

## The book

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### The context

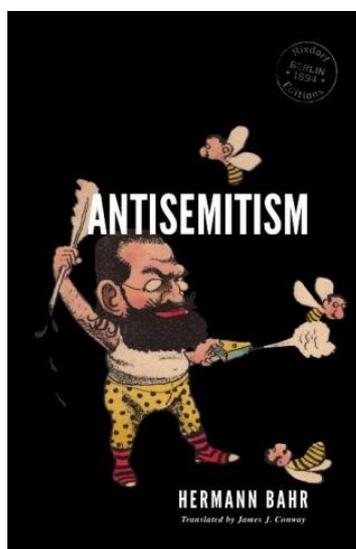
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Almost 75 years after the Holocaust, a range of statistics for 2018 point to an alarming resurgence of antisemitism. The German government reported a 10% yearly increase in antisemitic offences. An EU survey indicated over 80% of the country's Jewish respondents regard antisemitism as a serious problem, with similar values recorded in Belgium, Poland and Sweden, rising to 95% in France. The UK's Community Security Trust revealed figures for antisemitic attacks second only to the record year of 2017. A CNN survey found that more than a quarter of respondents in seven European countries believe Jews have too much influence in business and finance. The US witnessed its single deadliest attack on Jewish citizens and in its 2018 Global Anti-Semitism Report, Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs reported the highest number of fatalities in antisemitic crimes for a quarter of a century.



Now available in English for the first time, Hermann Bahr's 1894 book *Antisemitism* (translated by James J. Conway) has much to tell us not just about the ideological and social developments behind the atrocities of the 20th century, but also the ways in which hatred, division and demonisation are used to target minorities to this day. The book consists of interviews that Bahr conducted with public figures across Europe, first printed in a Viennese newspaper, the *Deutsche Zeitung*, throughout 1893 and issued in book form in Germany the following year. The interviews provided a vitally important international perspective at a time when racial antisemitism was becoming a political force. His respondents included socialist politician August Bebel, writer Charles Morice, scientific polymath Ernst Haeckel, dramatist Henrik Ibsen, journalist Maximilian Harden, historian Theodor

Mommsen, novelist Alphonse Daudet and Theosophist Annie Besant.

But Bahr does not simply solicit responses to a survey; he visits his interviewees in their homes and workplaces, and his dramatist's intuition for meaningful detail results in a rich portrait of the time and its personalities. He sets out with the thesis that antisemitism is an 'intoxication' which eludes rational analysis. But his report is no echo chamber, and a number of respondents share equivocal or nakedly antisemitic views. The conspiracy theories about Jewish control and manipulation that some interviewees reference sound all-too familiar today, and for the 21st-century reader *Antisemitism* offers an essential insight into these persistent ideas and societal processes that is enlightening and disturbing in equal measure. Along with the translation of Bahr's original text, this edition of *Antisemitism* includes extensive notes, biographies of the interviewees and a comprehensive afterword.

#### Hermann Bahr | *Antisemitism*

Translated by James J. Conway

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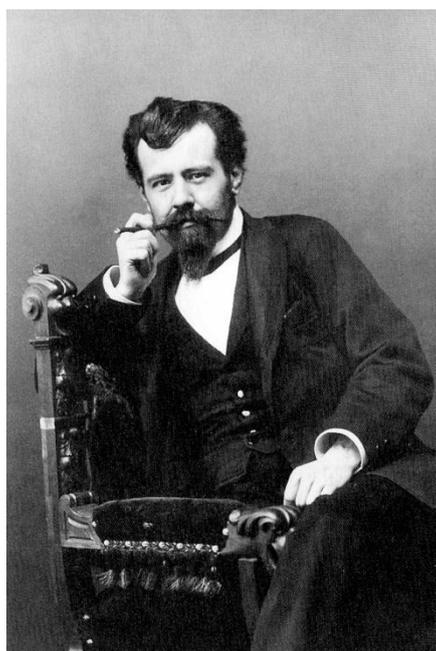
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In 1893, Hermann Bahr was best known as a playwright and theatre critic. His large-scale *Antisemitism* series that year not only represented a more explicitly political engagement than his previous work, it also signposted a remarkable turnaround in his beliefs. Born in 1863 to a Catholic family in Linz, Austria, Bahr was an agitator in his student years and fell under the influence of antisemite Georg von Schönerer, later an inspiration for Adolf Hitler. In 1883 Bahr was arrested for pasting up antisemitic slogans in Vienna and insulting Jews in a café, but he



