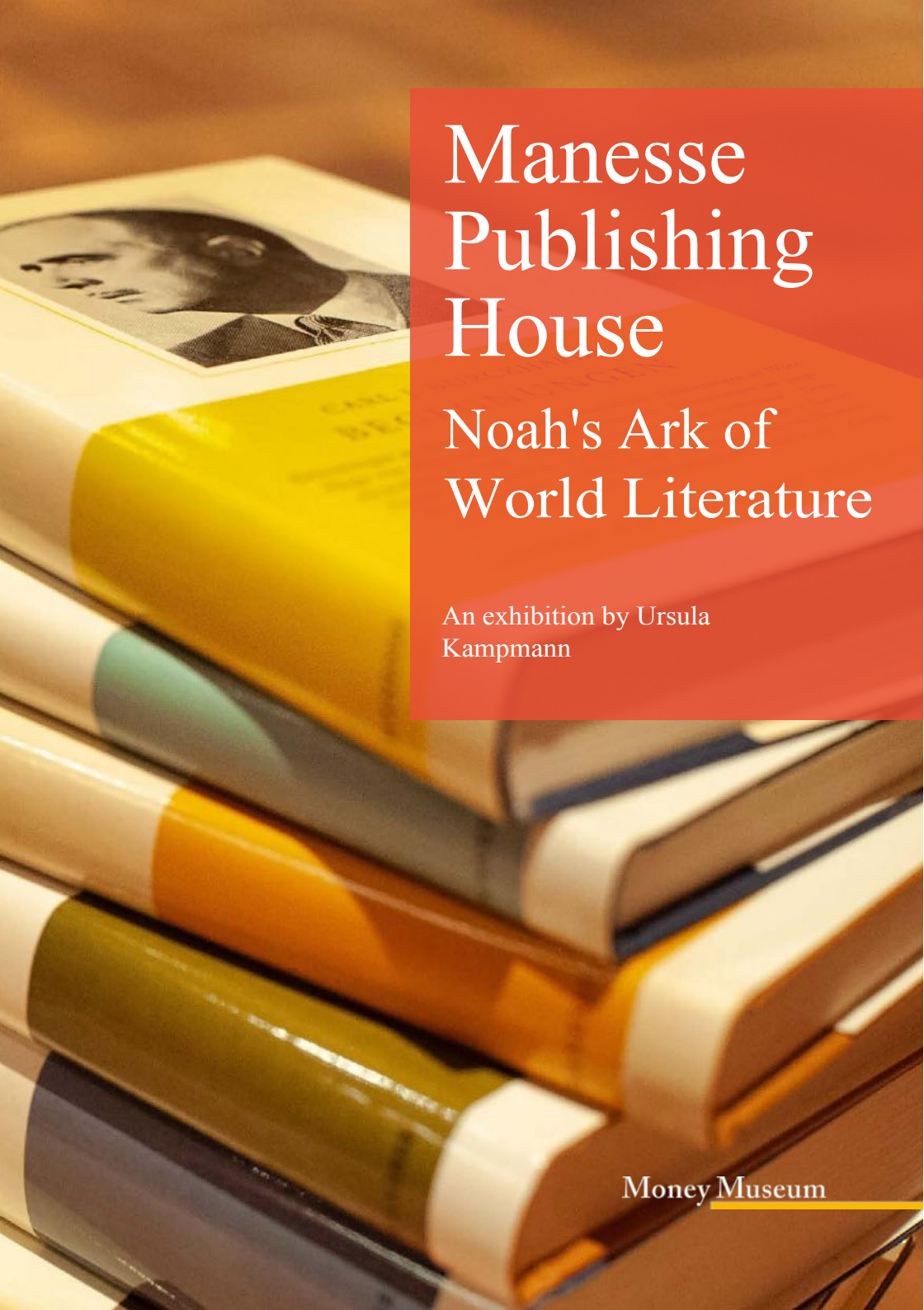

# Manesse Publishing House

## Noah's Ark of World Literature

An exhibition by Ursula Kampmann

Money Museum

# The Manesse Publishing House

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# Contents

Ursula Kampmann, historian, numismatist, and curator of the MoneyMuseum's book collection.

# Foreword

Every bibliophile reader in the German-speaking world is familiar with the Manesse Library of World Literature, those beautifully bound octavo-format books with colored belly bands on their dust jackets. They have their own place in every antiquarian bookshop, because they are still collected and read today.

They are published by Manesse Verlag, which celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2024. The Library of World Literature is more or less the only product of this publishing house. It has changed hands several times in the past and redesigned its cover in 2017 – after more than half a century. But one thing has always remained the same: the publishing house's management is committed to publishing aesthetically appealing books that are both entertaining and inspiring.

This is tradition: from the outset, Manesse Verlag was more than just a profit-oriented company. It was the dream of an educated publisher who wanted his publications to contribute to international understanding and who enjoyed the support of Conzett Verlag.

This exhibition at the MoneyMuseum places the founding of Manesse Verlag in its historical context
and traces the publishing program until the first sale of Manesse Verlag in 1983.

***Ursula Kampmann**, Summer 2025*

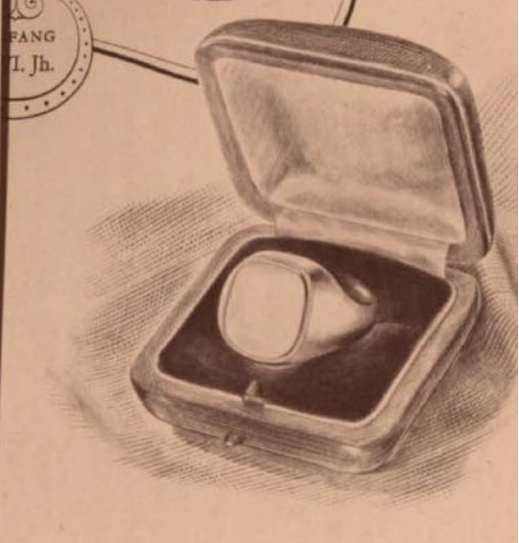
Teilansicht der Maria aus einer Verkündigungsgruppe der Wiener Burgkapelle, um 1480.

Der unbekannte Wiener Meister, der die Figuren des Engels und der Maria schuf, läßt den Engel knien und Maria sich emporrichten, im Unterschied zu den überwiegenden Darstellungen nördlich der Alpen, in denen die Jungfrau die Botschaft kniend empfängt. Locken und Hände zeigen die fragile Feinheit des Zeitstiles; mit der Sicherheit alter Handwerksüberlieferung und zugleich mit dem wägenden Gefühl des Künstlers sind aus dem Lindenholz sowohl die glatten Rundungen des Gesichtes wie auch die weichen Wellen der Haare und die eckig gebrochenen Falten des Gewandes geschnitten.

Du

Schweizerische Monatsschrift Februar 1947 7. Jahrgang





Station 1

# The historical situation

The year is 1942: At the Wannsee Conference, the National Socialist Reich government of Germany organizes the Holocaust and refers to it as the Final Solution to the Jewish Question. The Swiss Federal Council reaffirms its law on the expulsion of Germans of the Jewish faith at the borders, even if this puts their lives at risk. The first carpet bombing by the Allies destroys the city center of Lübeck. Glen Miller receives a gold record for Chattanooga Choo Choo, Bambi hits the cinemas, and Stefan Zweig writes The Royal Game, while Isaac Asimov formulates the three iron laws of robotics.

In that same year, 1942, Dr. Walther Meier proposed to Conzett Verlag that they jointly establish a new publishing house: Manesse Verlag's books would use literature to bring a message of tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and compassion into the living rooms of all Swiss people. With his library of world literature, Dr. Walther Meier wanted to show that even people who were considered enemies at the time shared the same fears, hardships, and hopes.

The first part of Station 1 deals with the historical background of the publishing house's founding, focusing in particular on Switzerland's exceptional situation with regard to censorship rules. The second part illustrates the central role that books played in the media landscape of the 1950s and 1960s.

in the 1950s and 1960s.

# ( 1.1) Censorship

Books that were affected by the book burning in Germany in 1933.

- Bertold Brecht, The Threepenny Opera
- Alfred Döblin, Berlin Alexanderplatz
- Friedrich Engels, The German Peasants' War
- Jaroslav Hašek, The Good Soldier Švejk
- Ernest Hemingway, In Another Country
- Erich Kästner, Pünktchen and Anton
- Lenin, The Revolution of 1917
- Jack London, Martin Eden
- Heinrich Mann, Professor Unrat (The Blue Angel)
- Karl Marx, Capital
- Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front
- Arthur Schnitzler, Reigen
- Lisa Tetzner, Hans Urian
- H. G. Wells, What Would a New War Look Like?

Book burning on May 11, 1933, at Berlin's Opernplatz. German Federal Archives, image 102-14597 / Georg Pahl / CC-BY-SA 3.0.


Victim of 18th-century censorship in Zurich: Johann Heinrich Waser was executed on May 27, 1780. Zurich Central Library, Waser, Joh. Hch. © I, 2, https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-53586/Public Domain Mark

Censorship is not an invention of the totalitarian states of the 20th century. It originated when the printing press made books and leaflets accessible to a wide audience. In the early modern period, every authority—whether republic, secular or spiritual monarch—attempted to use censorship to ensure that its subjects read only what the authorities deemed appropriate.

The most famous example was the papal Index, which between 1559 and 1966 listed all books that Catholic believers were forbidden to read. Reformed Zurich also subjected all printed matter—both Zurich and foreign—to state control from 1523 onwards. For the good of the people The most famous victim of Zurich censorship was the pastor Johann Heinrich Waser, whom the Zurich Council had beheaded on May 27, 1780, because of his writings.

It was not until 1829 that Zurich introduced freedom of the press. In 1848, it became part of the federal constitution. However, after 1933, it was subject to severe restrictions. The Federal Council decision of March 26, 1934 provided for measures ranging up to the banning of a publication in the event of "serious disturbances" in the context of reporting. During the Second World War, four newspapers were banned completely and 20 newspapers were banned temporarily. Eleven newspapers were subject to prior censorship. Literary works and theater performances were not affected by these measures.

Studenten und Bürger Würzburgs!

Pflegt deutsche Kultur und zerstört minderwertiges und zersetzendes Schrifttum undeutscher Schriftsteller. Die Studentenschaft veranstaltet in diesen Tagen einen Feldzug gegen jedes undeutsche Schrifttum. Es ist Pflicht jedes Deutschen, diesen Kampf zu unterstützen.

Reinigt Euere Büchereien!

Schriftleitungs- wie Mann Heinrich, Polgar, Sternheim, Toller, Tucholsky, Rilke, Barbusse, Döblin, Einstein, Feuchtwanger, Glaeser, Hahnekeber, Kaysser, Lenden Jack, Ludwig Emil, Mann Klaus, Neumann, Remarque, Schnitzler, Wassermann Jakob, Zweig Arnold, Zweig Stephan, u. a. dürfen in ihr feines Pfleg haben.

Die ausgesonderten Bücher werden von der Studentenschaft gesammelt.

Abgabestelle: Studentenhaus, Zimmer 70.

Die Bücher werden später feierlich verbrannt!

Eine ausführliche Liste liegt im Studentenhaus, Zimmer 70 zur Einsicht auf.

Die Studentenschaft an der Universität Würzburg
gez. Gerhard Linde, Studentenschaftsführer

Verantwortlich für den Inhalt: Gerhard Linde, Würzburg.
Buchdruckerei L. Popp, Würzburg, Sanderstraße 27, Telefon 2552. Drucksachen aller Art gut und billig.

call for self-censorship by the Würzburg student body

## Censorship in Germany and Central Europe

Swiss publishers were thus privileged. The situation was different in the German Reich. The staged book burning on May 11, 1933, marked the beginning of the systematic Gleichschaltung (enforced conformity) of all media. Anyone who wanted to work in the literary world – as a publisher, editor, translator, bookseller, librarian or even writer – had to join the Reich Chamber of Literature. People with Jewish roots were not allowed to join.

This effectively meant a professional ban. This could be imposed on any member in the event of misconduct.

What constituted misconduct was not public knowledge. There was a confidential list of 12,400 books and 149 authors that had been banned by the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Anyone who had anything to do with one of these risked being banned from their profession. Since the list was not publicly available, the literary world practiced self-censorship, avoided all risks, and thus refrained from publishing far more than just the books that were actually banned.

German censorship legislation had a strong impact on all conquered territories and vassal states. In 1942, these included the Benelux countries, northern France, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, as well as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece. As a result, strict censorship based on the German model existed in half of Europe.

## Censorship in Italy

In fascist Italy, too, all literary and artistic expression was censored. Before his march on Rome, Mussolini had worked as a journalist and was therefore familiar with the media industry. In order to keep it under control, he initiated a vaguely worded decree in July 1924. It affected not only daily newspapers, but also literature and film production. Its vague wording could be applied to any unwelcome expression. Anyone who "hindered the diplomatic activities of the government with false or tendentious statements" or made statements that "damaged the national reputation" or "disturbed public order" had to answer for themselves in court.

Mussolini opens the Cinecitta studios in Rome in 1937

## Censorship in Spain

As early as 1936, Francisco Franco ordered pre-censorship of all media intended for publication in his "política de comunicación." Literature was affected by the pornography law enacted in December 1936, which prohibited all content that was immoral, anti-church, anti-army, or anti-national unity according to the standards of national Catholic ideology. The rulers decided what content fell under this rule.
the Church, the army, or national unity. Those in power decided what content fell under this rule.

The situation was similar in neighboring Portugal, where Salazar also imposed strict censorship.

## The Soviet Union

The Stalinist Soviet Union relied on Glavlit to monitor all printed matter. This agency of the People's Commissariat for Education developed a detailed procedure for eliminating critical authors: First, the author was summoned to a meeting with the censor. After two or three warnings, a party official would intervene. If the author continued to be stubborn, the state security service would impose a harsh punishment. For example, the later Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to 10 years in prison in a private letter from 1953 for his criticism of Stalin.


Socialist poster from the Spanish Civil War with a caricature of Franco, which addresses his collaboration with the capitalist upper class and the church, between 1936 and 1937.

Interior view of a prisoner's quarters in the Gulag, 1936/7

Sentenced in 1945 to eight years' imprisonment and eternal exile.

## The British Ministry of Information

In Great Britain, the censorship exercised by the Ministry of Information was limited to the daily press. The ban on any reporting that contained information useful to the military was consistently enforced. This included, for example, the weather forecast for the coming days, the whereabouts of the royal family, and troop movements.

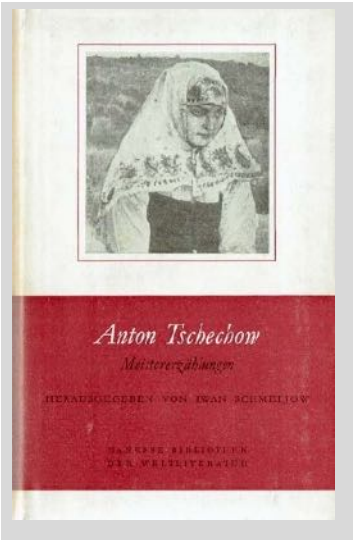
. Literary works were not affected by this censorship.

We must not forget one thing: when Dr. Walther Meier made his proposal for the Manesse Library of World Literature, no one knew that the war would end just three years later with an Allied victory. Conzett Verlag and Dr. Walther Meier embarked on this entrepreneurial adventure at a time when the free democratic world seemed to be on the brink of destruction.

# 1.2 The book in the post-war media landscape

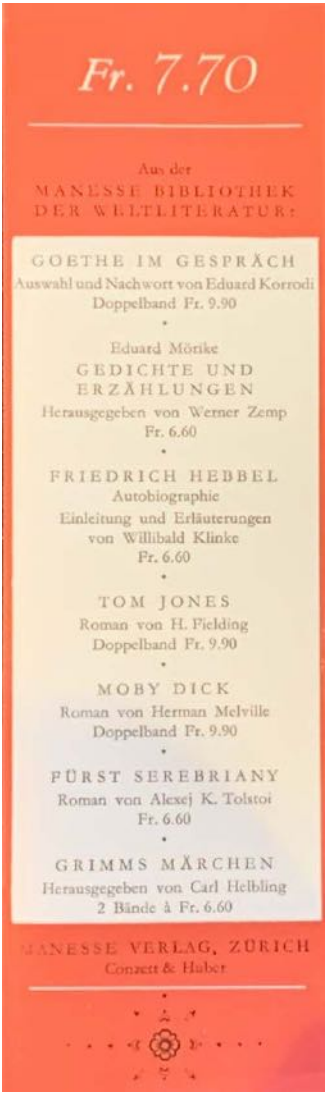
When Dr. Walther Meier believed he could change the world with his books, books played a central role in the media landscape. It was a matter of course that every "better" household had a library. The size and content of the library were a status symbol. Even though more books are published today than back then – in 1944, 2,648 German titles were published in Switzerland, compared to 4,600 in 2023 – they played a very different role in the post-war period. They were the most important and reliable source of innovative opinions and foreign cultures. Casual travel and television documentaries only became widespread at the turn of the 1970s. Until then, books remained the most reliable source of information about what other people did, thought, and felt.

Books were used differently than we do today. They were often exchanged among family and friends, lent out, read together, and discussed heatedly. Controversial texts inspired political debate and influenced public opinion. The best example of the enormous impact a book could have in the 1950s is *Women in the Playpen*. When Iris von Roten published her work in 1958, she sparked a scandal that continues to reverberate today.




