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Literary Historicism: Romanticism, Philologists, and the Presence of the Past

Joep Leerssen

Nous entrons dans l'avenir à reculons.—Paul Valéry

Between 1780 and 1840 a huge rediscovery of the early medieval vernacular roots and rootedness of the various European languages and literatures took place, in a process that reverberated back and forth between the fields of philology, antiquarianism, and imaginative literature. It revolutionized the European self-image and historical consciousness and led to the national diffraction of the Enlightenment's idea of culture and literature. Instead of one European culture cradled in classical antiquity, people came to envisage a plurality of European cultures, each rooted in the nation's vernacular and tribal origins. It was as if, in the words of one worried Oxford professor, those philologists who were "nourishing our language not from the humanity of the Greeks and Romans, but from the savagery of the Goths and the Anglo-Saxons," were "about to reverse the renaissance."¹

I wish to view this "reversal of the renaissance" in a fresh light, as a period and condition that might be called *literary historicism*.

¹ The sentiment was proffered by Thomas Case, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Waynflete Professor of Moral Philosophy, on the occasion of the establishment of a modern language curriculum in 1887 (quoted by Charles Harding Firth, *Modern Languages at Oxford, 1724–1929* [London: Oxford University Press, 1929], 70–71). Case's pompous conservatism should not distract us from the fact that he was speaking out against a dominant climate of ethnocentric Teutomania—a fixation with and glorification of England's Saxon-Germanic roots. The course that that fixation was to take, especially in German *Germanistik*, did indeed amount to "reversing the renaissance."

Double Talents

Romanticism involved a new interest in the past, preferably the medieval past. Romantic medievalism runs from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Ivanhoe*—and not just in the narrative imagination: between Goethe's essay "Von deutscher Baukunst" (1772) and Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), Romantic authors are implicated in the great flourish of neo-Gothic public architecture that we link with the names of Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, with the Parliament buildings of Westminster and Budapest, with the restoration of Carcassonne and the completion of Cologne cathedral.²

The medievalism characteristic of Romanticism was not restricted to literature or architecture; we encounter it also in public pageantry, monuments, and the general flavor of the public sphere. Indeed, if we attempt to subsume the great vogue of medieval taste under Romantic poetics—say, by such notions as "escapism"—not only do we belittle the scholarly and nonescapist aspect of Romantic authors as diverse as Sir Walter Scott, Ludwig Uhland, Joseph von Eichendorff, and Prosper Mérimée, but we also marginalize their connections and continuities with learned endeavors outside the field of literature. It would make more sense to see such medievalism in a broader context, one less concerned with literary poetics: that of early-nineteenth-century historical consciousness and historical sensibility. Indeed, the careers and talents of many authors of the time indicate the inadequacy of seeing them merely as Romantic *littérateurs*. The period is rife with "double talents," whose sensibility and work involve them in a historicist recuperation of the past well beyond the realm of literature.

If literary historians remember Uhland (1787–1862), for instance, it is usually as a minor Romantic, author of the *Vaterländische Gedichte* (1815), whom Heinrich Heine castigated; one tends to overlook his

² On Pugin and neo-Gothicism in England see Megan Aldrich et al., *A. W. N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival*, ed. Paul Atterbury (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). On Viollet-le-Duc and Carcassonne see Bruno Foucart, "Viollet-le-Duc et la restauration," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 1:1615–43. On Cologne cathedral see Hugo Borger, ed., *Der Kölner Dom im Jahrhundert seiner Vollendung*, 3 vols. (Cologne: Museen der Stadt Köln, 1980); and Otto Dann, ed., *Religion, Kunst, Vaterland: Der Kölner Dom im 19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Bachem, 1983).

scholarly and political career. He was a lawyer, secretary at Württemberg's Ministry of Justice at Stuttgart, later professor of German language and literature at Tübingen (1829–33), and an important prodemocratic voice in the constitutional debates and politics of the time; in addition, he brought out many editions of and studies of older Germanic literature and folk ballads.

Eichendorff (1788–1857), too, was not just a lyrical poet and narrator of wanderlust, nostalgia, and the ironic vagaries of coincidence; he also wrote a German literary history, *Geschichte der poetischen Litteratur Deutschlands* (1857). What is more, as a Prussian official (he had a law degree), he took part in the restoration of the main keep of the Teutonic Order in Prussia (the Marienburg), which he had used as the setting of a historical drama, *Der letzte Held von Marienburg* (1830); he also supported the completion of Cologne cathedral.³

Similarly, Mérimée (1803–70), whom we now chiefly remember for his torrid passion-and-death tales *Colomba* (1840) and *Carmen* (1845), was also inspector general of France's historical monuments. His *Notes de voyage*, dating from an inspection trip during the early 1830s, marks the beginning of France's official concern for the restoration of public buildings. It was Mérimée who in 1840 entrusted to Viollet-le-Duc the restoration of the Madeleine church of Vézelay—the first state-sponsored restoration project in France—followed by restoration work on Saint-Denis, Notre-Dame, Sainte-Chapelle, and Carcassonne. Mérimée's appointment to the Comité des Arts et Monuments (founded in 1835 by the historian François Guizot, then prime minister) was perhaps due to the two historical novels he had published: *La Jacquerie: Scènes féodales* (1828) and *1572: Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (1829).

