THE 'ZEITROMAN' FROM 1830-1900.

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Summary

Statement

Acknowledgements

Note

Chapter I: The Zeitroman as a form
(1) Introduction 1
(2) Universality and ephemeral elements 7
(3) The aesthetic element 10
(4) Development of the form 12
(5) The Zeitroman and the Bildungsroman 15
(6) Further formal problems 16
(7) Hasubek's work on the Zeitroman 21
(8) Worthmann's work on the Zeitroman 30
Footnotes to chapter I 39

CHAPTER II: Karl Immermann: Die Epigonen
(1) Introduction 44
(2) The nobility and the bourgeoisie 53
(3) The conclusion of the novel 68
(4) Contemporary history 74
(5) Other aspects of the age - manners, customs 83
Footnotes to chapter II 89

CHAPTER III: Friedrich Spielhagen: Problematische Naturen
(1) Plot 100
(2) Introduction 101
(3) The narrative-structure 107
(4) Literary references 116
(5) The nobility 122
(6) The ball-scene 133
(7) The military 139
(8) The novel's conclusion 143
Footnotes to chapter III 153

CHAPTER IV: Gottfried Kallm An. Martin Schlem..
(3) Social-climbing and social distinctions; the cultivation of externals 164
(4) Financial ascendancy, speculation and ruin 170
(5) Salander the politician; general political and educational trends 177
(6) Patriotism and the Volk 193
Footnotes to chapter IV 201

CHAPTER V: Theodor Fontane: Der Stechlin
(1) Introduction 205
(2) The Old and the New 218
(3) The first chapter 232
(4) Social classes
   a) Bourgeoisie 243
   b) Social Democracy 248
   c) Class-relationships - more general 251
(5) Politics 257
(6) Social manners, customs 259
(7) Art, culture 262
(8) Religion 266
(9) The army 269
(10) Zeitgeschichte 273
(11) Conclusion 276
Footnotes to chapter V 280

CHAPTER VI: Heinrich Mann: Im Schlaraffenland
(1) Introduction 289
(2) Das geistig-kulturelle Kraftfeld
   a) The metaphor of the theatre 299
   b) "Die deutsche Geisteskultur" 304
   c) The theatre as a social institution 307
(3) Das sittlich-religiöse Kraftfeld 313
(4) Das politisch-militärische Kraftfeld 318
(5) Das wirtschaftliche Kraftfeld 332
(6) Das gesellschaftliche Kraftfeld 342
(7) Conclusion 345
Footnotes to chapter VI 348
SUMMARY

The Zeitroman, an ill-defined and little researched genre, has found less resonance than the other main novel stream in 19th century German literature, the Bildungsroman, and still less than the social novel in other European literatures. This is partly because of the quality of the pre-Fontane Zeitroman, and partly because of the slow development of a traditional basis of the genre: Heinrich Mann's self-appraisal as the first social novelist in Germany may be misleading, but it is an exaggeration of an indisputable phenomenon rather than a misconception of what constitutes the social novel.

Chapter I of this thesis examines different usage of the term Zeitroman, the two main critical contributions to an understanding of the genre, and the particular problems the Zeitroman poses. This form of the novel exhibits in a very particular way the tension between the temporally limited and spatially expansive world of the novel. A further key issue is the way a degree of universality can make the work more durable than a mere period piece. The epic scope of many of these novels and the primacy of the age as a collective impression of different spheres of life create artistic dilemmas. Perhaps the two greatest problem-areas are the characterization of individuals - the degree to which they can evolve alongside the frequently overriding historical concerns of the novel - and the rendering in fiction of those historical concerns. From Immermann through to Heinrich Mann (with the exception of the Swiss Keller) the
ing is the vying for power and prestige between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, with the proletariat as a further "combatant" late in the century.

Another awkward task is establishing the aesthetic criteria for approaching such a factually-oriented genre. Aesthetically the *Zeitroman* progresses from the lingering of an alien *Bildungsroman*-tradition in Immermann to the radical satire of Heinrich Mann. Chapters II-VI of the thesis trace various stages of this development in analyzing a few important works. Very different tones emerge, from the elegy of Immermann's creation through the polemics and idealism of Spielhagen to the disillusionment of Keller, the serenity of Fontane and the grotesquely drawn features of Heinrich Mann's world. Fontane's predecessors tackle the problems of the *Zeitroman* from different directions and make progress in different areas: the scene at the beginning of *Martin Salander* where the children quibble over the distinction between the words "Mutter" and "Mama" is one of the first successful transferences of the theme of social distinctions to a naturally portrayed human context. The question of characterization has already been mentioned; too often in the *Zeitroman* the figures are no more than chiffres of the age, manipulated embodiments of abstract ideas and historical forces.

The peak of the genre is reached with Fontane. From his position at the end of the century he surveys the subsequent development of those issues which had been too confusing for Immermann and too compelling for Spielhagen, and
faceless accompaniments.

The thesis is then largely an analysis of important stages in the development of the Zeitroman genre. The guidelines of approach established in chapter I are applied to those novels subsequently examined. Successive novels considered both modify and expand the picture of the Zeitroman gained to that point, and the various threads emerging are then synthetized in the Conclusion.