Anton Chekhov, Master Stories, published in 1946 by Manesse Library of World Literature

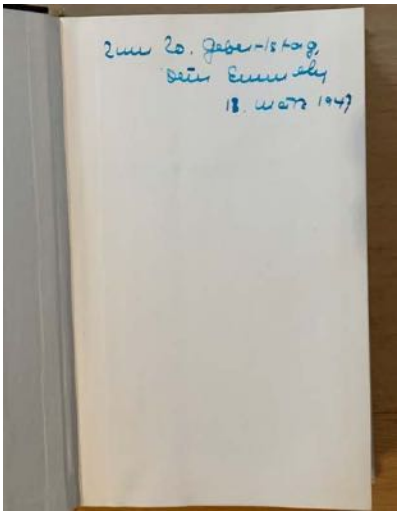
Chekhov's Master Stories accompanying flyer from Manesse Verlag with prices




## How much did a book cost?

The high esteem in which books were held was reflected in their price. The *master stories* by Russian author Anton Chekhov, for example, cost 7.70 francs in the year when an otherwise unknown Emmely bought the little book as a birthday present. What may not sound so impressive at first glance becomes so when you compare the sum with the average annual (!) income of a Swiss family.

In 1947, a married couple with two children had 8,204 francs at their disposal; today, that figure is 157,008 francs. If we compare the two figures, the 7.70 francs for 610 densely printed pages would theoretically correspond to around 150 francs today. In practical terms, however, 7.70 francs in 1947 had a very different meaning than 150 francs today. This is because households in the post-war period were able to spend a much smaller proportion of their income on leisure activities than is the case today.



Dedication by Emmely on the 20th birthday of a person unknown to us

Let's assume that this unknown Emmely, who so carefully wrote a dedication for a 20th birthday in turquoise ink, had to earn her money as a senior employee. Then she had a relatively good hourly wage of between 1.33 and 1.73 francs. That means she worked four and a half to six hours to earn the equivalent of the book.

No wonder people were careful with such expensive items. Although the booklet is printed on poor-quality, thin paper, there are hardly any signs of wear and tear apart from a slightly faded cover.

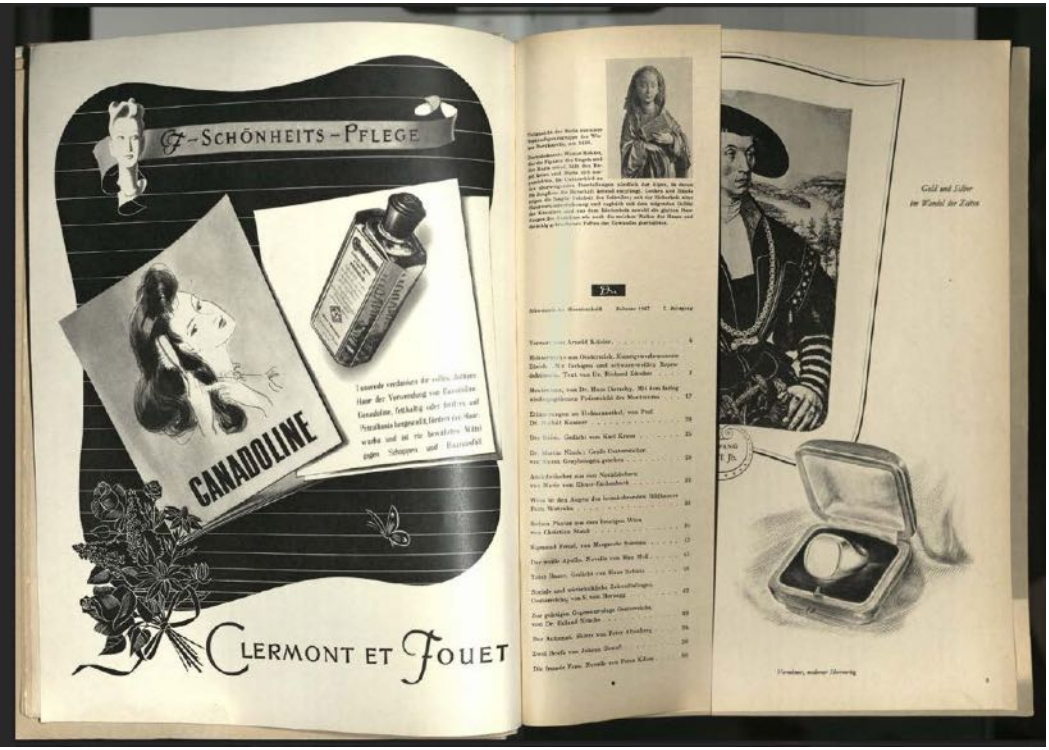
## Daily newspapers

Anton Chekhov was known for his neutral and reserved portrayal of the lives and mindsets of people in the Russian provinces. Through him, the unknown reader gained insights into the mindset of a people who had been living in the Cold War with the West since the end of World War II. What alternatives would a Swiss man or woman have had at that time to obtain better and more up-to-date information?

Today, our first choice would be the daily newspaper. This medium did exist, of course. The NZZ, for example, appeared on March 18, 1947, in three editions on eight

Neue Zürcher Zeitung on March 18, 1947

to twelve pages, each with completely different content. For 18 centimes – Emmely would only have had to work five to seven minutes for that – readers received relatively short news items on politics and economics, plus a little local news, sports, culture, obituaries, and, above all, advertising. Pictures were nowhere to be found. These were first introduced by the tabloids, which arrived relatively late in Switzerland. In 1959, Ringier Verlag launched the first tabloid newspaper, *Blick*.



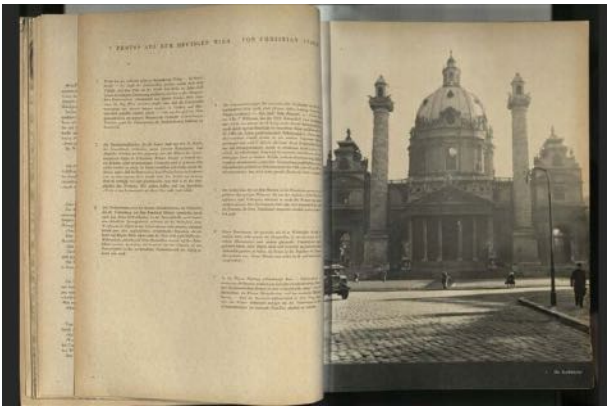

A few pages from the February 1947 issue of Du magazine

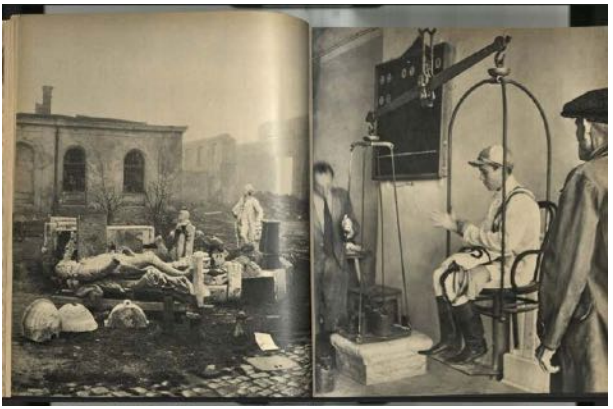
## Illustrated

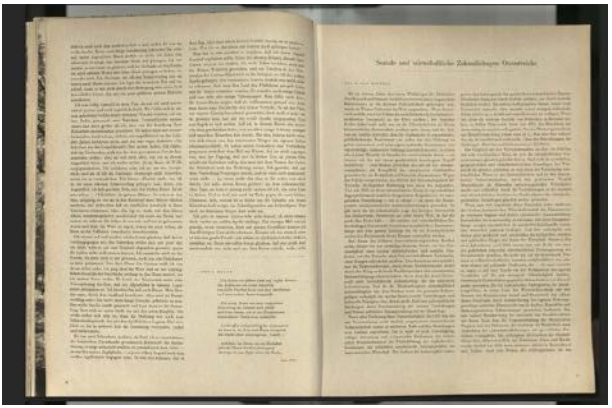
The lack of pictures in daily newspapers was compensated for by so-called illustrated magazines. As the name suggests, these contained a large proportion of pictures and relatively little text. One exception was Du, published by Conzett Verlag, which focused on comprehensive reporting from the outset, which led to its great success.

Other magazines did not do this. They were usually published weekly or monthly and served primarily as entertainment. They were enormously popular in the post-war period.

In the mid-1960s, there were still around 90 magazines on the Swiss market alone, with a total circulation of 4.6 million copies.







# CINEMA

**Apollo**
Loretta Young - Alan Ladd
**Als wär es heut**
2. Woche

**Capitol**
**Schleichendes Gift**
Ein Film über Geschlechtskrankheiten
Heute letzter Tag

**Rex**
**URANIUM**
Ingrid Bergman, Cary Grant

**Scala**
**Die Frau ohne Gewissen**
(Double Indemnity)
mit Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, Edward G. Robinson

**Urban**
Frank Sinatra, Kathryn Grayson, Gene Kelly — Letzte Tage
**Anchors Aweigh**
Urlaub in Hollywood — 2. Woche

**Orient**
**Die Fledermaus**
Hans Moser, Friedel Czepa, Hans Söhnker — 3. Woche

**Palace**
Der Spitzenfilm des Wilden Westens
**Die Schenke zum Roten Pferd**
Ein Nonplusultra an Unterhaltung
9. Woche

**Bellevue**
Jean Gabin, Michèle Morgan
**REMORQUES**
(Stürme des Lebens) — 3. Woche

**Forum**
„Weltwoche" ... einer der raffiniertest. Kriminalfilme! Charl. Laughton in: KEIN AUSWEG (Roman i. Beobachter) - 2. Film: Deanna Durbin-Lustspiel Die seltsame Mrs. Hollyday

**Kosmos**
1. Ein Film, der es wagt, die Wahrheit zu sagen: PROF. DR. EHRLICH Edw. G. Robinson, Alb. Bassermann
2. Ein grandioser Unterweltfilm mit Humphrey Bogart: DIE SÜHNE

**Olympia**
Erstaufführung für Zürich!
1. **Abenteuer in Texas**
mit „Hopalong" Cassidy
2. Panther-Blut mit Simone Simon

**Roxy**
**BATAAN** Robert Taylor, Thomas Mitchell
Ein nervenbesnspr. Werk, mit auth. Aufnahmen von bekannten Tatsachen ..., wild, zügellos und furchtbar

**Nord-Süd**
Sensat. O. Welles Premières! 8. W.!
**THE STRANGER**
(Der Ausländer) mit Orson Welles, Edw. G. Robinson und Loretta Young

**Maxim**
1. WALLACE BEERY
**Donner im Atlantik**
2. Ihr erstes Verhältnis
mit Jane Withers — Letzte 2 Tage

**Piccadilli**
**Herzensfreud -**
2. Woche — **Herzensleid**
Der große Wienerfilm mit Magda Schneider, Paul Hörbiger

**Seefeld**
Vivecca Lindfors in dem einzig dastehenden Sittenfilm:
EVA UND DIE GEMEINDE
(Roman von Esthay Lindin)
Täglich 15.00, 17.15 und 20.15 Uhr
Heute letzter Tag

**Walche**
Frankreichs größter Sittenfilm!
**Das Pfand ihres Abgottes**
(L'empreinte du Dieu)
mit Pierre Blanchar, Ginette Leclerc
Der Hauptfilm beg. pkt. 3, 5.10, 8.15

**Cinébref**
1. **Aktualitäten-Revue**
2. Können Tiere denken!
Ein Meisterwerk der Ufa
3. Ein neuer herrlicher Disney

The movie program from the NZZ newspaper dated March 18, 1947

## The cinema

Until the 1960s, cinema was one of the most popular media. On March 18, 1947, for example, Emmely could have chosen from 18 different movie theaters in Zurich. Would she have been able to see Russian films there? Probably not. The cinema program was dominated by German-language comedies such as *Die Fledermaus* with Hans Moser, French dramas such as *Remorques* with Jean Gabin, and American crime thrillers, westerns, and musicals such as *Anchor Away* with Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra.

## Newsreel

No matter which film Emmely would have chosen, in German-speaking Switzerland, the Swiss newsreel would have been shown before the program.

These were not news reports in the modern sense. The film newsreel consisted of short segments on various topics. It was a colorful mix of current events, picturesque customs, and

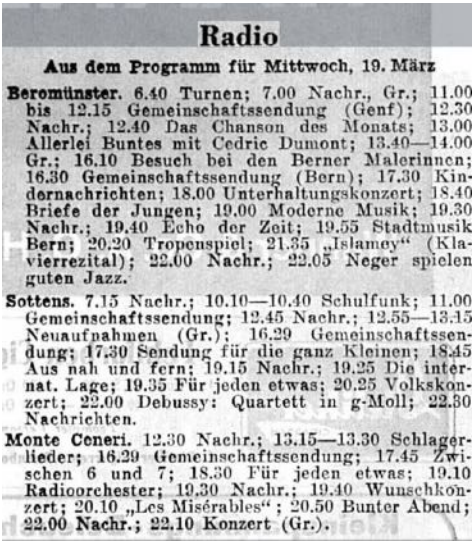
The focus was always on Switzerland. For example, the March 1947 film newsreel showed reports on the 17th Motor Show and the International Labor Office in Geneva, figure skater Sonja Henie, exhibitions in Zurich and Lausanne, and the Groppenfasnacht carnival in Ermatingen. The only foreign contribution came from Warsaw, which had been destroyed by the war.

The fact that an estimated one million people were dying of starvation in the Soviet Union at the same time was known only to the American secret services. There were no reports of this in the media. How could there be? There were no foreign correspondents. The
Since 1942, the newsreels had been produced by a federally funded foundation that had to budget its resources carefully. Its decision to produce only a few copies was particularly problematic, as it meant that only the large cinemas showed the latest newsreels, while the smaller cinemas showed old footage.

## Radio

The medium that most closely resembled a mass medium as we understand it today was radio. In 1950, around one million radio receivers were registered in Switzerland. With around 1.3 million households, almost 80% of the population had access to a radio.

The SRG, founded by the Federal Council in 1931, was responsible for the programming. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, modeled on the BBC, was



**Radio**

**Aus dem Programm für Mittwoch, 19. März**

**Beromünster.** 6.40 Turnen; 7.00 Nachr., Gr.; 11.00 bis 12.15 Gemeinschaftssendung (Genf); 12.30 Nachr.; 12.40 Das Chanson des Monats; 13.00 Allerlei Buntes mit Cedric Dumont; 13.40—14.00 Gr.; 16.10 Besuch bei den Berner Malerinnen; 16.30 Gemeinschaftssendung (Bern); 17.30 Kindernachrichten; 18.00 Unterhaltungskonzert; 18.40 Briefe der Jungen; 19.00 Moderne Musik; 19.30 Nachr.; 19.40 Echo der Zeit; 19.55 Stadtmusik Bern; 20.20 Tropenspiel; 21.35 „Islamey" (Klavierrezital); 22.00 Nachr.; 22.05 Neger spielen guten Jazz.

**Sottens.** 7.15 Nachr.; 10.10—10.40 Schulfunk; 11.00 Gemeinschaftssendung; 12.45 Nachr.; 12.55—13.15 Neuaufnahmen (Gr.); 16.29 Gemeinschaftssendung; 17.30 Sendung für die ganz Kleinen; 18.45 Aus nah und fern; 19.15 Nachr.; 19.25 Die internat. Lage; 19.35 Für jeden etwas; 20.25 Volkskonzert; 22.00 Debussy: Quartett in g-Moll; 22.30 Nachrichten.

**Monte Ceneri.** 12.30 Nachr.; 13.15—13.30 Schlagerlieder; 16.29 Gemeinschaftssendung; 17.45 Zwischen 6 und 7; 18.30 Für jeden etwas; 19.10 Radioorchester; 19.30 Nachr.; 19.40 Wunschkonzert; 20.10 „Les Misérables"; 20.50 Bunter Abend; 22.00 Nachr.; 22.10 Konzert (Gr.).

The radio program of
March 18, 1947

Still without remote control and in black and white: the television set from 1963

was financed by fees, had a monopoly, but also the responsibility to guarantee nationwide program coverage.

This programming was dominated by music. News broadcasts were of little importance. *Echo der Zeit*, which Emmely could have listened to as early as 1947, lasted 15 minutes at the time and reported the news of the day exclusively in short bulletins. Until 1971, the government obliged the SRG to broadcast only reports from the Swiss news agency so as not to compete with the daily newspapers.

## Television

The situation changed fundamentally with the popularization of television. Although the technology had been around for much longer, the SRG did not begin regular broadcasting until 1958. Initially, television spread mainly in restaurants, which wanted to attract additional customers. A decade later, the number of televisions exceeded one million. They replaced weekly newsreels and led to the decline of cinemas.

Radio, magazines, and daily newspapers lost attention and influence. Spending the evening together in front of the "boob tube" limited the time available for reading. As a result, the demand for print products, including books, declined steadily. For publishers such as Conzett & Huber, this was an existential threat.

In 1983, Manesse Verlag had to be sold; in 1987, the printing plant was transferred to Tamedia.

