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Gods, Heroes, and Mythologists: Romantic Scholars and the Pagan Roots of Europe's Nations

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the scholarly interest in Europe's non-Classical mythologies, from the rise of Edda studies in late eighteenth-century Denmark to the appropriation of Celtic origin myths in Spanish Galicia, and the flourish of overlapping Baltic mythologies between Tallinn and Vilnius, in the decades before 1900. Mythological studies attracted many important scholars (most notably Jacob Grimm, who published his benchmark *Deutsche Mythologie* in 1835), reached large readerships and inspired many artists, writers and composers. The progress and spread of this field of knowledge production is, however, extremely difficult to trace because it remained a cultural pursuit and never quite became a scholarly discipline. Its methods were heterogeneous and contradictory, combining the comparatist historicism of the New Philology with a tendency to leap from documentation to fanciful interpretation. The failure of the mythological pursuit to achieve academic consolidation stands in intriguing contrast to its popularity and its successful activation of a multinational repertoire of mythical figures and themes—sometimes reliably documented, often speculative, and always a welcome fuel for nationalist consciousness raising.

*Et si tam nobilissima gens . . . facta sua ex falsis fabulis rusticorum
uel a garrulo cantu ioculatorum quasi somnpiando audiret.
—Gesta Hungarorum¹*

1. And if this noble nation were to learn its history, as if in a dream, from false folktales and wayward minstrelsy: Prologue to *Gesta Hungarorum* (by the chronicler known as “Anonymus,” ca. 1200, available at https://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Gesta_Hungarorum).

*Poisson soluble dans les eaux de la mythologie, le mythe est
une forme introuvable: ni genre littéraire, ni récit spécifique.*

—Marcel Detienne²

The word *mythology*, like the word *folklore* (and the parallel is intriguing) can refer both to a cultural expression and to its academic study. A mythology can be a corpus of myths and beliefs (much as an anthology is a garland of poems); this, indeed, is the older meaning or the term, a collection of *muthoi* (tales, narratives). Later on, the semantics came also to include the study of such a myth corpus (much as ornithology is the study of birds). In what follows I shall concentrate on the development of this latter meaning, particularly as applied to the nineteenth-century interest in vernacular myths from the non-Classical cultures of Europe.³ I shall argue that this nineteenth-century scholarly pursuit, sparked in the closing decades of late Enlightenment antiquarianism, uneasily negotiated the widening gap between philology and archaeology—in the process relying increasingly on evidence from the new field of folklore—and that its remarkable diffusion across the map of Europe was driven less by its (limited) scholarly power to unlock new areas of knowledge than by its cultural appeal to an interest in ethnic roots in the context of Romantic nationalism.

For most of European history before around 1750, the study of supernatural tales reflecting ancient pagan belief systems addressed itself exclusively to Greco-Roman antiquity: the account of Athena's birth, the deeds of Hercules, the near invulnerability of Achilles. Supernatural narratives from the Jewish and Christian belief system (the Tower of Babel, Noah's Ark, or the linguistic miracle of Pentecost) would not be given the overly skeptical appellation *myths*; similarly, the wonder tales about Christian saints were called "legends" rather than myths. On the other hand, the belief systems encountered in the wider world outside Europe were seen as mere superstition, rarely dignified by the Classics-derived appellation *myth*, while the ancient pagan belief systems of non-Classical Europe were as yet known only sketchily, from the accounts of ancient authors or medieval chronicles. Only the pagan belief system of

2. Marcel Detienne, *L'Invention de la mythologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 238.

3. On the history of philology, see Pascale Hummel, *Philologus auctor: Le philologue et son œuvre* (Bern: Lang, 2003); and James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); on the emergence and importance of the modern philologies in the nineteenth century, see Joep Leerssen, "The Rise of Philology: The Comparative Method, the Historicist Turn and the Surreptitious Influence of Giambattista Vico," in *The Making of the Humanities*, vol. 2, *From Early Modern to Modern Disciplines*, ed. R. Bod, J. Maat, and T. Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 23–35.

the ancient oriental civilizations (foremost the Egyptian) were classified as “mythologies” alongside the existing Classical pantheon.

When pre-1750 authors discussed myths then, it was always with reference to the Greco-Roman world and often drawing on interpretative and analytical schemata already known in antiquity.⁴ Indeed, Classical scholars were among the great systematizers of myth in the academic world—for example, Karl Otfried Müller, with his *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (1825). Greek myth, which uniquely combined great antiquity and an excellent, widely familiar documentary record from within the tradition itself, would continue to occupy a central position in mythological studies; but alternative mythologies had become known in the course of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Already with Giambattista Vico (*Scienza Nuova*, 1724) there was a notion that each civilization had emerged from its own, autonomous ethnogenesis when it entered onto the stage of world history by articulating its own language, law system, heroic poetry, cosmogony, and belief system. The Classical scholar C. G. Heyne by the 1780s was already moving toward a philological approach in mythological studies and toward a comparative distinction between different mythologies.⁵

The mythologies that had begun to attract scholars’ attention in the late eighteenth century were twofold. To begin with, Italian archaeologists and antiquaries developed the suspicion of a fertility-oriented pagan substratum underneath the Classical myths of the ancient world. This hunch was triggered by the finds of phallic symbols in the Pompeii and Herculaneum excavations and a growing Enlightenment interest in the non-Classical aspects of Mediterranean antiquity: Greek mysteries, the Mithras cult, the civilization of the Etruscans and Phoenicians/Carthaginians. This overlapped with an Egyptian interest dating back to Athanasius Kircher and with the reports brought back from India and Persia about religious practices there, including lingam worship.

4. Consider, e.g., Euhemerus (fourth century BCE), from whom the notion of *euhemerism*—the idea that myths are the memories of important real-world events gradually translated, in their tellings and retellings, into supernatural agency—is derived.

5. In addition to Detienne’s *L’Invention de la mythologie*, a very good anthology of primary materials, with commentary, is Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, eds., *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680–1860* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972). For the various vernacular cases surveyed in the following pages, I have made grateful use of the various articles on national-mythological studies written for the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. J. Leerssen (<http://romanticnationalism.net>), by Nikolay Aretov (Bulgarian), Kaisa Kulasalü (Estonian), Toms Ķencis (Latvian), Monika Kropelj (Slovenian), Barbara van der Leeuw (Basque), Tchavdar Marinov (Macedonian), Suzana Marjanić (Croatian), Christian Noack (on Afanas’ev), Miloš Režnik (Slavic), Tom Shippey (Germanic), and Marija Snieckute (Lithuanian).

These were studied anecdotally (and discreetly, given their obscene nature) rather than systematically—the province of speculative antiquaries, often with masonic proclivities.⁶ While it was soon swept aside by a more comparative-analytical interest in, especially, Europe-focused mythological studies linked to the new scientific discipline of comparative philology, this sexual-anthropological tradition nonetheless kept a semi-underground existence occasionally glimpsed in nonacademic publications, to surface more noticeably in Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Mutterrecht* of 1861, Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* of 1871, Freud's *Totem und Tabu* of 1913, in the work of Sir James Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed., 1907–15) and the Cambridge Ritualists, and in the run-up to twentieth-century New Age thought.

Second (and this will be the focus of the present article), there was a more philological tradition whose rise was triggered in the 1760s by an interest in Nordic-Germanic supernatural tales and deities. Documentation for this mythology—for that it what it was—was readily available: Snorri Sturlusson's *Prose Edda* had been printed in Stockholm in 1665, his *Heimskringla* in 1697. This material was introduced to the wider European readership by Paul-Henri Mallet, a Geneva-born painter and amateur scholar who, having been appointed professor of belles lettres in Copenhagen in 1752, familiarized himself with Nordic antiquities there. His *L'histoire du Danemarch* (1755) treated, among other things, of the religion, manners, laws, and customs of the “ancient Danes”; the interest in what he himself termed “mythology” led, in 1756, to his *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves*.

