

Wellek, René

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A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950 2. The Romantic Age by René Wellek
(Sterling Professor of Comparative Literature, Yale University) New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1955

p. 18 (Friedrich) Schlegel's many speculations about particular genres proved more fruitful than his mystical generalities on the significance of poetry. In his early writings on Greek literature he is most interested in the theory of genres because the development of Greek literature presented him with a survey of the main genres. He did not get into the discussion of tragedy in detail but in connection with Homer devoted long arguments to the epic. ~~He violently rejected Aristotle's approximation of the epic and tragedy and argued, using Wolf's theories about the gradual composition of the Homeric poems, for a theory of the epic in which each larger or smaller member, has, like the whole, its own life and internal unity.~~ He violently rejected Aristotle's approximation of the epic and tragedy and argued, using Wolf's theories about the gradual composition of the Homeric poems, for a theory of the epic in which each larger or smaller member, has, like the whole, its own life and internal unity.

p. 39 August Wilhelm Schlegel was one of the first to take seriously the dictum of Johannes Muller that the Nibelungenlied was a German Iliad: he analyzed and praised the characterization of the heroes and the composition in a way that opened the poem for the first time to modern readers. But he also anticipated the extravagances of praise which have since been showered on the poetic value of the Nibelungenlied, and unfortunately he also was so deeply impressed by Wolf's theory of the origins of the Homeric epics that he suggested and initiated the long aberration of Nibelungen scholarship which was concerned with speculations about collective authorship and composition from individual "ballads" by a later "collector."

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p. 40 Schlegel argues that the Charlemagne romances owe their remote origin to Germanic epic traditions, a view which since has been thoroughly refuted by Joseph Bedier.

We might conclude from Schlegel's adherence to the Wolfian view of the origin of the Homeric poems that he hardly differs from Herder's outlook on universal natural poetry.

Chapter 11, "The Younger German Romantics", pp. 279-297.

p. 282 Gorres' articles on the Nibelungenlied (1808) were the first to examine the parallels in Old Norse sagas and to state the conclusion that the Nibelungenlied is the one surviving fragment of a colossal poem or myth. His . . . book . . . tries to establish more fully that there is only one natural poetry and that it is identical with myth and that all myth came from the East.

p. 282 to Jakob Grimm it seems unthinkable that there should ever have been a Homer or an author of the Nibelungen. No civilized nation is able to produce an epic and has never done so, he says. Epics can only compose themselves

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p. 287 In most details the general structure of the Grimms has since crumbled. The reaction against their views has gone far. Much evidence has been accumulated to show that a great deal of what they considered folk literature is the composition of a single author in the Western tradition and not unacquainted with antiquity. The Nibelungen, the Edda, even Beowulf, are neither primitive nor purely Teutonic. The chansons de geste have been shown to be monkish compositions. Folk songs, fairy tales, and chapbooks are frequently quite late in origin, traceable even to specific authors and full of the devices and traditions of artificial poetry. Much that is supposedly folk poetry is rather "gesunkenes Kulturgut," i.e. it has descended socially to the "lower classes" and its simplicity and naivete are rather a reduction than an origin. One may still, as Croce does,

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