Station 2

# The founders



The Second World War not only turned Switzerland into an island in a sea of censorship, but also a refuge for intellectuals from all over Europe. Cafés such as Zurich's Odeon became places of encounter, international exchange, and inspiration.
The literary horizon broadened thanks to all the artists who wrote about the culture of their homeland. They were all looking for ways to earn a living, even though foreigners were actually prohibited from doing any paid work. But thanks to creative solutions—many articles and translations appeared under a other names – publishers had access to the best writers of their time. The Bibliothek der Weltliteratur (Library of World Literature), for which important works of world literature were translated from foreign languages into German, combined an innovative business model with the idea of giving the many authors stranded in Switzerland a paid and meaningful job. Conversely, Zurich's literary diversity made the project possible in the first place.

The first part of Station 2 tells the story of the unique journey of Conzett & Huber, where Manesse Verlag was developed, and illustrates how this publishing house combined economic activity with social thinking. In the second part, we introduce the two men who founded the library of world literature.

# 2.1 Conzett & Huber: Social responsibility as part of the publishing house's DNA

Portrait of Verena Conzett-Knecht

## Verena Conzett-Knecht

We have an excellent source on the history of the *Conzett & Huber* publishing house: the memoirs of Verena Conzett-Knecht. The fact that she left us her memoirs is just as extraordinary as her rise from a simple factory worker to a successful entrepreneur.

When Verena Conzett was born in 1861, poverty was the norm in Switzerland. By this we mean poverty in the traditional sense: lack of food, lack of hygiene, lack of living space, and no social security whatsoever. Verena Conzett actually came from a family on the lower edge of the middle class. Her father, a foreman in a paper factory, earned a regular salary that secured the family's livelihood until he developed cataracts in 1874. With his eyesight, he lost his job and his family lost their livelihood. Everyone now had to work to contribute to the household expenses. Even 13-year-old Verena. She became a messenger girl in a wool dyeing factory, just the first of many precarious jobs in Zurich's factories. There she came into contact with the socialist movement.

that demanded better living conditions for workers. At a meeting, she met the well-traveled, divorced typesetter Conrad Conzett, whom she married in 1883.

## A socialist publishing house for socialist ideas

Verena Conzett became a congenial business partner to her husband, who set up a printing company and publishing house. The company spread socialist ideas among the working class and thus became the preferred printing company of all socialists. Its best-known product was the *Arbeiterstimme (Workers' Voice)*. Conrad Conzett worked for it as an author, editor, typesetter, and publisher, and he and his family were persecuted by the police for their involvement.

and publisher, and he and his family were persecuted by the police for it.

He was hit hard when he lost many orders from his former comrades after moderate socialism had reconciled with the Swiss state. At the same time, his subscribers dwindled because bourgeois publishers also developed products aimed at his traditional clientele.

The economic decline combined with two personal tragedies—one son disappeared without a trace in South Africa, the other ended up in an insane asylum after a riding accident—drove the now 50-year-old to suicide.

Arbeiterstimme.

Wochenblatt für das arbeitende Volk der Schweiz.

Offizielles Organ der sozialdemokratischen Partei der Schweiz und des allgemeinen Gewerkschafts-Bundes.

Motto: Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt Euch!

Zürich, Samstag den 11. Januar 1890. Nr. 4. Redaktion, Druck und Expedition von C. Conzett.

Wer lieh dem Geiste erst die Flügel?

Von Robert Seidel.

Wer lieh dem Geiste erst die Flügel,
Zu schwingen sich aus enger Haft
Hinaus weit über Thal und Hügel
In unbegrenzter Sehnsucht?
Wer bindt die unzerbrechliche Kette,
Die ihn an Wort und Schrift gebannt
Und schuf ihm eine würd'ge Stätte
Bei jedem Volk, in jedem Land?

War es das Goldes lockend Gleißen,
Das dieses Wunderwerk vollbracht?

Front page of the Arbeiterstimme from 1890.

Modern typesetting machines revolutionized the printing industry at the turn of the century and made skilled typesetters redundant.

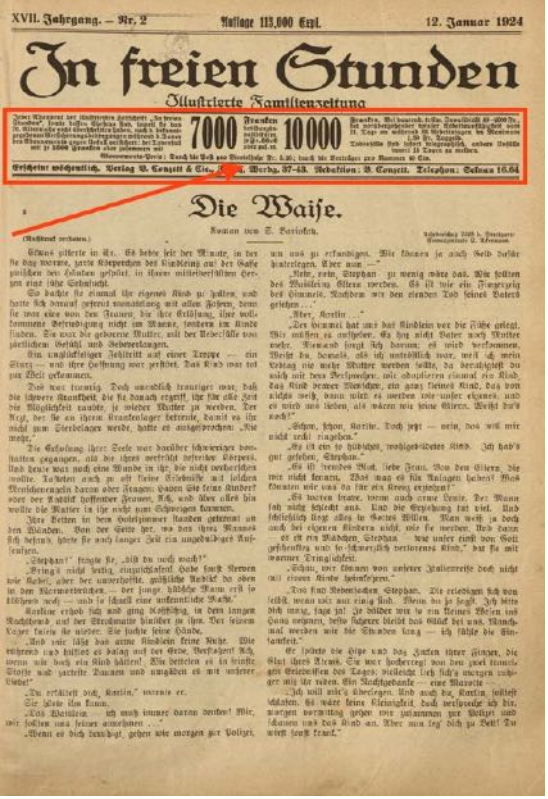
## Conzett & Huber Publishing House

This left his 36-year-old wife, Verena Conzett-Knecht, as the sole breadwinner for their surviving sons. She had no choice but to continue running the printing and publishing business, first on her own and then with the support of Dr. Emil Huber, a lawyer with an interest in literature. *Conzett & Huber Verlag* slowly established itself in Zurich's business community. Its breakthrough came with the daring investment of what was then an incredible 20,000 francs in a modern typesetting machine. This made it possible to print much more cost-effectively and quickly. Not only did this increase the profit margin on its own newspapers, it also brought many orders. In 1931, *Conzett & Huber Verlag* employed 430 people.

## Newspaper subscription with accident insurance

The Zürcher Anzeiger became a great success for Conzett Verlag. It not only provided reading material, but also offered all subscribers accident insurance. A huge success! The same concept was applied to the "blue booklets." These were a weekly magazine entitled "In freien Stunden" (In Free Hours), which provided its readers with appealing reading material. They

## 2.1 Conzett & Huber: Social responsibility as part of the publishing house's DNA



XVII. Jahrgang. – Nr. 2 Auflage 113,000 Expl. 12. Januar 1924

# In freien Stunden

Illustrierte Familienzeitung

7000 Franken 10000

Die Waise.

Roman von E. Barnstein.

Cover page of "In freien Stunden" from January 12, 1924. The information on accident insurance that each subscriber received is marked.

were so successful that a French edition was published for French-speaking Switzerland.

The Spanish flu Between 1918 and 1920, it is now estimated that up to 100 million people worldwide died 100 million people worldwide died of Spanish flu. Two of them were Verena Conzett's sons Hans and Simon. They left behind their widows and four grandchildren. As there were no other heirs in this generation, Verena Conzett, now 59, ran the publishing house until her death in 1947.

The Spanish flu: Patients in a US Army hospital in France, 1918

### Publishing products – Zürcher Illustrierte

Her social attitude shaped the image and products of the publishing house. For example, she was the first private printing company in Switzerland to introduce Saturday afternoons off work.

228 ZÜRCHER ILLUSTRIERTE No. 8

# Cayenne Grab der Verbrecher

VON DR. HS. BADER

Sa Martinière heißt das Schiff, das alle zwei Jahre den Hafen von Brest verläßt, den Atlantischen Ozean überquert und dann endlich an der Küste Südamerikas, in Guayana landet. Seine Fracht besteht aus den Traurigsten was man sich denken kann: Ausgestoßene Menschen, Deportierte! Was die französischen Gerichte im Laufe von zwei Jahren abgeurteilt haben. Rechtsbrecher aller Schattierungen, zum Teil wirklich schwer entgleiste Menschen, die aber trotz allem noch einen göttlichen Funken in sich tragen, wurden hier vereinigt, um an fernen Gestaden ihre Strafzeit anzutreten. Die Wenigsten kommen je wieder zurück. Denn das Klima ist dort so mörderisch, und die Behandlung der Gefangenen läßt — gelinde gesagt — so viel zu wünschen übrig, daß bald der Tod das Leben auslöscht. Indem er sie von den gesteigerten irdischen Qualen erlöst, kommt er als ein wahrer Freund zu den Deportierten. Besonders hart ist es, wenn ein Unschuldiger an diesem Ort der Flüche und Tränen gebracht wird. Leider geschieht dies immer und immer wieder. Die Reihe der Justizirrtümer will nicht enden und sie kann nicht enden, solange die Gerichte sich nicht strenger an den anerkannten Grundsatz halten: In dubio pro reo, d. h. im Zweifel zu Gunsten des Angeklagten, und solange nicht die gehässigen Indizienbeweise mehr verpönt und gemieden werden. Wehe dem Menschen, der schuldig, ein doppelter Wehe aber dem, der unschuldig deportiert wird! Dieudonné war ein solcher, der durch einen Justizirrtum nach Guyana gekommen ist. Viele Jahre mußte er dort harren und schmachten. Stets beteuerte er, den ihm zur Last gelegten Raubmord nicht begangen zu haben. Doch er war von hohen Schwurge-

*In den furchtbaren Kämpfen der Sträflinge, durch die immer wieder Strafflinge in entfernten Gegenden, schwer und tödlich verunglücken, schreckt Erfolg*

*Typus eines Sträflings*



*Die Teufelsinseln (Französisch haben sie den verhängnisvollen Namen «Iles du Salut») an der Küste Guayanas. Sie sind von Deportierten bewohnt. Kein Schiff darf sich auf weniger als 2½ km Entfernung nähern. Der äußerste links Ende war der Verbannungsort des französischen Hauptmannes Dreyfus*

Zürcher Illustrierte:
Always on the side of the weak – here a report on the French penal colony on Devil's Island

for all employees. And a magazine such as the successful *Zürcher Illustrierte* became the favorite reading material of intellectuals, thanks in part to its socially critical approach.

# 2.2 Hans Conzett and Walther Meier: A Dream Team in Swiss Publishing History

## Ways out of the next crisis

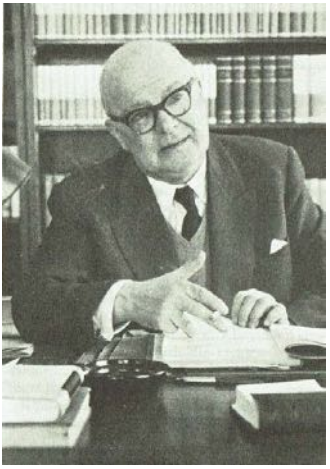
The decline in sales during World War II also caused economic hardship for *Conzett & Huber*. Once again, the publishing house reinvented itself—with innovative technology and interesting concepts. *Conzett & Huber* invested in the most modern color gravure printing process, becoming one of the first European printing companies to mastered it. This secured the printing company lucrative orders from numerous publishers.

*Conzett & Huber* also developed new concepts for its own publishing house. These included the highly successful cultural magazine *Du*, launched in March 1941, which made the world's most important works of art accessible to the average Swiss person in color for the first time.

Hans Conzett was probably already supporting his grandmother, Verena Conzett, who theoretically was still the boss, in all these decisions, even though he was still nominally a student until 1942. He officially joined the publishing house in 1942 and immediately made a groundbreaking decision: the *Manesse Library of World Literature*, whose concept had been developed by the freelance writer Dr. Walther Meier, became a product of *Conzett & Huber*.

## Dr. Walther Meier redefines the term "world literature"

At that time, Dr. Walther Meier was probably one of the best-connected figures in German-language literary circles. His studies in German language and literature, philosophy, and history in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris, as well as his first



editorial work

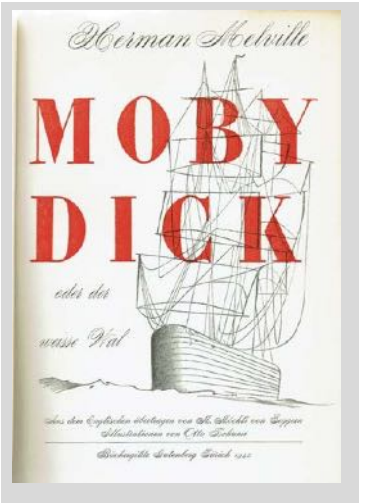
editorial activities had earned him the friendship of many writers and cultural scholars. Meier had been living in Zurich again since 1932, editing the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau,* which did not use photographs and whose highly sophisticated articles were aimed at a narrow intellectual elite.

The author himself summarized the developments that had led him to propose a library of world literature to the
young publisher Hans Conzett to create a library of world literature were summarized by the author himself in a contribution to *Radio Beromünster*, which was broadcast in March 1956.

In it, Walther Meier describes his fascination with the ever-expanding knowledge of international literature. His key experience was the discovery of missing writings by James Boswell, which an American collector had found as dusty manuscripts in the attic of a great-great-grandson's castle. The collector systematically set out on a search and published all his discoveries since 1928. Meier was particularly moved by this because Boswell was the author of a detailed biography of the English scholar Samuel Johnson.

Johnson's reputation was based on his Dictionary of the English Language, which covered the entire vocabulary of the English language using texts by the best authors. His contemporaries commented on his impressive education by referring to Samuel Johnson only as Dr. Johnson. Meier adopted this for himself. When introducing himself, he always introduced himself as Dr. Meier. In fact, the Zurich-based writer was probably as familiar with European literature
literature just as well as his role model had known English literature. So what could be more natural than to share this knowledge with a broad public, as Johnson had once done? That is why, from the very beginning, the concept included adding an explanatory commentary to the book that placed the author and work in their historical and cultural context. Before Wikipedia, this was often the only way for readers to learn more about a book.

Because very few people were as multilingual as Dr. Meier, he felt it was essential to have the works translated by equally talented translators in order to ensure they were properly understood. Dr. Meier made no compromises in this regard. Although only




Moby Dick in a 1942 edition by Gutenberg Verlag

Hans Conzett

two years earlier, a German translation of Moby Dick had been published by Gutenberg Verlag, so he had Fritz Güttinger retranslate the entire work. Güttinger's translation of this work, which was considered virtually untranslatable, is still regarded today as "not bad at all," while the version published by Gutenberg was described as the work of an "advanced amateur."

## Dr. Meier's concept for the free circulation of books

Dr. Meier's concept developed into a recipe for success within a few years. In Switzerland, the *Manesse Library of World Literature* met with enormous interest.
German-speaking countries outside Switzerland also responded enthusiastically.

Demand for cultural stimulation was high. In addition, the bombed-out libraries had to be replaced. *Conzett & Huber* initially sent huge packages of books to Germany as gifts, but after the currency reform of June 21, 1948, the country developed into an attractive market. Hans Conzett was the first Swiss publisher to circumvent the bureaucratic hurdles posed by the border by joining the Brockhaus book distribution system. Instead of delivering individual orders to Germany (and paying customs duties), large packages of books were sent to Stuttgart, from where Brockhaus took over delivery and billing. Most Swiss publishers

would sooner or later participate in this system. His experiences with German-Swiss customs bureaucracy prompted Hans Conzett, as secretary general of the International Publishers Union, a position he held on an honorary basis from 1952 to 1964, to advocate for the free movement of books across all borders.

## A global perspective, not just literary

Publisher Hans Conzett possessed the rare gift of trusting his employees and giving them free rein in their work. This left him time to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors and become involved in politics, both nationally and internationally. In 1951, at the age of 36, Hans Conzett was elected to the National Council, where he served for two decades. In 1967, he was appointed President of the Federal Assembly. He is considered one of the founding fathers of the SVP, at that time a centrist party with social-liberal elements.

On the international stage, Hans Conzett was committed not only to the free transfer of knowledge, but also to children. In 1959, he founded the Swiss section of UNICEF, whose approach he managed in various

Hans Conzett visits a UNICEF camp

capacities for many years. In 1964, on his initiative, the Swiss Parliament nominated UNICEF for the Nobel Peace Prize. Was the award ceremony on December 10, 1965, really one of the highlights of Hans Conzett's life? Or were there many moments of happiness when he witnessed firsthand how his commitment changed the fate of children for the better?

Whether through the *Manesse Library of World Literature*, his political activities, or his advocacy for forgotten children, Conzett was always keen to look beyond the horizon. He liked to quote a statement attributed to US President Eisenhower: "*Only an optimist moves the world, but never a pessimist.*"

Station 3

# What does Manesse actually have to do with world literature?



Conzett & Huber published his library of world literature under the Manesse label. At first glance, the connection is quickly made: Conzett & Huber Verlag had its headquarters in the posh Manessestrasse in Zurich. But the name Manesse also embodied a concept. After all, since the 19th century, one of the most magnificent collections of medieval songs had been associated with the Zurich patrician family Manesse.
The first part of Station 2 provides information about the Manesse family of Zurich and the Manesse manuscript named after them. In the second part, we look at what the Manesse manuscript has in common with the Manesse Library of World Literature.

# 3.1 A magnificent manuscript and the Manesse family

## The patrician Manesse family

Manesse Verlag is named after the Manesse family, which is documented in Zurich from the 13th to the 15th century.
This family, which was actually bourgeois, rose to nobility because it took on various important tasks for the abbess of the Fraumünster. For example, the Manesse family and their followers controlled the bridge over the Limmat and collected bridge tolls there for the Fraumünster Abbey. We still have evidence of this era today in the form of the Hardturm tower built by the Manesse family on the Limmat.

From the middle of the 13th century, the Manesses were represented on the Zurich City Council.
Council. Rüdiger VII is particularly well known. As was not uncommon at the time, he used the office of mayor to solve his family's financial problems. To this end, he diverted municipal revenues into his own coffers and used them to pay off debts.

