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Notes on

AUGUST PRINZ (1810–1883)

And the Publication of
Aus den Memoiren einer Sängerin

Extracted from

Irrgarten der Erotik

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August Prinz

German prudery has no doubt contributed to the fact that even specialist scholars—who dutifully record a mass of insignificant names in their reference works—have discreetly passed over this publisher, who supplied his contemporaries with reading matter through the printing of numerous erotica.

From Schultz's *Buchhändler-Adreßbuch* [Booksellers' Address Book] one learns only that his firm, "Verlagsbureau Altona," was founded in March 1848 in Altona, and that in partnership with H. Neubürger in Dessau he added a subsidiary business in 1871, the "Verlagsbureau Sep. Conto in Altona," which existed until 1877. In 1883 he transferred his business to Hamburg, Lincolnstraße 11, where he fell into financial difficulties. On 27 January 1884 August Prinz must either have withdrawn from the firm or died shortly before, for the 1885 directory contains the following notice:

"Verlags-Bureau (G. Kramer), publishing house in Hamburg, St. Pauli, Thalstraße 2.5. Agent Heitmann. Operates solely for the purpose of settling the affairs of the former firm: Verlagsbureau in Altona. All deliveries take place under the name G. Kramer in Hamburg."

Prinz's attitude toward erotic literature he made openly known at several points in his anonymously published work *Der Buchhandel vom Jahre 1815 bis zum Jahre 1843* (Altona 1855), as well as in its continuation, ... *bis zum Jahre 1860* (Hamburg und Altona 1860, printed by L. Schnauss in Leipzig, Ackermann & Wulff in Hamburg,

and H. G. Voigt in Hamburg).

I am no less of the opinion," he writes, "that such (i.e. obscene) books should not be brought openly before the public. But to condemn someone merely because he publishes such an (immoral) book is unjust, for books are merchandise like any other, and one tries one way or another. (p. 50)

With these words Prinz breaks a lance in his own defence, frankly admitting that he printed obscene works. He further confesses that criminal proceedings were instituted against him on account of the publication of licentious writings, namely on the basis of a denunciation by the Berlin bookseller Friedrich Schneider. Nothing, however, is known about the outcome of this investigation, which must have taken place before 1855. No criminal records relating to Prinz are preserved in the Altona police archives.

Even in his own time prudery among colleagues produced some curious blooms. In 1827 Althing's *Kleine Erzählungen*¹ (printed by Reizenstein in Schleiz) had been published and distributed by Ernst Klein in Leipzig. Prussia, Saxony, and several other states banned the book for immorality. At the Leipzig Fair the publishers Frommann, J. Campe, B. F. Voigt, and Fr. Perthes proposed a highly unusual motion: that the stories be destroyed and, as a token of contempt for such writings, that one copy be burned in the presence of all. The motion actually passed, and the *auto-da-fé* duly took place. The Board of the Börsenverein and Hinrichs, the author of the well-known bibliography, then declared that they would no longer include books dealing with prostitution in the catalogue of new publications.

¹ A collection of short stories by 'Christian Althing', a pseudonym used by Christian August Fischer (1771-1829). — Translator's note.

On closer inspection, however, these worthy colleagues were applying a double standard. Prinz rightly remarks that Casanova's *Mémoires* were no more immoral than Althing's tales. Yet Casanova had been published by Brockhaus, a respected firm (1822–1828), whereas Ernst Klein, because of his many quarrels with fellow publishers, was widely disliked. Toward other publishers and booksellers, the Börsenverein proved far less narrow-minded. Brockhaus, after his bankruptcy in Leipzig, had already issued forbidden books from Amsterdam under the imprint Peter Hammer in Cologne; nevertheless, he was permitted to advertise his editions of Casanova's *Memoirs* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* in the *Börsenblatt*. The same journal willingly offered its columns to Heilbutt in Altona, a publisher of erotic works. Fischhaber in Stuttgart was allowed, unmolested, to distribute Grecourt's poems and the *Memoiren des Herrn von H.*² Prinz further names the respected firm of Duncker & Humblot as publisher of the two obscene works *Denkwürdigkeiten des Herrn von S-a* and *Memoiren des Herrn T-y.*³ In the former case this probably refers to C. B. von Wolffmann's *Memoiren des Freiherrn von S-a*, edited by R. Müldener (3 vols.), which in fact was also published by Prinz himself (Altona 1874) and contained no obscenities. The identification is therefore doubtful.

