

PROBLEMS IN GERMAN LITERARY  
HISTORY OF THE FIFTEENTH  
AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

BY  
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Multum adhuc restat  
operis, multumque restabit, nec  
ulli . . . praecludetur occasio  
aliquid adicendi.

—Sen. *Epist.* VII. 2.

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TO  
MY TEACHER  
JOHN A. WALZ



## PREFACE

**I**N the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, German literature reflects movements profoundly affecting mankind. An older world imbued with the religious and social ideas of the Middle Ages was breaking up, and modern industrial and urban life was developing. Humanism brought new attitudes in thinking and living. Religious theories of every complexion fundamentally modified prevailing ethical and social principles. In the hands of the rising bourgeoisie, the ideas, themes, and literary conventions of the Middle Ages survived partly as conventional materials and partly as effective forces in a changing age. Close to the common man as it was, the German literature of this period reached its artistic perfection in folksong.

Apart from the cultural and historical importance of post-medieval German literature, this field is attractive because research in it can be undertaken and carried to a successful conclusion with simple means. In many instances, a single text in the form of a reprint or photographic copy and the ordinary reference works available in any college library are the only tools needed to attack a problem. It is hard to say whether reprinting and editing texts, compiling bibliographies, or writing essays in literary history is the most important. In the study of any epoch, these tasks comprise the business of the historian of literature. They are so interdependent that no one of them can be undertaken without some progress in the other two. Without a literary history we cannot know what texts deserve reprinting. Without a bibliography we cannot know what editions, old or new, exist or how these editions are related among themselves, or what value we should attach to a particular edition. Without access to the texts we cannot write a history of literature or compile a bibliography. Advances have been made in all three directions, but we still do not possess suitable texts, general and special reference works, and interpretative, critical, or evaluating accounts of literary movements sufficient to give us a good understanding of the characteristic literary movements and genres of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the following introduction to problems in the literary history of this period, I treat the tasks of the editor and bibliographer as subsidiary to those of the historian of literature; moreover, I endeavor to suggest tasks within the resources and abilities of American scholars and students. I have not sought to survey the entire literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I have not sought to enumerate many problems



which a historian of literature might try to solve. Finally, I have in general avoided religious topics still conducive to controversy and particularly those about which a large literature has grown up. The study of historical and philosophical currents demands wide reading and a large background of information. Although the student will do well to begin by investigating a clearly limited and narrowly defined problem, he should keep his eyes open in order to remain aware of the wider implications of his studies. I have tried to make clear the significance of the problems described, but I have not cited problems merely because they are traditionally regarded as important. I have rather considered first the possibility of an American student's solving the problem with the means at his disposal. Wolfgang Stammler, for example, cites the problem of the influence of monastic reforms on the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> This problem is too vaguely stated; it demands a greater familiarity than most students would claim with social, political, and ecclesiastical affairs, as well as with literature. In the main, I have indicated problems which can be undertaken with fair hope of success by a student who has comparatively few tools of research. The following essay purports to be no more than a superficial survey of a vast field. I hope that it will lead the earnest student to a larger view and deeper knowledge of a very interesting period in literary history.

The manner of outlining and stating the problem is intentionally varied from example to example. In one instance, the problem is stated in the form of an essay with mention of scarcely a name, date, or place. In another, a series of documents is systematically arranged, with abundant bibliographical detail and comment on the specific problems of each document. In still another, a tabulation in chronological order is given without comment. This variety in the manner of presentation is intended to appeal to differing tastes or to suggest various modes of attack. Casual illustrations are given from periods earlier and later than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Free use is made of the help afforded by comparison with literary studies in allied fields. In preparing to attack a problem, one will do well to study the methods employed by others.

I have tried to introduce in a natural manner the chief works of reference, such as bibliographical tools. In general, I have not repeated citations in every instance where they might have been made. The index will facilitate reference. I have given the information which was at my

<sup>1</sup> *Von der Mystik zum Barock* ("Epochen der deutschen Literatur", II, i; Stuttgart, 1927), p. 461.

disposal and which suggested the problem to me. Since it has not been my intention to solve the problems, I have not striven for completeness in references. The problems are those which have occurred to me in the course of my work at the University of Chicago, and the references are those which were available to me there. I have not hesitated to cite "popular" books in the hope of arousing interest. Although I have usually mentioned studies deserving of imitation, I have cited some which show "how not to do it." A preliminary consultation with an older scholar will ordinarily help the beginner to avoid embarrassing errors. In the interest of succinctness, many of the problems mentioned below have been described so briefly that difficulties which might easily arise in their solution have not been named. My emphasis is on method rather than on completeness.

