

Frank Wedekind: Stock Poster with His Autograph Prologue to *Der Erdgeist*

Lauriejean Reinhardt

During the winter and spring of 1898, a dramatic ensemble known as the Ibsen Theater and sponsored by the *Leipziger literarische Gesellschaft* toured northern Germany, Silesia, and Austria. The ensemble's program was devoted almost exclusively to works by the playwright for whom it was named, Henrik Ibsen, but in this, their final season, they also included premiere performances of Frank Wedekind's Lulu play *Der Erdgeist* (1895). Known to the *Gesellschaft* chiefly as a poet, Wedekind accompanied the tour as a "dramaturgical secretary," but he also performed incidental parts in various Ibsen plays and interpreted the role of Dr. Schön in his own work under the stage name Heinrich Kammerer. The tour opened in Leipzig late in February, with three performances of *Der Erdgeist*. The ensemble then traveled to Halle, Braunschweig, Hamburg, Stettin, Breslau, and Vienna, returning to Leipzig late in June for additional performances under the sponsorship of the ensemble's director, Dr. Carl Heine.¹

The stock poster used for the tour showed details concerning the specific play, cast, date, and location, which were printed for each performance in the framed area to the left.² The poster was designed by Brynolf Wennerberg (1866-1950), a Swedish artist who was active in Munich and who, like Wedekind, contributed to the satiric journal *Simplizissimus*. Wennerberg's elaborate illustration--with its sinuous lines, energetic surface patterns, asymmetrical perspective, and sensuous interplay of serpents, waves, and the female form--is a characteristic example of turn-of-the-century *Jugendstil*. To the left, peering over the empty frame, is a bust of Ibsen. To the right is a likeness of "The Woman from the Sea" ("Die Frau vom Meer"), a character from Ibsen's play by the same title that was performed on the tour. Other Ibsen works performed by the ensemble included *Nora*, *Ein Volksfeind*, *Die Wildente*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Gespenster*.



DIRECTION:
Dr. CARL HEINE

B. WENNERBERG

Der Mensch ist die Krone,
Der regiert über alle Thiere,
Der hat Vernunft und mit seinem Verstand
Die unsterbliche Seele zu erlangen,
Schändlich durch das menschliche Geist!
Der Mensch ist die Krone,
Der regiert über alle Thiere,
Der hat Vernunft und mit seinem Verstand
Die unsterbliche Seele zu erlangen,
Schändlich durch das menschliche Geist!

Mit dem Tode
So stehst und bleibst, er bleibst ein Leben lang?
Dagegen, Mensch, fragst du an ihren Tag,
Die diese Menschheit, meine geistliche Schale,
Was nun ist von mir, was noch zu erlangen?
Der Mensch ist die Krone, der regiert über alle Thiere,
Der hat Vernunft und mit seinem Verstand
Die unsterbliche Seele zu erlangen,
Schändlich durch das menschliche Geist!

So stehst und bleibst, er bleibst ein Leben lang?
Dagegen, Mensch, fragst du an ihren Tag,
Die diese Menschheit, meine geistliche Schale,
Was nun ist von mir, was noch zu erlangen?
Der Mensch ist die Krone, der regiert über alle Thiere,
Der hat Vernunft und mit seinem Verstand
Die unsterbliche Seele zu erlangen,
Schändlich durch das menschliche Geist!

Adding *Der Erdgeist* to the tour schedule was a bold and risky venture. At best, the play provided an uneasy counterpoint to the naturalistic works of Ibsen. Wedekind's original Lulu tale, a five-act play entitled *Die Büchse der Pandora: Eine Monstretragödie* (1892-1894), had initially been rejected by the Leipzig publisher Albert Langen as too controversial. The version ultimately published by Langen and premiered by the Ibsen Theater was revised and condensed into four acts, with a new third act and without the sensational fifth act where Lulu is brutally murdered by Jack the Ripper.³ Even with these changes, the play had been rejected for public performance by Otto Brahm's progressive *Freie Bühne* after a series of private readings in Berlin, and it was only added to the Ibsen Theater tour after "much pestering" by Wedekind.⁴

Reservations about the work proved well-founded. The initial Leipzig performances registered as a qualified success, after which time the play's fate rapidly declined. The Stettin performance was cancelled after a near scandal in Hamburg.⁵ The play was announced for performance in Vienna no less than five times in the *Neue Freie Presse*; however, it was not performed in that city, due to a ban by the local censor. The evening edition of the *Presse* on June 10 included a short announcement of the ban, with a full account of the situation appearing in the "Theater-und Kunstsachrichten" section the following day.