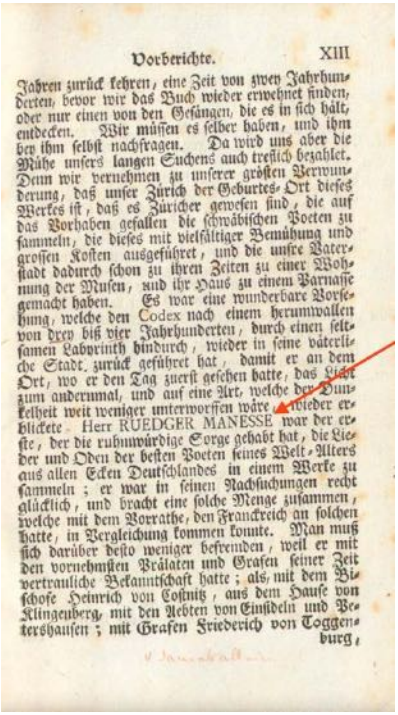
He is even said to have misused the Zurich city seal. The Grand Council put him on trial for this in 1374, but there were no consequences for Rüdiger. It was only after Rüdiger's death that his son Ital was forced to sell the family estate. The Manesse family produced other well-known figures in Zurich's history. But this one example should suffice. The only important thing to note here is that the Manesses were a Zurich noble family well known to Swiss historians of the 18th century.



The Manesse family, a noble and patrician family from Zurich, held held the Hardturm as a fief until 1461. Photograph of the Hardturm from 1890

Proben
der alten
schwäbischen
Poesie
des
Dreyzehnten Jahrhunderts.
Aus der Manessischen Sammlung.

Zürich,
Bey Heidegger und Comp. 1748.



Vorberichte. XIII

Jahren zurück kehren, eine Zeit von zwey Jahrhunderten, bevor wir das Buch wieder erwehnet finden, oder nur einen von den Gesängen, die es in sich hält, entdecken. Wir müssen es selber haben, und ihm bey ihm selbst nachfragen. Da wird uns aber die Mühe unsers langen Suchens auch treflich bezahlet. Denn wir vernehmen zu unserer gröſten Verwunderung, daß unser Zürich der Geburtes-Ort dieses Werkes ist, daß es Züricher gewesen sind, die auf das Vorhaben gefallen die schwäbischen Poeten zu sammeln, die dieses mit vielfältiger Bemühung und groſſen Kosten ausgeführet, und die unsre Vaterstadt dadurch schon zu ihren Zeiten zu einer Wohnung der Musen, und ihr Haus zu einem Parnasse gemacht haben. Es war eine wunderbare Vorsehung, welche den Codex nach einem herumwallen von drey biß vier Jahrhunderten, durch einen seltsamen Labyrinth hindurch, wieder in seine väterliche Stadt, zurück geführet hat, damit er an dem Ort, wo er den Tag zuerst gesehen hatte, das Licht zum andernmal, und auf eine Art, welche der Dunkelheit weit weniger unterworffen wäre, wieder erblickete. Herr RUEDGER MANESSE war der erste, der die ruhmwürdige Sorge gehabt hat, die Lieder und Oden der besten Poeten seines Welt-Alters aus allen Ecken Deutschlandes in einem Werke zu sammeln; er war in seinen Nachsuchungen recht glücklich, und bracht eine solche Menge zusammen, welche mit dem Vorrathe, den Franckreich an solchen hatte, in Vergleichung kommen konnte. Man muß sich darüber desto weniger befremden, weil er mit den vornehmsten Prälaten und Grafen seiner Zeit vertrauliche Bekanntschaft hatte; als, mit dem Bischofe Heinrich von Costnitz, aus dem Hause von Klingenberg, mit den Aebten von Einsideln und Petershausen; mit Grafen Friederich von Toggenburg,

Johann Jakob Bodmer, Samples of Old Swabian Poetry of the Thirteenth Century.
Zurich 1748

## Johann Jakob Bodmer and the Paris manuscript

One of these historians was the Zurich polymath Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783). Bodmer is considered the most important initiator of the academic and intellectual flourishing of enlightened Zurich. The well-traveled pastor's son was annoyed by a widespread view abroad that Switzerland had monumental natural beauty to offer, but was otherwise a place a place of cultural barrenness. Bodmer wanted to counteract this. To this end, he founded numerous learned societies and, together with his colleagues several highly sophisticated journals, whose articles were soon being discussed throughout Europe.

Bodmer countered the thesis of Swiss cultural barrenness with the theory that, on the contrary, the area between the Aare and Rhine rivers had a particularly "poetic atmosphere." However, he argued that special moral conditions were necessary to awaken a blossoming of literature from this atmosphere. During the Staufer period, Zurich had exactly the right conditions, which is why such a blossoming of poetry had occurred. As evidence, Bodmer boldly cited collection of songs known at the time as the Paris manuscript and claimed that it had been created in Zurich on the initiative of the Manesse family of Zurich. The clients were Rudiger Manesse (+1304) and his son Johannes (+1297).

The central argument for Bodmer's thesis was a few verses by the poet Johannes Hadlaub, which we have translated into modern German. The translation was written by Georg von Wyss in 1849.

Where can one find such poems? They are not
to be found in the kingdom.
What can be seen in Zurich. There, the
Meistersang is practiced a lot. Manesse
was so virtuous That he won the
songbook.
Singers may bow down before his court,
Praise him wherever they may be;
For song has its roots and origins there, And
wherever a place wants to show him a good
song, He would seek it out again and again.

His son, the Kuster, also takes great notice of
song; many a song of courtly love The lords have
collected well.
Their praise is well deserved here.
Who taught them in the beginning?
He took care of their fame.
That was their intention; it elevates them to honor,
As has always been the case since birth.
Sing, with which women, adorned and
beautiful, Can be exalted, their praise
increased, They would not let that pass.

## What is to be made of this thesis?

To date, science has been unable to either definitively prove or disprove Bodmer's thesis, as the manuscript itself reveals no clues as to where it was produced. We are therefore reliant solely on circumstantial evidence, which includes the verses quoted by Bodmer.
The only thing that is certain is that the process of creating the manuscript was never really completed and spanned several decades. The last additions were probably made more than 30 years after the death of Rüdiger Manesse. Over the decades, the concept of the collection was changed several times. To do this, double leaves were cut apart and sewn back together in a different order

.


Medal commemorating Gottfried Keller's 70th birthday. Arnold Böcklin compares the Swiss poet to the ancient singer Orpheus. Photo: KW.

## Who popularized Bodmer's thesis?

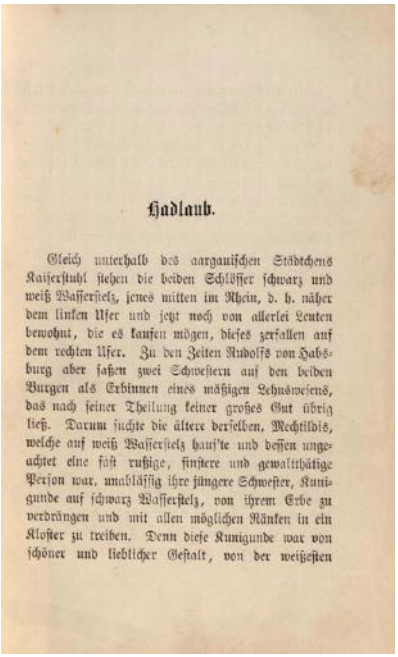
Bodmer's thesis would have remained relatively inconsequential had Gottfried Keller not published the novella *Hadlaub* in the Deutsche Rundschau in 1876, which appeared in 1877 as the first of *the Zurich novellas* in book form. Keller, himself born in Zurich and since 1861 the first state secretary of his hometown, follows a literary tradition in terms of plot and setting

fashion of his era: he tells the story of a simple man's rise through intelligence and education against a historical backdrop. The story contains enough verifiable facts to make it plausible to its readers, even though the plot is purely fictional. Keller thus follows in the tradition of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Alexandre Dumas' *Three Musketeers* . All of them continue to have a lasting influence on the collective view of history to this day. No scientific treatise has changed that. The same is true of the Paris song manuscript, which since Keller can no longer be separated from the Manesse.

## Keller's Hadlaub

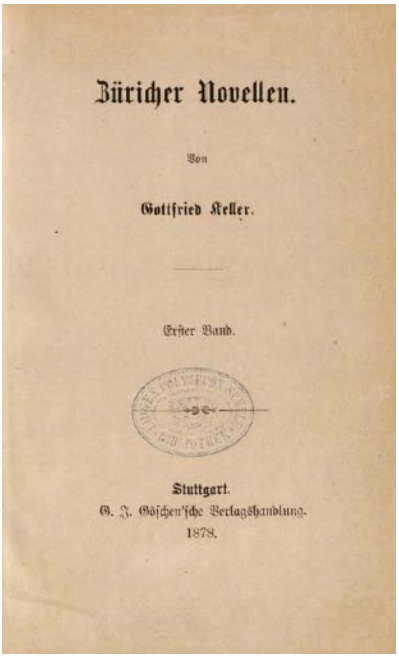
Gottfried Keller describes his Johannes Hadlaub as a gifted farmer's son whose abilities





Hadlaub.

Gleich unterhalb des aargauischen Städtchens Kaiserstuhl stehen die beiden Schlösser schwarz und weiß Wasserstelz, jenes mitten im Rhein, d. h. näher dem linken Ufer und jetzt noch von allerlei Leuten bewohnt, die es kaufen mögen, dieses zerfallen auf dem rechten Ufer. Zu den Zeiten Rudolfs von Habsburg aber saßen zwei Schwestern auf den beiden Burgen als Erbinnen eines mäßigen Lehnswesens, das nach seiner Theilung keiner großes Gut übrig ließ. Darum suchte die ältere derselben, Mechtildis, welche auf weiß Wasserstelz hauste und dessen ungeachtet eine fast rußige, finstere und gewaltthätige Person war, unablässig ihre jüngere Schwester, Kunigunde auf schwarz Wasserstelz, von ihrem Erbe zu verdrängen und mit allen möglichen Ränken in ein Kloster zu treiben. Denn diese Kunigunde war von schöner und lieblicher Gestalt, von der weißesten



Züricher Novellen.

Von

Gottfried Keller.

Erster Band.

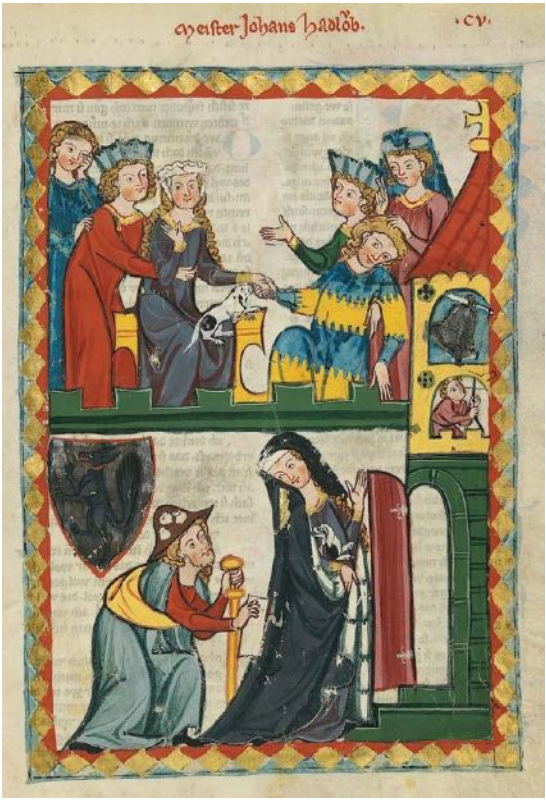
Stuttgart.
G. J. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung.
1878.

Title page of the novella Hadlaub by Gottfried Keller in the first volume of the Zurich novellas published in 1878.

Rüdiger Manesse's talents are discovered and encouraged. He makes him his secretary and commissions him to collect and write down the best verses of the important minstrels.
Surrounded by poetry, Hadlaub himself develops into a poet who loves Fides, who is far above him in society, and woos her with his songs. Of course, everything turns out well – after all, we are in the middle of the Romantic era: Hadlaub is allowed to add his best songs to the manuscript, wins the hand of his Fides, and his (rich) farmer father buys him a brand-new house in the city. All's well that ends well – and after reading it, each of *Hadlaub's* countless readers was convinced they knew how the Codex Manesse came into being.

## The real Hadlaub

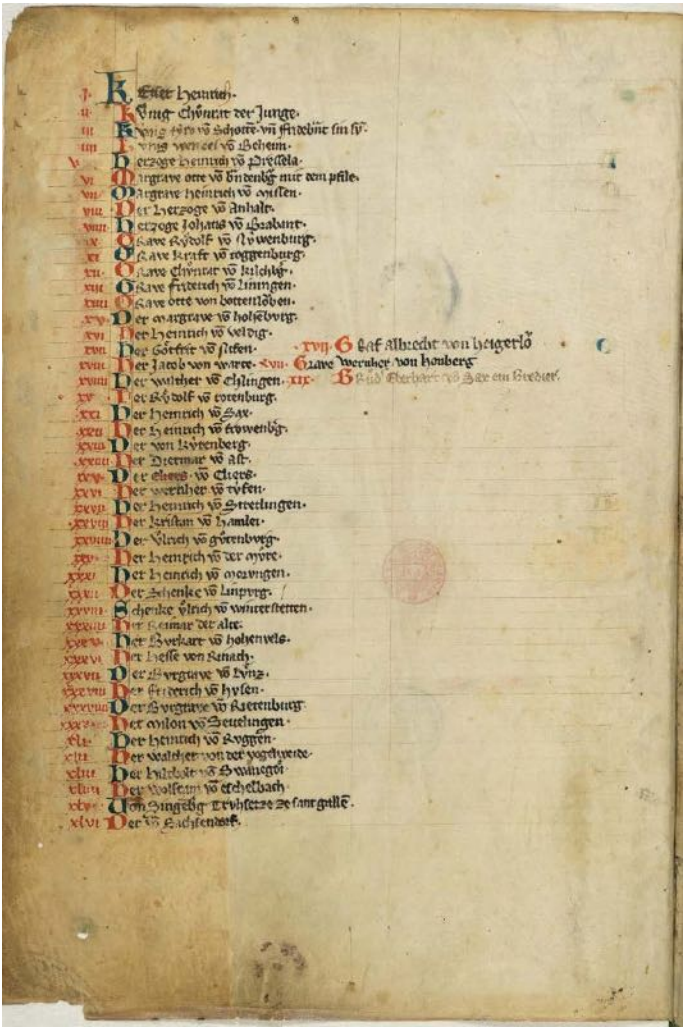
Much less is known about the real Master Johans Hadloub. Researchers believe he can be identified as a citizen of Zurich who is mentioned in various archives. On January 4, 1302, a Johannes Hadlaub bought a house in the Neumarkt district. The Grossmünsterpropstei's yearbook lists his date of death is given as March 16, without mentioning the year of death. An urbar roll tells us that his wife, whose name we do not know, had her own assets. And that is more or less all we know; the rest is speculation.




The Swiss minstrel Johannes Hadlaub

# 3.2 What does Manesse have to do with world literature?

Table of contents of the Codex Manesse



## What exactly is the Codex Manesse?

The magnificent illustrations in the Codex Manesse distract us from the fact that it is primarily the verses that matter; thus, the Codex Manesse is nothing more than an anthology. The manuscript provides its readers with an overview of German poetry of the Staufer period. To this end, several scribes collected exemplary verses by 140 minstrels who were active between 1150/60 and 1300.

The Codex Manesse is a magnificent panorama of an era that was perceived in the 18th century as the root of national German poetry. It contains what an educated person of the Staufer period
. An expert had pre-selected what was to be considered significant and what was not for laymen. This makes the song manuscript a guideline, a benchmark for quality. Through selected examples, the reader learns the characteristics that make up a high-quality poem.

## And what is world literature?

These two aspects also dominate the selection of works that made it made it into the Manesse Library of World Literature. Dr. Walther Meier attached great importance to the literary quality of each individual book. In contrast to the Codex Manesse, he did not limit himself to the literature of one nation and a specific era, but followed ideas that we today associate with Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

In *conversations with Goethe in his final years,* Eckermann recounts that in January 1827, the master he so admired had conceived the idea of world literature, which was to replace national literatures.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Oil painting by Joseph Karl Stieler, Schackgalerie / Munich. Photo: KW.

I see more and more that poetry is a common heritage of humanity and that it emerges everywhere and at all times in ...
But of course, if we Germans do not look beyond the narrow confines of our own environment, we can all too easily fall into this pedantic conceit. I therefore like to look around at other nations and advise everyone to do the same. National literature does not mean much now; the era of world literature is upon us, and everyone must now work to accelerate this era. But even with such an appreciation
of foreign cultures, we must not get stuck on something specific and consider it exemplary. We must not think that it is Chinese culture, or Serbian culture, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen; rather, when we need something exemplary, we must always go back to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beautiful humanity. We must view everything else only from a historical perspective and appropriate the good from it as far as it will go.

