Building a National Literature

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Building a National Literature: The Case of Germany, 1830–1870.

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What effect did the developmental scheme that gained acceptance through Dilthey have on the establishment of a canon? The incipient devaluation of the early Enlightenment and sensibility led to the suppression of two writers who had had a place in the liberal literary history of the Vormärz. Wieland and Klopstock, albeit for different reasons, were no longer credited in the full sense as pioneers of the new German literature. Wieland’s position had been problematic since the time of romanticism, when he had been denounced as the epigone of French literature. Still, Gervinus devoted an entire chapter to him and discussed his “school” in detail in the fifth volume of his history of German literature. Schmidt had omitted him from his list of crucial mediators, and Dilthey excluded him altogether from the German movement. Klopstock received similar treatment. Although Gervinus still regarded him as the leader of an important school and Schmidt at least granted him the role of a pioneer (together with Lessing, Winckelmann, and Herder), Dilthey concluded that his religious writings did not reach the requisite degree of maturity for a modern secular culture. Danzel, who died in 1850 at the age of thirty-two, had already begun this devaluation of Wieland and Klopstock. Besides Lessing, to whom his major work is dedicated, Danzel refers primarily to Goethe, from whom the new literary studies were to draw their inspiration. In contrast, his essays on Goethe’s time push Wieland into the background and mention Klopstock only marginally.  

1Theodor Wilhelm Danzel, Zur Literatur und Philosophie der Goethezeit, ed. Hans
see, was largely shared by publishers of textbooks. After 1850 Klopstock and Wieland were considered marginal figures in the institution of German literature. Although interest in the young Goethe, which developed later, brought such writers as Hamann and Herder to prominence again, Klopstock and Wieland were apt to be excluded as representatives of an "earlier phase."  

The Case of Jean Paul

The case of Jean Paul is more complex. By about 1850 he had already gone through a succession of phases in which he was received in contradictory ways, and to which Nachmärz criticism and historiography responded. The polemical reaction against Jean Paul in the Nachmärz can be explained largely as a criticism of his Biedermeier tendencies.\(^2\) But we should bear in mind that as a cult figure of Young German anticlassical criticism, Jean Paul was included by programmatic realists in their denunciation of romanticism and Young Germany for both literary and political reasons. Jean Paul's style was considered dated after 1848, because programmatic realism demanded more moderation.\(^4\) But just as Schmidt and Freytag's realist program did not go unchallenged, Jean Paul's position remained controversial in the Nachmärz period. If one compares the expenditure for the Schiller celebration of 1859, or even for the 1849 festivities for Goethe, with the commemoration of the centenary of Jean Paul's birth, it becomes obvious that the latter's reputation as a public cult hero had been severely damaged. Karl von Holtei believed this neglect was inevitable because of contemporary concern with other problems: "In truth, it does not suit the tenor of our time, it is not compatible with the direction of our youth, to descend into the deep, substantial well of his wisdom, truth, virtue, and gentleness, hidden behind strange vegetation and thorn-bushes. In our day there is no longer time for this."\(^5\) This untimeliness was, of course, the very reason that the opponents of programmatic realism supported Jean Paul. If they were inclined to anticlassicism, they praised him as an alternative to Weimar classicism; if they were closer to classicism, as was Gottschall, for instance, they placed him in the temple of German literature beside Goethe and Schiller. One must view

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\(^2\)The exception is Hettner's history of literature, which shows a full appreciation of both Klopstock and Wieland. Wieland is characterized as "Lessing's most important partner" (vol. 2 [1864], p. 461); he is credited with having initiated the German novel.  

\(^3\)Thus Sprengel, in Peter Sprengel, ed., Jean Paul im Urteil seiner Kritiker (Munich, 1980), pp. lxii–ix. 


\(^5\)Quoted in Sprengel, Jean Paul im Urteil seiner Kritiker, p. lxiv.
Schmidt's severe judgment of Jean Paul, as well as Gottschall's and Hettner's appreciation, against this background.

Schmidt's vehement criticism of Jean Paul in 1855 was connected with his fundamental confrontation with romanticism and Young Germany (which he understood as a second romantic generation). He expressly addresses Jean Paul as the father of the Young German style, and in so doing sets the tone of his attack. Schmidt turns the criticism of subjectivity advanced in the Hallische Jahrbücher against Jean Paul, measuring his novels against the sureness of form and objectivity found in Goethe's work. Goethe had tried to achieve a harmonious development of his talents in both his life and his work, whereas Jean Paul had no independent existence: everything became literature in his hands; he lived only for his writing. Schmidt classifies Jean Paul with the subjective, reflective writers: "Even though he tended to be sentimental and effusive, in his early life he gave himself over entirely to reflection." Measured against the norms of poetic realism, which Schmidt believes were at least partially realized by Goethe, Jean Paul is a fundamental failure and cannot be regarded as an essential figure in German tradition. He falls, Schmidt contends, between rationalism and romanticism, without achieving a synthesis: "As a contemporary of romanticism he strives for mystery, wonder, the inconceivable; but as a born rationalist he then perceives everything as natural again." The result is a force of imagination that does not extend beyond the fragmentary, which is mired in detail and thus cannot do justice to a person's "real content."

This harsh judgment unmistakably followed Gervinus, who had called Jean Paul immature and characterized him as an author whose creative power was constantly hindered by reflection. Schmidt takes up this thesis: "To feel intensely, the poet has to take a running start; to protect the inspiration of his unhampered will against all opposition he becomes excited, and his heroes become the same. This is what children do, but in Jean Paul childhood goes beyond the limits of decency." Schmidt, however, goes a crucial step beyond Gervinus; although he does not exclude Jean Paul from the history of literature, he expels him from the German tradition. Despite his detailed criticism of Wilhelm Meister, Schmidt asserts again at the end of his history of literature that Goethe's work represents the high point of the German novel and that no later novel has surpassed it. Jean Paul, in contrast, is denied the role

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6 Julian Schmidt, "Jean Paul im Verhältnis zur gegenwärtigen Romanliteratur (1855)," in Sprengel, Jean Paul im Urteil seiner Kritiker, p. 173; this sentence is missing in the second edition (1855) of his history of literature.

7 Ibid., p. 180.

8 Julian Schmidt, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, 2d ed. (Leipzig, 1855), 1:227.
of model; he appears as the forerunner of a false tendency, from which
Schmidt would like to free German literature. Although Gervinus was
willing in his comparison of Goethe and Jean Paul to accept Jean Paul’s
romantically unformed nature as a lesser alternative, programmatic
realism is no longer interested in the “most secret moods of the soul.”

Classicists and realists were equally opposed to Jean Paul. His public
reputation diminished, and in 1913 Hugo von Hofmannsthal was able
to speak of the “scant regard for and impending oblivion” of this
author in the preceding five decades.10 He was appreciated and ac­
nowledged as part of the tradition only by those who still had a
connection with the Vormärz and by those who resisted realist theory.
This is made explicit by Carl Christian Planck, whose more comprehen­
sive study of Jean Paul (1867) takes a position against the classicist
idealization of the German plight and thus joins Börne’s and Georg
Herwegh’s tradition of reverence for Jean Paul.11 Yet it is characteristic
that the two most important histories of literature besides Schmidt’s—
those of Gottschall and Hettner—avoid such an extreme position and
try instead to mediate between the canonization of Weimar classicism
and a commitment to Jean Paul.

