

A. W. Schlegel, Staël, and Sismondi in 1814
 The Groupe de Coppet and the *Confédération romantique*

Je n'étais point content de Schlegel dont les idées sont plus que jamais en opposition avec toutes les miennes.

Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi to his mother, May 23, 1808¹

There follow four chapters on Restoration Europe; this, the first, comprises a review of three major treatises published by the Groupe de Coppet as Napoleon fell. On March 31, 1814, Paris capitulated to the Sixth Coalition and France's twenty-five-year revolutionary experiment crashed to an end. Across post-Napoleonic Europe, the kings came back. Against this backdrop, the Groupe de Coppet brought out three summations of their thought, understandably labeled a *confédération romantique* by the Bonapartist press. The Romantic movement had arrived in France.

Before the arrival of the Romantics, the vast field of nonclassical literatures reduces for people of taste in France to a handful of names accessory to the real debates. Dante, Shakespeare, and Ossian do not bring into question the contributions of Greece and Rome. Imperial France speaks above all of a fight between supporters of the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; if the *idéologues* defend the *siècle des Lumières*, the government speaks of the Terror. It favors by policy the century of Louis XIV and Catholic reaction, which opens out somewhat onto the France of Saint Louis and the Crusades. Jean François de La Harpe sums up the situation in his *Cours de littérature*, which became an authority. Out of forty-six chapters, eighteen are given over to Greece and Rome; the two other parts concern the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The totality of foreign literatures scrabbles over one short chapter, which touches on *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Ossian, John Milton, and Alexander Pope. Here in brief is

This chapter appeared in French in Kurt Kloocke, ed., *Le Groupe de Coppet et l'Europe 1789–1830* (Lausanne and Paris: Touzot, 1994), 309–329. I wish to thank Laurence Belingard, who reviewed this study in detail.

the neoclassical “muraille de la Chine” presented in *De l’Allemagne* and *Corinne*.²

From Coppet – that cosmopolitan matrix for the coming nineteenth century – a new literary and political program takes shape, whose broad outline Staël sketches in 1800 in *De la littérature*. Facing the ancient Southern world, Staël promotes Europe’s “littératures ossianiques,” the only path to progress for a postrevolutionary society. Between 1807 and 1809, a series of works come out of Coppet. After Charles de Bonstetten’s *Voyage dans le Latium*, Staël in *Corinne ou l’Italie* and Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi with his *Républiques italiennes* are the first to reconsider Italy and make it fashionable, as Voltaire did for England with his *Lettres philosophiques*. August Wilhelm Schlegel at the same time attacks the foundation of the classical tradition in his *Comparaison des deux Phèdres*, a *succès de scandale*. Prosper de Barante publishes his *Tableau de la littérature française au dix-huitième siècle* in 1808; and Benjamin Constant, buried in his manuscripts after his eviction from the Tribunat, at last publishes a *Wallstein* designed to recuperate new German theater for a mistrustful Europe. These first Coppet texts play a primordial role in all that the group’s members write thereafter.

The idea of a common mission resurfaces in 1813–1814. As the allies advance on Paris, three great summations of Romantic thought emerge from Coppet; it is a second foreign invasion of which the contemporary press is very conscious. *De la littérature du midi de l’Europe*, *Cours de littérature dramatique*, and finally the notorious *De l’Allemagne*, pulped by Napoleon in 1810: These three texts bring Europe to France in three different guises.³ The narrow neoclassical universe is submerged by foreigners. Is this then a second Coppet manifesto? We have fundamental studies on the reception of these three books, but a new study addressing the texts themselves may better indicate the common priorities of their authors.

These three works ripened beneath the same roof for years; any question of precedent would be risky. Staël and Schlegel ground their texts more or less in works they wrote before they met, and the three writers have different priorities. Schlegel, Staël, and Sismondi finish one after another between 1808 and 1811, an order we respect here, even if Sismondi publishes first.⁴

August Wilhelm Schlegel

German Romanticism recuperates popular and national literature in the form of anthologies, to provide a nonclassical pantheon; August Wilhelm

Schlegel himself does it elsewhere, and Sismondi and Staël echo him. But his 1808/1813 *Cours de littérature dramatique* is different; the only extract comes from Aristophanes, and half the text talks about what Schlegel doesn't like. He here answers the format of La Harpe, summary and ex cathedra commentary. His fifteen courses have two strong points, the Greeks, with five courses, and France, which has three. The other half of the text divides thus: two preliminary courses, a course for Rome and Italy, then four for Shakespeare, the other English authors, Spain, and Germany. Shakespeare will have three courses, like France, in the second German edition.

In this text dominated by the Greeks, Schlegel imposes a Romantic framework in three ways: His preliminary courses explain the classic–Romantic opposition, which then directs his history and returns throughout the text in passages and isolated remarks. He thus splendidly fulfills the object he gives himself, “to combine the theory of dramatic art with its history” (17), and he will agree with his brother Friedrich in seeing here his greatest originality. Madame Necker de Saussure, Staël's cousin, cuts in two her translation of the text, to make up for her own publisher's three volumes but perhaps also to match the two German volumes, 1809–1811: *Théâtres classiques* and *Théâtres romantiques*. She divides the Italian and Shakespearean courses to have seventeen courses in all. Schlegel writes of this in 1814, “Je ne voudrais pas perpétuer les mécontentements qui s'y trouvent.”⁵

For Schlegel, the Greeks, whose civilization forms a block, created perfect and inimitable masterpieces. Christianity and the Germanic invasions produced a new and heterogeneous Europe (21): The word *Romantic* derives from romance, a term that designates the mixed languages thus formed (the definitions of his brother Friedrich, of Staël, and of Sismondi differ slightly – see note 6). This mixture brought us a purer love, respect for women, chivalry, the independence of the soul; it “regenerated the exhausted and fallen antique world.” But original sin separates the moderns from nature; conscious of this internal divorce, they attempt in their poetry to reconcile the physical and the moral world: “[T]he poetry of the ancients was that of possession, ours is that of yearning” (24, 25). The search for the infinite condemns modern men to an approximate art, which may be judged badly. The Pantheon in Rome and St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna respond to two different needs: “We do not want to argue with anyone over a preference for the one or the other” (22).⁶

This modernist dialectic corresponds perfectly to Berlin Romanticism and takes part in a German tradition that goes from Friedrich Schiller and

Johann Gottfried von Herder to G. W. F. Hegel; Staël and Sismondi interpret it in their fashion. Schlegel proposes a history in three stages: the classical Greeks; their Roman, Italian, and French imitators; and the “Romantic” English and Spanish, with a last course on his German public and a perspective on the future. These are the nations of Europe. Romanticism makes an appearance halfway through – a fact underlined by the French translation – when Schlegel speaks of Spanish influences in France. History and theory go together.

