**Historical Background.** The political and military history of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century is so well known that only the briefest outline will suffice. Under Kaiser Wilhelm II Germany began World War 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; hereconomy was severely damaged, the government was highly unstable, and the people were under a cloud of war guilt. As early as 1923 Adolf Hitler made a bid for power in the famous “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 World War I, carried out a campaign of racial purification (pro-Aryan, anti-Semitic), annexed Austria (1937) and part of Czechoslovakia (1938), and began World War II by attacking Poland in 1939. Germany was defeated again in 1945. Since then the eastern portion (proclaimed the German Democratic Republic, 1949) has remained under Russian influence; and the western section (proclaimed the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949) has been under French, British, and American supervision.

**General View of the Literature.** As in the nineteenth century, so in the twentieth: German literature has followed the same trends as French literature. The extreme forms of naturalism have pretty well disappeared, but realism has continued to exist side by side with neoromanticism.

World War I inspired some patriotic poetry and some realistic plays and novels. Most of this literature was ephemeral though historically interesting.

Hitler’s totalitarian regime virtually put an end to all genuine aesthetic and philosophical activity in Germany. Many scientists, authors, and philosophers found refuge in other parts of the world. Franz Werfel, Erich Remarque (or Krämer), Thomas Mann, and Albert Einstein are among the most eminent of those who escaped to America, where they continued their intellectual endeavors.

The lyric, the drama, and the novel have been the most significant literary types since 1900.
POETRY

In the early years of the century there was a great revival of lyricism. The pendulum swung away from naturalism and materialistic impressionism and toward Symbolism and the sentimental form of romanticism known as “Expressionism.” After the First World War the lyric became soberer, deeper, and more spiritual. The principal lyricists of the century are Dehmel, George, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, and Werfel (all discussed below).

Richard Dehmel (1863-1920). A disciple of Nietzsche. His poetry is a combination of the realistic and the romantic, the mystical and the rational. It “seethes with the confused and unsettled ethical ideals of its time; it is often crass and sensual, even morbid and cruel.”1 His three favorite themes are sex, the “relationship of the individual to cosmic life, and man’s duty to his fellow.”2 His principal volumes of verse are But Love (Aber die Liebe, 1893), Woman and World (Weib und Welt, 1896), and Two Human Beings (Zwei Menschen, 1903). Some of his best single lyrics are “The Silent City” (“Der stille Stadt”), “Many a Night” (“Manche Nacht”), and “The Goldfinch” (“Der Stieglitz”).

Stefan George (1868-1933). George was the antithesis of Dehmel and led a reaction against the chaos and effusiveness of Dehmel’s poetry. “An aristocrat of the spirit,”3 George was bitterly opposed to realism and naturalism. His poetry is cool, restrained, esoteric, aloof, and neoclassic. Directed at a small but select circle, it comes near achieving the Symbolistic aim of expressing the inexpressible. He preaches the gospel of “ethical idealism, . . . beauty, absolute truth, light, and clarity.”4 George published his lyrics in a number of small volumes; some of the most significant are Hymns (Hymnen, 1890), The Calendar of the Soul (Das Jahr der Seele, 1897), Tapestry of Life (Teppich des Lebens, 1899), The Seventh Ring (Der siebente Ring, 1907), and The Star of the League (Der Stern des Bundes, 1914). Several of his short poems are “Leo XIII,” “Day-Song” (“Tag-Gesang”), “The Monastery” (“Das Kloster”), and “Ripening” (“Reifefreuden”).

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929). An Austrian, Hofmannsthal was one of the leaders in the German Symbolic movement. Though indebted to the works of Stefan George, his poems are warmer and more readily understandable. He is perhaps more famous as a librettist for Richard Strauss; he wrote the words for Salome (1905), The Cavalier of the Rose (Der Rosenkavalier, 1911); and Ariadne on Naxos (Ariadne auf Naxos, 1911). He wrote some other original dramas: The Fool and Death (Der Tor und der Tod, 1893) and The Marriage of Sobeide (Die Hochzeit der Sobeide, 1899). Finally, he adapted some old plays: Sophocles’ Electra (Elektra, 1903), Otway’s Venice Preserved (Das gerettete Venedig, 1905), and the morality Everyman (Das Spiel von Jedermann, 1912).

