

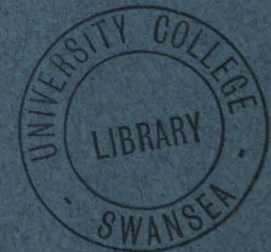
THE
CHANGING PATTERN OF
THE GERMAN NOVEL

*Inaugural Lecture of the
Professor of German
delivered at the College
on 23 February 1961*

by

H. M. WAIDSON

M.A., Dr.phil.



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MY first words tonight are to be in appreciation for the honour conferred upon me by the University of Wales in appointing me to be Professor of German at the University College of Swansea; and in appreciation to you, Mr. Principal, to the Council of the College, to my colleagues, and to other friends who have wished me well since I arrived here not quite five months ago. I should also like to take this opportunity of conveying my good wishes to my predecessor in this Chair, Professor Heller, who after twelve years in office here is continuing academic work in the United States.

Writing in the winter of 1906-7, the Viennese author Hofmannsthal referred to the power of literature to influence the minds of men in terms which indicate a considerable quality of dedication:

The book is there, full of its power over the mind and the sense. The book is there, whispering to us where happiness may be found in life and how happiness disappears, how man may be ruled and how the hour of death should be borne. The book is there, and in it lies the essence of wisdom and the essence of seduction. . . . There is no sense in making a cheap antithesis and contrasting books with life. For if books were not an element of life, a highly ambivalent, elusive, dangerous, magic element of life, they would be nothing at all, and it would be a waste of breath to talk about them. But in the hand of each man they are something different, and they only come to life when they are brought into contact with a living mind.¹

From this point of view, literature is an important aspect of man's life simply by reason of its being there. In any

¹ H. von Hofmannsthal, 'Der Dichter und diese Zeit'. In *Gesammelte Werke. Prosa II*, ed. H. Steiner, Frankfurt am Main, 1951, p. 293.

civilized community it exists and has to be taken into consideration; literature is to be regarded as an essential complement for the understanding of man in society and of man as an individual—and for the enjoyment of this understanding. Not all great writers have had such faith in their vocation, but where this faith exists, no need is felt to justify the study of literature. For if literature can illuminate life in an important way, it needs no further argument to justify its being taught and learnt, whether inside a university or beyond.

Heinrich Böll, of Cologne, writing fifty years later, has seen the power of the written word in terms which confirm Hofmannsthal's faith in its importance, while giving it a rather different emphasis:

Whoever writes down or utters the word 'bread' does not know what he has started; wars have been fought for the sake of this word and murders committed; it is loaded with a mighty heritage, and whoever writes it down should know what a heritage it bears and what transformations it is capable of. If we were to be conscious of this heritage which rests upon every word, and to take out our dictionaries, these catalogues of our riches, we should discover that behind every word there is a world, and whoever has anything to do with words, as anybody does who composes a newspaper article or puts a line of poetry on paper, ought to know that he is putting worlds into motion and releasing split entities: what may console one man, can wound another to death.¹

The function of a University Department of German is of course not confined to the study of German literature. The language, literature, arts, thought, and history of Central Europe, as they have expressed themselves over many centuries, together with a live contact with this civilization in its contemporary form, comprise a unity which in the last resort is indissoluble. Teachers and students of a modern foreign language and civilization

¹ H. Böll, 'Die Sprache als Hort der Freiheit'. In *Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll*, ed. F. Melius, Cologne, 1959, p. 18.

have the task of mediating between two worlds, and even if they might be reluctant to accept any responsibility for interpretation in the wider sense, it will almost certainly be thrust upon them at some time, whether they care for it or not. Translation—from German into English, or from English into German—is an act of mediation, aiming to bring understanding between people and books that would otherwise be wholly separated from each other. As Mr. Stephen Spender has said recently, we live 'at a time when translating has come to be regarded as a contribution to the language translated into as well as an interpretation of that translated from'.¹ And it is not a great step from translating to interpreting; the act of mediation includes the explanation of one world to another.

