

Hermann Sudermann: Social Criticism and East Prussian Regionalism in German Drama

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Prologue

Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928) had significant interactions with Mennonites of East Prussia while at the same time remaining at arm's length from the faith of his father. Therefore, the question as to whether he was a Mennonite cannot be answered with a definitive yes or no. His baptism in a Lutheran Church might suggest an easy answer, but when a review of his literary legacy is taken into consideration, a more ambiguous perception emerges. The fact that he was born of a Mennonite father and a Lutheran mother in a small village near the German-Russian border may be of interest to a biographer, but may hardly be persuasive on either side of this issue. Considerations as to what constitutes a Mennonite author, especially an East Prussian writer, are far more complex than parentage or baptism. A definition of what is "Mennonite" about an author should clarify whether Sudermann stands within or outside of that circle.

Al Reimer's suggestion that we view Mennonite authorship with a "wide-angle lens" is highly appropriate in the case of Sudermann.¹

With his wide-angle lens, Reimer identifies Mennonite authors as those who “spent at least their formative years in a Mennonite milieu...regardless of whether they now consider themselves ‘Mennonite’ in a religious sense, or in an ethnic sense, or in both senses, or in neither sense.” With a brief review of the interpreters of Sudermann it will be evident that Reimer’s definition is highly persuasive.

Sudermann’s paternal heritage is with the Mennonite community in Elbing, East Prussia, and he freely acknowledges those ties. In his autobiography *Book of My Youth*,² he devotes three chapters to his childhood years with relatives in Elbing. In that social milieu he attended a Mennonite school and participated in church activities. His uncle, Jacob Sudermann, was the leading minister in that church, and during the summers, when school was not in session, Hermann worked on his farm. As he describes it, the reality that he was connected to the people in that congregation always brought a “warm glow in his heart.”³

Nearly all of Sudermann’s interpreters have emphasized how his Mennonite heritage shaped, in positive and negative ways, his life and literature. In a brief biographical sketch, Herbert Reinoss⁴ blamed Sudermann’s Mennonite ancestry for the “thin skin”⁵ he demonstrated in his debates with the Berlin critic Alfred Kerr. Reinoss identifies Sudermann as a descendant of the Dutch Mennonites who settled in East Prussia. Theodore Kappstein⁶ noted that Sudermann grew up in a pious Mennonite home, the son of a brewer. That claim is not quite accurate because his parents seldom attended a Mennonite Church. The Lithuanian scholar, Anatole Matulus,⁷ credited Sudermann’s Mennonite background (a suppressed minority) as a possible explanation for his sensitivity to ethnic tensions in that region when the Imperial Regime was attempting to impose German culture on regional ethnic groups. In many of his works, Sudermann portrays the Jews⁸ in Germany as the ones who suffer the most from religious intolerance. Even so, he did not avoid including Mennonite characters as people “set apart” from the dominant society. In his *Lithuanian Stories*, he includes Mennonite characters and lauds them for their industry, honesty, and simplicity. They are portrayed as religious eccentrics who live outside the mainstream of German culture in a manner that is dignified but somewhat forbidding. His observations on the suppression of ethnic minorities may also explain, in part, his critical stance vis-à-vis militaristic nationalism and social oppression during his time.

Even though the question of his Mennonite identity in literature may not be resolved entirely with this analysis of Sudermann, the primary argument for its inclusion is that many of his literary works articulate the struggles of East European Mennonites during the age

in which his works are set. Therefore, in the spirit of Pascal it seems prudent to wager that he belongs within the circle of Mennonite writers.

The Literary Agenda

A century ago the playwright and novelist Hermann Sudermann eagerly picked the ripe fruit of popular and financial success and apparently never suspected that this youthful harvest might also have contained the seeds of his own literary demise. Sudermann gained a large and loyal following in Berlin and far beyond the dominion of the Prussian Empire, but the exuberant applause diminished long before he laid his pen to rest. His journey from poverty to popular acclaim and his ensuing dismissal by many theatre scholars establishes the broad framework for this essay. This essay will examine selected themes in his novels and plays, suggest reasons why they resonated with audiences and how his subject matter may also provide the key that explains his eventual demise. Along the way, we will observe methods of interpretation and suggest new perspectives for examining Sudermann's literary contribution.

In the 1890s Sudermann burst onto the literary scene with a double punch when two of his plays (*Die Ehre* and *Heimat*) filled the theatres, and his novel *Frau Sorge* established new records for fiction sales. At the time, he was the most acclaimed of all living German playwrights.⁹ A measure of Sudermann's quick rise to fame can be taken by noting that the most respected dramatist of the day, Henrik Ibsen, was Sudermann's guest at an early production of *Die Ehre*.¹⁰ In 1901, the literary historian Kuno Francke declared Sudermann to be a "dramatic genius"¹¹ which, according to Immanuel Kant's classification, was the highest praise that could be bestowed on an artist. Since Sudermann's plays follow a certain rhetorical design, he established himself, according to Francke, as a lesser poet but a superior dramatist to Hauptmann.¹² Edward McInnes concurs by stating that Sudermann's dramatic effects were powerful but concludes the play is compromised because the author "intensifies [the plot] for theatrical ends",¹³ thereby sidestepping the ethical challenge inherent in the play. The tendency to manipulate the maximum dramatic effect, according to McInnes, results in an ineffectual approach when contrasted with the vitality of the ethical dilemmas posed by many of his naturalist contemporaries.

But this rising star did not illumine the skies for long and today he is nearly forgotten: theatre history texts generally omit his name and only two significant studies have appeared in the past half-century. In the decades that followed Sudermann's death, scholars¹⁴ were

fascinated by the psychological nuances in his work and how his familial experiences shed light on his work. Since the Second World War, little attention has been paid to his work. Two recent studies, though, suggest the possibility of examining Sudermann's quest for a literary style as a secondary motif to his literary vision that was oriented toward social and political themes.¹⁵ Sudermann began his literary career during Bismarck's Machiavellian tenure as Germany's first Reich Chancellor.¹⁶ The combination of Bismarck's dubious international alliances, the military unification of Germany and national repression resulted in considerable domestic unrest. Any hint of revolution in Prussia was met with considerable force, and suspected revolutionaries were imprisoned before their efforts could take root. The Imperial response to the revolution of 1848 was six decades of increasing severity. Repressive tactics were not limited to those with political ambitions. Novelists and playwrights at the time, including Gerhart Hauptmann, Heinrich Mann and Theodor Fontane, also faced considerable scrutiny because their loyalty to Imperial authority was continually questioned. Kuno Francke extols Hauptmann and Sudermann as dramatists who could sympathize with the "revolt of the masses ... and the rebellion of the individual."¹⁷ A popular writer faced inevitable scrutiny. Surprisingly, though, in reference to this era the Stanford historian Gordon A. Craig writes: "Before 1914 it was only on rare occasions that German artists were interested let alone stirred by political and social events and issues."¹⁸ Such a claim invites further investigation.

Sudermann gave expression to these political stirrings with his unique development of regional themes and, simultaneously, his interest in dismantling German cultural lies.¹⁹ No scholar has attempted to explain Sudermann's swift rise to fame and his rapid fall, his development of regional themes and his calculated although risky attempt to explore regional themes as a foundation for social criticism. While his contemporary critics focused on his stylistic weaknesses, their attacks may now be viewed as misplaced analysis pursuing an unproductive line of investigation when Sudermann's unique contribution lay elsewhere. His plays and novels exhibit an eclectic approach to style by interspersing features associated with romanticism, naturalism, melodrama and the well-made French play. This mixture of styles may be attributed to the fact that he viewed formal consistency as a secondary value within the framework of his major literary agenda. Sudermann's pen documented a vision that called for an integration of literary sensibilities with a socio-political critique. He sustains this stance from the first novel to the last with a resolute consistency.

