

Mirella Kurkowska

LITERARY WORKS AS A SOURCE FOR STUDYING
SOCIAL HISTORY. GERMAN POPULAR NOVEL
DURING THE BIEDERMEIER PERIOD
(first half of the 19th century)

1. German popular literature

Dislike and distrust of popular literature had a long tradition in Germany but it was there that its production had since the turn of the 18th century been particularly abundant and its culture-building role hard to overestimate in view of the fact that it was published in numerous editions. But at the same time popular literature was scathingly criticised, for since the Enlightenment the German intellectual élites had credited belles lettres with a special role in the education of common people, in raising them to a higher level. It is not by chance that the term *Bildungsreligion* came into being. The fact that this sensitive field came under the control of people who, according to reviewers, were “barbarians”, “graphomaniacs” and “pornographers” seemed to be a cultural, and consequently also a national catastrophe¹.

Whereas Goethe's generation thought about a cultural emancipation of society, mainly of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, the generation of the late Romantics imbued this mission with a political and, especially, a national content. After years of conservative reaction started by the Congress of Vienna, criticism of popular literature intensified after the 1830s, critics presenting it as a specific opium for the people, under the influence of which German society, instead of taking up import-

¹ R. Scheffy, *The Late Eighteenth-Century German “Trivialroman” as Constructed by Literary History and Criticism*, “Texte” (Toronto University Press) vol. XII, 1992, pp. 197-212.

ant political tasks, such as unification and formation of a nation-state, slipped into "day-dreaming", into some sort of "dreams about a revolution". Opinions of this kind, even before they were penned by Karl Marx and his adherents, were formulated by conservative critics, such as Wolfgang Menzel (1798–1873), editor in chief of the influential "Literatur-Blattes" published by Publishing House Cotta. In this periodical Menzel fought for a national German state, dealing blows right, left and centre². "The Germans are doing little but are writing a lot", he stated in 1828³ and added: "We are leaving the skies to the Italians, saints to the Spaniards, accomplishments to the French and purses to the English, and sit down to read our books. The dreamy German people love to meditate and poetise, and they have always time to write ... Graphomania is a common disease of the Germans, a disease that controls literature, which has chained a large part of society to the desk"⁴.

Menzel as well as representatives of the Young Germany movement (e.g. Karl Ferdinand Gutzkow) who criticised the situation on the literary market from another point of view were undoubtedly right in one respect: never before had so many books been written, published and circulated as at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th. This was due to industrialisation processes, universal literacy and the growing activity of the middle class as well as to the emergence of the entertainment market and improvements in printing techniques.

There was a growing demand not only for the traditional types of poetry and prose but also for new genres, such as contemporary, women's and family novels, for reportage, detective novels and the like. The German public, while swallowing fashionable genres published in tens of thousands of copies, still enjoyed reading the traditional types, novels of manners, romances, novels of horror and brigandage, and also historical novels and

² For more details about Wolfgang Menzel's view see: B. Witte, *Literaturtheorie, Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, in: *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*, ed. B. Witte, vol. VI: *Der Vormärz: Biedermeier, Junges Deutschland, Demokraten 1815–1848*, Hamburg 1980, pp. 63–82, here pp. 68 ff.

³ Quoted after: *ibidem*, p. 68. He expressed this opinion in his history of German literature published in 1828, a book which gained great popularity. Cf. W. Menzel, *Die deutsche Literatur*, Stuttgart 1828; 2nd enlarged ed. 1836.

⁴ Quoted after J. A. Kruze, *Zeitromane*, in: *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*, vol. VI, pp. 164–179, here: p. 164.

dramas⁵. Since I would like to pay more attention to the last-named genre, let me supply some information on the situation on the market of historical poetry and prose.

In the 1760s, 125 dramatic texts were published in Germany (how many of them were staged is another question which I will ignore here). In the first ten years of the 19th century, as many as 1,029 were brought out. By 1830 between 3,500 and 4,000 dramas of various kinds had seen the light of day⁶. As a result of the growing demand for popular drama, now called trivial drama, some playwrights had contributed several dozen and even several hundred plays: Iffland as many as 60, Raupach 117, von Kotzebue and Meisl 200 each, Gleich ca 300⁷.

In the 1820s, that is before interest in drama had reached its zenith, a serious rival, the novel, appeared on the German literary market. It is due to the novel that the annual increase in the production of books achieved in the first half of the 19th century and estimated at 200 to 300 titles was not exceeded in the 19th century. It was the historical novel that from the 1830s dominated all literary genres and was the driving force in book production. The production of historical novels reached its height in 1826–1845, when 40 titles were published each year. In about 1835 the demand was satisfied and the number of editions not only stopped increasing but even began to drop gradually⁸.

2. A new status of writers and readers. The persuasive function of texts

The process of quantitative growth was accompanied by changes in the status of authors and publishers. Let us have a look at these changes for status is an important element in a social

⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 167; M. Beaujean. *Unterhaltungs-, Familien-, Frauen- und Abenteuerromane*, in: *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*, vol. VI, pp. 152–153.

⁶ J. Schulte-Sesse. *Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung*, München 1971, p. 46.

⁷ M. Borysiak. *Das deutsche Trivialdrama in der Zeit der Romantik*. Wrocław 1988, p. 8, "Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis" N° 880. *Germanica Wratislaviensis LXVI*.