The Ibsen Theater Company's performance of *Erdgeist* scheduled for tomorrow at the Carl Theater has, as you know, been forbidden. The work has not been prohibited on any particular religious or sociopolitical grounds, as might be imagined from the title *Erdgeist*; the authorities maintain that the work is offensive from a moral standpoint.... The author of the forbidden work, Mr. Frank Wedekind, and the director of the Ibsen Ensemble, Dr. Carl Heine, expressed the greatest surprise over the prohibition to a reporter who visited them today....⁶

With a Vienna performance out of the question, Wedekind and Heine seized the opportunity to propagandize on behalf of the play. In the notice quoted above, the reporter went on to present details of the strenuous objections voiced by Heine and Wedekind regarding both the ban of *Der Erdgeist* and the stifling conditions currently plaguing the German-speaking theater. Even more significantly, however, while the last-minute cancellation of *Der Erdgeist* was undoubtedly a personal disappointment for Wedekind, the prospect of performances in the Austro-Hungarian capital had

yielded a tangible result--the celebrated Prologue for the play.

The original version of the Prologue, little known in the Wedekind literature, was drafted on the verso of the Ibsen Theater poster shown here. The circumstances surrounding the creation of the Prologue are recounted in an informal memoir by Hilde Auerbach, daughter of the theatrical agent Berthold Auerbach who accompanied the Ibsen Theater on the 1898 tour. The essential facts of Hilde Auerbach's memoir, which accompanies the stock poster in the Moldenhauer Archives at the Library of Congress, are reproduced below.

My father's story [of] how Wedekind came to write this Prologue is as follows: Just before the first performance of the *Erdgeist* in Vienna (late summer of 1898) [sic], Dr. Heine, Wedekind and my father were sitting in a Cafe in Vienna and Dr. Heine remarked to Wedekind that the Vienna public would not understand his play without a prologue. There and then, Wedekind snatched the huge poster of the Ibsen Theater from my father. (These posters announcing the various Ibsen Theater plays and the casts all showed on one side Ibsen's head and on the other the naked "Frau vom Meer" [woman of the sea].) On the back of it, Wedekind wrote in one go, leaning on the Cafe house table, the first version of his famous Prologue to the Lulu-Tragedy. He spoke it himself in the first night of the play in Vienna [sic] because he himself played the part of the Circus Director, and my father was fond of imitating him as he stood before the curtain, pistol in one hand, whip in the other, speaking the words of the prologue with his harsh voice rolling his Rs and suddenly firing the pistol in the air, thus frightening the ladies.

Since the play was not performed in Vienna, Berthold Auerbach's recollection that the Prologue was presented in that city must be mistaken. The earliest-known performance of the play to include the Prologue occurred later the same month, in Leipzig. This information accompanies the Prologue as it appeared in a revised, near-final version, published in 1901 in the journal *Die Insel*. The heading for the revised Prologue text reads as follows: "PROLOGUE TO ERDGEIST / TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS BY FRANK WEDEKIND / SPOKEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH PERFORMANCE OF 'ERDGEIST' BY THE IBSEN THEATER (DIRECTED BY DR. CARL HEINE) IN THE CRYSTAL PALACE IN LEIPZIG, 24 JUNE 1898."⁷ Long misinterpreted to mean that the Prologue was written for the tenth, Leipzig performance of *Der Erdgeist*, this heading should be interpreted more literally, as a report of the Prologue's first delivery.