The conflation of Celts and Scandinavians—or, rather: their nondifferentiation—is noteworthy; at the time, antiquarians saw all societies of Northern Europe as derived from the “Scythians” indistinctly mentioned by Classical authors. This undifferentiated view helped to set the scene for the Ossianic éclat of Macpherson in 1760 and was to remain operative until the turn of the century.⁷ Mallet's work appeared in an English reworking as *Northern Antiquities* (1770). English-language readers had already been prepared for a Nordic heroic age by Thomas Blackwell's *Enquiries into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), which developed a Viscoesque line of thought,

6. Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*; George S. Rousseau, “The Sorrows of Priapus,” in *Perilous Enlightenment: Pre- and Post-modern Discourses, Sexual, Historical* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 65–108.

7. See, generally, Daniel Droihe, *La linguistique et l'appel de l'histoire (1600–1800): Rationalisme et révolutions positivistes* (Geneva: Droz, 1978). On antiquarianism and early linguistics, the general standard work remains Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel: Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker*, 4 vols. in 6 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1957–63).

to the effect that Classical antiquity was not just the universal origin of all civility, but rather one ancient civilization among many.⁸

By the 1760s, Europe was ready for a northern alternative to the Mediterranean-Classical tradition. In the German-speaking world, the Swiss literary antiquary Johann Jakob Bodmer, who in the 1750s instigated the rediscovery of the Nibelungen MS, rendered the portion of “Chriemhild’s Revenge” in Homeric hexameters, presenting the epic lays of Siegfried as a “German Ilias.” That phrase was soon echoed everywhere. Macpherson’s Ossian himself soon became known as the “Homer of the North.” Madame de Staël in her *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) saw European literature as consisting of two halves: the southern one derived from Homer, and the northern, bardic one derived from Ossian—or, we might add, failing Ossian, some other Celto-Scandinavian mainspring, be it the *Nibelungenlied* or the Edda.⁹ The older, or Poetic, Edda, with its pagan tales of the creation and the ultimate ruin of the world, received its first edition in 1787. By that time literati were quite prepared to see the Edda as the repository of what Mallet had already called a “Mythologie” in 1756: as early as 1771, Peter Frederik Suhm, the all-dominant historian-antiquary of the time, published his *Om Odin og den hedniske gudelære og gudstjeneste udi Norden* (On Odin and the pagan belief-system and religion of the north); his *History of Denmark of 1774–81* started from the “pagan times of Odin.” A new edition of the *Heimskringla* (by Schöningh and Thorlacius) appeared in Copenhagen in 1777–83. In 1806, Per Rasmus Nyerup published his *Edda eller Skandinavernes hedenske Gudelære* (Edda, or the Scandinavians’ pagan belief system), and N. S. F. Grundtvig followed through with *Nordens Mytologi, eller Udsigt over Eddalæren for dannede Mænd, som ei selv ere Mytologer* (The mythology of the north, or a survey of Edda lore for learned men who are not themselves mythologists) in 1808.

The great flourish of Germanic mythology, as a counterpart to the Classical repertoire, started from here and was hailed by none other than the aging Herder in *Zutritt der nordischen Mythologie zur neueren Dichtkunst* (1803). Indeed the Germanic pantheon made its way into the European cultural imagination on the coattails of the new editions of the Edda and the *Nibelungenlied*. Wilhelm Grimm synthesized (German/

8. Thomas Mohnike, “Géographies du savoir historique: Paul-Henri Mallet entre rêves gothiques, germaniques et celtiques,” in *Figures du Nord: Scandinavie, Groenland et Sibérie; perceptions et représentations des espaces septentrionaux du Moyen Âge au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Eric Schnakenbourg (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 215–26; Joanne Parker, ed., *The Harp and the Constitution: Myths of Celtic and Gothic Origin* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

9. On Ossian’s wider impact, see Howard Gaskill, ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2004).

Scandinavian) hero tales in his *Deutsche Heldensage* of 1829. The pantheon and cosmology of Thor, Odin, Balder, the Valkyries, Valhalla, and the *Ragnarök* or *Götterdämmerung* provided an artistic repertoire eagerly used by opera composers, painters, and writers in the following century, from Wagner to William Morris.¹⁰ Much of it was driven by Danish-German rivalry, crystallizing around the analogous figures of the Nordic and German dragonslayers Sigurð and Siegfried. These themes and materials were now considered specific to the Germanic language family, which in the newly established Indo-European family tree had shed its Celtic connections and become an ethnic rather than a geographical (Nordic) complex.¹¹ In the academic field (aptly known, in the nineteenth century, as *Germanistik*), the high point came with Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* of 1835 (fig. 1). Not only did it shift both the institutional-academic center and the ethnic focus of Germanic philology from Scandinavia to Germany, it also effected what Tom Shippey has rightly termed a "revolution" in the study of myths, in that it grafted a "New Mythology" onto that newly established and highly successful New Philology of which Grimm was the most illustrious and celebrated representative.¹²

MYTHS AND METHODS AFTER ANTIQUARIANISM: PHILOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGY, FOLKLORE

Grimm, before publishing his *Deutsche Mythologie* in 1835, had established himself as the veritable godfather of the New Philology. He had collected German folktales and fairy tales, edited ancient literary texts (which in these decades were coming to light in great numbers) and German jurisprudential sources, and written a comparative grammar of the Germanic languages.¹³

10. Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths* (London: Tauris, 2007); Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, eds., *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture/Den nordiske fortid i europæisk kultur* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996); Andrew Wawn, "The Post-medieval Reception of Old Norse and Old Icelandic Literature," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 320–37.

11. Friedrich Schlegel, in his seminal work on Sanskrit and the European languages (*Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder*, 1808), still had doubts as to whether the Celtic languages were part of the Indo-European family at all; that familiarity was only reestablished (now on a comparative-linguistic rather than "Scythian" basis) in the 1820s, by Adolphe Pictet and Franz Bopp; see Terence Browne, ed., *Celticism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).

12. Tom Shippey, "A Revolution Reconsidered: Mythography and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. T. Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 1–28.

13. Dirk Van Hulle and Joep Leerssen, eds., *Editing the Nation's Memory: Textual Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

Figure 1. Peter Nicolai Arbo, *Åsgårdsreien* (Odin's wild hunt), 1872, oil on canvas, 65.2 × 94.7 in., Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo (detail). Image in the public domain (Wikimedia Commons). Gods or ghosts thundering across the sky in their "wild hunt" is a common trope in folklore and was linked to Germanic mythology by Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie* of 1835. The Norwegian painter P. N. Arbo (1831–92) trained at the Academy of Düsseldorf and specialized in themes from Scandinavian antiquity and mythology.

In this multifaceted work, Grimm had developed, and had become the foremost practitioner of, a new historicist-reconstructive approach, working backwards from the variants of later documentation to primal root types. He did so at various levels: lexicographically and etymologically, reconstructing ancient word forms from their later variants; textually, extrapolating an urtext or putative textual prototype from comparing later variant manuscripts; and with tales and narratives, distilling a *Stoff*

or *matière* from different retellings.¹⁴ In his *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (1848) Grimm even applied this historicist-reconstructive method to the ethnonyms and tribal identities of the Germanic peoples. And in this method, the fundamental, truly primeval layer was very often, as he saw it, reached at the level of the cultic or mythological. Words, stories, texts, epics: they all are the latter-day fallout of the race's collective primal experiences in a heroic ur-time, most faithfully captured in their beliefs and myths.¹⁵ In other words: if, for Grimm, cultural expressions are all actualizations of underlying types, then these types themselves (linguistic, narrative, cultural) are informed by a yet more deeply underlying archetype,¹⁶ and this deepest form of a cultural *imaginaire* is reached at the level of mythology.