Hidden principles contribute to structure this narrative. Schlegel addresses France, land of imitators, falling in the center of the text between two original creations that cast it in shadow. At the same time, he addresses his Vienna audience, antirevolutionary and Catholic. An implicit discourse thus condemns empire and Revolution in favor of a certain popular nationalism and of religion, which he calls “the root of human existence” (23); he would even like to make the eighteenth century disappear from history (*268). Schlegel here is inspired by several German traditions: First, the celebration of medieval Germany, the turn to Vienna, and the wave of conversions to Catholicism, including his brother Friedrich – he himself almost converted; then, a *Kulturpessimismus* he elaborates after 1805, in his elegy *Rom* for Staël and in his manuscript essay on the decadence of cultures. The Greek perfection that inspired Johann Joachim Winckelmann is for Schlegel inimitable; he already speaks of the Indian *Vedas* (232).⁷

This is a deliberate return to the primitive that Staël and Sismondi, liberal perfectibilists, condemn explicitly. It also risks compromising the argument of the text. There is no new Romantic dawn; there is no vision of the future. Schlegel may well present us with successive cultures, but he inscribes them in a history made up of cyclic decadences that undermines the reader’s interest; each review is less a tool than a museum piece, where we are present as spectators. These Schlegelian cycles with their organic model nevertheless give the text a new interest: All, even the Greeks, foreshadow the French eighteenth century, where the corruption of primitive health will lead to catastrophe (105–106). These reviews also reflect a second, more subtle agenda. For Schlegel, every masterpiece emerges from divine inspiration. This vision of aesthetic autonomy and creative genius opposes the empiricism of the *philosophes*; Schlegel has not succeeded in integrating the Hegelian idea of the *Zeitgeist*, which he speaks of elsewhere. Epoch, nation, public barely participate in artistic creation, and their narrow place in this text is limited to the decor. For two centuries now, scholars have asked whether Staël owed her Romanticism to Schlegel, but the two great visions that structure *De l’Allemagne*, nation and Romantic

dawn, are here absent. Staël did not find in Schlegel a Romanticism he was not in a position to offer.⁸

Why then did Schlegel publish this study? And why such a controversy around a text that seems only half Romantic? In his preface, Schlegel says that he wants “to develop the ideas according to which the artistic worth of dramatic products of different times and peoples is to be judged” (14), and in fact he speaks little of new creation. His 1,200 pages focus rather on the French taste that still occupied Europe, which already explains the major part of the new controversy he raises in 1814. Schlegel had already insulted Jean Racine in his notorious *Comparaison des deux Phèdres* of 1807. He instead offers us a Promethean Shakespeare, demiurge of an ideal world; the *Racine et Shakespeare* of Stendhal owes him something. He makes and unmakes literary reputations, not without a certain taste for paradox; to the *Misanthrope* that he condemns without appeal, he prefers *Amphitryon*; to both, he prefers *Raoul Sire de Créquy*, a comic opera he calls a “master-piece of theatrical painting” (*98). In place of a Romantic dawn he does not see rising, Schlegel thus offers a fine historical gallery from which to judge its twilight. And yet, one presence seems lacking – Shakespeare, that Romantic hero, has a course to himself, but Pedro Calderón de la Barca, whom Schlegel also translated, earns only a couple of pages. It is arguable that Schlegel prefers unknown Spain to Italy, thereby opposing Sismondi; he did indeed prefer Calderón to Vittorio Alfieri, but he gives the two literatures one course apiece. In 1800, his brother also put Italian poetry in the Romantic pantheon alongside Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes. The myth of a “Spanish” and thus anti-Sismondian text is, bizarrely, a creation of Staël and Sismondi himself. *De l’Allemagne* devotes six paragraphs to Schlegel’s *Cours* and two-thirds speak of Spain; Sismondi gives a long extract on Calderón.⁹

A better knowledge of the dialectic peculiar to this text will allow us to reassess the place it occupies at Coppet and in Romantic thought. Within the limits Schlegel gives himself, this dialectic seems to me to offer all the attributes of genius: a profound grasp of esthetics, of the history of theater, and of the mechanics of the stage, solidly anchored in the development of German Romanticism and yet presented in a light that is quite unique. I find only fragments among his peers outside Germany; indeed, A. W. Schlegel may be the best pure theater critic in Romantic Europe. Josef Körner, great Schlegelian, calls this text the “most read book” of German Romanticism, and “Schlegels Haupt- und Lebenswerk.” He sees here also the only work to offer a readable frame or “complete summum of Romantic thought and research.”¹⁰

Schlegel divides Greek theater into three genres: tragedy, old comedy, and new comedy. These genres speak to three states of mind: ideal, parodic, and realist. He insists on the links between dramatic art and the mechanics of the stage, which for the Greeks is wide, shallow, and open to the sky. Greek tragedy is anchored in three principles: the ideal, fate, and the chorus, a subject of dispute at Coppet that returns in Staël and in Sismondi. Because “the battles of the human spirit have been won by only a few heroic geniuses” (28), Schlegel quotes Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, following a ternary structure that will repeat. The inimitable perfection of Sophocles will degenerate into affectation with Euripides, the source for French tragedy. Old comedy is limited to Aristophanes, a misunderstood genius who offers us a world of “inverted ideality” (133), also inimitable. New comedy, which appears when despotism gags the theater, subsists in fragments in Menander, then in his Roman imitators. The ancient ideal is inaccessible to us, making this “realist” third genre that marries poetry and prose the only one we can use for inspiration; the two others allow moderns only bastard imitations, as we have seen too often (43, 177).¹¹

The Romans are thus imitators. Schlegel’s agenda distorts his history: He attributes to Seneca a corrupting influence on Pierre Corneille and Racine, without a word on what his hero Shakespeare owes him (235). Christianity ends Roman decadence, as was often said thereafter, in closing the theaters for a thousand years (31; cf. Sismondi IV 1). Schlegel resumes his history with the Italians, the terrain of Staël and Sismondi after 1807. He attributes the success of Pietro Metastasio to Italians’ moral weakness, and calls Alfieri an “inverted Metastasio,” a phrase softened in 1814. Like Staël in *Corinne*, he praises his tragedies “more as actions of the man than works of the poet” (242–243), and the idea reappears in Sismondi (I 439). Schlegel ends by saying that “[i]n Italy attempts at a romantic drama have long perished without effect”; the lamentable state of the Italian stage derives from the complete lack of a national theater (246, 252).¹²