⁸ K. Habitzel, G. Mühlberger, *Gewinner und Verlierer. Der historische Roman und sein Beitrag zum Literatursystem der Restaurationszeit (1815–1848/49)*, "Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur", vol. XXI, 1996, N° 1, pp. 91–123; the text is also accessible via the Internet: <http://germ2.uibk.ac.at/hrdocs/iasltext.htm>. I am quoting after the Internet; *ibidem*, pp. 1–4.

analysis of literary works and their reception. By producing more and more for the needs of the literary market and not, as before, for a narrow circle of people of his own status, the author was gradually becoming a professional who earned his living by writing. This meant that he had to write more and more and follow the fluctuations of the public's moods and tastes. Such a situation was not conducive to ensuring a high artistic level, on the contrary, it forced even prominent writers to lower their level, to seek a compromise with publishers, theatre directors, book-sellers and owners of commercial libraries. What is no less important, the writer had to submit to the will (and even to a whim) of the censor, who was omnipotent in Germany.

Johann Wilhelm Appel, a 19th century precursor of research into popular literature, estimated that at the end of the 18th century over 10,500 persons were professionally engaged in writing in German-speaking Europe. This now seems to be an overestimation, but it is quite probable that there were 3,000–4,000 professional writers in the German-speaking area at that time. Twice as many reached for the pen occasionally and managed to publish just one item: a novel, a short story or a publicistic text⁹. Let us recall that these figures refer not only to the territory of the Germanic Confederation and territories subordinated to the Kingdom of Prussia but also to German-speaking Switzerland, Italy, the German diaspora in the two Americas and other overseas regions.

As regards readers, the quantitative processes were also accompanied by qualitative changes. The readers' attitude to books changed. The hunger for books, characteristic of young, immature readers, did not go hand in hand with the ability to choose texts and adopt a critical attitude to them. What is more, intensive reading gave way to extensive reading the main aim of which was pleasure. In other words, the reading of books was replaced with their "consumption"¹⁰. Quick, superficial reading in one's free time made it possible to forget the content and reach

⁹ J. W. Appel, *Die Ritter-, Räuber- und Schauerromantik. Zur Geschichte der deutschen Unterhaltungsliteratur*, Leipzig 1859, p. 1.

¹⁰ For more details see: K. Maase, *Grenzloses Vergnügen. Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850–1970*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, pp. 16–35, in particular pp. 27 ff; R. Engelsing, *Zur Sozialgeschichte deutscher Mittel- und Unterschichten*, 2 erweiterte Auflage, Göttingen 1979, the chapters *Die Aufrechterhaltung der intensiven Lektüre*, *Die Vorbereitung der extensiven Lektüre*, pp. 128–149.

for another book. Such being the general attitude, the fact that books were similar in their form and content was rather a virtue than a defect.

But the middle class reader looked not only for pleasure (the escapist function of literature) and for the realisation of his dreams (compensative function); he also wanted to learn something useful. In keeping with the well known Enlightenment motto, he got both, that is, "he learned while playing". The persuasive influence of texts was thus strengthened. At the same time — and this is the basic point of my reflections — even an ideologically fully "transparent" text, like stories about love, ghosts, knights-errant, and the like, retained its persuasive function in the linguistic, structural field for it evaluated all elements of the presented world¹¹. This fact allows us to reconstruct the moral values and unwritten laws preferred by authors and publishers and through them to see the social ideal, a vision of human issues of a subjective character, a proposal which was not a utopia. In the light of what has been said above, the social ideal propagated by popular literature could not depart from the common experience of reality, it could not ignore the reader's expectations. In other words, from the rich, complex universe of social issues this literature chose those phenomena which were in the range of vision of a middle class reader. As we shall see, it classified and evaluated these phenomena according to an extremely conservative system of values.

3. The popular historical drama: an apology of equality between the estates

As far as history was concerned, the popular "trivial" drama raised almost identical subjects as those discussed in the great Romantic dramas of Schiller or the dramas of Goethe, adapting them to the needs and level of the mass reader. The local colour, typical of the "great drama", disappeared from the popular plays of the Austrian Heinrich Joseph Collin (1771–1811), Eduard Raupach (1784–1852), Johannes von Auffenberg (1798–1857) and August von Kotzebue (1761–1819), best

¹¹ M. Markiewicz, *Wymiary dzieła literackiego (The Dimensions of a Literary Work)*, Kraków 1984, p. 155. Cf. M. Bujnicka, *Literatura popularna wobec ... Perspektywa funkcjonalna: tematy i rematy (Popular Literature and ... Functional Perspective...)*, "Ruch Literacki", vol. XXXIV, 1993, N° 5, (200), pp. 582–584.

known among them. The place of fictitious characters (for whom historical events and figures were points of reference, the effective causes of their fate) was taken by generally known historical figures. Their methodological biographies were used to promulgate obtrusive moral, political and social theses, sometimes also theses of a historico-philosophical character. The very titles of these dramas drew attention to prominent personalities of national and general history: *Heinrich der Löwe* by Raupach (1809), *Cromwell* by Klingmann (1820), *Pizarro* by Auffenberg (1823) and *Bianca della Porta* by Collin (1807).

