

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# GERMAN FICTION

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## Medieval German Literature

The origins of German literature, unlike the origins of the Romance literatures, retreat into the margins of the Roman Empire. In his *Germania*, the Roman historian Tacitus provides us with our first extensive account of the German tribe, the Germani, and gives us the sense of a warlike but socially organized people, whose strength and virtues were in some ways to be emulated by the increasingly decadent Romans. From that first semi primitive exposure to the great world, to the first individual voices of German literature, would require a millenium of tribal jostling, linguistic development and branching out from the native Germanic tongues—which were totally foreign to the Latin language families—and arguably a synthesis of pagan with the gradually adopted Christian culture, from which would come the rich and original textures of the literature we now consider German.

The first genres to meet us, in this new literary world, are epic and lyric poetry. The epic tradition in Middle High German, the Classical period (1180-1250), is of two distinct kinds: court and popular. The court epic is written for the nobility—with noble patronage—and is accordingly polite and cultivated, frequently sprinkling French words; the tales that are told typically—as in the epic *Parzifal*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-1220)—concern chivalry, and the high honor and courtliness culture implied by chivalry. The popular epic tradition, exemplified by *The Niebelungenlied* (1200 A.D.), blends ancient Germanic tales of warfare, revenge, and court life, with an overlay of Christian values, which blend forcefully, providing a ‘folk epic’ closer to Homer’s work than was anything produced out of the court tradition. The traditions of lyric poetry, in mediaeval Germany, are preserved from two major groups: Minnesingers, ‘singers about love,’ who emulated French troubador poetry, and whose greatest exemplar was Walther von der Vogelweide (1170-1230 A.D.); and Mastersingers, who flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries, were best represented by Hans Sachs, and who were an organized guild of professional traveling poets. Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) will stand in here for the brilliance of the German mystical tradition, which expressed itself in a poetry that qualifies it as the highest literature.

## 16th Century German Literature

As we enter the sixteenth century we must note that while England, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy were by this stage moving vigorously into the rediscovery of the Classics, and the power of their Romanic tradition, the Germans—but one cannot refer to them as such, for they were still four centuries away from nationhood—were barely starting to harvest their cultural traditions. And yet, complexly enough, there was cultural movement, from with the ‘Germany’ of the sixteenth century, which was to have exceptionally far reaching effect on subsequent centuries throughout Europe, indeed throughout the world.

From the very first, the humanist movement took a unique direction in north-central Europe. In the first place the revival of classical literature, especially Latin, was for Italy—and to some extent for France and Spain—a revival of its own past glories, while for Germany the Renaissance was of foreign origin. Furthermore humanism appealed primarily to the intellectual elite in Germany, who could speak Greek and Latin, whereas it appealed to a far wider audience in the countries where the languages were derived from Latin. Instead of an Italianate Renaissance, it might be said, Germany turned with fervor toward a kind of religious Renaissance, the Reformation.

It should not, though, be assumed that humanism made no headway in Germany. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1455-1522) and others became great scholars of classical languages. The invention of the printing press, in the mid-15th century, did much to stimulate reading and learning, and at least fifteen universities were founded in Germany between 1538-1545 A.D. Martin Luther himself was a friend to classical learning, except where it clashed with his religious beliefs.

## 17th Century German Literature

The historical event of huge importance for Germany, in the seventeenth century, was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which was brought on by the Hapsburgs’ renewed attempts to stamp out Protestants—thus, by the continuing inter faith conflict opened up Martin Luther, and a century after the Reformation mired in power-turf issues which were decidedly not theological. The Protestants were aided in the war by Denmark, Sweden, and France, and once again they won freedom of worship. Such freedom, however, was dearly bought. Germany was so utterly devastated and so nearly depopulated (about two thirds of the population perished) that it was unable to recover for nearly a century.

The century was for the most part literarily barren, with important exceptions made for the religious/visionary poetries of Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius, and the fascinating novel *Simplicissimus* (1669) by Grimmelshausen.

## Grimmelshausen

**Simplicissimus.** By 1668, the year of publication of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, we have encountered nothing in German literature like 'prose fiction.' (What have we encountered, in the realm of high literature or religious-literary thought? We have been reading epic material—*Niebelungenlied* and *Parzifal*--which ties us to archaic Germanic culture worlds; poetries of love and urban guild, which were pronounced factors of German life from the 12th to the 16th centuries; deeply meditative religious philosophical thinking—Eckhart and Boehme; activist religious thought, scholarship, and creativity in the path breaking moves of Luther and Erasmus.) With *Simplizissimus* (1668) we come on full blooded imaginative prose, a novel, one that arises from personal experience, passed through the sieve of wide reading and careful workmanship. This work remains one of the wonders of its time, and takes its place with the work of Smollett and Defoe in the formation of a European novel tradition.

**Grimmelshausen and the Novel.** The novel is just beginning to make its voice heard in Europe: the reading public for popular literature is growing, especially in Germany, where the western printing press was created and book selling and the book industry were starting to take off. The conclusion of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was only recent, Germany had been left in shambles and disease, and persons like Grimmelshausen (1621-1676) were on all sides, for the most part disoriented and directionless refuse of the War. *Simplizissimus* is a fictionalized autobiography of its author, who grew up among scenes of destruction and havoc, and who captures them in a fascinating fictional canvas; this book before you—and its sequel, *Courage*, which may particularly capture your attention for the vigorous, sympathetic, and sexy picture of the life of a camp-follower during the war.

**Grimmelshausen's own life and the novel.** Whether the present text is an autobiography of not—for certainly it might seem so—we know that Grimmelshausen lived events that intermeshed with the war. At the age of ten he was kidnapped by Hessian soldiery—fighting for the Holy Roman Emperor against the Protestants—and held captive by them throughout his teen years; a time, we can imagine, when he saw some aspects of the brutal war up close. At war's end, still a young man, he was taken into service by the Bishop of Strassbourg, with whom he resided until, in 1665, he was made a Magistrate in Baden, a position, and residence, in which he remained for the rest of his life. In other words, parts of his life suggest the world of the war, others a post-war existence of considerable stability. From hearsay and from his own imagination, at least in part, we have to imagine him bringing forth a tale that includes such events as these: a hero who is left on his own as a child and goes out into the fields to learn religion from a hermit, who went on to become a page to a great man, then a robber, then the discoverer of a significant treasure, who next marries, promptly deserts his wife, heads to Paris where he makes out to be a classy flaneur, returns to the cave of the hermit, whom he discovers to be his father, and then settles down, pipe and slippers, to a comfortable aging process.

**What it all means.** An account like the foregoing, which may seem flip, fails if it leaves out the maturely human tone of the narrator's life. The narration is carried out with some ironic distance, much compassion for the presented world, and a sense of humor which leavens the roughness of the war—one thinks perhaps of the brilliant tone of *Catch-22*. Readers who will love Tom Jones, a century later, can here see one of the seedbeds of that thoughtful and reckless comedy.

