



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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German Language and Literature

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INTRODUCTION

German language is a prominent European language which is spoken mainly in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and a few other parts of Europe. German, the national language of the nation Germany; translates to '*Deutsch*' and the country: '*Deutschland*' in German. As any language is vital in analysing people's characterisation, description and understanding of the world, the study of evolution of the German language makes us able to deduce how the people who had been speaking this language saw the nature, religion, ideas of God, social, political and personal interconnections and ultimately, the world. But as a language's history can be traced only through its literary works, we will be looking at the evolution of German language by analysing its literary works and delving into the way in which its prominent literary figures perceived the world.

EVOLUTION OF GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The evolution of any language is interwoven with contemporary socio-political and cultural changes and hence it is incredibly complex. To understand the evolution of German language, one has to trace the journey of today's German language from its oldest extant forms. The German language unfortunately shares the fate of German History and Politics that it is fragmented and discontinued over an era of thousands of years. However, literature of any language is said to be established long before its first extant works were written in the form of manuscripts. Therefore, we will be studying the evolution of German language by analysing its literary works, from first extant manuscripts; dating back to the eighth century to works of contemporary German literary figures.

PROTO GERMANIC LANGUAGE

Though the late fragment of manuscript of German language dates to eighth century, the Germans had been producing abundant poetry many centuries prior to this period. This poetry was only sung; and not written. It was produced in 'Proto Germanic Language', arising 500 years before the birth of Christ. It was a group of languages spoken by people living in Northern Europe. With the historical events of these people spreading out into the rest of Europe and Asia, called '*Völkerwanderung*', the Proto Germanic Language further diversified into East, West and North Germanic languages.

The Germanic language speaking tribes moved very long distances with remarkable speeds that the Germanic languages further diversified. One of them was German language, which was not a unified language since the beginning.

DEVELOPMENT OF GERMAN LANGUAGE

The German language spoken then, contained poetry about the nature – Earth and Sky, Forest and Streams, Mountains and Caves; influenced by the Pagan people. A prominent literary work arose in circa 98AD, when a Roman historian named Publius Cornelius TACITUS penned down a book on the origin and situation of Germans, which he called '*Germania*'. In his book Tacitus speaks about the existence of 'ancient songs' which explained religious rites, appreciated heroic sagas or were 'solemn hymns'. This was an eccentric form of alliterative poetry, known as '*Stabreimdichtung*'. Tacitus observes that these songs were the only traditionary annals Germans possessed. It is certain that the Germans, a thousand years before they actually commenced making literary records, had produced an indigenous poetic art of which no traces can be found rather unfortunately.

The German language went under a turmoil of changes due to political events and inevitable influence of Latin and Roman languages. Till the rise of circa 750AD, there was no standardised, unified German language.

2.2.1) ALTHOCHDEUTSCH (750 AD–1050 AD)

Alt-hoch-deutsch as it translates to Old-High-German was used to describe those different dialects that existed during this period in the German-speaking regions. These dialects varied with the clusters of people who spoke them. As church was dominant power in Europe during this period most works of the Althochdeutsch were religious writings – mainly the translations of Latin religious texts written by monks and clerics.

Then comes the succession of throne by emperor KARL THE GREAT in 768, who entered upon an educational reform. He established something like 'The Royal Academy', members of which were painstakingly dedicated to reading, discussing, writing and imitating Roman poets. Karl the Great emperor also set up monastic learning centres all around Germany and the era of German literature – Prose, Version of various Gospels started. According to his biographer, Einhard, Karl The Great was even writing a book of German grammar. A literary work written in this period, Version of the '*De Fide Catholica*' by Bishop Isidore of Seville was one of the most important pieces of German literature. Another intriguing religious poem, the '*Heliand*' was written about 830, which consists of 5-6 thousand alliterating verses presenting the Christ from a German point of view. About a century later of the coronation of Karl the Great, in 868, a learned monk named OTFRIED of Weissenburg arose as a pioneer of rhyme. He was the first German author whose name and local habitation are known to History. Otfried was impelled by religious and patriotic motives to pen down messiah in the language of his countrymen – the Rhenish Franks. His poem, '*Book of the Gospel*' was completed in 868. His

