Aristocracy and the Middle-Classes in Germany

SOCIAL TYPES IN GERMAN LITERATURE 1830-1900

Revised, with a new Introduction by

Ernest K. Bramsted

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REVISED EDITION

ERNEST K. BRAMSTED

WITH A FOREWORD BY G. P. GOOCH

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PREFACE

More than twenty-five years have passed since this book was first published. It then met with a very friendly reception in England and the United States whilst in Germany's Third Reich it was conveniently ignored. The attempt to provide a specific contribution to the sociological study of literature and to correlate social history and literary history has been generally acknowledged by the critics as being feasible and fruitful. It is particularly gratifying to the author that in the important *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren the present book has been described as "an admirably clearheaded study," furnishing evidence that "students of social attitudes and aspirations can use literary material, if they know how to interpret it properly."[1] Professors Wellek and Warren have also expressed their agreement with the caution expressed in the Introduction to this book that "only a person who has a knowledge of the structure of a society from other sources than purely literary ones, is able to find out if, and how far, certain social types and their behaviour are reproduced in a novel in an adequate or inadequate manner."[2]

In this preface to the present edition I intend to comment briefly on some relevant publications that have appeared since the first edition. The sociological study of literature has been handicapped frequently by the fact that too often literary historians have insufficient knowledge of the specialized work of social historians and vice versa.[3] However, today a number of social historians

[1] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, London, 1949, p. 100.

[2] See below p. 4.

[3] A lack of knowledge of the social history of the period is a major handicap in the study by Werner Oberle, *Der Adelige Mensch in der Dichtung: Eichendorff, Gotthelf, Stifter. Fontane.* Basel. 1960.

do take note of the illustrating significance of literary material, while at least some students of literature direct their attention to the sociological implications as distinct from the merely aesthetic aspects of the novel and the play.

Perhaps one of the most interesting of recent attempts to assess the meaning of social attitudes as portrayed in fiction has been made by Raymond Williams in his perceptive book *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*.[1]

Carefully tracing the various meanings of the idea of culture in England since the period of the Industrial Revolution, Mr. Williams offers us, to quote his own words, "an account and an interpretation of our responses in thought and feeling to the changes in English society since the late eighteenth century."[2] In this context he is not only concerned with contrasting the attitudes of men like Edmund Burke and William Cobbett, Robert Southey and Robert Owen, and with discussing the different interpretations of the grim realities of the Industrial Age by J. S. Mill and Carlyle; he also considers what he calls "The Industrial Novel," that is, half a dozen representative novels written in the middle of the nineteenth century. These books by Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, and George Eliot are relevant to the theme since they "not only provide some of the most vivid descriptions of life in an unsettled industrial society, but also illustrate certain common assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken."[3] Mr. Williams succeeds because he is familiar with responses to the situation from sources other than fiction. He finds that while Cobbett's "criticism of the System is in many ways very similar to that of Dickens [in *Hard Times*] and rests on so many similar valuations," yet the politician Cobbett had a much better grasp of the significance of the trade union movement.[4] Again, for an assessment of George Eliot's attitude in *Felix Holt*, an

[1] London, 1958.
[2] *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, Penguin Books Edition, p. 11.
[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 99.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

attitude which recognizes the existing social evil but is afraid of becoming involved in social issues, Cobbett serves as "a touchstone." His "conduct at his own trial after the labourers' revolt of 1830," we are told "is a finer demonstration of real maturity than the fictional compromises here examined."[1]

When we turn from England to Germany and to the relations between the two classes discussed in the present book, it seems that in recent years only one major contribution has been made by a social historian to the study of the German aristocracy. We refer to the analysis, undertaken by Heinz Gollwitzer for the period 1815–1918, of the political and social position of the so-called mediatized nobles or *Standesherrn* who lost their sovereignty and territories during the Napoleonic reforms.[2] He sheds a new light on the outlook of the "German Whigs," the type of "liberal aristocrat," which I discuss in this book.