Marianna Borysiak, author of a study on German trivial drama during Romanticism, draws attention to the dependence of the literature I am discussing here on the ideas of the Restoration period. The material cited by her shows that this concerned the following values:

1. The leading role of the monarchy in ensuring a nation's happiness.

2. Criticism of dictatorial (also usurped) power which disregards *vox populi*. This criticism could apply only to Napoleon and his policy towards the states of the Confederation of the Rhine for criticism of post-1815 political relations in Germany was forbidden and prosecuted by censorship and police (see the Carlsbad decrees adopted in the whole Germanic Confederation after the murder of August Kotzebue).

3. The principle of social solidarity: the necessity for co-operation between the middle class and the enlightened nobility which was ready to make concessions to the lower social strata.

4. The principle of moderate, controlled progress within the existing legal, social and moral order.

5. The conviction that any enlargement of political freedoms and privileges implies, first and foremost, greater duties. When becoming a citizen, a middle class member assumes serious new duties towards the state, not excluding high taxes.

6. The view that the happiness of the individual depends on the course of history, which he cannot influence. Happiness can be achieved only and exclusively in the family, at the side of those near and dear, in one's fatherland¹².

¹² M. Borysiak, *op. cit.*

The authors of trivial drama imitated the Romantics in their apology of the strong German empire of the Hohenstaufens. This question was referred to especially by Eduard Raupach. This writer, who up to 1821 was professor of world history at the university of St. Petersburg, held the view that the theatre should be "a school of national education" and the past "its best teacher". A truly national stage should, in his opinion, present a cycle of "70–80 dramas showing the history of Germany from Henry I to the Peace of Westphalia". To set a good example to his fellow-playwrights, Raupach wrote an enormous cycle of 24 plays dedicated to the rule of the Hohenstaufens. In this imperial cycle he presented enlightened monarchy as the highest form of mankind's moral and political development¹³. He pointed out that a powerful, just ruler should take care of the mighty as well as of ordinary people. In his dramas Raupach presented the common people as the embodiment of the German national spirit. But in fact, the people played the role of the Greek chorus, stressing the greatness and wisdom of the ruler who knew nothing about changes in his country. If we regard the stilted heroes of Raupach's imperial cycle as symbols of German monarchs living in his time then, paradoxically, but in accord with reality, their main characteristics were aristocratic manners extreme narrow-mindedness with regard to social questions, and fear of any change. An identical historical message can be found in the historical dramas of Kotzebue, but this extremely prolific writer did not even try to imbue his heroes and the situations in which they were involved with a semblance of historical authenticity. History was only a costume for him.

The conventionality of historical scenery did not embarrass the readers and the spectators. They did not look for information on the near or distant past in historical drama but for reference to the situations and problems they knew.

4. Popular historical novel: criticism of the way of life of the nobility and big bourgeoisie

Since its birth the historical novel has been performing two basic functions: a critical function and an escapist-compensatory function suitable for the "popular" Muse. But many texts reveal their

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 41 ff.

authors' ambition to reconcile the two seemingly incompatible functions. Books that performed the critical function were under the influence of historiography and were in permanent contact with the historical sciences. The literature whose aim was to give the reader an escape from reality did not have such ambitions. Both categories of the historical novel or short story were in (direct or indirect) dialogue with the present time. On the other hand, the most characteristic trait of the literary production of the Restoration period is its connection with the past which was frequently shown through the prism of individual experience. This method, as Winfried Hartkopf pointed out, aimed at depicting large structures, such as the state, nation, a social group and broad processes taking place within these structures¹⁴.

Hartkopf's remark refers to literature with greater, critical ambitions. But even that literature did not renounce the solutions characteristic of popular art which, in turn, quickly absorbed some structures and fictional themes of high literature, but without its critical approach. A similar convergence of the two levels of culture, the high and the low, can be seen in the works of Ludwig Achim von Arnim (1781–1831). In his extensive unfinished novel *Kronenwächter* (*The Crown Guardian*) published in 1817 von Arnim renounced neither the Romantic, frequently "Gothic", scenery nor the sensational or erotic plot, that is, the artistic means appreciated by the general public¹⁵.

The *Crown Guardian* draws on the Hohenstaufen myth: a secret association keeps guard over the imperial crown hidden in the Weiblingen castle in the mountains and wants to restore the medieval German empire. The scene is laid in the 16th century in the time of Maximilian I and Martin Luther. Its main heroes, the twin brothers Berthold and Anton, direct descendants of the Hohenstaufens, acquire worldly wisdom in different social roles. Berthold makes a fortune as owner of a textile mill, but finally chooses knighthood as his vocation. Anton is a painter. The plot abounds in extraordinary, miraculous events: Doctor Faustus

¹⁴ W. Hartkopf, *Historische Romane und Novellen*, in: *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*, vol. VI, pp. 134 ff.

¹⁵ For the function of the past in Arnim's novel cf. M. Elchlepp, *Achim von Arnims Geschichtsdichtung "Die Kronenwächter". Ein Beitrag zur Gattungsproblematik des historischen Romans*, Berlin (West) 1967, p. 413.

transfuses the blood of the two brothers to give them new strength at the end of their lives, flashes of lightning pierce the vault of the Hohenstaufens' crypt and kill Berthold who, having fulfilled his mission, wants to be buried in the family sepulchre.