This attack on Italy already sketches out the subsequent attack on France. Before Louis XIV, Schlegel finds there “an unspeakable desert of bad taste and barbarism” (*9). Here he interrupts his history to devote two courses to neoclassical rules, product of a profound failure to understand ancient art, as he shows. An action, he says, is “an activity depending on the will of a person.” It implies “the idea of moral freedom, by which alone Man is considered as the final author of his decisions” (*16, 18). *Andromaque* thus contains four interwoven actions, and Racine leads them all to the denouement. The unity of action of ancient tragedy is born of a

free determination of the will and ends in the recognition of physical necessity (61). This profound unity is found in Shakespeare and the Romantic dramatists, but Aristotle does not speak of it. Action for him has the meaning of *event*, as for “all the moderns” (*18). Antigone and Brutus should thus leave the stage after their initial act, but Orestes in Crébillon can kill his mother by accident (*66). The ideal unity of art is manifest in the physical world, just like the mechanical unity of a watch or the organic unity of a plant, which escapes the scalpel (*20). Several key Romantic points that return in *De l'Allemagne* unite here in a fine aesthetic argument: the ideas of organic unity, independence of the soul, and ties between the physical and moral universes. This argument is largely absent in Sismondi, ill at ease in pure aesthetics. Compare Sismondi's unhappy explanation of tragedy (II 303–310, III 404). He pays the price later, when he remarks in the work of Félix Lope de Vega y Carpio the “*charme particulier de l'unité romantique, si différente de la nôtre,*” but goes on to refer to a “*violation gratuite des règles essentielles de l'art*” (IV 160–164).

Voltaire already remarked on how ridiculous it is to execute a plot in twenty-four hours (*27).¹³ French tragedy moreover prepares these plots in the sovereign's antechamber, and its heroes lament in antitheses the alexandrine encourages (*34, *42). Thus, writers avoid sinning “against the rules of art” by sinning “against the rules of nature” (*35). Schlegel extracts and publishes a page of ridiculous quotations, which his translator will suppress. He indicates the absurdity of confidants and expositions: Great events may take place, but the viewer “is sitting in a poorly chosen place to be eyewitness to them” (*32). This adds little to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and the *Deux Phèdres* of 1807. But theatrical illusion is not a trick we play on spectators; it is “a waking dream to which one gives oneself willingly” (*22, *195), an idea for which Samuel Taylor Coleridge will earn credit – Körner speaks of plagiarism. It is to be found, less clearly, in Staël (*DA* II 218, 245A) and in Sismondi (IV 146). Schlegel would like to meet more moments of repose, the lyrical moments of the ancients (cf. Sismondi II 194); the moderns fill out their mutilated sources with plot, a mechanism that by its nature is less tragic than comic.¹⁴

By a sleight of hand, Schlegel disposes of Corneille and Racine, heroes of the French stage, in relegating them to the end of a chapter that opens on the Spanish, founders in his estimation of the theater in France – a supreme insult that his judgment on Racine, “a thoroughly lovable poet” (*51), cannot efface. French tragedy is a false path that the nation's taste condemns without appeal; of a thousand tragedies published since the death of Racine, no more than thirty still have the favor of the public

(*55). If one had followed the Spanish example, “French tragedy could have become national and truly romantic” (*38). All the same, Schlegel tells us later that “[n]othing is more different than the French and the Spanish national character” (*48). Schlegel has like Staël a weakness for Voltaire, “idol of an elapsed age,” despite it being fashionable to attack him “with the most hostile partiality” (*12). Molière, who takes his finest ideas from the Romans and the Spanish, offers in *Le Misanthrope* a very bad example to French comedy (*94). Staël herself was not overly fond of Molière; Sismondi simply avoids the century of Louis XIV where he is fundamentally opposed to the Germans. The present condition of dramatic art in France depends absolutely on the effort to introduce a mixed genre, as proven by melodrama and vaudeville, while avoiding the “misunderstood principles of illusion and nature” (*99–103).¹⁵

From misplaced and misunderstood imitation of the ancients, we pass to Shakespeare, that Promethean demiurge (the famous example of Caliban returns). Calderón alone is his equal; Schlegel later cites Dante (*110, *161). The English and the Spanish write neither tragedies nor comedies in the proper sense of the term, but Romantic dramas (cf. Sismondi III 512). Romantic art can thus be found in the South as in the North of Europe; it is distinguished by fusing together, as in painting, everything that more sculptural antiquity had separated (*110–111). Like his brother Friedrich, Schlegel associates different places and epochs, play and earnest, dialogue and lyric (*113); *De l’Allemagne* quotes this opposition without its cogent argument.

The arabesque of Berlin Romanticism is mentioned anew in this fantastic world (*159). Demigod and prophet, Shakespeare reveals the secret irony of him who has seen everything and who outlives sentiment; Staël presents Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and *Faust* in the same fashion (*136–137, *DA* II 80–83). But all this Romanticism does not eliminate a few old eighteenth-century themes; the ideas of terror and pity, the sublime and the beautiful are inseparable from Schlegel’s Romantic discourse (*176, *136).

Italy produced little after the time of Tasso, we read, and the English stage died when the Puritans closed the theaters (*117, *238). But the English, the French, and the Italians found their inspiration in Spain, whose *siglo de oro* is born before Cervantes and Lope de Vega and triumphs in Calderón (*251–253). Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Calderón thus crown a teleological argument that devalues their rivals. The rich field of a fertile epoch gives birth to a unique and inspired genius, as Herder said of Luther. Sismondi answers by devoting 330 pages to Italy’s third renewal in

the eighteenth century, while the Spanish had only “une seule période . . . celle de la chevalerie” (III 98, IV 256). In Italy, says Schlegel, the entire nation likes artifice, but the Spanish government subjugated a people once free and heroic; he says it once but does not insist. Courageous, honorable, proud but humble before God, serious and modest, such was the Castilian (*261). Sismondi would say rather the Catalan; he speaks at length about the heroic and tolerant Spain of the *Cid* and reproaches Schlegel for saying that the Spanish hated the Arabs (III 101–114, I 101–102). Staël speaks thus of the Germans; she even translates a long extract on the Spanish nation that she suppresses in her printed text (*260–263; *DA* III 335–339). Her final version notably eliminates the political context of the Crusades and tyranny, along with a whole passage on the guitar, the romance, and Arab influence. Sismondi will take up the same passage (IV 107–119). Indeed, this fine Spanish chapter in Schlegel is almost the only place where he turns to the nation to explain a literature, though he uses the term often.