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). Rilke was born in Prague. A disciple of Stefan George, Baudelaire, and the Russian novelists, Rilke combined Symbolism with a deep emotionalism. He was far more concerned than George was with humble people and spiritual matters. “His poetry, it has been well said, is a seeking after God. . . .”5 Many of his poems are mystical. His main collections of lyrics are The Book of Pictures (Das Buck der Bilder, 1902), The Book of Hours (Das Stundenbuch, 1905), and New Poems (Neue Gedichte, 1907, 1919). Some of his best-known pieces are “The Angels” (“Die Engel”), “The Solitary” (“Der Einsame”), “Lament” (“Klage”), and “Autumn Day” (“Herbsttag”).

3 Robertson, p. 622. George Madison Priest, A Brief History of German Literature (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), p. 327, says that George “had an aristocratic aversion to real life. . . .”
4 Weatherly and Others, II, 641.
5 Priest’s translation, p. 327.
6 Robertson, p. 623.
Drama

REALISM OR NATURALISM. Although Symbolism and Expressionism were becoming more and more the vogue in the early years of the twentieth century, Sudermann, Hauptmann, and some others who had written dramas prior to 1900 continued to turn out plays of varying degrees of realism or naturalism. Most significant of these other authors who have not previously been discussed are Schnitzler and Wedekind.

Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931). An Austrian who used Vienna as a setting, he wrote many plays and short stories depicting the decadence of the early part of the century. His dramas have relatively little action but are noted for their clever dialogue. Lange says that these dramas are “symptomatic of a listless age.”1 Some of the best known are Flirtation (Liebelei, 1895), The Legacy (Das Vermächtnis, 1898), The Green Cockatoo (Der Grüne Kakadu, 1899), The Veil of Beatrice (Der Schleier der Beatrice, 1900), Young Medardus (Der junge Medardus, 1910), and Professor Bernhardi (1912).

Frank Wedekind (1864-1918). Wedekind’s plays combined realism with the grotesque and the bizarre. Although some critics find his works indecent to the point of being repellent, at least one has praised him for his courage in depicting “the boldest and the most fascinating world of demoniacally dislocated bourgeois characters.”2 Wedekind’s dramas are expressive of the despair, cynicism, and skepticism prevalent among many of the literary figures of the early 1900’s. His Springtime Awakening (Frühlings Erwachen, 1891) is an unusual treatment of the problems of the adolescent. The Earth-Spirit (Der Erdgeist, 1895), Pandora’s Box (Die Büchse der Pandora, 1903), Hidalla (1904), and The Grisly Suitor (Der greise Freier, 1905) all are “decadent” and grotesque plays about sinners and criminals. Some later and more palatable dramas are Music (Musik, 1907) and Francisca (Franziska, 1911).

EXPRESSIONISM. The Expressionistic movement was especially strong in the drama during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Although the movement was not thoroughly unified and although certain factions within it disagreed on some matters, virtually all emphasized the need for more emotionalism, for social and spiritual reform, and for more faith in God and immortality. There were two especially important factions. The first, led by GEORG KAISER (1878-1945), KURT HILLER (1885- ), JOHANNES ROBERT BECHER (1891-1958), and ERNST TOLLER (1893-1939), was the so-called Activist branch; this group tempered its emotionalism with rationalism and was especially concerned with political and social reform. Another faction, led by FRANZ KAFKA (1883-1924), FRITZ VON UNRUH (1885- ), PAUL KORNFIELD (1889-1947), FRANZ WERFEL* (1890-1945), and REINHARD JOHANNES SORGE (1892-1916), was particularly interested in the relations between man and God—in “the liberation of the soul [rather] than in the reforms of society.”3 This group is less rationalistic than the first one.