All these attacks upon fellow publishers read like a carefully composed plea for the defence. Prinz knew why he wrote thus. He tried, in his own words, "one way or another" to secure success for himself. Erotica sold. Why

² Presumably a reference to *Denkwürdigkeiten des Herrn von H. eines teutschen Edelmannes*, a work generally ascribed to Gustav Schilling (1766-1839). The novel was first published by Himburg at 'Rom' [Berlin], in 1787. There are many reprints. For details see *Hayn/Gotendorf* II, pp. 29, 30 & IX, pp. 124,125. — *Translator's note.*

³ An unidentifiable work. — *Translator's note.*

should he not meet the demand of his readers? And so, in rapid succession, he issued works of the coarsest erotic kind, printed in the cheapest possible manner. As fictitious imprints he chose J. J. Wagener, Neustadt; Reginald Chesterfield, Boston; George Brown, Cincinnati; and occasionally Pietro Tarone in Padua.

Under these various imprints his wares were sent out into the world; only more cautious works appeared under the designation "Verlagsbureau." On 11 and 21 September 1863 the first prohibitions were issued against the following titles: *Memoiren und galante Abenteuer einer jungen Frau aus der Demi-monde* (Altona, Verlagsbureau);⁴ *Die Venusgrotte, oder die Kunst, Männer aus- und anzuziehen* (ibid.); *Memoiren und galante Abenteuer der Ida Jones* (Neustadt, J. J. Wagener); and *Das moderne Decameron, oder wahre Geschichten aus dem Leben und Treiben der feinen Welt* (Boston, Reginald Chesterfield).⁵

Prinz naturally had no intention of voluntarily cutting off so lucrative a source of income. He was clever enough to conceal his role as publisher so effectively that the censoring authorities failed to recognize how thoroughly they were being duped by the various false imprints under which Prinz operated. On 19 August 1868 the entire erotic catalogue of the Verlagsbureau in Altona was prohibited, and on 26 January 1869 that of J. J. Wagener in Altona in particular. Whether these sweeping bans bore fruit is doubtful. For some time at least they appear to have

⁴ This title, and the one following it, seem to have been part of a series of 10 pamphlets on the subject of prostitution by 'Baron V. Rosenberg' [i.e. Joh. Wilh. Christern, born 1803.]. See *Hayn/Gotendorf* vol. I, pp. 311,2. — Translator's note.

⁵ A 3-volume work comprising 100 strongly erotic tales in verse first published in 1854. Prinz produced his reprint in 1863 with the false imprint 'Boston [Altona], Druck und Verlag von Reginald Chesterfield.' See *Hayn/Gotendorf* vol. I, p. 256. & vol. 2, p. 18. — Translator's note.

had little effect, since it was not until 4 September 1872 that the book censors once more found it necessary to target the Altona publications (among them *Jettchen*,⁶ *die schöne Schenkmanzell*, *Liebesnächte*⁷, *Memoiren und Aventuren Therasas*,⁸ *Die falsche Pepita* by Reuen-Gerg⁹, and *Flora, die Geheimnisse einer Probiermanzell* by Vocativus).¹⁰ On 16 May 1877 the entire erotic catalogue of Reginald Chesterfield was placed on the index, and on 26 October the celebrated—or more appropriately, notorious—novel *Aus den Memoiren einer Sängerin* was expressly singled out for prohibition.

This brings us to what is undoubtedly the finest erotic novel of its time of German origin, one that has always and everywhere been associated with the name of the famous singer Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (6 December 1804 – 26 January 1860). She is supposed to have been the author of these ultra-realistically written reminiscences. Hayn-Gotendorf, in their *Bibliotheca Germanorum erotica*, list the various editions under her name without expressing the slightest doubt as to her authorship.