Gottschall begins his section on Jean Paul as follows: “An influence
on the further development of our literature as important as
Schiller’s and Goethe’s was the third coryphaeus of the German intellect, Jean
Paul Friedrich Richter, whom only an aesthetic, biased one-sidedness
could ban from the circle of our intellectual potentates.” He cites the
aesthetics of Friedrich Vischer in order to legitimize Jean Paul as a
classic humorist whose creative method differs from that of the roman­
tic style. Gottschall is not deciding against the Weimar writers in this
argument; rather, he is describing Jean Paul as a necessary supplement
to Goethe and Schiller, to the authors to whom modern readers turn:
“Jean Paul seized every aspect of modern life, never depicting it objec­
tively but always hovering over it with a free spirit that drew its inde­
pendent strength from the depths of his soul and from the ideal of
humanity forever alive in him.” The expressive forms in which Jean
Paul excels are the idyl and satire. His achievement lies in having com­
bined idealism and realism, the sublime and the humorous, thereby
supplementing the one-sided classical ideal of form. Yet despite this
positive assessment, Gottschall remains enough of a classicist to raise
significant objections to Jean Paul’s novels. Thus his judgment differs

9Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung, 4th ed. (Leipzig,
1853), 5:215.
10Quoted in Sprengel, Jean Paul im Urteil seiner Kritiker, p. 227.
11Karl Christian Planck, Jean Paul’s Dichtung im Lichte unserer nationalen Ent­
wicklung. Ein Stück deutscher Kulturgeschichte (Berlin, 1867).
less on the whole from Gervinus's and Schmidt's than one might initially expect. With respect to *Hesperus*, Gottschall too writes of an unsatisfying form and insufficient action. Only *Titan* is excepted from this criticism; it is said to be classicistic because it has poetic power and originality, despite a certain capriciousness. When Gottschall praises Jean Paul, he follows Börne's tradition: compared to the aristocratic Goethe, Jean Paul has the look of a popular writer: "He had the makings, as Goethe and Schiller did not, of a German Shakespeare, a poet he was as close to in the originality of his Weltanschauung, in his profound grasp of and insight into life, in his universal humor, glowing imagination, and unbounded richness of image and wit, as he was separated from him by the one great gulf of having found no popular and sustaining art form for this richness and, with all his enthusiasm for the breadth of historical life, no room for expressing it in his creative work."12

Hettner's history of literature follows a similar strategy. He places Jean Paul beside Goethe and Schiller and emphasizes their common distinction between the ideal and reality. Jean Paul, however, has a special status: "He was not able to achieve Goethe's and Schiller's free and beautifully harmonious ideal of humanity; he was far behind these giants both in talent and in the moral energy required for unsparring self-education. On the other hand, he was just as safe from the weaknesses and biases of the other stragglers of the Sturm und Drang period; his spirit was too tender and loving to harbor Klinger's harsh contempt for the world, and he had too earnest a disposition and too fresh and immediate a sense of reality for the unstable fantasticity of the romantics." This qualification allows Hettner to appreciate Jean Paul as a true humorist. He, too, views Jean Paul's work against Goethe's novels. He thus compares *Titan* with *Wilhelm Meister*, describes the *Flegeljahre* as a deepening of *Titan*, and again compares these with Goethe's work. Despite his high estimation of Jean Paul's achievement, however, Hettner ultimately concludes that his novels as a whole represent a danger to the German tradition and that they are no longer directly accessible to contemporaries. Nothing speaks more for Hettner's late political resignation than this judgment, which renounces the critical social function of the poet he had emphatically defended in about 1850. In his judgment of the novels Hettner ultimately comes closer to the position of Gervinus and Schmidt, who complained mainly about their formlessness. Thus he, too, observes that "it is inconceivable how destructive an effect Jean Paul had because of this dissolution of artistic form. We still

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find this bad influence in Heine and the writers of Young Germany.”¹³ Hettner’s judgment remains dichotomous and self-contradictory. On the one hand, he follows the classic model, depreciating Jean Paul aesthetically; on the other, he adheres to the politicized literary criticism of the Vormärz, underscoring Jean Paul’s political importance. But since this form of literary public sphere had been disrupted by the unsuccessful Revolution of 1848, it was unable in the late 1860s to come to Jean Paul’s rescue.

The Schiller Celebration of 1859

Monographic histories of reception tend to isolate their subject. Thus continuous lines can be traced in the reception history of Jean Paul as well as, albeit less clearly, in that of both Wieland and Klopstock. Certain groups of readers and critics continued to value these authors, while the literary public as a whole was neglecting them. For the most part, however, the reading public’s interest in its literary heritage was focused on Weimar. The Schiller celebration of 1859 afforded contemporaries a special opportunity to articulate their cultural and national identity. This example in particular makes it clear that by reconstructing the history of literature, light is thrown on only one aspect of the process of canonization. Discussions in periodicals, school programs, and public lectures, which were part of the centennial celebration, carried a weight of their own. Popularized material, excluded from scholarly history as a rule because it was considered incongruous, becomes highly significant from the standpoint of canonization. As the Schiller celebration clearly shows, the development and consolidation of a literary canon was more than a literary, aesthetic matter. The public was celebrating a cultural hero in whom it saw itself reflected and whom it could claim as its own.

The Schiller celebration was less a literary than a cultural and national-political event. The protest registered by Franz Grillparzer, who did not want to see his appreciation of the poet confused with the political goals of the German liberals, demonstrates this point.¹⁴ The surviving documents of the celebration, published lectures and addresses, present a one-sided picture, because they do not mention the actual ceremonies, processions, and festivities in schools, universities, churches, and synagogues which formed the background for the countless speeches in which the German bourgeoisie—and to some extent the

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working class—affirmed that, more than anyone else, Schiller had voiced the longings and aspirations of the German nation; that he could consequently be regarded as their *spiritual leader* on the road to national unity.

The Schiller celebration in Hamburg was rightly described as a national festival, for the three-day-long festivities exceeded the dimensions of the bourgeois public sphere. The great procession through the lighted streets on the third day brought the festivities directly to the people, linking the literary and popular public spheres to an extent hitherto unknown. For the participants, the festival was more than a commemoration; it was a historic act that was to give rise to something new. In Schiller’s name, the community of celebrants swore an oath to the cultural and national unity to which it aspired. Any attempt to separate the literary and political aspects of the Schiller celebration is futile, for the festival itself was understood as a political act.

The history of Schiller’s reception before 1859 suggests such an identification with the glorified author, but one should not forget that in 1859 only certain elements of that tradition were accepted. The criticism of abstract idealism and political distance expressed by the young Hettner in 1850 finds no place in the speeches delivered at the festival. At most one heard that Schiller was not necessarily the nation’s greatest writer—probably a clue that the speaker regarded Goethe as more important. The liberals, who had regained hope in the new era, avoided criticizing classicism. Instead, they sought in 1859 to use the literary tradition culminating in Schiller (and Goethe) to unlock and grasp the political future.