These two titles already indicate the influence, so important all over Europe and in all fields of letters and learning, of Scott—himself, of

³ On the Marienburg and its nineteenth-century elevation to a national landmark see Hartmut Boochmann, *Die Marienburg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Propyläen, 1982). Eichendorff completed his official report *Die Wiederherstellung des Schlosses der deutschen Ordensritter zu Marienburg* for the Prussian Ministry of Culture in 1844. The completion of Cologne cathedral had been part of his brief as an official in the ministry earlier, especially in 1841–42. See Hans Pörnbacher, "Joseph von Eichendorff und der Kölner Dom," *Kölner Domblatt: Jahrbuch des Zentral-Dombau-Vereins* 63 (1998): 265–70.

course, an example of the intimate connection between Romantic writing and antiquarian learning. The vogue for his historical novels is as famous as it was huge. They had a social and cultural impact that we are only beginning to assess in its full swell, which spilled over into opera and the naming of streets, ships, and train engines;⁴ and if Scott was not the “onlie begetter” of the genre, it was he who caused it to be taken up everywhere, from James Fenimore Cooper’s America to Aleksandr Pushkin’s Russia. But the Scott whose posthumous fame rests on historical poetry and novels was also an antiquarian of note, editing ballad material in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3) and *English Minstrelsy* (1810), writing a history of the French Revolution and a biography of Napoleon, and famously responsible for retrieving the Scottish crown jewels. Scott is, of course, a household name in literary history, but only recently has an appreciation begun to emerge of the part he played as a mediator between literature and history writing—witness his seminal role in inspiring the “Romantic history” school of Thomas Babington Macaulay, Augustin Thierry, and Jules Michelet and his influence in suffusing public space and public awareness with a sense of the past and the appeal of the historical picturesque.⁵

It is no surprise, then, to see Scott’s influence in Europe, not only in the rise of the historical novel as a genre but in the rise, for a generation or so, of historian-novelists: writers who could apply themselves with equal verve to history writing and to historical fiction. Alexandre Herculano (1810–77), to name but one example, counts in his native Portugal not only as its great Romantic historian (*História de Portugal* [1846–53]) but as its first practitioner of the historical novel in the style of Scott—for instance, *O bobo* (*The Jester*; 1843), set during the mid-twelfth-century emergence of Portugal as an independent kingdom.

The “double talent,” the Romantic writer who moves with equal ease in the fields of public affairs, on the one hand, and learning and literature, on the other, is not an individual singularity, then, but a part

⁴ See Ann Rigney, “Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,” *Poetics Today* (forthcoming).

⁵ See Ann Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

of a pattern. The point needs to be stressed. Nowadays the fields of learning and literature are well and truly divorced. Umberto Eco's are rarities; the "literature of knowledge" and the "literature of power," as Thomas De Quincey distinguished them, require different types of practitioners, different talents, different vocations.⁶ Nothing would be easier than to project this state of affairs back into the past and to imagine that things were always like that: to assume that literature "proper" always was a form of art, and learning a matter for academic professionals. If an author has an aptitude for both, then that is a singular coincidence, like a chess champion who is also a professional musician. Yet, as Michel Foucault has warned us, the demarcation between various fields of human culture and discourse is itself a historical variable, and we should be careful about applying the discursive taxonomy of one period to another.⁷ When De Quincey opposed the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, he was not stating a categorical given but articulating, formulating, and indeed helping create a novel distinction. Following the Romantics' poetics, literature has become more consciously artistic and "inspiration" driven, while, owing to known and describable historical factors, historical and antiquarian writing has undergone professionalization and academic institutionalization.⁸ The post-Scott generation of "men of letters" was perhaps the last that could claim *droit de cité* with equal ease in literary art and scholarly learning.

⁶ I refer, of course, to a famous passage in De Quincey's essay on Pope: "There is, first, the literature of knowledge; and, secondly, the literature of power. The function of the first is—to teach; the function of the second is—to move: the first is a rudder; the second, an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always through affections of pleasure and sympathy" (quoted in Frederick Burwick, *Thomas De Quincey: Knowledge and Power* [Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001]).

⁷ Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 32–33.

⁸ For French developments as a case in point see Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818–1914*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). Den Boer's study specifically highlights the importance of the historian-statesman François Guizot.

Discoveries: From Private Collections to the Public Domain

All this may serve to support my contention that the medievalism of the early nineteenth century is perhaps better contextualized against the background of scholarship than against that of literary poetics. So what was going on in the field of scholarship at the time?

One sea change was the discovery of ancient material. It may be now be a commonplace for novels to begin with a "manuscript found in an attic," as Scott's *Quentin Durward* did, or even, ironically, Eco's *Name of the Rose*. But at the time a lot of manuscripts *were* found in attics. Calls for the completion of Cologne cathedral were boosted by the find of fourteenth-century architectural sketches in the attic of an inn in Darmstadt in 1814. Most medieval literary material, we should realize, had been forgotten, half forgotten, or disregarded by the late eighteenth century, but between 1780 and 1840 much came to light. England was scouted by French and Danish scholars interested in neglected Anglo-Saxon texts. Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, who had toured British libraries and archives in 1786–90, transcribed the MS Cotton Vitellius on which he based his first (though flawed) edition of *Beowulf* in 1815. Nikolai Grundtvig's tour of England in 1829 resulted in his *Bibliotheca Anglo-Saxonica*, a "Prospectus . . . for the publication of the most valuable Anglo-Saxon manuscripts," which provoked a wave of source text editions. And in the Bodleian Library the French antiquarian Francisque Michel, on a field trip sponsored by Guizot, found the manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland*, which he edited and published in 1836.

In Germany, the "C" and "A" manuscripts of the *Nibelungenlied* were retrieved from the library of Count Hohenems in 1755 and 1779. Similar finds were made in Europe's Slavic southeast and Latin southwest: the Old Slovene Freising manuscripts were discovered in 1807, the Old Church Slavonic Codex Suprasliensis in 1823. The Portuguese *Chronica do descobrimento e conquista de Guiné* was discovered in Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale in 1837, seventeen years after two fifteenth-century texts by Dom Duarte had been found there. Indeed, Paris was a sort of Treasure Island, since Napoleon had ordered a wholesale bibliophile pillaging of his conquered territories and many old manuscripts had been taken to his capital. It was a sign of the times that after Waterloo steps were taken to return these old materials: even the most far-

reaching affairs of state were debated at the Congress of Vienna, the retrieval of old manuscripts (alongside that of statues and paintings) was considered a matter of sufficient “national” interest to take action on. Such action would have been unthinkable during the peace treaties of Louis XIV’s reign. Pope Pius VII sent Antonio Canova to retrieve the classical statues looted from the Vatican; the Austrian government entrusted a mission to retrieve pilfered manuscripts to the Slovene-born Jernej Kopitar (1780–1844), librarian and censor at the Imperial Court Library of Vienna, champion of the minority languages and literatures of central and eastern Europe, and later luminary of emerging Slavic philology.⁹

The discoveries of old manuscripts almost invariably took place as their repositories were shifted from the private to the public domain. Until the late eighteenth century, antiquarianism (like that of Thomas Warton, Richard Hurd, and Bishop Thomas Percy) had been based on the private ownership of old manuscripts or on access to privately owned collections and involving private contacts between individual scholars.¹⁰ At best, collective use of ancient materials before 1800 is encountered in monastic circles, for instance, the Bollandists or the Saint Maur Benedictines, who undertook the literary history of France from 1733 onward.