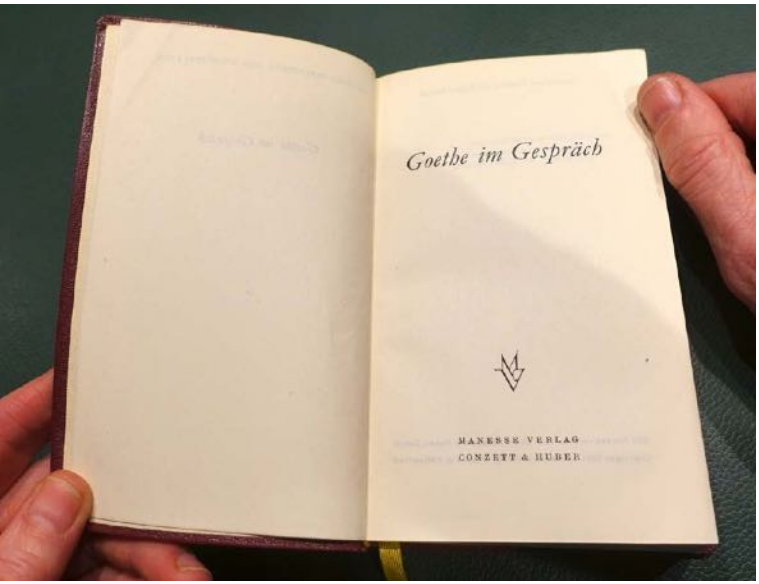
Johann Peter Eckermann,
Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life
Wednesday, January 31, 1827

To understand world literature, three aspects are therefore necessary

- All literatures must be considered equal.
- We must place them in their historical context.
- Every literary work contains a different treasure that must be extracted.

## Goethe in conversation

It is therefore entirely logical that the very first volume published in the Manesse Library of World Literature was dedicated to Goethe. It is entitled *Goethe in Conversation – All Essential Conversations, Including Those with Eckermann.* This choice brought Dr. Walther Meier several advantages. First, Goethe was one of the best-known and most popular authors at the time. That promised good business. Furthermore, no one could dispute that everything he had written was part of world literature. Secondly, Meier implicitly linked this theme to Goethe's conception of world literature and, thirdly, he based his concept on the highest cultural authority that the German-speaking world still knows today.



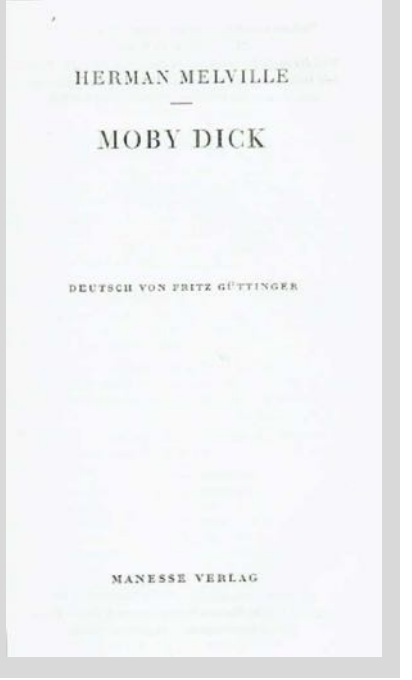

Title page of the first edition of Goethe's library in conversation

## The blessing of the literary pope

In addition, the shrewd publisher brought the most vocal critic of the time on board by winning Dr. Eduard Korrodi as editor of the Goethe volume. Korrodi was a renowned, opinionated, and extremely influential literary critic who headed the arts section of the NZZ between 1914 and 1950. He was regarded as the Swiss literary pope. Being able to count on such a man as the figurehead of the new series was an advantage that should not be underestimated.

## A programmatic choice: Moby Dick

However, the selection of the first three titles in the series was based on other criteria as well. Meyer dedicated them to the three major cultural languages—German, English, and Russian—of the leading warring parties in World War II. He contrasted Nazi Germany with Goethe, who said the following about himself in his Italian Journey: "I am a child of peace and want to keep peace with the whole world forever.




Cover of the second volume:
Moby Dick by Herman Melville

When World War II broke out, Hermann Melville stood with his *Moby Dick*. This book offered an alternative to nationalistic sentiments. The crew of the Pequod is made up of people from all countries, religions, and skin colors. They develop affection, understanding, and compassion for one another; indeed, the close friendship between the white narrator Ishmael and the "cannibal Kanak" Queequeg contradicts all white racial constructs.

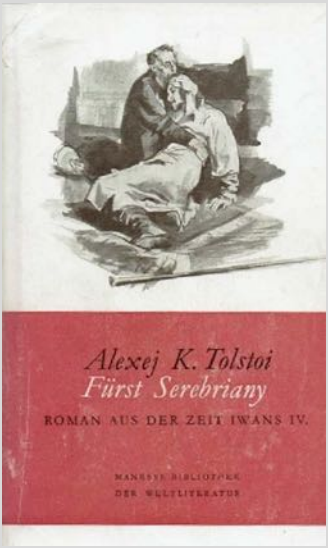
In addition, the battle for the white whale can be interpreted in many ways. It has been seen as the pursuit of the great truth, of beauty and goodness, which must remain forever hidden from stubborn people like Ahab.

Life under a tyrant The third book, published in 1944, stood for Russia and the Soviet Union, which fought on the side of the Allies under Stalin. The text was written by Alexei Tolstoy—not to be confused with his much more famous cousin and namesake Leo Tolstoy. In his 1862 work *Prince Serebriany*, Tolstoy describes the fate of a Russian boyar who returns to his homeland after five years of absence to find it completely changed. A cruel and unjust authority oppresses the people there. Prince Serebriany must find a way to reconcile his loyalty to the political system with his honor and humanity. This novel can be read as a parable of any form of tyranny. It conveys to its readers a nuanced picture of the inner workings of a dictatorship. In it, there is not only the dictator, but also his helpers, followers, the indifferent, and the persecuted. Only the few...

Most people are neither entirely good nor entirely bad. Most have incurred varying degrees of guilt and are both victims and perpetrators.
The perception of a dictatorship conveyed in this novel became extremely important when it came to reconciling the warring parties of World War II at some point.

## What distinguishes the Manesse volumes from normal literary editions?

Before the actual text by Prince Serebriany begins, the reader finds an introduction to this work penned by a great connoisseur of Russian literature. This was new and a unique feature of the series. Soon, each individual volume had a commentary, provided in part by the literarily educated translators and in part by well-known experts. In it, readers found information about the author's life, work, and style. It helped readers to recognize the significance of the book and to place it in the big picture. In this age of information overload, we can hardly imagine how new and revolutionary this concept was.




Front page of the third volume: Alexei K. Tolstoy, Prince Serebriany. A novel from the time of Ivan IV.

Previously, an author spoke only through his work, but now readers could learn to understand him in his time and context with the help of commentary. This made it much easier for European readers to access the literature of other continents.

Station 4

# World literature at Manesse: the first five years

53 books were published between 1944 and 1949 in the Manesse Library of World Literature. As there was also a shortage of paper in Switzerland during the Second World War, Dr. Walther Meier was only able to publish six volumes in 1945, following the first three volumes in 1944.
1946: publication of five books. Peace changed the situation: from 1947 onwards, 13 new volumes of the Manesse Library of World Literature were published annually.

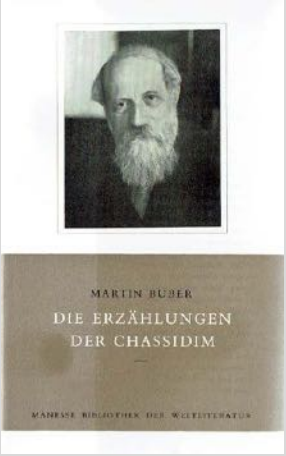
Meier had set out to collect, in the spirit of Goethe, all the national literatures that—at least in the publisher's eyes—had a claim to universal validity. But what did that look like in practice?
In the first part of the station, we take a look at the countries of origin of the authors whose works were represented in the Manesse Library of World Literature. We must not forget that although there was a great deal of enthusiasm behind the venture, its economic success was crucial to its continuation. Like other private publishers, Conzett & Huber also had to generate profits. That is why we are dedicating the second part of the station to the various forms of publications that were created to meet the needs of the target audience.

# 4.1 The first five years: caution, caution, caution

No experiments, please! Which works did Meier define as world literature in the first five years? Well, there were few experiments in the first five years. Around 38% of all authors belonged to the German-speaking world, and Meier relied on well-known names: the German poet laureate Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the Swabian-born Swiss writer Hermann Hesse, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946, and the Prussian classic Theodor Fontane are the frontrunners with two publications each. Otherwise, the classics dominated the field: Thomas Mann, Adalbert Stifter, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Wilhelm Raabe, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg – all of these were and are considered part of German cultural heritage.

## A plea for the cultural achievements of Eastern European Jewry

Only one work stood out completely from the rest. This was the first edition of Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, published in 1949. Martin




Martin Buber's Tales of the Hasidim, published in 1949

Buber was a prominent victim of the persecution of German Jews. The National Socialists had taken his homeland away from him. He, the world-renowned honorary professor of Jewish religious studies and ethics at the University of Frankfurt, first had to resign from his position and then lost any possibility of publishing due to his exclusion from the Reich Chamber of Literature.

During the November pogroms of 1938, he decided to emigrate to Jerusalem. There he completed his *stories of the Hasidim*, which Meier included in the *Manesse Library of World Literature*.

What seems obvious today was a publishing risk in 1949. For it was precisely the Hasidim who corresponded to the clichéd caricature of the backward Jew that had served the National Socialists as justification for the Holocaust just four years earlier.

Hasidism originated in the 17th century. It is a special form of Jewish life characterized by the close connection between the tzaddik, the teacher, and his followers, the Hasidim. The tzaddik's task is to open the way to God for his students. To this end, he also uses unconventional means such as music, dance, and joie de vivre. In order to convey the spirit of Hasidism to his disciples, many tzadikim recited short stories and parables. Successful texts were often passed down orally from generation to generation and only later written down in Yiddish. Buber collected and translated these stories. As world literature, they belong to the works

Jews from Prague's Maisel Synagogue pray at the grave of Rabbi Löw

Comparing him to Goethe must have shocked and provoked many of his contemporaries.

## English classics

The second largest group of authors came from the English-speaking world. Eleven works – around 21% of all books – originated in Great Britain or the USA and fell into three categories: Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, like Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, is a family-friendly classic that is ideal for reading together. Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad, each of whom had two works published, appeal to people who like to dream themselves away on distant adventures.
The Brontë sisters and Jane Austen created romance novels for a mostly female audience.

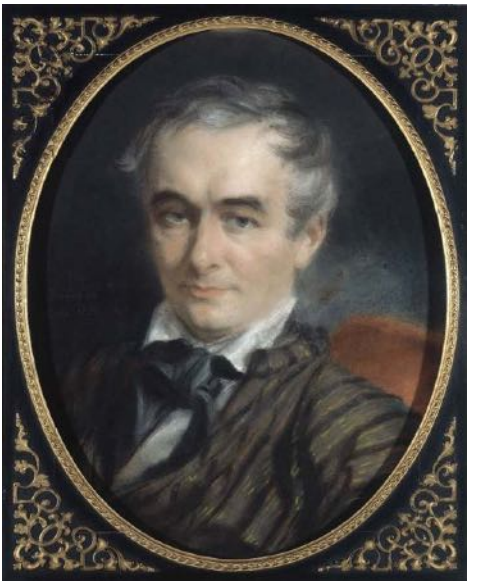
Meier did not venture into experimentation. All of the English-language works from the first five years are still highly ranked on the BBC's list of all-time classics: for example, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* is ranked 4th; *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is ranked 5th, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen is ranked 11th; Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness in 21st* place; Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* in 22nd place; and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* in 28th place.

## Russian classics

The situation is similar for the six Russian classics, which published between 1944 and 1949. The highly readable Turgenev is represented with two works. Apart from Alexei Tolstoy, we find only the names of the greats such as Chekhov, Gogol, and, of course, Leonid Tolstoy. Interestingly, Fyodor Dostoevsky is missing. Publisher Meier apparently noticed this too: he remedied the shortcoming as early as 1951 with two new translations of *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment.*

## Why is there so little French literature?

Which other nations are represented in the first five years? Meier presents four translations from Italian, four from Danish, two from Swedish, and one each from the dead languages Latin and Ancient Greek, as well as from Chinese. There is also a volume of stories by Prosper Mérimée.
This raises the question of why France, of all countries, is represented in the early days of the Manesse

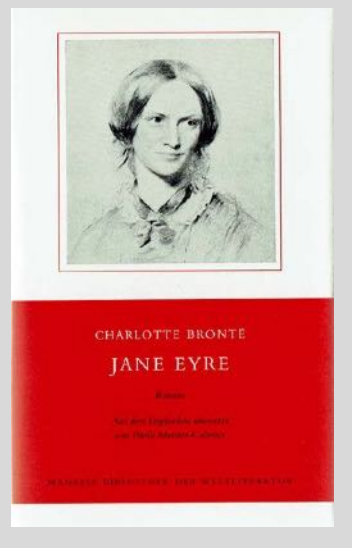


Prosper Mérimée.

*Library of World Literature*? After all, French was considered the cultural language par excellence for centuries, and even numerous authors who had been educated outside France wrote in it. There was a wide selection of easily readable novels and stories in French literature. Nevertheless, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* was not published until 1952, Balzac's *masterful novellas* in 1953, and Guy de Maupassant's *50 novellas* not until 1963. Only one collection of novellas by Prosper Mérimée, who belongs to the lesser-known French authors. Had he not provided the literary model for *Carmen*, which Georges Bizet turned into one of the greatest opera successes of all time, he would have been long forgotten today.

One can only speculate as to why Meier published so little French literature: did he see no financial potential in French classics? Did too many educated Swiss people in his day prefer to read French literature in the original? After all, Switzerland continued to refrain from dubbing foreign films for a long time.

# 4.2 Target groups




Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre

## Women's literature

As late as 1945, the English classic Jane Eyre appeared in the Manesse Library of World Literature. It tells the story of a governess who falls in love with her employer and is loved by him in return.

Of course, there are plenty of difficulties before they find happiness together. In fact, the two almost get married halfway through the book, but then it is revealed that the groom, Rochester, is married. Of course, he no longer loves his wife, who has gone mad, and keeps her locked up in a secluded part of his castle. But governess Jane runs away and almost marries a missionary who is leaving for India, until she admits to herself that she cannot forget Rochester after all. She returns to the place where she was a governess and learns that the castle has burned down, the insane wife died in the fire, and her husband lost his eyesight while trying to save her. Financially independent thanks to an inheritance, Jane Eyre decides to marry Rochester. Of course, they live happily ever after, have a child, and Rochester even regains his eyesight.

A totally happy ending.

If this sounds familiar, you're right. Jane Eyre is the epitome of the thousand times modified type of governess novel, better known today as the boss trope. The secretary (alternatively Lecturer or clerk),

Men who were serving in the war were absent from their homeland. Guard on duty at the Albun Pass. Photographer: Theodor Strübin; ©Archaeology and Museum Baselland; CC BY-SA 4.0.

the governess, the elegant penthouse the castle. What both have in common is the question of how a love between equals can succeed when there are major social differences. The core of the story remains the process by which the woman earns her partner's respect. We can well imagine how young women sat in their little rooms and consoled themselves with Jane Eyre because their men were guarding the home front or because the shortage of men after the Second World War had dashed any hopes of marriage.
Jane Eyre was a great success, which Meier attempted to repeat.

Two years later, he published Villette by the same author and expanded the romantic section of the Manesse Library of World Literature.

## Men's literature

But it wasn't just women who indulged in escapism. Men also needed reading material that would transport them away from their harsh everyday lives. Many war veterans had done things that they could no longer justify to themselves and their conscience in normal everyday life. Just like Charlie Marlow, the hero of Heart of Darkness. This magnificent story, which is a little too short for a novel and much too long for a short story, was published


Meier published it in 1947 together with two other novellas as Joseph Conrad's Master Stories. It tells of the journey of river captain Charlie Marlow, who sets out on

by Meyer in 1947, along with two other novellas as Joseph Conrad's Masterpieces. It tells the story of the journey of river captain Charlie Marlow, who travels through Africa on his steamboat in the 1890s. He meets people who, full of good intentions, want to bring civilization to the continent, which was considered dark at the time.
He perceives the dark side even more clearly. He is horrified by the brutal exploitation of the country, in which the welfare of the inhabitants plays no role. He realizes how greed and the unlimited power to satisfy this greed corrupt many white people.

What would be denounced as immoral at home becomes a gruesome everyday reality in Africa. Marlow's experiences reduce the hollow phrases of contemporary politicians to a farce.

Even for us, Marlow's stories are almost unbearable. But Conrad lets his listeners drift peacefully off to sleep. They don't want to hear about the misery on which their wealth and comfort are based. They are not interested in the terrible events that eat away at Marlow's soul, that make him so ill because he cannot speak about them.

Joseph Conrad had experienced all this himself. He sailed down the Congo in 1890 as captain of a river steamer and later turned his diaries into this story. When it was first published in 1899, the work attracted little attention. No one was interested in the fate of black people and the moral problems of an accomplice with a guilty conscience.

Belgian river station on the Congo, photo by Alexandre Delcommune, 1889.

