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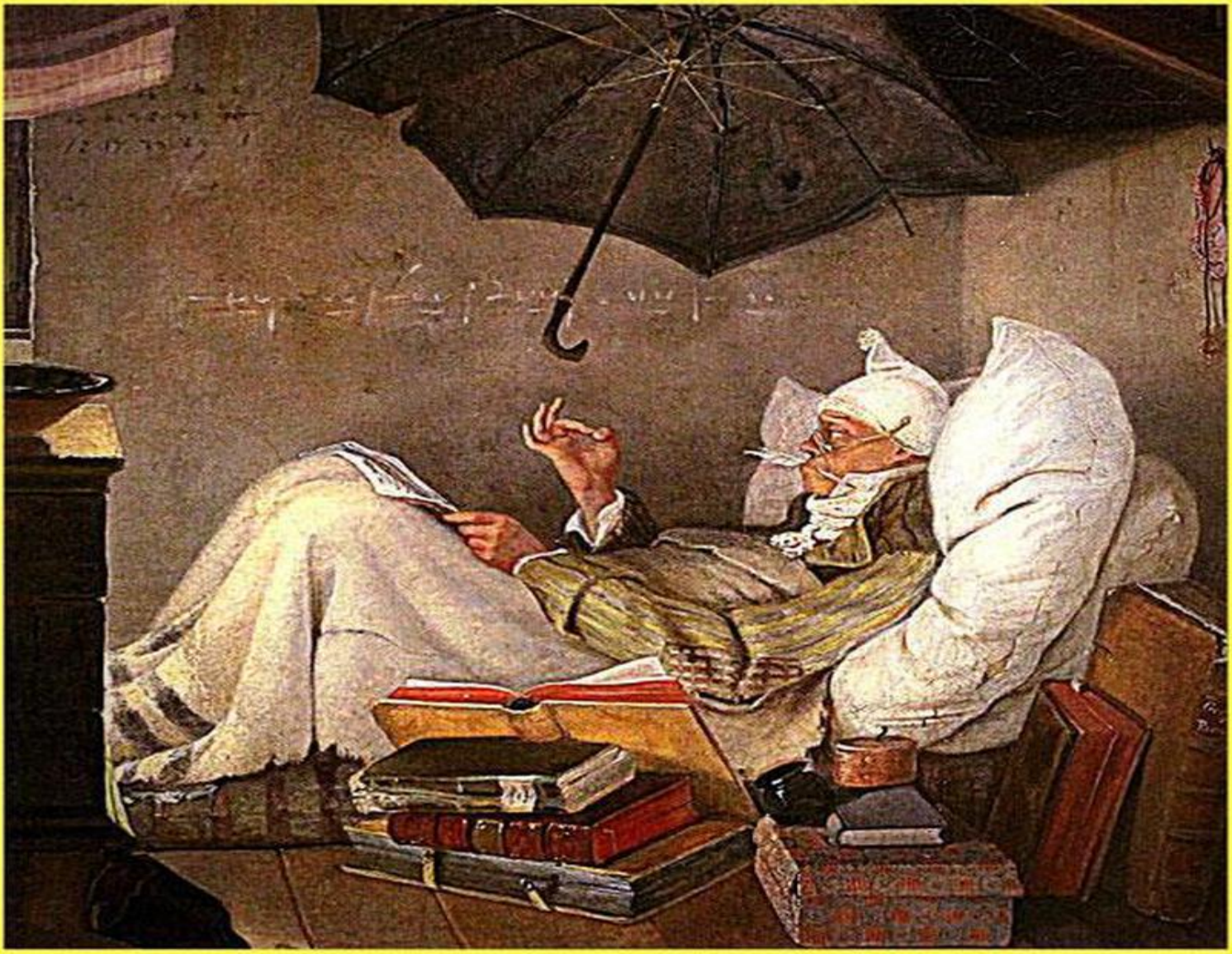

7 BEST SHORT STORIES

GERMANY

EDITED BY AUGUST NEMO

TACET BOOKS

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Germany

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August Nemo

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Introduction

German literature comprises those literary texts written in the German language. This includes literature written in Germany, Austria, the German parts of Switzerland and Belgium, Liechtenstein, South Tyrol in Italy and to a lesser extent works of the German diaspora. German literature of the modern period is mostly in Standard German, but there are some currents of literature influenced to a greater or lesser degree by dialects (e.g. Alemannic).

Medieval German literature is literature written in Germany, stretching from the Carolingian dynasty; various dates have been given for the end of the German literary Middle Ages, the Reformation (1517) being the last possible cut-off point. The Old High German period is reckoned to run until about the mid-11th century; the most famous works are the Hildebrandslied and a heroic epic known as the Heliand. Middle High German starts in the 12th century; the key works include The Ring (ca. 1410) and the poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein and Johannes von Tepl. The Baroque period (1600 to 1720) was one of the most fertile times in German literature. Modern literature in German begins with the authors of the Enlightenment (such as Herder). The Sensibility movement of the 1750s–1770s ended with Goethe's best-selling Die Leiden des jungen Werther (1774). The Sturm und Drang and Weimar Classicism movements were led by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. German Romanticism was the dominant movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Biedermeier refers to the literature, music, the visual arts and interior design in the period between the years 1815 (Vienna Congress), the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and 1848, the year of the European revolutions. Under the Nazi

regime, some authors went into exile (Exilliteratur) and others submitted to censorship ("internal emigration", Innere Emigration). The Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to German language authors thirteen times (as of 2009), or the third most often after English and French language authors (with 27 and 14 laureates, respectively), with winners including Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, and Günter Grass.