In contrast, the discoveries of the Romantic period occurred when scholars were sent on officially sanctioned missions to retrieve manuscripts or when archives and libraries were placed under new, public management and their contents professionally reinventoried. The dissolution of the Jesuit monastery of Lisbon in 1779 had brought to light

⁹ On Kopitar as librarian, philologist, and European “networker” see Antonia Bernard, “J. Kopitar, lien vivant entre la slavistique et la germanistique,” in *Philologiques III: Qu’est-ce qu’une littérature nationale? Approches pour une théorie interculturelle du champ littéraire*, ed. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1994), 191–209; Eva-Maria Hüttel-Hubert, “Bartholomäus Kopitar und die Wiener Hofbibliothek,” in *Bartholomäus (Jernej) Kopitar: Neue Studien anlässlich seines 150. Todestages*, ed. Walter Lukan (Vienna: Böhlau, 1995), 153–220; Walter Lukan, *Bartholomäus Kopitar (1780–1844) und die europäische Wissenschaft im Spiegel seiner Privatbibliothek* (Ljubljana: Narodna in Universitetna Knjižnica, 2000); and Jože Pogačnik, *Bartholomäus Kopitar: Leben und Werk* (Munich: Trofenik, 1978).

¹⁰ The most telling example is probably that of Percy, editor of the celebrated *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1777), analyzed in Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy’s “Reliques”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the manuscript of Portugal's oldest medieval ballad book, the *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*. The medieval student songs now known as the *Carmina Burana* were discovered when the Benediktbeuren monastery was dissolved and secularized in 1803. Angelo Mai's management of the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in Milan (1811–19) and of the Vatican archives (1819–54) uncovered many codices and new sources, not the least of which was an extensive set of palimpsests containing Wulfilas's Gothic translations of biblical texts, a find that galvanized linguists and philologists everywhere. It was a time when court libraries became national, when collegiate and monastic libraries acquired a function beyond the erudition of their cloisters, when the location of old manuscripts was no longer a matter for the *Wunderkammer* of the private connoisseur but was the purview of the minister of culture or education (a recently invented government post). The British Museum gradually incorporated, as a public and indeed a national institution, all those private collections whose names still feature in its manuscripts catalog, perpetuating the memory of their original owners: Rawlinson, Eglinton, Cotton, Stowe, and so on. In Germany, the statesman Karl vom Stein, who was one of Napoleon's (and Metternich's!) great antagonists in Prussia, also oversaw, after 1815, the initiative to publish all the charters and codices relating to the history of the Holy Roman Empire, the enormous *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Old manuscripts were acquiring a new status, not as collectibles but as important heirlooms in the public domain.

Indeed, the career of one of the pivotal "men of letters" during these crucial decades started (like Kopitar's) with his mission to Paris, on behalf of the count of Hessa-Kassel, to retrieve pilfered manuscripts. The man in question had been a hardworking sublibrarian at Kassel: Jacob Grimm (1785–1863).¹¹ He had been to Paris before, as assistant

¹¹ On Grimm there is a good deal of material but no major scholarly biography. In the absence of one, see the article by Wilhelm Scherer in the old *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, 56 vols. (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1875–1912), 9:678–88; Horst Brunner, "Jacob Grimm (1785–1863)," in *Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Germanistik in Porträts*, ed. Christoph König, Hans-Harald Müller, and Werner Röcke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 11–19; Gabriele Seitz, *Die Brüder Grimm: Leben, Werk, Zeit* (Munich: Winkler, 1984); and Murray B. Peppard, *Paths through the Forest: A Biography of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). See also, more specifically, Ulrich Wyss, *Die wilde Philologie: Jacob Grimm und der Historismus* (Munich:

to the legal scholar Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861), in 1805, and it was from this mentor that he had acquired the tenets and methods of historicism.

Historicism: History and Laws

The new accessibility of old manuscripts coincided with the emergence of a new attitude to the past: historicism. Some terminological clarification is in order, for “historicism” means various things. For historians, most famously represented by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), it meant that the past should be studied not as a collection of moral exempla and in terms of its applicability to the present, but “intrinsically,” in its own right and in its own moral and epistemic frame of reference. But the notion of historicism was first developed by Savigny in the field of legal studies and thence transferred to the field of philology by Grimm. For them, historicism meant the study of human culture as a diachronic growth process: “to understand *what is* in terms of *how it came to be*.”¹²

Although law and literature are now divided into separate faculties and spheres of learning, the legal, jurisprudential background of historicism is by no means an oddity or singularity. “Double talents”

Beck, 1979); and Lothar Bluhm, *Die Brüder Grimm und der Beginn der deutschen Philologie: Eine Studie zu Kommunikation und Wissenschaftsbildung im frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1997). Both of these works, however, concentrate on the systemic development of a philological discipline in the German context rather than on Grimm’s position and role in broader European developments.

