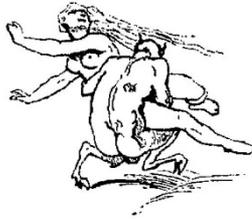


# Paul English

NOTES  
ON 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PUBLISHERS  
OF  
GERMAN EROTICA



SCISSORS & PASTE BIBLIOGRAPHIES  
SANTA ROSA, CA  
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## NOTE

This short but useful text was originally published in the periodical *Philobiblon : Eine Zeitschrift für Büchersammler*. (2,4. 1929. pp. 113-116). I am greatly indebted to Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel for agreeing to translate it into English for inclusion on this website; with only minor amendments it is entirely Hartmut's work. – P.J.K.



...And what of Germany (and Austria)? Here as well there has been no lack of courageous publishers who preferred risking everything to giving up the distribution of curiosa.

Starting with the 1848 revolution, there was an upsurge in erotic publishing. Here the main 'credit' is due to J. Scheible who, in Stuttgart, maintained unfathomable rooms that were true treasuries of erotic rarities, among them numerous copies of the three extremely valuable bibliographies of Pisanus Fraxi

(Henry Spencer Ashbee), long since vanished from the market. Bibliophiles could search through these treasures for hours, always finding something new. As the trade in French originals was blooming, Scheible began to publish German translations. But no great care was spent on their production, and they were comparatively cheap. *Die philosophische Therese* for instance, one of the finest French erotic books of the 18th century, only cost 1 Thaler 10 Silbergroschen. Besides publishing pornography, he was also interested in sexology, in those days a highly suspect subject; these books were however not published over his name.

Equally famous was August Prinz, of Altona<sup>1</sup> who produced one erotica after the other, either over the imprint of Verlags-Bureau, Altona, Reginald Chesterfield, Boston, or I. J. Wagner, Neustadt, which were poorly printed on worse paper. In 1874 he closed down this kitchen of bawdry after an already over-long production run. He also published the first edition of *Memoiren einer Sängerin*, attributed to the famous Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient. No sure proof of the authorship exists, however, so that the text has sometimes – I think wrongly – attributed to Prinz himself: it is much too fluently written and shows a wide knowledge of the world, which would be more plausible in the case of Schröder-Devrient.

Wilhelm Digel at Hamburg, later Stuttgart, Himburg in Berlin (under the pseudonym ‘Pietro Tarone’), Fischhaber in Reutlingen, Wallishauser in Vienna, Graeff in Leipzig, all published many erotic titles. Of these only Digel survives, and even now partially clings to his once cherished inclinations.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century brought a new flourishing of erotic literature. Pride of place must go to C. W. Stern of Vienna, who was active from 1906 to 1912. The firm advertised quite openly in popular journals

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<sup>1</sup> Then a town near, and today part of, Hamburg.

like *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus* and thus attracted customers for its pornographic publications from around the world, even in higher circles of society, who, due to their influence, helped to prevent the prosecution of their supplier. Stern eschewed cheap, worthless pornography and instead made possible the publication of first class works like Cary Von Karwath's *Die Erotik in der Kunst* (1908), Grand-Carteret's *Die Erotik in der französischen Karikatur* (1909), Monnier, Rops, &c. Finally however, the flood of anger of the guardians of morality breached the levees, and one day the police carried off five carloads of superb erotic publications from the premises of the enterprising firm. They comprised 30,000 volumes with a material value of about 150,000 Austrian crowns. Still, only about half of the impounded books reached the authorities, as the other half were sold off by the police to scrounging collectors on the way. The punishment was surprisingly lenient; Stern was sentenced on 31 May 1913 to pay a fine of 100 crowns – about 80 marks<sup>2</sup> – for contravention of the ban against cheap sensationalism, possibly because the judge considered him sufficiently punished through the loss of his stock.