German Literature

by John George Robertson[1]

Compared with other literatures, that of the German-speaking peoples presents a strangely broken and interrupted course; it falls into more or less isolated groups, separated from each other by periods which in intellectual darkness and ineptitude are virtually without a parallel in other European lands. The explanation of this irregularity of development is to be sought less in the chequered political history of the German people—although this was often reason enough—than in the strongly marked, one might almost say, provocative character of the national mind as expressed in literature. The Germans were not able, like their partially latinized English cousins—or even their Scandinavian neighbours—to adapt themselves to the various waves of literary influence which emanated from Italy and France and spread with irresistible power over all Europe; their literary history has been rather a struggle for independent expression, a constant warring against outside forces, even when the latter—like the influence of English literature in the 18th century and of Scandinavian at the close of the 19th—were hailed as friendly and not hostile. It is a peculiarity of German literature that in those ages

when, owing to its own poverty and impotence, it was reduced to borrowing its ideas and its poetic forms from other lands, it sank to the most servile imitation; while the first sign of returning health has invariably been the repudiation of foreign influence and the assertion of the right of genius to untrammelled expression. Thus Germany’s periods of literary efflorescence rarely coincide with those of other nations, and great European movements, like the Renaissance, passed over her without producing a single great poet.

This chequered course, however, renders the grouping of German literature and the task of the historian the easier. The first and simplest classification is that afforded by the various stages of linguistic development. In accordance with the three divisions in the history of the High German language, there is an Old High German, a Middle High German and a New High German or Modern High German literary epoch. It is obvious, however, that the last of these divisions covers too enormous a period of literary history to be regarded as analogous to the first two. The present survey is consequently divided into six main sections:

I. The Old High German Period, including the literature of the Old Saxon dialect, from the earliest times to the middle of the 11th century.

II. The Middle High German Period, from the middle of the 11th to the middle of the 14th century.

III. The Transition Period, from the middle of the 14th century to the Reformation in the 16th century.

IV. The Period of Renaissance and Pseudo-classicism, from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 18th.

V. The Classical Period of Modern German literature, from the middle of the 18th century to Goethe's death in 1832.

VI. The Period from Goethe's death to the present day.

I. The Old High German Period (c. 750-1050)

Of all the Germanic races, the tribes with which we have more particularly to deal here were the latest to attain intellectual maturity. The Goths had, centuries earlier, under their famous bishop Ulfilas or Wulfila, possessed the Bible in their vernacular, the northern races could point to their *Edda*, the Germanic tribes in England to a rich and virile Old English poetry, before a written German literature of any consequence existed at all. At the same time, these continental tribes, in the epoch that lay between the Migrations of the 5th century and the age of Charles the Great, were not without poetic literature of a kind, but it was not committed to writing, or, at least, no record of such a poetry has come down to us. Its existence is vouched for by indirect historical evidence, and by the fact that the sagas, out of which the German national epic was welded at a later date, originated in the great upheaval of the 5th century. When the vernacular literature began to emerge from an unwritten state in the 8th century, it proved to be merely a weak reflection of the ecclesiastical writings of the monasteries; and this, with very few exceptions, Old High German literature remained. Translations of the liturgy, of Tatian's *Gospel Harmony* (*c.* 835), of fragments of sermons, form a large proportion of it. Occasionally, as in the so-called *Monsee Fragments*, and at the end of the period, in the prose of Notker Labeo (d. 1022), this ecclesiastical literature attains a surprising maturity of style and expression. But it had no vitality of its own; it virtually sprang into existence at the command of Charlemagne,

whose policy with regard to the use of the vernacular in place of Latin was liberal and far-seeing; and it docilely obeyed the tastes of the rulers that followed, becoming severely orthodox under Louis the Pious, and consenting to immediate extinction when the Saxon emperors withdrew their favour from it. Apart from a few shorter poetic fragments of interest, such as the *Merseburg Charms* (*Zaubersprüche*), an undoubted relic of pre-Christian times, the *Wessobrunn Prayer* (*c.* 780), the *Muspilli*, an imaginative description of the Day of Judgment, and the *Ludwigslied* (881), which may be regarded as the starting point for the German historical ballad, the only High German poem of importance in this early period was the *Gospel Book* (*Liber evangeliorum*) of Otfrid of Weissenburg (*c.* 800-870). Even this work is more interesting as the earliest attempt to supersede alliteration in German poetry by rhyme, than for such poetic life as the monk of Weissenburg was able to instil into his narrative. In fact, for the only genuine poetry of this epoch we have to look, not to the High German but to the Low German races. They alone seemed able to give literary expression to the memories handed down in oral tradition from the 5th century; to Saxon tradition we owe the earliest extant fragment of a national saga, the *Lay of Hildebrand* (*Hildebrandslied*, *c.* 800), and a Saxon poet was the author of a vigorous alliterative version of the Gospel story, the *Heliand* (*c.* 830), and also of part of the Old Testament (*Genesis*). This alliterative epic—for epic it may be called—is the one poem of this age in which the Christian tradition has been adapted to German poetic needs. Of the existence of a lyric poetry we only know by hearsay; and the drama had nowhere in Europe yet emerged from its earliest purely liturgic condition. Such as it was, the vernacular literature of the Old High German period enjoyed but a brief existence, and in the 10th and 11th centuries darkness again closed over it. The dominant “German” literature in

these centuries is in Latin; but that literature is not without national interest, for it shows in what direction the German mind was moving. The *Lay of Walter* (*Waltharilied*, *c.* 930), written in elegant hexameters by Ekkehard of St Gall, the moralizing dramas of Hrosvitha (Roswitha) of Gandersheim, the *Ecbasis captivi* (*c.* 940), earliest of all the Beast epics, and the romantic adventures of *Ruodlieb* (*c.* 1030), form a literature which, Latin although it is, foreshadows the future developments of German poetry.