That view, coming as it did from someone acknowledged as the greatest humanities scholar of the nineteenth century, inspired mythological studies everywhere in Europe, drawing either on ancient epics or hero tales, on archaeological remains, on etymologically suggestive word-patterns, or anthropologically interpreted folk customs and fairy tales. The northern mythologies that follow in the wake of Grimm, some more fanciful than others, form a great swath from Iceland and A Coruña to Karelia and Bulgaria. In the process, the study of myth was lifted from the older tradition of antiquarianism into the new, nomothetic endeavor of Grimm-style philology, with its proclivity to schematize varieties of cultural expression according to their underlying regularities.¹⁷

14. This method foreshadows Émile Benveniste's later distinction, in structural linguistics, between *langue* and *parole*. This structural distinction between abstract type and concrete expression was applied to the folktale in the classic article by Roman Jakobson and Pyotr Bogatyrev, "Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens," in *Donum Natalicium Schrijnen* (Nijmegen-Utrecht: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1929), 900–913.

15. Beate Kellner, *Grimms Mythen: Studien zum Mythosbegriff und seiner Anwendung in Jacob Grimms Deutscher Mythologie* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1994).

16. I use the term *archetype* neutrally, without the specific theoretical cargo with which it was loaded by C. G. Jung and Mircea Eliade, and merely to identify, not to endorse or propagate, an analytical penchant among certain scholars that can be summarized as follows: An "archetype" refers to what scholars essentialistically hypothesized as constituting a culture's deep-structural, primeval imaginative patterns—the "mother of all types" (be these narratives, language, visual imagination) that themselves underlie cultural expressions such as tales, speech, and images.

17. The case that the humanities were never wholly averse to nomothetic pattern seeking has been made by Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The nineteenth-century status of philology as the core of the humanities rested largely on Jacob Grimm's elaboration of regular sound shifts (*Lautgesetze*) in historical linguistics, which is nothing if not nomothetic. Later myth- and folktale-based systematizations in the humanities range from Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), based on the Grimm-inspired Russian collections of Aleksandr Afanas'ev, to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

The rise of Germanic mythology provided Europe with a blueprint that first of all juxtaposed Classical and Nordic myth (Zeus/Jupiter and Hera/Juno versus Thor and Freya, etc.). Crucially, the narrative-thematic reservoir of these myths was strongly correlated with language families, in this case Romance (incorporating the gods of ancient Greece) versus Germanic (uniting German and the Scandinavian languages). This philological correlation between mythology and language family is based on the assumption that a mythology is situated at the very deepest, most primordial level of cultural typology. A pagan belief system is not specific to, or the product of, the later branchings and divisions of tribes and nations but reflects the oldest stages of primal ethnogenesis, when religious views and a fundamental vocabulary crystallized even before separate language groups separated out of the primal tribe. Indeed, from the moment when Sir William Jones, in the late eighteenth century, suggested the family relations between what we now call the Indo-European languages, the mythological study of primitive cultures was brought into that Indo-European frame of reference. Jones himself already juxtaposed Hindu deities with the Greco-Roman and Germanic ones and attempted a parallel alignment of gods in these respective pantheons: much as *raj* was cognate with *rex* and *Reich*, so too Zeus and Thor were cognate with Vishnu. This “wide” perspective was still the outer horizon of conceptualization for Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie* and remained the dominant mode of mythological studies at least until Georges Dumézil. For the widely popular philologist Max Müller (1823–1900), mythology was an extension of the analytical perspectives offered by comparative philology, and myths (famously defined by him as “a disease of language”) originated from the deification of the forces of nature metaphorically described in terms of human behavior or volition. Müller accordingly located mythology’s bedrock in those “organic” or “primary” myths that “were known to the primæval Aryan race, before it broke up into Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Celts.”¹⁸

However, the philological approach was not the only one: against a schematization by language family, a complementary method would see myths as the product, not of language groups and their linguistically circumscribed *imaginaire*, but as the moral regime of primitive or prehistoric societies, taking evidence primarily from archaeology and ancient history.¹⁹ These two emphases, philological and archaeological, reflect the breakup of an older, pre-1800 approach within which mythological studies would be part of an undifferentiated field of inquiry called “antiquarianism”: the study of ancient

18. Max Müller, “Comparative Mythology” and “Tales from the West Highlands,” in *Chips from a German Workshop*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1868), 1–146 and 237–48, quote at 242.

19. From this tradition emerge scholars like E. B. Tylor and Sir James Frazer, with the speculative archaeology of Marija Gimbutas representing a crossover.

remains, be they textual or material. Antiquarianism as pursued by Mallet, Percy, or Blackwood fissioned around 1800 into new scholarly disciplines, which would find institutional anchorage in the nineteenth-century university system.

If the two most important successor disciplines of antiquarianism are archaeology and the comparative New Philology, mythological interest in ancient myths and belief systems found itself straddling the widening gap between these two.²⁰ As it was, the only documentation concerning such ancient myths was either textual, in ancient writings, or material, in ancient places or objects of pagan worship (or, as a hybrid, in medieval writings describing such sanctuaries or worship objects). It is from such traces that scholars wished to reconstruct the non-Classical, pre-Christian belief systems which they felt lay at the deepest roots of Europe's vernacular cultures. Jacob Grimm's early speculations (1815) about the Saxon pagan *Irmingsûl*—historically known only from references to its destruction during the Christianization of the Saxons under Charlemagne—represent an early example of these postantiquarian attempts to bridge the widening divide between philology and archaeology. The fascination among legal historians like Karl von Richthofen for subsisting traces of vestigial paganism in medieval Frisian law texts (*Friesische Rechtsquellen*, 1840) is another example, as is the habit to scan lexical data for traces of ancient beliefs (such as the pagan gods Tiu, Wodan, Thor, and Frigg, discovered in the names of the weekdays Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday).

And, crucially, there was a third body of circumstantial evidence, eagerly used by the philologically minded and the archaeologically minded alike. Given the paucity of written documentation, further evidence would be supplied by extrapolations from contemporary folklore. The Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812) not only became a huge best seller among the general reading public, it also, in the academic world, established a new view of what such oral tales signified. The Grimms saw these tales, not just as a sentimental or homely fireside pastime, but as a trickled-down residue of ancient superstitions, involving supernatural beings like dwarves, giants, and elves and ancient social patterns such as curses, cures, rites of passage, seasonal festivals, and shamanism. Supernatural beings such as dwarfs and elves in particular Jacob Grimm saw as things handed down from pagan times and reflecting pre-Christian beliefs and, yes, myths. Even the medieval animal satire of Reynard the Fox to his eyes was the relic of an old Frankish or even Indo-European totem tale belonging to a genre

20. Tim Murray, *From Antiquarian to Archaeologist: The History and Philosophy of Archaeology* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014). Still enlightening on the spirit of antiquarianism is Arnaldo Momigliano's classic article "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 1955), 67–106.

of primeval “beast sagas” (his edition of *Reinhart Fuchs* appeared in 1834, a year before the *Deutsche Mythologie*).

Conversely, mythology, in at least one form, became the ancient rearview mirror of contemporary folklore, and the two were considered twin sciences, the latter working synchronically, the former diachronically. The Grimm-adept Wilhelm Mannhardt, erstwhile editor of the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie* and author of *Germanische Mythen* (1858), in 1865 distributed 150,000 copies of a questionnaire aiming to inventorize folk tradition and supernatural tales region by region, toward what he conceived as a “Monumenta Mythica Germaniae” (the title plainly calqued on the great historiographical *Monumenta Historica Germaniae*). A similar dovetailing between folklore and mythology is manifested in George W. Cox’s *Introduction to the Science of Comparative Mythology and Folklore* (1883).

