeois social standards is here apparent, as Marion not only fulfills her duties as the wife of an important member of the upper bourgeois class, but she does it with fervor. The preservation of the household and bourgeois standards was her duty, but for a well-traveled and experienced woman such as Marion, the limitations of what the provincial city of Königsberg could offer were suffocating.

Behind Marion's convincing façade of simple contentedness was something more: "Nur einer, der schärfer hinsah und die seltenen Augenblicke müden Selbstvergessens aufzufangen wußte, konnte dahinter den Brand fressender Lebenssehnsucht entdecken, der immer wieder schnell von gewohnter Beherrschtheit erstickt wurde" (68). Sieburth was the only male member of this social circle who could recognize that Marion was not so one-dimensional as her social behaviors would suggest: "Denn fraulichen Geheimnissen nachzuspüren, gehörte nicht zu den Künsten der Männer aus jenen Bezirken, in denen die eheliche

Ehrbarkeit nur um einer bequemen Dienstmagd oder, wenn's hochkam, einer weniger bequemen Balletteuse willen Schiffbruch litt" (68). The rising academic and the high-standing socialite wife were drawn to each other's respective complexity, and they formed a special friendship of confidences, which was only strengthened when Sieburth skillfully guided her out of a socially perilous situation involving the return of an ex-lover. This bond between the two became something more than just friendship, although neither were willing to admit it for social reasons: "Die althergebrachte Sittenstrenge der Provinz ebenso wie die selbstverständliche Unnahbarkeit der weithin sichtbaren Patrizierin verbot das lockere Liebespiel, mochte es noch so sehr bereit sein, sich als Schicksal und als Leidenschaft zu gebärden" (70). The chemistry between the two was more charged than the sterile notion of bourgeois love because of the potentiality for sensuality and passion. The feelings of sensuality and love according to bourgeois standards, so it seems, were not considered to be coexisting feelings. An early representation of this can be seen in the chemistry between the pairs in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809). The main couple Eduard and Charlotte has an amicable relationship and this produces a respectable household, which is disrupted by the former's passion for Otilie who comes to live with them. Strangely, even Nietzsche acknowledges incompatibility of sensuality and love in his *Beyond Good and Evil* when he writes, "Sensuality often hastens the growth of love so much that the roots remain weak and are easily torn up" (276). As Freud wrote about this bourgeois attitude, "Where they love they do not desire, and where they desire they cannot love" (Gay, *Bourgeois Experience*, "Gen. Intro. 37). For Sieburth, or at least how he explains it to

the Great Hegelian in their conversation about matrimony, the potential for “sittliche Einheit” must synthesize both love and affection, as well as passion and desire. The chemistry between the two, however, does not pull them from routine bourgeois existences, and “So lebte jeder von ihnen sein Leben. Sie mit dem wackeren Mann, den schönen Kindern und dem nie abzutragenden Wust geselliger Verpflichtungen. Er mit seinen Büchern, seinen Schülern, den ernstesten Lebenszielen und den kleinen Abenteuern, die den Weg dahin heiter umrankten” (70).

### **3. Sieburth’s Love and Intrigues**

The small “Abenteurer” or adventures—a euphemism for philandering—that provided Sieburth’s life with joy while pursuing his objective of Kant’s professorship, complicate his life at certain points throughout the novel. The depiction of these episodes includes a classist bias that treats Sieburth’s relations with proletarian women as inconsequential foolishness. This intermingling is to Sieburth purely in the pursuit of relieving his desire for sensuality—a kind of letting off of steam while he carries on with bourgeois life. Sieburth’s philosophy will be examined with greater depth in chapter four, but it is worthwhile mentioning it in the context of his erotic forays into the lower classes. At the heart of his philosophy is a kind of moral relativism, which allows one to see an action or behavior from two different standpoints. He calls this the “Tages- und Nachtansicht.” During one of his adventures he tells some listeners, “Jedes Ding auf Erden hat nämlich seine Tagesansicht und seine Nachtansicht. Um vier Uhr morgens in einem Bordell denkt man anders als um vier Uhr nachmittags beim Familientee, und eines hat dieselbe

Berechtigung wie das andere" (52). With his libertine sexual behavior in mind, this differentiation provides an ethical justification for the bourgeois *Doppelmoral* that allowed men of this class to preach, teach, legislate, and judge over moral behavior, but not feel personally compelled to abide by it. Despite his revisionist system of bourgeois ethics, Sieburth is still caused a degree of trouble by acting upon his erotic desires at will. Both the paranoia of social reverberations and the feeling of guilt afflict him after sexual encounters while on his adventures. Such natural human feelings as these do not seem to fit the Nietzschean philosophy of overcoming ingrained morality that Sieburth's philosophy at times mirrors. In one scene he goes home with a schoolteacher who duly warns him of consequences for his unreciprocated advances; in another scene he nearly finds trouble after the police find him with a woman suspected of theft. In all of these cases the women understand the frivolity of the rendezvous because "vor allen Dingen sei an die Heirat mit einem Bürgerlichen niemals zu denken" (312). This, of course, is not to mention the prostitutes he visits in bordellos, who come impoverished from the ghettos of the East. In another episode, however, he does not have such good fortune to escape the severe punishment of social embarrassment. The student Fritz Kühne brings a newspaper announcement to the attention of Sieburth, which reads,

Aufforderung!

Herr Universitätsprofessor Sieburth kann sich das Armband, das er meiner Tochter geschenkt hat, aus meiner Werkstatt abholen kommen, da eine Verwendung dafür nicht vorhanden ist. (251)

For *Burschenschaftler* or *Corpsstudenten* (fraternity members) at the Albertina this kind of behavior was not abnormal, but for a university professor it was deemed as inappropriate and it causes Sieburth a considerable deal of paranoia. The feeling of regret, however, comes toward the end of the novel after he has become alienated in society, and with nowhere to go, he turns to his landlady's daughter for affection, which causes a rupture between him and the last people in Königsberg who care for his well-being.

Despite his "adventures" into the lower levels of Königsberger society, options remained for Sieburth from the start. The fleeting association that came to mind when the notion of "sittliche Einheit" was mentioned in his parlay with the Great Hegelian, is Cilly Wendland, daughter of a famous surgeon and one half of a sister pair, who "durch Schönheit und Geist weit über den sonstigen Nachwuchs der Professorenschaft hinausragte" (67). Both of the sisters Cilly and Milly were two of the most beautiful available women in the bourgeois circle of Königsberg, and with time expectations grew that a marriage between Sieburth and Cilly was ineluctable. Such expectations were issued by a clique of wives among the bourgeois salon milieu called the "Schicksalsschwester," whose purview extended over the private lives of all who wished acceptance in this society: "und das war gerade die [Cilly], die nach dem Spruche der Schicksalsschwestern sein Schicksal zu werden drohte" (75). Conformity to the norms and standards of bourgeois life was a prerequisite for full acceptance into this class, and in this case it meant giving up one's agency to the will of the "Schicksalsschwestern." Cilly could offer Sieburth the best path to an ethical bourgeois life because she was available, her father was wealthy, and "sie

kannten sich gut, sie verstanden sich gut, sie hätten ruhig ins Brautbett steigen können, ohne einander viel Neues zu bieten" (76). The most important part of this chemistry is perhaps that there was an absence of passion between the two, which was necessary for a calculated nineteenth-century bourgeois marriage.

The social troubles that eventually lead to the young professor's demise begin when his desire sets sights upon a forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden among Königsberg's upper class: the wife of another university professor. Marx and Engels, in their *Communist Manifesto* write, "Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives" (260). This seems to describe the growth of Sieburth's erotic desire from mostly frivolous forays into the lower levels of Königsberger society to one of Faustian proportions. This is most likely what Sudermann had in mind when he wrote in his diary on May 15, 1924: "Faust als Don Juan" (Tagebuch VIII). The Hildebrands come to Königsberg after Frank, a young professor of Medieval history, is called to the Albertina. Critics who reviewed *Der tolle Professor* identified Felix and Therese Dahn as the basis for this couple, although Sudermann denied this. Frank Hildebrand is a rising talent at the university, "Ein Jünger Treitschke war er, glühend in Vaterlandsliebe wie er, wie er ein Prophet künftiger deutscher Größe, dem hingegen alles lauschte, was sich von dem neuerprobten Kriegsruhm der Hohenzollern tragen ließ" (71). Such *völkisch* qualities match Dahn's nationalistic enterprise in his historiographical writings, as well as his works of fiction. In any case, Sieburth is not so much interested in his new colleague, as he is the wife,



Herma. Upon seeing her for the first time he is overcome by a mystical feeling of familiarity with her. A quotation from Goethe comes to his mind, "Ach, du warst in abgelebten Zeiten/Meine Schwester oder meine Frau" (74). The deep feeling of connection that Sieburth feels for Herma goes beyond the passionless practicality of the typical bourgeois union. In every sense, Sieburth desires more than what Königsberger society is willing to allow him; like Icarus who failed to heed Daedalus' warnings about flying too high, Sieburth's desire eventually seals his fate.

#### **4. Bourgeois Surveillance and Social Control**

Just as the Great Hegelian warned, Sieburth's transgressions of bourgeois social norms do not escape the careful observation of the "Schicksalsschwestern." This clique of nosy wives is just one expression of surveillance in the novel, and the figures are continually evaluated by some kind of authority, whether in the social salon milieu, at the university by colleagues, or from government officials as seen in Sieburth's trip to Berlin. Furthermore, this network of social control through observation extends from the top to bottom of society in the novel. The student Fritz Kühne, who is a member of the Corps Students, a type of fraternity, is continually watched by his fellow members, making sure nobody deviates from the peculiar customs of this organization, which could spell the capital offense of dishonoring the group. Kühne's problems with his fraternity begin when he fails to observe the group's norms: "So war er zum Beispiel eines Abends in voller Couleur auf der Proletenseite der Schlittschubahn bemerkt worden" (39). In another scene Fritz Kühne notices that he is the object of surveillance when he catches his superior's

gaze upon him: "Ich irre mich wohl, aber es scheint, als ob er mich ganz besonders ins Auge faßt" (238). The ubiquitous angles of regulatory observation in *Der tolle Professor* create a general atmosphere of paranoia that corresponds to the *Zeitgeist* of the late nineteenth century and the growing problem of mental disorder. As Peter Gay puts it, "The Victorian was the Age of Neuroses" and in the later part of the century, "the preoccupation with nervous ailments grew into an obsession" (*The Cultivation of Hatred* 508). This era saw the introduction of new technologies, transportation, and mass communications that increased the speed and stress of daily life. Observers of the time such as Sigmund Freud, however, located the reasons for the increase in neuroses in the repression of unconscious drives. For him, the social developments by the end of the nineteenth century made the repression of erotic desire and aggression increasingly difficult and the effects were manifest in the pathologies. These ailments were typically bourgeois in character as this class was still obligated to uphold the values of order, propriety, industriousness, while the unconscious drives were bursting at the seam. Freud's famous explanation to convey the root of this problem was "daß das Ich nicht Herr sei in seinem eigenen Haus"; the demands between psychological and biological drives on the one hand, and social demands on the other was too much to bear for many. Unlike some who repressed the unconscious drives to the point of hysteria, Sieburth relents frequently to his erotic desires. The problem, however, is the feeling of paranoia that his adventures cause him. Unlike a Nietzschean *Übermensch* Sieburth is unable to entirely overcome the feelings of guilt for transgressing the bourgeois code of morality. Perhaps Freud's insights at the turn of the century

added to Nietzsche's call in the 1880s to rethink social values in so far that it discovered the limiting factors of the human psyche and the prices that need to be paid when one fails to aptly mediate the demands of the id and superego. The especially bourgeois nature of neuroses can be explained by the added internalization of the rigid guidelines to proper bourgeois living and the social enforcement of these norms.

The paranoia that Sieburth feels on account of his forays beyond the pale of bourgeois respectability is confirmed by the authority of the "Schicksalsschwestern." This feeling both reinforces and challenges the concept of fate that plays a large role in the novel. On one hand the rising young professor appears to be predestined to the professorship, but on the other his concern about his reputation shows that his belief in fate is not one of Calvinist confidence. Fate and paranoia present themselves as a paradox to Sieburth, who teaches a philosophy of individualism and champions the overcoming of prescribed social boundaries. The newspaper announcement regarding his inappropriate behavior provides Sieburth a first-hand glimpse of the surveillance in Königsberger society. In the immediate aftermath of this blemish on his character everything seemed to be business as usual for Sieburth: "Die Pein war zu ertragen und nur darum so fatal, weil er, der trotz aller Feindschaften bisher der Umworbene und Überlegene gewesen war, sich plötzlich in die Rolle des Abwartenden und Zubehandelnden gedrängt sah" (257). Sieburth is fully cognizant that when the "Schicksalsschwestern" catch wind of this scandal there would be a price to pay, because just as the Great Hegelian warns him, these women wield the authority to

determine the fates of fellow class members however they deem appropriate. Much to his bafflement, instead of being reprimanded for the advertised misdeeds, Sieburth is treated with a degree of warmth *vis-à-vis* one member this institution of power, Frau Geheimrätin Kemmerich. This unpredictable reaction has nothing to do with his own social leverage against them or that the matter failed to capture their attention; rather it is their will.

Among the so-called “Schicksalsschwestern” are three wives of professors who decide by committee the fates of individuals sent to the provincial East-Prussian city. Unbeknownst to Sieburth, Frau Kemmerich, the most pragmatic and matriarchal of the triumvirate has great expectations for him in Königsberger society. The “apollinische Zeit” in which she was married to an art historian, afforded her a fulfilling bohemian lifestyle that left its mark, making her as the most understanding of the *troika*. The other two by comparison are small-minded and carry a degree of *ressentiment* for their marginalized social positions next to their professor husbands: “Sie hatten sich mit ihren Männern durch die Langatmigkeit eines kargen Privatdozententums mühselig hindurchgearbeitet und trugen die Mängel und die Tugenden der Froschperspektive noch immer an sich herum” (258). These two figures are embodiments of Nietzsche’s concept of “slave morality,” and the mention of “Froschperspektive” makes the reference obvious. Frogs, of course, are one of Nietzsche’s favorite tropes to represent manifestations of the weak, petty, and small-minded. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he even uses the term “frog perspective” to set up his argument that casts doubt upon the dogmatic moralism in the philosophy hitherto, which for him is “the faith in opposite values.” He writes, “For

one may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and opposite values on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps even from some nook, perhaps from below, frog perspectives, as it were, to borrow an expression painters use" (200). Likewise, the narrator casts doubt upon the moralizing of the "Schicksalsschwestern" and the faith that their values constitute "good." But one must also consider the misogyny inherent in the works of Nietzsche and his term *ressentiment*, which is being implied in the case of the professor wives. In some places Nietzsche warns of woman's capacity for treachery, such as in *Genealogy of Morals* when he expounds on "the will of the weak to represent some form of superiority, their instinct for the devious paths to tyranny over the healthy." Going on he writes, "The sick woman especially: no one can excel her in the wiles to dominate, oppress, and tyrannize. The sick woman spares nothing, living or dead; she will dig up the most deeply buried things" (559). Later in the same work, however, he treats woman as a weaker being, upon whom one's will can be effortlessly imposed: "women—who are mostly both at once, work-slaves and prisoners" (570). Both this sense of cruelty and inferiority comprise this sense of *ressentiment* that the two members of the "Schicksalsschwestern" harbor. One of them, Frau Professor Ehmke, we are told, projects this bitterness in her *Weltanschauung*: "Sie hielt die gerade einsetzende Frauenbewegung für eine Versündigung an dem 'Geist der deutschen Familie'" (258). The other, Frau Professor Vallentin, not possessing a great deal of intelligence, occupies herself with the attentive "Betrachtung der jeweiligen Vorgänge in den Familien der Albertina" (258). This interest manifested itself in gossip with other salon women, which she

enhanced with great fantasy. Although Nietzsche's misogynistic evaluation of women is present in these two figures, the "Schicksalsschwestern" are more than just an essentializing of female qualities; rather it is also a statement about the pettiness of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

Sieburth's fate lies in the hands of these three figureheads of Königsberg's upper middle class. Just as Mephistopheles and God debate the fate of the professor in the "Prologue in Heaven" at the beginning of Goethe's "Faust Part I," the "Schicksalsschwestern" make conversation about Sieburth's misdeeds and what it means for his anticipated marriage to Cilly. All three have different opinions concerning the matter that represent various points of view among the bourgeoisie. For Frau Vallentin *Schein* (appearance) outweighs the *Sein* (being), and she suggests that Sieburth's relations with Cilly be put on hold for some time until the newspaper incident fades from the public's memory. Frau Kemmerich, proposes that Sieburth make a promise that he will not engage in anymore "Dummheiten" (stupidities) and then everything ought to be forgiven. For the rigid moralist Frau Ehmke, however, this is unacceptable, and she correspondingly retorts, "Dummheiten nennen Sie das? Ich nenne es Skandal" (260). Her reasoning for taking a hardline against behavior such as that of Sieburth has a nationalistic component to it. She says, "Ich werde immer tief traurig sein, wenn man die Grundlage der deutschen Familie verleugnet" (260). The nationalistic impulses that incubated in the later half of the nineteenth century only to explode during World War I are on display in Frau Ehmke's reasoning that the German family embodies something sacred, which is indicative of the belief in the German *Sonderweg* (special path). But if the aggressive moralizing

of Frau Ehmke can be seen to represent Nietzsche's ideas of slave morality and *ressentiment*, Frau Kemmerich's conception of what "scandal" means exudes Nietzsche's attack on a metaphysical stability of moral values. She explains, "Skandal ist nur, was zum Skandal gestempelt wird" (260). This refutation of objective truth echoes Nietzsche's exegesis on the metaphysical understanding of morality at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* where he questions if perhaps morality is only a matter of perspective (200).

The conversation is intensified when Marion Follenius joins the "Schicksalsschwestern" in their parlay about Sieburth's future. They continue the debate about Sieburth's newspaper affair, which evolves into a general discourse about bourgeois *Doppelmoral*. Frau Kemmerich argues that Sieburth should not be judged harsher than other men in this social class who behave similarly. She tells the fellow salon women, "Wenn wir alle die Männer, die uns die Hand zu küssen pflegen, wegen gelegentlicher Seitensprünge aus unserer Nähe verbannen wollen, dann würde uns schließlich zum Verkehr nur der eigene übrigbleiben. Und selbst bei dem sind wir unserer Sache erst sicher, wenn – nun, wenn wir einer andern Sache sicher sind, die uns sehr wenig Vergnügen bereitet" (262). These figures are at once both victims and collaborators of bourgeois *Doppelmoral*. They have little control over how their husbands behave, and in order to maintain the respectability of their household, they need to repress any suspicion of infidelity or the rationalization thereof with euphemisms such as "Seitensprünge." It is easier to condemn the misdeeds of others rather than recognizing the truth about their own matrimonial bonds. Frau Vallentin reacts to the unsettling thought of her husband's

possible infidelity with denial, “*Mein Mann denkt in allen solchen Fällen wie ich!*” and Frau Ehmke represses the thought with her typical moralizing, “Heiraten sollen sie [...] sollen die Pflichten kennenlernen, die das deutsche Familienleben dem gesitteten Manne auferlegt” (263). Frau Kemmerich tries once more to reason with obstinacy of the salon women by qualifying her seemingly liberal perspective on the matter of male sexuality. She tells them, “Wenn sie nicht wie die Wölfe in die Hürden einbrechen, die wir um unsere und die Häuser unserer Freunde gezogen haben” (263). This echoes Marx and Engels’ comment in their *Communist Manifesto* that when the bourgeoisie is no longer satisfied with seducing proletarian women they go after each other’s wives. For these women, however, it is clear that while “Seitensprünge” might be forgiven, transgressions within their own ranks cannot be. The imagery of a predatory beast, such as a wolf, that attacks the herd reminds one of Nietzsche’s parable in *Genealogy of Morals* about the lambs and birds of prey that attempts to dissect the opposite values of good and evil. He writes, “That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?’ there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: ‘we love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb’” (481). This crude metaphor of the predator, the herd, and their respective moralities is made clear when Marion Follenius divulges information



about Sieburth to the triumvirate that goes beyond trivial “Seitensprünge” with lower-class women.

### 5. Sieburth’s Fate Is Sealed

Sieburth’s fate is sealed on a trip to the East-Prussian countryside with a number of society women, including both Marion Follenius and Herma Hildebrandt. Although he is convinced of his acumen and savvy to outwit the others and satisfy his desire for the latter without their knowing, his confidence in doing so proves to be deceptive. While alone with Herma, Sieburth makes advances toward her that are initially resisted, as she tells him: “Denn was wir jetzt tun, das ist wider die Natur” (201). The “Natur” that she implies does not in fact mean against natural inclinations, but rather the prescribed bourgeois way of life, because she has also feelings toward Sieburth. Eventually the mutual affection and Sieburth’s persistence wear down her reservations and she relents to this socially perilous *Eros*. For Sieburth, the satisfaction of this desire has metaphysical implications, which was discussed earlier during the scene in which he meets the Great Hegelian and defines his understanding of the “sittliche Einheit” as a mutual sanctification of the soul by two like-minded individuals. Nevertheless, there is also an element of manliness and self-affirmation in this endeavor that can be traced back to his philosophy that will be discussed in more detail in another chapter. For now it suffices to say that this philosophy is rooted in the Nietzschean imperative of the will to power, even if it means acting beyond existing moral boundaries. In this episode, while fulfilling his desire, Sieburth is most like Nietzsche’s tropes of the blond beast, the *Übermensch*,

or the predatory bird. This exploit is a realization of his philosophy in which he allows himself consciously to shed social inhibitions, guilt, and fear of consequence: "Über das, was werden würde, gab er sich keinerlei Rechenschaft. Wenn er des warmherzigen und hochsinnigen Gatten gedachte, dem er sie wegnahm, fuhr ihm wohl ein Stich durch die Brust. Aber das half nun nichts, hier galt's einen Kampf Mann gegen Mann. Wer Sieger blieb, führte die Braut heim" (209). The scene in which Herma and Sieburth have a secret nightly rendezvous contains obvious imagery of the predator and prey motif with a cat and a caged bird in Sieburth's lodging: "Das Katzengetier hatte sich von neuem eingefunden und suchte des armen Opfers habhaft zu werden. Mit Zischen und Fauchen sprang er gegen das Gitter des Hühnen verschlags, bis das verängstigte Tier, in dem Wunsch, sich zu retten, den Stäben doch einmal so nahe kommen würde, um von den Krallen ergriffen zu werden" (229). This, however, does not mean that the impulse toward his desire overpowers his ability to reason. Contrarily, his awareness for the power of bourgeois morality is still given consideration. He asks himself, "Will ich meine stille, gesegnete Einsamkeit preisgeben um eines Skandals willen, der unausbleiblich sein würde? Oder muß ich nicht vielmehr dafür sorgen, daß alles zwischen uns in strengster Heimlichkeit bleibe?" (209). Still, even if he would do his best to keep this affair out of the public eye, Sieburth is aware of the difficulty in doing so. Again, he asks, "Wie sollte es möglich sein, in dieser eng umgrenzten Stadt, in diesem aufpasserischen Kreise Beziehungen, die jedem Argwohn offen standen, vor Spionage und Entdeckung zu bewahren?" (209). The reasoning on whether or not to follow through with this act reminds one of the part in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and*

*Punishment* (1866) in which the student Raskolnikov debates in his mind whether he should kill and rob the old money lender, and his decision that he is historically predetermined to commit this act. Great men, he reasons, must make these perilous steps in order to achieve their goals. Sieburth decides not to relent, but rather to reach for his desire, regardless if he succeeds or fails: “Er mußte die Verheißung sich erfüllen. Erst mußte der große Augenblick gekommen sein, der Heil oder Verwerfung, unasdenkbares Glück oder lebenslange Sehnsucht in sich barg” (209).

Sieburth’s plan is quickly made more complicated when Marion Follenius becomes involved in the matter. Up until this time, some distance had grown between the two who had at one time closely confided in one another. Soon after Sieburth is re-introduced into her company, he begins to suspect that she harbors suspicions about his intentions with Herma. At this juncture in the narrative, Marion becomes a hindrance to Sieburth’s intentions; she is representative of both the surveillance of bourgeois moral authority, as well as the Nietzschean concept of slave morality. The unfulfilled wish to keep Sieburth as her own confidante or even lover turns to a bitter sense of *ressentiment* toward the professor and Herma. During a hike together, Herma mentions that she feels as if Marion is observing them both, and makes the assumption that Marion had once been Sieburth’s lover. When he tells her that it never went further than a kiss of the hand, Herma reasons, “Dann ist es um so schlimmer. Dann trägt sie [Marion] das Gefühl mit sich herum, von Ihnen verschmäht zu sein” (216). Marion reappears with new bourgeois credibility that bolsters her social authority in the ranks of the Königsberger middle class: “Ihr Mann hatte den Kommerzienrattitel erhalten, der ihm wegen seiner politischen

Haltung bisher versagt geblieben war, und sie selber konnte sich eines Ordens rühmen, der ihr von Rechts wegen noch lange nicht zukam" (215). Titles such as "Order" or "Commerical Councilor" are indicative of a perceived feudalization that was taking place among the German bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth-century (Blackbourn, *Long Nineteenth Century* 366–67). The historian Karin Kaudelka-Hanisch elaborates on this culture of titles: "A title was understood by contemporaries as an official or honorific name which distinguished the bearer from others, by virtue of office, standing or worthiness [...] Titular councilors were divided into a first class (Privy Councilor, or *Geheimer Rat*) and a second class (simple Commercial Councilor, or *Kommerzienrat*) [...] In the nineteenth century it was within the gift of the King of Prussia to grant a businessman 'the rank (*Charakter*) of Royal Prussian [Privy] Councilor,' subject to criteria laid down by decree" (92). This further stresses the hypocrisy and superficiality of this class, who, even if it is contradictory to their liberal ideology, still swoon over titles bestowed on them by authority. But Marion is no fool as the two "Schicksalsschwester" Frau Ehmke and Frau Vallenitn are depicted; rather, she is a kind of predatory beast in her own right. Her unrequited desire for Sieburth unleashes something in her that, while resembling *ressentiment*, is more powerful than the herd instincts of other members of this social class. Just as Sieburth utilizes his so-called "Tages- und Nachtansichten," appearing respectable by day in order to maintain his position in society, while transgressing moral boundaries at night, Marion has also learned to manipulate the power of appearance, and also has the ability to think outside of bourgeois norms. In this sense, she is also a kind of *Übermensch*, and proves to be a

formidable adversary for Sieburth. In his typical fashion, Nietzsche's views regarding women seem to change page by page in his works. In addition to the numerous misogynistic passages regarding women, he also writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "What inspires respect for woman, and often enough even fear, is her *nature*, which is more 'natural' than man's, the genuine, cunning suppleness of a beast of prey, the tiger's claw under the glove, the naïveté of her egoism, her uneducability and inner wildness, the incomprehensibility, scope, and movement of her desires and virtues—" (359). This description seems befitting for Marion Follenius, who is an extremely dangerous foe for Sieburth as a beast of prey capable of destroying his reputation in bourgeois society in an instant.

The inevitable clash between the two *Übermenschen* comes during a final *tête-à-tête* in which Sieburth attempts to defuse the situation. Marion, however, plays a zero-sum game: either she will make him into her lover and thereby hold influence over him or nobody will. A trade-off of intrigues ensues as each party tries to manipulate the other toward the desired outcome. Sieburth plays the cards of bourgeois morality telling her that a more intimate rapprochement between the two was not possible because "wir leben in einer strengen Welt. Der Pflichtbegriff hängt über uns allen" (221). His appeal to bourgeois morality does not come across as credible to her so he tells her that it is because there is something more important in life that keeps him from her: "Noch höher als Sie, höher als jedes Weib der Erde, steht mir meine Arbeit" (222). She immediately accuses that he means instead his career, but he contends that he means it out of principle of his individual freedom: "Ihr Spielzeug, meine Fürstin, kann ich nicht werden" (222). Their conversation

ends leaving Sieburth with the false hope that he can keep Marion's influence over him at bay by maintaining that he wishes to uphold their friendship. Back in Königsberg, Marion, who had found a sign that a nightly rendezvous between Herma and Sieburth had taken place, goes to the "Schicksalsschwestern" to deliver the news that Sieburth had crossed the Rubicon: "Er hat sich einer Dame unserer Kreise in einer Weise genähert" (264). Sieburth had committed the one cardinal sin that could not be overlooked by the guardians of bourgeois morality, and in their minds his was not socially salvageable: "Denn Urteile gibt es, die eine so groteske Vergewaltigung ausüben, das trotz aller inneren Auflehnung ihnen niemand entgegenzutreten wagt. Der Name 'Schicksalsschwestern' war *keine* Übertreibung. Was hier geschah, kam einem Schicksalsspruche gleich" (266).

As dire as Sieburth's situation is, he flirts with an attempt at salvaging what he can by pursuing a respectable bourgeois marriage as the Great Hegelian, as well as Herma in her final letter advises him to do. He decides to test this idea once more, and writes to Cilly Wendland, the young woman most suitable for him. He immediately receives an invitation and the next day he attires himself with the proper bourgeois fittings and heads for her salon. Upon his arrival, he finds himself among obtrusively bourgeois surroundings, "Gut Ölbilder, ein [Ludwig] Knaus, ein Oswald Achenbach – einst auch von ihm bewundert – hingen an den Wänden . . . Brokatene Sessel standen herum und goldene Stühlchen" (426). The description of that around around Sieburth in the salon makes it clear that he feels alienated. In the meeting that follows, Sieburth gets the feeling that he is in fact *persona non grata* in the salon circles, but at the same time he senses that the young woman has

feelings for him. Here he finds himself at the crossroads, “Entweder man sprach offen aus, was nach Hermas Wunsch mit dieser Zusammenkunft angebahnt werden sollte, oder man griff nach seinem Hut und machte, daß man hinauskam” (429). Sieburth chooses to let this opportunity pass him by once and for all. Angered by his isolation from the bourgeois salon milieu, Sieburth thinks to himself, “Frei sein! Frei bleiben! Entronnen aus der Kellerigkeit der bürgerlichen Welt, aufwärtssteigend in die dünne Frostluft nebelfreier Höhen” (430). And with that he makes a break from bourgeois life.

### **B. Hermann Sudermann’s Reception among the German Bourgeoisie**

It is curious that such a scathing appraisal of the German bourgeoisie would come from the same author whose career rested upon the support of that particular social class. From his first job as a correspondent and chief editor for the liberal bourgeois Mosse Press, to his first breakthrough in the theater world with “Die Ehre,” Sudermann’s life work was intended for and received by the German bourgeoisie. His work touched a nerve because it often reflected trends or themes that were current among this class at the time. Looking back on the life and career of Hermann Sudermann for his seventieth birthday in 1927, one literary critic explains the significance of the author for German literary history:

Im Kulturleben Deutschlands waren damals fundamentale Umwälzungen geschehen. Die Aera Bismarck hatte dem deutschen Bürgertum das moralische Rückgrat gebrochen. Ihm nur ein Ideal gelassen: Geld erwerben. Technik und die ihr dienenden Naturwissenschaften herrschten im Reich der Geister. Das Volk der Dichter und Denker war realpolitisch geworden. Was

keinen unmittelbar praktischen Nutzen brachte, hatte keinen Marktwert. Das galt nicht nur für die Wissenschaften, sondern auch für die Künste. Diese hatten ausschließlich für die Unterhaltung und Zerstreuung des Bürgertums zu sorgen. Diesem Bürgertum erstand im Verfasser der "Ehre" der rechte Mann. (Schikowski)

The rise of the naturalist literary movement in Germany brought along with it a renewed enthusiasm for the theater and a new social awareness among the bourgeoisie. Women's issues that were being addressed on a larger social scale through the women's movement found their way into the works of naturalist authors. Other social issues such as alcoholism, the poor living conditions of the proletariat, and the paternal hypocrisy of the authorities also became key topics of interest in the 1890s. This spirit is easy to discern in his early works, and *Sudermann*, it seems, was able to perfect a mixture of social themes, melodrama, and appropriate technical knowledge of effective drama writing that up until World War I remained unsurpassed in popularity in Germany. Critics, however, did not find this mixture as favorable as the box-office numbers might suggest, and they began taking aim at the author's tendency to align his work with trending themes or political topics *du jour*, which often earned him the epithet of "Modedichter." The perceived timelessness that they wishfully projected onto the works of Gerhart Hauptmann, was in their minds the polar opposite of Sudermann's interest for whatever was popular at the time. Therefore the level of social engagement in his works was seen as superficial and insincere. Already in 1904, critic Samuel Lublinski writes about Sudermann: "Wir wissen nun sofort, daß Hermann Sudermann kleinbürgerliche Revolution im Wasserglase macht, und daß es ihm



lediglich daraufankommt, es den Offizieren und Kommerzienräten 'gut zu geben'" (*Bilanz der Moderne* 199).

As the *Sturm und Drang* of literary naturalism faded into neo-romanticism with the approaching turn of the century, so too did Sudermann's works. The critics lampooned him for plays such as "Johannes" (1898) and "Die drei Reiherfedern" (1899) that picked up on the themes of neo-romanticism. Lublinski writes about this:

Die paar modernen Probleme, die in Sudermanns kleinbürgerlichen Kreis hineinreichten, waren bald genug erschöpft, und immer krasser trat das nackte Theaterstück heraus, das durch die literarischen Allüren und Ansprüche des Verfassers um so schärfer zum Widerspruch herausforderte. Wenn er einen "Johannes" schrieb und die gewaltigste religiöse Revolution der Weltgeschichte zum dekorativen Hintergrund für eine aufgedonnerte und pikante Salome-Szene verwertete, die überdies dem Engländer Oskar Wilde schlecht nachgeahmt war, dann wußte man kaum, ob man mehr über die künstlerische Frivolität oder über die barbarische Geschmacklosigkeit erstaunen sollte. Es war damals gerade die Epoche der Neu-Romantik in Anbruch, und dadurch kam Sudermann auf den "Johannes" und auf die "Drei Reiherfedern". Es hat überhaupt keine Zeitstimmung und kein Zeitproblem gegeben, das nicht einmal seinen Weg in Sudermanns Werke fand, um dort sofort zur Theaterei verzerrt zu werden. Das gab Anlaß zu schweren Beschuldigungen, die sich gegen den Charakter des Menschen richteten und geradezu seine Ehrlichkeit bezweifelten. Darin tut man ihm wahrscheinlich unrecht, weil er in Wahrheit nicht anders empfand, als es eben seinem eigenen und dem Horizont seines Publikums entsprach. (*Bilanz der Moderne* 200)

Although the critics found issue with Sudermann's choices, his works continued to draw in great numbers and the yearly Sudermann production was awaited with great anticipation. That the critics of the time largely chose Gerhart Hauptmann as Germany's next great author—and this would intensify after Sudermann lashed out at the critics with a pamphlet titled *Die Verrohung in der Theaterkritik* in 1902—is partially responsible for overshadowing Sudermann's successes. There is still much to be learned about the author's sustained popularity among the German bourgeoisie at the time.

### **1. Sudermann as an Icon of the German Bourgeoisie**

Despite harboring a deep resentment toward the German bourgeoisie, Hermann Sudermann was himself through and through a member of this class. His persona was elevated to star status through the sensational success of his drama "Die Ehre" in 1889, and he became, in a way, an icon among the German bourgeoisie. In fact, his success at home and abroad made him into an internationally recognizable name—something the landscape of German literature had not seen for decades before him. Sudermann could claim that he elevated the reputation of Germany, becoming popular in Meiji Japan, receiving praise from the American literary critic H.L. Mencken, and bringing Sarah Bernhardt out of her deep Germanophobia to play the part of Magda in a production of "Heimat" (1893).<sup>9</sup> Even

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<sup>9</sup> See: H.L. Mencken. "Hermann Sudermann," in H.L. Mencken, *Prejudices: First Series* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1919), 107; Masahachiro Yokomizo. "Hermann Sudermann in Japan. Aspekte seines Einflusses auf Literatur und Geisteswelt der Meiji-Periode (1868 – 1912)," in Walter T. Rix, ed., *Hermann Sudermann: Werk und Wirkung* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1980), 345 – 359; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 19 January 1895.

his deepest critic Alfred Kerr felt compelled to admit that Sudermann did contribute at least to gaining German literature attention internationally (*Hermann Sudermann* 52). But it was also his habits, tastes, and lifestyle that turned him into a kind of iconic figure of the German bourgeoisie. His first three dramas “Die Ehre” (1889), “Sodoms Ende” (1890), and “Heimat” (1893), which are often considered as a trilogy, are worthy of a closer look because not only did they bring Sudermann literary fame, they also contain themes that were highly attractive to the German bourgeoisie at the time. Furthermore, each of them contains specific elements that can be related to his final appraisal of the bourgeoisie: *Der tolle Professor*.

#### **a. “Die Ehre”**

On November 27, 1889, a drama in four acts titled “Die Ehre” by an unheard of dramatist made its premiere in the Lessingtheater in Berlin. Just the month before on October 20, the premiere of another drama by an up-to-then unknown author had caused much uproar among literary circles in the German-speaking world. This was Gerhart Hauptmann’s debut “Vor Sonnenaufgang,” which is credited with opening up the era of German naturalism—a step away from the long-standing dominance of bourgeoisie realism and a step toward modernism. In the words of Hauptmann himself, “Die Aufführung von ‘Vor Sonnenaufgang’ 1889 in einer Matinee der sogenannten ‘Freien Bühne’ war ein grenzenloser Theaterskandal” (*Die großen Beichten* 642). By many accounts, however, Sudermann’s “Die Ehre” eclipsed the fanfare that “Vor Sonnenaufgang” was still enjoying. At the center of “Die Ehre” is a juxtaposition of the proletarian family Heinecke and their *Hinterhaus*

against that of the bourgeois family Mühlingk and their *Vorderhaus*. Although the contrasting of social classes was not necessarily new at the time—contemporary critics pointed to similar themes in *Volksstücke*—the success and exposure of “Die Ehre” brought the incongruities of the proletarian and the bourgeois classes into the open once and for all. In an article commemorating Sudermann’s seventieth birthday in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*, literary critic Hermann Kienzel summarizes the significance of the *Vorderhaus-Hinterhaus* theme: “Diese neuen Kontraste von Vorder und Hinterhaus, diese willkürlich verallgemeinerten Gegensätze im moralischen Empfinden zweier Menschenschichten wirkten zu einer Zeit in der das Theater die sozialen Fragen noch sehr oberflächlich behandelte.” Emil Faktor writes in the *Berlin Börsen-Courier* on September 29, 1927, “Es wird ihm nie bestritten werden können, daß er als einer der ersten die Hinterhausdramatik zur Diskussion stellte, Kontraste aufrührte, den Druck gesellschaftlichen Klassengeistes zu mildern suchte.”

The story begins with the homecoming of the son Robert Heinecke, who returns after many years abroad in the South Seas on a coffee plantation. The Heinecke’s inhabit the *Hinterhaus* of Kommerzienrat Mühlingk’s *Vorderhaus*, who is also Robert’s benefactor. While Robert holds on to his desire for the Mühlingk daughter Leonore, he disapproves of his younger sister’s mistress relationship with the cavalier Mühlingk son, Kurt, which the rest of the family seemingly encourages. The tension between Robert and Mühlingk mounts with his readiness to duel in order to restore honor to his family’s *Hinterhaus*, but his friend, and *raisonneur* of the drama, Trast, ultimately finds a solution. This drama struck a nerve in Berlin in

1889 because it especially spoke to the experiences of Berliners at the end of the nineteenth century. The *Vorder* and *Hinterhaus* combination was a typical housing arrangement in Berlin at this time, whereby a family of bourgeois standing takes on proletarian tenants to rent their *Hinterhaus* located on the back side of the *Vorderhaus*. Heinrich Spiero writes on June 5, 1927 in the *Königsberger Hartungschen Zeitung* that Sudermann's "Die Ehre" was especially significant because of its timeliness in German history: "Während Sudermann in der 'Ehre' einerseits noch mit blendenden Schlagworten aus der Sprachluft der französischen Theaterstücks arbeitete, riß er zugleich den Gegensatz zwischen Vorder- und Hinterhaus auf, dessen schicksalshafte Bedeutung gerade um die Zeit von Bismarcks Abgang und Wilhelms II. sozialen Erlassen, in den Jahren des seine Unmöglichkeit offenbarenden Sozialistengesetzes dem Bürgertum ins Bewußtsein trat."

The notable Berlin literary critic, Fritz Engel, writes in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on September 28, 1927 that he attended the premiere of "Die Ehre" in 1889 and that it captured the *Zeitgeist* of Berlin at the time because the various representations of class in the drama were realistic.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fritz Engel: "Eine Erinnerung bald vierzig Jahre zurück. Zwei junge Studenten haben die "Ehre" gesehen. Literarische Maßstäbe liegen ihnen noch fern, ebenso Erfahrung und Menschenkenntnis. Der Graf Traft-Saarbert imponiert ihnen wohl gar, er ging ja auch in den Romanen um, die sie verschlungen hatten, mehr auf den Stoff versessen, als auf dichterischen Gehalt. Und was ihnen sonst aus dem Schauspiel entgegenkam, besonders das Hinterhaus, schien ihnen lebendiges Leben zu sein. Das kannten sie, dieses Hinterhaus, von Heinekes hatten sie selbst ihre Buden abgemietet, zwanzig Mark mit "Kaffee". Und Alma, die Alma war ihre Grete oder Trude, und "man jing mit ihnen". Sie waren in Almas Gestalt ein bißchen verschönt, aber das tut wohl, und der Drang zum Verkehr mit "besseren Herren" war auch da."

Sudermann's breakthrough with "Die Ehre" not only meant for him recognition among the German literary scene, but rather it catapulted him to star status overnight. An article from September 29, 1927 in the *Elbinger Zeitung*, commemorating Sudermann's seventieth birthday, explains Sudermann's success: "Am 28. November früh morgens erwachte in irgendeinem möblierten Zimmer zu Berlin Hermann Sudermann als der große Mann, der große Sudermann" ("Hermann Sudermann"). The *Dresdner Nachrichten* reports Sudermann as having said on that day, "Ich wachte auf und fand mich berühmt" ("Hermann Sudermann"). The fanfare for Sudermann at this time was so exaggerated that it is reported someone once witnessed while walking by a monument to Friedrich Schiller in Berlin another uttering the verse: "Früher warst du der Mann. Jetzt ist es Sudermann!" (*Koblenzer General-Anzeiger*). The magnitude of his success brought about many legends concerning "Die Ehre" and its premiere, but one thing was certain: Sudermann was now famous. In his diaries Sudermann notes on November 29, 1890, one year after his breakthrough, after taking a walk: "Alles menschenleer dann in den Straßen ab u.[nd] zu ein Geleister [sic.] von Vorübergehenden 'Das ist der Sudermann'" (*Tagebuch I*).

### **b. "Sodoms Ende"**

Despite Sudermann's additional success as a novelist, he wished above all else to maintain his star-status as a stage author. 1891 saw the premier of his *fin-de-siècle* drama, "Sodoms Ende," which brought him more attention than he had bargained for. Set in "Berlin W." (Western Berlin), in whose salons Sudermann

crafted himself into the darling of the German bourgeoisie, “Sodoms Ende” is about the debauched artist Willi Janikow, who is engaged in a love affair with the married and wealthy Frau Adah. Literary historians Jost Hermand and Richard Hamann contextualize this drama in German history,

Schon zu Beginn der neunziger Jahre trifft man auf künstlerische Äußerungen, in denen die Dekadenz als eine bestimmte Phase der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung angesehen wird, und zwar als Endphase des mit der Gründerzeit hochgekommenen Großbürgertums. Den Auftakt dieser dichterischen Analysen bildet das Drama “Sodoms Ende” (1891) von Hermann Sudermann, das sich wie der Roman “Im Schlaraffenland” (1899) von Heinrich Mann mit dem dekadenten Treiben der Berliner Salonwelt beschäftigt. (*Naturalismus* 143)

The drama presents changes that were taking place among the German bourgeoisie in the 1880s and 1890s. Various members of this class are caricatured such as the aesthete and the *demimonde* in Janikow and Adah respectively, but also the *Bildungsbürgertum* and the *Großbürgertum*. The professor of art Riemann, for instance, is described as dressing “halb spießbürgerlich, halb künstlerisch” (129). Great detail is given to the appearance of these figures whose class is signified therein. Barczinowski, Adah’s husband, is described in the stage directions as a “Typus eines Börsenjobbers, doch ohne jüdische Maske. Mitte der Vierziger, - kurzgeschnittenes, blondes Haupthaar, aufgewirbeltes Schnurrbärtchen, Andeutung eines spitzen Backenbartes, hyperlegant gekleidet, zur Korpulenz neigend, mit fociierter Jugendlichkeit auftretend” (132). The absence of traditional morality is made plain throughout the play—the new state of the German bourgeoisie. This is evident when Willy Janikow calls another figure a “jämmerlicher Moralmensch”

(231) or when Frau Adah justifies her licentiousness: “Mein Mann treibt mit Dirnen” (198).

Sudermann also addresses topics that were globally trending at the time such as the concept of *fin-de-siècle*, thus bringing the perceived backward state of German literature up to speed with France. Thematizing the turn-of-the-century discourse of cultural degeneration, “Sodoms Ende” conveys such tendencies as nerves and hysteria, as well as moral decay associated with it. These turn-of-the-century discourses were about to give birth to psychoanalysis in the years to come, and that Sudermann’s drama outdates Freud and Breuer’s famous studies on hysteria shows that the author had a natural talent for finding and addressing socially relevant themes in his works. At one point, a character in the play quips, “Es gibt keine Liebe, bloß Nerven [...] Es gibt kein Schicksal, bloß Nerven,” which is not only indicative of the broader social discourse of psychological pathologies, but it also corresponds to the literary trends of naturalism (219). The metaphysical subjects of love and fate are reduced to biology in this instance. At the same time, however, this drama is a step away from the programmatic naturalism of Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf, or even Gerhart Hauptmann, for that matter. Sudermann was much more the author who wrote about the bourgeoisie for a liberal bourgeois audience, unlike Hauptmann who was still writing about the proletarian milieu for the middle class.

The reception of “Sodoms Ende” was not as sensational as his first drama, but the main parts played by star actors Lily Petri and Josef Kainz cemented Sudermann’s reputation as a master of writing roles for particular personalities.



Hans Wyneken writes about "Sodoms Ende" in the *Monatsblätter: Der Königsberger Theatergemeinde*:

Noch schärfer ging Sudermann mit seinen Gegnern in seinem nächsten Bühnenwerk, dem Drama "Sodoms Ende" ins Gericht. Und zwar nahm er hier ganz bestimmte Kreise der Berliner "oberen Zehntausend" aufs Korn, jene Kreise nämlich, in denen sich die Merkmale sittlicher Großstadt-Fäulnis und morbider *Fin de siècle* Dekadenz in unerfreulichster Weise geltend machte. ("Dramatiker Sudermann")

The *B-Z am Mittag*, in an article assessing Sudermann's literary career, writes:

Er schrieb 1890 "Sodoms Ende," das Drama der Tiergartenstraße, die als Wohnviertel der Börsenplutokratie galt, und der er sich als ein von der Interessantheit des parfümierten Lasters angezogener Sittenrichter genähert hatte. Die Zensur wollte "Sodoms Ende" verbieten. Doch dann wurde es mit Kainz als dem dekadenten Maler Willi Janikow gegeben, der [Seraphine] Detschy als der Tiergartenlöwin Frau Adah, der [Lily] Petri als Adahs Tochter Kitty: und [Josef] Kainz war der Neurastheniker im Frack. ("Hermann Suderman")

The themes of decadence and immorality in the drama, as the above passage indicates, did not escape the Berlin censor's watchful eye and three days before its premiere in the Lessing-Theater it received performance ban by the authorities. In response to this, Oskar Blumenthal, Director of the Lessing-Theater, demanded a *tête-à-tête* with Berlins Polizeipräsident, Bernhard von Richthofen. Blumenthal went to the press with the absurd nature of this meeting. The *Elbinger Zeitung* recounts, "Was er dort erlebt hat, berichtete er brühwarm, und das ganze lateinische Viertel von Berlin, das ganze liberale Deutschland wälzte sich vor Lachen" ("Hermann

Sudermann").<sup>11</sup> The magazine *Tempo* recounts the dialog between Blumenthal and von Richthofen:

Blumenthal beschwört von Richthofen: Aber warum das verbot?

v. Richthofen: Weil es uns so paßt.

Blumenthal: Ich verstehe, Sie wollen mir durch Ihre Kürze Gedächtnis rufen, daß Sie laut Polizeiverordnung keine Gründe anzugeben brauchen. Aber vielleicht sind es nur einige gewagte Stellen, um die es sich handelt.

v. Richthofen: O nein.

Blumenthal: Ja, aber was sonst?

v. Richthofen: Die ganze Richtung paßt uns nich [sic.]. ("Die ganze Richtung")

Sudermann's clash with the authorities over perceived immoralities in the drama made more of a splash in Berlin than did the actual work. This rabbleroising added to his literary legacy and gained him credit among the liberal German bourgeoisie.

Eventually "Sodoms Ende" premiered November 5, 1890, but not before Blumenthal

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<sup>11</sup> *Die Elbinger Zeitung*, on September 27, 1927, provides a more substantial report about the background of the circumstances regarding the premiere of "Sodoms Ende": "Am Lessingtheater war die Uraufführung sehr sorgfältig vorbereitet worden. Kein Geringerer als Josef Kainz sollte in der Hauptrolle gastieren. Ganz Deutschland und Oesterreich sahen mit Hochspannung der Premiere entgegen. Da – drei Tage vor der Aufführung – verbot die Polizei das Stück. Oskar Blumenthal, flink bei der Hand, sauste ins Polizeipräsidium. Was er dort erlebt hat, berichtete er brühwarm, und das ganze lateinische Viertel von Berlin, das ganze liberale Deutschland wälzte sich vor Lachen. Es gab nämlich eine ernste Auseinandersetzung zwischen Blumenthal und dem Berliner Polizeipräsidenten von Richthofen. Blumenthal zwang diesen Allgewaltigen zur Sachlichkeit. Das Gespräch wurde literarisch. Und der Herr Präsident sahen sich mir nichts dir nichts aufs Glatteis gesetzt. Ob er das verbotene Stück nicht gelesen hatte oder was da war, jedenfalls schlug er, in der Enge, mit der Faust auf den Tisch und schleuderte Blumenthal die für die Geschichte der Theaterzensur in Deutschland höchst bedeutsamen Worte entgegen: 'Die ganze Richtung paßt uns nicht!' Das Gelächter der Welt war gefährlich. Richthofen, der den Spitznamen 'Dichthofen' fortan führen mußte, war blamiert. Der damalige Minister des Innern, Herrfurth, griff ein, und am 30. Oktober 1890 fand im Lessingtheater jene denkwürdige Aufführung des Stückes statt, an der – fünf Zuschauer teilnahmen: drei Ministerialräte vom Ministerium des Innern, Sudermann selbst und Ernst Hartmann vom Wiener Burgtheater.

was forced to lobby the Innenminister Ernst Ludwig Herrfurth, and a special private performance was held for review by several state officials, after which slight alterations were made. This confrontation with the authorities about freedom of artistic expression won him applause from the side of the liberal bourgeoisie in the German speaking world, but this uproar did not come without a cost. In 1890, Paul Heyse, the standing literary member of the Schiller Prize Commission, nominated Sudermann's "Die Ehre" for the award. The Schiller Prize, which was founded in 1859 by the Prince Regent of Prussia, was awarded every three years to a German author generally for a dramatic work. Nevertheless, other members of the commission who were hostile toward the naturalist movement in German literature blocked Sudermann's nomination. Surprisingly, the award that year went to the old Theodor Fontane and Klaus Groth both for their "life work" (Huch 677).

### **c. "Heimat"**

The third installment of Hermann Sudermann's dramatic trilogy, "Heimat," appeared in 1893 and subsequently elevated his name internationally. "Heimat" presents a clash of two worlds in a father-daughter conflict that represents the incompatibility of the modern and traditional, the collective and the individual, the *démimonde* and bourgeois values, freedom and tyranny, the artist life and the blandness of bourgeois life. The narrative begins with a provincial East-Prussian city, ostensibly Königsberg, preparing for the highly anticipated visit of a world-famous diva. The story focuses on the family Von Schwartz with the domineering traditional patriarch Oberstleutnant Leopold von Schwartz at the head. The older

daughter Magda, we learn has been estranged from the family for some time. The narrative comes together when the famed diva pays a visit to the Schwartz household, and it is revealed that she is in fact Magda. At first Schwartz maintains his hardline against his daughter for her past transgressions against his authority. The original rift between the father and daughter had happened when she refused Schwartz's will for her to marry a pastor Heffterdingk, and she subsequently left the house. Eventually there appears to be a *rapprochement* between Schwartz and Magda, and the former wishes to have order and honor restored to his bourgeois household. Magda, however, has a secret that would not bode well with her father's set of bourgeois values. After having left home she was impregnated by the Regierungsrat Keller, who abandoned the young mother and child, leaving them in abject poverty and desperation. Through hard work and the will to greatness she eventually became a famed opera singer. Schwartz, after learning about the child, makes plans to arrange a marriage between Magda and Keller in order to restore honor to his household, but Magda is unwilling to accept the terms given. The play ends with Schwartz's heart attack.

Sudermann's "Heimat" is a searing criticism of Germanness and the bourgeoisie. Schwartz stands to represent both of these. In conversation with another figure, he reveals his authoritarian, paternal, and parochial *Weltanschauung*: "Und in diesen Zeiten, in denen alle Bande der Moral und Autorität zu zerreißen drohen, da ist es doppelt geboten, daß die Männer, die für die gute, alte, sozusagen familienhafte Gesittung eintreten wollen, die nötige Fühlung miteinander bekommen" (25). Here he mocks old-fashioned notions of morality and

authority in Germany, but he also offers a blow to German nationalism. Sudermann regarded himself as a *Weltbürger* at this time, who, much like his Magda, was greater than his provincial countrymen. Schwartze seems to characterize everything that Sudermann despises about this mentality which is laid bare in a revealing passage in which he tells other figures: “Aber kommen Sie in die stillen Heimstätten, wo dem Könige wackere Soldaten erzogen werden und sittsame Bräute für sie. Da wird kein Lärm gemacht mit Vererbung und Kampf ums Dasein und Recht der Individualität – da passieren keine Skandalgeschichten – da schert man sich den Teufel um die Ideen der Zeit, und doch ruht hier die Blüte und die Kraft des Vaterlandes” (25).

The felicitously timed premiere of “Heimat” in 1893 could not have been better positioned for success, considering how the themes so aptly coincided with the *Zeitgeist*, making this play an internationally acclaimed work. The theme of the new woman embodied in the figure Magda echoed the independence of Ibsen’s Nora in “A Doll’s House” (1879), as well as a Nietzschean determination not to conform to societal norms under the duress of the feelings of guilt. Nietzsche’s former person of interest Lou Andreas-Salomé confirms the Nietzschean influence in her summary of the drama’s core message: “Es gibt gar keine Seelengesundheit und gar kein natürliches, ungebrochenes Menschentum in der Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung des Einzelnen” (154). The end result for Magda in “Heimat” is that she has to sacrifice her father’s approval in order to fulfill her individual desires. The effect of her choices is that without the pain there would be no gain on her behalf, and this is much like the sacrifices that Zarathustra must make in his existence as *Übermensch*.

The role of this strong-willed new woman demanded an actress of equal proportions, and this it achieved. The Germanist Fritz Chlodwig Lange writes in an article in the *Westfälischer Merkur*,

Ja, mit dem künstlerisch keineswegs einwandfreien, vielmehr garzu unbekümmert auf den Effekt losgehenden Schauspiel "Heimat" gelang dem glücklichen Verfasser ein Erfolg, wie er bis dahin eigentlich noch nie einem deutschen Theaterstück beschieden war: in allen europäischen Ländern, dazu in Amerika, China und Japan wurde das reißerhafte Drama vom Schicksal der berühmten Sängerin gespielt, die gegenüber der Enge sozialer Vorurteile und kleinstädtischer Gewohnheiten die Freiheit des Individuums mit leider nur allzu rhetorisch-sentimentalen Phrasen vertritt. Die [Eleonora] Duse spielte die Hauptrolle italienisch, Sarah Bernhard französisch, [Konstantin] Stanislawski brachte eine Meisterinszenierung des Stückes auf dem Moskauer Künstlertheater heraus. ("Bewundert viel")

That this drama by a German author attracted arguably the two greatest actresses of the nineteenth century—Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse—was no small feat for Sudermann and German literature. Sarah Bernhardt's acceptance to stage and star in Sudermann's "Heimat" even brought forth waves of speculation in Germany of a French-German *détente*, because it was an established fact that the most famous of all actresses was an ardent Germanophile.<sup>12</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt* reports on

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<sup>12</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt*, on 14 February 1895 reports: "Aus London telegraphiert unser Korrespondent: Der Pariser Korrespondent der Times erblickt in dem Umstande, daß die deutschfeindliche Sarah Bernhardt in der Generalprobe vor einem meist deutschen Publikum ein Stück eines lebenden deutschen Dichters, 'Die Heimath', unter vorher nie dagewesenen Applaus unbehelligt spielte, einen vollständigen Umschwung in der öffentlichen Stimmung Frankreichs zu Gunsten Deutschlands. Der Korrespondent führt diese Thatsache auf die unausgesetzt friedliche und Frankreich freundliche Haltung des deutschen Kaisers, auf den Rücktritt Bismarcks und auf die Interessengemeinsamkeit Deutschlands und Frankreichs in Kolonialfragen zurück. Der Artikel schließt wörtlich: 'Die Szene bei der gestern Abend stattgehabten Probe, die scheinbar nur ein dramatischer Incidenzfall ist, darf als Zeichen einer allgemeinen Wandlung in der französischen

January 19, 1895: "Sarah Bernhardt macht ihren Frieden zwar noch nicht mit Deutschland, aber doch schon mit deutschen Kulissen."

Critics have pointed out that Sudermann's first three dramas "Die Ehre," "Sodoms Ende," and "Heimat" can be thought of as a trilogy, each addressing different problems that were facing bourgeois Germany as the century drew to an end. Many of the themes concerning the German bourgeoisie that the author addressed in these early important works figure prominently in *Der tolle Professor*—only more cynically. Save a few of his plays, however, almost all of his subsequent works confronted social issues *du jour* in one way or another. Nevertheless, all three of these works contain a degree of social and cultural pessimism that only intensified not just in his works but also in his own *Weltanschauung*. In each play we see a bourgeoisie that can no longer maintain the integrity of its nineteenth-century tradition when faced with the forces of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century. In "Die Ehre" it is the intermingling and presumable intermarriage of social classes that is central to the play, while "Sodoms Ende" is purely about moral corruption, showing a bankruptcy of bourgeois moral values, and "Heimat" addresses the end of submissiveness within the traditional bourgeois family unit and the beginning of the new modern individual. Themes such as these are what separated the new German literature at the turn of the century from the realists. With time Sudermann felt increasingly separated from the

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Volksseele angesehen werden, und solche Zeichen, bei denen sich wichtige Aenderungen im nationalem Charakter kund thun, verdienen die entschiedenste Beachtung."

nineteenth-century realist authors that he had so adored as an aspiring author. On November 26, 1897, for example, Sudermann writes, "Dann zu Fulda mit Heysechen Ehepaar. Heyse und ich gerathen in leidenschaftliche, doch elegant geführte diskussion über Realismus u. Idealismus, neue u. alte Kunst. Unüberbrückbare Kluft, bei allem guten Willen. Verständnis unmöglich" (*Tagebuch II*). Reading Sudermann today, one might find the nuances between the literature of nineteenth-century realism and an author such as Sudermann to be insignificant, but at the time this was, as Sudermann points out, an "unüberbrückbare Kluft."

## **2. A Typical Self-Loathing German Bourgeois?**

It is not uncommon that the desire for individualism among members of the late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie led them to despise their own class. Considering that the bourgeoisie as a whole was extremely heterogeneous in nature, it is no wonder that the innate human desire to distinguish oneself manifested itself from time to time. Often such expressions could be summarized by Freud's idea of "the narcissism of small differences" that he outlines in his work *Civilization and its Discontents*, which he believed was an outlet for natural human aggression. Others, however, have used the term to describe acts of an individual to differentiate him or herself from others in order to feign uniqueness. Many among the aesthetes, believing they had deeper sensibilities, to feel more than the average bourgeois, harbored hostility toward their class. Peter Gay writes,

Each critic had his favorite instance of the boring bourgeoisie: Stendahl despised all provincials; Flaubert, nearly all Frenchmen. Heine, for his part,



detested the English middle classes who were, he thought, the very embodiment of vulgar materialism and egotistical piety [...] Even more vehement than Heine, Gustave Flaubert had a consuming contempt for the bourgeoisie that amounted to a neurotic aversion: finding the bourgeois literally nauseating, he once signed a letter ‘bougeoisophobus.’” (*Education of the Senses* 36)

Being a “bourgeoisophobus” carried with it a certain degree of cultural capital; the more one disdained the conventional elements of being bourgeois the more artistic one might seem.

The case of Hermann Sudermann and the German bourgeoisie is a peculiar story. Not only did his lower-middle-class origins cause him to harbor some resentment toward the wealthier class, as well as a life-long inferiority complex, he also sought to establish himself as an aesthete who was superior in taste and intellect to bourgeois conventionality. At the same time, however, his career and sense of self-worth were predicated on his acceptance by the urban German middle class. In a complicated fashion, seeking to be bourgeois in taste, thought, consumption, and association, while simultaneously hating that, presents a sort of cognitively dissonant self-loathing. Different from the self-hatred that Sander Gilman describes as “‘outsiders’ acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group—that group in society which they see as defining them—as a reality,” Sudermann’s loathing of his own class was a choice of personal style and a reaction to his feelings of inferiority (*Jewish Self-Hatred* 2). This antipathy toward the bourgeoisie also belongs in part to the trend of aestheticism at the turn of the century. This sentiment, I argue, and which will be discussed in greater detail in

another chapter, contributed to the disengagement and withdrawal of some of the German bourgeoisie into the twentieth century; Sudermann, I maintain, was one of them.

### **a. Born of the Bourgeoisie**

In 1922 Sudermann released what was planned to be one of several installments of his memoirs, which, due to poor sales, were never completed. Titled *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, this work covers the time of Sudermann's birth up until his breakthrough into the world of liberal journalism for the Rudolf Mosse Press. In it one can get a sense of what influenced him, impressionable moments, opinion of himself, and *Weltanschauung*. Overall, Sudermann depicts himself in the novel as an outsider who, through hard work, discipline, and chance, is able to climb socially to the heights of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. He tells his readers that growing up in the remote province of East Prussia he was not born with the privileges of some: "Der Beginn des neuen Lebens war trübe genug" (Sudermann, *Bilderbuch* 26). This echoes the theme of his first novel, *Frau Sorge* (1887), in which he reconstructs some of the difficulties he had as a child growing up in the hinterlands of German civilization. He remembers, "Jawohl, Frau Sorge – die war fortan bei uns zu Hause" (*Bilderbuch* 26). This first novel, in the style of the *Entwicklungsroman*, charts the against-the-current development of Paul Meyhöfer, who, despite the circumstances of an impoverished home life and prohibitive social and natural environment, is able to overcome the odds and find success like a protagonist from a Horatio Alger novel.

This story would remain the most optimistic of all his works, and perhaps the one that most corresponds to the bourgeois faith in hard work and progress.

As a young man with an undistinguished background, Sudermann must have harbored the optimistic sentiments that he too could pull himself up out of the lowly social conditions into which he was born as Baron Münchhausen could lift himself out of a swamp by pulling his own hair. He recounts his formal education in East Prussia, as well as all of the hard-knocks and encounters that contributed to it. In doing so, he constructs a narrative of his formative years that resembles the form of a traditional German *Bildungsroman*. This national German genre, as Todd Kontje calls it,<sup>13</sup> traces the development of a character as he or she searches for their “calling” in life. In classic examples of this genre, such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*, and Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben*, the character must first suffer a series of hardships and encounter a diverse set of people and circumstances before he can know what is his true calling in life. The point is that every experience adds to one’s collective knowledge or *Bildung*. As Goethe writes in *Wilhelm Meister*, “Alles, was uns begegnet, läßt Spuren zurück, alles trägt unmerklich zu unserer Bildung bei” (659). Similar to the *Bildungsroman*, Sudermann recounts each encounter, each experience to demonstrate how they contribute to the development of his career. This is an enlightened belief that the human subject can be transformed through experience; one is not predestined, but rather is born with a *tabula rasa*, for which the subject is master. This, however,

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<sup>13</sup> See: Todd Kontje. *The German Bildungsroman: History of a Genre*. New York: Camden House, 1993.

becomes inconsistent when Sudermann reduces some of his experiences to fate. A key theme in the body of this author's works, as well as his life, is the tension between agency and fate. This is a struggle between an optimistic *Weltanschauung* that one is in control of one's destiny, and the pessimistic resignation that one's future will be determined by outside forces. This tension will be explored in greater depth in the analysis of *Der tolle Professor*.

Similar to Heinrich Lee in the 1879 edition of Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*, Sudermann's rite of passage includes a number of failed career paths before he finally arrives at his "calling." Whereas the figure Heinrich Lee undertakes a series of failed attempts at becoming an artist before settling on a career as a civil servant, Sudermann is a kind of reverse Heinrich Lee because he first tries out a string of middle-class professions before achieving a career as a writer of fiction. His first attempt came after he could no longer tolerate living with his aunt in Elbing where he was being schooled, which prompted him to explore other options, since other lodging arrangements there would not fit his parents' budget. An interest in chemistry led him to a fascination with the practice of pharmacy. Like the great German author of realism, Theodor Fontane, Sudermann too would have his chance to test out this profession, when a pharmacist in his homeland offered him an apprenticeship. This did not last much longer than a summer as Sudermann notes, because he quickly grew bored with the profession. He writes, "Jedenfalls bildete ich in meiner Großmannssucht mir ein, ich hätte nichts mehr zu lernen" (*Bilderbuch* 127). This career path, however, found approval with his father. Among nineteenth-century men of the bourgeoisie, who had ambitions that transcended the

boundaries of acceptable bourgeois professions, this seems to have often been the case. Sudermann writes in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, “Mein Vater war in dieser Zeit stets gut zu mir. Seiner Vorstellung von bürgerlichem Vorwärtskommen entsprach mein Werdegang und die Zukunft, der ich entgegensteuerte” (130). In his memoir, *Jugend in Wien*, Sudermann’s contemporary Arthur Schnitzler writes about his father’s disapproval for any activity that interfered with his career path to becoming a physician. Likewise, earlier in the century, the premier philosopher of pessimism, Arthur Schopenhauer, was only able to break free from his father’s insistence of him carrying on the family merchant business with the death of the elder Schopenhauer. Certainly, among the Oedipal conflicts between nineteenth-century fathers and sons of the bourgeoisie, there was a psychological dissonance between the desire to please the father and the desire to take control of one’s own destiny. As it would go, Sudermann did not yet have the confidence in his own agency to tell his father this career path was not suitable for him. Fate acted for him, and a knee ailment rendered him unsuitable for the work.