II. The Middle High German Period (1050-1350)

(*a*) *Early Middle High German Poetry.*—The beginnings of Middle High German literature were hardly less tentative than those of the preceding period. The Saxon emperors, with their Latin and even Byzantine tastes, had made it extremely difficult to take up the thread where Notker let it drop. Williram of Ebersberg, the commentator of the *Song of Songs* (*c.* 1063), did certainly profit by Notker's example, but he stands alone. The Church had no helping hand to offer poetry, as in the more liberal epoch of the great Charles; for, at the middle of the 11th century, when the linguistic change from Old to Middle High German was taking place, a movement of religious asceticism, originating in the Burgundian monastery of Cluny, spread across Europe, and before long all the German peoples fell under its influence. For a century there was no room for any literature that did not place itself unreservedly at the service of the Church, a service which meant the complete abnegation of the brighter side of life. Repellent in their asceticism are, for instance, poems like *Memento mori* (*c.* 1050), *Vom Glauben*, a verse commentary on the creed by a monk Hartmann (*c.* 1120), and a poem on "the remembrance of death" (*Von des todes gehugede*) by

Heinreich von Melk (*c.* 1150); only rarely, as in a few narrative Poems on Old Testament subjects, are the poets of this time able to forget for a time their lugubrious faith. In the *Ezzolied* (*c.* 1060), a spirited lay by a monk of Bamberg on the life, miracles and death of Christ, and in the *Annolied* (*c.* 1080), a poem in praise of the archbishop Anno of Cologne, we find, however, some traces of a higher poetic imagination.

The transition from this rigid ecclesiastic spirit to a freer, more imaginative literature is to be seen in the lyric poetry inspired by the Virgin, in the legends of the saints which bulk so largely in the poetry of the 12th century, and in the general trend towards mysticism. Andreas, Pilatus, Aegidius, Albanius are the heroes of monkish romances of that age, and the stories of Sylvester and Crescentia form the most attractive parts of the *Kaiserchronik* (*c.* 1130-1150), a long, confused chronicle of the world which contains many elements common to later Middle High German poetry. The national sagas, of which the poet of the *Kaiserchronik* had not been oblivious, soon began to assert themselves in the popular literature. The wandering *Spielleute*, the lineal descendants of the jesters and minstrels of the dark ages, who were now rapidly becoming a factor of importance in literature, were here the innovators; to them we owe the romance of *König Rother* (*c.* 1160), and the kindred stories of *Orendel*, *Oswald* and *Salomon und Markolf* (*Salman und Morolf*). All these poems bear witness to a new element, which in these years kindled the German imagination and helped to counteract the austerity of the religious faith—the Crusades. With what alacrity the Germans revelled in the wonderland of the East is to be seen especially in the *Alexanderlied* (*c.* 1130), and in *Herzog Ernst* (*c.* 1180), romances which point out the way to another important development of German medieval literature, the Court epic. The latter type of romance was the immediate product of

the social conditions created by chivalry and, like chivalry itself, was determined and influenced by its French origin; so also was the version of the *Chanson de Roland* (*Rolandslied*, c. 1135), which we owe to another priest, Konrad of Regensburg, who, with considerable probability, has been identified with the author of the *Kaiserchronik*.

The Court epic was, however, more immediately ushered in by Eilhart von Oberge, a native of the neighbourhood of Hildesheim who, in his *Tristant* (*c.* 1170), chose that Arthurian type of romance which from now on was especially cultivated by the poets of the Court epic; and of equally early origin is a knightly romance of *Floris und Blancheflur*, another of the favourite love stories of the middle ages. In these years, too, the Beast epic, which had been represented by the Latin *Ecbasis captivi*, was reintroduced into Germany by an Alsatian monk, Heinrich der Glichezære, who based his *Reinhart Fuchs* (*c.* 1180) on the French *Roman de Renart*. Lastly, we have to consider the beginning of the *Minnesang*, or lyric, which in the last decades of the 12th century burst out with extraordinary vigour in Austria and South Germany. The origins are obscure, and it is still debatable how much in the German Minnesang is indigenous and national, how much due to French and Provençal influence; for even in its earliest phases the Minnesang reveals correspondences with the contemporary lyric of the south of France. The freshness and originality of the early South German singers, such as Kürenberg, Dietmar von Eist, the Burggraf of Rietenburg and Meinloh von Sevelingen, are not, however, to be questioned; in spite of foreign influence, their verses make the impression of having been a spontaneous expression of German lyric feeling in the 12th century.
The *Spruchdichtung*, a form of poetry which in this period is represented by at least two poets who call themselves Herger and “Der Spervogel,” was less dependent on foreign

models; the pointed and satirical strophes of these poets were the forerunners of a vast literature which did not reach its highest development until after literature had passed from the hands of the noble-born knight to those of the burgher of the towns.

(*b*) *The Flourishing of Middle High German Poetry.*—Such was the preparation for the extraordinarily brilliant, although brief epoch of German medieval poetry, which corresponded to the reigns of the Hohenstaufen emperors, Frederick I. Barbarossa, Henry VI. and Frederick II. These rulers, by their ambitious political aspirations and achievements, filled the German peoples with a sense of "world-mission," as the leading political power in medieval Europe. Docile pupils of French chivalry, the Germans had no sooner learned their lesson than they found themselves in the position of being able to dictate to the world of chivalry. In the same way, the German poets, who, in the 12th century, had been little better than clumsy translators of French romances, were able, at the beginning of the 13th, to substitute for French *chansons de geste* epics based on national sagas, to put a completely German imprint on the French Arthurian romance, and to sing German songs before which even the lyric of Provence paled. National epic, Court epic and Minnesang—these three types of medieval German literature, to which may be added as a subordinate group didactic poetry, comprise virtually all that has come down to us in the Middle High German tongue. A Middle High German prose hardly existed, and the drama, such as it was, was still essentially Latin.