A number of recurrent themes and motifs can be traced in the many, generally not very original, talks. One was Schiller’s popularity. Vischer, for example, referred to the modest, trusting life of the German poet, adding that “one has to love him; it is impossible to keep a distance from him.” And Carriere, comparing him to Goethe, emphasized that only Schiller took the people seriously and considered them in his work: “And whereas even Shakespeare treated the *Volk* ironically as the unstable, polyccephalous masses, and Goethe in *Egmont* merely gave us pleasure through the individual portraits in his folk scenes, Schiller was the first to visualize the *Volk* poetically as an organic and capable entity, as the worthy bearers of its excellent guides.” Schiller’s proclaimed closeness to the people legitimized the conception of Schiller as the chosen leader of the German nation. In this sense, Carriere observed

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15See Die hamburg Schillerfeier. Ein deutsches Volksfest (Hamburg, 1859).
16Friedrich Vischer, Rede zur hundertjährigen Feier der Geburt Schillers (Zurich, 1859), p. 12.
that “even when his force attained the proportions of formal beauty and artistic perfection, poetry remained a serious mission, a service in a temple, a priesthood.”  

It was precisely the abstract idealism that Hettner and others had criticized which was evoked in 1859 as the reason for Schiller's ideal leadership. Jacob Burckhardt distinguished between aesthetic perfection, which he denied Schiller, and literary effect, concluding that his “individuals, who are really ideals, are depicted with such glowing enthusiasm that they will forever remain the beloved property of the German Geist.”  

Vischer was more emphatic about the poet's mission as a leader: “Thus he strides ahead hovering, hovers as he strides ahead of the people, all peoples, his people above all, whose power and greatness still lie buried under the ruins of the past, forward toward the lofty goal!” Even though Vischer had earlier spoken expressly of freedom and the beauty of human nature, which all human-kind shares, the commemorative celebration was the occasion when Schiller's idealism was pressed into service for national unification.

Vischer could thus not totally absolve Schiller of the blame of cosmopolitanism: “When the idea of freedom becomes totally dominant, it easily disguises the fact that above all we simply must have a fatherland, free or not free.” Only in Die Jungfrau von Orleans did he find that shift toward national patriotism which the liberals believed they saw in 1859. Hence Jakob Grimm, too, believed that he had to defend Schiller against the accusation of political indifference, and he tried to reduce the cosmopolitan and national aspects of Schiller's work to a common denominator: “‘Wallenstein’ was created for German freedom and so was ‘Tell,’ whose heroic deed is aptly expressed in stanzas accompanying the copy presented to the Elector Lord Chancellor. The universal human rejoicing inspired by the choruses of the ‘Ode to Joy’ will never die.”

This very aim—to exploit Schiller's dramas for national liberalism—brought the conservatives into the picture. They either pleaded for the strict separation of literature and politics or undertook to prove, like the critic of the Kreuzzeitung, that Schiller was anything but a friend of the people, that his proper place was in the Conservative party.  

In 1859 both liberals and conservatives exploited Schiller's texts for their own purposes. Liberal critics in particular posited their specific inter-

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17 Maurice Carriere, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Jean Paul. Vier Denkreden auf deutsche Dichter (Giessen, 1862), pp. 46, 47.

18 Jacob Burckhardt, Gedächtnisrede auf Schiller, quoted in Oellers, Schiller—Zeitgenosse aller Epochen, pt. 1, p. 418.

19 Vischer, Rede zur hundertjährigen Feier der Geburt Schillers, pp. 20, 16.

20 Jacob Grimm, Rede auf Schiller, quoted in Oellers, Schiller—Zeitgenosse aller Epochen, pt. 1, p. 449.

pretive models as absolute, thereby creating an image of Schiller that invited identification with the playwright. If, on the whole, postrevolutionary literary studies tended to safeguard the literary heritage by historicizing it, the Schiller celebration went counter to this tendency, for it was aimed not at the past but at the present and future. Those celebrants who spoke of "our Schiller" were contemporizing him even as they viewed his work historically. Political unity appeared to be the realization of what Schiller had created in his dramas. The conclusion of the description of the Hamburg festival is characteristic. The record-
er of the event evokes an image of the procession, the masses of "active, youthfully vigorous men," adding: "And consider that perhaps only a fourth of the unions and corporations were represented; quadruple the number and imagine this army of valiant men adorned with weapons and obedient to one will, one idea, and thus obedient because it is their own will, their own idea!" This observation comforts the writer and lets him imagine the next centennial celebration taking place on the ground of a unified, free Germany.

The commemoration of Schiller's centennial presupposed that his work was an inalienable part of the German literary tradition. In this respect, the ceremonial speeches merely corroborated what was already firmly fixed in the general consciousness. Not surprisingly, 1859 was the year not only of Schiller's celebration but also of Goethe's. In the classic model developed by Ruge and Gervinus, the two names were no longer separable. Any position taken on Schiller presupposed a judgment of Goethe. Grimm offered the clearest statement on the matter when he observed that "Goethe and Schiller stand so close together on the sublime heights they occupy—as they did in life, which bound them closely and indissolubly together—that it would be impossible to consider them apart from each other." The Schiller jubilee was supposed to emphasize not what separated Schiller from Goethe but what they had in common. For this purpose well-established formulas were used. Grimm chose the concepts of idealistic and realistic to describe how they differed; Carriere referred to their friendship, calling the bond a "beautiful moral act." He described the difference between them: "Schiller gave his ideas a lifelike basis in nature and embodied them in viable individual characters, whereas Goethe gave his creations a symbolic significance and rose more and more into the realm of pure thought." Thus the bond between the two authors resulted in a balancing of their points of view and ways of working, which had a sta-

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22 Die hamburgerschillerfeier, p. 64.
23 Quoted in Oellers, Schiller—Zeitgenosse aller Epochen, pt. 1, p. 441.
24 Carriere, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Jean Paul, pp. 48-49.
bilizing and integrating effect on literary tradition. Even Goethe's advocates, who were convinced of the greater worth of their author, in 1859 avoided attacking the more popular Schiller or even putting too overt an emphasis on their differences. The purpose of this strategy is unmistakable. The bond between Goethe and Schiller, which found literary expression in their exchange of letters, guaranteed the integration of potentially divergent literary and ideological tendencies and brought them into line with liberal demands. That the admiration for classicism did not stop there but was later to be part of the liberal German turn toward conservatism is demonstrated especially by Goethe's reception in the 1860s.