After a time at the Albertus University of Königsberg, Sudermann, much like the figure Fritz Kühne in *Der tolle Professor*, heads to Berlin to study and attempt to establish himself in Germany’s metropolis. He recounts that he soon recognized the difficulty of integrating into bourgeois society there. As an impecunious young man from East Prussia, the aspiring aesthete found himself out of place among the bourgeoisie of the wealthy western Berlin. Sudermann’s troubled relationship with the bourgeois class of Germany is one that stayed with him until his death.

Originating from the crude petit bourgeoisie of the East and socially climbing his

way into the caste of Germany's *Bildungsbürgertum*, Sudermann was through and through bourgeois, and even the success of his work can be attributed to its appeal to bourgeois aesthetic taste. Sudermann recounts being once invited to a social gathering of some of the finest specimens of western Berlin's bourgeois society. He remembers asking himself, "Wie würde ich bestehen vor denen, die auf der Menschheit Höhen wandelten? Würde ich elegant genug sein? Würde ich weltläufig genug sein? Und vor allem: würde mein armes Kandidatdasein nicht zum Steine des Anstoßes werden?" (*Bilderbuch* 333). Identifiable here is an inferiority complex stemming from his East-Prussian pauper origins that is a plausible cause for his enmity toward the upper class.<sup>14</sup> He recalls his powerlessness and naïveté in relation to the female members of this caste, and how he and others such as himself would do everything to win their favor: "In dionysischem Rausche würden sie sich emporschwingen über die Schwere dieses Erdendaseins, die uns arme Bürgerskinder zeitlebens im Banne hält" (*Bilderbuch* 333). Evident in this recollection is Sudermann's obsession with the notion of *Schicksal* (fate), which, together with the conflicting concept of individual agency, makes for a primary theme in the oeuvre of the author. But the idea of fate, especially with regard to social class and custom, will be of particular interest in this study, because it is a central theme in *Der tolle Professor*. Not only does the protagonist in that novel have to reckon with the fact that his *Schicksal* did not afford him with the wealth and

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<sup>14</sup> For more about this, see Paul Whitaker, "The Inferiority Complex in Hermann Sudermann's Life and Works." *Monatshefte* 40.2 (1948): 69–81.

name of the upper classes, but he sees how this society wields power in deciding the fates of others who do not belong to their circles or abide by their customs.

Much like his figure Professor Sieburth, Hermann Sudermann held a strong dislike for bourgeois customs, morality, styles, etc. in his diaries. This is somewhat curious, considering his own styles, preferences, morals, readership and theater milieu were almost exclusive to the German bourgeoisie. It is difficult to discern exactly what it was that brought about this bourgeoisie self-loathing, but one can detect a kind of inferiority complex produced by his lower middle-class familial background and the accompanying protestant work ethic that fueled a sense of inadequacy. He addresses these feelings in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* when he explains that “jede preußische Kleinstadt, jede Siedlung, die nicht rein ländlichen Charakter trägt, zerfällt in vier streng gesonderte Schichten [...] Aus einer in die andere überzugehen, ist schwer, fast unmöglich” (56). The four classes in which Sudermann divides Prussian society are worth a closer examination because they are somewhat different than what one would typically consider exclusive classes. The first class, he tells, is that of the “Honoratioren,” to which he counts the landed aristocracy, as well as affluent merchants and some people with higher degrees of education. This first grouping is interesting because he puts the *haute* bourgeoisie together with the nobility, while these two groups are typically considered mutually exclusive. The second class, he tells us has the largest range, containing everyone that can somewhat be considered educated. To this grouping belong the lesser civil servants, landlords, and other shopkeepers. The next class is that of the craftsmen, who populate the German *Volksschule*, and who belong to “Schützen-und

Turnvereine." The last grouping is for the servants, poor and the nameless<sup>15</sup> (56). Sudermann accounts his belonging to the second class as the greatest pain of his youth and asks whether this in turn can account for his drive toward success. As a youth, he tells, the blame for the family's inability to move toward the first class was placed with his father, who was far too humble in every sense of the word for this. Sudermann tells in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* of the financial difficulties of the family: "Dazu kam die Not, die immer gleichbleibende quälende Not, die ihn ganze Nächte lang stöhnend und händeringend im Zimmer umherlaufen ließ. Oft wachte ich auf und hörte durch den Fußboden sein wortlos fluchendes: 'Äh, äh, äh.' Und die Stimme der Mutter, die selber weinend ihm Trost zusprach" (57). He says that having had a childhood such as this, his autobiographical novel, *Frau Sorge*, came from much more than pure imagination.

### **b. The Mind of the Bourgeoisie**

A hatred for the German middle class, and thus self-hatred, comes forth even more pronounced in Sudermann's diaries, where scornful phrases about the *Bürgertum* and *Bürgerlichkeit* seem to abound. An entry dated April 31, 1898, for example, describes a visit with his cousin: "Hauch v. Kleinstadt und Kleinbürgerlichkeitsjammer verbreitet sich um" (Tagebuch II). Or on May 15, 1900,

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<sup>15</sup> Die oberste Kaste sind die Honoratioren. Dazu gehören die Studierten, die Gutsbesitzer, die wohlhabendsten Kaufleute und einige wenige sonst, die durch Anbiederung oder Konnexionen darin Unterschlupf finden. Die zweite Kaste heißt der Mittelstand; zu ihm wird alles gerechnet, was noch halbwegs auf Ansehen oder Bildung Anspruch machen kann: die Ladenbesitzer und viele sonst, die sich des Verkehrs mit der "Crème" nicht würdig fühlen. Von ihr wiederum durch Klüfte getrennt ist der Handwerkerstand, dessen Nachwuchs die Volksschule besucht und der in Schützen- und Turnvereine seine gesellschaftliche Zusammenfassung erfährt. Die Dienenden, die Armen und Namenlosen, bilden die letzte Schicht. Von ihr wird geschwiegen, also schweige auch ich.



in the midst of his great efforts against the *Lex Heinze* he writes, “nach so viel Arbeit u[nd] Sorge mein Werk der Bürgerlichkeit preisgegeben zu sehn!” (Tagebuch II). Interestingly, Sudermann is also derisive when he specifically addresses the East-Prussian middle class, which is also indicative of a self-loathing. While on a trip to his East-Prussian *Heimat*, a diary entry on July 25, 1900 scornfully describes the middle-class population of the city formerly known as Cranz: “Durch langweiliges schlecht gekleidetes Spießbürgervolk” (Tagebuch II). On July 16, 1901, after picking up his mother and her East-Prussian friends, who are visiting Berlin, he writes, “Eine ganze Collection v. Heydekrüger Kleinbürgerthum” (Tagebuch II). Or on August 22, 1901, while in the Swiss city of Chur, a Bavarian tells Sudermann of the unwelcoming nature of the locals, about which he notes in his diary, “Tyrannei des Spießbürgerthums, gegen die es kein Auflehnen giebt!” (Tagebuch II). Suderman, as much as he directs his anger at the *Bürgerthum*, also finds consolation in the middle-class customs and manners, as that is all that he knows. For instance, on August 1, 1902, while in East Prussia for a funeral, in a sentimental passage, Sudermann writes, “In Gesellschaft der Trauer durchzieht mich ein Gefühl, wie tief ich [...] allem in Bürgerthum wurzle u. wie ich hineingehöre” (Tagebuch II). Nevertheless, just eight days later on August 10, 1902, in a discussion with his friend, journalist Siegmund Feldmann, Sudermann writes, “Mit Feldmann in wilde Discussion über demokratische Nothwendigkeiten wobei ich ihm die Verrottung des Bürgerthums durch Argumentation ad hominen klarmache” (Tagebuch II). While on vacation on February 15, 1904, Sudermann writes of his fellow traveler Dernburg<sup>16</sup> and how he

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<sup>16</sup> It is unclear whether this is the German politician and publisher Friedrich Dernburg, which would

is embarrassed to be seen with this man, whose dress style he describes as that of the “Kleinbürgerthum”<sup>17</sup> (Tagebuch III). In other passages, Sudermann sees the characteristic of “bürgerlich” in other people of lower stature as an honorable trait. For example, on February 5, 1907, he writes about an encounter with a prostitute: “Herumgestrolcht. Eine Dirne gefunden, die wenig vergnüglich - aber voll braver Bürgerlichkeit. Ihr höheres Streben - das Ideal, das sie nicht zum Vieh herabsinken läßt, ist die eigene Wirtschaft. - So billig ist das ‘Ideal’ zu haben” (Tagebuch IV). During the Weimar Republic, however, Sudermann’s middle-class material conditions depend on a deeper solidarity with his class interests, in order to maintain his property from the communist interests. On February 21, 1921, Sudermann notes about the elections, “Abendblatt letzte Resultate zu erfahren. Sieg der Rechten im Bürgertum und Proletariat. Aber diese beiden stehen wie feindliche Nationen einander gegenüber. Ein Herüber und Hinüber giebt es nicht” (Tagebuch VII). On July 1, 1926, Sudermann makes an observation at the Berlin Zoo about the *Bürgertum* in the Weimar Republic, “Dann auf der Terasse gesessen. Der jetzt übliche Nepp. Unten das Bürgertum bei Biere. Barbarei – Diese Scheidung!” (Tagebuch IX).

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be sensible considering that the date corresponds to those of their letter exchange in the DLA-Marbach.

<sup>17</sup> February 15, 1904: “Großes Treiben in der Halle. Froh, daß ich nicht dabei bin, wenn kein anderer Verkehr mir blüht, als Dernburg, der mit gelben Stiefeln nach dem Dinner herumläuft, Ich weiss wohl, daß ich hier eine Ungeheuerlichkeit schreibe und wenn jemand nach meinem Tode diese Zeilen lesen sollte, wird er sagen: Er ist gerichtet! Aber Wahrheit über Alles! Auch die Richtenden werden einst zum Teufel gehen! Ich bin aber so geartet, daß wenn Jemand sich selbst zum Plebejer macht, indem er mit schwarzem Gehrock, weißer Kravatte und gelben Staubstiefel/Raubstiefel in Salon herumläuft, seine Nähe mir den Athem beklemmt und mich in die Atmosphäre des Kleinbürgerthums hinterzieht [...] Alles Stylwidrige empört mich, und diese Mischung riecht nach Außern mit Zwiebschmalz.” (Tagebuch III)

It is interesting that even in his hatred toward the bourgeoisie one can sense the bourgeois character of this hatred. Sudermann regularly sought treatment such as hypnosis for what he believed were nerve problems. As Peter Gay has noted, these types of ailments were typically bourgeois at the turn of the century. He writes,

One did not have to be an obsessive neurotic to be a nineteenth-century bourgeois, but it helped. It is interesting how proud Freud was of having been the first to isolate and name this ailment. The Victorian century was, we have seen, obsessed with control and an abiding fear of its loss. Good manners, respect for privacy, self-restraint—all the bourgeois virtues their critics denigrated as bourgeois defects—were stratagems designed to discipline the chaos of experience and master the pressures of passions. (*Cultivation of Hatred* 509)

Sudermann usually received treatment for his nervousness from the notable clinician Oskar Vogt but on July 31, 1921 he performed an exercise on himself to ease his nervous bourgeois mind. Afterwards he logged in his diary,

Eine Selbsthypnose, wie sie mir lange nicht beschert war, tobt sich aus und lindert ein wenig die Qual des Bewußtseins, mein Leben verfehlt, durch Bürgerlichkeit und ihr Korrelat, das versteckte Laster, verhängt zu haben. Dreißig Jahre bin ich nun bald verheiratet, habe die edelste [...] aufopferndste der Frauen, und niemals bis meinen letzten Atemzuge werde ich mir diese Verwirrung verzeihen die meinen Aufstieg gebrochen, mein Zu- Grunde - gehen. Trotz, Trotz und Fleiß, Trotz Kampfhaftem Greifen nach Leben in Dreißigjährigem Kämpfe mit geistigen Verarmen doch endlich zur Vollendung gebracht hat. Schwamm drüber! Arbeiten, bis den Tod mir die Feder aus der Hand nimmt. Was anders giebt es." (Tagebuch VII).

Here Sudermann blames succumbing to bourgeois life for his mental anguish. His preferred resolution to combat the predicament, however, is even more bourgeois: a stricter work regimen. Such pledges to greater industriousness are common throughout his diaries. For example, already in November 1893 he notes at the end of his diary: “Meine Gebote: 1.) Nicht Trödeln 2.) Nicht Klagen 3.) Kavallier sein 4.) Noblesse oblige d.h. dir ward viel gegeben, du mußt auch viel entsagen 5.) Was geht mich das alles an? Feinde etc.” (Tagebuch I). Sudermann’s relation to his work was less of a desire for immortality in the pantheon of German writers—although the fantasy of grandeur was always present—and more of what Max Weber described as the protestant work ethic. The completion of a work and the start of a new project provided him self-affirmation and existential grounding. This identification with production, however, was fertile ground for feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Indeed, Sudermann’s mind, much like that of his protagonist Sieburth who also finds refuge from in his work, was that of a tortured bourgeois.

Marriage, Sudermann perceived, was the root of his bourgeoisification and therefore the cause of his inadequacy as an author. In 1891, he married the widowed Cläre Lauckner, also an author, who brought three children into the marriage. From the beginning, the marriage was complicated. On November 28, 1891 he began this new chapter in his life prefaced with a new chapter in his diaries titled: “Mitleid für sie, Arbeit für mich” (Tagebücher I). Haunted by thoughts of becoming a bourgeois family man, he dedicated himself to his work, traveling, as well as periods of depression, in which he was plagued by thoughts of divorce and suicide. On April 27, 1892 he notes in his diary, “Muß ich vorwärts schreiten, sonst

komm ich nicht mehr lebendig aus diesem verfluchten Eheabenteuer heraus” (Tagebuch I). Between 1891 and 1892 Sudermann and his family moved between the cities of Königsberg, Rauschen, and Dresden. Although Sudermann was absent during much of this time, a note in his diary after a six-day stay with Cläre and the children—Cläre had given birth to Sudermann’s daughter, Hede in the summer of 1892—on September 8, 1892, reads: “Schluß! Gott sei Dank! Gott sei Dank! So lange ich lebe werde ich nichts so hassen wie Königsberg. Kein Jahr meines Daseins ist für mich gewesen wie das meiner Ehe! Schluß! Schluß! Schluß!” (Tagebuch I).

Rootedness, familial affairs, dependency, compromise, fidelity—all ideas that are important to fostering an upstanding bourgeois household—Sudermann believed, were draining him of his artistic creativity, thwarting his erotic impulses, and causing the nervousness that sometimes produced suicidal thoughts. Some of this of course had to do with his self-image as an artist. Artists, it was thought, had an intrinsic capacity to feel deeper and combine sensuality with affection—the content in the literature the bourgeoisie voraciously consumed. But as Peter Gay notes, “The very idea of romantic love and the much-advertised irregular private lives of many artists in the nineteenth century were so many reproaches to that monument to insincerity, that bland and deceptive façade, bourgeois marriage” (*Education of the Senses* 36). As a celebrity author, Sudermann’s life was much advertised at the height of his career with newspapers regularly running stories about him. His prowess for romance was also surely a topic among the salons of Berlin, which was even caricatured in literary magazines. One such romance before his marriage was with Frida Uhl, daughter of a Viennese author and literary critic. Uhl was a

prototype of Alma Mahler, who after her love affair with Sudermann went on to marry the dramatist August Strindberg and mother a child from Frank Wedekind, as well as become a salon creature *par excellence*.

Cläre Lauckner was far from a woman such as Frida Uhl. Like a good bourgeois marriage, *Eros* was absent from the union, even though there was affection. His dissatisfaction with family life erupted intermittently throughout the marriage between periods of seeming contentment that grew longer as they aged. It is safe to say that he often took for granted the benefits he reaped from family life such as stability and how much support Cläre provided him in his profession. After Cläre's death in 1924, the grief-stricken Sudermann came to realize how much he had taken her for granted and he wrote a biographical novel, *Die Frau des Steffen Tromholt* that charts the vicissitudes of their marriage, which appeared in 1927. The main character, an artist, expresses Sudermann's difficulties with marriage and bourgeois life. The artist Tromholt is torn between his career along with the bohemian lifestyle and the woman he loves and the accompanying bourgeois marriage. Early in the novel he explains his feelings toward the latter: "Sehen Sie, meine Mutter hatte ihr Lebtage in kleinbürgerlichen Kreisen gelebt, und deren Moral war festgewachsen an ihr. Ich aber hasse nichts so sehr wie die Bürgerlichkeit – was man so Gartenlaubenkitsch nennt . . . Ehe, Familie, Kinderkriegen, Pantoffeln und häusliche Lampe – das sind alles Greuel für mich" (29). Tromholt's problem is that he cannot find a comfortable middle ground between his life as an artist and a bourgeois family life with the woman he loves. He tells Brigitte, who later becomes his wife, early after their acquaintance that whoever marries her "muß

Familienvater werden und Haushaltungsvorstand und in der bürgerlichen Ordnung einen würdigen Platz einnehmen . . . Das alles wäre für mich der Tod – künstlerisch wie menschlich” (52). Eventually they marry, which satisfies his affection for Brigitte, but precipitates a decline in his career. Not unlike Sudermann, who often cruelly blamed Cläre for his gradual decline in popularity, Tromholt blames the marriage. In a bout of depression, he projects his career frustration on Brigitte. He tells her, “Die Ehe ist Schuld! Die bürgerliche Moral ist Schuld! [...] Und nun sitzen wir drin in dem gott-gewollten Käfig und beißen uns an den Gittern die Lippen blutig” (242). It is striking how much blame and derision is directed at the “Bürgertum” or everything “bürgerlich.” These terms are used as epithets to describe all that is boring, mundane, quotidian, void of intellect or beauty. Steffen attempts to de-bourgeoisify Brigitte as best he can: “Und ob ihr Geschmack noch immer etwas ängstlich und bürgerlich blieb, sein Einfluß beflügelte ihren Mut und erfüllte sie mit neuen Ideen” (189). Trapped in marriage, Tromholt justifies his *haute* bourgeois behavior as a remedy for his bourgeois ailment: “Den Pomp, den bunten Trara, den mußte er haben, den er erschien ihm als Entschuldigung, als Entsöhnung dafür, daß er sich durch seine Ehe von der Bürgerlichkeit hatte einfangen lassen. War er für die Bohême verdorben, nach der seine Sehnsucht noch immer zurückschaute, so sollte die Großartigkeit der Lebensführung wenigstens Ersatz dafür bringen” (170). As strange as this seems, this was also characteristic of Sudermann who became known for his lavish bourgeois lifestyle with frequent trips to the Mediterranean, extended stays at spas, spending sprees on antique art, and the purchase of a manor estate outside of Berlin. One of his greatest critics,

Maximilian Harden asserted with regards to Sudermann and his life of luxury and leisure: “Und der braucht viel Geld. Er lebt wie ein Bankdirektor, spielt den collectionneur, giebt große Diners, flüchtet, wenn er Luftveränderung sucht, nach Italien, in alte Paläste, hat bei Berlin ein Landgut gekauft und beträchtlich arrondirt, das er nur ein paar Monate bewohnt, und erzählt bei Tisch, er werde sich ein Automobil anschaffen” (*Kampfgenosse Sudermann* 39).

For someone who had sworn hatred against the German bourgeoisie, Sudermann fits nearly perfectly the behavior described in Thorstein Veblen’s notion of “conspicuous consumption” and “conspicuous leisure.” The author had no trouble affording such a way of life. Before 1900 the royalties from the publication of his yearly theater piece alone yielded him 100,000 Reichsmarks, not to mention his earnings from the many productions of his plays as the most performed German dramatist of the pre-World War I era, and the publication of his prose works (Bramsted 277). The purchase of the manor estate outside Berlin at Blankensee in 1903 was the ultimate sign of both of these. Among the nineteenth century bourgeoisie, the concept of home ownership was a symbol of freedom and a status marker within this heterogeneous class of people. The stage direction notes in Hermann Sudermann’s works provide exact details as to how the various homes of his figures should be decorated in order that his bourgeois audience could immediately discern if it is the upper middle class or *Hochbürgertum*, the lower middle class or *Kleinbürgertum* or the educated middleclass or *Bildungsbürgertum* that was being depicted. An article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* from 1908 states, “In jedem Kulturmensch wohnt die Sehnsucht nach einem eigenen Heim, das er nach



freiem Ermessen für seine Persönlichkeit gestalten kann" ("Künstler als Grundeigentümer"). For the readership of this liberal newspaper, such a statement was a self-evident truth that had been fostered during the era of the Enlightenment. Earlier in the nineteenth century Hegel had propagated the importance of property in becoming a rational, free and whole individual in his *Philosophie des Rechts* (1820). Instead of treating the deeper socio-economic and metaphysical dimensions of property ownership, the article addresses the significance of homeownership among Germany's top-tiered class of *Bildungsbürgertum*: its bestselling authors. It goes on, "Für niemand aber ist die Umgebung, in der er lebt wichtiger als für den Künstler" ("Künstler als Grundeigentümer"). Although it was customary that aesthetes exuded a higher degree of individuality than other subclasses of the bourgeoisie, there was still a degree of conformity. Blankensee, which Sudermann strove to create according to his own tastes and imagination, was in many respects a mere practice of "keeping up with the Joneses." In fact, the ownership of a home away from the city was hardly an exception among authors who could afford it. "Als Grundbesitzer abseits der Großstadt," the article explains, "ist in erster Linie Gerhart Hauptmann zu nennen. Er hat sich in die Einsamkeit der Gebirgswelt geflüchtet und in Agnetendorf angesiedelt" ("Künstler als Grundeigentümer"). After Richard Wagner's infamous "Villa Wahnfried," the article lists a great many other German aesthetes who set up luxurious residences such as Max Dreyer's country home on the island of Rügen; Paul Heyse's summer villa in Salo, Italy; the plethora who settled in the colony in Western Berlin, Grunewald; Ludwig Fulda's home in the Dolomites in South Tirol; Gustav Frenssen's residence in Blankensee near Hamburg;

Richard Strauß's in Upper Bavaria; and the actress Agnes Sorma, who lived on the Wahnsee outside of Berlin.

As stated earlier, sensuality was not a characteristic of a bourgeois marriage, and the matrimony of Hermann and Clara Sudermann can attest to that. At least in the case of the husband in this instance, it is not as if sensuality disappeared from life after the wedding vows. Instead, it was sought elsewhere, and to be sure, Sudermann had a formidable sexual appetite quite like the libertine Professor Sieburth. Sieburth's philosophy of "Tages- und Nachtansichten" was for the author a reality. In his diaries it is striking how many philanderings both before and after his marriage are noted, as well as how they are noted. The contrast between the logging of his structured bourgeois life and his so-called "Straßenabenteuer" seems extremely foreign to the contemporary reader. In the entry dated September 9, 1899, for instance, Sudermann's deep interest in the Dreyfus Affair is woven together with his search for a prostitute. He writes, "Nachmittags während ich arbeite, bringt Lehmann die Nachricht, Dreyfuss sei freigesprochen [...] Wüst nach einer Dirne umhergezogen, die nicht finde [...] Um 9, als Treppe hinuntersteige, weil Unruhe nach ein Weibe mich hinausjagt, meldet mir Portier, daß Dreyfuss 10 Jahre bekommen hat. Eine milde Dirne gefunden, mit der, wahnsinnig wie ich bin, in den Ernsten Südwesten ziehe. Um 12 zufrieden daheim" (Tagebuch II). This passage contains both the narrative threads of the bourgeois intellectual interested in this major world event, as well as the sex addict seeking a fix. In an entry on August 22, 1903, the separation of affection and sensuality is made clear: "Zu Cläre. Geliebt seit langem nicht mehr [...] In Berlin bei der Ankunft Herzklopfend. Weibstoll. Krank vor

Phantasiegier [...]Im Dunkeln Park umher [...] und nach Mädeln ausgeschaut” (Tagebuch III). Such erotic adventures, however, weighed heavily on him. On May 26, 1906 he writes, “Schwer nervös erwacht. Uebliche Nervenangst, wie immer, wenn bei einer Dirne war” (Tagebuch IV). It was common for him to have a bout of depression after extramarital erotic encounters, which he attributed to “Nerven.” For the troubled bourgeois mind of Hermann Sudermann, however, it may have been more likely that this mental anguish was coming from his strict bourgeois conscience or superego.

## CHAPTER IV

### GERMAN LIBERALISM AND HERMANN SUDERMANN: AN IDEOLOGY IN CRISIS?

*Liberal ist, wer die Zeichen der Zeit erkennt und danach handelt.*  
— Gustav Stresemann

#### **A. Introduction: Hermann Sudermann and German Liberalism: Love and Hate?**

The preceding chapter examined Hermann Sudermann's treatment of the German bourgeoisie in his socially critical novel *Der tolle Professor*, particularly the culture, customs, and habits of this class. This chapter will focus on another aspect of the German bourgeoisie with which Sudermann took issue: liberalism. Although the dominant middle-class political ideology throughout the nineteenth century, liberalism faced new challenges with the maturation of modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is more, the unification of Germany under the conservative Prussian crown put German liberals in a precarious position within the political landscape of Imperial Germany. Not only had they failed in 1848 to achieve what they believed was their historical mission in creating a German nation state, Bismarck took from them this purpose, doing what they had not been able to do. Such a lack of efficacy coupled with what Sudermann believed to be a lack of principle and integrity caused him to lose faith in the ideology of his class and his youth. Even though he began his career in the early 1880s as a journalist for the liberal Rudolf Mosse Press, Sudermann became disenchanted with the liberal political milieu early on. Instead of the politics that descended from the enlightened

and revolutionary ideals of 1848, Sudermann saw liberal politicians as having become spineless agents of self-interest, caring more for narrow economic gain than for universal ideas. It appears as though Sudermann's dissatisfaction with liberalism rested upon a romanticized notion of earlier nineteenth-century liberalism that really was never what he thought it to be. In this way, he falls victim to the *Sonderweg* thesis of German history. Historian David Blackbourn, for instance, tells us, "Liberals were not democrats. True, they criticized the arbitrary state in the name of the 'people,' organized petitions, and held liberal banquets and other politically based festivities. But liberals were alarmed by the poorest and most ignorant, critical of those they thought of as the 'masses.' They rejected universal manhood suffrage, as they rejected female suffrage, because the poor (like women) were thought to be dependent and suggestible" (*The Long Nineteenth Century* 131). At least a few of these points, if not the majority of them, describe Sudermann's own views.

In his later years, looking back sentimentally on the Germany of his youth from the Weimar Republic under the grips of the Treaty of Versailles, Sudermann was also bothered by how liberals—including himself—had once taken for granted their great *bête noire* Otto von Bismarck and contributed to his political downfall. This self-criticism is rooted in perhaps the most common theme among his works: the Nietzschean concept of *ressentiment*. Strangely enough, it was a feeling of resentment toward the postwar conditions imposed upon Germany after World War I that spurred him to resent the way in which liberals resented the much-mythologized great man Bismarck. All things considered, Sudermann's

disenchantment with liberal politics caused him not to become a reactionary as some suggested while he was still alive, but rather to entrench himself deeper into a *Weltanschauung* of aestheticism and disengaging in political matters.

**B. *Der tolle Professor*: The Regression of the Progressive or Progression of the Reaction?**

In *Der tolle Professor* both the student Fritz Kühne and Professor Sieburth undergo transformations that detach them from having any firm political inclinations. While the teacher disrupts the student's nationalistic and reactionary worldview of obedience to authority, he also overcomes his deep-seated hatred toward Bismarck. Considering the novel's subtitle "Ein Roman aus der Bismarckzeit," it is curious that the name Bismarck is not embodied in any of the figures but remains an idea of contention between the warring factions of the liberals and conservatives in the novel. At the end of *Der tolle Professor* we are left with a message that there are greater metaphysical truths than the petty world of parliamentary politics. Such a call to aestheticism was nothing unique at the time and such a worldview had already been outlined in great detail by the author Thomas Mann in his 1918 book *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. The novel, therefore, is not only a criticism of what Sudermann believed was becoming of the much mythologized ideals of 1848, but also a scathing rebuke of the factionalism along party lines in the Weimar Republic.

## 1. University Politics

Sudermann's choice of setting *Der tolle Professor* at the University of Königsberg—or at any university of the nineteenth century for that matter—is a particularly interesting setting for a novel set in the Bismarck era. Theobald Ziegler describes the German academic institution as a “Staat im Kleinen” (*Der deutsche Student* 37). Compared to other countries, the German university had a peculiar political environment through the course of the nineteenth century. Not only did Germany have one of the best university systems in the world by the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the student culture had also acquired a reputation. The long nineteenth century in Germany was a time that brought forth some of the greatest minds of all time, prompting Madame de Staël to coin the famous phrase, “Land der Dichter und Denker.” The University of Berlin, founded in 1810 by the educational reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt, had attracted the *crème de la crème* of the intelligentsia. This model of research-intensive university influenced other institutions of higher learning around the world. As the nineteenth century saw the birth of German national consciousness, the university played no small role in fostering nationalism both by its intellectual production and the extra-curricular activities of its professors and students. The famed brothers Grimm collected folk tales of the people and began the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. The philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who later served as Rector of the University of Berlin, by then renamed Wilhelm-Friedrichs-Universität, delivered his famous *Reden and die deutsche Nation*, an appeal to German nationalism in reaction to Napoleonic occupation. Moreover, students, at the time of the War of Liberation against

Napoleon, played a significant role, as many followed the call to arms in defense of the *Vaterland*. The political activities of university professors in the nineteenth century reached its pinnacle with the failed revolution in 1848, when the National Assembly in Frankfurt consisted of so many professors that it prompted Benjamin Disraeli to write in a letter: "Fifty mad professors at Frankfort, calling themselves a Diet, self appointed, have absolutely invaded Denmark & will not / conclude their labors till they have established a federal republic like the U.S." (24). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the historian Gordon Craig notes that political activism among the academicians had dried up and in its stead grew a reverence for *Weltfremdheit* or a removal from practical life (174). To be sure this was in part due to the increasing control the state wielded over the universities, as they were entirely dependent upon the funding for the growing costs of higher education. Hermann Sudermann paints a vivid picture of the state of affairs on German universities at the end of the nineteenth century in *Der tolle Professor*.

Much of the nationalistic fervor among the students found expression in the fraternal organizations of *Burschenschaften* and *Verbinderungen*, which soared after Napoleon had been defeated. Among organizations, with their devotion to the national cause and German tradition, the nationalistic fervor that was unleashed in reaction to the French occupation was continued. Even though *Burschenschaften* were officially banned in 1819 with the Carlsbad Decrees following the murder of the consul and playwright August von Kotzebue at the hands of a member Karl Ludwig Sand, they continued to play a role in student life in Germany. Their curious rituals of consuming copious amounts of beer, as well as their own Latin-based



vocabulary and their codex of honor, which was cause for their practice of dueling, gave German university life something of a unique character when compared with other Western university environments. In a lecture course about German student life in 1894/1895, the intellectual historian Theobald Ziegler professed to his students: “Wir sind auf einer deutschen Hochschule und sind hin und her Deutsche; uns interessieren darum hier nicht das *Quartier latin* zu Paris oder die Colleges in Oxford und Cambridge oder die Harvard University in Boston” (*Der deutsche Student* 10).

Hermann Sudermann was given a first-hand glimpse of these developments in the German university system when he enrolled at the Albertus University of Königsberg in 1875. For an impecunious student as he was, the best means of gaining support was by joining a *Burschenschaft*. In his case it was the “Landsmannschaft ‘Littuania,’ zu der von Traditionen wegen an Grünzeug alles gehörte, was aus dem nordöstlichen Winkel der Provinz nach Königsberg studieren kam” (*Bilderbuch* 191). Not only did members acquire a sense of belonging through joining a *Burschenschaft*, they also received subsidized meals, which was important for a student such as Sudermann. All of these benefits, the young man learned, came at a cost of one’s independence and individuality. Sudermann remembers this darker side of life in these organizations: “Wo ich mich sehen ließ, wurde ich angeschnauzt und umhergestoßen, wurde ich ‘rumkommandiert und geschurigelt” (*Bilderbuch* 193). The taxing social life of the *Burschenschaft* for Sudermann was difficult to negotiate with the demands that the academic side of university life was imposing upon him. Remaining in good academic standing was of the utmost

importance for him, considering the financial situation of his family. Still, the significant value placed on the code of honor and masculinity by these organizations demanded more from these young men than any other aspect of university life.

All of these values that were important in the culture of the *Burschenschaft* culminated in the ritual of the *Mensur* or student duel. Sudermann recalls, "Jedes etwa sonst noch vorhandene Interesse wurde erwürgt durch das für die Mensur" (*Bilderbuch* 197). This practice had at this time little to do with actual transgressions of honor, but much more with the superficial desire to show one's readiness or courage to engage in combat. Speculating on the cult of the *Mensur* at the end of the nineteenth century, Theobald Ziegler says, "Der Mann muß auch diesen Mut haben, und das Jünglingsalter ist das heroische Alter, also ist es des künftigen Mannes und des gegenwärtigen Jünglings nicht würdig, irgendwie unmännlich und unheroisch, d.h. feige zu sein" (*Der deutsche Student* 87). Despite the fact that the *Mensur* was strictly forbidden by the university, students continued this ritual with the intention of acquiring the *Schmiß*, a scar from dueling that was an outward proof of courage in defense of one's honor. In Heinrich Mann's famous novel about Wilhelmine society, *Der Untertan*, the antihero Diedrich Heßling serves as a caricature of this culture. Heßling's "Männlichkeit stand ihm mit Schmissen, die das Kinn spalteten, rissig durch die Wangen führen und in den kurz geschorenen Schädel hackten, drohend auf dem Gesicht geschrieben – und welche Genugtuung, sie täglich und nach Belieben einem jeden beweisen zu können!" (39).

In his memoirs, Sudermann romanticizes some of his experiences as a *Burschenschaftler*, while portraying himself as an outsider in this hyper-masculine

milieu. He recalls being an object of scorn for the others because of his ambitions of literary greatness. He writes,

Man wurde Richter, man wurde Arzt; wenn man sich als hervorragende Begabung erwies oder "Konnexionen" hatte, so kam man vielleicht sogar nach Berlin in die Verwaltung; aber Dichter werden, Erfolg haben und Ruhm ernten wollen – das durften nur Andere dort irgendwo im Reich, Leute, denen man nie begegnete und die den Stempel des Genies weithin sichtbar auf ihrer Stirne trugen. Nicht aber ein armer Litauerfuchs, der schon dadurch allein, daß er Litauer war, die Pflicht hatte, nicht anders zu sein als die Mittelmäßigen alle. (*Bilderbuch* 203)

This description of how his fellow members treated him with regard to his lofty ambitions strikingly resembles Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* in his work *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. In section ten of the first essay in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche attempts to capture the foundations of this disposition, which differentiates his antipodes, *Übermensch* and *Untermensch*. He writes,

Der Sklavenaufstand in der Moral beginnt damit, dass das Ressentiment selbst schöpferisch wird und Werthe gebiert: das Ressentiment solcher Wesen, denen die eigentliche Reaktion, die der That versagt ist, die sich nur durch eine imaginäre Rache schadlos halten. Während alle vornehme Moral aus einem triumphierenden Ja-sagen zu sich selber herauswächst, sagt die Sklaven-Moral von vornherein Nein zu einem "Ausserhalb," zu einem "Anders," zu einem "Nicht-selbst": und dies Nein ist ihre schöpferische That. (26)

Sudermann's perception of inferior individuals antagonizing his "Ja-sagen zu sich selber" became for him a firm belief that followed him far beyond the provincial city of East Prussia. He was convinced until the end that it was this *ressentiment* that

drove literary critics to give him unfavorable reviews, causing the sharp decline in his popularity. In his novel *Der tolle Professor*, *ressentiment* is the degenerative social disorder in Königsberg that denies the main character Sieburth an environment in which he can reach his full potential. But as an unripened student under the tyrannical influence of the *Burschenschaft* with all of its barbarity, the young Sudermann at this stage is more like the student Fritz Kühne in *Der tolle Professor*, who, much to the chagrin of his *Burschenschaft*, transcends its group-think and breaks free from the herd by leaving the backwaters of East Prussia for the more worldly cities of the inner-Reich.

#### **a. A Liberalizing Encounter?**

It is through his encounter with Sieburth that the young Corps Student Fritz Kühne is able to overcome his limited worldview and aspire to greater things. At first glance, Kühne is captivated by Sieburth's brilliance after visiting one of his lectures: "Und immer klarer stieg aus seinen [Kühne's] seelischen Kämpfen der Entschluß empor, den Gang zu jenem Wundermanne zu wagen und sich von ihm den Richtweg der eigenen Zukunft bestimmen zu lassen" (16). Through this encounter with Sieburth's ideas, as well as his charisma in imparting his philosophy upon his listeners, Kühne's *Weltanschauung* is gradually destabilized. The significance of this transition is that Kühne is no ordinary *Burschenschaftler* or fraternity member, but rather a *Corpsstudent*, which implies more reactionary

connotations.<sup>18</sup> Underlying Fritz Kühne's decision to move to Berlin belongs to a liberal *Weltanschauung* that stresses a rational and independent individualism in order to overcome the restraints of authoritarianism, collectivism, or utilitarianism for personal advancement. As *Der tolle Professor* is set at the end of the *Kulturkampf*, Bismarck stands as the *bête noire* of bourgeois liberalism. Although Otto von Bismarck is not an actual figure in the novel, the spirit of his policies is pervasive. Similar to Sudermann in his memoirs, Kühne undergoes a change of political perspective brought on by the teachings of Sieburth, which are steadfastly anti-Bismarck. This of course leads to problems with the other Corps Students, whose conservative nationalism demands full devotion to the chancellor. Sieburth's views on Bismarck deeply impact the young Kühne, for whom, "Bismarck war nicht mehr der leuchtende Heros, der treue Eckart, der schwertumgürtete Cherub, der den deutschen Garten Eden hütete. Bismarck war Dämon, Verderber, Vampir, Höllenfürst. Bismarck war der arge Hagen Tronje, der die Nibelungen dem Untergange entgegenführte" (233). As this revelation causes friction with his corps brothers, it culminates in one scene, in which he is accused of sinning against the national spirit of the fraternity. Intrepidly, Kühne asks the other members: "Was ist nationaler Geist? [...] In Knechtschaffenheit vor dem Mann ersterben, der das deutsche Volk in zwei feindliche Heerlager geteilt hat, heißt das national sein?" (236). And with these words Fritz Kühne sheds the provincial mentality of Königsberg and moves to Berlin.

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<sup>18</sup> The culture of German Corps Students and fraternities will be addressed again in the subsection on "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates."

## 2. Culture Wars

From an historical standpoint, Sieburth's invective against Bismarck is symptomatic of the fallout between liberals and conservatives in the wake of the *Kulturkampf*. After a papal declaration of infallibility in 1870, liberals felt compelled to counteract the perceived threat of Catholics pledging allegiance to Rome rather than their *Vaterland*. After all, the liberal struggle towards a unified Germany was a dominant theme throughout much of the nineteenth century, and Catholicism seemed irreconcilable to the spirit of nationalistic liberalism. Scholars of nineteenth-century Germany, however, are not in agreement in regard to the liberal reaction during the *Kulturkampf*. Some have argued that liberals ultimately compromised their own principles through their activities, while others believe it was a calculated move toward realizing their purpose of unification, and still others see their actions in accord with the principles of liberalism (Gross 547). In any case, the aftermath of the *Kulturkampf* did not bode well for liberals, and the early 1880s witnessed the splintering of right and left liberals to the benefit of the Bismarckian camp. Thus, this decade marks a period of early decline in the efficacy of liberalism as an ideological force in the political and social spheres of Germany.

### **a. The Albertina as Battleground**

Political factions at the Albertina University in *Der tolle Professor* represent a microcosm of the larger battle between the conservative and liberal camps. One might assume that Königsberg, the capital city of old Prussia and hot bed for the Junker class, would be a bastion of conservatism, but this was not at all the case.

Since the watershed year of 1848, the city of Immanuel Kant was a bulwark of liberalism in the nineteenth century<sup>19</sup> (Fuhr 140). Already in 1903 Sudermann had thematized the liberal culture in his political satire “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” whose tone aroused the ire of many liberal critics, prompting Sudermann to issue a pledge of loyalty to liberalism in a published response titled, “Die Sturmgesele. Ein Wort zur Abwehr.” The play and the author’s response to criticism suggest a seed of disenchantment with the liberal milieu in the last decades of the nineteenth century that is carried over nearly a quarter century into *Der tolle Professor*. By the 1920s this disenchantment with liberalism had matured into cynicism, as can be seen in the following passage from the novel:

Die Albertina war immer eine Hochburg des Liberalismus gewesen, und die Verfassungskämpfe der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre hatten Lehrer und Schüler mit der gleichen leidenschaftlichen Anteilnahme erfüllt. Die Fortschrittspartei, die als die Erbin der Demokratie auf den Plan getreten war, verdankte ihren Ursprung ostpreußischer Steifnackigkeit, und wenn auch die akademischen Kreise sich an ihrer Gründung nicht unmittelbar beteiligt sahen, so fühlten sie sich doch in selbstverständlicher Bundesgenossenschaft zu ihr gehörig. Der rauscherfüllte Heroenkult, der den Siegen des Jahres siebenzig und der Reichsgründung gefolgt war, hatte neue Werte geprägt und eine Stimmung geschaffen, die das gesamte deutsche Volk zum Hymnensang um den Fußschemel Bismarcks zu versammeln schien, bis dessen Abkehr zum Konservatismus die eingeschlafenen Gegensätze wieder

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<sup>19</sup> Lina Fuhr, the famous nineteenth-century German actress, recounts the liberal culture of Königsberg: “Die Stadt der reinen Vernunft war dazumal – 1847 – in einer sehr enthusiastischen Gärung. Seit Jahren schon eine Hochburg des politischen Liberalismus, hatte sie Programme und Schlagwörter massenhaft in die Welt gesetzt, und ihre Politiker, besonders Johann Jacoby, der Autor der ‘Vier Fragen,’ und Ludwig Walesrode, der ‘untertänige’ Redner und Meister feingeschliffener Epigramme, standen vor allem bei der Königsberger Jugend in hohem Ansehen.” (140)

erwachen ließ. Und während ein Teil des Bürgertums – und zwar der wohlhabend und einflußreich gewordene – sich's unter der Obhut des Allmächtigen wohl sein ließ, fühlte der andere nur den Druck der Junkerfaust im Nacken und sah mit Entsetzen die Fuchtel des Absolutismus über sich gewschwungen. (86)

Sudermann establishes the major quandaries of liberalism with the fault lines dividing the “wohlhabend und Einflußreich gewordene” and those who “sah[en] mit Entsetzen die Fuchtel des Absolutismus über sich geschwungen.”

The factionalism among university liberals is illustrated in the political tensions at the Albertina as Sieburth is approached by a senior faculty member at the university, Auerbach, who attempts to recruit his support for the liberal cause in the coming elections. Auerbach warns that even the “Unpolitischen” (like Sieburth) at the university must take a stand if they do not wish to lose liberal freedoms they enjoy because “der bewußte Kürassierstiefel, der eben auf den Katholiken herumtrampelt und der den Sozialdemokraten den Garaus machen will, holt, wie es scheint, auch zu einem Tritt gegen den Liberalismus aus” (88). Sieburth at first resists, stating that it is his duty as a philosopher to remain politically independent, but Auerbach warns him of the consequences should Bismarck's party triumph over the liberals: “Was dann aus der Lehr- und Lernfreiheit der Universitäten werden wird, das kann sich ein jeder ausmalen [...] Ich kümmere mich wenig um die Philosophie der Jetztzeit, auch um die Ihre nicht, aber ich glaube beinahe, Sie werden der erste bei uns sein, dem man Zeuge flickt” (88–89). Auerbach's arguments for supporting liberalism mark him as a principled liberal, with his



emphasis on “Lehr- und Lernfreiheit.” He stands for the classic ideals of liberalism that are often associated with the spirit of 1848.

### **b. In the Liberal Camp**

The “fortschrittlicher Verein” itself is riven by factions and powerless, as Sieburth witnesses after agreeing to attend a meeting. As Sieburth enters the hall, he takes notice of “alter oder doch alternder Männer, die ihre Parteistellung durch üppigen Haarausbusch und lässige Wäsche zu betonen trachteten” (157). The physical distinction between the liberals present could not be made more clearly. The left liberals, the old guard, the standard bearers for the ideals of 1848, had become outdated old men, who by this time were both figuratively and literally toothless. Sieburth notes this in describing the chairman: “Irgendetwas vom Jupiter tonans lag darin, und auch sein Pathos, wiewohl es hie und da in einen Heulton auslief, war das eines zürnenden Gottes. Schade, daß ihm ein Schneidezahn fehlte, was die Zischlaute erheblich vermehrte” (157). Beyond the expiring old guard, this scene also articulates another phenomenon that was taking place within bourgeois liberalism: “Wer modisch oder gar geschneigelt einherging, offenbarte schon hierdurch, daß er zu den Regierungstreuen gerechnet werden wollte, daß er Reserveoffizier oder alter Corpsstudent oder sonst ein Karrieremacher war” (157). Although the older generation in this scene might be suspicious of the ostentatiousness of some, the typically liberal bourgeois class in Germany was undergoing what some historians have identified as a process of feudalization. The historian Dolores Augustine explains this version of nineteenth-century history:

“According to this school of thought, the German *Bürgertum* – unlike its British and French counterparts – capitulated in the late nineteenth century to the aristocracy both politically (as exemplified by the coalition of rye and iron) and socially. It thus became feudalized” (46). More recently, however, the notion that a feudalization occurred among the German bourgeoisie has been revealed as a sweeping generalization. Nevertheless, as Augustine points out, “There was a tension between the old bourgeois values and the new tendency to ‘emulate the class next above it in the social scale,’ the aristocracy, or to be more exact, the wealthiest segment of the aristocracy” (48). Sudermann was not alone in thematizing the notion of feudalization of the bourgeoisie in his time. Historian Dick Geary writes, “That the industrial bourgeoisie of Imperial Germany had somehow adopted ‘feudal’ attitudes is a view to be found not only amongst latter-day commentators but also amongst contemporaries such as Heinrich Mann, whose novel *Der Untertan* portrays a title-hungry entrepreneur, and the Social Democratic Reichstag deputy Wendel, who declared in 1914: ‘Historical development has produced a situation in which the bourgeois class has become feudalized and militarized’” (140). The *Sonderweg* thesis, so it seems, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The chairman focuses the group’s attention on monetary issues: “Als Kern- und Grundthema diente ihm der neue Zolltarif, der nach Bismarcks Forderungen durch das konservativ-klerikale Bündnis zustande gekommen war und nach des Redners Meinung den Mittelpunkt aller reaktionären Machenschaften bildete” (157). The overall emphasis on the economic concerns (tariffs, taxes, and nationalization of the railroad) point to a glaring weakness of liberal politics: the

prioritizing of personal economic interests over broader issues of social liberties.

This is evident in the chairman's speech: "Sodann ging der Redner auf die von Bismarck geplante Verstaatlichung der Privateisenbahnen über und erklärte, daß damit eine so ungeheure Menge politischer Macht in die Hände *eines* Mannes gelange, daß fortan in Wahrheit der Absolutismus die herrschende Staatsform sein würde" (158). This raises the fury of the crowd, and they shout, "Darum, zurück auf die Schanzen!" (158), before the merchants present begin quarreling among themselves over the quality of their products.

In the midst of this chaos, the academic Auerbach attempts to elevate the discussion by raising the larger liberal perspective on the political situation in Germany. He warns them of the seriousness of the threats at hand:

Wir erkennen, daß die von Bismarck geschaffene wirtschaftliche Neuordnung dadurch, daß sie den Bürger die rücksichtslose Vertretung der eigenen Interessen lehrt, den Tod jeder politischen Moral im Gefolge haben muß. Aber wir stehen hier vor vollzogenen Tatsachen und tun besser, den Blick den künftigen Gefahren zuzuwenden. Daß der Hofprediger Stöcker, von dessen Wirken wir ja Genügendes gehört haben, (Rufe: Pfui! Pfui) zum Generalsuperintendenten von Ost- und Westpreußen ernannt werden soll, ja, Gott sei Dank, von uns abgewandt. Aber daß neue konservativ-klerikale Bündnis uns in kultureller Hinsicht nichts Gutes bringen wird, das ahnen wir alle. (159–160)

Here Auerbach makes a case for a liberalism based on universal principles by attacking Bismarck's economic policies and *Realpolitik*. Moreover, he mentions the "Hofprediger" Adolf Stoecker, who would increasingly become the face of anti-liberalism and anti-semitism in the *Kaiserreich* as the nineteenth century drew to a

close. Unfortunately for Auerbach and German liberalism, this prescient warning, instead of inspiring the crowd bores them: “man besah Fingernägel oder Zimmerdecke und begann sogar, sich in halblauten Sondergesprächen zu ergehen, bis er beifallslos sich wieder setzte” (160). In the atmosphere of this meeting, Auerbach, with his concern for civil liberties, ends up something of a Cassandra figure, whose warnings go unheeded.

The following speaker, however, is able to ignite the crowd not with reason, as Auerbach did, but rather with an appeal to emotions. He addresses what has been regarded as a major failure of liberalism in the late nineteenth century: the *Kulturkampf*. Herr Rektor Handtke alters the course of the discussion in order to address the Vatican Council’s declaration in 1870 of papal infallibility, which had appeared to German liberals as a threat to unification. Invoking Thomas Aquinas, he says with a thick East-Prussian accent,

Dem reemischen Pontifex, hat er jelehrt, missen sich alle Keenige der Christenheit unterwürfen. Und er ist Keenich der Keenige, und Härr aller Härrscher. Und alle wältlichen Keenige sind seine Vasallen. *Das* hat er jelehrt. Und wenn der Papst das heit noch für wahr hält und Bismarck sich mit so ‘nem Mänschen einläßt – denn das tut er, das wissen wir, in Kissingen werde er mit dem reemischen Nuntius neechstens zusammenträffen - , dann is uns auch schon klar, wohin der Weg fiehrt. Muß ich’s Ihnen erst noch sagen, meine Härren, wohin der Weg fiehrt? Nach *Canossa* fiehrt der Weg! (160-161)

Such sensationalist rhetoric is a symptom of what was to come, as mass politics increasingly become the norm. The liberal response to Catholicism during the *Kulturkampf* has been criticized for its lack of regard for the sanctity of personal

freedom and tolerance (Gross 547). Instead of attacking the Bismarckian camp from the standpoint of liberalism, Handtke appeals to the emotions of the audience, as well as their prejudices, a strategy that is met with incomprehensible fervor, as educated, worldly men are overcome by this “Rhetorik eines Bierbankpolitikers” (161). What follows is a cacophony of “Klagen, Forderungen, Mahnungen und Hochflügen in irgendein demokratisches Wolkenkuckucksheim” (162). Rather than a rational organization of collective demands, the crowd is invigorated by the chaos. The call for parliamentarism becomes the rallying point: “Ja, wenn erst der Parlamentarismus eingeführt wäre, der wahre, der echte, wie er in England und in Frankreich im Schwange war, mit Mißtrauenvoten und Parteiministerien und anderen Herrlichkeiten mehr, dann, ja dann hätten alle Nöte ein Ende, und das Himmelreich blühte auf Erden” (162). Such discrepancies between the German political system and those of France and Great Britain gave rise to the concept of a German *Sonderweg*, which posits that a lack of liberal institutions set Germany on a course different from that of the other European powers, thus explaining in retrospect the crises that were to come in the twentieth century. At this meeting in *Der tolle Professor*, democracy and parliamentarism are presented as antithetical to rational organization of political processes.

Towards the end of the meeting, Sieburth is called upon to speak his opinion. In doing so, he uses a blend of veiled sarcasm and obfuscating analogies to vent his scorn for what he has just witnessed. He exclaims to them: “Eine Postkutschenreform ist sicherlich auch noch im Zeitalter der Schnellzüge von hoher Bedeutung, denn die Freunde dieser Fortbewegungsart werden nicht aussterben,

solange der Sinn für die Freude an der Natur noch lebendig ist" (163). As he goes on, the crowd comments: "Ich verstehe keine Wort" and "Jedenfalls sehr geistreich! Sehr geistreich!" (163). As the crowd applauds Sieburth's senseless words, only Auerbach has understood Sieburth's criticism and he confronts him: "Glauben Sie nicht, daß ich die Lächerlichkeiten, die in einer solchen Gesellschaft losgelassen werden, weniger scharf sehe als Sie. Trotzdem halte ich an ihr fest, denn eine andre Möglichkeit, darüber hinaus zu wirken, gibt es nicht. Und ich hoffe, Sie werden zu dem gleichen Ergebnis kommen" (164). As he leaves, Sieburth encounters Königsberg's *Großbürger* Follenius and inquires about his fervent reactions to the rhetoric concerning the *Kulturkampf*. He answers: "Wir nüchternen Leute suchen die Steigerung, und wenn ein Wort wie 'Canossa' einen trifft, dann fliegt man hoch. Von solchen Anreißereien leben wir Armen im Gesite alle. Und die drüben machen's genauso. Man wirft sie dem Gegner an den Kopf wie die Pferdeäpfel und nennt das dann Überzeugung" (164). For an educated man such as Follenius, it is not that he lacks the reason to resist appeals to emotion, rather he actively desires such "Anreißereien," in order to divert himself from the monotony of bourgeois existence. For members of his class, the *Bierbankrhetorik* "hob sie über die Flauheit des Alltags, über die Enge ihrer Bürgerlichkeit zu einem Rausche der Entrüstung empor, der sie nichts kostete und ihnen die Würde von Vaterlandsrettern verlieh" (161). The search for *Rausch* or spiritual exhilaration is one of the key features of modernity that became manifest in the late nineteenth century and into World War I. In the broader context of liberalism, the notion of *Rausch* conflicts with the supposed measured, moderate, and rational tendencies of bourgeois liberalism and

seems at first glance more akin to the mass movements that proliferated in Europe after the turn of the century. The liberalism that Sieburth encounters in this scene lacks the principled values associated with the folklore of 1848. Instead, it is an ideology that has been corrupted by rapacious capitalism, religious intolerance, and the allure of mass politics. According to this depiction, German liberalism is indeed in crisis.

### **c. In the Conservative Camp**

But the other side of the political aisle proves to be no better—perhaps even worse. Ostracized by oppressive liberal bourgeois culture in Königsberg after transgressing a taboo, Sieburth makes a Faustian pact with the conservatives for personal gain and out of spite.<sup>20</sup> Although independent by nature, Sieburth realizes that his ambition of attaining Kant’s professorship stands no chance without support. This opportunity presents itself in the form of the conservative professor of Germanics, Pfeifferling, “Dessen Weltanschauung bei Dietrich von Bern oder Heinrich dem Vogler zu Hause war” (91). By engaging with this figure, Sieburth enters into a *quid pro quo* characteristic of Bismarck’s *Realpolitik*. Although Sieburth’s philosophical conviction was to remain independent of political constrictions, his natural sympathies align with the enlightened aspects of bourgeois liberalism. Pfeifferling, as the “Bannenträger der schwarz-weißen Reaktion” at the university, sees in Sieburth a potential candidate for the influential professorship

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<sup>20</sup> The philosophical nature of this Faustian pact will be discussed later in greater detail.

and therefore a potentially formidable ally for his own agenda. This senior faculty member's objective is the defeat of liberalism: "Kein Schimpfwort war ihm giftig genug, um die volksverderberische Kraft des Liberalismus zu brandmarken, und solange Bismarck mit dessen Ideen geliebäugelt hatte, war auch er seinem Hasse verfallen gewesen" (91). Pfeifferling, in addition to having a *Weltanschauung* anathema to the younger professor of philosophy, has a volatile personality and is feared by other faculty. Sieburth begins a rapport with him on these grounds. It does not take long, however, until the true motives for Pfeifferling's overtures are revealed at a dinner, when he says to Sieburth:

Sie sind viel zu gescheit, um das lauwarme Abwaschwasser auszutrinken, das die Herren des fortgeschrittenen Liberalismus Ihnen vorsetzen . . . Sehen Sie, die Zeit ist trüchtig wie der Leib einer Gebärenden, und da kommen diese Leute und zeigen uns die Leitfossilien irgendeiner Gedankenschicht von vor – man möchte meinen – Millionen Jahren, wenn es auch nur ein paar armselige Jahrzehnte sind – zeigen sie uns als allerneueste Novitäten moderner Spekulation. Da haben sie sich zum Beispiel ihren fahlen Marasmus auf Freisinn geschminkt . . . Ich verstehe wohl: Freisinn, wo er hingehört. (93)

Pfeifferling intends to use Sieburth in the prevailing culture wars between the liberals and the conservatives or at least keep him from forming an alliance with the other side. In revealing his views to Sieburth, he uses caution, such as his thoughts about certain academic freedoms. He tells, "Und *was wir* etwa in der Wissenschaft treiben – Gott, ich bin ja auch *da* mehr fürs Positive – , aber wenn da ein lieber Kollege 'n bißchen über die Stränge schlägt, ho, ho, ho [...] 'Freiheit der Wissenschaft' nennt sich der Schwindel, als ob es so was überhaupt gäbe" (93). The skepticism concerning scientific freedoms is an allusion to the coming of the *Lex*



*Heinze* debate in 1900, which was a significant event in the culture battles between liberals and conservatives in Wilhelmine Germany. Hermann Sudermann, of course, played no small role in this, and is partially credited with stopping the tide of the proposed reactionary measures against artistic and academic liberties.

During their meeting Pfeifferling also addresses another subject of importance: Bismarck. Following unification and throughout the *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s, Bismarck received broad support from liberals. By 1879, however, there was a *detente* with Rome and Bismarck's political machinations caused him to align more with the conservative camp. Pfeifferling's comments about Bismarck indicate this transition. In his tirade against the liberals, he uses the third person pronoun "er" without identifying the proper noun, whereupon Sieburth asks who is meant. Pfeifferling replies, "Gibt es *noch* einen auf der Welt, den man mit Namen nicht zu nennen braucht? . . . Dieser Mensch – ich habe ihn gehaßt, so lange er nicht wollte wie ich, aber er hat mich klein gekriegt [...] Sehen Sie sich das Gesindel an, das ihn neuerdings wieder anzupissen wagt" (93–94). Pfeifferling's argumentation is at first unsuccessful in swaying Sieburth, who maintains his apolitical individualism and his aversion to party politics:

Ich habe mich in politischen Dingen bisher auf eine Zuschauerrolle beschränkt und dabei die Bemerkung gemacht, daß weder Programme noch Personen sich eine maßgebende Stellung erobern, sondern immer nur Schlagworte . . . Wer für eine Idee kämpft, kann sie ruhig auf den Misthaufen werfen, wenn es ihm nicht gelingt, ein Schlagwort zu prägen, das sie genügend verschieft, verfälscht und übertreibt, damit auch der Dümme glauben kann, sie leuchte ihm ein . . . Und nur diejenige Partei scheint mir

zur Siegerin bestimmt, die genügend Pathos aufbringt, um dem Allgemeinbewußtsein zu suggerieren, daß in ihr die öffentliche Moral sich verkörpere . . . Mit solchen Ansichten wird man sich schwer in das politische Getriebe einfügen können. (94–95)

This statement in favor of independence from politics is indicative of early twentieth-century aestheticism. The belief that there are in fact greater metaphysical ideals, as well as the pessimistic disposition toward the notion that they could ever be embodied politically, convey an aversion toward the political system. It is not difficult to identify the landscape of Weimar politics in this statement, and one can read Sudermann's own bitterness toward the state of affairs during this time. The losses of World War I and the political chaos of the Weimar Republic made it easy for some to disengage from matters of the public sphere. Inherent in this kind of thought is a superiority complex, a way of thinking oneself above the political reality of the time, as if one was a kind of Zarathustra who could exist on the mountain away from those below. The same can be said about Sieburth's political position in the passage above. Pfeifferling, with his keen political acumen, sees the inevitability of problems that Sieburth will face in Königsberg's bourgeois society. At the end of this first *tête-à-tête*, Pfeifferling expresses his confidence in a future cooperation: "Ich kann warten. Und wenn Ihre bisherigen Freunde Sie einmal zuschanden geärgert haben werden – durch Spießbürgerei, durch Jammerlappigkeit, durch Pantoffelheldentum oder was weiß ich –, dann werden Sie schon noch an meine Türe pochen" (95).

### 3. Faustian *Freisinn* (Liberalism)?

The will to power (i.e., Kant's professorship) eventually overcomes Sieburth's principled political independence and he accepts the necessity of having political allies. The first call to action comes in the form of a petition in support of the conservative cause for the upcoming parliamentary elections, which reads: "Der Staat solle sich um Handel und Wandel kümmern, das Handwerk schützen, die Ausbeutung der Armen und Schwachen verhindern, dem kranken und verunglückten Arbeiter ein wohlmeinender Helfer sein und dergleichen. Aber, damit er das könne, müsse man den guten Absichten der Regierung eine kräftige Stütze bieten und vor allem dafür sorgen, daß die Rechte der Krone von den bösen Gegnern nicht tückisch geschmälert würden" (328).

At first he resists giving his name for such a submission to authority, but his bitterness about his exclusion from bourgeois liberal society makes him thirsty for revenge. He begins to think, "Rache! Jawohl! Aber wie? Welche Waffe war ihm gegeben, ihm, dem Einflußlosen, Alleingeblienen, dem nicht ein einziger Helfer zu Gebote stand?" (343) The weapon of retribution is of course the petition, which he is now ready to sign. Pfeifferling answers Sieburth's advances toward the conservative cause with a few words of wisdom, "Mit dem Segen der Fakultät versehen werden Sie niemals zu dem Posten aufrücken, der Ihnen gebührt, dessen kann ich Sie versichern; aber *gegen* ihren Willen sollen Sie ihn erobern. Dafür lassen Sie mich und das Ministerium sorgen" (344). Shocked by the severity of these words, and the prospect of being irretrievably pulled into the political arena, Sieburth seeks to avoid any more active participation in the elections. Still he has put himself in an

uncomfortable situation and the petition's signers are listed in a newspaper that "nun auch *seine* Versklavung der Welt verkündete" (346). This detail belongs to the *Schlüsselroman* aspects of *Der tolle Professor*, as Sieburth's biographical basis Richard Quäbicker had done the same. The candidate put forth by the conservatives is a man in whom Sieburth finds little to admire, while the incumbent liberal made a name for himself twenty years beforehand fighting bravely against the infamous "Preßordonnanzen." Naturally, Sieburth is inclined to the latter candidate, for his qualities: "Für ihn einzutreten hätte geheißen, der Lehrfreiheit zu dienen und dem eigenen Aufstieg ehrliche Wege zu bahnen" (346). This candidate's adherence to overarching liberal principles—those of personal "liberty"—are more akin to Sieburth's libertine philosophical *Weltanschauung*. In the end, the individualistic aspects of his philosophy guide him toward choosing the path of least resistance in order to achieve his objectives. These two possibilities, presented together, compose an antinomy; both are equally contradictory and compatible to his belief system. But as someone who had always shunned involvement in the political sphere, Sieburth is only able to console himself that nobody can accuse him of changing his political convictions, which would expose him as an opportunist.

#### **a. Political Action for the Reaction**

If it was not degrading enough to sign his name to a statement antithetical to his own worldview, Sieburth finds himself now shackled to the conservative cause. Pfeifferling informs him in no unclear terms that he will have to do more in order to obtain the support he is seeking. Cornered, Sieburth is now compelled to attend a

meeting where the competing candidates were going to speak. In the scene that ensues, Sudermann's rich description of politics demonstrates the state of German politics in the 1880s. It happens in the narrative that the young Fritz Kühne is back in Königsberg visiting when he reads Sieburth's name on a poster and decides to attend the meeting. There among the voters were "Kleinbürgern in sorgfältig gebürstetem Bratenrock und Angehörigen der niedrigsten Beamtenklasse, denen mit der Kriegskokarde auch der Zivilversorgungsschein aus dem Knopfloch zu gukken schien, drängten sich Arbeiter" (349). The old Prussian guard were not to be found on the benches. Kühne is promptly noticed by his former comrades among the Corps Students, who, considering his political transformation, are surprised to see him. As the meeting begins he finds a seat on the bench between two figures, each worthy of closer examination:

Der auf der rechten Seite, ein braver, grauhaariger Handwerksmann mit weltweisem Sinniererblick, suchte alsbald ein politisches Gespräch mit ihm zu beginnen. Er klagte über die bösen Fortschrittler, die Bismarck das Leben sauer machten, den der Mann, der das Deutsche Reich gegründet habe, der wisse genau, was uns not [sic.] tue. Der zu Linken hingegen, eine breitausladende Bierbankfigur, mit Vollmondsbacken und rostrottem Sergeantenschnurrbart sprach nur zu sich selber. "Ich hab' meinem Kaiser treu gedient," brummte er ingrimmig vor sich nieder, "und wenn der dem Bismarck das alles anvertraut, dann tu' ich es auch" (351).

The one to the right of Kühne presents himself as an inveterate Bismarck fanatic. This older man's expressed disdain for progressivism stems from its perceived disobedience to the Iron Chancellor. That Bismarck unified Germany is alone reason enough to have blind faith in him. His emphasis on Bismarck's deeds for the German

nation, as well as his trade, leaves room to speculate that this man is a recent convert to the conservative camp, and that before Bismarck, he was aligned with liberal aspirations of national unification. Kühne's neighbor on the left, however, bears the markings of the Prussian military. His political convictions are no deeper than his loyalty toward the Kaiser. Both of these men are instances of reactionary subservience; the only difference is that the one on the right pays allegiance to Bismarck, while the one on the left pays his to the Kaiser. The blind submissiveness exhibited in their remarks reminds the reader of the character Diedrich Hessling in Heinrich Mann's 1918 novel *Der Untertan*, who slavishly acts to please his superiors. Still, the convinced support of these participants contrasts with some of the others in attendance. For instance, "Auf der vorderen Bank saß eine Gruppe junger Arbeiter, die sich vorläufig still verhielten und nur durch heimliche Rippenstöße einander zu erkennen gaben, wieviel Spaß dies Getriebe ihnen bereitete" (351). These workers had been stripped of their natural political home through the passing of the *Sozialistengesetz* (Anti-Socialist Laws) in 1878. The back of the hall is where the politically-unaffiliated latecomers remain: "Dort war für vaterländische Ergüsse die Zeit noch nicht reif" (351).