This paper will develop the thesis that contrary to Craig's claim, Sudermann was stirred by the political and social issues of his time.

He was not alone in sounding the alarm on these issues but he may have been the most persistent. The voices of the contrarian writers of that epoch may seem somewhat muted in contrast with the post- World War I development of theatre protest and confrontation. The writers of Sudermann's time did not shout their condemnations from the stage because they fully comprehended the threats from the Wilhelmine court. The threat of imprisonment forced the writers to muffle their criticism but it did not diminish their continued verbal offensive against the regime. Arno Panzer notes that "Sudermann's Archive Papers reveal that he retained his interest in politics and art until the very end."²⁰ Interpretations of Sudermann that ignore his interest in art and politics sidestep his central thrust: an integration of a literary vision with a socio-political critique. During Sudermann's time, his boldness in addressing German social ills was evident to his readers and audiences, although his position was muted compared to later styles of protest and provocation. Sudermann's acknowledges his antipathy: "My hatred for [Bismarck] only dared to show itself in his absence."²¹ With the threat of censorship and even prison hanging over his head, Sudermann attempted a balancing act of providing social criticism in a manner that would avoid both of these calamities. This was considered bold for his time, but later, after the First World War, a more radical theatre emerged which considered his critique to be inadequate for the crises of the day.

The Big Bang

It may be difficult for us now to comprehend the sudden rise to fame Sudermann experienced in the 1890s. He achieved a level of recognition and popularity that is now conferred only on stars of the film and music industry. Heidelberg scholar Herbert Reinoss notes that "[Sudermann's] name went around the world with a bang, the way we think of Chaplin, de Sica or Fellini."²² Within the decade, his plays were produced in New York, London, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo and he maintained apartments in Berlin, Rome, Paris and Königsburg. This multilingual author was fluent in French, Italian and English and he made frequent journeys to many countries, including a long excursion to India and China in 1903. His frequent excursions through Europe and around the world may seem normal today for stage and screen stars, but it was a new phenomenon in his time.

The combination of his celebrity status and his exploration of controversial themes created box office records in Berlin and many other cultural centers. Students and young adults were drawn to his contemporary characters and the sense of daring he displayed in writing about situations that mirrored their lives. Audiences had grown

weariness of the intellectual aloofness of German classicism and by way of contrast Sudermann unleashed a flood of youthful emotions. He pointed his finger at the tensions of the time and the public was enthralled. At the turn of the century anyone who attended one of his plays achieved the aura of being “modern.”²³ Emma Goldman compared him to Ibsen and speculated that at the root of Sudermann’s appeal was his ability to “...treat social topics and discuss the pressing issues of the day.”²⁴ His sense of theatrics, though, was not limited to the emotions he elicited onstage. His private persona also generated considerable public attention.

Sudermann’s curly black beard functioned as a national trademark when cartoonists discovered an insatiable public appetite for caricatures of his shaggy locks. His image on the first page sold newspapers! Throughout Germany, barbers were inundated with young men requesting a “Sudermann trim.” Private parties in Berlin were frequently honored by his presence and middle-class hosts delighted in his ability to engage in light conversation or satirical debates. The printed press recorded his coming and going the way film celebrities are covered today.

Sudermann had marched to the literary front lines with two major successes: first a novel, *Frau Sorge (Dame Care)*, and a few months later, his first play, *Die Ehre (Honor)*.²⁵ The public clamor for these works was so immediate and impetuous that over one weekend “...Sudermann was famous and became rich.”²⁶ On the Schiller statue in front of the National Theatre in Berlin a fan hung a sign that boldly proclaimed, “Gestern warst du der Mann, heute ist Sudermann.”²⁷ In the eyes of many Germans he had acquired, according to Herbert Reinoss, the privilege of being called “Schiller’s rightful heir.”²⁸ During those decades of impassioned Sudermannia, the Harvard scholar William Lyon Phelps, who was generally restrained in his opinions, wrote, “Sudermann is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of Germany’s living writers.”²⁹

Audiences across economic and social lines left the theatre in spirited dialogue on the issues raised in his plays. One scholar wrote, “Not a single one of Schiller’s justly famous dramas contains so delicious an intellectual problem as *Die Ehre*.”³⁰ It was the appeal of his themes, the emotional depth of his characters, the sensational situations, and the well-crafted lines that attracted those early audiences to his work. And they also rewarded him financially so that he could devote his time to pursuing the complexities of his craft.

With this newly acquired wealth he purchased the Blankensee Castle near the village Trebbin, which lies 50km south of Berlin. Sudermann bought the manor house from the Baron von Thümen family, who could document their ownership of it since the middle of the fifteenth century. On the land around the castle he designed an

Italian garden complete with reflecting pools, trimmed hedges, a temple, an outdoor stage, and sculptures from antiquity that he purchased in Italy. By all appearances he was attempting to charm and purchase his way into the circles of the German intellectual and social elite, but really he was simply taking advantage of the opportunities that came his way. His stature as a man of cultural prominence and financial means appeared to be as permanent as one of his marble Roman figures.

Seldom has a writer simultaneously emerged with a best seller in fiction and a smash hit for the stage. Remarkably, the novel was the first in Germany to sell a million copies and it still ranks third on the all-time sales chart for German language fiction.³¹ As unprecedented as that achievement was, the size of his theatre audiences was even more impressive. In Berlin, Stuttgart, Vienna, Hamburg, London and New York, theatres were filled whenever a Sudermann play was staged. Peter Bauland observed that Sudermann's plays reached a greater level of success than those of other playwrights during the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³² A Sudermann premiere became an annually celebrated event in many cities. And his reputation was not limited to Europe; in Chicago, in one decade, his *Heimat (Magda)* was performed in German, Italian, French and English.³³

The Imperial censors in Berlin took notice of Sudermann's popularity as well as the thematic thrust of his plays. They continually threatened theatre managers who were considering a Sudermann play. When the censors blocked a Berlin performance of *Sodom's Ende*, theatres in Würzburg, Vienna, and Stuttgart eagerly offered to stage the work.³⁴ But few theatres in Germany were that bold. Because the play exposed the corruption of the landowners and how they swindled the poor, the middle classes felt threatened by this work.³⁵ The play faced a number of court hearings and censorship boards in Kassel, Hamburg, Cologne, and Dresden. While the censors sought to stifle Sudermann's voice, they were also forced to relent somewhat in the face of his international fame. Sudermann was never arrested for his plays, but he did stand close to the prison door more than once. On opening night of the premiere production of *Der sturmgeselle Sokrates* (1903),³⁶ a phalanx of Berlin police prevented Sudermann from entering the theatre, but after threatening him with arrest they did let him go before they reached the police station. And while he was spared the short prison sentences that Franz Wedenkind and Hauptmann both endured, he continued his attacks against the oppressors and opportunists of his time.

With these early achievements, Sudermann could have elected to withdraw from the crucible of the Berlin literary world to pursue a peaceful life in his castle. Surprisingly, however, he did not lean back

and rest on his dazzling accomplishments. Even his bucolic residence in Blankensee did not distract him from theatrical productivity. Instead, after bolting headfirst onto the literary scene, he continued to publish a new work nearly every year for the next 35 years. Altogether, 14 novels, 25 plays, a lengthy autobiography and a book of essays would flow from his swift pen. His name was continually in the front ranks on lists of fiction, stage and, eventually, cinema.

