

'VON UNS AUS BETRACHTET – EBEN VERRÜCKT!': LOUISE VON COBURG, PROFLIGACY, AND FELIX SALTEN'S CAMPAIGN FOR A CIVIL CONSENSUS

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ABSTRACT

Royal scandals intrigued Austrian (and indeed European) society right through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. In the light of Karl Kraus's commentary and Felix Salten's literary treatment, the case of Princess Louise of Belgium, who left her husband Philipp von Coburg and was institutionalised for six years in 1898 because her adultery and her uncontrolled spending were diagnosed as symptoms of insanity, can be read as an irritant and a challenge to civil society's principles of equality, inclusiveness, and due process. Issues that come to the fore here include the status of sexual morality and financial probity as core civic virtues (as a foray into legal debates on profligacy demonstrates), as well as the duties or failures of agents of civil society such as the legal and medical professions and journalism, to uphold its principles.

Skandale um Mitglieder von Herrscherhäusern hielten die österreichische (und gesamteuropäische) Öffentlichkeit während des gesamten neunzehnten und frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts in Atem. Im Lichte von Karl Kraus' Satiren und Felix Saltens literarischen Behandlungen gelesen, enthüllt sich der Fall der Prinzessin Louise von Belgien, die ihren Ehemann Philipp von Coburg verließ und 1898 auf Grund von Ehebruchs- und Verschwendungsvorwürfen für sechs Jahre in eine Irrenanstalt eingeliefert wurde, als Herausforderung für die Gleichheits- und Toleranzideale der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Auf dem Prüfstand stehen nicht nur Sexualmoral und finanzielle Redlichkeit, sondern auch die Rolle von Medizin, Justiz und Journalismus als Repräsentanten bürgerlicher Prinzipien.

I

The cult of celebrity is a defining feature of contemporary culture. But while the transmission of images, gossip, and 'revelations' is more instantaneous and truly global today than ever before, the phenomenon itself has not changed fundamentally over the course of the last century or more. Celebrity can be regarded as one of the sites where societal and cultural concerns are negotiated – initially, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in national frameworks that reflect the transformation of societies from aristocratic regimes to meritocratic middle-class communities. 'Celebrity', writes Jason Goldsmith, 'was one of the mechanisms through which national sentiments were fostered among a

diverse and heterogeneous populace'.¹ Not only adulatory celebrity serves this purpose. Notoriety, i.e. 'unfavourable public recognition', also achieves an 'impact on public consciousness',² particularly in that it prompts debates that affirm community, notably by way of reactions, criticism, and scorn towards the notorious. In such debates a larger public's collective understanding of its own values and preoccupations, what we might call a public mood, emerges. Celebrities surrounded by scandal can be perceived as public property; public indignation towards their transgressions can be regarded as an essentially democratic impulse as onlookers assume a position equal to that of their objects and take on the right to apply their own criteria of propriety. Such debates increasingly extended beyond the immediate forum of the nation, not only because the nineteenth century produced a plethora of 'international' celebrities, but also because the attention extended to famous and especially to notorious personalities also reflects concerns common to modernising societies across Europe and beyond. Both celebrities' 'desire for recognition' and their ability to exploit mass media and public interest for purposes of self-promotion³ on the one hand, and the public's appetite for and reaction to celebrity journalism on the other, render celebrity culture a barometer for collective preoccupations and attitudes at any given time.

The general public's interest in the misfortunes, trip-ups, and transgressions of celebrities is surely partly motivated by gleeful delight that those seemingly more fortunate, distinguished, or privileged are subject to the same errors and troubles as ordinary people. It is probably fair to say that public attention towards any transgression is proportionate not so much to the case itself as to the prominence of its protagonists. Members of the high nobility, especially of ruling houses, are particularly conspicuous because of the heightened expectations surrounding etiquette and decorum that they are meant to uphold. As the constitutional role of these classes started to change, cases concerning members of the ruling classes can also be ascribed a political significance. During the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, as their actual power faded and privilege was progressively superseded by egalitarianism and meritocracy, public discourses surrounding royalty shine a light on issues pertaining to the ethos and workings of civil society, its institutions and constituent members – all in a pronounced pan-European context.

From *Werther* to *Effi Briest*, stories bestowing notoriety on their protagonists had long inspired literary treatment. Felix Salten wrote at a time when, in Vienna as elsewhere, journalism and literature overlapped to some extent with regard to both their aesthetics and their

¹ Jason Goldsmith, 'Celebrity and the spectacle of nation', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*, ed. Tom Mole, Cambridge 2009, pp. 21–40 (p. 22).

² Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, London 2001, p. 10.

³ Leo Brady, *The Frenzy of Renown. Fame and Its History*, 2nd edn, New York 1997, p. 587.

subject matter. A contemporary of the Young Viennese generation, Felix Salten maintained his high profile in Austrian culture as a public figure, prominent commentator on public affairs, and shaper of public opinion for over forty years. He was allegedly personally involved in two royal celebrity scandals and published journalistic contributions as well as literary treatments of both of them. Proximity to royalty, especially to Leopold Ferdinand, Archduke of Tuscany, and to other black sheep of the Habsburg dynasty, was very much part of Salten's public persona, while his commentary on royal scandals forms an integral component of his literary and journalistic output.⁴ Amongst the literary works in question are a fictitious diary, ostensibly based on the story of Leopold Ferdinand's sister, Louise of Saxony, entitled *Die Bekenntnisse einer Prinzessin* (1905), and the short play *Auf Tod und Leben: Die Liebesgeschichte der Prinzessin Louise von Koburg. Fünfzehn Bilder* (1932), which two years later, in revised form and under the new title *Louise von Koburg: Das Schicksal einer Liebe: Fünfzehn Szenen*, was included in Salten's *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*. These two literary publications illustrate the proximity of celebrity journalism to socially engaged drama and fiction. The notoriety of the protagonists ensures the commercial success of the books and thus provides a vehicle for reaching larger audiences; this strategy, however, also restricts the writer in his choice of literary techniques and devices. While the fictitious diary adopts an approach familiar from celebrity journalism, namely that of intimate revelations offering exclusive access to otherwise hidden realms, the drama relies on the audience's knowledge that it is based on spectacular events which, at the time, had themselves been the stuff of sensationalist media reporting.

