DAS VOLK BILDEN: THE PURSUIT OF VOLKSTÜMLICHKEIT BY BERTHOLD AUERBACH, HEINRICH HEINE AND JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER

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Heinrich Heine and Johann Gottfried Herder examines the theorization of the concept of the Volk and Volkstümlichkeit by three authors from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Berthold Auerbach, Heinrich Heine and Johann Gottfried Herder. The term “volkstümlich” has no exact equivalent in English, although it has been rendered as “popular” “folkish” or even the slightly pejorative “folksy.” In German, it expresses both the quality of something proper to a given people or Volk, and the notion of popularity or commonness at which the English terms gesture. I analyze how these authors aim to expand the contemporaneous reading public by shaping the reading practices of audiences otherwise ignored by traditional belletristic literature. It also interrogates how they conceive of the Volk as a co-producer of literature and culture. Each author uses the terms “Volk” and “Volkstümlichkeit” in programmatic texts to refer to shared characteristics among a given people and as a distinction between high and low culture. All three also pursue the goal of creating a widespread reading public through their own literary practices: Herder in his collections of song and poetry, Heine in his poetry, criticism and journalism, and Auerbach through a thematic focus on the village in his fiction and the serial form of the Volkskalender in his role as editor. Each of them pursues a program that is both national and cosmopolitan, writing as they did during a period when invocation of the Volk was not yet primarily the province of conservative nationalists.
Chapter one shows how Berthold Auerbach used his dual role as author of the immensely popular *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* and as editor of and contributor to various *Volkskalender* to elevate the way of life he portrays. In doing so, he aimed at uniting the disparate audiences of the common people and the educated, as well as urban and rural populations into a single *Volk*. Chapter two focuses on several key texts of Heinrich Heine’s to show that he conceived of the *Volk* as an ideal addressee capable of resolving the contradictions that plague civilization. Contrary to much of the scholarship that sees a pessimistic turn in Heine’s later work, I use his many remarks on the common people throughout his work to draw out a utopian, trans-historical element in his thinking. Two early texts by Johann Gottfried Herder, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur: Fragmente* and the *Volkslieder* project, make up the focus of the third chapter. By importing genres associated with oral traditions and performance into his collections, together with texts by Shakespeare, Herder effaces existing distinctions between popular forms and high literature. The chapter shows that Herder conceives of the *Volk* not just as a public, but as active participants in literary world-making. My dissertation intervenes in existing scholarship on the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by centering *Volk* as one of the defining concepts of the era and demonstrating how different literary media has been used to imagine and establish relations to it.
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Introduction

The fact that “Wir sind ein Volk” was deemed a fitting political slogan by protestors demonstrating in favor of German unity in the German Democratic Republic of 1989 is a powerful testament to the fungibility and power of abstract expression the term Volk has been able to maintain. It and concepts like it have an extraordinary social and political importance, gesturing as they do to the self-understanding and self-organization of large, nebulously defined groups. If one were to choose a single term through which to trace the political history of Europe, Volk would not be an insensible choice. Following the publication of Montesquieu’s De l’esprit des lois (1748), the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw an intense interest in typologies of peoples, and many attempts to systematize what had previously been a loose set of cultural stereotypes. This interest developed concurrently with what would come to be the social sciences, along with genres like ethnography and the travelogue. There were even attempts to discover the laws that governed a people’s Volksgeist, embodied in the efforts of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal to found a Völkerpsychologie, a discipline which drew on the insights of linguistics, psychology and anthropology. Throughout Europe, the foreign was being conceptualized and brought home to the homes of readers.

Concurrent to this development was also what Michael Perraudin and Matthew Campbell call the “European Folk Revival” in their important collection.¹ They describe this phenomenon as “the rediscovery, revaluation and emulation of the ancient songs and stories of primitive people” (Perraudin and Campbell, 1) that occurred throughout the continent and the British Isles. As they point out, the publication of James Macpherson’s Ossian fragments beginning in 1760

and Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765 exercised enormous influence on the literary production and compilation practices of this era. In Germany, the most famous and studied examples of this are the Romantics and pre-Romantics, who, Perraudin and Campbell write, “articulated their sense of the inadequacy of cosmopolitan rationalism by espousing the cultural productions of ordinary (uneducated, rural) people as repositories of pre-rational truth and authentic experience.” (1) Herder is often counted as one of the primary theoretical and literary forerunners of the Romantic movement, although, as I will attempt to show, this oversimplifies his legacy. Among the German Romantics, other names likely to be mentioned in this context are the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel and antiquarians like Ludwig Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano and, of course, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

There are many studies devoted to precisely this topic available in German and English.2 In this dissertation, I have taken a decidedly different tack. The authors and texts I have chosen belong, I argue, to a strain of interest in the *Volk* and *Volksleben* not subsumable under the heading of “Romanticism”. My research shows how Berthold Auerbach, Heinrich Heine, and Johann Gottfried Herder employ the concept of *Volkstümlichkeit* in devising a program for what literature should be. What differentiates Herder, Heine and Auerbach from other figures generally associated with Romanticism is their interest not only in the *Volk* as a source of myth-making and object of mythologization, but as an addressee and public. They share with the Romantics the belief that the literature and culture of the German-speaking world can be enriched by taking inspiration and cues from those members of the population less managed by literary and cultural institutions and who interact with the world in a more direct, unmediated

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way. Not only this, but they take this sector of society seriously as an audience, whether real or ideal.

Heine and Auerbach both explicitly distance themselves from Romantic literature and philosophy (although Heine’s relationship to it, as with many things, is ambivalent), decrying it as backward-looking. Herder, so often associated with this movement and its nefarious, Teutonic nationalist successors, consistently emphasized the plurality of speakers, users and producers of language and culture, and advocated for a kind of cultural relativism in the dealings of Europeans with unfamiliar cultures. All three nurture a strong cosmopolitan impulse which exists alongside their ambitions for their own national literature and culture. In the body of literature dealing with uses and conceptualizations of the Volk during this period, this dimension has largely been forgotten, apart from in specialized studies on individual authors.

A concept and its history

What, then, is a Volk? This question has more often been the object of intellectual history than the literary sciences. My work has therefore been heavily informed by the intellectual-historical tradition which traces the self-understanding of collectivities, particularly the insights of conceptual history or Begriffsgeschichte. The conceptual history of “Volk” in the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland (hereafter GG) provides a helpful starting point with many important theoretical impulses. The GG is one of the influential, conceptual-historical lexica undertaken by Reinhart Koselleck and his collaborators and published between 1972 and 1997. The seventh volume contains a nearly 300-page entry (one of the longest in the entire lexicon) on “Volk, Nation,
Nationalismus, Masse”. The lability of this concept and the challenge of defining it was clearly recognized by the authors of the entry, as evidenced by its length and breadth. The entry itself is replete with references to the difficulty of compiling a theoretically coherent history of “Volk” and its related concepts. As Koselleck writes in the introduction, “Die Begriffe haben also einen relativ hohen Abstraktionsgrad, der eine allgemeine Verwendung ermöglicht, obwohl er in der Applikation immer nur konkrete Völker oder Nationen – oder Massen – erfaßt. Deshalb gibt es zwar eine Theorie der Demokratie, aber kaum eine Theorie der Nation oder des Volkes.” (GG VII, 142) A treatment of Volk thus requires more than the theoretical tools of political philosophy and theory. Although this dissertation is not an attempt to write a conceptual history of Volkstümlichkeit, I hope to contribute to the insights this theoretical approach provides by augmenting it with the methods of literary study and a sensitivity to the importance of literature and figurativeness in the formation of concepts as nebulous as this. This promises to disclose kinds of meaning that a purely theoretical analysis cannot.4

To understand the approach taken in the GG to this term and others, I will provide a brief gloss of the project. Koselleck and the other authors and editors sought to understand the conceptual transformations of the “Sattelzeit” (the years between the early modern and modern periods, roughly from 1750 to 1870). In doing so, they put forth four hypotheses:

Demokratisierung, Verzeitlichung, Ideologisierung (or Ideologisierbarkeit) and Politisierung.

The intellectual historian Niklas Olsen offers a concise summation of each of these hypotheses:


“Demokratisierung […] refers to the assumption that concepts were no longer used only by the elite, but had spread throughout all layers of society. […] Verzeitlichung […] refers to the assumption that social and political change was no longer interpreted through patterns of repetition and recurrence, but through a focus on the future and expectations of change and progress, so that concepts in this process were structured around historical-philosophical ideas of history, as a unified and progressive movement, running along a fixed scheme and toward an ultimate social-political end and meaning. […] Ideologiserbarkeit […] refers to the assumption that an increase of the level of abstraction in concepts made them utilizable according to interests and aims of various groups and movements. […] Politisierung […] refers to the assumption that the increase in the number of people who were able to use and be mobilized by concepts led to an increase in the use of concepts as slogans in the making of political and societal positions.5

This approach necessarily narrowed the range of texts considered in analyzing the transformation of a given term and the analytical approach. Koselleck acknowledged these limits and the fact that this method was meant, above all, to make conceptual history useful for the historical and social sciences.6 Clearly, however, many of these concepts are operative in literature and literary studies, both at the level of explicit content and in the motivations that underlie a given work – indeed, one of my arguments in this dissertation is that Volk is an operative concept in the work of the authors on which I focus, whether this is readily apparent or not.

With specific regard to concepts expressing collectivity, Koselleck offers a helpful set of examples for what separates a “word” from a “concept” in “Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte,” one of several programmatic statements composed in the early days of conceptual history:

Soziale und politische Begriffe enthalten einen konkreten Allgemeinheitsanspruch und sie sind immer vieldeutig – und beides für die Geschichtswissenschaft in jeweils anderer Weise als Worte schlechthin. So kann sich sprachlich eine Gruppenidentität durch den emphatischen Gebrauch des Wortes ’Wir’ artikulieren oder herstellen, begrifflich ist dieser Vorgang erst faßbar, wenn das ’Wir’ mit

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Kollektivnamen wie 'Nation‘, 'Klasse‘, 'Freundschaft‘, 'Kirche‘ usw. auf seinen Begriff gebracht wird.\textsuperscript{7}

Concepts are, by this definition, inherently capable of holding a multiplicity of meanings without coming into contradiction with themselves, as they have a claim to a kind of universal validity.

The words he lists which serve to demarcate a group first become \textit{Begriffe} when they begin to define the relation not only of the speaker to the world (as with ‘we’), but a set of relations that might be considered from any possible vantage point. In the case of “Volk”, as with the other concepts with which it shares an entry, it can be a concept of self-identification in addition to being used to name an “other”.

The authors of the entry on “Volk” correctly identify that the concept, in its emergence before the existence of a unified German nation, referred more to a hoped-for future than it described an existing present:

Mit der Sicht einer sprachlich-kulturellen Individualität, die als 'Volk‘ politisch noch keine Form erhalten habe, mehr noch mit dem demokratischen Begriff 'Volk‘ – oder 'Nation‘ –, der erst in der Zukunft zu verwirklichen sei, wurde aus dem Begriff ein Vorgriff, ein Erwartungsbegriff, dem in der Wirklichkeit noch keine Erfahrung korrespondierte. (GG VII, 148-49)

This is important to keep in mind when looking back on these concepts from a modern perspective, wherein recourse to \textit{Volk} is commonly associated with a backward-looking, even jingoistic impulse. Examining early uses of \textit{Volk} diachronically reveals an effort to capture a nascent sense of inter-confessional and inter-political, collective identity. Certainly, in its early stages, the concept \textit{Volk} contained both progressive, forward-looking and conservative dimensions. The term \textit{Volkstum}, from which \textit{Volkstümlichkeit} is derived, is generally thought to have been originated in 1810 by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, who held Anti-Semitic and

Francophobic views and defined German *Volkstum*, in part, in racial terms. Herder, Heine and Auerbach, however, all tinged their nationalism (if it can be called such) with a high degree of cosmopolitanism – indeed, the latter two were themselves Jewish. The authors of the *GG* also take care to point out the extraordinary fungibility this term retained in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before its meaning became more politically ossified. When examining its emergence in this period, therefore, it is all the more important to take into account the abstract, potentially figurative constitution of its meaning.

An important insight provided by this entry in the *GG*, and one on which I will continue to draw in the chapters that follow, is the discovery that *Volk, Nation* and *Masse* all express, depending on the context, a distinction between high and low within a given people, and between inside and outside between peoples:

> Es ist nun ein erstaunlicher Befund der folgenden Begriffsgeschichten, daß strukturelle Merkmale der Wortverwendung von 'Volk', 'Nation' und 'Masse' wiederhold auftauchen, auch wenn sich die tatsächlich ereignende Geschichte langsam oder schnell geändert hat. Solche strukturellen Merkmale sind die Opposition von oben und unten, von innen und außen, seit etwa 1800 auch von früher oder später. 'Volk', 'Nation' und 'Masse' werden quer durch die Sprachen immer wieder durch die genannten Oppositionsbestimmungen konstituiert. Obendrein werden dieselben Worte ebenfalls verwendet, um diese Grenzbestimmungen zu überschreiten. Dieselben Worte enthalten also je nach politisch-sozialem Umfeld oder Perspektive verschiedene Begriffe, die sich gegenseitig ausschließen oder analog wiederholen, selbst wenn sich die tatsächlichen Vorgaben tiefgreifend ändern. (GG VII, 144-45)

Not only do the same concepts refer to radically different, even competing ideas, but, as we will see, these same ideas occur within the same author’s oeuvre and sometimes even within the same work. Heine in particular, who uses the terms *Volk, volkstümlich* and even *Masse* less deliberately than Herder or Auerbach, frequently toggles between the high-low and inner-outer distinctions, and both are crucial to his program for literature in general and German literature in

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particular. Both senses of the term are also key for both Auerbach and Herder, though each of them is more self-conscious, if not explicit, in signaling how they deploy the term.

As I have stated, I draw on the insights of the *GG* although it is not my intention to compose a conceptual history of *Volkstümlichkeit*. This approach, which Koselleck calls “historical-critical” (*GG* I, XX), considers the synchronic perspective, which concerns the particular speech situations in which a concept is used (social-political context, intentions of the speaker, imagined audience, etc.) as well as the diachronic, which concerns the transformation of a concept over time. These considerations are central to my own analysis, as is the focus on concepts (as opposed simply to words) in the first place. Where I seek to intervene is both in the kinds of texts analyzed when tracing the transformations of a concept’s meaning and in the application of the concepts themselves. My interest in Auerbach, Heine and Herder is not primarily in their importance as innovators in the conceptual history of *Volk*, *Volkstum* or *Volkstümlichkeit*. Rather, I use their shared preoccupation with these concepts to examine how it informs their respective views on literature and what it can do for the culture(s) by which it is received. All three outline their thoughts on the relationship of literature to the *Volk* in programmatic statements and develop these programs in their own literary production: Auerbach in the popular form of the serial and in his *Dorfgeschichten*, Heine in his poetry and journalistic/critical writings, and Herder in his collection, translation and curation of folk songs.

Particularly with regard to Heine and Auerbach, much of the scholarship on the texts I analyze takes a strong historical or sociological approach. This is important work on which I rely and build. The subject matter, in some senses, demands attention to intellectual, social and political history, and the literature of the period has been ably historicized in relation to the
development of liberalism\(^9\) and nationalism.\(^10\) Concepts of the \textit{Volk} and efforts to create \textit{Volkstümlichkeit} had an important role to play in both of these developments. However, a focus on the material reality of what, in fact, constituted the Geman \textit{Volk} does not sufficiently acknowledge the concept’s importance as an \textit{Erwartungsbegriff}. Auebach, Heine and Herder were not merely defining what they took the \textit{Volk} to be and reflecting on how it might be addressed, but, through literary practices, actively attempting to imagine and create a \textit{Volk} that did not yet exist. By focusing on the kinds of \textit{Volksbegriffe} they define and the kinds of publics they seek to bring into being, we gain a more expansive understanding of what literature can achieve and whom it can reach.

**Terminological disambiguation**

I use the term \textit{Volkstümlichkeit} because, while it is not developed programmatically by each author, all three rely on some concept of the \textit{Volk} when formulating their ideas on the function and potential of literature. In fact, I will claim that thinking of literature with an ideal, \textit{volkstümliches} public in mind enables them to define it more expansively than they would if their imagined addressees were limited to a traditional belletristic reading public. As the ultimate \textit{Volksbuch}, Luther’s Bible constitutes, for Herder, Heine and Auerbach, both a literary work unto itself and a linguistic and symbolic repository on which literature can draw. They treat other popular and forms such as myths, folk songs, popular sayings and misremembered quotations as, if not literature in themselves, then as part of the cultural repertoire that enables literary production in the first place.

The word *volkstümlich* also already contains the tension at which all three authors, directly or obliquely gesture: a non-identity of what the term describes with the *Volk* itself. The suffix -*tümlich* (or -*mäßig*, as is sometimes but less frequently used) implies a degree of distance from whatever word to which it is appended. This reveals that, in their reflections on the *Volk* and literature, each of these authors is aware of the mediated relationship that literature has to those members of society not necessarily belonging to an educated reading public.

I also isolate the terms *Volk* and *volkstümlich* as opposed to the much more robustly theorized “nation” and “national” (as well as the more fraught *völkisch*, which rose to popularity among ethno- and cultural nationalists around the time of the *Reichsgründung* and reached its height under National Socialism). Although Auerbach, Heine and Herder all use both *Volk* and *Nation*, sometimes interchangeably, they are far more concerned with the abstract notion of a shared identity than with the existence of a political body. i.e. a nation or nation-state. Given that all three wrote before the existence of a unified, German nation-state, this is only to be expected. However, of greater interest to me are their thoughts on this concept as it pertains to literature than their stated ambitions for a German political body (Auerbach, at least, was active in these debates and advocated a *kleindeutsch* solution to the problem of the German nation-state).

*Volkstümlich* and *Volkstümlichkeit* capture something that *Nation*, *national* and *Nationalismus* cannot, namely the questions of audience and register. Here, we arrive at one of the problems of translating this concept into English. It is sometimes rendered as “popular,” “folkloric” or simply “folkish,” (or, even, the slightly pejorative “folksy”) all of which express important dimensions of the concept but fail to capture it in its entirety. This very difficulty, which one does not face with the elegant cognate, *Nation*, points to a gap in our understanding of the term in the Anglophone realm. To be sure, we see the same appeals to “the American people”
as to “das deutsche Volk” in contemporary politics, but an appreciation of the meanings *Volk, Volkstum* and *Volkstümlichkeit* which are not exhausted by interchangeable use with *Nation* is missing in contemporary discourse. It must be admitted that these latter two terms have considerably less purchase than they did in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and might now appear dated to the modern reader. My dissertation pursues the question of what theoretical gain might derived from a more thorough understanding of these terms and the imagine communities, à la Benedict Anderson,\(^{11}\) that they describe. Indeed, the suffix *tümlich* of which I have made so much seems to already point, self-consciously, to this imagined quality.

