

Madame de Staël, *Germany*, 1813

The word *romantic* has been lately introduced in Germany, to designate that kind of poetry which is derived from the songs of the Troubadours [medieval traveling musicians]; that which owes its birth to the union of chivalry and Christianity. If we do not admit that the empire of literature has been divided between paganism and Christianity, the north and the south, antiquity and the middle ages, chivalry and the institutions of Greece and Rome, we shall never succeed in forming a philosophical judgment of ancient and of modern taste. ...

Some French critics have asserted, that German literature is still in its infancy; this opinion is entirely false: men who are best skilled in the knowledge of languages, and the works of the ancients ... prefer that which is founded on the recollection of chivalry, on the wonders of the middle ages, to that which has for its basis the mythology of the Greeks. The literature of romance is alone capable of farther improvement, because, being rooted in our own soil, that alone can continue to grow and acquire fresh life: it expresses our religion; it recalls our history; its origin is ancient, although not of classical antiquity. Classic poetry, before it comes home to us, must pass through our recollections of paganism: that of the Germans is the Christian era of the fine arts; it employs our personal impressions to excite strong and vivid emotions; the genius by which it is inspired addresses itself immediately to our hearts, and seems to call forth the spirit of our own lives, of all phantoms at once the most powerful and the most terrible. ...

The greater number of naturalists have attempted to explain Nature like a good government, in which every thing is conducted according to wise principles of administration; but it is vain that we try to transfer this prosaic system to creation. Neither the terrible, nor even the beautiful, can be explained by this circumscribed theory; and Nature is by turns too cruel and too magnificent to permit us to subject her to that sort of calculation which directs our judgement in the affairs of this world. ...

The contemplation of Nature overwhelms our thoughts. We feel ourselves in a state of relation with her, which does not depend upon the good or evil which she can do; but her visible soul endeavours to find ours in her bosom, and holds converse with us. When darkness alarms us, it is not always the peril to which exposes us that we dread, but it is the sympathy of night with every sort of privation, or grief, with which we are penetrated. The sun, on the

contrary, is like an emanation from the Deity, like a glorious messenger, who tells us that our prayer is heard: his rays descend upon the earth not only to direct the labours of man, but to express a feeling of love for Nature.