

European Literature

MAN'S KNOWLEDGE of nature has made greater advances since the nineteenth century than in all preceding epochs. Indeed, compared with earlier advances, they may be called incommensurable. They have changed the forms of existence and they open new possibilities whose range cannot be estimated. Less well known, because less perceptible, are the advances in historical knowledge. These alter, not the forms of life, but the forms of thought of those who share in them. They lead to a widening and a clarification of consciousness. In time, the operation of this process can be of significance in the solution of humanity's practical problems too. For the greatest enemy of moral and social advance is dullness and narrowness of consciousness, to which anti-social feelings of every kind contribute as powerfully as does indolence of thought, that is, the principle of the least possible expenditure of energy (*vis inertiae*). The advances in our knowledge of nature are verifiable. There are no differences of opinion concerning the periodicity of the chemical elements. The advance of historical knowledge, on the other hand, can be enjoyed only through voluntary participation. It has no useful economic effect, no calculably useful social effect. Hence it encounters indifference or even resistance from the interested egoism embodied in powerful agencies.¹ The protagonists of progress in historical understanding are always isolated individuals, who are led by such historical convulsions as wars and revolutions to put new questions. Thucydides was induced to

¹ It is perhaps not untimely to refer to a warning which dates from 1926. "The expansion of democracy," wrote Max Scheler, "once the ally of free scholarship and philosophy against the supremacy of the ecclesiastically restricted mind, is slowly becoming the greatest danger to intellectual freedom. The type of democracy which condemned Socrates and Anaxagoras in Athens is slowly reappearing in the West and perhaps in North America too. Only the struggling, predominantly liberal democracy of relatively 'small elites'—so the facts already teach us—is an ally of science and philosophy. The democracy now dominant, and finally extended to women and half-children, is not the friend but rather the enemy of reason and science." (Max Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* [1926], 89).

undertake his history because he regarded the Peloponnesian War as the greatest war of all times. Augustine wrote his *City of God* under the impact of Alaric's conquest of Rome. Machiavelli's political and historical writings are his reaction to the French expeditions into Italy. The revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic wars provoked Hegel's Philosophy of History. Upon the defeat of 1871 followed Taine's revision of French history, upon the establishment of the Hohenzollern empire, Nietzsche's "unseasonable" essay on the "Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life"—a precursor of the modern discussions of "historism." The end of the first World War was responsible for the resonance Spengler's *Decline of the West* found in Germany. Deeper in intent and saturated with the entire yield of German philosophy, theology, and history was Ernst Troeltsch's unfinished work, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (1922). Here the evolution of the modern historical consciousness and its present problems are developed in a manner still unsurpassed. The historization of all traditional values had gone further in Germany than in other countries. In Ranke it was connected with the pleasure of aesthetic contemplation (*Mitwissenschaft des Alls*). It is also alive in Burckhardt, but corrected by an awareness of the deep shadows in the picture. The awareness inspired him with prophetic warnings of the abuses of the omnipotent state—warnings which were verified in the twentieth century.

Through publication of sources and the excavations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries an immense amount of material accrued to history. From the caves of Périgord rose the culture of the paleolithic period, from the sands of Egypt the papyri. The Minoan and Hittite past of the Mediterranean basin, the remotest age of Egypt and Mesopotamia, together with exotic cultures such as those of the Mayas or of ancient India, became tangible. European culture stood in contrast to all these as an "intelligible unit" of unique cast, and Troeltsch's discussion of historism became a defining of the essence of "Europeanism." If in many quarters historism was deplored as an enervating relativism, or was skeptically tolerated, Troeltsch gave it the positive sign of a great task whose accomplishment will take generations: "The principle of construction is to go beyond history through history and clear the ground for new creations."