**Outline and text corpus**

I will present my findings in reverse chronological order, beginning with a chapter on Berthold Auerbach and his program and execution of a *volkstümliche Literatur*. I do so because Auerbach, unlike Heine or Herder, has a robust and systematic program for the composition of literature that both depicts and addresses the *Volk*. His work thus provides the reader with a helpful introduction to the topic of *Volkstümlichkeit* and point of comparison for Heine and Herder, who both deal with the subject more elliptically. Auerbach’s also addresses the *Volk* as a concrete, real audience, where Herder and Heine tend to treat it more as an ideal one. The *Volk*, for Auerbach, is the rural, village population. They are the protagonists of his famous *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* and the intended audience of his *Kalendergeschichten*, which appeared both in his own publications and in more widely circulated ones such as the *Gartenlaube*. His emphasis on this particular sector of the population owes both to his belief in their unique vitality and proximity to nature and to what he perceived as an increasing chasm

between rural and urban communities. It is precisely this demographic fragmentation he sought to address with the *volkstümliche Literatur* he himself composed, encouraged, and published in his capacity as editor.

Auerbach is unique in that, alone among these three figures, he emphasizes the rural element inherent in the constitution of the *Volk*. Indeed, this is, for him, a prerequisite for anyone hoping to compose *volkstümliche Literatur*: one has to have understood the *Volk* from within in order to depict it both for the outside world and for the *Volk* itself. Still, this figure must also have the long view of his or her own present that is enabled by having left the *Volk* and being given a standard, humanistic education. Auerbach himself occupied this betwixt-and-between position, and his remarks thereupon clarify the appropriateness of the term *volkstümlich* – writing in the mode which Auerbach proposes can only ever approach its object, the *Volk*, in a mediated fashion. Writing for and about the common people in this way always already meant a degree of remove from them.

I will begin this chapter with an analysis of Auerbach’s programmatic writing on the *Volk, Volkstümlichkeit* and *volkstümliche Literatur* as statements of purpose on the type of audience he believed such a literature should both address and help constitute, and how this should be accomplished. I situate these texts in the contemporary debates around prose and realism in which Auerbach was involved and show where Auerbach aligned with and departed from other prominent thinks and authors of village tales, such as Johann Peter Hebel, Gottfried Keller and Jeremias Gotthelf. I will then analyze one exemplary story from the *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichte* and one *Kalendergeschichte* of Auerbach’s in order to compare how they function as concrete examples of the practices he lays out in his programmatic writings. Although these two kinds of stories have been considered to belong to different genres
and generally were received by different audiences, – with the Dorfgeschichten usually appearing in venues catering to middle and high-brow readers and the Volkskalender enjoying a more popular, low-brow reception – I interpret them as serving the same end: the creation of a reading public that would bridge the gap between urban and rural, and ultimately incorporate both into a single Volk.

My second chapter analyzes Heinrich Heine’s conception of the Volk as producer and receiver of arts and literature across several key texts spanning his oeuvre. Heine’s relationship to the Volk has been given some scholarly attention, though he is not often credited with taking them seriously as an addressee. This is likely due to the paternalistic and, at worst, pejorative tone of many of his explicit remarks on the lower strata of society. Although he was outspoken in favor of their political emancipation, scholars have tended to take for granted that the common people did not constitute Heine’s audience, real or imagined. Drawing on a selection of mostly prose texts in which Heine develops a theory and intellectual history of German literature, philosophy and religion (none of which can be neatly separated for him), I make the case that Heine, even in his later work, consistently conceptualizes the Volk as a kind of utopian, ideal public and addressee.

Heine’s relationship to the Volk is usually understood as being refracted through his political and cultural journalism, deeply engaged in the issues of the day. Although several of the texts I analyze, such as Französische Zustände (1831-33) and Lutetia (1854) are works of journalism, I contend that his conceptualization of Volk as audience transcends the journalistic and the aktuell and points to a utopian vision of the Volk as ultimate audience and producer of civilization. Although he himself acknowledges that these members of the population do not constitute his immediate public (or, in many cases, any reading public at all), this does not mean
that he excludes them from consideration as a public as such. Where some scholars have read Heine as retreating further into a belief in the autonomy of art as he became more disillusioned with the emancipatory potential of journalism, I instead hold that these disenchantments only strengthened his commitment to the Volk as ideal, utopian audience.

In spite of Heine’s lack of direct access to the common people, he is able to imagine this public due to the role he carves out for the poet (both for himself and for a theoretical, idealized poet) in execution of his literary program. For him, the poet is a kind of messianic figure who both deeply understands his own Volk and cultural moment, and possesses an extranational, trans-historical awareness which enables him to compose both works of Volksliteratur and Weltliteratur. This is the way in which Heine views Homer, Shakespeare and Cervantes, to name a few, and it is such a poet whom he envisions as being capable of addressing the Volk and Masse as they step into their emerging role as historical agents.

My third chapter focuses primarily on two early Herder texts, the collection of fragments Über die neuere deutsche Literatur (1767-68), in which Herder begins to develop his philosophy of language, and the Volkslieder project (1774-79), Herder’s effort to collect, curate and translate folk songs from various traditions and render them useful to German literature. My analysis will trace how Herder develops a concept of Volkstümlichkeit (without calling it such) that describes a kind of literary and verbal poetics which is part of a phase in the development of human language more “primitive” than its highest philosophical, mathematical achievements. I also use the concept of the ideal Publikum Herder develops in the two versions of the essay, “Haben wir noch jetzt das Publikum und Vaterland der Alten?” to show that Herder understands the Volk, in these texts, as one such public. As a cultural innovator and educator invested in activating the greatest potential of his addressee, Herder championed the collection, curation and translation of
this font of cultural goods for active use by the Volk. While some scholars have argued that Herder’s Volksbegriff does not include the Pöbel, i.e. the uneducated, often socially marginalized poor, I will attempt to demonstrate that he does not mean to exclude them from membership to the Volk (which, ideally, would include the entire people) but is merely identifying who does and does not participate in cultural production. Those who are reduced to thinking primarily of meeting their basic, daily needs, do not tend to be engaged in the creation and modification of poetic artifacts.

This concept of Herder’s relies on a notion of language as the repertoire of a culture’s world-building efforts, achievements and potential, not a simple system of representation. Language, for him, is a practice, lived and spoken and subject to constant modification by an entire population – not just the educated. In this, Herder places particular emphasis on orality and aurality, i.e. on the folk song. In his Volkslieder collection, he is not so much anthologizing the German folk song tradition as attempting to call it into being. In his prefaces to and commentary on the Volkslieder, he addresses the paucity of folk song available in German and hopes, by his own example, to encourage its production. Translation from other traditions is a key tool for him in this process, and one that he does not believe should be employed indiscriminately. Indeed, across both texts, he continually argues for the fundamental compatibility of the German and English languages and literatures and against what he views as an overemphasis on imitation of ancient Greek poetry and French literature. In his philosophy, languages are mutable but nevertheless individual entities that share relationships of affinity with other languages.

Herder also consistently adheres to the idea of plurality of speakers and producers of language and culture. This runs contrary to the strain of intellectual history that places Herder at the beginning of the tradition of ethno-nationalism that would eventually lead to Nazism. This
plurality, emphasized heavily in both texts, is part of the creativity he describes on the part of the *Volk*, in addition to having political implications. Herder embraces a broadly defined, inclusive population, with its wide-ranging reservoir for poetic production. He thus wishes to engage this population in the reception of poetry and contemporaneous impulses for the verbal arts. This project, I will argue, is both national and cosmopolitan: national in that Herder seeks to make German literature competitive with its neighbors and cosmopolitan in that he embraces difference and aims for an appreciation, not blind imitation, of the unique features of each distinct language and literature.

Understanding the contributions of Auerbach, Heine and Herder to the concepts of *Volk* and *Volkstümlichkeit* provides a new lens onto the study of German literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My objective is provide an archaeology of a shared project and to show that *Volkstümlichkeit* was an important theoretical touchstone in this period in which *Volk* was not yet necessarily tied to the idea of the nation-state, nor, for that matter, to ethno-nationalism, chauvinism and conservatism. As such, it helped thinkers interested in addressing the entire *Volk* – not just existing, educated audiences – conceptualize an ideal public that included all German-speakers. It also allowed them to develop a concept of literature that was not dictated by the prejudices and tastes of this audience or by existing canons: namely, one in which this *Volk* counts as both an addressee and as a productive life source for literary works. This perspective on the concepts of *Volk*, with its tarnished legacy, and *Volkstümlichkeit*, with its largely forgotten one, opens up new avenues to understanding the theoretical and popular potential of literature.
Berthold Auerbach: volkstümliche Literatur and the Making of a Prosaic Public

Berthold Auerbach (1812-1882), though one of the most widely read (and most translated) German-speaking authors of the 19th-century, fell, not long after his death, into relative obscurity, far behind his Jewish contemporaries, Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne, and his fellow realists, Gottfried Keller and Jeremias Gotthelf. Auerbach is best known as the author of the Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten, a series of stories composed between 1843 and 1880 set in Auerbach’s childhood village of Nordstetten. It is these stories as well as the 1846 treatise, Schrift und Volk: Grundzüge der Volkstümlichen Literatur, angeschlossen an eine Charakteristik J.P. Hebel’s, which garnered him a reputation for provinciality. Set against Heine’s cosmopolitanism and Börne’s more radical politics, Auerbach, where he is known at all, has become identified with a naïve vision for national unity and a parochialism that was already on its way out during his lifetime.¹²

When scholars write about Auerbach today, they frequently read him symptomatically, at a distance, and backward through the lens of the political developments of the time, with which he was out of step, and the contemporary literary context, in which he exists as little more than a footnote. Hans Otto Horch writes of him that it is “nicht die hervorragendsten, sondern eher die mittelmäßigen Autoren, deren Horizont auf ihre eigene Epoche und deren ’progressive’

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Möglichkeiten beschränkt bleibt und die deren Signatur besonders treu zeichnet.”

This assessment is characteristic of much of the scholarly and critical reception Auerbach in the 20th and 21st centuries, which reads him as a reflection of his own times rather than one who played a role (or at least sought to) in shaping them. In the following, I will attempt to demonstrate that he did precisely that.

In this chapter, I will explore how and to what end Auerbach develops a notion of Volks tümlichkeit in his Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten, his essays and programmatic writing (most prominently Schrift und Volk), his correspondences, and in works he both wrote himself and published in the two Volkskalender he edited: Der Gevattersmann (1845-1848) and Berthold Auerbach’s deutscher Volkskalender (1859-1869). I aim to show how Auerbach used volkstümliche Literatur, as he conceived of it, to remedy the political and cultural fragmentation of his day. In seeking to constitute a more unified reading public, Auerbach confronted the problem of political and demographic disunity, both between urban and rural populations, and among villages and townships at the margins of Germany’s urban centers. In his efforts to compose realistic fiction appropriate to his historical moment, he faced the problem of lending this fractured world a unity that would make it literarily viable. I hypothesize that Auerbach’s project of creating a volkstümliche Literatur aims, above all, at solving these dual problems.

I will look first to Schrift und Volk as a relatively early and thorough working out of Auerbach’s vision for a volkstümliche literature. I will examine the remarks he makes there on the form, content, composition and reception of this literature in order to determine what kind of audience or public he thought such a literature should both address itself to and construct. I will

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also situate the text in terms of contemporary debates about prose and realism in order to
determine which aspects of Auerbach’s vision were shared by other prominent thinkers and
authors (Johann Peter Hebel, Gottfried Keller, Jeremias Gotthelf) and which set him apart from
them.

I will then examine Auerbach’s *Dorfgeschichten* and *Kalendergeschichten* not only as
eamples of the kind of volkstümliche literature described in *Schrift und Volk* but as attempts to
instantiate a popular, democratic prose. Where other scholars (Uwe Baur most prominently\(^\text{14}\))
have tended to draw a firm distinction between *Dorfgeschichten* and *Kalendergeschichten* (both
Auerbach’s and others) as discrete genres with decidedly different audiences, I will argue that
they ultimately serve as different instantiations of the same project. The *Volkskalender* is indeed
a different type of publication from the literary journals in which Auerbach published his
*Dorfgeschichten*. Its closest cousin is the American almanac – a form and format which places
literature in the household as a kind of daily bread, something consumed as a matter of course
and as part of a regular ritual. Despite this difference in venue, the *Kalendergeschichte* deals
with strikingly similar themes as the *Dorfgeschichte* and, for Auerbach, aims at the same end: the
constitution of a reading public that includes both educated city-dwellers and thoughtful
villagers.

I will focus my analysis on one of Auerbach’s *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*,
“Befehlerles”, and one of his own *Kalendergeschichten*, published in *Berthold Auerbachs
deutscher Volkskalender*. Both of these narratives stage encounters within a village between the
domestic sphere, the “Gemeinde” and a more centralized authority. They explore the demands
that each of these structures places on its characters, and how they may compete with or

\(^{14}\) Uwe Baur, *Dorfgeschichte: Zur Entstehung und gesellschaftlichen Funktion einer literarischen Gattung im
complement one another. Though the two narratives provide decidedly different answers to these
questions, the interactions between individual characters and the organs of state or local power
are highly personal and invite clear identification with particular parties. I take the narrative and
stylistic differences between them as indicative of the distinct publics for which they were
intended, though I conclude that these differences are ultimately outweighed by their
commonalities.

**Auerbach in scholarship**

Many critics turn their attention first to Auerbach’s political convictions, reading his
aesthetic sensibilities as an epiphenomenon thereof. Peter Uwe Hohendahl reads the failure both
of his politics and his aesthetic program as the result of a faulty understanding of the *Volk*, i.e. as
literate village dwellers and not as the growing industrial proletariat.¹⁵ Nancy Kaiser accuses him
of having failed to marry his idealism to the political realities of his time, i.e. for his failure to
acknowledge the “primacy of practical and commercial priorities.” (Kaiser 416) Auerbach has
thus become, in the scholarship and criticism dealing with the period, a figure representative of a
particular moment and a particular point of view vying for dominance at this time – politically,
as an advocate for a liberal, united *Kleindeutschland* (a united Germany that excluded Austria) in
which Jews were considered full citizens, and aesthetically as a proponent and practitioner of a
literature that aimed to raise the small-scale and the local to the awareness of a nation. Critics

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¹⁵ Hohendahl writes, “Trotz aller Warnungen gegen utopisches Planen, die sich bei Auerbach wiederholt finden,
enhält dieser Glaube an die Humanisierung des Lebens durch die Literatur ein utopisches Element – wohl auch in
dem bedenklichen Sinn, daß Auerbach niemals die Frage stellt, wie denn die verelendeten Massen den Zugang zur
Literatur finden sollen. Dort, wo er diese Frage erörtert, hat er offensichtlich die geordnete dörfliche Gemeinschaft
vor Augen, wie er sie auch in seinen Dorfgeschichten schildert.” Hohendahl, *Literarische Kultur im Zeitalter des
Liberalismus* 351.
thus tend to read Auerbach first and foremost in the context of these two projects, and as informative of why each failed.

These critiques are not only a contemporary phenomenon, nor do they touch Auerbach alone: Julian Schmidt, once an outspoken proponent of Auerbach’s literary project and of Dorfgeschichten in general, wrote in 1852 that, despite the success of the genre, “für den Unbefangenen war es schon damals klar, daß diese Wirkung nicht lange aushalten konnte. Sie war eine glückliche Reaktion gegen die Phrasenhaftigkeit des herrschenden Liberalismus, aber ihr Inhalt war doch zu dürftig, um die gebildete Welt auf Dauer zu beschäftigen.”16 This assessment, though written during Auerbach’s lifetime, is reflected in much of the criticism of Dorfgeschichten that came after and is emblematic of the received wisdom about the genre. That the village tale in general and Auerbach’s in particular did not achieve the ambitious aims the latter set for them can hardly be disputed. That Auerbach’s contribution to this project was one of the most prominent at the time is as evident as his present obscurity. However, as examples of volkstümliche Literatur, the village tales participate in a much larger and more varied project in both politics and poetics.

I propose to read the treatise, Schrift und Volk, as Auerbach’s programmatic statement in constituting German Volkstümlichkeit and a volkstümliche Literatur. I argue that this text constitutes the most complete working out of a program for either of these categories during this period (the mid-to-late 19th century), and that Auerbach’s ambitions for a volkstümlich literature are not merely an epiphenomenon of his political aims but constitute an end in themselves. I contend that Auerbach sought to activate and integrate the Volk into the production of culture.

16 Julian Schmidt, “Vorwort zum neuen Semester”, Die Grenzbote 11 (1852), II. Semester, III. Band, 4-5.
and cultural artifacts, and that he did so by much the same operations by which he brought the
Volks home to the educated, bürgerliche world.

Auerbach’s Volksbegriff

I will first turn my attention to Auerbach’s definitions of the Volk and das Volkstümliche. How properly to define a Volk (sometimes as distinct from and sometimes as a precondition for a definition of Nation) occupied the attention of many thinkers from the mid-eighteenth century to long after the end of Auerbach’s life. Like many of the terms with which Auerbach works, his parameters for inclusion in the Volk are difficult to pin down. He comes closest to spelling them out in the following passage:

Wenn wir nach der Seite des Geistes und dessen Erscheinung in der Literatur den Begriff Volk abmarken wollen, so mögen wir darunter diejenige große Zahl der Menschen verstehen, die ihre Lebens- und Weltanschauung vorherrschend aus selbständiger Erfahrung und der unmittelbaren Gegenwart zieht […] Die Grundsätze und Ansichten verknüpfen sich nicht zu einem Systeme, mit innerer Folgerichtigkeit und einem obersten Satze, sondern stellen sich als Volksweisheit lose neben einander als Sprüche, die innere Wahrheit aus sich und nicht aus einem Princip erweisend.17

Here, Auerbach carves out a definition of Volk as decidedly distinct from Nation – that is, one that does not exhaust the entire population of a territory, nation or kingdom, or even those speakers of a common language within the same. The definition offered here describes instead a particular segment of this population, recognizable not by the language they speak, the environment in which they live or the type of work they do, but by the factors by which they constitute their world and the discursive genre of that world-building.