II

In spite of the ongoing democratisation and meritocratisation of societies across Europe, the political system in the vast majority of European countries in the mid- to late-nineteenth century was still characterised by the predominance of a small hereditary elite who, despite having been stripped of many constitutional powers and personal privileges, retained a good deal of social prestige and influence. In the political sphere, the restorational trend following the Napoleonic wars had instituted political systems of remarkable resilience and had returned to the elites of the *ancien régime* not only a degree of power, but also some of the influence, visibility, and symbolic capital which diminished, but did not evaporate, in the period of political and constitutional reform from the 1850s to the 1870s. While dynastic marriage politics were certainly not an invention of the nineteenth

⁴ For an overview, see Beverly Driver Eddy, *Felix Salten: Man of Many Faces*, Riverside, CA 2010, pp. 86–98.

century, their proliferation during this very period can be read in the context of the internationalisation of political and social affairs on an unprecedented scale on the one hand, and the rapid internationalisation of celebrity culture on the other. Both cases taken up by Salten concerned scandals of an international nature. Louise von Coburg, the daughter of Leopold II of Belgium, was married to a member of the Habsburg aristocracy, a prince of the Hungarian Koháry branch of the house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha; the other Louise, meanwhile, daughter of Grand Duke Ferdinand IV of Tuscany, became crown princess of the kingdom of Saxony upon marriage to the future king Friedrich August III. The involvement of the Habsburg court in the affairs surrounding both Louises attracted the particular attention of Viennese commentators such as Salten and Kraus, yet the significance of the concomitant debates was by no means merely local. Louise von Coburg's case had ramifications in both Brussels and Paris, and legal proceedings regarding her debt and her inheritance straddled three jurisdictions (Austria, Belgium, and the German Empire). Republican Paris gave the disgraced couple sanctuary after Louise's escape from the asylum and, most importantly, French experts issued a report on her mental state which diametrically contradicted the earlier Viennese document that had been instrumental in committing her to a mental institution for six years.⁵

The case of Louise von Coburg, in particular, concerned Habsburg society at its core. Louise was the eldest daughter of Leopold II of Belgium and Marie Henriette of Austria, a cousin of Emperor Franz Joseph I. While resident in Vienna, she achieved notoriety for her affair with the Hungarian officer, Count Geza Mattachich. All of this, and the fact that the adulteress's husband, Prince Philipp of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Koháry, was an in-law of the Habsburgs and an officer in the imperial army, turned the affair into a concern of the Habsburg court.

As monarchs' sovereignty was gradually replaced by constitutions granting elected parliaments at least a share of power, members of royal families were increasingly subject to the institutions of the modern state, which meant, amongst other things, that they became subject to the common civil legal codes of various jurisdictions. Placing Louise von Coburg under 'Verschwendungskuratel', i.e. placing her under guardianship for profligacy and committing her to a mental institution, was a matter for the civil institutions of the state, the legal and medical authorities charged with implementing the law of the land. The Louise von Coburg affair spawned a flurry of publications. Much media attention was obviously centred on sensational events such as the duel between

⁵ Valentin Magnan and Paul Dubuisson, 'Rapport médico-légal concernant Son Altesse Royale Mme La Princesse Louise de Saxe-Cobourg et Gotha, née Princesse Royale de Belgique', *Annales d'hygiène et de médecine légale*, série 4, no. 04 (1905), pp. 51–65, which arrives at a 'réponse négative' to 'interdiction' and 'nécessité de l'internement' (p. 65).

Geza Mattachich and Phillip von Coburg, the criminal case against Geza Mattachich for the alleged forgery of Louise's signature on credit notes,⁶ and on Louise's spectacular escape from the institution.⁷ Her financial affairs, particularly rising debts before and after her institutionalisation, and her attempts to access some of her father's personal fortune after having been struck from his will,⁸ also continued to be reported widely throughout Europe.

Although not immediately apparent, many of the issues broached by the affair are of central importance to the workings of civil society, especially to the negotiation of a consensus between the middle-class virtues of propriety and responsibility, but also to the political principles of equality, personal liberty, and the individual's right to self-determination. At stake was not only Louise's sexual transgression, but also her extravagant lifestyle and tendency to spend beyond her means. The common denominator across both offences lies in an alleged violation of the norms and the rights or duties of various groups in society, principally the former royal sovereigns and the current agents of the rule of law, to enforce compliance with such norms. But who in a civil society has the right and responsibility to define these norms and to impose sanctions on dissenters? At the core of this matter lay, in the words of the French report, the connection between 'les facultés intellectuelles' and 'les facultés morales et affectives'.⁹ Is profligacy, formerly so common amongst royalty of the *ancien régime*, where little distinction was made between a monarch's personal fortune and his country's wealth (as accumulated in taxes, tariffs and the tithes once owed by the populace as vassals), an offence punishable by law, is it an individual's private business, or is it an issue that falls under distinct royal jurisdiction? Is profligacy indicative of diminished intellectual capacities, thus justifying the placing of the squanderer under guardianship, or 'Verschwendungskuratel', as the Austrian expression would have it? Under which circumstances would this offence be of concern to the civil authorities, and how does their jurisdiction relate to that of former sovereigns when persons from their ranks are concerned?