*Goethe's Significance*

Viktor Hehn's essay "Goethe und das Publikum," published in 1888 in his *Gedanken über Goethe*, strongly affected our view of the history of Goethe's influence in the Nachmärz. Hehn describes 1849 as a low point in Goethe's recognition and fame. Taking the liberal criticism of Goethe in the Vormärz as his point of departure, Hehn charges that Goethe's hundredth birthday was virtually forgotten: "The centennial celebration of 1849 met nowhere with open approval; indeed, those who requested it were hissed. Smaller circles may have solemnly remembered the day, but only quietly, far from the noise of the market, where no procession assembled, no banner was unfurled, and where different business altogether was being transacted."\(^{25}\) This statement deliberately distorts the historical facts, because in 1849 there was no lack of public celebration taking place in public buildings, or even in marketplaces. It was not only an elite of Goethe admirers who acknowledged the poet in 1849. Hehn suggests a causal relationship between the alleged indifference of the public sphere and the political radicalism of 1848 and 1849. But this equation is not borne out, because Gervinus, on whom the later liberal history of literature was built, was by no means as disdainful of Goethe as Hehn makes him out to be. It was he who, despite his critical remarks, had established Goethe's canonical validity with his history of literature. Discussion, in which Hehn played a crucial role, centered on the question how Goethe's undisputed classicality could be reinterpreted after the failure of the revolution. Goethe's aesthetic and ideological rescue took place against the changed political and ideological background of the postrevolutionary period. Its goal was to give sufficient reason for the status of the Weimar author so that he would remain untouched by the defeat of

radical early liberalism. Hehn’s posthumously published *Ueber Goethes Hermann und Dorothea*, written in 1851, is one of the most important documents of this reinterpretation.

Hehn dissociates himself from two traditional interpretations that he regards as ahistorical. On the one hand, he defends Goethe against the politically motivated criticism of Börne and the radical camp, which accused the poet of political indifference; on the other, he opposes the early socialists’ intention to vindicate Goethe’s works because they contain a socialist message. In Hehn’s view, both of these tendencies removed Goethe from his epoch and measured him according to concepts not of his time. Hehn—and in this he would be followed by Wilhelm Dilthey—emphatically places Goethe in the context of the eighteenth century, which he understands as prerevolutionary and apolitical. Unlike the French Enlightenment, the German Enlightenment was restricted to religious and aesthetic issues: “All political questions were left unconsidered in this naturalistic-aesthetic emancipation. The struggle was directed against the boundaries limiting free subjectivity: the individual was to make use of the profound enigmas and mysteries of his inner being, his infinite sensations, to break out of the poor schema of finished externalized types.” Hehn describes the old German class society as a given, unalterable fact of eighteenth-century life, so that the rising political movement that had gripped Germany since 1770 appears to be something foreign. As a result, Goethe becomes an apolitical author, exclusively preoccupied with his own problems: “But Goethe himself, and his century, did not feel called upon either to be politically effective or to give poetic expression to a political efficacy that did not exist.” In order to explain Goethe’s work historically, Hehn is prepared, indeed resolved, to suppress everything that does not fit his picture of an apolitical Germany. With him, historicization becomes the instrument of both an aesthetic and an ideological legitimation of his subject, for he goes beyond giving historical distance to the literature of the past. He denies that Germans had any political interest at all after the experiences of 1848: “We are a people attached to family, private life, and feelings, and this trait runs through the entire history of Germany.” Hehn suggests accordingly that the conditions under which *Hermann und Dorothea* was written were identical to those of his own time, in other words, that the apolitical character of this work not only was determined by its genesis but must also influence the work’s later reception. In his hands, Goethe’s epic becomes a modern poetic witness in which the reader of 1851 can find pleasure.

To be sure, Hehn does not want to protect only Goethe from radical political constructions; he characteristically includes Schiller in his apolitical interpretation. Schiller’s historical dramas are explicitly described as private, and his letters Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen (On the Aesthetic Education of Man), whose subject is the relationship between aesthetics and politics, are read—in opposition to Gervinus—with the intention of showing that “aesthetic education aims only at a beautiful moral rebirth that, if it is ever achieved, will replace a political rebirth.” Although this interpretation of Schiller did not gain acceptance in the 1850s, Goethe criticism had a tendency—already incipient in Theodor Wilhelm Danzel—to use the historicization of its subject to create a conservative portrait of a classicist. The classicistic aspects of the literary theory of programmatic realism, even when its adherents regarded themselves as liberals, represented a decided effort to accommodate this tendency. This effort is part of the contradiction demonstrated by Hehn’s celebration of Hermann und Dorothea: the intent was to historicize Goethe’s work but at the same time to define it as exemplary—that is, as timeless. Hehn’s interpretation is characteristic of Goethe criticism of the 1850s and 1860s: “The epic and pictorial tendency that the poet had acquired by nature and through Spinoza came to full maturity in the vivid air of Italy. The natural and artistic world of Italy gave him the lucid clarity, consummate form, objective precision, and gentle tranquillity that henceforth marked his works.”

Goethe’s greatness lies in his presumed objectivity, which places him, in the opinion of his admirers, above the politically engaged Schiller.

Whereas the influential Grenzboten reported critically on Goethe’s centennial celebration, disparaging, in Schmidt’s essay “Zu Goethes Jubelfeier,” Goethe’s “subjective willfulness, his characterless dissolution in a sea of chance sensations, and his revolt against regulation and authority,”28 Deutsches Museum, edited by Robert Prutz, took a more positive attitude. Prutz, as he put it, used Goethe’s name for his journal.29 But Schmidt and the Grenzboten circle should not really be counted among Goethe’s opponents either. For them, too, the poet’s canonical status was already established. Schmidt turned against the romantic and postromantic criticism that especially valued Goethe’s irrationalism, praising instead the “self-discipline of a beautiful nature”—that is, Goethe’s objectivity—in the name of common sense.

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The bias of the Grenzboten circle against certain aspects of Goethe’s work was closely connected to the outcome of the revolution; every form of subjectivity that could be interpreted as political weakness was rejected.

Whereas programmatic realism extensively incorporated the aesthetics of Goethe’s time into its own program, academic literary studies tried to protect the classical heritage by approaching it historically. Danzel, whose essays on Goethe stand apart from the historico-philosophical thinking of the Hegelians, acknowledges, as does Hehn, the aesthetics of classicism. Danzel’s essay on Goethe and his fellow art lovers of Weimar represents nothing less than a rescue of Goethe’s literary theory. He argues that Goethe’s commitment to the art theory of the ancient world had no effect on his concept of literature, because there, in contrast to the visual arts, no compelling model was available, or at least not to Goethe. Thus Danzel was able to present Goethe as the creator of a new concept of literature.

This shift in opinion on Goethe was continued in the 1860s by Hettner, who retracted his old accusation of abstract idealism on the occasion of a lecture on Iphigenie delivered at the Berlin Goethe colloquium; henceforth he celebrated that drama as one of the pinnacles of the classical style. At the same colloquium, Berthold Auerbach spoke in similar terms on the objectivity of Goethe’s art of narration as exemplified by Wilhelm Meister. Herman Grimm, anticipating the cult of classicists in the Gründerzeit, already considered himself so far removed from the Goethe period that critical analysis of the classical heritage seemed unnecessary. As Goethe’s time receded into the past and people became less familiar with his cultural milieu, there was criticism not of Goethe but rather of the safeguards of philology and biography. Grimm’s introduction to his lectures on Goethe of 1874–75 is characteristic of this approach. Goethe has become an event forever shaping the fate of those within cultural reach: “Opinions of his worth will change; in different periods, the German people will seem closer to him or farther away. But he can never be deposed; nor will he disappear

30 Besides the work of Helmuth Widhammer, see on this Hermann Kinder, Poesie als Synthese (Frankfurt a. M., 1973), and Ulf Eisele, Realismus und Ideologie (Stuttgart, 1976).
33 Berthold Auerbach, Goethe und die Erzählungskunst (Stuttgart, 1861); see also Karl Robert Mandelkow, Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker, pt. 2, p. lxiii.
34 See his review of Dilthey’s Das Leben Schleiermachers (1870) in Grenzboten 29 (1870), II, 1, pp. 1–3.
on his own, melting away like a glacier of which nothing will remain when the last drop has run off.” Goethe has attained a position raising him above the history of literature; together with Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, he belongs to the timeless Olympians who will forever be above the history of their reception. There can no longer be any doubt about the perfection of the works Goethe created in Italy; the disappointment of his contemporaries with his development must be blamed on their lack of insight. Grimm calls Goethe’s problematic friendship with Schiller a “collective concept within German history,”35 by which he means to establish their great significance for all time.