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17 Berthold Auerbach, Berthold Auerbach’s gesammelte Schriften (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-1866), vol. XX, 9. Further references to this edition will appear in-text, hereafter referred to with the abbreviation “GS”, followed by volume number (Roman) and page number (Arabic).
Auerbach hastens to clarify, however, the particular set of experiences requisite for *Dichtung aus dem Volke*. In a later passage, he moves from a discussion of “Volkspoesie” to the assertion that “Alles das, was nun im Volke bloß Leben ist, rein im Geiste aufzufassen, abspiegeln und frei gestaltend in die Literatur überzutragen, dazu erheischt es, daß man äußerlich, oder mindestens zeitweise innerlich aus jenem Leben herausgetreten sei.“ (GS XX, 11) In other words, the would-be author of literature depicting the *Volk* must him- or herself emerge from it. Not only this, but he or she must have first made an exit from and a prodigal return to this world in order to gain the perspective necessary for depicting it: “Erst wenn man sich entäußert, an die Außenwelt hingegben oder verloren, kehrt man bewußten Geistes wieder zur eigenen Welt zurück, wie man die Muttersprache eindringlicher versteht und gebraucht, nachdem man fremde Sprache und Ausdrucksweise erforscht hat.” (19) Two key points emerge here: firstly, Auerbach presupposes a dialectical process of belonging, departure and return as necessary for the composition of *volkstümlich* works of literature. What’s required is not mere representation of the *Volksleben*, but reflections on it and construction of it from both within and without – a synthesis of the understanding that comes with having belonged and the perspective gained by having left. Secondly, Auerbach’s deployment of “Muttersprache” is significant for its implications as an instrument of world-making. He understands the role of *volkstümlich* literature as one of active, symbolic production of a world rather than mere representation thereof.

Here it becomes clear that Auerbach has a particular temporal, spatial and social context in mind which furnishes the tools for world-formation described above – the village. “Der Mann der Erfahrung” is, for Auerbach, identical with “der Mann aus dem Volke” (54) because of his upbringing and continued immersion in village life as contrasted with “Der wissenschaftlich und theoretisch Gebildete”. (54) Education, *Bildung*, is therefore a key factor for Auerbach in
demarcating the Volk. Where the cornerstones of the Bildung of the educated cosmopolitan are “Wissenschaft” and “Theorie”, Volksbildung is instead characterized by “Erfahrung” and “Volksweisheit”. Where the one carries a systematizing impulse, the other takes individual truths (gained through experience or passed down) on their own, without subordinating them to principles.

As Hohendahl points out, however, the Volk, for Auerbach, is not merely made up of all those citizens lacking formal education, but rather by those who came of age in a state which Auerbach calls “ein lebendiges Abbild der ersten Stufe menschlicher und menschheitlicher Entwicklung”, (19) in other words, village life. Importantly, he refers to this stage not only as “menschlich” but also “menschheitlich”, the latter term implying some claim to shared humanity.\textsuperscript{18} He thus understands the Volksleben not only as a stage in the life of a people, but of all people. The hallmarks of this existence are, for Auerbach, fellowship with nature, familiarity of the village dwellers with one another, and the fact that in the village, childhood is not merely seen as a stage to be overcome in the preparation for a future profession, but as possessing a value all its own. These are the factors of which Auerbach’s notion of Volk constitutes the nexus: the manageability of this mini-world, along with the practical knowledge and collection of myths, sayings and wisdoms which make up the tools by which members of the Volk constitute the world around them.

**The transformation of the Volksgeist: Auerbach’s social agenda**

Why this thorough elucidation of Auerbach’s subject and presumptive audience? These many observations amount to a diagnosis that his literary contemporaries fail to understand the

\textsuperscript{18} This could be likened to Marx’s notion of the Gattungswesen or “species-being”.
particular conditions of the Volksleben, and either treat the Volk as an ancillary readership (one of the few accusations he levels at his role model, Hebel19), or else furnish it with cheap entertainment that fails to enrich (see his critique of the “romantische Schule”20). Auerbach’s approach marks him as an early exemplar of realism:21 he aimed not merely to represent the material furnished by reality, but to poetically transform and elevate it. “Erst wenn es gelänge,” he writes, “in den untergeordneten Gestalten aus der wirklichen und gewohnten Welt den Widerschein des allbeherrschenden ewigen Geistes heraustreten zu machen, erst dann mögen sie in ihrer Verklärung wieder in das Volk zurückkehren.” (46) Auerbach appears to regard previous efforts to cater to the tastes of the Volk as merely giving into its preference for “wundersame Abenteuer und Fahrten, Könige und Grafen, Prinzessinnen und Schlösser”, (43) an enterprise which provides no opportunity for readers from the Volk to recognize the “Widerschein des allbeherrschenden ewigen Geistes” in themselves or begin to think of themselves as constituting a public worthy of being addressed.

Auerbach’s aims for volkstümliche literature are, in spite of his deliberate location of the Volksleben in an earlier stage of humanity, decidedly forward-looking. Auerbach’s descriptions

of the institutions of modern life amount to descriptions of the relation between the particular
and the universal. Nowhere is this more apparent than when the text deals with religion. If
Auerbach conceives of the *Volk* as being governed by experience and a relationship to nature and
community, the *Volksgeste* is the collective province of an entire people and stands in relation to
all of humanity: “Das Verhältnis des wissenschaftlich gebildeten Mannes zu seinem
urthümlichen Volksgeist entspricht dem des Volksgeistes zu der Menschheit überhaupt.” (30)
Auerbach characterizes the modern *Volksgeste* as open to (and indeed hungry for) knowledge
from every quarter, not sealed off from outside influence. The movement of the *Volksgeste* is, for
him, one increasingly toward universal humanity and away from provinciality. He credits this
generalizing tendency, largely, to the spread of Christianity:

> Der Volksgeist hat seine Abgeschlossenheit und Ausschließlichkeit aufgegeben. Dadurch, daß die Nationalreligionen wesentlich aufgehört haben, daß die neueren Völker ihr religiöses Bewusstsein nicht mehr aus besonderen, mit Natur und Stamm verbundenen Zuständen heraus entwickeln, sondern die Religion der Menschheit in sich aufzunehmen und aus sich herauszubilden trachten, ist der abgeschlossene Volksgeist nach der tiefsten Seite hin allgemeinen Einflüssen eröffnet. (31)

Religion, according to Auerbach, is no longer a matter of state or national interest, nor does it
arise from the natural environment or the received practices of a tribe. Religion, in other words,
is no longer the guarantor of *Volkstum* or *Volksgeste*, but rather of that which is common to all
human beings. This is the role that Auerbach assign to religion in the *Dorfgeschichten* as well –
the name of God flows freely from the mouths of the characters, but never does religion serve as
a constitutive element of storytelling, unlike with Gotthelf.

Auerbach makes clear elsewhere that this “Religion der Menschheit” is indeed
Christianity (and, given Auerbach’s emancipatory ambitions, Judeo-Christianity). He attributes
to Christianity not only the quality of universal humanity, but also of foreignness:
The religion of humanity is thus understood not only as the synthesis of all that is generally human, but as a collection of particulars. Insofar as I read Auerbach’s understanding of texts as having the potential to create publics, I see the importance of the Bible for him as the creation of a public and a community uncoupled from nationality and territory, one based on universal humanity. However, this public must necessarily consist of diverse peoples and nations, each bearing within it the potential for a shared experience of humanity. With this, as Auerbach spells out, comes the necessity of integrating foreign viewpoints into one’s own person (and culture).

This discussion of the “Religion der Menschheit” and nationality thus helps set up one of Auerbach’s core premises: that that which is common to all people belongs properly to religion, while nationality is where valuable difference is preserved. He sees this not merely as a static feature of each, but as two distinct processes of Bildung:

Aufgabe der religiösen Bildung: das Allgemeine, über allen Völkerschaften stehende zu entwickeln; Aufgabe der nationalen Bildung: die Besonderheit in ihrer Berechtigung zu erhalten und ihrem Endziele entgegenzuführen. Beide können und sollen vereint sein, denn die neueren Völker und ihre Zustände können sich ebenfalls zu heiligen erheben, zu jener Heiligkeit, die die Übereinstimmung von Natur und Gesetz ist. (33)

This passage makes plain that Auerbach does not argue for the preservation of local particularity against the universal (a term which, in his work, is difficult to pair with a precise referent), but, quite the reverse, that it is only natural that the two should co-exist harmoniously. Like most modern developments Auerbach describes in this text, he greets the spread of a “Religion der Menschheit” as something necessary and, what is more, irreversible. His aim throughout much of
the text thus seems to be to articulate ways in which Völker, particularly the German Volk can and should relate to themselves, their ancient and recent histories, and their cultural outputs.

The Bible thus constitutes for Auerbach not only the potential for a community of humanity, but a culturally specific store of knowledge.²² As Heine did six years before,²³ Auerbach describes the Bible as a cultural good common to all Judeo-Christian people and peoples, much as Homer was for the Greeks. As such, he reads out of these bodies of texts the evidence of a Volksgeist not yet divided by the stratification and specialization of the cultures out of which they arose:

Was die Nation von ihrem Geiste in Schriften niedergelegt hatte, gehörte nach Inhalt und Form dem gesammten Volke; so bei den Juden die Bibel, bei den Griechen der Homer. Was höher stehende Geister über das Vorhandene hinaus, oder es berichtigend, in sich hegten, trat bei den Griechen in der Debatte und Volksrede, bei den Juden in der prophetischen Verkündigung heraus. Der Mensch sprach zum Menschen, im lebendigen Worte, das nach Gehalt und Gestalt dem allgemeinsten Verständnisse nahe liege mußte. (113)

These fonts of knowledge and cultural artifacts, in other words, were not the domain of specialized fields, but accessible to (one must fill in some of the specificity Auerbach eschews) all literate members of a Volk or Nation – significantly, Auerbach seems to use the two interchangeably when discussing this period. He also follows Heine in focusing on the Bible not primarily as a religious document, but as a significant culture-defining asset and resource for world-making (see following chapter).

Auerbach sets himself against what he sees as the contemporary trend toward “das Allgemeine”, using this discussion of antiquity to make a case against the potential of the universal for creating community:

In der Bildung der neuen Welt trat ein ganz veränderter Entwicklungsgang ein. Geist und Welt trennten sich, ihre organische Verknüpfung war aufgelöst. Die neuen Völker sollten den reinen Menschen in sich aufnehmen und ausbilden, ihre besonderen Nationalgeister kamen dabei nicht in Betracht. Der Geist vertiefte sich in sich, wußte und wollte nichts von einem organischen Ergebnis des Lebens, das Allgemeine allein galt, das abstrakt Wahre stellte sich für sich hin. (114)

Auerbach describes the movement away from *National- und Volksgeist* as one of the individual turning increasingly inward, and membership to a community or public losing its purchase as a pillar of identity, collective or singular. Against this backdrop, *Volkstümlichkeit* stands as a necessary guarantor of a collective “Volksbewußtsein”. Whereas the *Volkstum* is not only “menschlich” but “menschheitlich” as well, containing something essentially human, “das Allgemeine” becomes identified with increased abstraction and atomization.

**Dichtung “aus dem” and “fur das” Volk: Auerbach’s aesthetic agenda**

**a. Auerbach on the Volkslied**

Auerbach has not only social but formal ambitions as well. Without explicitly positioning himself, Auerbach ties the maintenance of a “Volksbewusstsein” to contemporary debates surrounding ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’. As Phillip Böttcher summarizes, these terms are “seit dem ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert immer weniger im Sinne ihrer eigentlichen Wortbedeutung, sondern vielmehr metaphorisch verwendet.” (Böttcher 302) Nevertheless, we must explore why Auerbach found in prose the form best suited to *volkstümliche Literatur*. Rather than the forms of expression already practiced by the rural *Volk* (the folk song, the hymn, the ballad, the *Volksdrama*, etc.) Auerbach selected a genre that came to be principally associated (certainly in the German-speaking world) with the emergent bourgeoisie: realist prose.

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So, why did Auerbach not compose or compile Volkslieder? Early on in *Schrift und Volk*, Auerbach discusses the merits of the *Lied* as a store of *volkstümlich* cultural goods:

Wie die Weltweisheit sich als Spruch gestaltet, so auch das Gefühl in seiner reinen Subjektivität als Stimmungslied. Die ursprünglichste Poesie als lyrischer Empfindungserguß findet daher im Volksliede den reinsten Ausdruck, zu dem selbst die höchsten Genien aus allem Kunstbewusstsein wieder zurückkehren. [...] Dies ist, was wir hier als das Herz des Volkstums bezeichnen dürfen. Das ureigene Gemüthsleben eines Volkes prägt sich in Spruch und Lied, in Brauchen und Sitten, sowie in der Sagenbildung aus, die mehr eine Beherrschung und Deutung der Außenwelt anstrebt. (GS XX, 10)

Auerbach praises the *Volkslied* as the purest, most unmediated expression of the feelings and perceptions of the *Volk*, and as an inexhaustible font of inspiration for artistic expression of every stripe – and, of course, as a tool for world-making. Here, we see Auerbach further elaborating on the notion that experiences of the *Volk* find their expression in adages and sayings containing folk wisdom, rather than in a coherent system of laws and principles. As the artistic transfiguration of feeling, the *Volkslied* remains, according to Auerbach, a key resource for *volkstümlich* identity-formation. He clearly relies on a received understanding of the nature of the *Volkslied* (one that persists to this day): namely, that it arises organically out of an oral tradition and is not attributable to any one author.25

All the same, Auerbach outlines the difficulties (indeed, the near impossibility) of composing *Volkslieder* as an expression of the feelings of the *Volk* in his own age, scattered as contemporary identity formation had, in his view, become. He writes that the contemporary moment is characterized by the fact,

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daß die heutige Weltbildung eine so unfertige, daß die Pädagogik so viele fremde Elemente hereingetragen, die den rein lyrischen unmittelbaren Erguß verdrängt haben und noch keine allgemeine Bewältigung und Umkehr zur reinen Naivetät zu Stande kommen ließen. (10)

What the present moment has foreclosed, according to Auerbach, is the Unmittelbarkeit previously offered by lyric and Lied. There can be no pure expression where there is no purity and naivety of feeling. This moment, one must conclude from Auerbach’s remarks, requires a more mediated form to express the inner truths of the life of the Volk.

Despite the fact that, for Auerbach, volkstümliche Literatur could only mean prose, he did devote an earlier essay to the topic of the Volkslied. 1843’s “Über Zustand und Zukunft des deutschen Volksliedes im Volke selber” outlines similar ambitions for it as Schrift und Volk did for volkstümliche Literatur. Auerbach clearly envisions a more limited role for the Volkslied, given that it represents an earlier form with less of a reach. Auerbach also sees structural problems with the Volkslied, at least in terms of its potential for furthering the national project and fostering feelings of a shared identity among the Volk. As with a volkstümliche Literatur, Auerbach believes that, in order for a Volkslied to enjoy true longevity, it must arise out of a genuine experience of Volksleben and bear its traces. Against this he sets “das Allgemeine” or “das abstrakt Wahre” (GS XX, 114), as well as the poetic production of “die enge, egoistische Persönlichkeit”. (Volkslied, 135) Neither of these, so goes Auerbach’s reasoning, can carry the banner of Volkstümlichkeit, as they do not emerge from an understanding of the Volksleben in both its totality and particularity. Thus, we can distinguish four levels of generality by which Auerbach classifies literary products: the egoistic, the referent of which is only the author’s virtuosity; the subjective, drawing primarily on the author’s own experiences; the volkstümlich or

26 Berthold Auerbach, “Über Zustand und Zukunft des deutschen Volksliedes im Volke selber” in Europa. Chronik der gebildeten Welt 1843, Bd. III.
the provincial, arising out of the organic life of the *Volk*; and the general/universal, bearing little or no relation to any individual or collective.

In both *Schrift und Volk* and “Volkslied”, Auerbach cites the goal of *Bildung* as the felicitous reconciliation of these various degrees of individuality and universality. The key difference lies for Auerbach in the distinction between the *collective* – something shared by all members of a group, in this case a *Volk* – and the universal – something abstract given from on high, the origin of which cannot be traced to any individual or collective. He elaborates this distinction in a section entitled “Ueber allgemeine Zweckmäßigkeit der Volksschriften und deren Inhalte”:

So lange Religion, Wissenschaft und Kunst ein organisches Erzeugnis des Volkslebens sind, würden alle geistigen Errungenschaften nach Gehalt und Gestalt gemeinsam; sobald aber die Bildung sich aus der Abstraction heraus fortsetzt, gestaltet sich eine höhere und eine niedere. Die Aufgabe der Volksschrift ist, jene mit dieser zu vermitteln, der aus dem unmittelbaren Leben erwachsenden Bildung die allgemeinere zuzuführen, an das unmittelbare Leben anzuknöpfen und von da aus höher zu leiten. (119)

Thus he traces the emergence of the high-low cultural divide to the preeminence of abstraction in the *Bildung* of his day. The “Mann der Erfahrung”, (54) whom Auerbach holds up as the quintessential unit of the *Volk*, cannot access the realm of pure abstraction and universalism. The products thereof could therefore never call forth or represent *Volkstümlichkeit*. This passage also suggests a broader definition of *Volksschrift* than the one Baur puts forth by his exclusion of the village tale. The *Volksschrift*, as Auerbach would have it, is not merely an example of the “lower” order of cultural outputs, but one which would defy and, ultimately, suspend this distinction.

In the “Volkslied” essay, Auerbach brings this analysis to bear on the problem of nationally oriented folk songs – namely, the lack thereof in Germany:
Wenn der vaterländische Gemeinsinn in den Herzen Aller aufleben wird, wenn die Idee des gemeinsamen Vaterlandes nicht mehr bloß Idee, sondern Wirklichkeit geworden ist, wenn der Einzelne in allen Ständen der Gesellschaft sich nicht mehr vereinzelts, sondern unmittelbar von der Gesamtheit getragen und gehoben fühlen wird, dann werden auch Nationallieder in der umfassendsten Bedeutung des Wortes aus dem Herzen des Volkes erstehen, und sich unverwüstlich darin festsetzen. Auf der Stufe des ächten vaterländischen Bewußtseyns wird das allgemeine, das Nationalgeschick, wieder in erhöhtem Karakter zum Privatgeschick, zum Schicksal des Einzelnen; Glück und Unglück, Leid und Freud' des Einzelnen ist eng verwachsen mit dem der Gesamtheit, der Nation; es kann dann das Eine nicht von dem Andern getrennt werden. So kehrt denn hier wiederum die Bildung, das Bewußtseyn, zu ihrem Ausgangspunkte, dem unmittelbaren Gefühle, zurück, nur reicher und voller[.] (Volkslied, 135)

This passage demonstrates that this inextricable connection between the universal and the individual is at the heart of Auerbach’s notion of Volkstümlichkeit. As both texts attest, the volkstümlich can be neither universal nor purely individual, but collective. Further, the kind of collective it circumscribes is decidedly national, although Auerbach does not (at least as yet) count all members of the would-be nation among the Volk. This passage also makes clear that Auerbach takes a broad view of Bildung, taking it to mean not only (or even primarily) formal education but a process of cultivation not tied to formal institutions. Though he is hardly unique in this, the role he envisions for Bildung is key to understanding his overall program for a volkstümliche Literatur.