The first place among the National or Popular epics belongs to the *Nibelungenlied*, which received its present form in Austria about the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. Combining, as it does, elements from various cycles of sagas—the lower Rhenish legend of Siegfried, the

Burgundian saga of Gunther and Hagen, the Gothic saga of Dietrich and Etzel—it stands out as the most representative epic of German medieval life. And in literary power, dramatic intensity and singleness of purpose its eminence is no less unique. The vestiges of gradual growth—of irreconcilable elements imperfectly welded together—may not have been entirely effaced, but they in no way lessen the impression of unity which the poem leaves behind it; whoever the welder of the sagas may have been, he was clearly a poet of lofty imagination and high epic gifts (see Nibelungenlied). Less imposing as a whole, but in parts no less powerful in its appeal to the modern mind, is the second of the German national epics, *Gudrun*, which was written early in the 13th century. This poem, as it has come down to us, is the work of an Austrian, but the subject belongs to a cycle of sagas which have their home on the shores of the North Sea. It seems almost a freak of chance that Siegfried, the hero of the Rhineland, should occupy so prominent a position in the *Nibelungenlied*, whereas Dietrich von Bern (*i.e.* of Verona), the name under which Theodoric the Great had been looked up to for centuries by the German people as their national hero, should have left the stamp of his personality on no single epic of the intrinsic worth of the *Nibelungenlied*. He appears, however, more or less in the background of a number of romances—*Die Rabenschlacht*, *Dietrichs Flucht*, *Alpharts Tod*, *Biterolf und Dietlieb*, *Laurin*, &c.—which make up what is usually called the *Heldenbuch*. It is tempting, indeed, to see in this very unequal collection the basis for what, under more favourable circumstances, might have developed into an epic even more completely representative of the German nation than the *Nibelungenlied*.

While the influence of the romance of chivalry is to be traced on all these popular epics, something of the manlier, more primitive ideals that animated German national poetry

passed over to the second great group of German medieval poetry, the Court epic. The poet who, following Eilhart von Oberge's tentative beginnings, established the Court epic in Germany was Heinrich von Veldeke, a native of the district of the lower Rhine; his *Eneit*, written between 1173 and 1186, is based on a French original. Other poets of the time, such as Herbort von Fritzlar, the author of a *Liet von Troye*, followed Heinrich's example, and selected French models for German poems on antique themes; while Albrecht von Halberstadt translated about the year 1210 the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid into German verse. With the three masters of the Court epic, Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg—all of them contemporaries—the Arthurian cycle became the recognized theme of this type of romance, and the accepted embodiment of the ideals of the knightly classes. Hartmann was a Swabian, Wolfram a Bavarian, Gottfried presumably a native of Strassburg. Hartmann, who in his *Erec* and *Iwein*, *Gregorius* and *Der arme Heinrich* combined a tendency towards religious asceticism with a desire to imbue the worldly life of the knight with a moral and religious spirit, provided the Court epic of the age with its best models; he had, of all the medieval court poets, the most delicate sense for the formal beauty of poetry, for language, verse and style. Wolfram and Gottfried, on the other hand, represent two extremes of poetic temperament. Wolfram's *Parzival* is filled with mysticism and obscure spiritual significance; its flashes of humour irradiate, although they can hardly be said to illumine, the gloom; its hero is, unconsciously, a symbol and allegory of much which to the poet himself must have been mysterious and inexplicable; in other words, *Parzival*—and Wolfram's other writings, *Willehalm* and *Titurel*, point in the same direction—is an instinctive or, to use Schiller's word, a "naïve" work of genius. Gottfried, again, is hardly less gifted and original, but he is a poet of a wholly different type. His *Tristan* is even

more lucid than Hartmann's *Iwein*, his art is more objective; his delight in it is that of the conscious artist who sees his work growing under his hands. Gottfried's poem, in other words, is free from the obtrusion of those subjective elements which are in so high a degree characteristic of *Parzival*; in spite of the tragic character of the story, *Tristan* is radiant and serene, and yet uncontaminated by that tone of frivolity which the Renaissance introduced into love stories of this kind.

Parzival and *Tristan* are the two poles of the German Court epic, and the subsequent development of that epic stands under the influence of the three poets, Hartmann, Wolfram and Gottfried; according as the poets of the 13th century tend to imitate one or other of these, they fall into three classes. To the followers and imitators of Hartmann belong Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, the author of a *Lanzelet* (*c.* 1195); Wirnt von Gravenberg, a Bavarian, whose *Wigalois* (*c.* 1205) shows considerable imaginative power; the versatile Spielmann, known as "Der Stricker"; and Heinrich von dem Türlin, author of an unwieldy epic, *Die Krone* ("the crown of all adventures," c. 1220). The fascination of Wolfram's mysticism is to be seen in *Der jüngere Titurel* of a Bavarian poet, Albrecht von Scharfenberg (*c.* 1270), and in the still later *Lohengrin* of an unknown poet; whereas Gottfried von Strassburg dominates the *Flore und Blanscheflur* of Konrad Fleck (*c.* 1220) and the voluminous romances of the two chief poets of the later 13th century, Rudolf von Ems, who died in 1254, and Konrad von Würzburg, who lived till 1287. Of these, Konrad alone carried on worthily the traditions of the great age, and even his art, which excels within the narrow limits of romances like *Die Herzemoere* and *Engelhard*, becomes diffuse and wearisome on the unlimited canvas of *Der Trojanerkrieg* and *Partonopier und Meliur*.