III

In Germany the decades around the turn of the twentieth century were marked by debates surrounding the creation of a code of civil law that was to provide a consolidated regulatory framework for the unified empire.

⁶ Friedrich Austerlitz, *Ein Militärurteil in Österreich: Die Wechsel der Prinzessin Louise von Coburg*, Vienna 1902.

⁷ Joseph Weitzer, *Die Flucht der Prinzessin Louise von Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha aus Bad Elster*, Vienna 1904.

⁸ Karl von Stengel, *Gutachten betreffend die Rechtsansprüche, die Ihrer K. Hoheit der Prinzessin Louise von Belgien auf das Vermögen der ehemaligen Fondation de la Couronne du Congo zustehen*, Munich 1912.

⁹ Magnan and Dubuisson, 'Rapport' (note 5), p. 54.

While the run-up to the formal adoption of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* on 1 January 1900 in Germany was devoted to discussions about its preparation, the commentary thereafter concerned its interpretation and application, the explication of uncertainties and ambivalences, and the instruction of the legal profession on the ethos and operation of the new code. Even though a civil code had been in place in Austria since 1811, Austrians still participated in the debates surrounding the codification and reform of legal provisions for a changing society. The issues addressed related to societal conditions common to the neighbouring jurisdictions, and contain aspects that are relevant to the case in question.¹⁰

Literature on the matter of profligacy was neither particularly rich nor particularly controversial,¹¹ but it does shine a light on how social concerns become legal provisions. One common thread in contributions to the debate at the time was the attempt to derive current practice from ancient Roman law, where citizenship was tied to property held in trust for future generations, and where the squandering of possessions on a large scale might endanger the very foundations of the Republic.¹² Roman law made a distinction between conduct that was *liberalis* (generous) and *prodigus* (extravagant), with the category of profligacy occasionally defined in analogy with *furiosus*, i.e. adducing intellectual deficiency as a reason for the apparent lack of control over spending habits.¹³ In discussions around 1900 irresponsible disproportionality between income and expenditure is often understood as frivolous or unethical since it was seen as constituting a neglect of duties towards one's own kin and towards society at large. Consequently, a specific rationale for the state's right to intervene (pre-emptively or retrospectively) is the potential burden on the community of a profligate:

Verschwender im juristischen Sinne ist, wer in leichtsinniger Verletzung seiner ihm gegen sich selbst, seine Angehörigen und gegen die Gesellschaft obliegenden rechtlichen Pflichten durch übergroße, zu seinem Vermögen im Mißverhältnis stehende Ausgaben sein Vermögen derart mindert, daß er infolgedessen in absehbarer Zeit für sich und seine Angehörigen fremde Hilfe in Anspruch nehmen muß.¹⁴

¹⁰ The debates surrounding the adoption of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* are explained by Uwe Diederichsen in his essay, '1. Januar 1900 – der Tag, an dem der Bürger sein Recht bekam', in *Europäische Jahrhundertwende. Wissenschaften, Literatur und Kunst um 1900*, ed. Ulrich Mölk, Göttingen 1999, pp. 161–84.

¹¹ An instance of severe plagiarism must be noted here. Oskar Bungard, *Die Verschwendung als Entmündigungsgrund nach dem Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch*, diss. jur. Heidelberg, Borna and Leipzig 1912, is, to an overwhelming extent, and in minute detail, an exact copy of Carl Müller, *Die Entmündigung wegen Verschwendung*, diss. jur. Marburg, Borna and Leipzig 1910, but Bungard neither lists the latter as a source nor makes explicit reference to it.

¹² Ivo Pfaff, *Zur Geschichte der Prodigalitätserklärung*, Vienna 1911.

¹³ Karl Steiniger, *Voraussetzungen und Rechtswirkungen der Entmündigung des Verschwenders nach gemeinem Recht*, Berlin 1890, p. 20.

¹⁴ Müller, *Die Entmündigung wegen Verschwendung* (note 11), p. 18.

Such considerations informed the rather succinct stipulation in the German *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* of 1900, § 6, Ziffer 2: 'Entmündigt werden kann, wer durch Verschwendung sich oder seine Familie der Gefahr des Notstandes aussetzt.'

Roman law, moreover, knew different forms of intervention: the *interdictio* or nullification of individual transactions – even those made by proxy or on behalf of someone – which is an aspect relevant to Mattachich's alleged fraud; and the *cura*, the placing of a person under guardianship. These measures were envisaged to apply above all in the (male) world of business, although a Roman dictum also targets women as particular spendthrifts: 'et mulieri quae luxuriose vivit, interdicti potest'.¹⁵ It is abundantly clear from the literature on the meaning of the legal stipulations since Roman times that the estate and a person's access to his or her assets are meant to be subject to the interdict and supervised by the guardian, but that a person's other rights and freedoms should not be censored or restricted by their placement under 'Verschwendungskuratel'. Revealingly, though, the Austrian *Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* of 1811 conflates in one paragraph (§ 273) provisions for the *prodigus* and the *furiosus*, suggesting an inherent correlation between the two, and implicitly blurring the demarcations between reckless behaviour and insanity, and between the respective sanctions of supervising a person's spending and depriving them of their freedom:

Für wahn- oder blödsinnig kann nur derjenige gehalten werden, welcher nach genauer Erforschung seines Betragens und nach Einvernehmung der von dem Gerichte ebenfalls dazu verordneten Aerzte gerichtlich dafür erklärt wird. Als Verschwender aber muß das Gericht denjenigen erklären, von welchem nach der vorgekommenen Anzeige und der hierüber gepflogenen Untersuchung offenbar wird, daß er sein Vermögen auf eine unbesonnene Art durchbringt, und sich oder seine Familie durch muthwillige oder unter verderblichen Bedingungen geschlossene Borgverträge künftigem Nothstande preisgibt.