The method of the Expressionists was to express the author’s inner life — dreams, hopes, fears, and the like — by means of external, unrelated objects. “The essence of [Expressionistic] drama . . . consists in the depicting of sorrow and suffering rather than in action; but this suffering implies an ethical victory over apparent worldly successes. The typical Expressionistic drama ends with the discovery of positive values in life even if the hero succumbs.”4 And it holds out bright hope for the future.

Georg Kaiser (1878-1945). His early plays are satiric comedies, such as The Jewish Widow (Die jüdische Witwe, 1911) and King Mark (König Hahnre, 1913). The Citizens of Calais (Die Bürger von Calais, 1914) is not only Kaiser’s first Expressionistic drama but also one of the opening guns of the Expressionistic movement. It is the story of Eustache de Saint-Pierre, who commits suicide in order to prevent any one of a group of six other citizens from having to decide whether to offer himself to the King of England for execution. Thus, in keeping with Expressionistic ideals, the hero wins a moral victory although he meets death. Gas, Part I (1918) is the account of a rich man’s son who, after an explosion of his father’s gas works, wants to close the plant and provide farmland for
the workers so that they will be safe and happy. A capitalist group succeeds in persuading the workers that such a change will be disadvantageous, and so in order to prevent a riot and possible bloodshed, the son gives up his altruistic dream — but only for the present, for his daughter promises to make the dream come true in the future.

Other Expressionistic plays of importance by Kaiser are From Morning till Midnight (VomMorgens bis Mitternachts, 1916), The Centaur (Der Zentaur, 1916), The Coral (DieKoralle,1917), and Colportage (Kolportage, 1924).

Ernst Toller (1893-1939). Like Kaiser, Toller assails the ills of contemporary civilization and suggests solutions — solutions which he cannot effect but which he envisions for the future. The Transformation(Die Wandlung,1919) is about a young sculptor, turned soldier, who is at first proud of his part in World War I but whose pride turns to revulsion when he becomes aware that ten thousand men have been killed in a battle. He breaks up his statue "Victory of the Fatherland," is filled with love for humanity, becomes a politician, and leads a crusade against materialism. The play is unique in its alternation of realistic scenes with fantastic or visionary ones. The Machine-Breakers(DieMachinestürmer,1922) suggests a different solution of industrial problems from that offered by Kaiser in Gas. Toller holds that the answer is not the destruction of machines or gas plants but the reforming of the society that mans them.

2 Lange, p. 70.
4 Samuel and Thomas, p. 39.
The same trends that we have noticed in the twentieth-century drama are discernible in the novel, too. Realism, naturalism, neoromanticism, and Expressionism are all present. Before World War I most of the significant novels were concerned with diagnosing social and political ills. They exposed the falsity of many of the nineteenth-century values and warned of the impending collapse of the bourgeois culture. Between 1914 and 1939 the novelists were seeking some meaning for the individual and for the nation in a world which had lost its meaning. The hopes, attitudes, and objectives of the Expressionists were recognized to be of paramount importance. Virtually every novelist who wrote between the two great wars was to some degree an Expressionist. In addition to the three major novelists of the century — Wassermann, Thomas Mann, and Werfel — there were numerous good novelists of lesser magnitude.

Ricarda Huch (1864-1947). She wrote a historical trilogy on the Thirty Years' War, *The Great War in Germany* (*Der grosse Krieg in Deutschland*, 1912-1914).

Hermann Stehr (1864-1940). By turns a naturalist, a neoromanticist, an Expressionist, and a surrealist. In his later and more important novels he dropped the deterministic attitude of the naturalists and became an adherent of the Expressionistic "belief in the absolute and creative power of the human resolve." Some of his best-known works are *Three Nights* (*Drei Nachte*, 1909), *Peter Brindeisener* (1924), *Nathaniel Maechler* (1929), and *The Descendants* (*Die Nachkommen*, 1933).