The most conspicuous changes which came over the narrative poetry of the 13th century were, on the one hand, a steady encroachment of realism on the matter and treatment of the epic, and, on the other, a leaning to didacticism. The substitution of the “history” of the chronicle for the confessedly imaginative stories of the earlier poets is to be seen in the work of Rudolf von Ems, and of a number of minor chroniclers like Ulrich von Eschenbach, Berthold von Holle and Jans Enikel; while for the growth of realism we may look to the *Pfaffe Amis*, a collection of comic anecdotes by “Der Stricker,” the admirable peasant romance *Meier Helmbrecht*, written between 1236 and 1250 by Wernher der Gartenaere in Bavaria, and to the adventures of Ulrich von Lichtenstein, as described in his *Frauendienst* (1255) and *Frauenbuch* (1257).

More than any single poet of the Court epic, more even than the poet of the *Nibelungenlied*, Walther von der Vogelweide summed up in himself all that was best in the group of poetic literature with which he was associated—the Minnesang. The early Austrian singers already mentioned, poets like Heinrich von Veldeke, who in his lyrics, as in his epic, introduced the French conception of *Minne*, or like the manly Friedrich von Hausen, and the Swiss imitator of Provençal measures, Rudolf von Fenis appear only in the light of forerunners. Even more original poets, like Heinrich von Morungen and Walther’s own master, Reinmar von Hagenau, the author of harmonious but monotonously elegiac verses, or among immediate contemporaries, Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose few lyric strophes are as deeply stamped with his individuality as his epics—seem only tributary to the full rich stream of Walther’s genius. There was not a form of the German Minnesang which Walther did not amplify and deepen; songs of courtly love and lowly love, of religious

faith and delight in nature, patriotic songs and political *Sprüche*—in all he was a master. Of Walther's life we are somewhat better informed than in the case of his contemporaries: he was born about 1170 and died about 1230; his art he learned in Austria, whereupon he wandered through South Germany, a welcome guest wherever he went, although his vigorous championship of what he regarded as the national cause in the political struggles of the day won him foes as well as friends. For centuries he remained the accepted exemplar of German lyric poetry; not merely the Minnesänger who followed him, but also the Meistersinger of the 15th and 16th centuries looked up to him as one of the founders and lawgivers of their art. He was the most influential of all Germany's lyric poets, and in the breadth, originality and purity of his inspiration one of her greatest (see Walther von der Vogelweide).

The development of the German Minnesang after Walther's death and under his influence is easily summed up. Contemporaries had been impressed by the dual character of Walther's lyric; they distinguished a higher courtly lyric, and a lower more outspoken form of song, free from the constraint of social or literary conventions. The later Minnesang emphasized this dualism. Amongst Walther's immediate contemporaries, high-born poets, whose lives were passed at courts, naturally cultivated the higher lyric; but the more gifted and original singers of the time rejoiced in the freedom of Walther's poetry of *niedere Minne*. It was, in fact, in accordance with the spirit of the age that the latter should have been Walther's most valuable legacy to his successors; and the greatest of these, Neidhart von Reuental (*c.* 1180-*c.* 1250), certainly did not allow himself to be hampered by aristocratic prejudices. Neidhart sought the themes of his *höfische Dorfpoesie* in the village, and, as the mood happened to dictate, depicted the peasant with humorous banter or biting satire. The lyric poets of the later

13th century were either, like Burkart von Hohenfels, Ulrich von Winterstetten and Gottfried von Neifen, echoes of Walther von der Vogelweide and of Neidhart, or their originality was confined to some particular form of lyric poetry in which they excelled. Thus the singer known as "Der Tannhäuser" distinguished himself as an imitator of the French *pastourelle*; Reinmar von Zweter was purely a *Spruchdichter*. More or less common to all is the consciousness that their own ideas and surroundings were no longer in harmony with the aristocratic world of chivalry, which the poets of the previous generation had glorified. The solid advantages, material prosperity and increasing comfort of life in the German towns appealed to poets like Steinmar von Klingenau more than the unworldly ideals of self-effacing knighthood which Ulrich von Lichtenstein and Johann Hadlaub of Zürich clung to so tenaciously and extolled so warmly. On the whole, the Spruchdichter came best out of this ordeal of changing fashions; and the increasing interest in the moral and didactic applications of literature favoured the development of this form of verse. The confusion of didactic purpose with the lyric is common to all the later poetry, to that of the learned Marner, of Boppe, Rumezland and Heinrich von Meissen, who was known to later generations as "Frauenlob."
The *Spruchdichtung*, in fact, was one of the connecting links between the Minnesang of the 13th and the lyric and satiric poetry of the 15th and 16th centuries.

The disturbing and disintegrating element in the literature of the 13th century was thus the substitution of a utilitarian didacticism for the idealism of chivalry. In the early decades of that century, poems like *Der Winsbeke*, by a Bavarian, and *Der welsche Gast*, written in 1215-1216 by Thomasin von Zirclaere (Zirclaria), a native of Friuli, still teach with uncompromising idealism the duties and virtues of the knightly life. But in the *Bescheidenheit* (*c.* 1215-1230) of a

wandering singer, who called himself Freidank, we find for the first time an active antagonism to the unworldly code of chivalry and an unmistakable reflection of the changing social order, brought about by the rise of what we should now call the middle class. Freidank is the spokesman of the *Bürger*, and in his terse, witty verses may be traced the germs of German intellectual and literary development in the coming centuries—even of the Reformation itself. From the advent of Freidank onwards, the satiric and didactic poetry went the way of the epic; what it gained in quantity it lost in quality and concentration. The satires associated with the name of Seifried Helbling, an Austrian who wrote in the last fifteen years of the 13th century, and *Der Renner* by Hugo von Trimberg, written at the very end of the century, may be taken as characteristic of the later period, where terseness and incisive wit have given place to diffuse moralizing and allegory.