¹² I paraphrase this tenet from Scherer’s article on Grimm: “G. erklärte, seinem Lehrer Savigny alle wissenschaftliche Anregung für sein Leben zu danken. Er lernte bei ihm inductive Forschung überhaupt, . . . das Hinausgehen zu den echten und reinen Quellen . . . ; er lernte insbesondere historische Betrachtungsweise rechtlicher Institutionen, er lernte—wie man zu sagen pflegt—*das Sein aus dem Werden begreifen*” (emphasis mine). Ranke’s historicism, shared by many historians of his generation, is encapsulated in the *aurea dicta* that the past should be studied “as it was in itself” (wie es eigentlich gewesen) and that each historical period is *unter Gott*: autonomous, rather than relative to another period or to the present. I mention a third meaning of historicism only to point out its irrelevance for the present discussion: the fallacy, attacked by Karl Popper in *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), that an understanding of the past allows one to make reliable predictions for the future.

straddling the fields of jurisprudence and letters abound: Uhland, Friedrich von der Hagen, Scott himself. Certainly, in legal systems characterized by case law or customary law, knowledge of precedents and jurisprudence is indispensable. Accordingly, the archival hoarding, publishing, and interpreting of older legal sources is part and parcel of the discipline, which means that legal scholars from the invention of printing onward have been in the vanguard of text- and source-critical studies. In Sweden, H. S. Collin and C. J. Schlyter edited old law texts (*Sveriges gamla lagar*) from 1827 onward, and this work led to Schlyter's dictionary of Old Swedish, intended to accompany those text editions. Indeed, the momentous discovery of Sanskrit and its relation to the European languages was triggered by the resolve of Sir William Jones, a British magistrate in Calcutta, to study native legal sources in order to administer colonial law. "Thus an ancient language once more became the object of learned attention," Hans Aarsleff observes, "because it contained the law that still governed the present. The Elizabethans had turned to the study of Anglo-Saxon for the same reason, and the Grimm brothers would soon concentrate on the early dialects of Germany, thanks to the study of legal history, which they pursued under Savigny."¹³

For Savigny, the historical turn was all the more urgent since he had witnessed a millenarian catastrophe: Napoleon's abolition of the Holy Roman Empire a full thousand years after its creation under Charlemagne. The old empire may have been a moldering, *Gormenghast*-style monstrosity and did, it is true, find a latter-day continuation of sorts in the emperors of Austria (given as a sop by Napoleon to the ousted Habsburgs), but its formal abolition nonetheless caused a pervasive sense of uprooting and bereaved disorientation in German intellectual circles. The disappearance of the empire's long-standing aegis left all of German public life shivering on the windswept plains of history. To see its time-hallowed institutions, venerable, quaint, or both, replaced by regulations and committees designed by a Corsican warlord offered small comfort. Elsewhere, antirevolutionaries like Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre also rejected newfangled models and constitutional

¹³ Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 119. The culmination of Jones's Sanskrit studies was his publication of a legal source edition, *Institutes of Hindu Law*, in Calcutta in 1794.

contrivances, celebrating instead the patina and charisma of tradition: the authority derived from accustomed, ancient status, the idea that such institutions have grown up and functioned in a diachronic community linking the present generation to its ancestors. Reflection on the constitutional position of the German lands after Napoleon led Savigny to his historicism: the need for the law to constitute not just a mechanism for societal conflict management but a homegrown, organic ambience for communitarian cohesion across the generations.

It was this legal historicism, with its conservative emphasis on native organicism, that Grimm took from Savigny and applied to his literary researches; it is this historicism that sets nineteenth-century philologists apart from their ancien régime precursors, the eighteenth-century antiquarians.¹⁴ Grimm pursued jurisprudential interests throughout his career. The publication of his early essay “Von der Poesie im Recht” (1816) already testified to his idea of a cultural-anthropological continuum embracing the nation’s poetical imagination as well as its ways of settling affairs in society. The same idea still informed his great collection *Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer* (1828), which earned him doctorates from the universities of Breslau and Berlin and, ultimately, a professorial appointment in Göttingen (1830).¹⁵ After the famous political crisis that caused his dismissal from Göttingen in 1837,¹⁶ he continued his jurisprudential researches: the *Deutsche Weisthümer* started appearing in 1840, and although work on the great German dictionary prevented

¹⁴ Another distinction is, of course, that the antiquarians classified cultural and linguistic differences according to the “seventy-two nations” model ultimately derived from the ethnic tables listed in the Bible, whereas Grimm and his followers worked in the new Indo-European paradigm. That paradigm was itself historicist in nature, in that it generalized diachronic-comparative observation into linguistic laws of developmental differentiation; hence the regularities in certain consonantal shifts now known as “Grimm’s laws.”

¹⁵ See Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, “Das sinnliche Element des Rechts: Jacob Grimms Sammlung und Beschreibung deutscher Rechtsaltertümer,” in *Kasseler Vorträge in Erinnerung an den 200. Geburtstag der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, ed. Ludwig Denecke (Marburg: Elwert, 1987), 1–24.

¹⁶ For a critical view of the affair of the “Seven of Göttingen” see Klaus von See, “Jacob Grimm und die Göttinger Protestation von 1837,” in *Zur Geschichte und Problematik der Nationalphilologien in Europa: 150 Jahre erste Germanistenversammlung in Frankfurt am Main (1846–1996)*, ed. Frank Furbeth et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 277–86.

him from further work in this line, it is noteworthy that he emphatically included legal scholars as well as historians and philologists in his definition of that new human science called *Germanistik*. In Grimm's view, *Germanistik* was the study of Germanity, in its language, its literature, its history, and its institutions.¹⁷ When the first congress of the new discipline met in Frankfurt in 1846, legal scholars were conspicuously present, alongside historians like Ranke and philologists like Uhland and Karl Lachmann; indeed, Grimm, in his presidential address, vindicated the unity of the three sister specialties, as he saw them.¹⁸

Literary scholars in the first half of the century acquired the habit of compiling source editions and organizational congresses from the legal sciences. It is indicative that editions of texts that we now consider in the context of the literary canon—vernacular “classics” such as the retrieved manuscripts referred to above, *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and so forth—were initially published for their historical-anthropological interest, as illustrations of the life and mores of the nation's early heroes. That was certainly Francisque Michel's agenda in his edition of the *Chanson de Roland* (1836),¹⁹ and the first—faulty, contested—edition of *Beowulf*, by the Danish savant Thorkelin, was tellingly given as illustrative source documentation (“poëma danicum dialecto anglo-saxonico”) in a work titled *De Danorum rebus gestis saeculo III et IV*, published in Copenhagen in 1815. Also, the great source editions begun during the nineteenth century, such as the massive *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and the English *Rolls Series*, laid much emphasis on the publication of legal documents, charters, and the like. The very name of the great archival school established in Paris in 1821, the *Ecole des Chartes*, testifies to this legal-historical slant.