The first World War had made the crisis of European culture obvious. How do cultures, and the historical entities which are their media, arise, grow, and decay? Only a comparative morphology of cultures with exact procedures can hope to answer these questions. It was Arnold J. Toynbee who undertook the task. His historical method can signify, for all the historical sciences, a revision of bases and an expansion of horizons which has its analogy in atomic physics. It differs from all earlier philosophies of history by breadth of view and by an empiricism which is in the best English tradition. It is free from dogmatic hypotheses deduced from a principle. What are the ultimate units of the course of history, upon which the historian must train his vision in order to obtain "intelligible

fields of study'? They are not states, but more comprehensive historical entities, which Toynbee calls "societies" and which we may call cultures. How many of them are there? Twenty-one—neither more nor less. A very small number, then—which, however, makes comparisons possible. Each of these historical entities, through its physical and historical environment and through its inner development, is faced with problems of which it must stand the test. They are challenges, in which it grows or fails. Whether and how it responds to them decides its destiny. In Europe, the old Greek city-states during the period from *ca.* 725 to *ca.* 325 afford examples of how different members of the same historical entity can behave in the face of the same situation. Their common problem was an increasing inadequacy of the food supply as a result of population growth. Certain states—such as Corinth and Chalcis—take the step of overseas colonization. Sparta satisfies her land hunger by conquering the neighboring state of Messene. She is thus forced into a total militarization of her forms of life, the consequence of which is cultural paralysis. Athens specializes her agriculture and her industrial products (pottery) for export and makes new political arrangements to give a share in power to the classes called into being by the new economic system. What challenges had Rome to undergo? The decisive one was the century-long struggle with Carthage. After the First Punic War Carthage conquers Spain, intending to make that country's natural resources compensate for her losses in the war. Rome opposes her here, which leads to the Second Punic War. After a hard-won victory, Rome is obliged not only to take possession of Spain but also to secure land communication thither, which finally results in Caesar's conquest of Gaul. Why do the Romans stop at the Rhine, instead of pressing on to the Vistula or the Dnieper? Because in the Augustan Age their vitality was exhausted by two centuries of wars and revolutions. The economic and social revolutions after the Second Punic War had obliged Rome to import great hordes of slaves from the East. These form an "inner proletariat," bring in Oriental religions, and provide the basis on which Christianity, in the form of a "universal church," will make its way into the organism of the Roman universal state. When after the "interregnum" of the barbarian migrations, the Greco-Roman historical entity, in which the Germanic peoples form an "outer proletariat," is replaced by the new Western historical entity, the latter crystallizes along the line Rome–northern Gaul, which had been drawn by Caesar. But the Germanic "barbarians" fall prey to the church, which had survived the universal-state end phase of antique culture. They thereby forego the possibility of bringing a positive intellectual contribution to the new historical entity. They fail in the situation which had gained the northern emigrants into the Balkan peninsula the victory over the Cretomycenaean culture. The "Achaeans" forced their Greek tongue upon the conquered territory, whereas the Germans learned Latin. More precisely: The Franks gave up their language on the soil of Romanized Gaul.

These indications may perhaps give an impression of the fruitfulness of

Toynbee's point of view. They contain some of its basic concepts. We shall say only what is strictly necessary for an understanding of these. According to Toynbee, the life curves of cultures do not follow a fatally predetermined course, as they do according to Spengler. Though their courses are analogous, every culture is unique because it has freedom of choice between different ways of behaving. Individual cultural movements may be independent of one another (for example, the Mayan and Minoan cultures), but they may also be connected genealogically, so that one is the daughter culture of another. Antiquity and the West stand in this relationship, as do the Old Syriac and Arabic cultures and so on. The individual cultural movements take their place in a general movement, which is not to be conceived as progress but as ascent. The cultural entities and their members are seen in the likeness of men climbing a steep cliff—some remain behind, others mount higher and higher. This ascent from the depths of subman and of stationary primitive man is a rhythm in the cosmic pulse beat of life. Within each culture there are guiding minorities who, by attraction and radiation, move the majorities to accompany them. If the creative vitality of these minorities is crippled, they lose their magic power over the uncreative masses. The creative minority then remains only a ruling minority. This condition leads to a *secessio plebis*, that is, to the rise of an inner and outer proletariat and thus to loss of social unity.

These selected and isolated details cannot give even a remote idea of the richness and illuminating power of Toynbee's work—still less of the intellectual strictness of its structure and of the precise controls to which the material presented is subjected. I feel this objection. I can only offer in reply that it is better to give even an inadequate indication of the greatest intellectual accomplishment in the field of history in our day than to pass it over in silence. Such a silence in the face of a scientific discovery represents a concession to scientific intellectual inertia—the evasion, that is, of a “challenge” which breaks unseasonably into the routine of leisurely scholastic occupations. Toynbee's work represents such a challenge to our contemporary historical methods.