“Strangely enough, there is no real evidence whatsoever to support this claim. According to one widely circulated version, the singer Angelo Neumann (born 1838) is

⁶ “*Jettchen, die schöne Schenkmanzell*. 2. Auflage. Hamburg 1860. 12°. 48 S.” *Hayn/Gotendorf* vol. IX, 306. I’ve been unable to trace a copy of the 1st printing. — *Translator’s note*.

⁷ *Liebesnächte. Geheimnisse der Tausend und Einen Nacht einer schönen Frau*. Altona: August Prinz, [c. 1875]. 12mo. 3 volumes. *Hayn/Gotendorf* vol. IV, p. 191 & vol. IX, p. 354. — *Translator’s note*.

⁸ An unidentifiable work. — *Translator’s note*

⁹ An unidentifiable work. — *Translator’s note*

¹⁰ There is a work called *Flora die Geheimnisse einer Probiermanzell* (Altona, 1870), but no reference to ‘Vocativus,’ a pseudonym used by August Wilhelm Christern, a physician who hacked out a number of erotic works for Prinz and others. See *Hayn/Gotendorf* vol. 2, page, 323. — *Translator’s note*.

cited as a key witness, since he is said to have seen Schröder at work on the manuscript on several occasions and to have found it in her desk after her death. On closer inspection, however, this supposed witness proves wholly unreliable. In 1851, the year in which the preface to the *Memoirs* is dated, Neumann was only thirteen years old. It is hardly likely that the author would have allowed such an immature boy insight into her most intimate confessions. Moreover, in 1860, the year of Schröder-Devrient's death, Neumann was engaged as a tenor in Pressburg, while she died in Coburg. How could he, in the midst of his engagement, have immediately secured the manuscript from her desk upon her death?

Heinrich Stümcke, a careful authority on these matters, likewise denies that Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient wrote the *Memoiren einer Sängerin*, published in 1861 by Prinz in Altona. "At most," he suggests, "the anonymous author may have made use of certain confidential letters written by Schröder to her friends—especially, it is said, to the Dresden physician Hofrat Carus." Stümcke here has in mind the Privy Councillor G. G. Carus (1789–1869). But quite apart from the fact that this highly cultivated and exceedingly honourable man would scarcely have handed over private letters addressed to him during his lifetime—least of all for dubious purposes—the suppositions just mentioned collapse when one compares the actual facts of Schröder-Devrient's life with those presented in the *Memoiren*. Neither the dates nor the places withstand scrutiny.

The *Memoiren* maintain from beginning to end the fiction that they are based on a carefully kept diary in the form of letters addressed to the author's physician and friend, letters which unveil the final intimacies of her eventful life. Even if one were to assume—without any justification—that an unknown editor existed who arbi-

trarily altered names and places in order to avoid compromising living persons, such reshaping could scarcely have gone so far as to produce a life story entirely at variance with reality. One must not forget that the letters on which the book is supposedly founded were addressed to a man thoroughly acquainted with the author's circumstances. If we posit an editor, this otherwise capable arranger would hardly have burdened himself with such glaring inconsistencies.

Yet there is no evidence at all that the letters were revised by a third hand. We must therefore assume that, if Schröder-Devrient were indeed the author, the letters would have appeared in their original form—unless we adopt the only plausible explanation: that a third party invented them from beginning to end and merely exploited the resounding name of the recently deceased artist as a profitable advertisement.

One arrives almost inevitably at this conclusion upon examining the internal evidence of the *Memoiren*.

The preface is dated 7 February 1851. In it the author describes herself as “now” thirty-six years old, which would place her birth in 1815. In fact, the singer was born in 1804. In the first letter of the first part, she states that when she herself was fourteen, her mother was thirty-four. Yet her mother, Sophie Schröder, was born in 1781; her thirty-fourth year thus fell in 1815—whereas, according to the *Memoiren*, Wilhelmine would only have been born that year, though in reality she was already eleven.

On page 347 (I cite the 1907 edition), she remarks that when she was twenty-seven (therefore in 1831), both her parents died within a week of each other in a devastating epidemic. In reality, her father, Friedrich Schröder, died on 18 July 1818 in Karlsbad. Her mother survived her husband by fifty years and her daughter by eight, dying on 15 February 1868 in Munich.