As the meeting begins, the pugnacious and chaotic atmosphere of German politics at this time is told through Fritz Kühne's eyes. The conservative candidate speaks of "Steuern, deren Zahlung nicht weh tue, vom Tabaksmonopol, durch das die vom Glücke Enterbten gespeist werden würden, von Unfallschutz und Kronrechten und der Ausbeutung der Armen und Schwachen, wie sie der Liberalismus verlange" (353). After these accusations are made the discussion is

opened and pandemonium erupts and “für ein paar Augenblicke schien die zusammengelaufene Masse zum Chaos entarten zu wollen” (354). Like the meeting of the liberals that Sieburth attended, this meeting is dominated by the effects of mass politics. Unenlightened slogans, simplistic accusations, and rowdy behavior drown out reasonable debate. The respondent to the conservative candidate does not seem to recognize the state of affairs as he begins his opposing statement, “freundlich, behaglich und scheinbar sehr wenig zur Revolte geneigt” (354). While speaking, the crowd pelts him with jeers and shouts. As he makes his liberal case against the tendencies of Bismarckianism, he charges that “was der Herr Reichskanzler plant, heißt Vernichtung der Volksrechte” and, in turn, is answered with the call, “Einsperren muß man den Kerl!” (354). The speaker continues to make his case in a tactful manner, but when he quotes the Jewish liberal politician, Eduard Lasker, the strained atmosphere intensifies, and shouts of “Auch so’n Jude!” are heard (354). This scene further highlights the troubles that were plaguing liberalism at the end of the nineteenth century. In *Der tolle Professor*, one ominous sign for the future efficacy of liberalism is the proliferation of a new brand of *völkisch* anti-Semitism. The narrator comments on the presence of this at the meeting: “Damals lag der Antisemitismus noch in den Windeln” (355). The speaker continues to quote Lasker despite the interjections, “So sagte er: ‘Wenn ein Mann hinausgewachsen ist über sein Volk, wenn er hinausgewachsen ist über alle Mächte der Kulturentwicklung, so ist sein letzter Ehrgeiz darauf gerichtet, in höchsteigener Person die Not zu überwinden. Alle Cäsaren sind daran gescheitert. Geblieben ist allein die Unterdrückung der Freiheit.’ . . . Das sagte er, ich aber rufe: Deutsche

Bürger, schützt eure Kultur! Achtet nicht auf jene trügerische Fata Morgana! Nieder mit Bismarcks Cäsarenwahn!" (355) These words fan the flames, and the meeting grows even more tumultuous. For the changed Fritz Kühne in the audience, this speaker was a hero: he firmly spoke in favor of higher value of freedom despite the hostile audience.

The next speaker is none other than Sieburth. With great effort he attempts to synthesize his philosophy with the cause to which he is obligated to pay lip service. In his speech, he takes aim at what he formerly accused Bismarck of doing: divisiveness. He says that what is being disputed between liberals and conservatives, does not have to do with Bismarck at all, but rather "das ist vielmehr das Gespenst eines vergangenen Zeitalters, das immer noch zwischen uns umherstreicht" (356). For a moment, Sieburth seems to drink from the source of Hegelianism, with his talk about spirit and history. He asks both the conservatives and liberals if it is still the spirit of 1848 that divides them, telling them that the issues at stake are no longer of consequence, and that the new question is building the future: "Im Prinzip wären wir wohl alle damit einverstanden. Aber der eine will es als Demokrat, der andere als Konservativer, und keener weiß, daß es das beides gar nicht mehr gibt . . . Daß es zusammengeschmolzen ist in eine große Einheit . . . Und der Träger dieser Einheit heißt Bismarck" (356–357). Here he frames Bismarck as a great man, not unlike the kind that Hegel introduces in his *Philosophy of Right*. In it Hegel writes, "the great individuals of world history [...] are those who seize upon this higher universal and make it their own end" (410). Bismarck is the figure who seizes upon the universal, and the universal in Sieburth's argument is the



cohesion and progress of the German nation. The audience does not refrain from pointing out the obvious problems with making such claims about Bismarck by shouting comments about the *Kulturkampf* and the *Sozialistengesetz*, which were both highly polarizing policies attributed to the Chancellor. Sieburth brushes aside the ideological issues and pleads for them to focus on the larger issue: “Steuern und nochmals Steuern. Tabaksmonopol und sonstiger Kleinkram. Allenfalls, was vom Arbeiterschutz darin dämmert, schaut höheren Zielen entgegen. Was will das sagen? Daß es, aller künstlichen Erhitzung zum Trotz, ernsthafte Streitpunkte zwischen Bürger und Bürger im Augenblicke nicht gibt. Und warum gibt es die nicht? Weil bei weitem das meiste von allem, was die Demokratie einst wollte, von dem reaktionären Bismarck erfüllt ist” (357). Here, Sieburth is arguing that squabbling about taxes is frivolous, but policies such as the *Arbeiterschutz* have higher purposes. It is unclear what this exactly means, but it most likely refers to the Prussian policies for safer work environments that were implemented earlier in the nineteenth century in order to maintain public health that increased the pool of those fit to serve. Under Bismarck such welfare programs were expanded. Sieburth’s *laudatio* for the Bismarckian project continues to echo Hegel as he comes to the issue of freedom. This is the very core of the liberal animosity towards the Iron Chancellor. He asks the listeners, “Haben wir nicht in ihm alle die Freiheiten, die dem tätigen Bürger wohltun? Freiheit des Besitzes – Freiheit des Erwerbs – Freiheit der Berufswahl – Freiheit, selig zu werden” (357). The notion of freedom that Sieburth posits here is not exactly comparable to the liberal freedoms he espoused earlier. The freedoms that he lists here resemble what Hegel stresses in

the *Philosophy of Right*, which has also been criticized by many—Schopenhauer the foremost among them—as an adulation of the Prussian constitutional monarchy of Prussia in return for his privileged academic position. Furthermore, the dichotomous ideas of freedom posited by Sieburth in the novel are akin to Isaiah Berlin’s two concepts of liberty: negative and positive. His original ideal was that of negative freedom, which maintains that freedom is the absence of all constraint other than one’s will to do what one pleases. In his speech, however, Sieburth appeals for a positive conception of freedom, in which one accepts external constraints with the intent on realizing an end. The latter corresponds not only to what Sieburth is telling the crowd, but it also describes his compromised situation at the university, since he has subjected himself to constraining factors in pursuit of his objective. Sieburth proceeds with the topic of freedom: “Was nun aber die neuen sozialpolitischen Pläne des Kanzlers anlangt, so verstehe ich den Widerspruch der Herren Liberalen sehr wohl . . . Die Freiheit, die *sie* meinen, ist eine kitzlige Sache – ‘Rühr mich nicht an, auch wenn es mir wohltut!’” (358). Here Sieburth ridicules the desirability of negative freedom, stressing that positive freedom is oriented to the glory of the German nation. Accepting limitations of one’s personal liberty then is consonant with progress as long as it contributes to an ideal:

Fortschrittmänner nennen sie sich darum (Große Heiterkeit) –, erscheint uns sehr wenig begehrenswert . . . Und als Gespenster herumzulaufen wie sie, ebenso wenig! (Sehr richtig!) Darum ist es Pflicht aller, die den wahrhaften Fortschritt wollen, dem Manne, der uns einem neuen Gemeingefühl entgegenwollen, die Heeresfolge nicht zu verweigern. (Bravo!) So scheint es mir wenigstens, und so wird es vielleicht allen erscheinen, denen die Sorge

fürs Vaterland höher steht als der stumpfsinnige Götzendienst mit der eigenen werten Person" (359).

These words ignite the crowd into frenzy. In doing so Sieburth has lowered himself to the rhetoric of mass politics and appears now no more principled than the others.

### **b. The Price of the Faustian Pact**

As is the case with Faustian pacts, Sieburth must pay a price. His support of conservative politics did not go unnoticed, and an article appeared in a newspaper criticizing him for his new political affiliation. In the end, all of the effort was in vain and the conservative candidate was handily defeated. The damage done to his reputation and his own existential value, however, was irreparable. Moreover, since aligning himself with conservatives, he finds himself increasingly solicited as a lackey for the conservatives, which he detests. His only place to turn is inward and back to his old habits: "Und wieder began das Leben der abendlichen Mädchenjagd und der spätnächtigen Gelage, nur unvorsichtiger und blinder dem Augenblicke hingegeben" (367). After experiencing the unsavory aspects of politics—both on the left and the right—Sieburth realizes the virtue in his original apolitical worldview.

In many respects, the mass politics and factionalism represented in the scenes depicted above could be easily interpreted as commentary on the state of the Weimar Republic in which Sudermann wrote *Der tolle Professor*. It is almost as if Sudermann is providing an explanation for his own withdrawal inward during the last decade of his life. The setting in Bismarckian Germany bears significance in that it points to a starting point of when the troubles that were afflicting Germany in the

1920s really began. His mythologized understanding of the ideals from 1848 leads him to believe that liberalism had degenerated into a petty ideology of self-interest. Still, just as Sieburth finds out, the reactionary monarchists against which the old liberals fought, and to whom the national liberals were now tending, were just as backward as ever. It is curious, however, that Bismarck remains such a nebulous figure in all of the scenes concerning politics. Despised by the liberals and not exactly revered by all the conservatives, the Iron Chancellor stands as something of an ambivalent figure in the novel whose subtitle carries his name. Such a confused memory of Bismarck in the tumult of the Weimar Republic seems to have been the rule rather than the exception. As historian Robert Gerwarth points out, the historiography of Bismarck in the early years of the republic seemed to glorify him as a leader whose national achievements eclipsed the repressive and unsuccessful side of his legacy (48). Reversely, Peter Gay notes that among the *Vernunftrepublikaner* or rational republican supporters of the government, Bismarck came under attack for his authoritarianism and what they believed followed from that (*Weimar Culture* 28). The unstable opinion of Bismarck in *Der tolle Professor* reflects the shifting and disputed memory of him in the Weimar Republic.

### **C. Hermann Sudermann's Early Political Beginnings and *Weltanschauung***

Hermann Sudermann's late critique of German bourgeois liberalism in *Der tolle Professor* is somewhat surprising when one takes into consideration the beginnings of his career, and his early association with liberal circles and causes.

Still, when one takes a closer look at the biography of the author, one can also detect disenchantment with bourgeois liberalism long before the Weimar Republic. Insofar as the inefficacy of liberalism during the 1920s to win over the hearts and minds of the many in Germany goes, it would be beneficial to look to the decades preceding the Weimar Republic to see what caused this disheartening with the dominant middle-class ideology. At least partially to blame is a belief in the degeneration of liberalism that for many like Sudermann turned into a kind of self-fulfilling *Sonderweg* prophecy.

### **1. The *Bildung* of a Liberal**

In his memoirs *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, Hermann Sudermann describes how it was after his decision to leave Königsberg and establish himself in the big city of Berlin that he experienced a political awakening. After resuming studies at the university of Berlin, Sudermann found his first inspiration through a professor there by the name of Eugen Dühring. The pugnacious style of Dühring was appealing to Sudermann, who, only twenty years old, was exploring his own political convictions. With Bismarck at the height of his power, youthful sentiments of rebellion were directed at the authoritarian structures of the German Reich. These conditions translated into a sympathetic posture for the social democratic movement, which was soon to be banned via the Anti-Socialist Laws. Such sentiments, however, were not yet crystallized into a programmatic conviction of social democracy. He mentions that at this time the writings of Marx were beyond his understanding and Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* had not yet appeared, but Albert Schäffle's *Die*

*Quintessenz des Sozialismus* served as a source for his fervor (*Bilderbuch* 244).

Looking back at his youthful convictions from the politically chaotic era of the Weimar Republic, Sudermann writes that “die bürgerliche Demokratie, mochte sie sich zeitweise noch so ungebärdig benehmen, ist niemals die legitime Erbin des Revolutionsgedankens gewesen, der im Jahre 48 den Staat zeitgemäß ausbauen und ein Deutschland schaffen wollte, das friedlich und machtvoll einen dauernden Platz im Rate der Völker eingenommen hätte, anstatt daß es heute ohnmächtig hingestreckt verhungert in seine Ketten beißt” (*Bilderbuch* 245).

It seems in this passage that Sudermann maintained a high degree of reverence for the spirit of 1848. The spirit of 1848 is a familiar one in the works of Sudermann. In a later chapter in his memoirs, he remembers walking late one night around the Friedrichshain, where some of the fallen from the failed revolution were buried, when an inner voice spoke to him: “An dieser Stelle, die mir als Nationalheiligtum galt, hatte ich schon oft eine stille Andacht gehalten [...] Die sind für ihre Idee in den Tod gegangen [...] und du kannst nicht einmal so viel Mut aufbringen, um dem Capua zu entfliehen, in dem deine Willenskraft, deine Begabung, in dem der heilige Glaube an dich selbst langsam zugrunde geht” (346). Here one can detect a mythologizing of the spirit of 1848 that sets the groundwork for a *Sonderweg* theory concerning the degeneration of liberalism after 1848.

After cycling between periods of minor employment and poverty in Berlin, Hermann Sudermann began taking a more acute interest in the realm of politics at the outset of the *Kulturkampf*. These new interests were about to open up another door of opportunity for him: the door to the Prussian Parliament. It was here that he

came to seek out his archenemy, and the enemy of his generation of young liberals, Bismarck. He recalls in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* the first time he set eyes upon the great historical figure in his cuirassier's uniform: "Das war mein Feind und der Feind des Volkes. Das war der große Verderber Bismarck" (377). In no unclear terms, he articulates that the Iron Chancellor embodied the culmination of all his youthful rage. Sudermann remembers witnessing history as the Catholic centrist politician Ludwig Windthorst vehemently battled against Bismarck and other members of the conservative party such as the Minister of Public Education and Religion, Robert von Puttkamer. But there was another politician in the parliament to whom the young man felt drawn: Eugen Richter. By this time in the early 1880s, Richter was a leading figure of the liberal freeminded and progress parties that stood in fierce opposition to the policies of Bismarck. Sudermann writes about his first sighting of this man, who quickly became his hero: "Eugen Richter – das war mein Mann! Das war der trotzigste Tribun, der gegenüber der Kriecherei vor Fürstenthronen, gegenüber den Keulenschlägen der junkerlichen Reaktion den Nacken steif hielt – einer der wenigen in deutschen Landen, die ihren Mannesmut noch nicht zu Markte getragen hatte" (*Bilderbuch* 378). In this dynamic figure of German liberalism, Sudermann saw someone who quickly became his political *Heimat* because "das Gewissen eines in Knechtschaft ersterbenden Volkes hatte durch ihn Faust und Stimme bekommen. In ihm war Hoffnung, in ihm Erlöstsein" (*Bilderbuch* 378). Next to Richter, was another liberal politician who was to have a heavy impact on the fate of Hermann Sudermann: Heinrich Rickert. He writes in his memoirs:

Und dann kam Rickert, der bekannte Führer der “Sezession”, die sich unlängst von den Nationalliberalen getrennt hatte. Den liebte ich. Liebte ihn schon nach den ersten Augenblicken, in denen er geredet hatte. Ein mittelgroßer Mann, in den Fünzigern etwa – langgestrichenes Braunhaar, scharfe Brillengläser vor guten, erregt blickenden Augen – eifrig, eilig, mit warmen, weichem, vielleicht allzuweichem Pathos . . . Ach, das tat wohl, die schuhriegelnde Hoffart jenes Gardeassessors gekennzeichnet und verurteilt zu sehen! Nur schärfer, unerbittlicher, spießrutenhaft, skorpionenhaft hätte es geschehen müssen. Mir war, als sollte ich zu ihm hinübrufen: “Kß! Kß! Kß!” Und als er geendet hatte, blieb mir das mutlose Gefühl: “Es hilft ja doch nichts.” [...] Aber ich liebte ihn, liebte ihn mit zager, ein wenig mitleidiger Liebe, und ich habe ihn immer geliebt, auch als ich nach bald zweijähriger Zusammenarbeit mich von ihm trennen mußte. (*Bilderbuch* 379)

Although he claims in his memoirs that art, philosophy, and the study of philology are what drew Sudermann to Berlin, it is ironic that it was politics that had now become his passion, and which would eventually open up a career for him as an author of fiction. In many respects, *Der tolle Professor* reads as a parable that shows the danger of getting too involved in mundane political affairs at the expense of losing one’s individuality.

Returning to the parliament daily, Sudermann began to observe that “sich tagtäglich ein Drama abspielte, das weit mehr bedeutete als alles Theater, das Leben und Vaterland und das eigene Schicksal selber war” (*Bilderbuch* 380). This observation about parliamentary affairs in the era of Bismarck seems to have a touch of nostalgia looking back from the intensified factionalism in the Weimar Republic. In addition to visiting the sessions, he began reading the newspapers and their parliamentary reports with the intention of mastering the issues of the day, as



well as the craft of journalism. With the help of his friend Mathilde Jacobson, Sudermann eventually received an invitation to meet with the Reichs- und Landtagsabgeordnete for Danzig, Heinrich Rickert. This meeting was rewarded with the offer for a position as parliament reporter for the newspaper syndicate *Liberale Korrespondenz*, which was founded as the party organ of the so-called Liberal Secession. The novice journalist managed to impress Rickert so much that he offered him another position that required “eine schriftstellerische Kraft, mit der wir [the Secession] ein Volkswochenblatt gründen können, um die Ansichten der Partei auf dem platen Lande zu verbreiten” (*Bilderbuch* 393).<sup>21</sup> This position was the editor in chief of the *Deutsches Reichsblatt*, which allowed him to become acquainted with the leading members of the *liberale Sezession*, such as Lasker, Bamberger, Kapp, von Bunsen, as well as the liberal media magnate Rudolf Mosse (*Bilderbuch* 394). With the printing of the first number of this newspaper, Sudermann saw “Verantwortlicher Redakteur: Hermann Sudermann,” about which he writes: “Zum erstenmal in meinem Leben las ich diesen Namen gedruckt. Gedruckt, wie man Friedrich Schiller und Friedrich Spielhagen liest, ganz schlicht, ganz selbstverständlich, und doch – wie aufregend, wie schicksalhaft!” (*Bilderbuch* 403). With the achievement of his first publication, the author ends his memoir.

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<sup>21</sup> In *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* Sudermann recounts Rickert’s initial description of the newspaper as follows: “Es [Volkswochenblatt] müßte etwa im Kalenderstil gehalten sein und außer der Politik, die wir ja selber besorgen würden, einen populärwissenschaftlichen Aufsatz mit dazugehörigen Bildern, eine Erzählung, wenn möglich abgeschlossen, ein Gedicht, Rätsel und dergleichen enthalten. Das Blatt soll pro Quartal nicht mehr als fünfzig Pfennige kosten und außerdem in Mengen gratis verbreitet werden. Rudolf Mosse will es drucken und für die Hälfte der Unkosten einstehen” (393).

### **a. The Foundations of a Career**

Hermann Sudermann acted as editor in chief of the *Deutsches Reichsblatt* roughly from early 1881 to late in 1882. For a twenty-four-year-old, writing and putting together a weekly newspaper of that size seems to be no insignificant task. As stated in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, the targeted audience was primarily the rural East. The newspaper reminded subscribers why they should vote and where they should vote and what a liberal loss might mean for them. Not surprisingly, one of the most frequent topics that appears in this publication during those years is the issue of agricultural tariffs, which became one of the most dividing subjects between liberals and conservatives in the years following the *Kulturkampf*. Other social issues, however, such as the growing tide of anti-Semitism on the Right also receives a considerable amount of print in these years. The name Adolf Stöcker and his overt anti-Semitic politicking, and Bismarck's association with this dark figure is a common subject for articles. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these papers is the literary section, which generally included a short story (sometimes serialized) and a political poem. Since Sudermann was generally responsible for writing these, one can chart the development of his personal writing style. Often times these stories were more or less apolitical in nature, but other times, such as in the case when an election was approaching, they were purely propagandistic in nature. Eventually in late year 1882 for unknown circumstances Sudermann left the position as editor-in-chief of the paper, but he continued to write the literary sections, as well as those for other liberal newspapers of the Mosse-Pressé such as the *Der Reichsfreund*.

## **b. Liberalism and its Discontents**

Despite the fact that the *liberale Sezession* and their newspapers provided a springboard for Hermann Sudermann's long and lucrative career as an author, he attempts to distance himself from its politics while looking back on it in his memoirs. This contradicts earlier observations such as him having admired the father of this movement, Eugen Richter, like a hero. It's likely that his severe dissatisfaction with the efficacy of liberalism—as he perceived it to be—in the Weimar Republic had tainted his opinions of this once dominant ideology. Demarcating his personal views from those of his liberal benefactors in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend*, he writes, “Die Partei, für die ich fortan zu arbeiten, der ich als ehrlicher Mann mich angehörig zu fühlen hatte, war nicht die meine. Die meine, die, nach der ich in Sehnsucht schielte, war ihr benachbart und hatte das meiste mit ihr gemein – sie hat sich auch später mit ihr verschmolzen – aber sie lag weiter links. Und nach links – zur Demokratie, zum Republikanertum hin – drängte mein ganzes Wesen” (395). This political confession some forty years after his work for the *liberale Sezession* exposes how the myth of 1848 had grown. After all, did the members of this left-liberal splinter party such as Eugen Richter and Heinrich Rickert more or less stand for the same principles as the forty-eighters? Or could Sudermann be insinuating with “weiter links” that his sympathies were with the banned socialist party? What Sudermann writes in the following only further mystifies any clear judgement:

Heute ist es kein Kunststück, Republikaner zu sein. Es ist so trivial, daß man sogar aus Snobismus, aus Ästhetik und um stolz und unzufrieden

auszusehen, lieber zur Monarchie zurückkehren möchte—die Gemüts- und Zweckmonarchisten lasse ich unangetastet; damals aber war innerhalb der Bourgeoisie dieser Gedanke ein Wahnsinn, dem selbst die Überbleibsel des Achtundvierzigertums mit einem Achselzucken gegenüberstanden . . . Dem Sozialismus hatte ich mich wieder entfremdet, und die Fortschrittspartei gab vor, so königstreu zu sein wie alle die anderen. Auch den Namen “Demokrat” verschmäht sie. Er erschien halb komisch, halb anrühlich, mochten ihre Angehörigen auch noch vor kurzem darauf geschworen haben. Aber unter der Decke des Monarchismus schwellte drüben, das fühlte man, beides immer noch weiter, während meine Leute sich im Haß gegen Bismarck und in der Liebe zum Freihandel aufrichtigen Herzens genugtaten. (395)

His assessment of the public opinion at the time concerning the Weimar Republic is seemingly accurate. As the adage goes, the Weimar Republic was “a republic without republicans.” Still, Sudermann’s representation of his own political affinities is most perplexing when one takes into consideration passages from his diaries and from other sources.

His discomfort with some aspects of liberalism is true. He often expresses in his diaries a frustration with the liberal parties, and even swears off voting liberal on several occasions. In one instance on February 20, 1890, after voting for a socialist candidate, Sudermann justifies this: “mit dem Freisinn endlich in mir ein Ende zu machen” (Tagebuch I). Although Sudermann distances himself from the socialists in his 1922 memoir that ends in the early 1880s, one can read in his diaries that his sympathy to the socialists lasted much longer. One entry from August 9, 1901 expresses anger about the negative depiction of socialism in a book by Hans Hopfen (his former benefactor). He writes, “Rette mich, indem ich in dem

Hopfenschen Buche herumlese, das in roher, unwissender Weise die Sozialdemokraten zu brandmarken versucht. - Ekel vor dieser gewissenloser, thörichter Handwerker" (Tagebuch II). In 1903, after the social democrats won in the Reichstag election, Sudermann notes on June 17, "erwachende Hoffnung schleicht sich in's Gemüt" (Tagebuch III). Even more flamboyant, on August 19, 1903, after a friendly meeting with Kurt Karl Gustav von Glasenapp, who headed the Berlin censorship office in the last decades of the Kaiserreich, Sudermann notes: "Als über Sturmgeseilen ["Sturmgeseilen Sokrates"] sprechen und die Eventualität erwogen wird, daß die Fortschrittsgeister über mich herfallen werden, sage[...] indem [ich] einfach erkläre, daß [ich] seit 10 Jahren Sozialdemokratisch wähle." (Tagebuch III). Apparently, Sudermann was so attached to his left-wing political convictions that he chose to indoctrinate his children, as he notes on December 23, 1905: "Gespräche mit den klugen Kindern über Demokratie, Freigeisterei u. unbedingter Linkssein" (Tagebuch III). Furthermore, his posture towards monarchism was, as he claims in his memoirs, hostile to say the least. While on a trip to Paris, Sudermann read the rhetoric of a speech Kaiser Wilhelm II gave to the new military recruits on December 8, 1891, which was subsequently printed in a newspaper. Controversially, during the speech the kaiser is recorded to have said, "Es giebt für euch nur einen Feind, und der ist mein Feind. Bei den jetzigen socialistischen Umtrieben kann es vorkommen, daß ich euch befehle, eure eigenen Verwandten, Brüder, ja Eltern niederzuschießen – was ja Gott verhüten möge –, aber auch dann müßt ihr meine Befehle ohne Murren befolgen" (Johann 55–56). Such militarism and demand for blind obedience enraged the young author, who

after reading the text of the speech, writes in his diaries on December 29, 1891: “Der Figaro öffnend, lese den Wortlaut der Kaiserrede an die Rekruten. Das Blut erstarrt mir in den Adern. Also auf Väter u. Mütter auf Brüder u. Schwestern soll geschossen werden. Wie lange wird’s dauern u. der Cäsarenwahn bricht in Tobsucht aus?” (Tagebuch I). Sudermann’s irreverence for authority is also articulated in an entry dated June 2, 1905. He writes,

Mit Cläre und Mädels, die mich am Bahnhof Thiergarten erwarten, die Feststraße besichtigen gegangen. Papierrosenkörbe überall Teppiche zu den Fenstern hinaushängend. Festlich gestimmte, gehende Menge. Wagenreihe stockt. Kaiser fährt vorbei. - Alles johlt. Ich sehe den Wagen ruhig nach ohne hut zu luften u. mich am Geschrei zu beteiligen. In demselben Augenblicke macht sich bereits ein Herr [...] der vorher nicht da war, doch am Wagenschlage zu schaffen sieht krampfhaft hinüber, will aber auch heimlich eine Majestätsbeleidigung aufschnappen. - Die Illusion des “Freien Volkes.” Wenn nicht besser illustriert werden, wie durch dieses kleine, stumme Bild. (Tagebuch III).

There is little room to doubt Sudermann’s commitment to anti-authoritarianism and disdain for reactionary politics before World War I. During the war he, like many other rationally minded figures of his time, was captivated by the fervor, and his political views underwent some changes. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

## **2.Liberal Legacy: Hermann Sudermann’s Association with Liberalism**

In his open letter to Dr. J. Levy in the *Vossische Zeitung* on November 7, 1926, Sudermann addresses a prior insinuation that Levy had made concerning his

political convictions. He tells him, "In unserer Jugend waren uns die reaktionären Demagogenriecher ein Greuel; ich glaube, wir tun jetzt gut nicht nach der entgegengesetzten Himmelsrichtung abzuirren! Wenn sich in meiner Stellung zu diesen Dingen viel geändert hätte, wäre ich der letzte, dies nicht einzugestehen, den ich bin Gott sei Dank ein freier Mann, der Linken so gut wie der Rechten gegenüber" ("Mein Toller Professor"). Like Sieburth at the beginning of *Der tolle Professor*, as well as at the end, Sudermann values freedom from politics. With his attempt in *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* to set the record straight on his political convictions, as well as in the letter cited above, he attempts to free his life and work from being tied to the fortunes of any political movement. As it goes with artists, it is not unusual that they divorce themselves from politics, or make it at least appear so, in order to free their work from the present, and thereby give their corpus of work an air of timelessness. This of course is an ideal rather than reality, but it shows the obsessive side of many artists for whom nothing is more important than their work. While writing in the Weimar Republic during the twilight of his life, one can sense a degree of desperation to depoliticize his life and work for the sake of posterity. For Sudermann there was no stronger association than with the ideology of liberalism, which had become unpopular and passé.

The arrival of Hermann Sudermann and other dramatists associated with naturalism to the literary scene intersected with some political changes happening in Germany. Less than a year after Sudermann and Hauptmann ushered in an era of naturalist theater in 1889 with their breakthrough dramas "Die Ehre" and "Vor Sonnenaufgang," Germany went through the most significant political change since

the unification in 1871 with the dismissal of Reichskanzler Otto von Bismarck. The naturalists who were well received by the liberal German bourgeoisie were also part of a progressive spirit that took root in the 1890s with the fall of Bismarck. Social issues were placed front and center in works of literature, such as Sudermann's "Die Ehre" that brings up the theme of class taboos or "Heimat" and the matter of women's emancipation. But there was also another side to the post-Bismarck Era. Samuel Lublinski writes, "Die alten Mächte waren ja noch lange nicht ausgestorben, und Bismarcks jäher Sturz nützte den konservativen Parteien weit mehr als er ihnen schadete [...] Neben der sozialdemokratische und literatur-revolutionären gab es auch eine konservative Jugend. Man hätte sich, wenn man Preisfragen liebte, gerade damals ruhig darüber den Kopf zerbrechen dürfen, ob Deutschland das typisch revolutionäre oder das typisch rückschrittliche Land wäre" (17). Instead of being a revolutionary force or a continuation of the conservative literature since establishment of the German Reich, the new German theater that was established at the beginning of the 1890s was neither the new *Sturm und Drang* that it was hailed to be at its outset, nor was it a direct continuity of the bourgeois realism that preceded it—yet it was both. Containing both the revolutionary aspirations of modernism, and the conservative values of the past it was what the liberal bourgeoisie found palatable. Naming Sudermann as the leader in this new direction, Lublinski writes that the author knew how to make a "kleibürgerliche Revolution im Wasserglas" (199). In the early 1890s authors of naturalism confronted social questions pertaining to the fourth estate, women, and problems, such as alcoholism and masculinity, directly, and somewhat radically. Later in that decade one can



detect that these social questions had already become somewhat exhausted as these same authors dabbled in the new trend of neoromanticism. Critic Maximilian Harden explains this transformation in the case of Sudermann. In 1903 he writes in a pamphlet-form invective against Sudermann that, while meeting the just-turned famous author of “Die Ehre” by a dinner at the author Paul Lindau’s home along with his friend the literary critic Otto Neumann-Hofer, he saw “zwei riesig radikale Männer, die gegen Virchow für den Sozialdemokraten stimmen wollten und auf Freisinnsheuchelei und Tageblattwirtschaft respektlos schimpften” (*Kampfgenosse Sudermann* 34). Fourteen years later, however, Harden points how Sudermann had changed: “Und mein Freund von anno 89? Er ist nicht mehr radikal, verachtet Herrn [Paul] Lindau, schilt die Tageblattwirtschaft nicht mehr. Er hatte früh Romane und Novellen geschrieben; Theaterstücke bringen viel höheren Ertrag” (*Kampfgenosse Sudermann* 39). According to Harden, Sudermann’s transformation somewhat resembles the author’s own critique of liberalism in *Der tolle Professor* that it had lost sight of its progressive values and was now fixated on profit.

In 1895 Hermann Sudermann was selected to give the opening address at the Literary Congress in Dresden in lieu of the author of bourgeois realism Friedrich Spielhagen—a symbolic passing of the torch to a new generation of literature. Sudermann appropriately titled his speech, “Literarische Wandlungen in Deutschland.” In the speech Sudermann both argues for a new revolutionary spirit in literature and for independence from it. He tells the audience, “Eine neue Generation ist herangewachsen und sucht sich mit höchst respektabler Ellbogenkraft ihren Weg zu bahnen” (“Literarische Wandlungen” 165). Despite the

conservative dismissal of the new German literature at the turn of the century as being “scandalous” or “irreverent,” Sudermann proposes that other literary epochs of the nineteenth century, such as the 1830s, 1848, and 1860s, were also once considered rebellious, but over time became a part of the literary canon. Here he postulates a dialectical view of literary epochs: “Nur manchmal, wenn wir die Werke jener Dichter aus dem Schranke holen, die sich in den Dreißiger-Jahren zum sogenannten ‘jungen Deutschland’ zusammentaten, oder derer, die Anno 1848 blutdürstige Lieder schrieben, oder derer, die in den Sechsziger-Jahren ihre Ideale von bürgerlicher Freiheit in die Welt hinaus riefen, dann sagen wir wohl mit einem neidischen Seufzer: ‘Wie waren sie jung! Wie waren sie heiß!’” (165). Still, already at this stage in his career, Sudermann is careful not to pigeonhole himself into a label or movement. He tells the audience, “Ich bitte Sie, meine Damen und Herren, werfen Sie mir nicht das Wort ‘Naturalismus’ entgegen” (165). Even so, he takes the “social question” to be a major part of what separates the literature of the time from that what preceded it. This, of course, is what naturalism is remembered for in German literary history. He says,

Und Sturm erhob sich auch im eigenen Lande. Der vierte Stand, der bis dahin, halb unbewußt, halb resigniert, sein Tagewerk verrichtet hatte, begann sich trotzig zu regen. Auf ihn richteten sich in Angst und Staunen aller Augen. Die dunkeln Armeleutswohnungen in den Kellern der Großstädte, die rauchigen Lehmhütten auf dem platten Lande zeigten ihre geöffneten Türen, und was daraus hervorquoll, war – das Elend. Da bemächtigte sich der besitzenden Klassen ein merkwürdiges Gefühl qualenden Interesses, dumpfer Verantwortlichkeit. Wie ein stammendes Menetekel stand plötzlich die sociale Frage am Himmel. (166)

After addressing the “sociale Frage am Himmel” that separated the new literature of the 1890s from the old, his direction takes a more conservative turn, in a way emulating the change between the earlier part 1890s and the later half. Unlike the works of Sudermann from this decade such as “Die Ehre,” “Sodoms Ende,” “Heimat,” *Katzensteg* or “Das Glück im Winkel,” which more forcefully addressed social problems pertaining to the present, some others such as “Die drei Reiherfedern,” “Der Schmetterlingschlacht,” and “Johannes” relied more on their style, melodrama, and correspondence to aesthetic trends of the time rather than social criticism. As the turn of the century approached the outward social engagement of naturalism turned inward to a kind of bourgeois aestheticism. Sudermann insinuates this in his speech from 1895, when he turns to the theme of marriage, when he says: “Aber in die seelischen Intimitäten der Ehe selbst – dieses innigsten und geheimnisvollsten Verhältnisses zwischen Mensch und Mensch – sucht heute die nachschaffende Phantasie hellhörig einzudringen, zu erklären, zu läutern, Unhaltbares zu lösen, irrtümlich Gelockertes zu befestigen. Hier giebt es noch nie ergründete Probleme, die nur der ahnt, der den innersten Sinn des Selbsterlebten zu erfassen versucht . . . Sollte das keine Aufgabe für eine ernste Dichtung sein?” (167). Instead of looking to outward problems in the relations between sexes such as the topic of divorce or inequality, he chooses to assign to literature the task of presenting inward reflection on the relations between two people.

At the pinnacle of his career in the 1890s, Hermann Sudermann was a figurehead of the liberal bourgeoisie. His works contained the perfect amount of social criticism to satisfy the worldview of this class, but it did not go so far to be

considered radical or social democratic. His positive reception abroad and his critical stance *vis-à-vis* Hohenzollernism and nationalism gave him the profile of *Weltmann* or cosmopolitan that was a benchmark for the liberal bourgeoisie. This self-posturing is evident in an article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on January 28, 1895 about his reception in France. Basing itself on an interview he gave there, it quotes him as saying: "Man spielt bei uns vor allem französische Stücke; sie werden immer sehr günstig aufgenommen. Was unsere eigene nationale Produktion betrifft, so ist sie von viel geringerer Bedeutung und weniger abwechslungsreich." Here Sudermann puts on the airs of a cosmopolitan by distancing himself from German literature. This is no different from the constellations in his works, which usually consist of a worldly *Übermensch* who is surrounded by a parochial horde. For the liberal bourgeoisie in Germany the thought of being above unsophisticated proletarians and the backward conservative class was surely a comforting image and Sudermann embodied this ideal. The liberal Berlin press kept close tabs on Sudermann's whereabouts often reporting on his trips abroad.

Because of his stature in the cultural life among the liberal bourgeoisie in Berlin, it is no surprise that Sudermann played an active role in the clubs and salons of this class. In 1896 Sudermann more deeply entrenched himself in liberal Berlin society by becoming the chairman of the Verein Berliner Presse, which was the first organization in Berlin that brought together journalists and authors to advocate for freedom of speech and expression. In 1898 he accepted the chairmanship of a splinter-organization the Berliner Presseclub that put even greater focus on issues pertaining to freedom of the press. An article reporting about the dinner held for the

inauguration of the new club in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on May 9, 1898 gives insight into the purpose and value of such organizations among the liberal bourgeoisie of Berlin and names it “einen wirklichen Markstein in der sozialen Entwicklung Berlins.” The article does not fail to articulate the glitz and glamour of the space for the Berliner Presseclub: “Der gestrige Eröffnungsabend der in des Wortes bester Bedeutung großstädtisch ausgestatteten Klubräumlichkeiten Unter den Linden 33, an der Charlottenstraßen-Ecke, bewies auf das Glänzendste.” Of equal importance are those in attendance such as, “hervorragende Persönlichkeiten der Wissenschaft, der Kunst, der Literatur, der Tagespresse, des Kaufmannstandes.” As Klubvorsitzende, Sudermann of course had to give a speech on such an occasion. The article reports: “Herr Sudermann sprach mit dem ihm so vortrefflich Gesicht stehenden weltmännischen Selbstbewußtsein.” The topic of his speech was the “persönliche[n] Annäherung der Kämpfer im heißen Tagesstreite voll bewähren und auf die Gesundung unserer öffentlichen Zustände” (“Eröffnung Berliner Presseklubs”).

### **a. Sudermann the Liberal Crusader**

The formation of the Berliner Presseclub was not to exhibit the elegance of Berlin’s liberal bourgeoisie; rather it was preparing them for a battle with newly planned laws that would place restrictions on freedoms of expression. This was a topic with which Sudermann had first-hand experience in the early 1890s, considering the hullaballo surrounding the premiere of his turn-of-the-century drama, “Sodoms Ende.” The debate about censorship in Germany intensified in the

next years, culminating in what became known as the *Lex Heinze*—a highly controversial law that strengthened censorship—about which a fierce nation-wide debate occurred in 1900. The law has a curious history that began through an initiative of Kaiser Wilhelm II to restore moral order to a culture that he believed was increasingly becoming corrupted by lasciviousness in the public sphere. The controversial name of the law originates from a sensational case that happened in 1887 in which a pimp, Gotthilf Heinze and his wife held a young woman captive for days, abused her, and eventually murdered her. The public debate prompted by this case served as an occasion to pass sweeping laws in the name of morality. The legislation that went through the Reichstag in 1900 particularly took aim at immoral representations in the visual arts, theater performances and literature, threatening to censor everything—from antiquity to contemporary—that was not compliant with the new code.

The *Lex Heinze* hit close to home for Sudermann when the Reichstagsabgeordnete Hermann Roeren of the Zentrumsparkeifraktion and chief supporter of new censorship laws against perceived immorality used Sudermann's name in to build his case in favor of the *Lex Heinze*. The *Berliner Tageblatt* reports on February 9, 1900, in an article titled "Pfui!," Roeren having said the following: "Wenn Sudermann davon (nämlich von dem Theatersittlichkeitsparagraphen der Lex Heinze) getroffen wird und von der Bühne verschwände, wurde ihm kein anständiger Mensch eine Thräne nachweinen." This attack on Sudermann rallied the liberal and democratic sectors of German society in his defense. In the same article, the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* states, "So spricht man im deutschen Reichstag über

eine der ernstesten Erscheinungen unserer Literatur, über einen Dramatiker, der zum ersten Male seit langen Jahren der deutschen Dichtung den Triumph verschafft hat, überall im Auslande erfolgreich für die Kraft und Bedeutung unseres nationalen szenischen Schaffens Zeugnis abzulegen." The harsh words directed at Sudermann by the morality crusader Roeren were, however, also rebuked by liberal and progressive members of the Reichstag. The evening edition of the *Berliner Tageblatt* on February 10, reports that politicians Ernst Müller-Meinigen and Albert Träger did not leave Roeren's words unanswered.<sup>22</sup> The Verein Berliner Presse also did not allow this attack against its former chairman to go unanswered. On February 18, 1900, the *Berliner Tageblatt* reports the Verein Berliner Presse to have issued the following resolution:

'Der Verein Berliner Presse' legt gegen die engherzigen Anschauungen von dem Wesen der Kunst, die durch die Abstimmung der Reichstagsarbeit zu den Paragraph 184a und 184b der sogenannten 'Lex Heinze' zum Ausdruck gekommen sind, entschiedenste Verwahrung ein und bedauert lebhaft, daß derartige und unduldsame Auffassungen an solcher Stellung Anerkennung

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<sup>22</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt* reports in the evening edition on February 10, 1900 on Albert Trägers answer to Hermann Roeren: "Darauf hat der Abgeordnete Albert Träger Folgendes erwidert: 'Ich bin kein besonderer Verehrer dieser modernen Richtung; aber das muß ich sagen: es sind ernste, zielbewußte Bestrebungen, auf neuem Wege die höchsten Zwecke der Kunst zu erfüllen, und das kann man weder mit der Polizei, noch mit der Censur, noch mit dem Staatsanwalt unterdrücken, und es thut mir förmlich leid, als ich vorher von Herrn Kollegen Rören hörte, daß er gelegentlich der Nennung des Namens Sudermann, den mein Freund [Ernst Müller-Meinigen] Müller erwähnt hatte, sagte: es würden ja wohl wenig Leute oder Niemand den Meisten Stücken von Sudermann, wenn sie verboten werden sollten, eine Thräne nachweinen. Meine Herren das hat mich frappirt. Ich habe mir gesagt: wenn ein Mann von der hohen und umfassenden Bildung des Herrn Rören über einen unserer bedeutendsten, vielleicht sogar des hervorragendsten dramatischen Dichters der Gegenwart, dessen Ziele die Ernstesten sind, die man sich denken kann, ein solches Urteil fällt, wie könnte es manchem Dichter ergehen bei Richtern, die sich dieser umfassenden Bildung und des weiten Blickes des Herrn Rören nicht zu erfreuen haben.'"

finden konnten. Insbesondere weist der Verein 'Berliner Presse' die nach Form und Inhalt unberechtigten Angriffe des Abgeordneten Rören gegen die Person und Werke seines Mitgliedes Hermann Sudermann mit Entrüstung zurück.

As one can see in these passages, the label "Hermann Sudermann" very quickly became a synecdoche for liberal freedom of expression at this time.

The first mention of the infamous *Lex Heinze* in Sudermann's diaries is in an entry dated February 25, 1900, in which he encounters an acquaintance, "wer denn mir [Sudermann] über die Wirkungen der geplanten Lex Heinze auf die dramatische Kunst, juristisch betrachtet, halten lasse. Will das Gelernte am Mittwoch im Verein Presse verwerthen" (Tagebücher II). Convinced of the necessity to fight against the prohibitive measures of the *Lex Heinze*, Sudermann rallied important figures of the liberal German intelligentsia in resistance to this law. On March 4, 1900 in the hall of the Berliner Handwerkervereins, Sudermann was among a core group of politicians and artists including the sculptor Gustav Eberlein to take a stand against the proposed law by speaking out against it. In his speech, Sudermann assumes the role as spokesperson for the realm of German theater that was under attack. He begins his disquisition on the subject by presenting the theater as the primary target of the moral crusade: "Wie geht es zu, daß die dramatischen Dichter, in denen man ein Jahrhundert lang die höchsten Vertreter litterarischen könnens, die Pfleger der straffsten, kühnsten, begnadetsten Dichtungsart erblickte, plötzlich als Volksverführer, als Leute, welche auf die unsauberen Instinkte der Menschennatur spekulieren, vor den Strafrichter gestellt werden sollen? Sind wir wirklich so entartet, so heruntergekommen?" (*Drei Reden* 7). Sudermann was correct that the



theater was the focal point of the censorship laws contained in the *Lex Heinze*. Not only was theater deemed a dangerous medium because it was a performance art, it also was the artistic medium that most definitively ushered modernism into Germany. To be fair, in comparison to the works of bourgeois realism that preceded the literature of the *fin-de-siècle* in Germany, for an older conservative-minded individual, it really might have seemed “so entartet, so heruntergekommen.” The intentions of the social conservative proponents of censorship, argues Sudermann, are not only adverse toward aesthetic modernism, but rather they want to reverse the effects of modernity: “Es ist nicht ein Kampf gegen das moderne Drama allein, es ist der Kampf gegen die moderne Welt. Alles was sich gestaltet hat in Wissenschaft und Industrie, an neuen Lebensanschauungen und neuen Idealen, was aus dem Wirkungskreise priestlicher Bevormundung zu persönlicher Selbstständigkeit emporstrebt, ist und bleibt ihnen ein Greuel. Und da sie die moderne Welt nicht vernichten können, so versuchen sie wenigstens, ihr den Spiegel entzweizuschlagen, indem sie das werdende deutsche Drama zu Grunde richten” (*Drei Reden* 8).

Sudermann assesses that the fundamental problem the conservative camp has with modernist art is its ability to reflect reality. This differs, he argues, from older, traditional modes of art that present everything in the Manichaeian terms of good and evil, moral and immoral, just and unjust. In the real world, however, we find out “daß es solche Tugendhelden und Bösewichter in Reinkultur nicht gibt, daß in jedem Menschen Gutes und Böses mannigfach gemischt, einander durchdringend und häufig auflösend, den Charakter durchsetzen, und daß nur dadurch, daß wir diesen Mischungen nachspüren, eine lebensvolle Gestalt zu stande kommt” (11).

This seems to echo Nietzsche's philosophical hammer that he directed against the dominating regime of values in culture, deconstructing their claims at truthfulness. Instead of nihilistically attacking values, however, Sudermann ascribes to the aesthetic mode of literature a more benign task of revealing changes in social values over the course of time. He says, "Die Dichtung nun und insbesondere das Gegenwartsdrama hat ein feines Ohr für den Pulsschlag der Zeit. Sie fühlt den Widerstreit zwischen dem Niedersinkenden und dem Emporsteigenden, und dieser Widerstreit, der seinem Grund wiederum in dem Wandel sozialer Bildungen hat, ist der eigentliche Gegenstand aller und so auch unserer modernen Problemdichtung" (12–13). Here Sudermann implies a progressive spirit of modernism, which he believes has already arrived despite the efforts of the conservative camp to reverse history.

Activities such as public talks against the *Lex Heinze* by Sudermann and other intellectuals culminated in March 1900 into what became known as the Goethe-Bund—a loose affiliation of academics, artists, writers, and politicians who stood in defense of the liberal values of free speech and liberties in the arts and sciences. Among the notable individuals that came together in order to dispute this controversial law were liberal politicians affiliated with the Liberal Secession, such as Ernst Müller-Meiningen, Friedrich Dernburg, and the criminologist turned progressive politician, Franz von Liszt; notable academics such as Nobel Prize winner, Theodor Mommsen and the Germanist Erich Schmidt; artists including the sculptor Reinhold Begas and Adolph Menzel; and writers aside from Sudermann such as Ernst Wichert, Ernst von Wolzogen, Friedrich Spielhagen and Adolph

L'Arronge. According to Sudermann's diaries, the core members of the Goethe-Bund worked expeditiously in appealing to government officials, including Reichskanzler Chlodwig, as well as creating a media barrage to sway public opinion against the *Lex Heinze*. The Goethe-Bund soon spread to other cities around Germany, where the liberal bourgeoisie and social democratic forces also stood in opposition to the censorship laws, most notably in Munich.

Ostensibly, the efforts of the Goethe-Bund and its political allies in the *Reichstag* made an immediate impact on the *Lex Heinze*. In another speech on March 25, 1900, Sudermann acknowledges the softening of tones coming from the Reichstag, but he stresses the Goethe-Bund's uncompromising stance against the censorship paragraphs of the law. He also calls attention to how the law and the subsequent response to it changed the public discourse about such freedoms that had been taken for granted. Phrases like, "Freiheit der Kunst, Unantastbarkeit der Wissenschaft; Einbruch der Barbarei; Kampf gegen das Dunkelmännertum," had become a part of everyday conversation as a result of the impending censorship laws. In this speech, Sudermann also delivers a collective *mea culpa* on behalf of Germany's aesthetes, who he believes failed to stand in defense of their own occupation. He expounds,

In der Kunst und Litteratur fing an sich ein weltfremdes und hochmütiges Hyperästhetentum heimisch zu machen, das in gewollt unverständlicher Ausdrucksweise zu sprechen beliebt und es vorzieht, sich nur an wenige erhabene und eingeweihte Geister zu wenden. Ein müder und unfruchtbarer Ich-Kultus fand sich hinzu, der die Sorgen des Gemeinns als gemein empfindet und allen Fragen, die die Zeit bewegen, mit überlegener Ignoranz

gegenübersteht. - Und inzwischen ergingen sich die verschiedenen Schulen und Cliques in einem endlosen ästhetischen Gezänke, das viele Kräfte unterband und die eigentliche Produktion nicht um einen Schritt vorwärts brachte. (*Drei Reden* 28)

In this passage Sudermann touches on a thematic binary commonly found throughout his works and life: individual versus collective. In his works it is normally the individual who is championed, but in this case he is appealing for a collective action. His criticism of artists and authors being guilty of “weltfremdes und hochmüthiges Hyperästhetentum” is interesting, as he himself would later not only retreat to a worldview of individual aestheticism, but would also glorify it.

With the momentum on their side, Sudermann travelled south in early April 1900 in support of the Munich Goethe-Bund efforts where he delivered a speech. The efforts of the Goethe-Bund, along with those of their political allies in the Reichstag, had already changed the tide by late spring 1900. In May 1900, Sudermann made a push for one last large gathering in opposition to the *Lex Heinze* at the Circus Renz in Berlin. In addition to Sudermann as the Chairman of the Goethe-Bund, speakers such as the professors Franz von Liszt and Theodor Mommsen, the Reichstag members Müller-Meinigen and Heine, as well as the author Ernst von Wolzogen. By the time this rally took place on May 22, 1900, the *Lex Heinze* had been more or less defeated in the Reichstag through a compromise that removed the contentious parts of the law in §184. The *Berliner Tageblatt* proclaimed on May 23, 1900, “Die Künstler und Schriftsteller aber können froh sein, daß das Damoklesschwert, das über ihren Häuptern aufgehängt werden sollte, verschwunden ist.” In the same number, the *Berliner Tageblatt* reports Sudermann

to have addressed the jubilant crowd at the Circus Renz the evening before, “Als wir Sie zu der heutigen Versammlung einluden, da hatten wir vor, Ihre Stimmen zu einem letzten Proteste aufzurufen. Daß wir statt die Protestversammlung eine Siegesfeier haben würden, das haben wir nicht gehnt.”

Following the victory against the censorship laws, which was in no small part due to the intense activism during the spring months of 1900, Sudermann was mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted. This certainly had much to do with his introverted personality that was often mistaken as cantankerous and self-absorbed. Today, it is understood how intense public appearance and social activity can fatigue the introverted, and this it did to Sudermann. In his diary entry for May 25, 1900 Sudermann indicates this:

Abends bis 11 abgeschrieben, und während ich arbeitete, dann plötzlich für einen Augenblick eine Art von Glücksgefühl über mich, das mir sagte, du hast schließlich alles, was du dir einst erträumt hast. Du bist einer der zwei ersten, vielleicht der erste Dichter Deutschlands, der sitzend für u. schafft für das öffentliche Leben, für geistige Freiheit, du stehst an der Spitze einer großen über das ganze Reich sich erstreckende Organisation. Wenn du jetzt weiter schaffst – Einen Augenblick, dann war alles vorbei. Dann Gesundheit, Kraft u. Persönlichkeitsgefühl – die sind zum Teufel gegangen. Gegen dies Bewußtsein hilft kein Erfolg, kein Ruhm, kein Triumph. – Aber diesen Augenblick will ich mir doch wecken. (Tagebuch II)

Vicissitudes such as that of his intense activism against the *Lex Heinze* and then exhaustion occurred throughout his life. He was convinced that periods of engagement such as this drained his energies needed for him to create. Despite the fact that Sudermann was certainly also motivated by personal gain in his service of

freedom of expression, it does not discount the fact that he applied himself for liberalism at a crucial moment for the ideology in Imperial Germany.

### **3. Indifference, Critique, Backlash: Hermann Sudermann's Political Dramas**

Just as much as Hermann Sudermann was a figurehead of liberal Germany in its campaign against the *Lex Heinze*, he was also unafraid to show that he was not its puppet with his two successive plays, "Es lebe das Leben!" (1902) and "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" (1903), which both used politics as a backdrop to the stories. Perhaps after seeing his name so closely tied to the liberal bourgeois cause prompted in him the Nietzschean desire to stand apart from the herd, to represent something other than conforming to the mainstream. This perceived rebellion by the darling of liberal Germany did not go unnoticed and he was subsequently subjected to a severe backlash from the press that attempted to beat him back into line. With the first drama, "Es lebe das Leben!," Sudermann was accused not being political enough insofar that he did not deliver a searing criticism of the conservative class in his depiction. Whether or not this criticism provoked the author into writing the second play is unknown, but his next work, a comedy titled "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates," satirized the dying spirit of 1848 in German liberalism, which further irritated the liberal press.

#### **a. "Es lebe das Leben!"**

"Es lebe das Leben!" takes place among the milieu of parliamentary politics at the end of the 1890s and the political discourse of the time. Beate, the protagonist, is

married to a former conservative member of the Reichstag Michael von Kellinghausen and from the outside it appears that they have a happy successful household. As the story unfolds a conflict becomes clear: Beate has been secretly in love with family friend and member of parliament Richard von Völckerklingk for the last fifteen years, even though they have restrained it in the interest of career and family. This narrative of conflicted love is set over the backdrop of political discourse regarding morality. Most prominently figuring into the historical background of this play is the implementation of the Civil Code or *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* in 1900, which was effectively a wide-ranging national codification of civil laws that replaced the older state laws. One ramification of this vast piece of legislation was legally defining household structure. Not surprisingly, this was disadvantageous for women. The historian David Blackbourn writes in his book, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, "The Civil Code introduced at the turn of the century confirmed the husband as head of the family and legal guardian of his wife; abortion was unlawful and the grounds for divorce were one-sided" (369). The one-sidedness of male authority in marriage is a central theme in the drama, as well as free will concerning the institution. The title, "Es lebe das Leben!," is meant ironically. Beate, who is terminally ill, tries to live her life fulfilling to the extent that society allows. She has no legal control over her own fate in love, and she must also stay within the boundaries of socially accepted behavior in order not to become socially ostracized not only for her own sake but for that of her family and lover.

That this story plays out in the milieu of conservative Junker class makes the melodrama especially poignant because the insistence of stringent black and white

morality in legislation makes any hypocrisy more powerful. Indeed, hypocrisy is a major theme in "Es lebe das Leben!". The love triangle becomes embroiled when a former assistant who is running against Richard for office as a socialist prepares to blow the whistle on the love affair between him and Beate. Tensions arise as Kellingshausen learns of his wife's doings and a duell appears imminent. In the end Beate's death solves the conflict without the need for violence.

Behind Beate's troubled existence, "Es lebe das Leben!" does well to capture political attitudes of the time. The two competing ideologies in the drama are conservative Junkerism and socialism. In the background Richard von Völkerkling is locked in a heated election with the socialist candidate. The tactics of both parties produce a cynical atmosphere of politics driven by self-interest and unscrupulous machinations. Next to the beauty of Beate's persona in the drama, politics are treated as a sinister and ugly business. Sudermann's time spent dealing with political parties as a journalist may have soured his opinion of the affairs in this field of public life. Still, he may have also been pandering to a certain demographic within the liberal bourgeoisie, which had at this time become bored with its own political ideology. The turn away from politics to private life was a major trend at the turn of the century. Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand write in their five-volume work *Epochen deutscher Kultur von 1870 bis zur Gegenwart* that by 1900 there were essentially two poles in German politics: [der] übersteigerte Nationalismus der wilhelminischen Führungsschicht und d[ie] ständig wachsende Arbeiterklasse, die sich in der Sozialdemokratie ihre offizielle Interessenvertretung geschaffen hatte" (*Stilkunst* 7). A third inert political power at this time would be the liberal



bourgeoisie. Already in the 1880s and 1890s this class seemed to lack fortitude and zeal at times in facing the opposition from above, and they did not have the conviction and devotion of the class below. Among this class, “Opportunisten wurden Kaisertreu, die besseren unter ihnen zogen sich im Sinne einer Vogel-Strauß-Politik ins Ästhetische zurück und befriedigten ihre geistigen Interessen mit französischer, russischer oder skandinavischer Literatur, während sie den wilhelmischen Prunkstil verachteten” (Hamann/Hermand, *Stilkunst* 8). By the late 1890s a viable liberal response to the increasingly aggressive politics of Wilhelmine Germany was so absent both politically and culturally that Thomas Mann spoke of this time as a “Periode der machtgeschützten Innerlichkeit” (Hamann/Hermand, *Stilkunst* 8). Hamann and Hermand go on about the decline of bourgeois liberalism at the turn of the century: “Durch diesen Antikapitalismus und Antisozialismus verfielen alle ‘liberalen’ Ideen und wirtschaftlichen Gegebenheiten wie Industrie, Großstadt, Parlamentarismus, religiöse Aufklärung oder Demokratie, an denen das fortschrittsfreudige Bürgertum bisher gehangen hatte, plötzlich der ideologischen Verdammung” (*Stilkunst* 8).

With the decline of liberal bourgeois morale in the face of new challenges from above and below in mind, Sudermann captures the political *Zeitgeist* in “Es lebe das Leben!” Explicitly represented in the drama are the other two ideologies of the day: Junkerism and socialism. Perhaps by representing the aristocratic and working classes, Sudermann intended to give his audience something more exotic, something outside the normal liberal bourgeois milieu drama. The audience, however, is made to identify with the apolitical Beate, whose persona is represented

as being greater than party politics. The socialist opposition candidate Meixner is a former theologian and assistant of Völkerklingk who has gone over to the socialist camp, while Beate has convinced her husband Michael von Kellinghausen—who will assume other party duties at the national level—to step aside from his office in favor of her lover Richard von Völkerklingk who seems apt for the Reichstag seat. The latter's brother tells a party leader Baron von Brachtmann: "Ich kann mir auch vorstellen, wie nötig Sie ihn gerade jetzt – bei der Beratung des bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches brauchen können, wo all die großen Fragen sich nur so reihenweise aufrollen" (21). Taking place at the end of the 1890s, the Civil Code is explicitly mentioned, as conservatives at the time were jockeying to inscribe their moral values onto the law of the land. At the center of the drama lies the theme of morality, a common theme across the oeuvre of Sudermann. Völkerklingk and Beate transgress traditional conservative values by having an extramarital affair. In the end, the main figures in this drama are no more reactionary and have as much of a liberal worldview as any of Sudermann's other dramatic figures—sheep in wolve's clothing.

The question of morality disrupts the tranquility of the narrative when a party organ of the social democrats prints an article that underhandedly insinuates a love affair between Beate and Völkerklingk. The article states,

Es gelingt ja nur selten, diesen Herren der Rechten, die sich so gern als die offiziellen Hüter der öffentlichen Moral gebärden, hinter die Coulissen zu gucken [...] Bisweilen lüftet doch ein günstiger Zufall die Geheimnisse des Lebens, das sie führen. Und wenn ich reden dürfte, ich würde Ihnen allerlei Pikantes über den Herrn Kandidaten der Rechtspartei und die Beziehungen

zu seinem Freunde zu erzählen wissen – diesem Freunde, der, anstatt im eigenen Hause Wache zu halten, hier von Ort zu Ort zieht, um für den Hausfreund Stimmen zu werben. (52)

This captures the attention of some influential party figures, who ultimately function together as the arbiter of the party, as well as the fate of both the house Kellinghausen and Völkerklingk. They are the Junker von Brachtmann, the businessman Berkelwitz, and the Prince Usingen, who each represent a different demographic of the conservative party makeup. The personality of these three representatives shows a hierarchy in political power within the party: the royalty, Prince Usingen, is sharp-witted, decadent, and only connected to the party through birth; Baron Brachtmann, the party chief, is reserved, obedient, and cunning; and Berkelwitz, who appears to be a Junker or newly ennobled member of the bourgeoisie, is a bumbling dimwit. While together in a backroom of the manor of Kellinghausen, the three discuss the meaning of morality and what the issue at hand means for the party. In the dialogue, it becomes apparent that the party members, who publicly tout themselves as the guardians of morality, do not regard it necessarily as a metaphysical truth to be upheld, but rather as weapon to be used with tactics of *Realpolitik*.

The moral relativism of the conservatives in the drama is further conveyed by their knowledge of Richards past extra-marital affair with Beate. Regardless, they choose him to take the initiative to represent the conservative line concerning the question of divorce in the Reichstag. As already stated, the impending passage of the Civil Code, which serves as a backdrop to the narrative, included the legal definition of marriage. The issue of divorce therefore was a relevant theme at the time of the

drama's premiere. Baron Brachtmann, already aware of the history between Beate and Richard, asks the latter, "Wären Sie also bereit, am Freitag in der Scheidungsfrage für uns das Wort zu nehmen?" (56). After some hesitation from Richard, the Junker elaborates on the importance of this matter for the conservative party and public morality of the nation: "Wenn man den Anträgen von drüben [liberals and social democrats] nachgäbe, dann dürften Mann und Weib künftighin wie die zwei Kuckucke zusammen und auseinander fliegen. Da fehlt uns gerade ein Redner von Ihrer Kraft und Ihrer Verve, um den Herrschaften die wahrhaft sakramentale Bedeutung des Ehebündnisses zu Gemüte zu führen" (56). After Richard explains his knowledge of his former assistant Meixner's accusations from the social democratic side, Brachtmann tells him that it is then his duty to speak about the matter, and if he did and denies the charges aimed at him the matter will disappear.

"Es lebe das Leben!" does not expend all of its critical energy on the aristocracy, but saves some for the grand bourgeoisie who were thought to be guilty of class treason by assimilating to aristocratic customs. This of course was not a strictly German phenomenon, and had been taking place among European bourgeoisie for decades. In Germany this appears to have been the case since the 1870s, and intermarriage between these classes and ennoblement was on the rise (Blackbourn 365). With the issuance of special aristocratic Orders on the rise, as well as the adoption of feudal customs such as dueling by the grand bourgeoisie in the late nineteenth century, Richard Völkerklingk's son Norbert is a peculiar minor figure in the drama. Born into nobility, Norbert embodies not that of a feudalizing

bourgeoisie, but rather a liberalizing aristocracy. The fact that he treats Beate more like a mother than his own, suggests that he symbolizes hope for the future of the libertine love of Richard and Beate that could not be realized on account of class customs. In the drama, Norbert poses a problem by writing a brochure against the feudal custom of dueling. Even though taking a liberal stance against this practice could pose consequences for Richard, both he and Beate respond to it with an enlightened perspective. In discussing the matter with Beate, Norbert quotes her (“Kein Erlösungsgedanke ist etwas wert, wenn nicht ein Kreuz dahinter steht”) as his justification for writing the brochure. Beate answers him with a dose of *Realpolitik*: “Nur liebe ich das unnütze Märtyrertum nicht, mein Freund. Du sollst klaren Kopf behalten und dich nicht vorzeitig verbittern. Denn das habe ich dir auch immer gesagt: Diese Duelldinge, die dir heute wunder wie wichtig erscheinen, weil du Corpsband und Schläger noch immer über deinem Bette hängen hast, die sind nur rein harmloses Vorpostenspiel gegenüber den großen Fragen, den großen Gedankenkämpfen, die erst noch kommen” (30). Purposeless martyrdom is the primary objection that Beate raises against protesting class customs. Perhaps it is because she knows all too well how impossible it is to oppose them. When Richard is informed about the brochure from his colleagues he tells, “Das Höchste, was ich meinem seligen Vater verdanke, ist, daß er mir freie Entwicklung ließ. Ich habe mir geschworen, es mit meinem Sohne ebenso zu machen” (63). The idea of “freie Entwicklung” in child rearing was far from a standard practice in Wilhelmine Germany. Norbert is confronted by the party members in one scene in which he explains that there have been far sharper condemnations of the practice than in his

broschüre. Brachtmann then asks, "Auch von einem Angehörigen unserer Kreise," to which Norbert responds, "Wahrheit ist Wahrheit durch sich selbst und nicht durch den Mund, der sie ausspricht," after which the prince states, "Was ist Wahrheit? Sagte Pilatus" (77).

The exchange above shows three different perspectives to a social issue of much contention at the time. Norbert takes a liberal response that embraces the values of the Enlightenment; he believes that truth holds a metaphysical property that transcends personal politics. Brachtmann poses the idea of class privilege and duty; someone from the conservative circle should not question the customs. Lastly, the prince posits a philosophy of aloof decadence, and moral relativism. "Was ist Wahrheit," he asks, as if no social or political issue is important enough to be inconvenienced. Norbert responds to the others: "Die Hände waschen wir uns auch genug, Durchlaut. Man sagt sogar, daß wir uns vornehmlich durch den größeren Seifenverbrauch vom Pöbel unterscheiden, aber das Blut, das durch unsere Schuld dem Moloch unserer Standesvorurteile hingeopfert wird, das waschen wir nicht ab" (77). The progressive argument from Norbert prompts his father Richard to respond with a reasoning based in cultural pessimism. He tells his son: "Wir haben uns aus den Zeiten des Faustrechts und der Ordalien allerhand Nebengesetze herübergerettet, die unserem alterproben Herrenbewußtsein und unserem Persönlichkeitsdrang entsprechen. Und gleichviel, ob die anderen Stände sie verdammen oder – wie der höhere Bürgerstand es thut – sich ihnen zu assimilieren suchen, für das Blut, das in unseren Adern rollt, sind sie ein Segen. Mit ihnen werden wir leben oder untergehen" (77). Similar to the prince's argument of being a

prisoner in his own degenerated body due to class inbreeding, Richard cannot see an escape from the noble blood that pumps through his veins, and therefore from customs and moralities of the class. Richard further explains that the custom of dueling symbolizes the “Todesbereitschaft” of the class, which in turn gave them the superiority of fighting for what they wanted. This explanation is a striking statement of downfall and degeneration that pervaded at the turn of the century.