But I have had another reason for referring to it: A historical concept of Europe is a presupposition for our investigation. Europe is merely a name, a “geographical term” (as Metternich said of Italy), if it is not a historical entity in our perception. But the old-fashioned history of our textbooks cannot be that. General European history does not exist for it; it sees merely a coexistence of unconnected histories of peoples and states. The history of today's or yesterday's “great powers” is taught in artificial isolation, from the standpoint of national myths and ideologies. Thus Europe is dismembered into geographical fragments. By the current division into Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Period, it is also dismembered into chronological fragments. On pedagogical grounds, this twofold dismemberment is necessary to a certain extent (usually exceeded in practice). But it is equally necessary on pedagogical grounds to offset it by superimposing a general

view upon it. To comprehend this, we need only glance at the curricula of our schools. The historical picture in the schools always faithfully mirrors academic teaching of history. But from 1864 history in Germany was under the influence of Bismarck and the Hohenzollern empire. All the electors of Brandenburg had to be learned by heart. Did the Weimar Republic drop them? I do not know. But on the basis of the Republic's curricula, I do know how medieval history (919–1517) was parceled out to the eleventh grade. First, sixteen hours of Imperial history (four for the Saxons, five for the Salians, seven for the Hohenstaufen). Then four hours for the Crusades, and the same for “inner development and intellectual life of Germany.” German history of the later Middle Ages (1254–1517) got eleven hours. For the whole history of the Middle Ages outside of Germany, there remained nine hours: one for France (987–1515); one for England (871–1485); one for Spain (711–1516); two for the Discoveries; four for the Italian Renaissance. In England and France the proportions were doubtless the same. But Germany had gone through a defeat and a revolution. It could have profited by them and reformed the teaching of history. . . . Is that being done today? Europeanization of the historical picture has today become a political necessity, and not only for Germany.

The twentieth century's new knowledge of nature and new knowledge of history do not work against each other, as was the case in the era of the mechanistic view of the universe. The concept of freedom is making its way into natural science, and science is once again open to the questionings of religion (Max Planck). History, for its part, turns its attention to the problem of the rise of culture. It extends its view backwards to the prehistoric cultures. It measures the duration of the history we are able to survey by the age of humanity, and thence derives clues to the number of human cultures yet to be expected. Further, by comparing cultures, it attains to a typology of the myths which historical humanity has engendered, and interprets them as symbols of cosmic events. It opens its eyes to nature and religion.

The convergence of our knowledge of nature and our knowledge of history into a new, “open” picture of the universe is the scientific aspect of our time. At the close of his *Historismus* Troeltsch outlines the task of a concentration, simplification, and deepening of the intellectual and cultural content which the history of the West has given us and which must emerge from the crucible of historicism in a new completeness and coherence: “Most effectual would be a great artistic symbol, such as the *Divina Commedia* once was, and later *Faust*. . . .” It is remarkable that in Toynbee too—even though in an entirely different sense—poetic form appears as the extreme concept of historicism. His train of thought is as follows: The present state of our knowledge, which takes in barely six millenniums of historical development, is adequately served by a comparative method of investigation which attains to the establishment of laws by the road of induction. But if one imagines the stretch of history to be ten times or a hundred times

as long, the employment of a scientific technique becomes impossible. It must yield to a poetic form of presentation: "It will eventually become patently impossible to employ any technique except that of 'fiction.'"