The aim of this evening's lecture is to sketch in a few features of the German novel, which has played an integral part in the development of this literary form in Europe during the last three centuries. I do not wish to attempt to define the German novel by separating it sharply off from the short story and the novella; this would be a large subject in itself, and its pursuit would make it more difficult to see other aspects, for the fiction of any one author is essentially a unity, one work illustrating and complementing another. Any generalizations I make will be in a tentative sense, for any study of the novel is bound to confine itself to some fragments of a large whole.

It was with Goethe that the German novel first assumed undeniable world-significance. His *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister* laid the pattern for some important tendencies that have remained with German novelists ever since; they made explicit for the first time emotional attitudes and intellectual aspirations that have since become part and parcel of German literature as a whole. *Werther* may

¹ *Great German Short Stories*, ed. S. Spender. New York, 1960, p. 14.

be a characteristic product of the eighteenth century in its effusive display of sensibility, and its debt to Richardson and Rousseau has long been acknowledged; but it was new in the force of its impact because of its uncompromisingly introspective character. The letter-form is used to much the same effect as the interior monologue has been used in the twentieth century: to reveal less the reality of the outer world than the reality of one man's mind. It is perhaps the first inexorably subjective novel in modern literature. The subsidiary characters and episodes are grouped around the central figure with calculated skill, and with the purpose of depicting strong emotions for their own sake. The psychological analysis is pursued relentlessly to its desperate conclusion; Werther's suicide, his funeral unattended by any priest, give the short novel an abrupt finality in its despair.

Wilhelm Meister passes through an inward crisis similar to that of Werther, and partly for similar reasons, disappointment in love; but for the hero of Goethe's later novel the episode of his first love for Marianne is a briefly told introduction to the main action of the work. Wilhelm recovers from the depression caused by this shock, and proceeds to enrich his personality by renewed contact with the outside world. If the pre-Romanticism of *Werther* was to anticipate the mood of much later German fiction, *Wilhelm Meister* was to be more definitely influential upon the structure of the German novel as well as upon its conscious purposes. By its development from the picaresque form, *Wilhelm Meister* is altogether more traditional in its roots than *Werther*. To some extent the central character is a pretext for the display of realistic pictures of eighteenth-century theatre life, of the orisons of a dedicated pietist, of the mercantile middle class and their relationships with the aristocracy, of wanderings in Switzerland and Northern Italy and plans for founding an

ideal society in North America. But in no sense are these adventures and interspersed episodes put in for their own sake. They have the central purpose of contributing to the development of the hero along didactic lines. The emotional chaos of *Werther* is to be overcome by an educative process. *Wilhelm Meister* is thus in general tendency a renewed insistence upon the place of morality in art which is so frequent in the eighteenth century; the novel can be a debate on the best practical way of living, as in Wieland's *Agathon*, Goethe's most important predecessor in this field, or it can discuss education with the matter-of-fact sobriety of Pestalozzi's *Lienhard und Gertrud*. Melitta Gerhard¹ has pointed out that the sense of quest embodied in *Wilhelm Meister* reaches back to the medieval epic poet Wolfram von Eschenbach and his *Parzival*, as also to the seventeenth-century novelist Grimms-hausen, author of *Der abentheuerliche Simplicissimus*.

For the Goethe who wrote *Wilhelm Meister* art alone was no adequate purpose in life, and no sure consolation against emotional distress. Possibly this was to have been the case with the work as he first drafted it; after his depression Wilhelm gives up bourgeois life to share the checkered fortunes of an itinerant theatrical company, and practical participation in this artistic enterprise gives a new meaning to a life which has lost its zest. This culminates in his one single appearance as Hamlet, for he is not permitted to remain in this role, but is led through bizarre coincidences and interventions to membership of a secret society devoted to humanitarian aims. *Bildung* is the unfolding of all aspects of the personality to the full, in a sense of controlled dignity and avocation.² The leading

¹ M. Gerhard, *Der deutsche Entwicklungsroman bis zu Goethes 'Wilhelm Meister'*, 1926.