The author's subjective, instrumental attitude to the past allowed him to make the novel a commentary on the social and political problems of his time. He made use of 16th century material to depict the conflicts present at the beginning of the 19th century. The novel presents characteristic antitypic groups: the bourgeoisie — the nobility, the emperor — the nobility, the rich — the poor. The reader's attention concentrates on the conflict between the nobility and the other estates. The German nobility is presented as a reactionary group thirsting for power and money. This kind of criticism of the nobility would have been in keeping with the tradition of Enlightened absolutism had Arnim not condemned force as a method of restoring the empire. The secret association which wants to restore the Hohenstaufens' rule renounces neither force nor ruse. But in the second knightly, romantic stage of his life Berthold comes out against the brutal methods used by the association of the crown guardians. In the author's view the German crown can be gained only through a spiritual restoration of the Reich.

The structure of social forces in a modern monarchy, and consequently also in the 19th century, absorbed nearly all German writers who dealt with historical subjects¹⁶. The question became a good pretext for showing the bourgeois ideal of life, a modest, calm, industrious life which could ensure individual happiness. Its opposite was the life of the feudal class, filled with its unsound, excessive and politically harmful ambitions. Even in texts extolling the charm of landowners' life (this will be discussed later) the bucolic life lived in the circle of one's family and neighbours is very close to the burghers' notions of a decent, happy life.

Similar structures of meaning can be found in *Polenliteratur* popular in Germany in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, a literature dedicated to the history and affairs of Germany's Polish neighbour. The complex relations between monarchs and feudal lords, between the landowning nobility and the burghers, were de-

¹⁶ W. Hartkopf, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-151, here: p. 139.

scribed not only by the most popular writers, such as August Ferdinand von Oppeln-Bronikowski (1788–1834)¹⁷. The Jagiellons, John III Sobieski, Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski are but some of the positive heroes of *Polenliteratur*¹⁸. They were presented as positive characters because they opposed the values and style of public activity of the privileged nobility. Criticism of feudal egoism and arbitrariness was fully understandable for according to an opinion widespread since the 18th century, it was the nobility that was to blame for the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In the popular historical novels of Wilhelm Hauff (1802–1827), Willibald Alexis (Wilhelm Haring, 1798–1871) and many others writers, stilted, idealised figures of just, enlightened rulers were opposed to the egoism-motivated nobility. The feudal estate criticised in bourgeois novels had an irresistible attraction for the general public. Irrespective of its well known weaknesses,

¹⁷ Cf. L. Rath's work Aleksander A. F. Bronikowski. *Rozdział z dziejów powieści polskiej* (Aleksander A. F. Bronikowski. *A Chapter from the History of the Polish Novel*), Lwów 1937.

¹⁸ After World War II the subject was taken up by: W. Chojnacki, *Znajomość niemieckich "Polenlieder" w literaturze polskiej* (*The Knowledge of German "Polenlieder" in Polish Literature*), Poznań 1956; L. Gadoń, *Wielka Emigracja w pierwszych latach po powstaniu listopadowym* (*The Great Emigration in the Years Immediately Following the November Uprising*), prefaced by M. Kukiel, 2nd ed., Paryż 1957–1960; H. Kocój, *Niemcy a powstanie listopadowe. Sprawy powstania listopadowego w niemieckiej opinii publicznej i w polityce pruskiej 1830–1831. Zagadnienia wybrane* (*The German and the November Uprising. The November Uprising in German Public Opinion and in Prussian Policy 1830–1831. Selected Questions*), Warszawa 1970; A. Owsieńska, *Poglądy historyków polskich na stosunek Niemców do Polski w epoce porozbiorowej* (*Polish Historians' Opinions on the Germans' Attitude to Poland in the Post-Partition Epoch*), "Zeszyty Naukowe WSP Katowice. Prace Historyczne" 1964, № X; P. Roguski, *Tułacz polski nad Renem. Literatura i sprawa polska w Niemczech w latach 1831–1845* (*The Polish Wanderer on the Rhine. Polish Literature and the Polish Question in Germany in 1831–1845*), Warszawa 1981; idem, *Poezja i czyn polityczny. Powstanie listopadowe w poezji niemieckiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku* (*Poetry and Political Action. The November Uprising in German Poetry in the First Half of the 19th Century*), Warszawa 1993; M. H. Serajski, *Europa a rozbiory Polski. Studium historiograficzne* (*Europe and the Partitions of Poland. A Historiographic Study*), Warszawa 1970; M. Wawrykowa, *Deutsche und polnische Demokraten*, in: eadem, *Deutsche Geschichte aus polnischer Sicht, 1815–1848*, Braunschweig 1974; A. Will, *Polska i Polacy w niemieckiej prozie literackiej XIX wieku* (*Poland and the Poles in German 19th Century Literary Prose*), Łódź 1970; idem, *Motywy polskie w krótkich formach literackich niemieckiego obszaru językowego 1794–1914* (*Polish Motives in Short Literary Forms in the German Language Area 1794–1914*), Łódź 1976; J. Zimnik, *Echa polonofilskie w literaturze niemieckiej* (*Polonophile Echoes in German Literature*), Opole 1964; *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1815–1848/49. Wiosna Ludów i okres ją poprzedzający* (*Polish-German Relations 1815–1848/49. The Springtime of Nations and the Preceding Period*), Wrocław 1981.

it attracted the burghers by the beauty of its country residences, the splendour of its palaces, the elegance of its dress and customs. The idyllic atmosphere of English landscape parks created a climate favourable for tender feelings, also for family feelings which were so close to the Biedermeier heart. In the eyes of many authors the nobility's ethos with its family pride, its love of freedom and the chivalrous readiness for self-sacrifice *pro fide, lege et rege* favourably distinguished the old new nobility from the contemporary money aristocracy, the big bourgeoisie.

