



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Walker, John and Cooper, I. (2019) Introduction: literature and religion in the German-speaking world, 1200 to the present. In: Walker, John and Cooper, I. (eds.) *Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World From 1200 to the Present Day*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9781108284622.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/26999/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World: 1200 to the Present

Ian Cooper and John Walker

The conjunction in our title requires some explanation, if not justification, in the context in which this book is published. This book aims to introduce the undergraduate, postgraduate and general reader to a literary and intellectual relationship which is richer in German than in any other European culture. That is the constant and reciprocal relationship in the German-speaking world since the Middle Ages between literary and religious practice and discourse.¹

For at least the last three decades, the major trends in humanistic scholarship have combined with the exigencies of university teaching and recruitment to ensure that smaller and smaller numbers of students are likely to be studying ‘German’—in whatever terms that academic subject is defined—by itself. The study of German like other European literatures has increasingly been defined in terms of the study of the ‘culture’ of the German-speaking lands, and that study itself has been reconceived in both interdisciplinary and intercultural terms. This development is of great positive relevance to our theme, because the relationship between literature and religion has for the last eight hundred years informed not only the practice but also the very definition and self-understanding of both expressions of humanity in the German-speaking world. It should also (as we will seek to show) specifically inform our understanding of them now.

At the same time, this very development means that the terms ‘literature’ and ‘religion’ need to be approached afresh and may require a new kind of definition, different from that which the ‘literature and...’ type of literary history might suggest. The post-modern linguistic turn and its application to both literary and theological study suggests that ‘literature’ and ‘religion’ might be modes of human consciousness not only historically and culturally, but intrinsically and therefore hermeneutically connected.² Much contemporary cultural and literary theory insists that there can be no one foundational discipline of knowledge—especially no philosophical anthropology—which can ground all others. ‘Literature’, like ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’, is a cultural

¹ For the purposes of this introduction ‘German’ means ‘German-language’ or ‘German-speaking’, having a narrower definition only in instances where reference to ‘Germany’ is specified. ‘Germany’ refers to the lands which came to form part of Bismarck’s Second Empire in 1871 and to the geographical constituents of the state(s) claiming the name Germany from that time until the present day.

² On the relationship between theology and literary theory see especially Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Literary Theory* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin’s Press, 2000), pp.1-37 (‘Theology and Representation’).

practice with its own canons of coherence and interpretation which are related, but cannot be reduced, to the interpretation of texts. However, whilst structuralist linguistic theory has insisted on the equal right of discourses to rigorous hermeneutic attention, cultural theory has equally affirmed the inseparability of history and text. The deconstructionist claim that ‘there is nothing outside the text’³ is necessarily called into question by the relationship between the literary and religious ‘texts’ which we will consider and the wider culture in which both are produced and which constantly informs their practice. Both ‘literature’ and ‘religion’ create, as they are embedded in, what Hans-Georg Gadamer called ‘worlds’ of discourse which interact with each other, evolve through time, and cannot be reduced to their written expression.⁴

The notion of a textual ‘world’ owes its explicitly theological sense to the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. For Ricoeur the ‘world of the text’—the structure of meanings and relationships which a text proposes to us by virtue of being ‘about’ anything, and which of necessity exceeds the text’s representational space—has the character of a ‘manifestation’, or revelation, of what is: of being.⁵ Ricoeur’s argument entails that the ‘worldliness’, or secularity, of literature cannot be divorced from the question of the textual world’s being manifest to us, its showing us something which no particular representation of worldly phenomena could exhaust. We cannot mention Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of textual worlds without adverting also to Erich Auerbach’s profound identification of a continuity between the style and typological structure of Biblical narrative and the representation of the human world in European literature from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶ Like Auerbach, Ricoeur expresses a strong sense that literature registers its ‘world’ as given to it to represent, and hence that to acknowledge an extra-textual space of meaning is to acknowledge that the world’s meaningfulness or interpretability arises from its fundamental gratuity. It would be possible to extend Ricoeur’s residually Thomist idiom and say that in presenting us with being—in furnishing a textual world which is never only a *textual* world—literature is participating in the self-communication of that wherein being’s dynamic movement is, so to speak, perfected: of gift.

³ See e.g. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1967]), p. 158.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), p. 443f.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’, trans. by David Pellauer, *Harvard Theological Review*, 70:1/2 (1977), 1-37 (25).

⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton University Press, 1991 [1953; original Berne: Francke, 1946]), for example p. 73.

None of this means, of course, that literary authors have to be committed to understanding their work in these terms in order to be of interest in an undertaking such as that of the present volume. It does mean, however, that literature cannot meaningfully be spoken of as ‘secular’—either in the sense of ‘non-sacred’ or in the sense of ‘detached from religious commitments’—without us understanding by its secular status some effort to show or reveal which will put pressure on the coherence of any horizon that secular language can erect from its own resources. The question of such internal pressure on the secular horizon, implicitly significant in Ricoeur’s literary theory, is a defining element of what Hans Blumenberg—himself treading a path in part already cleared for him by Max Weber—posed as the problematic of modernity’s ‘legitimacy’.⁷ This volume takes the conceptual framework of secularization theory, as laid out and indeed modified from its earlier forms by Blumenberg’s analysis, as axiomatic for the historical investigation of any relationship between literary and religious discursive ‘worlds’; and it takes seriously the implication of Ricoeur and Auerbach, which is found to a lesser extent also in Gadamer, that such an investigation will not and should not avoid theological categories. It also insists, again with Blumenberg, that the question of secularization is not coeval with that of ‘modernity’, however defined.⁸ Auerbach’s insight into the relationship between the textual worlds given us in medieval literature and the narrative mode of the Bible is also an insight into their difference, and all non-sacred (certainly all vernacular) literature elaborates a human or worldly paradigm that is meaningfully distinct from claims about divine action made by the textual canons of revealed religion. Historically, the contributions to the volume show how from its beginnings literature in German manifested this relationship or tension in specific and acute ways, and how from the post-Reformation period until well into the twentieth century it was shaped by cultural discourses heavily invested in the more or less remote secular reimagining of religious ideas. The explicit working out of the worldly paradigm, especially through forms of life enabled by the social, economic and religious structure of towns, gives to ‘pre-modern’ and ‘early modern’ literature in German a unique sense of latent modernity,⁹ and to

⁷ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. By Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 3-11; 63-75.

⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁹ See for example Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

literature from the eighteenth century onwards a ready affinity with questions we are used to calling post-modern.

It will be a constant theme of this book that literature and religion in the German-speaking world from 1200 to the present day are especially closely connected, not least because they both form part of what Hugo von Hoffmannsthal called ‘writing as the intellectual space of the nation’ (‘das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation’).¹⁰ The political and social reference of this claim—especially what might be meant by the German ‘nation’ itself—will of course vary greatly throughout the time-span that this book addresses and between the several constituent parts of the German-speaking world. However, the relationship between literary and religious discourse is both close and reciprocal in every one of the periods this book treats. We will argue that the nature of that relationship is relevant not only to the writing of explicitly ‘religious’ as well as ‘secular’ literature in German, but also to the way we should read and critically respond to both kinds of writing. This thesis also entails another: that the course of both literary and religious history in the German-speaking world since the Middle Ages must be understood in terms of a process of secularization, the terms of which in the German-speaking lands differ from those which apply elsewhere in Europe. We must therefore first explore and specify the idea of ‘secularization’ itself.

As Charles Taylor showed in his monumental study *A Secular Age*, ‘secularization’ can mean many and often contradictory things.¹¹ It is not only a hermeneutic category which we might apply to the literature and culture of ages past; it can also be a central part of the self-understanding of the cultural worlds we study. Our understanding of the term, even the cultural presuppositions for our use of it, might differ radically from those of the past. Especially but not exclusively in the early part of our period, ‘secularization’ can mean the cultural universality of a mode of discourse which continues to be thoroughly theologically informed, indeed inseparable from religious practice. Rigid distinction between the ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ spheres, whether in relation to German literature or to German culture and society as a whole, will often be inappropriate. Taylor isolates three key meanings of the term in our own time. First, the thesis that political and social affairs are now conducted without any objective reference to religious belief or categories (irrespective of the

¹⁰ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation’ in Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, ed. Bernd Schoeller and Ingeborg Beyer-Ahlert, 10 vols. (Frankfurt a. M: Fischer, 1980), vol. X, pp. 24-41.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard; Belknap Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.

