

## Envisioning World Literature in 1863: From the Reports on a Mission Abroad

### Introduction

*Veselovsky has assigned a task to scholarship which can hardly ever be solved. The Russian formalists, however, have taken up his challenge.*

—René Wellek (279)

*The task, which many feel is beyond their abilities, lies within the power of scholarship.*

—A. N. Veselovsky

ALEXANDER NIKOLAEVICH VESELOVSKY (1838–1906) IS WIDELY RE-GARDED AS RUSSIA’S MOST DISTINGUISHED AND INFLUENTIAL LITERARY theorist before the formation of Opoyaz (“Society for the Study of Poetic Language”), whose members—Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yury Tynianov, Roman Jakobson, and others—developed the approach generally known as Russian formalism. Readers of Shklovsky may note the prominence accorded to Veselovsky in *Theory of Prose* (1925). Some will also recall the use of the term *historical poetics*—in reference to the method put forward by Veselovsky—in the 1963 edition of Mikhail Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky and in his “The Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics” (1937–38, pub. in 1975). Another eloquent testimony to Veselovsky’s spectral ubiquity in Russian literary theory is the concluding paragraph of Vladimir Propp’s pathbreaking *Morphology of the Folktale*, where Propp humbly asserts that his “propositions, although they appear to be new, were intuitively foreseen by none other than Veselovsky” and ends his study with an extensive quotation from Veselovsky’s *Poetics of Plot* (115–16). It is rarely recognized, however, that Veselovsky’s method, in its rudimentary form, constitutes a common denominator of Shklovsky’s, Bakhtin’s, and Propp’s widely divergent approaches.<sup>1</sup>

*Historical Poetics*, Veselovsky’s magnum opus, left incomplete at the time of his death, is generally held to be the foundational work of Russian literary criticism. Veselovsky conceived of it as a summation of his life’s work, which included books on Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Vasily Zhukovsky and studies

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on topics as diverse as Italian Renaissance culture, Slavic folklore, comparative epic studies, the ancient Greek novel, and East-West literary ties. These studies are exemplary in their erudition and attention to detail. To quote René Wellek's assessment, Veselovsky "must be classed among the greatest literary scholars of the [nineteenth] century in breadth of knowledge and scope of competence" (278–79).

The two epigraphs encapsulate the challenge Veselovsky faced in his early methodological reflections, translated here.<sup>2</sup> The challenge was no less than a complete overhaul of the study of literature that would raise it to the standards of rigorous, "scientific" inquiry exemplified by such newly established disciplines as ethnography, comparative linguistics, and comparative mythology. Veselovsky's youthful attempt at conceptualizing literary history evokes the promise, as well as the predicaments, of the emergent scholarly field of world (general) literature, which would later be transformed into the discipline of comparative literature. In particular, these reflections question the currently widespread view that the nineteenth-century discourse on world literature—and, more broadly, nineteenth-century comparatist thinking on literature—sprang from and continued Goethe's fragmentary reflections on *Weltliteratur*.<sup>3</sup> Veselovsky's remarks, issuing from the German academy of the early 1860s, attest to the vitality of a paradigm of literary comparatism formulated on analogy with such established disciplines as comparative philology and general (universal) history.<sup>4</sup> Veselovsky understands world literature (всеобщая литература) as a totality of national literatures that are related historically and morphologically, not—in Goethe's fashion—as a transnational field of cultural exchange and translation.

In addition to complicating received views on world literature, Veselovsky's early theoretical reflections speak directly to what is possibly the central problem of literary studies today: its self-definition with respect to the changing configuration of fields of knowledge. Veselovsky argues in favor of an astonishingly broad definition of literary history, which he equates with cultural history (*Kulturgeschichte*). While clearly at odds with many

strands of twentieth-century literary theory, Veselovsky's principled rejection of the aesthetic criterion as an ahistorical construct that is detrimental (especially) to the comparative study of literature may prompt us to review the methodological implications of contemporary historicism(s). In a formulation that appears to presage new historicism, Veselovsky in one of the reports translated here insists that a history of, for example, Provençal poetry should exclude "neither the Provençal *Elucidarius* nor the didactic treatise about hunting birds or the instructions of the jongleur." Yet, as Veselovsky's remarks (and his work on the whole) suggest, the view of literary texts as cultural productions rather than aesthetic artifacts calls for a particular kind of comparatism, one that goes beyond contextualist historicism. Arguably, the post-new-historicist privileging of proximate historical contexts presents difficulties both to comparative work (which has effectively become a *pia fraus* ["pious fraud"]—to borrow Veselovsky's expression—at many comparatist departments in the United States) and to serious engagement with literary form. Veselovsky's approach to literary texts—and literary forms—as testimonies to the *longue durée* of social and cultural history may provide a welcome respite from the modern fixation on the *histoire événementielle* and perhaps an invitation to engage with historicism itself as a historical phenomenon. On the other hand, Veselovsky's gentle polemic with Heymann Steinthal, one of his teachers in Berlin, indicates an interest in defining the specificity of literary works as objects *sui generis* operating in a wider cultural-historical field; this interest, combined with a consistently historical perspective, would remain characteristic of the Russian tradition of historical poetics.<sup>5</sup>