This point of view, previously unknown to the German novel, can be found for the first time in *Der alte Adam, eine neue Familiengeschichte* by Karl Christian Ernst von Benzel-Sternau (1787–1849) published in 1819. The sense of civic duty, characteristic of the old political class and represented in the book by its hero, is a new version of “the noblemen's (knightly) republic”, the most spectacular manifestations of which were of Polish descent¹⁹. The myth of an estate-based state in which the landowning class was in duty bound to rule, the bourgeoisie to multiply the capital, and the peasantry to produce material goods was developed later by Alexander von Ungern-Sternberg (1806–1868) in *Paul*, published in 1845. The principles of social, estate-based solidarity enjoined the author to criticise the big bourgeoisie, the money aristocracy (*Geldadel*) and to turn towards genuine representatives of the burghers' estate. In Ungern-Sternberg's view it was the duty of the enlightened, patriotic nobility to look after the honest merchants and craftsmen. It was the nobility that ought to prepare the burghers for joint governance of the state²⁰. George Heseckiel's *Die Bastardbrüder oder Geheimnisse von Altenburg* (1845–1848), which presents social dramas and conflicts not as a result of inequality between the estates but as an unfortunate decree of fate, ends with an appeal to the Prussian nobility's good intentions. The bastard brothers of the title experience many sufferings and humiliations but in the end — as in a 17th century romance — they recover their social position. The harshness of some scenes is compensated by the happy ending and a Christian moral.

¹⁹ M. Beaujean, *Unterhaltungsromane*, pp. 158 ff.

²⁰ A. Molsberger, *Adel und Adelsinnung in den Zeitromanen Alexander von Ungern-Sternbergs*, Halle/Saale 1929.

It was the existence of a common enemy, the supranational, cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, that was conducive to the acceptance of the idea of a patriotic integration exceeding the estate boundaries. Representatives of the bourgeoisie disturbed people by their alienation, by their plans which were incomprehensible to the ordinary mortals, by their growing influence at ducal courts. Their parentage was as doubtful as their conduct. German authors were alarmed by the fact that factory owners, members of company boards and bank presidents had foreign-sounding names, French, Belgian, Jewish and Polish.

On the whole, Poles were not fitted for the role of negative heroes in social anti-bourgeois novels for a fixed stereotype presented them as landowners and Catholics. Nevertheless, in one novel *Dämone* (1853) by Ernst Adolf Willkomm (1810–1886) we find a peculiar Pole, Count Stanislaus von Dobicky who, having squandered away his family estate in Great Poland, moves to Hamburg and there, fawning on dishonest capitalists, contributes to the collapse of a respected 200-year old firm²¹. The winner, who thanks to stockjobbery and Dobicky's help outs his rival from the market, turns out to be an illegitimate son of a Jewish woman and a German aristocrat. The novel abounds in retrospective family plots; we learn the history of the main *dramatis personae*: Dobicky, the swindler Magnus, his Jewish mother, the old merchant family of the Wenzel-Hubers. While criticising the methods used by the negative characters, the author points out the main causes of evil: cult of money and material success, and the indifference or excessive liberalism of public opinion unwilling to "meddle in other people's affairs". The adultery which led to the birth of Magnus also had its source in the unhealthy ambitions of a Jewish family which wanted to gain influence at an aristocrat's court. The aristocrat, instead of keeping his marriage vows, succumbs not only to sensual desire but also to Mammon, for Magnus's mother enjoys the support of the Rothschilds and other Jewish bankers. Evil breeds evil, concludes the author. Probity and observance of the laws of social

²¹ For the stereotypes of Poles and Germans cf. *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków (About the Stereotypes of German and Poles)*, ed. W. Wrzesiński, Wrocław 1993 and T. Szarota, *Niemcy i Polacy. Wzajemne patrzyenie i stereotypy (Germans and Poles. Mutual Opinions and Stereotypes)*, Warszawa 1996. The book contains a survey of Polish and German literature on this subject.

order and hierarchy, so brutally violated in the novel, seem to be a recipe for the happiness of individuals and for group harmony.

From the ark of the covenant between the landowners and burghers one could also see the victims of the criminal new class. These were members of the urban proletariat deprived of the natural protection previously extended to them by the local court and their parish, people at the mercy of capitalist exploitation and of pernicious temptations present in all large cities. Johann Georg Heseckiel (1819–1874) and the previously mentioned Ernst Adolf Willkomm felt compassion for the white slaves and drew the reader's attention to the material and moral situation of the urban population. Their novels were rather contemporary than historical for they used the retrospective method typical of the Biedermeier period²².