subjective beliefs of those who participate in the public sphere). Second, the thesis that there is an actual decline in subjectively held religious faith and practice in the modern world as compared to the past. Third, the idea that religious belief is itself a subjective phenomenon, the product of personal choice among several different cultural options, not a shared assent to a commonly held idea of ultimate truth. Each of Taylor's three definitions of secularization will be relevant to the arguments advanced in this book, although in their more explicit form they will be more applicable to the later sections. However, most relevant to our approach is that concepts of this kind, whether or not they are applied as sociological, theological, or broader cultural categories, differ greatly from the immediacy of both the literary and religious discourses themselves. A major emphasis of this book, which we hope will emerge from each of its contributions, is that both literature and religion in the German-speaking world share a capacity for immediate communication which can tell us much about the relationship between literature and religion as well as about German culture as a whole. A persistent theme, not only of literature in German but also of German theology and philosophy throughout our period, is the investigation and articulation of the nature of human selfhood. However, the imaginative, symbolic and verbally embodied way in which German literature can articulate human subjectivity — one largely denied to German philosophy and theology at the same time — means that literature in German has a particular relevance in relation to German culture as a whole. Precisely because neither literary nor religious discourse is identical with philosophical or theological doctrine, both discourses can have a critical function in a culture which, perhaps more than any other in Europe, depends on such doctrines for its legitimation.

That shared capacity also means that both literature and religion in the German-speaking world from 1200 to the present day can offer us independent insights into the process of secularization in excess of those which such abstract conceptual frameworks can provide. There will also be a constant tension between the idea of secularization as an objective process in German cultural and social history and the subjective modes in which that process might be experienced: German literature is often the privileged medium for registering that distinction. The narrative or, more precisely, the competing narratives, of secularization in the German-speaking world are anything but linear. As Charles Taylor acknowledges, many of the received narratives of secularization in the

West are of limited relevance to the kind of ‘thick’ description¹² which culturally embodied practices like literature and religion require. For example, Émile Durkheim’s thesis of the progressive reduction of religious consciousness to beliefs or practices which can be understood in exclusively social terms,¹³ or Max Weber’s concept of the disenchantment (‘Entzauberung’) of the world in industrial modernity,¹⁴ have limited application to the forms of religious consciousness which German literature most illuminates.

For Taylor, ‘pre-modern’ or ‘medieval’ is broadly distinguished from ‘modern’ culture by a shift from what he calls the ‘porous’ to the ‘buffered’ self.¹⁵ In an integrally religious culture such as that of medieval Europe, Taylor argues, the boundary between inward experience and our sense of an external world is thoroughly permeable and constantly transgressed. The ‘religious’ world and its manifestation in the form of spirits, angels and demonic powers, as well as the sacraments of the Church by which life is sustained and meaning embodied, is both outwardly experienced and completely internalized in the self. In such a world, Taylor suggests, the characteristically modern investigation of the relationship between human subjectivity and the ‘reality’ of experience has not yet happened. By contrast, he argues, the ‘buffered’ or ‘modern’ self is characterized by ‘the possibility of disengagement [...] and disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one’s whole surroundings, cultural and social’. This process is also accompanied by ‘an interiorization [...] a separation between Mind and World as separate loci’ (539). In the new culture of subjectivity, ‘all the features we normally ascribe to agents must be in minds, which are distinct from the outer world’ (*ibid.*). This new consciousness of the ‘buffered self’ is fundamentally ‘anthropocentric, expressive of our capacity to order the world and ourselves’ (300). It also suggests ‘a sense of invulnerability’, ‘because the buffered self is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind’ (*ibid.*). This development, Taylor argues, is also naturally associated with secularization, because ‘this sense of self-possession, of a secure inner mental realm, is all the stronger, if in addition to disenchanting the world, we have also taken the anthropocentric turn, and no longer even draw on the power of God’ (301). For

¹² See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 4-30 (‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’).

¹³ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain, ed. by Robert Nisbet (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976), p. 418f.

¹⁴ Max Weber, ‘Science as a Vocation’ in Peter Lassman, Irving Velody and Herminio Martins (eds.), *Max Weber’s ‘Science as a Vocation’* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 30.

¹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 41-2.

Taylor, this new understanding of human subjectivity is as relevant to literature as it is to religion, because it gives rise to a rich vocabulary of interiority, an inner realm of thought and feeling to be explored (539).