² W. H. Bruford, 'The Idea of "Bildung" in Wilhelm von Humboldt's Letters'. In *The Era of Goethe. Essays presented to James Boyd*, Oxford, 1959, p. 18.

of a hero from a life of drifting or error to a conviction of mission and service becomes a characteristic feature of the major German novels of the nineteenth century. This was the aspect of Goethe's novel which appealed most strongly to Carlyle. In the final sequel to the work, the *Wanderjahre*, Goethe in his later years regards his hero's development in a more austere light. Wilhelm forswears the aim of all-round development in favour of specialized training to be a surgeon in the new, classless society that the emigrants wish to establish; the grounds for this decision go back to an early childhood experience of bewilderment and horror at being confronted with sudden death.¹ Looking at his hero's development afresh after 1815, Goethe gives up the older conception of general education in an atmosphere of leisurely gentlemanliness, now seeing the demands of the day as consisting of a high degree of specialized application and scientific training in order to cope adequately with such problems as increasing population and industrial developments. For Goethe, in the *Wanderjahre*, the cultivation of individual feelings, personal relationships, aesthetic enjoyment, and a diversity of cultural interests are no longer of major importance; they are to be subordinated ascetically to the service of the community. The picaresque adventurousness of the earlier draft of the novel is now liable to be lost in a series of dissertations on educational and political theory.

With *Wilhelm Meister* the German novel assumed as its principal task the delineation of the impact of a wide set of experiences and environments upon one individual; it committed itself to a vastness of scope that could, and frequently did, result in a cumbersome, unwieldy shape. At the same time it wanted to comprehend this universality and subordinate it to the requirements of the

¹ H. M. Waidson, 'Death by Water: Or, the Childhood of Wilhelm Meister'. *Modern Language Review*, vol. lvi, No. 1, 1961.

individual that his life should have meaning and purpose. Consequently there is realism in the traditional German novel, though usually it is not employed as a means of presenting life with a minimum of comment—as perhaps in Balzac, Stendhal, or Flaubert—but rather of shepherding the hero, and the reader, into the acceptance of a positive outlook on life. The despair of *Werther* is the pessimistic alternative to the stoical dedication of *Wilhelm Meister*. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*,¹ in many respects an aesthetically more satisfying work than either of Goethe's other two novels, remained the least influential of them in the nineteenth century. The defence of marriage is a consciously didactic feature, while Eduard's dilettantism and the all-pervasive development of his passion for Ottilie are a manifestation of Werther's sensibility in a more credible and more mature form. This novel too illustrates Goethe's wish to link the arts with science. As this aim is worked out in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, it may be little more than a whimsical curiosity in the history of science to follow the author's interpretation of the personal relationships of four individuals in terms of a chemical formula. But it illustrates the unique combination of playfulness and earnestness with which Goethe regarded it as part of his task to find a common unity behind apparently disparate worlds; the world of artistic sensibility and cultured enjoyment of the many facets of civilization may be confronted with a world of rational, cool inquiry where competent specialization could make the speculations of a poetic temperament seem irrelevant; and in the world of the emotions the symbol of a cross entwined with roses, which Goethe uses in the epic fragment *Die Geheimnisse*, seems particularly relevant in the context of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

¹ Goethe, *Kindred by Choice*, translated with an introduction by H. M. Waidson, 1961.

The German Romantic movement, developing its theories of the novel hot on the heels of the publication of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, pursued further the ambition to absorb a universality of ideas, but was rather a continuation of the moods of *Werther* than of the *Humanität* of the later books of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Here too was a desire to link the various approaches to knowledge, particularly the natural sciences and the arts, though with a readiness to jettison the social-ethical element in favour of the apotheosis of the individualistic fancy to an extent that Goethe regarded as unbalanced. When Novalis called the *Lehrjahre* a 'Candide against poetry' he was expressing his indignation that Wilhelm should be allowed to regard the vocation of artist as anything less than the highest ideal. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* was his own reply to Goethe's novel; personal fulfilment and messianic leadership are to be developed from the faithful pursuit of the aesthetic ideal.

