

Through the prism of Germanic countries, the birth of a European literature.

Germanic countries constitute the area within which German is spoken, for Germany, as known to us today, does not exist.

Literature, which is nowadays often deemed as being of secondary importance, is sensitive to the political, economic and social situation of a time. It mirrors societies, the fights they lead, the struggle they are engaged in, and also the dream they have.

In Europe, the onset of any original literature coincided with the awareness of one's own language, that of a people, as different from the universal language, namely Latin, so it coincided with the awareness of one's belonging to a group or community with common projects. Language, Literature and nation are closely linked to one another.

I. The Carolingian Renaissance 768 - 919

768 is mostly given as the year of the earliest stage of German literature for it is the year of Charles the Great's accession to power.

He met the conditions to form Germany. He initiated a literary movement in his mother tongue, Frankish, the language of the Franks.

The first texts to be written in some of the countries that would then make part of Germany were initially imbued with Christian references.

II. The early stages of the profane literature are set in the second quarter of the 12th century. At a first time, the main German poets of the Middle Ages would often copy the French epics such as *Parzival*, *Tristan und Isolde*, to cite the most famous ones.

The heroic epic of *the Song of the Nibelungen*, dating back to the early 13th century, and that of *The ship of fools* by Sebastian Brandt are original texts in German and major successful achievements of the literature of that time. They are still read and studied at the present.

III. Luther's religious will : to give the people a role

Luther decided that texts should be understood by everyone. He started translating the Holy Bible in 1522 into the simple, colourful language that was spoken by the people. The cultural impact was primordial : standardisation of the language (vocabulary, syntax, phonetics).

On account of the printing that translation was widespread to all German-speaking countries.

The German language became the language of literature, the link between Germans, laying the foundation for the nation.

In 1587 the first *Faust* was published as an anonymous Protestant text.

IV. The baroque literature resumed that work of language standardisation, especially in the Protestant countries. The first adventure novel in German is *The adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus* by Grimmelshausen ; it was published in 1668.

V. The Enlightenment freed the individual

Literature freed itself from foreign models. *Sturm und Drang* writers took up their pens to be at the service of the individual searching for their own self, expressing their own originality as opposed to social conventions.

V. The author of the different waves of romanticism freed their country, seeking their roots in « Germany »

The German genius soon imposed itself on the entire Europe. Literature became then a sort of alternative fatherland..

VI. The tragedy of 1933

The language was diverted from its mission of liberation. It was reduced to propaganda, strove to erase any trace of individuality from individuals, became a means to make fanatics and exercise mass suggestion. Viktor Klemperer brilliantly dissected it in his book *LTI Lingua Tertii Imperii*

A literature of the exile from centres for migrants was developed in France, in the USA and elsewhere in the world.

VI. After 1945

The country of thinkers and poets sank into a profound cultural crisis that tolled the intellectual creativity in Germany also the self-confidence of people as humans.

The 60s writers contributed to give an identity to both German states. The German identity is once more cultural

The time stood still for more than thirty years around a few major authors who all dealt with one single topic : the workings of grief over the Nazi past, the task of remembrance in works of a high literary worth that nonetheless convey the utmost pain

VII. The rebirth of Year 2000

After the Fall of the Wall things changed. Other concerns were set on the agenda. A rather powerful profusion of works of art suddenly appeared after year 2000. By no means did it imply oblivion. But new historical topics are being addressed. New talented voices, those of nationals from Russia or from Eastern countries, have been resounding.

The young authors, the female and foreign authors, have endeavoured to tackle the new realities of a Germany that is downrooted in the contemporary world. They have cast a new, critical look at the rapidly changing society and they have subverted the literary habits.

As a conclusion : literature needfully mirrors society and time. Those pens usher readers from the national and crossborder eras to the postnational era

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