Herman Grimm’s historicization of Goethe is really the mythicization of a cult hero whose life, with all its philologically revealed details, assumes the form of a legend. In Grimm’s lectures, the critic’s position is identical to that of the author under consideration. His introduction frankly concedes, on the other hand, that this affirmation is connected with the change in political circumstances: “We possess a present that far surpasses our desires. Its offerings are no longer, as before, merely something to be hoped for or attained, but something to be held fast, developed, and exploited. In the dawn of this new day, we see past ages in a different light. We no longer search in them for weapons to help us win our freedom. Rather, now that the battle for freedom has been won, we search for that which will strengthen our new position and secure our possession of the goods we have gained.” Once national unity was achieved under Bismarck, the liberals’ political criticism of Goethe seemed outdated and incongruous. Gervinus and his students had regarded Goethe’s political indifference as one of the deficiencies of classicism; Grimm regards the conservative sentiments of his author as the prerequisite for Bismarck’s recently founded Reich: “Goethe’s labors have helped prepare the ground we sow and reap today. He belongs among the noblest founders of German freedom. For all our victories, without him we would lack the best ideas for exploiting those victories.”36 The depoliticization of Goethe criticism demanded by Hehn after 1848 has here reached its political conclusion: Goethe, and with him Schiller, prepares the way for the second Reich.37 Even such a moderate liberal as Schmidt showed a similar change in thought after 1866.38 Following the Prussian victory at Königgrätz, Schmidt, too,

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36Ibid., 1:8, 9.
37This monumentalization is already apparent in 1859 in Grimm’s essay “Schiller und Goethe,” which, however, still contains a concept of history oriented toward the future which was later lost; Herman Grimm, Essays (Hanover, 1859).
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was prepared to forgo political criticism of classicism, because national unity was more important to him than self-determination. In Schmidt’s *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod* (History of German Literature since Lessing’s Death) (1866), he judged Goethe more positively than he had in 1855. One should not overemphasize this change, however, as Bernd Peschken does, because Schmidt’s opinion of Goethe was already ambiguous during the 1850s. The main point is that despite his polemic against Goethe, he never contested the basic canonical validity of Weimar classicism. Since the early 1860s—that is, after the essays of Adolf Scholl—one of the familiar arguments of Goethe criticism had been that classicism prepared the way for German public spirit; that is, that it initiated a political consensus among the Germans.\(^{39}\) Schmidt had only to change emphasis in order to complete what scholars such as Danzel, Schöll, and Herman Grimm had already begun.

Prussia and the Literary Tradition

The linkage of Weimar classicism with Prusso-German history—since the new Reich fulfilled the aspirations of classicism—brought a factor into play on which Franz Mehring was the first to focus attention. Postrevolutionary literary history began, especially after the 1860s, to draw a connection between Prussian history and the development of German literature. This tendency has a bearing on the function of the canonization of the German tradition. As Mehring showed,\(^{40}\) the beginnings of the Prussian legend are found in scattered references in Goethe, particularly in a passage in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, where Goethe attributes a certain degree of importance for German literature to Frederick the Great. Goethe refers to an ambitious young national literature that was challenged by the king’s rejection. This situation was reversed, to be sure, after 1850. Henceforth the Prussian king would appear as the direct or indirect patron of German literature.

When Gervinus speaks of “Prussian literature”\(^{41}\) in the fourth volume of his history of literature, he means writers such as Johann Gleim and his circle, and after him Thomas Abbt, Mendelssohn, Christoph Nicolai, and Lessing; he has in mind literary life in Berlin, not the Potsdam court. He frankly concedes that because of its French orientation, the latter had little to offer to German literature. Gervinus sees the


\(^{40}\) See Franz Mehring, *Die Lessing-Legende*, in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 9 (Berlin, 1963), pp. 36–44.

\(^{41}\) Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*, 4:188.
court's contribution to German culture in the fields of philosophy, theology, and music. And even then he makes a distinction between the achievements of Prussian citizens and what the Hohenzollern contributed. Still, we find in Gervinus the beginnings of a Prussian orientation in the history of German literature to which later historians could appeal. Gleim's grenadier songs appear beside bardic poetry as the start of a national poetry in Germany. On the other hand, Frederick II's contempt for German literature is defended; his enmity toward the most important authors of his time is explained as the result of his French education. But under no circumstances would Gervinus have considered the culture of the Prussian court a prerequisite for Weimar classicism, or even have established a causal relationship between the Prussian state and Goethe and Schiller. Even the conservative August Friedrich Vilmar, who wanted to reconcile German classicism with Christianity, in his well-received *Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur* avoided grounding Weimar classicism in Prussian history. Only after 1850, owing to the Prusso-Austrian conflict—to the impending decision between a Little German (*kleindeutsch*) solution and a Great German (*grossdeutsch*) solution—did this question become acute for the construction of a literary tradition. The closer the pro-Prussian, *kleindeutsch* solution came to becoming reality, and the more unification came to be seen as the fulfillment of the cultural and political hopes of the German people, the more pressing became the question how earlier Prussian history had contributed to the development of the now secure literary canon. Prussian victory over Austria in the summer of 1866, which decided the issue in favor of the *kleindeutsch* solution, provoked an immediate revision of opinion, not least among the liberals who had opposed the Prussian state between 1862 and 1866. Schmidt's preface to the second volume of the new edition of his history of literature, dated September 7, 1866, is a striking document of this revision. In reference to the Prusso-Austrian war, he says that "anyone who has read my work carefully will recognize the thread running through it: particularism has destroyed the boldest and proudest flights of our spirit. To have seen the day when Germany, led by a strong arm, finally threw off these crippling shackles must be one of the great joys of life." Prussian victory is frankly equated here with German victory; the *kleindeutsch* solution is taken as the natural one. It is worth noting that Schmidt immediately draws conclusions for the history of literature from this change: in 1866 the polemical approach to classicism which characterized his early works seems antiquated to him.

This revision is evident in the first volume of Schmidt's history of literature. He depicts both classicism and romanticism with greater understanding than he had in 1855. Although Schmidt remains true to his earlier position when interpreting individual works—Wilhelm Meister, for example—his overall judgment is closer to the affirmation of someone like Herman Grimm. Volume three, which appeared in 1867 and covered the period from 1814 to the present, shows a considerable change in point of view, approaching the national-conservative interpretation of German tradition.