After this “*last* summit of romantic poetry,” a key word suppressed in the French translation (III 270), comes the fatal eighteenth century (*266–268). Romantic art, for Schlegel, is as dead as classical. Sismondi also retraces “la décadence de toutes les littératures romanes” (IV 561); the Italian renewal is for him neoclassical. Staël alone finds in Germany a living Romanticism. For Schlegel as for Friedrich Hölderlin, their country is corrupted like the others; the nature of the “Romantic” after all is that it is to be found elsewhere. Besides, Schlegel finds the new German theater inferior to other genres. *De l’Allemagne* on the contrary devotes half its long second *partie* to it. Schlegel like Staël argues that Goethe writes for the study; his *Götz* is in jargon, they say (*276–277; *DA* III 21, 30). But in his short chapter, Schlegel also cites those neoclassical plays and translations of Voltaire that Staël ignores. Schlegel dislikes Schiller’s *Wallenstein*, despite the tastes of Staël and Constant (*281–282). After 1,200 pages on the past, he ends at last with two pages on the future of German theater, a structure that Staël would find unthinkable. German taste leans to the *Romantic* – a word profaned in a thousand posters. National poetry can offer theatrical entertainment, but Schlegel, Staël, and Sismondi (III 499) agree in saying that the most dignified genre is historical drama. Despite today’s shame, says Schlegel, one will thus rediscover a nation that was once the greatest and most illustrious in Europe. One thinks of Johan Gottlieb Fichte in 1808.¹⁶

Staël indicates three strong points of Schlegel’s: his analysis of tragedy and comedy (*131–136), the enthusiasm he inspires for great geniuses, and

his taste for the *concetti* of the South (*DA* III 332–333). We might also note two things. First, as Martine de Rougemont puts it very well, Schlegel makes of the Greeks themselves the coping stone of Romanticism: The virus thus occupies the artistic universe. Second, we may date to Schlegel's courses the famous opposition between mechanical and organic art (*109). The genius of the poet, of the age, of the nation, has no choice; it must follow its internal logic. The childish gardener beholds the lovely rootless flowers he once boasted of now dying, without noticing the sublime uncultivated forest that overshadows him (18).¹⁷

De l'Allemagne gives this argument more space than Schlegel himself, grounding it in a very personal dialectic of the nation and the march of history. Staël borrows from Schlegel only his beautiful conclusions; she creams his discourse, reduced to a new decor for a system of thought she had been articulating since 1788. Thus, Staël speaks of sculptural antiquity and picturesque modernity, of public squares and Greek relief sculptures, retracing a Schlegelian argument about the wide, shallow ancient stage where the chorus represents the *demos* (49, 58, *28); he speaks like Wagner of mythic distance and the mixture of the arts (38). And, in turn, Schlegel cites in passing several great Staëlian themes: unity of interest, local color (29–30), melancholy, the frank character and turn within of the North (24, *243–244), German character, more speculative than practical (*289), ennobling pain (64), *translatio studii* (*110), the correspondences between the physical and the moral world (*166), the contrast between courtly and popular taste (20, *13), the fear of ridicule (241, *43). He asks for a book on the Greek nation (45) – *De l'Allemagne's* method – and he wants a social role for theater, as Staël does for all literature.

Certain metaphors also return in both authors: the harmonica, the Eolian harp (35), the comet (*30; *DA* IV 68), the soldiers in a line (*140). One last echo concerns the atheist empiricism of the Old Regime. “Lorsque les sauvages,” *De l'Allemagne* says, “mettent le feu à des cabanes, l'on dit qu'ils se chauffent avec plaisir à l'incendie qu'ils ont allumé” (*DA* IV 71–72). In Vienna, under threat from Napoleon at the time, Schlegel curiously takes up the same image: “[T]he sight of a fire at night can . . . delight; but when one's neighbor's house is burning . . .” (*101). He speaks of revolutionary despotism, of the philosophy of Epicurus that softens it, and of the corrupted taste of the Romans under their bloody tyrants: “One has seen the same occurrence in similar epochs in modern history” (137, 171, 234). “[T]hey were,” Schlegel remarks, “the iron necessity of other peoples; the general destroyers” (232). Lastly, he permits himself a dozen allusive pages on Richard III and even Henry V of

England, who made up for usurpation and domestic tyranny with wars of conquest abroad (*184–196).¹⁸

Schlegel gives these conferences in Vienna in spring 1808. He then returns to Coppet with Staël, the *Nibelungenlied* in his bags; on July 10, she takes up her notes, some dating from 1803, to begin the first manuscript of *De l'Allemagne*. Its influence on Romantic Europe will be even clearer than that of the texts of Schlegel and Sismondi. Studies on those are lacking. On *De l'Allemagne*, they are plentiful, and I will linger here less.¹⁹

Germaine de Staël

Schlegel speaks of theater, Sismondi of poetry and eloquence; politics enters their texts only surreptitiously. In *De l'Allemagne*, pure literature occupies a quarter of the text, and even the philosophical discussions reveal veiled allusions to oppression and revolt. Legend claims that Napoleon ordered the book's pulping when he recognized himself in the portrait of Attila; the manuscript proves that Staël wanted this risky allusion, speaking for instance of a taste for fine art very visible in Napoleon but not in the Attila she is discussing.

The simple fact of speaking about Germany in 1810 represents a direct attack on two French authorities: Napoleon, who is crushing the German nation, and French classicism, which calls Germany insipid and archaic. In her first *partie*, “De l'Allemagne et des mœurs des Allemands” (twenty chapters), Staël thus eliminates a series of manuscript remarks on German division and injustice in order to make room for Romantic propaganda. Her printed text similarly stresses the Rhine – the old border – at the moment when Napoleon extends French borders to Lübeck; it ignores the enormous socioeconomic division between eastern and western Germany, because in 1810, the vestige of western Germany remaining formed the Confederation of the Rhine, a puppet in the hands of the Emperor. Staël thus presents a German nation that receives the torch of the future from the hands of an irresistible historical dialectic. This was not made to please French readers in 1814, nor those of a century later.