Kellinghausen adds the concept of “Ehrgefühl” to the discussion, which of course is the historical reason for the practice of dueling. In foreshadowing his own transgressions, Richard adds that there are “Fälle genug, in denen ein Mann von Herr- und Rechtsgefühl die Ehre und die Rechte eines andern schwer und in irreparabler Weise gekränkt hat, vielleicht hat kränken müssen. Erkennt er seine Schuld an und wird Sühne von ihm gefordert, soll er sich aus dem Staube machen oder sich hinter die hohe Justiz verkriechen, deren Paragraphen auf das Ehrgefühl von Hausknechten zugeschnitten sind” (79). All of this philosophizing is directly related to the end, in which Beate martyrs herself in order to prevent a duell between Richard and Michael after the secret affair is revealed. The younger generation, exemplified in Norbert, would have a different perspective on the system of mutually exclusive classes, as the boundaries between them would continue to dissipate. This new perception of the old class system is represented in Norbert’s nuanced understanding of the discussion about *noblesse oblige*. He responds:

Mir scheint, hier liegt gar nicht der Kern des Konflikts. Solange unsere Adelskaste streng abgeschlossen auf ihren Schlössern und Burgen thronte, da

hatte sie es leicht, sich selbst und anderen Gesetze zu geben, aber heute, wo sie in den Wettbewerb des bürgerlichen Lebens hat eintreten müssen, wo sie sich täglich an den Grundsätzen und Gewohnheiten der anderen Stände reiben muß – ohne ein anderes Prä zu besitzen, als ihren kleinen, süßen Adelstick – da wird sie in dem Augenblicke wehrlos, in dem die böse plebejische Welt ihre Sondergesetze nicht mehr anerkennt oder sie sogar damit auslacht. Und dann bleibt ihr als Zuflucht doch bloß die vielgeschmähte Justiz. (79–80)

Norbert, unlike the older generation, sees the falsity in the claim that the nobility has an intrinsic connection to some higher metaphysical values. Here, it is he who is maintaining a sense of *Realpolitik*; the old belief in *noblesse oblige* can exist only so long that this class stays encased on its estates, removed from the actual fluidity between social classes. Not surprisingly, the late Nietzsche of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886) and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) is once again called to mind here. The caste of the nobility is comprised no longer—that they ever were is beside the point—of some sort of *Übermenschen* or blond beasts. The actually existing nobility is in fact as much beholden to slave morality as the rest, and perhaps even has more of a herd mentality than the other classes when one takes the social democrat Meixner's political machinations into mind. Beate, however, can also be seen as an expression of some noble character that is far greater than the hypocritical, ignominious party politics in the drama. She accepts the consequences of her actions and commits suicide to preserve the wellbeing of the others, when Michael demands Richard take his own life. Richard's last words indicate that he too realizes he cannot take the path of least resistance and also commit suicide; the noble path is to suffer and continue one's duty.



The philosophy espoused in “Es lebe das Leben!” is perhaps as conflated with different imperatives and values as Nietzsche’s oeuvre. “Es lebe das Leben!” are the final words in Beate’s suicide note, which appear to be consonant with the optimism in the earlier works of Nietzsche; nevertheless, taking one’s own life seem to be anathema to this imperative. Furthermore, Richard’s self-denial of joining his true love in death also seems contrary to the will to power—the power of having agency in a situation. Still, Richard remains empowered via his seat in parliament, even if he is a lackey to the biddings of the party. This he shows when Brachtmann makes sure it is Richard who gives a speech outlining the conservative party’s stance of the current question of marriage and divorce in the Reichstag. In this task, Richard did not fail to deliver a fiery speech concerning the matter. Norbert tells, “Ich habe wohl nie im Leben eine so schonungslose Brandmarkung des Ehebruchs gehört, wie heute aus dem Munde meines Vaters” (121). In endorsing the state’s right to uphold the institution of marriage by law, Norbert recounts the main points of his father’s speech before the Reichstag:

Aus der Psychologie des modernen Menschen entwickelte er ein Bild der heutigen Ehegemeinschaft, ihrer Aufgabe nach außen und ihrer inneren Notwendigkeit [...] Und dann zog er die Nutzenanwendung. In einer Zeit, in der alles schwankt, in der das Verhältnis zwischen Eltern und Kindern an Kraft und Innigkeit verliert, in der der Gehorsam vor den staatlichen Autoritäten sich mehr und mehr veräußerlicht, in der selbst Gott und seine Priester ihre Allgewalt über die Seelen eingebüßt haben, da müßten wir dafür sorgen, daß das einzige Band, welches den Menschen dauernd an den Menschen bindet, nicht noch mehr gelockert würde – damit die irrenden Triebe der Jugend Zeit haben, sich in feste Gewohnheiten umzubilden, damit aus den Gewohnheiten

Pflichten, aus den Pflichten Gesetze, aus den Gesetzen eine im Dulden und Beharren gleich starke Volksseele sich gestalten könne. (121)

A statist response to the perceived degeneration of the institution of marriage was an integral part of the discourse of the Civil Code at this time in Germany. Richard von Völkerkling's public endorsement of this policy negates his own life choices and desires. The conflict between his private and public persona hindered him to realize the life he wanted. Therefore, Beate, not he, lived a fulfilled life of agency, which she upholds through her suicide.

As usual, "Es lebe das Leben!" was a public success but failed to capture the praise of the critics. The next-day review of the play's premiere in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on February 2, 1902 begins: "Die Spannung auf dem neuen Sudermann war überaus stark gewesen, und die Erwartung, ja die sichere Prophezeiung, daß es einen ungemein großen Erfolg geben würde, nicht minder. Aber ganz so kam es nicht." Even though, according to the review, the audience seemed to have favorably received the play, the theater critic for the newspaper accuses him of trying to transcend his place in society as a pure technical playwright. The inclusion of current political and social questions seems to have irritated the critic who calls "Es lebe das Leben!": "Kein robustes Tendenzstück." The reason he provides is that Sudermann "zieht nicht am Wagen eines Programmes und legt nicht die Abzeichen irgend einer Clique an. Er strebt durchaus zu der Höhe, die die Freiheit des Urtheils über Menschen und Dinge giebt, und fühlt sich der Materie gegenüber ganz unabhängig." This, together with the usual Sudermann motifs, such as the love conflict and the stronger female character vis-à-vis her male counterpart, make for

an inconsistency, a violation of the classic Sudermann product that one might expect annually. Still, it is the perceived lack of partisanship that Sudermann shows in the play that most offended the critic's taste. He writes of the figures in the drama, "Es sind ferner conservative Parteiführer, satirisch, aber nicht mit Voreingenommenheit gesehen, Typen, welche *mutatis mutandis* schließlich auch auf anderen Seiten des hohen Hauses zu treffen wären." Sudermann's accused half-hearted attempt at depicting the conservative aristocratic milieu seems to have more at stake than it did at the time. The cynical depiction that one political party is much like the rest shows a boredom and apathy with the political system that can be attributed as a sign of withdrawal among the liberal bourgeoisie. At the end of the review the author appears to touch on this: "So schwach und lahm ist die soziale Schicht, die der Dichter uns vorführt, eine Herde mit Heerdengeist! Sudermann hat sie oft geschildert, aber, ich meine, niemals mit solcher Resignation und Skepsis." The reviewer goes on to attribute this to the modern worldview that "Helden sind nicht mehr wie früher Ausnahme und Kraftmenschen, die siegen oder untergehen und sich mit einem bewußten Ja oder Nein vom Schauplatz entfernen. Die Helden sind ganze Gesellschaftsklassen: ihr Widerspruch mit sich selbst ist ohne Ende, ihre Schwäche bietet keinen Ausweg." To be sure, the ambiguous and cynical ending leaves no black and white moral. Perhaps this is only a sign that modernism was changing the liberal bourgeois worldview—it is just that the public did not yet realize it.

## **b. “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates”**

The second play, “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates,” which appeared one year after “Es lebe das Leben!” in 1903, changed the setting from a conservative milieu to a liberal one, and from a tragedy to a comedy. The liberal bourgeoisie that comprised the most of Sudermann’s fan base could absorb a play that shows the contradictions of conservative positions, and the hypocrisy among the aristocracy in “Es lebe das Leben!” “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates,” with its satirical depiction of a group of 1848ers who are aged and out of touch at the end of the 1870s raised the ire of many of the liberal bourgeoisie who saw this depiction as irreverent and demeaning toward the founding fathers of their own political ideology. The backlash was so strong against this portrayal of the martyrs of 1848 that Sudermann felt compelled to write a pamphlet to clarify the meaning and purpose of the play. The controversy that this produced shows that there was still a high degree of reverence for the forty-eighters, who were apparently for some critics beyond reproach. Putting this generation on such a pedestal contributes to the mythologisation of this era, which in turn made subsequent generations of liberals appear catatonic by comparison. Even Sudermann’s criticism of this generation, and what it became after 1848, aligns with this thinking, and propagates a *Sonderweg* thesis of a sick liberalism, which became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although it first appeared in 1903, the author had dabbled with this topic many years before while he was still writing stories for various newspapers of the liberal press. On May 28, 1881, a story titled “Kienapfels Heldenthaten in der Wahlschlacht” appeared in the *Deutsches Reichsblatt*. This short story functions as a

parable to warn against political complacency and practicing *Bierbankpolitik* (political discussions in pubs) without actually voting. It begins in a “durchaus liberale Stadt” where something strange has occurred: a conservative has been elected. The narrator is a former resident who moved away many years ago but has returned on business, just in time to listen to the grandiose political debates of the patrons in the local pub. The most pronounced of these figures is a local named Kienapfel who aggressively debates politics from a fastidiously liberal position. About Kienapfel’s harangues, the narrator remarks: “den solltet ihr einmal hören, wie der den Mund voll nimmt! Akkurat so, als wäre er der gestrenge Richter, der über Deutschland, den armen Sünder, zu Gerichte säße.” He pessimistically opines that “Der Stern Deutschlands ist im Sinken [...] ein jeder freiheitsliebende Mann muß trauernd sein Haupt verhüllen und sich abwenden von dem ungerathenen Vaterlande. Die Nation ist mit Blindheit geschlagen, wie hätte sonst jemals die konservative Partei den Sieg in der Wahlschlacht davon tragen können?” The narrator then clarifies how the conservatives won the election. Early on electionday he stopped into the pub before his meeting. From a corner he eavesdrops on the alcohol-fueled political debates of Kienapfel and his comrades. As Kienapfel successively drinks beer from his *Bierstein* with a lid inscribed with “An’s Vaterland, an’s theure, schließ dich an,” he is emboldened to condescend and question the political convictions of others. One of his debating partners, a shop owner, expresses his apathy toward political labels and his attention to personal gain in voting: “Liberal oder konservativ, das ist mir ganz Wurscht.” Amidst Kienapfel’s political battles at the *Stammtisch*, the narrator begins a conversation with a teacher who has

come to the pub after voting. He tells how he was pressured to vote conservative, but as a liberal-minded individual he voted with his conviction and now fears for his career. The narrator tells the teacher, “Sehn Sie diese Leute an, die hier am Kneiptisch so pathetische Reden zu halten verstehen, ihnen ist ihre Staatsbürgerpflicht, ihr Staatsbürgerrecht nicht so viel werth, um ihr Seidel Bier im Stich zu lassen, sonst würden sie den kleinen Gang in’s Wahllokal gescheut haben.” Kienapfel, who scrutinizes the politics of the other bar patrons, never makes it to vote, telling the others that his vote would not make a difference. The story ends with the admonishing words: “Am anderen Morgen hörte ich sagen, er [Kienapfel] hätt’s an diesem Abende noch auf’s siebzehnte Glas gebracht. Das waren Kienapfels Heldenthaten in der Wahlschlacht. Nächsten Tag’s, als die Resultate der verschiedenen Wahlbezirke zusammengestellt waren, ergab es sich, dass die Konservativen eine—wenn auch nur ganz unerhebliche—Majorität erhalten hatten.” The *Bierbankpolitik*, inaction, rhetoric, and political intimidation are all themes that Sudermann would once again visit with his play “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates.”

“Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” takes place in a provincial city in East Prussia at the end of the 1870s. At the center of the play is the dentist Hartmeyer, his two sons Fritz and Reinhold, and his old compatriots from the revolution of 1848, the so-called “Sturmgesele” who still meet regularly in the backroom of a local tavern. Hartmeyer’s continued zeal in promoting the revolution, although it had failed, and the expressed goal of a German nation state had been already realized through the conservative Chancellor Bismarck, provides a source of humor in the comedy. Even

though all of the “Sturmgesellen” have led typically comfortable bourgeois lives for the past thirty years, raising families and holding professions such as teacher, businessman, bureaucrat, and rabbi, these men still clandestinely gather, call each other by their secret names, and fantasize about revolution. As one figure calls it later in the play “ein hammliges-dammliges Gesellschaftsspiel” (186). The efficacy of their 1848 ideal has long since become irrelevant, and the others can sense this, but Hartmeyer is blinded by his identity as a revolutionary. When the barkeeper explains that they would like to use the backroom for other events, and that, “Die Polizei hat Ihnen doch seit Anno Schnee nuscht mehr jetan,” Hartmeyer responds: “Wir Sturmgesellen sind eine Geheimverbindung mit revolutionären Zielen, die wir gegebenen Falls auch nicht verleugnen würden” (121).

One major theme in the comedy is the transitory nature of political movements and ideals. What one generation is willing to die for, seems absurd to the following generation. Hartmeyer’s inability—or unwillingness—to see how the times have changed in the last twenty-five years puts him on course for an existential crisis in the play. The thought of losing the private backroom of the tavern, where the Sturmgesellen meet, puts him into a mood of panic. He despairs to his fellow Sturmgeselle Markuse about the planned changes in the tavern where they gather:

Die Fahnen sollen wir wegnehmen. Die Banner unserer Hoffnung, die Oriflamme unserer Begeisterung. Wissen Sie den nicht, Mensch, was diese Kattunfetzen für uns bedeuten? Wissen Sie den nicht, daß ich für die Farben meine Karriere, meine Existenz, die Ziele meiner Jugend, den Glauben an meine Zukunft, alles, alles hingeopfert habe? Wissen Sie den nicht, daß diese

Farben dem alten Leben von uns Freiheitsveteranen Hoffnung und Weihe geben? Daß wir ohne sie gar nicht mehr auf der Welt sein möchten? (123–24)

This crisis of identity that comes from his confrontation with reality is too much for Hartmeyer and he sinks back into his dreamworld of idealism. Instead of facing the fact that the Sturmgesehen have become too aged, scarce, and obsolete to justify financially their retention of the private room in the tavern, he concludes that they must recruit members from the younger generation.

Generational difference is a recurring theme in the works of Sudermann. For Hartmeyer, the spirit of 1848 that was left unrealized in the wake of the revolution was the end of history. His ideology blinds him to the fact that the dialectical progression of history continued after the revolution, and that the next generation does not share the same values as their predecessors. In this way, he is a kind of tragic figure, such as a King Lear—a prisoner of his own convictions. Furthermore, with time, values that were once perhaps considered “radical” or “subversive” may not carry the same meaning to the next generation. In the case of Hartmeyer, his belief in the ideals of 1848 is as flimsy as his grasp on reality; his comfortable bourgeois existence and lack of meaningful political engagement renders his rhetoric hollow. Rather than being a radical, at the end of the 1870s, he is merely a middling member of the liberal bourgeoisie. The radical torch had been passed to the socialists in Bismarck’s Germany who were about to be outlawed through the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1878. In the keynote speech at the Literary Conference in Dresden of 1895, Sudermann had outlined the shifting of political spirits in the literature of the nineteenth century. He told the audience that it is wrong that



subsequent generations be encumbered by the values and standards of their predecessors. Hartmeyer's judgment of the next generation shows the contradictions of the older generation vis-à-vis the younger one. In speaking with his comrade Markuse about a particular socialist agitator and his organization of public rallies, Hartmeyer exclaims: "Das Volk gehört uns. Uns Demokraten gehört das Volk. Niemand soll es wagen, uns die Volksseele streitig zu machen!" (126). Here Hartmeyer speaks as if his generation has a monopoly on the political spirit of the people; only the 1848ers should be allowed to practice oppositional politics. Markuse answers pessimistically but also realistically: "Was Anno siebzig noch von der Volksseele übriggelassen hat, darum beißen sich jetzt die Hunde" (126). Here he realizes that their time is over, even if he sees what has taken its place as unworthy. This sense of pessimism directed at the younger generation represents the discourse of degeneration that pervaded the end of the nineteenth century. A teleological belief in progress that was the cornerstone to Hegel's philosophy and his adherents who dominated the philosophical discourse of the mid-nineteenth century, and which provided an intellectual basis for the brand of liberal thinking that spurred the events of 1848, had now succumbed to a worldview of pessimism. Traditionally, intellectual historians have argued that pessimism grew out of the failed opportunity of 1848 and the popularization of Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism in the 1850s.

The generations preceding the founding of the German Reich had a sense of idealism, a sense of passion. Taking aim at *Realpolitik* that sparked a disinterested realism in society, from statecraft down to aesthetics and technology, Sudermann

tells the audience at the Literary Congress at Dresden in 1895 that it is the “unbarmherzig sachliche Nüchternheit” of the statesmen that is the culprit for exterminating this optimistic spirit (“Litterarische Wandlungen” 166). The liberalism of Hartmeyer and Markuse is *Realpolitik* draped in idealism; their once higher ideals are now only the thin veneer that covers their personal interests and desires. Markuse, who is now a rabbi, uses his identification as a revolutionary to occasionally eat a piece of ham in secret, and Hartmeyer, although a married family man, still womanizes in the name of freedom. The rabbi tells Hartmeyer, “Die deutschen Frauen, das ist deine Schinkensemmel [...] Was man nicht deklinieren kann, das sieht man gern als heilig an. So geht’s mit der deutschen Freiheit, so geht’s mit den jungen Witwen, so geht’s mit allem” (129). But Hartmeyer is not the only womanizer; it seems that the other Sturmgesehlen are most interested in still attending the meetings in order to be waited on by the “blonde Ida.” With the ageing ranks and the threat of losing their secret meeting place, Markuse suggests initiating their children into the Sturmgesehlen. Hartmeyer latches on to this idea, exclaiming, “Das ist ja ein großer Gedanke, das ist ja Erlösung, das ist ja Wiedergeburt! So zwingen wir die nächste Generation in unsere Bahnen hinein. So machen wir sie zu Vollstreckern unseres Willens. So säen wir die Drachensaat weit in das Land hinaus” (131). Hartmeyer here is guilty of gravely misinterpreting the ideals for which he believes he is still fighting. Instead of the grand ideals of freedom and democracy, he sounds more like a totalitarian when he speaks of forcing the younger generation to be the executors of his will.

The differences between the generation that came of age after German unification and the generation of 1848 are embodied in the children of the Sturmgewissen. Hartmeyer's two sons Fritz and Reinhold represent two directions of the liberal legacy in Bismarckian Germany. Fritz leads the daily bourgeois life that the onetime revolutionaries adopted after the failed revolution. He follows his father's footsteps in the career of dentistry, and with German bourgeois industriousness, dedicates himself to family, career, and political interests better suited for the time. All of this, however, is unworthy to Hartmeyer, who seems to harbor a sentiment of bourgeois self-hatred that he displaces on his son. When Fritz appears in a scene in which Hartmeyer and Markuse are having coffee, a dialogue ensues that illustrates the tension between the two generations as he quickly drinks a coffee standing:

FRITZ. Ich stör euch nicht lang'. Ich trink' rasch mal im Stehn.

HARTMEYER. Da hast du die neue Generation. Im Stehen ißt sie, im Stehen trinkt sie, im Stehen halt sie Feierstunde.

FRITZ. Da irrst du, Vater. Die neue Generation halt überhaupt keine Feierstunde.

HARTMEYER. Und was kommt dabei 'raus?

FRITZ. Arbeit.

HARTMEYER. Und was kommt aus der Arbeit 'raus?

FRITZ. Menschentum, Vater.

HARTMEYER. Wir haben uns unser Menschentum etwas anders gedacht, mein Sohn.

FRITZ. Die Welt ist eben nicht mehr dieselbe. Was ist da zu machen?

HARTMEYER. Was da nicht zu machen ist, das ist die Frage. Oder hältst du es für richtig, mit Lehmknetern und Packträgern zusammen hinter gewissenlosen Volksverführern herzulaufen?

FRITZ. Ach so, du meinst den Sozialisten Lampe, weil ich in dessen Versammlungen war? Ja, lieber Vater, solch' gewissenlose Volksverführer waret ihr auch einmal, und was die Lehmkneten und Sackträger belangt, so suchen sie da dasselbe Menschentum, das ihre Arbeit ihnen nicht beben kann. (129–130)

The contrast between Fritz and Hartmeyer is one of action versus inaction. Fritz has no time to sit over coffee and discuss the problems of the world because he is devoted to his career. He demonstrates a sense of Prussian industriousness and a confidence in his profession that resembles the notion of “calling” in Max Weber’s topic of the protestant work ethic. Fritz is the embodiment of the liberal historical worldview. If one assumes a teleological progress over time, each subsequent generation must show an improvement in condition and character. Implementing the fruits of medicinal progress, Fritz outearns Hartmeyer due to his use of anesthetics. The progressive spirit that Hartmeyer purports has become shaded with pessimism. He tells his wife: “[Fritz] Verdient ja auch mehr! Alle wünschen die sogenannten schmerzlose Zahnbehandlung. Ach, diese verweichlichte Zeit! Mir graut vor dieser entarteten Zeit” (175). Moreover, Fritz’ association with socialist meetings further irritates Hartmeyer. Condescendingly, Hartmeyer refers to the socialist camp as “Lehmknetern” and “Packträgern.” The classism inherent in this derogatory statement reminds us that nineteenth-century liberalism was not the same as late nineteenth-century democrats. As David Blackbourn points out in *The Long Nineteenth Century*, “Liberals were not democrats. True, they criticized the

arbitrary state in the name of the 'people,' organized petitions, and held liberal banquets and other politically based festivities. But liberals were alarmed by the poorest and most ignorant, critical of those they thought of as the 'masses'. They rejected universal manhood suffrage, as they rejected female suffrage, because the poor (like women) were thought to be dependent and suggestible" (131). This summary of the liberal worldview seems to explain both Hartmeyer's classism as well as his misogyny.

Hartmeyer's other son Reinhold is the polar opposite of Fritz. If Fritz stands as a true and humble expression of the revolutionary values of freedom, justice, and democracy without any superficial pomp or self-promotion in doing so, Reinhold is all form and no content. The myopic Hartmeyer can see no further than this appearance as he tells Markuse: "Der Reinhold, der ist Feuer von unserem Feuer. Der wird die Tat sein von unseren Gedanken, wie Heine sagt" (131). Reinhold, the hope of Hartmeyer's ideals, is a caricature of what had become of the *Studentenverbindungen* by the 1870s. Like the young Diedrich Hessling in Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* (1918), Reinhold makes his appearance at his family home with bandages covering the coveted *Schmiss* (scar) earned from a duel that he fought with a member of a rival fraternity.

So-called *Studentenverbindungen* have been a part of university life since the medieval times when universities were divided. Sometime in the seventeenth century *Landmannschaften* developed along these lines of division according to homeland, and adopting the old practices of pennialism. The ritualistic nature of these organizations arose with the culture of other secret societies such as Free

Masonry in the mid-eighteenth century, and from these *Landsmannschaften* came the *Corps* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The *Corps*, stemming from the original feudal organization, was soon joined by the relatively more democratic *Burschenschaften* in the landscape of student organizations following the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. With the rise of the middle class in Germany, these organizations were soon populated with members from different strata of this class. The *Corps*, however, remained the more prestigious of the organizations through Wilhelmine Germany. As Peter Gay notes in his monumental study *The Bourgeois Experience*, “The *Corps* student was not just fatuous, involuntary fodder for uncomplimentary wits; he and his brethren made up the pool from which Germany [...] drew not only its generals and its cabinet ministers, but its bankers, civil servants, university professors, medical specialists, and trial lawyers” (*Cultivation of Hatred* 16). In contrast, the *Burschenschaften* were a direct outgrowth of the student contribution in combatting Napoleon during his march through Europe. The *Burschenschaften* were organized along the lines of early nationalism, carrying principles of the Turner movement—healthy body, healthy mind—and drawing its members from a larger pool of students, accepting converted Jews, but even this was not always strictly observed. The *Burschenschaft* was organized to overcome the more traditional *Corps*. As the century progressed, from 1848 to the founding of the German Reich, many traditions were upheld, such as the regulated duel, the *Mensur*. This practice of non-lethal dueling became the means to defend one’s honor after student organizations swore off the lethal duel. But as Peter Gay notes, “Whatever moved university *Corps* to fight duels, they were scrupulously

unpolitical. A primitive patriotism and no less primitive loyalty to the ruling dynasty was all they demanded and permitted. [...] Peaceful or bellicose in later life, conformist or rebellious, student of law, medicine, or theology, the *Corpsier* was bound by the sacred statutes of his fraternity to do his fighting on the dueling grounds. Politics had nothing to do with it" (*Cultivation of Hatred* 20). After 1871, however, with the founding of the German Reich, anti-Semitism became more typical in these organizations, and the Jewish student was not regarded as "Satisfaktionsfähig" or capable of defending his "honor," which along with "freedom" and "fatherland," composed the basic principles of fraternity life.

The trends of fraternity life in the 1870s find representation in "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates." Hartmeyer, who sees his son with a bandaged face, assumes that by resorting to the *Mensur*, he had been defending the old principles of the *Burschenschaft*: "Wie kam's, daß du auf Mensur tratst? Hat man deine Mannesehre verletzt? Hat man deine Freiheitsideale angetastet?" (134). Reinhold explains that politics no longer have anything to do with the *Mensur*, and Hartmeyer asks, "Und ihr habt nichts, worfür ihr kämpft? Kein Ideal, kein gedankliches Ziel, nichts?" (135). His reason for dueling is not political but solely for "die Ehre der Couleur." Hartmeyer, still living in the past, explains that his activities led him to incarceration and expulsion from the universities in order that the German nationalist colors of black, red, and gold could be worn. But the values of freedom and fatherland bear little meaning to Reinhold and his fraternity brothers in the 1870s. He brags, "Wir haben die feudalsten Schläger von sämtlichen Couleuren," as well as about his association with officers (136). Hartmeyer cannot comprehend this and asks, "Wie

verträgt sich den das mit euren demokratischen Prinzipien?“ and tells that “ich habe mein Leben einer Idee geopfert” (136). In the following scene, Reinhold complains about the older generation to Fritz and how Hartmeyer is too obstinant with his ideals: “Das mit dem dammligen Schwarz-rot-gold. Das is er ja rein versessen drauf” (137). He divulges that he no longer belongs to a *Burschenschaft* but his organization has become a Corps Student, which explains the cavalier attitude. Furthermore, the arrival of Siegfried, Markuse’s son, reveals the anti-Semitic character of a *Corps* member. Although it was believed that Siegfried was a member of the same *Burschenschaft* as Reinhold, the change from *Burschenschaft* to *Corps* excluded him from the ranks. He tells Fritz, “Seit er [Reinhold] aber zu der göttergleichen Höhe eines Arminen oder – Pardon – Borussenfuchses emporgediehen ist, beliegt es ihm nicht mehr, meine devoten Grüße entgegenzunehmen” (146). Whereas Markuse and Hartmeyer fought for the same values during 1848 despite their religious differences, Siegfried and Reinhold are not on speaking terms. This articulates the increasingly reactionary character of fraternities in the 1870s, but it also shows how far the German Reich was from being a realization of the democratic principles espoused in 1848. That Hartmeyer is unaware that his favorite son Reinhold is a *Corps* member makes for a few humorous exchanges. In one scene Hartmeyer opines that there is much dishonor in the world, such as the *Corps* members at the university who are “frech nach unten, ölig nach oben” (172). Fifteen years later this characteristic was the subject of Heinrich Mann’s novel *Der Untertan* (1918), which Sudermann admired. After reading said novel, the author noted in his diary on January 10, 1919: “Dies Buch



hätte ich schreiben müssen, denn was es bringt, habe ich 30 Jahre lang knirschend und um mich und in mir erlebt." Sudermann, himself once a *Burschenschafter*, had no love for fraternities—especially the *Corps*. On August 5, 1900, he notes in his diary a conversation he had about the "10 Jahre, die Deutschland seine Jugend verplempern läßt in Corpsstudententhum, Biersauferei etc" (Tagebuch II).

The anti-Semitism that was growing in the fraternity culture in Germany was in the 1870s a bad omen of what was to come. As Peter Gay notes, assimilated Jews had been traditionally accepted into *Burschenschaften*, as was the case of Heinrich Heine in Bonn, who joined in 1818–19, six years before he was baptized (*Cultivation of Hatred* 23). In other areas too, anti-Semitism was on the rise, as was demonstrated on a global scale with the Dreyfus Affair in France that was still underway in France when "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" premiered in 1903. The assimilation of Jews in Germany happened gradually over the course of the nineteenth century, but by the latter part it seemed that not as much progress had been made as a 1848er such as Markuse might have expected, and in some cases there was a general regression of those tendencies. Men such as Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau felt these winds and created a refuge with the movement of Zionism. Siegfried is representative of this generation who saw in the late nineteenth century the limitations of assimilation. The thoroughly assimilated Theodor Herzl, who was a passionate fraternity member, was eventually compelled to resign due to anti-Semitism (Gay, *Cultivation of Hatred* 25). The *Berliner Tageblatt* reports on March 25, 1896 that the famed literary critic Hermann Bahr took to the *Mensur* after a much younger fraternity member dealt him an anti-Semitic slur. Sudermann was

personally acquainted with each of these men, and he was very much aware of the growing wave of anti-Semitism. Siegfried explains to his father his failure to find acceptance among the fraternities and students:

Ich hab' mir auch mal die Beine danach ausgerissen, mit jenen dort Freund und *cochon* zu sein. Aber glaubst du, sie wollten mich? Nicht mal als *cochon* . . . Als du mich vor drei Semestern ins Reich schicktest, Burschenschafter zu werden – das ist bei euch alten Achtunvierzigern mal der Traum der Träume – da hab' ich angeklopft an dieser Kneipe und an jener Kneipe – ganz bescheiden und krummbucklig wie 'n kleiner Kleiderjude . . . Kaum haben sie meine Nos' gesehen, kaum haben sie gehört: Siegfried Markuse. – “Was? Vollzählig.” (178).

While Hartmeyer and company are still preoccupied fighting past battles against the leftovers of the first estate, they are unable to see the new dangers that face their democratic principles including the new virulent anti-Semitism that has crept into their own institutions such as the *Burschenschaft*. The concept of assimilation that had been the ticket of admission into such organizations was no longer valid.

Siegfried explains that he had done as his father taught him: “Ich sprach von allem möglichen, von altem Idealismus und modernen Knopfgamaschen, – von Deutschlands unveräußerlichen Volksrechten und der eleganten Pudeldressur, von der Entbehrlichkeit der Hegelschen Gottesidee und der Unentbehrlichkeit eines guten Rollmopses. Ich zitierte Plato, Schopenhauer und Wippchen” (179). Markuse initially resists Siegfried's bleak message, and he reacts with progressive optimism: “Und nun glaubst du, du hättest ein Recht dich zu verbittern?” or that Siegfried is deceived “durch zu große Demut und zu großen Dünkel” (179–80). This optimistic outlook is the crystallized spirit of 1848, stuck in time, and unexposed to the world

around it, and the spirit of cultural pessimism that had deeply impacted the liberal bourgeoisie since the 1850s through the philosophy of Schopenhauer and later even more so with Nietzsche. It is when Siegfried reminds his father that his optimism is still rooted in a hope for social mobility through assimilation that Markuse takes notice of the situation. Siegfried tells him, "Du stehst noch mit einem Fuß im alten Ghetto und glaubst dich zu wunder welcher Dankbarkeit verpflichtet, weil man dich 'rausließ. Ich wittere bereits die Luft eines neuen, in das sie uns sperren wollen" (180). Markuse, now awakened from his obliviousness like a Rip van Winkel from a deep sleep, admits, "Der Deutsche will nicht, daß wir mit ihm Deutschen, der Russe, daß wir mit ihm Russen, der Franzose, daß wir mit ihm Franzosen sind" (180).

The figures of the Sturmgesehen, along with their stubbornness in maintaining obsolete roles as revolutionaries, provide plentiful comical relief in the play. The secret names they use at the meeting such as "Sokrates," "Der Alte vom Berg," "Giordano Bruno," "Catilina," "Spinoza," and "Poniatowski" are all taken from revolutionaries or figures that thought outside of the mainstream. The ridiculous formalities to which they still cling during the meetings and their constant distraction with the "blonde Ida" gives the play something of a slapstick tone. The plot thickens when one of the princes from the region seeks Hartmeyer's assistance for help with his beloved dog's tooth. Upon finding this out, Hartmeyer, emboldened by the presence of his comrades, tells those present at the meeting, "Mit Demagogenriechern habe ich nichts zu schaffen. Privatim nicht und nicht geschäftlich. Das weiß er, seit ich ihn höflich ersucht habe, seine Zähne in Königsberg behandeln zu lassen" (153). Even though Hartmeyer has already

compromised his position by having helped the prince on one occasion, he wishes to appear steadfast in his convictions. Some of the others, however, are slightly alarmed at Hartmeyer's bravado, considering that their secret meetings are still technically illegal in their province and are punishable by death, while their archive contains ample evidence against them. One scholar at the time found this to be the point where the comedy reaches the point of the absurd because "Geheimgesellschaften, die Todesurteile abfassen, gibt es wohl jenseits, aber nicht diesseits der russischen Grenze!" (Stern 381). The situation at hand coupled with the new members of the organization (his sons), only makes Hartmeyer even more zealous to relive his past as a revolutionary. He calls for an official meeting which the bureaucrat Stentzel, who serves as the chairperson in place of the perennially absent Freiherr von Laucken-Neuhof, refuses on account of not having had one in years. Stimulated, Hartmeyer responds: "Leere Formalitäten, sage ich, die mit einem freiheitlichen Gemeinwesen an sich nichts zu tun haben, so bäumt sich mein Unabhängigkeitsdrang dagegen auf, und ich frage mich in meinem demokratischen Gefühl: Wozu, meine Freunde, brauchen wir überhaupt einen solchen Vorsitzenden?" (158).

All of the members of the Sturmgesehen, in one respect or another, pose a paradox: Hartmeyer believes himself still to be a revolutionary when in fact he is a rather innocuous middle-class family man; Markuse has now devoted himself to religion as a rabbi; and the grocer Tomaschek does business with the authorities ("Ich bin ein friedlicher Bürger. Ich habe meinen Kredit" 183). The Freiherr von Lauckner, who is absent throughout much of the narrative, has long lost interest in

the Sturmgesehen. Furthermore, his sons, one of whom, "hielt es für nötig im Duell abschießen zu lassen," and the other who was killed in the Franco-Prussian War, paid the full price of living by the ideals of honor and fatherland. The hypocrisy is laid bare when the District Administrator pays the Sturmgesehen a visit in their "secret" meeting place. The rebellious fervor that they expressed earlier quickly transforms to an instinctual Prussian obedience to authority. As the District Administrator enters the scene, he is met with: "Womit können wir Ihnen dienen, Herr Landrat?" (162). Markuse's son Siegfried sees the company of the administrator as an opportunity to advance his career. He promptly introduces himself to this figure and says, "Und ich erlaube mir hinzuzufügen, daß es mir ein besonderes Vergnügen bereitet, die Bekanntschaft eines Mannes zu machen, der in meinem Elternhause stets mit so hoher Verehrung genannt worden ist" (163). Turning his attention to Reinhold, he identifies him and says "Sie sind der Fuchs, der eben mit meinem Neffen los war? . . . Ja, was machen Sie denn hier? Erlaubt das Ihr Korps?" (164). Hearing this revelation, Hartmeyer retreats into a state of denial concerning his favorite son, interjecting: "Mein Sohn ist Burschenschafter – Armine –, wie auch ich einst war. – Er würde niemals –" (164). Contrary to the paranoia of the Sturmgesehen, the District Administrator is not there to trouble them, and he attempts to ease their suspicions. He tells them, "Alte Sünder sind wir alle [...] Man ärgert sich, man quält sich – und wofür? – Und dann im Vertrauen, meine Herren: dieser Bismarck! Was will der Mann eigentlich? Will der das gute, alte Preußentum ruinieren? Da müßten wir noch einmal gemeinsame Sache machen, wir von rechts und ihr von links" (164–5). The administrator's suggestion shows that the

Sturmgesellen's obsession with the past has become as reactionary as the far right for whom Bismarck's politics are an abomination of the old Prussia. Both of these parties of the left and the right do not believe in the inevitability of change and want everything to remain as it was. The District Administrator then tells them of the reason for his visit. The prince has ordered him to find Hartmeyer to attend to his hunting dog's tooth, because the local veterinarian has proven to be unreliable. Fervently, Hartmeyer objects to the request. This absurd sense of honor annoys the District Administrator who hints that he could take legal action against the Sturmgesellen for holding secret meetings if Hartmeyer does not oblige his wish. Instead of being rational, Hartmeyer's already-inflated bravado blinds him and he flippantly professes: "Herr Landrat, würde ich mir hier die Hand abhacken, ehe ich dem Mitgliede eines Herrschergeschlechts, das einst unsere Ideale mit Füßen getreten, unsere Hoffnungen zum Gespötte gemacht hat – Und wenn auch das nicht: ich bin ein Kind des Volkes, ich bin ein Mann der Freiheit – mit einem Wort: ich kann nicht Fürstendiener sein, Herr Landrat!" (167). Ready to sacrifice himself and the Sturmgesellen for such a frivolous matter, his older son Fritz intervenes and volunteers to examine the dog's tooth, thus rescuing the Sturmgesellen by martyring his relationship to his father. Hartmeyer, after just inveighing against tyranny, tells him, "Ich verbiet' es dir," whereupon Fritz replies, "Verzeih, ich bin mündig, Vater" (167). The changing of roles in this scene is remarkable. Hartmeyer, who extolls the ideals of freedom and democracy in the face of political authority, is actually the authoritarian in the constellation of his own family. This is a paradox of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Even though this class can be credited with

transforming the ideas of the Enlightenment into institutions that upheld certain universal principles such as justice and other basic freedoms, the familial units were still feudal units with the male head acting as ruler, judge, and executor. In disobeying his father, Fritz invokes the term “mündig,” which in this sense implies that he is rationally capable to act according to his own volition. “Mündig,” which comes from the noun “Mündigkeit,” meaning the state of being rational enough to act according to one’s own volition, instantly calls to mind Immanuel Kant’s essay “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” (1784). In it Kant famously defines the term Enlightenment as “der Ausgang der Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen.” With this in mind, Fritz fulfills Kant’s definition of Enlightenment by using reason to resolve the issue regarding the prince’s dog despite his father’s orders to do otherwise.

Fritz’s use of reason in disobeying his father’s will, sets Hartmeyer into a rage. “Ich verlange Gericht über meinen Sohn,” he declares following what he perceived as an offense against his honor and principles. Fritz’s sacrifice for his father’s wellbeing – even though the latter does not understand – puts him in the position of a Cordelia in Shakespeare’s “King Lear.” Reinhold enjoys his father’s favor, while he scoffs at the ideals of 1848 behind Hartmeyer’s back. Contrarily, Fritz is so devoted that he is willing to sacrifice his father’s favor in order to save him from himself. This leads to Hartmeyer taking a course of action against his son in defense of his honor. The hypersensitive concept of honor among the bourgeoisie, according to David Blackbourn, was derived from an imitation of feudal norms that

were “centred on masculinity, and defined by the possession of property, education and reputation” (*Long Nineteenth Century* 367). In many cases such a perceived transgression of honor would have forced a nineteenth-century male to demand *Satisfaktion* (duell), but Hartmeyer appeals to his secret organization for retribution.

The plot of “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” intensifies with Hartmeyer’s accusations against his son and the trouble that he has stirred up with the authorities. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, a meeting is called, and the long absent, aged chairman Freiherr von Laucken or “Der Alte vom Berg” comes out of seclusion to bestow his wisdom and judgment on the matters at hand. It becomes clear from the beginning of the scene that Freiherr von Laucken is no longer interested in playing the “hammliges-dammliges Gesellschaftspiel” of the Sturmgesele with the secret names that Hartmeyer maintains to be a “flammendes Zeugnis für den Idealismus, der uns beseelt hat und noch beseelt” (186). Von Laucken’s agenda of disbanding the organization is not surprisingly met with resistance from Hartmeyer, but others welcome it. Boretius, the head teacher, lets the others know that he has more to lose in a conflict with the authorities: “Ich bin derjenige unter euch, dem die Gefahr droht, durch eine künftige Untersuchung sein Brot, seine bürgerliche Existenz, sein alles zu verlieren” (187). As a pillar of society in the field of education, he recognizes that he could lose his career for behavior not appropriate for the educators of the youth in the German Reich, which would spell an end to his “bürgerliche Existenz.” Boretius is an example of how the ideals and spirit of 1848 were buried in bourgeois comfort after the founding of the Reich in 1871. He names his “bürgerliche Existenz” as a *sine qua non* alongside of “Brot” and



“alles.” Hartmeyer in his zealotry has little concern for the consequences and pushes the issue of banning his son from the ranks of the Sturmgesehen for attending to the dental problem of the prince’s hunting dog. In a speech before the Sturmgesehen he appeals: “Meine Freunde, wir armen, alten Krauter haben von unserer verlorenen Jugend, von unseren zugrunde gegangenen Idealen nichts weiter übrig als unsere zwei reinen Hände. Ich aber erblicke in der Handlungsweise meines Sohnes das Zeugnis einer so liebedienerischen, so knechtischen und – ich will das Wort aussprechen – so hündischen Gesinnung –“ (190). With a twist of logic Hartmeyer renders Fritz’s deed as that of a lackey, an unenlightened brute, without the strength of will to resist authority. Fritz, however, offers his reasoning behind his actions in disobeying his father’s will. He tells them, “Gott, die Motive, aus denen ich es tat, sind so simple . . . Sie werden mich auslachen! Ich kann kein Viehzeug leiden sehen. Noch weniger als Menschen” (191). Once again Fritz’ reasoning draws upon the ideas of the Enlightenment. From Kant to Hegel, Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, German philosophy has a tradition of measuring the goodness in man by his treatment of animals. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant observes, “If [man] is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men” (240). Schopenhauer was the most forthright in his opposition to animal cruelty. In his *On the Basis of Morality*, he writes: “Compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character, and it may be confidently asserted that he, who is cruel to living creatures, cannot be a good man” (223). Fritz goes on, “Und als ich hörte, daß ein so edles Tier sich hilflos in Schmerzen winden muß, da war mein Entschluß gefaßt. Mit meiner – politischen

– Überzeugung hat das nicht das mindeste zu tun. Die ist übrigens noch ein ganz Stück radikaler als die Ihre. Aber Hund bleibt Hund, denk' ich, selbst wenn er einem Prinzen gehört" (191). Unlike his father who cannot help but to see everything in Manichean terms of his ideology versus the authority, Fritz is able to see the living creature not as an extension of its owner but as a thing in itself. Like Nietzsche's breakdown after seeing a horse beaten in Turin, Fritz cannot stand to see the suffering of animals. This compassion is also recognizable in his experimentation with socialist politics. He tells the members, "Wohin gehöre ich, ob ich mich zu denen rechnen darf, die jetzt den Kampf für die Armen und Elenden in die Hand genommen haben, das weiß ich selber noch nicht. Eines aber weiß ich: Zu Ihnen, meine Herren, gehöre ich nicht" (191).

Freiherr von Laucken's motion to disband the Sturmgesellen, and his reasoning behind it, presents an example of *Realpolitik*, or a pessimism that is more reasonable than Hartmeyer's irrational optimism in the play. He tells the members, "Sind wir mal in dem demokratischen Gedanken jung und stark gewesen und mit uns das halbe Deutschland. Wir haben uns den Weg der Welt überhaupt nicht anders vorstellen könne, als wie wir ihn uns zurechtgemacht hatten. Aber da is einer gekommen, der war starker als wir [...] So sehr haßten wir ihn. Trotzdem hat er aus seinem Unrecht sein Recht gemacht – trotzdem hat er uns Königgrätz und Sedan zwischen die Zähne geworfen. Nu geht die Welt seinen Weg. Und wir müssen mit" (193). It would seem that Bismarck is the figure who eventually did what they could not achieve in creating a German nationstate. This passage highlights the strange

and complex relationship of German liberals to Bismarck, who at once castigated him but paled by comparison to the skilled statesman.

Bismarck's legacy changed considerably after his dismissal in 1890. While he was polarizing during his tenure as Reichskanzler, a Bismarck myth developed in the 1890s. In his study *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor*, Robert Gerwarth writes about Bismarck's image in the 1890s: "large parts of the public now primarily remembered Bismarck as the statesman genius and founder of the Reich rather than as Bismarck the Prussian Minister President or the East Elbian Junker" (14). This was especially true among the conservative and national liberal constituents, who were not always thrilled by the Iron Chancellor's politics, but the Bismarck myth went on to captivate more progressive members of the liberal bourgeoisie as nationalism became the *Zeitgeist* toward World War I. This describes Sudermann's personal change of heart concerning Otto von Bismarck. After Bismarck's dismissal, Sudermann's views concerning the former chancellor evolved dramatically. In his memoirs, Sudermann recalls the revulsion he felt when he saw Bismarck for the first time around 1880: "Das war mein Feind und der Feind des Volkes. Das war der große Verderber Bismarck" (377).

1898 marks a date of significant importance for the rehabilitation of the Iron Chancellor's image after his dismissal, when the Cotta publishing house released the first volume of his memoirs *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, which were finalized twenty years later in 1919 with the publication of the third volume. Sudermann was impacted by the first volume. He notes in his diaries on December 17, 1898:

Ich las den ersten Band wie einen Roman. Und ein Roman, welthistorischen Stils, ein Ich-Roman, wie ihn selbst Cäsar nicht geschrieben hat, steckt darin. Das Auflauchen des unternehmungslustiger Junker in dem Wirren der Märztage erinnert an Dumas u. Scott. Dann, der geheimnisvoller Werth, der seine Privatpersönlichkeit bei Jedermann, vom Könige abwärts, fortan gewinnt u. behält, bis er eines Tages an der Spitze Preußens steht. Hier sind Zauberkräfte des Geistes, des Charakters thätig, die mit seinem der gemeinhin bekannte Maße gemessen werden dürfen. Und dies Alles thätig im Dienste der Dynastie u. des Adels ohne Rücksichtnahme, ohne Anerkennung, ohne Beziehung beinahe zu den großen Mächten des Volkstums! Alles, was uns heilig und theuer war, was der Ideale unserer Jugend bildete, wofür unsere Natur litten und wofür wir selber zu leben u. zu leiden gedachten, wird mit schweigendem Achselzucken höchstens mit einem Wort des Hohnes abgethan. Und er hat Recht behalten, denn er hat gesiegt. Ich werde dieses Buch noch Capital [sic] für Kapitel einmal aufnehmen müssen, ehe ich damit zu Rande komme. (Tagebuch II)

It is often said that history is the narrative of the victors, and Sudermann does not seem to have any qualms about that: "denn er hat gesiegt." Surprising, however, is that he absorbs Bismarck's version with so little scrutiny, not appearing to be concerned with the author's embellishments, exaggerations, and inaccuracies. Perhaps it was because at the end of the 1890s Sudermann was able to identify with the Iron Chancellor who had been ousted from his position with little regard for his great deeds in forging the German nation state. Sudermann also felt he was an underappreciated man of greatness, attacked by his critics, and misunderstood by the masses. This shift in opinion concerning the polarizing chancellor is reflected in the Freiherr von Laucken's reasoning: "So sehr haßten wir ihn. Trotzdem hat er aus seinem Unrecht sein Recht gemacht" (193). This recognition of Bismarck's

legitimacy through deed, his right through might, is symptomatic of specific discourses at the *fin de siècle*. Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* is one iteration thereof. But another corresponding trend was the social Darwinism that had taken off, finding an extreme expression with the publication of the book *Might Is Right or Survival of the Fittest* (1890), by the pseudonymous author Ragnar Redbeard. The mystique with which Bismarck is treated in "Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates" would only be intensified twenty years later in *Der tolle Professor*. Summing up the ambiguous presence of Bismarck in Sudermann's works, Professor Sieburth tells: "Um die Frage 'für oder wider Bismarck,' dreht sich alles" (*Der tolle Professor* 111).

The Freiherr von Laucken's sober speech to the Sturmgesellen makes him something of a *raisonneur* in the play, albeit a curious one. His pessimism—"Nu geht die Welt seinen Weg. Und wir müssen mit"—is one of realism. Himself having difficulties walking due to his advanced years, he understands that it is no longer the Sturmgesellen's time, and he sees the absurdity in continuing the bygone struggles of 1848. Despite Hartmeyer's protests of "Junkertum!" it is of no avail—the Freiherr von Laucken insists on facing the pessimistic reality of the circumstances. He explains the dynamic of conflicts that dialectically passes with the coming of each generation. He tells them, "Und die liebe Demokratie? Es wird immer noch einiges Rindsvieh geben, das auch mal im Schatten grasen will. Und dann wird eben das andere Rindsvieh, das schon im Schatten grast, noch etwas enger zusammenrücken [...] mit der ganzen Bierphilisterei, in der wir uns dabei doch ganz wohl sein lassen, sind wir nuscht weiter wert, wie den Dung abzugeben für die nächste Generation,

die von uns nichts mehr wissen will" (194). Von Laucken, or Der Alte vom Berg, has come down from the mountain to reveal a truth that did not want to be heard. Like a veil being pulled from before his eyes, Hartmeyer is confronted with reality. Suddenly, his son Reinhold is no longer the extension of his own ideals and a symbol of hope for the future. Reinhold tells him, "Die alte Germanenfreiheit, die wohnt doch jetzt wieder in unserer Brust . . . Bismarck hat sie uns doch erkämpft," encouraged by Lauckner, he continues, "Und durch die deutschen Waffen ist der Glanz der alten Hohenstaufen doch wieder auf uns herabgestiegen, und die Raben brauchen nicht mehr um den Kyffhäuser zu fliegen. Darum müssen wir doch in deutscher Treue stehen zum Thron zu unserer siegreichen Armee" (195). The counter-reality in which Hartmeyer had been living comes crashing down with the revelation that Reinhold is a Corps Student. Still, Hartmeyer resists coming to terms with the circumstances. He tells the Sturmgesehen, "Ich meinesteils wünsche nicht lächerlich zu sein. Ich fühle mich nicht reif für die Verachtung, mit der er [Laucken] uns beschenkt! Ich will für die Ideale meiner Jugend leben, leiden und untergehn. Mein Charakter und mein Haus – die sollen rein sein und bleiben" (197). And with these words he refuses to relent, defying protocol, after Freiherr von Laucken set in motion the disbandment. Hartmeyer sends his son away and bids the chairman of the Sturmgesehen farewell. In the final exchange between Laucken and Hartmeyer in the scene, Laucken offers to send the latter a book, "Das heißt: Donkischott" (196).

Optimistic as a Don Quixote, with the hubris of a Hamlet, Hartmeyer refuses to relent from his ideals even at the cost of friends, family, and career. Markuse

attempts to reason with the dentist about his situation, telling him, “Die Zeit ist stärker als du” (201). Historically, this pessimism comes decades too late. The failed revolution of 1848 is generally considered to have been immediately followed by a general turn to cultural pessimism that is represented in trends during the mid nineteenth century such as realism, *Realpolitik*, and a fascination with the pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Hartmeyer’s answer to Markuse’s pessimism, however, is more than the delusional optimism that he espouses earlier in the play. Responding to the notion that time is stronger than the individual, he replies, “Die Zeit der königlich preußischen Volksbenedelung? Die Zeit des obrigkeitlich kommandierten Freiheitsrausches? Die Zeit, wo Leutnants die Erlöser spielen, wo armes, willenloses Schlachtvieh zur Heldengröße aufgepäppelt wird? Da spuck’ ich aus vor der Zeit” (201).

Regardless of their convictions, whether they have been tamed with pessimism, or steadfast, all of the Sturmgesehen once again find themselves in the same position when the tavern keeper Makrocky threatens to bring the compromising documents from the Sturmgesehen’s archive to the authorities. The Sturmgesehen gather once again at Hartmeyer’s home to vent frustration and direct accusations at each other for their precarious situation. While the old revolutionaries are in a state of panic, the rest of the city is celebrating Germany’s glory at a festival for Sedantag. An ominous visit of the Landrat is announced and the Sturmgesehen solemnly await their fate. Instead of ordering their arrest for the subversive and conspiratorial documents, Hartmeyer is awarded the Ritterkreuz des Ordens, at Fritz’ request after tending to the prince’s hunting dog. In the final

scene Hartmeyer is left looking at himself in the mirror with his Ritterkreuz des Ordens, while the music from the Sedan festival can be overheard. Warming up to his post-Sturmgesellen life, he exclaims, "Ich will nicht mehr im Winkel stehn. Ich will auch teilhaben an dem großen – an dem großen – ja ich auch!" (221). Even the most obstinate of the opposition succumbs to the allure of national celebration, pomp, and accolades. Cured of his revolutionary delusions, Hartmeyer imbibes in the *Zeitgeist* of nationalism.

After its debut in 1903, Hermann Sudermann's "Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates" provoked some negative reactions from the public. The *Berliner Tageblatt* reported on October 4, 1903, the day after the play's premiere: "Im ganzen war es – an Sudermannschen Maßen geprüft – kein großer Erfolg." In summarizing the message of "Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates" it reports: "Sudermann versucht, an einem Beispiel preußisch-deutscher Geschichte zu zeigen, daß die politischen Ideale, wie alle anderen Ideale, keine Ewigkeitsdauer beansprechen können. Auch sie sind nur ein Teil der immerdar fließenden Bewegung, in der sich alles Menschliche befindet. Jede Generation darf und soll ein Eigentum an politischen Zielen haben." A more detailed critique of the play on October 5, 1903 from Fritz Engel in the *Berliner Tageblatt* accuses that Sudermann strikes a minor key of fatalism with this play: "Das erzählt uns Hermann Sudermann – versteht man ihn recht, aus einer sehr resignierten Grundstimmung heraus. Wenn Ideale alt geworden, so aussehen, wenn Begeisterung sich dergestalt in Geckentum verwandelt, was lohnt es, am Bau der Zukunft mitzuarbeiten?" This degree of pessimism and perceived attack on the most sacred generation of liberals seems to have perplexed the author, because of its



incongruency with Sudermann's recent actions in combatting the Lex Heinze just two years before. The article explains, "Nach seinem bisherigen Auftreten schien Sudermann doch selbst aus dem Gedankenkreis entsprossen, den vor bald sechszig Jahren die Väter in einer machtvollen Aufwallung ihrer berechtigtsten Gefühle gezogen haben. Ich glaube mich zu erinnern, daß als wir im Goethe-Bund die lex Heinze bekämpften, Hermann Sudermann mit dem aus jenen Tagen überkommenen Wortschatz sehr geschickt und sehr gläubig arbeitete." Trying not to appear anti-liberal in its critique of Sudermann's criticism of this idolized generation among liberals, the critic qualifies the treatment of "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" with the line: "Wie wir im bürgerlichen Leben Meinungsfreiheit beanspruchen und, falls wir keine Bebel sind, einander auch gewähren, so wollen wir dem Dichter Gestaltungsfreiheit gönnen." The remainder of the article then scrutinizes the unrealistic aspects of the play, finding the figures, especially Hartmeyer, implausible. Coming from the liberal press, such a negative response is not entirely surprising. But it seems that the irony and humor managed to entirely escape the critic. Punctuating the ending with an emphatic sense of irritation, he writes:

Wir ärgern uns, daß die drei jungen Leute, die Brüder Hartmeyer und der Literatur-Markuse, sich in den Sturmgeselembund zwingen lassen, mit dem Bewußtsein, durchaus nicht dorthin zu gehören. Wir ärgern uns, daß dieser Reinhold Hartmeyer feudalstudentische Ausdrücke gebracht, die in den siebziger Jahren noch unbekannt waren. Wir ärgern uns über die oberflächliche Begründung am Schluß, der dem alten Hartmeyer plötzlich einen Orden beschert, wir ärgern uns über . . . Kurzum wir ärgern uns."

Clearly, Sudermann touched a sensitive nerve with liberals. Although the liberal press never hesitated to brutalize Sudermann's work, it seems as if this play's subject matter took the liberal bourgeois literary establishment by surprise. On one hand Sudermann was proving to be no slave to bourgeois liberalism, but on the other hand he was also holding a mirror up to this class at the turn of the century and what they saw was perhaps not pleasant to look at.

The indignation provoked by "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" continued for some time in the press. On October 6, 1903, a heavy-handed rebuttal to Sudermann's perceived mockery of the heroes of 1848 was issued in the *Vossische Zeitung* titled "Die Sturmgesele" with no author's name listed.<sup>23</sup> With lofty words of praise, the author exalts the heroes of 1848 and their ideals for the German nation, appealing to the mythology of this generation: "Jeder Fortschritt, den die deutsche Nation in der Gesetzgebung und Verwaltung gemacht hat, führt auf das Jahr 1848 zurück. Ohne das 'tolle Jahr' hätte es kein Sedan gegeben, kein Deutsches Reich, kein Kaisertum. Es ist manches anders geworden, als unsere Altvordern dachten; aber das Beste, was erreicht ist, haben sie gewollt, erstrebt, zu ihm den Grundstein gelegt, den Samen gestreut. Und dessen in Anerkennung, in Dankbarkeit zu gedenken, ist eines gebildeten und gesitteten Volkes würdig." Calling Sudermann's knowledge of the events of 1848—especially those in East Prussia—into question, the author writes, "Sudermann kennt weder die Männer, wie sie 1848 wirkten, noch wie sie 1877 geworden waren." Not refraining from using personal

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<sup>23</sup> It was later established that the author of the article was a Dr. J. Levy with whom Sudermann exchanged open letters in the *Vossische Zeitung* twenty years later after the publication of *Der tolle Professor*.

attack, the article singles out the barmaid Ida as the only believable character because, “Die Tilsiter Kellnerin freilich, die kennt er, sie hat er verstanden und glaubhaft gezeichnet.” In the article one can detect a general sense of denial concerning some of the problems facing liberalism at the turn of the century. This is especially true regarding the spread of anti-Semitism among the student organizations, which the author of the article refuses to acknowledge. He writes, “Der Antisemitismus spielt dabei keine Rolle, und von der Gesinnung der Studentenschaft von 1877 weiß Sudermann so wenig wie von den Gesinnungen und Taten der Achtundvierziger. Es gab dazumal recht viele jüdische Mitglieder sowohl in Burschenschaften wie in Korps, und gerade in Königsberg kannte man keine konfessionellen Unterschiede.” Moreover, the author attacks Sudermann’s perceived disloyalty to liberalism. He writes, “Hier ein Kompliment vor den Nationalen, dort eins vor der Sozialdemokratie, und dazwischen Hohn für die Achtundvierziger als eine ebenso alberne wie charakterlose Gesellschaft.” Such a fierce response to a comedy shows that this was a sensitive subject at the time and Sudermann was not afraid to provoke opinion, even if it meant stirring up emotion within his own liberal bourgeois milieu. Although the liberal press held no punches back when it came to brutalizing the most recent Sudermann play, there appears to still be an expectation that he pay reverence to this mythologized generation. This is evident in the concluding quotation from Schiller’s “Don Karlos”: “Sagen Sie ihm, daß er für die Träume seiner Jugend soll Achtung tragen.”

A milder treatment of Hermann Sudermann’s “Der Sturmgessell Sokrates” appeared in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on October 11, 1903 titled “Das Program der

Sturmgesellen.” The author of the article, Friedrich Dernburg (1833–1911)—a journalist, liberal politician, and author of fiction—had worked closely with Sudermann during the Lex Heinze campaign two years before, and they had a seemingly amicable rapport. Dernburg presents the play in a more favorable light by highlighting its verisimilitude in presenting the truculence of programmatic politics. Relating the play to current events, he invokes August Bebel’s speech at the Socialdemocratic Party Convention in Dresden just a month before the premiere of “Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates.” He compares Hartmeyer of the Sturmgesellen to Bebel, whose fiery, aggressive speech was directed at the so-called revisionists who wished to alter the orthodox revolutionary party platform of the social democrats. The party program, Dernburg explains, becomes a matter of existential grounding for the politically active. “Einem sein Programm nehmen,” Dernburg writes, “das ist grausamer als Mord. Das greift an die Nieren, das zieht die Seele aus dem Leibe.” Bebel’s “Berserkerwut” against the proposition of revision, like Hartmeyer’s persistence in clinging to the ideals of 1848 exemplify the importance that orthodoxy can carry. Curiously, it is the unrealized party program that remains in an unadaltured state: “Das Schlimmste, was einem Programm passieren kann, aber ist offenbar, das es ausgeführt ist.” In other words, the orthodoxy of party programs stand no chance in the *Realpolitik* arena of parliamentary politics. For the long liberal struggle for the German nation, civil liberties, and freedom of thought and expression, the victories of 1870 realized German national aspirations with unexpected consequence: “Bismarck hatte den Achtundvierzigern den Wind aus den Segeln genommen.” Dernburg explains that the chair had been pulled out from

underneath the old standardbearers of the German nation, and with that “Sudermann hat die witzige Komödie vom gestohlenen Programm geschrieben.” But aside from the political problem at the center of the play, there is also an ethical dimension. One might describe Hartmeyer as an obstinate, backward, moralizer of lofty political ideals, or, in accordance to the myth of 1848, as a persistent, resolute, and honorable democrat. And of all the self-described national characteristics of the Germans, Dernburg tells that it is the tenacious loyalty, which seems to be the most accurate. The German concept of *Treue* or loyalty is “Das unverbrüchliche Festhalten an einer erwählten Sache, an einem erkorenen Führer. In den Augen des Volkes ist der größte Ruhm für den öffentlichen Charakter noch immer die Konsequenz, der schwerste Flecken auf der Ehre die Inkonsequenz.” This is the tragic side of the *Sturmgesellen*: Sudermann presents an ethical problem to go along with the political conflict. Hartmeyer, like Bebel, has turned his political convictions into his essence. Dernburg explains, “Wenn einem Mann wie Hartmeyer zugemutet wird, der Treue auch nur einem Emblem zu brechen, dem er zugeschworen hat, zum Beispiel der schwarz-rot-goldenen Fahne, so ist das in der Tat etwas, was sein ganzes Wesen ins Schwanken bringt, es ist ein tragischer Konflikt.” Reflecting on the skepticism of the *Sturmgesellen* vis-à-vis Bismarck in the 1870s, Dernburg adds that such skepticism does not seem so foolish thirty years later. Drawing from his own personal experience in liberal politics from this era, he writes:

Wenn die Liberalen, von deren Standpunkt aus die Situation im Stücke betrachtet werden muß, die Geschichte dieser dreißig Jahre revidieren, so müssen sie finden, daß in dem Widerstand jener fortschrittlichen *Sturmgesellen* doch ein gesunder Kern war, daß sie die mißtrauische

Ablehnung Bismarcks zu weit trieben, daß jedoch ihre Ahnung, die Liberalen würden bei dem Verhandeln mit Bismarck den Kürzeren ziehen, sich nur allzu sehr bewährte. Die Führer der Fortschrittspartei aus dem Osten, die Junker v. Hoverbeck, v. Saucken behielten ihren kühlen Kopf. Wir aus dem Süden und Westen machten das politische Geschäft mit Bismarck im Enthusiasmus, die Altpreußen in Überschätzung ihrer Widerstandskraft, alle unter dem Zwange der Notwendigkeit. Doch und die Rechnung haben wir bis an den heutigen Tag zu zahlen.

Dernburg concludes his assessment of the controversy provoked by “Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates” by suggesting that the metric by which the play should be judged is not whether Sudermann based the Sturmgesellen on real-life figures, but by the believability of the characters on the stage.

The widespread vexation aroused by Sudermann’s play, and the lingering suspicion that his political sentiments had grown conservative, necessitated a response from the author that came in 1903 in the form of a pamphlet titled *Die Sturmgesellen. Ein Wort zur Abwehr*. Sudermann was no stranger to public controversy with his dramas that were deemed scandalous by the authorities and subsequently banned, but also with his battle against censorship and his invective against theater criticism. Although critics such as Alfred Kerr and Maximilian Harden accused him in the past of grandstanding for media attention during the Lex Heinze affair, there is no indication that Sudermann wished to provoke a scandal for publicity with “Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates,” nor does it appear that his response intended any further provocation. Instead, it seems that the author wished to dispel the rumors concerning his political sympathies and preserve his standing within the liberal bourgeois milieu.

Citing the article in the *Vossische Zeitung* on October 6, 1903 as the catalyst for his response, Sudermann begins his defense of “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” by rebuffing all claims that he had become conservative stating: “Hätte ich es für notwendig gehalten mich einer konservativen oder imperialistischen Anschauung zuzuwenden, so würde ich diesen Wandel zwar wie vor meinem Gewissen so auch vor der Oeffentlichkeit ohne Scheu vertreten, ich würde es aber als eine Entwertung meiner selbst betrachten, nach Art gemeiner Ueberläufer das, was ich bisher angebetet habe, in den Staub ziehen” (4). Contrarily, Sudermann pledges his loyalty to the democratic ideals of his youth. He writes, “Ich habe mich in meiner Jugend, dem Vorbilde der Väter nacheifernd, zum Demokraten erzogen, fühle heute demokratischer denn je und werde, da die Lebensjahre, in denen man sich zu wandeln pflegt, hinter mir liegen, wohl auch als Demokrat mein Dasein enden” (4). As discussed earlier in the chapter, Sudermann, with his memoirs written nearly twenty years later, went on to reiterate his loyalty to these principles in very clear words. One can assume that the author was still sensitive to the accusations leveled at him in 1903.