## Reading

### *Primary source reading*

*Simplicissimus*, trans. Mike Mitchell, 1999.

### *Secondary source reading*

*A Companion to the Works of Grimmelshausen*. Otto, Karl 2003,

### *Further Reading*

*Grimmelshausen, Life of Courage*, 2001. (Grimmelshausen's fascinating sequel to *Simplicissimus*.)

### *Original language reading*

Meid, Volker, *Grimmelshausen: Epoche—Werk—Wirkung*, 1984.

### *Suggested paper topics*

Suggestion: look into the Spanish novel tradition of the picaresque—check the prototype novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, from the mid 16th century, some plays of Quevedo, or for that matter *Don Quixote* of Cervantes—and then check out some of the collateral work being done, in the 17th century, by writers like Grimmelshausen, who display a picaro character in circumstances which are often full of human meaning. Is this a genre of writing we understand and appreciate today?

Courage is a star player in *Simplicissimus*, then reappears as the main figure in a continuation fiction, written by Grimmelshausen a couple of years later, *Courage*. What is Grimmelshausen's attitude toward this 'woman of the road,' this easy going but long suffering figure of strength? Take a look at Defoe's *Moll Flanders* for a characterization of the same kind of rough and ready, and witty, street woman—from the standpoint of contemporary British society.

### **EXCERPT**

[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7cq85KGmb3sC&dq=grimmelshausen&printsec=frontcover&source=in&hl=en&ei=kkCNS538DovcNtTglW4&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7cq85KGmb3sC&dq=grimmelshausen&printsec=frontcover&source=in&hl=en&ei=kkCNS538DovcNtTglW4&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=&f=false) So far and no further could I get with my song: for in a moment was I surrounded, sheep and all, by a troop of cuirassiers that had lost their way in the thick wood and were brought back to their right path by my music and my calls to my flock. "Aha," quoth I to myself, "these be the right rogues! these be the four-legged knaves and thieves whereof thy dad did tell thee!" For at first I took horse and man (as did the Americans the Spanish cavalry) to be but one beast, and could not but conceive these were the wolves; and so would sound the retreat for these horrible centaurs and send them a-flying: but scarce had I blown up my bellows to that end when one of them catches me by the shoulder and swings me up so roughly upon a spare farm horse they had stolen with other booty that I must needs fall on the other side, and that too upon my dear bagpipe, which began so miserably to scream as it would move all the world to pity: which availed nought, though it spared not its last breath in the bemoaning of my sad fate. To horse again I must go, it mattered not what my bagpipe did sing or say: yet what vexed me most was that the troopers said I had hurt my dear bagpipe, and therefore it had made so heathenish an outcry. So away my horse went with me at a good trot, like the "primum mobile," for my dad's farm. Now did strange and fantastic imaginings fill my brain; for I did conceive, because I sat upon such a beast as I had never before seen, that I too should be changed into an iron man. And because such a change came not, there arose in me other foolish fantasies: for I thought these strange creatures were but there to help me drive my sheep home; for none strayed from the path, but all, with one accord, made for my dad's farm. So I looked anxiously when my dad and my mammy should come out to bid us welcome: which yet came not: for they and our Ursula, which was my dad's only daughter, had found the back-door open and would not wait for their guests. \_ HOW SIMPLICISSIMUS'S PALACE WAS STORMED, PLUNDERED, AND RUINATED, AND IN WHAT SORRY FASHION THE SOLDIERS KEPT HOUSE THERE Although it was not my intention to take the peace-loving reader with these troopers to my dad's house and farm, seeing that matters will go ill therein, yet the course of my history demands that I should leave to kind posterity an account of what manner of cruelties were now and again practised in this our German war: yea, and moreover testify by my own example that such evils must often have been sent to us by the goodness of Almighty God for our profit. For, gentle reader, who would ever have taught me that there was a God in Heaven if these soldiers had not destroyed my dad's house, and by such a deed driven me out among folk who gave me all fitting instruction thereupon? Only a little while before, I neither knew nor could fancy to myself that there were any people on earth save only my dad, my mother and me, and the rest of our household, nor did I know of any human habitation but that where I daily went out and in. But soon thereafter I understood the way of men's coming into this world, and how they must leave it again. I was only in shape a man and in name a Christian: for the rest I was but a beast. Yet the Almighty looked upon my innocence with a pitiful eye, and would bring me to a knowledge both of Himself and of myself.

## 18th century German Literature

The 18th century, especially the second half of it, is arguably the richest period in German cultural life, and the period of its influence over world wide culture, to this date. Although the country was still a hodgepodge of more or less independent states bound together in a loose confederation, Prussia began to emerge as the dominant power, and glimmerings of a national consciousness began to appear. In the Seven Years War (1756-1763) the brilliant leadership of Frederick II (the Great, ruled 1740-1786) enabled Prussia, assisted by troops from Hanover and subsidies from England, to withstand the armies of France, Austria, and Russia.

In Germany, as in most of the other European countries, rationalism and deism were beginning to attract many adherents. These systems of belief were opposed first by pietism (a revival of simple piety, plus religious emotionalism) and later by Rousseauism. The theories of Diderot and Rousseau about democracy, the rights of man, and individual liberty led to no political upheaval in Germany—but in the social and intellectual realms Rousseauism imposed on rationalism helped to foster the indigenous movement known as Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) ‘which had as its objectives a reform of political and social life and a regeneration of literature.’ After mid century there was a burst of great writing—one thinks of this as the Classical Age of German literature—Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Herder, and from there, passing into the following century, the rich contributions of Germany to the Romantic movement, and to its philosophic drivers, Kant and a lineage of greats

## 19th century German Literature

The conquests of Napoleon Bonaparte dealt a severe blow to the hopes of the German patriots and those who were beginning to make Germany aware of herself as a nation. French domination lasted from 1803-1813. As usually is the case, military attacks did not extinguish nationalist zeal, but fanned the flames higher; and uniting against the common enemy helped to bring the loosely confederated states closer together. Some of the dramas and lyrics of the great poets—especially *Minna von Barnhelm* by Lessing, Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*, and Goethe’s *Faust (Part I; published 1808)*—gave the German speaking states an illustrious common heritage and emphasized the idea of a common fatherland.

The German armies that helped defeat Napoleon in 1813 had been promised various reforms, including more political liberty and a constitutional government. Their expectations were disappointed. A policy of reaction, inaugurated by Metternich in Austria, was adopted by most of the states; and participation in the government and freedom of the press and of speech were denied to the people. The period of reaction and absolutism continued for several decades, but popular discontent grew so strong that it became open rebellion in 1848. Then some steps toward constitutional government were taken, and some of the absolutist policies were abolished. In 1871 the German people were given quite modern social legislation, under Chancellor Otto Bismarck.