5. Family and women's novel: between myth and social reality

Interest in everything that concerned life within the four walls of the family home and the balcony facing the garden was one of the cultural phenomena of the Restoration and the Biedermeier period. It was an interest that had not changed since the 18th century. In this seemingly very restricted area changes which are perceptible not only today were taking place in the first half of the 19th century. Wolfgang Menzel, undoubtedly the most influential literary critic in the epoch, noticed the ever growing popularity of women's novels and the growing number of women writers. In May 1831 he wrote in "Literatur-Blatt": "Our writing ladies could reach for the needle instead of the quill and put the novel out of their heads. It weel be much better form them and the reader if they feel ashamed of their bad novels ... Nowadays young girls do not want to get married, they want to write, they do not want to fulfill women's duties, they want to write"²³.

Among the 265 authors of historical novels (a total of 965 books) researched by the Austrian historians from Innsbruck Kurt Habitzel and Günter Mühlberger, 45 authors (17 per cent of the writers' population) were women²⁴. German

²² Cf. J. A. Kruze, *Zeitromane*, in: *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*, vol. VI, p. 179.

²³ Quoted after K. Habitzel, G. Mühlberger, *Gewinner und Verlierer*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

literature which owed much of its international renown to a woman, Madame de Staël, did not produce a personality on a par with her or talents of the calibre of the Brontë sisters. It was novels of the class of those by Carolina Pichler that evoked caustic remarks like those quoted above.

Critics were alarmed above all by changes in the subject-matter and poetics of contemporary novels. On August 8, 1826 "Literatur-Blatt" published an editorial comment which read: "When we compare the great number of new novels with the old novel we see a significant difference. The specific naivety (of the old novel — MK) has disappeared and with it warmth and cordiality; instead we now have heartless persiflage (gibes pretending to be words of courtesy — MK), exceptional pertness and all kinds of absurdities characteristic of soulless illusions. The kind-hearted, robust and rather limited heroism of stories about knights, robbers and wizards has given way to strong, poisonous violence ... The sentimental, plaintive bourgeois novels in which love exists only in marriage and suffering can only be afflicted by parents or guardians have been ousted by refined stories about chosen affinity and marital conflicts ... The authors of novels, even women writers, are more interested in presenting depravation as a sign of innocence and show us psychological experiments in place of the old outpouring of feelings. Moral novels have been replaced with humoristic, ironical stories. Instead of the voluminous novels of Richardson, Hermes, Salzmann and the like we are offered mainly short stories which are becoming increasingly numerous and which fill the columns of pocket editions and entertainment periodicals, turning the novel into periodic literature ... The language of these novels is more skilful than before and they are easier and more attractive to read"²⁵.

This review, the tone of which is characteristic of all critiques of that time, depicts the evolution of readers' interests and their shift towards extensive literature. Big volumes were replaced with much cheaper pocket and periodical editions. A new, increasingly important category of readers, women, appeared and, in addition to the "fair sex" also the "younger sex", that is, children. Many periodicals and serial publications were addressed to these two closely connected groups. The growth of reading habits among

²⁵ Quoted after M. Beaujean, *Unterhaltungsromane*, p. 152.

women, children and young people, that is groups which had much free time at their disposal, speeded up the commercialisation of literary production in 1815–1848 and enhanced the success of entertainment literature²⁶.

To the despair of academic literary critics, the emancipation of women had an effect not only on reading habits but also on literary production. Hence the unfriendly, arrogant statements dividing writers into a “higher” and a “lower” class or category or, as was done by “Intelligenzblatt zum Mitternachtsblatt” of 1828, repudiating all popular authors. The paper pointed out that many of the books it had criticised were written by women. It ironically described all fiction as graphomania: “The category of refined entertainment for the educated and highly educated includes (works by — MK) C. Pichler, Julius von Voß, Amalia Schoppe, Johanna Schopenhauer and Laurid Kruse. The second class comprises: 1) novels about robbers and knights, 2) sinful novels, 3) sinless novels for girls and dressmakers in love, heroic shop-assistants and whipper-snappers ... for sentimental maid-servants and housemaids and the like, in brief for all persons claiming a higher education”²⁷.

Like other kinds of the novel of that time, the 19th century literature for women, though written mainly by men, was a continuation of the genre shaped in the previous century. It grew from the philosophical traditions of European Enlightenment and from the emancipatory trends characteristic of German society in the 18th century.

The ideal of the *Hausmutter* was called into question in theory and practice in the second half of the “age of lights”. Women’s

²⁶ A review of the state of research on mass readers is presented by: K. Habitzel, G. Mühlberger, *Die Leihbibliothekforschung in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*, “Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur”, vol. XXII, 1997, N° 2, pp. 66–108 (the text is also accessible via the Internet: <http://germ2.uibk.ac.at>). The 19th century distribution market is discussed by I. Köhler, *Ein Schundverlag und seine Helfershelfer. Verlegerische Praktiken und literarische Techniken der Kolportage*, in: *Die Wonnen der Gewöhnlichkeit: Karl Masy und die europäische Trivialliteratur gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. R. Wolff, Bielefeld 1996. For the production and distribution of books in the 19th and 20th centuries cf. W. Heindl, *Bücher und Buchhändler. Was man vom Einzelhandel mit Büchern wissen sollte*, Hühig 1992; idem, *Bücher und Büchermacher. Was man von Verlagen und Verlegern wissen sollte*, Hühig 1993 (both compendia present an extensive up-to-date picture of literature dealing with this subject); E. Hess, *Die Leser. Konzepte und Methoden der Printforschung*, Offenburg 1982.