In other Austrian legal stipulations, insanity and profligacy are also mentioned in the same breath, for example in decrees regarding the 'Verhängung von Curatelen wegen Wahn- oder Blödsinnes oder wegen Verschwendung'.¹⁶ Responsibility for declaring a person insane or profligate, and for intervening in their affairs to the point of institutionalisation and placing them under guardianship, is assigned to the medical and legal professions as agents of the understanding that society has to be protected from both insanity and recklessness.

¹⁵ Cited in Steiniger, *Voraussetzungen und Rechtswirkungen* (note 13), p. 19.

¹⁶ *Landes-Regierungsblatt für das Erzherzogtum Oesterreich unter der Ems 1854*, Erste Abtheilung, 45. Stück, Nr. 198, which implements the identical provision in the *Reichs-Gesetz-Blatt* of the same year.

In the area of profligacy, the spirit of the law seems particularly indebted to the distinctly middle-class values of honesty, prudence, and probity, in particular to the principles that debtors are liable for their debts, and that customers should only purchase what they can afford and what is commensurate with their income and station in life. Civil society is based on the ability to police its own rules. In doing so, it assumes responsibility for its members both as a collective and as individuals, and it devises measures to execute this self-appointed responsibility. As the state asserts its authority on behalf of the population at large, the question arises as to the extent of civil society's reach, its ability to subject former sovereigns to its ethos and the concomitant legal obligations, and its ability to enforce its rules. Financial matters are a good example of the civil state's ability to bring rogue elements under its remit. Absolutist monarchs had not traditionally been subject to agreed and equal standards regarding financial transactions; yet since the Enlightenment this very exemption from accountability, as it applied to others, became the target of moral and political disparagement. Their successors, although curtailed in their political powers, still enjoyed a large degree of leniency in matters concerning public morality, including financial behaviour.

Constitutionality would suggest that royals hold their fortune in trust or on behalf of the population they represent; on the other hand, even if their apanage derives from private funds, their public function entails responsibilities and obligations, the breach of which might be seen as forfeiting the very privileges that define their position. After marrying out of the royal Belgian household, Louise's personal fortune, other than her subsistence as Princess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Koháry, would have depended on her father's private fortune, gained through investment in property (much of upmarket Ostend belonged to his development company) and by exploiting his African colony. Louise and her lover borrowed in anticipation of this inheritance, yet in the process were perceived to taint the Habsburg in-laws' reputation by flaunting extravagance. The conflation of this profligate behaviour and sexual impropriety turned the case into a celebrity scandal and, concurrently, potentially a matter for the civil authorities. The ensuing altercations highlight unresolved tensions within society between general civil principles and the status of exceptionality of its former sovereigns.

The idea that members of royal families were at least partly exempt from the reach of the civil codes, being subject instead to the dictates of the heads of royal households which emerged as a distinct legal sphere, was expressed by another Habsburg black sheep and renegade, Louise von Sachsen's brother, Archduke Leopold Ferdinand Salvator of Tuscany, who adopted the bourgeois name Leopold Wölfling when he renounced his royal status. He is credited with coining the slogan

'Familiendiktatur als Absolutismusersatz', explaining that 'die Grundrechte der Dezemberverfassung von 1867 galten nicht für die Mitglieder des Hauses Habsburg'.¹⁷ Instead, the Habsburg *Hausrecht* of 1839 (which at its core codified rules of succession to safeguard unity within the many branches of the family) provided the basis for the resolution of conflicts and gave the head of household the licence to police the behaviour of members of his extended clan. Such leftovers from the *ancien régime* would have been perceived by many as a provocation. Celebrity culture absorbed such conflicts in that it provided a public forum for exposure and scrutiny.

Salten shows himself to be keenly aware of the status of representatives of privilege and inequality in the context of social transformation, and he intervenes in the debates surrounding them. In a small book of sketches devoted to the public appearance of royalty and high nobility in Vienna, Salten bemoans the failure of this class to provide 'sorgfältig[e], dauernd[e] Führung' in forging 'ein[e] gleichgestimmt[e] Gesellschaft'.¹⁸ The existence of a sphere separate from the civil consensus, and the resultant conflicts, are vividly illustrated by Felix Salten's literary treatments of the two pertinent cases of the two Louises. The earlier book focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of a victim of royal oppression; the later one chronicles the ostracisation of one fallen from grace.

This point was also one that particularly agitated Karl Kraus, whose scathing commentary provided the focus of the very sparse scholarly interest in the case.¹⁹ Kraus pillories the abuse of the institutions of the state as manifested both in the institutionalisation of Louise von Coburg for the insanity that allegedly caused her adultery and profligacy, and in the sentencing of her lover Mattachich for supposedly forging signatures on credit notes. When Kraus speaks of the 'akute Sinnesverwirrung vom hohen Auftrag geblendeter Hofräte',²⁰ he accuses the legal and medical guardians of the social order of servile deference and obedience towards their monarch, and of bending the law and subverting its intent so as to suit the interests of a group that still largely operated in a pre-egalitarian mode by placing itself above the common law and purporting to occupy a separate legal sphere. Kraus very astutely identifies the hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the measures against Louise von Coburg: the formerly sovereign class uses the agents of civil society to discipline members of its own class for violating the norms of middle-class morality, thereby bringing

¹⁷ Cited in Matthias Stickler, 'Dynastie, Armee, Parlament: Probleme staatlicher Integrationspolitik im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Zwischen Tradition und Modernität: König Johann von Sachsen 1801–1873*, ed. Winfried Müller and Martina Schattkowsky, Leipzig 2004, pp. 109–40 (p. 114).