Here, as elsewhere, Auerbach uses Bildung nearly interchangeably with Bewusstsein. Both terms seem to refer to a particular stage of awareness reached by a given group (individual development is of less interest to Auerbach) that exceeds “die Stufe der bloßen Naivetät” (Volkslied 130) or “des bloß Naturwüchsigen”. (137) This stage is meant to further enrich the products of the earlier “state of nature”, which Auerbach never elaborates but which he nevertheless assumes as a precondition of both Bildung and Bewusstsein. Belonging to the “natürlich und geschichtlich Gewordenen” are “im Gebiete des Geistes die nationale Kunst und
Wissenschaft, im Gebiete des Lebens das nationale Selbstbewußtseyn.” (130) These national developments would be enriched, Auerbach argues, by the more universal Bewusstsein at which the human species as a whole has presently arrived. This is a curious appellation, given the fact that Auerbach aims to encourage a national strain (one he does not yet see) in the Volkslied. It suggests a natural progression from a preoccupation with purely individual concerns to national consciousness, and eventually to the universal – a progression which has bypassed this necessary middle stage.

Like any cultural product that addresses itself primarily to the Volk, the Volkslied, according to Auerbach, can, if misused, exercise a barbarizing effect on the former’s tastes and temperament. As such, Auerbach is keenly interested in both exploiting the potential of the Volkslied as a national artform and resource for identity-formation, and in mitigating its potentially harmful effects. On contemporary efforts to achieve this latter aim, Auerbach writes:

Die naïve Freude an den alten Liedern ist im Volke selber meist dahin, es gilt nun, sie mit Bewußtseyn wieder festzustellen. Man bemüht sich vielfach, dem Volke reinere Begriffe und Genüsse zu bieten, man will Dorfbibliotheken und Leseabende einrichten, die aber bei der jugendlichen Lust und bei dem Bestreben, nach harter Arbeit nun auch sich gehen zu lassen, nicht recht Wurzel fassen können; das Lied ist daher die beste Vermittelung, Gesangvereine in den Dörfern sind die sichersten Hebel der Veredelung. (137)

This passage betrays Auerbach’s vision for the particular scope of the Volkslied and its influence on the Volk: the cultivation and refinement of the latter’s disposition – indeed, his use of “Veredelung” suggests agricultural cultivation, underscoring the deliberateness of his proposed interventions. This passage also suggests that this process must take place somewhat covertly, where the Volk already gathers in order to sing these songs and hear them sung. The Volkslied is therefore most powerful not when collected and preserved in a Gesangbuch, but as an organic part of cultural life.
This role is clearly different from the one envisioned for the *Volksschrift*. Auerbach judges both to be vulnerable to the kinds of foreign influences that could unmoor a people from its own identity. As potentially polluting influences on the *Volkslied*, Auerbach cites “Schule, Garnison, Theater und modernes Bänkelsängerthum” (136), and “Schule und Kirche, und sodann hauptsächlich das Soldaten- und Wanderleben” as forces “die eine Halbheit und Unfertigkeit hinterlassen”. (GS XX, 122) In the case of the *Volkslied* (as ever), these forces cannot be reversed, but the goal for the future of the *Volkslied* should be “ihre Hinderung möglichst in eine Förderung zu verwandeln.” (Volkslied 136) The *Volksschrift*, similarly, “soll diese [Halbheit und Unfertigkeit] aufheben und zur Ganzheit und ihrem nothwendigen Endziele führen, die zerstreuten Eindrücke sammeln und in sich abschließen.” (GS XX, 122) The “Halbheit und Unfertigkeit” which threatens the *Volkslied* were also widely thought to plague the emerging literary prose of the early and mid-19th century. Auerbach’s choice to ultimately focus his literary and critical attentions on prose, rather than the *Volkslied*, thus reflects a belief that the former was better suited to the construction of a *Ganzheit*, likely due, in part, to its being the product of a single author.

Where the *Volkslied* enjoys, for better or for worse, a primarily public existence (at least according to Auerbach), the *Volksschrift* has the advantage of reaching the *Volk* where the *Volkslied* cannot: namely, in the private or domestic sphere. Where *Volkslied* has both the advantage and disadvantage of being dependent on particular venues of social intercourse and physical co-presence, the *Volksschrift* is both limited and liberated by its role as a medium of private consumption and by print. There are therefore distinct processes of *Bildung* at work in the *Volkslied* and the *Volksschrift*: the one subterranean and “civilizing”, the other acting more  

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directly on the consciousness of the Mann aus dem Volke (Auerbach’s subject is decidedly male), in moments of quiet contemplation. One appeals to his experience of collective identity, one to his individual habitus.

In spite of the separate spheres in which the Volkslied and Volksschrift operate, Auerbach does point to the potential for each to occupy a similar role in the life of the Volk. In a discussion of the “volkstümliche Sprache” required to lend the Volksschrift believability and make it palatable to its readership, Auerbach writes:

Die Volksschrift muß auch das mit dem Volksliede gemein haben, daß sie wie dieses nicht unmittelbar für die stummen Zeilen des Drucks zubereitet sei. Wie das Volkslied erst gesungen und spät erst aufgeschrieben wurde, so muß auch die Volksschrift gewissermaßen erst mündlich erzählt und dann erst aufgezeichnet werden. Dadurch zeigt sie sich auch um so angemessener, wie das meistentheils geschieht, laut gelesen zu werden. Auch ist nicht nöthig, daß Alles gleich beim ersten Lesen so plan und platt sei, daß keine Nachlese mehr gehalten werden kann; gerade diese erfreut am meisten, weil sie die Thätigkeit des Suchens und die Überraschung des Findens gewährt. Im Volke wird eine Geschichte mehr als einmal gelesen, und da ist es gut, wenn man davon noch eine besondere Ausbeute hat. (133)

Auerbach seems here to suggest something like a practice of collection or compilation as most appropriate for the generation of Volksschriften – a practice more readily associated with the fable or the fairytale than with the kinds of narratives Auerbach wrote and published in his Volkskalender.

Auerbach makes clear elsewhere in the text that recourse to the fairytale addresses only the people’s tendency to backwardness, a tendency that should not ultimately be cultivated.28 He is interested rather in a kind of realism which appeals to the subject’s sense of his own identity

28 Auerbach writes that “Der freie Geist läßt sich nicht mehr in die Behausung der Mährchen, Dogmen u. s. w. zurücklocken, er will eine neue ihm genehme Erscheinungsweise.” He clarifies the persistent preference among the Volk for the fairytale-like thus: “So tief begründet auch der Zug nach dem Märchenhaften im Volksgeist ist, so läßt sich darin doch kaum mehr als eine Rückständigkeit erkennen, sowohl für das bereits Vorhandene (das nach und nach aus dem Volksmude verschwindet) als auch für etwaige neue Schöpfungen.” (63)
and belonging to a collective. He also expresses the belief that *Volksschriften* should be read aloud, a practice also associated with the fairytale or fable. This description does not, however, imply that the *Volksschrift* should provide only fleeting entertainment – quite the contrary, Auerbach emphasizes that the repeatability of *Volksschriften* carries enormous potential for fostering new discoveries and fresh insights. Without suggesting anything like a practice of close reading, he offers the *Volksschrift* as a way to fill the gap between the primarily oral forms of expression to which the *Volk* was accustomed and the written works which, so full of abstractions and generalities, seldom comprised part of the *Volksleben*.

Auerbach does not rule out the role of *Volksschriften* in conferring higher truths – he merely insists on the importance of their being mediated through forms and structures recognizable to the *Volk* and with which they might identify. In contrast to Gotthelf’s, Auerbach’s work is decidedly secular. Nevertheless, in *Schrift und Volk*, Auerbach writes that “Der religiöse Grundzug des Volksgeistes giebt […] der Volksschrift Maß und Richtung.” (184) He treats this characteristic as primarily cultural, rather than strictly confessional. He strenuously objects to the notion “daß mit dem Verschwinden von Trachten, Bräuchen und Sitten das Volksgemüth sein innerstes Leben verliere. Das Leben, der Geist, schafft sich allezeit neue Formen. Der deutsche Volksgeist ringt nur nach neuer Belebung des religiösen Grundzuges.” (185) He writes that “Dem religiösen Grundzuge gerecht zu werden ist daher unsere besondere Aufgabe und gewiß eine erhabene.” (187) The form that this is to take, however, bears little to no relation to the religious institutions or liturgical traditions which members of the *Volk* might be able to identify as belonging to the church. Indeed, Auerbach elaborates a rather diffuse, abstracted notion of the religious in his text:

Der Kultus muß Kultur sein, die Religion muß Bildung werden, innere Befreiung und Erlösung des Menschen, seine wahre Wiedergeburt; nicht in
Worten und Bräuchen, sondern in der That, im Charakter, in der Gesammtheit des Lebens, in der Reinigung und Heiligung alles echten menschlichen Wirkens. (187)

This conception of religion sees it becoming almost part of the scenery, so fully integrated into the fabric of everyday life that it ceases to exist primarily as identical with a set of practices and traditions. He treats it as a fundamental anthropological feature of existence, rather than as a denominational issue.

Of principal importance to Auerbach are 1) that the content of the Volksschrift – i.e. the plot of a story or the subject matter of a song – remain grounded in the structures and forms – e.g. the church, the family, etc. – recognizable to the Volk, and 2) that these texts furnish something of use to the Volk. They should not aim to provide mere entertainment but engender higher values, but they must not do so by means of simple abstractions and appeals to “ideas” only accessible to the formally educated. Auerbach circumscribes the parameters of such a Volksschrift with relative precision:

In den engen Kreisen unseres Stadtbürger- und Bauernlebens bewegt sich Alles fast ausschließlich in der familienhaften Umgrenzung. Die poetische Wiedergestaltung muß sich daher auch innerhalb dieser Linien halten, um verstanden und erfaßt zu werden. Die Interessen, die über das Familienleben hinausragen, überspringen in der Regel die Mittelstufen des Gemeinde- und Staatslebens und drängen sich alsbald an den Endpunkt menschlicher Entwicklung, an das religiöse Leben. (185)

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, the domestic sphere is the one with which Auerbach is principally concerned, not only as the probable and ideal site of encounter with the Volksschrift, but as the setting of the former as well. In his own Dorfgeschichten, Auerbach remained, for the most part, true to this directive. Although stories like “Befehlerles” deal with the Gemeindeleben, they do so largely through the lens of family and domestic life. The inciting incident of “Befehlerles”, for example, is the placement of a May tree by a young man before the
door of his intended. “Die Frau des Geschworenen” begins with a quarrel between husband and wife. Each encounter with the organs of local and state power is highly localized to the involved parties, possessing more the character of a personal struggle (or, in the latter case, a personal rite of passage) than an official or legal proceeding.

b. Auerbach on Volksdrama

Having made his case for the ability of lyric and Lied to express the inner nature of the Volk, Auerbach turns, in the second half of Schrift und Volk, “Dichtung für das Volk”, to the challenges of addressing that inner nature. He thus begins to interrogate drama as a genre capable of depicting Volkstümlichkeit. He first concludes that the use of dialect is inappropriate in dramatic dialogue, as it would require the normally laconic Bauer to translate his abstract inner life into speech, “wo man alsbald den Boden der Wirklichkeit verlassen hätte.” (96) This seems to suggest that the average farmer does not maintain a kind of inner monologue or narrativize the events around him as a person of letters might. He then goes on to elaborate the limits of Volksdrama on similar grounds as he did with the Volkslied: namely, that it relies on virtues absent in his own period:

Wie das Volksdrama ursprünglich aus den Mysterien, aus der Darstellung heiliger Geschichten und andererseits aus Fastnachtsspielen entstand, so sind Tiefsinn und Uebermuth immer die beiden Grundelemente, die hier vorwalten. – Unsere auf Schrauben gestellte Gegenwart kann zu jenem schwer durchdringen und diesen nicht ertragen. (98)

Auerbach is thus able to account for the continued composition and popularity of plays like Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell and Immermann’s Andreas Hofer: they draw on elements of already established and familiar elements and mythologies, or else on a tradition of public revelry and

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29 Of these two plays, Auerbach writes: “Schiller, der in seinem Tell, und Immermann, der in seinem Hofer einen Bauern zum dramatischen Helden gewählt, halten denselben ideal, lassen uns aber dabei den frischen Hauch aus der wirklichen Welt in der höher getragenen athmen. Wir könnten uns Tell und Hofer im Drama nicht im Dialekt sprechend denken. Die Sprache behält etwas Volkstümliches, schwingt sich aber in die höhere allgemeine.” (97)
spectacle. The Volksdrama thus, according to Auerbach, relies on the logic of retelling. He calls “Tiefsinn und Uebermuth” the foundational elements of these traditions, suggesting that they are grounded in more than the aim of mere entertainment – they reflect elements of life lost to modernity. These are curious terms to pair with one another, and their coupling implies that, on the one hand, people neither act with nor tolerate the wanton overconfidence of ages past. On the other, they have sacrificed something of the profundity of which their forefathers were capable. Given other passages in which Auerbach assesses the conditions of his age, the lack of a shared repertoire of cultural expressions and references is likely at fault.

Auerbach also outlines yet another limitation to the potential of drama to furnish the people with a volkstümlich literature: the reliance of the theater on the stage as a public space that forges a collective experience. Given the relative paucity of Nationaltheater at the time in Germany (or of permanent, standing theaters), he believes that such an experience would have been a difficult thing to achieve with any regularity or sustainability.\(^\text{30}\) He goes on to write:

> Die nationale und volksthümliche Gestalt und Macht des Theaters hängt wesentlich mit einem großen und öffentlichen Gemeinleben zusammen, in dem das Leben und das freie Spiel der Dichtung sich begegnen, oder wo mindestens die sozialen Zustände genugsame Festigkeit zum Aufbau poetischer Gebilde gewonnen haben. (Auerbach 1846, 161)

Again, here we see the charges levelled earlier in the text at lyric and song carried through to the theater. Auerbach saw in his present neither a sufficiently robust public life, nor an adequately developed sense of collective identity, nor indeed subject matter suited to the pathos and poetry of the theater. Thus, Auerbach makes his case for prose, and what he goes on to call “politische

\(^{30}\) It is possible that Auerbach is oversimplifying here for the sake of argumentative force or was not sufficiently familiar with popular theatrical practices in the 19\(^{th}\) century. There was indeed a tradition of popular enactments of classic plays, e.g. by Schiller and Goethe, as well as the Festspieltheater, Passionsspiele and, of course, Bauernspiele. For a history of popular theatrical practices from the 18\(^{th}\) to the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, see Toni Bernhart’s Volksschauspiele: Genese einer kulturgeschichtlichen Formation. Deutsche Literatur. Studien und Quellen, Bd. 31 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).
Poesie”. Given a fragmented present without a common repertoire of myths and images by which to constitute the world, the author must supply unity and poetry. “Er bindet die Blumen von der Au in einen Strauß und hat nicht nöthig zu sagen, daß auch viel blüthenloses einfaches Gras dazwischenstand, aus dem er sie herausgelesen.” (27) Using the trope of the florilegium (something like an anthology or collection of literary extracts), he describes the author’s process as one of selection and curation – again, not mere representation. He must also do so, according to Auerbach, in a form appropriate to a present in which the Volkslied no longer naturally occurs, and in which the Volksdrama can no longer be experienced as intended. The prose Auerbach envisions is one written for private perusal by the literate villager in the solitude of the home, but in which he or she must recognize the harmony of the village community.

c. Volkstümliche Literatur as prose

A common refrain in the 18th and 19th century debates on prose and poetry is that poetry is no longer equal to the task of representing a prosaic, disenchanted world. As we can read in Hegel’s discussion of the epos vs. the novel in the Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik,

Was jedoch fehlt, ist der ursprünglich poetische Weltzustand, aus welchem das eigentliche Epos hervorgeht. Der Roman im modernen Sinne setzt eine bereits zur Prosa geordnete Wirklichkeit voraus, auf deren Boden er sodann in seinem Kreise […] der Poesie, soweit es bei dieser Voraussetzung möglich ist, ihr verlorenes Recht wieder erring.31

The debate then becomes largely about how to achieve coherence in a work of prose and confer a poetic wholeness on the fractured reality it depicts. Theodor Vischer summarizes the two options for achieving this as follows: “Der erste ist der, daß die Handlung in Zeiten zurückverlegt wird, wo die Prosa noch nicht oder nur wenig Meisterin [sic] der Zustände war; [...]. Ein zweites

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Mittel ist die Aufsuchung der grünen Stellen mitten in der eingetretenen Prosa."³² (Vischer, 
\textit{Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen} III, S. 1304-5) In other words, one must either depict a 
time in which the "poetische Weltzustand" Hegel describes has not yet been wholly disrupted or 
seek out the aspects of contemporary reality into which the prosaic tendency of modernity has 
not yet penetrated. In other words, one can, with literature, confer on reality a poetic quality 
which, taken as a whole, it no longer possesses.

Auerbach’s remarks in \textit{Schrift und Volk} reveal him as a decided advocate for the second 
method. Though Auerbach still uses the language of “Poesie” and “Dichtung”, he dismisses 
Romanticism’s potential as \textit{volkstümliche} literature on the grounds that “jene Sehnsucht nach 
einer Vergangenheit, jenes Zurückschrauben auf dieselbe” is “verkehrt”, wenn es mehr sein will 
als bloße momentane Stimmung.” (GS XX, 47) In describing the task of the “Dichter” (a term 
Auerbach consistently employs for the author of prose), we can recall (from the passage quoted 
above) that Auerbach closely mirrors Vischer’s characterization of the “grüne Stellen” that make 
up the poetic content of everyday life. The entire passage reads thus:

\begin{quote}
Er [der Dichter] bindet die Blumen von der Au in einen Strauß und hat nicht 
nöthig zu sagen, daß auch viel blüthenloses einfaches Gras dazwischenstand, aus 
dem er sie herausgelesen. Weiter schreitend zur epischen und dramatischen 
Darstellung, kann er die auseinanderliegenden Momente zusammendrängen, bei 
den Hochpunkten der Leidenschaft oder des Friedens länger verweilen und das 
farblose Zwischenreich der Alltäglichkeit mit eiligen Worten bezeichnen. (27)
\end{quote}

The task of the poet is thus to recognize and curate that which is worthy of poetic representation. 
This is also a comment on the relationship of poetic time to measurable time – the poet is not 
beholden to the tyranny of the minute, the day, the month, etc. He or she mines a given moment 
for all it contains which cannot necessarily be experienced during the duration of its occurrence.