While some of Berthold Auerbach's details may be inaccurate, his tale of the Prologue's genesis is substantiated by the original text, for among the many variants between autograph and published versions is a passage directed specifically toward a Viennese audience. In the original third stanza (lines 22-27), the Animal Trainer who narrates the Prologue laments the fact that the crowds have abandoned his menagerie for more genteel forms of entertainment, ironically listing among their new interests "Ibsen" and "plays." He concludes with an acerbic outburst, comparing the poverty of life in the theater (represented by his menagerie) with the comfortable complacency of the Viennese bourgeois, known for leisurely promenades through the city's famous park, the Prater: "Ha, welch ein Abstand zwischen dem Theater/Und der Menagerie im Wiener Prater!" [Ha, what a difference between the theater/and the menagerie in the Vienna Prater!]

This local reference was one of the many passages changed or deleted when the Prologue was later adapted for a general audience. Wedekind's revision can be seen here in pencil. The latter portion of the third stanza has been crossed out and marked "F" for *fortlassen* or "omit." The replacement lines, drafted across to the right, expand the stanza and focus more generally on the poverty of theatrical life. Like the original, the revised stanza concludes with a comparison, but one of a more universal, moralistic tone in which true art is distinguished from financial success: "Doch will man Großes in der Kunst erreichen/Darf man Verdienst nicht mit dem Glück vergleichen." [But if one wants to achieve greatness in art/one should not equate earnings with success.]

Wedekind's other revisions range from minor adjustments involving syntax and word choice to more substantial alterations of meaning. One of the more illuminating revisions is found in stanza four. The original version of lines 29-30 ("Haustiere, die so wohlerzogen fühlen/An blassen Theorien ihr Mütchen kühlen") [House pets who think they're so well-bred/vent their rage on pale theories] was later changed to "Haustiere, die so wohlgesittet fühlen./An blasser Pflanzenkost ihr Mütchen kühlen." [House pets who think they're so well-mannered/vent their rage on a pale vegetarian meal.] The key expression "blassen Theorien" [pale theories] recalls a famous passage from one of the opening scenes of Goethe's *Faust* (I:2038). At this point in the poem, Mephistopheles, disguised as Faust, instructs a novice on the difference between theory and practice, privileging the latter by claiming "Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie." [Gray, dear friend, is all theory.] Wedekind's original Faustian reference may well have been aimed at his presumed Viennese audience; more specifically, the young aesthetes who patronized Vienna's famed coffeehouses and cultivated an urbane and highly literate or "wohlerzogen" [well-bred] image. The substituted phrase "blasser Pflanzenkost" [pale vegetarian meal] refers more generally to the international class of young European aesthetes, many of whom were avowed vegetarians.

Collectively, Wedekind's revisions yield a more polished result that is finely attuned to the events and characters of the ensuing drama. He would ultimately add a number of stage directions, including an introductory paragraph that sets the scene and calls for specific costumes and sound effects. By way of contrast, the impression offered by the original version shown here is one of an improvisation that had been noted down, as Auerbach recalled, on the spur of the moment. The few in-process ink changes shown on the manuscript suggest that Wedekind's ideas flowed freely as he drafted the text. His passion for the circus and intimate acquaintance with the rhetoric of the circus barker served him particularly well in this regard. Wedekind borrowed a variety of stock phrases from the circus world for his Prologue--most notably the invitation "Hereinspaziert!" [Step right up!]--using them as a scaffolding around which to structure his original lines. His experience as a lyric poet and cabaret *recitateur* is likewise evident in the Prologue, for even the unedited version possesses a genuine musical quality, revealing in particular a keen sensitivity to rhythm and meter.

Moldenhauer's interest in the Wedekind manuscript was undoubtedly influenced by Alban Berg's memorable setting of the Prologue in *Lulu*, his operatic adaptation of Wedekind's two Lulu plays. In all likelihood, Berg did not know the original version of the Prologue. Moldenhauer's acquisition of the Wedekind manuscript attests rather to his interest in the broader spectrum of musical history and the sister arts.