¹⁸ Felix Salten, *Wiener Adel*, Berlin [1905], p. 43.

¹⁹ Sigurd Paul Scheichl, 'Skandalgeschichte und Satire: Louise von Coburgs "Kampf um Liebe und Glück. Irrenhaus Österreich" von Karl Kraus', in *Satire – Parodie – Pamphlet – Caricature en Autriche à l'époque de François-Joseph (1848–1914)*, ed. Gilbert Ravy and Jeanne Benay, Rouen 1999, pp. 231–44.

²⁰ Karl Kraus, 'Irrenhaus Österreich [1904]', in Karl Kraus, *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität (1908)*, ed. Helmut Arntzen and Heinz Müller-Dietz, Berlin 2004, pp. 55–68 (p. 58).

into disrepute those who considered themselves beyond the consensus that inspired the codification of the rules of social interaction. Kraus pinpoints the hypocrisy of the arguments and measures against Louise by citing from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's medical opinion the very passage that describes, as a symptom of Louise's allegedly deranged mental state, the unproductive and spoiled behaviour of someone completely divorced from the realities and necessities of normal life: 'Sie liegt viel zu Bett, vertändelt ihre Zeit mit Toilette [...], liest flüchtig Zeitung, interessiert sich für Nichtigkeiten, ohne ernstlich an Vergangenheit und Zukunft zu denken oder gar Schritte zur Verbesserung ihrer Situation zu unternehmen'.²¹ This last comment is certainly an allusion to her financial predicament after being expelled from the Saxe-Coburg-Koháry, and by extension Habsburg, fold. The incompatibility of conspicuous consumption and idleness with middle-class ideals of productivity, prudence, and circumspection obviously made the agents of the state more inclined to mete out partisan justice. For Kraus, the institutionalisation of Louise von Coburg makes a mockery of the rule of law. In particular, he attacks the royals' utilisation of social prestige and inherited influence to discipline members of their own caste for their transgressions, thereby violating not only the human right of two individuals to due process, liberty, and self-determination in sexual matters, but also the very spirit of civil society and the principle of equality before the law. Some irony lies in the fact that the henchmen of the royal elite act in accordance with public sentiment that directed its (self-)righteous condemnation at the misfortunes of the fortunate.

The aspect of legality is echoed by Felix Salten, who wrote in 1904 of the *Mattachich* dimension of the scandal: 'Das öffentliche Rechtsgefühl ist beunruhigt'. That his criterion for 'legality' is derived from notions of middle-class morality and propriety, as well as from general principles of individual freedom and choice, is obvious in statements such as: 'Nach unsern bürgerlichen Begriffen ist eine Prinzessin, die einen gewöhnlichen Sterblichen ehelichen will, darum noch lange nicht schwachsinnig.'²² Echoing Karl Kraus and reiterating the allegation that the legal provisions and the civil code had been abused by vested interests, he remarks thirty years later in a contribution that coincided with the publication of his dramatic version of the affair: 'An diesem Mann [*Mattachich*] hatten hochgestellte Personen, zu einem Klüngel gesellt, ein Verbrechen verübt.'²³ At the heart of Salten's allegation is the collusion between the agents of civil society and the very forces resisting integration into its fold: the 'Klüngel' or coalition between the Habsburg household and subservient legal and medical communities. In the conflict between

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²² Felix Salten, 'Mattachich', *Die Zeit*, 27 March 1904, 1–3 (3).

²³ Felix Salten, 'Auf Tod und Leben: Die Liebesgeschichte der Louise von Koburg', *Neue Freie Presse*, 25 December 1934, 31–7 (32).

democratic principles – equality before the law and protection of the rights of the individual – and powerful vested interests, civil society was exposed as vulnerable and corruptible, and as ready and willing to sacrifice important values, such as the right to personal liberty, in pursuit of approval from higher quarters. The accusations both of profligacy and of insanity are exposed as pretexts.

In Salten's literary treatments of the Louise von Sachsen and the Louise von Coburg cases, the problematic issues surrounding financial propriety and partisan justice feature only peripherally. The works are, however, intended to explain the protagonists' apparent inability to function in society. To that end, the focus in both pieces is on capturing the exceptionality of this parallel sphere of the royal household as one that contravened the ideals of individual freedom, responsibility, and self-determination. Salten creates vivid characters and gives them a voice in an attempt to illustrate the contradictions and absurdities of an existence outside the realm of the normal civil community, in a world apart which strongly resisted integration and acceptance of the rules applied to everyone else. The two Louises in Salten's works embody exactly what they seem to rebel against: they are products of privilege and as such deserve their notoriety. Salten however rejects the tacit assumption that this might justify discrimination before the law. He is less polemical and polarising than Kraus, and affords an insight into the frame of mind of those concerned. Salten depicts his protagonists as victims, yet concurrently as examples of unresolved contradictions and anachronisms which continued to riddle society.

IV

Salten, a writer and journalist who rejoiced in 'consorting with royalty', claimed to have had exclusive access to the protagonists of his accounts and to have played an active role in the liberation of Louise von Coburg from her asylum.²⁴ This intimate knowledge lent a certain authenticity to his depiction and authority to his commentary. However, to file Salten's two literary treatments of instances of royal adultery under the rubric 'Adelskritik' is reductive,²⁵ since this label short-sells the thematic intricacies of the two pieces which appear, at first sight, to be sensationalist attempts to piggyback on celebrity scandals. Beyond exposing the strictures and self-deceptions, the estrangement from the real world, and the delusions of members of princely households, they both attempt to tackle relevant and timely issues. At the centre of Salten's concern is not

²⁴ For details, including a discussion of Salten's involvement in the affair, see the chapter entitled 'Consorting with Royalty' in Driver Eddy, *Felix Salten* (note 4), pp. 86–98.