In the meantime, tremendous progress toward national unity was made. In 1815 Austria allied itself with some of the other states in the German confederation; in 1834 the formation of the Zollverein began real unification; and in 1866 the North German Confederation was formed. Finally Germany defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), and William I was declared Emperor of the German Empire in 1871.

## **Jean Paul (Friedrich Richter)**

**The life of Jean Paul.** Jean Paul (1763-1825) is an original voice in the chorus of German voices that make up the transition from Weimar Classicism to the Romantic tone. He was born in the area of Franconia, in Wunsiedel. His father was an organist, then was hired on as village pastor, but soon after that died, leaving Jean Paul and the rest of the family in serious poverty. By strong learning efforts Jean Paul got into and passed on from the gymnasium in nearby Hof, then moved on to the University of Leipzig. While in University his true interests declared themselves, and he shifted his studies from Theology to Literature. From the outside one would have expected this decision, from the exceptionally labile imagination of the young man. (In 1790, when he was twenty seven, he had had a moving and life-changing vision of his own death.) In any case the first literary publications of Jean Paul, which followed in 1793 (*Die unsichtbare Loge*) and 1795 (*Hesperus*), introduced some of the literary traits which were to dominate the development of his lifetime of writing: prominent use of the Doppelgänger and fake suicides, directive materials for what was to go on to be developed (but always surprising) fictions full of genuine religious sentiment, artifice and trickery, and an edgy humor, which unnerved those who were looking for the 'classical' postures of Goethe and Schiller—who did not like Jean Paul—and which were a complex way of bringing formal and individualistic language worlds together.

**The Work of Jean Paul.** Jean Paul breaks sharply from the classicism we see insistent in German literature of the last quarter of the 18th century. We can see this break in the remarkable story, '*Die unsichtbare Loge*,' '*The invisible Lodge*,' 1791, the first work of Jean Paul to attract significant attention. The text is essentially a Bildungsroman, a tale of the education of youth, such as was in vogue in contemporary works like Goethe's Wilhelm Meister tales, or in certain works of Wieland or Karl Philip Moritz. But the difference is marked, with Jean Paul. Gustav, Jean Paul's personage elected to be raised to the level of a hoher Mensch, a high exemplar of mankind, lives and is educated, for the first eight years of his life, in a catacomb. (The Pietist individual raising him is called 'the genius,' who assures Gustave that in emerging into the upper world he will enter both the realm of death and the realm of God, who will guarantee rebirth. The tale oozes with overtones of the ancient Greek idealist/mystic tradition, especially that of Plotinus.) The actual education of Gustave begins with a blinding experience of the brilliance of the present world, but after that sets in the complexity of educational stages. For a while the tutor of Gustave is Jean Paul, who takes advantage of his role as embedded persona to divagate on many topics of interest to him—government and politics, marriage, pedagogy, even the structure of the narrative which he himself is weaving—until the burden of the narrative structure becomes too much for Jean Paul the narrator and he must be replaced by his sister, while at the same time the primary narrative is enriched by a second narrative about Gustave, introduced by a court poet who has been brought into the tale. Enough? Is the point clear enough? Jean Paul introduces, from the start, a kind of ironic, self-reflective, philosophically speculative, indeed religious tale which has no parallel in the work of his end of century contemporaries.

### **Reading**

#### ***Primary source reading***

Behler, Ernst, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 1993.

#### ***Secondary source reading***

Fleming, Paul, *The Pleasures of Abandonment: Jean Paul and the Life of Humor*, 2006.

#### ***Further reading***

Stopp, Elisabeth, *German Romantics in context: Selected essays 1971-86*, 1992.

#### ***Original language reading***

Wiethoelter, Waltraud, *Witzige Illuminationen: Studien zur Aesthetik Jean Pauls*, 1979.

### **Suggested paper topics**

Read Jean Paul's *Titan*, or one of his other numerous prose fictions available online, and consider what is meant by the humor of Jean Paul. Is it what we might prefer to call irony today? Are there conspicuous elements of satire in his humor? The Romantic movement in Germany is often associated with the development of paradox and dialectical thinking—two different but related issues. Is Jean Paul's humor related to those issues?

Jean Paul's '*Unsichtbare Loge*,' and many of his other works, deals with 'education,' the growth and maturing of a young person into the social world. We have seen that Goethe, in his works on Wilhelm Meister, is centrally interested in this kind of Bildungsroman. What connection do you see between the Romantic movement and this kind of tale of personal growth? Is there a connection of the Bildungsroman with the notable 'rediscovery of the child' in Romantic thought?

**Excerpt** (from *Titan*) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35664/35664-h/35664-h.htm>

On a fine spring evening, the young Spanish Count Cesara came, with his companions, Schoppe and Dian, to Sesto, in order the next morning to cross over to the Borromæan island, Isola Bella, in Lago Maggiore. The proudly blooming youth glowed with the excitement of travelling, and with thoughts of the coming morrow, when he should see the isle, that gayly decorated throne of Spring, and on it a man who had been promised him for twenty years. This twofold glow exalted my picturesque hero to the form of an angry god of the Muses. His beauty made a more triumphal entry into Italian eyes than into the narrow Northern ones from the midst of which he had come; in Milan many had wished he were of marble, and stood with elder gods of stone, either in the Farnese Palace or in the Clementine Museum, or in the Villa of Albani; nay, had not the Bishop of Novara, with his sword at his side, a few hours before, asked Schoppe (riding behind) who he was? And had not the latter, with a droll squaring of the wrinkle-circle round his lips, made this copious answer (by way of enlightening his spiritual lordship): "It's my Telemachus, and I am the Mentor. I am the milling-machine and the die which coins him,—the wolf's tooth and flattening mill which polishes him down,—the man, in short, that regulates him"?

The glowing form of the youthful Cesara was still more ennobled by the earnestness of an eye always buried in the future, and of a firmly shut, manly mouth, and by the daring decision of young, fresh faculties; he seemed as yet to be a burning-glass in the moonlight, or a dark precious stone of too much color, which the world, as in the case of other jewels, can brighten and improve only by cutting hollow.

As he drew nearer and nearer, the island attracted him, as one world does another, more and more intensely. His internal restlessness rose as the outward tranquillity deepened. Beside all this, Dian, a Greek by birth and an artist, who had often circumnavigated and sketched Isola Bella and Isola Madre, brought these obelisks of Nature still nearer to his soul in glowing pictures; and Schoppe often spoke of the great man whom the youth was to see to-morrow for the first time. As the people were carrying by, down below in the street, an old man fast asleep, into whose strongly marked face the setting sun cast fire and life, and who was, in short, a corpse borne uncovered, after the Italian custom, suddenly, in a wild and hurried tone, he asked his friends, "Does my father look thus?"