This translation includes two of five reports written by Veselovsky while he was studying at Berlin University and published in 1863 and 1864. It omits some of the sections that describe his course work. The same two reports were chosen for inclusion (under the title "From the Reports on a Mission Abroad") in the most authoritative collection of Veselovsky's work on historical poetics, prepared by Viktor Zhirmunsky in 1940 (Историче-

ческая поэтика). As compared with Zhirmunsky's edition, this translation includes a few additional paragraphs from the original publication that shed more light on Veselovsky's intellectual experience in Berlin. The original reports were untitled. We have also taken the liberty of introducing additional paragraph divisions. In preparing the endnotes, none of which were part of the original publication, I made use of Zhirmunsky's notes to the 1940 edition. In translating *всеобщая литература*, we have opted for "world literature," inasmuch as *всеобщая* ("universal, general") in this phrase is synonymous with *всемирная* ("world").<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

1. For the centrality of Veselovsky's method to the Russian critical tradition, see Shaitanov; Kliger and Maslov. Other Russian literary scholars whose work is available in English and who, in various ways, engaged with and built on Veselovsky's legacy are Lidiia Ginzburg, Olga Freidenberg, and Mikhail Gasparov. I discuss the reception of Veselovsky in the twentieth century, including Wellek's assessment, in a forthcoming article. Zhirmunsky, "А. Н. Веселовский," and Engelgardt provide introductions to Veselovsky's methodology and overviews of his scholarly work; see also an important overlooked statement by Shklovsky ("Александр Веселовский"). Erlich 26–32 and Zhirmunsky, "On the Study," are succinct summaries of Veselovsky's works and method in English. Further bibliography on Veselovsky and a list of translations of his work can be found at *Historical Poetics: An Online Resource*.

2. The articles were originally published in the journal of the Russian Imperial Ministry of Education, *Журнал министерства народного просвещения* 117 (Feb. 1863, sec. 2, 152–60) and 119 (Sept. 1863, sec. 2, 440–48), under the rubric "Selections from the Reports of Those Sent Abroad in Preparation for Professorship."

3. The assumption of the paramount importance of Goethe's notion of world literature for reflections on literary comparison in the second half of the nineteenth century underlies, e.g., Birus; Hoesel-Uhlig; and Pizer. For a more balanced assessment, see Berczik 15–18. In fact, even the German term *Weltliteratur* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most often had generic meanings such as "the totality of literatures of the world" and "the best of literatures of the world," neither of which was intended by Goethe (Lamping 98–113).

4. The new comparative disciplines provided the obvious model for transnational discussion of literature.

The relevance of comparative (Indo-European) linguistics is more fully discussed by Veselovsky in his 1870 lecture "On the Methods and Aims of Literary History as a Science"; an English translation of this lecture was published, at Wellek's instigation, in 1967. It is interesting to compare that lecture with a programmatic lecture by Charles Chauncey Shackford, delivered at Cornell in 1871 (in the words of his modern editors, "the first known formal presentation concerning the discipline of comparative literature to be given in the United States"). Shackford argues that the comparative method, "which is pursued in anatomy, in language, in mythology," presents "the only satisfactory course in which general literature can be pursued" (42). For his part, Veselovsky would repeatedly point to the epistemological limits of comparative (Indo-European) mythology and of the mythopoetic aesthetics of verbal art associated with figures like Steinthal and Alexander Potebnia. In his 1864 student report he is more outspoken than in his critique of Steinthal translated here, as he plainly asserts the inapplicability of "the principle that unites the history of literature with the history of language" to postmythical literary cultures (396–97).

5. The influence of Steinthal, one of the founding figures in modern psychology, on Veselovsky is examined in Trautmann-Waller, *Aux origines* 286–88 and "Народная литература" 27–30.

6. Močalova 308. On the term *general literature*, see Wellek and Warren 17.

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THE DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF WORLD literature has yet to be granted citizenship in Germany, at least in the sense in which there exist the departments of world history, of general philology, and so on. One need only glance at the curricula of German universities in the current year to be convinced of this: [Karl] Höck (in Göttingen), [Franz Ludwig Anton] Schweiger (also in Göttingen),

[Karl Friedrich] Merleker (in Königsberg), and [Franz von] Löher (in Munich) have not made a name for themselves as scholars.