Heinrich Mann (1871-1950). This elder brother of Thomas Mann wrote satirical novels, exposing and attacking Germany's ills before 1914. In *The Land of Cockayne* (*Im Schlaraffenland*, 1900) he criticizes bourgeois life for its sensuality and superficiality. Professor Rubbish (*Professor Unrat*, 1905) employs caricature in the style of Wedekind. *The Subject* (*Der Untertan*, 1917) is an attack on Germany's spirit prior to World War I. *The Head* (*Der Kopf*, 1925) is a satirical study of the Wilhelminian era. And finally, two late works, *The Youth of King Henry IV* (*Die Jugend des Königs Henri Quatre*, 1935) and *The Completion of King Henry IV* (*Die Vollendung des Königs Henri Quatre*, 1938) are biographical novels with didactic implications.

Hans Grimm (1875—1959). This novelist is most famous for *Folk without Room* (*Volkohne Raum*, 1926), a semihistorical novel about adventures of some Germans in south-west Africa; it is perhaps too serious a book, but it has some excellent human characterization. Grimm is well known for his Novellen, too: *South African Tales* (*Südafrika-nische Novellen*, 1913), *Passage through Sand* (*Der Gang durch den Sand*, 1916), and *The Judge in the Karu* (*Der Richter in der Karu*, 1930).

Hermann Hesse (1877— ). Before the end of the First World War this poet and novelist wrote "a series of subdued and musical novels of private, provincial, and melancholy lyricism:"

Peter Camenzind (1904), *Gertrud* (1910), and *Demian* (1919). After the war his thinking became deeper and more serious. *The Wolf of the Steppes* (*Der Steppen Wolf*, 1927) is a rather shocking portrait of a generation torn between lawlessness and bourgeois timidity. His two last novels suggest as the solution to world problems the Expressionistic ideals of self-sacrificial devotion; these novels are *Narcissus and Goldmund* (*Narziss und Goldmund*, 1930) and *Glass Bead Play* (*Glasperlenspiel*, 1943).


noveis (all unfinished) appeared earlier. The Lawsuit (Der Prozess, 1925), The Castle (Das Schloss, 1926), and America (Amerika, 1927) form, according to Brod, "a trilogy of loneliness." And, according to Lange, "Like every other work of Kafka's, they reflect, in a seriously religious sense, the experience of human isolation and the pathos of exclusion. Man, forever aware of 'guilt,' is compelled to face the 'trial' of life in a universe whose pattern and coherence are fundamentally uncertain and incomprensible." Kafka's main beliefs are that man can never understand God's purposes but that he is obligated to seek with all his might those purposes insofar as they pertain to man's actions here on earth, and man must submit and obey. Kafka's works give an excellent picture of Europe and especially Germany during the decades immediately preceding and following the First World War. His style is characterized by an extensive use of religious symbolism; compactness; intensity; minute analysis of religious and philosophical problems; and numerous grotesque, fantastic, nightmarish scenes which may be termed surrealist — scenes which Lange thinks resemble those of Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, Poe, and Dickens.

Ernst Wiechert (1887-1950). This novelist belongs to a group of writers who, disillusioned by Germany's defeat in 1918, launched a "back-to-nature" movement; by "returning to nature" this group meant a rather stoical acceptance of life and its obligations. Like so many other novelists of the period, Wiechert and his associates attacked what they considered to be the falsities of the prewar bourgeois civilization. Wiechert's best-known novel is The Baroness (Die Marjorin, 1934).

Erich Maria Remarque (or Krämer, 1897-1970). He wrote several novels on World War I and the subsequent period of depression in Germany. The best known are All Quiet on the Western Front (Im Westen nichts Neues, 1929) and The Road Back (Der Weg zurück, 1931).

