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| Benda, Julien (1867–1956) |
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| Julien Benda was a French writer, literary critic, and political thinker. An atypical figure in French literary history, Benda opposed most of the intellectual trends of his time, including Henri Bergson’s philosophy of duration; Charles Maurras’s integral nationalism; dialectical materialism; and Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism. Influenced by the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment, he condemned what he perceived as the irrationalist tendencies of his contemporaries. |
| Julien Benda was a French writer, literary critic, and political thinker. An atypical figure in French literary history, Benda opposed most of the intellectual trends of his time, including Henri Bergson’s philosophy of duration; Charles Maurras’s integral nationalism; dialectical materialism; and Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism. Influenced by the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment, he condemned what he perceived as the irrationalist tendencies of his contemporaries. Benda’s fight for rationalism in the philosophical realm was inseparable from his commitment to democratic values in the political realm. In his most famous essay *La Trahison des clercs* [*The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*; 1927], Benda argued that intellectuals had fallen prey to political passions such as nationalism and socialism, embracing particular interests of class or nation instead of defending universal values, reason and democracy. Benda remained a prolific literary polemicist in the 1930s, warning against the rise of fascism and totalitarianism. Due to his political convictions and Jewish background, he was forced to spend most of the Second World War in hiding. He published a new edition of *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals* in 1952, in which he described the collaboration of French intellectuals with the Nazi regime as the result of yet another political passion, the fascination for totalitarian social order. |
| Further reading:  (Nichols) |