The second *partie*, “La Littérature et les arts” (thirty-two chapters), is the cutting edge of the classic–Romantic debate, dividing literary history in two. Staël here subjects her alleged Romantic initiators to a fundamental distortion that serves her propagandist needs. She benches the novel and the Berlin Romantics, to offer a free field to theater and Weimar classicism. She scrambles Goethe's *Faust* to offer neoclassical Europe a less “ridiculous” play, inventing a new *Faust* for the nineteenth century. It is a key

moment in the difficult birth of French Romantic theater. And again, the disturbing truths of Staël's manuscripts – here, a faithful translation of Goethe – yield to propaganda in the text, which crushes once and for all the accusations of ignorance her text has endured. In *De l'Allemagne*, Staël rightly chooses to offer Europe a Romanticism in her image, which she then attributes to the Germans.²⁰

In her third *partie*, “La Philosophie et la morale” (twenty-one chapters), Staël attacks the universe of imperial France, where every aspect concerns the exterior of things. An astonishing synthesis links empiricism, the *faits* of literary classicism, Catholicism, salon society, and the tyranny of Napoleon. When Staël simplifies German problems or leaves unmentioned their philosophers' quarrels, she gains on two fronts – her awkward German raw material thus becomes less illegible for a doubtful Europe, and a united front replaces a scrabbling one to oppose Napoleon's hegemony. These local effects coincide with Staël's broader goals – difficult truths in manuscript yield once again to Romantic propaganda. Immanuel Kant and the Germans see themselves deformed in striking manner: She says *phénomène*, for instance, for the Kantian “noumenon.” Staël again makes herself a place apart between Romantic revolution and French tradition: Her own pre-German texts of 1788–1800 reveal a series of “Romantic” ideas that have been called borrowings in her great work of 1810.

The work ends on “La Religion et l'enthousiasme” (twelve chapters), quite topically for the Catholic renewal if only Staël did not celebrate Protestants. She fights as always on two fronts, attacking two dominant opinions in the Empire: the enlightened atheism of the *idéologues* and the Catholic reaction encouraged by the Concordat. Staël was Genevan, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Calvinist; in 1799, she had proposed transforming France into a Protestant republic. This religion then is another nonborrowing from the Germans, because Staël has been speaking of it since 1788. To the public of 1814, *De l'Allemagne* offered a fecund synthesis of religion and philosophy that overcame the sterile debates of the Enlightenment. It is a synthesis that echoes German and Genevan Protestantism, found also in Sismondi but largely absent in Schlegel. As it happens, Staël rejects a strong primitivist current in European Romanticism that celebrates the Catholic Middle Ages; Ernest Renan and the Americans will profit from this.²¹

Generations of critics have looked for a mythic ancestor to Europe's various Romantic movements. Here, explicitly, it stands. Staël dominates two epochs like a Janus. Behind her stands the France of the

Enlightenment, from the Versailles of her first successes to the Assemblée nationale she influenced. This is the period of French hegemony, born of aristocratic cosmopolitanism, that opened to Staël a path to European glory. Before her stands the bourgeois and Romantic nineteenth century, alongside the new Europe of nationalities – Staël’s word – of which she and *De l’Allemagne* are both vanguard and victim. In September 1810, *De l’Allemagne* is pulped by the imperial police, thus recognizing its political topicality (see Chapter 11). Staël, Schlegel, and Sismondi are in Geneva, as in Italy in 1805 or Vienna in 1808. But the crucible of the years 1805–1810 is breaking. The police remove from Coppet the author of the *Deux Phèdres*. Staël and Schlegel seem to speak little of the course of Sismondi; he himself writes to Schlegel in August 1811 of “mon cours qui est . . . très superficiel.” Why then interrupt the sixteen volumes of his *Histoire des républiques italiennes* to devote two thousand pages to the literary terrain of his two friends? The answer lies once again at the heart of the Groupe de Coppet.²²

Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi

Sismondi’s work in *De la littérature du midi de l’Europe* (1813) brings both continuation and corrections. Its preface echoes Schlegel in opposing the rules of convention to the “règles fondamentales” of beauty. The author adds, “[J]’ai surtout voulu montrer partout l’influence réciproque de l’histoire politique et religieuse des peuples sur leur littérature, et de leur littérature sur leur caractère” – precisely the aim of Staël’s great treatise of 1800. Sismondi gives Coppet a particular accent when he traces in literature the unending combat between liberty and despotism; and in distinction to Schlegel, who only comments on literature, Sismondi reproduces it, offering a new mine of data to the nineteenth century (III 212). The Southern manifesto Sismondi’s title indicates is born of the fact that Sismondi, like Staël in 1796, was unable to complete the second panel of his work, on the literature of the North; it is no less effective for that.

Let us examine a little the structure of this text, which opens with two courses on the fall of Rome and the Arabs – from the outset, the structure itself seems the coping stone of a new Romantic propaganda. Things, however, are not so simple: Voltaire in his *Essai sur les mœurs*, an essential precedent for Coppet, already spoke of Europe’s Arab creators. Like Constantin François de Volney, Sismondi contemplates this lovely civilization sunk beneath the sands of Africa and asks whether Europe one day

will have the same fate. It is precisely the image that closes *De l'Allemagne*, and the application to Napoleon is clear.

Coppet perceived the end of homogeneous classical civilization in two events: the Germanic invasion and Christianity. Sismondi inflects this idea by distinguishing two halves of medieval France: the troubadour students of the Arabs and the Norman *trouvères* of the *langue d'oïl* (179 and 90 pages, respectively). Two races of conquerors, from Viking North and Arab South, met in France to found modern Europe. It is therefore a contradiction to situate the Romantic world elsewhere than in the romance countries of the South, as Staël does, or to call those countries classical. Looking to give a real basis to the troubadour genre, Sismondi the historian returns those unpublished texts he cites to within the framework of an entire civilization: Christian religion and feudal society create an expression that is “presque absolument poétique,” that is, chivalry (I 58), which in its turn influences customs. Sismondi insists on the organic unity of the chivalrous world: Politics, religion, and poetry mingle, and through them the good, true, and beautiful. Man and nature are in harmony; writer and poetry have a recognized, national, and popular function. This liberal portrait of the Middle Ages inflects Novalis or Schlegel in 1800–1803, and it has multiple French and British parallels.²³