²⁵ Thus Michael Gottstein, *Felix Salten (1869–1945): Ein Schriftsteller der Wiener Moderne*, Würzburg 2007, pp. 182–92.

the aristocracy as a landowning, military, or administrative elite, but the members of formerly ruling royal households as actors in an environment where their formal power was diminished, yet their history, reputation, and social capital still bestowed upon them an exceptional status generating heightened public attention and scrutiny. As stories about former sovereigns, royal scandals offer test cases for the workings and ethos of civil society, and their notoriety provides material for literary treatments of public interest. Indeed, in both works, 'normal' aristocrats, those serving as diplomats and officers, for example, are mostly on the other side of the gulf separating royal households from society at large.

Though the *Bekenntnisse einer Prinzessin* are not directly linked to the Louise von Coburg scandal, the relative contemporaneity of the publication of this book with unfolding events in the latter's story – Louise's escape from the asylum, the counter-report from Paris on her state of mind, the publication of Mattachich's account of events,²⁶ Kraus's interventions – suggests a connection of this text with the Louise von Coburg case. The *Bekenntnisse* can be read as something of a pre-history to Louise von Coburg's circumstances. The book chronicles a princess's life in an unhappy marriage in a royal household marked by the 'despotism' and 'the arbitrary authority of the king', exerted to keep up appearances of propriety and unity;²⁷ it ends with the protagonist's apparent resolve to break free from the oppressive environment. Louise von Coburg's story then deals with the consequences of rebelling against such conditions and leaving the golden cage without being in any way equipped to cope with life outside.

The fictitious court in *Bekenntnisse* is described as a world apart, and its regent as a law unto himself, who subjects those under his authority to a discipline, the harshness of which clearly contradicts any principles of liberal bourgeois society and, from the perspective of the victim, infringes her human rights. Salten paints his picture and conveys his message by foregrounding the human side of his diarist – flawed, conceited, self-absorbed as it might be. By adopting the diary form and thereby giving voice to the woman at the centre of the outrage, Salten produces an analysis of the frame of mind of an individual without any proper appreciation of her place in society. Her sexual affairs become plausible as a clumsy and selfish attempt to assert some form of autonomy in a social sphere where the principles of individualism, freedom of choice, and self-determination are suspended. Her yearning comparisons of her own life to the world outside illustrate the aim of the book as providing a forum to investigate modes and possibilities of incorporating and accommodating anachronistic elements in the emerging bourgeois consensus. Her complaint that 'Jeder

²⁶ Geza Mattachich, *Aus den letzten Jahren: Memoiren*, Leipzig 1904.

²⁷ Driver Eddy, *Felix Salten* (note 4), p. 93.

Mensch lebt freier'²⁸ implicitly confirms the safeguarding of personal freedoms as the central principle of societal organisation. When she comments longingly on her interaction with the middle-class professional amongst her lovers, a 'Medizinalrat' employed to look after her during and after her pregnancies, she affirms 'Bürgerlichkeit', in the German sense of middle-class normality, as epitomising civil virtues: 'Mit ihm rede ich von meinen Kindern und er gibt mir Ratschläge. Mit ihm spreche ich von meinen Geldsorgen und er weiß auch da Bescheid. Es ist beinahe wie eine glückliche bürgerliche Ehe' (p. 220). Her original heartfelt simplicity endears her to readers when, for example, at the outset of her first affair, in the diary entry relating her decision to accept her suitor's advances, Salten lets her use simple and affecting language: 'Und ich überlege, daß es unendlich wohl tut, so von einem Menschen geliebt zu werden' (p. 147). Her resolve to save, in the form of the present diary, 'den besten Teil meines Ichs' (p. 350), illustrates the underlying agenda of Salten's work: even though, as the book's cover illustration suggests, it unashamedly exploits the juicy side of the story, it is very much concerned with the issue of personal freedom, freedom of choice, and freedom of expression as core elements of middle-class identity, explicated by way of a negative example or contrastive foil. The fact that Salten participates in a debate that preoccupied his generation is evidenced by his employment of the very same catch-phrase which only three years later was to provide the title for Arthur Schnitzler's engagement with agency and responsibility; here the author lets his diarist define her aim as 'den Weg ins Freie, den Weg in die Freiheit zu gewinnen' (p. 348). Further thematic connections to Louise von Coburg's story are suggested by the metaphors describing the denial of personal freedom imposed by the regimentation of her existence – 'Irrenhaus' and 'Narrenhaus' (pp. 348 and 350) – as well as by Salten's allusions to his diarist's naiveté about her financial affairs (see p. 62).

Salten's later play about Louise von Coburg chronicles in a succession of key scenes the events surrounding her institutionalisation and liberation, as well as her lover Mattachich's conviction for fraud before a military court. The story concludes with the rehabilitation of both individuals, Louise's as evidenced in the French psychiatric report, and Mattachich's through the official restoration of his honour as an officer. Despite portraying historical events, the play's designation as a 'Tatsachenbericht' misses the point of the piece.²⁹ In order to attribute meaning to the events, Salten uses as the medium of his message a representative of the very democratic attributes that were violated in pursuit of notorious celebrities. In the character of the writer-journalist Ifflinger, Salten clearly portrays himself and his

²⁸ [Felix Salten,] *Bekenntnisse einer Prinzessin*, Vienna and Leipzig [1904], p. 342. Further page references are given in the text.