Taylor's conceptual framework is of great relevance to the subject-matter of this book. However, each of our specialist chapters will suggest that its application to the changing relationship between literature and religion in the German-speaking world since the Middle Ages must be thoroughly critical: that is to say, conscious of the specificity of literary and religious discourses and of the particular cultural environment in which they both work. As Almut Suerbaum and Helen Watanabe O'Kelly show, medieval and early modern literature in German articulates an idea of human subjectivity with a remarkably modern relevance. German literature before 1700 is not lacking in tension between dogmatic tradition and subjective response, indeed in the emergence of modes of writing which embody critique of religious and therefore political authority. In her chapter on writing in German until 1450, Suerbaum begins by discussing the literary context up to 1200, going back to the earliest vernacular works in German. Decisively for the entire relationship surveyed in this volume, the late twelfth century saw the aristocratic court develop as a centre of literary patronage (a role it was to maintain for at least six hundred years). Suerbaum shows how, as a result of this shift in particular, medieval German literature was insistently concerned with the relationship between dogmatically enshrined belief and forms of individual social agency—those forms being invariably not passive determinations of religious tradition, but rather the dense and complex medium through which its picture of human personhood could be articulated. Accordingly, Suerbaum argues, we should depart from any view of this period as characterized by a straightforward and subjectively indifferent dominance of 'religious' as opposed to 'secular' assumptions. But by the same token we should repudiate any suggestion that the relationship of sacred and secular in the medieval period be seen teleologically, as making inevitable what came after it: namely the imposition of secular political priorities on religious identity which was definitive of Luther's Reformation. The literary context of the Reformation is the subject of Watanabe O' Kelly's chapter, and she begins by showing how Humanist polemic, notably Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, converged with ideas of church reform (notably those of Erasmus) and fermented a stylistic and intellectual mix whose most influential, and vituperative, expression is the language of Luther. Running through Watanabe O'Kelly's vivid account is a sense of two competing but related desires which Blumenberg, writing of this

period, identified: desire on the one hand for the ‘abbreviation’ of worldly time in accordance with conventional Biblical expectation, and on the other for a feeling of ‘acceleration’ of experience, of that which ‘for the first time is supposed to make it pleasant to remain in the world’.¹⁶ Narrative prose of the period characteristically exhibits an attraction simultaneously towards didacticism and towards enjoyment, as Watanabe O’Kelly suggests: whether in the picaresque novel *Simplicissimus* by the Catholic Grimmelshausen, or in the anonymously written Lutheran ‘history’ of a figure to whom Blumenberg’s category of ‘accelerated’ experience might be said emblematically, and in the context of later German literature fatefully, to apply: Dr Johann Faustus.

The idea of a passive, because receptive and undifferentiated, pre-modern self, which is replaced by the active self-fashioning modern subject, is not borne out by the history of either religion or literature in the German-speaking world. Neither can German literature of the pre-Reformation medieval period be read simply as the precursor to an implicitly modern idea of the self which emerges after the Reformation. As our later chapters show, the culture and vocabulary of interiority which emerges, in different and yet constantly related ways, in German literature and religion after about 1700 does not suggest a ‘buffered’ or ‘invulnerable’ self. What Taylor sees as the modern separation of ‘mind’ and ‘world’, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience, is indeed crucial to much of German literary and religious discourse since the eighteenth century. However, this does not only entail confidence in a newly emancipated inner self confronting social reality. Precisely that separation gives rise to a process of profound self-interrogation, indeed radical doubt, in German literature at the same time. What Taylor identifies as ‘the culture of fastidious inwardness’ (300) which accompanies this development and is anatomized in Norbert Elias’s *The Process of Civilization*,¹⁷ is anything but an adequate compensation for the ‘loss of complementarity’ which this process entails.¹⁸ As several of our later chapters show, much post-Enlightenment German literature is a critical interrogation of that culture, in which its inner contradictions and inadequacy to social reality are exposed. From at least the late eighteenth century onwards, what Taylor calls the ‘mobilization’ of religious consciousness (505-6), through

¹⁶ *Legitimacy*, p. 50.

¹⁷ See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), vol. II, ‘State Formation and Civilization’, pp. 229-47 (‘The Social Constraint Towards Self-Constraint’).