Only slightly less important was the Wiener Verlag, whose owner, Fritz Freund, published quite a few reprints and translations of erotic literature. He had, for instance, Sade's *Justine* and *Juliette* translated, which were distributed through his representative Eichberg, who, unable to make money out of it, jumped in despair into the Seine. Freund needs to be mentioned as well because he first published Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen* (1903) and also because he was the first publisher of one of the most popular German erotic books, *Josefine Mutzenbacher, die Geschichte einer wienerischen Dirne*<sup>3</sup>, the genesis of which is

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<sup>2</sup> In 1929, 80 Reichsmarks was the approximate equivalent of \$20.

<sup>3</sup> *Josefine Mutzenbacher, the Story of a Viennese Whore* (1906). The titlepage of what is probably the second edition, published in the same year, is reproduced above.

not without piquancy. Freund assigned the writing to a well-known writer Felix S\*\*\*<sup>4</sup>(4), who finished two thirds of it before asking for a higher royalty. When Freund refused his demand, the author stopped work and the resourceful publisher then asked the journalist Willi Handl,<sup>5</sup> who died only recently, to finish the book. Handl did a very satisfactory job, so that the novel doesn't seem the work of two authors.

I shall desist from naming publishers belonging to present times for reasons that will easily be understood, but none of them can be called outstanding. This might also be caused by a typically Viennese idiosyncrasy, in that here printers produce erotica on their own and then go looking for distributors, as a result of which the dealers get caught more frequently than the publishers.

In Budapest, Gustav Grimm and Fritz Sachs (trading also as the firm of Sachs & Pollack or the Pannonia Bookshop) were the most well-known, the latter concentrating on the basest pornography, and flooding the market with pornographic photographs and the like at very cheap prices.

In Berlin, it was Willy Schindler who, around 1910, was committed to the distribution of erotic literature. In his journal *Blätter für Bibliophile*, of which only four issues were published, he gave information about new publications, some of which he'd published himself. *Hayn-Gotendorf* name him as the author of books published under the pseudonym of 'Richard Werther'.

All these publishers were very clever and quite aware of the fact that they were treading on very thin ice. Quite often they therefore used the cover of a society, pretending that they were producing private editions for limited membership. In reality,

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<sup>4</sup> Felix Salten (1869-1945). The attribution of *Josefine Mutzenbacher* to Salten has been disputed.

<sup>5</sup> Siegmund Wilhelm 'Willi' Handl (1872 – 1920), Austrian author & theatre critic.

the society usually consisted of just the publisher himself. Already Jules Gay had used this same trick earlier, in the 1870s and 80s; in 1871, for example, he'd founded the 'Société des bibliophiles Cosmopolites', the only members of which were himself and his son Jean. He was imitated by C. W. Stern and his 'Gesellschaft deutscher und österreichischer Bibliophilen'<sup>6</sup> and Willy Schindler's 'Internationale Vereinigung zum Studium der Sexualwissenschaft'<sup>7</sup>(6), which was of serious intent and actually had quite a large number of members.

However, of fantasy pure and simple were:

The 'Eros-Gesellschaft' of Munich (in reality in Berlin), which published masterpieces of erotic world literature in mostly well illustrated, fine editions. The only member of this was the bookseller Fritz Jentsch. Its catchy name was exploited by 'Eri-Gesellschaft', 'Eros Verlag', and 'Aphrodite-Verlag, Strasbourg.'

The 'Bimini-Gesellschaft,' which issued the *Silberne Bücher der Insel Bimini* series, was published by the bookseller Johndorff, who sold his productions via three travelling sales agents to private customers, earning so much money that he was able to acquire the majority holding of a well-known publishing house.

In Berlin, the 'Bimini-Club' consisted of just the two entrepreneurs, F. Schwalbe and Otto Wiehle, the latter having a sideline in counterfeiting so called 'wallpaper' 50-Mark banknotes.

The 'Iris-Gesellschaft' in Frankfurt/Main even published a monthly journal.

F. Edgar Shulz founded the 'Collectionneur-Club in Charlottenburg.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'Society of German and Austrian Bibliophiles.'