Our survey of the modern historical method has led us to the concept of poetry in the sense of a narrative produced by the imagination ("fiction"). This is an elastic formula which comprehends the antique epic, the drama, and the novel of ancient and modern times. But Greek mythology falls within it too. For, as Herodotus says, Homer and Hesiod created their gods for the Greeks. The creative imagination which makes myths, stories, poems, is a primary function of mankind. Is it a final fact, which cannot be analyzed further? Or can philosophic thought resolve it and integrate it into our comprehension of the world? Among the numerous autarchic philosophies of contemporary Germany I see none capable of doing so. They are far too occupied with themselves and with the problems of "existence," and hence have little to give to one who thinks historically. The only philosopher who attacked the problem was Henri Bergson (1859-1941). In 1907 (*L'Évolution créatrice*) he had interpreted the cosmic process under the image of an "élan vital." Nature seeks to realize in matter a life which attains to consciousness. By various roads (many of which are blind alleys) life ascends to ever higher forms. In the world of insects it drives on to social forms among the ants and bees. They work perfectly, because they are guided by instinct. But for the same reason they are unchangeable, and no development lies before them. Only in man is consciousness realized. The imaginative power which attests itself in the whole realm of life by the creation of new species has found means only in humanity to continue itself in individuals who are vouchsafed intelligence and with it initiative, self-determination, and freedom. Man creates tools with which to work matter. Hence his intellect is adapted to the world of solid bodies and is most successful in the sphere of mechanics. But just as life is safe under the guidance of instinct, so it is endangered in the sphere of the intellect.² If intellect encounters no resistance, it can threaten the existence both of the individual and of society. It bows only to facts, i.e., to perceptions. If "Nature" wished to take precautions against the perils of the intellect, she would have to produce fictitious perceptions and facts. They have the effect of hallucinations, i.e., they appear to the mind to be real beings and can influence conduct. This explains the simultaneous existence of intelligence and superstition. "Only intelligent beings are superstitious." The fiction-making function ("fonction fabulatrice") has become necessary to life. It is nourished by the residuum of instinct which surrounds the intellect like an aura. Instinct cannot directly intervene to protect life. Since the intellect reacts only to perceived images, instinct creates "imaginary" perceptions.³ They may first appear as the undefined consciousness of an "operative presence" (the *numen* of the

² The following after *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1933).

³ This mechanism appears from time to time today, as Bergson (p. 125) shows by an example.

Romans), then as spirits, and, not until very late, as gods. Mythology is a late product, and the road to polytheism is a cultural advance. The imagination, maker of fiction and myths, has the function of “fabricating” spirits and gods.

We shall not here trace how Bergson’s metaphysics of religion culminates in its meeting with mysticism. Let it suffice to point out that Toynbee too (like Planck) confesses himself a Christian. The advance of natural and historical knowledge, like that of philosophy—upon which we have cast an all too hasty glance—also converges upon the affirmation of Christianity.

For our study, Bergson’s discovery of the “fabulatory function” is of basic importance. For thereby the much-debated relations between poetry and religion are for the first time cleared up conceptually and integrated into a comprehensive scientific picture of the universe. Whoever rejects Bergson’s theory must replace it by a better. It appears to me to require amplification only in one point. Bergson derives intelligence and the fabulatory function biologically. They are apparatuses brought forth by “Life” or “Nature” or the “creative drive” which underlies both. But it is a general law “that mechanisms of human nature which originally served the biological preservation of the species are in the course of evolution employed for extra-biological and superbiological ends as well” (Scheler). Eyes and ears originally served as protection in the struggle for existence. In the visual arts and music they have become organs of nonpurposeful ideal creation. The intelligence of the tool-forging *homo faber* has risen to a cognitive contemplation of the universe. The fabulatory function has risen from producing fictions for biological ends to creating gods and myths, and has finally freed itself entirely from the world of religion to become a free play. It is “the ability to create persons whose stories we tell to ourselves.”

It shaped the Gilgamesh epic and the myth of the snake in Paradise, the *Iliad* and the saga of Oedipus, Dante’s divine and Balzac’s human comedy. It is the root and inexhaustible spring of all great literature. Great in this sense is the poetry which survives through centuries and millenniums. It is such poetry which is the farthest horizon, the background, of the complex of European literature.

Now, turning to this subject, we shall understand Europe not in the geographical but in the historical sense. The “Europeanization of the historical picture” which is to be promoted today must also be applied to literature. If Europe is an entity which participates in two cultures, the Antique-Mediterranean and the Modern-Western, this is also true of its literature. That literature can be understood as a whole only if its two components are united in one view. But for current literary history modern Europe does not begin until about 1500. This is as intelligent as if one were to promise a description of the Rhine, but only provided the section from Mainz to Cologne. To be sure, there is a “medieval” literary history