On the other hand, the history of particular literatures is being actively studied, mostly in relation to the history of the language or to the reading of this or that text. In this regard German scholars are far ahead of what is being done or has been accomplished by other scholars. [Friedrich] Diez, [Adolf] Ebert, [Karl] Bartsch, [Ludwig] Blanc, [Nicolaus] Delius, [Adelbert von] Keller, and [Wilhelm]

Wackernagel are the leaders in Romance studies (I have only named those who hold chairs at universities, and I have not mentioned Ferdinand Wolf). This semester, Ebert is lecturing on the history of Italian literature, [Friedrich] Zarncke, in Leipzig, on the history of German literature before the Reformation; [Karl] Müllenhoff lectured last summer on the history of German literature before the thirteenth century. I do not go into great detail because that would lead us too far afield. The fact is that in Germany, where there is both world history and general philology, the department of world literature does not exist.

We suppose the existence of world literature possible, if only in the sense of world history. World history is not the history of humanity—of some shared idea of being human that manifests itself in various authors that one calls nationalities. Rather, world history is a history of nationalities that abstract thought has collected under one idea of humanity. What is common to them is that they all develop according to one and the same physical and moral laws, insofar as there are in fact connections between them in war and in peace through borrowing and conquest. What they also share is a striving toward the improvement of everyday life that one calls progress. Yet with regard to the various kinds of general ideas and forms manifesting themselves in the history of humanity, there exist as many doctrines as there are congregations. World history remains all the same a general history of nationalities; we will not be mistaken if we construe the history of world literature as the general history of literatures.

Now it is clear why such a history does not exist. The immensity of material would intimidate the most resourceful intellect; philological preparation alone would take dozens of years. We need only think of the task of collecting and publishing material that is far from gathered and brought to light. Denigrating Russian scholarship, we consider a factual history of Russian literature an im-

possibility, given the current paucity of basic data. The author of “an overview of Russian religious literature” even considered it “an unwise undertaking.”<sup>1</sup> We are surprised when in 1862 in that scholarly Germany which reads and teaches all the Semitic dialects we hear almost the same words. “All histories of (German) literature,” says [Emil] Weller (*Annalen der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen im XVI und XVII Jahrh.* [vol. 1, p. v–vi]), “all histories of German literature were hitherto fragmentary; that is, they spoke of what their authors had found ready to hand in one or another library, or of what had previously been discussed. An essay by [Karl] Goedeke, the best of its kind, says nothing about the treasures of the libraries of Vienna, Munich, Dresden, Ulm, Augsburg, Würzburg, Nuremberg, and Switzerland . . . Our annals comprise two thousand more poems than Goedeke’s essay, and that is only in the first three sections.”

We note that the historian of literature must at the same time be a publisher and an archaeologist, and be at work in both conveyance and construction. To say nothing of people devoted solely to publishing: what have the Grimms not published? Their editorial work on German fairy tales and on the songs in the Edda has a genealogical connection with their German mythology. Such an absence of the first condition of any developed economic production, the division of labor, directly indicates that production is at a low level of development. We speak of political economy as a new science but one that is already defined, having its future and its path set clearly before it. We also speak of the science of folk psychology as one that promises much, though it lives by a single journal.<sup>2</sup> Of world literature we say nothing, just as we say nothing of mathematics, music, and other liberal arts that have been dispiriting humanity since the time of Martianus Capella. And, indeed, it is only *pia fraus*, wishful thinking; world literary history as a field of scholarship does not yet exist; it remains to be created.

Indeed, what is the history of world literature? What is the history of literature at all? Literature is what is written down [письменность]—but this excludes popular epic, songs, and the abundance of unwritten works, which, being unwritten, neither drown nor burn but only grow old organically and likewise become extinct. Literature is letters [словесность]. This definition frightens the scholar who proposed it; having sensed its enormous capacity, he hastens to hide from it, like Ilya Muromets, who slammed the lid on the mighty Svyatogor.<sup>3</sup> Letters? All sorts of things would fit under this definition: the history of scholarship, of poetry, of theological questions, of economic systems, of philosophical constructs. The range is enormous. But definitions are not made to suit a single person, and scholarship still less so—and is there any reason why it is necessary to exclude even the history of scholarship from the history of letters? In the first volume of [Heinrich] von Sybel's journal, a few thoughts were expressed apropos what remains to be done in German historical science; the history of scholarship was set as a desideratum to future researchers.<sup>4</sup> I see no reason why this proposal could not have been made in any literary-historical journal. Some might point out to me that the history of scholarship is an independent field of knowledge, that the history of philosophy is also an autonomous field of study, as is the history of the church. But what then is the history of literature?

We thus imperceptibly turn to the widely received definition of the history of literature that restricts it to a small circle of belles lettres and to poetry in a broad sense. This definition is quite narrow, however inclusive the notion of poetry. Why exactly is the history of literature assigned to the domain of the refined, and within what limits? I do not think that any contemporary person would privilege questions of aesthetics or the development of poetic ideas. The time of manuals on rhetoric and poetics is irretrievably past. Even those gentlemen who would wish to create the his-

tory of poetry out of the history of literature defend themselves with a justification that is not at all poetic but is borrowed from another camp: poetry is the color of national life, that indistinct realm where the character of the nation is interminably and integrally expressed along with its purposes, its deeply ingrained aspirations, and its original identity. This justification destroys itself and leads directly from poetry to life. Indeed, to understand the color of life—that is, poetry—we must, I think, begin with the study of life itself; to smell the soil, we must stand on it.