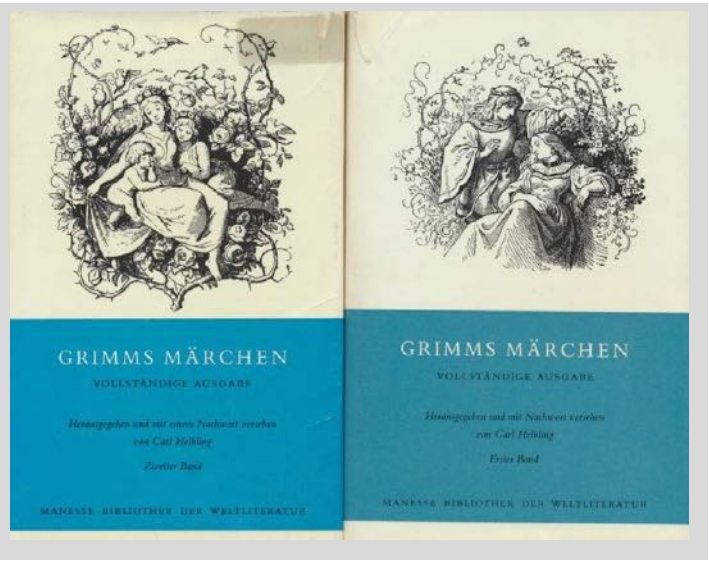


In 1947, many readers, especially male readers, would have perceived Conrad's text very differently. They knew that human beings are not good, especially when circumstances prevent them from being so. They had seen what individuals do when the system allows it, even commands it. They may have done it themselves. They understood what it meant to be unable to talk about all these experiences. They empathized with Marlow, who was unable to convey the horrors he had experienced in civil society.

The success of Conrad's masterful stories was so great that Meier published another volume of Conrad's stories the following year under the title Typhoon.

### And something for the little ones

In 1946, Meier added *Grimm's fairy tales* to his program. These really need no introduction. Who didn't grow up with the stories of *the Frog Prince* and *Rapunzel*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella*, and the *Brave Little Tailor*? However, most of us—unless we only know the distorted Disney versions—are probably more familiar with a child-friendly adaptation




Grimms' Children's and Household Tales in two volumes

. The *Manesse Library of World Literature* did not make this compromise. Meier commissioned a complete and faithful edition with the classic woodcuts by Ludwig Richter and Moritz von Schwind in two volumes. This allowed the intellectually discerning user of *Grimm's Children's and Household Tales* from *Manesse Verlag* to flatter themselves that they were holding the original version in their hands.

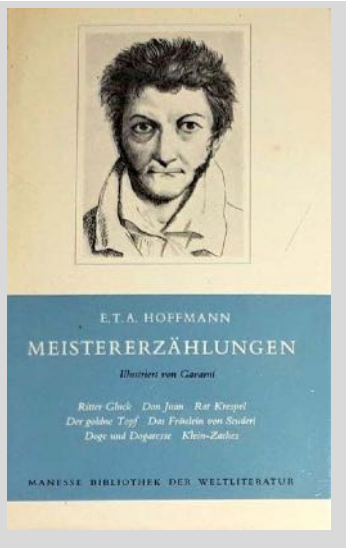
But no matter what form the fairy tales took.
The two volumes provided all parents whose children cried themselves to sleep with the basis to comfort their little ones with fairy tales. We must not forget that 1946/47 brought the terrible winter of hunger, which also affected the Swiss civilian population.

The fairy tales became a success. In 1949, Meier followed up with the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen, including such well-known stories as *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *The Little Mermaid* and *The Princess and the Pea*. This was followed in 1951 by *European Folk Tales* and in 1955 by *The Most Beautiful Love Stories from One Thousand and One Nights*.

## Brevity is the soul of wit

Around 60% of the works—31 of the 53 books – published in the first five years were anthologies or contained short texts that could mostly be read in a relatively short period of time. In this way, Meier catered to the time constraints and reading habits of his customers. Leisure time was a scarce commodity in those years. Long working hours, time-consuming household chores: we must not forget that the official 48-hour week with six working days still applied and that the washing machine did not become widely used until the 1960s.
This left little time in the day for relaxing reading. Reading a long novel in quarter-hour and half-hour increments is unsatisfying. That is why many readers preferred short stories.

Meier developed the appropriate formats for this in the *Manesse Library of World Literature*. *Master stories* or *master novellas* were published in the first five years by Anton Chekhov, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Mann, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Nikolai Gogol, and Prosper Mérimée. Sometimes the stories were supplemented by poems, as in *Poems and Stories (*Eduard Mörike) or *Novellas and Poems (*Jens Peter Jacobsen).

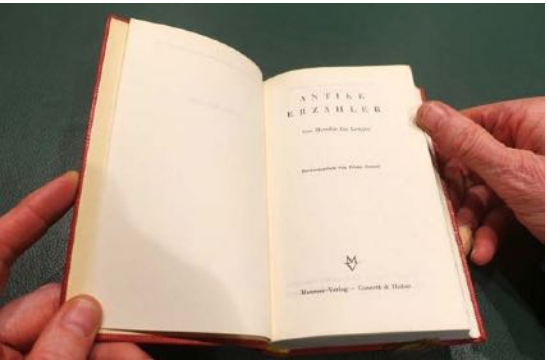



E. T. A. Hoffmann, Master Stories and Master Novellas (1948)


Italian Novels (1946)

The volumes that brought together various authors from a single nation were to prove particularly successful in the coming decades. The first double volume was devoted to *Italian novellas*. It was published in 1946 and provided interested readers with a brief overview of Italian literature: from Boccaccio (1313–1375) to Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936), Nobel Prize winner in 1934.

This example illustrates that shorter stories were in demand in these early days: the average length of the texts was around 12 pages.




Ancient Storytellers (1947)

A year after the Italian novellas, *Antike Erzähler (Ancient Storytellers)* was published with excerpts from Greek and Latin classics. The selection was made by the Jewish classical philologist Franz Stoessl. He took great care to offer readers both very short texts and a few longer ones, so that they had the option of short or extended reading.

Franz Stoessl was one of the many refugees living in Switzerland at the time. Born in Vienna, the Jewish man lost his job as a high school teacher in 1938.

In the same year, he fled to Zurich, where he led a rather precarious existence as a private lecturer and titular professor of classical philology at the University of Zurich. He emigrated to Canada in 1950 before returning to Vienna in 1952.

The small commission that Stoessl carried out for the *Manesse Library of World Literature* probably helped him to earn a living. Like many other authors in these difficult times, he was happy to receive commissions.
We will probably never be able to comprehend what it means to be able to work for *Conzett & Huber*.

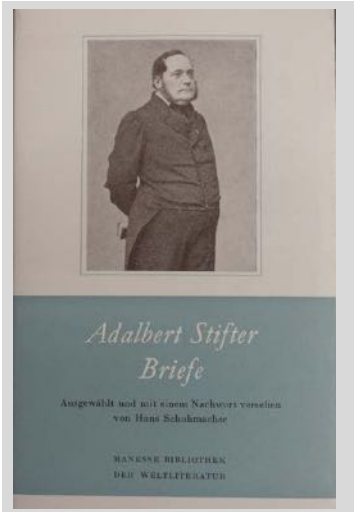
The first thematic anthology of *the Manesse Library of World Literature* also appeared in the first five years. In 1948, Meier published the volume *Schön ist die Jugend* (Youth is Beautiful), which collected childhood and youth memories from two centuries. However, it was not until much later that the thematic anthology developed into a core product of *the Manesse Library of World Literature*. In the early stages, the format was used rather hesitantly: *Musikalische Novellen (Musical Novellas)* was published in 1951, *Tiergeschichten* (Animal Stories) in 1957, *and Hundegeschichten* (Dog Stories) in 1968.

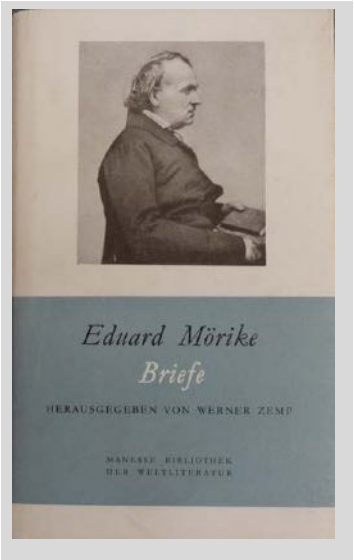
The great success of the thematic anthologies only came after the sale of *Conzett & Huber* in 1983. By this time, television had long since won the battle with books and had become the favorite means of leisure activity. Since the 1980s, many books have been purchased not for personal reading but as gifts. The thematic anthologies from the *Manesse Library of World Literature* were particularly well suited for this purpose. With them, one could choose a gift that was related to the personal interests of the recipient.

In addition to all the successful models Of course, there were also publishing ideas that Dr. Walther Meier was not successful with. His preference for the correspondence of well-known authors was apparently not shared by customers. In the first five years of the *Manesse Library of World Literature*, around 11% of all editions contained editions of letters. After that, this section declined dramatically and was eventually discontinued altogether. Apparently, readers preferred exciting plots and were not interested in world

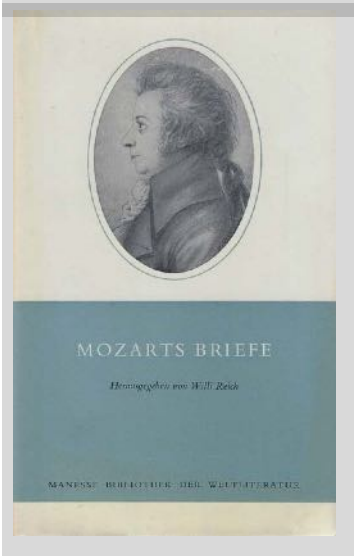
view of the writers they had invented.

However, Meier continued to develop the format. The result was the highly successful musician portraits. They combined statements by well-known composers and their contemporaries in diaries and letters with short quotations from scientific works. *Johann Sebastian Bach* was published in 1957, *Frédéric Chopin* in 1959, *Joseph Haydn* in 1962, and *Beethoven* in 1963, to name just the first of many.




Eduard Mörike, Letters




Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Letters

Station 5

# A lot of geography and a little bit of statistics

Even before Goethe, educated circles agreed that the French, Italians, Germans, English, and Scots had produced world literature. He directed attention further to the ancient civilizations. He recommended that his contemporaries read about China and Persia and the epics of the steppe peoples. After his death, Russian authors secured their place in the literary canon.

But what about all the nations that only came into being in the 19th century? What about the other countries of Asia? Furthermore, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Persian were languages that only scholars mastered. They provided literal translations without any poetic flair. Could that be world literature? What about the indigenous peoples? Were their oral traditions also world literature?

Publisher Meier faced the difficult task of reconciling his own standards with the interests of his readers. He had to produce books that sold easily and at the same time made people want more. This station examines how he went about doing this. To this end, we examine various geographically organized language groups. This allows us to show how Meier managed to develop a program that was a financial success despite publishing risks.

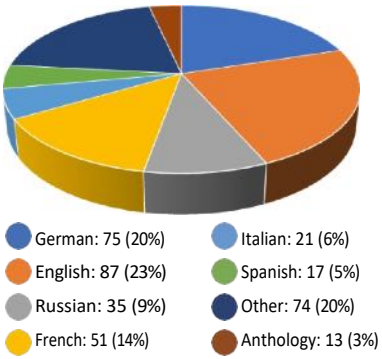
that was a financial success.

## World literature versus marketability

Readers usually have limited time for reading. Therefore, they tend to buy books by authors they know and like. When it comes to world literature, literature from their own country has an advantage.

After all, readers have known the most important names since childhood. Meier and later his successor Federico Hindermann could therefore calculate that German-language authors would be well received by readers. This was reflected in his publishing program: 75 of the 373 publications up to 1983 were by German-speaking

The most important languages




This figure was surpassed only by the 87 translations from English. Not surprising. After World War II, English developed into a global language. and the American way of life became the dominant culture. French, on the other hand, took a back seat, but still played a central role in the *Manesse Library of World Literature* with 51 volumes. Translations from Italian and Spanish lagged behind with 21 and 17 works respectively.

This set the Western framework, even though *Manesse Verlag* systematically had Russian authors translated. Thirty-five volumes, or around 20% of publications, come from this area. The result: six languages—German, English, French, Russian, Italian, and Spanish—covered 77% of all publications.

All other cultures shared the rest. And yet it was precisely this good fifth that has shaped our image of cosmopolitanism to this day.

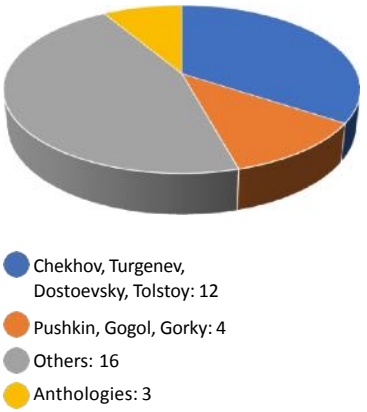
*Manesse Verlag,* which practiced literary equality for all cultures, long before the English term "woke" came into use.

The known and the unknown After the Second World War, literature served not as an intellectual status symbol, but as entertainment. Anyone who wanted to be successful as a writer therefore had to write in a way that appealed to their readers. Meier selected the most palatable works by the best-known authors for his *Manesse Library of World Literature*. He supplemented them with entertaining, touching, and/or exciting texts by unknown writers.

We illustrate this with the example of Russia, where the focus was on the trio of great classics: Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, supplemented by Chekhov, who was omnipresent on all stages at the time. There is one book each by the lesser-known authors Gogol and Gorky, and two by Pushkin. This means that around half of all Russian books published in the *Manesse Library of World Literature* were written by authors whose names were familiar to the average educated citizen.

This allowed the publishing house to publish lesser-known authors such as Ivan Goncharov with *Oblomov* and Yevgeny Zamyatin with *We*, which was, incidentally, the first book to be officially banned in the Soviet Union. Two extensive anthologies made readers eager to discover more.

Russian literature – a mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar




## China: The dominant culture of the Far East

Goethe had drawn attention to Chinese literature, and Meier followed suit by publishing an anthology of *Chinese ghost and love stories* as early as 1948. Other classics quickly followed:

In 1951, the two main works of Chinese Daoism were published, the

Chuang Tzu and the Tao Te Ching
Te-King, a collection of
sayings attributed to the great
philosopher Lao Tzu
were written.

1952 a novel appeared that
Ming Dynasty, entitled
*The Jade Dragonfly* and Short
stories from the
*Kin Ku Ki Kwan.*

1954 was followed by a novel by
19th century about
a Chinese Amazon
the Manchu period.

1960 Meier took further short
stories of Kin Ku Ki
Kwan under the title
*Goldjunger Sung.*

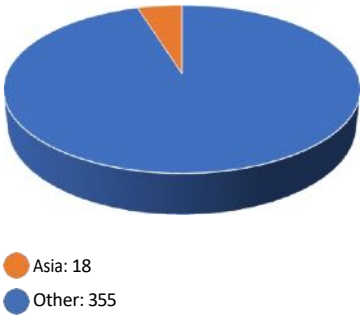
1969 published under the title
*The Tale of Genji.*
*snowy bamboo* chinesi-
Chinese poems.

After that, Meier's involvement
for China, approximately
at the time when the inter-
national student movement that
Cultural Revolution in China as
discovered the model and began to
red Mao Bible in his pocket
This abrupt ending could be
also be related to
that the long-time translator
Franz Kuhn in 1961.

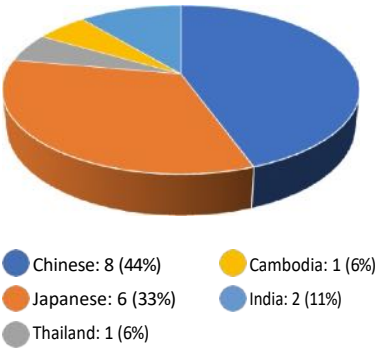
## Japan. Between the past and modernity

A second focus was
Meier also focused on Japan. Here, too, he
initially focused on the well-known classics
In 1952, the pillow book
Book of the Court Lady Sei Shonagon,
1966 the Tale of Genji. Both
were written in the 11th century
and are considered classics
of Japanese literature.

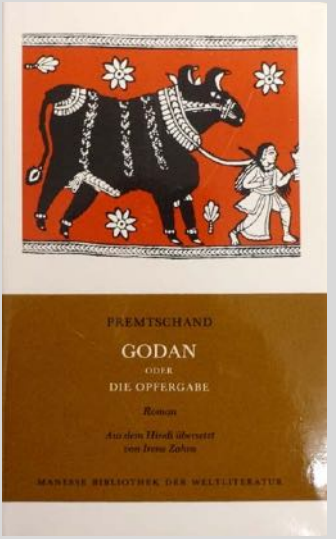
Asia in the overall program




Asia divided by country



In 1963 and 1983, two books of Japanese poetry were published. It is noteworthy that, in the case of Japan, *Ma-nesse Verlag* focused not only on classical literature, but also on other aspects. In 1972, *Die ehren-werte Landpartie (The Honorable Country Trip)* by Thomas Raucat was published, a humorous parody of the usual misunderstandings between East and West. In 1976, Kokoro was published, a novel by Natsume Soseki, probably the best-known Japanese writer of the Meiji period. In it, he addresses the end of the Meiji period and the dawn of new ideals.



Godan

## Insights into other cultures

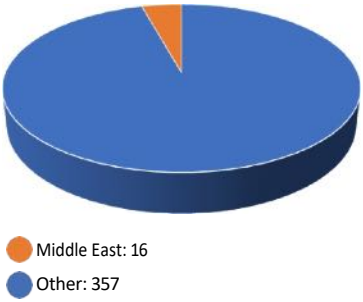
In 1971, Federico Hindermann, the new editor of *the Manesse Library of World Literature*, had one of India's most important works translated. Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's novel, *The Courtesan of Lucknow*, published in Urdu, is part of the country's literary heritage and has been adapted for film several times by Bollywood.
The same applies to Munshi Premchand's Godan, translated from Hindi in 1979. Godan or The Sacrifice is now considered one of the most important works ever written in India.