Theil: Die Kunstlehre} (Stuttgart: Mäcken, 1857), 1304-5.
While this passage concerns the composition of prose fiction in general, the
_Dorfgeschichte_ as a genre (and Auerbach’s as the most famous examples) emerged, for
contemporary and later critics, as uniquely suited to the kind of poetic prose\(^{33}\) which was the aim
of so many writers at the time. As Philip Bötcher writes, “Die Dorfgeschichte zeigt einen
‘poetischen’ bzw. poesiefähigen Bereich der zeitgenössischen nationalen Wirklichkeit auf.”
(Bötcher 310) While Auerbach doesn’t argue this explicitly, he does treat the _Dorfleben_ as a
singular literary object, calling the life of the village child “ein lebendiges Abbild der ersten
Stufe menschlicher und menschheitlicher Entwicklung”. (19) In other words, this figure
represents a stage of development in which prose had not yet become dominant over poetry as
the governing force of reality. Reading this together with Vischer, we can see that, here,
Auerbach recognizes in the _Dorfgeschichte_ a way for the would-be _Dichter_ of prose to have it
both ways: to explore a relic of an ideal past while depicting a contemporary reality not entirely
subject to a modernist regime.

The image of flowers and grass shows up again, significantly, in the narrative _Die Frau
Professorin_, published the same year as _Schrift und Volk_ (1846). To wit, the following passage
appears in the middle of the story of the misalliance between Reinhard, professor at the
_Kunstakademie_, and Lorle, an inkeeper’s daughter:

Die Verlobten gingen miteinander über die Wiese. Da raufte Reinhard jene
Pflanzen aus und zeigte Lorle den wundersamen zierlichen Bau des Zittergrases
und die feinen Verhältnisse der Gockenblume: „das gehört zu dem Schönsten,
was man sehen kann,“ schloß er seine lange Erklärung.
„Das ist eben Gras,“ erwiderte Lorle, und Reinhard schrie sie an: „Wie du
nur so was Dummes sagen kannst, nachdem ich schon eine Viertelstund‘ in dich
hineinrede!“ (GS III, 199-200)

\(^{33}\) “Alles poetische sollte rhythmisch behandelt warden! das ist meine Überzeugung, und daß man nach und nach
eine poetische Prosa einführen könnte, zeigt nur daß man den Unterschied zwischen Prosa und Poesie gänzlich aus
den Augen verlor.” Goethe to Schiller, November 25, 1797 in _Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe in den
Gottfried Keller opens his 1859 review of Gotthelf’s *Uli der Knecht* and *Uli der Pächter* with this passage; so mystified is he to find such dialogue in a supposed *Volksschrift*, that he writes “‚Das ist eben Gras!‘ Sollte das Volk vielleicht den Schilderungen seines eigenen alltäglichen Lebens einen ähnlichen Titel geben, nachdem wir Gebildeten und Studierten schon eine Viertelstunde und länger in dasselbe hineingeredet haben?” This is certainly a just question, especially if one reads this passage together with the above, in which the task of the poet consists precisely in separating the “Blumen” from the “einfaches Gras”. Keller does not, however, quote the passage’s continuation: “denn [Reinhard] vergaß, daß nur, wer die Seltenheit und Pracht der Zierpflanzen lange erschaut hat, wieder an den einfach schönen Formen des Grases sich ergötzen mag.” (200)

These two passages, from *Schrift und Volk* and *Die Frau Professorin*, evocatively illustrate the distinction between “Dichtung aus dem Volke” (the title of the first part of *Schrift und Volk*) and “Dichtung für das Volk” (the second part). As Keller points out, Auerbach’s *Dorfgeschichten* were “sämtlich von dem gewöhnlichen belletristischen Publikum konsumiert worden”. (Keller, 59) The admonishment is directed at Reinhard, not Lorle: as the representative of *Bildung*, his task should be to thoughtfully direct his wife-to-be’s attentions, not upbraid her for her lack of discernment. Only the studied observer of the “Zierpflanzen”, i.e. the author, can appreciate the grass that surrounds them. This is the very skill that Auerbach takes as requisite for the composition of *volkstümliche Literatur*: the depiction of the “einfaches Gras” of village life, such that the village dweller might not only recognize himself, but do so through the eyes of the poet, finding in himself something both singular and universal. Hence the term *volkstümliche*.

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Literatur, as opposed to Volksliteratur (following the pattern of Volkslied and Volksdrama). That which is volkstümlich is not identical with the Volk, but stands at a necessary remove.

d. Volksschrift vs. volkstümliche Literatur

Auerbach, like many of his contemporaries, took advantage of the popularity of the Volkskalender in order to reach a wider audience than was targeted by the literary journals of the day. He made many contributions to such periodicals, including the extremely successful Gartenlaube, as well as serving as editor of both Der Gevattersmann and, later, Berthold Auerbachs deutscher Volkskalender. While scholars such as Werner Hahl and Uwe Baur tend to view these Kalendergeschichten primarily as vehicles for entertainment and occasional instruction, in contrast to the more literary Dorfgeschichten, Auerbach himself does not make this distinction, dividing his treatise, Schrift und Volk instead into sections dealing with “Dichtung aus dem Volke” and “Dichtung für das Volk”. Importantly, in the former half of the work, Auerbach emphasizes the positionality of the author over that of the intended public. Where he does discuss the latter, he chides his role model, Hebel, “daß erst in zweiter Reihe an eine Rückwirkung auf das Volksleben gedacht wurde.” (GS XX, 71) This, I believe, is where Auerbach himself sought to intervene. Though he might indeed have accorded his own village tales a special status, nowhere in Schrift und Volk does he make explicit that “Dichtung aus dem Volke” and “für das Volk” correspond to sets of texts different in kind.

Uwe Baur, in his landmark 1978 study, Dorfgeschichte. Zur Entstehung und gesellschaftlichen Funktion einer literarischen Gattung im Vormärz (a work which inaugurated a wave of newly serious, scholarly interest in the topic), emphasizes a kind of empiricism as

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36 Baur, Dorfgeschichte.
characteristic of the early village tales. Manifestations of this empiricism include the geographic and topographic exactness of the tales, proximity of the authors to their subject matter (each writing about his or her home village), and dependence on developments in contemporary natural and social sciences: namely, a nascent interest in the basic foundations of human society: “Sprache, Kunst und Religion, Race, Volk und Stamm, Staat, Stand, Gemeinde, Familie”. (Baur, 83)

Baur takes this reading, in part, from the contemporary reception of the village tale. Take for example, Hermann Hauff’s (editor of the Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser from 1828 to 1865) appraisal of the genre, occasioned by the publication of Auerbach’s Barfüßele. Hauff argues that the existence (and popularity) of village tales would have been unthinkable without advancements in what we would now call the social sciences (but which he merely refers to as “Wissenschaften”). Hauff’s reading presents village tales as epiphenomena of the social history out of which they emerge, not as literary artefacts meriting analysis on the basis of their aesthetic features. Hauff argues, essentially, that the “niederen Gesellschaftsschichten” (1129) first had to become objects of social-scientific inquiry before they could become literary objects, given that the humanity of those occupying these stations had not yet been recognized in full:


Here, Hauff sets up a binary between the social sciences and literary arts not dissimilar to a model of distant vs. close reading: that which is not yet an object of literary interest or artistic portrayal is instead subjected to empirical investigation. Poetic portrayal involves the identification and elucidation of shared humanity and bridges the distance between the poet and his or her object. Empirical investigation codifies the distance between subject and object by acknowledging them as belonging to two distinct orders.

Hauff describes operations akin to those of an ethnographer, through which poets are able to get closer to the peasantry and those of lower station by first viewing the organs of their own society at a distance.

Jetzt erst, ausgerüstet mit Boussole und Quadranten der Naturwissenschaft, konnte der Geist seine eigenen Tiefen befahren und nach Heimath und Ursprung aller jener aus ihm geborenen Gebilden forschen, welche überall die organischen Elemente der geselligen Menschheit sind […] Diese Elemente aber heißen Sprache, Kunst und Religion, Race, Volk und Stamm, Staat, Stand, Gemeinde, Familie. (1130)

In recognizing that the civic life of the educated consisted of the same basic building blocks as that of the less educated or refined classes, poets were able to view their own social milieus at the remove afforded by the tools of empirical inquiry. Here, it becomes even clearer that Hauff has the emerging social sciences of ethnography and anthropology primarily in mind, and the transformation of these areas of study since the Enlightenment (which he holds responsible for the increased distance between social stations). The latter, he argues, “hatte noch viel zu viel mit dem Menschen als Masse zu thun, um für die geistigen und gesellschaftlichen Spielarten desselben ein scharfes Auge zu haben.” (1132) In other words, the Volk was thought of as a collection of societal elements to be managed, ruled over and occasionally served or studied as a curiosity. The inner and social life of the Volk, however, was hardly understood. Hauff writes further “Daß der Bauer ein Mensch ist, unterlag keinem Zweifel, aber er war es eben nur, wie es
auch der Chinese ist, und von beider Seyn und Wesen wußte man ungefähr gleich viel und machte es sich gleich leicht, wenn man es zu schildern unternahm.” (1132) In other words, the Volk was seen as an undifferentiated, not yet individualized species being. Thus literary portrayals of the peasantry reduced it either to caricature or to the mythological, the peasants appearing like so many “Faunen und Nymphen des idealisirten, frisirten Gesellschaftsolymps.” (1132) This is a somewhat gentler version of Heinrich von Treitschke’s anti-Semitic charge that Auerbach’s peasants were only “verkleidete Juden” (contrasted with Hauff’s praise of Auerbach as a producer of authentic images of peasant life). These shifting perspectives are representative of the change in reception of the Dorfgeschichten Uwe Baur describes – namely that they were largely viewed as authentic portrayals of village life by contemporary critics but were later maligned for their artificiality and idealized quality amid a greater appetite for realist literature that depicted the social fabric of urban life.

Hauff’s assessment that the Dorfgeschichte offered a new perspective on a large and little-understood sector of the population goes a long way to explaining the contemporary reception of the village tales of Auerbach and others. As the Treitschke quote above betrays, however, this reception quickly gave way to suspicion and a notion that the narratives were insufficiently realistic in their depictions of village life. Hauff’s reading also (along with the rest of his analysis) foregrounds the image of the Volk in the imagination of the educated classes. Indeed, his entire premise rests on making members of the Volk as subjects real to those with whom they did not regularly interact; he devotes no attention to the inner lives of the members of the Volk themselves. This is consistent with much of what has been written about the genre of the Dorfgeschichte, both contemporaneously and retrospectively. In this larger context, Auerbach’s

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attention to works “aus dem Volke” and “für das Volk” is all the more key to understanding the uniqueness of his literary and theoretical project.

Auerbach’s village tales are indeed characterized by an interest in “Religion, Race, Volk und Stamm, Staat, Stand, Gemeinde, Familie”. However, I am not only concerned with Auerbach as exemplar, but as unique among the authors and thinkers of his day in his apprehension of Volksstümlichkeit. As Baur points out, tempting though it is to align the Dorfgeschichte with the Volksschrift, the two were intended for distinctly different audiences and as such circulated in decidedly different publications. The Dorfgeschichte tended to cater to an educated public, fueled by an “Interesse am Binnenexotikum” (Baur 41) and/or a desire on the part of the author to bridge the social chasm between urban and rural populations, educated citizens and farmers. Meanwhile, the Volksschrift constituted the reading material consumed by the Volk – understood, for the purposes of this discussion, as the uneducated but literate peasantry and lower middle classes and appeared in periodicals of the day like the Volkskalender. (Baur, 42-43) Among authors of village tales, Auerbach is unique, though not alone\(^39\), in his participation in both genres. For the most part, authors who composed Dorfgeschichten and authors who wrote for a less educated public comprised separate groups.

Baur distinguishes Dorfgeschichten from what I call Volksschriften/Volkstexte (although some contemporaries of Auerbach’s such as Keller, refer to the village tales as “Volksschriften”). These roughly align with the division Auerbach draws in his Schrift und Volk: “Dichtung aus dem Volke” and “Dichtung für das Volk”. As Baur notes, the vast majority of village tales from the Vormärz aimed at making the Volksleben accessible to educated readers and city dwellers. They were not not (or at least not primarily) intended for consumption by the

\(^{39}\) Baur also names Josef Rank, Ernst Willkomm and Ernst Dronke as authors of village tales who also either composed Volksschriften or edited publications containing them. See Baur, Dorfgeschichte, 45.
Volk itself. By Volksschriften and Volkstexte I understand those texts, written and oral, for which the Volk is the primary audience. These can be further subdivided into three categories: 1) Literary texts (i.e. the vernacular Bible, the songbook, the fairytale etc.); 2) Nonliterary Sachbücher or trade publications; 3) Orally transmitted traditions such as Volkslieder, aphorisms, legends, etc.

As I have mentioned, Auerbach appraises all of these in his various programmatic writings, most prominently in Schrift und Volk. The first section of the treatise, “Dichtung aus dem Volke,” concerns the conditions under which such literature should be produced and the aesthetic conventions to which they adhere. I believe, however, that Auerbach does not merely have in mind the educated reader as the consumer of volkstümliche Literatur. Indeed, he criticizes Hebel (otherwise the ideal by which he measures volkstümlich efforts) on the basis that he devotes insufficient attention to the Volk itself, writing primarily for those with already developed artistic sensibilities. He also dedicates a great deal of space in this first section of his book to distinguishing the perspectives and aesthetic sensibilities of the Gebildeten from those of the Volk, and what this means for the author who would attempt to reach both.

After a lengthy discussion of why romanticism fails to call forth national feeling or produce Volksstümlichkeit, Auerbach writes that “Selbsterkenntnis des Volkes ist hiezu der erste Schritt und die erste Aufgabe der volkstümlichen Literatur. – Im Gegensatze zur Romantik und Weltliteratur steht die volkstümliche Poesie nach außen auf dem rein nationalen Standpunkte.” (GS XX, 55) What Auerbach calls volkstümliche Literatur is thus not, as Uwe Bauer claims, meant exclusively or even primarily for an educated readership. He recognizes a “volkstümliche Poesie nach außen”, which would bring the village home to the rest of the nation.

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40 This may mostly hold true for the Dorfgeschichten of the Vormärz, however, given Auerbach’s prominence in this category, he constitutes an important exception.
To be sure, Auerbach’s *Dorfgeschichten* do cater to the ethnographic gaze from the urban centers outward to rural areas. Nevertheless, as *Schrift und Volk* makes clear, cultivating the interest and promoting the understanding of the educated urban population is not his primary purpose – first, the *Volk* must recognize itself in the works that depict it. This passage also sets up an inner-outer dichotomy different from the one Baur primarily treats (inside and outside the village): namely, that of the domestic and the foreign. Second, a *volkstümliche Literatur* should not only serve to buttress the self-image of the *Volk*, but act as a thoroughly national genre by which foreign readers may experience life in a German village – an ambition that was certainly borne out in Auerbach’s case, his *Dorfgeschichten* being some of the most translated German-language works during his lifetime.

Auerbach describes the turn to the provincial as outward-looking: “Der Schritt über die subjektive Poesie hinaus zur provinzialen bezeichnet schon ein Eingehen in eine Gemeinsamkeit. Ist es nun wol eine zu hoch getriebene Erwartung, wenn wir von der provinzialen Poesie aus den Gang zu einer erneuten volksthümlichen und nationalen erwarten?” (56-57) This clearly establishes that Auerbach does not treat “provinzial” and “volkstümlich” as synonyms: the move from the latter to the former is a decidedly generalizing one. In addition, there is both a contrast between rural and urban, and between the province/periphery and the city/center. As Auerbach’s stories show, the village constitutes its own cultural center of gravity. Auerbach sees in this potential for a *volkstümlich-nationale Poesie* a stronghold of German identity (one hardly on firm footing) capable of standing against the currents of what he identifies as increased erosion of national and local particularity. *Volkstümlichkeit* represents not only a manifestation of national life, but a step on the way to a more thoroughly national literature. It represents the collective as a counterbalance to the merely subjective. These are already much more lofty
ambitions for a *volkstäumliche Literatur* than the cultivation of merely internal interest for civic village life. Auerbach identifies in the village an essential quality that the German people should recognize as uniquely its own, and the international public as singularly German.

In the end of the first and the beginning of the treatise’s second section, devoted to “Dichtung für das Volk”, Auerbach further elucidates the relation and interdependency of literature “aus dem” and “für das Volk”:

Mit dem Streben, aus dem Volke heraus sein innerstes Wesen erkennen zu lassen, geht nothwendig auch das hervor, auf dieses Wesen einzuwirken, denn nicht das schlechthin Wirkliche ist Gesetz, sondern das Höhere, in der ewigen Natur gegründete. Hieraus ergibt sich zunächst die Schriftstellerei für das Volk.

This declaration gives the lie to the assertion that the *Dorfgeschichte* may be studied separately from, say, the *Kalendergeschichten*, as Baur suggests in drawing such a firm distinction between the two. The project of capturing the *Volk* in its innermost nature could not, for Auerbach, be done merely for the benefit of those not belonging to it. The *Volk* should not simply be depicted as observed, but elevated and transfigured. The poet’s first duty, according to Auerbach, was not to empirical reality, but to the eternal truths of nature.

Introducing “Die Dichtung für das Volk”, Auerbach further clarifies the difference between it and “Dichtung aus dem Volke” as between a “volksmäßige” and a “volksthümliche Literatur”: “Die volksthümliche und die volksmäßige Literatur ergänzen sich wie Arterien und Venen, jene leiten den Lebenssaft aus dem Herzen, diese führen ihn zurück.” (111-12) As before, we see Auerbach treating the reading public as a unity, in this case, a single organism of which the *Volk* constitutes the heart. Curiously, both terms contain a suffix implying non-identity. Ultimately, they stand in the same relation to the *Volk* as a whole (an intermediary between inner and outer).
Auerbach goes on to elaborate that this distinction is primarily conceptual and formal, rather than essential:

Das Volkstümliche und das Volksmäßige ist daher kein der Wesenheit nach Verschiedenes. Wir müssen es blos, wie das überhaupt mit den Strömungen ein und desselben Seelengrundes geschieht, begrifflich trennen, um jedes in seiner Besonderheit schärfers zu fassen. (112)

This could indeed explain the difficulty in distinguishing the two terms – if the separation is purely formal, then only a formal, terminological difference is called for. Nevertheless, the -mäßig/-tümlich distinction may prove productive after all. Immediately following the passage quoted above, Auerbach writes:

Wie wir uns bei der Dichtung aus dem Volke in die Urgründe des dichterischen Subjektes zu vertiefen trachteten, so müssen wir hier vor Allem die Bedingungen des Objekts zu erforschen suchen; wie wir dort die seelische Innerlichkeit aufzudecken strebten, müssen wir hier den geschichtlichen Thatsachen nachgehen. (112)

As discussed above, the section on “Dichtung aus dem Volke” primarily pursues the conditions of possibility for a volkstümliche Literatur, i.e. its mood and inner qualities. Here, Auerbach insists on the necessity of an outward gaze and attention to historical context. He does not so much seem to describe two different orders of literary object, but rather two distinct perspectives needed to produce one. These two perspectives appear in the Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten in both the subtle psychological portraits and the ambition to sketch an entire village “vom ersten bis zum letzen Hause”, i.e. to produce a poetically unified whole. As I will demonstrate, this ambition holds for both Auerbach’s “Dorfgeschichten” and “Kalendergeschichten”.