During his lifetime E. T. A. Hoffmann, probably the greatest writer of fiction belonging to the German Romantic movement, was despised by Goethe and Hegel, in part because he returned competently and unashamedly to the prime purpose of the novel and story, that is, to tell a tale that holds the reader's attention and compels him, for the time being, to identify himself with the author's imaginative world. Hoffmann enjoyed popular success as a writer of fiction, and his peculiar combination of fluent realism and sensational fantasy has been a representative contribution to German imaginative prose. But what annoyed Hegel about Hoffmann was the lack of harmony and metaphysical security that he discerned in his writing. He says, in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*: 'Above all, what has become the fashion in recent times is the inner, unstable pessimism of spirit which goes through all the most repulsive dissonances and has set up a humour based

on nastiness and a grotesqueness of irony in which Theodor Hoffmann, for example, took pleasure.'¹ If Werther's tragedy could be ascribed to grief at the disparity between the real and the ideal, Hoffmann's interpretation of this disparity was, according to this reading, one that took deliberate pleasure in exploiting the absence of harmony and balance that he detected in human nature. Incidentally, admirers of Hoffmann's fiction need not be discomfited at Hegel's strictures; as Professor Mayer has pointed out, Shakespeare's *King Lear* comes in for equal disparagement in the same context. But Hoffmann's approach to human nature can be acutely perceptive. According to Jakob Wassermann the qualities, impulses, and instincts of a literary psychologist are derived 'not from a unitary feeling, not from an elemental being and observing, but from a variety of roots: he is not carried by any pure, simple current of life, but is at the mercy of many varied and often contradictory tendencies, against which he has to maintain himself; in consequence of this he is in a continuous state of self-justification, defence and conflict'.² Hoffmann himself speaks of the 'incongruity of inner feeling and outer life', and his own explorations of the border-country between commonsense reality and a world of delusion and fantasy anticipate many of the preoccupations of early twentieth-century writers.

Something of this problem is implicit in Jean Paul's writing on the theory of the novel. Contemporary with Goethe and the Romantics, Jean Paul's novels enjoyed great popularity during his lifetime, though for the most part they have ceased to make a live impact on modern readers. Jean Paul is closer to Goethe than to Hoffmann in his conception of the function of the novel, though the

¹ Quoted from E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Poetische Werke*, ed. H. Mayer, Berlin, 1958, vol. i, p. xlix.

² J. Wassermann, 'Der Literat'. In *Imaginäre Brücken*, Munich, 1921.

quirks and arabesques of his fantasy link him also to the latter. In his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* he asserts that fiction should not depict strong passions for their own sake, and that it should avoid dwelling unnecessarily on suffering. Humour should be gentle and whimsical, fantasy should be enjoyed as a vehicle of delight and pleasure, and the outer world should be seen for what it is for many people much of the time: a place where people stay quietly in their families, in small regional centres rather than capital centres, and live at a leisurely pace a life which consists largely of routine work which brings in enough to live on, but not enough to allow for Byronic gestures. Jean Paul sees the idyll as the acceptable form of the novel, suited by its epic shape to the delineation of happiness in limited surroundings, while the stirring of strong emotions should be left to tragedy. In this argument he is following an older way of thought which would separate the genres by their content as well as by their form, but none the less he is introducing a new texture to the German novel that is to be particularly favoured throughout the nineteenth century. Goethe and the Romantics were consciously intellectual and imaginative in their approach to problems, but Jean Paul and the mid-nineteenth-century realists put much more emphasis on the environment of the majority of Central Europeans at this time as being something that is fundamentally acceptable. If Goethe's Wilhelm Meister learns to control violent emotion through resignation of an ethical-metaphysical character, and the Romantics tend to regard the dissonances of individual life as phenomena that are fated and uncontrollable, Jean Paul sees that in fact most people suppress the potentialities of violent feeling through remaining close to conventional living, and that this can be aesthetically as interesting as the treatment of more sensational themes.