On page 104 Wilhelmine claims to have been born in Austria. In truth, she was born in Hamburg. She speaks of heavy financial losses suffered by her father; yet in her authentic notes, used by Claire von Glümer, she frankly admits that both parents were poorly paid and that her father was content with a modest post at the Burgtheater—hardly evidence of a once splendid fortune.

She mentions a continuous three-year stay in London, whereas in fact she was there only in three separate seasons (1832, 1833, and 1837). She speaks of a two-year engagement in Florence, where she claims to have played, but says not a word of Dresden, her permanent home, nor of Berlin. Admittedly, the preface concludes with “D., 7 February 1851,” which might be taken to mean Dresden. But in 1851 she was in Russia with her husband and later in Ems. She did not return to Dresden until 1852.

In the sixth chapter of the first part she expounds at length that she has not yet married, since an artist cannot at once be housewife, mother, and darling of the public. Yet at the supposed time of writing (1851) she was already living in her third marriage with the landed nobleman von Bock.

A letter reproduced by Claire von Glümer (p. 127) is also instructive. Addressed to Carus, it concludes:

You remind me of my memoirs—I have not yet been able to resolve to undertake the task; I should have to reopen many a wound scarcely healed and pass stern, unrelenting judgment on those who are still alive and whom I would rather spare. I have taken one step toward this work: I have arranged my papers, and when the proper mood comes over me, much will already lie prepared.

It is difficult to understand why the supposed author would have concealed the matter from her closest friend and physician. One would then have to assume that the

letters of the *Memoiren* were addressed to some other doctor—yet Carus was in fact her long-standing and only personal physician. Moreover, the melancholy tone of this letter, written in the same year, is wholly at odds with the lightly buoyant preface of the erotic work.

Finally, the date of publication raises further doubts. The first part of the *Memoiren*, as Stümcke plausibly suggests, appeared in 1861—shortly after the singer's death, when her name was still fresh in public memory and a speculative publisher might easily capitalize on it. August Prinz, proprietor of the “Verlagsbureau” in Altona and demonstrably the publisher of the *Memoiren*, was precisely the sort of unscrupulous businessman who would not hesitate to step over corpses. There is much to suggest that he himself wrote the eroticon—at least the first part.

If there are already well-founded doubts regarding Schröder-Devrient's authorship of the first part, then with respect to the second part there is almost certainty that it was written not by the artist herself but by a third party. *Hayn-Gotendorf* give “after July 1875” as the date of publication, though without substantiating this claim. Yet the *Memoiren* themselves contain several clues that allow us to determine the period more precisely.

At one point reference is made to the so-called “Wagner mania,” which, as is well known, took place between 1868 and 1872. The alleged author also mentions reading Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who under the pseudonym Numa Numantius championed the cause of homosexual rights and published his writings between 1864 and 1870 (with only one appearing later, in 1879). Since August Prinz, who also issued the second part, did not dissolve his publishing house until 1884, the composition must fall somewhere between 1869 and 1884.

But the most important argument against Schröder-Devrient's authorship arises from a passage referring to the

so-called “Provisorium” in Hungary. It reads:

“At that time the so-called Provisorium still prevailed in Hungary; no Reichstag had yet been convened, although there was talk that one would be summoned in the following year. The Austrian government was beginning to realize that a system of coercion could achieve nothing in a country like Hungary and considered it more expedient to yield.”

The Provisorium ended, as is known, on 14 December 1865. A Reichstag was provisionally convened that same year and definitively in 1867. Since the author allegedly left Frankfurt “in July” (this statement immediately follows the passage quoted), this can only refer to July 1865. She then states that she spent two years in Budapest, one in Prague, two in Florence, and three in London. Thus, the second part could not have gone to press before 1873 at the earliest. That would, of course, concern only the date of printing, not authorship. But as Schröder-Devrient had already died in 1860, she could hardly have reported on political events of 1865.

There is yet another weighty consideration. On pages 282–284 and 303–319 a prolonged orgy in the Budapest brothel of Resi Luft is described in comfortable detail. This scene corresponds almost word for word—apart from certain literary embellishments—to a similar scene in the satadic pamphlet *Meine Tante Resi, Luft-Resi, Bordellbesitzerin Budapest, Geschrieben von Ihrer Nichte Elise*. Verlag von Casanova (no place, no date), pp. 46–65. In that text the niece Elise recounts her participation in the orgy, even giving the number of participants individually—though adding them up incorrectly; the Memoirs reproduce the same erroneous total.