too. It begins about 1000—that is, to pursue the metaphor, as far downstream as Strassburg. But where is the period from 400 to 1000? For that one would have to start at Basel. . . . This stretch is passed over in silence—for a very simple reason: the literature of those centuries, with infinitesimal exceptions, is in Latin. Why? Because the Germanic peoples, as we have indicated, allowed themselves to be assimilated by Rome in the form of the Roman Church. And we must go further back. The literature of “modern” Europe is as intermingled with that of the Mediterranean as if the Rhine had received the waters of the Tiber. The last great poet of Rhenish-Franconian descent, Stefan George, felt that he belonged by a secret elective affinity to Roman Germania and the Frankish intermediate kingdom of Lotharingia, from which his ancestors stemmed. In six cryptic gnomic poems on the Rhine he has as in a dream conjured the memory of that kingdom into the future. It will throw off the dominion of East and West, Germany and France:

*Ein fürstlich paar geschwister hielt in frone
Bisher des weiten Innenreiches mitte.
Bald wacht aus dem jahrhundertschlaf das dritte
Auch echte Kind und hebt im Rhein die Krone.*

(In vassalage a princely pair of brothers
Has held the center of the wide Inner Kingdom.
Soon from centennial sleep shall wake the third
Legitimate Child and raise the Crown in the Rhine.)

He who has ties with the Rhine may let the poet's myth sound within him. Four cities are named: the “First City” (Basel), the “Silver City” (Argentoratum, Strassburg), the “Golden City” (Mainz), and “holy” Cologne. The risen river speaks:

*Den eklen schutt von rötel kalk und teer
Spei ich hinaus ins reinigende meer.*

(The loathsome rubble of reddle, chalk, and tar
I spew into the purifying sea.)

A reader pointed out to the poet that “reddle, chalk, and tar” corresponded to the national colors of imperial Germany. He smilingly accepted the interpretation. The last gnome of the Rhine runs:

*Sprecht von des Festes von des Reiches nähe—
Sprecht erst vom neuen wein in neuen schlauch:
Wenn ganz durch eure seelen dumpf und zähe
Mein feurig blut sich regt, mein römischer hauch.*

(Speak of the Festival's nearness, of the Kingdom's—
Of new wine in new skin: but speak it not
Until through all your dull and toughened souls
Shall run my fiery blood, my Roman breath.)

The lines are from *Der siebente Ring* (1907). Beside them I set the testimony of the Rhenish-Franconian Goethe. Sulpiz Boisserée reports, under date of August 11, 1815: "The subject of Goethe's predilection for things Roman came up. He said that he certainly must once have lived under Hadrian. That everything Roman instinctively attracted him. That that great reasonableness, that order in everything, were congenial to him, whereas things Greek were not." I cite these testimonies because they document a tie between Germany, which once formed part of the Roman Empire, and Rome—a tie which is not sentimental reflection, but participation in substance. In such consciousness history enters the present. Here we become aware of Europe.

We spoke of the twofold dismemberment of Europe in our historical curriculum. If we turn to literary history, the question is no longer one of dismemberment but one of a total deficiency. In history courses the school-boy still hears something of Marathon and Cannae, of Pericles, Caesar, and Augustus, before he is conducted from Charlemagne to the present. But what does he learn of European literature? Let us disregard the schools and ask: Is there a science of European literature, and is it cultivated at the universities? For half a century, at any rate, there has been a *Literaturwissenschaft*.⁴ It undertakes to be something other and better than literary history (the relation of *Kunstwissenschaft* to art history is analogous). It is not well disposed to philology. Hence it seeks support in other disciplines: philosophy (Dilthey, Bergson), sociology, psychoanalysis, and, above all, art history (Wölfflin). Philosophizing *Literaturwissenschaft* examines literature for metaphysical and ethical problems (e.g., death and love). It wishes to be *Geistesgeschichte*. The trend which finds its support in art history operates on the extremely questionable principle of "mutual illumination of the arts" and thus begets a dilettante beclouding of facts. It then proceeds to transfer to literature the art-historical system of periodization by successive styles. Thus we get literary Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, etc., down to Im- and Expressionism. Then, by the process of "essence-intuition," each stylistic period is endowed with an "essence" and peopled with a special "man." The "Gothic man" (to whom Huizinga has added a "pre-Gothic" comrade) has become the most popular, but "Baroque man" cannot be far behind him.⁵ Concerning the "es-

