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Ann Taylor Allen

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Wilhelmine Germany: Kladderadatsch and Simplicissimus, 1890–1914:

The reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II was a transitional period in German history when the traditions of the nineteenth century were coming into conflict with the emerging cultural, social, and political patterns of the twentieth century. The resulting tensions were clearly reflected in the period's leading satirical journals, Kladderadatsch and Simplicissimus. Both journals appealed to a diverse middle-class readership and attracted widespread attention through their flamboyant and sometimes scurrilous attacks on authority. Their satire, expressed through cartoons, anecdotes, verse, and fiction, ranged across nearly every aspect of German life and employed the talents of some of the period's most important writers and artists. That their purpose was essentially serious was shown by the frequent seizures of offending issues and the jail sentences meted out to satirists whose jabs struck too near home. Kladderadatsch, founded in Berlin in 1848, was liberal politically but generally mild in its social satire. It remained for Simplicissimus, founded in Munich in 1896, to launch a more radical critique of bourgeois culture. The primary target of both journals was the absurdities of an essentially weak monarchy personified in a Kaiser who seemed always to be "on stage." Simplicissimus, in addition, delighted in ridiculing a military establishment dominated by class, a repressive educational system, and a hypocritical religious hierarchy. Even the family came in for satirical treatment. Through the history of these two periodicals, Ann Taylor Allen demonstrates the uses of humor in a society that offered few effective outlets for dissent. She also provides important new insights into the role of popular journalism in this critical period.

About the Author Ann Taylor Allen is associate professor of history at the University of Louisville.