If it is the longing for universality and adventures with

ideas that the reader looks for in the novel, he will do well to devote his attention to the products of the age of Goethe or to those of the twentieth century. The world of the mid-nineteenth-century writers is on the whole comparable to that of their Victorian contemporaries such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy: a world that is clearly and narrowly limited, which is socially secure and where standards of behaviour can be accepted without question. The darker aspects of emotional life are usually kept in the background in the fiction of Gotthelf, Keller, Stifter, Raabe, and Fontane; they are there, of course, but they are subordinate to a sense of the fitness of conforming to the given environment, or of resignation to it. The *Bildungsroman* becomes a novel offering its hero an education towards idyllic acceptance. In the novels of the Swiss Protestant pastor Gotthelf,¹ if tragedy is approached, dissonance is resolved into harmony. There is a certain Old Testament flavour about the way Uli, the chosen, but obstreperous farm-hand, is guided to happiness in this life through hard work and common sense. The author is not concerned here with the education of the human race, but with the training of a simple, rather limited youth to become later, with the help of a sensible and loyal wife, a competent farmer in the Emmental. With its racy realism and humour, *Uli der Knecht* is far removed from the lofty patronage of the secret society's guidance of Wilhelm Meister; Gotthelf's sights, in this particular work, are directed lower than Goethe's, for the Swiss author is writing ostensibly for farm-hands and maid-servants, not for an intellectual *élite*. Consequently there is a lack of cultural tone and urban gloss which some readers may miss, but the lack of pretentiousness, combined with lively narrative skill, makes possible a rounded portrayal

¹ H. M. Waidson, *Jeremias Gotthelf*, Oxford, 1953. J. Gotthelf, *The Black Spider*, translated with an introduction by H. M. Waidson, 1958.

of character and an impression of objectivity in spite of the overt didacticism of the author's asides. The sequel, *Uli der Pächter*, takes the development of the hero to a deeper level. As so often in Gotthelf's work, the achievement of a happy ending is seldom the end; the idyll has to be defended, in this case against the central figure's own temperament. It is characteristic that a trivial issue, the money owing on a cow (for Uli is prosperous enough now not to need to notice one cow more or less), can come to threaten his whole stability of outlook. Gotthelf tends at times to overplay his role of anti-aesthetic, anti-intellectual advocate of the peasantry; for his letters and other writings of his student days show no naivety of approach. His gift of writing was essentially a practical one; as he puts it in 1849, his talent was developed by hard work and regular habits, but attributed primarily to the grace of God:

People wonder how I get so much done. It's a simple matter. Firstly, I have to thank God that I work easily, secondly I never put anything off. . . . Thirdly I make use of my time, get up early, don't go out much, but work. In this diligence lies the blessing that my head is always clear, thoughts come as soon as they are called and begin to flow with great ease, both orally and in writing. Twenty years ago I should not have thought this possible.

The *Uli* novels are simpler in construction and emotional atmosphere than various others of their author's works, and this particular recipe for creative achievement is not a considered statement, but a private confidence to an old friend. However, Gotthelf, historically the first of the great mid-nineteenth-century realists in the German novel, embodies a will to realize the idyllic here and now which is present also in Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*, Stifter's *Nachsommer*, Raabe's *Stopfkuchen*, and Fontane's *Der Stechlin*. In a letter of 1894 Fontane wrote: 'What I still feel attracted to portraying are the smallest, most

everyday happenings.'¹ His last novel, *Der Stechlin*, is an idyll of old age and a peaceful death, following a life the main events of which in the later years have been the marrying off of a son and the unsuccessful contestation of a political election. It is a slow-moving work, resigned and mellow, less consistently ironical than Raabe's *Stopfkuchen*, where the narrative method owes much to the contrast between its two narrators, Eduard who has emigrated to South Africa and taken his middle-class limitations with him, and Heinrich Schaumann who stays at home as the secret avenger of a crime for which the society around him is only too eager to accept the easy, wrong explanation.