²⁷ Quoted after M. Beaujean, *Unterhaltungsromane*, p. 154.

new self-consciousness evoked significant tensions between the mind and feelings, between common sense and instincts, between culture and nature. These tensions became the most important subject of belles lettres. The heroines of the Enlightenment novel tried to solve this conflict by the voice of the heart and with its help establish harmonious relations with men. The autonomisation of feelings, including erotic love, which were previously subordinated to women's social role as daughters, wives, mothers and also widows, was the first step towards the emancipation of women²⁸.

As regards its form and content, women's literature was a continuation of at least two genres of the 18th century novel: the moralising novel and the novel of adventures. It was British literature, especially the books by Richardson and Goldsmith, that provided models which guaranteed equilibrium between the two elements, the didactic and the entertaining. These two writers initiated the family novel which presented "the development of character and descriptions in which subtle processes predominated over a plot of adventure"²⁹.

This literature began to deal more and more exclusively with the contraction of marriage and its fate. Confirming as they did the bourgeois society's belief that the family and marriage were institutions of the highest rank, novels of this kind did not have to bring women's role into relief. Women's literature was coming into being in an economic and social situation in which man, the head of the household, did not spend much time at home. Work and public functions kept him out of home, with the exception of owners of artisan workshops, shops, etc. Women, especially those who were well-off, could, after fulfilling their household duties, rest for a few hours in the circle of children, relatives and friends. It was there that the feelings and virtues about which they read in novels developed without any obstacle. Women could see as their model — at least in the opinion of "Literarische Conversationsblatt" — the heroine of Maria von Pfister's *Eugenie von Nordstern*. The novel presented the life of a "severely tried", "self-possessed, submissive, pious woman who lived and did pure

²⁸ U. von Kortzfleisch, *Bürgerliche Emanzipation in der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, "Themenhefte zur Kulturpädagogik", vol. II, Wolfenbüttel 1989, pp. 16–19.

²⁹ Franz Hirsch in "Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung" 1826, p. 441.

and clear as glass", setting the reader a beautiful example of womanhood"³⁰. But this almost ascetic ideal (Eugenia got married and bore a son) did not figure in all German 18th century and later novels addressed to women. The moralising 18th century novel was concerned mainly with persecuted, lost chastity, with sexual danger and, in accordance with the late-Enlightenment ideal of moderation, presented the solution of women's problems according to the moral code in force. The authors showed that they understood their heroines' changing frame of mind.

Women's novels of the Biedermeier period, imitating the classical-sentimental model, continued to discuss the affinity of souls and destiny. Since the heroines' lives were ruled by convention, the resurgence of old love or the birth of a new passion was a mental shock for them. But "an honest woman's soul" knew that she could overcome it by renouncing her feelings. It was only on her deathbed that, like the heroine of Johanna Schopenhauer's novel *Gabriele* (1821), she could confess her feelings to the man she loved. Emotion, which surged in the lives of heroes of the 18th century sentimental novel and determined the existence of romantic heroines, was subjected to specific exorcism. Tamed and set in the frame of marital duties, it was no longer a threat to the heroine. But it undoubtedly lost much of its strength and charm. In other words: the positive heroines of the conservative current of women's literature renounced, seemingly of their own free will, the powerful motivational force which love for a man can become in real life. What remained was the force of self-sacrifice which, in view of the lack of love, meant nothing more than renunciation, a persistent waiting for an initiative from the husband, father or guardian. But no woman writer formulated such a pessimistic conclusion.

Self-sacrifice as woman's fate is the subject of Theresa Huber's (1764-1829) novels dedicated to matrimonial questions *Ehstandgeschichte* (1804) and *Ehelosen* (1829). Self-sacrifice was believed to be the duty of both married women and women living in celibacy. The heroine of *Clementine* (1841) by Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) contracts a marriage of convenience despite the revival of her old passion³¹.

³⁰ Quoted after M. Beaudeau, *Unterhaltungsromane*, p. 155.

It is difficult to say whether the renunciation of passionate sensual love, propagated by men and women writers of that epoch, was motivated by ascetic-religious reasons or was an indirect result of the institution of marriage having been put on a pedestal. But in view of the growing laicisation of German society, it seems more probable that writers of the conservative trend regarded the strengthening of the family, especially of matrimonial bonds, as the simplest and most important remedy for the maladies and afflictions of their time. Not without importance was the already mentioned fact that German Restoration literature tried, above all, to meet the needs of the middle and lower strata of the urban population. These strata, unlike the aristocracy and big bourgeoisie, regarded the institution of marriage not as a way of keeping up the economic and political status of their family but as an obvious recipe for everyday life. In middle class circles a woman did not have to bring in a considerable dowry (it was enough that she was not poor for then she would have been suspected of dissipation); she did not have to lend lustre to her husband's house by her beauty, appearance and manners, nor did she have to concentrate on child bearing. The writers of the Biedermeier epoch did not glorify large families but contented themselves with presenting heroes who had a few healthy and well-bred children. Children's literature reflected the same views³². In return, a woman had to devote much time to the home so as to contribute to maintaining the family's economic status, to the upbringing of children and, last but not least, to the comfort and satisfaction (also in the sexual sphere) of her husband who — unlike representatives of the higher classes —

³¹ For 18th and 19th century family literature, including women's literature, cf. M. Beaujean, *Trivialromane*; idem, *Unterhaltungsromane*, pp. 155–157; R. Böschenstein-Schäfer, *Idylle*, Stuttgart 1967.