Important questions of rank and caste, of "proper" marriages and misalliances, the chances of the mediatized nobles to rise, their position in the eyes of their kings and of other sovereigns are examined with expertise. We learn much about the patriarchial authority of the head of such families and the relative dependence of the younger brothers, and of the women, widows, and children. Some of these highly placed members of a group of the nobility which had lost its political function though not its social prestige preferred to lead a patriarchal life on their estates while others turned courtiers, often filling major positions at the many German courts. Probably a novelist could have provided a livelier picture of this group. Professor Gollwitzer himself points to the advantages, in this respect, of the writer of fiction who is free of the restraint set by verifiable facts which determine the approach of the historian. He also rightly

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

[2] Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die Standesherren: Die politische und gesellschaftliche Stellung der Mediatisierten; Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Sozialgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 1957.

points out that the upper strata of the German aristocracy have rarely been depicted in German literature. Indeed there never has been produced in German literature a social picture of the brilliance and subtlety of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. A convincing analysis of Proust's masterpiece set against the findings of French social historians is a task still to be undertaken. Proust has well illustrated how "the sense of caste that separates the aristocrat from the bourgeoise is operative also within the nobility." There was a clearly defined aristocratic hierarchy. "A member of one circle scorns the one below and will stop at nothing to be admitted into the one above."[1]

The study of nineteenth century realism in European literature, and particularly that of German writers, has been stimulated by George Lukacs, the Hungarian literary critic. Although the present writer finds his Marxist concepts of history and literature and his often one-sided polemics in favour of the Russian masters unacceptable, it would be churlish not to acknowledge the wealth of his shrewd remarks on individual writers and their social attitude, his wide knowledge and his often felicitous formulations. Mr. Lukacs judges literature and society from a progressive point of view. He and his friends see in history "a purposeful development where formerly only a blind, senseless confusion surrounded them." Having been severely criticized by some less knowledgeable and more narrow-minded comrades as a "deviationist," Lukacs seems till to maintain that "Marxists watch the birth pangs of a new world and assist in mitigating the pains of labour."[2]

It has been rightly said of Lukacs, who regards both naturalism and aesthetic formalism as undesirable extremes, that he has developed among Marxists "the most coherent theory of realism,"[3] a theory which in fact owes

[1] Harold March, *The Two Worlds of Marcel Proust*, London, 1948, pp. 186–187.

[2] George Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism*, London, 1950, p. 2.

[3] R. Wellek, *The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship*, Groningen, 1961, p. 11.

as much to the aesthetics of classical German idealism as to Marxism. To Lukacs naturalism is indefensible as it shows only the surface of life, whereas realism points to essentials and creates types "which are both representative and prophetic." This literary type has a number of criteria, such as individual characteristics, representativeness, anticipatory power foreshadowing future trends and, last but not least, articulate expression or self-consciousness.[1] Altogether realism, as Lukacs understands it, means that a work of literary art has the function not only of a mirror but also operates as "a X-ray screen and even as a divining rod."[2]

All this leads to very marked value-judgments. Lukacs asks point blank: "Which of the two, Balzac or Flaubert, was the greatest novelist, the typical classic of the nineteenth century?" The question is, do you prefer a work of art which proclaims the unity of the external with the internal world or their separation? Did the modern novel reach its climax in Gide, Proust, or Joyce, or earlier in the works of Balzac and Tolstoy? Lukacs has no doubt that the answer must be in favour of the latter.[3]

It is this valuation which one has to keep in mind when perusing Lukacs' spirited, though by no means always convincing, work on German realists in the nineteenth century.[4] Admittedly during that period the German novel did not produce a figure of the world rank of a Balzac or Tolstoy, but is this really sufficient justification for measuring Fontane solely by the yardstick of Tolstoy, as Lukacs prefers to do? To him the difference in the literary calibre of the two novelists is not only one of talent but is also the outcome of the different social developments in Russia and in Prussian Germany which are said to have proved helpful in the case of Tolstoy and restrictive in that of Fontane.[5] Lukacs does not deny

[1] See Peter Demetz, *Marx, Engels und die Dichter*, Stuttgart, 1959, pp. 271–74.
[2] P. Demetz, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
[3] G. Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism*, p. 2.
[4] G. Lukacs, *Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1951.
[5] G. Lukacs, *Deutsche Realisten*, p. 306.

that "Fontane belongs to the most important realists of the second half of the nineteenth century," but rather diminishes his significance by the remark that *Anna Karenina* compares with *Effi Briest* as "the Great October Revolution of 1917" in Russia does with the Revolution of November, 1918 in Germany.[1] As a result Lukacs has little appreciation of the highly individualistic and rather independent attitude of the old Fontane, which I have emphasized in my Conclusion.