In his *Die Sturmgesele. Ein Wort zur Abwehr* Sudermann addresses the controversial aspect of having created a comedy out of forty-eighters. It seems that this is what caused the most outrage among the liberal bourgeois community. Sudermann explains his choice:

Was ich in meiner Komödie “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” einem nachdenklichen Lachen preisgebe, ist, wie sich von selbst versteht, nicht die Demokratie, die den Reichsgedanken schuf, die unsere Staatsverfassung und unsere spärlichen Freiheiten erzwang, sondern der Niedergang und die

Auflösung der Demokratie, wie die siebziger Jahre sie mit sich brachten, jene Entartungs- und Umwandlungsprozesse, die unter der erdrückenden Uebermacht Bismärkischer Ideen und Erfolge in den Gemütern sich vollzogen und die – im einzelnen von vielfältiger Form – in ihrer Gesamtheit einen Zusammenbruch darstellen, dem sich an Tragik vielleicht nur das Ausgemerztwerden des heutigen Freisinns aus dem – an sich freisinnig gearteten – Volksbewußtsein an die Seite stellen läßt. (5)

The greatest tragedy, Sudermann tells, is the decline into banality, which he believed to be the case with liberalism in the 1870s. Words such as “Niedergang,” “Auflösung,” and “Entartungs- und Umwandlungsprozesse” are all typical vocabulary for the turn-of-the-century pessimism that became an apparent characteristic of the liberal bourgeoisie. This perspective, claims Sudermann, comes from his own experiences with old forty-eighters that he met and observed in the smoke-filled bars of East Prussian cities. The behavior of these men whom he grew up admiring, he explains, was no less petty and ridiculous than that which he depicts in his play. Anti-Semitic gesturing, despairing about their lack of a leader, and the disdain for how the newly formed German Reich was born were all themes that he heard from these men. He tells, “Und meine Freunde selber waren wahrlich keine großen Geister, sie standen knietief im Spießbürgertum” (7). According to Sudermann, “Während draußen auf den Märkten, in den Zeitungen und von den Kathedern her der Rausch des Bismärckischen Liberalismus jubelte, dem bereits nach einem Lustrum der Katzenjammer folgen sollte tranken sie weiter ihr Bier, hielten Brandreden, kitzelten die Kellnerin und versimpelten mehr und mehr” (8). The socialists, who would soon be banned by Bismarck in the 1870s, had become the true inheritors of the revolutionary progressive spirit. Despite the critical



perspective, Sudermann claims to have written these figures with admiration and love even though they are all flawed—especially Hartmeyer and Markuse. He denies accusations that the Freiherr von Laucken in the play is the conduit for the author's own opinion. The reason Sudermann gives for including this democratic Junker is to remind people that such "merkwürdige Menschenspezies jemals gegeben hat" (12). Addressing his critics' accusations that "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" is nothing more than frivolous mockery, Sudermann states that his purpose was to write a piece of "nationale[r] Seelengeschichte" (16). In what follows, he gives a short excursus on the decline of liberalism—in other words, a *Sonderweg* explanation of German liberalism. July 3, 1866, the date of the battle at Königgrätz, marks for Sudermann the beginning of what he terms an "Auflösungsprozess" of liberalism (18). Shortly thereafter the Fortschrittspartei lost half of their seats in the Prussian Landtag. Later the party enjoyed some small victories such as during the *Kulturkampf* in its fight against clericalism, which was waged in cooperation with the governing party; or when the Fortschrittspartei was able to win over sympathy from the public in its campaign against tariffs on foodstuffs. Still, Sudermann believes that the party was never again able to overcome its fears of losing and no longer enjoyed the public support it once did: "Immer farbloser wurden ihre Wahlprogramme, immer weiter sanken die alten demokratischen Forderungen, als deren Erbin sie aufgetreten war, ins Reich ideologischer Unerfüllbarkeit zurück, bis allgemach die prinzipielle Feindin staatlicher Fürsorge aus ihr wurde, als welche sie z.B. bei Gelegenheit der sozialpolitischen Vorlagen auftrat" (19–20). Sudermann points out the excitement that some liberals felt after the military victories that accumulated in German

unification. He cites the scientist turned liberal politician Rudolf Virchow who told soldiers in 1866: "Hüten wir uns den Götzendienst des Erfolges zu treiben" (18). This "Götzendienst," Sudermann writes, was unavoidable "weil er eine Art Religion in sich barg, in der Deutschlands tiefstes Sehnen sich ausströmte" (18). And the gratitude that the nation felt toward the ruling classes, according to Sudermann, was the downfall of liberalism: "Der Zoll der Dankbarkeit, welche die Nation ihren Fürsten und Heerführern, vor allem aber Bismarck schuldete, mußte entrichtet werden, nur leider ist das selbstständig denkende, freiheitlich gesinnte Bürgertum an dieser Dankbarkeit zugrunde gegangen" (18).

In response to his critics pointing out his earlier service to the ideology as a journalist for the liberal press, Sudermann writes:

Ich habe schlecht und recht im Wochenlohn gearbeitet, habe die atlantische Tragkraft Eugen Richters, die messerscharfe Ironie Bambergs und vor allen den aufopfernden, nie ermüdenden Eifer meines hochverehrten Lehrers Rickert kennen und beneiden gelernt, und bin schließlich nach ein paar Jahren wieder meiner Wege gegangen, weil ich das nötige Quantum monarchischen Gefühls, das ein freisinniger Publizist, insbesondere an patriotischen Festtagen, nun einmal zu entwickeln hat, beim besten Willen nicht aufbringen konnte. (20)

Here Sudermann places himself further to the left than the names of those left liberals he mentions. Twenty years later in his memoirs *Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* he restates this conviction. Considering his votes for socialist candidates around the time of "Der Sturmgesele Sokrates" seems to confirm this, even though his critics accused him of becoming increasingly conservative. Sudermann states that through his work for the liberal press he fought for their platforms such as the opposition to

the tobacco monopoly, against foodstuff tariffs, against Bismarck's slush funds, and against coercion of thought, but he asks what did these small time political objecties actually achieve. Once again Sudermann builds an argument that can be seen as a *Sonderweg* explanation for the decline of liberalism in the late nineteenth century. He believes it was the pettiness, the lack of strength, idealism, and fortitude that caused it to weaken in the face of the ruling party. He tells,

Man kämpfte für zollfreies Brot und zollfreies Licht, aber des zollfreien Gedankens gedachte niemand. Niemand dachte daran, der lichthungrigen Jugend eine Weltanschauung zu geben, die sie stark machen konnte gegenüber den herabstimmenden Einflüssen eines aristokratisierenden Petitmaitretums, gegenüber dem Zauber militärischer Würden, gegenüber dem dünkelfhaften Rausch der neuerstehenden Herrenmoral, eine Weltanschauung, welche den neuen sozialen Bedingungen Rechnung tragend, die richtunggebenden Gedanken der alten Demokratie nie aus dem Auge ließ, eine Weltanschauung, welche wie bei der Sozialdemokratie und beim Klerikalismus den jüngsten Fant mit dem weisesten Führer ein eins zusammenkittete. (21)

The preoccupation with petty politics weakened the foundations of liberalism. According to Sudermann, the liberal political machine lost sight of the fundamental basis of its ideology: freedom of thought. The consequence for this was that it no longer had the ability to inspire the next generation to fight for these principles:

So entstand die leidige Bezirksvereinstimmung, in welcher hohles Pathos und flauere Skepsis ergänzend aufeinander klappten, und in welcher meine geliebten Sturmgelassen manch geistes verwandten Nachfolger fanden. So entstand die Krieger- und Schützenvereinsmeierei, welche, auf nationalistische Grundlage geschoben, Deutschland mit einem engmaschigen

Netze neuer Bildungen zu überziehen begann, und in welcher die patriotische Hurrahphrase von herablassenden Landraten und gastfreien Gutsherren zum Zwecke konservativer Wahlen eifrig gepflegt wurde. So entstanden Unmut, Schlawheit, Indifferentismus, so entstand die Ansicht, daß die Politik den Charakter verdürbte, so entstand das geistige Leichenfeld, als welches Deutschland in den letzten Jahren des Bismarck-Puttkamerschen Regimes und unter der Herrschaft des Sozialistengesetzes sich darstellt. (22).

The result of all of this according to the author was that the once distinctly liberal bourgeois spirit of democracy was now blended with the Caesarian politics of the ruling party. Taken root was what Sudermann describes as a new "Optimatenklasse" to which belonged not only the old landed aristocracy and the administrative nobility, but also the socially climbing bourgeoisie, who through "Korpsstudentenunwesen, durch Reserveoffizierthum, durch Verschwagerungen und sonstige Beziehungen mit dem Adel vergesellschaftet, sich zu einer Art von Afteraristokratie herausgebildet hatte" (24). These developments at the top of the bourgeoisie divided the class, resulting in the split between the "zwei Nationen Deutschlands" to be within the bourgeoisie.

Hermann Sudermann's somewhat mystifying response to critics of his "Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates," baffling as it is in its thought process, is also equally revealing about the author and the discontents of liberalism. Although the forty-eighters are made to be the fools in the play, the author argues in his response to the critics that these men in their old age were not to blame for what befell liberalism in the age of Bismarck. Rather it was the devotion of energies to mundane and petty issues instead of upholding the idealism of the democratic spirit in the time after

Sedan. The looming figure of Bismarck remains a slippery one for Sudermann who treats him both as the antithesis of the freethinking liberalism that was lost after 1871, but also as a great man of history who acted and succeeded in achieving his ends. The subsequent generation, argues the author, was left with a divided bourgeoisie and a liberal ideology that had become stale. This historiography of liberalism subscribes to the *Sonderweg* theory of Germany in the nineteenth century that would become a self-fulfilling prophecy in the twentieth century. By passing the blame for the weakening of the ideology to the generation in the 1870s—which Sudermann also does both in “Der Sturmgesele Sokrates” and *Der tolle Professor*—he effectively justifies his own growing disinterestedness and aloofness from political affairs after the turn of the century even though he openly criticized others for apolitical tendencies during his campaign against the *Lex Heinze* and in his response to critics of his “Sturmgesele.”

## CHAPTER V

### CULTURAL PESSIMISM: HERMANN SUDERMANN, THE GERMAN BOURGEOISIE, AND THE SPIRIT OF DECLINE

*“Der eine mit seinem Optimismus, der andere mit seinem Pessimismus.”*  
— Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1776)

#### **A. Introduction: Sudermann and German Pessimism**

It has been argued back and forth by historians as to what extent cultural pessimism affected the course of German history the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I do not intend to provide a revision for any of these narratives, but rather this chapter seeks to show how this pessimism or *Schwarzseherei* manifested itself in the life and work of Hermann Sudermann. As I have argued in the previous chapters, Hermann Sudermann, the darling dramatist of the liberal German bourgeoisie before World War I, became increasingly discontented with his class and its ideology in this time period. The literary expression of this progression of pessimism culminated in the Weimar Republic with his biographical *Schlüsselroman, Der tolle Professor*, which also reveals what he believed to be the fundamental flaws that led to the demise of the liberal German bourgeoisie. As popular as the author was at one time among this class, we can assume that the worldview espoused in his works touched a nerve with the liberal bourgeoisie at that particular time. Some historians have pointed out, cultural pessimism is not singular to the German bourgeoisie, but rather an evident feature of the world

bourgeoisie (Blackbourn and Eley 213). Today, one might be hard pressed to find scholars who believe pessimism is an identifiable trait of the German national consciousness such as William James who wrote: "The pessimistic controversy has far more of an ethnic than a philosophic interest for us" ("German Pessimism" 314).

Even if pessimism was just a part of being bourgeois, one might still invoke Tolstoy's Anna Karenina principle: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Certainly modernity's fast-paced alteration of the world was causing discontents for the bourgeoisie at large, but among these discontents there is room for nuance. There is also room for nuance under the broad description of "German bourgeoisie." I do not claim that Sudermann represents the German bourgeoisie as a whole, but rather that he was one part of a larger picture. This space, in whatever the magnitude it might represent the German bourgeoisie, I maintain, was one that was attracted to a pessimistic *Weltanschauung*. Taking into account the popular intellectual influences on Sudermann, one might agree that there was something peculiarly despairing about it. From Arthur Schopenhauer to Eduard von Hartmann, Friedrich Nietzsche to Julius Langbehn, Max Nordau to Oswald Spengler, there is a common story told that history is not progressing towards something better as the Hegelians told in the first half of the nineteenth century. These ideas figure prominently into the literature of Sudermann, who was only popularizing this worldview by disseminating it to the theater-going masses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However little his perceptions of the liberal bourgeoisie and German society at large may have been backed by historical reality is not the question here. The question, rather, is what was this

worldview disseminated in his works, and how much did it impact his ability to engage in the world around him.

### **B. *Der tolle Professor: The Process of Cultural Despair***

Hermann Sudermann's late novel *Der tolle Professor* contains some final thoughts about the rise of this new *Weltanschauung* and offers some explanation for the author's acute sense of despair in the Weimar Republic, which is reflected through the lens of the main character Professor Sieburth. Throughout the novel the reader is informed of the intellectual, political, and social developments that cumulate in the protagonist's philosophical system that is only realized at the end. In this respect, *Der tolle Professor* carries the traits of an *Entwicklungsroman* insofar that there is a tangible maturation in Sieburth's system of thought from the beginning to end. The novel begins with the young professor of philosophy turning heads at the university because of his new brand of philosophy that is informed by the teachings of Arthur Schopenhauer, whose minor tone struck a nerve after the failed revolution of 1848.

In the case of Arthur Schopenhauer, it was not as much a matter of his philosophy being a product of the disappointment directly after 1848, but rather the reception of his work benefited from the general mood of despair in the aftermath. Schopenhauer, after all, had already completed the first edition of his *magnum opus*, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, by 1818 (the second expanded edition appeared shortly before the revolution in 1844). The decade of the 1850s proved itself to be Schopenhauer's time to step out from the periphery of German philosophy where he



had long stood, mostly in the shadow of his nemesis G.W.F. Hegel and his followers. Theobald Ziegler writes in his summary of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century that after 1848, “Die Philosophie war bankrott geworden—durch den Zusammenbruch der Hegelschen Schule und das Fiasko Schellings in Berlin. Feuerbachs Vorlesungen in Heidelberg im Winter 1848 auf 49, in denen er die Welt für ‘eine Republik’ erklärte, die ‘weder einen absoluten noch einen konstitutionellen Gott ertrage,’ hatte der Reaktion ohnedies alle Philosophie verdächtig gemacht” (309). Up until then it had appeared that history was moving forward and advancing human civilization at an increasingly rapid pace since the Enlightenment. The misfortunes of 1848 revealed to such optimists that the progress of humanity was not inevitable and that regression was not impossible. Correspondingly, “Schopenhauers Pessimismus erlaubt nicht, an moralischen Fortschritt oder Intellektuelle Vervollkommung zu glauben; überall waltet in der Menschheitsgeschichte nur Zufall und blindes Ungefähr” (Ziegler, *Geist. Strömungen* 299). The Schopenhauerian turn in the 1850s was, if anything, not surprising given that his ideas paired well with the *Zeitgeist*, but rather a curiosity considering the biography of the philosopher. Arthur Schopenhauer, unlike the preceding influential thinkers of nineteenth-century German thought, had only tenuous ties to universities throughout his career. Unlike his contemporaries who had the resources and stage of the university to disseminate their ideas, Schopenhauer was an outsider, which helps to explain why his ideas went unnoticed for so long. One might add that his generally cantankerous demeanor and pugnacious attitude to his peers and superiors alike was also likely not a benefit to this end. Schopenhauer’s

philosophical enterprise differed from that which preceded him because of his level of independence from the university system and therefore from the state that funded it. Despite the fact that no organized school of thought based around Schopenhauer's philosophy ever crystallized, his ideas held great influence in the arts, psychology, and most importantly philosophy in the late nineteenth century. The influence of Schopenhauer is significant in the field of philosophy at this time because it marks its decentralization; no longer was it something that need be sponsored by and supportive of the state. The next most important German philosopher to arrive in the second half of the nineteenth century continued this process.

### **1. The Rudiments of Sieburth's Philosophical Enterprise**

The young and dashing Professor Sieburth in *Der tolle Professor* embodies the arrival of a new brand of thought that seeks a place within the field of philosophy but also independence from its structures. The changes in philosophy are represented in the contrast between Sieburth and his predecessor to Kant's professorship at the Albertina who is called the Great Hegelian. Reviewers of the novel had no problem identifying this figure as a literary representation of the Hegelian philosopher and long-time occupant of Kant's professorship at the Albertina, Karl Rosenkranz (1805-1879). One review in the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* from October 6, 1926, points out, "Unschwer errät man auch, daß jener namenlose Hegelianer kein anderer als Karl Rosenkranz ist" (Jenisch). The latter finds his significance in German intellectual history as being a purist and moderate

in the field of Hegelian philosophy that dominated in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, and authored the only contemporary biography of Hegel. The inclusion of the philosopher was also somewhat of a clue for reviewers searching for the historical basis of the novel. Richard Quäbicker, upon whom Sieburth was based, was, in turn, the author of a book about the philosophy of his predecessor, titled *Karl Rosenkranz. Eine Studie zur Hegel'schen Philosophie* (1879). One reviewer, who was assisted by this clue in solving the mystery, writes, "Denn der einzige, der ausführlich und zwar wunderschön über Karl Rosenkranz unmittelbar nach seinem Tode geschrieben hat, ist der wenig bekannt gewordene, neben Julius Walter wirkende Philosophieprofessor Richard Quäbicker" ("Neue Heimatdichtung"). Sudermann's own detective work in researching the philosophy and life of Karl Rosenkranz to create the "Großer Hegelianer" is impressive. Diary entries show that Sudermann diligently studied his philosophy, as well as sought the aid of academics. His diary entry from January 31, 1924 shows: "Nachm. Quäbickers Rosenkranzstudie. Psychologiekolleg studiert" (Tagebuch VIII). On May 2, 1924 he notes, "Mit Quaebickers [sic.] Rosenkranz-Philosophie bis spät," and again on August 12, 1924, "Mit wüstem Schädel in Quäbickers Rosenkranz erfolgreich studiert" (Tagebuch VIII). Before the publication of *Der tolle Professor*, Sudermann prudently consulted Professor Ferdinand Jakob Schimidt to proof the philosophical dimensions of the novel. In a newspaper article in the Eberfelder *Generalanzeiger*, remembering Sudermann following his death in 1928, friend Siegfried Mauermann reminisces about the author's preoccupation with the philosophy of Rosenkranz

while writing the novel. According to all accounts, his depiction of Rosenkranz's philosophy and persona in the "Großer Hegelianer" is accurate.

Sieburth's arrival at the Albertina marks the generational shift in philosophy between the old Hegelianism and the new Schopenhauer-inspired generation. At the beginning of *Der tolle Professor* we are informed about Sieburth: "Sein wissenschaftliches Gepäck war leicht und durchaus nicht dem Laden des Hegelianismus entnommen. Im Gegenteil: die zwei oder drei dünnen Bändchen, die er, von einer schulmäßigen Doktordissertation abgesehen, bisher veröffentlicht hatte, zeigten eine entschiedene Abkehr von der alleinseligmachenden Lehre, die früher Jahrzehnte lang von fast allen Lehrstühlen des preußischen Staates gepredigt worden war" (60). The Great Heglian, in contrast to this new philosophy, zählte nur der Form nach noch mit" (61). The distinction between the old and the new symbolizes social changes materializing at the end of the nineteenth century. As Hegel himself noted in the *Philosophie des Rechts*, philosophy only tells of that which is actual, rather than that which is to come, with his famous line, "Die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug" (14). The Great Hegelian accepts the dialectical progression of thought as he sees it surpassing his own and turns to the next generation represented in Sieburth. The sage of the Albertina was aware of this when he summoned the young academic to Königsberg, as one reference letter in complaining of his arrogance stated, "Aber das sei ja jetzt in der jungen Generation Mode geworden [...] seit dem verhängnisvollen Schopenhauerschen Einfluß Tür und Tor geöffnet war" (60).

The completion of the dialectical advancement of nineteenth-century philosophy takes place in one scene as Sieburth is invited to the home of his elderly colleague. In their tête-à-tête, the Great Hegelian says to Sieburth, "Ich weiß wohl, daß es unter den lebenden Philosophielehrern kaum etwas Gegensätzlicheres geben kann als uns beide. Das bringt schon allein der Wechsel der Generationen mit sich," but his reason for the meeting is because he knows his life is nearing its completion. In examining his successor to the university's most prestigious professorship, he inquires as to why Sieburth has published so little. This is possibly an allusion to the historical figure Quäbicker, whose life work, Sudermann notes in a diary entry on December 22, 1923, consists of "zwei Schmale Bändchen wirklich nur" (Tagebuch VIII). Sieburth answers, "Ich habe das Gefühl, daß sich in mir Wandlungen vollziehen werden, die ich heute noch nicht übersehen kann" (133). This thought anticipates the new developments to come in German philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century. This pleases the Great Hegelian, who in turn says:

Gut, angenommen, daß die philosophische Spekulation sich überlebt hat! Und oftmals, wenn ich nachts wach liege, höre auch ich die Rattenzähne der empirischen Wissenschaften an unserem Bauwerk nagen. Aber schmähen Sie dieses Bauwerk nicht! Es hat der Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen zwei Menschenalter lang eine Zuflucht geboten. Und mehr als das! Da, wo die Kirche im Zerfallen war, baute sie über ihr einen Gedankendom, der höher in den Himmel strebte, als diese je getan hat. (133)

Speculative philosophy is a main trait of nineteenth-century thought. After Kant brought philosophy to the limits of human reason with his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781 it was the task of the next generations to theorize the transcendence of

these frontiers. The content of the systems and destination of the speculations, however, changed drastically through the century and after the arrival of Nietzsche, even the “Gedankendom” of speculative philosophy was in peril. Schopenhauer had first demystified Kant’s idea of the *Ding an sich* by rendering it into the will to life, but Nietzsche took it a step further arguing that the ontological and epistemological endeavors since ancient times can be condensed into the will to power. Only three weeks after the meeting between the two philosophers, news circulates in Königsberg that the Great Hegelian had died and “die ganze Stadt klagte, wie sie einst um ihren Mitbürger Kant geklagt hatte” (137). The owl of Minerva once again begins her flight.

#### **a. Sieburth’s Philosophy: First Impressions**

Sieburth’s philosophy is perhaps one of the most dynamic aspects of the novel, because as the narrative develops so do his ideas. Nevertheless, his is not a coherent system of philosophical thought, but rather a series of fragments that progress throughout the novel, whose most pronounced traits are a pessimistic fatalism and epicurean individualism. The fragments from his lectures and discussions can be reassembled to provide an overall outline of his philosophy. Conceptualizing this in the history of nineteenth-century German thought, Sieburth and his philosophy encapsulate the transition from the intellectual currents of Schopenhauer to that of Nietzsche. In other words, this might also be interpreted as the dissolution of bourgeois realism into a *Weltanschauung* of modernism.

Professor Sieburth's philosophy is introduced in the novel through Fritz Kühne, while listening to the lectures of this rising star at the Albertina. During the first lecture that the impressionable student visits, Sieburth discourses semi-incoherently about Hegelian philosophy opposed to Johann Friedrich Herbart, before arriving at the idea of "chemische Prozesse," which he says characterized the struggle between church and state in the Middle Ages. Advancing his ideas about the latter, he uses the example of the socialist agitator Ferdinand Lasalle, who according to Sieburth, understood that "auch die Monarchie so ein Chemischer Prozeß sei, der erst mit der Einführung der Republik zur Neutralisation geführt werden könne" (9). The evaporation of monarchy into republic calls to mind the situation in Germany as Hermann Sudermann was writing this novel in the early 1920s. As Sieburth presents this phenomenon, it seems to be an alternative to Hegel's notion of *Geist* as a guiding force of history. His concept of "chemische Prozesse," however, radically differs from Hegelian dialectics in so far as it replaces Hegel's pure metaphysical understanding with empirical scientific concepts and it speculates beyond the monarchy to the "Einführung der Republik." The dominance of Hegelianism receded in the wake of the failed 1848 revolutions; realism, not idealism, was the new banner of progress, and science was a large part of this. In organic chemistry, for instance, Justus Liebig, the father of the laboratory-oriented teaching method, made the discovery of artificial fertilizer, which had a significant impact on the human condition. His achievements allowed him to inveigh against natural philosophy by observing, "If a man kills another in a state of madness he is locked up; yet natural philosophy is to this day permitted to train our physicians and to impart to them

that state of madness which will permit them, with a clear conscience and in accordance with principles, to kill thousands” (Safranski 332). This new scientific turn is identifiable in philosophy around the mid-nineteenth century and bodes well, of course, for Schopenhauer finally stepping out of the shadow of Hegel, but science continued to infiltrate philosophy through the nineteenth century. The culmination of this is perhaps Nietzsche, at the heart of whose philosophy, according to Robert Holub, “natural science played a seminal and, in some cases, determinate role” (56).

After Sieburth is finished treating Hegelianism in his lecture, he begins with Schopenhauer. “Dieser Mann,” he says, “war in der beneidenswerten Lage, von niemandem abhängig zu sein und keines Menschen Billigung erstreben zu müssen” (10). Continuing, he cites a passage from the fourth book of Schopenhauer’s *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, “Ich bin kein Vielschreiber, kein Kompendienfabrikant, kein Honorarverdiener, keiner, der mit seinen Schriften nach dem Beifall eines Ministers zielt, mit einem Worte: dessen Feder unter dem Einfluß persönlicher Zwecke steht” (10). As discussed in chapter three, the notion of independence of thought was a value that Hermann Sudermann regarded highly. The author’s response to liberal critics of the novel had a similar tone to this Schopenhauer quotation. Likewise, Sieburth tells his audience that he wishes they too will one day be able to write or think with independence and freedom as this thought exhibits. This, however, will not be the case for the vast majority, who, even if free, will not have the consciousness to perceive this, which he posits as an endemic trait of the German nation. He says:



Die Knechtschaffenheit ist uns Deutschen beinahe ebenso sehr eine nicht wegzudenkende Vorbedingung unseres Seins, wie, um Kantisch zu reden, die apriorischen Formen der Anschauung es sind. Und wenn wir je in die Lage kämen, freie Bürger zu werden – schließlich warum nicht? – selbst der bestgehaltene Hühnerhund kriegt manchmal das Wildern –, ich bin überzeugt, wir würden aus schönem deutschen Idealismus uns sofort wieder an die Kette legen lassen. Vorläufig aber gilt leider das Wort unseres großen Staatsmannes: “Die Freiheit ist ein Luxus, den sich nicht jedermann gestatten kann.” Nur *einen* Luxus wenigstens können *wir* uns gestatten: Zu philosophieren, wie es den staatlich approbierten Schulen genehm ist. Und ihm, meine Herren, wollen wir frönen, bis *was* erfolgt? Bis Er–folg erfolgt.

(11)

In many respects, this passage gives the impression that it could have been taken directly from the works of Nietzsche. The critical stance on German subservience to authority, pessimistic prognostications, and the retreat to philosophy, are all essential qualities of Nietzsche in the years following the formation of the German Empire. In what ought to have been perceived by liberals as a realization of their great nineteenth-century vision in the unification of Germany, pessimistic premonitions quickly followed the jubilations after the Battle of Sedan. In the first of his *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, Nietzsche writes that the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War concomitantly brought the “Exstirpation des deutschen Geistes zugunsten des ‘deutschen Reiches’” (137). Sieburth’s lecture conveys a severance of the bond between state and thought that had been a defining characteristic of the Hegelian hegemony of German philosophy around the mid-nineteenth century. Toward the end of the *Gründerzeit*, the spheres of art and philosophy increasingly became alienated from the political, and Nietzsche, of

course, was the head prophet of this movement (Schieder 322). Bismarck, whose person had a heavy impact on the shape that the German Empire took, became the logical target for the alienated. Doing just that, Sieburth uses the often-cited Bismarck quotation that “Die Freiheit ist ein Luxus, den sich nicht jedermann gestatten kann,” to present him as the great spoiler of the democratic ideal of freedom. Since the rallying cause of a unified German nation had been completed, the only weapon of resistance readily available for the alienated is to philosophize—and to do so with a hammer.

After shocking his audience with his Nietzschean appraisal of the state of the German nation, Sieburth introduces one of his central ideas that consists of a transmogrification of the title of Schopenhauer’s main work: “Die Welt als Weib und Gedanke” (12). In the following chapters the meaning of this formulation is gradually exposed as Fritz Kühne becomes more familiar with the person and ideas of Professor Sieburth. After the student is confronted with this postulation, his *Weltanschauung* is altered: “Wie ein Blitzfeuer hatten die Worte ins Dunkel des kaum Empfundnen hineingeleuchtet. Was nicht Gedanke war, gehörte dem Weibe. Was das Weib freiließe, floh ins Reich der Gedanken” (14). Fascinated by this idea, he attempts to define the terms of this equation:

Alles, was Jugend hieß und Tränen und Überschwang, was Wunsch und Fürchten schuf, was die Muskeln straffte und die Augen aufglühen ließ, war Weib und immer nur Weib. Doch nun die Kehrseite! Vom ersten Buchstabieren an – die Lesestücke der Fibel – die Regeldetri? auf knirschender Tafel, der Cornelius Nepos, der Ovid, das erste Schillerdrama, der deutsche Aufsatz, die Geologie – der früheste Anhauch Kantischer Größe

und dann vornehmlich Faust und immer wieder Faust – das alles, was Wissen und Erkenntnis und Aufstieg kaum geahnter Horizonte verhiß und verschenkte, was Streben aus Streben, Fleiß aus Fleiß, Schauen aus Schauen immer aufs neue hervorwachsen ließ, das war die andere – die Welt des Gedankens.” (14)

Fritz Kühne appears to conceptualize Sieburth’s misogynistic rendering of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* as something akin to Nietzsche’s concept of the Apollinian and Dionysian, developed in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872). One half of this binary is the realm of pleasure, pathos, senses, feeling, and drives, coalescing in the objective presence of the object of sexual desire embodied in the woman; the other side belongs to reason, organization, rigor, diligence—this all is the realm of thought. As chauvinistic as this sounds, it is indicative of the discontents within bourgeois morality. To this belongs the Protestant work ethic that assisted the bourgeoisie in their social ascent and served as a cohesive factor of this class. Peter Gay writes of the bourgeois idea of work: “An ethical imperative, it embraced much that Victorian bourgeois valued, a principle to which good burghers felt compelled to subscribe. It implied honest dealings with employers, customers, and competitors, a dedication to self-discipline, a wholesome commitment to family, and an alert sense of duty” (*Schnitzler’s Century* 192). This was what demarcated this peculiar class from that below it and above it. Through the course of the nineteenth century, however, this bourgeois way of life was eroding to the effects of modernity. The rise of mass culture, urban growth, and technology, are just a few of phenomena that were presenting the traditional bourgeois way of life with problems. One sign of this conflict is the rise of psychological disorders such as hysteria and other nerve

afflictions that proliferated in epidemic proportions at the turn of the century. With time sexual morals became unsteady, as conditions changed at the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of the "Großstadt," such as the case of Berlin and Vienna in the second half of the century, included problems of urbanization and the concomitant sex trade flourished. Such new temptations were no longer hidden, and it began to manifest itself in the culture of the time. Hermann Sudermann's 1889 drama for instance, received wide critical acclaim because of its thematizing sexual forays between the "Vorderhaus" and the "Hinterhaus," something that was already all too familiar to the public. Still, it was not as if the old bourgeois code of conduct was suddenly replaced. Professor Sieburth's binary formulation "Die Welt als Weib und Gedanke" adds to the traditional bourgeois values of work and order that of desire and satisfaction. Literature at the turn of the century is filled with instances of bourgeois hypocrisy, introducing concepts such as *Doppelleben* and *Doppelmoral*. As these themes generated greater exposure and regularity there remained a one-sidedness in terms gender. Professor Sieburth's formulation conveys this explicitly with the woman objectified in male desire. This notion was backed by the scientific discourse of the time. The famed psychologist Richard Kraft-Ebbing maintained at the close of the nineteenth century that women's sexual desire was biologically different than that of men. Although she too might desire, the woman's drive is toward love and security, unlike the man's, which is propelled by sexual aggression (Gay, *Schnitzler's Century* 82–83).

As the end of the nineteenth century faded into the twentieth the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche became increasingly influential. The philosopher Raoul

Richter, for example, observed in 1906 that Nietzsche's ideas were impacting how people lived their lives (Aschheim 31). Hermann Sudermann was certainly among those who were impacted by Nietzsche's rethinking of traditional morals.

Throughout the course of Sudermann's career, this was his *modus operandi*: periods of work punctuated by over-indulgence in secret pleasures. A look at the life and work of Sudermann's contemporaries shows that he was more the rule than the exception concerning this matter. Hermann Sudermann's diary entries provide countless examples of him finding refuge from the suffocation of middle-class morality in "Straßenabenteuern." Nevertheless, Sudermann was restricted by the social structure of the bourgeoisie and had to maintain appearances. This led him to lead his own version of a double life, which was akin to Sieburth's binary of "Weib und Gedanken." One instance of this can be found in his diary on Christmas Eve 1891, which included a visit to a brothel, followed by attending midnight mass. He writes, "Bordell u. Miternachtsmesse - welche Gegensätze - u. dennoch beides in einer Stimmung verschmolzen" (Tagebuch I). This duality of a bordello and midnight mass melting together into one mood is the perfect instance of the clash of modernity with traditional codes of morality.

In many respects Professor Sieburth represents the arrival of Nietzschean thought. Although *Der tolle Professor* is set in the 1880s, Sieburth's philosophy of hedonism corresponds more to the aftermath of Nietzsche in the 1890s. His teachings are not merely for the sake of theory, but instead meant for practice as he himself demonstrates. While on a "Bierreise" with his fellow corps brothers, Fritz Kühne lands late one night in a pub. During the ensuing bout of Bacchanalia, Kühne

recognizes Sieburth in disguise, and after the pub closes the party lands in Königsberg's red light district. While pontificating to the students in a brothel, he professes his disdain for all philosophy that is singular, static, consistent, and universal. He propounds to his listeners, "Jedes Ding auf Erden hat nämlich seine Tagesansicht und seine Nachtansicht. Um vier Uhr morgens in einem Bordell denkt man anders als um vier Uhr nachmittags beim Familientee, und eines hat dieselbe Berechtigung wie das andere" (52). Sieburth's dichotomy of the "Tagesansicht" and "Nachtansicht" refers back to the paradoxical formulation of "Die Welt als Weib und Gedanken." Once again, this has to do with the notion of *Doppelmoral* or the two sides to bourgeois life. The professor adds:

Wer zum Beispiel von den Achtundvierzigern herkommt, bei Tage denkt er so: Völkerbrüderung. Schmierstiefel. Menschenrechte. Ewiger Friede. Contrat social. Bezirksverein. Heiligsprechung der Majorität. Nieder mit Bismarck! Und dergleichen . . . Bei Nacht aber, wenn der Schatten des großen Vergewaltigers auf ihm lastet und er sich überwunden vor ihm duckt, dann denkt er so: Stumpsinn der Massen. Faust im Genick. Imperialismus. Recht der Persönlichkeit. Might is Right. Poposcheitel. Hohenstaufen. Gefolgschaft des Islam. Leutnant als Blüte der Menschheit. Deutsches Wesen, an dem die Welt wird genesen" (54).

It is interesting that Sieburth seems to juxtapose the ideals of 1848 to the power of Bismarck and nationalism. Every German liberal, according to this formulation, also has an innate attraction to power. This idea is indicative of a *Sonderweg* narrative of German liberalism in the nineteenth century. The German soul or the "Deutsches Wesen" is presented here to have something essentially unique about it. This is

similar to Thomas Mann's process of thought in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in which he contrasts the German *Kultur* to French civilization.

It is obvious that Sieburth's tirade is directed at what he believes to be contradictory currents among the liberal German bourgeoisie. In daily routine the typical member of this class maintains appearance by upholding its traditional ideals. Underneath the surface, however, lie drives and desires that are not necessarily in accordance with typical bourgeois values. Four years after the publication of *Der tolle Professor*, Sigmund Freud, published his study, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, which addresses the question of what lies beyond the appearances of culture. He maintains that civilization functions to repress the instinctual drives of human beings. These unconscious tensions, however, are not eradicated and find other outlets for release, which Freud identifies as aggression. In the passage cited above, Sieburth describes the two sides of the bourgeois way of life in a pastiche of phrases that convey the two sides of civilization that Freud calls *Eros* and *Thanatos*. The former of these terms is embodied in Sieburth's notion of *Tagesansicht*, while the latter finds expression in the *Nachtansicht*. The imagery of day and night corresponds to the conscious and unconscious elements of civilization, as well as the utilitarian values of the two. Whereas Freud's *Eros* and Sieburth's *Tagesansicht* are of necessity in order for civilization to function, *Thanatos* and the *Nachtansicht* are what lurk beneath. The recognition of a darker side of humanity is characteristic of cultural pessimism that had been growing at the end of the nineteenth century, but made a powerful return after World War I.

Just as Freud postulates religion as a false belief that serves as a support beam of civilization in his 1927 work *Zukunft einer Illusion*, Sieburth categorizes religion—and one might add here the secular religion of orderly bourgeois living or ethical life as Hegel termed it—as a component of the *Tagesansicht*, which he calls “Massenfütterung. Volksbedürfnis. Pflichtenschule. Moralische Weltordnung. Verwicklichung sittlicher Postulate” (56). His observations prompt one of the listeners to interject by calling it “nichts weiter als Umschreibungen der Alten Volksvorstellung,” and asks that if for him divinity does not stand for the concepts “Naturgesetz” or the “Absolute,” what then takes its place. Echoing both what Ludwig Feuerbach thought to be humanity’s projection of itself onto the concept of a deity, and Nietzsche’s calls for a new breed of demigod species in his concept of the *Übermensch*, Sieburth answers: “Was der Mensch Gott nennt, das ist nichts weiter als der signierte und hypostasierte Sinn des eigenen Lebens” (57).

As Professor Sieburth explains to his pupils the implications of his philosophy, one member of the group says to him, “Du tust dich wie Mephistopheles im ‘Faust’, der *alles* madig macht” (55). Considering that he is holding forth in a brothel, tempting the students to abandon their ingrained morality, the comparison seems compelling. This reference to Goethe’s *Faust* gives cause for more speculation about the origins of Sieburth’s philosophy. In the first part of Germany’s national drama, there are the competing forces of good and evil represented in God and Mephistopheles, but also the difference between the figures Faust and his assistant, Wagner. Both men are longing for knowledge, but not in the same way. Faust longs for a divine knowledge that is supplemented by feeling and emotion, whereas



Wagner idealizes the pure reason of the Enlightenment. It is this tension that is at the heart of the play and in the scene “Vor dem Tor,” whereupon Faust tells of his desire to experience, Wagner says that one can feel the world from a desk, to which Faust answers:

Du bist dir nur des einen Triebs bewußt;  
O lerne nie den andern kennen!  
Zwei Seelen wohnen ach in meiner Brust  
die eine will sich von der andern trennen  
die eine hält in derber Liebeslust  
Sich an die Welt mit klemmernden Organen  
die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust  
zu den Gefilden hohen Ahnen! (57)

Here Faust is plagued by irreconcilable drives. Sieburth’s philosophy, by contrast, holds the two mutually exclusive parts—the worlds of *Weib und Gedanken* and *Tages- und Nachtansichten*—together, comprising the two sides of one subject. In a letter titled “Die Ideenentwicklung des Goethe’schen Faust” addressed to an unknown female friend in 1880, Sudermann shows that he carried with him this idea of two coexisting souls for many years, in which he writes: “Beide Seelen sind - Sehnsucht. - die eine will Offenbarung, die andere Lust. Sie sind sich diametrisch entgegengesetzt, und dennoch ist nur die Vereinigung beider der Erfüllung, - des Glück.” These two minds, he writes later, “Sind allerdings Theile einer Einheit, d.h. nämlich sie stellen beide Seiten des Götheschen Wesens dar.” He calls Mephistopheles Faust’s “Führer” in the first part of this “Tragödie des Genießens.”

During his after hours lesson with his students, Sieburth acts as a spiritual guide who leads them beyond the traditional boundaries of middle-class values that the figure Faust is so desperate to transcend. This scene shows that Sieburth's philosophy incites the dialectic of the mental and sensual, which is Faust's essential dilemma at the beginning of the play. At the end of their session, Sieburth checks to see if they have learned the importance of accepting both the *Tages- und Nachtansichten*, in asking them the same question Faust asks himself: "Seid ihr nun klüger als ihr wart?" (57).

With his imagination piqued by the radical ideas of the young professor, Fritz Kühne goes to Sieburth in order to learn more from his teacher. Kühne is drawn to Sieburth's teachings but he still has questions regarding the contradictions taking place within his own *Weltanschauung*. Regarding politics, the student is torn, being on the one hand the progeny of forty-eighters, and on the other hand a Corps Student who believes in the German monarchy and the chancellor who orchestrated the nation state. Seeking answers, he asks Sieburth: "Als Sie in der Frage der vaterländischen Gesinnung die Tages- und Nachtansicht gegenüberstellten, da schien's mir, Herr Professor, als ob Sie sich für keine der beiden entscheiden mochten [...] Soll ich's mit den Fortschrittlern halten, die in Bismarck den Feind der deutschen Freiheit sehen, oder mit den andern, die ihn als Schöpfer des Reiches vergöttern? . . . Schon vorher einmal haben Sie ihn gescholten, und um die Frage: 'Für oder wider Bismarck' dreht sich doch alles" (111). The presentation that one's political affiliations at this historical juncture were reduced to the black and white choice of "Für oder wider Bismarck," or that a son of 1848 would be drawn to the

reactionary force of Bismarck, appeals to the general belief that the once dominantly liberal German bourgeoisie was increasingly becoming feudalized at the end of the nineteenth century. Sieburth's philosophy, however, presents a third way, an escape from this narrow order of two diametrically opposed worldviews: individualism.

The individualism that Professor Sieburth advocates is one that is clearly informed by the author's interpretation of Nietzsche. If anything at all, Nietzsche's philosophy valued the individual who maintains his/her sense of self in the death struggle against society. A significant number of Hermann Sudermann's works involve a juxtaposition of individual against society in some shape or form. In other works, Nietzschean philosophy can be detected in an individual holding true to his/her values despite social pressure. O.L. Bockstahler, for example wrote of Sudermann in 1933: "For Sudermann society is made up of horizontal social strata that are antagonistic to each other. No matter what the relation is—laborer and employer, producer and consumer, common man and capitalist or aristocrat—there is always friction. Each stratum has its own conception of honor, its own philosophy of life and its own social standards and customs" (103). *Der tolle Professor* presents a more forceful interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy insofar that Sieburth does not just stay true to his values against society's pressures, but rather his teachings are a transvaluation of values. In this sense, Sieburth is far more of a Nietzschean than other Sudermann portagonists, and for that reason Sieburth and his fate are all the more tragic. As the discourse between student and teacher goes on, it becomes clear that Sieburth reflects the coming of the Nietzschean caesura in German philosophy. One of the ways in which this is apparent is Sieburth's elusiveness with

regard to questions about the political climate of the day. When Kühne draws attention to contradictions in his thought process, Sieburth retorts: "Jedes Gedankenbett ist zweischläfrig eingerichtet. Nur so kann was Neues darin erzeugt werden" (112). His refusal to be a slave to consistency and philosophical systematics, reflects in many respects the significance of Nietzsche's demolition of traditional philosophical thought. Moreover, Sieburth's *Weltanschauung* is characteristic of the neo-romanticism that was in part spurred by Nietzschean philosophy. He rejects the scientific rationalization of philosophy as unnecessary and tells his pupil, "Was man fühlt, braucht man nicht zu begründen" (112). Also familiar is Sieburth's opinion of the German nation, which he regards as a tragedy of eternal return: "Die Hohenstaufen endeten im Kerker und auf dem Schafott. Die Habsburger wurden Knechte hispanischer Pfaffen. Im siebzehnten Jahrhundert, als alle Länder ringsum blühten, versank das Reich, das blühte wie sie, in Blut und Brand. Napoleon benutzte es als Schachbrett für seine Welteroberungsspiele, und als die Freiheitskriege ihm endlich einen Platz an der Sonne verschaffen wollten, warfen seine eigenen Fürsten ihm alle Hoffnungen über den Haufen. (112-113).

Sieburth remains critical of Germans despite the creation of "Germany." "Wo ist der Deutsche?" he asks before providing a critical assessment of German society's divided and weakened character (113). Just as tragic as the fate of the Germans, he tells, is their character: "Schwarmgeistig und stumpf. Weltumfassend in Liebe und voll von hämischem Neide. Knickrig und opferfroh." Worst of all, however, is the lack of "Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl" (114). It is somewhat perplexing that someone who values individualism would bemoan this. With a romantic look back,

he says: "Wahrhaftig, damals, als Deutschland arm und zerrissen und ohnmächtig war, da war jeder Deutsche ein König; heute, da Deutschland geeinigt und reich und Beherrscher der Welt ist, da ist jeder Deutsche ein Lump . . . Das hat Er gemacht, der Allmächtige, vor dem ihr alle im Staube liegt" (115). Baffled by Sieburth's disregard for the chancellor, Kühne reminds him that it was he who made the German Reich possible. But Sieburth persists, and says that the real tragedy is that its enemies founded the Reich. Here he makes some observations about militarism and the tragedy that was created through making enemies, especially with France, whose friendship could have advanced German culture. But now, he laments, Germany, once the land of "Dichter und Denker," is surrounded by enemies. At the end of the conversation he invokes a biblical prophecy of *Untergang*: "Ich will dich ganz greulich machen und dich schänden und ein Scheusal aus dir machen. Daß alle, die dich sehen, vor dir fliehen und sagen sollen: Ninive ist zerstört! Wer will Mitleid mit mir haben?" (116). Sieburth's conflated history of the German nation mirrors his creator's mixed feelings about it. For much of his life, Sudermann was a staunch critic of Bismarck, German nationalism, and Wilhelminism. The outbreak of World War I in 1914, however, awakened in him that sense of "Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl" for which Sieburth longs. In fact, Sudermann so wholeheartedly supported the German war effort that he was one of the signatories of the infamous Manifest der 93, an internationally distributed manifesto signed by ninety-three notable Germans in support of their country. During the years of the Weimar Republic Sudermann had mixed feelings about the republic, the abdicated monarchy, and German nationalism. Sieburth's position is also confused. He accuses

that Germans suffer from a weakness of character, but he also curiously takes aim at their individualism when he mentions the lack of “Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl.” That has as much to do with the author, who believed that the German bourgeoisie was spoiling itself through feudalization, as with the philosophy of Nietzsche. Nevertheless, the latter did believe that Europeans, and Germans in particular, were becoming a degenerate pack, but he provided a deeper reasoning that reaches back further than 1870 as Sieburth suggests. Sudermann’s ambiguous political views during the Weimar Republic will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

### **b. Sieburth’s Philosophy: A Work in Progress**

Despite Sieburth’s pessimism with regard to the state of affairs in Germany, his individualism holds room for optimism. The popularization of Nietzschean philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century marks the rise of a new individualism that contrasts to other philosophy earlier in the century. This is especially identifiable in his turn from Schopenhauerian pessimism starting in the 1880s with works such as *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), in which Nietzsche rejects his teacher’s view of individuality as an aberration (Hammacher 115). In *Der tolle Professor*, Sieburth’s philosophical work-in-progress is his conception of *Die drei Stufen der Ethik*. This dialectical construction amounts to the process of arriving at a modern theory of morality. Sieburth reveals this idea in a conversation with Cilly Wendland, the daughter of an upstanding bourgeois Königsberg family, whom many believe he should marry. During their parley, Cilly expresses doubt as to his suitability for the position of Kant’s professorship after he rejects the concept of

duty, prompting him to explain his position. The reason for his inquiry into the realm of ethics, he states, is because “die meisten Ethiker von den Menschen, wie ungleich sie auch sein mögen, immer das Gleiche verlangen” (176). The first of his three steps is the behavior of the instinctual or rugged individual ideal type. In describing this stage, Sieburth says, “Sei unbarmherzig, soviel du willst – gib einen Ellbogenstoß jedem, der dir im Wege steht – schätze deinen Nächsten nur, soweit er dir Vorteil oder Vergnügen bringt – alles gut, alles berechtigt. Und die göttliche Mutter Natur lehrt dich täglich das gleiche” (176). The first part of this formulation, “soviel du willst” immediately calls to mind one of Kant’s imperative of Enlightenment in his 1784 essay, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” in which he commands: “Räsoniert so viel ihr wollt, und worüber ihr wollt; nur gehorcht.” But the content of this aphorism is much more akin to another philosopher who is radically departs from the Kantian system. “Schätze deinen Nächsten nur, soweit er dir Vorteil oder Vergnügen bringt,” is strikingly similar to Nietzsche’s call only to value that what you can use to your advantage in his *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1874). At the very beginning of this work the philosopher employs a Goethe quotation that echoes Sieburth’s own wording: “Übrigens ist mir alles verhaßt, was mich bloß belehrt, ohne meine Tätigkeit zu vermehren oder unmittelbar zu beleben” (3). This startles Cilly and she invokes the notion of evil, upon which Sieburth calls her error, saying, “Ich tadle nicht. Auch den Proleten nicht, den ich Ihnen hier produziere. Und Gut und Böse gibt’s für mich ebenso wie für Spinoza und manchen andern nur im Sinne des Nützlichen oder Unnützlichen” (176). Once again the reference to Nietzsche is made

obvious with the dichotomies of “Gut und Böse” and “Nützliche und Unnützliche.” This first stage, as described here, however, may have more in common to Schopenhauer’s conception of the pure “will,” unthwarted by intellect, seeking only the negation of suffering by preying upon other life forms.

This first primal stage, Sieburth explains, is followed by one that is shaped through the rational restriction of negative freedom for the common wellbeing of society. He elaborates about this step, “Hier hat die Erziehung reichere Früchte getragen, hier herrschen Rücksichtnahme, Einfühlung, Opferfreude, Wahrheitsglut, Lust am Leiden um der Allgemeinheit willen, alle Errungenschaften jahrtausendalter geistiger und seelischer Bildung. Hier formen sich die geeichten Lehrer und Führer. Hier werden die Goldbarren der Menschheitsideen zu gängiger Münze geprägt, hier vollzieht sich unmerklich der Wandlungsprozeß, der jeder Generation ihr eigenes Blühen verbürgt” (177). This second step of Sieburth’s history of morality seems to encompass the rise of civilization, organized religion, and the philosophy of ethics up to the late nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, Sieburth abhors the stasis of this stage in which the novel is set. For him, traits that are esteemed in traditional morality are transvalued here as hinderances to the further development of humankind. The present state of the dialectical progression of ethics is at a standstill. Instead of ameliorating the human condition, the above-mentioned virtues that are characteristic in Christianity have derailed the development of the human species. This argument is strikingly similar to that put forth by Nietzsche in his 1887 *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in which he provides a critique of the value of values and attempts to render the traditional binary of good



and evil null and void. The end result is the establishment of Nietzsche's two conceptions of morality: *Sklavenmoral* and *Herrenmoral*.

While the second of the three steps corresponds to the former, the third step is consonant with the latter. Despite the obvious similarity of Sieburth to Nietzsche, it is nevertheless worthwhile to examine closer the last step of his ethical system. In arriving at this final destination of his concept of ethics, Sieburth tells Cilly:

Und zu den Menschheitstyrannen kommen wir jetzt. Das sind die Männer der dritten, der obersten Stufe. Sie weisen dem Menschengeschlecht seine Wege. Sie zwingen ihm die eigenen Ideen auf, so daß es schmachvoll und lächerlich wird, anders zu denken wie sie. Sie pfeifen auf jedes geschriebene oder nachgefühlte Gesetz und geben sich selber Gesetze, wenn sie nicht gerade nach der Willkür des Augenblicks handeln. Dahin gehören die Eroberer und die Staatenbildner, die Genies im Reiche der Gedanken und der Kunst, und ich möchte auch sagen: die großen Verbrecher, wenn sie nicht zu einem andern Teile armselige Lumpen und Schwachsinnige wären. (177)

According to Sieburth, those who belong to this category are the figures who stand above the rest of humanity, capable of shaping history. The model for this step is naturally Nietzsche's conception of *Herrenmoral* or the *Blondbestie*, but it also includes selected elements from other nineteenth-century thinkers. This paradigm as a sporadic historical phenomenon bears similarities to Hegel's explanation of the "great man" and his capacity to sway the movement of history. Another element would be the inclusion of the "Genies im Reiche der Gedanken" and the similarity to Schopenhauer's notion of genius. These great men of conquerors, statesmen, geniuses, and criminals, Sieburth says, are only to be found a few times in a generation because of the difficulty they face, first in the theoretical phase, but then

in praxis. This difficulty is because they too have come into being in the “Netz moralischer Forderungen” that is imposed upon humankind, and “man nennt sie ‘Persönlichkeiten’ und ärgert sich an ihnen allewege, wenn man sie nicht unschädlich macht” (178). Sieburth differentiates the first step from the last by explaining, “Jene handeln nach Instinkten, diese nach Erkenntnissen. Jene stehen *unter*, diese stehen *über* der zünftigen Moral. Nur in *einem* gleichen sie sich: die Gefahr der gesellschaftlichen Ächtung droht ihnen beiden. Und über dem Abgrunde hängen sie immer” (178). In summary, one can break down the three steps of Sieburth’s ethics into tangible objects. The first step regards the animal instincts innate to human beings. This might include pleasure seeking and acting on sexual drives or aggression without any regard for others. The second step pertains to social contract that regulates human behavior for utilitarian and collective good. The third step is a supremely neo-romantic regard for the notion of “hero,” “great man,” or “genius” in society, who is exclusive from the horde. In his formulation, Sieburth places both the barbarism of the first step and the cultural superiority of the third step above the social living or community of the second step. One can see how these three steps determine the central conflict in the novel as the exceptionally gifted protagonist who lives according to his own maxims comes into conflict with bourgeois society.

### **c. Sieburth’s Philosophy: Faustian Freewill**

When Sieburth finally clashes with liberal bourgeois Königsberg and is compelled to make the Faustian pact with the conservative camp, his worldview

becomes increasingly fatalistic. In *Der tolle Professor*, Sieburth functions as a romantic instance of individual who is made to suffer for not conforming to the collective. The theme of the individual versus the collective is not foreign in the novels of nineteenth-century realism. It is often the case, for instance, that the characters in Theodor Fontane's novels do not realize their aspirations due to entanglements with other characters and violating social norms. If Sudermann's work can be read as an autobiographical historical novel that provides an evaluation of bourgeois liberalism in his lifetime, one must also take the historical background into account. As the 1880s progressed into the turn-of-the-century era, liberalism was increasingly weakened as an ideology due to several trends. Opportunists in the liberal camp became government loyalists, while others retreated into private life (Hamann and Hermand, *Stilkunst* 8). This corresponds to the concept of "Innerlichkeit," which developed significantly over the course of the long nineteenth century. Thomas Mann, writing about Richard Wagner's transformations in a 1933 essay titled "Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners," posits the composer's philosophical and biographical course as symptomatic of the German bourgeoisie at the time. He writes, "Er ist den Weg des deutschen Bürgertums gegangen: von der Revolution zu Enttäuschung, zum Pessimismus und einer resignierten, machtgeschützten Innerlichkeit" (463). In some respects this describes the course of Sieburth's trajectory in *Der tolle Professor*. Initially, he is a revolutionary in terms of his not conforming to university faculty tradition or the dominant trends of philosophical thought. Still, for Sieburth, "Innerlichkeit" remains an ideal both at the beginning and at the end. The difference, however, is that it changes from one of

optimism to one of pessimism. While lecturing his students at the beginning of the narrative he tells them to be like Schopenhauer, who wrote, "Ich bin kein Vielschreiber, kein Kompendienfabrikant, kein Honorarverdiener, keener, der mit seinen Schriften nach dem Beifall eines Ministers zielt, mit einem Worte: dessen Feder unter dem Einfluß persönlicher Zwecke steht" (10). Sieburth's predicament complicates this matter. In order to carry out his intellectual mission, he seeks to ascend to Kant's professorship, which would give him the degree of freedom and authority that he needs. His alienation by the liberal bourgeoisie, including the majority of faculty at the Albertina University, puts his plans in jeopardy. Recognizing that he needs powerful allies to fulfill his mission, he finds himself in a devil's pact with the conservatives, paying them lip service for their support. Therefore he falls short of Schopenhauer's resilience to favor seeking that he presents to his students as an ideal.

Rather than possessing the independence that his philosophy values above all else, Sieburth finds himself beholden to a political cause in which he does not believe. His only place to turn is inward and back to his old habits—"Und wieder begann das Leben der abendlichen Mädchenjagd und der spätnächtigen Gelage, nur unvorsichtiger und blinder dem Augenblicke hingegeben" (367). In addition to pleasure seeking, Sieburth soon seeks the company of other outcasts. One evening in a pub he over hears a discussion at another table and notices that "ihre Argumente waren von drolliger Urwüchsigkeit und nicht selten dem Schweinestall entnommen, aber gleich Pfingstflammen schwebte über ihnen der heilige Geist des Verbummeltseins" (294). The three men all reveal themselves as failures in their

chosen vocations, and therefore “lost souls.” The first, Chelmnitzky, had been a senior teacher, recognized for his outstanding teaching merits, until he succumbed to drink. Totenhöfer, the second, is a so-called “ewiger Student” who had been banished from his fraternity. The third, Möwes, had been a pastor in Lithuania but was forced to give up that position on account of scandal with the local young women. This triad of castaways is an allegory for the deadliest sins of the German bourgeoisie: self-indulgence, sloth, and licentiousness.

These three failures present Sieburth with another possibility of what could be his own fate. All embittered by failure and resigned to defeat they direct their animosity toward the society that cast them away. Although Sieburth has been ostracized from Königsberger society, his continued will to succeed provokes the *ressentiment* of the three. His *quid pro quo* with the conservative camp does not escape them and they take issue with the incongruence between his theory and practice. The teacher accuses: “Du scheinst ja unter die allerzuckrigsten Optimisten gegangen,” while the student remarks, “Es sieht überhaupt so aus, als ob du für deine Überzeugungen immer gleich ein Retourbillet nimmst” (369). This prompts Sieburth to justify his position, and off-handedly philosophize about the virtue of optimism. “Erkenntnisse,” he tells them, “sind dazu da, daß man über sie hinauswächst. Zudem lebt jeder Gedanke nur von der Gnade unserer Gedankenlosigkeit, sonst würde er alsbald an seinem Gegensinn zerschellen” (369). Here Sieburth is able to philosophically justify his seemingly contradictory political practices. Just as he teaches to remain independent of others, he now posits that one should retain a degree of independence from one’s own thoughts to allow room for

intellectual growth. Growing bolder as his argument develops, Sieburth invokes politics into the discussion. He tells them: "Im übrigen gibt's eine Philosophie, die beiden Parteien gerecht wird: die Philosophie des 'Und doch' möcht' ich sie nennen. Von Rechts wegen müßten wir an der allgemeinen Trostlosigkeit längst schon verreckt sein. Aber ihr seht: der Natur zum Trotz, der Wissenschaft zum Trotz, der großen Sinnlosigkeit zum Trotz, dem eigenen und dem Alltode zum Trotz schaffen, handeln und sind wir. Ist das nicht genug, um einen robusten Optimismus auf die Beine zu stellen?" (369). With this display of argumentative contortionism, Sieburth finds a philosophical expression that suits his position in life. It is not a Leibnizian optimism that purports this is the best of all possible worlds, but rather an expression of individualistic optimism within an overall outlook of cultural pessimism. More than anything this is the optimism of Nietzsche's *amor fati*: "Ich will immer mehr lernen, das Nothwendige an den Dingen als das Schöne sehen: – so werde ich Einer von Denen sein, welche die Dinge schön machen. Amor fati: das sei von nun an meine Liebe! Ich will keinen Krieg gegen das Hässliche führen. Ich will nicht anklagen, ich will nicht einmal die Ankläger anklagen. Wegsehen sei meine einzige Verneinung! Und, Alles in Allem und Grossen: ich will irgendwann einmal nur noch ein Ja-sagender sein!" (*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* 521). Nietzsche instructs that to live a fulfilling life is to live free of resentment; one should not occupy one's time with the matters of others. Similarly, Sieburth advises his listeners, "Wer kein Rezept zum Leben mehr weiß, soll sich ruhig empfehlen. Ohne Rückblick und ohne Hoffnung . . . Verscharrt und vergessen sein. Gelöscht von den Tafeln der Menschheit Denn 'der toteste Tod ist der heilsamste' hat ein großer Lebenskünstler gesagt. Und

diesen Tod der Tode, meine Freunde, will ich mal sterben" (370). Like Nietzsche's optimistic brand of pessimism, Sieburth advocates a kind of cheerful fatalism. "Make the best of what you have!" is the imperative to be extrapolated from these lines, just as Nietzsche advocates finding pleasure in one's sufferings.

The idea of embracing one's own fate free from the recognition and affirmation of others is too much for the three bitter outcasts. Chmelnitzky replies, "Vom Leben wollten wir reden und sind glücklich wieder einmal beim Tode angelangt" and the pastor follows, "Das scheint nun einmal so Schicksal bei uns [...] und deshalb glaub' ich, deine neue Lebensbejahung wird auch nicht weit her sein" (371). To the skepticism regarding his fatalistic outlook, Sieburth replies, "Solche schamhaften Liebhaber des Todes sind wir alle. Daher die Lebensverneinung, die am üppigsten blüht, wenn sie sich als Lebensbejahung frisiert. Also, ganz unverschämt: Es lebe der Tod, meine Freunde!" (371). This seemingly morbid formulation is actually a re-wording of Sudermann's 1902 drama, "Es lebe das Leben!" whose title is deceiving as contemporary critics were quick to point out. The title is actually a line in the play voiced by the main character Beate, who as a married woman is unable to realize her love for another man. She prefaces the call to life before her own death (suicide is implied but she is already terminally ill) with the words, "Mein Dasein ist für Leib und Seele nur ein langes Ringen mit dem Niedergang gewesen" before toasting "Es lebe das Leben, meine lieben Freunde" (165). Beate is expressing regret for a life that could have been, whereas Sieburth's views are rooted in his apathy. He terms this newly formulated philosophy of complacency, *Psychēs galenótēs* or "Windstille der Seele"; this concept of

resignation, or even *joie de mort*, is by no means new to the oeuvre of Sudermann as shall be discussed later in the chapter.

The three lost souls challenge Sieburth, compelling the professor to temper his positions, thereby developing his philosophy even further. Seeing a possible point of weakness in the contradiction between theory and praxis, they pounce upon his partisan activities during the election. In an attempt to rationalize his political choices, he tells them:

Also, werden wir wieder sachlich [...] Von wem sprachen wir doch? Natürlich von Bismarck. Von wem spricht man sonst als von Bismarck? . . . Der Mann *ist* gar nicht so schlimm. Der pflegt *keine* kleinen Kinder in der Pfanne zu braten . . . Ah, wenn ich Bismarck wäre! . . . Wann kommt der große Zuchtmeister, der den Plattheiten der Bourgeoisie, als da sind: 'Gleiches Recht für alle,' 'Assekuranz des Lebensanspruchs', 'Einer für alle, alle für einen,' und wie sie sonst wohl so heißen mögen, den Hals umdreht? *Der* Mann könnte es, aber ihm fehlt der Mut zu sich selbst" (374).

In comparison to his past heavy-handed criticism of Bismarck to his students, and his praise of the chancellor during the election campaign, this is a nuanced position. For Sieburth, the Iron Chancellor presents the better option in comparison to the banal and stale bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the chancellor does not possess the resolution to stamp out his adversaries, which by Sieburth's standards makes him less than that of a "great man." As Fritz Kühne joins the table of outcasts, Sieburth finds it imperative to provide further rationalization for his change of political position. He exclaims:

Unser neuer Ordensbruder da – der ist mal aus seinem Corps ausgesprungen, weil er zu freiheitsliebend war, auf Bismarck einen Salamander zu reiben . . .



Höchst deplaciert, junger Mann! . . . Wenn die Freiheit sich die Freiheit nimmt, sich in den Dreck fallen zu lassen, warum soll der ehrliche Finder mit ihr nicht machen, wozu er Lust hat? . . . Das Deutsche Reich hat er uns geschenkt! Und das deutsche Parlament hat er uns geschenkt! . . . Parlament! Hähähähä! Parlament! Wißt ihr? In Schottland – bei den Bauern – die sind schlaue Hunde – ! Wenn nämlich eine Kuh, die nach dem weggenommenen Kalbe schreit, obstinate ist und sich nicht melken läßt, dann wird ein ausgestopftes vor sie hingestellt, und dann halt sie ganz stille . . . So läßt sich das deutsche Rindvieh von ihm melken. (374–375)

The change of position concerning Bismarck is not surprising considering that the crafty statesmanship and untainted *Realpolitik* of the chancellor are not necessarily anathema to the philosopher's original tendencies. This is also an example of the dialectical development of the philosopher's ideas as the novel progresses. The transformation that Sieburth undergoes is an aspect of the novel that is commensurate with the *Entwicklungsroman* genre. *Der tolle Professor*, however, is a curious example insofar that the progression of the protagonist can be seen as a regression as he slips deeper into the abyss of pessimism and fatalism until his ultimate demise.

## 2. Sieburth on Trial

After time spent alienated from Königsberg society and from his colleagues at the university, the moment comes for Sieburth to see if his political maneuverings would pay rewards. Pfeifferling mentions to the young professor one day that "im Kultusministerium kucken sie schon längst mit Fernrohren nach Ihnen aus" (444). This prompts Sieburth to make a pilgrimage to the capitol city in order to see if his

fate had Kant's professorship in store. After arriving in Berlin he takes stock of the metropolis and thinks to himself, "Da stand der Palast, in dem der Wissenschaft des Landes Preußen ihr Schicksal bereitet wurde" (450). "Schicksal" becomes an increasingly important theme at this juncture in the novel as the protagonist inches toward finding out if his intrigues were enough to secure his future, considering that promotion within the Imperial German university system relies as heavily on chance as it does on merit. Hermann Sudermann was no stranger to frustrations vis-à-vis the crown. His own work suffered (or gained appeal) due to censorship throughout his career, and it was exactly this that prompted him to lead the charge against the *Lex Heinze* in 1901 by creating the Goethe-Bund to ensure that law's defeat. Outliving the *Lex Heinze*, the Goethe-Bund remained an action group for other cultural affairs in Germany for years to come. One other issue that was called to its attention was the matter of the Schillerpreis for Literature that the Prussian monarchy awarded to a poet every three years. This prize, although prestigious, was not just awarded on the basis of aesthetic merit alone, and political affairs and ideology played a significant role. In protest of this prize, the Goethe-Bund created its own Volks-Schillerpreis in 1905 as a counterweight to the Kaiser's prize, in order to promote younger authors who might be considered too controversial for the conservative tastes of the crown. Without a doubt, Sudermann was disappointed at not having been awarded the prize, as there was wide speculation in 1890 that he was the top candidate on account of his 1889 sensational breakthrough drama "Die Ehre." The problem was that his following play, "Sodoms Ende" in 1890, was considered inconsistent with the acceptable morality of the day and was therefore

censured. In response to this, renowned literary critic and author, Fritz Mauthner wrote in 1890:

Mit der Nachricht, das Werk des jungen Dramatikers sei verboten, verbreitete sich das Gerücht, Sudermann werde für die "Ehre" den diesjährigen Schillerpreis bekommen. Wenn sich dieses Zusammentreffen bestätigt, so hätte der Zufall wieder einmal einen guten Witz gemacht. Es handelt sich ja in beiden Fällen nicht um dasselbe Stück, wohl aber um denselben Dichter. Und da liegt es nahe, an eine Einrichtung zu denken, welchen innerhalb der bildenden Künste besteht und auf litterarischem Gebiete recht gut nachgeahmt werden könnte. Wenn ein Maler oder Bildhauer einmal die goldene Medaille erhalten hat, ist er von dem Urteil der Jury nicht weiter abhängig; er darf, was immer er geschaffen hat, in der Kunstaussstellung aufstellen oder aufhängen. Und wäre er inzwischen in das revolutionäre Lager der Decadende [sic.], er braucht nach der Censur der Jury nicht mehr zu fragen. Wie wäre es nun, wenn der Schillerpreis ebenso von der Theater-Censur frei machte? Es ist schade, daß es für diesen Antrag keine zuständige Stelle giebt. ("Wieder Censurverbot")

The creation of the Volks-Schillerpreis was a small victory against the authoritarian structure of Wilhelmine Germany. Sieburth, however, has no such backing, and must stand alone against the omnipotence of the system.