²⁹ Lieselotte Pough, *Wiener Literatur und Psychoanalyse: Felix Dörmann, Jakob Julius David und Felix Salten*, Frankfurt a. M. 1997, p. 185.

involvement in the escape of Louise, and the rehabilitation of both. In the play, Salten has his stage wife Hedwig say of her husband: 'Er glaubt, er ist nur für die andern auf der Welt und es ist seine Pflicht.'³⁰ More important than this aggrandisement of Salten's *alter ego* as a noble, altruistic, and non-discriminatory embodiment of civil virtue is the fact that this character's intrinsic moral rectitude vouches for Mattachich's integrity and for the sincerity of the lovers' feelings for one another.

Kraus's allegation that the measures against both Louise and Mattachich represent miscarriages of justice also forms a prominent motif in the play. The collusion between the court, the military authorities, and civilian justice is pilloried when Louise accuses the director of the asylum – and with it the entire medical establishment that declared her insane without so much as an examination ('Ich habe keinen Psychiater gesehen!', p. 21) – of being 'Ein bezahlter Lackai! – Ein bestochener Mensch!' (p. 19). The hypocrisy of the accusers' stance is exposed when, in spite of the prosecutor's protestations of wishing to keep the adultery out of the court proceedings ('Der Ehebruch nicht. Das ist eine Privatangelegenheit', p. 12), the infidelity is cited, if 'nicht als eine Straftat', then 'zur Charakterisierung des Angeklagten' (p. 15). At the trial a junior officer is given the role of reminding the jury that Mattachich has not even been granted the opportunity to defend himself. The entire problematic complex of 'Gesetz', 'Gewissen', 'Rechtsgefühl', and 'Gerechtigkeit' (pp. 28–31) is unravelled when Mattachich refuses to accept a pardon. The Emperor's offer of 'Milde' (p. 31) acts here as a reminder of a princely prerogative incongruous with the rule of law, with the principle of equality before the law, and with the universality of justice.

The play thus argues that these principles have to be defended and applied, even to those who consider themselves above the law, or those untroubled by considerations of propriety, responsibility, and proportionality, as evidenced by reckless spending. The portrayal of the eponymous character is anything but sympathetic. In her words there are echoes of the traditional defence of princely privilege and divine right; she even understands her love for Mattachich as somehow anointed from above. She asserts her destiny with the words 'Für uns! Für den Willen des Allmächtigen!' (p. 67). She derides the merit of those who facilitated her escape: 'Niemandem haben wir zu danken! Keinem Menschen! Einzig uns selbst – unserm Recht – und Gott!' (p. 67); 'die Herren, die uns Geld

³⁰ Felix Salten, *Auf Tod und Leben: Die Liebesgeschichte der Prinzessin Louise von Koburg. Fünfzehn Bilder* [Bühnenmanuskript], Berlin-Wilmersdorf [1932], p. 85. Further page references are given in the text. Salten later published a revised version which differs more significantly from the original than M. Gottstein (note 25) allows, showing the vindictive husband Philipp in a slightly more humane light, for example, and elaborating on Louise's distance from the realities of ordinary life. See Felix Salten, *Louise von Koburg: Das Schicksal einer Liebe. Fünfzehn Szenen*, in Felix Salten, *Vom andern Ufer: Ernste und heitere Theaterstücke. Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, Berlin, Vienna and Leipzig 1934, pp. 9–155.

vorstrecken – alle – – Und doch sind alle miteinander nur Werkzeug, nichts als Werkzeug im Gebrauch einer höheren Macht' (p. 76a). She insists on being shown reverence and decorum commensurate with her royal rank, even in the most precarious and destitute of circumstances: 'Sie vergessen den ungeheuren Unterschied, der zwischen mir und Ihnen – ' (p. 20). In one of her utterances inserted in the revised version, the connection between the claim to divine distinction and profligacy is made explicit: 'Herkunft ist alles – ist von Gott bestimmt! Geld ist gar nichts! Gar nichts!'³¹

Ifflinger, by contrast, represents the fourth estate and the role of the press and public opinion in defining and protecting the norms of civil society. He is the spokesperson of common decency, representative of 'die Menschlichkeit und die Menschheit' (p. 54a). He is cast as the occupier of a middle ground, a social consensus based on a sense of justice, compassion, and personal freedom, and he espouses an ideal of tolerance and inclusion that extends even to its detractors:

Man muss helfen! Immer wieder helfen! Ob das nun ein Prinz ist oder ein Prolet. Die Menschen sind ja so arm! [...] Die Prinzessin ist allerdings verrückt. [...] Aber nein! Sie gehört in kein Irrenhaus! Gewiss nicht. – – Ein Funken Verrücktheit spritzt durch ihren Verstand – einige Funken Verrücktheit sogar! Sie ist ganz weltfremd – glaubt unbedingt an ihre Hoheit – von uns aus betrachtet – eben verrückt! [...] Von diesen Leuten trennen uns Jahrhunderte und Abgründe. [...] Proleten und Prinzen – alle Klassenbewußten sind sich ihres Menschturns nicht bewußt. Verrückte Gesellschaft! (pp. 86f.)

Since their behaviour reveals a strong sense of entitlement and privilege beyond the norms of restraint and moderation, it is debatable whether the actions displayed by Louise von Coburg and indeed Louise von Sachsen can be regarded as attempts at rebellion against antiquated rules and oppressive moral standards. They are not exponents of modern civil society but wards of the custodians of lawfulness and civility. But this very contradiction makes them suitable as test cases for society's tolerance, firmness, and assurance when challenged: 'von uns aus betrachtet – eben verrückt!' This very sentiment summarises the realisation that Louise von Coburg displays no more allegiance to civil society and its norms and institutions than her enemies; it is echoed by several minor characters in the play, the *vox populi*. One of the messages of the play is thus an appeal to public opinion not to display the same self-righteousness towards the privileged as the latter themselves do in their disregard for the foundations of civil society: justice, personal rights and freedoms, financial prudence, and responsible conduct. Salten's allegation is that, when affected by the dynamics of celebrity culture, the public castigates dissenters, colludes with

³¹ Salten, 'Louise von Koburg' [1934] (note 30), p. 77.

anti- (or rather, pre-)democratic forces, and now, backed by the power of mass media and sensationalised public opinion, perpetuates inequality and discrimination.

