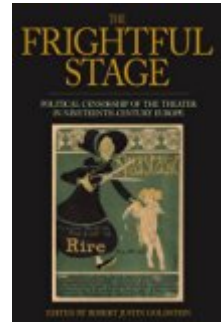


**Robert J. Goldstein.** *The Frightful State: Political Censorship of the Theater in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2009. 310 S. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84545-459-3.



**Gary D. Stark.** *Banned in Berlin: Literary Censorship in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2009. xxvii + 316 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84545-570-5.



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**Commissioned by** Benita Blessing (Oregon State University)

The topic of censorship in nineteenth-century Europe, as presented by these two volumes, is worthy of more attention among historians in political and cultural arenas. The authors here demonstrate not only the role of censorship in a variety of national contexts, but also the history of the institutionalization and bureaucratization of censorship. The two approaches to censorship here will be of interest for historians of the German Right, and historians of German and European culture and society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries more generally. Censorship, whether self-censoring or enforced by someone with cultural or political power, turns

out to be a complicated and intrinsic part of modern society.

Gary D. Stark has become an important scholar of neoconservative publishers, and his readers can now read his long-awaited book-length treatment of censorship of literature and theater in imperial Germany. His book is the product of an exemplary research effort: it draws on the holdings of an impressive array of archives, as well as a daunting quantity of published sources, including sometimes hard-to-track-down pamphlet and periodical literature, and makes effective use of legal sources and official publications. The endnotes at the end of each chapter testify to the thorough-

ness of Stark's research and will be invaluable to anyone trying to follow him in this field.

After an introduction situating his work in relation to both the historiography on imperial Germany and the wider literature on censorship, Stark begins, appropriately, with an examination of the legal basis for the censorship, looking at the censorship laws that existed in the imperial German state after 1871. In a sense, the alliterative title *Banned in Berlin* does the work a disservice, as Stark's research and analysis range well beyond the Reich's capital, taking regional variations into account, even if Berlin's censors increasingly set the tone in this period.

Stark provides a balanced and objective depiction of the censors themselves, roundly mocked at the time by writers such as Heinrich Heine and others as slow-witted, primitively repressive plods. Some censors, Stark argues, were relatively urbane and cultivated figures, like Kurt von Glasenapp, Berlin's chief censor in the last years of the empire. But there was still a tendency for censorship duties to be carried out by relatively uneducated police officials. Attempts to enlist recognized authors as advisors to censorship boards could backfire nastily, as writers easily found themselves caught between two fires, as Thomas Mann learned to his discomfort when the Munich censors banned Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* trilogy (1892-1913), despite Mann's advice to the contrary.

Stark analyzes the activity of German censors thematically, with chapters on political censorship, the defense of the social order (focusing on the censorship of socialist or socially critical drama and the running conflicts between the authorities and the Social Democrat-aligned *Freie Volksbühne*), religiously motivated censorship, and censorship on grounds of morality. A final chapter examines writers' responses to censorship. This includes a consideration of the vexed question of self-censorship. Stark acknowledges that there is no way of knowing what books and plays re-

mained unwritten because of the anticipated effects of the censorship. Perhaps the writer most deeply affected by censorship in Germany was the militant blasphemer Oskar Panizza, who was imprisoned and ultimately incarcerated as insane. Meanwhile other writers, like Carl Sternheim, also suffered from their clashes with censors. Still other writers adapted and showed a willingness to conform to avoid such difficulties.

Stark offers a carefully nuanced set of conclusions. He draws a number of comparisons between censorship of literature and theater stages in Germany and that in other countries, finding German censorship not that different from that of many other states. He also makes use of relevant theoretical literature, for example on the sociology of deviance. He finds that the state authorities did not always win in disputes over censorship: writers often got a fair day in court, although it made an enormous difference whether the defendant was a Social Democrat or a middle-class independent author. The draconian law of *lèse-majesté*, for example, was overwhelmingly used against socialist critics of the empire. Interestingly, Stark detects a trend towards gradually more liberal censorship practices after the 1890s, followed by a return to more repressive policies around 1909-10 with the appointment of Traugott von Jagow as police president of Berlin. Stark also notes that the state was not solely responsible for repressive policies in this field, with the agitation of conservative "moral entrepreneurs" and clerical interests and the Center Party, especially in Bavaria, doing much to muddy the waters when it came to fights over artistic freedom on German stages.