poems were actually a response to two of his friends who claimed ‘to have been disturbed by the singing of unholy songs.’ Then arriving to HROTSWITH, the first literature woman of German history, a learned nun of Gandersheim who versified a number of church legends to Germans, also wrote ‘feminist’ plays. Due to the influence of Latin on official documents and religious writings, efforts were being continuously made to translate these works to German. NOTKER Teutonicus of St. Gall made appreciable efforts on behalf of the vernacular community. He translated many Latin manuscripts to German. His major works were German ‘*Versions of the Psalms*’, ‘*Versions of the Boethius*’ *De Consolatione Philosophie*’ and some bits of Aristotle too!

2.2.2) MITTELHOCHDEUTSCH (1050 AD–1350 AD)

Mittel-hoch-deutsch means the Middle-High-German. During this period, the German culture became more urbanised and sophisticated as different families rose to power. The members of this courtly society came up with writings infused with deep religious meanings. But during a period of 1160-1180, a special poetry of ‘courtly love’ dawned its influence. Stories of unrequited love and fidelity were being rephrased in form of poetry, which were called ‘*Minnesänger*’, translating to ‘songs dealing with courtly love.’ Other heroic or moral stories were also written in this period by this sophisticated society. ‘*Wolfram*’, one of the major courtly epics was written around 1205, by PARZIFAL of Eschenbach. WALTHER of Vogelweide, who lived from 1170 to 1230 in Würzburg represented virtues of a balanced and ideal life in his works. More than 100 of Walther’s poems that are extant are concerned with religious virtues, moral beliefs or political affairs. His moral poems were quite didactic- he preached the importance of virtues like charity, loyalty, honesty. When it comes to his love poetry, he was a free poet and developed a fresh and original treatment to the courtly love affairs. His poem ‘*Unter der Linden*’ had an uninhibited style in which the mannerism of courtly society bows down to the natural affections of village folk. HARTMANN of Aue, a Swabian knight and poet was the first to bring the new tales of King Arthur to Germany. Hartmann adapted Christian romances and translated them into – ‘*Erec*’ and ‘*Iwein*’, two elegant Middle High German verses. These verses gave a new shape to the narrative of the story. It also provided a new concept to the destiny of hero, where his education and behavioural conduct mattered as well. GOTTFRIED was another eminent literary figure who died in 1210 without completing his masterpiece ‘*Tristan und Isolde*’ of about 19,000 lines, the source of which was ‘The Roman de Tristan’ by an Anglo-Norman poet THOMAS. It was a tragedy of adulterous love.

2.2.3) NEUHOCHDEUTSCH (1350 AD - present)

The Neu-Hoch-Deutsch means New-High-German. As the Mittelhochdeutsch period came to an end, most forms of literature which exist in modern day German language existed. The German language flourished with vivid forms of literature during nascent renaissance period. With the political turmoil going on, influence of Latin on official records started reducing and German found a place in most of official writings. The bulk of writings of this period were legal documents written by the ‘administrative units’ of the court. Though German language was still fractured to be counted as ‘unified’ as there were various dialects of the same language spoken in different communities, the bureaucrats were encouraged to write in the vernacular German, and a greater portion of German speaking population had access to these texts, ultimately this population was influenced by the subtle ways of writing down their vernacular German. Taking into account that the ‘spoken’ and ‘written’ German language influenced each other, there is no wonder that the German language gradually became more unified over the period of time. Furthermore, Gutenberg’s invention of Printing Press in 1450 acted as the mightiest driving force behind the unification of different dialects into ‘one’ German language. The printer spoke a language of the court in earlier times of its invention, called the ‘*Druckersprache*’, translating to ‘the printer language’; but ultimately it provided the vernacular a written form. Famous works like ‘*Das Narrenschiff*’ meaning ‘Ship of Fools’ written by Sebastian BRANT were produced during this period. ‘Age of Satire’ came to Germany in the 16th century. Plenty of satirical plays, poems, short stories were written during this period. One of the most eminent writers, HANS SACHS, wrote popular plays, short stories in verse and satirical poems. Hans Sachs was a shoemaker of Nürnberg. His style of writing was rough but alluringly simple, leading to a great impact on contemporary German language and literature. Thereafter different trends ran through the German literature as discussed further.