What Schmidt began was consciously and systematically developed by the young Dilthey. Although it is an exaggeration to maintain that Dilthey initiated a "total change in literary historiography," he drew conclusions from the traditional liberal model of classicism which were unmistakably foreign to Gervinus and his students, indeed even to Danzel. As long as Dilthey regarded German idealism as the driving force of Prussian history, as in his early essay on Schleiermacher, he remained part of the liberal tradition, which during the constitutional conflict tried once again to realize the idea of a constitutional state opposed to Bismarck's government. The turning point came in 1866, when in the course of his critical analysis of recent literary history Dilthey reversed the relationship, declaring Prussian tradition—that is, the combination of Enlightenment and absolutism—to be the foundation of the German literary tradition. One must clearly distinguish here between his idealistic approach of the early 1860s and his "realistic" revision of about 1866. It is not enough to say that in his essays on Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin, and Lessing, Dilthey was trying to carry out a program of instruction,43 for this intention was equally shared by the liberals, who by no means denied the literary and aesthetic supremacy of classicism. His conservative turn lay in his assumption that these authors had a message that brought them into line with the impending Little German solution. Dilthey explicitly formulated this idealistic and Prussian synthesis in a later addition to his essay on Lessing, first published in 1867: "Thus two great intellectual forces of this German period of enlightenment have come together here, the exalted concept of honor held by Frederick the Great's army and the noble humanity that is the most beautiful product of our literature of that time."44 Dilthey sees the conflicts in eighteenth-century German drama as a reflection of tension between a humanistic culture and "Prussian power." Lessing's comedies, especially Minna von Barnhelm, are ac-

43Thus Peschken, Versuch einer germanistischen Ideologiekritik, pp. 126, 128.
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Accordingly interpreted as the resolution of this tension. In Dilthey’s view, Lessing achieved a synthesis that anticipated *Tasso* and *Faust*.

Dilthey was not the only one to hold this opinion. In his history of literature, Hettner also tried to prove that the Prussian tradition was important for the development of German literature, if not directly through the person of the king, then at least indirectly. He examined in detail the influence of the Western European and German Enlightenment on the young Frederick II, and then he tried to show that the Prussia shaped by the Enlightenment shared the same spirit as German literature. Hettner did not, however, succeed in disguising the flaws in this concept. After describing the philosophical aspirations of the crown prince, he cannot conceal the fact that the young king did not adhere to his program in the first Silesian war. This contradiction is revealed in the following statement: “Frederick redeemed his word as sincerely” as ambition, the impressions made on him since his youth, and the peculiarities of the Prussian military state allowed. As one might expect, his justification of the Prussian state relies on Kant’s treatise on the Enlightenment, which attested to the Prussian king’s fundamental contribution to that movement. Hettner remarks that “the philosophical king brought to realization the spirit of the rationalist law of nature, which derives the creation of the state from a contract between citizen and sovereign and thus puts the legitimacy and regulation of the government solely and exclusively under the protection of the law and universal freedom.” As a consequence, the Seven Years’ War is characterized boldly as a “fight for freedom and enlightenment against the dark powers of clerical and despotic oppression.” Through this forced progressive interpretation of Prussia, which is oriented toward constitutional reform and especially the land law of 1794, Hettner seeks to save Prussia for the further development of the German intellect. He cites *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in order to clarify the significance of the Seven Years’ War. Far from explaining the war in relation to the European politics of alliance, Hettner emphasizes only its cultural aspect, that is, its allegedly stimulating influence on contemporary writers. In extolling its cultural significance, Hettner goes so far as to draw a comparison with Greek history: as the wars with Persia opened the Periclean age, so the Seven Years’ War initiated the golden age of German literature. By distinguishing between Prussian enlightenment and the plight of the small German states, Hettner brings Prussian history into the tradition of an emerging national German literature. In his view, German culture became national in scope because of the policies of Frederick II. Yet he is still close enough to the liberal tradition to recognize the limitations of absolutism: “Everything for the people, nothing by the people. This motto of enlightened despotism is enough to show that even under this
new form of government, the Volks and the administration are separated by a wide, impassable gulf, just as they were under the cruelest princely domination.” Hettner maintains—and this makes him old fashioned in 1870—that the historical process has to legitimize itself as the course of human emancipation. Thus in the introduction to his second volume, he again separates the violence of the aging Prussian king from the real task of German history. The latter leads, on the one hand, to Kant and, on the other, to the literary bond between Goethe and Schiller.

The Literary Canon in Education

Until 1870 the history of literature played a leading role in the establishment of literary tradition: historians and critics debated over which authors were to be regarded as classic, how German literary history had developed, and where its climaxes occurred. The available histories of literature, however, were not binding on institutions of learning. They tell us nothing about what was taught at universities or how educational programs were developed in schools, particularly in Gymnasien, or secondary schools. Discussion among educators over the canon of reading matter was in fact largely independent; in any case it has a history of its own in the continuing discussion of the tasks and goals of the educational system. One must remember that the teaching of German in the Gymnasium was subordinate to that of classical studies (Greek and Latin). Before 1840 literature was taught primarily by the rhetorical method. Assigned texts were used for rhetorical analysis. It was not until the 1840s, with the encouragement of educators such as Robert Hiecke, that it began to be recognized that the teaching of literature could contribute to the development of national literary awareness.

The first attempts to teach literature of Friedrich Niethammer at the beginning of the nineteenth century made no headway against the new humanism of Friedrich Thiersch. It was Hiecke, in his fundamental work of 1842, Der deutsche Unterricht auf deutschen Gymnasien (German Instruction in German Secondary Schools), who presented a reading program for German studies conceived as a national program of education. His ideas largely coincided with those of the liberal literary historians. Returning to Herder’s position, Hiecke insisted that Gymnasium education should include a systematic consideration of German

literature. His immediate concern was to put instruction in German literature on an equal footing with that of Greek and Latin literature. Hiecke justified this extension of the canon by maintaining that drills in the ancient texts was meaningful only from the standpoint of native literature. His task, however, was different from the literary historian's, because he had to find a selection of readings which was suitable for the schools and took into consideration the intellectual maturity of various age groups. For this reason, his program does not yet expose the lower and middle Gymnasium classes to the grand tradition. On the lower and middle levels of instruction in German, biblical stories, fairy tales, travel accounts, and the like are used to prepare the student for the reception of literature in the narrower sense. That task begins in the Sekunda (the sixth and seventh years of secondary school), where Herder's Cid, the Nibelungenlied, patriotic lyric poetry by Ewald von Kleist and Karl Wilhelm Ramler, and some of Klopstock's odes are read. In addition, Hiecke recommended selected dramas by Goethe and Schiller, such as Götz von Berlichingen or Wilhelm Tell and possibly Wallenstein. Only in the Prima (the eighth and ninth years) was the strict classical canon of German literature to be studied. Some of the decisions made by Hiecke in his program had considerable influence on subsequent debate. He wanted not merely to educate students but to create a profound intellectual relationship between them and their nation, and he chose his texts accordingly.