But what impels him with such intense emotions towards the island is this: He had, on Isola Bella, with his sister, who afterward went to Spain, and by the side of his mother, who had since passed to the shadowy land, sweetly toyed and dreamed away the first three years of his life, lying in the bosom of the high flowers of Nature; the island had been, to the morning slumber of life, to his childhood's hours, a Raphael's painted sleeping-chamber. But he had retained nothing of it all in his head and heart, save in the one a deep, sadly sweet emotion at the name, and in the other the squirrel, which, as the family scutcheon of the Borromæans, stands on the upper terrace of the island.

## **E.T.A.Hoffman**

**The achievement of E.T.A. Hoffman.** Ernest Theodor William Hoffman (1776-1822) was one of the most influential and multi sided Romantic artists. He was a writer of fantasy and horror stories—of great sophistication and charm; delights to children—a music critic, a distinguished jurist, and a composer. It was through his influence on the classical music of his period that he most firmly fixed his reputation: the ballet *Coppelia* is based on two stories by Hoffman, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Ballet* is based on Hoffman's story, 'The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,' and Robert Schumann's Kreisleriana is based on a character in a Hoffman story; Jacques Offenbach's suite, *The Tales of Hoffman*, is centered around a reshaped hero, who is basically E.T.A. Hoffman. To speak of these influences is to indicate the kind of popular but fine legacy Hoffman left behind.

**The Life of E.T.A. Hoffman.** The author, born in Koenigsberg in 1776 was child to two barristers, and though they divorced, and he spent his formative years with his mother and her family, including his sisters, he remained imprinted by the earlier exposure to the culture of the law, to which he would turn as the most stable grounding of his career life. Educated at the Burgschule in Koenigsberg, Hoffman established a firm foundation for his multifaceted life. (Already in gymnasium he proved his high level of versatility, in piano playing, drawing, drafting, and sketch writing. His gift for caricature/cartooning was marked from the outset.) From that point he moved through a series of artistic related jobs, and romantic attractions—the most intense to Dora Hart, a married woman ten years his age—and yet despite the instability of his personal life managed to sustain an ever active creative process. That process was jumpstarted, in the midst of financial difficulties, by a visit to the Dresden Art Gallery in 1798, where his experience of the paintings of Correggio and Raphael was hugely inspiring. By 1804 Hoffman acquired a post as artistic director in Warsaw, where he found himself for a while in highly congenial artistic company, which was welcome, for throughout the surrounding years he and his family had been buffeted by the storms of Napoleonic War, its conflicts with Prussia, and the gradual dismantling of the Holy Roman Empire. By 1814 Hoffman was once again back at the practice of law, his security. He died at the age of forty six, after a life of brilliant but fragmentary achievement.

**Kater Murr.** *The Life and Opinions of Murr the Cat* (1820-1822) is one of Hoffman's most careful and deeply expressive stories, and a few words on it may be the easiest portal into Hoffman's imaginative trend. Murr is a cat, who has written his autobiography, to enlighten children. He is naïve and full of himself. However the editor of the autobiography, 'E.T.A. Hoffman,' has made the story complex by (mistakenly) using the proof sheets of another volume, a biography of the Romantic composer Kreisler, as scrap paper, and in the process of printing—during which the cat has clawed into tatters much of the book on the composer-- the autobiography of the cat and the biography of the composer have been randomly mixed up together. The result is a counterpoint and confusion of tales, from which emerges a blend of the seamlessly readable cat story with the shredded and tortured tale of the composer. The self-reflective observation, on the turmoil of the Romantic sensibility, could not have been more cunningly put before us.

### **Reading**

#### ***Primary source reading***

Wittkop-Menardeau, Gabrielle, *E.T.A.Hoffman*, 1991.

#### ***Secondary source reading***

Ruprecht, L., *Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E.T.A. Hoffman and Heinrich Heine*, 2006.

#### ***Further reading***

Peters, U.H., *Studies in German Romantic Psychology: Justinus Kerner as Psychiatric Practitioner, E.T.A. Hoffman as a Psychiatric Theorist*, 1990.

#### ***Original language reading***

Feldges, Brigitte; Stadler, Ulrich, *E.T.A. Hoffman, Epoche-Werk-Wirkung*, 1986.



## Suggested paper topics

Does *Kater Murr* seem to you an extraordinarily 'modern' literary construction? Are you familiar with any such structural complexities and play, in literature prior to 1800? What kind of critical and philosophical mindset seems to be implied, by being able to see the world and fiction in that way?

Hoffman is well known for his mystery stories, ghost stories, and tales of the occult. (Edgar Allen Poe is one of those writers most indebted to him.) Do you see this literary genre as an organic element in the Romantic sensibility? We know that the Romantics were concerned with 'spiritual issues,' but do you understand the genesis, in Romanticism, of fascination with the supernatural?

*Excerpt* <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/46447/>

THE JESUITS' CHURCH IN G——.

BY E. T. A. HOFFMANN.

Packed up in a wretched post-chaise, which the moths had left from instinct—as the rats left Prospero's vessel—I at last, after a break-neck journey, stopped half dislocated, at the inn in the G—— market-place. All the possible misfortune that might have befallen me had lighted on my carriage, which lay, shattered, with the postmaster at the last stage. Four skinny, jaded horses, after a lapse of many hours, dragged up the crazy vehicle, with the help of several peasants and my own servant; knowing folks came up, shook their heads, and thought that a thorough repair, which might occupy two, or even three days would be necessary. The place seemed to me agreeable, the country pretty, and yet I felt not a little horror-struck at the delay with which I was threatened. If, gentle reader, you were ever compelled to stop three days in a little town, where you did not know a soul, but were forced to remain a stranger to every body, and if some deep pain did not destroy the inclination for social converse, you will be able to appreciate my annoyance. In words alone does the spirit of life manifest itself in all around us; but the inhabitants of your small towns are like a secluded orchestra, which has worked into its own way of playing and singing by hard practice, so that the tone of the foreigner is discordant to their ears, and at once puts them to silence. I was walking up and down my room, in a thorough ill-humour, when it at once struck me that a friend at home, who had once passed two years at G——, had often spoken of a learned, clever man, with whom he had been intimate. His name, I recollected, was Aloysius Walter, professor at the Jesuits' college. I now resolved to set out, and turn my friend's acquaintance to my own advantage. They told me at the college that Professor Walter was lecturing, but would soon have finished, and as they gave me the choice of calling again or waiting in the outer rooms, I chose the latter. The cloisters, colleges, and churches of the Jesuits are everywhere built in that Italian style which, based upon the antique form and manner, prefers splendour and elegance to holy solemnity and religious dignity. In this case the lofty, light, airy halls were adorned with rich architecture and the images of saints, which were here placed against the walls, between Ionic pillars, were singularly contrasted by the carving over the doorways, which invariably represented a dance of genii, or fruit and the dainties of the kitchen.