There is practically no Middle High German literature in prose; such prose as has come down to us—the tracts of David of Augsburg, the powerful sermons of Berthold von Regensburg (d. 1272), Germany's greatest medieval preacher, and several legal codes, as the *Sachsenspiegel* and *Schwabenspiegel*—only prove that the Germans of the 13th century had not yet realized the possibilities of prose as a medium of literary expression.

III. The Transition Period (1350-1600)

(*a*) *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.*—As is the case with all transitional periods of literary history, this epoch of German literature may be considered under two aspects: on the one hand, we may follow in it the decadence and disintegration of the literature of the Middle High German

period; on the other, we may study the beginnings of modern forms of poetry and the preparation of that spiritual revolution, which meant hardly less to the Germanic peoples than the Renaissance to the Latin races—the Protestant Reformation.

By the middle of the 14th century, knighthood with its chivalric ideals was rapidly declining, and the conditions under which medieval poetry had flourished were passing away. The social change rendered the courtly epic of Arthur's Round Table in great measure incomprehensible to the younger generation, and made it difficult for them to understand the spirit that actuated the heroes of the national epic; the tastes to which the lyrics of the great Minnesingers had appealed were vitiated by the more practical demands of the rising middle classes. But the stories of chivalry still appealed as stories to the people, although the old way of telling them was no longer appreciated. The feeling for beauty of form and expression was lost; the craving for a moral purpose and didactic aim had to be satisfied at the cost of artistic beauty; and sensational incident was valued more highly than fine character-drawing or inspired poetic thought. Signs of the decadence are to be seen in the *Karlmeinet* of this period, stories from the youth of Charlemagne, in a continuation of *Parzival* by two Alsatians, Claus Wisse and Philipp Colin (*c.* 1335), in an *Apollonius von Tyrus* by Heinrich von Neuenstadt (*c.* 1315), and a *Königstochter von Frankreich* by Hans von Bühel (*c.* 1400). The story of Siegfried was retold in a rough ballad, *Das Lied von hürnen Seyfried*, the *Heldenbuch* was recast in *Knittelvers* or doggerel (1472), and even the Arthurian epic was parodied. A no less marked symptom of decadence is to be seen in a large body of allegorical poetry analogous to the *Roman de la rose* in France; Heinzelein of Constance, at the end of the 13th, and Hadamar von Laber and Hermann von Sachsenheim, about

the middle of the 15th century, were representatives of this movement. As time went on, prose versions of the old stories became more general, and out of these developed the *Volksbücher*, such as *Loher und Maller*, *Die Haimonskinder*, *Die schöne Magelone*, *Melusine*, which formed the favourite reading of the German people for centuries. As the last monuments of the decadent narrative literature of the middle ages, we may regard the *Buch der Abenteuer* of Ulrich Füetrer, written at the end of the 15th century, and *Der Weisskönig* and *Teuerdank* by the emperor Maximilian I. (1459-1519) printed in the early years of the 16th. At the beginning of the new epoch the Minnesang could still point to two masters able to maintain the great traditions of the 13th century, Hugo von Montfort (1357-1423) and Oswald von Wolkenstein (1367-1445); but as the lyric passed into the hands of the middle-class poets of the German towns, it was rapidly shorn of its essentially lyric qualities; *die Minne* gave place to moral and religious dogmatism, emphasis was laid on strict adherence to the rules of composition, and the simple forms of the older lyric were superseded by ingenious metrical distortions. Under the influence of writers like Heinrich von Meissen ("Frauenlob," *c.* 1250-1318) and Heinrich von Mügeln in the 14th century, like Muskatblut and Michael Beheim (1416-*c.* 1480) in the 15th, the Minnesang thus passed over into the Meistergesang. In the later 15th and in the 16th centuries all the south German towns possessed flourishing Meistersinger schools in which the art of writing verse was taught and practised according to complicated rules, and it was the ambition of every gifted citizen to rise through the various grades from *Schüler* to *Meister* and to distinguish himself in the "singing contests" instituted by the schools.

Such are the decadent aspects of the once rich literature of the Middle High German period in the 14th and 15th centuries. Turning now to the more positive side of the

literary movement, we have to note a revival of a popular lyric poetry—the Volkslied—which made the futility and artificiality of the Meistergesang more apparent. Never before or since has Germany been able to point to such a rich harvest of popular poetry as is to be seen in the Volkslieder of these two centuries. Every form of popular poetry is to be found here—songs of love and war, hymns and drinking-songs, songs of spring and winter, historical ballads, as well as lyrics in which the old motives of the Minnesang reappear stripped of all artificiality. More obvious ties with the literature of the preceding age are to be seen in the development of the *Schwank* or comic anecdote. Collections of such stories, which range from the practical jokes of *Till Eulenspiegel* (1515), and the coarse witticisms of the *Pfaffe vom Kalenberg* (end of 14th century) and *Peter Leu* (1550), to the religious and didactic anecdotes of J. Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522) or the more literary *Rollwagenbüchlein* (1555) of Jörg Wickram and the *Wendunmut* (1563 ff.) of H.W. Kirchhoff—these dominate in large measure the literature of the 15th and 16th centuries; they are the literary descendants of the medieval *Pfaffe Amis*, *Markolf* and *Reinhart Fuchs*. An important development of this type of popular literature is to be seen in the *Narrenschiff* of Sebastian Brant (1457-1521), where the humorous anecdote became a vehicle of the bitterest satire; Brant's own contempt for the vulgarity of the ignorant, and the deep, unsatisfied craving of all strata of society for a wider intellectual horizon and a more humane and dignified life, to which Brant gave voice, make the *Narrenschiff*, which appeared in 1494, a landmark on the way that led to the Reformation. Another form—the Beast fable and Beast epic—which is but sparingly represented in earlier times, appealed with peculiar force to the new generation. At the very close of the Middle High German period, Ulrich Boner had revived the Aesopic fable in his *Edelstein* (1349), translations of Aesop in the following

century added to the popularity of the fable (*q.v.*), and in the century of the Reformation it became, in the hands of Burkard Waldis (*Esopus*, 1548) and Erasmus Alberus (*Buch von der Tugend und Weisheit*, 1550), a favourite instrument of satire and polemic. A still more attractive form of the Beast fable was the epic of *Reinke* de Vos*, which had been cultivated by Flemish poets in the 13th* and 14th centuries and has come down to us in a Low Saxon translation, published at Lübeck in 1498. This, too, like Brant's poem, is a powerful satire on human folly, and is also, like the *Narrenschiff*, a harbinger of the coming Reformation.