Chivalry matters because Sismondi's course is also and almost primarily a medieval manifesto. If Schlegel speaks a good deal about the Greeks, Sismondi begins at the fall of Rome, and he devotes fifteen chapters of forty to literature before 1500: The rise of Northern literatures corresponds to the decadence of Southern ones. Sismondi in 1811 has already published eight volumes on the Italian republics, and he there exposes his philosophy. For the Groupe de Coppet, as Norman King shows, speaking of the Middle Ages is a necessary consequence of their liberal thought. Like Staël in 1800, Sismondi distinguishes in history a succession of “phases régulières et correspondantes” (I ii). Chivalry was the last great motivating factor of the human spirit, which turned toward liberty after 1789. It is ridiculous, in politics as in literature, to attempt to remount the current after such a break. But these lovely independent Middle Ages sink in the sixteenth century beneath calculation and despotism. Rousseau and the *Encyclopédie* furnish Coppet with this key idea of liberal Romanticism: Schlegel and Berlin barely speak of it. In fact, apart from Schlegel, the rest of Coppet knows the Middle Ages poorly, even if they take some interest in it, and Sismondi dislikes the use Schlegel makes of it. They fight over Staël, dear friend and European power, who is according to Adalbert von Chamisso “également amoureuse de liberté et de chevalerie.” In April

1808, Sismondi writes that he bitterly regrets seeing Staël adopting Schlegel's opinions: "[J]e ne saurais dire combien ses nouvelles opinions me font de peine." One might see here the trace of the Vienna Conferences. Henri Meister writes in March that Staël is exalting German literature, claiming "qu'on ne peut lui comparer la littérature française." She will be less confrontational in 1810. On the other hand, Schlegel reminds Staël in 1811 of her judgment that "rien ne se compare aux troubadours," a phrase "contre laquelle j'ai vainement réclamé." Staël here follows Sismondi; Schlegel prefers the *Minnesinger* he is editing. Whether out of politeness then or out of real gratefulness, Sismondi praises Schlegel in his text: "[P]ersonne n'a mieux étudié les Espagnols que lui" (IV 110). If in fact "ce fut . . . Sismondi qui, malgré son perpétuel agacement à l'égard de Schlegel, adopta la majorité de ses vues," we must say that his aims are very different.²⁴

"The sciences have always owed their origin to some great spirit," said *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, attributing to Staël "the art of analyzing the spirit of nations and the springs which move them." Schlegel, in proposing a comedic grammar, may remind one of Ferdinand de Saussure. In his long and influential text, Sismondi does as much as anyone, and more than his friends, to found comparative literature. From our twentieth century, the sociocritic Sismondi seems to oscillate between triumph and ridicule – but such judgments are easy at two centuries' distance, and they falsify the reception of the text. History for Sismondi is, in Norman King's words, "une science expérimentale au même titre que les sciences physiques." Like Isaac Newton, he seeks laws and etiologies, and the troubadours furnish him with two further literary examples.²⁵

We have spoken of France. But frontiers are deceptive, and another nation can be made out behind their apparently neutral grid: Sismondi unites Provençal and Catalan, as they were in 1100, to retrace a great and free civilization, crushed in France by the Albigensian Crusade, "au moment peut-être où [son génie] allait prendre les plus grands développements" (I 208), and in Spain by the union of Aragon and Castile. Here is a liberal historian's judgment that crisply opposes him to Schlegel. Eight pages earlier, however, he spoke exclusively of "une cause plus immédiate de destruction" of the troubadours – that is to say, their ignorance of the Greeks. Both judgments seek to be scientific; both are born of the same desire to retrace the laws of the organism behind appearances. If Sismondi contradicts himself a good deal on Romanticism, he does so equally on the scientific front. The same fact

receives two judgments, historical and literary, which he cannot reconcile; he lacks Staël's astonishing gift of synthesis – thus his tergiversation on the Crusades, or on Lorenzo the Magnificent, which William Roscoe reproached him for.²⁶

Similarly, after 200 pages on chivalry, Sismondi adds that the real home of Romantic chivalry was not with the troubadours but with the *trouvères* (I 204). Love, a weakness for the ancients, here becomes a virtue. Eight pages later, he says that the north of France was still prey to the fanaticism of the priests, while he treats the Cathars as “Réformés” – his word – before their time. Schlegel dated dramatic and lyric poetry from the Spanish and the Germans; Sismondi attributes to France the renaissance of the three genres (epic, dramatic, and lyric), when in contrast to the lyric poetry of the troubadours the *trouvères* chose epic and theater.

And yet, neoclassical France refused this national heritage (I 259). Sismondi thus ignores it, and alongside it, without excuse, the three centuries after 1300, perhaps through lack of knowledge. The obsessive classical menace thus disappears in an eyeblink: Greece, Rome, Louis XIV find themselves shown the door of a “Romantic” civilization of which they are “en quelque sorte l'antithèse.” We might praise this desire to judge a poorly known civilization according to its own criteria, without reference to the great classical model; unhappily, Sismondi doesn't manage it, and the problems he elides through a desire for neutrality return to trouble him throughout the entire text. Absent France, “centre, lieu de vérité et de certitude,” does not structure his text any the less. He himself tells us that his task is to “présenter aux gens de goût ce qu'il leur convient de savoir sur les littératures étrangères” (I i); he cannot do so without making use of their rules.²⁷

Italy and Spain, with 653 and 688 pages out of 2,000, dispute two-thirds of the course. They alone adopt a century division with its own strong points: the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* with 314 pages and the Italian sixteenth and eighteenth centuries with 200 and 274 pages. The erotics of reading here imposes a comparison of the two great rivals; this game at which readers have exercised themselves for the past two centuries may seem otiose – but allow me two remarks. First, facing moribund Spain, Italy is living a third literary renewal that one might compare to Staël's Germany: In no way Romantic, it is in a sense Romanticism's negative image. Second, which authors are privileged? To establish the strong points of this work, critics have, as always, objective criteria they have only to make use of. Among the Italians, Dante, Francesco Petrarca, and Metastasio earn 30–40 pages apiece. Torquato Tasso and Alfieri receive

70 and 80 pages, as do the Cid and Lope de Vega. Next come Cervantes and Calderón with about 100 pages, and lastly Luis Vaz de Camoëns with 130. Dante thus occupies one-quarter the space of Camoëns, even though the latter is not overly discussed by critics. How are we to justify this choice?

Sismondi's *Républiques* and his Italian articles for the *Biographie universelle* offer two supplements to this course on Italy. He speaks first of lyric poetry and epic. These two genres barely feature in Staël and in Schlegel, but they return constantly in Sismondi, who thus offers a Romantic reading of them to the nineteenth century. Speaking of Petrarca, Sismondi rejects the sonnet in favor of the ode, that spontaneous overflowing of the inspired self. This authenticity of speech was guaranteed in *Corinne* by improvisation; a nineteenth century of improvisers was, however, hard to imagine, and Sismondi assures us that writing is not falsehood. At the same time, he refuses technique – that proof of calculation. His age still believed Pindar's odes lacked structure. Schlegel, who is a poet, sees the absurdity of this Romantic myth – in Greek, *téchnē* and *mousiké* go hand in hand.