The professor entered—I reminded him of my friend, and claimed his hospitality for the period of my forced sojourn in the place. I found him just as my friend had described him; clear in his discourse, acquainted with the world, in short, quite in the style of the higher class priest, who has been scientifically educated, and peeping over his breviary into life, has often sought to know what is going on there. When I found his room furnished with modern elegance, I returned to my former reflections in the halls, and uttered them to the professor aloud.

"You are right," said he, "we have banished from our edifices that gloomy solemnity, that strange majesty of the crushing tyrant, who oppresses our bosoms in Gothic architecture, and causes a certain unpleasant sensation, and we have very properly endowed our works with the lively cheerfulness of the ancients."

"But," said I, "does not that sacred dignity, that lofty majesty of Gothic architecture which seems, as it were, striving after Heaven, proceed from the true spirit of Christianity, which, supersensual itself, is directly opposed to that sensual spirit of the antique world which remains in the circle of the earthly?"

## Novalis

**The Life of Novalis.** Friedrich von Hardenburg, who later christened himself Novalis (1772-1801), was born on the manor estate at Overwiederstedt, Saxony, in the Harz mountains. (His childhood was spent on that estate, and his fantasy life of oneness with nature was played out on trips into the mountains.) His father administered the inherited estates, which were part of the patrimony of this distinguished family, and managed the salt mine, which was the source of revenue for the region. Novalis' father was a strictly Pietistic Moravian; Novalis was the second of eleven children. He was sent to a local Lutheran school for his primary education. From 1790-1794 Novalis studied Law at Jena, Wittenberg, and Leipzig Universities. During this time he heard and was influenced by Friedrich Schiller's lectures, and while at University he made brief acquaintances with Goethe, Herder, and Jean Paul. It was at this time that he became engaged to Sophie von Kuehn—who was thirteen years old—and, a quite different issue, became passionately interested in Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre. (That this extremely brilliant young man was at the same time writing goes without saying.) In light of this rapid development of his thought and work, we should note that from childhood on Novalis was keenly interested in the natural and physical sciences. He was a trained geologist, and had he not died at the age of 29 he would have completed his vast Romantic Encyclopedia of the sciences.

**The work of Novalis.** The prioritizing of the poetic imagination, by Schlegel and many of his contemporaries—including counterparts like Wordsworth and Lamartine elsewhere in Europe—became the leitmotif of Novalis' work. In his *Hymns to the Night*, 1799, Novalis lets his imagination create from the fixed point of the death of his first fiancée, a death which lured him to follow the beloved. As he contemplates this loss, he sees salvation in poetry, whose magic power can transform all that passes into a metaphor of the spirit. Like Orpheus, dealing with the night, he descends into the center of himself, to the point where he can create a salvation—parallel to Christ's saving—from the deification of love. Building from this perception Novalis conceives the universe as a fusion of nature and spirit in the aura of which he can be truly one with his beloved. In two other characteristic works he continues to work the rich Romantic themes of the Catholic Middle Ages. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) he unfolds, self-reflexively, an account of a mediaeval court poet's education in his trade. Heinrich's youthful dream has been of a passage from self-transcendence, through redemption in nature, and the discovery of love, an ecstatic passage through which his experience leads him, bathed in powerful historical mystery. In the speech Christianity or Europe Novalis develops imaginatively his vision of the new Europe to come with Romanticism, a Europe which is romantically Catholic, and in that regard highly conservative, but respectful of the individual, and fit to lead the new post Revolutionary monarchical culture of the new Germany.

**The conservative Novalis.** The early German Romantics, privileging poetry as the visionary weapon for envisaging the new world, turned with frequency to the Middle Ages, and at least the atmosphere of the religious life that flourished at that time. For Novalis in particular the French Revolution was a brutal but necessary stage on humanity's long trek to self-awareness. Mankind's history was a powerful and ongoing education.

### Reading

#### *Primary source reading*

Novalis: *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia*, ed. David Wood, 2007.

#### *Secondary source reading*

Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, trans. Hilty, 1992.

#### *Further reading*

*Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. Bernstein, 2003.

#### *Original language reading*

Kutzke, Hermann, *Romantik und Konservatismus. Das 'politische' Werk Friedrich von Hardenbergs (Novalis) im Horizont seiner Wirkungs geschichte*, 1983.

## Suggested paper topics

Read through what remains of Novalis' Encyclopedia. What connections do you see between his thinking in the 'sciences,' and his poetic visionary thinking? Review Goethe's conception of the sciences in his time, a few generations earlier, and compare the value of the contributions of the two men toward 'understanding.' How does Novalis's worship of the mediaeval square with his scientific knowledge?

Does Novalis's conservatism spring from a reaction to the French Revolution, which was itself built onto Enlightenment ideas of progress and human perfectibility? Or is it an integral part of the Romantic fascination with the past in general, and specifically with the 'Romance' traditions, often poetic and mysterious, which underlie much German thinking of the early 19th century?

## Excerpts

*en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Novalis*

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I was still blind, but twinkling stars did dance throughout my being's limitless expanse...  
True anarchy is the generative element of religion. Out of the annihilation of all existing institutions she raises her glorious head, as the new foundress of the world.  
To romanticize the world is to make us aware of the magic, mystery and wonder of the world...

- There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism.
- Throughout my being's limitless expanse,  
Nothing had yet drawn close, only at distant stages  
I found myself, a mere suggestion sensed in past and future ages.
  - o True anarchy is the generative element of religion. Out of the annihilation of all existing institutions she raises her glorious head, as the new foundress of the world..
- Blood will stream over Europe until the nations become aware of the frightful madness which drives them in circles. And then, struck by celestial music and made gentle, they approach their former altars all together, hear about the works of peace, and hold a great celebration of peace with fervent tears before the smoking altars.
- Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason.
- The world must be romanticized. In this way the originary meaning may be found again.

## **20th Century German Literature**

The political and military history of Germany during the first half of the 20th century, is so well known that only the briefest outline should suffice. Under Kaiser Wilhelm II Germany began WW I in 1914. Decisively defeated by the Allies in 1918, she lost all her colonies, Alsace-Lorraine, and some frontier territory. The Republic of Germany (Weimar Republic) was proclaimed in 1919. For fourteen years the nation remained in a deplorable condition: her economy was severely damaged; the government was highly unstable and the people were under a cloud of war guilt. Already as early as 1923 Adolf Hitler made a bid for power in the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich; although this attempt proved abortive, Hitler continued to gain power, and by 1933 he was able to seize complete control of the country. He abolished the Weimar Republic, set up the so called Third Reich, with himself as dictator, repudiated the Versailles Treaty which had ended WW I, carried out a campaign of racial purification, annexed Austria (1937), and part of Czechoslovakia (1938), and began WWII by attacking Poland in 1939. Germany was defeated again in 1945. The division of Germany into East and West, during the Cold War between the United States and Russia, consumed much of the German spirit for the remainder of the 20th century.