Some of the investigations described here can be attacked only by one who has at his disposal the resources of a large library. Others—particularly those discussed in the first chapter—can be begun anywhere but as they progress will tax the resources of even the largest libraries. Still others—and to these I have given special attention—can be begun in small libraries and continued by interlibrary loans or by visits to larger collections. Most problems can be undertaken more efficiently with limited resources than with free access to a large collection of books. A large library often overwhelms one by its very abundance. When one has carried an investigation beyond its initial stages, the resources of a large library become a foundation instead of an avalanche. After the plan of the investigation has been clearly formulated and has been tested by the preliminary studies possible in the smallest library, one can so organize one's time in a large library that every moment is devoted to books available only there. A scholar should not wait to attack a problem until he has at his disposal months of free time or funds for a trip to a great library. Let him do what lies to his hand. In many cases only very modest resources and very small expenditures are necessary. Goedeke's *Grundriss* will suggest an unprinted text; Götze's *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar* will provide the indispensable "first aid" in its interpretation; and a small expenditure for books, dissertations, and *programme* will supply the scholarly background. The cost of a comprehensive collection dealing with a particular subject is rarely excessive, particularly if we use ordinary common sense in selecting a subject. Most of us cannot seriously think of buying an adequate collection on the Reformation, on Martin Luther, or on saints' lives, but almost anyone can acquire a satisfactory library on a small subject or a definitely limited aspect of a larger one. A practically complete collec-

tion of publications on Meistergesang, including such unusual minor items as a *programm* published in 1807, a volume of a Moravian agricultural society, and a pamphlet issued by a society for the study of German music in Bohemia, cost less than a hundred dollars. On the other hand, a working collection of Johannes Geiler von Kaisersberg, whose works have not been reprinted since 1525, and are therefore rare, actually cost more than fifteen hundred dollars and needs considerable additional expenditures to be entirely satisfactory. One must cut one's coat according to the cloth. A collection of photographs of the manuscript books of rules of Meistergesang could be assembled for perhaps fifty or seventy-five dollars. It would be an arsenal for studies in the interrelations of texts, the technical vocabulary of the art, the changes occurring in the art, and so on. For even smaller expenditures one can get access to the material necessary for prosecuting a study. Interlibrary loans have developed to a point where no one is shut off from the tools of scholarship. Photography is an ever-helpful aid and, if used wisely, not unduly costly. Even problems which seem extensive can be safely undertaken in spite of onerous limitations. To make a historical dictionary of the language of German hunters, one can begin with the *Nibelungenlied*—which ought to be in the private library of every Germanist—and excerpt the pertinent words. In collecting even this small stock of words, one will meet and necessarily solve many problems fundamental to the prosecution of the investigation. What words are to be chosen? Which ones are to be excluded? What form shall the excerpts take? In thinking about such matters, one has no need for the resources of a large library. When the plan of the investigation has been worked out, one can borrow Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isolde*. Book by book—and the cost of an interlibrary loan is not excessive—one can borrow the pertinent texts. I need not go farther to demonstrate the feasibility of undertaking even with limited resources a problem so complicated as that of making a dictionary.

For convenience I have standardized such spellings as *Literatur* and *16. Jahrhundert*, and for clarity I have introduced single quotation marks to set off the titles of books and the words forming the subject of a discussion. I have taken particular pains to indicate the series in which the books cited have appeared. This I have done because many libraries have not "analyzed" their series. Furthermore, the student will do well to post himself as to the nature and contents of these series. I have given dates for the publication of German works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but in doing so I have often given the date of the edition before me or of the edition to which I was re-



ferred. This date does not always refer to the first edition. Except when it was pertinent to the discussion, I have not indicated the place of publication or the publisher of German works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This procedure is designed to guide the student to the standard works of reference. In citing works published outside Germany, and German works issued after 1700, I have given the usual bibliographical details.

The publication of this book by the Modern Language Association has been made possible by the generosity of the American Council of Learned Societies. Without the efficient and competent assistance of the staff of the University of Chicago Library I could not have verified the references. I am happy to acknowledge the assistance of many friends. John G. Kunstmann has warned me against many a slip. Gustave Otto Arlt, Roland H. Bainton, C. R. Baskervill, Ernst Beutler, Leonard Bloomfield, Leicester Bradner, Hardin Craig, Robert Herndon Fife, William Hammer, Millett Henshaw, Rudolf Hirsch, and Hilda Norman have given me substantial aid and encouragement. From almost its beginning John W. Spargo has watched the growth of this essay with a friendly eye. His generous and unsparing criticism has left its mark on every page. The dedication intimates—in the nature of things, it can do no more—my debt to John A. Walz. I thank all who have helped me. “The indulgence of the learned reader must be solicited, to pardon errors or omissions, which, notwithstanding anxious and repeated perusal of the proofs, may have escaped detection.”