#### **a. Friedrich Althoff**

The civil servant to whom Sieburth must answer proves to be a curious figure, who at once stands as a metonymic representation of the monarchical system, but also demonstrates himself to be more closely an example of Sieburth's third step of his ethical system than anyone in Königsberg. As the candidate enters the palace, a

rich description is given of the pomp he is met with inside: “Ein hochgewölbter Vorraum. Bronzierte Treppengeländer. Eine Marmorgruppe aus frommer Schinkelzeit” (450). This grandeur is symbolic of the high time of Germany after the Franco-Prussian War with all of the proper accoutrements for a royal building fitting for the rising star among European power in the 1880s. The detailed description of these monumental structures conveys the omnipotence of the monarchy. The thought of such a baroque spectacle with vaulted ceilings, a bronze banister, and a marble staircase seems to dwarf any subject by comparison and invokes a feeling of the sublime. In some respects, this scene is reminiscent of how Franz Kafka relates his figures to structures, especially when one thinks of texts such as *Der Prozess* (1925) and *Das Schloss* (1926). After making his way past these sites, Sieburth asks for the Herr Ministerialdirektor Kürschner, and after giving his name, he is promptly led into another large room with “Gipsbüsten. Blumige Sessel. Ein abgetretener Teppich. Und hinter dem geräumigen Schreibtisch ein dünnmähniger Kopf voll heiterer, breitausladender Würde” (450).

The description of this figure before Sieburth caused critics to speculate about the historical basis for the *Ministerialdirektor*. This man, whose “mehrfach gewickeltes schwarzseidenes Halstuch, aus dem, von weißem Kragenrand umgeben, ein glattrasiertes Doppelkinn sich herausgrub, und immer weiter nach oben in dem fleischigen Feinschmeckergesicht ein Augenpaar, aus dessen geröteten Spalten soviel lachende Verschmitztheit hervorschoß, daß Sieburth ganz wohl und wehe zumute ward” led readers at the time to identify Ministerialdirektor Kürschner as none other than the former Prussian Ministerialdirektor Friedrich Althoff (451).

This resemblance of the figure to the biographical person of Friedrich Althoff is similar to other such instances in the novel, and it solidifies the categorization of the novel as a *Schlüsselroman*. The detailed description provided for this figure is not merely words of prose to enhance the reader's imagination, but, also serves as a clue for the reader to study and discern what historical figure(s) could be the basis. The former Ministerialdirektor Friedrich Althoff had a personality and system that largely impacted higher education in Germany after his appointment to the Ministry in 1882, gaining him nicknames such as Prussia's "heimlicher Kultusminister" and "Bismarck des Hochschulwesens." Althoff's greatest contributions to the education system went to reforms that sought to find the best researchers and pedagogues to occupy Germany's professorships. Having said that, he was notorious for ignoring the suggestions of faculty, and often appointed those who he believed had the most originality. As a liberal, he later pushed through reforms that enabled women to study, as well as the appointments of Jews and Catholics to professorships in Prussia. His appointments created a network of supporters for his measures that bestowed him with a significant sphere of power within the field of education, which was known as the "System Althoff" ("Althoff"). The literary historian Alfred Klaar wrote on October 2, 1927 in the Viennese daily *Die neue Freie Presse*, of his impressions about this figure in Sudermann's novel, "Auch Althoff, der almächtige Ministerialdirektor, ist im wesentlichen frei nach dem Leben gezeichnet." Klaar goes on to explain his own real life encounter with the historical figure Althoff:

Ich lernte den merkwürdigen Mann kennen, als er sich für einige Aufsätze meines Buches "Wir und die Humanité," namentlich für die aufgeworfenen

Fragen "Prüfung oder Erprobung," interessierte, mich um meinen Gegenbesuch, leicht hin Konferenzen anregte und viel zu geschäftig war, um jemals Wort zu halten. Althoffs bestechende Art, die Gewandtheit, mit der er die Mitte zwischen Ämtlichkeit und Bequemlichkeit des Verkehrs hielt und die rasch bereite, wenn auch nicht immer zuverlässige Entschlußkraft, mit der er die Professorstube, den "Versprecherkeller," wie man sein Vorgemach damals nannte, an sich fesselte, ist vorzüglich gezeichnet, wie alle Figuren des "Tollen Professors."

In the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* on October 6, 1926, a reviewer named Erich Jenisch writes about the Ministerialdirektor in Sudermann's novel, "Man spürt, daß die Figuren und Ereignisse dieser Geschichte keine Erfindungen der Phantasie sind. Leicht erkennt man in dem Ministerialdirektor, der Sieburth die ordentliche Professur verschafft, Althoff wieder." Dr. J. Levy demonstrates in his open letter to Sudermann on October 9, 1926 in the *Vossische Zeitung* concerning the novel that he too has solved the puzzle and identified Althoff. Nevertheless, Levy expresses his doubt in terms of the plausibility of this character. He writes,

Und wenn der Ministerialdirektor, den Sieburth-Quäbicker in Berlin aufsucht, um durch ihn Ordentlicher zu werden, wirklich Althoff sein soll, dessen amtliche Allüren glänzend nachgezeichnet sind, so sieht man gern darüber hinweg, daß er der Allmächtige im Ministerium erst viel später wurde. Der Dichter hat die Freiheit, der Zeit vorzugreifen. Läßt doch auch Shakespeare mit Kanonen schießen, ehe das Pulver erfunden war. Aber daß der Ministerialdirektor mit dem tollen Professor Nachtkneipen aufgesucht habe mit dem ewig Weiblichen, wie es im Roman liebevoll geschildert ist, mit Verlaub, das darf bezweifelt werden.

Whether or not Sudermann reproduced an accurate literary representation of the Ministerialdirektor Althoff can be debated, but most critics at the time agree that

there is a resemblance. One can imagine that a significant turn-of-the-century figure such as Althoff was likely to still loom large in the minds of those living in the Weimar Republic.

### **b. Sieburth Meets his Match**

Beyond questions regarding his historical basis, Kürschner at once presents himself to Sieburth as the gatekeeper of his fate as well as a mind of *Übermensch* proportions, whose meeting with the young professor only strengthens the latter's philosophical enterprise. In this sense, one can see the *Bildungsroman* characteristics of the novel as the protagonist progresses through encounters with other figures and situations. In the Ministerialdirektor, Sieburth finds a quick-witted and engaging host, who, unbeknownst to the professor, had been expecting the visit. The prompt reception of the guest without having a scheduled meeting could be regarded as significant, considering a conventional complaint against Althoff was that he notoriously left people waiting hours for him (Schmoller 113). Not only is he welcoming, but he also proves to be of an intellect that Sieburth finds lacking in the university city of Königsberg. From the start Kürschner does not try to conceal the magnitude of his power. He tells Sieburth, "Es gibt Männer der Wissenschaft, und zwar von unbestrittenen Verdiensten, die in meinem Vorzimmer ihren Stammplatz haben" (451). This figure appears to embody what one might have considered a "great man" by nineteenth-century standards, for it was through his scrutiny that others of academic excellence first had to pass. Sieburth, however, does not cower in the presence of this powerful man and he boldly replies, "Ich will mich nicht rühmen

[...] aber über die Schwellen hoher Gönner hat mich die schweißige Toga noch nie gehetzt" (451). Demonstrating his formidable intelligence, Kürschner recognizes this to be a citation from the Latin poet Martial. In Königsberg, except for perhaps his protégé Kühne, Sieburth's intellect was never fully comprehended or appreciated, but with this man it is different. He even asks Sieburth to recite the line from Martial in Latin, which Sieburth does,<sup>24</sup> and in response observes, "Ich will dem Schicksal nicht vorgreifen, aber mir scheint, unter diesem Zeichen werden wir uns schon verständigen" (451). At this point it is clear that the Ministerialdirektor and Sieburth have each perceived the other's mental prowess that initiates a mutual respect. The mention of "Schicksal" or fate however, complicates the matter. If we assume that these two figures are representations of the Hegelian "great man" or the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, one must assume these figures possess the will, might, and command to shape their own destiny rendering the anti-modern belief in a predestined fate null and void. Still, the idea of "Schicksal" continues to figure prominently in the meeting between these figures, adding to them an element of the Greek hero. In addition to Kürschner and Sieburth, one might add the Great Hegelian to the list of the "great men" to appear in *Der tolle Professor*. The irony is that the historical people upon which these figures are based (Friedrich Althoff, Richard Quäbicker, Karl Rosenkranz) have all been faded by age, even if their personalities, feats, and intellect made them great in their own time. In many respects, this is not unlike Hermann Sudermann, who also had experienced a

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<sup>24</sup> "Dum per limina te potentiorum sudatrix toga ventilat."



serious decline in popularity by the time the novel was published in the Weimar Republic.

True to the historical figure, Friedrich Althoff, who reputedly went to lengths in order to acquire an authentic sense of those he was promoting, Ministerial Direktor Kürschner, sees to it that he can get a better look at Sieburth in a more natural atmosphere, and he invites Sieburth to meet him that evening. Sieburth, however, is aware that such an invitation is not hospitality, and that he will be scrutinized closely by the administrator: “Am Kneiptische zwischen Abend und Morgen wurden die Bewerber auf ihr geistiges Stammkapital und dessen Nutzbarmachung hin geprüft, wurden ausgeholt, ausgebeutelt, ausgelaugt und kurz und klein geschnitten, bis sie als Opfer seiner Zergliederungskünste mit aufgeschlitzter Seele vor ihn lagen, worauf er dann mit kühlem Abwägen seine Entscheidung traf” (453). The encounter again calls to mind notions of the ancient hero who must stand the test of bravery, and instead of succumbing to feelings of uncertainty about the situation, Sieburth looks to the challenge with resolve: “Mit erbittertem Vergnügen sah er ihm entgegen” (453). Meeting at a bourgeois wine establishment, the Ministerialdirektor commences the philosophical odyssey that ensues with the words, “An diesem geruhsamen Platze wollen wir anfangen [...] Später können wir ja sehen, wohin unsere Beschwingtheit uns tragen wird” (454). Just as Sieburth himself once took Kühne on a philosophical and bacchanalian adventure one evening to the underworld of Königsberg, the same was about to happen to the professor. This time, however, a central existential question is involved.

The meeting with Kürschner provides a deeper look into Sieburth's philosophical views, as his intellect is put to the test. While it is apparent that the two men are capable debaters, it also becomes clear that the two men have both similarities and differences in their respective *Weltanschauungen*. The minister begins their discussion with the provocative statement, "Ohne Raub kommt man anständig nicht durch die Welt [...] Das haben wir von Bismarck gelernt. Erst mit dem Frevel beginnt das Vergnügen" (454–55). At that point Sieburth realizes that Kürschner already knows a considerable amount about him, so he refrains from taking the bait and chooses not to reply. The faculty at the Albertina, according to the minister has always been troublesome for the Prussian administrators:

Sie ist von altersher etwas schwierig – diese Fakultät. Es gibt da einige Herren, die glauben, ihren Beruf verfehlt zu haben, weil die Barrikaden und die Schafotte nicht mehr in Mode sind. Hat man sich auf die Forderung hin frisiert: "Sire, geben Sie Gedankenfreiheit," dann ist es ein großes Malheur, wenn diese Gedankenfreiheit schon da ist. Denn schließlich *haben* wir sie im Bismarckschen Staate, wenigstens so wohl temperiert, daß als Lohn für staatserhaltende Gutgesinntheit ein Platz an der Sonne<sup>25</sup> immer noch Wert hat. So haben auch Sie gemeint, Herr Professor, was? (455)

The last line is in reference to Sieburth's political activities in Königsberg, and reveals the minister's omniscience. Realizing the necessity to reply cautiously, Sieburth responds, "Staatserhaltung und Gutgesinntheit sind gewiß sehr wichtige Dinge, besonders, wenn man dem Gestalter seines Schicksals gegenüber sitzt, aber

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<sup>25</sup> The recognizable phrase "Platz an der Sonne" is used in this case anachronistically. It comes from a statement by Minister Bernhard von Bülow before the Reichstag in 1897, and is generally considered to be an indication of Germany's ambitions of becoming a leading world power in the twentieth century.

ich muß leider verzichten, sie als Motive für mich in Anspruch zu nehmen, auch da, wo ich mich bei den jüngsten Wahlen nützlich zu machen versuchte" (455).

Interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Sieburth's Faustian pact with the conservatives, he asks him to explain: "Wer sich der Staatsidee, wie wir sie jeweilig verkörpern, dienstbar erweist, der hat allen Grund, auf unsere Dankbarkeit zu zählen. Mißachtung mag mitspielen, wenn man die sogenannten Nicht-Gentlemen ablohnt, die wir ja leider auch nicht entbehren können. Aber was hat das mit *unserem* Falle zu tun? . . . Sie haben sich bei den Reichstagswahlen auf die Regierungsseite geschlagen, wie ich höre" (456). The term *Staatsidee* calls to mind the philosophy of Hegel, who was accused by his most bitter critics of directing his philosophy in support of the *status quo* in return for patronage. Sieburth explains that the *Staatsidee* is of peripheral importance to him: "Man kann ihr anhängen aus allen möglichen Gründen: aus Furcht, aus Ordnungsliebe, aus Grauen vor dem Stumpfsinn der Gegner, aus Gier nach persönlichem Vorteil – und letzten Endes auch aus Bequemlichkeit . . . Ich glaube sogar, daß wir diese als staaterhaltenden Faktor nicht hoch genug in Anrechnung bringen können" (456). As a minister of the Prussian state, Kürschner asks the logical question about how Sieburth can expect to teach *Staatsphilosophie* with opinions such as that. Sieburth's reply is that when he has developed a system such as that of the Hegelians, "dann wird der Handwerksjargon meine Ansicht so gut in Watte packen, daß jeder darunter vermuten kann, was ihm als angehendem Staatsbürger geziemend und nützlich erscheint!" (456). The vision of his philosophy seems to be one that deviates from the notion of universal truth, to which other systematic philosophies of the

nineteenth century laid claim. It is not an objective truth that he strives to attain, as Kant once attempted with his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, but rather he strives for a philosophy whose truth is merely phenomenological and specific to the experiencing subject. This marks the significance of Nietzsche's philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather than compiling a system of philosophy, the thinker created one that was very much aphoristic. Even if his works are best understood chronologically, Nietzsche's philosophy was written to be cherry-picked. In this sense, even the form of his books and how he advocated they be read correspond to his attempt to topple philosophy as it had been.

Sieburth's individualistic philosophy poses an antithesis to Kürschner's worldview, which is based upon an indispensable belief in the social structure of the state. Baffled by this, he asks, "Und Sie glauben, daß Sie damit die begeisterte Übereinstimmung erreichen werden, die wir bei den Gebildeten der Nation gerne vorfinden möchten?" (456). Sieburth's only answer to such a direct question is to ask the minister what he means by "Übereinstimmung," to which is hesitantly replied, "Nun – nun – mit den Zielen, – die – die – – Regierung eben verfolgt" (457). Kürschner's reply indicates not only the authoritarian nature of Prussian institutions, but also how his philosophy reinforces it. Conformity, insinuates the minister, is the path to a successful career in the academy, not unlike what Hegel's critics accused him of doing. Sieburth's reply is an expression of individualism punctuated with *amor fati*. He tells Kürschner, "Die Ziele des gestrigen Tages kennen

wir allenfalls, die 'Norddeutsche Allgemeine'<sup>26</sup> meldet sie ja. Aber was die nächste schlaflose Nacht dem Gewaltigen an Zielen bescheren wird, das weiß er heute selber noch nicht" (457). One notices the clash of *Weltanschauungen* between that of individualism and collectivism when the minister follows up: "Noch immer aber haben Sie mir nicht verraten, Verehrtester, warum Sie die Basis unserer gesellschaftlichen Existenz – denn das ist die Staatsidee nun einmal – als nebensächlich betrachten" (457). The minister's challenge provokes in Sieburth "der Trotz zum selbstzerstörenden Rausche," which causes him to intensify his position at the peril of losing all that he had come to Berlin to achieve. This urge that arises in Sieburth during the course of the debate is comparable to what Sigmund Freud wrote about *Thanatos*. Given this, Sieburth's philosophy is more than just ideas, but part of his psychological makeup. Perhaps this is symbolic of the deep cultural turmoil that was taking root at the end of the nineteenth century and being absorbed into the psychology of individuals. To be sure, between the time in which the novel is set and when Suderman was writing, the processes of modernity had reshaped the *Weltanschauung* of the Western World. Not even comprising a half-century, the time between the early 1880s and the 1920s in Germany is a significant gap in terms of industrial, political, and social development. By the time of the Weimar Republic, the nineteenth-century European mind—especially that of the German—that Nietzsche lambasted in his works, was dead.

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<sup>26</sup> The *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* was a conservative organ that had close ties with the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. While close friends and allies counted among the shareholders of the newspaper, the editorial board was accused of taking cues from the administration. At one point the newspaper was even financed directly from a so-called "Reptilienfond" (slush fund) through the government.

The confrontation between the minister's state philosophy and Sieburth's individualism becomes intensified as the latter is emboldened from a surge of *Thanatos*. The professor minimizes the notion of "Staatidee" as a mere accidental phenomenon. He tells the minister, "Der erstbeste Zufall liegt sich mit dem zweitbesten Zufall irgendwie in den Haaren. Und daraus entsteht als drittbesten Zufall die jeweilige Verkörperung der Staatsidee . . . Wir dienen ihr, wir müssen ihr selbst als Gegner dienen, weil sie, wie Herr Ministerialdirektor eben bemerkten, die Basis unserer gesellschaftlichen – und nicht bloß gesellschaftlichen – Existenz ist. Sie aber darum wichtig nehmen hieße dem Zufall zu viel Ehre erweisen" (457). Such a deconstructive perspective of the institution of state, out of which Hegel built his epistemology, is further representative of Nietzschean disavowal of any claims of value. For Sieburth, the state is as meaningless as anything else except for the fact that value is arbitrarily ascribed to it. The philosopher's attack prompts the bureaucrat to comment on his style of argumentation: "zusammengeduckt wie ein sprungbereites Raubtier" (458). The analogy of a "Raubtier" again harkens to Nietzsche and his discourse on beasts of prey, and it alludes to his performance in their combat of minds. Continuing his assault, Sieburth tells the minister,

Alles leugnen wir, was die schlichten Männer des gesunden Menschenverstandes – '*Idiotai*' hießen sie darum schon bei den Griechen – begrifflich für nötig erachten. Außerdem sind wir dazu da, allem Geschehen, selbst dem blödesten, das Mäntelchen ewiger Sinnmäßigkeit umzuhängen. Auch mir ist der Zufall natürlich '*asylum ignorantiae*' – oder was man sonst will . . . Ich hab' mir übrigens auch noch einen andern schönen Namen dafür ausgesucht. Ich nenne ihn: den Witz der Zusammenhänge. Und in dieser

Form ist er mir identisch mit dem Weltgesetz und der Gottheit . . . Halten Sie das für Blasphemie, Herr Ministerialdirektor? (458)

Sieburth's refusal to attribute meaning to worldly phenomena is consistent to his submission to the notion of *Schicksal*. The passage above indicates a nihilistic turn away from the project of the Enlightenment with its drive to organize and find meaning for all phenomena. His term "Witz der Zusammenhänge" suggests that there is no rational reason for things as they are, but rather it is all merely because of chance. This explanation is indicative of the purely irrational; reason and understanding are superfluous under this interpretation of the world.

During their parley two diametrically opposed *Weltanschauungen* become apparent. Nevertheless, a kind of dialectic occurs not only between the two mutually exclusive worldviews but also between the two men. Just as Sieburth expounds on the dialectical nature of accidents producing accidents, the two men come to a *modus vivendi*. This is evident as Sieburth observes, "Ich fühle, daß Sie, Herr Ministerialdirektor, und ich aus demselben Holze geschnitzt sind," (458) to which the minister agrees. Even though their worldviews do not coincide, they still have respect for each other on the basis of their profundity. In other words, they each recognize themselves as a kind of *Übermensch* or "great man." Through this mutual recognition, Sieburth impresses the enigmatic minister in such a way that the meeting takes a more personal turn. While toasting libations, Kürschner exclaims, "Heute abend wollen wir Menschen sein. Ach was, Menschen! Götter wollen wir sein! Damit Sie morgen früh wissen, daß es dergleichen gibt! Das wird Ihrem Unglauben sehr gesund sein!" (459).

### c. Apollinian Odyssey of the Mind

With all reservations aside, the two minds embark on an odyssey through the history of western philosophy:

Und nun ging's mit geschwellten Segeln auf das Meer der Skepsis hinaus, dem Gestade des 'Nichts' entgegen, das als ein nie erreichbarer Ankergrund vor dem spähenden Schiffer dahinfliehet! Die großen Verhöhnner aus der römischen Untergangszeit fuhren lachend mit ihnen. Bald hatte Martial eine brennende Fackel dazwischen zu werfen und bald Juvenal. Und das Flugfeuer des Persius zündete manchmal am grellsten. Auch der Geist Montaignes wurde beschworen. Und Humes Schattengestalt schritt unangegriffen vorbei. Auch der schlimmheilige Prediger Salomonis stieg lächelnd aus den Tiefen, und selbst der Romanheld Pelham war da und gab seinen Senf. An Schopenhauer wollte man gerne vorbei, weil er ja letzten Endes ein Dogmatiker war, aber das ging nicht an. Zu tief hatte sein galliger Spürsinn in die faulen Untergründe prunkvoller Kompromisse hineingegriffen. Umso sicherer thronte Hobbes auf seinem weitschauenden Wolkensitz. Und schließlich lenkten die alten Sophisten triumphierend die Wettfahrt. Ein herrisches Schweifen war's durch die sonnigen Welten des großen Verneinens, wo Zweifeln Moral war und die Spielhölle des Lebens ihre Marken hergeben mußte, hinter denen kein Goldwert steht und die nichts sind wie armselige Splitter, aus Totenknochen geschliffen. Die Geheimlehre der Gewalt, die nur für die Auserwählten da ist, wurde blinzelnd gestreift – *'might is right'*, zweifelsohne, aber nur, wenn *'right'* in drohnender Faust blutig-göttlich zu *'might'* wird – und Aristokratien und Demokratien fanden sich einträchtig auf dem gleichen Schutthaufen wieder. Die Freiheit wurde zum Metier fortschrittstrunkener Gewürzkrämer, die Sitte zum Petrefakt heuchelnder Egoisten, und die Schönheit gar! Wozu hatte Voltaire gesagt: *'Le beau pour le crapaud c'est sa crapaude'*, um sich lange damit zu beschäftigen? (459–460)



With this deep knowledge of Western philosophy, both men prove to embody the bourgeois ideal of *Bildung*, something that appears to be missing from other sectors of the bourgeoisie in the novel.

Eventually the two land upon some topics that they are able to explore earnestly and in depth. As no exhaustive philosophical discussion would be complete without it, the minister tackles the concept of truth, telling Sieburth that if it exists at all then it is nothing but a luxury. He says, "Was wahrhaft ist, ist nicht nahrhaft. Für den einzelnen ebensowenig wie für die Gesamtheit" (460). Here he dismisses the importance of truth whether in service of the individual or in service of the collective or state. Now with the superficialities of an interview aside, the minister surprisingly concedes to Sieburth the superfluosity of the *Staatsidee*. He touches on something else that has a stronger, more durable nature. He tells the candidate, "Und die Menschheit ist eine fiktive Größe. Wenn Sie sagen: 'es lohnt sich nicht, um ihretwillen den kleinen Finger zu rühren', so sag' ich dazu: 'Meinethalben'. Aber zwischen beiden steht etwas, das keine Fiktion und keine Verlegenheit ist, das nennt sich: Vaterland!" (460). As it would seem here, nationalism or patriotism is the rightful placeholder of truth. Given that *Der tolle Professor* was written only years after the collapse of the Kaiserreich during the precarious Weimar Republic, faith in the state had been shaken. Monarchists held their hopes for a restoration of the Kaiser even though it was not realistic, and many longed for something other than the republic. Political systems had come and gone but in the wake of nationalistic, patriotic fervor wrought by World War I, love of *Vaterland* was the enduring remainder. For as much as any, this describes Hermann Sudermann during

the years of the Weimar Republic. The reshaping of borders that took place after the Treaty of Versailles led to Sudermann's *Heimat* in Lithuania (Memelland) being separated from Germany. Although traumatic for the author, his deep love for the homeland endured until the end. In some ways these strong feelings for *Heimat* are represented in Kürschner's notion of *Vaterland* that is of a metaphysical nature that cannot be erased by worldly politics. Upon the minister's mention of *Vaterland*, Sieburth must compromise his own dedication to individualism to meet his partner in debate in this middle ground. He thinks, "An diesem Felsen scheiterte jeder Sturmflug des eigenwilligen Denkens" (460).

From the founding of the German *Kaiserreich* to the Weimar Republic when Sudermann was writing *Der tolle Professor*, Germany underwent waves of mass jubilation, and intoxicating national fervor, while at the same time a clear brand of German cultural pessimism pervaded the intellectual sphere. Once again, Nietzsche is called to mind with his competing tendencies of the Apollinian and the Dionysian. Bringing up the nationalistic glory ten years beforehand at the Battle of Sedan, the minister describes the overwhelming forcefulness of the event, when the long-developing German nationalism reached its zenith in its great military victory making a unified German nation state possible. He tells Sieburth, "Hätten Sie am zweiten September siebenzig vor Sedan gelegen wie ich, Sie hätten den Choral: 'Nun danket alle Gott' nicht bloß mitgesungen, Sie wären auch genau so gläubig gewesen wie neben Ihnen der pommersche Bauernsohn. Was hilft uns unsere Skepsis, was hilft uns unsere Denkkraft, wenn beides an einer beliebigen Massenwirkung zugrunde geht?" (461). Here nationalism is presented as an equalizer, whose

capacity is greater than the philosophical qualities of the Enlightenment. This “Massenwirkung,” as the minister describes it, overpowers skepticism and mental capacity, two important themes for the philosophy of reason, especially when one considers the key contributions of Immanuel Kant to this body of knowledge. Kant’s fundamental work *Die Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was written as a dispassionate search for reason, testing the limits of human mental capacity. The minister instead invokes the primacy of the senses over that of reason, which, in addition to echoing Nietzsche’s notion of the Dionysian, is reminiscent of the challenge that Romanticism posed toward the project of the Enlightenment.

As the conversation goes on, Sieburth reveals the pessimistic side of his philosophy. Instead of invoking the Dionysian aspect in favor of nationalism, which the minister does, he gives a deeply fatalistic answer: “Zuerst handelt es sich hier nicht um eine beliebige Massenwirkung [...] sondern dahinter steht Homers ‘purpurner Tod,’ dem auch des Stärksten Gefühl seinen Zoll zahlt . . . Und weiter: Skepsis wäre nicht Skepsis, wenn sie nicht schließlich sich selber vernichtete. Jeder letzte Grund ist ein Abgrund. Und wenn wir den Hals darin brechen, geschieht uns nur recht” (461). This expression of fatalism seems akin to the concept of degeneration that took root as the nineteenth century drew to a close. This train of thought rested upon the belief that ideas, inorganic concepts, and even nations perish as do biological objects. About degeneration, Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman write in the preface of their book on this subject: “Degeneration was part of a convenient dialectic for the organization of contemporary thought and feeling – a kind of fiction, if you will. But also it was part of the inevitable structure of reality,

an indisputable fact. People, nations, perhaps the universe itself, all run down, grow old and die" (X). Insinuating nationalism, Sieburth tells that even the strongest feelings are subject to what he describes as "Homers purpurner Tod." The color purple appears in many scenes from classical texts in which heroes meet their earthly end; purple is symbolic of an absolute death, such as that served by fate. In other words, some feelings might stand above others at certain periods of time, just as the heroes of antiquity stood above others; still, both must face their end just as any mortal. The final part of his observation suggests a kind of fatality for the sake of fatality, wherein skepticism breeds skepticism *ad infinitum*. Not surprisingly, the language used by Sieburth is strikingly similar to that of Nietzsche, who writes in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* that there is a deeper level to all ideas, philosophies and philosophers: "'ein Abgrund hinter jedem Grunde, unter jeder Begründung.' Jede Philosophie ist eine Vordergrunds-Philosophie" (211). Reacting to Sieburth's pessimistic worldview, the minister calls attention to its inherent *Thanatos*. He says, "Sie sind kein Skeptiker – und sind auch kein Zyniker – krank sind Sie – wissenskrank sind Sie – lebenskrank sind Sie. Die Lust des Leidens ist Ihnen ins Blut gegangen und hat es vergiftet" (461). Kürschner goes so far here as to call this kind of pessimism an ailment that has affected his thought and lifestyle. At this point it is important to note the development in Sieburth's philosophy. Earlier in the novel we saw a life-affirming, epicurean side that is absent in this exchange. Still, it should be noted that the optimism of the minister and the pessimism of the professor comprises a duality of pessimism and optimism much like Nietzsche and his concept

of Dionysian and Apollinian, who himself employed varying degrees of optimism and pessimism in his works.

#### **d. Dionysian Oddyssey of Desire**

Sieburth is awoken from his pessimistic spell, or rather *Tagesansicht*, when Kürschner invokes another topic familiar to the philosopher: sexual desire. With hyper-masculinity and great misogyny he says, “Und kommen wir zu einer andern, die wir bisher ängstlich gemieden haben, obgleich sie, wenn ich nicht *sehr* irre, uns beiden noch immer geholfen hat. Sie nennt sich: Weib! . . . Weib, der ruhende Pol in der Ergötzungen Flucht. Wer uns heute abend zugehört hätte, der hätte uns sicher für zwei Neutren gehalten” (461). The suggestion of pleasure seeking immediately changes the mood of the conversation. Like an addict who has deprived himself of his substance of choice, Sieburth immediately replies to this suggestion, “Ich bin hier längst fremd geworden. Wo nehmen wir Weiber her?” (461). Taboo sexual gratification—or the mere thought thereof—is the *Rausch* (intoxication) that allows Sieburth to step outside of his deeply pessimistic musings and back into a state of bacchanalian fervor. But rather than suggesting one of Sieburth’s well-known nightly adventures, he instead proposes that they assume the role of observer on the shadier side of Germany’s metropolis. In this regard the minister takes on the Apollinian role in their duality. With regard to pleasure, the minister, a successful bureaucrat, has been able to strike a balance between the bourgeois life of family, career and reputation, while not entirely forgoing desire. In other words, the Apollinian is able to suppress the Dionysian. Conversely, Sieburth’s imbalance

between pleasure and bourgeois lifestyle has put him in a precarious position in Königsberg society and at the university. These two examples call to mind Sigmund Freud's two opposing theories of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The former is the belief that the mind actively seeks pleasure at the insistence of the id. Since this is incompatible with human civilization, the developed ego manages to overcome the constant pressure of the id. The result, according to Freud, is the victory of reason over passion, moderation over excess.

The two heroes, on the course of their odyssey, reach the underworld stage of their tale. Under the cover of darkness in the center of the city they see, "Einzelne Mädchen, süße Herumtreiberinnen, die dem an den Ecken lauernden Dirnentum gefährliche Konkurrenz machten, zogen von einem Ladenfenster zum andern, wo sie, scheinbar von Neugier gefesselt, die dunkeln Auslagen musterten, innig bereit, jedem, der ihnen gefiel, Antwort und Auskunft zu schenken" (462). Noticing the stimulation of this atmosphere, Sieburth contemplates how his nightly adventures would have been had they taken place in a modern Sodom and Gomorrha such as Berlin. Among this milieu, the professor's philosophical formulation of "die Welt als Weib und Gedanken" fittingly becomes the topic of discussion. The minister is intrigued by this idea, but remarks that such educators as Sieburth are a "staatsgefährliche Sache," to which the professor replies, "Ich glaube kaum [...] daß ich damit mehr Unheil anrichte als der Staat, indem er die andere Verquickung 'Weib und Besoffenheit' unter seine schützenden Fittiche nimmt" (462). This exchange certainly lends itself to be analyzed in the context of morality at the end of the nineteenth century. In philosophizing about the topics at hand with the minister,

Sieburth essentially turns the power dynamics. The minister reveals himself as someone who is familiar with the other side of bourgeois existence, or in Sieburth's terms, the "Nachtansicht." The hedonism that the young professor preaches to the young minds at the university might cause dismay in bourgeois circles, but as revealed through the minister, the disregard for the old moral standards among men pervades German society all the way up to the highest-ranking ministers.

Under the cover of night, the two men enter an establishment, and from everywhere the esteemed minister is greeted. Sieburth thinks to himself that only in Cologne during the carnival season has he seen such a convivial atmosphere. Not long after they find a table, the stature of these two figures attracts the attention of others. A woman comes to sit down at their table and asks, "Wer seid ihr beide? Ihr seid wer! Ihr seid mehr als das ganze Volk da! Sie mit den Märtyreraugen! Und Sie! Ein Stück Lieber-Gott sind Sie. Liebhaben muß man euch, ob man will oder nicht" (464). Following up these cryptic words, she prophesizes, "Wenn *der* nicht aufpaßt, wirst du [Sieburth] ein schlechtes Ende nehmen [...] Ein Weltreisender bist du, der von einem Lande zum andern jagt, weil er nirgends Erlösung findet" (464–465). These observations provide insight into the protagonist's dilemma and foreshadow his impending doom. This woman calls to mind Shakespearian figures such as the Three Witches in "Macbeth" and the Soothsayer in "Julius Caesar," who likewise make ominous prophecies. But the erotic, anonymous atmosphere and the mystical discourse in this scene also reminds one of Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*, which, along with *Der tolle Professor*, appeared in 1926. As much as both Schnitzler and Sudermann were authors of the *fin de siècle*, these two works both contain imagery

that is more associated with decadence in postwar Europe. The mysterious orgies which Sieburth and Fridolin in *Traumnovelle* enter have an ethereal nature to them. The nightly carnevalistic atmosphere described in these works calls to mind other visual depictions of this era such as Otto Dix's 1927–28 triptych painting "Metropolis." The two outer images of this work show Berlin's underworld of prostitutes and the destitute on the streets under the cover of darkness, while the center painting depicts the wild and debauched environs of a nightclub. Furthermore, one could also compare this scene in *Der tolle Professor* with those from Fritz Lang films of the 1920s such as the dance scene in *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) in which the infamous Anita Berber appears or the depraved club scene in *Metropolis* (1927). The mention of carnival as Sieburth and the minister enter the establishment adds to the imagery of wild behavior, as well as to the mystique, since costume and anonymity is a part of the festivities. Costume, or rather disguise, plays a major role at the orgiastic gathering to which Fridolin invites himself in *Traumnovelle*. All of this cover of night, disguise, and randomness provides a stark contrast to the daytime bourgeois principles of order and transparency. Once again, this fits neatly with Sieburth's philosophy concerning bourgeois *Doppelleben* (double life) with the *Tagesansicht* and *Nachtansicht*. One might also add that there is also an air of Bakhtin's notion of the *carnivalesque*, not only in this scene but also throughout. In his work *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin focuses attention on the traditions of the carnival during the Renaissance period. The term *carnivalesque* in a Bakhtinian sense represents behaviors that deviate from the norm, such as those during the holiday of carnival, when people wear costume and behavioral norms of



all social-class strata are subverted. In the novel this can be seen through the taboo intermingling between classes.

Despite the distractions of the orgiastic atmosphere of the Berlin underworld, the philosophical musing between Sieburth and Kürschner continues. The idea of two figures, one of them bearing influence over the fate of the other, in the tempting underworld atmosphere of carnal pleasure bears a striking resemblance to the Auerbach's Keller scene in Goethe's *Faust. Eine Tragödie*. Instead of Mephistopheles telling Faust, "Damit du siehst, wie leicht sich's leben läßt," it is the minister who presents Sieburth with the wild atmosphere of Berlin nightlife (*Faust* 69). As the discussion between the two visitors is resumed, the Renaissance period is touched upon, specifically Giordano Bruno. Referencing a work by this author—*Spaccio del la bestia trionfante* (1584)—he says, "Wenn nur die 'bestia trionfante' nicht wäre [...] die einem ewig im Nacken sitzt" (465). In this case it appears that "triumphant beast" signifies the inner drive that propels him to the *Nachtansicht*, and Sieburth presents it as a burden. Using another Bruno quotation, the minister retorts, "Liebet das Weib, wenn ihr wollt, aber vergeßt nicht, Verehrer des Unendlichen zu sein.' In die Sprache des heutigen Abends umgesetzt: 'Verächter des Unendlichen zu sein'" (465). Bruno's words encourage the seeking of carnal pleasure but not to forget the eternal world that exists outside of this one. The minister's re-rendering of this statement implies that their search for pleasure on earth does so with the intended insult to the other world. This is the minister's own declarative: "God is dead." Most interesting about this dialogue is the pendulation between intellect and hedonism, or in Sieburth's formula, between "Weib und

Gedanken" or in Nietzschean terms "Apollinian and Dionysian." The minister's statement appears to be from the standpoint of his *Nachtansicht* or his Dionysian side, while Sieburth's response to him is of Apollinian thought and reflection. He says, "Dabei wollen wir uns aber nicht verhehlen, daß, was heute zwischen uns geredet wurde, zum größten Teile doch Spiel und Rausch war" (465). Kürschner asks if he is already retreating from the Bacchanalia, to which Sieburth reasons, "Der Ernst des Erkennens hat wohl über allem gelacht. Aber ebenso wie ich in ein paar Wochen platonische Dialoge sezieren werde, werden Sie morgen christliche Staatserhaltung betreiben, und Sie wie ich werden das Gefühl haben, zu tun, was uns zukommt" (466). The reason and objectivity in Sieburth's statement sobers the minister from his state of intoxicated *Nachtansicht*, and he says:

Wir fügen uns der gegebenen Ordnung, mag sie uns auch noch so widersinnig erscheinen. Und sie tut's nicht einmal. Denn Ordnung ist niemals Widersinn. Und wenn sie abdankt, kann sie nur einer Neuordnung weichen. Die wird auch allerhand Widersinn in sich tragen und wird trotzdem so wenig widersinnig sein, wie die alte es war . . . Aber solche Stunden, wie wir sie heute erlebten, die müssen sein. Spiel und Rausch, die müssen sein, damit die beiden Urfeinde des menschlichen Denkens, das Dogma und das Absolute, uns nicht die Kehle zuschnüren . . . Lassen Sie das süße Zeug stehen, lieber Freund! Wenn's Ihnen recht ist, wollen wir fort. (466)

As the rays of the *Tagesansicht* vanquish the rousing *Nachtansicht* of the two figures, their furtive outing comes to an end. The language is once again returned to its bourgeois orderly state: "Denn Ordnung ist niemals Widersinn." Here, the minister states the eternal dialectic between *Tagesansicht* and *Nachtansicht*, and "Die Welt vom Weib und Gedanken." For the professional man, the bourgeois regiment of life

can only be momentarily usurped before it is replaced once again by order. These adventures beyond the pale of bourgeois respectability, according to the minister, are necessary in order to preserve a morsel of individuality: "Spiel und Rausch, die müssen sein, damit die beiden Urfeinde des menschlichen Denkens, das Dogma und das Absolute, uns nicht die Kehle zuschnüren." In this case, membership in the bourgeoisie with all of its folkways and customs is something of an iron cage from which one might only be released momentarily. It is only in these moments that one does find some existential grounding beyond the façade of bourgeois respectability.

#### **e. The Veil of Maya Lifted**

The next day, sitting again face-to-face in the Apollinian glow of the minister's office, Sieburth learns of his fate regarding the desired professorship. The faculty in Königsberg, he tells Sieburth, had already filed a complaint about him. Reading through his file, the aspiring academic could see that since the departure of the Great Hegelian, the ministry had made overtures to fill the vacancy with Sieburth, but time and time again these advances were met with resistance from his colleagues. Curiously, the reasons for this resistance make no mention of his notorious personal conduct. Furthermore, his pedagogical success finds full recognition in the report. In the end, his rejection was entirely based upon the eternal warning for those entering the academic profession: publish or perish: "Er habe literarisch so wenig geleistet, und es fehle ihm vor allem die mathematisch-naturwissenschaftliche Vorbildung!" (467). Rather than his moral shortcomings, it is his transgressions against the bourgeois gospel of work and productivity that his

colleagues deem unacceptable. And the worst for Sieburth is that among the faculty signatures on the report stands that of his so-called ally, Pfeifferling. Not only does this come as a surprise for the candidate, but he is also pained by this revelation. But the minister reassures him that fate has something else in store: “Wie wir Sie gegen den Einspruch der Fakultät als Außerordentlichen hineingeschoben haben – weiß der Teufel, was die Leute schon damals gegen Sie hatten! –, so werden wir Sie ihnen jetzt auch als Ordentlichen auf die Nase setzen . . . Ja, im Vertrauen: Ich habe von meinem Chef schon einen tüchtigen Rüffel erwischt, weil es noch nicht geschehen ist” (468). Baffled by this fortuitous turn, Sieburth assumes that this is his compensation for services during the election, but the minister then inquires as to how he has royal connections. Sieburth can only call to mind the sickly prince, whom he tutored and looked after four years long. Making sense of this matter, the minister replies, “Der hohe Vater Ihres Schützlings und *unser* hoher Herr sind dicker Freunde. Das ist bekannt. Und aus der Entfernung sorgt er noch immer für Sie. Da hätten wir beide uns gar nicht zu treffen brauchen! Da hätten Sie sich auch bei keiner Wählerei zu strapazieren brauchen. Mit solchen Gönnerschaften hupft man auf den Lehrstuhl Kants wie der Floh auf das Strumpfband” (468). Instead of feeling the joy of having reached the pinnacle of his career he feels emptiness. Rather than having achieved the professorship upon the merit of his ideas and teaching, or even due to his calculated participation in the elections and his odyssey with Kürschner, the decision was from the beginning determined by fate. After everything, *Schicksal* trumps free will.

The strange twist of fate and the circumstances surrounding it provides the two men a chance to reflect further on their philosophical discussion the day before.

Seeing Sieburth's dismay in the situation, he tells him:

Na, was wollen Sie? [...] *Einen* Vorteil muß die jeweilige Verkörperung der Staatsidee doch mit sich bringen. Manche nennen das Korruption. Aber ich sage Ihnen: die sogenannte Korruption, die als gütige Fee helfend und ausgleichend auf Filzschuhen 'rumschleicht, wirkt oft moralischer als die dumm-stolze und alle niedertrampelnde Tugend . . . Nein, nein, ernsthaft! Nach Prinzipien arbeiten nur die Banausen. Wer mit Persönlichkeiten zu tun hat, dem wird die Ausnahme zur Regel und die Regel noch nicht einmal zur Ausnahme. (469)

With this explanation, the minister lays bare the mechanics of social order, using it to show Sieburth the virtue of "Staatsidee" and how it is necessary for meritocracy. Sieburth's struggle for Kant's professorship can be reduced to a struggle between three competing *Weltanschauungen* in terms of social order: 1) An individualistic society, free from the restrictions of morality, ordered only by the Darwinian survival of the fittest principle. 2) A democratic society in which individuals are beholden to partisan interests, and their personal welfare rests upon their ability to align with the correct circles. 3) An authoritarian system in which the individual appears to have agency as in a democratic society, but this is merely an illusion because an enlightened invisible hand/fate intervenes. Sieburth's own understanding of the world had been based upon the first of these *Weltanschauungen*. Social order for him was something that should be overcome, just as the "great man" must take the bold step outside of the existing social order to separate himself from the masses. The democratically ordered society rests upon

the parliamentary system with all of its alliances and partisan factions. In order to be of importance one must have an association with a party of importance. Although this might be only considering the disadvantages of a democratic system, it must be taken into account that Sudermann was writing the novel during the Weimar Republic as factionalism and partisanship was widely seen as a cause for the political tumult that seemed to be tearing Germany apart. The third *Weltanschauung* is a Hegelian belief in a system with a power that is immune to the rabble that parliamentary systems could produce. This comes with a blind faith that a power not subject to the *vox populi* will maintain a good will despite the dearth of checks and balances. Without doubt, the minister appeals to this third social order, when he tells Sieburth, in reference to the arbitrariness of decisions, that this system “wirkt oft moralischer als die dumm-stolze und alles niedertrampelnde Tugend” (469). Order, for him, is more important than liberal, democratic values.

Before taking leave, Kürschner takes care to impart some final words of wisdom upon Sieburth, just as the Great Hegelian had once done: “Ich habe hintenrum gehört, daß Sie sich viel mit Weibern zu schaffen machen. Seit dieser Nacht weiß ich, daß das in Ihrem Leben nicht anders sein *kann*. Ich mach’ Ihnen keinen Vorwurf daraus. Eher wäre ich neidisch – obgleich man ja auch seine Erinnerungen hat. Aber *einen* Rat möchte ich Ihnen mitgeben. Nicht den unseres Freundes Juvenal: ‘Liebe drauflos und sei stumm’” (469). Different from the Great Hegelian, the minister understands the *Nachtansicht* even if his life conforms more to that of the *Tagesansicht*. Still, he warns Sieburth to take caution. To get his point across he tells of a certain Saint Chapelet: “Der war bei Lebzeiten der ruchloseste

und liederlichste von allen. Aber er wußte es so schlau einzurichten, daß er nach seinem Tode der *heilige* Chapelet genannt wurde und sogar Wunder tat. Man müßte überhaupt den Boccaccio immer auf seinem Nachtsch liegen haben. Man kommt dadurch zu leichterem Atemholen. Und das werden Sie brauchen können in der Stadt, in der man den kategorischen Imperativ mit der gleichen Selbstverleugnung benutzt wie den Igel als Arschwisch" (469). The minister reaffirms here his belief in the possibility of living the double life of *Tagesansicht* and *Nachtansicht*. With these final words the two men, after finding so much common ground, separate from one another: the minister back to his duties in the interest of the state and Sieburth to return triumphantly back to the provincial city and university, where reality awaits him.

### **C. Hermann Sudermann's *Fin-De-Siècle* Works and the Discourse of Degeneration**

As a whole, the works of Hermann Sudermann contain a remarkably bleak worldview. A large part of his critique of German bourgeois liberalism that is discussed in chapter two has to do with a belief that morality and tradition that had long been considered a unifying factor of this social class was now disintegrating. Sudermann was by no means alone in thematizing this topic in his works. Programmatic literary naturalism engaged with social problems, exposing the world as it is in its often times ugly, immoral, dirty state. German authors associated with this movement who later achieved international recognition wrote about the effects of alcoholism on the population, the dire conditions of urban and rural poverty,

crime, and sexual immorality. Much of what made the backbone for German literary naturalism was strongly influenced by various scientific findings of the day. Inherent in the program of naturalism was the broader idea of degeneration, which extended the biological notion that death is inevitable to also include inorganic ideas and objects. Crystallizing at the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of degeneration became a kind of ideology. Just like living organisms, it was thought that culture, society, and civilization were also subject to a cycle of life and death. This worldview was not only informed by the natural sciences, but also by the physical sciences. In the nineteenth century scientists introduced the law of increasing entropy, or the second law of thermodynamics. It stated that the available energy in an isolated system such as that in the universe will decrease over time (Chamberlin and Gilman, Introduction IX). Degeneration provided an all-encompassing means for explaining the world, feelings, ideas, and things. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman write in the introduction of their book *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*: “The idea of degeneration provided a framework and a focus for knowledge about immanent natural processes in social and cultural and historical as well as biological contexts, and a locus of belief about transcendent forces affecting the pace and direction of change as well as the vitality of races and nations” (XII). The idea of degeneration offered a counterpoint to the all-powerful belief in progress often associated with bourgeois liberalism that has come to define much about the nineteenth century.



## 1. Cultural Pessimism at the Turn of the Century

Even though the optimistic belief in progress seems to be an inextricable characteristic of the bourgeois imagination, pessimism is has also maintained its presence among the German bourgeoisie. While the efforts to forge a German nation that began after the Napoleonic upheaval in Europe hinged upon a teleological faith in historical progression, the defeat of this ideal in 1848 planted the seeds of despair within the German liberal bourgeoisie. Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, after decades without recognition, finally found an audience among this class after their harsh reality check. Unlike Kant's philosophy that allowed room for the unknown in his notion of *das Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself), Schopenhauer left no room for optimistic faith by filling the vagueness of the world beyond our comprehension with an all-explaining truth: the will to live. With derision, Schopenhauer took aim at Hegel's history with a purpose. He dismissed Hegelian belief in progress through history, subordinating the importance of both the past and the future to the present (Ausmus 145). Corresponding to the popularity of Schopenhauer's philosophy after 1848 was the rise of *bürgerlicher Realismus*, an era in which saw the rise of the third estate in Germany and the crystallization of bourgeois culture. The founding of the German Reich in 1871 created a financial boom along with rapid industrialization from which the third estate accumulated wealth and separated itself from both the second and fourth estates. This, of course, produced friction among the classes. As the bourgeoisie grew wealthier, many were able to afford the lifestyle, estates, and habits of the aristocracy. All the while the proletariat was suffering in poor working and living conditions in the industrializing cities, working the factories and mills.

The state of Germany, and Europe for that matter, disgusted Friedrich Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century. A sickness, he believed, had spread across the continent that lamed civilization and culture. What he prescribed was a turn away from the herd mentality, which he believed had become dominant in Germany, and a return to individuality. This brand of cultural pessimism espoused by Nietzsche became highly influential as the century drew to a close.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a new culture arose in Germany—as well as Europe as a whole—that demarcated itself from the years of the *Gründerzeit*. New trends, fashions, tastes, and sets of artistic expressions arose that distinguished themselves from the era of *bürgerlicher Realismus*. The approaching literal “end” of the nineteenth century further dramatized the social and cultural shifts that took place as Germany rapidly modernized. If ever the passing of one century to the next signified a transition from the old to the new, it was in 1900. The belief that the old world was coming to an end began about a decade before that year, however. Politically, the age of *Realpolitik* came to a screeching halt with Bismarck’s dismissal and the rise of Wilhelm II’s aggressive politics in 1890. A little more than a decade after Bismarck’s fall, cultural critic Samuel Lublinski noted: “Mit ihm fiel zugleich das Hauptbollwerk der Regierungskunst seiner letzten Jahre, das Ausnahmegesetz gegen die Sozialdemokratie. Es war ein völliger Wendepunkt in deutschen politischen Leben, ohne Zweifel das wichtigste Ereignis seit der Reichsgründung” (3). Around this time, social questions became more visible in public discourse. The thematization of the low quality of life among the proletariat even made its way into the literature of the time. It seemed as if a high point of bourgeois culture had been

reached during the *Gründerzeit* and now it was regressing; for some, this was an exhilarating thought. Gone was the firm belief in progress that characterized the 1870s and 1880s, and the concept of *Décadence* was in. This shifting signifier that made its way to Germany via France came to define the *fin de siècle*. About the culture of decadence in the intellectual sphere at the turn of the century, Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand write: “In den Literaturkreisen der Jahrhundertwende verstand man darunter den Gefühlsbereich von der höchsten Genußverfeinerung bis zur nihilistischen Apathie. Die Darwinisten gebrauchten ihn in der Rassentheorie, die Nietzscheaner übertrugen ihn auf die Moral, während ihn die Neuro-Mantiker wie ein ästhetisches Parfüm verwendeten, um ihren inhaltslosen Gedichten und reizlosen Dramoletts den Anschein einer “poetischen” Melancholie zu verleihen” (*Impressionismus* 136). Pessimism and downfall became stylish. In literature, terms such as “Krankenstubepoesie,” “Lazarettichtung,” and “Kunst der Irrenhäuser” were born, while psychiatric terminology such as nervousity, neurasthenia, and hysteria came into everyday usage (Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus* 137). Furthermore, the interest in historical eras shifted from the old bourgeois reverence for republics such as early Rome to the late crumbling Roman Empire.

#### **a. The Influence of Julius Langbehn**

The cultural pessimism of the *Jahrhundertwende* was given a major boost in 1890 with the publication of Julius Langbehn’s *Rembrandt als Erzieher*. This book managed to capture the *Zeitgeist*, making the theme of cultural discontent popular

beyond a few artists and intellectuals. Fritz Stern notes, "However wild and chaotic the book was, its intent was unmistakable: to condemn intellectualism and science, to denounce modern culture, to praise the 'free' individual and the true Germanic aristocrat, to revive the German past" (*Cultural Despair* 98). Langbehn appealed to the notion of German *Innerlichkeit* and individuality, polemicized against Jewish and French characteristics, lambasted the historical objectivity of Theodor Mommsen and Leopold von Ranke, and promoted a distorted interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. Langbehn's strange, somewhat psychotic persona found an echo in this era and a kind of cult of personality developed around him that was impressionable. Two aspects of this are of particular importance. First, Langbehn was anti-bourgeois in style and thought. Second, Langbehn shunned politics.

*Rembrandt als Erzieher* begins with a memorable passage, firmly rooted in the notion of cultural degeneration. Langbehn tells, "Es ist nachgerade zum öffentlichen Geheimniß geworden, daß das geistige Leben des deutschen Volkes sich gegenwärtig in einem Zustande des langsamen, Einige meinen auch des rapiden Verfalls befindet" (1). The way back to finding itself was a return to art, individualism, and aristocracy. "Der treibende Grund- und Urkraft alles Deutschthums," writes Langbehn, "aber heißt: Individualismus" (3). Rembrandt and his art represent for Langbehn an ideal of Lower Germanness to be pitted against the cultural disease of rationalism, materialism, Francophilia, specialized philosophy, and urbanization. "Der neue deutsche Mensch," prophesizes Langbehn, "wird aristokratisch sein, weil er künstlerisch sein wird" (296). An enemy of the new German is the bourgeoisie: "Zumal wird es Aufgabe des Kunstpolitikers sein,

jene krankhafte Abartung des Bürgerthums, welche Spießbürgerthum heißt, nicht über die Kunstverhältnisse eines Staates oder Volkes disponiren und dominiren zu lassen" (253). These are the fundamental components of the aestheticism that remained a trend among the German bourgeoisie well into the twentieth century.

### **b. The Influence of Max Nordau**

Another work that spoke to the atmosphere of decadence and degeneration at the end of the nineteenth century is Max Nordau's *Entartung* (1892). In this work Nordau explores the general atmosphere of pessimism that people call *fin-de-siècle*, which he believes would be more aptly termed *fin-de-race* or the belief in the downfall of human civilization. The mood at this time, he describes, is like "the impotent despair of a sick man, who feels himself dying by inches in the midst of an eternally living nature blooming insolently forever" (3). Nordau, an Austro-Hungarian-born cultural critic who spent much of his professional career in Paris, did much to research about the everyday usage of the term *fin-de-siècle* among French books and periodicals in order to determine its original meaning. His findings include a wide array of examples across the cultural spectrum that convey a general sense of cultural and social change. A king, for instance, who abdicated, left his country for Paris, accrued considerable gambling debts was called a "*fin-de-siècle* king; a bishop prosecuted for insulting a minister and forced to pay a fine, uses his celebrity from the matter and makes a tour around the cathedrals of a country, passing around the collection plate at each one, is called a *fin-de-siècle* bishop; a head of the secret police cuts off a large piece of skin from an executed serial killer

to make cigar cases for his friends is called a *fin-de-siècle* official; an American marries his bride, afterwards getting into a hot-air-balloon for a honeymoon in the sky—a *fin-de-siècle* wedding; one young lady tells another that she is in love with a Raoul, who is handsome, albeit impecunious. Her parents want her to marry instead a rich but ugly baron. The other woman advises, “Well marry the baron without any fuss, and make Raoul acquainted with him.” These are *fin-de-siècle* girls (*Degeneration* 4–5). These examples have little in common other than a vague sense that they can be explained through social and cultural shifts. Nordau points out that Germans adopted the idea of *fin-de-siècle* and vulgarized the meaning, using it to describe all that is indecent and improper. Nordau states the real underlying meaning to this idea is a contempt for traditional morality and customs. He writes, “It means the end of an established order, which for thousands of years has satisfied logic, fettered depravity, and in every art matured something of beauty” (*Degeneration* 5). This notion, however, is class specific, as much of the middle and lower classes did not share the spirit of the *fin-de-siècle*, still clinging to the old forms of tradition, custom, and beauty. Nevertheless, Nordau admits, “It appears as if the whole of civilized humanity were converted to the aesthetics of the Dusk of Nations” (*Degeneration* 7). For him, this was a cultural sickness that needed to be overcome rather than popularized, and he polemicizes against that (i.e., Nietzsche, Tolstoism, Ibsenism, the Cult of Wagner) which he believes promotes this kind of thought. He concludes the work by demarcating true modernism from the degenerate form:

The “freedom” and “modernity,” the “progress” and “truth” of these fellows are not ours. We have nothing in common with them. They wish for self-indulgence; we wish for work. They wish to drown consciousness in the unconscious; we wish to strengthen and enrich consciousness. They wish for evasive ideation and babble; we wish for attention, observation, and knowledge. The criterion by which true moderns may be recognized and distinguished from impostors calling themselves moderns may be this: Whoever preaches absence of the discipline is an enemy of progress; and whoever worships his “I” is an enemy to society. Society has for its first premise, neighborly love and capacity for self-sacrifice; and progress is the effect of an ever more rigorous subjugation of the beast in man, of an ever tenser self-restraint, an ever keener sense of duty and responsibility. (560)

Despite what he saw as a pervading sense of degeneration in culture at the turn of the century, Nordau still believed in the old liberal worldview of progress. William James leveled the critique that Nordau’s accusations of degeneration are as degenerate as the objects of his scorn: “If one were to apply Herr Nordau’s method to the description of his own person, one could hardly help writing him down as a degenerate of the worst sort” (“Degeneration” 507).

The culture that Nordau lambasts in his book *Entartung* is also the territory in which Hermann Sudermann ascended to fame and fortune. Nordau, however, does not make mention of Sudermann in his polemic against the German *fin-de-siècle*. This could be due to the fact that the two men shared a kind of mutual respect for one another. At the height of his fame in the early 1890s, the young author became acquainted with the older Nordau during a trip to Paris. Sudermann’s high regard for the culture critic is expressed in a letter that he wrote to his wife on December 10, 1891 from Paris. He writes, “Ich bringe ihm [Nordau] viel Respekt

und Sympathie entgegen und hoffe ihm näherzutreten" (*Briefe an seine Frau* 19).

Unlike many of Sudermann's other friends, with whom he fell out of favor, it seems that his friendship with Nordau remained cordial throughout. On April 7, 1906 he notes in his diary: "Zu Nordau, dessen Freundschaft immer noch aufrecht halte [...] unerkennlich, wie wohl an seine Freundschaft glaube" (Tagebuch IV). Strangely, he even appears to have admired Nordau's work *Entartung* that takes aim at many trends in German culture of which Sudermann was a representative. He writes to his wife on October 29, 1892: "Ich sitze über Nordaus neuem Buche: 'Entartung.' Wunderbar geschrieben. Besorg es Dir ja, oder wenn Du es nicht erhältst, so schick ich es Dir" (*Briefe an seine Frau* 64). In their correspondence, Nordau was not shy about addressing those elements in Sudermann's works that he found to be degenerative. After receiving a copy of the author's play "Die drei Reiherfedern" (1898), which was thoroughly shredded by Berlin theater critics, Nordau shares his thoughts in a letter to Sudermann dated May 9, 1899: "Danke auch für "die drei Reiherfedern." Ich persönlich beklage die nicht seltenen allzu sichtbaren Spuren des zerstörenden Einflusses Nietzsches auf manche Ihrer Gedankengänge und Ausdrucksweisen." Nietzsche is of course singled out in *Entartung* as one of the principle disseminators of cultural degeneracy. Considering the degree in which Nietzschean philosophy—or at least a certain interpretation thereof—is present in his works, it is unusual that the two men had so much understanding for each other.



## 2. Hermann Sudermann at the Turn of the Century

Hermann Sudermann was above all else fascinated by the idea of *fin-de-siècle* and what he perceived as changes in morality and tradition. In his diaries he archived stories pertaining to this notion. For instance, on a trip to Paris the capitol of decadence in 1891, Sudermann listed in his diaries a series of anecdotes under the heading "Sittlichkeitsbilder." Among these, are stories of homosexual encounters between women, and the extramarital love affairs of notable society personages (12 December 1891 Tagebuch I). The fascination with such salon gossip as this might also account for the popularity of his works at the time. Many of his more popular plays include at the very center a question of morality. In his breakthrough piece "Die Ehre" (1889), for instance, it is the inappropriate intermingling between the classes that makes the central theme in the drama. What made it so popular was the fact that the general public had real-life stories and experiences to relate to what was depicted on the stage. Literary critic Fritz Engel reminisces attending a performance of "Die Ehre" in 1889 with a group of fellow students when it was first performed. He writes, "Und was ihnen sonst aus dem Schauspiel entgegenkam, besonders das Hinterhaus, schien ihnen lebendiges Leben zu sein. Das kannten sie, dieses Hinterhaus, von Heinekes hatten sie selbst ihre Buden abgemietet, zwanzig Mark mit 'Kaffee.' Und Alma, die Alma war ihre Grete oder Trude, und 'man jing mit ihnen.' Sie waren in Almas Gestalt ein bißchen verschönt, aber das tut wohl, und der Drang zum Verkehr mit 'besseren Herren' war auch da" ("Sudermann").

Sudermann's next play "Sodoms Ende" would be his ultimate *fin-de-siècle* drama, depicting the decadence of the salon milieu around Berlin's Tiergarten.<sup>27</sup>

### **a. Morituri**

Attuned to the general sense of finality that pervaded as the century drew to a close, Hermann Sudermann released in 1896 a series of one-act plays under the fitting title *Morituri* (Latin for "those who are about to die"). As the name suggests each one-act play is about a figure standing before imminent death. In all there are three parts, "Fritzchen," "Teja," and "Das Ewig-Männliche." While "Fritzchen" is set in the contemporary time of the late 1890s, the other two plays have backdrops of the crumbling Gothic Empire and a fairytale respectively, both signs that Sudermann was moving in the direction of neo-romanticism. "Teja" is especially indicative of the neo-romantic style that had arisen to challenge the dominance of naturalism in German literature. Jost Hermand and Richard Hamann point out that many works now orientated toward so-called high cultures of humanity. They write, "Beispielhaft dafür ist der allgemeine Kult der Antike -Einzelnemensch als Symbol des Vornehmen und Heroischen aufgefaßt wurde" (*Stilkunst um 1900* 12). In "Teja" the eponymous Gothic hero prepares for one final battle with the invading Byzantines knowing that death and defeat are certain. In the final scene he tells a bishop before setting off for battle, "Vergib mir und hab' Dank, den nun weiß auch ich, wofür der Gote den Tod liebt . . . Nun, seid ihr bereit?" (58). Teja, in this case,

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<sup>27</sup> See chapter two for analysis on "Sodoms Ende."

seems to heed Nietzsche's imperative of *amor fati*. The most critically acclaimed of the three one-act plays was the contemporaneously set "Fritzchen." The main character Fritzchen is a young officer who has dishonored a superior officer by having an affair with his wife. With the impending duel against the more experienced sure-shot officer on the horizon that almost certainly spells doom for him, Fritz ponders fleeing from the scandal, while his father advises otherwise, telling him of the virtues of upholding one's manliness and honor even if it means death. As Fritz talks the matter over with his father he becomes resigned to his fate—"Vater, ich bin ein Sterbender"—and at the end he rides away to meet his death (95). This play caught the public's attention with its mixture of *fin-de-siècle* themes of decadence as there is a scandal at the center of the story, but also with its critical depiction of the cult of masculinity among the officer class with its feudal practice of dueling. In the end, Fritz is a prisoner of his own class, and has no choice.

#### **b. "Johannes"**

In 1898 Sudermann turned to the Old Testament and the story of John the Baptist for his play "Johannes"—a fitting material for the apocalyptic anticipation at end of the nineteenth century. Earlier in the decade of decadence the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde had already utilized this material for his tragedy "Salome" (1891). Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand note that the biblical figure of Salome occupied a position of importance at the turn of the century. About the "Salome-Kult" they write: "Ihren Höhepunkt erlebt diese dekadent-satanische Perversität in der Figur der Salome, die ihre ganze Liebesmöglichkeit an eine exzentrische Idee

verschwendet" (*Impressionismus* 160). The setting for the play is Jerusalem, which, under the rule of Herodes and his wife Herodias, has become a hotbed of decadence and vice. Their daughter is a kind of *demimonde* prototype, representing a new style of femininity. At one point she tells another figure, "Ich fürchte mich vor keinen Männern" (39). Her transvaluation of values is also associated with her youth in the tragedy: she is the embodiment of the modern. She tells Johannes, "Bin ich nicht jung unter den Töchtern Israels? Und Jugend, hört' ich sagen, kennt keine Schuld und keine Schuldigen" (52). There is something of Nietzsche's predatory beasts to be found in her as she tells the prophet: "Ich las einmal den Spruch, daß die verstohlenen Wasser süße sind" (52). Johannes' religious extremism finds no resonance in a city where the people say, "Wir sind krank an judäischer Sittsamkeit. Die judäische Sittsamkeit frißt wie die Pest unter uns" (95). This is not ancient Jerusalem that Sudermann has recreated on the stage, but rather this is the modern European city. Max Nordau makes this observation in a letter to Sudermann dated December 19, 1897: "die Gedankenwelt zur Zeit des Erdenwollens Christi war vielfach anders als Sie sie darstellen; aber Sie wollten ja auch kein gelehrtes, sondern ein menschliches Werk schaffen, und mit das größte Verdienst Ihres "Johannes" ist in meinen Augen, daß auch derjenige, der für Glaubens – Mystik, [...] Evangelismus, Rundismus u.s.w herzlich wenig übrig hat, in Ihren dichtung genug schleift und ewig Menschliches findet, um zu verstehen und ergriffen zu sein."