¹⁸ On this point, see Elias’s own analysis in Norbert Elias, *Studien über die Deutschen: Machtkämpfe und Habitusentwicklung im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Schröter (Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 223-70 (‘Zivilisation und Gewalt. Über das Staatsmonopol der körperlichen Gewalt und seine Durchbrechungen’).

its channelling into public religious allegiance and practice, has in the German-speaking world been a very incomplete and problematic practice. Indeed, much of modern German literature is concerned with the tension between what Taylor calls ‘authentic’ religious consciousness and the forms available for its cultural expression. What Lionel Trilling called ‘the opposing self’¹⁹ and the associated modern idea of subjectivity are in the German-speaking context both literary and religious phenomena since at least the age of Goethe. In the German-speaking world, literary and religious expressions of the ‘authentic’ self are not a consequence of the modern decline in religious practice or the political power of the established Church. Indeed they accompany, and frequently undermine, the political establishment of Protestant Christianity from its very outset.

Eighteenth-century German literature prior to the Kantian critique of Enlightenment, argues John H. Smith in his contribution to the volume, played a fundamental role not only in expressing, but also in shaping, the idea of the infinite—formulated pre-eminently by Leibniz—as a dimension of (finite) experience. Smith argues that the ‘shock’ of the mathematical infinite was absorbed through literature (especially poetry) which was both secular in its commitment to the sensuous and materialist registering of humans’ natural environment, and religious in its subjective and affective orientation. The result of this, Smith argues, was that mathematics, literature and religion were jointly involved in reconceiving the infinite as something which can only be sought within the finite. Drawing both on Blumenberg and on Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions, Smith suggests that the religious idea of transcendence, having been rendered problematic not least by speculation about infinite worlds, was transformed (but not ‘overcome’) and reinstated as part of the subjective exploration of nature. Moreover, it was integral to the possibility of maintaining the new mathematical infinite as something to be *experienced*. The great nature poets of the mid-eighteenth century, Brockes and Haller, chart a transition from the Baroque equation of nature with fallenness—which had been given searing expression in the deeply Lutheran poetry of Andreas Gryphius—to a view of nature as reflecting the divine. Such a view, Smith shows, was not free from paradox or indeed from introspective despair, which in the work of the most influential poet in the decades leading up to 1770, Friedrich Klopstock, became a powerful occasion for Pietist aesthetic sublimation. Suggesting throughout the ways in which poetry of this time articulated problems of secular subjectivity which came to weigh heavily on Kant and his successors (both literary and

¹⁹ Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1995), p. x.

philosophical), Smith argues that the infinite, though ‘normalized’ in this period, was far from tamed.

By the late eighteenth century German secular literature is thoroughly permeated by the vocabulary of both Pietism and the theological Enlightenment. Ian Cooper’s chapter on literature and religion in Germany in the period 1770-1830 shows how, in the classical age of German literature and philosophy, the progressive dissolution of the antithesis between religious inwardness and Enlightenment critique gives rise to historically unparalleled creativity in German literature and thought. This is also the age in which human subjectivity is decisively redefined by critical and then post-critical Idealism in German philosophy. At the same time, Herder inaugurates an entirely new conceptualization of language as both the vehicle of human freedom and the embodied medium in which human beings both recognize and creatively bring to expression the truth revealed in nature. Cooper shows that the combination of these two elements makes the conflict between the ideas of the ‘human’ or ‘divine’ origin of reason and language, so influential in the German Enlightenment, increasingly irrelevant in its aftermath. Between 1770 and 1830 the twin heritages of rationalism in German Idealist philosophy and Pietism in the beginnings of modern Biblical criticism come together. In so doing, both decisively affect both the vocabulary of German literature and its function as a key mode of cultural critique in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany. The development in German writing from the literature of *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) and *Empfindsamkeit* (Sentimentality) to Romanticism, Cooper shows, reflects the evolution of a specifically literary idea of inwardness which not only reflects but critically challenges both theological and political constructions of the subject at the same time.