The history of Provençal poetry cannot be limited to the biographies of troubadours or to the sirventes of Bertran de Born and the moralizing songs of Giraut de Borneyl. Biographies of the troubadours lead to [the topics of] chivalry, castle life, and the predicament of women in the Middle Ages. Against the clear background of the Crusades, the significance of the love song will be more lucidly revealed. Similarly, the sirventes compel us to discuss the Albigenses and their nonpoetic literature. I believe that neither the Provençal *Elucidarius* nor the didactic treatise about hunting birds or the instructions of the jongleur should be excluded from observation.<sup>5</sup> All this also belongs to the history of literature, though it does not have the pretense to be called poetry. To separate such works [from the history of literature] would be as inappropriate as if someone conceived of limiting the study of Dante to a poetic economy of *The Divine Comedy* and ceding historical allusions, medieval cosmogony, and theological debates in paradise to the specialists. Specialized research is not thereby ruled out, nor is the history of scholarship as a separate field of study.

Having established a notion of literary history as the history of belles lettres, Professor [Stepan] Shevyrev himself was compelled to expand his definition when it came to the facts. His history of Russian letters is least of all a history of poetry. If hagiographies and sermons predominate therein, this is only par-

tially explained by his predilection for one or the other of these two moral-didactic genres; indeed, it could not have been otherwise, and it seems to us that the correct proportions have been observed. “Yaroslav’s silver” was, of course, out of place.<sup>6</sup> If [Emil] Ruth’s history of Italian poetry, consisting of two thick volumes, contains numerous details about novelists and writers of novellas while saying almost nothing about Machiavelli (except as the author of *The Mandrake*), it is a history not of literature but of poetry, as the author himself called it.<sup>7</sup>

The history of Italian poetry without Machiavelli, without Giordano Bruno? Such a lack is not compensated for by historical introductions, geographic or political orientations, or chapters about everyday life, which for some time now have been in vogue and are appended in the back of the book haphazardly, without any intrinsic connection to its content. Such appendices are of no aid; they explain nothing. They only add an extra measure of discomfort and distress to future literary scholars. As long as the historical and everyday aspect remains nothing but an appendix or an accessory, a *Beiwerk*, of literary inquiry, the history of literature will remain as it has been up until now: a bibliographic guide, an aesthetic excursus, a treatise on itinerant stories, or a political sermon. Until then, literary history cannot exist.

We turn again to von Sybel’s journal, which is of particular interest to us for the views on the discipline of history expressed in it by leaders in German historiography and for the hopes they placed on the future development of this historiography. In one of the first volumes, in a short report on [Karl] Biedermann’s book, an unknown critic voiced his doubts concerning the feasibility of the field of cultural history, *Kulturgeschichte*.<sup>8</sup> Biedermann’s book serves as his example: despite the author’s talent, has he succeeded in delivering anything coherent or organic? Nothing of coherence resulted, only a little bit of everything: political history, everyday

life, archaeology, literature, philosophy, and all sorts of other things. What if all academia roused itself and set off on a campaign against *Kulturgeschichte*, each discipline claiming its proper part? The whole of *Kulturgeschichte* would then be disassembled part by part, and nothing would remain. The historical section would be transferred to history, the philosophical, to philosophy. Cultural history is *ein Unding* [“nonsense”]. Instead, there is the history of history, the history of philosophy, of literature, and so on. If we asked the author Biedermann what the history of literature is, we do not know whether he could provide an answer to this difficult question. If he could not, we might suggest our own: the history of literature is precisely the history of culture.

Now it is clear why the history of world literature did not find for itself a permanent department in German universities. If entire books are devoted to the particles μέν and δέ and to the Basque verb for *to be*, and if people dedicate their entire lives to the study of Dante or the Breton cycle of legends, the history of the literary life of a nation also demands an entire life’s work. To fully understand and appreciate what constitutes a nation’s identity—its distinctiveness—one must become one with the nation; one must live one’s way into it, become acclimated to it, and—if one is not born in its milieu—adopt its peculiarities and its habits. We cannot get away with generalizations here. Conclusions about the integrity of development, about the general character of the life of a nation—if it exists—should be the result of a long series of microscopic tests rather than serve as the point of departure; otherwise, the danger of taking one’s own view as fact lies in wait.

The more cohesive national life may sometimes appear to be, the more careful and painstaking one’s investigation should be, lest an appearance of external orderly development be mistaken for an internal connection of phenomena. The facts of life are connected by a mutual dependence: economic conditions call forth a particular historical formation,

and together they determine one or another kind of literary activity. It is not possible to separate one from the other. The complete unit is like a circulatory system in which each small vein that lurks at the edges of the living body has a direct genealogical connection with the heart even though what lies within the heart remains unknown, whether it is poetry or prose, and whether it is indeed only poetry that accounts for the color of national life.