## Hugo von Hofmansthal

**The Life of Hugo von Hofmanstahl.** Hugo Von Hofmanstahl (1874-1929) was an Austrian novelist, librettist, poet, and dramatist, who came to believe strongly in the writer's need to be significantly absorbed in his society, and who accordingly was widely known in his home world of Vienna. His father was an Austrian-Italian banker, and his mother came from an old and distinguished Viennese family. His great grandfather was a Jewish merchant, prominent in Vienna, who was ennobled by the Austrian Emperor.

**Student and early creative life in Vienna.** At an early age Hofmansthal was active writing poems, and at 17 he made the acquaintance of Stefan George, and published poems in George's *Blaetter fuer die Kunst, Art Journal*. (Characteristically enough he refused George's invitation to membership in George's Kreis, anxious not to adopt a servant/master relationship to the great man.) Hofmanstahl studied Law and Philosophy at the University of Vienna, but on graduation, in 1901, he chose to take the direction of poetry—which his financial situation permitted. He settled into Viennese avant garde creative circles, joining the Young Vienna group, in which he enjoyed the partnership of the Viennese dramatist, Arthur Schnitzler.

**Hugo von Hofmanstahl, a literary life.** Hugo von Hofmanstahl met the composer Richard Strauss for the first time in 1901, and formed a working relationship with him, as the Romantic fabulist E.T.A. Hoffman had formed such a relationship with the great composers of his day. (Libretti for a number of superb opera dramas were generated by Hofmanstahl and Strauss: we note *Elektra*, perhaps the best and best known, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Ariadne on Naxos*. In 1912 Hofmanstahl adapted into German the 15th century English mystery play, *Everyman*—which is still performed annually at the Salzburg Festival. We can easily imagine that, during the years following WW I, Hofmanstahl was writing continuously, in several genres: but he was also taking his part in society, in the way, he thought, the poet should. During the War he supported a pro-Government position, and grew increasingly conservative and supportive of the Austro Hungarian Empire. His disappointment, at the outcome of the war, was predictably great, and the Weimar Republic little solace. Nonetheless, von Hofmanstahl continued with an intense regime of writing and directing. In 1920, with the director Max Reinhardt, von Hofmanstahl founded the Salzburg Festival of the arts, which flourishes to our day.

**Hugo von Hofmanstahl in later life.** Hugo von Hofmanstahl married in 1901, his Jewish wife having converted to Christianity, and von Hofmanstahl having grown deeper in his appreciation of Roman Catholicism as he advanced in his own imaginative work. Three children were born to the marriage; von Hofmanstahl's son Franz, committed suicide, and two days later von Hofmanstahl himself died of a stroke. He was buried in the habit of a Franciscan tertiary.

**The character of the work.** A couple of examples will suffice. In 1902 von Hofmanstahl published his fictive letter, 'Ein Brief,' 'A Letter,' purportedly written by the English nobleman Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon, in the 16th century. This fascinating letter allows von Hofmanstahl to elaborate his own ideas about the crisis of language, as a means to encountering the world, and the inherent loneliness of the person who tries to reach the world through language. The Bildungsroman *Andreas or the United* (1912) consists of two parts: the first, set on an Alpine farm, features Andreas mystically identifying with the extremes of good and evil; the second part, set in Venice, displays Andreas in love with a split personality woman whom he tries, it seems in vain, to reunite into one person through love. Von Hofmanstahl probes deeply into imagination and its psychological depths.

### Reading

#### *Primary source reading*

McClatchy, J.P., ed. *The Whole Difference: Selected Writings of Hugo von Hofmanstahl*, 2008.

#### *Secondary source reading*

Broch, Hermann; trans. Michael Pitnam, *Hugo von Hofmanstahl and his Time: The European Imagination, 1860-1920*, 1984.

#### *Further reading*

Schorske, Carol, *Fin-de-siecle Vienna. Politics and Culture*, 1980.

***Original language reading***

Mayer, Mathias, *Hugo von Hofmannstahl*, 1993.

**Suggested paper topics**

Look into the Chandos letter of Hoffmanstahl. Why is this discussion set centuries in the past, in England? What point is Hofmanstahl making here? Is the issue primarily the nature of human beings lost in the loneliness of their own private language?

*Read Andreas or The United*, and discuss Hofmanstahl's perceptions into serious mental illness. Does he show a technical understanding of the psychoanalysis which was a major trend in the Vienna of Hofmanstahl's time?

*Excerpt [www.poemhunter.com/hugo-von-hofmannsthal/](http://www.poemhunter.com/hugo-von-hofmannsthal/)*

The valley of dusk was filled  
With a silver-grey fragrance, like the moon  
Seeping through clouds. But it wasn't night.  
The silver-grey fragrance of the dark valley  
Caused my sleepy thoughts to blur,  
And silently I sank into the weaving,

Transparent sea and left my life.  
What wonderful flowers there were,  
With dark chalices glowing! A maze of plants  
Through which a yellow-red light,  
as if from topazes, glowed in warm streams. All  
Was filled with a deep swelling  
Of melancholy music. And this I knew,

Even though I could not fathom it, but I knew:  
This was death. Death turned music,  
With an immense longing, sweet and glowing darkly,  
Brother to deepest melancholy.  
And yet:  
A nameless homesickness for life kept crying  
Mutely in my soul, crying as someone

On board a big ocean vessel would cry, a ship, driven  
By gigantic yellow sails, passing by the city,  
His city, at night in dark-blue water. There he sees  
The lanes, hears the rushing of the fountains, smells  
The scent of the lilac bushes, sees himself,  
A child, standing on the shore, with a child's eyes,  
Fearful, with tears welling up, sees

Through the open window the light in his room  
But the big ship carries him along,  
Gliding away on dark-blue water soundlessly,  
Driven by gigantic yellow sails of strange shape

## Kafka

**The Achievement of Franz Kafka.** Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was a writer in German—of short stories, novels, and aphorisms; a body of largely incomplete work which has nonetheless made Kafka one of the determinant literary forces of the twentieth century.