A complete innovation was the drama (*q.v.*), which, as we have seen, had practically no existence in Middle High German times. As in all European literatures, it emerged slowly and with difficulty from its original subservience to the church liturgy. As time went on, the vernacular was substituted for the original Latin, and with increasing demands for pageantry, the scene of the play was removed to the churchyard or the market-place; thus the opportunity arose in the 14th and 15th centuries for developing the *Weihnachtsspiel*, *Osterspiel* and *Passionsspiel* on secular lines. The enlargement of the scope of the religious play to include legends of the saints implied a further step in the direction of a complete separation of the drama from ecclesiastical ceremony. The most interesting example of this encroachment of the secular spirit is the *Spiel von Frau Jutten*—Jutta being the notorious Pope Joan—by an Alsatian, Dietrich Schernberg, in 1480. Meanwhile, in the 15th century, a beginning had been made of a drama entirely independent of the church. The mimic representations—originally allegorical in character—with which the people amused themselves at the great festivals of the year, and more especially in spring, were interspersed with dialogue, and performed on an improvised stage. This was the beginning of the *Fastnachtsspiel* or Shrovetide-play, the

subject of which was a comic anecdote similar to those of the many collections of *Schwänke*. Amongst the earliest cultivators of the *Fastnachtsspiel* were Hans Rosenplüt (fl. *c.* 1460) and Hans Folz (fl. *c.* 1510), both of whom were associated with Nuremberg.

(*b*) *The Age of the Reformation.*—Promising as were these literary beginnings of the 15th century, the real significance of the period in Germany's intellectual history is to be sought outside literature, namely, in two forces which immediately prepared the way for the Reformation—mysticism and humanism. The former of these had been a more or less constant factor in German religious thought throughout the middle ages, but with Meister Eckhart (? 1260-1327), the most powerful and original of all the German mystics, with Heinrich Seuse or Suso (*c.* 1300-1366), and Johannes Tauler (*c.* 1300-1361), it became a clearly defined mental attitude towards religion; it was an essentially personal interpretation of Christianity, and, as such, was naturally conducive to the individual freedom which Protestantism ultimately realized. It is thus not to be wondered at that we should owe the early translations of the Bible into German—one was printed at Strassburg in 1466—to the mystics. Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg (1445-1510), a pupil of the humanists and a friend of Sebastian Brant, may be regarded as a link between Eckhart and the earlier mysticists and Luther. Humanism was transplanted to German soil with the foundation of the university of Prague in 1348, and it made even greater strides than mysticism. Its immediate influence, however, was restricted to the educated classes; the pre-Reformation humanists despised the vernacular and wrote and thought only in Latin. Thus although neither Johann Reuchlin of Pforzheim (1455-1522), nor even the patriotic Alsatian, Jakob Wimpfeling (or Wimpheling) (1450-1528)—not to mention the great Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-

1536)—has a place in the history of German literature, their battle for liberalism in thought and scholarship against the narrow orthodoxy of the Church cleared the way for a healthy national literature among the German-speaking peoples. The incisive wit and irony of humanistic satire—we need only instance the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* (1515-1517)—prevented the German satirists of the Reformation age from sinking entirely into that coarse brutality to which they were only too prone. To the influence of the humanists we also owe many translations from the Latin and Italian dating from the 15th century. Prominent among the writers who contributed to the group of literature were Niklas von Wyl, chancellor of Württemberg, and his immediate contemporary Albrecht von Eyb (1420-1475).

Martin Luther (1483-1546), Germany's greatest man in this age of intellectual new-birth, demands a larger share of attention in a survey of literature than his religious and ecclesiastical activity would in itself justify, if only because the literary activity of the age cannot be regarded apart from him. From the Volkslied and the popular *Schwank* to satire and drama, literature turned exclusively round the Reformation which had been inaugurated on the 31st of October 1517 by Luther's publication of the *Theses against Indulgences* in Wittenberg. In his three tracts, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae*, and *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520), Luther laid down his principles of reform, and in the following year resolutely refused to recant his heresies in a dramatic scene before the Council of Worms. Luther's Bible (1522-1534) had unique importance not merely for the religious and intellectual welfare of the German people, but also for their literature. It is in itself a literary monument, a German classic, and the culmination and justification of that movement which had supplanted the medieval knight by the burgher and swept away Middle

High German poetry. Luther, well aware that his translation of the Bible must be the keystone to his work, gave himself endless pains to produce a thoroughly German work—German both in language and in spirit. It was important that the dialect into which the Bible was translated should be comprehensible over as wide an area as possible of the German-speaking world, and for this reason he took all possible care in choosing the vocabulary and forms of his *Gemeindeutsch*. The language of the Saxon chancery thus became, thanks to Luther's initiative, the basis of the modern High German literary language. As a hymn-writer (*Geistliche Lieder*, 1564), Luther was equally mindful of the importance of adapting himself to the popular tradition; and his hymns form the starting-point for a vast development of German religious poetry which did not reach its highest point until the following century.