There may be minor disagreements with some of Stark's views: literary Naturalism, while socially critical, was not as "socialist" as Stark seems to suggest, and the effects of censorship on Social Democratic cultural activities, which extended to restrictions on *tableaux vivants* and even censorship of a socialist puppet theater, re-

main understated by Stark's focus on "high" literature and the formal literary theater. Certainly, this focus is a legitimate framework for this study, but some contextualization with "low" culture would make his compelling argument even stronger. Certainly, this call for more research does not rise to the level of criticism, but rather suggests that Stark's admirable rich research achievement begs for even more detail on this subject by future scholars. In this sense, Stark's work will reach a wide readership among scholars of imperial Germany, as well as anyone interested in the history of the German theater and literature of the period, and scholars who study censorship more broadly.

Robert Justin Goldstein's edited collection of essays on the political censorship of the theater in nineteenth-century Europe, *The Frightful Stage*, provides a bridge to Stark's work in Germany, not least with his contribution in the volume. The purpose of this work, as stated by the editor, is "to provide reliable and comprehensive summaries, for an English-language audience, of the latest research available from the most important countries of nineteenth-century Europe" (p. viii). The collection excludes Britain, on the grounds that English-speaking readers already have access to good treatments of the history of the censorship of the British stage. Although a defensible decision, it perhaps misses an opportunity for certain comparative purposes. Fortunately, some of the contributors, including Stark, have exceeded their brief and provide concise presentations that include much original research. Stark's own chapter, for instance, maintains the focus of the volume on political censorship—although, as becomes clear in these many essays, the lines between censorship on other grounds and political censorship are anything but easy to draw. Stark's chapter offers more than a reiteration of *Banned in Berlin* with relation to the theater, not least because of the different time frame and political focus. Because it starts with the early nineteenth century, Stark is able to include key figures such as Heine

and Karl Gutzkow, thereby demonstrating the censorship practices of the German states before unification, before returning to the imperial period.

Another chapter that will be of most interest to scholars of German history is Norbert Bachleitner's chapter on the Habsburg Empire. Bachleitner avoids the temptation of focusing solely on Vienna and the *Burgtheater*, providing a concise survey of the censorship practices in other parts of the empire as well. One feature of Habsburg theater censorship, along with a strong clerical influence, was an acute sensitivity towards anything that could inflame conflict between nationalities, which led to bans on works that could incite antisemitism (including William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* [c. 1596] for some years in the 1820s). Things changed in this regard by the 1890s with the rise of the Christian Social Party.

Other chapters deal with France (by Goldstein), Russia (Anthony Swift), Spain (David T. Gies), and Italy (John A. Davis). Interesting points of comparison and contrast emerge from these essays. The role of the church was strong in Spain, where the Inquisition played a role in censorship until 1834, and in the Italian states. Russia was the most repressive, with a full one-third of the 3,947 plays evaluated by the censors between 1882 and 1891 banned from performance. Prior censorship of works for the stage, as existed in Germany, was the norm in many European states.

Goldstein's introduction to the volume, and his summary at the end, abstain from relating the case studies to any theoretical framework or even from attempting to draw systematic comparative findings, offering instead a few common themes in the many different examples (e.g., the severity of censorship followed the "pendulum" of political repression). That this volume offers a mass of often very colorful details allows for intriguing new questions about individual countries' practices. Certainly, more research is in order for these sec-

tions in order to define or to further a comparative research agenda. But the chapters themselves provide excellent introductions to each case study. The detailed bibliographical essays that follow each essay may well stimulate more comparative research in the future.

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