**Auerbach’s Dorfgeschichten**

Auerbach’s attends to the concepts of a reading public, as well as cultures of writing and publishing in both his fiction and his programmatic writing. In both, Auerbach exhibits a vexed
relationship to writing and the written word, taking pains to differentiate between volkstümliche Literatur and the Vielschreiberei associated with the increasing standardization of bureaucracy and the press. The foil of writing is, naturally, spoken discourse, particularly that of the public forum.

In *Schrift und Volk*, Auerbach writes extensively of the role of oral/aural discourse, which he takes to be the most democratic method of intercourse. He underscores the importance of a public sphere in the examples of the ancient Greeks and Jews, “die gebildeten Völker des Alterthums” (GS XX, 112). Auerbach sees in the example of these two peoples a collectivity in which writing did not yet separate the common people from the “higher” souls. As such, he aligns the written word with the spoken, each as expressions of the same Volksgeist and neither of which, barring illiteracy, excluded the common man. He nevertheless emphasizes (perhaps even privileges) orality and the power of assembly to constitute and cultivate the spirit of a people.

Here, as elsewhere, Auerbach exhibits an acute concern for the loss of directness, Unmittelbarkeit in intercourse between people. He writes of “die Erfindung der Presse, die die persönliche Mittheilung und unmittelbare Verständigung immer mehr zurückdrängte.” (114-15) The language of the press, according to Auerbach, is not of the people (volkseigen) and does not stand in direct relation to it. Its invention thus only contributed further to the rift driven between specialized and general knowledge, and between the general population and the learned. This development cannot, however, be reversed, and its reversal should not be the aim of literature.

Auerbach thus admits to the impossibility of Unmittelbarkeit in printed discourse and communication. The essay, “Vorreden spart Nachreden”, written in 1842 and later published as
an introduction to the first volume of the *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*, demonstrates an acute awareness of the uneasy status of writing about and, to an extent, from the world of the village and the “Bauernleben”. As previously discussed, the very term *volkstümlich* bespeaks this anxiety – the suffix -*tümlich* itself marks a certain distance from that which precedes it, a likeness but not identity. In this sense, the medium of writing in the *Dorfgeschichten* functions both as a bridge between the *Volk* and the wider, literate public, and from living speech into the world of written communication previously closed to it. This mediating function, however, cements the -*tümlich* quality of Auerbach’s *volkstümliche Literatur*, its distance from its subject. The vexed status of writing comes into relief at several points in Auerbach’s *Dorfgeschichten*, most prominently in the narrative “Befehlerles”, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Auerbach purports, both in *Schrift und Volk* and in “Vorreden spart Nachreden”, to prefer oral storytelling and physical co-presence to written transmission. In the latter, he writes: “Ich habe mich fast immer als mündlich erzählend gedacht; die Ereignisse stehen als geschichtliche Thatsachen da. Darüber mußte es kommen, daß hin und wieder manche Lebensregel und allgemeine Bemerkung eingestreut wurde.” (GS I, V-VI) The occasional insertion of ‘Lebensregel’ and ‘allgemeine Bemerkung’ thus evokes the orality of Auerbach’s narration; his fiction should mirror, to an extent, the spoken word. This comes, however, as I will demonstrate, with important caveats.

In this same essay, Auerbach demarcates the *Volkstum* from the national, as a space, physical and cultural, in which the local predominates:

In den Ländern der Centralisation, der geschichtlichen Einheit und Einerleiheit, kann der Dichter weit eher Nationaltypen aufstellen. Engländer, Franzosen, sind unter denselben Gesetzen, ähnlich Lebensbedingungen und geschichtlichen Eindrücken aufgewachsen; ihr Charakter hat nicht bloß in der Richtung auf das Allgemeine, sondern auch in Einzelheiten, in Gewohnheiten, Ansichten u. etwas Gemeinsames. Wir aber, durch die Geschichte getrennt, stellen weit mehr die
Ausbildung des Provinciallebens dar. Die aus dem Volksthume genommene Poesie wird sich daher ähnlich der neueren Richtung geschichtlicher Forschung auf das Provinzielle, immer mehr lokalisiren müssen. Wie wir die Einzelheit politisch auszubilden haben, so haben wir auch poetisch diese Aufgabe; das Bewußtsein der Vereinigung und Einheit muß hindurchgehen, und so auch hier ein in sich gegliedertes Leben sich herausstellen. Durch die Länderarrondirungen ist das Provinziale freilich vielfach zerschnitten, aber noch steht der Kern desselben fest. (VII)

The predominance of the “Provincialleben” clearly does not preclude the existence of a “wir” around which these localities are organized. Auerbach does not appear to see a conflict between “die aus dem Volksthume genommene Poesie” and its depictions of splintered, separately evolving segments of Volk and “das Bewußtsein der Vereinigung und Einheit”.

His own depictions of life in his home village of Nordstetten address a broader interest, and are written for “sowohl Städter als Landbürger”. (V) He thus does not prioritize an absolutely faithful recreation of the locals’ speech: “Die Eigenthümlichkeiten des Dialekts und der Redeweisen sind daher nur in so weit beibehalten, als das wesentliche Gepräge derselben damit dargethan wird.” (V) To this end, local idioms appearing in the stories (both in dialogue and the auctorial narration) are footnoted and furnished with definitions in standard German. Auerbach’s attention to the provincial does not rely on an insistence on the absolute singularity or particularity of any given province. On the contrary, his is a volkstümliche Literatur that, in spite of its stated goal, “ein ganzes Dorf gewissermaßen vom ersten bis zum letzten Hause zu schildern”, (VIII) offers up the particular village as representative of the provincial in general, and as a cultural center all its own. Where its particularity comes to the fore (as in the sparing use of the local dialect), it serves to furnish the narrative with local color, a feature more ornamental and contingent than central and necessary.

a. “Befehlerles”
The 1842 village tale, “Befehlerles”, provides a striking example of this very particular use of dialect and orality. We can distinguish, I believe, three orders of communication in this story: 1) strictly oral communication employed by members of the Volk and presented as the absolute other of bureaucratic language (Aivle’s testimony, the “Maibaum” song); 2) strictly written communication employed by the bureaucracy (the ordnance nailed to the tree, Aivle’s written statement) and shown to be utterly incompatible with the first order of communication; 3) speech that mediates or tries to mediate between living (i.e. oral) and written language (Buchmaier’s speech).

I have selected “Befehlerles” because of the way it stages the encounter between city and village, center and periphery. While other Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten, such as “Der Lauterbacher” and “Die Frau Professorin” accomplish this at the interpersonal level, each selecting particular characters as representatives of each position (and, in each case, drawing them into a romantic attachment with one another), “Befehlerles” does so at the communal level, setting up a conflict between members of the Gemeinde and those of a centralized authority. The conflict also takes place at the level of language, setting up a dichotomy between bureaucratic, standard language and that of the village or villager. In it, the hallmarks of Auerbach’s volkstümliche Literatur are on full display: the limited but judicious use of dialect, the smattering of folk song (used primarily as scene-setting), and the unadorned but articulate speech (which I call “volkstümlich”) of his heroes. It is the Dorfgeschichte in which we can most clearly recognize the features of Auerbach’s particular brand of Volkstümlichkeit.

“Befehlerles” sketches a clash between state bureaucracy and a time-honored tradition: the placement of a May tree by a young man before the house of his beloved. As the narrator explains, this tradition is strictly forbidden and viewed “als großer Waldfrevel” (GS I, 154) by
the authorities.⁴¹ The village is thus abuzz when, on the morning of May 1st, a May tree appears before the door of young Aivle, widely known to be the sweetheart of “des Wendels Matthes”⁴². On display is also the tradition of the Maimann, a young boy wearing a structure made of branches and leaves (the Maihütte), accompanied by a knot of other boys singing in front of every house:

    Ho! ho! ho!
    Der Maiemann ischt do,
    Geant auns schnell d’Eier ’raus,
    Sust kommt der Marder in’s Heanerhaus,
    Geant aus Eier, wie mer’s wella,
    Sust streue mer Spreuer auf dia Schwelle
    Ho! ho! ho! u. s. w. (154)

As Marcus Twellmann points out, the singing of a folk rhyme at the beginning of the narrative “kennzeichnet die dörfliche Lebenswelt bereits als eine von Mündlichkeit geprägte.”⁴³ But it is not simply speech and orality that assert their primacy here: it is a taunting, playful song, sung in the local dialect by the village’s boys as a kind of ritual. It is a speech act with a primarily ritual, not communicative, function: namely, the collection of eggs from the villagers’ homes. It occurs outside of the normal space of social intercourse conducted between adults. As an instance of communication, however, it falls into the first order.

Once the village has had a chance to marvel at the extraordinary sight of the may tree, Mathes is swiftly apprehended by the Dorfschütz, whom we later learn has been insultingly dubbed ‘Soges’ by the villagers: “Er hatte nämlich noch in den letzten Jahren der österreichischen Herrschaft sein jetziges Amt versehen; in seiner Dienstbeflissenzienheit glaubte er

⁴¹ The publication year of this story, 1842, coincides with that of Marx’s articles on the “Debatten über das Holzdiebstahlgesetz” in the Rheinische Zeitung. I am grateful to Joseph Albernaz for calling my attention to this connection.
⁴² After this initial mention, “Matthes” is written “Mathes”.
auch den österreichischen Dialekt sprechen zu müssen und sagte einmal: ‘i sog es’. Seitdem schimpfte man ihn den ‘Soges’.” (157) This description bears a number of curious features: it, along with many other features of the narrative, reveals the narrator’s embeddedness in the world of the story and identification with its characters. It might indeed be read as an instance of free and indirect discourse. It additionally establishes the stakes of spoken language and dialect in the narrative: to reveal the speaker’s relationship to the official loci of power. Thus transformed, the present or past-tense declarative (presumably used where “I sag’s” or “I han’s g’sa’t” would have been expected) becomes a mocking imperative, an inducement for the officer to repeat the gaffe and an insinuation about the limits of his power. Since language is so explicitly tied to bureaucratic power in the story, the declaration “I sog es” implies a certain authority, a capacity to act. The perversion of this speech act into the onomatopoetic sobriquet, “Soges”, mocks the official in question as middling, ineffectual. Finally, it calls attention to the absurdity of trying to adopt a style of speech (particularly dialect) not one’s own. The narrator underscores his own proximity to the narrative by continuing to refer to the policeman by this sarcastic nickname throughout the story, not simply in the dialogue.

Once in custody, Mathes is subjected to interrogation by the Oberamtmann, who “redete ihn sogleich mit Du an und schimpfte ihn auf Hochdeutsch eben so, wie gestern der Schultheiß auf Bauerndeutsch.” (161) The magistrate uses High German to upbraid Mathes, but the real locus of linguistic power proves to be the “Gerichtssprache” in which the magistrate expresses his wish to “make an example” – “ein Exempel statuiren”. (163) This, too, points to the

44 The narrator repeatedly uses the word “wir” in reference to himself and the villagers.
45 Twellmann also emphasizes that this “bringt seine Abhängigkeit von wechselnden Obrigkeiten zum Ausdruck.” Twellmann, 603.
46 Curiously, the sheriff’s dialogue is not recorded and is instead summarized with the remark: “Der Schultheiß schalt den Angeklagten wegen seines Verbrechens sogleich tüchtig aus.” (GS XX, 157) As for Mathes, all of his dialogue appears in fairly articulate High German.
representative function of language in the narrative: the magistrate, in making an example of Mathes, also makes him exemplary. It is a de-individualizing gesture which, as I will discuss later, Auerbach’s narrative repeatedly imputes to the bureaucracy (and to the language of which it avails itself).

The conflict between speech and writing is staged differently here than elsewhere in the narrative. After all, it is Mathes, not the magistrate, who appeals to the capacity of the written record to safeguard justice: “Ihr müsset das, was Ihr da gesagt habt, in’s Protokoll ’neinschreiben; ich will sehen, ob ich ein Spitzbub bin.” (162) Demonstrating an impressive familiarity with the demands of procedure, he invokes the magistrate’s official duty, which the latter fulfills only selectively. “Wäre die Sache des Mathes nur eine bessere gewesen, es hätte dem Amtmann schlecht ergehen können; wohlweislich aber ließ dieser seine Rede nicht in’s Protokoll setzen.” (162) He also “erkannte das Ungehörige” (163) of using the attachment between Mathes and Aivle (well known to all in the village, as ‘Soges’ points out) as proof of Mathes’ having committed the crime, but nevertheless decides to “make an example” of him. It is not so much the practice of writing or the bureaucracy itself under attack here, but its susceptibility to misuse by individuals from outside of the community installed to replace existing mechanisms of self-governance.⁴⁷

The passage in which the Gerichtssprache (a primarily written language) and the local dialect find themselves most clearly at cross-purposes is that in which Aivle testifies before the court. Apart from a single line from the Schultheiß in the second episode of the story, Aivle is the only character whose dialogue is written phonetically, to reflect the spoken dialect. Where the magistrate seeks over and over to force Aivle into a decisive answer, the latter offers repeated

⁴⁷ Twellmann writes extensively about the “Gemeinde” as the structure implicitly replaced by the bureaucracy in “Befehlerles.”, an organization that relies on physical co-presence and oral communication.
equivocations: “‘Nun, wer hat dir den Maibaum gesetzt?’ , I kahn’s et wisse, Herr Oberamtmann. ‘[...] ‘Der Mathes hat Dir also den Maien gesetzt?’ ‘s kann wol sein, aber me derf jo et dabei sein, und i bin diesell Nacht—‘ es konnte wiedenum vor Weinen nicht weiter reden.” (166-7) This encounter illustrates powerfully the tendency of the language of bureaucracy, in the narrative, to pursue precision (if not clarity or truth) and the language of the people to resist it.

Later on, once the magistrate has finally wrung a confession from Aivle, the latter witnesses the final transformation of her speech into written language legible and useful to the court:

Nun wurde [Aivle] das Protokoll vorgelesen, worin die Aussagen in hochdeutsche Sprache übersetzt und in zusammenhängende Rede gebracht waren; von all dem Weinen und den Qualen des Mädchens stand kein Wort darin. Aivle erstaunte über alles das, was es da gesagt hatte; aber es unterschrieb doch und war seelenfroh, als es wieder fort durfte. (168)

Aivle barely recognizes her own words, so total is the translation and transformation of her speech in to the language of the official record. That the narrator describes the omission of Aivle’s “Weinen und Qualen” as an omission of words is noteworthy – it betrays a conviction that these vocal ejaculations can indeed be rendered into “Worte”. Several scholars claim that this is precisely what Auerbach himself aims to do: develop a narrative voice that approaches volkstümliche Sprache.48 The narrative itself, however, runs somewhat contrary to this ambition in its sparing and, for the most part, ornamental use of dialect. This scene serves as an especially

damning example of the incapacity of dialect to stand toe-to-toe with state power. Aivle appears entirely overcome in the face of the court and its linguistic instruments, is rendered inarticulate and, finally, is deprived of the power of narration and reduced to underwriting a document in which she can barely recognize the supposed statements as her own. Her speech and the resulting statement represent two instances of utterly incompatible media – not speech and writing as such but Aivle’s imprecise and volkstümlich speech (conveying more emotion than information) and legal writing (meant to convey very particular, if not entirely factual, information).

The second episode of the story furnishes another example of the other of volkstümlich speech: the written ordinance effectively prohibiting the carrying of axes in the village, a practice traditional among the local farmers. This ordinance contrasts with ordinary speech not only in style and composition (written as it is in the Gerichtssprache), but in its privileged position, posted “in allen Dörfern des Oberamtes am schwarzen Brette des Rathhauses”. (171) Though the ordinance adopts a depersonalized author position (“Da man in Erfahrung gebracht, daß viele Waldfrevel von dem unbefugten Tragen der Aexte herrühren” [171]), it cannot conceal the magistrate’s rather personal contempt (“Von heute an soll Jeder, der sich auf der Straße oder im Walde mit einer Axt umhertreibt […]” [171]). It shares this feature with the other instances of the magistrate’s speech, giving the lie to any protestations of bureaucratic neutrality or non-partisanship.

In contrast to Aivle, the male characters who manage to effectively resist the authority of the Oberamtmann, Mathes and his cousin, Buchmaier, speak in an unpretentious, colorful manner which, though peppered with local expressions, nonetheless remains far closer in register to the magistrate’s own speech than to Aivle’s. These two characters also demonstrate a familiarity with the operations of the bureaucracy, as well as an understanding of the political
power associated with writing: faced with the magistrate’s insults during his interrogation, Mathes defiantly insists that the magistrate follow procedure and enter his own statements into the record. (162) Likewise, when Buchmaier leads the men of the village to the courthouse to protest the ordinance against the carrying of axes, he addresses the court scribe: “Schreibet’s auf, Wort für Wort, was ich sag’; sie sollen’s bei der Kreisregierung auch wissen.” (177) He recognizes not only the power of the written record (and its potential, when properly employed, to safeguard justice), but of circulation: those who could not witness the triumph of orality in the public forum that his speech demonstrates will be able to experience it, albeit less directly, in written transmission.