THE DIFFUSENESS OF MYTHOLOGY AND ITS DIFFUSION ACROSS EUROPE

After the break-up of antiquarianism then, the study of vernacular mythologies stood, or rather wobbled, on a tripod of archaeological, philological, and folkloric-ethnographical approaches. These methods and fields of expertise were not easily combined: none was by itself sufficiently productive to generate the necessary critical mass of reliable information; and as a result mythology inevitably became both ubiquitous and vague, a diffuse speculative background to other forms of knowledge production. Mythology, that deep-seated archetype underlying all other expressions of a culture’s *weltanschauung* or *imaginaire*, was invoked to “explain” (or supply a meaningful interpretation to) folktales, to epic, to archaeological remains, to the social history of Europe’s ancient tribal societies.

In providing a background explanation to almost everything else (folklore, ancient history and literature, archaeology), mythologies were almost impossible to foreground: when placed into the focus of attention, they almost invariably dissolve into a mere tentative collection of supernatural tales and ancient superstitions. Mythology then becomes an anthology rather than an analysis of myths and enriches not so much the field of academic knowledge production as that of artistic inspiration. Literary raconteurs or visual artists make grateful use of the mythographers’ harvest: the proto-Czech prophetess Libuše, the Celtic Rhiannon or Manannan Mac Lír, or the Lithuanian love goddess Milda. Mythological studies in the Romantic nineteenth century are less important as the study of myths and mythical themes than as their cultural launching platform, stimulating their renewed cultural currency, transplanting them from their putative tribal origins to the reality of middle-class cultural nationalism. The most outstanding example is the reception history of the Edda in German culture, the dual-track, scholarly-cum-cultural recycling culminating in the popularizing retell-

ings by the Germanist Andreas Heusler (*Urväterhort*, 1904), the poet/novelist professor Felix Dahn (*Walhall*, 1885) and the operatic-dramatic treatment by Richard Wagner. It demonstrates, once again, that curiously amorphous nature of mythology: at the same time *poièsis* and *technè*, cultural imagination and scholarly discipline.

That pattern of Wagnerization can be encountered in most mythological pre-occupations in nineteenth-century Europe, from Ireland to Bulgaria and from Spanish Galicia to Finland. The international dissemination and diffusion of nationally inflected mythology is then both a cultural one (comparable to the European spread of Romantic poetics or historical novels) and a scholarly one (comparable to the European spread of philological and archaeological methods).

The establishment of a Germanic mythology raised the question whether the other language families of Europe should not, by the same logic, have their own mythologies, particular to their own linguistic genome. Germanic mythology posed a standing challenge to Celtic and Slavic scholars and for the nonaligned languages of Europe (Finnish, Baltic, Hungarian, Basque). Europe in the nineteenth century developed two, three, many mythologies. Indeed, it appears that any national self-positioning in the nineteenth-century process of national consciousness raising, including Basque, Latvian, and Albanian, necessarily included a reference to the nation's ancient mythology.²¹ In this respect, the evident need for a mythology parallels the other great needs in Romantic nationalism: for a language of one's own, and for a foundational epic, if necessary an oral one.²² In order to count as a nation (rather than a group of provincial rustics) it was taxonomically necessary to have one's own language and, if possible, one's own foundational hero tale (Beowulf, Siegfried, Árpád, Libuše, Marko Kraljević, or Skanderbeg) and mythology.

The migration patterns of that "soluble fish" of mythology (as Detienne calls it in this article's epigraph), which makes its appearance everywhere in Europe and then melts back from scholarly solidity into an ambient national-cultural repertoire, presents a challenging and a promising topic for the study of intellectual and cultural dynamics. Having already established a starting point (the rise of Germanic mythology in Denmark and Germany), we can outline some migration trajectories across the European map. I will offer an initial foray into this theme by indicating three sightlines: a sample of "fancy mythologies" (Frisian, Basque, and Bulgarian), a Celtic line leading from Ireland to Spanish Galicia, and a Nordic-Slavic "pincer movement" converging on the Baltic (see fig. 2).

21. Thus, Sami Frashëri's formative Albanian tract *What Was, What Is Albania, and What Will It Become?* (1899) in its opening pages extolls the noble mythology of the ancient Albanians; the text (in German) is available at <http://www.spinnet.eu/images/2015-08/frasheri1913.pdf>.

22. See George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Figure 2. A visualization of the various mythological transfers and adaptations described in this article. The line from Iceland to Copenhagen identifies the impact of the Edda on Danish scholars; the ones emanating from Macedonia chart the impact of the *Veda Slovena*'s two volumes. The unnamed locations linked to Vilnius and Warsaw identify the working ground of two displaced Poles: Narbutt (Barbruysk) and Kraszewski (Volyn/Volodymyr). Some nodal cities pinpoint important individuals such as Macpherson (Edinburgh), Max Müller (London), Kassel/Göttingen/Berlin (Grimm), and Gdańsk/Danzig (Mannhardt).

CONTRIVED AND INVENTED: FANCY MYTHOLOGIES

The urgent need for a national mythology is manifested most ironically by the art of contrivance: filling lacunae in the cultural record by means of fiction or forgery. Historical novels and occasional speculative flights of fancy in romantic history writing are two modes of patching up the imperfections of positive historical knowledge.²³ It would be reductive to subject this Romantic, postantiquarian bricolage (negotiating the patchy documentary record) to the binary opposition between genuine and false. A palette of intermediary shades lies between the genuine article and the rank forgery: genuine materials may be fictionally embellished or editorially manipulated, gen-

23. That this is, not an anomaly or aberration, but a structural feature of romantic historicism and the condition of our never perfect knowledge of the past, is demonstrated in Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

uinely documented myth figures (like Krok and Libuše in the Czech tradition) may accrue additional, spurious extra characters in their entourage (Slavoj and Zabo); and outside the opposition between truth and falsehood there is also the “once upon a time” condition of suspended veracity, proper to narrative fiction—which explains why so many historical novels, as Ann Rigney points out, functioned as *histoire fautive de mieux* in the absence of reliable archive-based history writing.²⁴

The gray zone between documented evidence and deliberate forgery affects Romantic historicism as a whole, but no field more so than that of mythology, which only in the rarest cases had hard, reliable source material to go by. Mythology is almost invariably an extrapolation from hearsay and from obscure and tenuously connected sources involving mysterious and exotic cultural references often couched in mystical or incomprehensible language. It is, in other words, a Rorschach test, and what mythologists see in their sources cannot but be the speculative projections of subjective assumptions. Mythologists, even if they are in the rare good fortune to have a real text to go by (like Hesiod or the *Völuspá*) cannot but make the myths that they claim to describe. Invention of tradition? Yes. But that is a generic condition of mythography, not a salient or deliberate choice. To qualify a mythology as a “projection” is not an analytical insight, but a tautology.

Most Romantic mythologies, for all their subjective projection, uncritical over-interpretations of scant data, and imaginative embellishments, are, if not authentic, at least sincere: they reflect and are driven by their authors’ genuinely held beliefs. That fundamental fact should not be dismissed on account of the small number of actual forgeries that are demonstrably counterfeit and in bad faith. The cases in point are anecdotally entertaining, picaresque: fanciful mystifications with the deliberate aim to obtrude a falsehood on the public. But although they catch the eye, they are relatively rare, and even here we can see a range of motivations, from prank to misunderstood fiction to actual fraud.