The epic lets the text return to chivalry. Sismondi in literature praises to the heavens the Crusades he detests as a historian, that unique example of a struggle between “la plus haute civilisation” in bloom and “la plus avilissante servitude” (II 100). It seems futile to seek to reconcile these two Sismondis, whose judgments on the beautiful and the good differ so often and in so marked a fashion. He was not alone in the nineteenth century in facing these problems. Similarly, Sismondi praises in Lodovico Ariosto “enthousiasme de bravoure” and “ivresse des combats,” old building blocks of despotism that Staël labors to destroy. He will contradict himself again in speaking of the conquistadors. The life of Tasso nevertheless offers him the model of a new Romantic hero, a poet not a soldier, precisely the example of *De l'Allemagne*. Here, the poetic ideal dear to great minds suffers in the hands of a mediocre society. This story of genius misunderstood by its nation returns like a fugue across the text's long portraits, from the Cid to Don Quixote, to Francisco de Quevedo and Camoëns; it is also an obsessive theme of Staël's, of Rousseau's, and of Romanticism, whose German side Sismondi exposes in a long analysis (II 380–381).

Sismondi is at his most fascinating when he speaks of the ties between literature and society. More Herderian than Schlegel, he treats nations as organic units, passing through a vigorous youth, during which all are poets, to maturity. From his first page, he insists on a Romantic equation: Out of the organic nation is born a national genius whose works share his

enthusiasm with the nation itself. But foreign literature, a disaster for the young, becomes indispensable for older nations. Thus, the Italians faced the same sterility that triumphed over the troubadours, which was to triumph over the Spanish. Between these two fatal examples, Sismondi offers a literature that on leaving childhood creates a second youth for itself by turning consciously to foreign models. This is exactly the lesson of Germany, except that Italy resuscitates precisely with the models of Louis XIV (II 296). Of the three Coppet “Romantics,” Schlegel alone sees in the age of Louis XIV an aberration of art. Sismondi tells us like Staël that Tasso is sung by the gondoliers of Venice (II 160), but it is Metastasio that he calls their most nationally representative poet. His portrait of Alfieri also surprises – he celebrates the “ardeur après une autre existence” of this disenchanted man, and the “l’univers nouveau qu’il créa dans son propre sein” (III 49). The Romantic theme of a second nature is normally reserved for Shakespeare and epic. Where also are the Italian Romantics, Ugo Foscolo, Silvio Pellico, Alessandro Manzoni, and Giacomo Leopardi? Sismondi, their friend and collaborator, says not a word of them in his successive editions. Staël and Schlegel keep the same silence in their own manifestos on the Romantic authors they had before their eyes.²⁸

The science of the connections between peoples and their institutions finds in Spain two other historical illustrations. First, the romantic Middle Ages disappear under despotism; these medieval texts we read are relics of a liberty that has been lost. After Provence and Italy, Spain offers conclusive proof of this. Sismondi opposes the free Spain of the Cid, “qui maintint pendant cinq siècles sa liberté civile et religieuse,” to the Spain of Calderón that Schlegel praises and which seemed to “vouloir accabler l’Europe et le Nouveau Monde sous les ruines de sa propre constitution” (III 101). Art itself suffers; isolated in intolerance, the Spanish became sterile.

The Cid offers to Sismondi, modern Plutarch, the model of a true hero, reconciling history and poetry in his person: “[A]ucun héros . . . n’a été plus universellement célébré par ses compatriotes, et la gloire d’aucun n’est plus intimement liée à toute la poésie, comme à toute l’histoire de son pays” (III 200). After him, we fall back into anonymity, a presage of the sterility that similarly destroyed the troubadours. Sismondi distinguishes no Spanish name from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, at which point they turn happily to the Italians. But at this very moment, Charles V of the House of Austria submits the nation to despotism: “La poésie prenait son premier essor au moment où tout périssait, excepté la gloire des armes” (III 311).

Charles V had already served in *De l’Allemagne* as a figure of Napoleon. Here, “tandis que l’Europe et l’Amérique étaient inondées de sang,” the

Spanish poets, all soldiers, “se peignent comme des bergers tressant des guirlandes de fleurs.” Sismondi suggests that this sybaritic softness retraces their disgust – that reminds him of those ancient poets who saw their free republics yielding to empires. In addition, these wars of conquest were not national, and Spanish poetry reflects that: “[A]u milieu de tout son éclat, on démêlait déjà les symptômes de sa prochaine destruction” (III 313). Sismondi devotes ten more pages to Charles V: His power, unrivaled in Europe since Charlemagne, “était bien faite pour tourner la tête à un jeune souverain, et lui inspirer le funeste projet d’une monarchie universelle”; the nation in its enthusiasm let itself be deceived about the “changement de ses lois et de sa constitution” (III 263). It seems astonishing that the imperial censor allowed these pages in 1813, and that Sismondi could claim he had added no attack “contre aucun ordre établi.”²⁹

After this military passage comes a religious attack. Philip, son of Charles, did not have “le caractère de la nation, mais celui de ses moines.” This fanaticism shaped his subjects, who “ne doivent aucun de ces vices à la nature,” and Spain thus shows us “le caractère comme le goût national pervertis par . . . le fanatisme” (IV 50, 35). As Frank Bowman has said, this third volume offers a long Calvinist refutation of the *Génie du christianisme*. Sismondi even uses the distinction, in noting the fashion for calling Spain the country of the purest Christianity: “Gardons-nous de nous laisser tromper par un nom, et de dire ou de croire que cette religion soit la nôtre” (IV 179). And he adds an anecdote: “Je n’ai point eu l’avantage d’entendre prêcher un capucin espagnol; mais le hasard m’a fait rencontrer en voyage un barbier italien, qui faisait commerce de sermons avec des moines trop ignorants pour en composer eux-mêmes” (IV 240). A Genevan speaking in Geneva, Sismondi condemns Italian Catholicism at a stroke, comparing the state of the church in the eighteenth century to “un grand désert qu’aucun mouvement et aucune vie n’animaient” (II 349).³⁰