The best histories of literature have been written by scholars who made a name for themselves in Europe with works on political history: [Georg Gottfried] Gervinus, [Friedrich Christoph] Schlosser, [Leopold von] Ranke (whose *Zur Geschichte der Italienischen Poesie* retains its significance). We conclude that the reverse is also true: a good historian of literature should at the same time be a historian of everyday life. Tell me how a nation lived, and I will tell you how it wrote: the best literary historians have earnestly applied themselves to *Kulturgeschichte*. I will mention only [Karl] Weinhold. Emerson's phrase—that each of us experiences the entire boundless history of humanity from the comfort of our own microcosm—remains a mere phrase, admittedly beautiful and in the highest degree humanistic. Should we possess an all-too-expansive heart, it may well finish with an aneurysm. Fair enough if one is able to experience within oneself the life of a single nation. The history of literature, as I understand it, can exist only as a specialized field.

It is another question whether practicing literary history in this manner is possible for us in Russia. It seems to me that it is not. Our scholarship is still at the primitive level of economy: a single pair of hands must accomplish much work that in more advanced conditions of life is distributed among many laborers. Even if there were a desire to specialize, where would one focus one's efforts or attention when there is nothing yet in existence and nothing to choose from? When possible, we must supply literary history with more prolegomena,

provide aid to those who seek to orient themselves in a mass of facts, and indicate the pivotal points on which a later, more felicitous and more specialized inquiry could be based. Such an encyclopedic review should not, of course, exclude original research. If this review does not forge new paths, then, when possible, it should verify those traveled by Western scholarship so that one is not led blindly by the mentor's words and repeat lessons learned long ago. Such is, in my opinion, the task of departments of world literature in Russian universities: instead of specialized research and a distrust of manuals and secondhand knowledge, it is the transmission of the results of Western scholarship, critically verified and elucidated.

This is how I understood my task, and in Berlin I have selected several specialized courses. [. . .]

Berlin, 9–18 December 1862

In the historical-philological sciences, a revolution is now under way such as there has not been since perhaps the time of the great renewal of knowledge of the classics. Revolutions are always linked to an unexpected expansion of one's field of vision in both a moral and a physical sense. This is all the more true the further we are from the beginning of history, when human beings were more tightly connected with nature and their development had not yet created its own laws, sanctified by tradition—when the masses were more malleable and their development smoother. The closer we are to our own moment in time, the more clearly the system of social laws appears in opposition to the laws of purely physiological life, which everywhere constitutes the lining of this system. But this lining is deeply embedded, having passed through the whole series of transmissions; it had time to mold itself into customs and laws [формулироваться в обычай и закон], such that the forms of these customs and laws are already developing further. This is what we call progress or organic development. On the other side there is organic decline, which

takes place in perfect accord with the rules of society and history, just as a doctor lets a sick patient die according to the rules of his art.

Revolution occurs when into this quiet development, which springs from its own principles, there intrudes a host of new principles and facts that must then be reckoned with. Whichever side gains the advantage in the struggle between the new and the old, the result will always be a trade-off—neither a victory nor a defeat. This is one of the fruitful results of Hegel’s philosophy on which the Tübingen school built its history of Christianity. New vistas open in the distance, often accompanied by a spatial widening of the horizon as if the expansion of purview were closely connected with a wider familiarity with the outside world. In this way the paths to the East that were opened during the Crusades laid a broader foundation for medieval culture, elevating the ideal of the knight to the Templar Knights and the Holy Grail. It is worth comparing the representations of William of Gellone in the *chanson de geste* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries with, for example, Tasso’s Godfrey of Bouillon, a figure that marks the highest realization of the ideal of the knight in the Breton circle, albeit a one-sided one. Devotees of epic naïveté and of a primitive simplicity in morals prefer, of course, the Aquitaine hero. This is a matter of personal taste. Here even comparison is not possible because comparisons can only be performed between like variables; to compare the past of a nation with its present and thus arrive at a condemnatory verdict amounts to nothing, as does a comparison between the potential for development and its realization. Certainly no one would dispute that in the later chivalrous romances, the scope of moral principles—whatever they may be—is incomparably greater than in so-called heroic epic. So what is more interesting in the end: a life fully lived and experienced [прожитая жизнь] along with its hard-won results, whatever they are, or the absence of any life—a life of instincts and animal strength, where a

knight-errant stabs another through with his lance so that one could hang a coat on its protruding tip, “qui s’en fust pris bien garde” [“if one did it very carefully”]?<sup>9</sup>

Those same Crusades were the first to elevate the significance of towns and the middle class back home while the knights were earning their honor in Palestine. On their return, they encountered an entire literature—which they themselves had brought from the East—of *fabliaux*, short stories of the middle-class apologues, and novellas. There is no doubt that most of these stories already existed in the West before the Crusades, brought from the common Asiatic homeland. But they lacked the impetus to develop into the immense literary corpus in which chivalrous literature gradually drowned. The impetus came from the East—the same place where chivalry attained its lofty ideals of struggle and of self-sacrifice. Since the second half of the thirteenth century, literature takes on an increasingly middle-class, didactic character. The place of the romance is now occupied by the novella, legend, exhortation; verse makes the transition to prose. Even the knights of the romances of this time bear the Flemish stamp: they set out on the road not headfirst but after arranging their domestic affairs and securing enough money for the journey. This remained true throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; we are speaking of Germany in particular.

