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978-0-521-09152-7 - A History of the German Novelle

E. K. Bennett

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A HISTORY OF
THE GERMAN *NOVELLE*

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A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN *NOVELLE*

BY
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To
ELLA, HAROLD
AND
JOACHIM

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FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO
THE FIRST EDITION

I shall attempt in the first chapter, before tracing the historical development of the Novelle in German literature, to arrive at some sort of definition of the genre as such, basing myself upon the writings of German critics and poets and selecting from the innumerable pronouncements upon the subject those which seem to be of most importance. A very comprehensive account of the attempts made to define the nature of the Novelle as a literary genre is given in the first chapter of Arnold Hirsch's book *Der Gattungsbegriff 'Novelle'* (Germanische Studien, Heft 64, Berlin, 1928) to which I am indebted for much valuable information. So far no comprehensive history of the Novelle in German literature has appeared either in England or Germany.

The history of a literary genre is not the mere enumeration of the writers who have cultivated that genre, brief biographical notes about them, followed by a synopsis of their various works. It involves an investigation into the origin of the genre, an attempt to account for its emergence at a given period, its basic types, possibly in the literature of another country from which it is taken over, the changes and modifications which it undergoes, as the result of various influences, such as the personality of the writers who employ it, the prevailing literary fashions, the sociological tendencies or philosophical currents which affect the thought and attitude to life of successive generations. The genre is regarded as an organism which contains within itself possibilities of development, and the history of the genre must show how far and in what way

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these possibilities have been realized. These are the lines upon which this investigation has been carried out.

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that the word 'development' is not used in the sense of improvement or advance towards perfection, but signifies merely the modifications which the term undergoes under the influence of the forces above mentioned. It is of course possible that the history of a literary genre will reveal an increasing improvement in the use of the form, so that in the works of a given author or group of authors the form will appear to have attained a maximum of effectiveness beyond which no further progress seems possible or at least beyond which none can be recorded. Thus in tracing the development of the German Ode it is permissible to say that, proceeding from the Middle Ages, when the Ode first enters German literature from Latin sources, a gradual development—in the nature of a greater poetical effectiveness—can be traced which reaches one climax in Klopstock and a second, heightened one in Hölderlin, after which no further achievements of equal value can be recorded.¹ Or in tracing the development of the German novel (Roman) it can be said that the novel as a genre develops during the seventeenth century under the influence of foreign models without attaining to any really independent form of its own; that in the eighteenth century it follows a parallel development under the influence of different models; and that at the end of the century it suddenly reaches its climax in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, since when it has nothing of greater importance to register. Though it might be added that *Wilhelm Meister* establishes the 'inner form'—that of the Erziehungsroman—for the majority of important novels which

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have been written in Germany since.

In this account of the history of the Novelle in German literature I have attempted to show its development from its Romance origins to a specifically German form which finds its most effective expression in a group of writers in the middle of the century of whom Gottfried Keller is the most eminent. Later writers in their treatment of the genre seem to me to have failed to achieve the same maximum of effectiveness, and the modifications which they have introduced have tended with few exceptions to undermine the specific form which had been slowly evolving in the course of the century. That the feeling exists with certain writers who are sensitive to the requirements of form, that the German Novelle has come to the end of its development, is indicated by the fact that a definite attempt has been made in various quarters to revert to the original Romance form.

Since there is no equivalent in English for the word 'Novelle' I have throughout adhered to the German word, printing it as a German word with a capital letter in order to avoid confusion with the English word 'novel'. I have likewise retained the German expressions: *Stimmung*, *Bürgertum*, *bürgerlich*, *Bauerntum*, *Bauernstand*, for which English equivalents, where they exist, are misleading. In particular the quasi-English terms *bourgeoisie* and *bourgeois* have had to be discarded as translations of *Bürgertum* and *bürgerlich*, since they fail to give the meaning which attaches to the German words. For the German expression 'Rahmennovelle' or 'Rahmengesichte' I have used, for lack of a recognized English literary equivalent, the term 'framework Novelle' or 'Novelle with a framework'. Quotations from foreign

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critical works are usually given in translation in the text. In nearly every instance the reference to the original quotation will be found in the notes.

I have restricted myself to an account of works of outstanding excellence or such as reveal some characteristic quality. It is impossible to enumerate the vast number of writers who have written competent Novellen which neither show marked originality nor contribute to the development of the genre. And this holds good especially of more modern writers, with regard to whom I have further restricted myself to those whose literary reputations were already established before 1920.

I owe a debt of gratitude, which I gladly acknowledge, to the following: to Geheimrat Professor O. F. Walzel of the University of Bonn, for his great kindness in placing the library of the Germanistisches Seminar at my disposal; to Professor G. Hübener, likewise of the University of Bonn, in particular for one most fruitful suggestion; to Fräulein Dr Etscheid and to Hellmuth Jäsrich for the stimulus derived from discussion of my subject with them; to my sister, E. N. Bennett, for her help with the index and the preparation of this book for the press; and to my friend and colleague, Dr Joachim Rosteutscher, for invaluable criticism and suggestion.

E. K. B.

St Valentine's Day

1934

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

E. K. Bennett died on 13 June 1958 at the age of seventy. His serene and genial personality will be long remembered with affection and respect by his many friends and colleagues. An even wider circle has known him and will continue to know him through the medium of his writings, and especially through the present book. Bennett's *History of the German Novelle* was the first full-length treatment of its subject to appear in any language, although a number of studies on the German Novelle have been published in German in the intervening twenty-six years. It was as an undergraduate that I made the acquaintance of this book when it first appeared, and it was for me, as for many others, an introduction to new, unexplored and fascinating aspects of German literature.

Some years ago E. K. Bennett hoped to write a further chapter to extend the story of the German Novelle from the period of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* up to more recent times. He told me about this plan, and we discussed together a number of the personalities and problems that might be involved in a consideration of the place of the Novelle in the first half of the present century. On taking up the preparation of the book for its present edition, it seemed right for me to confine any changes in the text almost entirely to those sections about which he and I had exchanged views in some detail. Chapter vi has, therefore, been rewritten and now been renamed 'The Novelle of Country Life', and some of the material from the old chapter x has been

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incorporated into chapter xi so that discussion of Schnitzler, Mann and Hesse now takes its place in the context of the twentieth century. A brief new chapter x ('Novelle and Short Story') serves to introduce the new concluding chapter, 'The Novelle in the Twentieth Century'; these are both my responsibility, apart from the section on Schnitzler which has been largely incorporated from the old chapter x. To make room for this fresh material, the appendix consisting of analyses of narratives has had to be omitted. Some additions have been made to the Select Bibliography, and the Index of Novellen has been replaced by an index of authors' names. I hope that this new edition of a much-valued work will be a not unworthy memorial to E. K. Bennett.

H.M.W.

March 1960