soon renounced these early provocations as he took up a bohemian existence, immersing himself in the literary life of Austria, Germany, France and beyond. In the early 1890s Bahr became a leading figure in the avant-garde 'Young Vienna' group alongside Jewish writers such as Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig, Peter Altenberg and Karl Kraus, and counted early Zionist Theodor Herzl among his friends. By this time he had issued his first fictional and dramatic works and was establishing a name for himself as an unusually perceptive forecaster of cultural movements. He nurtured new talent, and his 1891 essay 'Overcoming Naturalism' was a landmark work of the period; Bahr was one of the first writers in Europe to propose modernism as a way forward. Along with extensive critical and journalistic writings, Hermann Bahr produced over forty works for the stage in the course of his career, including the

highly successful comedy *The Concert* (1909) which was widely seen in the UK and the US and filmed multiple times. His prose works included *The Good School* (1890) which bore the influence of French Decadence, and the collection *Fin de Siècle* (1891) which was banned on publication for depicting 'abnormal and aberrant gratification of the sex drive'.

Combative, outspoken yet ceaselessly inquisitive, the polyglot Bahr was extraordinarily well-connected and travelled extensively. His Austrian patriotism didn't prevent him from proclaiming the ideal of a 'United States of Europe', a concept in which he believed cross-border cultural exchange was key. In 1909 he divorced his first wife, Jewish actress Rosa Jokl, and later married opera singer Anna Mildenburg. His output slowed around the time of the First World War, although the 1916 essay 'Expressionismus' demonstrated that his insight into new forms remained acute. After the war Hermann Bahr moved to Munich where he died in 1934. His posthumously published correspondence is an invaluable account of the creative culture of his time. Between 2004 and 2014, the University of Vienna produced an authoritative series of his critical works in German, but aside from a small selection of his dramas and essays that were translated in the early 20th century, little of Bahr's bibliography is available in English.

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Hermann Bahr's *Antisemitism* captures the crucial moment in European history when long-standing anti-Jewish antipathy transformed from largely religious bigotry to an aggressive racial prejudice with true political momentum. It shows how this new and virulent form infiltrated every aspect of public life, spurred on by rising nationalism and spurious race science. While the early and mid-19th century witnessed a wave of Jewish emancipation in most of western and central

Europe, this period of relative harmony was shattered by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.



The unification of Germany in 1871 was followed by an economic crash that shook the new empire, and as conspiracy theorists pointed the finger at Jewish speculators, antisemitism grew to become the most divisive issue of the day. It spread rapidly and brought together unlikely allies – Catholics and atheists, aristocrats and street brawlers – who saw a common enemy in the country's Jewish citizens. Confronted with the profound, structural changes of industrialisation, some found it easier to blame Jews, casting them either as secret controllers of capital markets, or competition in the labour market in the form of new immigrants from eastern Europe. In 1893, when Bahr set out on his inquiry, antisemitic parties had attained levels of success in the Reichstag that would remain unequalled until the rise of the Nazis, and figures like Hermann Ahlwardt had introduced a new form of populist politics based on slander, vitriol, chaos and conspiracy theories.

In France, Bahr reveals the conditions that informed the Dreyfus Affair, which broke shortly after the book was published. Among the country's most prominent antisemites was Édouard Drumont (who appears on the cover of *Antisemitism*), who in 1886 produced the extensive and highly popular study, *La France Juive* (Jewish France). Another of Drumont's projects, the newspaper *La Libre Parole*, became the primary organ of antisemitic sentiment in France, with grotesque caricatures of its targets. Like their German counterparts, Drumont and his followers claimed that Jewish perfidy lay behind most of the financial scandals of the time. Ancient antisemitic motifs – including accusations of ritual murder and deicide, and particular qualities such as greed and duplicity – were joined by new tropes that persist to this day, which held Jews to be in control of the media and financial markets, but also somehow responsible for the spread of socialism. Together France and Germany were the centre of *politicised* antisemitism in Europe, although naturally there were variations across the continent as exclusionary definitions of national identity prompted a return to tribal loyalties. Bahr's respondents in Spain, Belgium, Britain and Ireland often claimed their countries to be more or less free of antisemitism, optimistic assertions at odds with the record.



