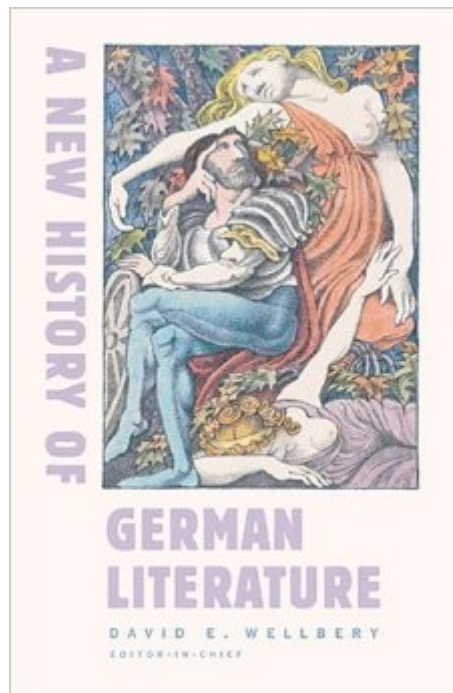


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A New History Of German Literature (Harvard University Press Reference Library)



Synopsis

The revolutionary spirit that animates the culture of the Germans has been alive for at least twelve centuries, far longer than the dramatically fragmented and reshaped political entity known as Germany. German culture has been central to Europe, and it has contributed the transforming spirit of Lutheran religion, the technology of printing as a medium of democracy, the soulfulness of Romantic philosophy, the structure of higher education, and the tradition of liberal socialism to the essential character of modern American life. In this book leading scholars and critics capture the spirit of this culture in some 200 original essays on events in German literary history. Rather than offering a single continuous narrative, the entries focus on a particular literary work, an event in the life of an author, a historical moment, a piece of music, a technological invention, even a theatrical or cinematic premiere. Together they give the reader a surprisingly unified sense of what it is that has allowed Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Luther, Kant, Goethe, Beethoven, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, Jelinek, and Sebald to provoke and enchant their readers. From the earliest magical charms and mythical sagas to the brilliance and desolation of 20th-century fiction, poetry, and film, this illuminating reference book invites readers to experience the full range of German literary culture and to investigate for themselves its disparate and unifying themes. Contributors include: Amy M. Hollywood on medieval women mystics, Jan-Dirk Mäler on Gutenberg, Marion Aptroot on the Yiddish Renaissance, Emery Snyder on the Baroque novel, J. B. Schneewind on Natural Law, Maria Tatar on the Grimm brothers, Arthur Danto on Hegel, Reinhold Brinkmann on Schubert, Anthony Grafton on Burckhardt, Stanley Corngold on Freud, Andreas Huyssen on Rilke, Greil Marcus on Dada, Eric Rentschler on Nazi cinema, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl on Hannah Arendt, Gordon A. Craig on Günter Grass, Edward Dimendberg on Holocaust memorials.

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Customer Reviews

This is the second of the Harvard University Press' avowedly "new" versions of literary history, having been preceded by a "New History of French Literature." It stands in marked contrast to the traditional banal historical surveys, which often read like annotated bibliographies rearranged in chronological order, which give the reader no flavor for actual literature. It is also different from an ideosyncratic synthetic history which presents the viewpoint of one critic, glossing over certain periods and authors in order to dwell on others, merely because the author finds them more interesting or in better conformity with his thesis. Instead, this book is a compilation of essays written by over 150 specialists in different periods and aspects of German literature, each essay concentrating upon a particular work, or a particular moment in German literary history. In some respects, it works amazingly well, seeing 1200 years of Germanic literature through a series of epiphanies. The quality of the essays is extremely high, and there are enough of them that the reader does get a notion of the richness and breadth of literary creation in the German language. Best of all, the essays are such that they tend to create a hunger to read many of the works reviewed. The reader can browse through the book, following one of the many threads provided by the diverse assembly of critics, jumping from one essay and epoch to another, noting along the way many works of which he may never have heard, accumulating a rich mine of future reading. But the History's chief success is also its chief failing: such a book can never be catholic enough to serve as a reference with which to place in its historical or literary context any book which one has read, or of which one has heard.

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