London audiences had the privilege of witnessing an historic acting duel between two performers of the same Sudermann play. At Drury Lane, Eleanora Duse played "Magda" while Sarah Bernhardt performed the same role at Daly Theatre. Bernard Shaw, intrigued by their differing interpretations, wrote a seminal essay that compared romantic (Bernhardt's) and naturalistic (Duse's) acting styles. Shaw generally withheld praise from most other playwrights, so when he cautiously praised Sudermann it was read as a downright endorsement. "Sudermann," wrote Shaw, "is a real playwright."³⁷ Although Sudermann was a friend of Bernhardt and may even have written the play for her, he was enamored by Duse's performance.³⁸ Critics took notice. As far away as Nebraska the *Lincoln Journal* delved into this debate when Willa Cather, then a fledging critic, jumped into the foray with her own comparisons between Duse's and Bernhardt's "Magda."³⁹

The burgeoning European and American film industries also sought to capitalize on this new international personality. During his lifetime, ten movies, both silent and talkies, were made from his novels and plays. Four of the silent films were made in Hollywood and the remainder in Germany. Noted directors such as F. W. Murnau and Clarence Brown began their careers with Sudermann scripts. Murnau received an Oscar for *Sunrise*, a movie based on Sudermann's *An Excursion to Tilsit* that debuted Greta Garbo, and Brown adapted *Es War as The Flesh and the Devil* with Janet Gaynor and John Gilbert.

Leading actors also clamored for the prospect of being associated with his fame. The popularity of an author could easily result in a successful run and in touring options. So, "not without reason did the greatest actors hang their hearts on Sudermann's roles...."⁴⁰ Even Max Reinhardt, who would later become a major director in Europe and America, had his first professional role in Sudermann's *Heimat* as the First Lieutenant. Marlene Dietrich made her debut in a film based on Sudermann's Lithuanian story *Jons and Erdme*. Thus, as he ascended toward the zenith of his career it appeared as though Sudermann's literary reputation might endure the ravages of time.

But it was not only Sudermann's fame and success that drew attention. Many actors were drawn to him by his deftness in portraying the complexity of human emotion. The link between unveiling the

depth of human feeling within a plot and exploring socio-political themes was at the heart of Sudermann's literary schema. John Coar observed that Sudermann, "Often wrote in a pessimistic and despairing mood and in the bitterness of the moment uncovered the cesspools of society."⁴¹

A century later, however, the applause has long subsided and this former icon of the stage has not only lost its luster but is essentially forgotten. Currently, all of his plays are out of print and many standard theatre history texts fail to devote a single reference to this prolific writer.⁴² If Sudermann is mentioned in a theatre text today, it is usually in a single sentence with a deprecatory comparison with Gerhart Hauptmann, his rival and contemporary. His plays have essentially disappeared from the international repertoire. Apparently, only one of his works (*Der sturmgesellen Sokrates*) has been "on the boards" in Germany since he became *persona non grata* with the National Socialist party and their oppressive policies. Even though the ban against Sudermann ended with World War II, the clamor for his work had waned and his work remains largely forgotten and discredited. This decline and disappearance among the constellation of twentieth-century playwrights deserves further investigation.

His apparent disappearance raises questions about the connection between Sudermann's historical context and his focus on current crises rather than universal themes. Were the historical dynamics that brought him such acclaim also the ones that caused him to vanish from the theatrical scene with such swift and apparent finality? Are his plays so undeserving in content that scholars are justified in avoiding these scripts? Was the early enthusiasm by the German and the non-German public merely misplaced ardor, the way a multitude might chase after a sensational persona?⁴³ Are his plays so context-bound in language, theme and structure that they fail to communicate to audiences in subsequent decades—even in Germany?

Works of art that are bound to their own time and cease to provide meaning to later audiences might still be viewed as period pieces, but Sudermann does not seem to have moved into that special category either. Because his early plays and novels received such an enthusiastic response from the public, it seems all the more baffling that he would be the one who would receive such a complete cultural burial.

Sudermann's popularity was rooted, in part, in his ability to put his finger on social and emotional issues of his day. One of those issues was the division between high culture and popular culture, with the latter placing a special emphasis on regionalism.⁴⁴ While the advocates of high culture were defending neoclassicism in the arts, other writers such as Sudermann exploited the public's desire for plays that reflected the realities of common life.

The historical context was the era of Bismarck and his unification of Germany through military machinations and social oppression. Sudermann had an intense dislike for Bismarck and an even stronger disdain for the policies and tactics of the Iron Chancellor. Is it possible that his works are so context-specific to the political and economic realities of that Imperial regime that when that epoch came to a close Sudermann lost his audience? If that is the case, then what were some of those themes and contextual features that have given his works a time-bound rather than timeless dimension?

Regionalism and the Limits of Germania

In one sense, Sudermann never left the liberal editorial desk of the *Deutsches Reichsblatt*. With his pen literature became an extension of investigative journalism. Careful analysis of his plays and novels reveals that Sudermann developed four major themes: detailed portraits of independent and vibrant female characters, ethnic minorities living in Germany's remote borders, a critique of German militarism and, finally, exposure of society's indifference towards the impoverished masses. Sudermann provides dramatic expression for Kuno Francke's observation that "military achievements and political glory had crushed the finer emotions of the German heart."⁴⁵ With his ability to portray these issues as sensational crises, Sudermann assaulted the sense of smug success that Bismarck implanted in a German people who were unified not through evolution of a common culture, but by military coercion and political manipulation. His early opposition to the policies of Bismarck began a lifelong agenda of condemning the oppressive military and social policies of the Prussian court.⁴⁶ A brief overview of one of his plays will illustrate his methodology.

With his first play, *Die Ehre*, Sudermann set off the dynamite that exploded the myth of German economic prosperity and justice. The play takes place in two homes, the rich "Vorderhaus" (master's big house) that stands in sharp contrast with the unfortunate "Hinterhaus" (servant's little house). The class struggle between poor and rich families establishes the dialectic for the plot's love story. The daughter in the rich home falls in love with the gifted and sensitive son from the poor house. Both families are scandalized by love across the forbidden boundaries and seek to prevent the marriage. But here Sudermann employed devices from melodrama: love wins, arrogance loses and a marriage ensues. Sudermann went even further than a typical melodrama by castigating the upper classes and their oppressive actions against the underprivileged. While the rich family condemns the love relationship with considerable intensity, their argument

becomes more ludicrous as the plot develops.

The people in the "Vorderhaus" were easily recognizable to the Berlin middle class audiences. The family consisted of a rich merchant with a rigid code of morality, his vain wife, a frivolous spoiled son and a dignified daughter who stood apart from the materialism of the family. She loved the virtuous son of the unfortunate family and their union portrays all the complications embedded in the economic clash between these two classes. There had been indigent characters in previous plays, but *Die Ehre* gave the poor visual prominence onstage and a strong protagonist in the plot. Sudermann captured their accent and dialect and contrasted their humble dignity with the shallow, pernicious pomp of the middle class. The sense of honor among the destitute is admirable and stands in stark contrast to the morally bankrupt world of the "master" of the big house. While the destitute seek both noble and ignoble means to improve their own fortunes, in contrast to the rich, they carefully avoid trampling over others along the way. This was scandalous and risky because Sudermann dared to bloody the noses of the ruling classes.