Thailand and Cambodia are not represented by individual authors, but "only" by anthologies. Other regions of Asia such as Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka are completely absent.

## The Middle East

The image of the Middle East conveyed by the *Manesse Library of World Literature* is characterized by fairy-tale aspects. The *love stories from One Thousand and One Nights*, the *parrot*

The Middle East in the overall program




*book*, *Wisramiani* or *Chos-rou and Shirin*, all of these are classic fairy tales, just as we would expect from Scheherazade.

But in addition to the classics of Arabic-Turkish-Persian fairy tale literature, Meier published two volumes that fall outside the norm. In 1961, Persian Master Storytellers of the Present was published, compiled and translated by Rudolf Gelpke, and in 1970, Georgian Storytellers of Recent Times, selected and translated by Ruth Neukomm.

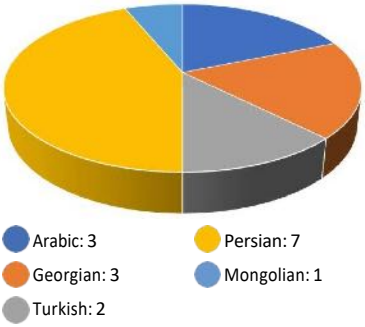
## The personal factor: Georgia

One could puzzle for a long time over why little Georgia, of all places, has three works in the *Manesse*

*library of world literature* and thus receives just as much attention as entire Arabic cultural area. The solution is simple: Meier had personal connections to a male and a female translator who were dedicated to translating Georgian world literature in Zurich. The first result was *Wisrami-ani*, published in 1957, which Kita Tschenkéli and Ruth Neukomm had translated from Georgian into German.

Tschenkéli was born in Georgia in 1895. In 1920, he received a scholarship to study in Germany. However, the occupation of Georgia by the Soviet Union in 1921 made him stateless. He initially remained in Germany, but emigrated to Switzerland in 1944
to Switzerland. There he settled in Zurich and found three students interested in languages, among them Ruth Neukomm.
Tschenkéli must have had an incredible

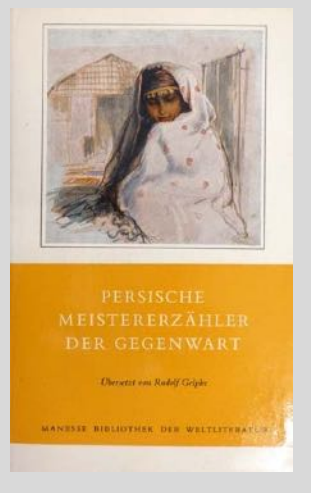
The Middle East divided according to languages



He must have been an inspiring personality, because even after his death, his students continued to champion Georgian culture uncompromisingly. Meier supported Ruth Neukomm in this endeavor. She went on to publish two more books in the *Manesse Library of World Literature*: the medieval epic *The Man in the Panther Skin* and an anthology of *modern Georgian storytellers*.

## The personal factor: Persia

The large number of translations from Persian in the *Manesse Library of World* Literature—seven in total—has personal reasons. Meier probably knew the young Rudolf Gelpke, who came from a family of artists and politicians in Basel, personally. Gelpke's first translation is a collection of novellas by the Persian poet Nizami entitled *The Seven Stories of the Seven Princesses*. The work was published in 1959. Gelpke had received his doctorate in Islamic studies in Basel two years earlier. Despite his turbulent life – he taught at the University of Tehran, went to the University of California, only to return to Tehran, where he converted to Islam in 1967 – he delivered a total of six magnificent translations from Persian to Meier every two years, including an anthology of contemporary Persian master storytellers.from Persian, including an anthology *of contemporary Persian master storytellers*.



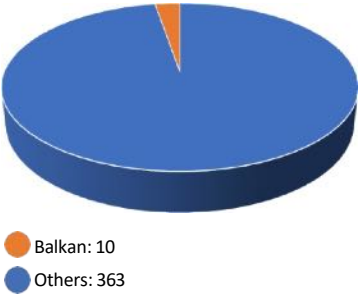

Persian Master Storytellers of the Present

But it was not these that made the brilliant young man famous. It was his experiments with LSD in collaboration with Albert Hofmann. His best-known work was *Von Fahrten in den Weltraum der Seele (Journeys into the Space of the Soul)*, which of course did not appear in the *Manesse Library of World Literature*. Rudolf Gelpke died in 1972 at the age of only 44.

## Unknown Balkans

Only ten volumes of *the Manesse Library of World Literature* originate from authors from the Balkans – which seems very little to us today. The problem is likely to be found in the fact that the national languages of the Balkans only established themselves as written languages during the 19th century. Even though nationalist linguistics would like to trace the roots of the various national languages back to the Middle Ages, the Migration Period, and in some cases even to antiquity, children only began learning to read and write these languages in school in the second half of the 19th century. It was only at this point that the spoken language developed into a literary language. This is why the books by Balkan authors in the *Manesse Library of World Literature* all date from the period after the second half of the 19th century. The earliest is Božena Němcová's novel entitled *The Grandmother*. It was published in 1855. This is followed by the Hungarian novel *The New Landlord* by Mor Jokai, first published in 1863. The Serbian writer Simo Matavulj published *His Glory Frater Brne in* 1892. Around the same time, the Hungarian writer Kálmán Mikszáth wrote his stories, which were published under the title *The Black Rooster*, and the Hungarian Frigyes Karinthy wrote his satires, which were published in the Manesse Library of World Literature under the title *Please, Professor*. The list is rounded off by two modern Greek novels, *The Bailiff of Kastropyrgos* (1944) and *Madonna with the Fish Body* (1949).

The Balkans in the overall program




## Blind spots

The program of *the Manesse Library of World Literature* was revolutionary for its time. Even if this is sometimes difficult to comprehend from today's perspective. Critics might complain, for example, that neither Meier nor his successor Federico Hindermann systematically

to promote female authors in a targeted manner. Conversely, this does not mean that he rejected female authors for chauvinistic reasons. On the contrary, many well-known and unknown female authors are included in the *Manesse Library of World Literature*.

What we know today as indigenous literature is also missing. This is probably because there was no easy access to this literature in Western Europe at the time. There is only one book by an indigenous African author: *Chaka Zulu* by Thomas Mofolo, which was not translated from Sesotho, the language in which it was originally published, but as a translation of the English translation.

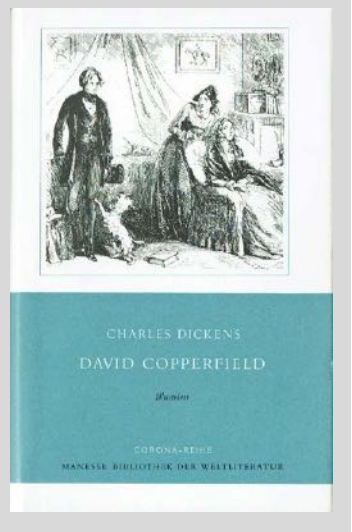
The fact that there were no reservations about indigenous literature can be seen from the publication in 1960 of *the Mayan legends* collected by Antonio Mediz Bolio. Just how exotic this topic was is shown by the fact that the afterword deals not with the text but with the Mayan people. The average reader at that time knew nothing about this people.

The vast landmass of Central and South America is also represented in the Manesse Library of World Literature series is represented by only a single anthology, published in 1956. This deficiency would certainly have been remedied had *Conzett & Huber* not spun off *Manesse Verlag* from their company in 1983 and sold it to *Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt*.

Station 6

# Favorite books

At our last stop, we present our favorite books from the Manesse Library of World Literature. They are all very special—for a variety of reasons. The selection is purely subjective and is intended to do nothing more than whet your appetite for more. Because no matter which book you choose from the Manesse Library of World Literature: if you read it with an open heart and an alert mind, it will broaden your horizons and enrich your life.



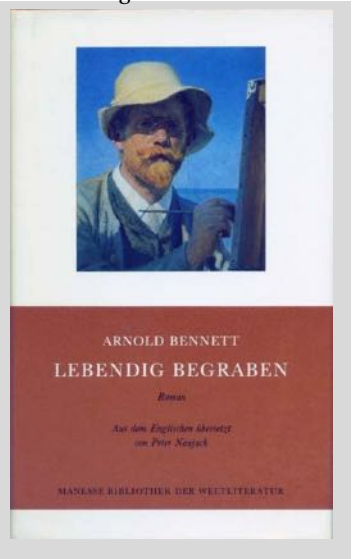

Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1961

Rediscovering the familiar Yes, yes, I know you know David Copperfield. After all, he has appeared in over 20 films and numerous adaptations as a television series and radio play. You read about the trials and tribulations of the little orphan boy who, despite all obstacles, makes his way into bourgeois society in a version adapted for children when you were twelve years old. And yet it is not a waste of time.
of the little orphan boy who, despite all obstacles, makes his way into bourgeois society, you already read in a child-friendly abridged version when you were twelve. And yet it is not a waste of time to pick up this thick book again. For it offers an insight into the history of the development of our bourgeois norms of behavior.

David Copperfield was published in 1849/50, at a time when our modern social system and its ethics were beginning to take shape. The novel not only tells a story, but illustrates successful and dangerous behavior. Dickens divides his protagonists into different types, repeatedly places them in similar situations, and lets them react in completely different ways. Almost like a social experiment. The results gave every attentive reader food for thought even back then. Dickens was never anything like boring self-help literature. His books were and are entertaining.

And that makes David Copperfield a great advocate for the best possible education, for initiative, for careful handling of money, and for even more careful selection of the person with whom one wants to spend one's life. In addition, the book provides a wonderful panorama of the times, teaching us a lot about the mindset of Charles Dickens' era.

More importantly, David Copperfield is an encounter with ourselves. For the characters that Charles Dickens describes with such love are still too similar to us and our fellow citizens for us not to recognize ourselves in them.




Arnold Bennett, Buried Alive, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1983

Exciting discoveries Let's stick with British literature, which we all think we know so well. And yet there is

There are still some insider tips, such as Arnold Bennett's satire about the painter Priam Farll. In *Buried Alive*, Bennett addresses two interesting phenomena: first, the shyness and inability of shy people to say no, and the precarious situations this shyness can lead to. And then there are the crazy rules of the art market, which guarantee maximum prices as soon as an artist dies.

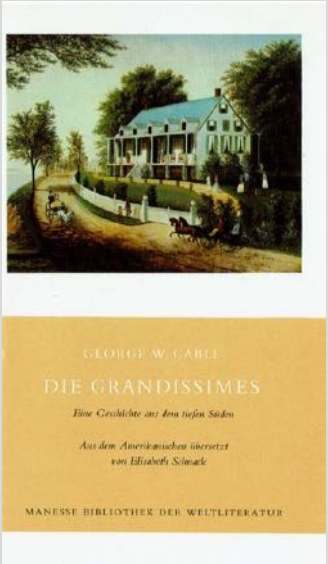
This brings us to the hero of the novel. Priam Farll is a brilliant painter and so shy that he needs other people to communicate with the outside world for him.
They are happy to do so, because they earn good money from it. No matter how often they cheat him, the shy Farll is unlikely to confront them. This sets the stage for the plot: Farll's servant uses his master's photo to jazz up his own marriage announcement. But before he can meet the most promising candidate, he suddenly dies, and Farll is far too shy to explain to the coroner who has rushed to the scene that it is not the dead man,

but that he himself is the famous painter Farll. The result: he is declared dead, receives a grave of honor in Westminster Abbey, and his heirs throw the supposed servant out of the apartment. Fortunately, the marriage candidate that his servant had picked out is a real sweetheart. She does not exploit her beloved, but spoils him rotten. Yes, she even indulges his whims and buys him a paint box. The sudden appearance of new paintings by a deceased painter leads to complications that are so comical that you can't stop laughing.

It is only at second glance that you notice that Bennett casually addresses issues that are extremely topical: How does an artist separate his public and private personas? Is it still possible to lead a normal life once you have achieved fame? In the age of social media, Priam Farll's refusal to share his life with his fans is downright refreshing!

## Slavery in the Southern States

While we're on the subject of the unknown: have you ever heard of




George W. Cable, Die Grandissimes, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1976

anything by George Washington Cable? No? You're not alone. Cable is hardly known outside the United States. And that's despite the fact that he painted a realistic and critical picture of everyday racism in the southern states extremely early on in his literary work. He knew the circumstances firsthand. In contrast to many activists of the time, who—like the author of *Uncle Tom's* Cabin—drew their knowledge purely from books.

Cable's parents lived in New Orleans, were wealthy, and, of course, slave owners. Nevertheless, their son, who had fought on the Confederate side in the Civil War, became a vehement critic of all racist prejudices.

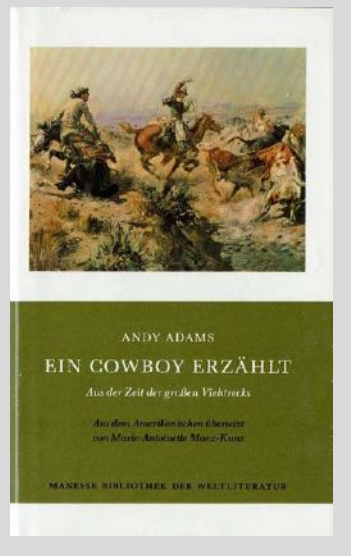
He usually sets his stories in the early 1800s, shortly after the United States purchased Louisiana from the French. In his detailed descriptions of the milieu, Cable knows no taboos, speaking freely about slavery and lynching. One of his favorite themes is the Creoles, disadvantaged children born out of wedlock to white men and black women. The historical setting is well researched and very close to reality—too close; today Cable is criticized for having his Creoles speak poor English.

Cable's greatest work is considered to be *The Grandissimes*, first published in New York in 1880. In it, he tells the story of two half-brothers. One is white, legal, heir to his father's estate, and economically rather unsuccessful; the other is Creole and a shrewd self-made man with considerable fortune, willing to help his half-brother in order to gain the family's recognition. They are surrounded by a panopticon of different people with a wide variety of attitudes toward skin color and slavery. These range from complete intolerance on the part of both whites and blacks to the will to fight together for a better world.

Cable's novel is still worth reading, above all because of the great dignity he bestows on each of his characters. Anyone who wants to know what life was really like in the southern states should definitely read *Die Grandissimes*.

## Working world

And while we're on the subject of reality, there is a Wild West novel that you can read in public without blushing. In 1981—when the Western had long been declared dead in the *cinema—Manesse Bibliotheque de la Littérature Mondiale* published the diary-like stories of Andy Adams. He himself had worked as a cowboy for around 15 years. He incorporated his experiences into his first novel. In it, he describes the five-month trek of a 3,000-strong cattle drive.




Andy Adams, A Cowboy Tells His Story. From the Time of the Great Cattle Drives, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1981

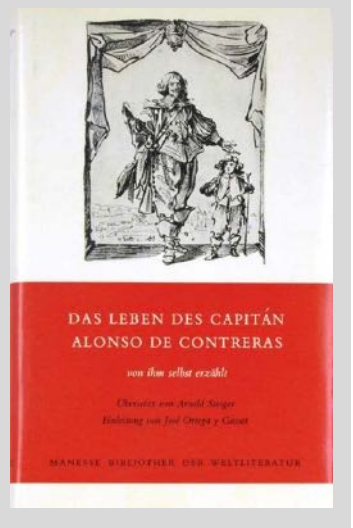
herd being driven from Texas to Montana in 1882, from where it would be transported by rail to the slaughterhouses of Chicago.

Of course, the story is fictional, but it is enriched with so many real experiences that Adams' account is still considered the most important source on the life of cowboys today. So if you're in need of a little Wild West romance, we can highly recommend this wonderfully unpretentious novel. After the Reading it, one senses what it meant to herd cattle, lure cows across a river, or break up a stampede.

## On the ethics of a conquistador

While we're on the subject of working environments, have you ever wondered what kind of profession a conquistador was? What must they have thought, these Spanish warriors who killed locals in South America by the dozen to steal their gold? If you want to experience this era through the eyes of a contemporary, we recommend the autobiography of Alonso de Contreras. He lived from 1582 to 1641 and proves to us that all the values we consider to be irrefutable truths
are precisely that: unshakable and indisputable truths.

Contreras would be amazed at our current set of values. He himself adhered to completely different norms. And he shared them with the majority of his contemporaries. He considered himself a great guy and could count on his readers to agree with him. We, on the other hand, are left breathless: Contreras murders without hesitation (even his own wife) and robs,




Alonso de Contreras, The Life of Captain Alonso de Contreras. As told by himself, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1961

whenever the opportunity arises.

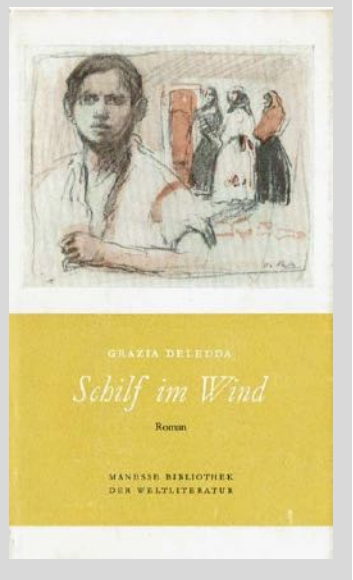
Books such as the autobiography of Alonso de Contreras should be read with a very alert mind. For, of course, they can be used as a mere collection of facts. These then serve wonderfully to make oneself feel morally superior and to condemn the unscrupulous actions of our ancestors. This is politically absolutely correct and in line with the spirit of the times.