Nineteenth-century literature in German from 1830 onwards manifests a problematic of secularization as a component of modern social reality. This is explored by John Walker in his treatment of the period 1830-1900, or from the post-Idealist age to the cusp of Modernism. Germany underwent in the nineteenth century an ‘objective’ process of secularization, whereby religious modes of thought and social practice were replaced by secular equivalents or substitutes; yet religion maintained a forceful and generative ‘subjective’ presence as a determinant of individual consciousness. Walker shows how this tension in the historical structure of secularization in Germany expressed itself in disparate phenomena such as the ‘left-Hegelian’ political appropriation of Idealist theological language by the movement of *Junges Deutschland* (Young

Germany), and the conservative theological aesthetic of *Biedermeier* associated above all with Austria and German-speaking Switzerland (both decisively influenced by the cultural authority of Germany) in the period leading up to 1848. Meanwhile the classical distinctions made in post-Kantian theology continued to assert themselves in David Friedrich Strauss's culturally potent deconstruction of scriptural 'mythology'. The novel from Karl Gutzkow to—definitively—Gottfried Keller; lyric poetry from Heinrich Heine to Eduard Mörike; the short prose narrative in its immensely subtle and complex deployment by Adalbert Stifter: all these variously distil, satirize and sometimes overcome the mismatch between residually Idealist subjectivity and objectively materialist reality which Strauss and his theological successors articulate. Strauss's (antipathetic) philosophical successor is Nietzsche, who, Walker argues, poses the question of how any representation of truth is possible when both Idealist philosophy and its attendant religious (or secular) culture have evacuated themselves of substance. Nietzsche bequeaths this question to literary Modernism, and it is highly significant, Walker argues in the conclusion to his chapter, that at the turn of the twentieth century Thomas Mann, in his novel *Buddenbrooks*, presents the attempt to lay claim to an understanding of ultimate reality as founded in a tragic misunderstanding, resulting directly from the intellectual and aesthetic language of secularized religion which shapes the characters' cultural world.

Carolyn Duttlinger's contribution highlights the religious resonance of German literature from 1900-1945, considering what Daniel Weidner calls 'the cultural afterlife of religion' in both the Christian and the Jewish traditions of German writing. She examines how a pervasive consciousness of alienation and despair, even the definitive absence or 'death' of God, can give rise to a literature in which the act of writing itself acquires a kind of 'religious' or even liturgical significance. Her analysis, ranging from the Expressionist lyrical poetry of Georg Trakl written under the trauma of his experience of the First World War, to the poetry of Rilke in which Catholicism is refracted through the transfiguring lens of Austrian Modernism, shows that German writing at the beginning of the twentieth century does not bear out Charles Taylor's thesis of a 'buffered' modern self. On the contrary, much modernist writing in German suggests only a precarious hold on the idea of the 'self' at all, in which the 'modern' emphasis on authenticity in relation to experience is constantly challenged by the loss of any sense of an integrated human subject. In her close reading of dramatic texts especially, Duttlinger traces this development in the

continuing ‘negative’ presence of the Christian idea of Incarnation in the writing of Trakl and Rilke and the Jewish idea of the Covenant in the work of Daniel Wolfenstein. By contrast, Duttlinger uncovers the legacy of the *Lutherbibel* in the radically atheistic and socialist dramas of Brecht, whose roots lie equally in the context of German Expressionism but which end with the most potent literary critique of National Socialism in German, in which the residual Christian idiom in German culture is fully exploited. This chapter also analyses the afterlife of religious consciousness in the work of Franz Kafka, the greatest Modernist writer in German, and Thomas Mann, the greatest German realist novelist. In the work of Kafka, both Jewish and Christian motifs abound in an oeuvre which insistently precludes any definitive form of theological idiom or commitment, whilst in that of Mann the cultural legacy of European Christendom persists only, although also relevantly, in the cultural world of Europe on the eve and in the aftermath of the First World War, imagined and critically illuminated in his great novel *The Magic Mountain*. Throughout her analysis Duttlinger highlights the context of developments in German literature in wider currents of intellectual history, such as Rilke’s and Mann’s concern with spiritualism and psychoanalysis and the influence on several Jewish writers of the rediscovery of Jewish mysticism and the Hasidic tradition by Martin Buber. Her essay concludes with a fascinating analysis of the beginnings of post-Holocaust Jewish writing in the wartime lyrics of Nelly Sachs.