"Johannes" was for Sudermann a turn from naturalistic inspirations toward the new trend of *Neuromantik* that was crystalizing at the end of the 1890s, much like Gerhart Hauptmann's "Die versunkene Glocke" was for him in 1896. These new

developments were well documented by the theater critics at the time. An article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* titled “Bei Gerhart Hauptmann” on July 11, 1898 addresses these changes in German literature. The journalist questions Hauptmann about the new direction, asking: “Ich was vor einigen Tagen bei [Otto] Neumann-Hofer, und der sagte mir, als wir vom ‘Johannes’ sprachen, er glaube der ‘Johannes’ bedeute für Sudermann die Brüche in ein neues Land, respective in eine neue Provinz. Glauben Sie auch, daß sich Sudermann ganz dem Romantischen ergeben wird?” (1). The critical reception of “Johannes” was lukewarm at best—nothing near to his theatrical success at the beginning of the decade. The initial report in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on January 16, 1898 the morning after the premiere, unenthusiastically begins: “Für Alle, die Sudermanns “Johannes” als das große Ereignis des Theaterwinters erwarteten—und das übervolle Haus sah ganz sensationslüstern aus—wird der gestrige Abend eine kleine Enttäuschung gewesen sein. Es war kein ganzer Erfolg” (2). In a Sudermann-like fashion, the anticipation of “Johannes” was intensified by an initial ban that was placed on the play by the police in Berlin due to its treatment of biblical content. As always, these conflicts with the authorities only added to his reputation as a rabble-rouser in German literature. Theater director Martin Zickel criticizes Sudermann, whom he describes as a *Modedichter*. He writes, “Es ist kein Zufall, dass Sudermann gerade jetzt uns das Johannesdrama bescheert. Seine Seele düsterte gerade in dem Augenblicke nach dem Neuen Testament, da Alle gespannt sind, wie der schlesische Märchendichter die Gestalt des Heilands erfassen wird. – Sudermann hat es stets verstanden, den richtigen Zeitpunkt zu treffen [...] Als Nietzsche einzog in das Sammelbuch der modernen Salonzitate und das Wort

von der Herrenmoral hinter sich am Gängelbände führte, schrieb er “Die Heimath” (332). By the late 1890s Hermann Sudermann was increasingly under attack from critics for his *Modedichtung* as does Martin Zickel. Despite the slights leveled at him by critics, his works continued to be enormous commercial successes to the chagrin of many. Considering his wide appeal to the taste of the German bourgeoisie at the time, Sudermann can perhaps tell us more about this class at the time than can a more classical conception of the artist as an isolated genius. Sudermann knew what the public wanted to see and he gave it to them. As Zickel admits, Sudermann had with “Johannes,” “einen vollen Erfolg, wenn auch nicht bei der Premiere, so bei den folgenden Aufführungen errungen” (332).

### **c. “Es lebe das Leben!”**

Another work that exudes the spirit of cultural despair at the turn of the century is the ironically titled drama “Es lebe das Leben!” (1902), which is discussed in greater detail in chapter four. In her final words to her loved ones, the main character Beate touches on the overarching theme of finding and maintaining individuality in cynical and adverse circumstances. Despite her caged and compromised existence within social and political norms, as well as her own failing health, Beate never stops bringing joy to the lives of others. She says, “Mein Dasein ist für Leib und Seele nur ein langes Ringen mit dem Niedergang gewesen [...] und doch hab’ ich das Lachen nie verlernt – doch bin ich voll von Dankbarkeit und Glück – doch heb’ ich jetzt dies Glas und ruf’ aus vollster Seele: Es lebe das Leben, meine lieben Freunde!” (165). Beate’s call for people *really* to live their lives is

complicated, if not somewhat contradictory. Even though her health perpetually puts her life in peril and society constrains her freedom to act on her own free will to live as she wants—that is marry Richard—she nonetheless finds a *modus vivendi* that ensures her the maximum amount of joy in a limited situation. One cannot help but to see this as a case of Nietzschean philosophy in practice—especially that of the philosopher’s middle period when he wrote *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882). Nietzsche’s own declining physical health but continued intellectual keenness resembles Beate’s failing health while still being spiritually vivacious. In the foreword to the second and third editions of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche writes: “Ein Philosoph, der den Gang durch viele Gesundheit gemacht hat und immer wieder macht, ist auch durch ebensoviele Philosophien hindurchgegangen [...] Es steht uns Philosophen nicht frei, zwischen Seele und Leib zu trennen, wie das Volk trennt, es steht uns noch weniger frei, zwischen Seele und Geist zu trennen” (349). For both Nietzsche and Beate, there is both a physical and figurative sickness affecting them. The philosopher wishes to cure himself of the intellectual sickness that plagues Western society, while the protagonist Beate must live with the terminally ill reactionary social mores of her time. The affirmation of life up against these circumstances is the prescribed cure for these ailments. Nietzsche continues, “Wir müssen beständig unsre Gedanken aus unsrem Schmerz gebären und mütterlich ihnen Alles mitgeben, was wir von Blut, Herz, Feuer, Lust, Leidenschaft, Qual, Gewissen, Schicksal, Verhängnis in uns haben. Leben – das heisst für uns Alles, was wir sind, beständig in Licht und Flamme verwandeln, auch Alles, was uns trifft, wir können gar nicht anders” (350). This, as well as Beate’s final words: “Es lebe das

Leben!," can best be described as optimistic pessimism. This seems to be a theme at the turn of the century for Sudermann. On June 22, 1899, the author proudly notes in his diary that his friend and literary critic Otto Neumann-Hofer commented after having told him the concept for his future novel *Das hohe Lied*: "stille lächelnder Pessimismus" (Tagebuch II). The path to healthy living (i.e., intellectually and spiritually) may be doomed with misery but we must embrace it. This idea is articulated most clearly in Nietzsche's concept of the *ewige Wiederkunft* or eternal return that he formulates in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. He asks:

Wie, wenn dir eines Tages oder Nachts, ein Dämon in deine einsamste Einsamkeit nachschliche und dir sagte: 'Dieses Leben, wie du es jetzt lebst und gelebt hast, wirst du noch einmal und noch unzählige Male leben müssen [...] Würdest du dich nicht niederwerfen und mit den Zähnen knirschen und den Dämon verfluchen, der so redete? Oder hast du einmal einen ungeheuren Augenblick erlebt, wo du ihm antworten würdest: 'du bist ein Gott und nie hörte ich Göttlicheres!.' (570)

Unlike the common adage that one should take advantage of life because "you only live once," the eternal return intensifies this with the imperative that you should live as if you had to eternally repeat every second of your life; *amor fati* is the dictum for this *Weltanschauung*.

In *Der tolle Professor* the figure Sieburth is representative of the cultural despair at the turn of the century that crystalized in the intellectual sphere in Germany. Although Sieburth prescribes a high degree of *joie de vivre* in his philosophy, his worldview is a pessimistic one. Culture for him—and for Nietzsche and other cultural pessimists for that matter—has become stale and it is up to the



individual to rise above it and separate oneself from the herd, even though this does not come without grave social consequences as Sieburth finds out. The German bourgeoisie was targeted by the cultural pessimists as the problem, but it was paradoxically the German bourgeoisie that received this ideology with such verve at the turn of the century. This train of thought also had the tendency of being virulently nationalistic as is the case with Julius Langbehn and other misinterpreters of Friedrich Nietzsche. Even though Langbehn, who had seen battle during the Franco-Prussian War, was repulsed by the thought of war, the idea that Germanness was under attack by the forces of modernity harmonized well with Kaiser Wilhelm II's aggressive foreign policy in the leading up to World War I. Furthermore, the mythicization of Germanness and its contrast to Jewishness continued to resonate long after.

## CHAPTER VI

### NO PLACE TO CALL *HEIMAT*: HERMANN SUDERMANN, THE LIBERAL GERMAN BOURGEOISIE, AND THE TUMULTOUS TWENTIETH CENTURY

“*Bin heimatlos in meiner eigenen Heimat.*”  
— Hermann Sudermann, Diary entry, 25 May 1904

“*Und das alles bloß, weil man seelisch heimatlos ist.*”  
— Melitta, “Notruf”

#### **A. Introduction: The Later Years of Hermann Sudermann**

The last chapter explored the landscape of Professor Sieburth’s philosophy, how it is a philosophy to be lived rather than theorized, and how these ideas relate to the intellectual climate at the end of the nineteenth century in Germany. This chapter is somewhat of a continuation of the themes in the last chapter; it examines the continuity of these ideas in the novel *Der tolle Professor* and their historical progression into the twentieth century. The pessimistic, fatalistic worldview espoused in Hermann Sudermann’s works in the 1890s took on biographical dimensions in the twentieth century. Assaulted by the critics for what they viewed as his *Modedichtung*, Sudermann became increasingly embittered by his station in career and life. Much of this anger he directed at the German bourgeoisie, which is discussed at length in chapter two. For him, the bourgeoisie was like Nietzsche’s idea of the herd that wishes to destroy anything that deviates from or strives for something better than the standard set. Bourgeois customs, he believed, were strangling his spirit and artistic genius. These feelings of intense pessimism with

regard to social and cultural entrapment manifested with such intensity that they became indiscernible from clinical depression. Just as Sieburth who was a diamond in the rough among the bourgeois rabble in Königsberg and at the university, Sudermann felt himself an *Übermensch* among *Untermenschen* in Berlin, and like the professor he too often contemplated what he believed was the only escape: self-annihilation. What is more, World War I brought for Sudermann, as well as many others, a degree of hope and a chance for *Erlösung* (deliverance) from a liberal bourgeois worldview and life that had become stale and hollow. *Vaterland* and Germanness now became ideals that were worthy of fighting for, and the call to arms in 1914 awoke many from their political slumbers. The loss of the war and the harsh peace via the Treaty of Versailles left Sudermann and many others more bitter and disillusioned than before. The political disarray, the social and cultural shifts, along with the rise of mass culture that offended his hopelessly bourgeois taste for unity and order displaced Hermann Sudermann. His work and persona that had once struck a nerve with the liberal German bourgeoisie was now something that belonged to an irretrievable past. In every sense of the word, Sudermann had become *Heimatlos* (homeless) with his Lithuanian homeland being separated from the Weimar Republic via the Treaty of Versailles, his cultural and social displacement in 1920s Berlin, the uprooting of his nineteenth-century tastes and customs, and the daily passing of friends and family as his prosperous life reached its end in 1928. All of this accounts for the general atmosphere and circumstances under which Hermann Sudermann wrote his *magnum opus*.

## **B. Transcendence or Annihilation: Sieburth's End**

Having returned to Königsberg from his victorious campaign in Berlin, the new semester for Sieburth commences with an assembly of the university's general council that must acknowledge his promotion. The Chairman of the Council, a gnarled and notoriously rude figure on the campus, meets Sieburth to accompany him to the meeting. Surprisingly, the elder academic reveals himself as a secret ally of the newly appointed professor. He explains to Sieburth, "Ich mein's gut mit Ihnen. Ich hab' immer zu Ihnen gestanden, wenn man Sie von hinten her angriff. Außerdem bin ich ein königstreuer Mann und weiß Ihre Haltung zu würdigen" (471). The term "königstreu" is interesting considering the context of the Weimar Republic with its excess of nostalgia for the old *Kaiserreich* and its many secret and not so secret monarchists. He then tells Sieburth how he had worked in Sieburth's interest throughout the years: "Wie manchen anonymen Brief hab' ich schon untern Tisch fallen lassen!" (471). Here once again, Sieburth finds unexpected favors from high positions. Although this admiration seems in part to originate from his services in support of the conservatives during the election, Sieburth still had no idea that these actions would make secret friends such as this one. At work again is the notion of *Schicksal*. Instead of reaping the benefits of his agreement with Pfeifferling, who actually lobbied against him, other forces intervened to guide him to this station. At work here are two Goethean concepts of fate. In the case with Pfeifferling, it is an active Faustian pact, a *quid pro quo*, in which Sieburth attempts to shape his own destiny. A Mephistophelian figure such as Pfeifferling, however, is not to be trusted as can be seen with the outcome. The second case is comparable to the

*Turmgesellschaft* in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*. It has been often discussed whether or not the intervention of this secret society that decides the fate of the protagonist disrupts the process of *Bildung* in the novel. Likewise, Sieburth's success in ascending to Kant's professorship must be called into question, because it was not his individual machinations that in the end achieved it, but rather it was an intervening authoritarian fate.

### 1. The Spoils of Victory

Sieburth's participation in the meeting proves to be a formidable task. He is repulsed by the hollow gestures of tradition and custom that must be done in front of colleagues who resent his success. Still, he is advised by his elder to proceed with all the formalities, especially considering his precarious situation at the Albertina. The mere thought of this makes Sieburth ill. Shamelessly drawing attention to himself for personal advancement stands against his philosophy of individualism and defiance of the collective's domination over the individuals' will. As a matter of personal survival, he must consider the possibility. He reasons, "Da ein Weiterexistieren in dieser Umgebung notwendig war, so durfte kein Mittel von der Hand gewiesen werden, ihm menschenmögliche Formen zu geben" (471). Agency is still a matter of philosophical importance to Sieburth, and the will to power—or in this case academic greatness—is still the propelling factor that drives him forward despite all other unpleasantness. As Sieburth and the Chairman enter the room of the assembly, he notices that his heart begins to beat at a faster rate, and he interprets this as a sign that there was at least something inside him that was still

beholden to the earthly: "So gab es also immer noch etwas in ihm, das sich der Welt beugte, die er in Grund und Boden verachtete" (472). At first this appears contradictory, considering that the preceding chapter in Berlin shows how he was still driven by sexual desires. Pleasure in Sieburth's philosophy has a metaphysical role; it is an eternal truth as it stands in his dichotomous formula, "Die Welt als Weib und Gedanken." His "Nachtansicht" transcends this world as it exists eternally, while the "Tagesansicht" belongs to the mechanical world of bourgeois customs that is trapped in its historical context and will not transcend this particular point in time.

The antagonistic atmosphere in the meeting comes as no surprise to Sieburth. Taking stock, he observes, "Haß! Haß! Haß! Haß in den Augen, die sich ins Leere bohrten, Haß um die Lippen, die sich verkrampften, genau so wie die seinen es taten, Haß in der Haltung der Köpfe, die hart im Nacken saßen, Köpfe von Empörern und von Empörten" (472). Considering what Minister Kürschner had revealed to him in Berlin, he contemplates, "War er doch der Unwillkommene, der Aufgehalste, der par Ordre de Mufti zu ihnen Gesellte. Was heute der einen Fakultät begegnete, konnte morgen das Schicksal der drei andern sein; drum hatten sich die Reihen geschlossen in wehrlosem, doch um so rachsüchtigerem Widerstände gegen ihn und seine Berufung" (473). This situation is deeper than a confrontation with those harboring *ressentiment* against his success. Initially, it was Sieburth's lived philosophy that spurred conflict with the liberal bourgeois customs of the democratic university structure, causing him to fall out of favor in this sphere. Sieburth's fate at this point, however, has nothing to do with his own individual,

opportunistic philosophy. This academic promotion was wrought through the intervening force of the authoritarian state against the democratic decision making of the university faculty. At the end of the meeting Sieburth has fulfilled his mission in the novel to ascend to Kant's professorship: "Er war am Ziele. Die Welt sollte es wissen. Was später geschehen konnte, vielleicht geschehen *mußte*, blieb seinem Belieben anheimgeben. Zaudern würde er nicht, selbst den gewaltsamsten Entschluß in die Tat zu verwandeln" (473).

## 2. Or a Victory Spoiled?

In the days and weeks that follow, Sieburth finds that his isolated position in Königsberg is the other side to his fateful appointment at the university. Attempts at rapprochement with other colleagues fall flat, and all of his possibilities for finding companionship in marriage have been exhausted, so he must turn inward for affirmation. He pledges, "Weg also mit allem, was Weib heißt! Zurück zur Gegenseite der Welt, in der der Gedanke Alleinherrscher ist" (479). Amidst the emptiness and loneliness, the semester begins anew, and he finds that he has no further preparations to fill his time. Besides the usual "Kantkolleg," Sieburth chooses to offer a reading of Plato's "Phädon,"<sup>28</sup> which causes him much consternation. He asks

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<sup>28</sup> According to William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Phaedon was a philosopher of considerable fame and a native of Elis. After being enslaved, following the war between Sparta and Elis in 400 B.C., he was forced to prostitute himself because of his compelling beauty. Fleeing his master, Phaedon sought refuge with Socrates, and he witnessed the death of the latter. No writings of Phaedon have survived, but he is present in dialogues, and he appears to have been on friendly terms with Plato, although Athanaeus has maintained otherwise. After spending time in post-Socratic Athens, he returned to Elis and founded a school of philosophy there. Even though Sudermann writes "Phädon," it is likely that he means *Phaidon*, given the mention of Plato, the author of this work. Named after Phaedon, in which the final days of Socrates are dialogued, the

himself, “Wenn es schon Plato sein mußte, dann hätte man besser den ‘Staat’ oder etwas anderes gewählt, wobei sich Gelegenheit bot, dem herrschenden System in den Rücken zu fallen” (479). The *Phaedo* is a natural choice that reflects the philosophy of Sieburth. The dialogues of this work consist of Socrates philosophizing during his last days, arriving at the conclusion that the living organism might perish but the soul is eternal. Furthermore, an important part of the work has to do with duality, such as life and death, hot and cold, knowledge and the absence thereof. On the exegesis of life and death in the dialogues, it is determined that the living come from the dead, as do the dead from the living. Sieburth’s resignation to the metaphysical realm of thought, is a Socratic gesture toward the realm of the non-living. This is represented in his choice of reading the *Phaedo* instead of surmounting the task of attacking Plato’s concept of the state for which Plato is often remembered.

### **a. The Seeds of Despair**

Even though *Phaedo* might reflect his situation, it causes Sieburth pain that he is still relegated to teaching the work of others. After all, “Wie lange würden die ‘drei Stufen der Ethik’ und die ‘Naturgeschichte der Grundprobleme’ und mit ihnen die ‘Heilslehre der Sophistik’ zum Gefängnis des Schrankes verurteilt sein, ehe ihnen allen der geistige Hochzeitsflug freistand?” (480). Self-doubt takes root within him: “So lange, bis du deine Bestallung in Sicherheit wußtest, hast du geheuchelt und dich

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*Phaedo*, as it is known in English, stands as one of Plato’s great dialogues, and a number of famous lines of logic have been derived from it.



geduckt. Hast dich oben Liebkind gemacht und den flauen Bejaher gespielt. Jetzt erst enthüllst du dein wahres Gesicht" (480). As evidenced in previous points in the novel, Sieburth's uncertainty and tortured mental state in the wake of such thoughts reveal the human side of the philosopher. Sieburth values an individualism, whereby the use of one's abilities is implemented with the sole purpose of advancing one's own interests, much like that which Nietzsche advocates. After attaining his highest objective he learns that his needs are more than that such as the satisfaction of a sense of honor: "Wenn an seinem Charakterbilde noch etwas zu verderben blieb, dann mußte ihn dieses Urteil zugrunde richten" (480). Like Nietzsche, Sieburth aspires to liberation from the constricting values of nineteenth-century bourgeois society only to find that he has not escaped the grasp of his time and place. In the end, he has not transcended the strictures of the nineteenth-century codex of honor.

Before long Sieburth's position at the university and in society becomes stagnant with no prospect for change. The courses he teaches on Kant and Plato provide him with little satisfaction, and most of the students in attendance are new and merely attracted by the names of Kant and Plato. The lack of stimulation causes him to invest very little and it all becomes mechanical duty. Pondering what is actually left for him, he concludes, "Nein, nichts lohnte sich mehr. Das Ziel war erreicht, und – nun und? Die Welt blieb die gleiche, die Einsamkeit blieb die gleiche" (481). One prospect for change would be to find a new apartment, but this is also complicated because of his nostalgic attachment; it was here that his great ideas came to fruition, and also "an diesem heiligen Platze hatte Herma gesessen. Hier war

mit Helenens Lichtgestalt das Glück bei ihm zu Gaste gewesen" (481). These feelings that prevent Sieburth from moving forward are not unlike those that hindered Sudermann's own progression after the death of his wife Cläre. Sudermann was paralyzed by the loss, and endlessly nostalgic for all that they had shared in life. At the same time, it was expected by many that he would remarry his younger companion Irmgard Leux, but this was not possible for him. Instead of a healthy period of mourning Sudermann fell into a melancholia from which he never recovered in the remainder of his life. He too was unable to move on.

The abysmal stasis in which Sieburth finds himself in Königsberg brings forth thoughts of finding an escape from that which he previously sought: "Im welchem Augenblick, aus welchem Anlaß der Gedanke an ein freiwilliges Sterben zum ersten Mal in ihm aufgetaucht war, das wußte er nicht. Vielleicht jüngst, als im Senate die Erinnerung an das Abschiedswort seines Vorgängers die aufgepeitschte Bitterkeit zum Schweigen gebracht hatte" (481). The isolation, the purposelessness, the missed opportunities of sublimating his instinctual desires into love, drive him to the brink. Still, it seems to him as if this feeling had always been there: "Doch schien es beinahe, als sei er immer schon in ihm gewesen. Vom Baume des Lebens fiel er herab wie eine überreife Frucht" (481). Nevertheless, for the moment he is able to repress these thoughts by contemplating all that his fate had brought him thus far. Not many had achieved the status of full professor by the age of thirty-five,<sup>29</sup> or the resources to do essentially what one pleases, or a powerful friend in the government

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche had become Chair of the Department of Classical Philology at the young age of twenty-four.

who could also assist him in eventually finding a more hospitable professorship elsewhere. Despite this fortunate position, Sieburth is not able to rid himself of the weariness and apathy he feels toward everything—especially his work. If he should go, he decides that his work must go with him, “Gelöscht von den Tafeln der Menschheit” (482). Loneliness was at onetime an intellectually productive state of mind for him, but now it was suffocating him intellectually and spiritually.

Perhaps even worse than loneliness for Sieburth is the thought of what his position means for his sense of individualism. He thinks to himself, “Keine Möglichkeit gab’s, sich davon reinzuwaschen! [...] Mochte er zum größten Denker aller Zeiten werden, sein Menschentum blieb besudelt bis in graue Zukunft hinein” (483). Never would he live up to the Schopenhauerian ideal of not being beholden to favor seeking toward which he once instructed his students to strive. Instead, he would forever be marked as one who benefited from patronage:

Diese Günstlingswirtschaft freilich war, genau besehen, beschämender als alles andere. Nirgendwo eine Spur von eigenem Verdienst. Die Pflege seines Wissens, die Geschmiedigkeit seines Denkens, die wachsende Schar seiner Schüler, das alles galt nichts. Begönnert, geschoben, aufgedrängt und ein Stein des Anstoßes selbst denen, die ihn das Gefüge der Lehrenden hineinzustopfen beauftragt waren. Ein Fürst und ein Königssohn, von denen der eine vertraulich seinen Namen genannt, der andere als Notiz ins Merkbuch geschrieben hatte, die waren die Träger seines Schicksals, die Schöpfer seines Wertes geworden. Nach Tisch, beim schwarzen Kaffee mochte es geschehen sein, und zwei Sekunden später war man zu wichtigeren Dingen übergegangen. (483)

In “King Lear,” Gloucester famously quips, “As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport.” This analogy accurately captures the magnitude of Sieburth’s agency at the hands of the greater powers: a mention of his name over coffee and a career was made. This is a far more pessimistic scenario than Marx’s formula that man makes his own destiny but under imposed and given conditions. Sieburth’s philosophy, much like that of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, rests upon the premise of steering one’s destiny and surroundings as the great figures of history had done before him. The reality of his fate having been decided by others, however, renders his philosophy hollow. In his disparaged state of mind, one question continually returns: “War es nicht menschenwürdiger, *nicht* mehr Mensch zu sein?” (483).

Sieburth, in his desperate state of mind, decides that something must be done, but only two options for escape present themselves: either win the love of his landlady’s daughter Helene back or go to Berlin and request a transfer. He rules out the second, because his friend certainly had more important tasks than hear someone begging, and even if he would grant the request, it would take years to be fulfilled. That left him with the first choice, “Der freilich hieß Lebensbankrott. Denn einen solchen Skandal überlebte kein Amt. Aber Lebensbankrott war auch das freiwillige Ende” (490). He tries to locate Frau Schimmelpfennig in order to arrange reconciliation but his attempts are unsuccessful. Once again the alternative of taking leave of this world enters his thoughts. He sits at his desk and remembers the famous lines of fatalism from philosophy: Seneca, “Qui potest mori, non potest cogi”; Septimius Severus, “Omnia fui, et nihil expedit”; and that of Rudolf von Ihering, “Wo

das Leben and der Finsternis hängt, ist Hineinbringen des Lichts Todesverbrechen” (491). Thoughts such as these make Sieburth wonder if his philosophy and its practice caused him to miss the opportunity for happiness in life: “Oft genug hatte er sich mit Ähnlichem vergnügt, und in dem, was aus eigener Küche sich vorfand, lag mancherlei als Zeugnis davon, wie sehr er mit seinem Handwerk zerfallen war: ‘Je strenger die philosophische Forschung, desto mehr verdient sie den Fußtritt, den das naïve Denken ihr gibt.’ Und: ‘Schauernd erbaut sich der Mensch die Welt, handlend sucht er in ihr seine Heimstatt, und denkend schlägt er sie wieder in Trümmer” (492). Like Faust at the beginning of Goethe’s masterpiece, Sieburth too is disillusioned with his profession and in the midst of a deep existential crisis. He doubts the importance of philosophy in this world, so much that he loses reverence for the philosopher, whose professorship he has strived for and attained. He thinks,

Etwas jämmerlicheres als das Kantsche Wort von den zwei Dingen, die das Gemüt mit immer neuer Ehrfurcht erfüllen, dem bestirnten Himmel über uns und dem moralischen Gesetz in uns, wird sich in der Geschichte des Denkens kaum entdecken lassen. Daß das moralische Gesetz nichts ist wie der zufällige Niederschlag wechselnder Zweckmäßigkeiten, wissen die meisten, wollen’s aber nicht wissen. Und der ehrfürchtige Schauer vor dem Sternenzelt ist nur ein verkappter horror vacui. “Horror nihili” müßte es heißen, doch dieses auszudenken hat niemand den Mut. (492)

The step away from the canon of Western philosophy is in fact the significance of Sieburth’s intellectual enterprise. The chasm that lies between him and his discipline is representative of the fissure now that separates the workings of modernity from traditional bourgeois society since the Enlightenment. In Goethe’s tragedy, Faust’s disillusionment with his profession at the beginning causes in him a

*Lebensverneinung* (life negation), which then turns to a *Lebensbejahung* (life affirmation), and the subsequent seduction of a young woman. In the case of Sieburth, his life affirming philosophy leads to the seduction of women, which in turn produces his life-negating situation.

### **b. Sieburth as *Faustus Invertus***

After making the decision to do what Faust ultimately did not do, Sieburth begins the necessary preparations to take leave of this world. In doing so, he is making a last attempt at reclaiming his agency, which had been subsumed by external powers. He consoles himself, “Nun kann ich in Ruhe meinen letzten Kampf auskämpfen” (494). In order to determine his legacy after he has departed, he begins to order his belongings, “Leerte die Kästen und stopfte alles, was sich an Briefschaften fand, in das Ofenloch. Nur Hermas Abschiedsgruß behielt er zurück” (495). While disposing of his property, he sets aside all materials that have to do with death. Still the philosopher at heart, he ponders the dialectic of life and death, a theme that has a long heritage in nineteenth-century German thought. Using Kant as a starting point for a brief exploration into the philosophical musings of morbidity—especially with regard to the free will of taking one’s own life—one can identify an intellectual progression. In general, the perspective gradually shifts from a concern for the universal and moral dimensions of the matter, toward it being a matter that begins and ends with the individual. The Kantian basis of existence rests upon the fulfillment of duty; what we are to accomplish is no more than adherence to the categorical imperative of acting only according to those maxims that can be willed a

universal law. In other words, our purpose is bound to carrying out this formula until forces beyond our control or comprehension incapacitate us. If suicide would prevent us from acting upon the categorical imperative, it is immoral and incongruent with rational behavior.

With Hegel death becomes more complicated because his philosophical system offers more perspective. In many respects, his system treats world history like the natural progression of life and death up until the present. The Great Hegelian (based on the Hegelian philosopher Karl Rosenkranz), whose final departing words to Sieburth, "Philosophie heißt sterben lernen," suggests this being also true with philosophy. In other words, philosophy requires an acceptance of the coming and going of different ideas. To be sure, Hegel's concept of dialectical progression is a vision of history with a purpose: civilizations and their ideas appear and disappear at the right time. With regard to himself in their meeting, the Great Hegelian sees that his mission has been accomplished and that it is now time for new ideas to fill the void he is about to leave. Furthermore, Hegel's system proposes the willingness to die in some circumstances as an absolute necessity for a self-conscious being. This he lays out explicitly in the fourth chapter of his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. But Hegel also specifically explores the matter of suicide in his *Philosophie des Rechts*, whereby he identifies man as the only living being with the power to commit suicide.<sup>30</sup> For Hegel, unlike Kant who deemed

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<sup>30</sup> "It is inherent in this element of the will that I am able to free myself from everything, to renounce all ends, and to abstract from everything. The human being alone is able to abandon all things, even his own life: he can commit suicide. The animal cannot do this; is always remains only negative, in a determination which is alien to it and to which it merely grows accustomed. The human being is pure

suicide always to be morally corrupt, suicide is wrong unless there is an appropriate reason. He expounds upon this in the seventieth paragraph of his *Philosophie des Rechts*, stating that each singular life must dedicate itself to the ethical whole. The suicides of Hercules and Brutus, according to Hegel, were correct because they were the acts of heroes against their own personalities; but even heroes do not have an unqualified right to do away with themselves.<sup>31</sup> We see that with Hegel the individual is no longer beholden to a metaphysical law in terms of one's right to commit suicide but rather to the ethical whole.

Although mentioned in the systems of Kant and Hegel, it is Schopenhauer who prioritizes death and dying as a central aspect of his philosophical system. As one Schopenhauer scholar writes:

Schopenhauer interprets death as the aim and purpose of life. He maintains that to live is to suffer, that the triumph of death is inevitable, and that existence is a constant dying. Yet Schopenhauer also insists that death is the denial of the individual will or will-to-live; that birth and death as events in the phenomenal world are alike unreal; that death is not complete annihilation; and that suicide, though not morally objectionable, is philosophically pointless because it affirms the will-to-live. (Jacquette 293)

For Schopenhauer, *Der Wille zum Leben* (will to live) is the metaphysical *Ding an sich* that Kant claimed exists beyond the phenomenal world. For Schopenhauer the

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thinking of himself, and only in thinking is he this power to give himself universality, that is, to extinguish all particularity, all determinacy." (*Philosophy of Right* 330)

<sup>31</sup> "The comprehensive sum of external activity, i.e. life, is not external to personality as that which itself is, immediate and a *this*. The surrender or the sacrifice of life is not the existence of *this* personality but the very opposite. There is therefore no unqualified right to sacrifice one's life. To such a sacrifice nothing is entitled except an ethical Idea as that in which this immediately single personality has vanished and to whose power it is actually subjected. Just as life as such is immediate, so death is its immediate negation and hence must come from without, either by natural causes, or else, in the service of the Idea, by the hand of a foreigner." (*Hegel's Philosophy of Right* 53)



will to live is the very essence of being. Dying is the cessation of the will to live, and we are encouraged to resist this truth with our only possibilities: asceticism, aesthetics, and acting kindly. Because Schopenhauer's ontology is pessimistic in nature, finding no meaning beyond the will to live, he poses no firm opposition to suicide. On this subject he finds himself more in agreement with the ancients and Eastern civilization than with Western thought. When the suffering of life outweighs the fear of death, it is for him logical that a human might seek to negate the will to life. He turns to the Roman philosopher Pliny, whom he cites: "The chief of all remedies for a troubled mind is the feeling that among the blessings which Nature gives to man, there is none greater than an opportune death" ("On Suicide" 45). Morality, according to Schopenhauer, exists in the denial of the will to live. Thus, the only moral argument that can be leveled against suicide is that "for a real release from this world of misery, it substitutes one that is merely apparent" ("On Suicide" 48). This means that suicide is not a resistance to the will to live, but rather an emphatic assertion thereof. In doing so, one is fleeing not from the will to live, but from the absence of pleasure, since the subject would continue living should there be adequate satisfaction.

After Schopenhauer the next philosopher who must be considered concerning the matter of life and death is naturally Friedrich Nietzsche. His views on death, dying, and suicide, like many of his ideas, appear throughout his works in contradictory fashion. One place Nietzsche specifically addresses the theme of dying at length is in the first part of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche death is an inevitable end for all; therefore it should be done with honor. In the passage "Vom

freien Tode,” in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces the notion of timeliness in death: “Viele sterben zu spät, und Einige sterben zu früh. Noch klingt fremd die Lehre: ‘stirb zur rechten Zeit!’ Stirb zur rechten Zeit: also lehrt es Zarathustra.” Some die too early or too late; for Nietzsche, dying at the right time is the important factor. The will to power, which is generally thought to be at the center of the Nietzschean philosophical system if there is one at all, must first be life affirming. Nevertheless, when considering all of his writings, it is difficult to make sense of Nietzsche’s views. For instance, his take on suicide in the 157<sup>th</sup> aphorism in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*: “Der Gedanke an den Selbstmord ist ein starkes Trostmittel: mit ihm kommt man gut über manche böse Nacht hinweg” (84). Suicide seems anathema to the will-to-power, but in this aphorism the thought of suicide is used to advance one’s cause. Since he suggests a re-evaluation of all values, nothing is off limits for Nietzsche when it comes to the will to power—even death and suicide.

Sieburth’s philosophy concerning life, death, and suicide is in the post-Schopenhauerian tradition of cultural pessimism. As he begins to reflect on his life and its approaching end, he thinks: “Die Bejahung des Lebens ist nur eine Flucht und eine Ausflucht, um sich dem Griff des Todes nicht beugen zu müssen,” and he follows this formula with an aphorism befitting his own situation, “je intensiver wir leben, desto weniger bleibt uns selbst zum Bejahen die Zeit” (495). The beginning phrase is characteristic of Schopenhauerian pessimism; there is no meaning to life, which will inevitably be followed by death. But at the same time it echoes Nietzsche’s call to transcend the normal. In this way, Sieburth’s end is not a sign of his weakness, but rather evidence that he led a life beyond the confines of a

mundane bourgeois existence. These philosophical musings invoke further inquiries into Sieburth's life, approaching its end, and his philosophical system. He postulates,

“Die Lehre von einem jenseitigen Leben ist ein Unfug, dessen die Menschen, feige wie sie sind, sich nicht zu erwehren vermögen. Sie verfälscht den Blick für das Diesseits, dessen wahrhafte Werte nur aus dem Grundgefühl seiner Wertlosigkeit zu erfassen sind.” In dem letzten Nebensatze lag eine Wahrheit, die sich wohl hätte ausbauen lassen. Eine ganze Ethik lag eingewickelt darin. Umso törichter, was voranging! Warum sollte der Glaube an jenes Märchenleben ein Unfug sein und der an dieses, das wirkliche, nicht? Das uns von Lüge zu Lüge hetzt, um uns schließlich auf den Trümmern unseres Wesens verenden zu lassen? (495)

The belief in an afterlife has been attacked by other thinkers of the nineteenth century. Karl Marx's famous line that religion is the opiate of the masses, or similar statements by Marquis de Sade and Novalis also convey this message. No doubt, the notion of living in the moment without regret is consonant with Nietzsche's purposes in practicing a genealogy of morals and arriving at the very core of the restrictive essence of human conscience. This contemplation brings Sieburth back to an idea, which he had already thought about, “Der Unfug des Daseins.” Briefly he ponders this thought in the formula of “Der Unfug *meines* Daseins,” but he is quickly alarmed by the degree of regret latent in this thought (495). Sieburth's philosophical outlook allows no room for the act of regretting. To regret implies a weakness either in not having had the courage to act upon one's will, or not having the strength to live with one's past actions. This is more or less the idea behind Nietzsche's “Ewige Wiederkunft,” which appears in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* aphorism 341. The philosopher asks if one were told that one must repeat the life

one has lived up until now for all eternity, would one react with joy or horror. The lesson here is that one should live such a life that it would be joy to have to repeat it *ad infinitum*.

Sieburth's will to live, his will to fortune and fame, his philosophical mission all had run their course, "Und die Jungfräulichkeit der Seele, die der Urgrund alles Schöpferischen ist, die war vertan" (495). Much to the chagrin of his enemies, he attained his goal of the most important professorship in the German Reich, albeit not in the fashion he would have liked. Still, for a time his philosophical enterprise is seated on Kant's endowed chair, the highest peak of German academic profession. Similar to Hegel's theory of the world-historical individual, however, this achievement is followed by nothingness: "When their end is attained, they fall aside like empty husks. They may have undergone great difficulties in order to accomplish their purpose, but as soon as they have done so, they die early like Alexander, are murdered like Caesar, or deported like Napoleon" (*Philosophy of History* 412). Although he was about to disappear into oblivion, Sieburth had advanced the world philosophical spirit by breaking down dogma and entrenched traditions, introducing a new philosophy of the modern era. In the dialectic, the torch of progress and Enlightenment must now be taken up by another: "Ein Anderer, Größerer, mußte kommen, das Schwert aufzuheben, das *seiner* Hand entsank. Einer, der es in funkenschlagendem Spiele auf die Häupter der Gegner herabsausen ließ, während er selbst nur mühselige Lufthiebe führte" (495–496). Even though Sieburth can see what impact his great victory could have on the state of university philosophy in Germany, he holds no hope of being forever inscripted in an era of

history like the figures that Hegel mentions. Sieburth's relationship to time is not concerned with Hegel's, but rather more pertains to Nietzsche's. Time, for the latter, is space to be filled by and for the individual, whereas the former is concerned with the collective. It is a matter of micro versus macro: how one is remembered in world history is of little concern to Nietzsche.<sup>32</sup> Sieburth only feels responsible toward the self and with his impending death he will be "Gelöscht von den Tafeln der Menschheit!" (496). These sentiments do not only have to do with the changing philosophical discourses in the nineteenth century, but they also pertain to Hermann Sudermann's state of mind as he approached the own death in the late 1920s.

As Sieburth comes to terms with his own self-worth, he must also decide what legacy he wishes to leave behind. He begins writing his testament, "Ich bestimme, daß meine Leiche nicht aus der Wohnung fortgeschafft werden darf, ehe die sämtlichen Papiere, die sich zur Zeit in den beiden obersten Fächern meines Schrankes befinden, im Ofen verbrannt worden sind" (496). The theme of burning one's documents already appears in an earlier work of Sudermann. In the novel *Katzensteg* (1890), for instance, the protagonist Boleslav von Schranden finds documented evidence that contradicts the very reason for which the people of his homeland are persecuting him. Instead of revealing the truth to these *Untermenschen*, Boleslav decides to burn the pertinent papers with the conviction that revealing a truth to the incorrigible horde would in the end change nothing. By

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<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche advocates the use of history in his *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* in so far that it benefits the plight of the individual.

burning the letters Boleslav follows Nietzsche's call to living one's life "unhistorisch" as advocated in his 1874 essay on history.<sup>33</sup> It is better to be written out of history altogether than to allow one's legacy to fall into the hands of those not worthy of truth. For Sieburth, the only person trustworthy of carrying out this task is his former student Fritz Kühne, to whom he assigns the duty. After writing several farewell letters he turns his attention to the revolver that ominously ended the life of a crow in an earlier chapter of *Der tolle Professor*, thus fulfilling Chekov's famous theatrical imperative that should a revolver appear in an earlier act it must be fired by the finale.

### **c. Sieburth's Finale**

Sieburth's death in the novel leaves many questions unanswered, but it presents an eye-opening experience for the Königsberg community. When Fritz Kühne arrives at Sieburth's residence, there is a crowd assembled outside, and inside he finds "Kränze, buntschleifig, mit goldenen Inschriften prunkend, überwölbten den Deckel und lehnten sich an den Katafalk" which is curious for a man who was ostracized to the point of desperation (499). Making his way through the house, he finds a number of Sieburth's colleagues from the university gathered in his study intensely reading the unpublished works that were to be destroyed. Among them he sees the old liberal historian Auerbach, contemplatively reading. Pfeifferling, the back-stabbing archconservative, appears to be reading the works

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<sup>33</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche. *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*.

with abhorrence and admiration at the same time. Another member of the philosophy faculty and old nemesis of Sieburth, sits among the works, giving a “scheuen Blick in die Runde, als fürchte er auf Diebeswegen ertappt zu werden” (501). Even Geheimrat Wendland was seated there among other representatives of the Königsberger bourgeoisie. The university administrators, who are also present, conduct the procedures of carrying out their colleague’s final wishes. As everyone is called to step back from Sieburth’s work, Auerbach clings to a bundle of papers and exclaims, “Hier geschieht ein Verbrechen,” explaining that although no expert in the discipline of philosophy, even he can discern “daß darin ganz eigenartige, vielleicht noch nie ausgesprochene Gedanken zum Ausdruck kommen. Deren Niederschrift zu zerstören würde sicherlich für die Wissenschaft einen schweren Verlust bedeuten” (503). Hagemann, the other professor of philosophy is called upon to confirm this opinion. He was never collegial with Sieburth, but he tells the others objectively: “Meine Herren! Nach einer ha – halben Stunde ka – kann ich natürlich kein fa – fachliches Urteil fallen, - aber – aber so viel weiß ich: Ich ha – habe diesem Manne U – Unrecht getan . . . Wir alle – haben – diesem Manne – Unrecht getan. Denn – den – wir glaubten – er a – arbeite nichts und er – er habe nichts – zu - veröffentlichen . . . Und – jetzt sehen wir hier – ein ganzes – ein ganzes – Lebenswerk – aufgeschichtet. Welches dessen Werte sind – mag unbestimmt bleiben, aber – zugrunde gehen, meine ich, darf es nicht” (503). Honorable as it may seem that these academics want to rescue the work of their colleague from oblivion, Sieburth mandated that his unpublished work be destroyed lest it fall into the wrong hands. It is said that when a work of art is finished by its creator, the work no longer is in the control of the

artist and it takes on a life of its own. Still, a living author has the agency to explain, promote, defend, and criticize the work, which a dead author cannot do. Naturally, this is why authors prepare what materials they will bestow upon posterity and who will be in charge of such matters; it is a final effort of asserting agency in the matter of one's own lifework. History tells of authors who for various reasons were not successful in shaping the afterlife of their work after death. Franz Kafka famously requested that his work be destroyed upon death, but (fortunate for posterity) his confidante and literary executor Max Brod published the material. Another author, Friedrich Nietzsche, lost the ability to manipulate his legacy when he fell ill suddenly in 1889 and his sister took control of his estate and was responsible for certain interpretations of his work that blemished his legacy until after World War II. For Hermann Sudermann it was quite the opposite. In his case, besides a handful of adaptations for film, his works went to the grave with him, and in the case of *Der tolle Professor* quite literally.<sup>34</sup>

Protests against the destruction of Sieburth's work do not convince the Prorektor of the university, who has assumed the role of watchdog in making sure order is maintained. Pfeifferling makes a last-ditch effort to usurp the rules of custom in this matter by implying that Sieburth was not in a sane state of mind in the time leading up to his death. He proposes, "Wenn wir hier einig sind – was dazu gehört – geistige Umnachtung oder verminderte Zurechnungsfähigkeit – oder wie sonst die juristischen Ausdrücke lauten, das würde sich reichlich feststellen lassen"

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<sup>34</sup> A copy of *Der tolle Professor* was placed with him in the casket.



(504). This statement prompts Fritz Kühne to action as the executor of Sieburth's will. He steps forward and says, "Aber auch ich trage ein Dokument bei mir, das mein Eingreifen rechtfertigt. Darf ich Eure Magnifizienz bitte, Einsicht zu nehmen"

(504). Kühne, mismatched in social stature *vis-à-vis* his professorial opponents, makes a bold plea on Sieburth's behalf that nobody has the right to deny his teacher his final wish. Moments later Sieburth's life work is set aflame.

After the burial Kühne and Helene remain the only two who sincerely mourn the death of their friend. Both harbor regrets of not having been able to have done more for Sieburth during his difficult times, but they come to terms with the fact that Sieburth's fate was beyond their control. Kühne tells Helene, "Wir beide werden das Rätsel nicht lösen, woran er zugrunde ging [...] Vielleicht wird uns später einmal Klarheit kommen. Vielleicht kommt sie auch nie. Es ist möglich, daß seine Werke sie uns gebracht hätten. Aber die sind ja nun hin" (509). Helene asks Kühne if he has regrets concerning the fate of Sieburth and his answer shows that Sieburth's Nietzschean philosophy of having no regrets lives on in his pupil: "Auf die Vollzieher seiner Wünsche muß der Tote sich verlassen können. Die sind, was von ihm noch lebt. Und darum darf kein Zweifel und keine Reue uns anwandeln. Sie nicht und mich nicht. Und zum Trost müssen wir uns sagen: Das Wahre, das drin stand, kommt wieder. Vielleicht ist es schon da. Wir wissen's nur nicht" (509). As the two get up to take leave of Sieburth and each other they see a wreath placed on the spot of burial on whose ribbon are the names of Marion und Rudolf Follenius. The former, being of course the architect of Sieburth's social demise, and the latter the

patriarch of the liberal bourgeoisie in Königsberg.<sup>35</sup> The two take notice of the hollowness of this gesture, as well as from the other outpourings of sympathy by those who had done Sieburty wrong. Before taking leave, Kühne remarks, “Ich fürchte, wenn *wir* ihm nicht Treue halten, wird er sehr bald vergessen sein” (510). So ends Hermann Sudermann’s biographical novel *Der tolle Professor*.

### **C. Aesthetic Isolationism: Hermann Sudermann in the Twentieth Century**

Like many among the German liberal bourgeoisie, World War I awoke Hermann Sudermann from a kind of lethargy in spirit and work. Since his activities in opposition to the *Lex Heinze* at the turn of the century, Sudermann had become less of a public presence among Berlin’s *Bildungsbürgertum*. Instead, he spent much time away from Berlin at the finest European sanatoriums, vacations to Italy, world cruises, and summers at his manor estate at Blankensee. He had long struggled with depression, but after his public dispute with Berlin’s leading literary critics such as Alfred Kerr and Maximilian Harden in 1902, which more or less backfired on him, it had become debilitating. He blamed the critics for obliterating the artistic merit of his works. Even though his marriage was volatile from the beginning, Sudermann often contemplated divorce at this time. What is more, he also often considered suicide. Nevertheless, his works continued to be commercially successful. In an obituary piece about Hermann Sudermann on November 27, 1928 in the *Münchener Neuste Nachrichte*, literary critic Arthur Eloesser explains Sudermann’s continued

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<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, at Hermann Sudermann’s burial, his coffin was topped with a wreath sent from his archrival Gerhart Hauptmann.

resonance with the public, despite his brutalization by the critics: “Warum hätte er sich nicht für ebenbürtig halten sollen, wenn ihm ein ansehnlicher Teil der Kritik, vor allem die Zustimmung des Publikums, seine Legitimität bestätigte? Ein Volksentschied wäre damals zugunsten von Sudermann ausgefallen; er hatte die zahlenmäßige Überlegenheit. Die letzte Vorkriegsstatistik gab ihm 1300 Aufführungen im Jahr gegen 650 von Gerhart Hauptmann. Das Verhältnis hat sich erst nach Krieg und Revolution umgekehrt” (“Gedenkblatt für Sudermann”). Sudermann’s withdrawal from the public eye corresponds to a general trend among the German liberal bourgeoisie toward a “Vogel-Strauß-Politik ins Ästhetische zurück” ( Hamann and Hermand, *Stilkunst* 8). As critic Samuel Lublinski already noted in 1904, “Dieser Mann [Sudermann] war der temperamentvolle Epigone eines schal gewordenen Liberalismus” (194). Like Sieburth, Sudermann too sensed a spiritual suffocation in the bourgeois atmosphere and that he desired something greater. In 1914 Sudermann was convinced that the outbreak of the world war was something that would awaken him from his ennui.

### **1. Trying Times: 1900–1914**

If Sieburth fulfills Chekhov’s rule in *Der tolle Professor*, Hermann Sudermann fails to do so in his diary. By the turn of the century the author, who was hailed throughout the 1890s as the hope of German literature, saw the once sensational critical reception of his works turn stale. After the early successes of “Die Ehre” and “Heimat” it seemed as if Sudermann was destined to achieve the status in history as the “great man of German literature” or “genius of his time,” still a common feature

of historiography in that era. The partisan war waged upon him by hostile literary critics was for him making this prospect seem increasingly distant. Even though Sudermann saw himself as something of an *Übermensch* in his time, attacked by the herd out of *ressentiment* for his genius, his intense ambition made him often no better. After attending the premiere of his rival Gerhart Hauptmann's play "Schluck und Jau," he notes in his diary the next day on February 4, 1900: Erwachend greife mir nach der Zeitung. Mißerfolg. Ich freue mich nicht, aber Lasten fallen mir von der Seele. Hätte der Rausch der Naiven verbunden mit der gehässigen Reklamenmacherei der Clique soweit gedauert, das Arbeiten wäre aller Anderen Hochstrebenden mit der Zeit verleidet worden. Unlängst hatte sich Kerr zu Satze vorschrieben: 'Seitdem Bismarck u. Wagner von der Bildfläche verschwunden sind, beruht Deutschlands einzige Hoffnung auf den zwei Augen Hauptmanns!'" (Tagebuch II). So strong was the cult of genius in Germany at this time. Unlike the protagonists Sieburth in *Der tolle Professor* and Boleslav von Scharanden in *Katzensteg* who liberate themselves from the concern of how they will be remembered in the future, Sudermann was preoccupied by this thought so much that it induced suicidal thoughts. On February 18, 1900 he makes a note in his diary about this conflict of life and death: "Noch überwiegt die Lust am Dasein die Unlust. Noch kann und wird geschaffen werden" (Tagebuch II). These thoughts appear frequently throughout his diaries. With obvious torment, he records on April 1, 1904: "Was soll werden, wenn der würdelose Zustand, in dem meine letzter Jahrzehnt dahin geflossen, voll Hader um nichts, voll Gram und Verbitterung bis an mein Lebensende weiter dauert? Kugel, Kugel, Kugel! Drei mal in der Nacht

aufgestanden und nach dem Revolver gegriffen" (Tagebuch III). In the end it was the glimmer of optimism that there was still another act to be written that prevented him from fulfilling Chekhov's imperative, such as can be seen in his entry on November 23, 1904: "So verhärtet und verbittert bin ich durch mein [...] aussichtsloses Steigen, daß kaum einen weichen Gedanken in mir aufkommen lassen. Nur eine dämliche Freude ersteht in mir: 'Noch lebst du; noch kannst du rücken vorwärts'" (Tagebuch III).

In order to escape the pressures of celebrity in bourgeois Berlin, Sudermann sought refuge elsewhere. He traveled frequently for his work, but he even spent more time traveling throughout Europe. Sudermann frequently visited sanatoriums to seek treatment for various health issues that he believed to be associated with "Nerven." His public persona was so great at this time that the daily Berlin press even tracked his whereabouts. Following his first real theater flop with "Die drei Reiherfedern," the *Berliner Tageblatt* reported to its readership on March 3, 1899 that Sudermann was in Baden-Baden recovering from an illness. The author also planned annual vacations to Italy for the purpose of relaxation and stimulation. Such excursions to the Mediterranean had been a hallmark experience of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* since Goethe's *Italienische Reise*. In 1903 Sudermann even undertook a world trip that spanned Italy, Egypt, and Ceylon in order to gain respite from the hectic theater world of Berlin, his suffocating bourgeois family life, the politics of Germany, as well as to round out his *Bildung*. He writes in his diary on January 27, 1903 while on his trip: "Wie werd' ich nur wieder zu wissen, Bildung und Anschauung kommen, damit auch mit Leuten von Kaliber wieder sprechen

kann" (Tagebuch III). The trip was a kind of journey into the "heart of darkness" for him, as if the impressions from these "exotic" lands would stir him from his bourgeois afflictions. In his diaries he made many notes about his impressions of these foreign lands, and as a dutiful member of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* he took extensive notes on the society and culture of these lands. He also seems to have regained his mental strength to some degree over the course of his travels, but even on this trip he cannot escape Germany. He could not help but to make an entry in his diaries on January 29, 1903 that shows his disinterestedness in politics and nationalism at this time in which he scorns a group of Germans who foolishly celebrate the Kaiser's birthday while in Egypt: "Noch eines von Kaisers Geburtstag nachzutragen: die Deutschen Hotelgäste gingen u dem Konsul einem arabischen Anitquitätenhändler um ihm zu Kaisers Geburtstag zu gratulieren und selbiger Araber hat beim Diner als offizielle deutsche Persönlichkeit den Kaisertoast gehalten. So überschlägt sich die Loyalität in's Purzelbaumhafte!" (Tagebuch III).

#### **a. Sudermann at Blankensee**

There was only one place at this time that was ever a real refuge, a source of respite for the beleaguered aesthete: Blankensee. This manor estate provided him escape from the chaos of the growing city Berlin, its vicious theater criticism, and bourgeois society. Blankensee was also where the author could complete his turn inward, building a monument for his disengagement with worldly affairs. A testament to his own success, Blankensee was a world of its own that he could shape to his own liking. For him it was tangible evidence to remind him that he was

a successful author, an affirmation that he desperately needed. Sudermann and his family took up temporary residence at Blankensee in the late 1890s, and in 1902 he was finally given the opportunity to purchase it.

In 1899 a journalist came to Blankensee to meet with Sudermann, and in the article that followed, he reports Sudermann as having said to him: “Ja, leicht ist mir das Leben und der Erfolg nicht gemacht worden! Aber mit desto größter Freude blickt man auf das Selbsterrungene [...] Ein Bodensatz von Melancholie bleibt von einer schweren Jugend in der Seele zurück” (Veltin). This was the fruit of his success, his Horatio Alger myth with which he embellished his autobiography. Here, one can see that the liberal bourgeois might be able to remove himself from the liberal bourgeois salon life of Berlin, but the liberal bourgeois imagination remains ingrained. This manor estate was for him the happy ending wrought through hard work and self-denial—liberal values. Blankensee is described in the article as a paradise hidden in the Brandenburger Marche with “alte Bäume, blühende Rosen, Statuen,” and decorated with art from “italienischen Palazzos und deutsche Kirchen, Gemälde, kostbare Geräte und Statuen, Teppiche und Sticheereien, namentlich aus dem Cinquecento” from his travels (Veltin). The possession of an estate or *Landgut* such as Blankensee was not only a penultimate sign of bourgeois prosperity, as it embodied the triumph of their class over the landed aristocracy in the nineteenth century, but also in line with the general trend of liberal bourgeois retreat around the turn of the century. The occasion of the journalist’s visit to Blankensee, however, was in 1899 after the flop of Sudermann’s “Die drei Reiherfedern” and for him a period of deep withdrawal from public life. He explains in the article, “Als ich bei der

Aufführung meiner 'Drei Reiherfedern' nach dem dritten Akt sah, daß das Publikum mit dem Stück, das ich am tiefsten aus mir herausgeschrieben habe, nicht mitgehen wollte, da fiel mir auf einmal ein: Du hast ja dein Blankensee. Dahin reicht die Welt nicht. Und ich wurde ganz ruhig" (Veltin). At another point he explains the inner isolation that he was experiencing after writing such a difficult drama in verse at which point his wife interjects, "Darum mußt Du auch wieder unter Menschen und reisen," to which Sudermann answers, "Ach, laß lieber die Menschen zu mir kommen! Es ist zu schön in Blankensee" (Veltin). This tendency of withdrawal is not only telling of Sudermann's own psychology, but also symptomatic of bourgeois complacency at the turn of the century. All at once, Blankensee was an outward manifestation of bourgeois power, but also a place of respite from bourgeois society. On the one hand Blankensee was for Sudermann a kingdom of his success, an accolade to show the world his self-made purchasing power, but on the other hand it was a sanctuary for him to withdraw in ennui to his "Bodensatz von Melancholie." The great enjoyment that Sudermann took in admiring the charm and beauty of his estate corresponds to the joy of living or *Lebensfreude* typical of this period, it was an act in line with the motto "l'art pour l'art." At the same time, however, the isolation and retreat is a cynical statement that contradicts the liberal belief in progress through engagement with the world.

Despite the fact that ownership of a residence away from the heart of the bourgeois and aesthetic milieu of Berlin was fashionable among aesthetes—for it fostered the affectations of a genius whose creative faculties required an existence away from the mundane everyday world of their audiences similar to a Zarathustra



who comes down from the mountain to the masses<sup>36</sup>—Sudermann, true to his public persona, made an extra pompous spectacle with his acquisition of Blankensee. The size, heritage, and arrangement of the estate outclassed that of his contemporaries and quite likely that of any other author in Germany before or since. In contextualizing Sudermann’s Blankensee among the homes of contemporary authors and artists, another newspaper article expounds:

Seit einer Reihe von Jahren spielt Sudermann in Blankensee bei Trebbin die Rolle eines Rittergutsbesitzers und Schloßherrn. Das Herrenhaus von Blankensee mit seiner in weiß gehaltenen, imposanten Fassade, blickt freundlich aus der Umrahmung von grünen Bäumen und Buschwerk des Parkes heraus. Und um das Wohnhaus herum sieht man den ganzen großen Apparat, den der Betrieb einer ausgedehnten Landwirtschaft erforderlich macht: Scheunen, Ställe, Remisen und andere Wirtschaftsgebäude. (“Künstler als Grundeigentümer”)

The barock manor or *Herrenhaus* at Blankensee was erected in the mid-eighteenth century by the noble family von Thümen, who for centuries resided in this area of the Brandenburger Marche that Theodor Fontane forever immortalized in his five-volume travelogue, *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (1862–1889). At some point in the late 1890s Sudermann was able to rent the Blankensee estate from the family and later purchase it in 1902 at a relatively inexpensive price due to their dire financial situation; a testament to the rise of the middle class at the expense of the old nobility.

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<sup>36</sup> See chapter two for more examples.

The first mention of Blankensee in Sudermann's diaries is on August 23, 1896, in which he notes: "Wie ein Tierschloß [...] Lust sie [Blankensee] zu erwerben [...] Der Besitzer todt: wollen sehn. Arbeit wichtiger als solche protzensorgen" (Tagebuch II). It seems that the purchase of Blankensee could not have happened at a better time in Sudermann's life. At the turn of the century the pressure of being one of Germany's foremost authors, his feud with the critics, and marital problems produced a period of prolonged and serious depression for him. His diaries at this time are filled with notations that describe Blankensee as a refuge for his troubled mind. On June 7, 1899, in an especially dark moment of despair, Sudermann writes: "Blankensee, die Einzige, was mich an die Ehe fesselt, wolle ich nicht mehr wiedersehen, sondern sofort nach meiner Genesung ein Ende machen" (Tagebuch II). The tranquility and beauty of the place made bourgeois family life palatable for the irascible and driven author. It was also here away from the stage of public life in the metropolis to which Sudermann could flee when he wanted to be alone, as he intimates on November 1, 1899 in his diary: "Durch den Park gewandert [...] dann mit den Hunden in den Wald empor. Als ich trunken von Herbstluft u. Wiedersehensglück auf dem blauen See u. den rothen Wald hernieder [...] Wie froh ist meine Einsamkeit!" (Tagebuch II). Before the complete sale of the estate had been finalized, the family Sudermann was faced with a moment of panic when Kaiser Wilhelm II considered the purchase of Blankensee. A diary entry on June 30, 1901 conveys how heavily the prospect of losing this refuge weighed on the author and his family:

Finde Cläre überreizt. Will sie durch Spaziergang froh bringen. Unglücklich. Thumer kommt u. kündigt mir für Morgen den Besuch des Hausministers an, da der Kaiser Blankensee für einen Prinzen kaufen wolle. So zerrinnt mein einziges Glück. - Schluß, aus! - Die einzige Hoffnung, die bleibt, ist, daß der Preis der Beamten zu hoch sein wird. Im Park dahergehend besprochen Alles. – Er muß. Er kann nicht mehr. – Alle meine Mittel würden nicht ausreichen, den Kauf zu hindern. Schluß aus. Muß vor Cläre geheim halten, deren Ueberreizung bis zur Tollheit gediehen ist. Visionär mit Thränen ringend etc. – [...] Dann halte stillen Abschiedsgang, das herzvoll Thränen – Kein Verlust trifft mich mehr bis in's innerste, seitdem die zwei Reiherfedern meine letzte Zuversicht zerbrochen. – still in's Bette. (Tagebuch II)

Much to Sudermann's satisfaction—and perhaps mental wellbeing—the Kaiser's purchase of Blankensee never materialized and it remained in his possession for the remainder of his life. On August 23, 1903 Sudermann was able to note in his diary while in transit to his sanctuary: “Frohes, liebes Heim” (Tagebuch III).

Although the grandeur and history of Blankensee stood as a monument to Hermann Sudermann's success, it was also a space that he could shape to fit his own values, preferences, and reflect his *Künstlertum* (artistry). While Sieburth created a life philosophy that showcased his individuality, Sudermann had Blankensee. This estate was the author's ivory tower, just as his protagonist Sieburth had his high-seated professorship (if only for a brief time). One newspaper article on the author and his new property states, “Für niemand aber ist die Umgebung, in der er lebt wichtiger als für den Künstler” (“Künstler als Grundeigentümer”). This is most evident in the creation of a park on the estate. It was here that Sudermann reached the apotheosis of his aestheticism. Carl Schorske writes, “Since ancient days the garden

has served Western man as a mirror of paradise to measure his temporal state” (280). In the case of Sudermann, it may not have been so much as measurement of his temporal state, but rather a refuge from it. This can be seen in his obsessive collection of antiquaries from his travels with which he decorated this park. While visiting an antique dealer while in Italy he notes in his diaries on May 10, 1906, “Dann zu unserem Freunde Piccoli, der uns hinreißend schöne Sachen zeigt und dessen ganzen Marmorhof ich auskaufen möchte” (Tagebuch IV). During this particular trip alone to Italy Sudermann accumulated among other things numerous marble statues and busts, a marble tabernacle, vases, a marble bench, marble pillars, paintings for the manor, as well as a desk all amounting to over 4,000 Reichsmarks—an enormous sum at the time for dilettantish amusement. On May 16, 1906 his entry states, “In meinen Träumen tanzen Marmorfiguren. Alles schöne der Welt hat sich zu marmor krystallisiert” (Tagebuch IV). Seized by the desire to own marble, he writes to his wife on May 19, 1913 from Rome: “Mich hat richtig wieder einmal die dementia marmorea, der Marmorpuschel ergriffen. Ich sehe nichts mehr, ich höre nichts mehr – nur Marmor, Marmor, Marmor kaufen. [...] Wie liebt man dieses Blankensee! Oh, wie liebt man jeden Platz darin und will ihn schöner und schöner gestalten. Ein Dichterwerk soll’s werden, ein Hymnus auf die Schönheit” (*Briefe an seine Frau* 278). Used since ancient times as the material to produce the ultimate classical specimens of beauty, marble has a consistency that is both aesthetically pleasing to the touch and eye, but also that is also enduring. Goethe remarks of this in his fifth *Römische Elegien*: “Dann versteh’ ich den Marmor erst recht: ich denk’ und vergleiche,/Sehe mit fühlendem Aug’, fühle mit sehender Hand.”

This was the later Goethe who was reflecting in Weimar about his experiences several years before during his Italian journey. With seemingly unlimited capital at his disposal, Hermann Sudermann, the Faustian<sup>37</sup> bourgeois man that he was, preferred to make classical Italy a part of his home.

The park at Blankensee was not only a collection of antiquity, but also a work of art in itself that reflected its creator. In some respects, Sudermann's project at Blankensee is comparable to the garden setting for Adalbert Stifter's *Nachsommer* (1857). The owner of the garden, Freiherr von Risach was like Sudermann born into a poor family, but he was able to socially climb, eventually becoming a nobleman, before turning away from politics and society to live a peaceful existence of activity and harmony on his estate. The *Rosenhaus* garden that he has designed for aesthetic effect, and cultivates for the blossoming of spirit is at the center of the novel. Carl Schorske identifies three features of the *Rosenhaus* that can be further applied to the park at Blankensee: "the transposition of the *petit bourgeois* parsimoniousness into aesthetic fastidiousness; the substitution of art for religion as the source of the highest meaning in life; and the tendency of social mobility and cultural acquirement to destroy the democratic ideal of a single, universal, ethical culture" (291). In the days of his youth, Hermann Sudermann read the few copies of the *Gartenlaube* magazine that his family had in possession in their humble *petit bourgeois* East-Prussian home, gaining his first contact with the bourgeois German ideal of *Bildung*. As a famed author, Sudermann created his own garden that could in

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<sup>37</sup> Here the term "Faustian" in Oswald Spengler's use of the term is meant.

its own right disseminate this ideal with its museum of antique sculptures, rose bushes, and other structures. One journalist describes the beauty in an article,

Ein großer alter Park, der von Kanälen durchzogen ist, die in zwei Seen einmünden, umhegt das Schloß. Man fährt unter weißen blumengeschmückten Brücken durch diesen schöngehaltenen Park, der des Abends seenhafte Stimmungen hat, viele Marmorstatuen beleben ihn. In der hohen Allee mit Taxuswänden leuchten die ernsten Profile römischer Feldherrn auf ihren Sockeln, zwei rosenrote Marmorsäulen halten ein prachtvolles hohes Würzburger handgetriebenes Tor. Hier in der Stille arbeitet Sudermann, in seinem Arbeitszimmer ist er ungestört, nur die grünen Bäume schauen zu den Fenstern herein. (Dill)

In this description one can see how Blankensee as a space where aesthetic beauty was elevated to the height of religion for Sudermann—quite literally when he built his “Rundtempel” out of marble in the park. Amidst all of this beauty he drew much inspiration for his own works of art. Some of these works of art were given their own shrines throughout the park, such as a decorative bridge that spanned two sides of a small stream, which was given the name “Johannisbrücke” after his play “Johannisfeuer” (1900), or the rowboat that he took out onto the lake, which was called the “Blumenboot” after his eponymous 1906 play.