*Chicago, March 4, 1939.*

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## CHAPTER I

### GENERAL PROBLEMS

#### Problems Involving a Survey of the Whole Period

1. *A Comprehensive History of German Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*.—The need of a history of post-medieval German literature is obvious; the undertakings proposed in the following pages are preparatory to such a history. Wolfgang Stammeler's *Von der Mystik zum Barock*,<sup>1</sup> the only recent volume devoted to this period, is a praiseworthy effort, but its author would be the first to concede the desirability of a new survey. Gustav Ehrismann's excellent account<sup>2</sup> is bibliographical rather than interpretative and deals only with the beginning of the period. Although Günther Müller's review<sup>3</sup> of post-medieval German literature contains insufficient bibliographical details and deals with too few writers and works to be entirely satisfactory, it is valuable for its abundant use of illustrative materials from history and art. Finally, the many general histories of German literature give scant space to this period—perhaps because its problems seem remote from those of our day. To be sure, Josef Nadler's history of German literature on tribal lines contains much more than most general histories, but even it cannot take the place of a comprehensive account. Such an account would have to be based on firsthand knowledge of the literature and on a wide survey of its connections with the history, philosophy, religion, and culture of the age.

The history of post-medieval German literature is complicated by the fact that scholars have not agreed in their appraisals of many works of this age. In the case of Greek, Latin, or even Middle High German authors, the final estimates of literary historians have been largely established by centuries of opinion. The situation in post-medieval German

<sup>1</sup> "Epochen der deutschen Literatur," II, i; Stuttgart, 1927. This will be referred to henceforth as Stammeler. Compare the reviews: Alker, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, LIV (1929), 483-486; Gassen, *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik*, XXIV (1930), 84-91; Wiessner, *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum*, XLVIII (1929), 35-53.

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, II, Schlussband ("Handbuch des deutschen Unterrichts," Munich, 1935). This volume will be referred to henceforth as Ehrismann; other volumes of this work will be described when cited.

<sup>3</sup> *Deutsche Dichtung von der Renaissance bis zum Ausgang des Barock* ("Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft"; Wildpark-Potsdam, 1927).



literature is quite different. Thus the *Faustbuch* (1587), important as it is, has not been satisfactorily and definitively appraised. Wolfgang Stammeler speaks well of it; other critics have loudly condemned its literary and artistic values. Such sharp differences of critical opinion show that the bases of literary history in our period are still in the making.

The importance of critical appraisal is shown by the entirely new valuations now put upon Heinrich Wittenweiler's *Ring* and the anonymous *Ackermann aus Böhmen*. The "discovery" of the *Ring* is the result of Wiessner's faithful efforts. Long after the appearance of Ludwig Bechstein's edition (1851), the *Ring* was neglected. In it Wiessner and Nadler have found a summary of the ideas of the late fourteenth century, and their line of thought has recently been followed by Pfeiffer-Belli. Possibly someone will take Niewöhner's hint<sup>4</sup> that an appreciation of the *Zimmerische Chronik* as a source of literary history is long overdue.

On an enormous scale, Konrad Burdach has drawn attention to *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* as typical of the first German outburst of humanist enthusiasm. His learning has made this work available to the general reader and has deepened our knowledge of an age. The influence from Bohemia exemplified by *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* is yet to be fully appraised and succinctly described. We must go much farther than did Rudolf Wolkan forty years ago in a meritorious study restricted to Bohemia. The literary and artistic streams rising in Bohemia bring to the whole of Northern and Northeastern Germany cultural changes of the utmost importance. Painting and sculpture, literary forms and ideas, and even the very shape of the language exhibit the influence of German culture in Bohemia. Ernst Beutler reminds me that the late fifteenth-century statue of the Madonna in Breslau is now believed to be Bohemian and not Rhenish in origin. Appreciation of these influences demands the wide vision found in such works as Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages; a study of the forms of life, thought, and art in France and the Netherlands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries*.<sup>5</sup> Although the task is more extensive and more difficult than most of those proposed in these pages, the spirit guiding Wiessner, Nadler, Burdach, and Huizinga should inspire the student, and their works should be familiar to him. Fundamental to a study of these relations is *Kulturräume und Kulturströmungen im mitteldeutschen Osten*,<sup>6</sup> by Wolfgang Ebert, Theodor

<sup>4</sup> *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum*, XLV (1926), 20, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> London, 1924. The original editions—*Herfsttij der middeleeuwen* (Haarlem, 1919, 1921, 1928, 1935)—should also be consulted; they contain references omitted in the English translation.

<sup>6</sup> Halle, 1936.