But when reading, one can also reflect on how relative all values are. One might learn from this that societies act unanimously when they share values. And that in a divided society, the solution is not the next election, but a discussion about which values should apply. Once priorities have been agreed upon, it is then child's play to decide on and implement the appropriate political measures.

## Values and norms

The problem is that we often no longer recognize how oppressive the demands are that are subtly imposed on us from outside. Let's take the story of the noble Pintor family as a literary example. They play the leading role in the wonderful novel *Reeds in the Wind* by Nobel Prize winner Grazia Deledda. The author describes the fate of the three daughters of the strict Don Zame. They have made it their mission to atone for their sister Lia's misstep through their strict morals. Their father has long since died, passing away on the very night in

Lia could no longer bear it and fled with her lover. Since then, all the wealth has disappeared, lost and squandered by the unworldly maidens, who are completely overwhelmed by the management of their estate. Deledda's description of the barren landscape of Sardinia, the exuberant celebrations, and the merciless self-mortification of the elderly sisters is unforgettable. Her protagonists grow dear to the reader's heart, especially the simple farmhand Efix, whom the sisters treat with



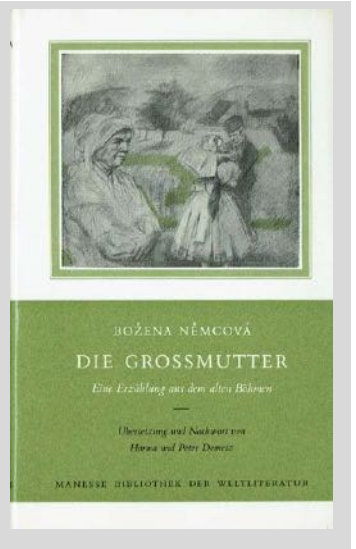

Grazia Deledda, Reeds in the Wind, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1951

, who ensures that they have their daily bread despite all their hardship.

The story takes a turn when one day the son of the now deceased Lia contacts the sisters and asks them for financial help. He promises them the moon and squanders their meager funds. So there is only one thing left to do: Noemi must finally give up her pride and, against the commandment of her long-dead father, marry the man who has loved her for so long. Suddenly, everything falls into place: Noemi learns to love again. Modest prosperity returns, and in the end, there remains the hope that perhaps something like happiness is possible after all.

## A plea for a meaningful old age

*Babička* would never doubt that happiness is possible. You don't know who that is? Well, that's because we are very familiar with the literature of the English-speaking and perhaps also the French-speaking world, but we have no idea which books are considered school reading material by our eastern neighbors. And yet




Božena Němcová, The Grandmother, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1959

would be well worth discovering. Take, for example the example of *Babička* by Božena Němcová. Published in 1855, the novel is still one of the best-selling novels in the Czech Republic.

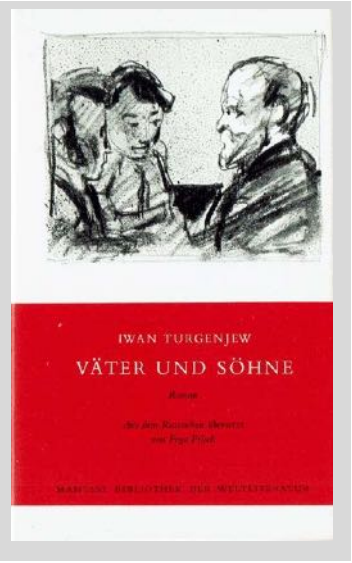
How remarkable. After all, *Babička* is an old woman. How many successful works of world literature do you know in which an old man or woman plays the leading role? The Czechs, on the other hand, learn from an early age with *Babička* what it means to living their old age meaningfully. No, *Babička* does not receive a large pension, and no, she does not travel around the world on a cruise ship. Instead, she lives for her fellow human beings. She is open to listening to their concerns without judging and without bringing up her own experiences. Instead, whenever the opportunity arises, she actively intervenes to fulfill the innermost wishes of those around her. In doing so, *Babička* draws on two resources that she has in abundance—as, indeed, every elderly person should: time is of no consequence to her. She also has the courage to tell everyone, absolutely everyone, the truth. She no longer hopes or fears anything for herself. And yet, even though her own life has not offered her much of what we would call happiness, she enjoys the small pleasures of life and is an example to others to do the same.

Yes, yes, of course this book thrives on the romance of a bygone era. You could call it Bullerbü for adults. But nevertheless, it should also be required reading for us. Because *Babička* shows how much the

generations could give each other if they valued sharing their lives with one another.

## Changing values and the student movement – in the 19th century

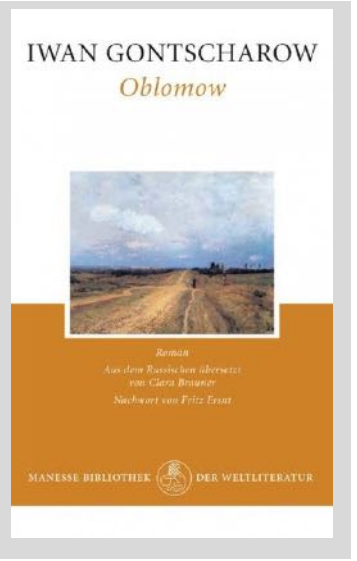
Where *Babička* describes peace between the generations, Ivan Turgenev sees only misunderstandings and the resulting strife some ten years later. *Fathers and Sons* is a portrayal, still valid today worldwide, of the fact that values change and that




Ivan Turgenev, Fathers and Sons, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1949

That is why, despite the deep love that binds parents and children, rifts open up between the generations that can only be overcome with the greatest of effort.

That is, if one is willing to make that effort at all. The medical student Bazarov has no desire to do so. With all the arrogance of youth, he is convinced that he knows the truth. Nihilism is his motto. He can only laugh at the ideals of his elders. His friend Arkady is cut from a different cloth. Yes, he too is a nihilist (at least most of the time, and definitely when Bazarov is around), but he has sympathy for his father and uncle and doesn't want to turn the world completely upside down, just a little bit at most; at least in the areas where his economically inept father has really got himself into trouble. Who would you say has a better chance of leading a happy life? That's right: Arkady. He makes peace with the older generation and finds his own little happiness on his father's farm. And Bazarov? Such a hothead can only meet a senseless death. He dies, cared for and mourned by his loving parents, who remain indifferent to him even in death.




Ivan Goncharov, Oblomov, The Superfluous Man, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1980

## Paralyzed by fear in the face of crisis

While Turgenev is known to every literature lover today, Ivan Goncharov remains more of an insider tip, because his thick novel Oblomov is quite heavy going. A fluid plot? Forget it. The title character hardly ever leaves his own bed, let alone his own apartment. It takes a hardcore reader to even get through the first
50 pages of the book, which describe the title character's journey from his bed to a chair. Oblomov has made it into psychology

Achieved. Oblomov syndrome is diagnosed today when a physically healthy person suffers from complete apathy—just like his literary ancestor, who does nothing while his friend (and antagonist) Stolz first takes over the management of his estate, then marries his bride, thus displacing him from his own life.

Oblomov played a central role in political discussions in 19th-century Russia. People wanted to see him as the idle nobleman. His friend Stolz represented the successful citizen whose drive would lead Russia to a glorious future.

Today, we know that excessive activism leads to burnout at best if you don't listen to the Oblomov in yourself from time to time. And that's why it's time to read this book again, to slowly work your way through the plot, so that you can understand that there is a time for everything: for bold deeds, but also for enjoyable rest.

## Between Russia and Europe

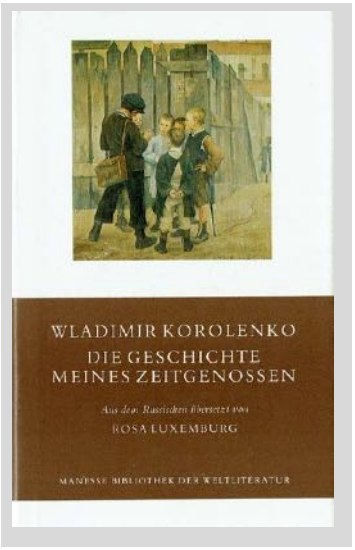
Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko, born in 1853 in Zhytomyr,

died in 1921 in Poltava, was a Russian poet. At least, that is what we read in Wikipedia. Now, Vladimir Korolenko wrote in Russian, that much is certain. But did that make him Russian? After all, he was born in (what is now) Ukraine and died in (what is now) Ukraine. At that time, both belonged to the Russian Empire. But the Korolenko family did not feel Russian. How could they have? Although his father earned his living as a Russian civil servant, he was actually a Ukrainian Cossack who, to the horror of his priest, had married a Catholic Polish woman.

When we think of nations with clearly defined borders today, this has little to do with the reality of the 19th century. In Zhytomyr, where Korolenko grew up, a wide variety of traditions and religions mingled happily. Much to the displeasure of the Russian authorities, who did everything in their power to create a Russian national identity.

Korolenko experiences all this with his alert mind. He describes the many inconsistencies of his youth. He depicts the Russian bureaucracy that forces him to complete a mathematical-technical branch instead of a classical language high school. He tells of the arbitrariness of the teachers, the beatings, and the dark detention room, under which many of his less gifted classmates suffer.

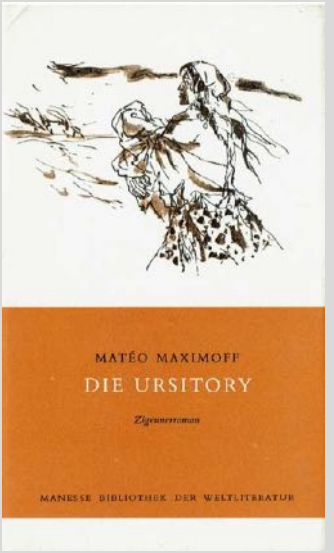
What many authors would have described in black and white, Korolenko depicts in color with countless shades of gray. For he understood that it is often not the wickedness of man that determines his actions




Vladimir Korolenko, The Story of My Contemporary, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1985

but the system. Korolenko observes time and again how young teachers arrive full of enthusiasm and are broken by the regulations of the school authorities and the long-pent-up hatred of the students toward the teaching staff. He understands that even the staunchest defender of the system may have had ideals at some point and had to abandon them.

Korolenko's *story of my contemporary* is particularly important reading today, so important that we have exceeded the time frame set for this exhibition. For our time has forgotten that opinions are often linked to the experiences a person has had. Instead of condemning him for his attitude, it would be more fruitful for any discussion to ask, as Korolenko did, what led him to adopt this attitude.




Matéo Maximoff, Die Ursitory, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1954

## (Not so) funny is the gypsy life

What do you actually know about gypsies—or, as we should correctly say today, about Sinti and Roma? How many Sinti and Roma do you know? Or are you like me, and when you hear the word "gypsy," you think of...

ner life, do you still think of the endless freedom of a life beyond all bourgeois obligations?

The problem we all have is that we know very little firsthand about the actual lives of Sinti and Roma. When they appear in a novel, as in *Carmen*, they are nothing more than completely fictional characters created by an author who has never spoken to a real "gypsy." Until the mid-20th century, literary history did not offer any inside perspective.

That changed when the lawyer representing 21-year-old tinker Matéo, who was being held in custody in Issoire, France, in 1938, advised his client to write down his version of a bloody dispute. Matéo was a Romani and, moreover, extremely talented with words. When the lawyer returned, Matéo handed him the manuscript for the novel *The Ursitory*. This was the first authentic narrative by a Romani person in the world. For the first time, it was possible to read firsthand about the values and customs of this people. The lawyer was deeply impressed, but it took several more years before Die Ursitory was printed. And for obvious reasons: Sinti and Roma were interned and in some cases murdered, both in free France and in German-controlled Europe.

But shortly after the end of the war, in 1946, the novel *Die Ursitory,* written in French, was published. To those who read it today, the events seem a little strange, very fairy-tale-like and at the same time familiar.
This is because the novel plays with Greek mythology: like Meleagros, Arniko's life is tied to a log. When it burns, the hero must die. Women guard the log, first his mother, then, after her death, Arniko's wife. Everything goes well as long as he abides by the rules of his people. Only when he plans to leave his wife to live in the castle with a rich gadje—as the Roma call all non-Roma
Roma – with whom he has fallen in love, do things go wrong. His wife is hurt, burns the log, and Arniko must die.

It is impressive that Meier decided to have this particular novel translated and to include it in the publishing program as world literature in 1954. Of course, the word "gypsy novel" still appears on the title page; of course, the detailed afterword still refers to the Sinti and Roma as "gypsies." But if we know more about the Sinti and Roma today, it is because books like *Die Ursitory* paved the way. To mock the use of words that are frowned upon today is ahistorical and presumptuous.

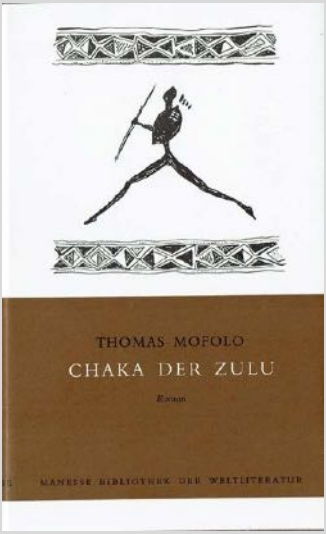
## The oppressed also have a right to be angry

What do you think of when you hear Africa? Small children with big

whose bloated hunger bellies prompt you to immediately transfer money to an NGO? Well, this idea is unfortunately all too widespread and completely overlooks the rich history of the black continent. Of course, Africa also had great empires, powerful men, and terrible wars. The Basotho Thomas Mokopu Mofolo tells the story.

His protagonist is Chaka, who is now considered one of the central figures in South African history. He ruled over the Zulu between 1816 and 1828 and turned the previously insignificant tribe into the dominant power in southern Africa. The Basotho nation,
to which Mokopu Mofolo belonged, was among Chaka's victims; up to a million people are said to have died in his conquests.

Mokupo Mofolo examines this personality and attempts to understand how Chaka, born out of wedlock, could become the all-powerful warrior king. He shows step by step
for step, as from the cruelties of his peers that the young Chaka must endure, the



Thomas Mofolo, Chaka the Zulu, published in the Manesse Library of World Literature in 1953

. He observes how Chaka first develops into a strong man who finds his place in life, and then drives him further and further as he accumulates more and more power. Chaka's humanity falls by the wayside.

The images Mokopu Mofolo uses to describe this change seem strange to us. There is a sorcerer who provides Chaka with more powerful talismans. But these derive their power from sacrifices. The greater the

sacrifice, the more it hurts Chaka, the more powerful the talisman. Chaka must purchase the ultimate talisman by murdering his beloved wife with his own hands. This marks the climax. Chaka has gone too far. He loses the support of his family and is murdered by his own brothers.

No, Chaka is certainly not a victim. He is a perpetrator with more blood on his hands than we can even imagine. But that is precisely why it is important to know his story. Because his life story prevents us from perceiving the inhabitants of Africa as helpless beings whose lives we can save with our handouts.

# Afterword

When *Manesse Verlag* celebrated its 40th anniversary in 1984, it published an almanac that included a short essay in which Dr. Walther Meier classified three types of readers.

First, there are all those readers who, like St. Jerome, reverently and lovingly internalize every word they read in order to let it touch their lives.

Then there are those who weigh every claim made in a book on golden scales to measure its meaning or nonsense against reality.

And then there are modern readers who, like Don Quixote once did, lose themselves in the worlds of books in order to dream themselves away from their own reality.

For Dr. Walther Meier, the perfect reader would be someone who possesses the ability to combine all three types of reading.

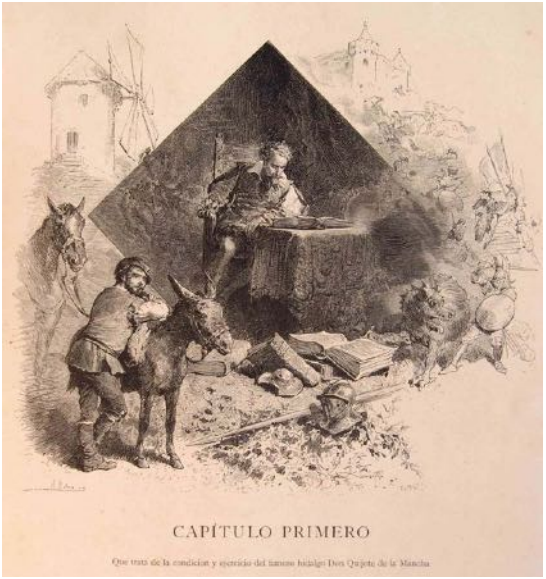
But is that still realistic today?

After all, we have lost our faith in authority and at the same time lost our overview. How often are we unwilling, even completely overwhelmed, to decide whether a text is true or merely reflects what its author believed to be true when writing it?

What we still have, however, is the desire to lose ourselves completely in a story, so that we can then rise again, strengthened, and face the reality of everyday life.

Or, as Michael Ende once said: Every real story is an endless story.


The three types of readers according to Walther Meier: St. Jerome, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Don Quixote.



Sunflower Foundation / MoneyMuseum
Hadlaubstrasse 106
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www.moneymuseum.com

Text: Ursula Kampmann

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