It may come to be recognized that after the sixty years of the Classical-Romantic period, the first half of the present century has been one of the most varied and lively periods in German literature, in drama and poetry as well as in fiction: an uncomfortably lively period, no doubt, and not on that account necessarily of greater literary merit in the field of the novel than the relatively quieter preceding half-century. With the early prose of Hofmannsthal and Thomas Mann, and a few years later Rilke's one novel, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Neo-Romanticism ushered in a period in the German novel when poetic sensibility, psychological complexity, aesthetic pessimism, and the allure of a new *avant-garde* made the quieter realism of the previous generation seem old-fashioned. The didactic element was now deprecated, and introspection and analysis regained the esteem they had enjoyed with the Romantics, though they were carried to far more uncompromising lengths. Hofmannsthal's Lord Chandos is conscious of the unusability of words, as they crumble in his mouth 'like

¹ T. Fontane, Letter to O. Neumann-Hofer, 21 July 1894. Quoted from T. Fontane, *Schriften zur Literatur*, Berlin, 1960.

mouldering fungi'; Goethe's Werther had difficulties with his chief on account of his stylistic innovations. Rilke's Malte, fleeing in the streets of Paris from the terrors of his childhood, is enmeshed in an anguish as unmitigated as that of Werther. Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, published only a couple of years later than Fontane's last novel, is a family novel where features of nineteenth-century regional realism are tautened by the clinical, meticulously photographic technique of the French naturalists, and held together emotionally by a sense of the inevitability of decay induced by the juxtaposition of disease and artistic sensibility. But I need say no more about these characteristics of Mann's early writing, which will be familiar to you from the work on this author that has been done by my predecessor in this chair, Professor Heller.¹ Mann recognized the dichotomy underlying the tradition of the German novel: that is, its dependence on two sources of inspiration, on the one hand, the darker recesses of emotional experience, on the other hand, the determination to make the novel a vehicle for *Bildung*, which should include the education and control of the emotions as well as of the intellect. It is well known that after 1918 Mann turned away from his earlier preoccupations and gave much freer rein to the didactic element in his fiction, and declared himself as an active supporter of the Weimar Republic. *Der Zauberberg* reflects the conflict in terms of dark and light in the characters of Naphta and Settembrini, and their influence on Hans Castorp. *Joseph und seine Brüder* expands the Genesis story into a four-volumed *Bildungsroman*, while the sombre *Doktor Faustus* offers little hope for a musician who pursues his art to the exclusion of social responsibility.

In an essay on the art of the novel² Mann sees the

¹ E. Heller, *The Ironic German*, 1958.

² T. Mann, 'Die Kunst des Romans', 1939. In *Altes und Neues*, p. 387.

development of the European novel from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries as consisting of a steady process of *Verinnerlichung*, that is, of an increasing inwardness and an intensification of analytical and subjective aspects to the exclusion of the earlier picaresque emphases on adventure in a tangible world. Here he seems to be disparaging the picaresque novel (though twenty-five years later his *Felix Krull* exemplified a successful return to this form) and developing a thought of Schopenhauer: 'A novel will be the higher and nobler in kind, the more inner life it portrays, and the less outer. . . . Art consists of bringing the inner life into the most violent motion with the least possible use of outer life: for inner life is really the object of our interest.'¹ What Thomas Mann presumably had in mind in 1939 was the preoccupation with psychological and descriptive minutiae in the work of Joyce and Proust, where the European novel was apparently taking up the German Romantic and Neo-Romantic conception of the novel as a world-totality envisaged through the eyes of an aesthetic pessimist. But the experimental novel of the 1920's no longer seems the culmination of the genre that it may have done twenty years ago, and it is a dubious form of dogmatism to insist that a minimum of outward action with a maximum of introspection is the superior recipe for the fabrication of the novel as a work of art. Formalized distinctions between the genres can be misleading, and the argument just outlined seems to reflect the theory that the drama should be concerned with action and the novel with analysis; but if there can be epic theatre, there can equally well be the dramatic novel. One gladly allows oneself to be reminded by Mr. E. M. Forster that the novel is a

¹ A. Schopenhauer, *Zur Metaphysik des Schönen und Ästhetik*. In *Sämtliche Werke*, Großherzog Wilhelm Ernst edition, Leipzig, n.d., vol. 5, p. 482.

piece of prose of a certain length that tells a story; incidentally, Mr. Forster's gifts as a novelist lie much closer to those of Keller or Fontane than to the writings of the German Neo-Romantics.