⁴ Officially introduced, as far as I know, by the *Prinzipien der Literaturwissenschaft* of the Germanist Ernst Elster (1897).—The relations between *Literaturwissenschaft* and comparative literature have not been elucidated. A *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* was founded in 1885 by Max Koch (1855–1931). I mention also H. M. Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (New York, 1886).—W. Wetz, *Shakespeare vom Standpunkt der vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* (1890).—L. P. Betz, *La Littérature comparée* (1900).—For criticism: Gröber, *Grundriss der romanischen Philologie*, Vol. I (2nd ed., 1904–06), 181.—F. Baldensperger, "Littérature comparée. Le mot et la chose" (*Revue de littérature comparée*, I [1921], 1–29).

⁵ René Wellek, "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, V (1946), 77 ff.

sence" of Gothic, of Baroque, etc., there are profound views, which to be sure are partly contradictory. Is Shakespeare Renaissance or Baroque? Is Baudelaire Impressionist, George Expressionist? Much intellectual energy is expended upon such problems. In addition to stylistic periods there are Wölfflin's art-historical "basic concepts." Here we find "open" and "closed" form. Is Goethe's *Faust* in the last analysis open, Valéry's closed? An anxious question! Is there even, as Karl Joël, with much acumen and much historical knowledge, attempted to show,⁶ a regular succession of "binding" and "loosing" centuries (each equipped with its own "secular spirit")? In the Modern Period the even centuries are "loosing" (the 14th, 16th, 18th; and to all appearances the 20th too), the uneven "binding" (the 13th, 15th, 17th, 19th), and so on *ad infinitum*. Joël was a philosopher. Usually, those who cultivate *Literaturwissenschaft* are Germanists. Now, of all so-called national literatures, German literature is the most unsuitable as the field of departure and field of observation for European literature, as will appear. Is this perhaps a reason for the strong need of outside support exhibited by Germanistic *Literaturwissenschaft*? But it shares with all the modern trends of *Literaturwissenschaft* the characteristic that at best it makes literature begin about 1100—because the Romanesque architectural style flowered then. But art history is as little a superdiscipline as geography or sociology. Troeltsch was already making fun of the "all-knowing art historian."⁷ Modern *Literaturwissenschaft*—i.e., that of the last fifty years—is largely a phantom. It is incompetent as a discipline for the investigation of European literature for two reasons: deliberate narrowing of the field of observation and failure to recognize the autonomous structure of literature.

European literature is coextensive in time with European culture, therefore embraces a period of some twenty-six centuries (reckoning from Homer to Goethe). Anyone who knows only six or seven of these from his own observation and has to rely on manuals and reference books for the others is like a traveler who knows Italy only from the Alps to the Arno and gets the rest from Baedeker. Anyone who knows only the Middle Ages and the Modern Period does not even understand these two. For in his small field of observation he encounters phenomena such as "epic," "Classicism," "Baroque" (i.e., Mannerism), and many others, whose history and significance are to be understood only from the earlier periods of European literature. To see European literature as a whole is possible only after one has acquired citizenship in every period from Homer to Goethe. This cannot be got from a textbook, even if such a textbook existed. One acquires the rights of citizenship in the country of European literature only when one has spent many years in each of its provinces and has frequently moved about from one to another. One is a European when one has become a *civis Romanus*. The division of European literature among a number of unconnected philologies almost completely prevents this. Though "classi-

⁶ Karl Joël, *Wandlungen der Weltanschauung. Eine Philosophiegeschichte als Geschichtsphilosophie* (1928).

⁷ *Der Historismus*, p. 734.—Cf. *infra*, n. 11.

cal" philology goes beyond Augustan literature in research, it seldom does so in teaching. The "modern" philologies are oriented toward the modern "national literatures"—a concept which was first established after the awakening of nationalities under the pressure of the Napoleonic superstate, which is therefore highly time-conditioned and hence still more obstructive of any view of the whole. And yet the work of philologists in the last four or five generations has created such a quantity of aids that it is precisely their wrongly decried specialization which has made it possible for one to find one's way about each of the principal European literatures with some linguistic equipment. Specialization has thus opened the way to a new universalization. But the fact is still unknown, and little use is made of it.