**The Life of Franz Kafka: Jewishness and Education.** Franz Kafka was born into a middle class German speaking Ashkenazi Jewish family living near the Town Square in Prague, in the later years of the Austro Hungarian Empire. Prague was a city in which both Czech and German were spoken, and which, during the course of Kafka's lifetime, was to see a rivalry verging on hostility develop between the two racial groups. (Kafka was later to dismiss the claim that his work was marked by its Jewish tone, and yet the lifetime evidence is that the sensitive Kafka strongly felt the Jewish predicament he found himself in.) Kafka's father was a ritual slaughterer, who later became a fancy goods retailer and traveling salesman rep. His mother was better educated than his Father, and easier for Kafka to understand and love than his Father, with whom Franz had a lifetime struggle toward an understanding which never materialized. (In his later Letters to His Father he described this parental disharmony as a major life-blockage.) Kafka himself was sent to the local boys' elementary school (1889-1893), then, for the usual eight years, to the State Gymnasium in Prague, a home to strict Latin and Greek educational practices. Kafka entered Charles University in 1901, majoring in Chemistry, but soon changing to Law, with which he was to complete his degree. While at Charles University, Kafka met Max Brod, with whom he formed a firm and creative relationship which was to be seminal for both men. (Brod would later be the biographer of Kafka, and the editor of his literary estate.) Together they read Plato (in Greek) and Flaubert together, and shared ideas, on aesthetics, which would buoy up their fellow Prague aesthetes in the years following graduation (1906). The life and work of Franz Kafka after graduation become increasingly bifurcated: fairly successful employee of two different insurance companies, at one point President of a new asphalt company, Kafka frets and will continue to fret at the only limited time he has for his work.

**The work of Franz Kafka.** The hypersensitive Kafka lived to see a brutal war (World War I) and its aftermath, the increasing bourgeoisification of European society, and formative stages of a uniquely barbaric political movement, National Socialism in Germany. (And fortunately not the Third Reich, in which three of his sisters were gassed.) Like many in his time, Kafka grew increasingly aware of the inhumanity of the 'new society' forming around him; a wasteland of bureaucracy, of faceless decisions, of abject middle-class values, and, of course, of undercurrents of menacing revenge for the wartime humiliation of his homeland. Better than any critic, however, Kafka knew how to describe the crisis of his time, in novels or short stories catching the human in the midst of bureaucratic labyrinths, and meaningless adventures.

**Kafka's Work.** *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926), two of these novels, skewer the individual against the mysterious and threatening power of society. It is easy to see the spiritual kinship among George, Rilke, and Kafka, as they confront a world which to them seemed dangerously confused, but which to us is beginning to seem unremarkably familiar. But the turn Kafka gives, to these shadowy tales of individuals lost in the non meaning of contemporary life—that is of life one hundred years less far, than we are today, into the ravages of alienation, family disintegration, impersonality, and occasional, mysterious transformation—is more directly spooky than the lamentational or aristocratic twists given by Rilke or George, as they call out against the monstrously new. Kafka places shadowy figurae in a shadowy world, and becomes their lostness with them.

## Reading

### *Primary source reading*

Kafka, Franz, *The Trial*, 2009.

### *Secondary source reading*

Murray, Nicholas, *Kafka*, 2004.

Corngold, Stanley; Wagner, Benno, *Franz Kafka; The Ghosts in the Machine*, 2011.

### *Original language reading*

Alt, Peter-Andre, *Franz Kafka: der ewige Sohn. Eine biographie*. 2011.

*EXCERPT en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Franz\_Kafka*

“Many a book is like a key to unknown chambers within the castle of one’s own self.”

“Don't bend; don't water it down; don't try to make it logical; don't edit your own soul according to the fashion. Rather, follow your most intense obsessions mercilessly.”

“A First Sign of the Beginning of Understanding is the Wish to Die.”

“I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for? So that it will make us happy, as you write? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That is my belief.”

“All language is but a poor translation.”

“The meaning of life is that it stops.”



## Hesse

**Herman Hesse's Life.** Herman Hesse (1877-1962) was a German novelist, poet, and short story writer, who won the Nobel Prize in 1942, for the novel *The Glass Bead Game*. Hesse was born in Calw, in the Black Forest in the State of Wuerttemberg, of parents who were missionaries of the Basel Mission, at one time in India. Hesse's mother was born on mission. Her husband, a doctor, hailed from Estonia, but the parents settled in Calw, when the father, who was severe and religiously powerful, settled the family into a new job. (Hesse himself was never comfortable with the small town culture he then found himself raised on, and from the start, with the help of a highly cultivated polylingual grandfather, considered himself a citizen of the world.) As Dad took on a job with a theological publishing company the Pietist atmosphere in young Hesse's family grew even more marked. Accordingly young Hesse grew up yielding to his powerful stubbornness—his Mother wondered what force could subdue him—and at times seriously depressed. By the age of twelve, Hesse had firmly decided to be a writer.

**Hesse's Education.** Hesse's formal education began at the Latin School of Goeppingen, in Switzerland, was then continued to the gymnasium level at the Theological Seminary of Maulbronn Abbey. Not a model student, Hesse took to drinking and smoking with older boys, not to mention a serious episode—a suicide attempt—to prove how deeply disorganized he was in that educational environment. After matriculation he took on a number of bookstore jobs, finally discovering a position in Tuebingen at which, after a twelve hour day as salesman, he was left free to read at his leisure—and did so, voraciously, in the German classics and Nietzsche, whose notions of good and evil, and transcendence of them, were compelling to Hesse.

**Hesse's Work.** Hesse had decided, from age 12, to devote himself to writing, and of course did fill his teen age years with essays and stories. But his first major public success came with *Peter Camenzind* (1904), a book Freud considered one of his favorite texts. In 1911 Hesse traveled to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, a trip on which he would build impressions and insights later to gel into the novel *Siddartha* (1922), a tribute to aesthetic withdrawal, and transcendence, which many found facile and unrealistically 'poetic,' at the time. (Interestingly enough, the American sixties, with their hippie stress on Peace and Love, brought back Hesse's novel as a cult commodity.) Like most sensitive Germans, Hesse was appalled at the sufferings and cruelties of WW I, but unlike most he tried to remain 'European,' rather than nationalist, throughout the conflict; though later he confessed that he had failed in his effort to use love against war. After the war, with return to civilian life, and to a second shattered marriage, Hesse readdressed himself to the realities of his world, and created his most powerful novel, *Steppenwolf* (1927). *The Wolf from the Steppe* is in fact a study of the profound split in the mind of Harry Haller, a disoriented post WW I middle class German, who both adores German comfort, classical values, the world of finance, and, on the other hand, reveals himself as exposed—a steppe wolf—to the vicious and uncivilized in mankind, and to the New Americanized World of jazz, danger, wild dreams and self-discoveries, and, foreseen but foresworn by the protagonist, the onset of a world catastrophic clash of forces. *The Glass Bead Game* (1944) projects into an ideally pure elite company of aesthetes, who have found a (temporary) solution to chaos, in the perfection of a game which is pure pattern.

### Reading

#### *Primary source reading*

Hesse, Herman, *Siddartha*, 1981. (There are many updates of this translation; take your pick.)

#### *Secondary source reading*

Freedman, Ralph, *Herman Hesse: Pilgrim of Crisis. A Biography*, 1978. (The classic study of Hesse.)