A Frisian mythology was concocted, by way of a practical joke, in the 1860s by intellectuals from the Netherlands; their actual identity was kept secret, has long been debated, but suspicions now focus on the philologist Eelco Verwijs and, especially, the poet clergyman François HaverSchmidt. Known as the *Oera Linda Boek*, this forgery purported to be a primordially ancient, hereditarily maintained chronicle of the ancient Frisians, spanning many centuries, and couched in a quasi-archaic Frisian and in a specially designed Runic script. As an artifact, it was cleverly and humorously contrived, and it was a fine satire on the wilder philological speculations

24. Ibid.

of the time. Once “discovered” (as such ancient manuscripts ought to be) and “deciphered” in 1870, its prankster nature could be savored by the attentive reader through thinly veiled allusions to contemporary theological debates and anachronistic puns (one “Nephew Tony” who settled in the Mediterranean, was purportedly euhemerized as Neptunus). Even so, the need for an archaic Frisian foundational mythology was so acutely felt by some that they found the *Oera Linda Boek* too good to be false and, against all common sense and skepticism, maintained its authenticity even into the twentieth century.²⁵

The gullible victims of this practical joke represent the crank fringes of the reading public, where wild beliefs and outlandish Dan Brown–style conspiracy theories teem with abandon. Slightly less off-target were the misunderstood Basque fictions of Augustin Chaho, whose *Aitor, Légende cantabre* (1845), a fantasy in the style of Mérimée, was misread south of the Pyrenees as a serious reference to a genuine origin myth. The figure of Aitor, patriarch of the Basque race, was recycled in the historical novel *Amaya o los vascos en el siglo VIII* (by Francisco Navarro-Villoslada, 1879), which features pagan priestesses guarding the secret Aitor cult.²⁶ Priestess princesses at the tail end of ancestral pagan cults were a popular trope in Romantic fiction: Bellini’s opera *Norma* (1831) is about the tragic fate of a Gaulish druidess serving in the temple of Irminsul (!) under the shadow of the Roman conquest; Hermingard of the oak knolls (*Hermingard van de eikenterpen*, by Aarnout Drost, 1832) is a Batavian heroine at the dawn of Christianity; Silvestris Valiunas’s Romantic balladry around the figure of Birute (*Birutė*, 1828), a Lithuanian princess fleetingly mentioned in medieval chronicles, casts her as the last priestess of a dying pagan cult; Bogomila, in France Prešeren’s elegiac Slovenian national epic *Krst pri Savici* (Baptism on the Savica; 1836), is the last priestess of the Slavic goddess Živa but converts to Christianity. All these examples indicate how intensely the evocation of ancient paganism mediated between isolated antiquarian references and a rich Romantic imagination; and how widespread that imagination was in nineteenth-century Europe, and how similar its expressions from country to country.

25. Goffe Jensma, *De gemaskerde God: François HaverSchmidt en het Oera Linda-boek* (Zutphen: Walburg, 2004), and *Het Oera Linda-boek: Fascimile, transcriptie, vertaling* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006).

26. Jon Juaristi, *El linaje de Aitor* (Madrid, Taurus, 2000); Xabier Zabaltza, *Augustin Chaho, 1811–1858: Precursor incomprendido/Un précurseur incompris* (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Gobierno Vasco/Departamento de Cultura, 2011).

Wholly fraudulent is the Bulgarian *Slavic Veda*.²⁷ It was triggered by the pan-Slavic interest among Serbs for the relatively scantily documented Slavic cultures of the southern Balkans. One of these cultural activists, Stefan Verković (who was in Serbian government employ as a cultural agent in the region) had published a collection of folk-songs of the Macedonian Bulgars in Belgrade in 1860. But in 1874, the much more sensational *Slavic Veda*, containing “Bulgarian folk songs of the pre-historical and pre-Christian age, discovered in Thrace and Macedonia” (*Bălgarski narodne pesni ot’ predistorično i predhristijansko doba otkril’ v’ Trakija i Makedonija*), appeared. The songs and ballads were an astounding mixture of Vedic references, Classical mythology, and modern folklore. The volume (followed by a second installment, published in 1881 in St. Petersburg) caused a furor, because it seemed as if this most mysteriously descended of all Slavic nations harbored within its cultural memory ancient Indian and Greek mythical elements (Vishnu and Orpheus are both mentioned, as are the Trojan war and Alexander the Great), all preserved in their oral balladry.²⁸ The *Slavic Veda* gave accounts of the origin of the plough, the sickle, viticulture, and writing; and all this had been noted down from oral recitation in the remote mountains of Macedonia. It was Ossian all over again: the remote mountainous provenance evoking a time-bubble preserve with an isolated oral tradition keeping its cultural memory alive over many generations and the idea that fragmentary ballads can be read as the *disiecta membra* of what once was an epic whole and reassembled as such. But Verković was neither a Macpherson nor one of the Frisian pranksters behind the *Oera Linda Boek*; an overeager pan-Slavic enthusiast, he had been hoodwinked by his source, the village schoolmaster Ivan Gologanov, who had “sold” Verković the material he claimed he had collected from oral recitation. Here as in other countries, the national-cultural needs were so intense that scholarly skepticism had no say in the matter.

27. Tchavdar Marinov, “Ancient Thrace in the Modern Imagination: Ideological Aspects of the Construction of Thracian Studies in Southeast Europe (Romania, Greece, Bulgaria),” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 3, *Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 10–117. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 2, *National Romanticism: The Formation of National Movements* (Budapest: Central European University Press), 181–87. An edition with accompanying essays by various authors and ancillary documentation, including the correspondence between Verković and Gologanov, is Boris Hristov et al., eds., *Veda Slovena*, 2 vols. (Sofia: Otvoreno Obščestvo, 1997).

28. On the belated ethnogenesis of Bulgaria as a Slavic nation, see Janette Sampilmon, *Becoming Bulgarian: The Articulation of Bulgarian Identity in the Nineteenth Century in Its International Context: An Intellectual History* (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2006).

BUYING INTO CELTIC ORIGINS

One of Europe's few self-documented vernacular mythologies is the Irish-Gaelic one: there are, in fact, authentic written texts from the Middle Ages documenting the origin myths of Ireland's Celtic population, and these (like the Edda) reflect in important passages a pre-Christian belief system (see fig. 3). The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* or "book of the takings of Éire" traces the wanderings of the Gaels' ancestors from biblical times to their settlement in Ireland, involving a meandering route through the Mediterranean and around Gibraltar, a sojourn in Spain under a leader called Breogán, and the final crossing to Ireland under Breogán's son Míl. In addition, it is related how since the biblical flood Ireland had been populated by earlier settlements, including supernatural or monstrous races like the Fomorians or the elf-like, magically endowed Tuatha Dé Danaan. Other magical beliefs appear between the lines of epic hero tales.

Vestigial pagan myths and medieval literary material (heroic romances, parabiblical genealogical tables) were digested into an anti-English diatribe around 1635 by a priest,

Figure 3. A visualization of the various diffusions of Germanic and Celtic mythologies as traced in this article. The Germanic network includes London (Max Müller) and Brussels (J. W. Wolf, adept in Grimm and mentor of Mannhardt); but Paris (d'Arbois de Jubainville) is part of the Celtic network. The line from Edinburgh to A Coruña visualizes the impact of Macpherson's Ossian on the Galician poet Eduardo Pondal. Wrocław, then Breslau, was where Felix Dahn became university professor and rector; Gdańsk (then Danzig) was where Mannhardt, who failed to secure university tenure, became city librarian. Riga was the home base of Garlieb Merkel and Herder. The unnamed location triangulating Wrocław/Breslau and Berlin is Bayreuth, where Wagner staged his *Ring des Nibelungen*.