JAKOB WASSERMANN (1873-1934). One of the earliest Expressionists, Wassermann used the psychoanalytic method to explore human emotions and the human soul. His principal thesis is "man's individual responsibility for the whole of mankind." In The Jews of Zirndorff (Die Juden von Zirndorff, 1897) he treats the still-current problem of the hardships of the Jewish people scattered throughout Protestant lands. Caspar Hauser (1908) is a novel about a sensitive foundling whose soul is made greater by a series of sufferings which it endures. Two later novels are Christian Wahnschaffe (1919) and The Maurizius Case (Der Fall Maurizius, 1928).

There is much scholarly disagreement about Wassermann's merits as a novelist. Lange calls his works "minor fiction" and says that he "has not achieved a single novel of major importance." This same critic believes that Wassermann's style is "flamboyant" and "mannered" and that the novels are superficial and artificial. Robertson concurs and doubts "whether any of his work has more than a transient value." W. R. Benet, however, thinks that Wassermann's work has "depth of feeling and insight into the human soul." And W. P. Friederich considers Wassermann one of the three major German novelists of this century (the other two being Werfel and Thomas Mann).

THOMAS MANN (1875-1955). Mann was born in Lübeck. When he was fifteen, his father died, and three years later the family moved to Munich. Thomas worked for a while as a clerk in an insurance office, but, upon the publication of two stories, devoted his time to writing. His first important literary work was Buddenbrooks (1901), which went through fifty printings in ten years and won him an international fame. In 1933 the Nazis condemned his books, and Mann took up his abode in Switzerland. Later he had six children, and his brother Heinrich came to the United States.

Influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Freud, Mann is interested in the psychological and philosophical problems arising out of the individual's relations with twentieth-century society, which he regards as decadent. He is especially concerned with the role of aesthetics in the modern world.
Mann is a very careful literary artist, taking almost infinite pains with each narrative. His "style is always highly artistic and has much in common with musical composition. We find recurrent leitmotifs, contrapuntal devices, striking antitheses, lyrico-philosophic intermezzi, and similar artistic features. . . . His works may aptly be styled symphonies in words." Some critics have thought him occasionally verbose and guilty of irrelevancies.

**BUDDENBROOKS** (1901). Based partially on the history of Mann’s ancestors, Buddenbrooks is a long novel about the decline of a prosperous family of German merchants during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the financial fortunes of the Buddenbrooks deteriorate, the members of the family become increasingly interested in art, learning, and music. Hanno Buddenbrook, the last of the clan, is a sickly youth, whose effete aestheticism is symbolic of the material decay of the family.

**TONIO KRÖGER** (1903). A novelette about an artist’s inner conflict. "No problem," says Tonio, "none in the world, is more tormenting than that of artistry and its effect on humanity." Tonio feels a great gulf to exist between himself and the general run of people because he is a writer, but he is also aware of a gulf between himself and the pure artists who seek beauty alone because he has a deep love for plain, happy, active people. His inner conflict is resolved when he realizes that the poet’s duty is to seek out antransmit to others not abstract beauty but the beauty and happiness of everydaylife. **Tonio Kröger** contains many long philosophical speeches, but some critics consider it Mann’s masterpiece because it is comparatively concise.

**THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN** (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924). A long symbolic novel. Hans Castorp visits his cousin at a tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps (representing the realm of pure aestheticism). Feeling that he himself may be infected, Hans remains several weeks, during which time he has many deep philosophical discussions with Settembrini (representing humanism and liberalism), Peeperkorn (representing animal sensuality), and others. Hans breaks away from the spell of the mountain to become a soldier in World War I. Somewhat like Tonio Kröger, he finally learns to maintain “a balance between the aesthetic and the practical tendencies of his nature.” The Magic Mountain is by far Mann’s most famous novel and, according to many critics, his best.