¹⁷ In fact, Grimm took the name *Germanistik* from the legal profession, which had always distinguished between *Germanisten* and *Romanisten*, those who concentrated on native case law and on Roman law, respectively.

¹⁸ *Verhandlungen der Germanisten zu Frankfurt am Main am 24., 25. und 26. September 1846* (Frankfurt am Main: In Commission bei J. D. Sauerländer, 1847). Grimm's presidential addresses and interventions are also in his *Kleinere Schriften*, 8 vols. (Berlin: Dümmler, 1865–90), 7:556–81, esp. 556–63 (“Über die Wechselseitigkeit der drei vertretenen Wissenschaften”).

¹⁹ Witness the preface in Francisque Michel, *La chanson de Roland et le roman de Roncevaux des XIIe et XIIIe siècles, publiés d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque bodléenne à Oxford et de la Bibliothèque impériale* (Paris: Didot, 1869), i–xxx.

Philologists and Fatherland: The Nibelungen

The historicist vogue spread far beyond jurisprudential, or even antiquarian and historical, circles. The texts brought to light and published as antiquarian illustrations of life in bygone ages acquired a much farther-reaching symbolic value and appeal: they became instant literary classics, with inspirational value not just for a learned audience but for a broad national readership. The reception history of the *Nibelungenlied* is a well-known case in point.²⁰ Its “A” and “C” manuscripts having been rediscovered some decades earlier, a former law student, Friedrich von der Hagen (1780–1856), published the story of Siegfried and of Chriemhild’s revenge in 1807. It was the time of Napoleon’s ascendancy immediately following the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Later, in 1819, von der Hagen would describe it as “the Fatherland’s nadir of ignominy” (in der schmachvollsten Zeit des Vaterlandes). Accordingly, the “immortal ancient heroic poem,” as the 1807 preface put it, was presented to offer “comfort and true edification” as reason for hope:

In the midst of the most destructive storms, the love of the language and works of our worthy ancestors is alive and active, and we seem to seek in the past and in poetry what is painfully declining in the present. Yet still this comforting ambition is a living testament to the indestructible German character, which, rising above all servility, sooner or later always smashes any foreign fetters and, wiser and chastened as a result, recaptures its inborn nature and freedom.²¹

²⁰ See Otfried Ehrismann, *Das Nibelungenlied in Deutschland: Studien zur Rezeption des Nibelungenlieds von der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Fink, 1975).

²¹ Friedrich von der Hagen, dedication of *Der Nibelungen Lied*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Varrentrapp, 1824), i–ii. In the original: “So ist auch jetzo, mitten unter den zerreissendsten Stürmen, in Deutschland die Liebe zu der Sprache und den Werken unserer ehrenfesten Alvordern rege und thätig, und es scheint, als suche man in der Vergangenheit und Dichtung, was in der Gegenwart schmerzlich untergeht. Es ist aber dies tröstliche Streben noch allein die lebendige Urkunde des unverilgbaren Deutschen Karakters, der über alle Dienstbarkeit erhaben, jede fremde Fessel über kurz oder lang immer wieder zerbricht, und dadurch nur belehrt und geläutert, seine angestammte Natur und Freiheit wieder ergreift.” The phrase “in der schmachvollsten Zeit des Vaterlandes” is used in von der Hagen’s apology *Die Nibelungen, ihre Bedeutung für die Gegenwart und für immer: Gegen Herrn K. E. Schubarth* (Breslau, 1819).

A plethora of literary adaptations spun off from von der Hagen's retelling, and indeed von der Hagen himself became a one-man Nibelungen industry in subsequent decades, earning himself professorial appointments in Breslau and Berlin for his patriotic efforts. Affiliate professor of German literature at Berlin from that university's founding in 1810 onward, he was the first to introduce the study of Old German in an academic setting. He moved to Breslau in 1811 but was recalled to Berlin as regular professor in 1821. His popular success led to jealousy among fellow workers (the Grimm brothers and Lachmann), who considered his editorial method shoddy and impugned his work with criticism and countereditions. Accordingly, the Nibelungen text became a constant irritant in the budding discipline of *Germanistik* while acquiring a massive cult following, culminating, of course, in Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle.²² Tellingly, when Gutenberg's invention of printing was commemorated in 1840, the occasion was marked with a sumptuous edition of songs of the Nibelungen prepared by the highly respected editorial scholar Karl Lachmann.²³ In sum, the reception of the *Nibelungenlied* in nineteenth-century Germany moved continuously between the adjacent fields of literature and scholarship.

Literary Historicism

Thus a pervasive common condition, which I term literary historicism, affected the field of literature, as well as antiquarian and philological scholarship. Von der Hagen's assumption that old texts could inspire

²² Wagner worked on the *Ring* cycle from 1848 until 1874 but burst on the scene with the topic in 1850, when he published the essay *Die Nibelungen: Weltgeschichte aus der Sage*. On the protracted, vituperative polemics between von der Hagen and the Grimms see Ehrismann, *Das Nibelungenlied in Deutschland*; and Bluhm, *Die Brüder Grimm*.