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Bahr's book contains interviews with 38 figures representing seven western European nationalities, predominantly German and French but also including English, Belgian, Spanish, Norwegian and Irish respondents. They range widely in age from John Henry Mackay, still in his 20s, to French politician and philosopher Jules Simon, in his late 70s. Bahr's selection unsurprisingly includes a number of writers, including novelist Alphonse Daudet, Séverine, subject of a Renoir painting and one of the most prominent French journalists of the Belle Époque, Maximilian Harden, who enjoyed

comparable renown in Wilhelmine Germany, English Germanophile Sidney Whitman and the bohemian Spanish writer Alejandro Sawa. But there was a similar tally of politicians, including German Social Democrat August Bebel, exiled Spanish prime minister Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla, Irish parliamentarian Tim Healy – later the first Governor-General of the Irish Free State – and Arthur Balfour, who in 1917 lent his name to the 'Balfour Declaration' which established the



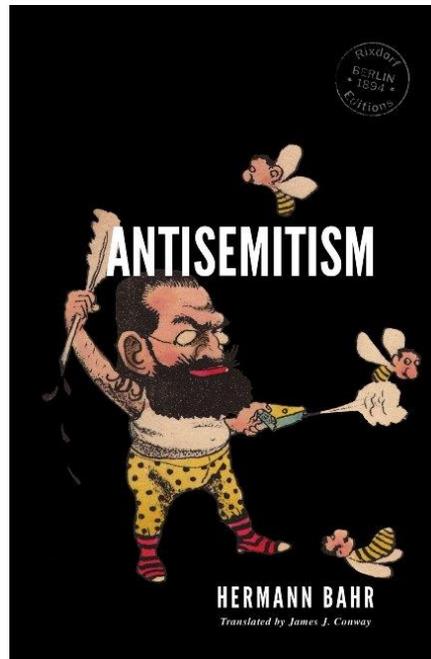
principle of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Elsewhere we find economist Gustav Schmoller, scientist Ernst Haeckel and activist Annie Besant. *Antisemitism* is thought to be the first book of interviews in German.



The concept and the loan word *Interview* were extremely new in Germany, and some of Bahr's respondents greet the format with suspicion. Their positions on antisemitism – its causes, its significance and possible responses to it – vary widely. They range from the philosemitism of French Symbolist writer Charles Morice ('great, rare, indispensable gifts') to the unvarnished hatred of exiled politician Henri Rochefort ('The Jews are venal, the Jews are corrupt, the Jews are usurers.'). In between they offer a huge spectrum of opinion on issues such as assimilation and exceptionalism, the difference between religious and racial antisemitism, and distinctions between Jewish groups (new immigrants, long-settled communities).

Friedrich Spielhagen • Theodor Barth • August Bebel • Theodor Mommsen  
Gustav Schmoller • Pastor J. Schmeidler • Maximilian Harden • Moritz von Egidy  
Ernst Haeckel • Adolph Wagner • Heinrich zu Schoenaich-Carolath • Heinrich Rickert  
John Henry Mackay • Wilhelm Foerster • Alfred Naquet • Jules Simon  
Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu • Alphonse Daudet • Francis Magnard • Arthur Meyer  
Édouard Pailleron • Séverine • Charles Morice • Gustave Paul Cluseret • Alejandro Sawa Manuel  
Ruiz Zorrilla • Henri Rochefort • Sir Charles Dilke • Arthur Balfour  
Henry Labouchère • Annie Besant • Sidney Whitman • Tim Healy • Paul Janson  
Edmond Picard • Charles Buls • Henrik Ibsen • Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