**OTHER WORKS.** Other important works by Mann are **Mario and the Magician** (*Mario und der Zauberer*, 1930), an allegorical novelette on the effects of Fascism in Italy; **Joseph** (1933—1943), a four-part novel in which the titular character “represents the artist who redeems society by his own vicarious suffering”;; and **The Beloved Returns** (English title for **Lotte in Weimar**, 1940), still another philosophical novel concerning the role of the artist; it tells of an imaginary visit with Goethe in his old age.

Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929. He is considered the greatest living German author and, along with Proust and Joyce, one of the greatest novelists of this century.

**FRANZ WERFEL** (1890-1945). Poet, dramatist, and novelist. He was born in Prague of Jewish parents. Like so many other writers and thinkers, he escaped Nazidom by fleeing first to France and thence to America.

Like Rilke and Wasserman, he was firmly convinced of the importance of spiritual values, and he had a mystical belief in the brotherhood of man and in the existence of some power immanent in all the world. Soon after World War I he assailed the attitudes which had led to the war and proclaimed universal brotherhood as the only condition which would save mankind.

**POEMS.** Like the poetry of Dehmel, Werfel’s lyrics are largely concerned with the relation between the individual ego and the outside world. His most important volumes of verse are **The Friend of the World** (*Der Weltfreund*, 1911), **We Are** (*Wir sind*, 1913), **One Another** (*Einander*, 1915), and **The Day of Reckoning** (*Der Gerichtstag*, 1919).
NOVELS. It is as a novelist that Werfel has won his largest group of readers. The Forty Days of Musa Dagh (Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh, 1934) is a best seller concerning an Armenian siege of the First World War. The Song of Bernadette (Das Lied von Bernadette, 1942) was also highly successful and was made into a moving picture. It is the life of a French saint in whose church Werfel is said to have taken refuge during the invasion of France in 1940. Star of the Unborn (Stern der Ungeborenen, 1945) is an imaginative narrative of the distant future when world brotherhood will really exist and when Judaism and Roman Catholicism will be the only two religions.

Lange says that in the novels of Werfel (and some others) "the real purpose of the expressionistic attitude becomes clear: it is a radical attempt to maintain the force and validity of metaphysical aspirations in a fundamentally antispirtual world, the debilitated forms of which require re-examination." 14

PLAYS. Almost equally important are Werfel’s plays. In them he voices, of course, the same Expressionistic ideas that are found in his lyrics and novels. In the foreword to his Trojan Women (Die Troerinnen, 1915) — an adaptation of Euripides’ play of the same name, Werfel sums up the “inner purpose of tragedy” in answer to the question why Hecuba must die: “The poet does not give Man the right to die. The DUTY of Man is to live. For Man’s life is a duty. Duty means resistance to the inhuman world, to Nature, belief in the intermediary role of mankind, which exists in order to give meaning to the world.” 15 The Mirror-Man (Der Spiegelmensch, 1920) is a drama which presents once more the “Faust-problem of the two souls within our breast.” 16 In the drama the Mirror-Man’s soul leaves his body, goes through various experiences which purify and strengthen it, and then returns to the body. Juarez und Maximilian (1924) is a historical tragedy; Paul among the Jews (Paulus unter den Juden, 1926) reasserts Werfel’s fervent belief in the importance and the obligation of the individual and also in the existence of a spiritual God.

1 Lange, p. 120.
2 Lange, p. 100.
3 Pp. 88-89.
4 Literally, “Nothing New in the West.”
5 Lange, p. 73.
6 Pp. 73 and 74.
7 P. 637.
9 Comment made to the author of this outline.
10 Weatherly and Others, II, 646.
11 Bayard Q. Morgan’s translation, quoted by Weatherly and Others, II, 658.
12 Benet, III, 673.
13 Benet, II, 567.
14 P. 86
15 Quoted by Samuel and Thomas, pp. 38-39.
16 Robertson, p. 635.

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