²³ Karl Lachmann, *Zwanzig alte Lieder von den Nibelungen* (Berlin: Decker, 1840). Famous for his editions of the Greek New Testament and of various classical authors, Lachmann brought to "serious" German philology the expertise and prestige of scholarship in the classics. In the Nibelungen feud he sided with the Grimms against von der Hagen. On Lachmann see Magdalene Lutz-Hensel, *Prinzipien der ersten textkritischen Editionen mittelhochdeutscher Dichtung: Brüder Grimm—Benecke—Lachmann: Eine methodenkritische Analyse* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1975); and Uwe Meves, "Karl Lachmann (1793–1851)," in König, Müller, and Röcke, 20–32.

the nation in the present resoundingly proclaimed a new attitude. Wilhelm Grimm sourly remarked that von der Hagen's Nibelungen edition owed its success to the preface rather than to the actual text, but then again, the Grimms themselves were bolstering the German national tradition by publishing *Altdeutsche Wälder* (1813), claiming "Altdänische Heldenlieder" as part of the greater German tradition (Wilhelm Grimm's edition of that title was appended as volume 4 to Achim von Arnim and Clement Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*) and collecting German folktales, the famous *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–22). The retrieval and publication of old texts were not merely legal-historical or antiquarian enterprises but the means of restoring the nation's canon of dispersed and lost literary heirlooms. The Grimms—and their followers, such as Uhland, Moritz Haupt, and Hoffmann von Fallersleben—trawled history for lost manuscripts, much as Jacob himself had gone to Paris to retrieve them from the French libraries. The old texts that were recovered attained a status beyond that of the historical *pièce justificative*; they came to be seen as "national epics," a previously unheard-of genre that now entered the critical vocabulary. In a review dated 1807 Jacob was already applying the term *National-Epos* to the *Nibelungenlied*.²⁴

It would of course be tempting to probe more deeply this idea of a national epics—what precisely was meant by *national* and what by *epic*. Suffice it to say that, before August Wilhelm Schlegel, the idea of a national epic would have been a contradiction in terms: the epic belonged, as a genre, to a canon of world literature that was not yet nationally dif-

²⁴ Grimm's essay "Über das Nibelungen Liet," *Neuer literarischer Anzeiger*, nos. 15–16 (1807), which ends with an attack on von der Hagen, starts by invoking the grandeur of the original, the "vortrefflichkeit dieses national-epos, das in der ganzen modernen literatur ohne beispiel ist, und für welches man, wenn es sein müsste, den ganzen kreis der deutschen tafelund-romane, wie reizend sie auch sind, hingeben möchte" (superiority of this national epic, which is without example in the entirety of modern literature and for which, if it had to be, one would sacrifice the whole cycle of German Round-Table novels [charming though they be]) (*Kleinere Schriften*, 4:1). The conceptual background of Grimm's phraseology is illuminated by August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (Vienna, 1808), especially the twenty-fifth lecture, which praised English and Spanish drama as national and original, that is, as springing from the nation's homegrown, organic sensibilities, not from any foreign or classical example, and as the starting point for the nation's subsequent literary development.

ferentiated and that embraced Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton side by side.²⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder's cultural philosophy had prepared the ground for a division of the world canon along national lines by arguing that the diversity of human cultures was a categorical given and that human culture expressed itself by definition in the differences between nationalities. Herder's radical relativism provided a much-needed philosophical accolade for all those vernacular and "national" traditions in Europe that could not boast of descending from classical antiquity, but he had written before historicism and had drawn on oral material rather than on ancient manuscripts. What was new in Grimm's use of the term *national epic* was, precisely, the concept's historicist charge. To reappropriate this fountainhead of a nation's literary heritage, one must go into, indeed immerse oneself in, the past and reconnect oneself to it. Grimm phrased this well when he hailed the retrieval of the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, in a lecture read before the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1845:

Of the three poetic genres, none is more difficult to judge than the epic. For lyrical poetry, arising as it does out of the human heart itself, turns directly to our feelings and is understood from all periods in all periods, and dramatic poetry attempts to translate the past into the frame of reference—the language, as it were—of the present, and cannot fail to impress us when it succeeds. But the case is far different with epic poetry. Born in the past, it reaches over to us from this past, without abandoning its proper nature, and if we want to savor it, we must project ourselves into wholly vanished conditions.²⁶

²⁵ I offer some thoughts on the subject in "Primitive Orality and Archaic Heroism: The Romantic Conception of Epic," in *Romantična pesnitev: Ob 200. obletnici rjstva Franceta Prešerna*, ed. Marko Juvan (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, 2000), 19–31.

²⁶ Jacob Grimm, "Über das finnische Epos," in *Kleinere Schriften*, 2:75. In the original: "Unter den drei dichtungsgattungen fällt zu beurtheilen keine schwerer als das epos, denn die lyrische poesie aus dem menschlichen herzen selbst aufsteigend wendet sich unmittelbar an unser gemüt und wird aus allen zeiten zu allen verstanden; die dramatische strebt das vergangne in die empfindungsweise, gleichsam sprache der gegenwart umzusetzen und ist, wo ihr das gelingt, in ihrer wirkung unfehlbar. . . . um die epische poesie aber steht es weit anders, in der vergangenheit geboren reicht sie aus dieser bis zu uns herüber, ohne ihre eigne natur fahren zu lassen, wir haben, wenn wir sie genieszen wollen, uns in ganz geschwundene umstände zu versetzen." The idea that epic was uncompromisingly archaic, accessible only through the reader's imaginative reaching into the past, was already present in Grimm's above-

Antiquarian and literary appeal merged, and it was this appeal to “project ourselves into wholly vanished conditions” that I would offer as a definition of literary historicism.

It certainly revolutionized literary praxis and literary history. As the very mention of the *Kalevala* indicates, the retrieval of “national epics” practically created the various “national” literatures whose existence we now take for granted but which were hardly thought to have a separate existence before 1800. This philological-historical invention of national literatures affected all of Europe. The literatures of Europe, from Britain to Ukraine and from Finland to Slovenia, each announced their emergence into the literary world system by attempting something like a national epic. Slovenia’s France Prešeren (1800–1849) consciously tried to give his nation its national epic by writing *The Baptism on the Savica* in 1836; Taras Shevchenko (1814–61) similarly provided Ukraine with epic poems on Cossacks and rebel outlaws; both poets celebrated the heroic beginnings of their nations’ historical record and provided the initial impetus of a literary tradition in their respective languages. Romanticism in Hungary features Mihály Vörösmarty’s (1800–1855) epic on national-historical themes, *Zalan’s Flight* (1825). The Scott-style historical novel was adapted by many European epigones into a prose epic on the nation’s struggles and glories—for instance, *The Lion of Flanders* (1838), by Hendrik Conscience (1812–83; subsequently known in Flanders as “the man who taught his nation to read”).²⁷ The theater and the genre of the historical drama were also used for cultural self-invention, self-positioning, and self-proclamation in cities from Copenhagen (dominated by the towering figure of the nationalist poet and playwright Adam Oehlenschläger [1779–1850]) to Zagreb and Belgrade (where historical-patriotic plays by Jovan Popović were performed in the 1840s).

cited review of 1807, when he criticized as fundamentally misguided von der Hagen’s attempts at accommodating the epic in a modernized text for a contemporary readership.