His second affront, a rebel-like counterpunch, was to designate a young woman instead of a priest or a government minister as the voice of compassion for the impoverished. If love could transcend the rigid lines of class in German society, could it not also rise above other divisions such as race, language and religion? As Witkowski notes, "No dramatist had ventured to represent such characters in their true form and as a necessary product of the social conditions of the present."⁴⁷ Through the clash of crass contrasts, Sudermann revealed the shallowness of his society.⁴⁸ These two motifs, namely, the honest portrayal of the lower classes and the female as a vehicle of social justice and transcendent truth, reappear in many of Sudermann's plays and novels.

From this moment on, Sudermann was always on the verge of being "banned" because he exposed the vices of the German middle class, which in the name of honor insisted that their way of life was the ethical standard for the nation. He attempted to reveal hypocrisy by contrasting middle class morality with the integrity of the lower classes. As Wikowski puts it, "Sudermann plucked the first ripe fruit of the new efforts to establish a dramatic form suitable to the times...class structure was the root of conflict."⁴⁹ Sudermann, according to John F. Coar, approached class conflict with the intent of drawing blood from the ruling classes. He "wrote in a pessimistic and despairing mood, and in the bitterness of the moment uncovered the cesspools of society."⁵⁰

The radical nature of Sudermann's approach was to portray onstage the daily circumstances and home environment of a destitute family.

In the past the indigent had always been presented as intruders into genteel society. Sudermann gave his audiences a direct look into the conditions and social interactions of the destitute. Witkowski writes: "No dramatist had ventured to represent such characters [the destitute] in their true form and as a necessary product of social conditions of the present. . . They were looked at with a mixture of curious astonishment and disgust."⁵¹ The implication was strong, namely that middle class honor was centered on maintaining a middle class life at the expense of the poor. Therefore, this could not be a viable social ethic because the lower classes could not survive the tyranny of this morality code. In *Die Ehre* and in most of his subsequent plays, according to Natan, Sudermann, "... uncovered the false values immanent in Germany's aristocracy and plutocracy."⁵²

While the public clamored for his works, the critics soon began to expose the weaknesses in his plays. With the critics poised against him, the high expectations that had once accompanied every new play from his pen began to dwindle.

Regional Sensibilities, Berlin Context

Sudermann's impoverished background in the remote regions of East Prussia, where he had rubbed shoulders with various nationalities, prepared him for a unique role in examining cultural diversity. Hermann was born on September 30, 1857 in the East Prussian village of Matziken in the area near Heydekrug (Silute, Lithuania).⁵³ The area was called the "northernmost corner of East Prussia" (nördlichsten Ostpreussen) on the Russian border and is, today, within Lithuania. The German population in Matziken was small and vastly outnumbered by the Lithuanians. Hermann's parents insisted on a German education for their children, but the German schools were completely understaffed and meagerly financed.

At the age of 14, his father's bankruptcy forced him to withdraw from the Elbing School and he began, as Ibsen had earlier, to work in a pharmacy. Eventually, Sudermann completed his gymnasium studies in Tilsit and attended the University of Königsburg where Immanuel Kant had once taught and was still regarded with considerable reverence. Following that course of study he sought to complete a university degree in Berlin. With money sent by his Mennonite relatives in Russia as a stipend for his studies, he attended lectures and participated in student life in Berlin for three years.⁵⁴ Even though he is reported to have begun a dissertation, there is no evidence that he ever completed it.⁵⁵ He spent too much of his stipend on non-academic pursuits and with no prospect for employment returned to Heydekrug for a two-year hiatus. During that time he began writing his first novel.

Even though he would later refer to that area in the East as a “paradise”,⁵⁶ he eagerly sought a return to the cultural vitality of Berlin.

That wish was fulfilled in 1879 when Sudermann became a private tutor for the children of a number of wealthy families in Berlin. With a stable income he was able to focus his attention on establishing a literary career. After sending his manuscripts to a number of writers he was suddenly hired as the editor of the liberal newspaper *Deutsches Reichsblatt*.⁵⁷ In that post he immediately rolled up his sleeves and engaged in editorial battles with the conservative Berlin political establishment. Critiques of Bismarck’s military and social policies were a regular feature in his publication. As an editor, he sought to expose the manipulative tactics of a Chancellor he despised.

During those early years as an editor, the indefatigable Sudermann wrote his first novel, *Frau Sorge*, and his first play, *Die Ehre*. Both works delve into ethical issues that plagued the political regime of that time. *Die Ehre* exposes the moral hypocrisy of the German middle class and *Frau Sorge* explores the injustices of life among the rural East Prussian peasantry. The novel and the play present characters that face financial hardships and all too frequently find themselves at the mercy of upper-class, law-abiding citizens who are indifferent to their plight. This theme would be repeated with considerable consistency with each subsequent play or novel. William Phelps made this observation about *Der Katzensteg* (*Cat’s Bridge*), a work that was published a decade and a half later: “The best thing about the novel is that it once more illustrates Sudermann’s sympathy for the outcast and the despised.”⁵⁸ Phelps was the first to observe what was to become increasingly obvious, that Sudermann’s empathy towards marginal ethnic groups served as a major through-line within his oeuvre.

Despite his fascination with the political and cultural scene in Berlin, Sudermann’s regional origins weigh heavily in many of his works.⁵⁹ His novels in particular are an “...expression of longing for the unbroken strength of his origins by one who is confined to the metropolis.”⁶⁰ He locates most of his novels and plays in East Prussia. Rural poverty and a multicultural setting marked those origins, where Orthodox Russians, German Jews, Catholic Poles and Lithuanians, Dutch Mennonites (his father’s heritage) and German Lutherans (his mother’s heritage) lived in close proximity. Each group was a minority within a larger population that was ruled by Germans who were also, incidentally, a minority in the region. The diversity of people and values in this remote border area hang like a fog over his major characters.

William Mainland has observed⁶¹ that Sudermann was the only playwright and novelist of his time who developed sympathetic portraits of non-German peoples who lived side by side with Germans

in these remote areas. In the novel *Der Katzensteg*, Sudermann condemns the intensity of narrow German nationalism as represented by the locals who hold club meetings at the Black Eagle Inn. They plot and scheme against the protagonist, Baron Boleslav von Schranden, who had received his surname in honor of his loving Polish grandmother. "His father had not hesitated to give his son a Polish name, and to bear it at a time when the spirit of hypersensitive patriotism was rampant in the land..."⁶² Boleslav had been a hero in the German war against the French, but to the locals that did not diminish their distaste for his foreignness. Because he administered the estate and related to the villagers with a high degree of fairness toward his Polish residents, his German neighbors formed a deep-seated mistrust of his loyalty to the Fatherland.

Since Sudermann's family and educational background was primarily German, the reader might assume that his sympathies would lean towards German characters. Interestingly, Sudermann rejects such a simplistic approach and even goes beyond mere even-handedness when he presents the Polish Baron in a more sympathetic light than the Germans who plot against him. This pattern is repeated in *Der sturmgesele Sokrates*, where the Rabbi Marcuse is presented as more insightful and emotionally stable than his close friend, a sentimental and ruminating German romantic. In *Der Katzensteg*, he briefly mentions a Russian-Jewish peddler with inferior wares, but this one tendency toward caricature needs to be compared with the Jewish benefactor in *Song of Songs*, who also makes a fleeting appearance. In the latter novel, a consumptive teacher in a German school is given a chance to regain his health when an anonymous donation from a Jewish community leader enables the teacher to enter a sanitarium in Italy. The vast majority of non-German characters in Sudermann's work are given a sympathetic reference or full portrayal.