2.2.3 i) REFORMATION

Time of REFORMATION of German Language arrived when Protestant Martin LUTHER finished translating Bible from Latin to German, only a few years less than century after Gutenberg’s invention. This work being a remarkable literary work, influenced that period’s writers on a greater extent, spreading a more coherent form of German language. While his chief objective was to write in such a way that speakers of both Low and High German would understand, he did pay attention to the written language of the Saxon Chancery, ‘*Die Kanzleisprache*’ and its spelling and grammar in particular, as one of the bases for his ‘*Bibeldeutsch*’ – ‘Language of the Bible’, which is why Luther is lauded as “THE FATHER OF GERMAN LANGUAGE.”

2.2.3 ii) RATIONALISATION

Early 18th century was enlightened by ‘Rationalisation’, when Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, a German scholar and mathematician came up with the thesis of ‘Best of all possible worlds’ in his ‘*Essais de Théodicée*’ translating to ‘Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil’ in 1710 and his ‘*Monadologie*’ in 1714. But Leibniz wrote most of his essays in French or in Latin as these being the languages of university scholarship.

2.2.3 iii) ENLIGHTENMENT

When the time of ‘Enlightenment’ dawned at Germany, Gotthold Ephraim LESSING surmounted Gottsched’s strictures, throwing an impudent statement that he denied that Prof Gottsched contributed on a larger part towards improvements in German language. And so, Lessing became FOUNDER OF MODERN GERMAN LITERATURE. Lessing introduced to the German stage a new genre: ‘*Bürgerliches Trauerspiel*’ which means - ‘bourgeois tragedy’, with his play ‘*Miss*

Sara Sampson' in 1755. This revolutionary play demonstrated that tragedy need not be limited to the highborn, as Gottsched had asserted in his interpretation of Aristotle's Poetics. His works inspired the famous '*Strum und Drang*' movement which maintained the importance of individualism, freedom and nature. Dramatists of this movement admired Gotthold Lessing and his Bourgeois tragedies, and besides Bourgeois tragedy historical drama, like Goethe's '*Götz von Berlichingen*' and dramatic satire was their choice. In their plays, the dramatists attacked socio-political scenarios of prostitution, sexual exploitation of middle-class women by the nobility, private education of the nobility by tutors, primogeniture, and capital punishment for infanticide. Next to young Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller as a latecomer in 1781 with '*Die Räuber*' (The Robbers), the major dramatists were Jakob Lenz, Johann Leisewitz, Friedrich Klingler, Heinrich Wagner, and Friedrich Müller. The '*Strum und Drang*' movement ended when Goethe accepted a civil service position at the court of the duke of Saxony-Weimar in 1775.

2.2.3 iv) WEIMAR CLASSICISM

'*Weimarer Klassik*' (Weimar Classicism) movement then revolutionised the German literature, lasting for thirty-three years, from 1772 until 1805. It was an age of prominent literary figures like Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schiller, and Christoph Martin Wieland. Then during the period of 1788–1805, this movement was dominated by a duo of Goethe and Schiller. Goethe published his first Neoclassical work, the drama of '*Iphigenie auf Tauris*' (1779–87; Iphigenie in Tauris). This marked the beginning of Weimar Classicism. Through this drama, Goethe gave the message of '*reine Menschlichkeit*' meaning 'pure humanity', which conquered barbaric customs. Goethe then completed his Renaissance drama '*Torquato Tasso*' in 1790, on the eve of the French Revolution. It dealt with the fate of a bourgeois poet in courtly society, who could no longer glorify his noble patron and the aristocratic society and later embraced his rival, who saved him from self-destruction. The geniuses of Goethe and Schiller met in 1794 and an era of 'shared achievement' that culminated the German literature began. At Schiller's insistence, Goethe resumed his major work, '*Faust, Part I*', which he could miserably complete three years past Schiller's death in 1808. In their search of aesthetic standards, Goethe and Schiller moved toward Greek Classicism and brought an infusion of Classical Greek aesthetics in new forms which suited to the character of their time to German literature. And thus, the Weimar Classicism was an integration of individualism into a higher form and a reformulation of Herder's concept of '*Humanität*'. Schiller was a versatile writer and dramatist and had established a reputation with his powerful dramas of the 'Sturm und Drang' period. During classical period, his major dramas, the '*Wallenstein trilogy*' (1800–01, about Thirty Years' War) and '*Maria Stuart*' (1800), proved to be more successful. Schiller's idea of 'sublimity of soul' was realised through the characters of the above plays. Schiller was also a philosopher. His most influential philosophical works include '*Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*' – 'Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man' written in 1790, '*Über Anmut und Würde*' meaning 'On Grace and Dignity' written in 1793 and '*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*' meaning 'Naive and Sentimental Poetry' written in 1795.