The German novelist of the early twentieth century who succeeded best in giving a sense of universality and depth without being prone to swamp his readers in non-creative essayism is Kafka. His three novel-fragments follow the *Bildungsroman* tradition in tracing the development of their central character as he struggles against overwhelming odds to adapt himself to an environment that is alien to him or that he does not understand. In his conjuration of his 'dream-like inner life' and the strange quality of his fantasy, Kafka is an heir to the Romantics, and especially to E. T. A. Hoffmann. There is a many-faceted, elusive quality about his imaginative world that asks for detailed interpretation, and makes it a happy hunting ground for academic controversy. Mann agreed with Kafka's friend and first biographer, Max Brod, in regarding his work as essentially religious. The quest for 'heavenly food' is not deferred, or compromised, by any acceptance of the here-and-now as idyllic, as was the case with a number of the nineteenth-century novelists. Kafka's fiction makes no concessions, but imposes its author's grim irony and paradoxical combination of disillusionment and reverence upon the world around. The seeking of Josef Knecht in Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel*, indeed the whole world of Hesse's writing, is less strange than the fabric of Kafka's creative imagination, but perhaps not altogether dissimilar to it.

Kafka was a writer whom Hermann Broch admired very much, though he seldom wrote about him.¹ In an essay on *James Joyce und die Gegenwart* (1935) Broch remarked, with various qualifications, 'that the period of

¹ H. Broch, *Gesammelte Werke. Essays*, vol. i, p. 355.

the ethical work of art has begun, and that Goethe is its inaugurator'.¹ This Austrian novelist felt overwhelmed by a desire to contain the whole of what he considered the essence of European civilization in the form of large-scale fiction. His work illustrates the danger to the vitality of fiction that is threatened by the combination of a traditionally German subjectivism and didacticism with the international interior-monologue techniques of the 1920's. *Die Schlafwandler* and *Der Tod des Vergil* are impressive, though heavily didactic in their concern for the 'decline of values'. A contemporary compatriot of Broch's, Robert Musil, was preoccupied in a comparably ambitious summing up of pre-1914 civilization in his novel-fragment *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, which merges into a series of turgid intellectual discussions interspersed with increasingly grotesque episodes.

It may be asserted that the German novel has habitually taken itself too seriously, in its predilection either for sombre emotional states or for morally instructive expositions, as also in the sheer breadth of its structure. It is true that in the nineteenth century its finest examples have not attained the world-repute of the best English, French, and Russian novels of the same period. They remain, however, as works of integrity which have their own specific contribution to make to world-literature. From the formal point of view the middle-length tale, the *Novelle*, is likely to be more widely appreciated as representative of German fiction;² this is a genre which would extend the range of our investigations to Kleist, Storm, Meyer, and other important writers who did not contribute to the novel as such. In the present century too the short story has been widely practised, in particular since

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

² E. K. Bennett, *A History of the German Novelle*, 2nd edition, revised by H. M. Waidson, Cambridge, 1961.

1945.¹ Contemporary German novelists have begun to react against the intellectualizing, subjectivist tendencies of the Neo-Romantic generation, while appreciating their historical importance. The events of the recent past have provided material of emotional starkness, of violent and rapid action, and material with plenty of jumping-off ground for the discussion of ethical issues.² In authors such as Heinrich Böll, Gerd Gaiser, and Heinz Risse topical and traditional elements combine, but with a strong reaction against the earlier domination of the expansive form of the *Bildungsroman*. Among older writers there is the even production of Werner Bergengruen, an author who prefers to think of the writer as a craftsman of talent rather than as a Romantic genius.