Perhaps the most significant work that represents Sudermann's approach to cultural diversity is his book of *Lithuanian Stories*.⁶³ In these accounts he explores life among the Lithuanians who lived under German rule. This is a sympathetic and compassionate depiction. Sudermann's Lithuanian people, Matulis says, are "portrayed by a writer who loves and understands them, who stands beside them during the joyous and tragic moments of their lives."⁶⁴ He describes the life of minorities as one of economic struggle and legal insecurity because ethnic groups were without political and often legal representation within the chambers of power. In *Jons and Erdme*, the young couple is completely dependent on the whims of a German steward who, as it turns out, is benevolent despite rumors to the contrary. The mother, in an effort to spare her daughters the struggles that she and her husband have faced, prepares them to cross over into

German culture. They are provided with a German education, encouraged to adapt German styles of dress and, most importantly, seek a German husband who will provide a life of luxury or at least comfort. Erdma succeeds with her dream only to discover that their passage into German culture then alienates the daughters from their parents. While it might be typical for children to lack empathy for the sacrifices of their parents, in this case they become disdainful of the very heritage that nurtured them. They adopt the coldness of the Prussian ethos and fail to comprehend the compassion that filled the lives of their parents.

Numerous writers and intellectuals at that time, including Friedrich Naumann, Max Planck, Max Weber and D. F. Strauss,⁶⁵ were emphasizing German cultural triumphalism across Europe and over domestic ethnic groups. Strauss called for a universal aesthetic that could embody the advancements of German scientific and technological superiority. Philipp Eulenburg, one of the Emperor's most devoted aides, penned a series of ballads and plays that expressed Germany's "Nordic-mystical" genius.⁶⁶ The rising winds of nationalism seemed to dictate that authors from the (national) boundaries were expected to portray the pre-eminent nature inherent in German cultural values. Roy Pascal observes this trend by noting its implications:

The literary market after 1870 was swamped by patriotic verse, stories, plays celebrating German victories, rejoicing in the superiority of German culture, and excavating from the German past situations that prefigured the coming of the Reich.⁶⁷

Generally, these works had a common theme—German domination over their unfortunate neighbors. There was a general enthusiasm for German cultural superiority in music, science, philosophy, and education and, with the achievements of Bismarck, a sense of national destiny that was deeply linked with the Prussian military ethos. Sudermann, however, appears to stand in sharp distinction from the tendency of "triumphalism" found in his contemporaries such as Freytag, Fechtner and Fontane.⁶⁸ He challenged the centralization of power, especially Bismarck's manipulative use of Imperial authority, and the new interpretations of German identity that linked the advancement of culture with military domination. In contrast to this emerging and prevalent spirit of cultural superiority, Sudermann portrays people from other cultures as authentic characters who are fully developed individuals standing in contrast to stereotypical portraits of ethnic minorities. Sudermann develops characters that are

fully human in their range of emotional depth and psychological complexity. When the poor, the oppressed and the dispossessed are portrayed as well-rounded characters, the reader can develop a sense of empathy for them.

His *Lithuanian Stories* were written during the final years of his life, after his successes, and appear to indicate that he was becoming increasingly disenchanted with German cultural and military domination. The stories were begun during or shortly after World War I and they reflect a level of skepticism that was not frequently shared by Sudermann's countrymen.⁶⁹ His emphasis on regional settings, non-German characters and cross-cultural issues served as a direct critique against claims of national or racial superiority that infected the spirit of German nationalism during that time.

While developing sympathetic characters from the marginal cultures within Germany, Sudermann, it is important to note, showed that sympathy also had limits. He was not interested in the ideology of cultural empathy but, instead, the development of authentic characters. For example, in the play *Johannisfeuer* (*The Fires of St. John*), the main character is a young Lithuanian woman who, as a child, was given to a German family by her dissipated mother, who could no longer care for her. The mother appears a number of times in the play and always as an inebriated beggar or as a thief. This negative image is contrasted with the positive impact on the community of the annual Lithuanian pagan ritual of lighting bonfires to celebrate fertility and renewal. These fires hark back to a pre-Christian era when society was not constrained by rigid social structures and serve as a pagan ritual of purification and social healing. A subplot in the work involves the old Lithuanian woman who is an alcoholic and a thief. Her daughter, the foundling, is also a thief but steals hearts instead of money.

The contrast between these positive and negative images of Lithuanian characters provides a polarity of images. These dual images, within the context of the fire rituals, serve to develop a picture of past hope for the current situation. The window onto humanity that Sudermann presents is then a synthesis of these two perspectives on ethnic character. Sudermann avoids a programmatic or ideological perspective on ethnicity. Instead, he provides a carefully developed portrait of the issues and characters that dwell in a multicultural setting.

In the context of the post-Bismarck era, when German nationalism gained intensity, Sudermann's articulate portrayal of cultural diversity appears to destabilize or challenge this patriotic emphasis on cultural superiority. But he was not content with merely providing positive portraits of ethnic difference; he also developed a variety of critiques of the rising German nationalism. Indeed, Sudermann was intent on

presenting the hollowness of provincial life among the powerful German elite. With this dual strategy—empathy toward minorities while portraying the hollowness of the German provincial class—Sudermann was also driving a nail into the coffin of German cultural superiority that was being advocated during the Wilhelmine Era.⁷⁰

His region of origin, the remote wetlands of East Prussia, sustained its significance for Sudermann throughout his literary career. Even though Berlin served as a location for some of Sudermann's controversial works, he preferred to portray life on the eastern boundaries. The vast marshlands of the east shaped his sensibilities and continued to provide distinguishing features within his work.⁷¹ William Mainland contends that Sudermann was socially displaced, since his personal identity continued to be defined by his regional origins as he worked in the urban centers of Europe.⁷² His novels demonstrate an "...expression of longing for the unbroken strength of his origins by one who is confined to the metropolis."⁷³ His longing for the place of his origin is, generally, contrasted with the realities of life in Berlin. The rural hinterlands are not glorified because Sudermann provides detailed portrayals of the hardships and the social limitations of life on the boundaries. Geography served not only as a concrete literary device for him, but also as an exploration into the social fabric of ethnic diversity.

Sudermann had a complex relationship with his place of origin. He was proud of his East Prussian German accent (which he never lost),⁷⁴ while at the same time he often provided a harsh critique of the behavior of German citizens of that region. By way of contrast, residents of that region from other nationalities (especially Poles and Lithuanians) were portrayed with a general degree of sympathy. The reason for this ambivalence towards his own nationals may be rooted in his sense of justice. He had, according to Mainland, a "genuine and lasting desire to share with his readers a fascinated interest in the way of life of a people displaced by his own nationals."⁷⁵

This life on the margins may have sensitized Sudermann to others who were not part of the established classes of German society. His Lithuanian stories deviated from standard German literature in one significant way. Other contemporary authors such as M. G. Conrad and Heinrich Mann generally tended to portray minority cultures as a social burden on the German nation state. Even the liberal scholar Theodor Mommsen and the novelist Theodor Fontane championed the contribution made by French minority communities while at the same time portraying recent East European immigrants as less than fitting for the new Germany.⁷⁶ Sudermann carefully avoided derogatory portraits of Poles and Lithuanians who interacted with Germans in the eastern frontier. Instead, his development of sympathetic and

convincing characters now appears rather remarkable when compared with those of other popular novelists of his time.