2.2.3 v) ROMANTICISM

'Romanticism' struck German literature in the early 19th century, which inculcated values of individualism with new synthesis of mental and physical reality. An eminent work of this century was done first by Johann Gottlieb FICHTE, when he wrote '*Wissenschaftslehre*' (1794; 'Science of Knowledge'), defining the subject - "Ich," or "I" in terms of its relation to the object-world - "Nicht-Ich," or "Not-I". Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling's '*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*' (1797; Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature) was another such work which defined a reciprocal relationship between the nature and human psyche.

2.2.3 vi) REALISM

However, at the end of 19th century, 'Realism' laid its foundations in Germany when Theodor Fontane's novels of Berlin life: '*Irrungen, Wirungen*' (1888; 'Entanglements'), '*Frau Jenny Treibel*' (1892), and '*Effi Briest*' (1895) put a light on social criticism and psychological observations. Other naturalists like Flaubert, Honoré Balzac, Guy de Maupassant, and Émile Zola were also concerned about the life of the lower classes, driven nature of the human psyche and social obligations.

2.2.3 vii) MODERNISM

The 20th century came with 'Modernism' in German literature. The 'Expressionism' began in 1910 and reached its consummate point during World War I. Authors like Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, and Gottfried Benn posited terrifying images of war and city life, poverty and illness in their poetry. Franz Kafka, a well-known German author wrote influential expressionist stories such as '*Das Urteil*' (1913; 'The Judgment') and '*Die Verwandlung*' (1915; 'The Metamorphosis'). Numerous authors arose during the 20th century, whose works are now considered as German classics. Theodor Mommsen, a well-known German historian received 'Nobel Prize' for his three-volume work '*History of Rome*,' in 1902. Gerhart Hauptmann, an eminent dramatist was awarded with a Nobel prize in 1912 for his popular play, '*The Weavers*.' In 1929, Thomas Mann, the author of remarkable novel '*Buddenbrooks*' (an intimate portrait of 19th German bourgeois life) received another Nobel prize in literature. Late 20th century gave birth to the 'Feminist' movement and a prolific group of women writers emerged. They encouraged women to feel and write through their bodies and the distinctiveness of feminine sensibility became a controversy. Karin Struck's novel '*Klassenliebe*' (1973; 'Class Love') was an exploration of female sexuality. Verena Stefan's '*Häutungen*' (1975; 'Shedding') was a collection of notes and jottings that traced a young woman's search for identity. These works are regarded as popular German feminist classics now.

2.2.3 viii) POSTMODERNISM

International postmodernism influenced the German literature in last decades of the 20th century. Parody, pastiche, and multiple allusions and other types of cultural production were characteristics of postmodernist literature. *'Der Butt'* (1977; 'The Flounder') and *'Die Rätin'* (1986; 'The Rat') were influential works by Günter Grass, during this time. *'Das Parfum: die Geschichte eines Mörders'* (1985; 'Perfume: The Story of a Murderer'), was a work produced by writer Patrick Süskind in this period that became an international best-seller. After World War II ended, 'soul-searching' was undertaken by a group of literary figures. Monika Maron addressed this issue by writing a socio-political novel, called *'Stille Zeile Sechs'* (1991; Silent Close No. Six). The impact of Nazi and communist era was observed on a large scale on German literature. Another lady author, Christa Wolf's narrative, *'Was bleibt'* (1990; 'What Remain's'), revealed a brutal controversy about the pensive East German past.