One is more prepared to agree with some of the general observations on the German novel after 1848 made by Lukacs. Although he is inclined to put too much blame on the quick capitalist development in Germany for the lack of literary significance and for the philistine features in the novels of Gutzkow, Freytag, and Spielhagen, Lukacs is right in his remark that in German literature "everything truly valuable and anticipating the trend to the future has been pushed to the periphery." This, he says, is true even in a geographic sense. "One has only to think of the Swiss Gottfried Keller and C. F. Meyer, of Theodor Storm in Holstein. By the way, the only productive and original playwright is the Austrian Anzengruber."[2] The movement to the periphery has also a psychological relevance. "Anything else of lasting literary value has been pushed back to the periphery of literature as can be seen in the case of Raabe and, in spite of his success with the public, in that of Fritz Reuter."[3]

Perhaps the best part of Lukacs' analysis of the German realists is his study of Gottfried Keller, whose mature, earthy and often attractive stories and novels reveal 'what could have become of German literature, if the democratic revolution of 1848 had succeeded. This would have meant the victory over the ideological diseases of the German mind and with it of German literature."[4]

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

Indeed the literature produced after 1848 in the territory which was later to become Bismarck's Second Empire has markedly philistine and uninspiring characteristics. There no longer existed strong literary movements and schools such as Classicism, Romanticism, or the group of the Young Germans (which I discuss in chap. ix). There was, in Lukacs' words, "a growing inability of highly talented writers to regard the local events of provincial life in an overall national and social perspective."[1] But to blame a Raabe or Fontane because they were inclined to come to terms with the existing order or disorder is too limited a criterion by which to assess their work.

In my Conclusion I state that "in the frenzy of the boom period, in the exultation of the era of successful bourgeois finance, his pietistic mixture of *Innerlichkeit*, individualism and diffident pessimism found no demand amongst the bourgeoisie."[2] It is this flight inward, into *Innerlichkeit* which is so significant of not a few of the heroes in German literature. It is true, the German novel in the nineteenth century shares with the French novel of the time, with Stendhal and Balzac, the theme of disillusionment. In the end its heroes, too, have few illusions left, if any. But as Hans Mayer has observed in a penetrating essay,[3] only with German writers does disillusionment result in this typical introvert reaction of an "escape into *Innerlichkeit*." It has had its forerunners in some of Jean Paul's heroes, it excels—as we can see in the following pages—in Hans Unwirrsch of Raabe's *Hungerpastor*, it has continued in the twentieth century with Hermann Hesse's Peter Camenzind and with some figures in the work of Hans Carossa and of Ernst Wiechert. The demand from a considerable German public for this type seems to have receded only since 1945. Professor Mayer has shown that to some extent

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

[2] See below, p. 338.

[3] Hans Mayer, "Der Deutsche Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Deutsche Literatur und Weltliteratur: Aufsätze*, Berlin, 1955, pp. 268–84.

the heroes of Fontane, of Th. Vischer's *Auch Einer* and of Keller's *Martin Salander* belong to this category.[1] Disapproving of the roughshod methods of an industrialized and property-proud society, they all flee from the overcrowded cities to the country, into their study, to the fringe of society. There is certainly a good deal of resignation in Fontane's, Storm's, and Vischer's heroes. However it is simplifying the categories too much to see in this escape into a private inner life nothing but "an expression of a deeply artistic, that means a deeply grievous, clash with the world of the bourgeoisie now also advancing everywhere in Germany, a clash with the economy and society of a fully developed capitalism."[2] Rooted in seventeenth century pietism, the tradition of German *Innerlichkeit* found a new expression in the German Youth Movement of the twentieth century which is without parallel in other European countries and cannot therefore be simply explained as a by-product of modern imperialism or capitalism.

Since the present work first appeared, a good deal of attention has been paid by literary historians and lovers of literature—two categories, incidentally, which are by no means identical—to such lonely "outside" figures as Raabe and Fontane.[3] We discuss below the cleavage between the "ideal public" and the "actual public" which is so indicative of Fontane.[4] It has been shown

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 279.

[3] See the relevant chapters in Lukacs' *Deutsche Realisten* and, in Roy Pascal, *The German Novel*, Manchester, 1953; also Fritz Martini, *Die Deutsche Literatur des Bürgerlichen Realismus 1848–1898*, Stuttgart, 1962; and the survey of recent publications in this field by the same author "Deutsche Literatur in der Zeit des Bürgerlichen Realismus: Ein Literaturbericht," in *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, XXIV, 1960, pp. 581–666. For further material on Fontane see the essays by D. Barlow, "Fontane and the Aristocracy," *German Life and Letters*, New Series, VIII, 1955, pp. 182–91, and E. K. Bramsted, "Marriage and Misalliance in Thackeray and Fontane," *German Life and Letters*, III, 1939, pp. 285–97.