Geoffrey Keating. In 1723, Keating's Gaelic manuscript treatise was printed in an English translation. The publication was badly mistimed: history writing by the 1720s was moving away from old legendary accounts, had learned the craft of source criticism, and was beginning to pride itself on a critical, "philosophical" attitude. The tales of Keating were laughed out of court: they could not be taken seriously as history. It would be another century before they could be taken seriously as myths.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of the Celtic was linked either to the curate's egg called Ossian or to medieval romance, for example, figures like Tristan and Isolde and, above all, the *matière de Bretagne* around King Arthur. When Lady Charlotte Guest translated the *Mabonogion* (1838), she presented it as a book of medieval romance; only the uncritical and vainglorious Breton Théodore de La Villemarqué, who plagiarized Guest's work for his own *Poèmes des bardes bretons du VI^e siècle* (1850), tried to give the texts an older and more mythical provenance, which he called bardic and druidical. But by this time, comparative philologists had begun to take Celtic matters into their scope: La Villemarqué was in correspondence with Jacob Grimm, and Grimm at that time was debating certain recondite issues on Gaulish Celtic with Johann Caspar Zeuss, whose *Grammatica Celtica* in 1854 definitively fixed the position of the Celtic languages within the Indo-European family.²⁹

As the Celtic languages were being accommodated into the New Philology, Gaelic manuscript sources were repertoried and edited, and Keating's accounts of pagan, pre-Christian Ireland were beginning to gain fresh, and this time more positive, attention. In addition, folklore was, also in Ireland, taking a Grimm turn. Thomas Crofton Croker, deeply impressed with the Grimms' *Fairy Tales*, collected his Irish fairy superstitions which in turn were eagerly seized upon by the Grimms and translated by them as *Irische Elfenmärchen* (1826). Around this time, an associate of Croker, Thomas Keightley, formulated the first body of theory structurally linking folklore to mythology. *Fairy Mythology* appeared in 1828, anticipating the work of Mannhardt in Germany by some decades and possibly helping to inspire it (a German translation of Keightley's work, by Oskar Ludwig Wolff, appeared in the same year 1828 as *Mythologie der Feen und Elfen*). Tales of the supernatural were now being investigated

29. La Villemarqué's druidical orientation echoed the lingering strains of speculative Celtophile antiquarianism, which in England had canonized Stonehenge into a "druidical temple" and in Wales had found a powerful, if untrustworthy, champion in the notorious mystifier Iolo Morganwg (1747–1826); see Ronald Hutton, *The Druids* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007); Mary-Ann Constan-tine, *The Truth against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romantic Forgery* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007); Bernhard Lauer, Bärbel Plötner, and Donatien Laurent, "Jacob Grimm und Th. Hersart de La Villemarqué: Ein Briefwechsel aus der Frühzeit der modernen Keltologie," *Jahrbuch der Brüder Grimm-Gesellschaft* 1 (1991): 17–83.

as folklore, while folklore was beginning to count as a way of access to the study of mythology. Irish material fell into line with what the Grimms were doing with their Germanic elves and dwarfs. The peasants' stories about leprechauns, pookas, and banshees and the folktales of "little men" and fairies in the course of the century gradually drifted from Croker's rustic-anecdotal register toward something more serious and uncanny: the Gaelic *sidhe* elves were increasingly correlated with the older, legendary references to Ireland's pre-Gaelic inhabitants, the Tuatha Dé Danaan, who had been credited with supernatural powers and were believed to have gone underground once Ireland had been settled by the Gaelic population (arrived from across the Gulf of Biscay under the leadership of Míl, as described by Keating).

Thus the mythologically interested study of folktales afforded a fresh importance to the medieval legends gathered 200 years earlier by Keating and dismissed out of hand a century previously. The legendary material in the margins of Keating's pseudohistory and in oral folklore circulation began to be considered as such. The idea of a mythical, deathless Land of the Young in the distant west (*Tír na nÓg*); stories of elves, of Fomorians and Fir Bolgs; the Tuatha Dé Danaan druid Manannan Mac Lir; the Valkyrie-style Morrigan, sinister goddess of death-in-battle—such themes and tropes were in the course of the century collated into what might pass as an Irish and by extension Celtic mythology. It was a process in which textual philology, folklore studies, and poetical literature went hand in hand: the supernatural references in ancient hero tales were aligned with superstitions taken down from oral recitation and harmonized into a coherent narrative scheme by creative writers.

The process was completed by the end of the century and flourished in the literary work of Standish O'Grady and W. B. Yeats and in popular syntheses by Lady Gregory (*Gods and Fighting Men*, 1904). The impact on a nascent, nationally Irish school of literature was enormous. For Yeats, future Nobel Prize laureate, the pagan aristocratic hero tale was linked to the humble contemporary peasant superstition in that both manifested Ireland's long refusal to submit to Christian moralism or to British pragmatism. Thus the Celtic supernatural furnished Yeats with a national ideal for his own literary agenda. Legendary figures and supernatural beings became a stock-in-trade for what around 1890 emerged as the Irish Literary Revival. Even those who found themselves unable to learn the declining and expiring Gaelic language could buy into the cultural frame of reference of myth-derived names like Deirdre, Maeve, Diarmuid, Fionn, and Aoife.

This revivalism is well known. More suggestive for our present purpose is its propagation into the Iberian peninsula. Celts had been established there in pre-Roman and Roman times (a fact known from Classical authors and archaeological remains) but had played no role of importance in the Spanish collective memory until a Celtic mythology was adopted by Galician authors of the so-called *Rexurdimento* (the

nineteenth-century regionalist revival), largely from Irish or Irish-derived sources.³⁰ Early works by José Verea (*Historia de Galicia*, 1838) and Benito Vicetto (*Historia de Galicia*, 1865–1873) had already stressed the region's Celtiberian roots; but their argument had been wholly within the tradition of old-school antiquarianism, with no mythological aspect worth speaking of. There is no reference in their writings to contemporary philological learning or to the freshly recalibrated meaning of the term *Celtic* in the new Indo-European paradigm. One remarkable source used by these Galician antiquaries, however, is Joaquín Villanueva, who indeed is the only contemporary scholar mentioned prominently by Vicetto.³¹ Villanueva had taken up residence in Ireland after 1815 and there encountered the rearguard antiquarians of the outdated "Celtomaniac" view of Gaelic antiquity His *Ibernia Phoenicia* (1831) maintained, beyond its academic sell-by date elsewhere in Europe, the Biblical-Mediterranean narrative of Celtic descent and migration.³² On the authority of Villanueva, Vicetto follows this view, which by 1865 had become wholly obsolete everywhere else. Vicetto also follows Villanueva and Villanueva's Irish authorities (yes, Geoffrey Keating) to the effect that a tribe of Brigantes (identified by Villanueva as Phoenicians) had under their king Breogan established themselves at A Coruña, using it as a vantage point from where (under Breogan's son Míl) to migrate to, and settle into, Ireland.

Mythology was added to these antiquarian speculations by the cardinally important figure of Manuel Murguía.³³ To be sure, Murguía (who was in league with, and in debt to, Vicetto) continues the uncritical tradition of amateur antiquarianism: his *Historia de Galicia*, which he began in 1865, digests snippets from published books without subjecting these to source criticism. But at the same time Murguía is in tune with new developments elsewhere in Europe. He mentions (but misspells) the German historian of the Migration Period, Felix Dahn; he signals the value of the new school of national history writing established by Augustin Thierry in France and pays homage to the Portuguese adept of the French school, Alexandre Herculano. What is more, the references to a vague and unspecific "Celtic" Galician past (which Murguía inherited from his forerunners) are now specifically placed in the context of the newly estab-

30. The standard work is Ramón Maiz, *O nacionalismo galego: Organización e ideoloxía* (1897–1904) (A Coruña: O Castro, 1984). See also the Galician contributions to the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. J. Leerksen (<http://romanticnationalism.net>) by Raquel Bello Vázquez, Ramón Maiz, and Xosé Manoel Núñez. And on Spanish historicism, see José Álvarez Junco, *Mater dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Taurus, 2001).

