Alfred Kerr (1867–1948)

Born Alfred Kempner, Alfred Kerr is remembered as one of Germany’s most important theatre and film critics and as a writer with literary ambitions who worked tirelessly to establish criticism as its own genre; in particular, his voluminous writing on playwriting, stagecraft, and performance demonstrates the crucial role of the critic in co-constructing theatre as a social medium. His importance lies in his support for progressive tendencies in literature, in his championing of innovative dramatists whose works were remembered by posterity (for example, Henrik Ibsen, Gerhart Hauptmann, Arthur Schnitzler, and Frank Wedekind), and in the highly polished and witty style of his writing that makes his critiques more memorable than many of the plays he wrote about. Kerr’s influence was strongest in the period of 1895 to the end of World War I, though he continued to write into the Weimar and Nazi periods. His *Gesammelte Schriften* (*collected works*) were published between 1917 and 1920. The first five volumes, *Die Welt im Drama* (*The World in Drama*) bring together in book format Kerr’s numerous theatre reviews of the previous twenty-five years. Kerr’s books were burned by the Nazis, and he was forced to spend most of the 30s and 40s abroad, taking British citizenship and returning to Germany only shortly before his death. In addition to criticism, Kerr also wrote poetry, memoirs, and travel narratives.

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