As we have already indicated, no stretch of European literary history is so little known and frequented as the Latin literature of the early and high Middle Ages. And yet the historical view of Europe makes it clear that precisely this stretch occupies a key situation as the connecting link between declining Antiquity and the Western world which was so very slowly taking shape. But it is cultivated—under the name of "medieval Latin philology"—by a very small number of specialists. In Europe there might be a dozen of them. For the rest, the Middle Ages is divided between the Catholic philosophers (i.e., the representatives of the history of dogma in faculties of Catholic theology) and the representatives of medieval history at our universities. Both groups have to deal with manuscript sources and texts—hence with literature. The medieval Latinists, the historians of Scholasticism, and the political historians, however, have little contact with one another. The same is true of the modern philologists. These also work on the Middle Ages, but they usually remain as aloof from medieval Latin philology as they do from general literary, political, and cultural history. Thus the Middle Ages is dismembered into specialties which have no contact. There is no general discipline of the Middle Ages—a further impediment to the study of European literature. Troeltsch could rightly say in 1922: "The culture of the Middle Ages still awaits presentation" (*Der Historismus*, 767). That is still true today. The culture of the Middle Ages cannot yet be presented, because its Latin literature has as yet been incompletely studied. In this sense the Middle Ages is still as dark today as it—wrongly—appeared to the Italian Humanists. For that very reason a historical consideration of European literature must begin at this darkest point. The present study is therefore entitled *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, and we hope that this title will justify its purport with increasing evidence from chapter to chapter.

Are we not, however, setting up an unrealizable program? The assertion will certainly be made by the "guardians of Zion"—so Aby Warburg used to call the proprietors and boundary guards of the specialties. They have inherited rights and interests to preserve—*Los Intereses creados*, as Jacinto Benavente, Nobel prize winner in 1922, entitled one of his comedies. Their objection means little. The problem of the broadening of our humanistic

disciplines is real, pressing, general—and solvable. Toynbee proves it. Bergson discusses it, using metaphysics as his example: “Here is a philosophical problem. We did not choose it, we encountered it. It closes our road. Nothing remains except to remove the obstacle or else to cease philosophizing. The difficulty must be solved, the problem analyzed in its elements. Where will this lead us? No one knows. No one can even say what science is competent for the new problem. It may be a science to which one is wholly a stranger. What am I saying? It will not suffice to become acquainted with it or even to obtain a profound knowledge of it. We shall sometimes be obliged to revise certain procedures, certain habits, certain theories, to conform with precisely the facts and the grounds which raised new questions. Very good; we will study the science that we did not know, we will go into it deeply, if need be we will revise it. And if that takes months or years? Then we will spend whatever time it takes. And if one life is not long enough? Then several lives will accomplish it; no philosopher today is obliged to build up the whole of philosophy. So we shall talk to the philosopher. Such is the method we propose to him. It demands that, however old he may be, he is ready to become a student again.”⁸ He who would study European literature has an easier task than Bergson’s philosopher. He has only to familiarize himself with the methods and subjects of classical, medieval Latin, and modern philology. He will “spend whatever time it takes.” And in the process he will learn enough to make him see the modern national literatures with different eyes.

He will learn that European literature is an “intelligible unit,” which disappears from view when it is cut into pieces. He will recognize that it has an autonomous structure, which is essentially different from that of the visual arts.⁹ Simply because, all else aside, literature is the medium of ideas, art not. But literature also has different forms of movement, of growth, of continuity, from art. It possesses a freedom which is denied to art. For literature, all the past is present, or can become so. Homer is brought to us anew in a new translation, and Rudolf Alexander Schröder’s Homer is different from Voss’s. I can take up Homer or Plato at any hour, I “have” him then, and have him wholly. He exists in innumerable copies. The Parthenon and St. Peter’s exist only once, I can make them visible to me by photographs only partially and shadowily. But their photographs give me no marble, I cannot touch them, cannot walk about in them, as I can in the *Odyssey* or the *Divina Commedia*. In the book, the poem is really present. I do not “have” a Titian either in a photograph or in the most nearly perfect copy, even if the latter were available for a few dollars. With the literature of all times and peoples I can have a direct, intimate, and engrossing vital relationship, with art not. Works of art I have to contemplate in museums. The book is more real by far than the picture. Here we have a truly ontological relationship and real participation in an intellectual entity. But

⁸ Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant* (1934), 84 f.