According to *Hayn-Gotendorf* (IV, 450), the original edition of *Resi Luft* appeared in the early 1860s, though they append a question mark. I have never seen such an

edition. The copy in my possession, identical with that described by Hayn-Gotendorf, bears on the verso of the second blank leaf the imprint “Privatdruck 1908,” apparently overlooked by those bibliographers.¹¹ This latter year seems the only plausible one, for Resi Luft ran her brothel in Budapest’s Strickergasse between 1870 and 1900 and died on 12 March 1906. Przibram reports that visits to her establishment were among the regular pleasures of the Austrian delegations.

We are therefore compelled to consider the possibility that the author of Resi Luft drew upon the Memoirs—a curious hypothesis when one compares the cultivated language of the latter with the coarse style of the former. It is hard to see why, if the author of that crude pamphlet had the *Memoiren* before him as a model, he would not also have profited from their more polished German, especially since he clearly struggled with the language.

Given the almost verbatim parallels, however, no other conclusion seems possible—unless one assumes that both descriptions derive from some third, as yet undiscovered source.

Even if we set aside the brothel episode as inconclusive, there remains an overwhelming probability that the *Memoiren*—at least in their second part—are the product of an unknown fantasist who laboured to create a connection with the first part, though not always successfully. Thus, for example, whereas the supposed author in the preface to the first part declares herself to be thirty-six years old,

¹¹ Vol. 9 of *Hayn/Gotendorf*, (p. 394) a supplementary volume edited by Paul Englisch and published in 1929, lists a copy of *Meine Tante Resi* dated 1910, with the same imprint, ‘Verlag von Casanova’, as the original edition published in the 1860s. The title of the 1910 edition is slightly different: *Meine Tante Resi Lust, Bordellbesitzerin in Budapest, geschrieben von ihrer Nichte Elise*. — Translator’s note.

in the sixth chapter of the second part—after so many further experiences—she has reached only twenty-seven years of age. Such inconsistencies point almost certainly to two different authors for the two parts.

The author's own uncertainty is revealed in the precautionary introduction to the first letter of the second part, where he remarks that the letters now following “differ entirely from those I have written hitherto in style, in form, in philosophy and in views, as well as in the variety of their subject matter.”

Anyone who takes the trouble to examine the objections enumerated above must surely arrive at the conviction that it is an insult to the memory of a noble artist to associate her name with a fabricated eroticist. No proof of her authorship can be produced; the arguments against it accumulate under serious scrutiny and are of such weight that they cannot simply be brushed aside.

Who, then, was the true author of the most famous publication of Prinz's house? It will never be established with certainty. One may only conjecture that Prinz himself—who possessed literary ability and favoured anonymity even in works of no questionable character—wrote one of the two parts.

It is also possible that the eroticist came from his house poet, August Wilhelm Christern (1809–ca. 1870), a Hamburg physician and writer who, under the pseudonyms Baron von Rosenberg and O. Vocativus, produced numerous piquant and equivocal writings for the Altona “Verlagsbureau,” for the similarly inclined “Verlagsanstalt in Leipzig” (whose entire erotic catalogue was banned on 11 May 1872), and for related enterprises. In general his daring works drew upon Berlin or Hamburg prostitution—such as *Grisetten- und Loretteleben in Hamburg und die Schlupfwinkel der geheimen Prostitution usw.* (Altona 1861) and *Hamburgs galante Häuser bei Nacht und Nebel*, 10th ed.,

Altona 1870.

Gugitz suspects that Christern also wrote the frankly obscene *Roman eines öffentlichen Mädchens* and *Julchen und Jettchen auf der Leipziger Messe*, deducing this from certain stylistic and technical peculiarities. If that conjecture were confirmed, then the Memoirs could scarcely have come from his pen, for the style of the two sotadic works differs fundamentally from that of the *Memoiren*.

Yet Gugitz's assumption may be mistaken. Perhaps a thorough textual analysis could still determine whether Christern may lay claim to paternity of the *Memoiren*.