Hiecke's selection corresponds largely to the authors emphasized in literary history. It centers on Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe, who give clear expression to the "national spirit." Their works are to be more highly valued than those of others because, in Hiecke's view, they afford a greater understanding of the development of the German Geist and a better grasp of its ultimate goal. Characteristically, neither Klopstock nor Herder have comparable standing in this respect. Like Wieland, they qualify as precursors, who must be considered, of course, but who are not the main focus. Hiecke at least refers to Klopstock and Herder by name, but he no longer recommends Wieland. Jean Paul is considered marginally, and the romantic generation is mentioned, though not without bias. To study the German character, students should read something by Ludwig Tieck and above all be familiar with Ludwig Uhland's works. At this point it becomes eminently clear that Hiecke's choice of works to be studied is not governed exclusively by a literary point of view but by a national-political one as well. He wishes

47 Robert Heinrich Hiecke, Der deutsche Unterricht auf deutschen Gymnasien (Leipzig, 1842), pp. 89-91.
48 Ibid., p. 106.
to reshape the concept of humanistic literature, which was linked to antiquity, by giving it a basis in the national German tradition.

Hiecke's program was by no means generally accepted in the 1840s. It was strongly criticized by Christian educators such as F. J. Günther and H. Hülsmann. From a Christian point of view, Günther would sanction only Klopstock, whereas Hülsmann was at least willing to acknowledge Lessing and, to a certain extent, Goethe and Schiller. 49 Christian objections to the "pagan" classicists of Weimar—to neo-humanism in general—also helped shape the literary pedagogy of the 1850s. The Stiehl regulations on elementary education were the clearest expression of this attitude. On the whole, however, religious objections to Weimar classicism played a minor role after 1850.

The issues addressed by Hiecke were raised again by Rudolf von Raumer in his section on German studies in the second edition of Karl von Raumer's Geschichte der Pädagogik, even though he advocated an entirely different didactic theory. Although Raumer rejected the analytical method of literary instruction and argued for an affirmative, unreflective assimilation, he continued to agree for the most part with Hiecke's literary canon. The number of authors and works included in the permanent heritage, and thus made recommended reading, has in fact become even smaller. Raumer's selection includes: "By Goethe: Götz von Berlichingen, Iphigenie, Hermann und Dorothea. By Schiller: Wallenstein, Wilhelm Tell, Jungfrau von Orleans. By Lessing: Minna von Barnhelm. In addition, some of Shakespeare's plays (perhaps Julius Caesar and Macbeth, but not Schiller's), Herder's Cid, and a play by Calderon." There is a conspicuous preference for the classicistic phase of Goethe's and Schiller's work and a total neglect of their early and late works. In Lessing's case, surprisingly, not even Nathan der Weise is included. Authors such as Klopstock, Wieland, and Jean Paul are not mentioned. Both the romantics and more recent literature—Heine, for instance—are omitted. Raumer's reduction of the canon to Lessing, Herder, Schiller, and Goethe is an isolated phenomenon, however, and he was not followed with such strictness by educators and writers of textbooks in the 1850s and 1860s. Classicality, on the other hand, became the crucial criterion for selection. Raumer, in fact, demanded a form of learning by students which precisely repressed reflection. "The task of the school with respect to recent German literature," he writes in opposition to Hiecke, "accordingly will be far more to transmit than to enlighten." What Raumer meant by this is clear from his suggestion that lyric poetry should be left primarily to classes in singing; it would

thus be learned and assimilated through “singing and recitation.” For didactic reasons Raumer opposes the expository method: explanations presumably remain subordinate to the direct impression made by a great work. Though justifiable in part, this argument has one (perhaps unintentional) side effect: German instruction as envisioned in Raumer’s pedagogy dogmatically defines tradition. It tacitly assumes that the reception of masterpieces is an affirmative one, because appropriate selection by an experienced educator has already eliminated those texts that could “confuse” the student’s education. Raumer is aware that educators and teachers interfere in the process of a developing literary tradition, and he therefore asks himself, “Who then should decide what is superior and what is not?” His conclusion is that “no matter how uncertain the judgment may be in individual cases, this question can still be answered. The decision depends on lasting recognition by the best among the Volk.”

He expounds this viewpoint of historical efficacy in such a way that, in the final analysis, the decision falls to public opinion. The schools merely follow prevailing opinion in their selection. It thus follows that Raumer’s selection ultimately reflects the conclusions arrived at in the course of literary historical discussion.

Despite some disagreement, Ernst Laas basically still follows Raumer in the 1870s. He extends the canon somewhat, allowing the poems of Uhland, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Adalbert von Chamisso, and Heine, for example, to be read in the lower classes. But he, too, concentrates his selection for the upper level on Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing. In addition, he suggests as reading material for the upper Secunda Walter von der Vogelweide, Herder (Der Cid), and Shakespeare. Unlike Raumer, he again gives a more prominent place to literary history. The history of German literature, beginning with the poetry of the Germanic tribes and ending with the sixteenth century, is to be briefly covered in the Secunda, so that German instruction in the Prima can concentrate on the period between 1500 and 1800. As in Gervinus, Laas’s introduction to recent literature ends with 1815. After that, Germany had a political task to fulfill: just as a classic national literature had to be created in the eighteenth century, so a national state had to be built in the nineteenth.

In Laas, the history of literature, which Raumer wanted to exclude from Gymnasium instruction, has become a solid part of the reading program. But with him, too, the notion that students must be guided toward the apogee of German literature in the late eighteenth

51Ernst Laas, Der Deutsch-Unterricht auf höheren Lehranstalten (Berlin, 1886), pp. 268–97, esp. 295.
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century is always in the background. Literary history is a preparation for masterpieces. This tendency was legitimized by the Austrian government in 1849 in an organizational plan calling for the reading of Middle High German texts in the Obergymnasium along with a cursory treatment of the history of literature. Recent German literature, from Herder to the present, was delegated to the third class (fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds), while the fourth and last class was to grapple with the masterpieces of Greek, Roman, and German literature. In Prussia, in contrast, literary history gradually replaced rhetoric in the 1820s and 1830s, until Hiecke raised objections to this equation of literary instruction and literary history. Georg Jäger has rightly pointed out that the combination of literary history and selected readings had already formed the nucleus of German instruction in the Vormärz. We might add that this linkage is the very reason that the problem of constructing a canon became a fundamental issue.