At this point again new vistas open toward the East and the West. Greek scholars come from the East; Europeans set out to the West in search of the New World. We are aware of the magnitude of the consequences that this expansion of the conceptual and geographic horizon had for both the moral and the material development in our part of the globe. The fruitful effects of both were felt in the sixteenth century. We are almost ready to accept that history—or what we usually refer to as history—moves forward only with the aid of such unexpected catalysts, whose necessity does not lie in the sequential, isolated development

of the organism. In other words, all of history consists in *Vermittlung der Gegensätze* ["negotiation between opposites"] because any history consists in struggle. Isolate a nation, remove it from the throes of struggle, and then attempt to write its history—if there will be a history. Until then we do not believe in the possibility of a physical construction of historical phenomena. History is not physiology. If it develops according to exclusively physiological principles, it ceases to be history. [Henry Thomas] Buckle attempted to create for European historical life what is feasible only for the Eskimos or Hot-tentots, and even then only until they encounter the first foreigner. The first foreigner alone would disturb the physiological peace of their life; an exchange with alien thought raised on different soil and amid different concepts would infringe on the proper course of their own thoughts. To define the laws of these collisions is of course impossible, at least for us. Everything is limited to such general truths as the enslavement of the lower civilizations by the higher, the compromise between the struggling principles, and so on. It is still not the time for the science of history, for the physiological science of history. And will it ever be?

In recent times, historical-philological studies have indeed been given a more scientific basis than in the past. The rapid progress that they have made on entering this new solid ground promises extensive results in the future. It would be audacious to claim that these results will reverberate in all of historical science, yet even now Buckle would be able to take advantage of some of them for the first chapters of his history of civilization as demonstrated by the work of [Adalbert] Kuhn, [Adolphe] Pictet, and others with respect to the description of primitive culture. Instead, we receive a rather meager list of influences on the human, such as those produced by climate, nutrition, and similar natural conditions. In a word, history is being constructed above—and in spite of—the human, while its construction should start with humanity itself, viewed as a physiologi-

cal and psychological entity that is, of course, subject to the influence of the surrounding environment yet is in possession of enough material within itself to evolve of its own accord.

The new science of linguistics will contribute the most to the advancement of such an immanent approach to history, at least in some of its aspects. This is yet another of the felicitous results of the expansion of the conceptual and spatial horizon of which we have so often spoken. The English have conquered India; English scholarship conquered Indian scholarship. Sir William Jones was the first to discover that Sanskrit is cognate with Greek, Latin, and most living European languages. The discovery, while itself seeming of little importance, led to the classic work of [Franz] Bopp and a complete renovation of philological studies. Sanskrit was integrated into the Prussian university education system thanks to the efforts of Wilhelm von Humboldt and [Karl von] Altenstein and nowadays is represented in almost all German universities; professorial chairs for Sanskrit have spread even to America, and with them, the study of comparative grammar. The English have already produced a popular manual *for the use of students*.<sup>10</sup>

It has been noted above what an enormous influence new gains in linguistics can have on the scholarly methods of the discipline of history. Not without reason, earlier this year [Adolf] Stenzler proclaimed comparative grammar a part of the comparative history of culture. ("Ich betrachte daher die vergleichende Grammatik nur als einen Zweig der vergleichenden Kulturgeschichte des ganzen Volksstammes.")<sup>11</sup> Not to mention the fact that with its aid, dark corners of the historical world that archaeology dared not touch have been illuminated: comparative grammar called forth the science of comparative mythology. Its influence has also spread to the study of German epics and novellas proper. Previously, when we considered the similarity between two narratives, it was fashionable to speak of borrowing, whereas now we have

become accustomed to referring to our common Asian fatherland, whence we brought language and our common customs and beliefs. Perhaps these references go too far, misused under the influence of an exclusive love for national literature [народная литература]. Borrowing, you see, is offensive; inheritance is not offensive, although inheritance is also borrowing—especially if handed to us from such distant progenitors as our forefathers of the Iranian highlands. Accordingly, the jackal in *Hitopadesa*, who fell into a tub of blue paint, and the story of the Reinhard fox stained in gold are adduced as derivations from a single common prototype of the legend. “Our German scholars,” says Gervinus on this occasion,