²⁷ See Walter Gobbers, “Conscience’s *Leeuw van Vlaenderen* als historische roman en nationaal epos: Een genrestudie in Europees perspectief,” in *Vlaamse literatuur van de negentiende eeuw: Dertien verkenningen*, ed. Ada Deprez and Walter Gobbers (Utrecht: HES, 1990), 45–69.

Alongside theater, the historical novel, and epic poetry, there was the editing of folk epic. Finland's *Kalevala*, collected and reconstituted from oral fragments by Elias Lönnrot (1802–84), formed the very topic of Grimm's above-cited lecture. Lönnrot was himself, of course, a Finnish Grimm, collecting true folk culture from far-flung rustics and believing, as Grimm did, that folk poetry was virtually authorless, that it "wrote itself" and was an outgrowth of the nation's collective experience and that it expressed the nation's character as purely as the language's grammar or the community's customs. That belief in oral poetry as furnishing the raw materials from which national epics emerged was widely held across Europe—for example, by Claude Fauriel (1772–1844) in Paris, who edited Greek ballads in the massively influential philhellenic *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (1824) and who, with the Grimms, was among the earliest and most celebrated scholarly adepts of Serb folk epic as collected by the Serb national *homme de lettres*, Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864).²⁸ In Brittany, Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815–95; a regular correspondent of Jacob Grimm) likewise believed that by collecting, embellishing, and publishing Breton poetry, he was (as James Joyce ironically phrased it) "forging in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race."²⁹ Forging they

²⁸ Fauriel, a close friend of the Italian historical novelist Alessandro Manzoni and later the first (Guizot-appointed) professor of *littérature étrangère* at the Sorbonne, worked mainly on the early history of Provençal literature. On his links with Greek ballads and Karadžić see Miodrag Ibrovać, *Claude Fauriel et la fortune européenne des poésies populaires grecque et serbe: Etude d'histoire romantique, suivie du Cours de Fauriel professé en Sorbonne (1831–1832)* (Paris: Didier, 1966). Grimm's support of Karadžić's endeavors and efforts to secure recognition of them are well known: volume 4 of *Kleinere Schriften* is full of extensive, laudatory reviews and lengthy excerpts in German. See also Vera Bojić, *Jacob Grimm und Vuk Karadžić: Ein Vergleich ihrer Sprachauffassungen und ihre Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der serbischen Grammatik* (Munich: Sagner, 1977); and Miljan Mojašević, *Jacob Grimm und die serbische Literatur und Kultur* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1997).

²⁹ On Villemarqué, his correspondence with Grimm, and the question of his (and Lönnrot's) editorial integrity, see Jean-Yves Guiomar, "Le *Barzaz-Breiz* de Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué," in *Nora*, 3:3479–3514; 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; and Gaela Keryell, "The *Kalevala* and the *Barzaz-Breiz*: The Relativity of the Concept of 'Forgery,'" in *Celtica Helsingiensia: Proceedings from a Symposium on Celtic Studies*, ed. Anders Ahlqvist et al. (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), 57–104.

certainly were, and in many respects the Lönnrots and Villemarqués followed in the footsteps of “Ossian” Macpherson rather than of Lachmann and Grimm, but the very ambiguities of their position, and the many shades of gray that exist between conscious counterfeit and editorial emendation, once again indicate that a continuum links the fields of poetically invented literature and philological-textual scholarship.³⁰

A Period in Literary Reception

I have listed so many, and so many different, examples because I want to draw attention to the enormous bulk and presence of the literary preoccupation with culture’s rootedness in the national past—that condition which I term literary historicism and whose true massiveness and importance are unrecognized because it straddled fields of letters and learning that we have since relegated to separate disciplines.

Literary historicism, as an attempt to reconnect with the nation’s past, was a nostalgic reaction provoked by the disappearance of ancien régime traditions. Ironically, that modernization process, the irritant that spurred historicists into their stance, also provided them with their institutional infrastructure and opened up to them the source materials on which they thrived. The historicist turn seems to be institutionally linked to specific, datable changes in post-Napoleonic history, such as the professionalization of history writing and philology and the reform of the universities, archives, and academies.

Once we have identified the condition of literary historicism, how do we situate it within literary history? Literary historicism ran concurrently with the period we are used to calling “Romantic.” It certainly involved some prominent Romantic authors, affected the outlook of many Romantics, and expressed itself in many Romantic writings, though

³⁰ The influence of James Macpherson (whose Ossianic productions invited a rigor of source criticism, and a mistrust of anachronism, that helped stimulate a historicist outlook among literary critics) is obvious but complex. It expresses itself in the tendency to “restore” epic wholes from retrieved fragments; in the temptation to furnish counterfactual forgeries in order to fill the lacunae of the literary-historical record; and in ongoing reflections on the relationship between collective “folk” authorship and individual epic genius. See, for a closer analysis, my “Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism,” in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill (London: Continuum, forthcoming).

not in all of them. It was concurrent with, but not coterminous with or merely a part of, Romanticism. So how do the two relate?

To approach this question, we should place it in the context of how we see literary history generally. Here it is important to emphasize that literary history is not just the history of how texts were produced, although that is how it would seem if we went by the standard literary history handbooks. Such handbooks are usually chronologically arranged, with the earliest texts and authors occupying the first chapters and the expository scheme of the history following the chronology of successive periods, fashions, and authors.