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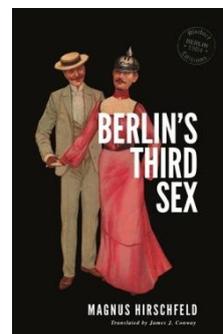


Designed by Svenja Prigge, the cover of *Antisemitism* incorporates artwork from an original postcard (undated; circa 1890) by French illustrator Philippe Norwins depicting France's most prominent antisemite of the time, Édouard Drumont. The caption on the postcard reads 'Drumont anéantit ses mites', a play on 'Drumont, un antisémite' which literally translates as 'Drumont annihilates his moths'. We see the writer with an outsized pen in one hand, dripping black ink, and in the other an implement with which he sprays a deadly chemical agent at conspicuously big-nosed insects. The victims are depicted as dehumanised, as vermin, and in a single image we have the link between words and actions, between the polemics of hatred and the obscenity of genocide, in a way that the artist could never have anticipated.

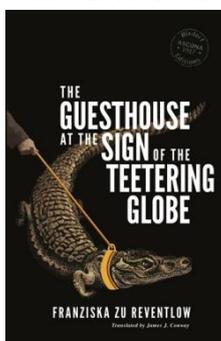


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Described by the *Times Literary Supplement* as an ‘exciting new list’, Rixdorf Editions is a small press established in Berlin in 2017 with the aim of introducing English-language readers to neglected German texts. Focusing on the Wilhelmine period (1890-1918), it shows how progressive writers defied authoritarianism and censorship to produce visionary works that often foretold the world in which we now live. Titles are issued in high-quality paperback editions pairing original translations with thoughtful commentary to provide context for the works, their creators, and the wider cultural environment.

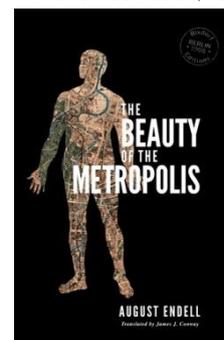


The press is particularly committed to highlighting the work of women writers of the era who were unfairly neglected by both their contemporaries and posterity. The first title issued by Rixdorf Editions was *The Guesthouse at the Sign of the Teetering Globe*, a set of surreal tales



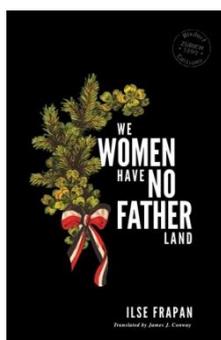
originally issued during the First World War by Franziska zu Reventlow, the ‘bohemian countess’ who was possibly the most liberated woman of her age. The first non-fiction title, also released in November 2017, is Rixdorf’s biggest-selling title to date: *Berlin’s Third Sex*, in which pioneering physician and activist Magnus Hirschfeld, the ‘Einstein of Sex’, describes a queer subculture in the German capital at the beginning of the 20th century that could boast an exuberance and confidence to rival anything in the fabled Weimar Republic, or

even today.

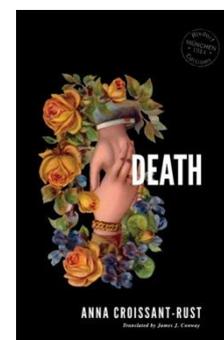


In 2018 Rixdorf Editions issued a lyrical essay by architect August Endell originally published in 1908, *The Beauty of the Metropolis*, which showed ways of looking at the

urban environment that seem strikingly modern. The same year brought *Death*, a series of mortal vignettes originally issued in 1914 and paired with even earlier works that showcase author Anna Croissant-Rust as a fearless literary innovator. This was followed by Ilse Frapan’s novel *We Women Have no Fatherland*, a howl of righteous rage originally issued in 1899. Rixdorf Editions is releasing its first digital-only title in 2019, *The Nights of Tino of Baghdad*, an episodic journey through an Arab and Jewish world constructed in the mind of Else Lasker-Schüler, best known for her immortal poetry. *Antisemitism* by Hermann Bahr (October 2019) is the seventh title on the



Rixdorf Editions list.