#### *Further reading*

Mileck, Joseph, *Herman Hesse: Biography and Bibliography*, 1977.

#### *Original language reading*

Zeller, Bernhard, *Herman Hesse*, 2005.

### **Suggested paper topics**

From *Siddhartha*, with its sympathy for peace and withdrawal to the darker jungles of urban imagination, in *Steppenwolf*, is a long journey. Was the Hesse of *Steppenwolf* still the same peace seeking sensibility we saw in *Siddhartha*?

What was Hesse's experience of trying to bring love to the understanding and resolution of the conflict in WW1? Was Hesse discouraged by this experience? Did the experience change the direction of his thinking?

**Excerpt** [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1113469.Hermann\\_Hesse](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1113469.Hermann_Hesse)

“For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great, solitary men, like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfil themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves. Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful, strong tree. When a tree is cut down and reveals its naked death-wound to the sun, one can read its whole history in the luminous, inscribed disk of its trunk: in the rings of its years, its scars, all the struggle, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the happiness and prosperity stand truly written, the narrow years and the luxurious years, the attacks withstood, the storms endured. And every young farmboy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow.

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

A tree says: A kernel is hidden in me, a spark, a thought, I am life from eternal life. The attempt and the risk that the eternal mother took with me is unique, unique the form and veins of my skin, unique the smallest play of leaves in my branches and the smallest scar on my bark. I was made to form and reveal the eternal in my smallest special detail.

## Mann

**The Importance of Thomas Mann.** Thomas Mann (1875-1955) was a German novelist, critic, short story writer, philanthropist, and towering figure of mature perspective during the catastrophic and chaotic years of the Third Reich. Mann won the Nobel Prize in 1929, for his novel *Buddenbrooks*, which was published in 1901. His elder brother, Heinrich, was also a prominent and influential fiction writer.

**Life of Thomas Mann.** Mann was born in Luebeck, Germany, into an old Hanseatic business family. He was the second son of Thomas Mann, a senator and prosperous grain merchant, and of a Brazilian-German mother, who had been brought to Germany as a child. The young Thomas Mann was baptized as a Lutheran, and moved to Munich, where his first education was in the science departments of the Munich gymnasium. After matriculation he enrolled at the University of Munich, and then at the Technical University of Munich, where it was his intention to study Journalism. During these years, as we know from Mann's Diaries, which were opened after his death, he became aware of his homosexuality—which was to play a keen role in some of his short fiction—and fought hard to come to terms with his bisexual nature. None the less he fell in love with the woman of his life, with whom he was to have six children, three of them consequential writers. He grew in his writing—perhaps his most ambitious novel, *Buddenbrooks*, was published in 1901—and in his public presence, early on as a friend to the German nation, and to the Weimar Republic, then in the increasingly explosive twenties as an ardent foe of the National Socialist Movement, and finally, in 1933, as an exile to Switzerland. (Mann's children had warned him, just in time, that it was too dangerous to return to Germany after a European trip. In 1939, as the European landscape grew desperate, and many German intellectuals were going into exile, Thomas Mann and his family left Europe for the United States. He spent the war years in California, then returned to Switzerland in 1962.

**The Work of Thomas Mann.** Mann's work spans a vast period of tumultuous personal and political turmoil, and generates themes of widely varying character. One thinks first of *Buddenbrooks* (1901), then of the short story 'Death in Venice' (1912), *The Magic Mountain* (1924), *Joseph and his Brothers* (1933J-43), and *Dr. Faustus* (1947). In the aggregate these works constitute the most mature analysis available to us, of the double nature of German society, at best brilliant and creative, at worst demonic, hate filled, and disastrous. *Dr. Faustus* puts this complex package in a powerful way, through the character of one Adrian Leverkuehn, a composer. Typically German, as Mann puts it, Leverkuen is given to exhilarating and frightening regions of experience, like Nietzsche, and accordingly makes a pact with the Devil, promising not to love anyone in return for the understanding of how to use the absolutely pure and anti humanist twelve tone scale. Leverkuehn's biography is recounted by his friend, a decent man and schoolmaster, who is a realist, around whom—his narration starts in 1943—the world is starting to fall apart, German cities bombed out of existence. Mann's overall comment on the powers and perils of the German personality are intense and vivid.

**Mann's grand reach.** Mann, writing at the height of his powers from exile, struggles to defend the German enterprise, hearkening back to the Humanist tradition in his nation, a tradition which political madness and virulent hatred had rendered nearly a dead letter.

### Reading

#### *Primary source reading*

Mann, Thomas, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. Woods, 1996.

#### *Secondary source reading*

Kurzke, Hermann, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art: A Biography*, trans. Leslie Wilson, 2007.

#### *Further reading*

Reed, T.J., *Thomas Mann: the uses of tradition*, 1974.

#### *Original language reading*

Boehm, Karl Werner, *Zwischen Selbstzucht und Verlangen: Thomas Mann und das Stigma Homosexualitet*, 1991.

### Suggested paper topics

Thomas Mann was tortured, it seems by his homosexuality. (He was in fact a married father of six.) How does he handle this personal tension in his writing? Is his tension the source of 'good writing'?

What layers of German historical experience are embedded in Mann's *Doktor Faustus*? Why is so much emphasis placed on 12 tone music? Are you convinced by the artistic technique of combining story narration with panning shots of the actual destruction of German cities by bombing?

*Excerpt* [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Mann](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas_Mann)

- I think of my suffering, of the problem of my suffering. What am I suffering from? From knowledge — is it going to destroy me? What am I suffering from? From sexuality — is it going to destroy me? How I hate it, this knowledge which forces even art to join it! How I hate it, this sensuality, which claims everything fine and good is its consequence and effect. Alas, it is the poison that lurks in everything fine and good! — How am I to free myself of knowledge? By religion? How am I to free myself of sexuality? By eating rice?
- Here and there, among a thousand other peddlers, are slyly hissing dealers who urge you to come along with them to allegedly "very beautiful" girls, and not only to girls. They keep at it, walk alongside, praising their wares until you answer roughly. They don't know that you have resolved to eat nothing but rice just to escape from sexuality!
- We are most likely to get angry and excited in our opposition to some idea when we ourselves are not quite certain of our own position, and are inwardly tempted to take the other side.
- It is as though something had begun to slip — as though I haven't the firm grip I had on events. — What is success? It is an inner, an indescribable force, resourcefulness, power of vision; a consciousness that I am, by my mere existence, exerting pressure on the movement of life about me. It is my belief in the adaptability of life to my own ends. Fortune and success lie within ourselves. We must hold them firmly — deep within us. For as soon as something begins to slip, to relax, to get tired, within us, then everything without us will rebel and struggle to withdraw from our influence. One thing follows another, blow after blow — and the man is finished.