Nothing would seem more obviously justified at first sight—until we realize that the “first chapters” in these handbooks were actually added to our historical purview in the early nineteenth century, that literary history books do not take shape in the order that they present themselves to us. There is, in other words, reason to rethink our *priori* notion that the workings of literary history run smoothly in tandem with the chronological parameters of literary production.

We assume, almost unthinkingly, that operative concepts in literary history like “influence” and “development” work along a forward-moving vector, that they run downstream on the river of time, pointing from the past toward the present. At best, our usual understanding of the historicity of literature is tickled, and challenged, by counterintuitive thought experiments such as how one “Pierre Menard” could come up with a text that is identical to Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* yet has a radically different, modern meaning and intentionality, or how a bright young critic could study the influence of T. S. Eliot on Goethe. (I refer, of course, to the famous story by Jorge Luis Borges and to an element in David Lodge’s novel *Small World*.) Yet such thought experiments alert us that it is possible to see literary history counterchronologically: as a self-revising process of retroactive memory construction, as something that cultural historians in recent decades have given names like “the invention of tradition” or “the construction of social

³¹ I discuss this more fully in “Literary History, Cultural Identity, and Tradition,” in *Comparative Literature Now: Theories and Practice/La littérature comparée à l’heure-actuelle: Théories et réalisations*, ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Milan V. Dimic, with Irene Sywenky (Paris: Champion, 1999), 389–97; and in “Women Authors and Literary History,” in *Writing the History of Women’s Writing: Toward an International*

memory.”³¹ Readers read from their present into their past: they approach their literary heritage counterchronologically, and Eliot is quite plausibly an influence on one’s reading of Goethe. Our way of understanding Cervantes is programmed by the succeeding generations, which have mediated him to us and which intervene between us and him. When we read of the self-delusions of Don Quixote, we are mindful, as no Cervantes could have expected us to be, of similar delusions in characters like Scott’s Edward Waverley or Gustave Flaubert’s Emma Bovary—and of Borges’s Pierre Menard. Similarly, if we want to address the Middle Ages, we must pass through the nineteenth century first, and when, in doing so, we read the medieval novels of Scott or Hugo, we approach their presentation of the Middle Ages from under the shadow of Umberto Eco, Jacques Le Goff, and Johan Huizinga.

Therefore, the accustomed view of literary history as chronologically forward-facing is only part of the story. Alongside this *genetic* literary history, concerned primarily with the genesis of events and texts, there is a *hermeneutic* literary history, involving the reception and reading not just (as Hans Robert Jauss would have it) of newly emergent texts but of older ones, too—a history, then, of literary memory, of literary anamnesis, of rereading, of how readers’ eyes changed as they looked at the available inheritance of a literary canon. If literature, too, “moves into the future backward” (to recall the Valéry dictum prefixed to this article), literary history cannot be content to see literature merely in factual-genetic terms, as a series of productive moments; it will also have to pay attention to literature’s accretive-hermeneutic dimension, as the cumulative reservoir of available texts and possible inspiration- and interpretation-templates.³²

These two aspects of literary history, the productive and the receptive, the genetic and the hermeneutic, overlap and interact, but they are not identical. We know, almost as a commonplace, that the pres-

Approach: Proceedings of the Colloquium, Amsterdam, 9–11 September 1998, ed. Suzan van Dijk, Lia van Gemert, and Sheila Ottway (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2001), 251–57.

³² An example of how such an approach to literary history might work in practice is Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past, 1660–1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

ence of John Keats in the literary system did not cease with that poet's untimely death and that Dante's sway over Italian literature was not limited to the laureate's lifetime. But this realization should do more than merely emphasize the importance of posthumous canonicity: it should alert us to the more widely significant condition in literary history that Eliot called "the presence of the past."³³

Literature is a long, chronic process of turbulent textual inheritance and appropriation, and that process has not yet received its history.³⁴ But this much is clear: the rise of literary historicism after 1790 was of cardinal importance. Its emergence and impact present us with a field of inquiry of considerable interest, magnitude, and relevance. Literary historicism was more than a sidecar hitched to the Romantic juggernaut. The early medieval vernacular texts that figure, obviously and unquestioned, in the first chapters of our literary history handbooks (*Beowulf*, the *Eddas*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Chanson de Roland*, etc.) were recuperated, canonized, and given literary currency and national status, mostly after centuries of comparative oblivion or total neglect. Literature reinvented the literary past in a drastic overhaul of received opinion that was as revolutionary and pervasive as the Battle of Ancients and Moderns, or even (to recall the sentiments quoted at the outset of this article) as the Renaissance itself.

While Romanticism was primarily a new school in how to write literature, historicism was first and foremost a new development in the history of literary reception. It greatly influenced post-1789 tastes and created an interest that provided a congenial ambience not only for retrieved "national epics" (like the *Nibelungenlied*) but for fresh productions (like Scott's historical novels).

In thus identifying and situating literary historicism, we gain a fresh perspective on certain key figures whose importance and mutual con-

³³ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1960), 49.

³⁴ See also my "For a Post-Foucauldian Literary History: A Test-Case from the Gaelic Tradition," *Configurations* 7 (1999): 227–45. Recent initiatives in this direction are exemplified by collections such as Menno Spiering, ed., *Nation Building and Writing Literary History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); and Joep Leerssen and Marita Mathijssen, eds., *Oerleksten: Nationalisme, edities en canonvorming* (Amsterdam: Instituut voor Cultuur en Geschiedenis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2002).

nections have been neglected and relegated to specialist, nonliterary studies. Alongside the likes of Scott, Alessandro Manzoni, and Lönnrot, we encounter, in a fresh light and in richly suggestive new contexts, writers like Fauriel in Paris, Kopitar in Vienna, and, supremely, the crabby and faux modest figure of Jacob Grimm, who brought fields of learning and scholars from many countries into contact with each other under the aegis of a shared interest in understanding “*what is in terms of how it came to be.*”

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