⁹ Lessing discussed “the boundaries between painting and poetry” as early as 1766.

a book, apart from everything else, is a “text.” One understands it or one does not understand it. Perhaps it contains “difficult” passages. One needs a technique to unravel them. Its name is philology. Since *Literaturwissenschaft* has to deal with texts, it is helpless without philology. No intuition and “essence-intuition” can supply the want of it. So-called *Kunstwissenschaft*¹⁰ has an easier time. It works with pictures—and photographic slides. Here there is nothing intelligible. To understand Pindar’s poems requires severe mental effort—to understand the Parthenon frieze does not. The same relation obtains between Dante and the cathedrals, and so on. Knowing pictures is easy compared with knowing books. Now, if it is possible to learn the “essence of Gothic” from the cathedrals, one need no longer read Dante. On the contrary! Literary history (and that repellent thing philology!) needs to learn from art history! In all this, one thing is forgotten—namely that, as we pointed out, there are essential differences between the book and the picture. The possibility of having Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe at any time and “wholly” shows that literature has a different mode of existence from art. But from this it follows that literary creation is subject to other laws than artistic creation. The “timeless present” which is an essential characteristic of literature means that the literature of the past can always be active in that of the present. So Homer in Virgil, Virgil in Dante, Plutarch and Seneca in Shakespeare, Shakespeare in Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen*, Euripides in Racine’s *Iphigenia* and Goethe’s. Or in our day: *The Thousand and One Nights* and Calderón in Hofmannsthal; the *Odyssey* in Joyce; Aeschylus, Petronius, Dante, Tristan Corbière, Spanish mysticism in T. S. Eliot. There is here an inexhaustible wealth of possible interrelations. Furthermore, there is the garden of literary forms—be they the genres (which Croce is forced by his philosophical system to declare unreal!) or metrical and stanzaic forms; be they set formulas or narrative motifs or linguistic devices. It is a boundless realm. Finally, there is the wealth of figures which literature has formed and which can forever pass into new bodies: Achilles, Oedipus, Semiramis, Faust, Don Juan. André Gide’s last and ripest work is a *Theseus* (1946).

Just as European literature can only be seen as a whole, so the study of it can only proceed historically. Not in the form of literary history! A narrative and enumerative history never yields anything but a catalogue-like knowledge of facts. The material itself it leaves in whatever form it found it. But historical investigation has to unravel it and penetrate it. It has to develop analytical methods, that is, methods which will “decompose” the material (after the fashion of chemistry with its reagents) and make its structures visible. The necessary point of view can only be gained from a comparative perusal of literatures, that is, can only be discovered empirically. Only a literary discipline which proceeds historically and philologically can do justice to the task.

¹⁰ I distinguish it from the historical discipline of art history.

Such a “science of European literature” has no place in the pigeonholes of our universities and can have none. Academic organization of philological and literary studies corresponds to the intellectual picture in 1850. Seen from 1950, that picture is as obsolete as the railroads of 1850. We have modernized the railroads, but not our system of transmitting tradition. How that would have to be done cannot be discussed here. But one thing may be said: Without a modernized study of European literature there can be no cultivation of the European tradition.

The founding hero (*heros ktistes*) of European literature is Homer. Its last universal author is Goethe. What Goethe means for Germany Hofmannsthal has put in two statements: “Goethe as the basis of an education can replace an entire culture.” And: “We have no modern literature. We have Goethe and beginnings.” A heavy judgment upon German literature since Goethe’s death. But Valéry too says cuttingly: “Le moderne se contente de peu.” European literature of the nineteenth and the twentieth century has not yet been sifted, what is dead has not yet been separated from what is alive. It can furnish subjects for dissertations. But the final word upon it belongs not to literary history but to literary criticism. For that in Germany we have Friedrich Schlegel—and beginnings.¹¹

¹¹ The above chapter was published in advance of the book, in 1947, in a journal. Objection was expressed from the art-historical side. Offense was taken at the statement that literature was the medium of ideas, art not. I therefore clarify: Were Plato’s writings lost, we could not reconstruct them from Greek plastic art. The *Logos* can express itself only in words.