Buchmaier’s speech makes both an explicit political point and develops an implicit thesis on the nature of volkstümlich speech, as both a statement about and an instance of the latter. He begins by invoking the very powers from which the magistrate derives his authority: “Allen Respekt vor Euch, Herr Oberamtmann, der König hat Euch geschickt und wir müssen Euch gehorchen, wie das Gesetz will”. (177) It is not, therefore, a crisis of legitimacy to which he points, but a crisis of communication and representation. The problem is not the fact of an outside authority or the authority of the king itself, but the “kleinen Herrle” with their “Befehlerles-Spielen”, (177) the “Schreiberle” with their “Schreiberwesen”. (178) The rising supremacy of these institutions means that “Die Gemeind’ soll jetzt gar nichts mehr gelten, Alles soll in den Beamtenstuben abgethan werden.” (178) Buchmaier grants the necessity of a central authority and of a learned few to act as the governing class but protests that “in der Hauptsach’ vom Leben muß ja doch Jeder für sich und jede Gemeinde für sich sorgen und nicht ihr Herren.” (179-80) Buchmaier’s comments demarcate the spheres to which bureaucratic authority should be restricted, in his (and, implicitly, the narrator’s) view: at the macro (“in der Hauptsach’ vom
Leben”) and micro (“Zuletzt stellet ihr noch an jeden Baum einen Polizeidener, damit er keine Händel kriegt mit dem Wind und nicht zu viel trinkt, wenn’s regnet.” [179]) levels, the sovereignty of the individual and the local community (or Gemeinde) should remain primary. “Es muß g’sstudirte Leut’ geben, die über Alles eine Aufsicht haben; aber zuerst müssen die Bürger selber ihr Sach’ in Ordnung bringen.” (178) In attempting to interfere in those matters better left to individuals and communities, the bureaucracy only signifies its own pettiness, as expressed in the repeated diminutives Buchmaier employs. This is not merely a critique of micro-management by centralized government, however. Buchmaier exposes the officials’ lack of understanding of village life, of the village’s cultural practices and how these practices contribute to the village’s own self-government.

Though the Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten offer ample fodder for reflecting on the tension between city and countryside, “Befehlerles” brings this conflict most explicitly to a head and introduces an additional element by staging a direct conflict between representatives of the Gemeinde and the bureaucracy. It also foregrounds the role of language in this encounter, making it as much a conflict between bureaucratic and colloquial speech and writing as between city and countryside or community and bureaucracy.

Auerbach’s “Kalendergeschichten”

Despite stylistic differences between Auerbach’s “Dorfgeschichten” and his “Kalendergeschichten”, i.e. a slightly higher register, longer sentences and more complex vocabulary in the “Dorfgeschichten”, the principal features of both are remarkably consistent. In both, the following characteristics can be observed: 1) proximity of narrator to the Volk, 2) narrative realism: absence of myth, legend, folk tale, 3) imparting of information about the
Volksleben (a feature admittedly more central to the “Dorfgeschichte”), 4) fixity and exactness of
time and place, 5) contemporaneity, firm footing in the present, 6) taking seriously the
psychology and inner life/world of country people (for Auerbach, generally the adult male
farmer). The setting of the Kalendergeschichten is, nevertheless, less exact than in the
Dorfgeschichten – although it is sometimes named, they do not take place in Auerbach’s native
Nordstetten, possessing instead a kind of generality. They thus do not serve the same
ethnographic interest as the Dorfgeschichten. Still, for all their differences, Auerbach’s
“Dorfgeschichten” and “Kalendergeschichten” share a great deal.

The most obvious way to distinguish the two is by types of publications in which they
appeared. Uwe Baur draws a distinction between “Dorfgeschichten” and “Kalendergeschichten”
which seems to refer primarily to the venue in which a given text appeared. Auerbach’s output
does indeed divide itself along these lines: the first “Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten”, before
appearing in book format, were published in journals such as Europa. Chronik der gebildeten
Welt, and Zeitung für die elegante Welt. The Volkskalender, on the other hand, addressed itself to
a different public. As Baur puts it, “Erstere wandte sich dominant an das gebildete Bürgertum,
das Periodikum hingegen an die untersten lesenden Schichten im Agrarbereich und städtischen
Kleinbürgertum.” (Baur 43) As evidence for this, Baur cites the fact that Auerbach kept the two
separate, never publishing any of the “Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten” in his Volkskalender or
vice versa.49 The only formal description he offers of the two genres is as follows: “Ein im Sinne
der klassisch-romantischen Ästhetik höherer Kunstanspruch, der sich an der Novelle orientiert,

49 The 1869 issue of Berthold Auerbach’s deutscher Volkskalender contains two stories by Auerbach himself,
entitled “Der Straßen-Mathes. Eine Dorfgeschichte” and “Benigna. Eine Dorfgeschichte”. As Baur points out,
however, neither of these appear in the collections of Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten.
stand jenen Kurzformen der Kalender entgegen, die Auerbach als spezifische Volksschriften ansah.”\(^{50}\) (Baur 43)

In addition to the differences in publication venue and intended readership, the particular aesthetic distinctions between the two forms merit further attention. When read alongside the narratives Auerbach published in his own calendars, the “Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten” are certainly more narratively and syntactically complex, and their instructive intent is usually (although not always) somewhat less obvious. Nevertheless, the difference in register is not the primary one.

a. “Die Frau des Geschworenen”

I will take as a representative example the story “Die Frau des Geschworenen” from the 1862 issue of *Berthold Auerbach’s deutscher Volkskalender*.\(^{51}\) Like “Befehlerles” this story involves a conflict of sorts between locality and central authority, although in this case the antagonist is the hero’s wife, representing the interests of the domestic sphere as necessarily opposed to those of both the Gemeinde and the city government. Encounters of this type are not unique in Auerbach’s “Kalendergeschichten”, though seldom do they feature so centrally. “Die Frau des Geschworenen”, like “Befehlerles”, also thematizes the distinction between writing and orality and the affordances of each medium. Unlike “Befehlerles”, however, this story exhibits in its protagonist, Martin, a Bauer as at home in the written word as he is in speech, and who moves effortlessly between the household, the Gemeinde and the city to which he is summoned as a juror. Though exploring similar themes to “Befehlerles”, it models for its readers an idealized

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\(^{50}\) Though Auerbach never makes this distinction explicit in *Schrift und Volk*, Baur takes the fact that he appended the term “Volksbuch” to the issues of the *Gevattersmann* which appeared after the publication of the former in 1846 as evidence for its existence in Auerbach’s thought. See Baur, p. 243, endnote 86.  
and harmonious relationship between the levels of social and political life in and around the village.

The narrative opens with a quarrel, reproduced only in dialogue, between a farmer and his wife about the voluntary work he undertakes for the community. The very first lines introduce writing as a principal concern: “Ich möchte nur wissen, was du immer und ewig in den Akten zu kramen hast. Ich wollte, du könntest nicht lesen und nicht schreiben.‘, Wer nicht schreiben und nicht lesen kann, ist auch taub und blind.’” (FG 1) Following this exchange, which continues for several paragraphs, the narrator introduces the pair as Martin and Afra Sprösser of the mountain village of Wellendingen. Martin, it emerges, takes it upon himself to perform many voluntary functions for the Gemeinde, an occupation he takes to be nothing more or less than his duty to the community, both that of the parish and the county at large. His wife, Afra, “stammte aus einem vornehmen, einsamen Bauernhof, da war man brav und fleißig, bedurfte aber keines Menschen Ansprache und keines Menschen Hülfe.” (2) As such, she not only experiences Martin’s voluntary work as a distraction from his duties as husband and head of household, but imagines their fellow villagers to be taking advantage of his good nature and generosity.

After Martin reveals to Afra that he has been selected by the local assembly to serve as a juryman at the upcoming court hearings, the two elaborate their positions further. “Ich thue meine Schuldigkeit,” Afra says defensively, “ich gebe den Armen wie sich’s gebührt, das bin ich von daheim her gewohnt; damit hab’ ich das Meinige gethan vor Gott, mehr fordert er nicht.” (5) The argument continues as follows:

„Ja wohl, es wird noch mehr verlangt. Ich habe Soldat sein müssen, und das Gesetz ist gut, daß Jeder Soldat sein muß. Was Alle angeht, da muß Jeder dabei sein. Und jetzt bezahl’ ich meine Steuern.“ – „Ja, und wir sind hoch genug eingeschätzt.“ „Nicht höher, als wir’s ertragen können. – Ja, aber mit Soldat sein und Steuern zahlen, ist die Sache noch nicht fertig. Soll es rechtmäßig und ehrenhaft hergehen,
so muß jeder Bürger selber mithelfen den Staat zu ordnen und Recht zu sprechen, wenn’s von ihm verlangt wird. So lange nicht Jeder willig und mit Freuden dabei ist, so lange haben wir kein Recht, über den Hochmuth der Beamten zu klagen und daß die Bürgerschaft nichts gelten soll.“ (5)

Afra’s objection to her husband’s honorary appointments is not only that of the doting housewife, loathe to be deprived of her husband’s company. Her short-sightedness with regard to matters of community indeed stems from the fact that, as a farmer’s wife, her principle concern is with the affairs of the household. However, she represents in the narrative not only the perspective of her gender, but the worldview conferred by her upbringing as well. Throughout the story, she serves as the mouthpiece of her father (a character introduced later), who, absent the community of the village, takes a narrow view of a person’s duties to his fellow man. As a woman, whose sphere of influence is primarily in the home, Afra is somewhat isolated from that which “Alle angeht”. As the daughter of an isolated Weiherhof, she is doubly so.

By contrast, here we see Martin take an even wider view than that of the entire community, village or county – every citizen must do his part in service of a strong civil society (not necessarily the state), or he has no cause to complain about any bureaucratic overreach. According to Martin, taking part in the affairs of state is not only a duty that attends citizenship, it is a defensive act. Where, in “Befehlerles”, Auerbach satirizes state intervention and depicts a cadre of male citizens aware of their rights as such and prepared to defend them, here he reminds the average citizen of these duties, and the cost if they are not performed “mit Freuden”. Citizens not only have an obligation to one another, but an obligation to themselves and to the state to prove themselves capable of a measure of self-governance.

On the evening before Martin’s departure, the couple has little time to themselves, as many local councilors and other villagers are gathered in the Sprösser home, trading stories of previous sessions of the court and gruesome crimes. The Oelmüller is making his way through
his lineup of stories when Afra cries: “Um Gotteswillen! Redet nicht soviel von solchen grauslichen Sachen; ich kann ja die Nacht kein Aug’ zuthun, und wenn man euch so hört, meint man, in der ganzen Welt wären nichts als Diebe und Mörder und Menschenmetzger.” (7)

Auerbach could not have been in any doubt as to the irony of putting these words in the mouth of Afra, who otherwise takes the grimmest view of human nature seen in the story. The men of the village might amuse themselves by shocking one another with gory tales, but Afra is the first to attribute nefarious motives to her fellow citizens in their dealings with her husband: at best they rely on him too heavily, and at worst they wish to ruin him.

Eventually, the day arrives when Martin must set off for the county seat to perform his duty as juror. Since the narrator makes the reader privy to both Martin and Afra’s private thoughts, we know that each desires an exchange of kind words, but neither is willing to put pride aside. As such, Martin departs under a cloud of marital discord. He sends the horse groom back to Afra with instructions for the maintenance of the household affairs, but without a tender word. Afra takes this to heart and is distressed and ashamed to admit to her neighbors that Martin has not written to her. A loyal and proud wife, however, she refuses to speak ill of her husband in the company of others, and, when her father arrives, full of accusations “daß dein Mann sein Hauswesen im Stich läßt und den Gemeinderath und den Beamten spielt” (21), she finds herself defending him. After she loudly praises his conduct both as the head of household and in all of the voluntary duties he takes it upon himself to perform, and has declared herself the happiest of wives, a messenger fortuitously arrives with a letter from Martin. In it, he declares:

Du bist grundgut, wenn Du es auch nicht immer so zeigen willst. Und Du kannst nicht dafür, daß Dir meine Arbeit für Andere und für das Gemeinwesen so zuwider ist; Du bist auf einem einsamen Hof aufgewachsen, wo man abgeschieden lebt und für eine Frau ist es recht, daß sie vor Allem nur an das Heimwesen denkt. Bleib nur dabei. Du bist aber auch gescheit, und wirst schon
After weeks of failed verbal communication, Martin puts his skill at reading and writing (previously bemoaned by his wife) to use not only in service of the household affairs and his various voluntary duties, but to convey his sincere feelings to Afra. Still, he acknowledges that the written word can only act as intermediary – “Das ist besser zu reden als zu schreiben.”

Evidently in agreement on the last point, Afra resolves to take the horse and cart and ride alone to greet her husband at the end of his two weeks as juryman.

Meanwhile, during the court proceedings, Martin has shown himself to be exemplary even among his fellow jurymen, who select him as “Obmann” on four occasions. He follows the proceedings with keen attention, questioning many of the witnesses himself. He recognizes the need to pronounce decisive and just judgements but does not allow this to erode his empathy for the accused who face the possibility of spending half a lifetime in confinement. Afra arrives at the courthouse in time to hear the president thank all the jurymen for their services, reserving special thanks for “unserm braven, rechtschaffenen Obmann Martin Sprösser.” (27) Once again unable to speak privately, the couple must endure the praise of Martin’s fellow jurymen, not yet having resolved the tension between them.

It is not until after “eine geraume Weile” of riding in silence that the two finally exchange honest words. Afra acknowledges the correctness of her husband’s conduct and the following dialogue ensues:

„Confirmirt?“
„Ja, ein Mann, der ein Ehrenamt hat und ihm vor aller Welt rechtschaffen vorsteht, der wird als Mann confirmirt. So kommt mir’s vor.“
„Das ist ein braves Wort, das läßt sich hören. Aber weißt du, was mir jetzt das Liebste wäre?“
„Was?“
„Wenn ich nicht Obmann und nicht gelobt worden wäre. Ich fürchte, es ist die Eitelkeit allein, die dich bekehrt hat.“
Die Frau wehrte ab, er solle das doch nicht denken, aber Martin fuhr fort:
„Ich wäre lieber da beim Gericht wie beim Militär nichts als ein gemeiner Soldat gewesen, ohne alle Auszeichnung. Wenn nur Jeder seinen Posten gut ausfüllt, dann ist Alles gut. Schau Afra, ich bin jetzt gelobt und ausgezeichnet worden; es kann ja aber auch einmal kommen, daß ich so vorgehen muß daß mir Niemand Dank sagt, ja noch mehr, daß ich statt gelobt geschimpft werde. Wie wird’s dann bei dir sein?“
„Dann stehst du bei mir in hohen Ehren, in Allem was du thust. Du willst nur was gut und rechtschaffen ist. Du sollst dein Lebenlang nicht mehr hören, daß ich dir in diese Sachen dreinrede. Und jetzt bist du gut und Alles ist gut und red’ nichts mehr.“ (31-2)

One can easily imagine this as one of the passages which Auerbach envisioned his readers returning to again and again to extract fresh insights. Afra seems to speak with the author’s voice when she describes the virtuous execution of a voluntary office as a kind of second confirmation; she might be commenting on the passage in Schrift und Volk in which Auerbach declares that “[Die religiöse Bildung und die nationale Bildung] können und sollen vereint sein, denn die neueren Völker und ihre Zustände können sich ebenfalls zu heiligen erheben, zu jener Heiligkeit, die die Übereinstimmung von Natur und Gesetz ist.” (GS XX, 33) The civic rite of passage stands in for the religious one as an equally essential component in the making of a man. In this quotation, Auerbach effectively uses religious ritual as a civic interpellation.

Martin, meanwhile, cautions his wife against vanity, reminding her that one fulfills one’s civic duties not for the praise or distinction one might receive, but because it is only right and honorable that one does so. Not only this, but one’s confidence in the correctness of one’s conduct must be such that one does not falter when faced with criticism or insult. Resolving the ethical and marital dispute in a single gesture, Afra affirms her husband’s view of things and withdraws all of her previous objections. The narrative closes with the following lines: “Bei der
letzten Landtagswahl war Martin mit im Wahlgang, und Afra redete ihm zu, daß er die Wahl annehme. Er wurde aber nicht gewählt und möchte jetzt lieber warten, bis er im deutschen Reichstag sitzen kann. Wird er wohl noch lange zu warten haben?” (FG 34) With the titular “Frau des Geschworenen” having broadened her perspective beyond her immediate household affairs, the narrative widens its gaze to include speculation about both the future of its protagonist and of a German governmental structure.

The story’s conclusion, as well as several of its other features, merit further consideration, particularly with an eye to a comparison with the “Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten”. For one, if Auerbach only sparingly employed the local dialect for the dialogue in his “Dorfgeschichten”, the “Kalendergeschichten” contain almost none. “Die Frau des Geschworenen” is no exception. Indeed, even characters like the Waldbauer, one of Martin’s fellow jurymen who is described as “karg in Worten, aber noch karger in seinem Behaben”, (16) speak in complete sentences with nothing to distinguish their dialogue from that of the other characters. Auerbach is clearly not at pains to convey an authentic feeling of village life to his readers; the ethnographic impulse which underpins many of his village tales, attempting to make the village legible to the educated, urban reader, does not appear to motivate the style or plot of “Kalendergeschichten” such as this one. Indeed, the dialogue is at times stilted: Martin in particular holds forth on the topic of his civic duties in long, fluid sentences that seem to violate Auerbach’s own aesthetic dictates. As Auerbach writes in Schrift und Volk, “Der Bauer und der im Dialekt sprechende Kleinbürger erörtert einen Seelenzustand nur wenig, kurz und knapp.” (GS XX, 96) With a few notable exceptions, Auerbach hews fairly closely to this principle in the village tales. In the Kalendergeschichten, by contrast, characters routinely sketch out ideological positions in dialogue which does not so much follow the poetic conventions of realism as that of
a fable, wherein a given character must clearly represent a particular idea. Rather than proselytize himself, he is content to let his characters act as mouthpieces for in the stories’ symbolic conflicts.

As in “Befehlerles”, “Die Frau des Geschworenen” offers a number of opportunities to reflect on the mediality of different expressions – of speech acts and written statements. As mentioned above, the story opens with the characters’ reflections in dialogue on the usefulness of reading and writing. Afra muses that, if her husband were not so skilled in this regard, he would not be continually called upon to perform these functions on a voluntary basis. For her, the skills of reading and writing, only minimally useful to the running of the farm and household, are an unnecessary indulgence that invites unwanted attention. When Martin remarks later that it is fortunate that she can read and write, Afra merely answers, “Ja, furs Haus[.]” (FG 7) On the other hand, Martin, the budding politician, insists that, without these skills, one is “taub und blind”. For him, they are not merely tools for cataloguing, but themselves organs of perception. His ability in reading and writing functions as an extension of his skills as a speaker, which, in part, prompt his selection as “Obmann”, or head juror. His skills as a writer, furthermore, finally succeed in neutralizing the conflict with Afra, where speech, both direct and mediated, had failed. Martin is able to express himself both clearly and authentically in speech and in writing – something which distinguishes him from his wife, whom we do not see reveal her innermost thoughts and emotions in written form.

Afra, in contrast to her husband, is obviously more at home in speech than in writing. Her first act in the story is to admonish her husband for burying his nose in “Akten”, and she summarizes her views on domestic life thus: “nur so viel versteh’ ich, daß der Mann am Abend mit der Frau spricht, und sich nicht dahnsetzt und immer Gemeindesachen liest und schreibt.”
(2) The function of Martin’s reading and writing as a form of intercourse binding him to the community is not legible to Afra – for her, communication takes place in speech, between people in physical co-presence. Performing these activities in the home therefore only serves to isolate him from her.