³² As regards literature for children cf. S. Köberle, *Jugendliteratur zur Zeit der Aufklärung*, Weinheim 1972 (bibliography and short biographic notes, *ibidem*, pp. 209–225); *Deutsche Kinderbücher des 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Vorbereitung einer Bibliographie alter deutscher Kindbücher. Katalog einer Ausstellung der Herzog August Bibliothek 1978*, ed. T. Brüggemann, H.-H. Ewers, *Handbuch zur Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Von 1750–1800*, Stuttgart 1982 (it contains a characterisation and historical-sociological commentaries on the prints in the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel). *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur 1498–1950. Kommentierter Katalog der Sammlung Theodor Brüggemann*, Osnabrück 1986 is an enlargement of the last-named item. Selected 18th and 19th century texts can be found in *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Aufklärung. Eine Textsammlung*, ed. H.-H. Ewers, Stuttgart 1980.

had neither the time nor the means for social contacts, clubbing, extramarital relations or paid love. It can be said that dire necessity became a virtue in the family literature of the Biedermeier period, but it was rather a practical everyday virtue than a religious one.

Not all women's novels written in 1815–1848 belong to the conservative current discussed here. Historians of literature also draw attention to emancipatory trends, including liberal, even democratic solutions in the literature of the decade preceding the March revolution. They regard some novels as very close to the Young German novel, for instance the popular books by Ida Countess von Hahn–Hahn (1805–1880) or Luise Mühlbach (Clara Mundt, 1814–1873) and partly also those by Fanny Lewald, whose literary works evolved from affirmation of woman's self-sacrifice and devotion to a discussion of the problem of divorce in the 1840s (divorce was permitted under Prussian law), and of single women's loneliness and lack of financial resources. Fanny Lewald discussed these problems in a novel published in 1844 under the significant title *Eine Lebensfrage*.

The visible links between the programme of Young Germany and the novels of the women writers mentioned above had no influence on the opinions of those who distanced themselves from novels written by women. As far as the question of women is concerned, Börne, Haine and Laube followed the instructions of the first socialists, in particular Saint-Simon or, on the contrary, were inclined to approve (as Heine did) of the libertine way of life propagated by George Sand. The question of women's freedom was interpreted differently by Ida Countess von Hahn–Hahn, an independent writer from a Pomeranian Junkers' family. Negating the stereotype of "a woman's tender heart" submissive to man, she made one of her heroines declare: "I would like men to treat women as their equals, not as bought slaves who can be trampled on just for the pleasure of it or collared for fun"³³.

The natural revolt of the oppressed and the demand for equality, at that time only in the intimate, private sphere, constituted the lower of the problems facing women. The key question

³³ I. von Hahn–Hahn, *Faustine*, Mainz 1840, p. 15.

of how to guarantee women real independence was asked not only by Fanny Lewald. In a cycle of novels and short stories published in the 1830s and 1840s, Luise Mühlbach described the difficulties that hindered women from achieving the freedom which was necessary for their existence and spiritual development. In *Zögling der Natur* (1842) and the short story *Das Mädchen* (1839) she criticised the omnipotence and terror of conventions, showed the humiliation and misery experienced by single women, but the only remedy she was able to prescribe for the troubles of life was a well-matched marriage. She frequently expressed the conviction that a woman can be strong only if her husband is strong. In other words, a woman's freedom is based on the institution of marriage; family happiness is the only happiness she can have³⁴.

An interesting feature of the two currents of the family novel, including women's novel, is that negative heroines do not exist in it. The novels present unhappy women, women deprived of their fortune, single women, widows or women abandoned by dishonest partners, frequently also weak women who bear the blame for their fall. But there are no demonic, really evil women in these novels or women who find pleasure in hurting and humiliating their partner, like the Marchioness in Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's (1741–1803) *Les liaisons dangereuses*. Condemnation of evildoing, so clear in the Laclos's famous work, did not seem to be enough, criticism of the mentality and customs of the French aristocracy contained in *Les liaisons dangereuses* and similar novels could not conceal the obvious fact that negative heroines were fully free individuals. Rich widows, influential matrons independent of their husbands could do evil at their will; after all they could always return to the path of virtue and atone for their sins. The choice between good and evil, between sin and atonement was in their hands. A female counterpart of Don Juan did not appear in 18th century European literature; it was even less likely to appear in 19th century literature.

The social conditions in which women's literature developed were an important reason why the psychological portrait of woman was reduced to several stereotypes, the dominant part being played by the stereotype of a self-sacrificing woman, always faithful to her destiny of being man's partner. With but a few

³⁴ M. Beaujean, *Unterhaltungsromane*, pp. 156 ff.

exceptions, such as Countess von Hahn-Hahn, it was middle-class women that were the authors and addressees of this kind of literature. Education and its basic component, reading habits, were still the privilege of the middle class. From the 18th century on the German middle class regarded education as a way towards social emancipation³⁵. In the 19th century the ideas cherished by this class, that is, secular school, education of the common people, children, girls and women, embraced wider circles. It was the time-honoured estate system that was an obstacle to universal education embracing the lowest strata of society.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

³⁵ R. Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser. Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800*, Stuttgart 1974; idem, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1973.