The most powerful and virile literature of this age was the satire with which the losing side retaliated on the Protestant leaders. Amongst Luther's henchmen, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), the "praeceptor Germaniae," and Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) were powerful allies in the cause, but their intellectual sympathies were with the Latin humanists; and with the exception of some vigorous German prose and still more vigorous German verse by Hutten, both wrote in Latin. The satirical dramas of Niklas Manuel, a Swiss writer and the polemical fables of Erasmus Alberus (*c.* 1500-1553), on the other hand, were insignificant compared with the fierce assault on Protestantism by the Alsatian monk, Thomas Murner (1475-1537). The most unscrupulous of all German satirists, Murner shrank from no extremes of scurrility, his attacks on Luther reaching their culmination in the gross personalities of *Von dem lutherischen Narren* (1522). It was not until the following generation that the Protestant party could point to a satirist who in genius and power was at all comparable to Murner, namely, to

Johann Fischart (*c.* 1550-*c.* 1591); but when Fischart's Rabelaisian humour is placed by the side of his predecessor's work, we see that, in spite of counter-reformations, the Protestant cause stood in a very different position in Fischart's day from that which it had occupied fifty years before. Fischart took his stand on the now firm union between humanism and Protestantism. His chief work, the *Affentheuerlich Naupengeheurliche Geschichtklitterung* (1575), a Germanization of the first book of Rabelais' satire, is a witty and ingenious monstrosity, a satirical comment on the life of the 16th century, not the virulent expression of party strife. The day of a personal and brutal type of satire was clearly over, and the writers of the later 16th century reverted more and more to the finer methods of the humanists. The satire of Bartholomaeus Ringwaldt (1530-1599) and of Georg Rollenhagen (1542-1609), author of the *Froschmeuseler* (1595), was more "literary" and less actual than even Fischart's.

On the whole, the form of literature which succeeded best in emancipating itself from the trammels of religious controversy in the 16th century was the drama. Protestantism proved favourable to its intellectual and literary development, and the humanists, who had always prided themselves on their imitations of Latin comedy, introduced into it a sense for form and proportion. The Latin school comedy in Germany was founded by J. Wimpfeling with his *Stylpho* (1470) and by J. Reuchlin with his witty adaptation of *Maître Patelin* in his *Henno* (1498). In the 16th century the chief writers of Latin dramas were Thomas Kirchmair or Naogeorgus (1511-1563), Caspar Brülow (1585-1627), and Nikodemus Frischlin (1547-1590), who also wrote dramas in the vernacular. The work of these men bears testimony in its form and its choice of subjects to the close relationship between Latin and German drama in the 16th

century. One of the earliest focusses for a German drama inspired by the Reformation was Switzerland. In Basel, Pamphilus Gengenbach produced moralizing *Fastnachtsspiele* in 1515-1516; Niklas Manuel of Bern (1484-1530)—who has just been mentioned—employed the same type of play as a vehicle of pungent satire against the Mass and the sale of indulgences. But it was not long before the German drama benefited by the humanistic example: the *Parabell vam vorlorn Szohn* by Burkard Waldis (1527), the many dramas on the subject of *Susanna*—notably those of Sixt Birck (1532) and Paul Rebhun(1535)—and Frischlin's German plays are attempts to treat Biblical themes according to classic methods. In another of the important literary centres of the 16th century, however, in Nuremberg, the drama developed on indigenous lines. Hans Sachs (1494-1576), the Nuremberg cobbler and Meistersinger, the most productive writer of the age, went his own way; a voracious reader and an unwearied storyteller, he left behind him a vast literary legacy, embracing every form of popular literature from *Spruch* and *Schwank* to complicated *Meistergesang* and lengthy drama. He laid under contribution the rich Renaissance literature with which the humanistic translators had flooded Germany, and he became himself an ardent champion of the "Wittembergisch Nachtigall" Luther. But in the progressive movement of the German drama he played an even smaller role than his Swiss and Saxon contemporaries; for his tragedies and comedies are deficient in all dramatic qualities; they are only stories in dialogue. In the *Fastnachtsspiele*, where dramatic form is less essential than anecdotal point and brevity, he is to be seen at his best. Rich as the 16th century was in promise, the conditions for the development of a national drama were unfavourable. At the close of the century the influence of the English drama—brought to Germany by English actors—

introduced the deficient dramatic and theatrical force into the humanistic and “narrative” drama which has just been considered. This is to be seen in the work of Jakob Ayrer (d. 1605) and Duke Henry Julius of Brunswick (1564-1613). But unfortunately these beginnings had hardly made themselves felt when the full current of the Renaissance was diverted across Germany, bringing in its train the Senecan tragedy. Then came the Thirty Years’ War, which completely destroyed the social conditions indispensable for the establishment of a theatre at once popular and national.

The novel was less successful than the drama in extricating itself from satire and religious controversy. Fischart was too dependent on foreign models and too erratic—at one time adapting Rabelais, at another translating the old heroic romance of *Amadis de Gaula*—to create a national form of German fiction in the 16th century; the most important novelist was a much less talented writer, the Alsatian Meistersinger and dramatist Jörg Wickram (d. c. 1560), who has been already mentioned as the author of a popular collection of anecdotes, the *Rollwagenbüchlein*. His longer novels, *Der Knabenspiegel* (1554) and *Der Goldfaden* (1557), are in form, and especially in the importance they attach to psychological developments, the forerunners of the movement to which we owe the best works of German fiction in the 18th century. But Wickram stands alone. So inconsiderable, in fact, is the fiction of the Reformation age in Germany that we have to regard the old *Volksbücher* as its equivalent; and it is significant that of all the prose writings of this age, the book which affords the best insight into the temper and spirit of the Reformation was just one of these crude *Volksbücher*, namely, the famous story of the magician *Doctor Johann Faust*, published at Frankfort in 1587.