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*Antisemites are antisemites out of desire for the delirium and intoxication of passion. They seize the arguments that are closest to hand. Should you debunk them, they will seek others. And if they should find none it will not change their minds. They do not wish to forgo the intoxication.*

– Hermann Bahr, p. 11

*He babbles rapidly, a thousand ridiculous things all mixed up together – you cannot even tell what he wants. It is simply a mystery what the masses find in him – except the mean pleasure of slander, defamation and scandal; the mob seeks amusement, and nothing amuses it more than hearing decent people slandered and insulted. Lately we have witnessed inadvisable efforts to prosecute him – and so the mob have come to regard him as a genuine martyr and a hero. And in the face of that, any form of reason is defenceless, futile.*

– German politician Theodor Barth on antisemitic leader Hermann Ahlwardt, p. 20

*The Germans readily recognise the Jew and therefore regard him as a foreigner, and among the less intellectual element in particular, race is always of great import. So one is perfectly able to explain antisemitism from factual circumstances, and then comes the fact of it being artificially promoted and stoked by all sorts of people.*

– German Social Democrat leader August Bebel, p. 26

*Look at the Jewish women on the street, how they dress and behave! That surely arouses a certain aesthetic antisemitism – we perceive them as an alien race which offends our taste and our habits. In this sense every German is an antisemite, no honest person can deny it.*

German economist Adolph Wagner, p. 69

*I have come to regard Europe as a dying land ... and even Germany, dear God! The Germans are always last in culture, but the first in any universal stupidity – like antisemitism. I have given up looking for reasonable people here.*

– German-Scottish anarchist writer John Henry Mackay, p. 87

*The German manner of determining nationality by race seems, to our French custom, just as foolish and reactionary as the Russian manner of determining it by uniformity of religion. This is simply not possible for modern peoples which have evolved throughout history, because they are all conglomerates [...] For where in Europe today is there a race that has remained unalloyed and pure, that is Aryan beyond all doubt?*

– French historian Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, p. 103

*If you look at the great swindles and fiddles, and when you realise that in all those dirty dealings the Jews always play the leading role – well, ultimately it becomes difficult to avoid a certain antipathy.*

– French author Alphonse Daudet, p. 110

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*So all the Jews are rich and the rich never Christian? I know enough Catholic usurers and poor Jews in distress and misery. And if we blame the Jewish spirit for seeking profit, should we not rather blame ourselves for creating it? For centuries we kept them in the ghetto, in shame and contempt. [...] They had nothing but trade, usury, the hated professions that others spurned. And now we wish to blame them for that, rather than complaining about ourselves, about the cruel conceit of our ancestors!*

– French journalist Séverine, p. 132

*Panama and all the big scams – who is always the first in line? Jews, nothing but Jews. There are Jews I know whom I value and admire immensely. But that does not dispel the fact that all these disgusting scandals of recent years have found their origins and their most resourceful leaders in the Jews.*

– French politician, artist and mercenary Gustave Paul Cluseret, p. 140

*Once in our history we had a fundamental antisemitism – and that shame is indelible. We have been warned. For us, the Jew and the Christian are treated the same. The Castilian is much more foreign to the Andalusian than the Jew is to the Christian.*

– Spanish writer Alejandro Sawa, p. 147

*The Jews are to blame for all the great catastrophes of my people. [...] The Jews are venal, the Jews are corrupt, the Jews are usurers. In their blood they have a principle that drives them and urges them to seize everything for themselves.*

– French politician Henri Rochefort, p. 157

*It seems strange to us and certainly does France and Germany no honour. But we cannot imagine that it will gain in stature in European history. We consider it a disease which will fade of its own accord when its power is exhausted.*

– British politician Sir Charles Dilke, p. 161

*I have come to the conclusion that there is great danger in granting liberty to Jews, who have an entirely different psychology, a very different way of thinking and feeling to us, even if they adopt our dress and our customs, and that they exert a ruinous influence with their economic, political and journalistic power.*

– Belgian jurist and writer Edmond Picard, p.175

*I cannot say anything about antisemitism because I find the whole movement completely incomprehensible and unfathomable.*

– Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, p.179

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