Daniel Weidner’s concluding contribution on German literature since 1945 addresses the total political and cultural collapse of the German nation with the end of National Socialism and defeat in the Second World War. In this context, Weidner argues, the most relevant interpretive framework is not the idea of the ‘individualization of piety’— a change in emphasis from the public expression to the private authenticity of religious experience — but the loss of credibility of any cultural or social expression of ‘religion’ at all. Conventional analyses of the fate of religion in modernity are inapposite to post-war Germany, not least because the idea of (German) culture as the secular successor to religion has been comprehensively discredited by the events of the Nazi dictatorship and the war. This idea, still incongruously invoked in the historian Friedrich Meinecke’s *The German Catastrophe* (1947), with its proposal for a public cult of German classicism as a response to the debacle, can only appear offensive in the light of the actual compatibility of such a cult with National Socialism. Immediately after 1945, the only credible use of a religious vocabulary in German literature is the emphatic rejection of the ‘theological’ and ‘religious’ idiom altogether,

even if what is addressed—as in Wolfgang Borchert's *The Man Outside* (1947) or the post-war lyric poetry of Gottfried Benn—is the impossibility of faith in God or religious practice. At the same time, influential German writers like Romano Guardini speak not of the conflict between religion and modernity but (the anticipation is highly relevant to post-war German literature) of the end of modernity as such. By the same token, religious categories appear irrelevant to the question of German collective guilt. As the war recedes into chronological but not psychic or cultural distance, the emphasis of Christian or at least religiously aware German writers shifts to the social and political legacy of Catholic and Protestant Christianity, forever tainted by their complicity in Nazism, in the German-speaking world. Heinrich Böll anatomizes the continuing false consciousness and political cowardice of German Catholicism, treating in his novels both the political conservatism of the West German Catholic Church under Adenauer and its increasing abrogation of political engagement and responsibility in the affluent society of the 1970s and 1980s. By contrast, the radical atheist Günter Grass continues to employ the residual Catholic vocabulary and symbolism of his Danzig roots in a savage critique, in the novels known as *The Danzig Trilogy*, of the course of West German political development after 1945. The situation in East Germany is of course different, because of the officially atheist Soviet-backed Communist regime and the self-justifying ideology of the German Democratic Republic as the heir to anti-fascist resistance. East German literary uses of 'religious' material range from Thomas Wolf's dramatic treatment of Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' Revolt to the overtly anti-religious poetry of Johannes R. Becher. The Jewish émigré writer Stefan Heym, returning from American exile, offers a similarly ambiguous treatment of Jewish religious history. In the later part of the period, Weidner argues, the religiously inflected challenge to cultural orthodoxy is less overtly political and more formal, though still with an emphatically political relevance. German writers like Erich Fried, Botho Strauss and the Catholic feminist novelist Luise Rinser anticipate many of the positions of post-modernism by challenging in their writing the idea of 'subjectivity' itself, often in language and form which suggest a religious context. In the immediate past, Weidner suggests, this movement has embraced forms which confound 'high' and 'pop' culture in a peculiarly German mix.

A common theme of our contributors is that the key interpretative terms they employ—'secularization', 'modernity', 'subjectivity' and so on—have a meaning in the context of literature in German which can only be shown by the

close reading and analysis of literary texts: the immediacy of the way literature can communicate with its readers is highly relevant to all the phases of the German literary tradition with which this book is concerned. However, certain major themes emerge from all our chapters which can usefully be highlighted for the orientation of our readers. The idea of secularization will be a central concept in all the following chapters. It is as relevant, we will suggest, to the earlier part of our timespan (1200-1700), in which the distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' literature can only be made with great qualification or not at all, as it is to the later period, in which the process of cultural, social and literary secularization becomes progressively more overt. Secularization also links both literary and religious discourse to the articulation of human subjectivity in the German-speaking world. Both forms of discourse are concerned with the representation of human selfhood, about which they can offer insights inaccessible to other discourses equally influential in German culture at the same time: for example philosophy or political and public theology. The difference between religious consciousness in the broadest sense and its articulation in officially sanctioned theological doctrine or public practice should constantly be borne in mind. Literature in German throughout our period is often less overtly concerned with the public practice of faith and its social and political implications than the literature of England and France. However, this does not entail that German literature is less relevant to the political and social dimension of religious belief. The difference between the objective presence and the subjective consciousness of religion in the German-speaking world is itself of great social and political import; German literature is especially qualified to explore the meaning of that difference.

All these features of religion and literature in the German-speaking lands since about 1200 mean that the way we read literary texts in German is at least as important as what we say about them. What we call 'literature' and 'religion' are different ways of expressing what it is to be a human person. Our arguments are therefore both analyses of and invitations to the act of reading: the inescapably personal engagement of a reader with a literary text that is also the source of the general social and cultural relevance of literature. That connection, we hope to show, is especially relevant to literature in the German language and therefore to our reading and writing about it as students and scholars.