<sup>7</sup> 'International Association for the Study of Sexology.'

<sup>8</sup> Charlottenburg was then near, and now part of, Berlin.

A special case was the 'Internationale Zentralverband der Bibliophilen über Volkserotik aller Zeiten und Völker'<sup>9</sup>(8) of Friedrich Karl Holzinger, aka Ferdinand Rodenstein (alias also as Dr Schwimmer, Siegfried Freiherr Von Fried, Waldemar Ferkes, Dr Steinröder &c.), who was utterly convinced of the importance of pornography. His journal *Der Venus-Tempel* (1919-1925) published some quite interesting material, including information concerning legal proceedings against the publisher. By May 1922 he claimed that the society had 501 members, though that number would diminish rapidly due to police searches of the homes of members. Rodenstein not only wrote a number of pornographic texts, but also ran a lending library where members could, for a fee, borrow erotic publications – for study purposes, of course. As a bibliomaniac completely lost in his passion, he bound some of the books in his library in keeping with their content. In the 18th century, particularly in France, there had been bibliophiles who had their erotic books bound in skin from women's breast, including the nipple; Rodenstein went one step further in having his bindings embellished with other female sexual characteristics.

Rodenstein's not very select but extensive library was confiscated in 1928 when he offered it for sale, and it has now found a final home in the Department II of the Berlin police headquarters. The collection contains numerous manuscripts, mostly of flagellant content, which show that Rodenstein, left to his devices, might have given the world many an erotic book.

With very few exceptions, none of the publishers of such literature made a financial success out of it. On the contrary, many of them had to pay for their operations with heavy fines and jail terms as well as the loss of the money they'd invested in confiscated materials. Only one enterprise – not however residing on German soil – is said to have flourished, and even made

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<sup>9</sup> 'International Central Association of Amateurs of Popular Erotics of all Time and Peoples.'

its proprietors into the owners of large houses. This was the *Bibliothèque des curieux* in Paris, 4 rue de Furstenberg, a publishing house belonging to the brothers George and Robert Briffaut, which existed from about 1908 to 1924.<sup>10</sup> Their publicity in Germany was quite active, and an army of smugglers carried the contraband goods across the borders – the brothers knew their business. In spite of small editions and careful production of each erotic text, the prices were kept extremely low (between 6 and 25 francs). The most famous works of erotic world literature were reborn, accompanied by well-informed bibliographical and historical introductions by competent bibliophiles such as Guillaume Apollinaire. When the police seized the books heaped up in the business offices in rue Boissy-d'Anglas, they needed two heavy trucks for their removal. Another warehouse was discovered at 22 rue Milton, under the name of Merlin, and here a great number of packages ready to be posted were impounded. The total weight of the seized material was estimated at 400 hundredweight.<sup>11</sup> A third storeroom was found at James Joffe's, 54 rue Saint Martin, though here the materials amounted to only 6 hundredweight. Finally, a keen police inspector discovered in Butry (Oise), at the premises of the photographer Langlois, stores of 400 negatives and 10,000 enlargements of pornographic photographs. The two owners of this far-flung enterprise owned a plush château and earned an annual net profit of 800,000 gold francs from the distribution of erotica. The extraordinary success of their initial publishing efforts seems to have led the owners to arrange their enterprise in too businesslike a manner.

In the meanwhile, in contradistinction to Germany and Austria, where even now there are mostly poor editions on bad

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, the company existed at the same address until at least 1949, in which year it published J. Rives Childs' fine bibliography of Restif de la Bretonne.

<sup>11</sup> About 400 metric tons.

paper with many misprints and kitschy illustrations, a change of taste has occurred in France. Erotic books published there recently are distinguished by refined taste and a meticulous delicacy of production, proving that first class artists are being employed and that wealthy publishers who love their work are producing choice items for well-to-do booklovers – without regard to the hazards of outmoded laws.

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