helped create a new science of linguistics. The kinship between modern languages everywhere indicated to them an ancient source. This was natural, since languages can be changed beyond recognition but cannot be completely rejected. Legends and works of poetry are a different matter. The Crusades drowned almost all memory of the time of the Ottonians. In our fatherland, the Great Migration of peoples destroyed grand memories of the past; amid these great devastations of antiquity,<sup>12</sup> amid God knows how many thousands of years of transmigrations, a fable about a fox painted in gold and blue was preserved! The fact that so much was preserved in language is already surprising; we cannot presume the same about an unstable saga. It seems to us that even in language, too little attention is paid to the fact that the same sense of observation, directed at the same objects, could find—on its own accord—similar expressions for inner impressions. And these it probably often found. If one is to derive all the similarities in history from such supposed prehistoric sources, there would be no law of inner development, and not a single nation or individual could take a single step without borrowing.<sup>13</sup>

As we have said, the path for those searching for this “law of inner development” has been blazed by the new philosophical direc-

tion recently taken by the science of language. We see how gradually the science of language passes from abstract questions regarding the beginning of language to such vital questions as the beginning of myth, of custom, and of a nation’s character and psychology. An introduction to literary history taught by [Heymann] Steinthal this semester also belongs to the disciplines that acquire new meaning and a clearer significance through the influence of a philosophical-linguistic perspective. When Steinthal asks himself about the beginning of art and finds it in religion, the answer takes on a meaning completely different from that of platitudes on the origin of drama in the festivals of Dionysus, the religious origins of Greek sculpture, and so on. The well-known empirical difference between poetry and other representational arts—namely, that poetry depicts actions while sculpture and painting depict states—attains a deeper meaning when compared with the differences between symbol and myth, word and sentence. The word is a symbol; the sentence and the phrase are myths. According to Steinthal, the word originates from the sentence, while the symbol originates from myth; poetry should have therefore appeared earlier than other arts. Myth must have existed in poetry so that representational arts could depict the myth symbolically.

In this way myth, language, and art meet in a higher unity and explain one another. What has hitherto remained obscure in footnotes and addenda will now be introduced into the actual text. The study of the fine arts should undergo radical change along with the antiquated doctrine that professes the identity of that which is beautiful, true, and good.

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, Steinthal’s “introduction” is characterized by an aesthetic-critical approach, posing general questions regarding beauty, form, and the differences between various arts. A historical survey of notions of literary history from the ancient Greeks to Schlegel and Gervinus by itself took Steinthal several lectures

to complete. In my first report I was able to express my opinion on the study of literary history. A task was set before us: to trace the history of cultural formation [образование] without limiting it to mere *Geschichte der Dichtung* ["history of poetry"] and accommodating within it the history of philosophical constructs and religious ideals. The task, which many feel is beyond their abilities, lies within the power of scholarship. Steinthal understands the matter completely differently. For him, the history of literature is a wholly aesthetic discipline: "eine ästhetische Disciplin; die Literaturgeschichte ist nur die Geschichte der eigentlichen Kunstdarstellungen auf dem Gebiete der Literatur."<sup>14</sup> Which works constitute the object of literary history? "Solche Werke, deren ganzes Wesen vollständig auf der Form beruht."<sup>15</sup> Historiography, oratory, philosophy—these enter the domain of literary history only insofar as they are distinguished by their refined form. On this basis Thucydides and Plato find themselves a place next to Homer and Sophocles; Kant and Fichte remain behind closed doors—or else are fitted into an addendum.

Of course, here we must take into account national peculiarities: Germans pay more attention to content than to form; for them, what is most important is the extraction of thought in whatever form it is expressed. As a result, no scholars on earth write as poorly as the Germans. The French are another matter; they respect proper style and therefore write well, and they continue even today to read Bossuet, whereas scarcely anyone in our time would tackle Herder, who in fact wrote well. As it is not clear what distinguishes scholars who write well from those who write poorly, the criterion for who will be admitted to literary history and who will not is likewise obscure. And what is the basis of admittance? Steinthal calls scholarly language "eine wissenschaftliche Notsprache" ["a scholarly language of expediency"], just as there exists the language of business and the language

of everyday conversation. Whether scholarly language is elegant or not, it will nevertheless remain *eine Notsprache*, even without all its specialized terms and erudite turns of phrase, if only because it is fundamentally conditioned by the content of research and the logical development of thought. If thought is not included in the exposition of the history of literature, then no matter how far its presentation surpasses ordinary academic *Notsprache* (as does, for example, the language of [Hermann] Lotze in his *Microcosm*), it will not enter the history of literature except perhaps as a special chapter—"Of Good Style."