Heimito von Doderer's *Die Dämonen*³ is the heavy-weight among contemporary novels in the German language. It can compete with Broch and Musil in sheer cleverness, and has the advantage over the majority of universalist novels of the last sixty years in that it controls a large caste of characters and keeps them briskly moving in a precisely described environment, the Vienna of 1926. Analytical and didactic features are firmly subordinated to narrative requirements, and the work is essentially comedy. Like Bergengruen, Doderer believes that the novelist should see himself as a skilled worker and not as a priest of an esoteric or messianic cult. As he puts it in his essay *Grundlagen und Funktion des Romans*:⁴

In the long run the artist's fate is contained wholly in his technique, in technical luck and misfortune; and only then is he healthy

¹ *German Short Stories 1900-1945*, ed. H. M. Waidson, Cambridge, 1959; *German Short Stories 1945-1955*, ed. H. M. Waidson, Cambridge, 1957.

² H. M. Waidson, *The Modern German Novel*, Oxford, 1959.

³ H. M. Waidson, 'Heimito von Doderer and his Demons'. In *German Life and Letters*.

⁴ H. von Doderer, *Grundlagen und Funktion des Romans*, Nürnberg, 1959, pp. 33-34, 40.

in his fate. He does his work, as it were, with downcast eyes—cast down upon the technical aspect of his art—and the higher element, which is added to it if he is very lucky, is there for the others.

And again:

The task which confronts the novel today is . . . the re-conquest of the outside world; and here, as we know, things happen, in every sense.

One feels that such a task is acceptable to many authors writing in German today, Böll and Gaiser, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and others.

The tradition of artistic inwardness and tragic despair has weighed heavily upon the German novel since the publication of Goethe's *Werther*. It has of course been a fruitful trend in many ways, encouraging a sensibility of approach as poetic as that of Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* or D. H. Lawrence. Poetic temperaments such as Novalis, Hölderlin, Eichendorff, Mörike, and Rilke, as well as Goethe, have made contributions to this often lyrically subjective type of novel. At the same time it has encouraged fantasy to overwhelm external reality and deprive it of its clarity of shape in the reader's eyes.¹ The novel of educative purpose is seldom tragic in texture; after all, if a character is being 'improved', the sympathetic reader will presumably welcome the development. But education is a serious process, especially if, as often happens in German fiction (and indeed elsewhere too), it looks toward self-limitation and resignation as much as to expansion and self-assertion. Consequently the German novel of literary quality has tended to give a subordinate place to action and comedy, and to feel itself necessarily separated from anything approaching light comedy; this is perhaps less true of the mid-nineteenth-century authors than of those who came immediately before and after, while today German fiction is as varied in its form and

¹ R. Pascal, *The German Novel*, Manchester, p. 296.

as close to contemporary reality as it has been at any time in the past. The fundamental aim of the *Bildungsroman* seems to be much the same as the purpose of comedy in drama, as Schiller formulated it:

Its aim is identical with the highest aspiration that man has to strive towards, to be free from passions, always to see clearly and calmly about and within himself, to find everywhere more chance than fate, and rather to laugh at folly than to be angry or to weep at malice.¹

Such controlled reasonableness is by no means the whole story, evidently, and German novelists can and frequently do give expression to a holy anger and an impassioned indignation. Poetic feeling and humane purpose both play a leading role in their best work.

To paraphrase the words of Hofmannsthal which I quoted earlier, if literature were not an element of life, it would be a waste of breath to talk about it. The significance of prose fiction in the history of German literature of the last two hundred years is evident, and as an aspect of the literary life of Europe during this period its position is firmly fixed. German literature is an integral part of European life, and it is part of the business of a University Department of German to study and teach this literature. How this is to be done is indeed a separate question, and one that cannot be taken up at this point. But a spirit of tolerance is essential. Various approaches are capable of yielding fruitful results. Different authors and periods respond to varying methods, and since imaginative literature continually reflects human situations it is no more likely to fall into water-tight categorization than any other humane study. It cannot be lifted out of its personal, social, and historical setting without losing part of its living quality, even though what is ultimately most valuable in literature, and indeed in many university studies, lies in the glimpses of eternity it affords.

¹ F. Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*.