V

Salten's public interventions and campaigning on behalf of marginalised groups have been comprehensively studied with regard to Jewish causes. What holds true for Salten's Jewishness and for his support for Zionism on the basis not of Eastern European spirituality, but of firmly European rational liberalism, is also applicable to his espousal of civil causes, namely that he possessed 'produktives Ressentiment' (here directed against the abusers of status and privilege), an unquestioning belief in the virtues of 'Europeanness', a keen sense of right and rectitude, and of mission and vocation.³² In that respect, his stance seems not very far removed from that of his personal enemy Karl Kraus, as displayed in the latter's attacks on the hypocritical servility of public servants towards their former sovereigns, the willingness of new bourgeois elites to ingratiate themselves with the hereditary elite and thereby betray the principles they are meant to uphold and – as professionals who gained their position by merit rather than inheritance – to represent. In a way, Kraus engages in a very similar debate to that of Salten; he too acknowledges that civil society is still provisional, fluid, and flawed, and that some of the flaws are legacies of a bygone age – in this case the feudal era that retained its contemporary sway, not only by virtue of the reputation and influence of royalty, but also by accumulated social capital. They both, to varying degrees, operate within the logic of celebrity culture when they use cases already prominent in the public imagination and forms which veer between journalism and literature to fight their battles.

The case Salten selects to pursue his public crusade is intimately linked to a cultural substrate conducive to the emergence of celebrity and notoriety. The facilitating factors were, in Chris Rojek's view, the decline of organised religion and the substitution of negotiated civil arrangements for both clerical and royal authority; the contestation of the workings and standards of society under the auspices of democracy; the commodification of public personae; and the rapid spread of information about persons of interest in an era of mushrooming communication media.³³ Complex mechanisms determine the role of celebrity discourse and the framing of notoriety in communities. In emerging democracies, or rather in the socially diverse and politically conflicted societies around 1900, celebrity occupied a growing public sphere and, in the ways that attention is

³² Manfred Dickel, *Ein Dilettant des Lebens will ich nicht sein': Felix Salten zwischen Zionismus und Jungwiener Moderne*, Heidelberg 2007, especially pp. 480 and 497.

³³ Rojek, *Celebrity* (note 2), p. 13.

focussed and topics are framed, allows insight into the wider social, political, cultural, and moral preoccupations of a given collective at a given time. The 'disdain for extremity' and a 'grey affirmation of equal rights and responsibilities' might have provided a discursive site for communities to find some common ground.³⁴ Yet the 'bitterness, resentment and anger geared at the common perception (and left over from the *ancien régime*) that celebrities "get away" with avoiding fiscal responsibilities and ride roughshod over legality',³⁵ must not, to Kraus's and Salten's minds, be abused as a pretext to deny members of the privileged class the protection and respect that should form the spine of civil society. The 'extensive, industrialised, and inter-textual mode of gossip, disseminating information, facilitating identifications, channelling desires, defining relations within a community, proscribing behaviours and legitimating values',³⁶ has become the vehicle for expressing public sentiment, and Salten, with his juicy tales of sexual transgression and adventure, participates in this vein of celebrity discourse.

Thus concepts to combat the abuse of privilege and the impulse to scorn, and positive visions of implementing a civil spirit combine in Salten's works, which, beyond his attempts at self-promotion through association, seem indebted to an idea of tolerance, inclusion, and compromise in the sense of establishing communalities between formerly disparate spheres. A rather routine note under the rubric 'Kleine Chronik' of the *Neue Freie Presse* of 7 October 1913 on legal-financial wranglings between Vienna and Brussels about the princess's debts provides a fitting metaphor for Salten's aim: 'Es scheinen Vergleichsverhandlungen zwischen Wien und Brüssel im Gange zu sein', reports the paper about the status of Louise's financial claims to her father's private fortune after he had struck her from his will.³⁷ The term neatly encapsulates the significance of the discourse on the Coburg case: civil society is dependent on an 'Ausgleich' between competing parties, and on the accommodation of difference through agreed mechanisms. The aim of Salten's literary treatment of the scandal surrounding Louise von Coburg could be described as a form of arbitration, a negotiation of the terms on which civil society functions, how it affects its members, and who can lay claim to its protection. It is noteworthy that Felix Salten should publish his account of events only a generation after the height of the affair, more precisely around the time of the seizure of power by the Nazis, an event that heralded the suspension of civil rights and the suppression of debates on the self-understanding, inclusiveness, and applicability of the norms of civil society, developments which also excluded persons of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Also of interest here is the chapter 'Becoming Visible', in Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890–1940*, Chapel Hill and London 2002, pp. 11–41.

³⁵ Chris Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and its Consequences*, London 2012, pp. 4–5.

³⁶ Goldsmith, 'Celebrity and the spectacle of nation' (note 1), p. 22.

³⁷ 'Kleine Chronik', *Neue Freie Presse*, no. 17645 (7 October 1913), p. 7.

Salten's (Jewish) background not only from these debates themselves but from the very community of debaters. When, in the early 1930s, Salten revisited the case of some thirty years earlier, the defence of the middle ground of moderation, responsibility, inclusiveness, and tolerance, including the promotion of 'Vergleichsverhandlungen', had taken on a whole new urgency.