31. Benito Vicetto, *Historia de Galicia* (Ferrol: Taxonera, 1865), 1:140n., 147 and n., 170ff., 175.

32. There is more on this in Joep Leerksen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Literary and Historical Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).

33. On Murguía, see Xosé Ramón Barreiro, *Murguía* (Santiago de Compostela: Galaxia, 2012); and Fernando Pereira, "Manuel Murguía e a lenda de Breogán," *Gallaecia* 33 (2014): 281–307.

lished Celtological philology and mythological studies. Murguía made use of what by now had become an established academic corpus of Celtic mythology in the new, post-Grimm paradigm; he refers to Pictet and, in later volumes and editions, takes issue with the work of Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, recently appointed professor of Celtic Philology at the Collège de France and author of *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique* (1884). This makes Murguía's *History of Galicia* a hybrid. It mixes in equal parts references to the earlier antiquarian/speculative tradition (Villanueva is part of the secondary sources invoked by him) but by now can also rely on the new learning. As a result, Murguía can invoke Keating's references to Breogán and the Milesian migrations, not just by way of Villanueva's Phoenician antiquarianism but also in dialogue with d'Arbois de Jubainville and that scholar's philological-mythological understanding of the Milesian "taking of Ireland" tales.

Following Murguía, the historical acceptance of a mythical Celtic ancestry (revolving around Breogán, father of Míl) has become a prominent feature of Galician regionalism. Murguía's mythological Celticism was given a literary treatment in José Ogea's *Célticos: Cuentos y leyendas de Galicia* (1883), to which Murguía wrote a foreword. This ethno-historical fancy has since taken root in an explicit self-Celticization of the region. The name of Breogán has been firmly enshrined in the Galician poetical lexicon, notably thanks to Eduardo Pondal's widely popular poem *Os Pinos* (composed in 1890, set to music in 1907, and now the Galician national anthem). A huge statue of Breogan stands near A Coruña; the city's most important archaeological showpiece, the Roman lighthouse known as *Torre de Hercules*, has (thanks to Murguía) been given a spurious but tenacious Celtic interpretation; in the souvenir shops of Santiago de Compostela, the icons of the old pilgrimage route are crowded out by pagan Celtic symbols such as the triple spiral (*triskele*); and Galicia is a participant in pan-Celtic festivals.³⁴

SLAVIC, FINNISH, BALTIC SWIRLS

Slavic pagan pantheons and supernatural tales were reconstructed from references in medieval chronicles (the Nestor chronicle and Saxo Grammaticus), fleshed out with extrapolations from contemporary folktales. By the late eighteenth century, these disparate data were synthesized into systematic lists (fig. 4). Karl Gottlob Anton, author of *Erste Linie eines Versuches über der alten Slaven Ursprung* (1783–89), and Anton Linhart, author of a *Geschichte von Krain* (1788–91), listed pagan Slavic deities like

34. See Kerry Ann McKevitt, "Mythologizing Identity and History: A Look at the Celtic Past of Galicia," *e-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies*, http://www4.uwm.edu/celtic/ekeltoi/volumes/vol6/6_13/mckevitt_6_13.html.

Svantevid, Belbog, Černobog/Črt, Živa, Radegast, and others; a good many of these names concurred with the ones furnished, more fancifully, by the Croatian Matija Petar Katančić. The first author to address these pagan beliefs as a "mythology" was the Russian Andrej von Kayssarow, a student of Schlözer at Göttingen; his *Versuch einer*

slavischen Mythologie in alphabetischer Ordnung appeared in 1804. Further academic consolidation was achieved by the Slovak-Austrian Ignaz Johann Hanusch in *Die Wissenschaft des slawischen Mythos* (Vienna, 1842). This development led ultimately to Gregor Krek's *Über die Wichtigkeit der slavischen traditionellen Literatur als Quelle der Mythologie* of 1869 (the author was professor of Slavic philology at Graz) and Natko Nodilo's *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata, na glavnoj osnovi pjesama, priča i govora narodnoga* (The ancient belief-system of the Serbs and Croats, based largely on songs, stories, and the vernacular), written in 1885–90 and influenced by Max Müller's Aryanism.

A pan-Slavic synthesis was then consolidated, first in Konrad Schwenck's Herder-inspired *Die Mythologie der Slawen* (1853) and (more sympathetically) in the *Mitologia słowiańska* (1918) by the Pole Aleksander Brückner. The extrapolation from folktales was particularly noticeable in this field: most Slavic mythologists were also assiduous folklorists who keenly scanned each peasant tale for traces of archaic ritualism or paganism. By far the most influential collector was the Russian Aleksandr Afanas'ev, the "Russian Grimm"; characteristically, his fairy tales (*Narodnye russkie skazki*, 1855–63) led him into ethnographical studies on paganism and seasonal rituals, such as *Poetičeskie vozzrenija Slavjan na prirodu* (The Slavs' poetic views on nature, 1865–69). Its cultural spin-off reached into Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* and *The Rite of Spring*.

In contrast to these South Slavic and Russian trends, a mythological-folkloric interest in the Polish lands was triggered primarily by historians seeking to fill the early, prehistorical chapters of their books. Their frame of research was biethnic: they focused on the ancient Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its prehistory. This Polish-Lithuanian prehistory then triggered a cascade of mythologies across language borders and across cultural media whose very complexity is fascinating to trace:

- The prominent historian and future revolutionary Joachim Lelewel (then in the early days of his turbulent career and teaching at Vilnius) in 1816 published a comparison between Slavic and Lithuanian folk customs, *Winulska sławianszczyzn*, with some mythological references.
- Slightly later, the Romantic historian folklorist Teodor Narbutt collected folktales from his Polish/Lithuanian/Belarusian home region. These were as easily classified as Baltic-Lithuanian as Slavic-Polish; and indeed the mythologically interpreted folktales of Narbutt were to inspire the beginnings of Lithuanian mythology. The histories of the ancient Lithuanians by Simanas Daukantas (1822, 1838) were directly inspired by Narbutt.
- Narbutt's *Mitologia litewska* (1835; the first of a nine-volume Lithuanian history, *Dzieje narodu litewskiego*) inspired a (Polish-language) poetical adaptation by the prolific Romantic writer Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. His *Witolorauda* (1840; the opening canto of a larger historical epic) was wholly

suffused with Indo-European descent notions (the Lithuanians as descendants of the ancient Persians, the Poles of the ancient Indians) and with contrived mythological references culled from the speculative source of Narbutt.

- Kraszewski's *Witolorauda* gained wide popularity thanks to the fact that in 1848 it was set as a cantata by the foremost national composer of the time, Stanisław Moniuszko.
- The *Witolorauda* was then eagerly seized upon by the emerging national Lithuanian movement, which by now saw itself as a separate Baltic nation rather than as a branch of the ancient Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with a wholly un-Slavic language rendered philologically prestigious by its Indo-European archaisms. *Witolorauda* was translated into Lithuanian by Audrius Vištelis in 1881–82, and claimed as the Lithuanian national epic in the first issue of the hugely influential activist periodical *Ausra* (1883). In particular the (spurious, invented) love goddess Milda became a popular deity in Lithuanian national consciousness raising; Milda is still a popular woman's name among Lithuanians.

Nor is this Polish-Lithuanian cascade of influences across cultural media and between ethnicities the end of the story. At the same time, the Baltic region was hit from the north by a mythological cascade originating in Finland.