In his social and political criticism Sudermann did not directly attack the institution of monarchy, nor did he seriously advocate an alternative political or economic system. His strategy was to strip bare the false assumptions of the successes that swirled around Bismarck and thereby insinuate a reform of that system. On a lesser scale, his intent may simply have been to attract the attention of a disgruntled and impoverished public and give voice to their misery. Both approaches assume that Sudermann had an impressive agenda for changing the political and moral constraints of the Wilhelmine era. His perspective on regionalism explored the dignity of cultural pluralism and appeared to directly oppose the Emperor's xenophobic fulminations in support of Germanic cultural and racial superiority. Sudermann's works may not have directly confronted the system of the monarchy but he certainly provided alternative perspectives to the jingoistic claims of that militaristic regime.

The Celestial Fall

The decline in Sudermann's popular appeal has also been the topic of considerable speculation. Walter Benjamin⁷⁷ suggested that the beginnings of Sudermann's fall from theatrical grace could be explained by his turn toward biblical and symbolic themes. Horst Claus⁷⁸ notes that the great director, Otto Brahm, had qualms about the quality of Sudermann's plays and that these misgivings eventually became public knowledge and shaped popular perceptions. A significant number of commentators⁷⁹ accept the argument that Sudermann's published counter-attack against the Berlin critics who had battered him through the years was the foundation for his downfall.

Sudermann's *Verrohung in der Theaterkritik*⁸⁰ was a pointed denunciation of two Berlin critics: Maximillian Harden and Alfred Kerr. He accused Maximillian Harden of trying to ruin him, but directed his strongest venom at Kerr. He charged him with attempting to destroy not only his career but also his life. Kerr replied by stating that Sudermann's plays were replete with "superficial trash"⁸¹ and accused him of using the worn-out devices of cheap melodramas. Kerr then dug deeper and claimed that Sudermann's theatrical successes were plagiarized scripts, outright plot thefts from the contemporary French stage. Since Sudermann owned an apartment in Paris and lived there a few months of every year, he was vulnerable to the charge of betraying the spirit of the patriotic German writer.⁸²

Kerr did not limit his attacks to Sudermann's alleged misuse of dramatic sources. His criticism became very personal. He accused

Sudermann of being a provincial rustic who had grown wealthy by assaulting the urban, honorable rich. Sudermann's life was affected by these attacks.⁸³ Some scholars state that Sudermann felt so deeply wounded that he abandoned playwriting. Alex Natan claims that these vitriolic attacks by the critic Alfred Kerr caused Sudermann to stop writing for the stage.⁸⁴ The harsh feelings between the critics and the dramatist apparently never abated. Yet, Sudermann stubbornly continued applying pen to paper. In fact, in contrast to Natan's claim, over half of his plays were written after this year of torment in 1902.

The critical response was shaped, in part, by German theatre tradition. The Berlin critics did not accept the public perception that a new duo, Hauptmann and Sudermann, were ushering in a new dramatic age. At an earlier time, Germany had had the duet of Goethe and Schiller whose legacy established the expectation for another age when, like Siamese twins, two writers would emerge to announce the age of modernity. They scoffed at the prospect of adding Hauptmann and Sudermann to the constellation of Goethe and Schiller. Even though Hauptmann was hailed as a great dramatist, Kerr's attacks on Sudermann effectively removed him from this equation. Kerr heralded Hauptmann as the "long awaited giant for the German stage."⁸⁵ Sudermann, however, was essentially ignored. While Kerr acknowledged Sudermann's popular appeal, he derisively reproached him for willfully "sitting on a short dramatic stick."⁸⁶ In 1923 Edward Shanks wrote: "I have noticed for some years past a curious tendency among the higher critics of the higher drama to aim a kick at Sudermann as they go by."⁸⁷ Artur Müller suggests that Hardin and Kerr were predisposed to dislike any writer who came from the provincial regions of East Prussia to the city that was home for the Imperial Court.⁸⁸

The public, however, preferred Sudermann to Hauptmann and did not accept, without question, the perspectives of the professional critics.⁸⁹ This may have exacerbated the situation, as Cordelia Stoinigg observes: "It may have been his enormous popularity that turned the critics against him."⁹⁰ It is also fair to state that Sudermann understood his public and that his plays, in particular, were addressed to them and their social situation.

As interesting as these perceptions may be, they do not explain Sudermann's continuing popularity or the fact that the majority of his plays were written after his counter-attack against the critics and following his only biblical play *Johannes (John the Baptist)*. And even though Brahm had his doubts about Sudermann's work, these qualms did not prevent him from directing six Sudermann debuts, including his first play *Die Ehre*, when the author was untested and unknown. Thus, it seems as though the root causes for his theatrical vanishing act appear to defy these commonly held assumptions.

In spite of the Berlin critics, it is important to remember that outside of Berlin, Sudermann continued to experience enthusiastic responses. The *New York Times* stated that Sudermann demonstrated “the high water mark of intellectual drama.”⁹¹ Sudermann brought to the stage issues that few had dared to address. The London critic Edward Hale credited Sudermann with introducing the possibility for a new kind of British theatre.⁹² This new theatre was still a combination of the nineteenth-century romanticism rooted in Sturm und Drang, and the domestic situations portrayed in the emerging realism movement. Sudermann stands as a bridge between these two powerful movements.

Like many romantics, he seems to idolize the land of his youth while condemning the injustices of a modern society that is structured by a military ethos. He assaults those in society who demonstrate a lack of feeling towards the unfortunate and those who suffer from social oppression. According to Bauland, “Sudermann, reconsidered today, can be more clearly understood in much of his work as a latter-day romantic rather than a naturalist.”⁹³ With his romantically dressed plays he exposed the power structure of the German monarchy and those classes that benefited from compliance with autocratic rule. His unswerving pattern of social criticism did not, however, challenge the institution of the monarchy as such, but sought to bring about wholesale reform of Imperial abuses.⁹⁴

Altered Boundaries, Vanquished Regime

Sudermann’s literary strategy of relying on regional themes as a critique of both the oppressive social and political trends of the Prussian regime may have eventually betrayed him. The forces behind this betrayal came suddenly and with little warning: the loss of the territories in the East and the end of the German monarchy. The explanation for Sudermann’s absence on the German stage rests on two factors and both are rooted in the consequences of the First World War.

The first is the geographical and cultural loss of German identity on the Eastern Boundaries and the second is the abrupt end to both Bismarck’s Reich and its oppressive internal policies that formed the basis for Sudermann’s social criticism. We have noted that Sudermann’s multicultural perspectives were rooted in his origins on the eastern boundaries. The implications of the loss of these regions to German self-identity and Sudermann’s literary works have generally been overlooked.

It is apparent, however, that these novels and plays no longer addressed the national consciousness, since they were located in

geographic areas that were now outside of the nation's borders. In addition, with the abdication of the Emperor, the militarization of Germany that began with Bismarck in the 1870s had also disappeared from the national identity. These factors had an immediate impact on Sudermann's literary legacy because they relegated his contributions to a world that was rapidly receding into the past. When Germany shifted its attention to Weimar and then to the Third Reich there was little need or interest in re-examining the literature of social criticism that addressed, primarily, the geography and crises of a previous age. Yet Sudermann's rival, Hauptmann, was embraced by subsequent generations of theatre artists because they saw in his work the ideology of revolution.

Later, Sudermann's social criticism was seen as weak because he supported the reform of national policies rather than joining those forces that clamored for a radical revolution. Even if he had joined the revolution, the national map would still have remained unchanged. With a stroke of the pen, Sudermann's boundary land in the East was no longer German, his works no longer expressions of life among the various nationalities. His critiques of the social order imposed by Bismarck and of the military culture of the Prussian regime seemed passé after both of these icons of power disappeared from German life. His characters and their crises now belonged to a vanished age, and in short order Sudermann became a writer who belonged to a distant past. And because his works are not examples of a well-developed and uniform style, he has seldom found a place within studies that focus on historical periods.