We will leave it to others to decide: did Steinthal outline the boundaries of literary history too narrowly? For our part, we explain matters as follows. There is a rubric by the name of literary history: its boundaries are unclear, expanding from time to time to adopt elements that have become specialized fields. It was necessary to draw boundaries—to define how far the history of literature was allowed to go and where foreign proprietorship began. The alien territories are political history, the history of philosophy, of religion, of the hard sciences. As a result, what remains as the share portioned to literary history is only so-called belles lettres; [literary history] becomes an aesthetic discipline: the history of refined works of verbal art, or historical aesthetics. This is what one calls the legitimization and the effort to make sense [осмысление] of that which exists. Without a doubt, the history of literature can and should exist in this sense, replacing the stale theories of the beautiful and the lofty with which we have thus far been compelled to occupy ourselves.

And in the hands of Steinthal it would so remain. Still, his talent is necessary; we are afraid that in different hands the history of literature, taken in this direction, would always be theoretical or prove untrue to itself. Forgoing the desire to study exclusively poetic works, literary history will be compelled to explain them by resorting to the peculiarities

of their political and religious development. Gervinus's *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* offers much more than one could possibly expect from its title. Instead of leaving a cautionary loophole for ourselves, we would do better to acknowledge that the boundaries of literary history must sometimes be defined much more widely than as an exclusive selection of belles lettres. While we seek to make sense of the existing rubric, it is possible, I believe, to offer a new, alternative rubric. We have offered [such an alternative]: the history of cultural formation [образование], of culture, and of social thought insofar as it is expressed in poetry, science, and life. The hard sciences will be included, of course, only with their results; in any case, they have generally begun to influence culture only in recent times.

I am the first to admit that this task is not easy. One needs an abundance of knowledge and the time to acquire it—not the two years assigned to us by the decree of the Ministry [of Education]. One sometimes loses heart when faced with the mass of material that one hopes to master to be adequate even minimally to the task that one has set before oneself. For this, specialization is often required, but instead one must hasten and read as many books as possible. This explains why you sometimes find yourself scattered, attending many lectures that distract you from more productive studies at home. Currently, I am studying Old French at home, whereas at the university I am taking psychology with Jürgen Bona Meyer and two courses with [Karl] Müllenhoff: one on German historical grammar and another on Walther von der Vogelweide in relation to German metrics. [. . .]

Berlin, summer 1863

## EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Filaret, archbishop of Chernigov, *Обзор русской духовной литературы* (Kharkov, 1859–61).

2. *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal (1860–90).

3. Veselovsky refers to an episode in a widespread northern Russian lay on Svyatogor and Ilya Muromets, in which Svyatogor lies down in a gigantic coffin the two encounter on their travels and the younger богатырь (“epic hero”), Ilya Muromets, proves unable to remove the coffin's lid. At the time, the text of the lay had appeared in print only once, in *Песни, собранные П. Н. Рыбниковым* (vol. 1; Moscow, 1861; 41–42), in an unusual variant in which Ilya declines to perform the imposition of the lid. The lay also circulated orally; see Konstantin Aksakov's testimony in *Песни, собранные П. В. Киреевским* (vol. 1; Moscow, 1860; xxx–xxxi).

4. *Historische Zeitschrift* (1859–).

5. Veselovsky appears to refer to *De arte venandi cum avibus*, by Frederick II, and to the genre of Occitan didactic poem (*ensenhamen*), which some troubadour poets addressed to the jongleur.

6. Stepan Petrovich Shevyrev (1806–64) was Veselovsky's teacher at Saint Petersburg University and one of the pioneers of the study of medieval Russian literature. In his *History of Russian Letters*, Shevyrev mentions that among the works and artifacts surviving from the period of the Kievan grand prince Yaroslav (d. 1054) is a “coin in his name with the inscription Ярославле серебро” (lecture 6, *История русской словесности* [vol. 1; Moscow, 1846; pt. 1; 11]).

7. Emil Ruth, *Geschichte der italienischen Poesie* (Leipzig, 1844–47).

8. Karl Biedermann, *Deutschlands geistige, sittliche und gesellige Zustände im 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1858). The review, signed “K.,” appeared in *Historische Zeitschrift* 1.1 (1859): 260–61.

9. Veselovsky paraphrases an episode from *Le couronnement de Louis* (12th cent.), narrating the exploits of William of Gellone. The quotation is on line 917.

10. English in the original.

11. “I therefore regard comparative grammar only as a branch of the comparative history of the culture of the entire national stock [of the Indo-Europeans]” (*Über die Wichtigkeit des Sanskrit-Studiums und seine Stellung an unseren Universitäten* [Breslau, 1863; 14]).

12. Gervinus: “des Alten.” The text of Veselovsky's original publication reproduced in later editions has страны (“of the country”), most likely corrupted from старины (“of antiquity”) in the process of typesetting.

13. Georg Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (vol. 1; Leipzig, 1853; 131).

14. “Literary history is only the history of artistic representations proper, [investigated] in the domain of literature.” The source of Veselovsky's quotations from Steinthal has not been identified; they may derive from Veselovsky's lecture notes.

15. “Such works whose entire being is fully dependent on form.”