One can imagine the effect of this situation on literature, which always follows political upheavals, “mais souvent à demi-siècle de distance” (IV 51); as Simone Balayé underlines, Sismondi here rejects the Romantic theme of the writer as guide or prophet of the future. But the bizarre law he elaborates allows him at last to explain a paradox “sur lequel nous avons, à plusieurs reprises, appelé l’attention: l’époque du plus grand éclat littéraire fut celle de la subversion des lois et des mœurs” (IV 504). Calderón, “vrai poète de l’inquisition,” symbolizes this second Spain; opposite him, Sismondi insists that the *Cid* is unequaled, and that Spanish literature, clearly seen, only has “une seule période” (IV 255). This art closed to outsiders, like that of the troubadours, is brilliant but

sterile according to another organic law: “Les Espagnols doivent s’accuser eux-mêmes d’une décadence aussi rapide . . . Loin de se perfectionner . . . ils n’ont plus su que se copier eux-mêmes . . . [A]près avoir parcouru le théâtre espagnol, dont la richesse étonnait et éblouissait d’abord, on le quitte, fatigué de sa monotonie” (IV 207, 218). Here then is the risk for imperial France: Imitation and ignorance are equally sterile. This organic model may seem absurd or dangerous, but it serves as excellent propaganda for Romantic comparative literature, as for Coppel’s Europe of nations.³¹

Sismondi ends with 305 pages on Portugal. He speaks above all of Camoëns, whose *Lusiads* seem to him “en quelque sorte le complément de la poésie espagnole, et le poème épique qui avait manqué à cette littérature” (IV 426). In Napoleon’s Europe, Camoëns is a salutary example of the poet’s mission: “Telle est l’étrange puissance du génie dans un homme, qu’il fonde la renommée de tout un peuple . . . devant qui des millions d’individus disparaissent” (IV 323). Sismondi has, however, not managed to reconcile his opinions on war. He praises the Portuguese poets, “toujours occupés de la guerre et de l’amour,” and speaks of the conquistadors as follows: “des héros portugais d’une bravoure que l’imagination suit à peine, se succédèrent rapidement dans ce monde inconnu” (IV 276–281). A hundred pages later, he returns to these same events: “Les mémoires d’Alphonse d’Albuquerque sont tout dégouttants de sang” (IV 416). Here, Sismondi feels a sudden qualm. He first excuses himself – “Ce n’est point m’écarter de mon sujet que de signaler ces grands crimes politiques” – and then turns one final time toward Schlegel, to attack “[l]es mêmes critiques qui . . . ont rappelé notre attention sur la littérature espagnole . . . [C]e n’est pas d’après les convenances poétiques qu’il est permis de juger les actions des hommes” (IV 418). Sismondi will rediscover coherence and impartiality in avoiding henceforth the shifting sands of literature.

Sismondi’s vast new work has followed “la marche de l’esprit humain dans toute l’Europe,” retracing in all the southern nations the “modifications d’un même esprit” (IV 261, 557). Sociocriticism and comparative literature here find their origin. Ludovico di Breme calls the course an *Esprit des lois poétiques*, a natural history of poetry; we find here the fundamental unity of taste demonstrated across the diversity of nations. “Une fois de plus,” says Jean Rudolf von Salis, “le mouvement romantique a rendu un service inestimable à la science.”³²

Sismondi does not proclaim these virtues: Three-quarters of his text is summaries. His structure speaks for itself, but his choice of facts rather than opinions pushes the kernel of his philosophical discussion to the

superb opening and closing pages, 100-odd pages out of 2,000. This explains two, after all, rather similar judgments: First, Sismondi says of the three unities, “[L]es neuf dixièmes de mon ouvrage n’ont que faire de cette doctrine.” Second, Auguste Louis Philippe de Saint-Chamans claims that in removing “des quatre gros volumes de son ouvrage une trentaine de pages,” one will have “un livre fort utile.” We begin to see here the nature of the enormous misunderstanding, on both sides, in press reaction to this work, a misunderstanding that is echoed with regard to Staël and Schlegel. Sismondi himself tells us that his “désir d’impartialité n’a point été reconnu; l’un et l’autre parti nous a considérés comme hostiles” (III 467). This polemic fed on itself: In Italy, chapter 30 on Romantic theater, a chapter distinguished by its absolute refusal to resolve the question, was republished on its own. For these three “Romantic” products of Coppet, text and reception are two quite independent phenomena. Romanticism after all is somewhat larger than quibbles about the unities in France.³³

Rodrigue Villeneuve has distinguished a Sismondi who judges “d’après mon propre sentiment” (I 398). Art’s value depends on the reader: “[P]our qu’une chose fausse soit vraie poétiquement, il faut . . . que ceux qui l’écourent aient en eux les germes d’une croyance semblable” (II 143). Sismondi shares with Staël this Romantic model, which seems lacking in Schlegel. But, on the other hand, a concern for the morality of art places both of them in an irreducible dilemma. Following Schiller, Schlegel finds in beauty itself the moral function of literature; Staël and Sismondi prefer to insist on the moral beauty of the Romantic hero. Protestant and republican, Sismondi sees in the subject of his course “à côté du mal, ce ressort moral qui relève l’homme après qu’il a été rabaissé” (*Epistolario* I 419). And here is the political advantage of literature. If these three writers find in reality only despotism and massacre, art offers them an abundance of beautiful actions, a lever to raise up a cynical world. This bright future also demands proof of human progress. But battles resemble each other; Staël and Sismondi find in art better proof than in history itself of changes in the human spirit. It is thus that in 1814 Wellington chooses to quote *De l’Allemagne* in his proclamation to occupied Paris, and that Pietro Giordani recommends reading Sismondi to the future king of Italy, discouraged in his patriotic wars.³⁴

Conclusion

In literature, these three texts furnish a Romantic dialectic and a vision of the new man for the multiple anticlassical reactions playing out in Europe

over the previous half-century. Each country finds here what it wants: Schlegel offers Shakespeare and arguments to reject France; Staël proposes *Faust* and Kant; and in Sismondi finally one finds a free Middle Ages opposing that of François-René de Chateaubriand. But the three also offer an idea of the *nation* that seems to me as influential as their literary ideas, as well as tools to explain and transform the Europe of the nineteenth century. From Coppet, two steps from Geneva, these writers elaborate a new Europe of the imagination to confront the dead Europe of the Emperor. Romanticism is vast, and these texts are distinguished above all by the immense scope of the subjects they treat. If Victor Hugo's *Hernani* brings a renewed alexandrine, we face here a new universe. Our young twenty-first century has difficulty finding this unity of thought, where art, science, and society meet. It remains as topical today as in 1813.