Sudermann was giving expression to an East Prussian regionalism not out of sentimentality, as has been suggested, but for more profound claims. While a writer may attempt to develop a portrait of a "quaint" people in a far away place in an effort to validate his or her unique heritage, this was not Sudermann's aim. His plays were a canvas upon which he painted East Prussian society, its characters, accent and dialects with a sense of advocacy. Many of his characters spoke in regional dialects or with regional accents. This was uncommon during his time when nearly all of the German writers had their characters speak standard German. He was trying to turn the attention of Imperial Germany towards the marginal citizens who were living on the boundaries of the German realm. Those on the boundaries were able to establish relationships with other cultures and were therefore less inclined towards German triumphalism. When plays such as Sudermann's *Die Ehre* develop empathetic portrayals of the lower classes, they are challenging the socio-political system that creates and thrives on the process of marginalization.

Sudermann candidly presented the poor and ethnic minority groups on the eastern boundary as undervalued, misunderstood and belittled.

His interpretation of the marginal classes, including his own family background, provided a critique of the dominant society, a sympathetic portrait of the humanity of the cultural minorities and a plea for the dawning of justice. Sudermann explored cultural diversity within the boundaries of the Prussian state in an effort to seek a foundation for cultural salvation and an alternative to the national catastrophe that provides a sort of undertow in many of his works. The German sense of cultural arrogance was, according to Sudermann, his country's greatest threat, so he assigned himself the task of exposing it through literature.

The abdication of Wilhelm II and the loss of the eastern lands brought an abrupt end to the Iron Chancellor's oppressive policies. Consequently, Sudermann's voice no longer addressed the primary socio-political crises of the time. The calamitous events of 1918 pulled the rug out from under Sudermann's social and political criticism. Stripped of the immediacy of these themes, his novels and plays quickly retreated into the historical background. Subsequent events, the depression of the 1930s, the rise of National Socialism and the Second World War, brought swift and catastrophic changes to Germany society. The writers from the Imperial Age appeared to have written in an archaic style that belonged to a distant past. The heightened acting style of the *Sturm und Drang* movement had faded at the end of century. Sudermann's emotionally laden themes were soon identified as the remains of that earlier and more melodramatic theatre. They did not seem to fit with his contemporary characters and situations that hinted at a more refined realism. In that sense Sudermann stands with one foot in the nineteenth and the other in the twentieth century. Even though a more radical and revolutionary theatre quickly replaced his eclectic and romantic modernism, Sudermann's contribution remains significant despite the dated features of his works.

Notes

- ¹ Al Reimer, *Mennonite Literary Voices* (North Newton: Bethel College, 1993) 1f. He states a preference for a 'wide-angle' lens approach for writers who were shaped by a Mennonite milieu.
- ² Hermann Sudermann, *Book of My Youth*, trans. W. Harding (London: John Lane, Ltd.) 55-95
- ³ *Ibid.*, 82f.
- ⁴ Herbert Reinoss, *Das Hermann Sudermann Buch* (Muenchen: Langer Mueller, 1985)
- ⁵ Reinoss, *op. cit.*, 540.
- ⁶ Theodor Kappstein, *Hermann Sudermann und seine 17 besten Bühnen werke* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1922). He states, "...aus einer religiös eifrigen Mennoniten familie; eines Brauers Sohn."
- ⁷ Matulis, Anatole C. *Lithuanian Culture in Modern German Prose Literature:*

Hermann Sudermann, *Ernst Wiechert, Agnes Meigel*. (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, 1966) 128.

- ⁸ This is clearly stated in Siegfried Marcuse's appeal for understanding when he tells his father that he cannot live with one foot in the ghetto and one in modern Germany. *Der Sturmgesele Sokrates* (Berlin: Cotta, 1903) 106f.
- ⁹ "Hermann Sudermann war um die Jahrhundertwende der erfolgreichste deutsche Dramatiker", in Herbert Reinoss, *Das Hermann Sudermann Buch* (München: Langen Müller, 1985) 537.
- ¹⁰ Cecil Davies, *Theatre for the People: The story of the Volksbühne* (Austin: University of Texas, 1977) 30.
- ¹¹ Francke, Kuno, *History of German Literature* (New York: AMS press, 1969) 560.
- ¹² Francke, op. cit., 571.
- ¹³ McInnes, Edward. *German Social Drama* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1976) 120.
- ¹⁴ Irmagard Leux, "Hermann Sudermann: Eine individual analytische und schaffen psychologische Studie." *Journal für Psychologie und Neurologie*, 1942, 42: 231-413.
- ¹⁵ Karl Leydecker. *Marriage and Divorce in the Plays of Hermann Sudermann* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1996) and Cordelia Stroinigg, *Sudermann's "Frau Sorge": Jugenstil, Archetype, Fairy Tale* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).
- ¹⁶ David Kirby notes that the Prussian government would purchase available lands from minority owners with the intent of selling them to German farmers, sometimes at reduced prices, thereby advancing German encroachment eastward. German was made the official language of East Prussia during the 1870s. *The Baltic World* (New York: Longman, 1996) 172f.
- ¹⁷ Francke, op. cit., 565.
- ¹⁸ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany: 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 215.
- ¹⁹ Max Nordau, *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization* (Chicago: L. Schick, 1884) 81ff. Nordau's book had 4 editions in as many years and he influenced the Berlin liberal establishment with his attacks on religion, politics, the monarchy and education. He was not an advocate of radical change but of evolutionary progress and reform. In *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895) Nordau praises Sudermann for resisting the tendency to imitate popular literary trends and refers to him as a "most vigorous talent." 532.
- ²⁰ Arno Panzer, "Hermann Sudermann," in Walter Rix, Hrsg., *Hermann Sudermann Werk und Wirkung* (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 1980). "Der Nachlass Sudermanns zeigt, wie er bis zuletzt politisch und künstlerisch interessiert bleibt." 27.
- ²¹ Hermann Sudermann, *Book of My Youth*, Trans. W. Harding (London: John Lane, Ltd, 1923), 377.
- ²² "Sein Name ging mit einem Schlage um die Welt, so we heute der eines Chaplin, de Sica oder Fellini." Müller und Schlien, 573. Masahachiro Yokomizo has noted Sudermann's popularity in "Hermann Sudermann in Japan" in Walter T. Rix, Hrsg., *Hermann Sudermann* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen, 1980) 345-359.
- ²³ Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of Modern Drama* (NY: Applause, 1985) 36.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ The Censor initially prohibited this play but permission was finally given for a Berlin performance when theatres beyond the control of the Prussian censor began scheduling productions. Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 264.
- ²⁶ Herbert Reinoss, *Das Hermann Sudermann Buch* (München: Langen Müller,