[4] See below, chap. vi. See also the article by P. Magill, "The German Author and His Public in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Modern Language Review*, CXLIII, 1948, pp. 492–99.

that in the end, in resignation, this sage found himself with a public very different from the aristocracy he had hoped earlier would provide his keenest readers. Reflecting on his public a few years before his death, old Raabe displayed a similar realism. As he remarked in a handwritten *curriculum vitae* in 1906, "Only for the writings of my first work period which extends to the book last mentioned [his *Hungerpastor*] have I found readers, for the rest only lovers of books, but these are, I think, the truly finest public which exists among the German people to-day."[1]

Writers, consciously or unconsciously, reflect and illustrate trends and attitudes of the society in which they live. But however wide the appeal of their work, most of them are little inclined to identify themselves altogether and always with the taste and the outlook of one social unit (class, stratum, group) or another. In short, they cannot, and probably in most cases would not aspire to the shortlived glory of becoming the literary "Beatles" of their time.

London E. K. BRAMSTED
Sydney

[1] Quoted in H. Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

FOREWORD

THIS learned and original book deserves a warm welcome from students of modern German history and literature. While Bismarck was founding and ruling the Hohenzollern Empire, far-reaching social transformations were in progress of which neither the political nor the literary historians tell us as much as we need to know. Where shall we look for the most authentic information as to the decline of the feudal aristocracy, the transition from a mainly agricultural to a mainly industrial state, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the emergence of the Jew, with all the shifting of political influence and social values which such changes inevitably bring in their train? In the German novel above all, answers Dr. Bramsted, who approaches his subject as a trained sociologist, working along the lines of such eminent pioneers as Max Weber, Sombart and Mannheim.

Though the German novel can hardly be said to rank with the English, the French and the Russian, and though Goethe is the only German novelist of the first rank, the nineteenth century produced a long series of works of the highest significance for the study of national life. Since the mutual illustration of the history of literature by social history and of social history by the history of literature is the purpose of our author, he is concerned, not with the intrinsic merits of the works under discussion, but with their illustrative function. Thus many old favourites which have been resting on the top shelves of the libraries are taken down again and studied from a new angle. For however literary reputations may wax and wane, our interest in the past, above all in the recent past, remains. Some Russians maintain that the

gloomy picture of the national character which emerges from their wonderful novels and dramas is unfair and incomplete, and we are often warned not to form our impressions of French character and morality from a century of novelists from Stendhal to Proust. Be that as it may, no one is likely to argue that the fiction of England and Germany in the nineteenth century bears false witness. That the picture should be complete in every detail is too much to expect, and we have plenty of other evidence to fill up the gaps. Yet no reader will close this volume, filled as it is with skilful analyses of many books, good, bad and indifferent, without finding his vision of modern Germany enlarged, coloured and vivified.

It is a story of unceasing change, and Dr. Bramsted is careful not to confuse one generation with another nor to claim evidential value for works beyond the limits of their authors' experience. The study both of German society and German literature must be pursued not merely chronologically but regionally. For the differences in temperament and tradition between North and South, between East Prussia and the Rhineland, were and are too deep to be removed by the political unifications of Bismarck and his successors. One of the merits of this work is to remind us of the numerous elements which have gone to the making of a great nation, and of the need of bearing in mind not only the date but the birthplace, the residence, the social and professional status, the political and religious colour of the writer.

Dr. Bramsted's picture gallery contains portraits of men whose work is little known outside the circle of specialists as well as of those whose names are still household words. Yet for the scientific purposes of the sociological inquirer the one category may be as valuable as the other. The author of *Soll und Haben*, the most popular German novel of the century, receives the attention he deserves as the spokesman of the optimism of the comfortable and cultivated bourgeoisie as it began advancing towards the centre of the stage after 1830.

But Immermann and Gutzkow, Spielhagen and Fontane hold the mirror up to the life they knew no less faithfully than Gustav Freytag himself.

The volume ends with a penetrating study of the place of the writer in society, carrying on the story recently begun in Professor Bruford's *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*. The making of an Intelligentsia is due as much to authors as to schools and universities, and in describing a state of society they are often, consciously or unconsciously, transforming it before our eyes. For novelists, like other men, have their ideologies, and they preach through types and situations as effectively as the journalist, the parson and the professor. Writers make readers, and with a wide diffusion of culture what Dr. Bramsted calls society based on status comes to an end. Such changes occur so gradually that we do not always realize their vast importance till the process is almost complete. And even when our eyes are opened it is a privilege to be shown how it came about.

G. P. GOOCH.

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These studies would never have been completed without the generous encouragement and the valuable suggestions of Dr. G. P. Gooch, to whom my special thanks are due. Further, I have to thank Dr. W. Rose, Head of the Modern Language Department, London School of Economics, for the very kind interest he has shown in my work.

Mr. H. Instein has taken considerable pains in revising the English of my book. He, as well as Dr. R. Wellek, have read the proofs and have, together with Mr. A. F. Wells, greatly assisted in finding adequate English expressions for difficult German concepts and idioms.

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