The Literary Canon about 1870

If one attempts to reconstruct the literary tradition as it appeared to the educated literary public in about 1870, no uniform picture emerges. With a few exceptions, however, it was generally agreed that the unified German Reich under Bismarck had a literary heritage that could be drawn on collectively. Guiding principles for the legitimation of the new Reich were discovered more in the history of literature than in the history of politics, where Prussians, Saxons, Holsteiners, and Württembergers could hardly be said to have a common fund of experience. The fragmentation of Germany was overcome earlier in the literary than in the political sphere. In the former, a significant change did in fact occur around 1870: the concept of national literature no longer had to serve as a blueprint for a national political history; the political unity that had been achieved henceforth exerted its influence on the history of literature. The literary heritage now became the property of the newly formed nation. No matter how the literary tradition was defined by critics, historians, educators, and journalists—no matter which authors were included or excluded—the educated had agreed by about 1870 that, like their European neighbors, the Germans possessed a corpus of classic authors and works which gave them legitimacy as a “civilized people” (Kulturvolk). Despite the many changes and shifts occurring after 1870 (Hölderlin and Kleist were more highly regarded, and

52 See Adolf Matthias, Geschichte des deutschen Unterrichts (Munich, 1907), p. 394.
Büchner was discovered), the process of establishing this canon was essentially complete. The outlines of what was regarded as the true tradition were set. Goethe scholarship no longer had to justify itself after 1870, and for this reason alone it had a different mode of articulation. In 1872 Goethe's greatness and importance were so taken for granted by David Friedrich Strauss that it was inconceivable for Strauss to criticize the “primeval rock that dominates our horizon.” In his affirmation of the new belief, Strauss expected educated Germans to identify with Goethe: “His works in themselves constitute a library so rich, so full of the most wholesome and strengthening nourishment for the spirit, that one could reasonably dispense with all other books.”

What matters here is not Goethe's distinguished position but rather the assurance that the works of this canonical classicist suffice to give intellectual fulfillment to the educated reader. A remark in Nietzsche's posthumous papers shows clearly what was involved: “‘Culture’ tried to settle down on the foundation laid by Schiller and Goethe as if on a couch.” The establishment of a literary heritage did in fact give rise to the claim that Germany was a cultivated nation, a claim Nietzsche disputed: “There is no German culture because there is not yet a German style of art. Incredible amount of work by Schiller [and] Goethe to achieve a German style. Cosmopolitan tendency necessary.”

The first of his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen (Untimely Meditations) demonstrates by the example of Strauss what canonization had led to: the erection of a wax museum in which the classicists retain no more than a semblance of life. They have become counters in the game of learned commentary and sophisticated tea-table conversation. In Nietzsche's view, the greatly admired classicists have become harmless, the property of a public who fancied that in the war of 1870 it had triumphed over French culture.

Herman Grimm's lectures on Goethe, delivered in 1874 and 1875, illustrate the attitude to which Nietzsche objected. Grimm assures his audience that Goethe's place is beside Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, and that neighboring modern nations have no one comparable to him. When Grimm compares Goethe to Voltaire, the verdict, as might be expected after 1870, is not in favor of the French writer. Grimm puts the literary tradition frankly at the service of politics. As he openly says, the founding of the Reich changed the relationship between Germany and its heritage: “Before Germany became unified and free and stood politically on its own feet, the goal of our historical work was to sub-

55 Quoted in Mandelkow, Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker, pt. 3 (Munich, 1979), p. 21.
merge ourselves in the past, from which, as secret advocates of a process that could not openly be called by its true name, we dared to derive a better present for ourselves. All historical works bore the secret motto: things cannot possibly remain as they are in Germany.” In 1874, in contrast, gifts no longer had to be won but instead could be “held fast, developed, and exploited.”56 Grimm, like most of his contemporaries, was so preoccupied with this reversal that he was unaware of the consequences of such a redefinition of what tradition had to accomplish. What was the significance of retaining a more or less fixed concept of canonical authors and works once the ostensible goal of history had been achieved? What task fell to the classic writers? What would happen if the process described by Grimm continued; if the new Reich changed historically?

The solution to the problem proposed by Grimm and Strauss was to create a heroic aura around the classic authors. The contemporary public was made to swear allegiance to an author removed in time. Goethe now became an Olympian. Thus Herman Grimm announces in his final lecture on Goethe’s life in Weimar that “Weimar . . . had become a real place of retirement for Goethe, where he worked quietly in his own residence, next to that of Carl August. For someone of his nature, this undisturbed yet eventful existence was a real gift of providence. He reigned there in a natural way, unbothered by the envy of others, and with regal goodwill was pleased to receive anyone who knocked at his door.”57 In his theater criticism Theodor Fontane proposed a different solution: viewers would be lifted out of their everyday existence, and the language and ideas of the classic authors brought to life for them, by staging the familiar dramas of Schiller and Goethe. “There is a growing desire,” we read in his review of a production of Schiller’s Piccolomini in November 1871, “to escape from wretched insipidity.”58

The third, and probably the most interesting, solution to the problem of constructing a literary tradition is found in the writings of Nietzsche. He argued that the problem of tradition should be viewed from a different perspective. It had been taken as established fact since Gervinus, Hettner, and Schmidt that the evolution of German literature had culminated in Weimar classicism, that the German spirit had come into its own in the course of this development, and above all that it represented a release from the hegemony of French literature. Nietzsche turned that judgment upside down: he regarded this process as the ruin

56Grimm, Goethe, 1:8.
57Ibid., 2:300–301.
of European classicism in Germany. Goethe and Schiller could never quite compensate for Lessing's destructive work. If there was anything that distinguished German tradition, it was its lack of tradition, of classicality. Nietzsche's early criticism of the bourgeois concept of classicism (of the cultural philistines) is intensified in 1878 in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human) to a fundamental criticism of German tradition and the historical concept supporting it. Lessing no longer appears as the great precursor of German classicism but rather as the destroyer of French classicism, which could still claim Greek antiquity as its authority: "One only has to read Voltaire's *Mahomet* from time to time to bring clearly before one's soul what European culture has lost once and for all through this breach with tradition. Voltaire was the last great dramatist to subdue through Greek moderation a soul many-formed and equal to the mightiest thunderstorms of tragedy—he was able to do what no German has yet been able to do because the nature of the Frenchman is much more closely related to the Greek than is the nature of the German." From this perspective, the classicistic Goethe could at most be acknowledged as an author who tried to recapture Greek tradition—the belated, exceptional case in German literature. The structure so painstakingly erected by liberal historiographers has been torn down. Except for Goethe, the German classicists fail to pass Nietzsche's test.

The radicalism of this polemic, however, does not lie so much in its attacks on individual authors—Schiller, for example—as in its intention of undermining the entrenched concept of tradition as such. This intention was already announced in Nietzsche's first *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung*, in which he deplored the German victory over France as a danger to German culture. For the majority of critics it was an accepted fact that the way for this victory had been paved by German literature and that the outcome represented the fulfillment of the German tradition. Nietzsche hit upon the model from which this concept of tradition drew its strength by making a sharp distinction between the political and cultural spheres. His judgments of Goethe and of Schiller—who he increasingly separated from Goethe and classified with the rest of German writers—can only be understood against the background of this general problematization of the German tradition. Could a connection with the literature of the past still be taken for granted? Were the classic canonical writers really as alive as critics and historians assumed? Academic literary history, the discipline entrusted with the task of constructing and guarding tradition, overlooked this question, be-

cause it relied unthinkingly on the category of historical development. Even though in the discussion of classicism after 1850 an increasing number of voices emphasized the historical distance between their time and the closing years of the eighteenth century, this historicization remained within the framework of a historical model that relied largely on the efficacy of the literary heritage. Historicization in the hands of such writers as Haym and Dilthey was not a renunciation of this heritage but rather a strategy for ending controversy over the relationship between classicism and romanticism. What did not enter into discussion of the literary heritage was the striking changes that occurred in the institution of literature, such as the rise of a new reading public and the growing capitalization of the literary marketplace.