2.2.3 ix) REUNIFICATION

After the fall of Berlin wall, 'Reunification' novels were finally being written. Thomas Brussig wrote an ostensibly comic novel *'Helden wie wir'* (1995; 'Heroes Like Us'), which was a satirical about the controversial East German secret police. *'Frühling'* meaning 'Spring' proved to be a popular novella written by Thomas Lehr in 2001, which was in the form a monologue. This novella was also haunted by the Nazi past like other novels published during this time. A 'memory culture' came in practice when novels were constantly being written about how memories of the Nazi period could be best represented. The Austrian writer Christoph Ransmayr's powerful *'Morbus Kitahara'* (1995; The Dog King) was set in dystopian landscape which resembled Mauthausen concentration camp. W.G. Sebald wrote novel *'Austerlitz'* (2001; Eng. trans. 'Austerlitz'), which was the story of a man who had been rescued from Nazi Germany and later adopted by an English couple. The novel narrates his journey in search of the places he believes to have been way stations in his early life. This haunting novel has had international success as a moving, yet puzzling novel. Helmut Schmidt was a formal German chancellor who wrote more than twenty influential political-philosophical books during the period of 1980-2010. His books like *'Unser Jahrhundert'* ('Our Century'), *'Mein Europa'* ('My Europe'), *'Perspectives on Politics'* are highly regarded by contemporary German readers. His books mainly concentrate on practical matters of public policy, but in philosophical essays, Helmut Schmidt speaks in a pensive, contemplative voice, which provides an insight into the underlying moral sensibility and personal view of public life. Speaking about contemporary literature, the most recent German-speaking Nobel Prize recipient is Herta Müller, who won the prestigious award for her 304-page prose-poem *'The Hunger Angel'* (2009), in which she narrates deportation of a young man to some labour camp in Soviet Ukraine. In words of the Nobel jury, she is an author, "who, with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed." Few of Germany's latest best seller books are *'Hummeldumm'* (2010) meaning 'stupid as cattle' written by Tommy Jaud, *'Erbarmen'* (2010) meaning 'Mercy' by Jussi Adler-Olsen, *'Deutschland schafft sich ab'* (2010) meaning 'Germany Abolishes Itself' by Thilo Sarrazin (2010).

CONCLUSION

German language has undergone through a plethora of changes since it diversified from the Proto Germanic language. The changes in its grammar and literature were mere reflections of social, political and economic events taking place. The influence of Roman and Latin languages on the Old-High-German period, the rising of courtly love poetry in Middle-High-Period, legal documents written in German during the New-High-German period which influenced the vernaculars, outline the history of this versatile language. It is observed that till the end of Middle-High-German, only an elite few that had power, either religiously, culturally, or politically were able to read and write. This number grew during the New-High-German period as efforts were made to unify the German language and to rid it from the influence of Latin and Roman languages by communities like *'Sprachgesellschaften'* (Language societies) which also wrote German grammar. Trends like Expressionism, Romanticism, Modernism, Rationalism, evolved in German language from time to time similar to the languages of Greek, Latin and English. These trends and the movements like 'Sturm und Drang' provided the German literature with new ideas of human and nature, mind and cognition, society and relations. The literature had a powerful impact on the German society. It bridged the gap between higher and lower societies by weaving them into a chain of 'one' language speaking people. Germans, in the past and present hence have been rather boastful of their glorious history and vivid language. Prestigious institutes like the *'Goethe-Institut'* operate worldwide with 159 institutes, promoting the study of the German language abroad and encouraging international cultural exchange and relations. About 246,000 people around the world have been reported pursuing these German courses per year. Thus concluding, the impact and influence of this wonderfully lucid but austere language on the world will keep growing through the upcoming times.

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