- Its starting point lay among Swedish intellectuals in the university of Åbo (now also known as Turku; Finland was then still part of Sweden and was ceded to Russia only in 1815). There, Cristfried Ganander had in 1789 published a *Mythologia Fennica*, a dictionary-style list of deities from folk religion, often illustrated with stanzas from Finnish folk balladry. It already included names like Ilmarinen and Väinämöinen, important figures in the later folk-based *Kalevala* (1834), compiled by Elias Lönnrot as a Finnish national epic. Indeed, Ganander did much to prepare the ground for Lönnrot.³⁵
- The inspiration of *Kalevala* for the analogous Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1853) is well known and involved a philologically driven awareness among Estonians that their language and folklore could look to Finnish as

35. Juha Y. Pentikäinen, *Kalevala Mythology*, rev. ed., trans. Ritva Poom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). On the Finnish context, see Derek Fewster, *Visions of Past Glory: Nationalism and the Construction of Early Finnish History* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2006). On the international ramifications, see Lauri Honko, ed., *Religion, Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epics: The Kalevala and Its Predecessors* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990).

a prestigious and better-documented relative (both standing wholly outside the Indo-European family complex). Fifty years before the appearance of *Kalevipoeg*, the young Romantic poet Kristjan Jaak Peterson had published a German translation of Ganander's *Mythologia fennica* for the Baltic-German periodical *Beiträge zur genauern Kenntniss der ehstnischen [sic] Sprache* (1822). In his notes, Peterson already pointed out that Estonian folk poetry featured a mythical giant Kalewi-Poeg who was an obvious analogue to the Finnish Kalevi.³⁶

Between Lithuania and Estonia, the Latvian area around Riga was hit by these two mythological waves from a Polish-Lithuanian south and a Finnish-Estonian north.

- Here, early modern German chronicles documenting subsisting traces of local paganism had been picked up by the Baltic German Garlieb Merkel (*Die Vorzeit Lieflands*, 1798–99, and the historical romance *Wannem Ymanta: Eine lettische Sage*, 1802).
- A scholarly elaboration was undertaken by the previously mentioned folklorist/mythologist Wilhelm Mannhardt in his *Letto-Preussische Götterlehre* of 1870 and in an article series “Die lettischen Sonnenmythen” (in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1875).
- By this time the appropriation of a vernacular mythology by Latvian cultural nationalists had got under way here as much as in the neighbouring lands; both in Latvian and Lithuanian culture (which are linguistically related), an extensive corpus of oral balladry provided the type of ethnographical material that the Finnish ballads had given to Ganander and Lönnrot. Juris Alunāns wrote on the nation's mythology in the 1850s with a good deal of creative imagination as well as reliance on Narbutt's Polish-Lithuanian work.
- In turn, these materials were poetically used, and popularly disseminated, in the legendary poems of Mikus Krogzemis (his pseudonym, Auseklis, was taken from mythology). The culmination point was Jēkabs Lautenbahs-Jūsmaņš's *Latviešu mitoloģija* of 1882.
- At the same time, a national epic on mythical themes was constructed by Andrejs Pumpurs. *Lāčplēsis* (The bear slayer; 1888), now considered Latvia's

36. Madis Arukask, “The Estonian National Epic, *Kalevipoeg*: Its Sources and Inception,” in *The Voice of the People: Writing the European Folk Revival, 1760–1914*, ed. Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin (London: Anthem, 2013), 123–40.

national epic, has many scenes set among gods and supernatural or magic-working beings and brings figures from various Baltic pantheons together.³⁷

CONCLUSION: SOLUBLE FISH IN NATIONAL WATERS

The reader may by now feel slightly light-headed: the Europe-wide diffusion of all those diffuse mythologies bounces from cultural community to cultural community and oscillates between scholarly fact gathering and cultural fiction making. The scholarly investigation balances between different specialisms and the cultural dissemination swirls across different media: literary, musical, and—not covered in this article—pictorial.

Some recurrent features will, however, have become noticeable. These involve (1) a constant dovetailing of literary-poetical fancy and scholarly evidence gathering; (2) an eclectic combination of philology, archaeology, and folklore, shifting back and forth between ancient chronicles, prehistory, and contemporary folk tales and customs; (3) an extreme transnational mobility, working by way of competitive imitation and cultural transfer; (4) a tension between transnational (often German) philological scholarship and the popularizing appropriations by national activists.

One paradox stands out: while mythology is considered by all nineteenth-century practitioners as the very deepest substratum of the proper, identity-forming *imaginaire* of a cultural or ethnic tradition, it turns out to be as transnationally adaptable and exportable as the genre of the historical novel or replicas of the Lourdes Grotto. As we can see from the diffusion lines traced here, the “soluble fish,” mentioned in this article’s motto, is everywhere and nowhere. No sooner is it spotted in the world of learning, or it melts back into the ambient waters of national revivalism. Ancient belief systems are invoked and referred to continuously, always as something of foundational importance to a nation’s cultural identity but always in a vague gesture indicating a wider, more distant perspective, only tentatively intuited from tantalizingly incomplete evidence.

The scholars who took it upon themselves to inventorize and interpret that evidence were either amateur literati and belated antiquarians (Murguía, Verković, Narbutt, Daukantas), transdiscipline *monstres sacrés* (Grimm, Dahn, Max Müller), or experts in adjacent disciplines like comparative linguistics, ethnography or history. Mythology was always something adjacent to the institutionalized disciplines. It never developed an academic institutionalization in its own right, even as a *Hilfswissenschaft*. Mannhardt, towering figure though he was, failed at securing a university appointment. And even with the great Jacob Grimm himself, people were uncomfortably aware of his tendency

37. See in general, and also for the twentieth-century continuation, Toms Kęncis, *A Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2012).

toward indiscriminate, unfocused anecdote gathering. All this was exacerbated by the fact that myths, of all things, are fatally impervious to anything like falsification or source criticism. Mythology, so assiduously dedicated to fact gathering and so exuberantly addicted to speculation, has no proper *Fachgeschichte* to speak of—probably because it is not, really, properly, a *Fach*. It is the definition of an undiscipline.³⁸

All the more pronounced, on the other hand, was the remarkable two-way exchange between the scholarly interest in mythologies and the poetic reactivation of myths. As I pointed out at the beginning of this essay, the word *mythology* can apply both to an academic pursuit (as the academic study of mythical tales) and to the object of that pursuit (as a corpus of mythical tales). Doomed to failure as a properly scientific analysis of ancient belief systems, mythology was all the more successful in focusing a cultural interest, and making available—from obscure documentation and enhanced by a good dose of speculative guesswork—a reservoir of mythical narratives for cultural recycling and reproduction. The tales of Wodan, Balder and the Ragnarök, Deirdre and Milda, Libuše and Väinämöinen, Aitor and the Bear Slayer became leisure reading for the educated bourgeoisie and a repertoire of themes for painters, sculptors, composers, and storytellers. The study of mythology was most noticeably successful in providing cultural production with a repertoire of national myths; indeed, studying mythology and propagating myths amounted to one and the same thing.³⁹

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38. While this characterization of mythology as an undiscipline explains, I believe, its failure to achieve academic institutionalization, that judgment should be qualified in the light of Tom Shippey's contention ("Revolution Reconsidered") that nineteenth-century mythologists did succeed in assembling philological evidence for a Europe-wide prehistoric *imaginaire* of monstrously nonhuman creatures like dwarfs, elves, etc., which may yet constitute a focus for further research. And cf. also n. 17 above.

39. With thanks to Fernando Pereira González, Stefan Poland, Arend Quak, Tom Shippey, and lab1100, whose NODEGOAT technology (<http://www.lab1100.com>) generated the networks visualizations.

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