¹ On the circumstances surrounding the Ibsen Theater tour and the first performances of *Der Erdgeist*, see Kurt Martens, *Schonungslose Lebenschronik 1870-1900* (Vienna: Rikola-Verlag, 1921), pp. 206-7, 216-18; Artur Kutscher, *Frank Wedekind: Sein Leben und seine Werke* (Munich and Leipzig: Georg Müller Verlag, 1922; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1970), Bd., 1, pp. 395-97; Frank Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das Theater 1898-1959* (Munich: Laokoon-Verlag, 1964), pp. 132 passim, see esp. pp. 339-48, and Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1974), pp. 78-81; and Joachim Friedenthal, ed., *Das Wedekindbuch* (Munich and Leipzig: Georg Müller Verlag, 1914), see esp. Joachim Friedenthal, "Frank Wedekind. Sein Leben und sein Werk. Eine Monographie," pp. 16-18, and Max Liebermann, "Wie ich Wedekind kennen lernte," pp. 212-23.

² For reproductions of the stock poster that include details for actual performances, see Hans-Jochen Irmer, *Der Theaterdichter Frank Wedekind: Werk und Wirkung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1979), pl. 23, and Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind in Selbstzeugnissen*, p. 80.

³ *Der Erdgeist: Eine Tragödie in vier Aufzügen* (Paris/ Leipzig/Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1895). Wedekind would later incorporate much of the excised material into a companion play, *Die Büchse der Pandora: Tragödie in drei Aufzügen* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1904). On the complex evolution and publication history of the Lulu dramas, see Manfred Hahn, ed., *Frank Wedekind: Werke in drei Bänden* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1969), Bd. 1., pp. 704-8; Kutscher, op. cit., pp. 337-56; and Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das*

Theater, pp. 339-40.

⁴ As recounted by Martens, op. cit., p. 205, later cited in Kutscher, op. cit., p. 396. Some confusion exists about the version of Wedekind's Lulu drama that was performed by the Ibsen Theater. Taking his cue perhaps from Marten's claim that the work was performed "vollständig und ungestrichen," Jack Stein maintained that it was the original, five-act "Monstretragödie" that was premiered in 1898; see "Lulu: Alban Berg's Adaptation of Wedekind," *Comparative Literature* 26 (1974): 323. Upon closer inspection, this appears not to be the case. Martens clearly refers to the play by the revised, published title, *Erdgeist*. Moreover, the stock posters cited in n. 2 above establish that the play performed was in four and not five acts.

⁵ See Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das Theater*, p. 132, and Kutscher, op. cit., p. 397.

⁶ [Das für Morgen durch die Ibsen-Gesellschaft im Carltheater zur Aufführung bestimmte Stück "Erdgeist" ist bekanntlich verboten worden. Das Stück ist nicht, wie etwa der Titel "Erdgeist" vermuthen lassen könnte, aus irgend einem religiösen oder socio-politischen Grunde untersagt worden; die Behörde macht geltend, daß das Werk vom sittlichen Standpunkte aus anstößig sei...Einem Berichterstatter gegenüber, welcher heute den Verfasser des verbotenen Stückes, Herrn Frank Wedekind, und den Director des Ibsen-Ensembles, Dr. Heine, besuchte, sprachen diese ihr größtes Erstaunen über das Censurverbot aus...] *Neue Freie Presse* (Wien: Samstag, 11 Juni 1898), "Theater-und Kunstnachrichten" p. 8. Before this date, *Erdgeist* had been announced on the theater pages of the *Presse* for performances on June 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12.

⁷ [PROLOGUE ZUM ERDGEIST / TRAGOEDIE IN VIER AKTEN VON FRANK WEDEKIND / GESPROCHEN GELEGENTLICH DER ZEHNTEN AUFFUEHRUNG DES "ERDGEIST" DURCH DAS IBSEN-THEATER (DIR: DR. CARL HEINE) IM KRYSTALLPALAST IN LEIPZIG. 24. JUNI 1898.] *Die Insel* 6 (March 1901), 315.