The solipsistic nature of Hermann Sudermann’s Blankensee existence can be further identified in his turn away from social realism at the *Jahrhundertwende* toward neo-romanticism. Beginning with “Das Ewig-Männliche” in 1896, and later with his first theater flop “Die drei Reiherfedern” in 1899, Sudermann tried to break from his reliance on the social question to solidify his literary status. Critics accused that the author was merely following trends that were already taking place rather

than being a trailblazing literary force in this respect. This argument might hold some water, but Sudermann's new forays into fairytales, verse dramas, biblical subject matter, as well as historical drama, is also a reflection of his personal turn inward at this time and his waning sense of engagement since his activities with the Goethe-Bund in opposition to the *Lex Heinze* in 1900. In the period between this time and World War I there is only one exception to this turn away from social consciousness: his play "Stein unter Steinen" in 1905, which is about the difficulties ex-convicts face in re-socialization.

#### **b. "Thea"**

One short story that does well to exemplify this solipsistic turn inward is his novella "Thea. Phantasien über einen Teetopf" that belongs to a collection of shorts that were published under the title *Die indische Lilie* in 1909. American literary critic H.L. Mencken who often criticized Sudermann for not having a coherent philosophical *Weltanschauung* in his works, was so impressed by this collection that he proclaimed: "'The Indian Lilly' contains some of the best short stories in German—or any other language for that matter—can offer" (107). All at once "Thea" mixes together fairytale, autobiography, and the lonely, solipsistic process of writing. The story follows a struggling author from childhood to the point of death and back, who has several times in his life surreal experiences with a fairy named Thea. The story begins in a living room as the author, then a child, is reading the tale of Baron von Münchhausen, conjuring up his first experience of the fairy, taking him into a fairytale world. The story then follows the author into adolescence and

adulthood, telling of the moments in which the fairy appears. At each of these moments he attempts to seize Thea, to make her into his own, but these moments are only momentary lapses in which he enters another world and eventually returns to reality. The author narrates, "Aber von den wenigen Malen, da sie leibhaftig vor mir stand – immer wechselnd an Gestalt und dennoch stets dieselbe – mein Schicksal, meine Zukunft, wie sie werden sollte und nicht ward" (253). During his university years he is resolved to become a writer and already has written some poems and a play. At one point during these formative years the fairy compliments his beard. This is an autobiographical reference to Sudermann, who for years donned a full beard, which became known as the "Sudermannbart" in Germany. He often saw this as a trademark of his individuality but also as a symbol of his youth and success. Among a carnival atmosphere in an establishment, the narrator is drawn by the fairy into a Roman fresco on the wall. In surreal atmosphere, he wanders through the landscape into a desert with Thea towards "die Freiheit, in die Heimat," and he wanders and wanders (279). This scene is pregnant with literary symbolism that had come from France to Germany around the turn of the century. The narrator's access to this other world is like the two Kantian realms of noumena and phenomena. In the other world, the narrator wanders the desert, hopelessly, and aimlessly. This is symbolic for the years in which he struggles to make it as an author, a story that was all too familiar to the author Hermann Sudermann. The narrator then experiences death, which is for him the ultimate turn inwards away from the order of this world. He tells, "Im Grab gibt es keinen Stand und keine Standesvorurteile, im Grabe sind alle gleich, hoch und niedrig, arm und reich" (293).



As he lies in his coffin he can hear the voices of those at his funeral. He listens as his friends speak disparagingly about him, and his critics admit: "Heute, da er aus dem Wege geräumt ist, dürfen wir uns ja gestehen, daß wir ihn eigentlich immer ganz gerne gehabt haben. Er nahm es Ernst mit der Arbeit wie mit dem Leben, nie hat er sich anderer als anständiger Waffen gegen uns bedient — und hätte uns die Taktik des Kampfe nicht gezwungen, seine Vorzüge als seine Fehler hinzustellen, wir hätten sogar manches von ihm lernen können" (299). In this passage Hermann Sudermann's self-perception is revealed: an author who had been all but laid to rest by the critics. This is also an early version of the final scene *Der tolle Professor* as Sieburth's enemies at the university convene at his home to look over his papers, coming to the conclusion that they had misunderstood him and treated him unjustly. The deceased narrator decides for himself, "Ich will leben!"; with these words he is brought back from the beyond to this world. He then sets out in pursuit of his fairy, to make her finally his own. He visits many lands, and seeks the advice of countless wisemen who offer him different advice, such as a philosopher who tells him, "Achte auf die Sprache deines Innern" (308). At the end the fairy appears to him one last time, and once again he fails to capture her. He concludes at the end: "Wer festen Boden unter den Füßen hat, der braucht keine Feen!" (320). The fairy in the story is the happiness that one believes will be seized. With age and experience, it slowly becomes apparent that this idealistic notion of happiness is only an apparition. The message of the story is the reality principle: to be happy is to come to terms with what you have. This bitter-sweetness captures Sudermann's aesthetic isolation at Blankensee in the first decade of the twentieth century.

## 2. The Great *Reveille*: 1914–1918

In Adalbert Stifter's *Nachsommer* it is a weather storm that leads the main character Heinrich Drendorf to seek shelter in the Freiherr von Risach's idyllic garden of *Bildung*. In 1914 the storm of steel that closed over Europe with the onset of World War I drew Hermann Sudermann and other members of the liberal German bourgeoisie from their aesthetic drowsiness back into the phenomenal world. For many, it appeared as if a new heroic age was about to dawn over the dark age of decadence and stagnation that Nietzsche had been writing about since the 1870s. Bourgeois liberalism had been gradually losing its appeal in the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries at the hand of Wilhelminism. As with Sudermann, the spirit of liberalism no longer had the appeal to excite and motivate like it once did. It had become dull. World War I offered to the disaffected an idea, something to believe in that was greater than the individual. Terms such as *Erlösung* and *Stahlbad* entered everyday usage to describe the world war, and the anticipated benefits. Delusions such as these were what tempted many back into the world of politics in not only Germany but in other belligerent nations as well. The idea of a world war did not take the world by storm, but rather the idea of one had been lingering in the air for quite some time.

### **a. Sudermann and the Great War**

Two days before Germany's declaration of war, Sudermann notes in his diaries on July 30, 1914: "Ahnung kommender großer Zeit dämmert auf, untermischt mit letzter sinkenden Friedenshoffnungen" (Tagebuch IV). This

reserved reaction to the impending crisis that had spread across Europe is a fitting prelude to his note regarding the outbreak of the war on August 1: Nun kommt große Zeit. Wenn ich den Bericht dieses Monates schließe, wird das Schicksal Deutschlands sich schon zum guten oder schlechten gewandt haben. Weltwende wird es auf jeden Fall. Jetzt muß auch ich meinem Mann stehen" (Tagebuch IV). Even though this statement contains the typical naivete about the duration of the conflict, Sudermann lived up to his word and he stood with Kaiser and *Vaterland* throughout the war. The interest, engagement, and vigor with which he followed the events of the war, and contributed to the war effort through various patriotic activities is remarkable for a man who had been for years under the spell of narcissistic fixation, caring about little other than his work and image. The physician and pacifist Oskar Vogt, who had treated Sudermann's hysteria and nerve problems for years, was caught off guard by this transformation in his patient. Sudermann notes on August 4, 1914: "Staunend sieht er [Vogt] mich und meinen Enthusiasmus und fand kein Wort der Erwiderung" (Tagebuch IV). It appears that this newly found patriotism even surprised the author himself, who notes on October 10, 1914: "Vor meinem Schreibtischfenster weht die schwarz-weiß-rote Fahne. Dieser Lappen welch heiligen Sinn bringt er! Noch nie hab' ich eine deutsche Fahne besessen, habe stets verschmäht zu flaggen, und nun streck ich die gefalteten Hände zu diesem Lappen empor" (Tagebuch IV).

Not wanting to miss the opportunity to participate in the global events, Hermann Sudermann began directing his energies toward patriotic activities. Already on August 16, 1914, the liberal newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* published a

poem on the front page from him titled “Was wir waren?” that captures the *Zeitgeist* at the outset of the war. The poem presents the *Vaterland* as the great idea and the war as the great equalizer in which Germans of all classes and political affiliations will stand together side by side:

Was wir sind? Wir sind Geweihte!  
Jedem ward sein Ritterschlag!  
Wir sind Qual- und Todbereite,  
Wenn das Vaterland uns mag.

Wir sind nicht mehr Arm' und Reiche,  
Stand und Kaste ward zum Spott,  
Wir sind Kraft- und Wesensgleiche,  
Und wir glauben auch an Gott.

This intoxicating presentation of the conflict reminds of the fervor that Sieburth witnesses at a political rally for liberals in *Der tolle Professor*. Surprised to see this behavior among the liberal bourgeoisie, Sieburth asks the *haute bourgeois* Follenius about the excitement for this kind of sensational politics. Follenius answers that it “hob sie über die Flaueheit des Alltags, über die Enge ihrer Bürgerlichkeit zu einem Rausche der Entrüstung empor, der sie nichts kostete und ihnen die Würde von Vaterlandsrettern verlieh” (161). The primal feelings that are awakened by such barbarism also finds justification in Sieburth’s philosophy, as evidenced when he tells Fritz Kühne, “Was man fühlt, braucht man nicht zu begründen” (112).

## **b. "Heilige Zeit"**

After the war Sudermann wrote a three-part cycle of plays titled "Das deutsche Schicksal. Eine Vaterländische Dramenreihe" (1921), in which he attempts to capture the feeling of the German nation at the outbreak of the war, during the war, and shortly after the war. The first part is aptly titled "Heilige Zeit. Szenische Bilder," and it does well to depict the euphoric, false heroic, martyr-like spirit that overcomes the German nation as it mobilizes for battle, even if it is conspicuously uncritical. At the heart of the drama is the idea of the German nation coming together at this critical moment in 1914, regardless of class, race or gender. These differences are articulated in a group of boys at a boarding school and their families. As in many works of Sudermann, the youth are depicted as the hope for the future, and in this drama their fearlessness in rising to the occasion provides the others inspiration. The idea that the war was a foregone conclusion before it even began plays heavily in this drama. One figure remarks, "Den Krieg will keine bei uns, das ist selbstverständlich, aber was nutzt das? Er kommt, und er kommt sogar als 'ne Art von Erlöser, den die Spannung macht uns schon lange die Nerven kaput" (51). Another speaks of the benefits of testing the nation's merit on the battlefield: "Den Krieg will keiner bei uns, das ist klar, und doch sag' ich: "Er muß sein" aber nur, weil er das Stahlbad ist, durch das gehärtet wir unsern Aufschwung unsere Üppigkeit werden ertragen können, sonst verfaulen wir noch bei lebendigem Leibe, wie Rom es mal tat" (51). In the closing scene, a man with a telescope on Potsdamerplatz in Berlin sells to the crowd a peek at "der neue Kriegskomet: Deutschlands Sieg in den Sternen geschrieben" (118).

In the drama all of the figures are convinced that Germany's fate is to come from the war victorious. The steady rise of the German nation as a world power since 1871 seemed to suggest an unstoppable teleological progression to glory. This belief in the German nation is depicted in "Heilige Zeit" as transcending all social boundaries, and it is the idea that would unify the hearts and minds of the German *Volk*. One figure explains the problem of social divisions in Germany: "Der Arbeiter haßt den Bourgeois – und der Bourgeois schimpft den Adligen Junker . . . Und dem Christen ist der Jude ein Abscheu . . . Und die Frommen möchten den Freidenker ausrotten . . . Und der Soldat sieht im Offizier bloß den Quälgeist [...] Wo sind die Führer? [...] Wo soll da mit einmal der Rausch herkommen, der Rausch, der uns allmächtig macht, der alte Rausch, der einst die Kreuzfahrer nach Jerusalem trieb, der anno 13 ganz Preußen in eine Feuersäule verwandelte" (53). Belonging to the German nation subordinates all other religious belief. A Jewish boy with pacifistic inclinations rises to the occasion and volunteers for service: "Ich werde meine Pflicht tun als Deutscher und als Jude." *Vaterland* is the idea against which ideology is crushed: "Wo sind die Wider-den-Stachel-Löckenden, die Demokraten, die Atheisten, die Funktionäre des Eigengefühls? Wo die großen Gott-sei-bei-unse? Die Marxe, die Stirners, die Nietzsches—existieren sie noch?" (66). Even love between the sexes pales in comparison to love of one's country: "Wir deutschen Mädchen können jetzt keine Ehe brauchen. Unsere Liebe heißt Deutschland" (80). The main character Sebald Hamann, who selflessly volunteers for service despite a serious health condition, serves as a martyr figure, giving inspiration to the others. The example of his sacrifice inspires his communist father to abandon his commitment

to international solidarity of the working class in favor of the German nation.

Following his son's death, he kneels down in a church and proclaims before the others:

“Ein gasförmiges Wirbeltier gibt es nicht . . . Darum verzeih mir, daß ich hier liege und winsle . . . Aber wenn es ein –ein – ein – Abso – Absolutes gibt – im Weltenbau – und das muß es geben – dann bist du –das Vaterland bist du” (116). A Road to Damascus moment for the sinner who has seen the light and bows to the nation. In chapter three, I presented Sudermann's liberal anti-nationalism, but as one can see, he too was converted to nationalism.

### **c. Sudermann and the War Effort**

Once the cosmopolitan who was celebrated internationally, Hermann Sudermann used his influence to justify to the world his support of Germany in the war. Together with ninety-two other artists, scholars, scientists, politicians, and Nobel Prize recipients, Hermann Sudermann signed his name to the infamous “Aufruf an die Kulturwelt” also known as the “Manifesto of the 93” that circulated through the international press in early October 1914. In this declaration, the ninety-three leading minds of the German intelligentsia expressed their support of Germany as a non-aggressor state in the conflict and denied the reports about German war crimes during the so-called “Rape of Belgium” campaign. The opening statement reads:

Wir als Vertreter deutscher Wissenschaft und Kunst erheben vor der gesamten Kulturwelt Protest gegen die Lügen und Verleumdungen, mit denen unsere Feinde Deutschlands reine Sache in dem ihm aufgezwungenen schweren Daseinskampfe zu beschmutzen trachten. Der ehernen Mund der

Ereignisse hat die Ausstreuung erdichteter deutscher Niederlagen widerlegt. Um so eifriger arbeitet man jetzt mit Entstellungen und Verdächtigungen. Gegen sie erheben wir laut unsere Stimme. Sie soll die Verkünder in der Wahrheit sein ("Aufruf" 3).

This call from Sudermann and such other notable names as Gerhart Hauptmann, Max Liebermann, Wilhelm Röntgen, Max Reinhardt, Max Planck was an appeal to the intellectuals in other countries that were still neutral to lobby their governments to stay neutral. After the war, there were many signatories who later regretted adding their name to this document. Some claimed that they had not read it closely, while others claimed they did not even have the chance to read it. On August 13, 1919 the *New York Evening Post* ran a story about this document that identified Hermann Sudermann still as its most adamant defender. Charles Victor, author of the article, was given the chance to interview Sudermann about the matter. He writes, "Of all those whom I have seen, only one defended the document, and the fact that he is generally supposed to be the author of the text may be regarded as an extenuating circumstance" ("German Professors"). That Sudermann was the author of the text has proven to be false, and it is now widely thought that his close friend Ludwig Fulda penned the document. In some respects, his defense of the "Aufruf" does not seem as outlandish today as it did in 1919 when defeated Germany was assigned full responsibility for the war. Justifying the text, Sudermann tells in the interview: "This document is a defence against the defamations of the enemy propaganda" and he admits, "I will not say that we were absolutely guiltless in the actual kindling of the flame." The intensity of his nationalism, however, does show its face when he defends German militarism. He tells the reporter:



What we meant was that Germany's position throughout the centuries was such that it had constantly to defend itself against enemies. German unity was achieved only under the most terrible difficulties, and German culture was preserved only by the armed force of the people who fought against extinction. Thus German "militarism" was created; without it our culture could not have developed. But the people who fought in our armies in this war were the same people who inherited this culture and who are its keepers; among them are artists and poets and musicians; if they are killed German art and science is killed. As the manifesto reads, "The army and the people are one." I cannot see what there is offensive in that. I still cannot believe that this army became an army of barbarians. But be assured that wherever it is proven that crimes have been committed our intellectuals will be the first to condemn them.

Unlike his colleagues who had reversed their support of the "Aufruf," Sudermann, for better or for worse, stood by his position, and was willing to leave his name forever attached to it.

Whether his colleagues changed their minds for opportunistic reasons or out of conviction is uncertain, but Sudermann may have been in a different position since he had gone on record at other points and voiced his opinions about the war. His support was a *fait accompli* and he was changed. In 1915 an interview with him about the war was published in the magazine *Aktion* in which he articulates this transformation. He explains how the war has affected him as an author:

Sie würden nicht glauben, wie gealtert wir alle sind: in wenig Monaten hat sich alles um uns völlig verändert. An den Philosophen, den wir mehr als alle anderen in Deutschland liebten, Friedrich Nietzsche, wollen wir heute nicht einmal mehr erinnert werden. Wir waren schon zu raffiniert, zu kompliziert. Heute haben wir eine neue Lebensnorm erworben. Was gestern existierte,

existiert heute nicht mehr. Der Krieg hat Deutschland eine neue Seele gegeben. Diese Umwandlung mit Worten zu erklären, ist sehr schwer; man muß die deutsche Seele kennen, um dieses Wunder wahrzunehmen. Was wir bisher getan, gehört fortan der Vergangenheit an. (286)

He is right in discerning that the world of antebellum Germany would be forever vanquished through the war. The changes brought by the events, however, were not favorable for his work, and World War I is commonly seen as the point at which he lost relevance because he remained stuck in a world that was no more. Certainly, he was not alone in this.

Besides disseminating his jingoistic attitudes about the war through the press, Hermann Sudermann also took it upon himself to contribute in less aggressive ways. During the war his liberal spirit of organization and amelioration was revived when he put together speaker events called "Frohe Abende." This series consisted of authors or other notable figures who read from their works to a war-weary German audience. The purpose was to keep morale from crumbling and for a distraction from the burden that the war became. Such events were most welcome for the many refugees that poured in from Germany's eastern regions. For his wartime activities Sudermann received the *Eisernes Kreuz* in early 1918; an anticlimatic feat considering that by this time Germany's prospects for a favorable outcome appeared very bleak.

#### **d. Germany's Fate in the War**

As Germany's plight continued to worsen, the belief in Germany's glorious fate quickly evaporated among those who had been momentarily awoken by the

delusions of grandeur. For old bourgeois liberals such as Hermann Sudermann, a return to pessimism was a natural result. With the truth about the war slowly penetrating the false sense of hope that the media served the public, Sudermann's mood began gradually to transform. Already on March 4, 1916, after a discussion with his friend Walther Rathenau, he notes: "Das Volk hungere, und die Friedensverhandlungen hätten noch niemals aufgehört [...] Wenn's so steht, woher soll der Sieg uns kommen?" (Tagebuch V). On August 31, 1916 he superlatively records: "Dunklere Tage hat Deutschland nie gesehen! Und woher soll Hilfe kommen? Denn unsere Kraft ist am Ende!", as well as on September 6: "Ueber die Kriegslage düsterste Stimmung! Ich lebe in ruhiger Hoffnungslosigkeit. Schieße mir ja doch eine Kugel vor den Kopf!" (Tagebuch V). By 1918, realism had replaced the optimism of 1914. He opines on August 30, 1918: "Deutschlands Schicksal hat sich zum Niedergang gelenkt. Niemand hofft mehr, jeder trägt stumpf, was kommen und kommen. Nur ein neues Vernichtungswunder kann uns retten" (Tagebuch VI). Even though the self-absorbed aesthete's pride was heavily invested in the war, Sudermann was just as deeply affected by the suffering that he witnessed all around him, and his pity moved him to donate generously to those who were more directly impacted by the war. On July 12, 1916, the sight of an impoverished and hungry young woman at a train station nearly caused him a nervous breakdown, and after news came that a family friend's brother had fallen, he notes on October 24, 1918: "Opfer über Opfer! Alles sinkt nur wir Alten abgebraucht und nutzlos bleiben übrig" (Tagebuch VI). By the end of the war, Sudermann's short-lived support of the Hohenzollerns was over, and by late 1918 he was ready to place the blame on Kaiser

Wilhelm II. On November 6, 1918, he notes: "Heute wieder scheint mir das Bleiben des Kaisers unmöglich. Wer diese Katastrophe herbeigeführt hat, muß verschwinden," and two days later his wishes materialized: "Mittags bringt [...] die Nachricht, daß der Kaiser abgedankt habe. Ich rufe aus tiefsten Seele Gott sei Dank!" (Tagebuch VI).

### **e. "Opfer"**

In his three-part drama cycle *Das deutsche Schicksal*, Hermann Sudermann captures the gloomy *Zeitgeist* of the late war years in the play "Opfer" that takes place on a country estate in East Prussia in the year 1917. Defeat is all but certain in this play as soldiers continue to give their lives and civilians on the homefront make great sacrifices for the war effort. A fighter pilot in the play, likely modeled after Manfred von Richthofen, tells another figure with the utmost realism: "Das Trauern ist billig in deutschen Landen und die Taschentücher sind teuer" (20). Another figure who has lost all three of his sons in the war exclaims: "Draußen um de ganze Welt ein großer Schützengraben und drinne ein großes Gefängnis – Das is den das deutsche Vaterland!" (77). Gabriele the matriarch of the estate, whose husband and son are at the front, foregoes all personal pleasures and dutifully operates the estate fulfilling the agricultural quotas for the war effort. She tells, "Ich tu' nur ganz dumm meine Pflicht oder das, was ich dafür halte. Und was die Heimat belangt – die Heimat von heute" (39). The "Heimat" of the present contrasts with the high spirits of 1914 in "Heilige Zeit." As the good German people sacrifice everything for the *Vaterland*, politicians, who are clandestinely planning to squander the great contributions,

betray them. This is the notorious *Dolchstoßlegende* couched into this dramatic cycle about Germany's fate. One figure explains to the suffering heroes: "Selbst der Reichstag hat die Flinte ins Korn geworfen [...] Daß das drüben als Bankrotterklärung wirken muß, versteht sich wohl von selbst" (80). For the characters in "Opfer," the all too obvious result of an ill-timed peace will be more suffering after the war.

### **3. Fear and Loathing in the Weimar Republic: 1918-1928**

For Hermann Sudermann and many other members of the liberal German bourgeoisie the war had been a brief moment for them to shed their cultural pessimism. By the end of the war pessimism would once again be back in fashion. For men such as Sudermann, the changed landscape of Germany displaced him culturally, spiritually, and socially. His nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois sensibilities were no longer compatible with the major social changes that were underway in the 1920s. Although he was a republican, he, like millions of others, felt alienated by the political polarization in the new political system. What is more, his work no longer touched the nerve of middle-class Germany. It became increasingly difficult for him to find theaters that were willing to produce his plays. As Bertolt Brecht irreverently put it after Sudermann's death in 1928: "Die Werke Hermann Sudermanns, so schätzenswert wie sie vermutlich sind, liegen außerhalb des Vorstellungskreises, in dem wir leben" (Kuhn 31). Although his works may not have contained the preferred styles and themes that had become popular with the advent

of the Weimar Republic, his worldview still reflected the worldview of the ageing generation of nineteenth-century liberal bourgeoisie.

One idea that had always factored largely into Hermann Sudermann's *Weltanschauung* is the concept of "Schicksal" (fate). This idea of destiny was popular around the turn of the century when fatalism was *en vogue*. In all of Sudermann's works, the figures are usually faced with their *Schicksal* and the outcome of the narrative is their coming to terms with an uncontrollable inevitability. In "Heimat," for example, Magda rises to her fate of having been abandoned with child by the father and her own father by becoming an artist. In *Katzensteg*, Boloslav von Schranden bears the burdensome fate of his father's misdeeds, and he is made to pay for them. In the one-act plays of *Morituri* each figure faces imminent death. In no work, however, does *Schicksal* take on greater meaning than in *Der tolle Professor*. In the end, Sieburth finds out that fate trumps all merit when he is awarded Kant's professorship not by his own cunning or scholarly eminence, but rather by unforeseen circumstances. Still, Sieburth was deserving of this promotion because it was his *Schicksal*, and after it was fulfilled he saw no further purpose to exist. Sudermann used this idea in his dramatic cycle about World War I "Das deutsche Schicksal" in which the fate of Germany is shown in three different plays. For him, *Schicksal* was a metanarrative that explained all that happened in the world as well as in his works.

### **a. Oswald Spengler and the Fixation with Fate**

This belief is consonant with another thinker who was highly influential in the postwar period: Oswald Spengler. Similar to the discourse of degeneration that had become popular at the turn of the century, Spengler believed that civilizations could run their course like any other organism. Using the ideas of Nietzsche and Goethe, he concocted a pseudo-historiography that demarcated civilizations by different cultural features, and introduced the idea of *Schicksal* as an indispensable category such as time and space. *Schicksal*, he explains, is an inexplicable, mystical element that is present *a priori* in a culture and it will be a determining factor in its lifespan—“Schicksal ist ein Wort dessen Inhalt man fühlt” (“Pessimismus?” 6). Thus, *Schicksal* is presented as an antithesis to the notion of causality. This idea was first presented in his 1918 two-volume monumental work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. In the 1922 revised edition he writes that this work, “Enthält nur *eine Seite* von dem, was ich vor mir sehe, einen neuen Blick *allein auf die Geschichte, eine Philosophie des Schicksals*, und zwar die erste ihrer Art” (foreword). Although Spengler’s work is considered a signal of another pessimistic turn in German thought after World War I, he took issue with that particular “-ism.” Already in 1921 he responded to the debate that his work incited across Germany with a short essay titled “Pessimismus?” He declares, “Nein, ich bin kein Pessimist. Pessimismus heißt: keine Aufgaben mehr sehen” (15). For him, cultures are programmed to complete their *Schicksal*; here he employs the Goethean organic concept of *Vollendung*, or becoming complete. Using the Nietzschean idea that cultures can become sick, Spengler identifies that this process can be hindered for various reasons. This, he

argues, is the juncture at which the Western world stands. He admits, “Aber allerdings, was das “Ziel der Menschheit” angeht, so bin ich ein gründlicher und entschiedener Pessimist. Menschheit ist für mich eine zoologische Größe. Ich sehe keinen Fortschritt, kein Ziel, keinen Weg der Menschheit, außer in den Köpfen abendländischer Fortschrittsphilister” (“Pessimismus?” 14).

Whether or not it has something to do with his bourgeois *Bildung* or his personal trajectory, Hermann Sudermann’s worldview relied heavily upon the idea of *Schicksal* and it also served as his explanation for Germany’s condition after the war. On September 9, 1918, he notes in his diary: “In einem Jahr taxier’ ich wird Deutschlands Schicksal sich erfüllt haben” (Tagebuch VI). Here he articulates a Spenglerian view on the trajectory of the German nation. But the individual is inextricably linked to the fate of the nation. On May 7, 1920 after a meeting with Reichspräsident Friedrich Ebert and functionaries about the state of culture in the Weimar Republic, Sudermann disparagingly notes: “Die armen Kerls Alle, die deutsches Schicksal spielen wollen und von deutschem Schicksal in den Abgrund gerissen werden!” (Tagebuch VI). Although his fixation on the concept of *Schicksal* to explain phenomena predates the work of Oswald Spengler, Sudermann felt fascinated, if not vindicated, by his ideas, and he avidly read his works. On May 1, 1920 after reading *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, he writes: “Die Höhe des Standpunkts erstaunlich. So aus zeitlosen Höhe hat noch Keiner geurteilt” (Tagebuch VI). The melancholic prognostications that Spengler puts forth either struck a chord with Sudermann’s own depressive state or put him in a disconsolate mood. On August 21, 1920, he read aloud from Spengler for his family. He records,



“Aus Spenglers “Sozialismus u. Preußentum” vorgelesen. - - himmlische Stille [...] Ach bin ich seelenkrank” (Tagebuch VII). On January 16, 1923, Sudermann makes a note in his diary about the occupation of the Ruhrgebiet that shows Spengler’s terminology and methodology had influenced his worldview: “Das Schicksal des Ruhrgebiets u. Zugleich Deutschlands Schicksal vollendet sich. Va-banque Spiel. Das hätten wir vor 3 Jahren wagen müssen” (Tagebuch VII). For him, German history was at its end.

### **b. Thomas Mann and German Exceptionalism**

Another work that is often considered an example of a new cultural pessimism after World War I is Thomas Mann’s *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* that he wrote during the war years and published after the armistice. Although Mann distanced himself from the work seemingly early, he captures and gives expression to new attitudes among the German bourgeoisie concerning politics and culture that were formulated during the war and tempered after Germany’s defeat. Using a *Sonderweg* narrative, Mann, through the use of intellectual history, demarcates German culture from other European national cultures by essentializing their characteristics. At the very heart of his argument was the difference between the *Zivilisationsliterat* and the unpolitical aesthete, bourgeois and the *Bürger*, or more plainly put: the Frenchman and the German. A personal feud with his brother Heinrich, who sided with international pacifism during the war while Thomas Mann supported the German cause, lingers heavily in his argumentation. Still, this work is worthwhile to examine in connection with Hermann Sudermann because it applies

to the sentiments of a vast swath of the German bourgeoisie at the time (even though Mann would have taken issue with the word “bourgeoisie”). This belief is that the German is unpolitical at the heart, meaning that he is more inward focused and concerned with *Geist* (spirit or mind) than the politics of the day. He describes his own intellectual-cultural structure: “Romantik, Nationalismus, Bürgerlichkeit, Musik, Pessimismus, Humor, – diese Atmosphären des abgelaufenen Zeitalters bilden in der Hauptsache die unpersönlichen Bestandteile auch meines Seins” (43). These nineteenth-century values, he argues, are what forms the difference between the international bourgeoisie and the German *Bürgertum*. He uses the apolitical philosophy and lifestyle of Schopenhauer to exemplify the unpolitical nature of the *Bürgertum* in comparison to the democratic strivings of the bourgeoisie. He argues, “Ich bekenne mich tief überzeugt, daß das deutsche Volk die politische Demokratie niemals wird lieben können, aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil es die Politik selbst nicht lieben kann, und daß der vielverschiedene ‘Obrigkeitsstaat’ die dem deutschen Volke angemessene, zukünftliche und von ihm im Grunde gewollte Staatsform ist und bleibt” (51). He goes on to disavow liberalism as an element anathema to the German national character: “Bin ich liberal, so bin ich es im Sinne der Liberalität und nicht des Liberalismus. Denn ich bin unpolitisch, national, aber unpolitisch gesinnt, wie der Deutsche der bürgerlichen Kultur und wie der der Romantik, die keine andere politische Forderung kannte, als die hoch-nationale nach Kaiser und Reich” (133–134). This kind of national thinking also finds expression in Oswald Spengler’s 1919 *Preußentum und Sozialismus* in which he demarcates the German culture from other European cultures in its socialistic qualities such as industriousness,

collectivity, discipline, and creativity. Liberalism, democracy, politics all endanger the German spirit of *Bürgertum*. He writes, "Wenn Liberalismus nichts Gutes ist, unter der Hand zu einem anderen Namen für Charakterlosigkeit wurde, so beweist das nichts anderes, als daß die Politik eben alles verdirbt" (154).

There is no doubt that Thomas Mann, Hermann Sudermann, as well as many other middle-class German aesthetes held the same beliefs about Germany's situation in World War I: German culture was being threatened by the world. In the case of Sudermann, the end of the war and the chaotic atmosphere in the fall of 1918 were a sure sign that Germany and its *Volk* were looking into the abyss. From his diaries, it is clear that Sudermann had read some of Thomas Mann's essays from this period, albeit with various reactions. On April 4, 1920 he writes: "Im "Tagebuch" packt mich immer auf's Neue der Thomas Mannsch[e] Aufsatz. Hieran muß sich für mich ein neuer Aufstieg anschließen lassen" (Tagebuch VII). Nevertheless, he was not entirely impressed with all of Mann's ideas at this time, and two years later an entry from August 20, 1922 shows just that: "Abends den Artikel Thomas Manns in der Voss über Nationalismus u. Internationalismus vorgelesen. Verlegenes Gelegenheitsgeschreibsel ohne Gedanken und Material, aber gespreizt und eitel. Einer beweihräuchert der Andere, und ich sitz' im Winkel verachtet und totgeschwiegen. – Schaffe und lache. So komm' ich weiter" (Tagebuch VII). Here he seems to question the substance of Thomas Mann's ideas, but envy, as was always the case when it came to other writers, certainly played a role in this appraisal.

### c. Turbulent Times

The revolution and the fear of a Bolshevik takeover caused him much distress. Still, the apparent disorder and inaction by the government frustrated him to such a point that he noted on December 28, 1918, the day of the *Reichsrätekongress*: “Heute entscheidet sich Deutschlands nächste Zukunft. Ob die Mehrheit, ob die unabhängigen Sozialisten Sieger bleiben, gleichviel. Schlimmer kann es nicht werden. Selbst ein Ministerium mit Liebknecht bedeutet diesem Jammer gegenüber einen Fortschritt” (Tagebuch VI).<sup>38</sup> Sudermann’s fear that Germany would be overrun by foreign influence, and German culture disintegrated is apparent. At the end of the year 1918, he summarizes his fears about Germany’s future, which ultimately is regarded as his own. He opines in his diary:

So geht das Jahr zu Ende, das nach göttlichem Ratschluß die Aufgabe hatte, uns Sieg und Frieden zu bringen. Was ist Vaterland? Wie haben der Vaterlandsidee, der Staatsidee Alles dargebracht, was wir hatten, zum Dank dafür macht sie uns wehrlos, ehrlos, vaterlandslos. Denn von nun an wird der Deutsche der Kuli der Welt. Und so wundervoll wird er sich seinen Knechtstum anpassen, daß er der treueste, fleißigste, zuverlässigste Slave aller derer werden wird, die ihm Brot u. Unterschlupf geben. Denn vorgegeben er auch sein, was er auch tun wird, er wird darauf Arbeit um ihrer selber tun. Und so wird er doch noch einmal wieder zu Ehren kommen. Das ist der weg, der das Jahr 1919 als Ausgang hat, der Leidensweg, der vielleicht nie ein Ziel und Ende sehen wird. Denn wenn sich Millionen, ihr Deutschtum verleugnend, mit den Völkern vermischen, denen sie dienen,

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<sup>38</sup> By January 16, 1919 he had undergone a change of opinion concerning the matter. Having received news of the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Wilhelm Liebknecht, he notes in his diary: “Bei allem Schauder Gott sei Dank. Dann die Regierung hätte keine Kraft gehabt, mit diesen beiden Dämonen endgültig aufzuräumen” (Tagebuch VI).

werden immer neue Millionen hinterherströmen die der heimischer Boden nicht mehr ernähren kann. (Tagebuch VI)

There were many reasons for Germans to be afraid at the end of World War I. Many were hungry, invalids filled the streets, the threat of foreign occupation loomed, soldiers had gone missing. Society was in disarray from top to bottom. With the loss of the war, and the perceived *Schicksal* of Germany, as well as his own appearing to be reaching the end, there was much about which Hermann Sudermann had to despair. If the highest values of German *Bürgerlichkeit* rest upon the principles of quiet and order, none too much of this was to be had in the early years of the Weimar Republic. As political chaos ensued in Germany, Sudermann records in his diary on February 27, 1919: “Die Spartakus-Gefahr wird böser von Tag zu Tag. Die “Unabhängigen” gehen in Schaaren zu ihnen über. Mit Bayern nun auch ganz Thüringen unter ihrem Fuchtel. Hier hilft nur eines: Fatalist sein und arbeiten” (Tagebuch VI). Here is the seemingly contradictory pessimism in the bourgeois worldview and the emphasis of industriousness together in one passage. As the situation worsened in Germany, Sudermann recorded the hunger, partisanship, and criminality that he saw daily in Berlin. On March 3, 1919, he received word of the grim spectacle of street battles that were happening. Together with his wife Cläre, daughter Hede, and officer son-in-law Hans Frentzen, the family despaired. He records an anecdote from this dark evening: “Die neue, die große Revolution kann jetzt ihren Anfang nehmen. Hans umfaßt Hede und sagt mit leuchtenden Auge: ‘Nun dies Jahr wenigstens haben wir noch gehabt.’ und gleich darauf : ‘man sollte eigentlich Gift immer bei sich tragen.’ Mich fragt er, ob mein Revolver in Ordnung

sei. Ich erwidere: 'Leider hab' ich nur 3 Schuß drin.' Und Cläre sagt: 'Mehr als zwei brauchst du ja nicht – einen für mich, einen für dich.' – Ohne Phrase, ohne Angst. So ist's recht. Das ist Stimmung der Zeit würdig" (Tagebuch VI).

One can argue that a wealthy bourgeois aesthete such as Sudermann had much less to worry about than those of the fourth estate, and this is clear. But the dramatic social and cultural shift that was underway following the war threatened all that had been familiar to the author and this caused him much anxiety. Not surprisingly, Sudermann's luxurious lifestyle suffered during the economic crises of the Weimar Republic. Inflation, bad investment, and new tax codes all burdened the once seemingly limitless finances of the Sudermann family. The early crisis years were the hardest, it came to pass that the most prized familial possession was in peril: Blankensee. As Hermann Sudermann's popularity was dwindling before his eyes after the war, Blankensee still stood as a palpable testament to the success he once had. It also provided a refuge from the political inferno Berlin. On June 19, 1923, after he and his wife were able to leave the city for Blankensee, he notes: "Selig Beide, dem Hexenkessel Berlin entronnen zu sein. Daher mich von Glück. Dankbar, daß dieses Paradies und meine Cläre habe" (Tagebuch VIII). As his financial situation grew increasingly dire, the prospects for keeping his "Glück im Winkel" lessened. On July 11, 1925, he mourns: "Mein Blankensee ist versunken. Wahrscheinlich für immer!" (Tagebuch VIII). Fortunately for him he never had to witness this loss, and the manor estate still belongs to the Sudermann-Foundation today. But if he was spared the treasure of Blankensee, this was not the case with his East-Prussian *Heimat*. His birthplace in the Memelland had become an occupational

zone of the League of Nations following the Klaipėda Revolt, and, in the spirit of Wilsonian self-determination, was made an autonomous region for the newly formed independent state of Lithuania in 1923. As one might expect, the loss of homeland left a permanent mark on the author, who was closely associated with the region since many of his works were set in East Prussia. The world in which he was born and raised, and then recreated in his works and sold to millions, was gone. Sudermann, for his part, used his influence as an author to ameliorate the poor conditions there, through monetary donation, literary verses dedicated to the *Heimat*, and reading events to draw awareness to the region. Because of his dedication to his homeland, he was honored with having his face printed on emergency currency bills that were in circulation during the political and financial turmoil. On March 5, 1923, following the Lithuanian annexation, Hermann Sudermann, in an event hosted by the Association of German Authors (Verband deutscher Erzähler) in the Reichstag, read to an audience of intellectuals, businesspeople, and politicians a number of poems and passages about his *Heimat*. The *Berliner Tageblatt* reported the following day on May 6, 1923: “Der Plenarsaal des Reichstags war bis auf dem letzten Platz besetzt, als, nach einleitender Worten Georg Engels, Hermann Sudermann sich an das Vortragspult stellte. Sudermann ist gewiß mehr als ein Vertreter engherziger Lokalpoesie, er ist ein Heimatkünstler im besten Sinne des Wortes, der vom Anfang (Frau Sorge) bis heute (Litauische Geschichten) die tiefsten Wirkungen seiner Kunst aus dem Heimatboden zog” (“Memelland und Ostpreußen” 2).

#### d. "Notruf"

The third part to Hermann Sudermann's 1921 "vaterländische Dramenreihe," *Das deutsche Schicksal*, attempts to capture the *Zeitgeist* in Germany immediately after the war. "Notruf," like the other two installments to this dramatic cycle, is a melodramatic narrative that is set against the historic atmosphere at the time. Although kitschy in nature, the play manages to include a number of themes that loomed large in the winter of 1918–1919 such as the Spartacist Revolution, the notion of *Heimkehr* (homecoming), the *Freikorps*, as well as the impact that the war had on family, love, and friendship. Taken as a whole, *Das deutsche Schicksal* is nowhere near to ranking among his more recognized literary successes, but the relevance of the plays at the time depicting the very rapid rise and fall of Germany in the war has some cultural merit. The play takes place as refugees are streaming in from the chaos in the East, while revolution is imminent in the inner Reich. Lieutenant-Colonel Hecklingen and Lieutenant Wölfert are charged by the majority socialist government to form a *Freikorps* to combat the Spartacist Revolution. Hecklingen explains to Wölfert, "Die letzte Rettung bleiben die Freiwilligenverbände. Das sieht auch die Regierung ein, mögen sie ihr im Grunde noch so unsympathisch sein [...] Was denkt ihr zu einem Freikorps Hecklingen?" (17). Hecklingen represents the military class that is ready to serve the government, while Heinz' reservations about the republic put him in the monarchist camp. Nevertheless, his desire to preserve the *Vaterland* for a future restoration of the monarchy cause him to join the government's cause. Both men have suffered greatly due to their separation from loved ones throughout the war, and with the new



political chaos, there is no end in sight to the suffering. Wölfert is embittered by his circumstances after the war, but Hecklingen encourages him that he is not alone: “Es teilen viele Ihr Schicksal” (26). While fighting for the nation, he says, they always had the “Heimat” to ease their minds, but upon their return they found disgrace: “Die einen finden fremde Küken im Nest – den anderen sind die Frauen verludert, syphilitisch womöglich – andere sehen sich feindseligen Widerstand gegenüber” (26). Wölfert’s fiancé, Melitta, was a nurse on the eastern front, and he had not seen her for the duration of the war, while Hecklingen was separated from his wife Agnes and his young adult son Udo. Over the course of the narrative, each of these officers finds that life before the war was an irretrievable past.

Every figure in “Notruf” represents a different *Weltanschauung* that was present in Germany that fateful year 1919. These varying opinions and perspectives show the divisions among Germans following the war, which greatly contrasts to the harmony of *Vaterlandsliebe* in the play “Heilige Zeit.” As Melitta returns to Wölfert in Berlin, it becomes apparent that their relationship cannot go on because they have grown apart. Melitta decides that the chaos in Germany is too much for her. She tells him, “Die Welt ist für uns Deutsche eng geworden” (61). Melitta has been offered a job as a hospital director in St. Petersburg and decides she cannot miss this opportunity. She represents the cosmopolitan opportunist who is ready to turn her back on her country when it needs her most. This is the sign of an international *Zivilisationsmensch* rather than a German *Kultur Mensch*. Wölfert, whose monarchist inclinations have instilled in him a duty to the *Vaterland*, cannot leave Germany at this critical time, nor does he wish this. In one scene he states his allegiances: “Ich

diene der Ordnung in dieser Republik. Ich diene ihr, damit, wenn einst die Hohenzollern wiederkommen—” (61). Feelings of bitterness produce in him a spirit of revanchism against those who have brought his nation shame. He tells another figure at the end of the play, “Aber die Schmach, die seit dem Herbste der Feind uns tagtäglich ins Gesicht speit, wie kann die einer länger ertragen? [...] Ob Hohenzollern oder nicht, ob Liebknechtianer oder nicht, das ist mir schließlich alles egal . . . Ich liefere mich jedem aus mit Haut und Haar, der Rache zu nehmen entschlossen ist. Mit welchen Mittel, zu welchem Ziel – ich scheu vor gar nichts zurück. Ein Bund der Rache müßte entstehen, wie er nicht da war” (100).

Hecklingen fears both for his sense of *Heimat* as in his country as well as that in the sense of his family. His time away from his wife Agnes has brought with it a spiritual distancing from each other. Although she has been faithful to her husband, she has grown emotionally attached to other men in Hecklingen’s absence. Agnes represents the burdens of the civilian population in Germany at the time. She is torn between the different ideologies, and wishes for nothing more than peace. Her distress even causes her to contemplate suicide. One frequent visitor to the home, Dr. Deichmann, who has become somewhat intimate with Agnes while her husband is away, has the worldview of the pacifist and defeatist. Referring to the harsh conditions in Germany after the war, he tells the others, “Deutschland muß eben büßen, was es verschuldet hat” (40). Deichmann resembles Thomas Mann’s concept of the *Zivilisationsliterat* in that he does not see the exceptionalism of German culture. He tells, “Ich habe das Deutschtum nie sehr hoch eingeschätzt [...] Die Engländer sind immer meine geistige Zuflucht gewesen” (42). This figure is almost certainly based

on Dr. Oskat Vogt who treated Sudermann for his nervous conditions. Vogt and his wife were steadfast pacifists, which irritated his patient to no end. Finally there is Hecklingen's son Udo, who has changed dramatically over the course of the war. This can be seen as an allegorical statement about the breaking down of the patriarchal order during the war. Udo has come to resent his father and what he stands for. Ascending to manhood in the four years that Hecklingen was fighting for the *Vaterland*, Udo developed pacifist sentiments, but now in 1919 these views have radicalized him into a Spartacist. The clash of Udo and his father is exacerbated into an Oedipal conflict, as Udo's feelings toward his stepmother turn to sexual desire. Hecklingen gives his son the ultimatum of joining him in the *Freikorps* or being banished from the home. He tells his father, "Zu den Schergen der Reaktion gehöre ich nicht" (38). His virulent anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois opinions are evident in such remarks as, "Man hätte nur nötig, die Aussauger, die Kapitalisten, die ganze Rasse der Bourgeois zu vertilgen, und mit einmal wäre Platz genug" (41). As the clash between the Spartacists and the *Freikorps* approaches, Udo decides to join the rebellion. He tells Agnes about his decision: "Dies Haus ist für mich Symbol der versunkenen Zeit – ist ein Petrefakt aus dem ewigen Gestern. Ich aber gehör' in die Zukunft, ins werdende, ins Morgenrot. Den Maskenstaat meines Adels hab' ich verbrannt, die Vorrechte der Herkunft, der Bildung, der *éducation* schmeiß' ich dem Bourgeois hochachtungsvoll und ergebenst in die fettriessende Schnauze" (87). In the end, Udo dies for the Spartacist cause, while Agnes and Hecklingen stand once again united—a sign that the patriarchal order remains intact.

“Notruf” can be looked at as a testament to the generational shift that came with the war. Hecklingen’s moderate devotion and sacrifice to the *Vaterland* is depicted as the rational moral choice compared with the frivolous, passionate, irrational sentiments of the younger generation. Several decades before, Sudermann, who was seen as a rabble-rouser by the generation that preceded him, sided with the revolutionary spirits of the youth. In his play “Heimat,” his heroine Magda stood against the reigning patriarchal order that crumbled before her modern strong-willed individualism. Now it was the patriarchy that upheld the sacred sense of bourgeois order. Once the defender of the youth against the hegemony of tradition, Hermann Sudermann found himself out of touch with the younger generation. This explains the fate of “Notruf,” which was the most controversial of the three parts of *Das deutsche Schicksal*, and most panned by the critics. One review from the time in the magazine *Vorwärts* criticizes Sudermann’s attempt to depict contemporary events, claiming, “Es ist Hermann Sudermanns aufrichtigster Wille, nicht ein Prophet für unsere Zeit zu sein, sondern eine Unke,” and “Es handelt sich also um ein politisches Stück. Nein, es handelt sich um etwas anderes. Gleich zu Anfang wird auf der Bühne das Wort Kolportage ausgesprochen” (“Sudermanns ‘Notruf’”). Sudermann realized on August 31, 1921 that this play did not strike the nerve that he had intended when he notes in his diary, “Notruf” verhunzt und versunken” (Tagebuch VII). In 1924 Dr. J. Levy, in an open letter to Sudermann after the publication of *Der tolle Professor*, mentions Wölfert’s “Bund der Rache” in “Notruf” as a sign that the author was not the liberal lion that he once had

been. In his answer to the letter, Sudermann takes issue with this assumption. He answers,

Ferner tadeln Sie als Verfehlung, daß ich in meinem "Notruf" einen neurasthenischen und an sich selbst zugrunde gehenden Offizier von einem Bund der Rache und den Taten der Assassinen fabeln lasse. Woher wissen Sie, daß ich innerlich je mit ihm eins war? Ich schilderte in diesem Schauspiel die Symptome der seelischen Erkrankung, der Deutschland in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren anheimgefallen war. Und selbst wenn ich ihr Gift auch in mir gefühlt hätte, wäre mir als Dichter das Recht dichterischer Selbstbefreiung zu bestreiten gewesen? ("Mein toller Professor")

In many respects Sudermann is correct in asserting that the author ought to be granted the liberty to create characters without being automatically associated with those views. In "Notruf" there are a number of different ideologies present, but the audience is not compelled to align with any one of them. In the end, Udo is a martyr for his beliefs just the same as Wölfert for his belief in revanchism. In his letter to Levy, Sudermann also reasserts his belief in democratic values, as to confirm that he has not changed. He tells him, "In unserer Jugend waren uns die reaktionären Demagogenriecher ein Greuel; ich glaube, wir tun jetzt gut, nicht nach der entgegengesetzten Himmelsrichtung abzuirren!" ("Mein toller Professor"). In the end, it was perhaps less so that Sudermann had at all changed but rather that the times had.

#### **e. Sudermann's Pessimism**

After the war the paroxysm of conservative national sentiments were gradually quelled by liberal bourgeois reason for many. By 1922 Thomas Mann

distanced himself from his anti-democratic sentiments when he made a *volte-face* endorsement of the Weimar Republic with a speech “Von deutscher Republik” in honor of Gerhart Hauptmann’s sixtieth birthday. Hermann Sudermann had never entirely lost his bourgeois liberal spirit, despite harboring some *völkisch* inclinations. It is safe to assume, he deposited his most inflammatory thoughts and ideas in his diary. Like Sieburth’s philosophy of the “Tages- und Nachansicht” in *Der tolle Professor*, it appears that in the case of his strong sentiments concerning Germany’s *Schicksal* following the war, there was a duality in sentiments. It was if by day, his ingrained liberal-bourgeois superego participated in public life, and afterwards another *völkisch* revanche-spirited id would sometimes surface in his diaries. Still, Sudermann remained a bourgeois liberal. Pessimistic, bitter, and with an inclination to withdraw from public affairs so as to let Germany’s and his own *Schicksal* run its course, Sudermann begrudgingly returned to action in the early period after Germany’s painful defeat in order to lend influence to the new government. Along with Gerhart Hauptmann and other artists, Sudermann took action to provide a moderate liberal response to the formation of the leftist “Rat der geistigen Arbeiter.” This group of intellectuals, including figures such as Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil, Magnus Hirschfeld, Lou Andreas-Salomé, and Kurt Pinthus among others, was founded with the intent to politically engage in the creation of the new republic. They created a political program calling for equality among the sexes, reforms in school curriculum, abolishment of the death penalty, and division of church and state (“Bund zum Ziel” 219–222). This organization was put into action on November 10, 1919 in the midst of the revolution, as it went to the

Reichstag to assert influence in the government. With the intention of engaging in the political process by providing a response to the “Rat der geistigen Arbeiter,” Hermann Sudermann, Gerhart Hauptmann, Ludwig Fulda, and others created the “Bund schaffender Künstler.” This organization seems to have been a subsidiary of the many other associations and other organizations of literary and intellectual Berlin, including the still active Goethe-Bund. Although the “Bund schaffender Künstler” does not appear to have made any lasting effects on the situation during that fateful fall of 1919, they did receive audience with leading politicians of what was to become the Weimar Republic. In the case of Sudermann, this activity shows that Sudermann and other like-minded liberal aesthetes were willing to take political action against a perceived threat. The “Rat der geistigen Arbeiter” was largely comprised of members who had connections to the expressionist movement. The fact that Sudermann, Hauptmann, and Fulda, all representatives of turn-of-the-century modernism, wished to present a counterweight to this comes then as no surprise. One more sign of the eternal generational strife. But these men also wished to put forth a moderate, liberal response to the radicalized atmosphere of 1919. In his diaries from this time, Hermann Sudermann exposes his moderate worldview at the time. On November 17, 1919, after attending a meeting of one of the many literary, intellectual organizations that existed at the time, he describes the politically polarized group: “Entsetzlich rüdes Pachulken Volk, [...] wie hungrige Bestien – die von rechts und die von links wie gleicher Wüstheit” (Tagebuch VI). In his mature age, the liberal Sudermann abhorred crude political radicalism, right and left. This is evident in a conversation that he had with his doctor Oskar Vogt, with

whom he had a conversation about the reigning government in Germany on April 6, 1919. In the conversation it is apparent that his hope for Germany rests in the ability of the *Bildungsbürgertum* to take control, even though he sees little hope at avoiding a Bolshevik-style takeover. He writes, "Ich frage: 'wie wir hineingeraten, wissen wir nun, aber wie kommen wir raus?' Vogt antwortet: 'Entweder die wissenschaftlichen Sozialisten erhalten die Führung, oder wir gehen unter.' Ich erwidre: 'Die Männer der Wissenschaft haben noch niemals die Führung gehabt, also gehen wir unter'" (Tagebuch VI). Perhaps above all else Sudermann wished to preserve the German culture, which held his future legacy from the perceived threat of extinction, not unlike that which Thomas Mann advocated. This is apparent in an entry that Sudermann made on March 20, 1920 of a conversation that he had with his close friend Ludwig Fulda. He writes, "Ich aber stelle mich bewußt auf der Seiten der oder viel mehr vor die alte Kultur u. lasse mich mit ihr zu Grunde gehen. Fulda will daß man sich der neuen Bewegung anschließe um dadurch von dem Alten so viel als möglich zu retten. Doch wird nichts davon gerettet werden, nur ein Charakter mehr geht in die Brüche" (Tagebuch VI). Here, Sudermann ascertains that the "old culture" is in peril, but yet his response is one of resignation. The liberal system of government in the Weimar Republic was indeed in peril, as was the traditional bourgeois way of life.

Despite many examples of the latter already provided, the author remained a nineteenth-century bourgeois liberal, and even though he grumbled plenty about the Weimar Republic, he accepted the new state. As the conditions in the Weimar Republic stabilized, Hermann Sudermann began to express this. In his memoir



*Bilderbuch meiner Jugend* from 1922, he nostalgically remembers his youth with the political chaos of the Weimar Republic as a background. While reminiscing about his earlier days, he writes: “Schade, daß ich nicht vier Jahrzehnte später auf die Welt gekommen bin! Jetzt ein Zwanzigjähriger—oh, wie hätte ich mich austoben können! War es in meiner Primanerzeit schon höchstes Ziel meiner Sehnsucht gewesen, auf dem Schafotte zu sterben, so hätte ich noch jüngst unter den Mashinengewehren der Schergen Noskes<sup>39</sup> mein junges Leben in aller Bequemlichkeit aushauchen können” (243). Here Sudermann endorses the majority socialist government of the Weimar Republic, even though in other parts of the memoir he describes himself as having been a “red” in his youth, making it more likely that he would have sympathized with the Spartacists. At the end of the memoir he explains his longterm dedication to the republican cause. He explains how the times have changed since his youth in the *Gründerzeit* of the German Reich: “Heute ist es kein Kunststück, Republikaner zu sein. Es ist so trivial, daß man sogar aus Snobismus, aus Ästhetik und um stolz und unzufrieden auszusehen, lieber zur Monarchie zurückkehren möchte” (395). Echoing this sentiment, in his open letter “Mein toller Professor” in 1926, he confirms his political beliefs: “Es kann nicht meine Aufgabe sein, an dieser Stelle ein politisches Glaubensbekenntnis abzulegen. Aber so viel darf ich sagen, daß ich heute noch ebenso Republikaner bin, wie damals, als der Gedanke einer deutschen Republik selbst in den Augen waschechter Fortschrittmänner eine Lächerlichkeit war.”

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<sup>39</sup> Gustav Noske (1868–1946) was a German politician and member of the SPD, having served as the first defense minister of the Weimar Republic. Today Noske is a complicated figure because of his role in utilizing the military and *Freikorps* to brutally put down the Spartacist Uprising in 1919.

Although he harbored sentiments of revanchism against the allied forces, who he believed were systematically strangling Germany through the harsh peace process, Sudermann's fears were gradually quelled. One influential friend of his did much in the early years of the Weimar Republic to provide him reassurance: Walther Rathenau. Hermann Sudermann owned a villa in Berlin Grunewald, often visited his friend Rathenau who likewise lived in this affluent settlement. If ever he had a question about the future of Germany or about the political process he would go to Rathenau, who had intimate knowledge as a politician. It was all the more disturbing for the anxious author that he experienced the political turmoil of the Weimar Republic first-hand when his friend became one of the first political victims of the republic when he was assassinated in 1922. What is more, Sudermann had the horror of being one of the first on the scene to witness the aftermath of this heinous act. Arriving at the home, Sudermann was recognized as a friend and allowed entry by the police. He chronicles this scene in the entry for June 24, 1922: "Da liegt vorm Schreibtisch auf der Erde, mit weißem Decken bedeckt, ein längliches Elend. Schlage das Decken zurück: Sein Gesicht – am rechten Unterkiefer durch eine drei Finger breit klaffende Wunde gespaltet, der weißgewordene Spitzbart durch darüber zerronnenes Blut wieder Braun. – Sonst wie alle die Mordopfer, die man auf Bildern seit 14 gesehen. Die rechte Schulter des Hemdes von Blut durchnässt, der andere bedeckt. Gram durchschauert mich. Unser bester Mann – nun haben sie ihn zur Strecke gebracht" (Tagebuch VII). This murder only strengthened Sudermann's belief that a system of centrist order is imperative. Punctuating his diary entry of that fateful day, he writes: "Wahnsinn hier – Wahnsinn allenthalben" (Tagebuch

VII). As conditions in the Weimar Republic stabilized, Sudermann found a political refuge in the leadership of Gustav Stresemann. Even though it seemed that nothing could please the old liberal bourgeois Hermann Sudermann, he deemed Stresemann as adequate. He notes on August 16, 1926: "Nachm. Stresemann Rede an die deutschen Studenten gelesen. Bekehre mich zu ihm. Verteidigt deutlich genug seine verdächtige Nachgiebigkeit" (Tagebuch IX). Perhaps this perfunctory praise is as close to an endorsement as could be had from the aged and cynical nineteenth-century man.

#### **f. The Author's Final Years**

As conditions began to change, and the Weimar Republic entered its "Golden Era" in 1924, Hermann Sudermann was dealt a blow from which he would never recover, when Cläre his wife of more than thirty years died. This day on October 17, 1924, he writes: "Heute ist mir, als bin ich selbst gestorben in jener Stunde. Denn zur Welt bin ich noch nicht zurückgekehrt" (Tagebuch VIII). Already pessimistic, the loss of his wife put Sudermann in a deep state of depression. From this point forward, it was less so that the author spent his time enjoying life than preparing for his own death. But before leaving this world, he wanted to leave something upon this earth that remembered his marriage. He did this in 1927, when he published *Die Frau des Steffen Tromholts* as his monument to Cläre, and he considered this the the last accomplishment that he wanted to finish before his own death. On January 16, 1926, he notes: "Was tut mir das Alles noch, wenn nur zu leben habe und Clärens Geschichte noch schreiben kann! Wieder versinken Leben u. Welt – und der Freitod

steht vor mit auf“ (Tagebuch IX). But even before that, the love for his wife found literary expression in *Der tolle Professor*. Cläre died while Sudermann was still writing the novel. This would be his first work since the early 1890s that Cläre did not help see through to the end with advice and edits. The love between Herma and Sieburth bears a striking resemblance to that of his own. Although Sieburth attains his objective of Kant’s professorship in the *Der tolle Professor* it does not provide him happiness. Only Herma’s love could have given him that, but this love and prospect for happiness is forever gone when she dies. Sadly, Sudermann let Cläre’s absence define his existence in the final four years of his life. On Februar 25, 1925, he observes in a diary entry: “Wie anders wirkt jetzt der Tod auf mich ein, seit Clärens Sterben hinter Allem steht” (Tagebuch VIII). In these years Sudermann began to come to terms with the *Vollendung* of his own *Schicksal*. After a discussion about death with his son-in-law, he reports in his diary on April 16, 1926: “Das Rätsel des Nicht-Mehr-Seins quält mich. Hans tröstet sich mit der Utopie der Weltseele, in die Alles zurückkehrt. – Auch der Massenmörder Haarmann, der heute hingerichtet wurde. Schöne Gesellschaft” (Tagebuch IX).

Despite his existential crisis amidst the political troubles and depression following his wife’s death, Hermann Sudermann lived on through the “Golden Era” of the Weimar Republic, getting to see and experience much of those storied years. His fortunes had also gradually changed over the course of time following the crisis years as the economy stabilized, but more importantly another source of income arose. Already before the war, Sudermann’s works had been filmed, including a 1914 adaptation of his play “Die Ehre” starring Asta Nielsen titled *Vorderhaus und*

*Hinterhaus* The first major production of one of his works came with director Max Mack's *Katzensteg* in 1915. But Sudermann paid little attention to the medium of film until after the war when it became a seriously monied industry, and it presented itself to him in these troubled times as a *deus ex machina*. What is more, the author also had to take consideration of film as it slowly transformed from a mass form of entertainment to gaining recognition as a bourgeois form of art. For this reason he saw it as favorable to his legacy as an author to have quality film adaptations of his works. But if Sudermann was savvy enough to recognize the financial and artistic merits of the new artistic medium, he was also difficult to deal with. His notes about the various correspondences, telephone calls, and meetings with film executives and producers are telling. In the world of theater, the author commanded the authority to micromanage the production of the play, dictating the direction and cast. Sudermann treated his involvement with the film industry no differently, even though his expertise for the technical aspects of theater did not carry over to film. Furthermore, he still harbored a condescending attitude toward the new medium and its artists. In 1918 Sudermann showed his irascibility with the production of his play "Heimat." The production company Messter-Film was set to use the established film star Henny Porten for the lead role, which the author found unacceptable. In his diary entry for December 18, 1920 he calls her a "süßliche Kitschdarstellerin, schön, [...] aber weichlich und seelenlos" (Tagebuch VII). Of equal hubris are his comments about Carl Mayer's script for the film *Sunrise* adapted from his novella *Die Reise nach Tilsit*. About this Sudermann writes in his diary on June 26, 1926, "Unglaublicher Stil, aus Unbildung und falschverstandenen

Expressionismus.“ To read the *ad hominen* attacks and epithets in his diaries directed at figures today considered pioneers in film is telling of the bourgeois personality. The nineteenth-century bourgeois aesthete could not help but to be skeptical of the new medium. In 1920 an acquaintance at the police censorship station in Berlin asked the author to evaluate, whether or not a detective film was suitable for release to the public. After doing so, he decided against censorship, reasoning in his diary on January 4, 1920: “Diese Phantastareien viel zu fernliegend scheinen, als daß sie unserer Proletarierjugend zur Nachahmung der Verbrechen anreizen könnten” (Tagebuch VII). It seems strange that the dramatist, whose works had once been notoriously banned, was now working for the authorities. Even though he was skeptical of the medium, Hermann Sudermann avidly visited the cinema during his years in the Weimar Republic. He was awed by the special effects of the pioneering films of the era, and disgusted by modern aesthetics such as Expressionism. One film that particularly touched a nerve with him was a 1923 adaptation of Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, and it opened his eyes to the potential of the medium. After seeing the film, he notes on September 22, 1923: “In zartester, vornehmster Ruhe rollen die Dinge sich ab und geben ein Bild, das Leben selber ist” (Tagebuch VIII). Certainly, it was for Hermann Sudermann also “das Leben selber” to see the decay of nineteenth-century bourgeois order as it disappeared into a sea of mass culture.

Likewise, Hermann Sudermann saw his legacy disappearing into the sea of a new mass culture that he no longer understood. In 1927, in honor of his seventieth birthday, Hermann Sudermann’s longtime publisher Cotta suggested that they

arrange to have a portrait of the author painted to donate to the National Gallery. First, Sudermann rejected the idea outright and suggested instead an essay contest with the theme “Sudermann und die Presse” to document how his career was ruined by the critics. Secondly, he objected to the chosen painter, Otto Dix, whose blend of Expressionism and New Objectivity did not appeal to the author’s nineteenth-century tastes. Eventually, Sudermann agreed to a portrait by the older Max Slevogt, whose impressionism better suited him. Also, in honor of his seventieth birthday in 1927, the president’s office suggested an official celebration, of which Sudermann wanted no part, and to avoid the unwanted attention on this day, he left Germany for Italy. In 1928, the 71-year-old suffered a series of strokes, which resulted in his death on November 21, 1928. The final entry in his diaries of over forty years ends on October 4, 1928 with the lines, “Alles erleuchtet. Liebe u. Sorge umfängt mich. Wiewohl das tut. Auf Sofa erschöpft liegen geblieben, bis Schlafenszeit” (Tagebuch X).

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The pessimistic worldview espoused in *Der tolle Professor* has much to do with the later years of Sudermann’s life. Personally, the almost seventy-year-old Sudermann had witnessed in these years the decline of his popularity and success as an author, the loss of his East-Prussian *Heimat*, as well as the loss of his wife and other close friends. But for others of his generation and class, these times were equally disparaging. The war had changed Germany forever, and the prosperous *Gründerzeit*, as well as the figure who had unified the nation and led it to greatness,

Otto von Bismarck, were now all just nostalgic remembrances. The polarized political atmosphere, financial instability, and cultural changes were transforming Germany. While the Weimar Republic did eventually stabilize, the threats of mass political movements on the left and on the right perpetually imperiled the liberal system of government and threatened the bourgeois way of life. If this was not enough, middle-class sensibilities were being challenged by a new mass culture with different aesthetic tastes, values, and worldview. Although Hermann Sudermann made attempts to engage in the politics and culture in the early twentieth century, he ultimately failed in finding a voice in the cacophony, as did many from his cohort. For the bourgeois German liberal at this time it was the path of least resistance to submit to the self-fulfilling prophecy of decline and the narrative that the dissipation of the once strong ideology of bourgeois liberalism was *Schicksal*. Today, this disengagement is especially frustrating having the advantage of knowing what tragedies were on the horizon. Sudermann was given a taste of what was to come in 1923 when he witnessed a rally of national socialists. He notes in his diary on May 1, 1923: "Maifeier. Draußen Aufzüge mit vielen Musik. Chören [...] Diese tragen Hakenkreuzfahnen – jene haben auch die Kinder für die neue Religion gemacht. So scheitert die Menschheit vom Wahnsinn zu Wahnsinn" (Tagebuch VIII). The figure Professor Auerbach in *Der tolle Professor* warns Sieburth of the dangers of resigning oneself to pessimistic disengagement: "Wir Juden haben Ursache, vorsichtig zu sein. [...] Mich sollte wundern, wenn die neue Berliner Bewegung, die uns zu einer Art von Parias herabzudrücken strebt, ihre Ausläufer nicht schon bis hierher gesandt hätte . . . Dem Geschichtskenner sind das ja geläufige Erscheinungen . . . Jedesmal,



wenn ein gesteigertes Nationalgefühl nicht wußte, in welcher Weise sich ausleben, mußten die Juden herhalten" (87). Much like Hermann Sudermann, Sieburth fails to see the urgency of this wisdom, ultimately choosing to depart from this world rather than engage in it.

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