- 1985) 540. "Sudermann war berühmt und kam zu Reichtum."
- 27 Müller und Schlien, *Dramen des Naturalismus* (Emsdetten: Verlag Lechte, 1962) 573. "Yesterday you were the man, today its Sudermann."
- 28 Reinoss, op. cit., 538.
- 29 William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Modern Dramatists* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910) 158. Other German writers living at that time were Rainer Maria Rilke, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, and Franz Wedekind.
- 30 H. J. Boyesen, "The Drama of Revolt," *The Bookman*. Vol 1, No 6, July 1985. 384.
- 31 Cordelia Stroinigg, op. cit., 5.
- 32 Peter Bauland, *The Hooded Eagle: Modern German Drama on the New York Stage* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968) 9.
- 33 Mrs. Patrick Campbell, *My Life and Letters* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1922) 146.
- 34 Horst Claus, *The Theatre Director Otto Brahm* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983) 67.
- 35 David, Claude, *Von Richard Wagner zu Bertholt Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bucherei, KG, 1959) 114.
- 36 Reprinted in the program of the Karlsruhe production of the play in 1998.
- 37 G. B. Shaw, *Plays and Players: Essays on the Theatre* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) 41. He continues: "There really was something to roar about this time." "Magda" is the lead role in Sudermann's *Heimat* and the English translation of the play is also titled *Magda*. Meisner, Sanford and Dennis Longwell. *Sanford Meisner On Acting* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) "Duse's Magda", p13-15.
- 38 "To describe her (Duse's) art is something I am incapable of doing. Imagine our ideal Magda and add thousands and thousands of surprises and revelations." Sudermann letter to his wife Clara, quoted in William Weaver, *Duse: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) 96.
- 39 Willa Cather, commenting on the differing interpretations of Magda wrote, "Art is Bernhardt's dissipation, a sort of Bacchic orgy. It is Duse's consecration, her religion, her martyrdom." Quoted in Gold and Fizdale, *The Divine Sarah* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) 259.
- 40 Müller und Schlien, *Dramen des Naturalismus* (Emsdetten: Verlag Lechte, 1962) 574. "Nicht ohne Grund hingen die grössten Schauspieler ihr Herze an seine Rollen..."
- 41 John F Coar. *Studies in German Literature in the 19th Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1903) 316.
- 42 Oscar Brockett, *The Theatre: An Introduction*. 7th ed., (NY: Holt, Rienhart and Winston) 1979. Interestingly, his 8th edition does have a brief reference to Sudermann. Arnott, Peter. *The Theatre in its Time: An Introduction* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1986) and Wilson, Edwin and Alfred Goldfarb. *Living Theatre* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1996). The massive *Literarische Manifeste der Jahrhundertwende 1890-1910*, edited by Erich Ruprecht and Dieter Bänisch (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970) dismisses Sudermann with a few cursory references.
- 43 A number of commentators have referred to him as the "Balzac from the East."
- 44 Volker Berghahn, Volker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany: 1871-1914* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994) 96-131 and John C. G. Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 137.
- 45 Francke, op. cit., 556.
- 46 Werner Schienemann: "Auch als Gegner Bismarcks wusste Sudermann sehr wohl die Tragik des eigenen Volkes zu beurteilen." In Walter Rix, Hrsg, *Hermann Sudermann: Werk und Wirkung* (Würzburg: Königshausen, 1980) 218.

- ⁴⁷ Georg Witkowski, *German Drama of the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by L.E. Horning (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1909) 153.
- ⁴⁸ Alex Natan, *German Men of Letters* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1963) 3.
- ⁴⁹ Georg Witkowski, op. cit., 155.
- ⁵⁰ John Coar, op. cit., 326.
- ⁵¹ Witkowski, op. cit., 153
- ⁵² Natan, op. cit., 2.
- ⁵³ Reinoss, op. cit., 539
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 206ff.
- ⁵⁵ Reinoss, op. cit., 540.
- ⁵⁶ Hermann Sudermann, *Im Paradies der Heimat* (Berlin: Paul Franke Verlag, 1928).
- ⁵⁷ "Hermann Sudermann," *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama*, vol. 4 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972) 253.
- ⁵⁸ Phelps, *Essays on Modern Dramatists*, 149.
- ⁵⁹ Anatole Matulis, *Lithuanian Culture in Modern German Prose Literature* (W. Lafayette: Purdue University, 1966).
- ⁶⁰ Stroinigg, *Op. Cit.*, 7.
- ⁶¹ William Mainland, "Hermann Sudermann" in *German Men of Letters*, Alex Natan, ed., 34.
- ⁶² Hermann Sudermann, *Cat's Bridge*. Translator not identified (New York: P.F. Collier, n.d.) biographical sketch, 33.
- ⁶³ Hermann Sudermann, *The Excursion to Tilsit*, trans. Lewis Galantieri (New York: Horace Liveright, 1930).
- ⁶⁴ Anatole Matulis. *Op. Cit.*, 36.
- ⁶⁵ Pascal, op. cit., 92-92.
- ⁶⁶ J. C. G. Röhl, *Op. Cit.*, 33.
- ⁶⁷ Roy Pascal, *Op. Cit.*, 254.
- ⁶⁸ For example, the novelist Gustav Freytag wrote the following after Bismarck's 1871 victory against the French: "There never was a struggle fought for a greater ideal than this; never perhaps did Nemesis strike down the guilty so violently; never perhaps did any army have such warmth, such inspiration, and such deep poetic sense of the fact that the dreadful work of the battlefields served a higher ethical purpose..." Cited in Gordon Craig, op. cit., 35.
- ⁶⁹ Matulas, op. cit., 125.
- ⁷⁰ Volker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany: 1871-1914* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994) 96-131 and John C. G. Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995) 190-212. Roy Pascal differs with this interpretation of *Der Katzensteg* and reads it as an appeal to German nationalism.
- ⁷¹ Werner Schienemann, "Mensch und Landschaft im Werk Hermann Sudermann," in Walter Rix, op. cit., 215-231
- ⁷² Mainland, op. cit., 35.
- ⁷³ Stroinigg, op. cit., 7.
- ⁷⁴ Sudermann, *Book of My Youth*, 295f.
- ⁷⁵ Mainland, *Op. Cit.*, p.36.
- ⁷⁶ Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. His chapter "The Jew as Alien and Bourgeois" is informative on this theme. Pp67-84.
- ⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Volume 2, Greg Smith, editor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 408. This is probably a reference to *John the Baptist* and the three one-acts *Morituri*.
- ⁷⁸ Horst Claus, op. cit., 67.
- ⁷⁹ Müller und Schlien, op. cit., 574
- ⁸⁰ *Verrohung in der Theaterkritik: zweigemasse Betrachtungen*. Berlin: Cotta, 1903. 56p.
- ⁸¹ Alfred Kerr, *Herr Sudermann, der D..Di..Dichter: Ein kritisches Vademecum*

- (Berlin: Verlag Helianthus, 1903) 45.
- ⁸² Perspectives on his decline abroad are beyond the scope of this paper.
- ⁸³ Müller und Schlien, *op. cit.*, 573-4. "Und so würde diesen das Leben als Dramatiker immer schwerer gemacht." 573-4.
- ⁸⁴ Alex Natan, *Op. Cit.*, 3.
- ⁸⁵ Stroinigg, *Op. Cit.*, 2
- ⁸⁶ Kerr, *Op. Cit.*, 38.
- ⁸⁷ Edward Shanks, "There was a Young Lady Named Magda." *Outlook*, April 7, 1923. 51:289.
- ⁸⁸ Müller und Schlien, *op. cit.*, 572.
- ⁸⁹ Alex Natan, *op. cit.*, 2 also Müller und Schlien, *Op. Cit.*, 573: "das Publikum entzückten und mitrissen, aber die Kritik gin night mehr mit"
- ⁹⁰ Stroinigg, *op. cit.*, 1.
- ⁹¹ Bauland, *op. cit.*, 12
- ⁹² Hale, Edward E. Jr. "The Renaissance of the English Drama." *The Dial*, September 16, 1896, 21: 149-150. "Magda."
- ⁹³ Bauland, *op. cit.*, 24
- ⁹⁴ Hermann Sudermann, *Book of My Youth*, 234. "But, my friends, it was not so easy to make a revolution in those days as the revolutionaries, by the grace of November 9, 1918, have come to imagine."