While the story certainly reflects on the different functions of writing and orality, the question of register does not come into play the way that it does in “Befehlerles”. In the latter, the state and bureaucracy distinguish themselves from their subjects (in this case, village dwellers) by dint of the register in which they communicate, both in spoken and written form. Indeed, this serves as one of the principal sites of conflict between the two. By contrast, the organs of the state depicted in “Die Frau des Geschworenen” have no difficulty communicating with citizens, nor indeed do there seem to exist meaningful differences between the two. This narrative depicts a benevolent, idealized civic society which relies on cooperation with its citizens in order to function and recognizes them for their efforts – those who acquit themselves well in this capacity might, like Martin, even aspire to hold office themselves. The narrative does not deny the “Hochmuth der Beamten”, but neither does it present this as a necessary feature of governance. The civic apparatus appears as something in which even the most modest Bauer can, and should, take an active interest.

The “Kalendergeschichten” not only share with the “Dorfgeschichten” their reflections on civic and governmental organization and on written and oral communication as loci of power, but space as well. “Die Frau des Geschworenen” takes place across and directly thematizes various kinds of spaces, each freighted with a unique significance. Most importantly, there is the home, the village of Wellendingen, the Weiherhof where Afra was raised, and the Kreisstadt, which itself contains the courthouse and the tavern where the jurymen go to decompress after the
day’s proceedings. Many of Auerbach’s “Dorfgeschichten” contain similar spatial constellations, the primary loci of which are the village (usually Nordstetten) and a more central location, such as Horb, which serve as seats of centrally organized political authority.\(^{52}\) Franco Moretti enumerates the institutions found in these spaces in Auerbach’s village tales: “law courts, jails, army barracks, and the like. The state. The state as repression: a grim determination to achieve the monopoly of legitimate violence that outlaws regional traditions, drafts people against their will, takes them to court, jails them if they run away.”\(^ {53}\) (Moretti 51) This is indeed the version of the state we see depicted in “Befehlerles”.

Not so in “Die Frau des Geschworenen” – here, the “Kreisstadt” mirrors the village community, the regional traditions of which are never depicted. The primary contrast to the village and the “Gemeinde” is instead provided by the “Weiherhof” of Afra’s father, which isolates him from his fellow man and renders invisible the needs, functions and obligations of the collective.\(^ {54}\) The state is certainly visible in the form of the courthouse, but it, again, does not rule by fiat and set itself in opposition to its citizens – on the contrary, they act as an important armature of it. In the tavern, certain hierarchies are observed: Martin meets his former sergeant there, who, now the inspector of a large, state-owned iron mill, “hielt sich natürlich schon seinem Titel nach zu den Beamten, aß mit denselben an ihrem Tisch, that indessen sehr herablassend und freundlich gegen Martin; nur vermied er jede gerade Anrede, denn er ahnte mit Recht, daß wenn er das vertrauliche ‚Du‘ anwende, ihm Martin jetzt mit Gleichem antworte.” (FG 16) After Martin is selected for a fourth time as “Obmann”, however, both the sergeant and the president leave their seats at the table of the “Beamten” in order to keep Martin’s company, the former

\(^{52}\) A third key space in Auerbach’s “Dorfgeschichten” which is almost never seen but often referred to and which looms large is the world beyond Germany: America, Switzerland, France, Greece, Spain, Russia, etc.


\(^{54}\) This is also thematized in “Des Schloßbauers Vefele”, one of the early *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*. 
finally addressing Martin as “Du”. These hierarchies are not treated as unjust or improper, but their boundaries are porous and genuine admiration and affection can mediate across them.

Auerbach’s “Kalendergeschichten” are not merely “Dorfgeschichten” lite. Auerbach, while conscious of the differences in readership and circulation, composed to be palatable to both the educated and the Volk, rural and urban. Nevertheless, given the likely readership of each, the “Dorfgeschichten” have much more the character of ethnography, catering to, as Baur puts it, an “Interesse am Binnenexotikum”. (Baur 41) They were not, however, meant as mere novelties or objects of purely aesthetic interest, but had their own instructive function: they staged encounters, often conflicts, between the village and the outside world, be it embodied in the state or some even further-flung, international locale. They depict the farmer in a way that is both dignified and in which he may still recognize himself. The “Kalendergeschichte” does the same, though, in Auerbach’s hands, it primarily gives the Bauer an ideal, both personal and political, to which he might aspire. It depicts the state as it might be under the guidance of benevolent actors, and a robust role for village and city-dweller alike in its day-to-day operations. Both, in this way, serve Auerbach’s political and aesthetic ends. Where the “Dorfgeschichte” brings the village locality into the world of the educated urbanite, the “Kalendergeschichte” brings the world, writ small, home to the villager.

Conclusion

Berthold Auerbach stands out as unique, not only among Vormärz authors of village tales, but also as a proponent and theorizer of Volkstümlichkeit. Though mostly forgotten, except by specialists, his work, both theoretical and narrative, deserves reexamination. While it can hardly be disputed that his own prose no longer enjoys the influence it once did, in part due to a
gradually dwindling interest in the population he depicted, the insights he brought to the topic can as little be denied.

Auerbach brought more clarity to the issue of literature about and for the Volk than any of his contemporaries and embraced a more capacious definition of Volksstümlichkeit than critics (such as Baur) have since. Where most authors of Dorfgeschichten did not concern themselves with the what was consumed by the peasants and villagers about which they wrote, Auerbach saw a deep relationship between the two (another notable exception to this is Jeremias Gotthelf). He saw in the Dorfgeschichte an opportunity not only to cultivate in the educated reader an interest in village life, but a way to bridge both the social and literary chasm between the two parts of the larger Volk. Thus the Dorfgeschichten and Kalendergeschichten are volkstümlich in equal measure: they aim at the constitution of a single Volk as reading public, one that delighted in the differences between town and country. Auerbach envisioned a literature in which the villager would recognize himself and the world around him as objects proper to poetic transfiguration, and the city-dweller would come to see the former as a thinking and feeling subject, possessed of the same universal humanity as himself.

Auerbach saw in volkstümliche Literatur the answer to a social problem that had not yet found its aesthetic solution. That to which poetry, folk song and drama were unequal, a decidedly volkstümlich prose literature showed itself to be uniquely suitable, both historically and aesthetically. Auerbach firmly situated his project in his historical moment, although it appears that such a moment may have again arisen. In a July 2021 issue of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Julia Encke announces a revival of the Dorfroman.55 She quotes another critic, who

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muses “dass Gesellschaftsromane überhaupt nur noch als Dorfromane möglich sind” and points to an increasing (and primarily middle-class) exodus of city-dwellers to the countryside. The flight from the chaos and contradictions of city life, the desire for *Entschleunigung* and the need to rediscover a lost connection to nature are nothing new – indeed, they are so thoroughly the stuff of cliche that one is tempted, with Encke, to deem the above sentiment “völlig verrückt”.

Nevertheless, the last several years have seen a groundswell of interest in and production of so-called “Dorfliteratur”. This time, however, Encke points out, the protagonists and authors are primarily women – often creative women seeking a refuge in which to practice their craft undisturbed. The figure of the *Schriftstellerin aus der Stadt* (usually Berlin) stands as a surprisingly apt foil to Auerbach’s prodigal *Dichter*, raised in the country, educated in the city, and returning, if only in print, to bring his village home to the wider literary world. As Encke notes, the female authors of contemporary *Dorfromane* offer their readers “Welthaltigkeit”, using the village as the backdrop against which to explore issues of equal concern to the metropolis: climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and right-wing extremism. Encke closes her piece with the following sentence: “Es ist doch so schrecklich schön und wunderbar übersichtlich auf dem Dorf.” Though the longevity of these recent works has yet to be tested, it might indeed be that the village offers a unified, poetic whole – an alternative to the fragmentary nature of cosmopolitan life. The temptation to depict an entire world, “vom ersten bis zum letzten Hause” still seems to draw ever new literary voices to the village.
Heinrich Heine: *Volkstümlichkeit* as Agent of Reconciliation Between Flesh and Spirit

In many ways, Heinrich Heine presents an obvious foil to Berthold Auerbach: both were 19th-century Jewish intellectuals and writers who wrote extensively on the relationship to *Volk* and literature, but from almost opposite positions. Auerbach focused on the village, from where he came, while Heine was the urbanite *par excellence*, growing up in Düsseldorf and spending almost half his life in exile in Paris. Where Auerbach is earnest and didactic, Heine is ironic and acerbic. While Auerbach consistently seeks to ennoble the *Bauer* in both his fiction and theoretical writings, Heine’s discussions of the common folk frequently take a patronizing, even derisive tone. These characteristic elements of Heine’s style conceal, however, a serious conviction in the potential of the *Volk* as a utopian public and historical actor. This is the strain in Heine’s thought I will attempt to bring into relief.

In this chapter, I will examine Heine’s development of a program for how literary production might draw inspiration from the lower social strata, the *Volk*, and how the latter’s self-understanding could in turn be enhanced by literature. I will analyze how Heine conceives of this *Volk* as an ideal addressee, far-removed from his actual reading public. While Heine’s preoccupation with the *Volk* has not gone unremarked on by scholars, it has seldom been explored as the foundation for a literary program. This program exposes a side of Heine’s thought not grounded in journalism or immersed in current events. It shows us a Heine who is not just *aktuell* but utopian, and who imagines a trans-historical public with the potential to steer civilization in a better direction, if properly addressed. Throughout his works, I contend, Heine imagines the *Volk* both as both audience and co-producer of literature and culture with more permanence and historical importance than the political power-players of the day.
To conduct my analysis of Heine’s program for literature and his conceptualization of the 
Volk as ideal public, I will work with a corpus of mostly prose texts. In this, I am following the 
tradition of intellectual historians who have attended primarily to Heine as critic, philosopher and 
theorist. I depart from this tradition, however, by treating these works not only as programmatic 
statements but as literary works in themselves, and in the context of Heine’s larger aims for 
literature. The primary sources that went into the research for this chapter are the Harzreise 
(1826), part of the of the Reisebilder series of genre-bending travelogues which first won Heine 
literary fame, the Französische Zustände (1831/32), a series of reports for the Allgemeine 
Zeitung on the situation in post-revolutionary France, Die romantische Schule (1833) and Zur 
Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland (1834), two pieces written in partial 
response to Germaine de Staël’s De l’Allemagne, and Ludwig Börne. Eine Denkschrift (1840), a 
tribute to and biting critique of Heine’s literary ally-turned-nemesis.56

The texts I have chosen are certainly not the only ones of Heine’s which comment on the 
Volk and its relationship to literature, culture and politics. As I mentioned, these were concerns 
which preoccupied Heine throughout his life. They are each, however, exemplary of Heine’s 
thoughts on these subjects at particular stages in his development as a thinker. The Harzreise 
sees Heine engage directly with the German Volk and reveals his (deliberately simplified) 
understanding of how they interact with their own national, cultural artifacts. In the Französische 
Zustände, Heine also engages in a kind of participant observation with the Volk, although this 
time with what he calls the French “masses” – largely, Paris’ urban poor. Comparing these two 
works as literary ethnographies yields distinct portraits of two different collectivities: a rural,

56 Unless otherwise indicated, I will refer to Heine’s Sämtliche Schriften in zwölf Bänden, ed. Klaus Briegleb 
(Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1976). References will appear hereafter in text with the abbreviation B, followed by 
the volume number (Roman) and page number (Arabic).
mobile *Volk* and a large, somewhat anonymous urban *Masse*. I have chosen to focus on the *Zustände* rather than *Lutetia*, also a collection of correspondence articles about France, both because the time of its composition is much closer to that of the *Reisebilder*, which serves as my point of comparison, and because, despite the subtitle of *Lutetia* being “*Berichte über Politik, Kunst und Volksleben***”, Heine’s remarks on the life of the *Volk* in it are more general and sweeping in nature, containing fewer thick descriptions of interactions with particular members of the *Volk*. I will, however, discuss relevant examples of this in *Lutetia* later on in this chapter as evidence that Heine’s notion of *Volk* as ideal public remained remarkably consistent, even in his later works.

Heine’s two long-form essays on the history and origins of German culture and habitus, *Die romantische Schule* and *Religion und Philosophie*, are often treated as companion pieces due to their shared aim: to educate the French reading public about intellectual and cultural life in Germany. That they belong in this chapter is clear enough from their content: both pieces concern German national cultural goods and their relationship to the peoples from which they emerge. But even apart from this, Heine himself saw them as an important intervention not only in the reception and perception of German culture by French readers but believed that they could perform an indispensable function for the German public as well. In April 1833 he wrote to Heinrich Laube, “*Es war nötig nach Goethes Tode dem deutschen Publikum eine literarische Abrechnung zu überschicken. Fängt jetzt eine neue Literatur an, so ist dies Büchlein auch zugleich ihr Programm, und ich, mehr als jeder andere, mußte wohl dergleichen geben.***” (B. V, 846) These works therefore furnish us with explicit, programmatic statements by Heine to his audience (real, not ideal) on the present state of German literature, religion and philosophy and his hopes for their further development and reach.
Some scholars have concluded that, later in his career, Heine gave up some of the loftier ambitions he and the other Young Germans had held for the revolutionary potential of literature (and which he expresses, to an extent, in *Romantische Schule* and *Religion u. Philosophie*).\(^57\) It is true that, in Heine’s later work, he made many pessimistic pronouncements about what might become of art under Communism. These remarks, however, made largely in *Lutetia*, most often refer not to Marxism but to Babouvism, an early revolutionary-socialist movement active in France in the 1840s.\(^58\) Many of them are also of a general nature, concerning art in the abstract, or are made explicitly about art forms other than literature, most particularly music.\(^59\) Indeed, borrowing ideas from Hegel’s aesthetics, Heine wrote in *Lutetia* that “die Musik ist vielleicht das letzte Wort der Kunst, wie der Tod das letzte Wort das Lebens.” (B. IX, 357) When it comes to literature, however, one searches in vain for such explicit statements in Heine’s later writings.

Rather than conclude, with Kuttenkeuler, Oesterle and others that, because of this, that Heine was losing faith in literature as popular art form, I propose that we look to those literary figures to whom he returns again and again – Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes and, for Heine’s purposes, Luther. He treats these figures not only as practitioners of world literature, but as thoroughly national, in the sense that they were deeply in touch with the cultures out of which they arose and transfigured the collective goods of their respective peoples into works of art at

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\(^{58}\) For a concise treatment of Heine’s vexed and changing relationship to socialism and communism, see Leo Kreutzer, *Heine und der Kommunismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

\(^{59}\) Heine’s writings on music contain many important reflections on popular art and the relationship of art to an exoteric public, but, given my focus on literature, they fall outside the scope of this chapter. Fortunately, Michael Mann’s *Heinrich Heines Musikkritiken* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1971) provides a thorough analysis of these works.
once culturally specific and universally human. On this topic, I analyze 1840’s Ludwig Börne, in which Heine makes an extended comparison between the Luther’s Bible and the Homeric epics as works that both define a nation and transcend it. Through the lens of this work, I see in the later Heine not a turn away from politics and toward artistic autonomy, but an affirmation of the importance of literature beyond just the issues of the day.

An analysis of Heine’s evolving ideas about the Volk and how it participates in and receives literature helps reconcile, on the one hand, Heine’s political ambitions for art in general and literature specifically, and on the other, his later disenchantment with the ability of literature to produce positive social outcomes. If we see in these developments not a rupture or even a gradual disillusionment but a continuity, and an evolving but, for the most part, consistent notion of the role of literature vis à vis the Volk, we see that, far from giving up on literature, Heine continued to reserve a place of importance for it. Although the population Heine conceived of as Volk did not make up his actual literary audience, it constitutes a key element in his thinking of who produces and enjoys culture.

I will begin with a gloss of the relevant Heine scholarship and where I situated my contribution to it. Next, I will explore how Heine positions himself in relation to the Volk throughout his work. How does he depict real and ideal audiences, and what is his relationship to the latter? Building on this, I will analyze Heine’s encounters with the German Volk in the Harzreise and the French in Französische Zustände. How does he present the provincial population in the former and the urban in the latter as different models for reception and production of culture? Finally, I will move from these very localized observations of Heine’s outward to his philosophy of history. I will examine how Heine, across his oeuvre, identifies the opposition of spiritualism to sensualism as the central conflict driving historical events. How
does he see literature as reflecting and influencing these events, and what role does he envision for the *Volk* as the ideal literary public?

**Trends in Heine scholarship**

**a. Heine and the ideal subject**

The scholarly understanding of both Heine’s poetology and political thought has thus far been largely dominated by a focus on his poetic and philosophical subjectivity, i.e. the way he centers his own subjective experience and position over extra-individual or intersubjective considerations. This thread runs through both the Germanophone and Anglophone receptions of Heine’s work. Some scholars have attributed this strong subjectivity to his Romantic heritage, and/or to his personality. Michael Perraudin summarizes this view quite succinctly: “As an heir to German Romantic irrationalism, as well as an individual with a fairly narcissistic disposition, Heine always wrote subjectively, with the implication that writing out of mood and personal inspiration by a great poet was a path to greater insights than reason could supply.”60 This element of Heine’s work cannot be denied and is vital to understanding his poetic and authorial voice as well as his critical and philosophical writings. It has rarely, however, been analyzed alongside Heine’s equally strong preoccupation with collectivities, nationalities, and the cultural practices that create and are created by them. One of the aims of this chapter is to evaluate how these two features of Heine’s work interact to shape his vision for what literature might become in the service of a people.

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Heine’s narrative voice certainly tends to privilege subjective insight over the operations of a universal reason. This is, after all, the same Heine who famously wrote, “das Herz des Dichters [ist] der Mittelpunkt der Welt.” (B III, 403) Indeed, the central role of the poet in comprehending the world and making it comprehensible in turn is central to my own analysis of Heine’s poetics and politics. The figures of the poet and thinker on the one hand, and the generalized individual subject on the other, must nevertheless be differentiated. When we speak of Heine as prizing subjectivity, it is not only his own that assumes a central role in his thought. Perraudin is correct to point out that, for Heine, the mind and heart of the great poet have greater powers of understanding than reason alone (the “pure” existence of which Heine was deeply skeptical). However, throughout his oeuvre, Heine sets great store by the individual as such, a kind of imagined everyman who does not possess the long view of history, art and politics which constitutes the poet or intellectual’s great advantage, but who experiences life in a direct and unmediated way that cannot be subsumed under any grand, unifying theory. This figure of the individual is not opposed to but inextricably tied up with that of the collective, and the cultural products generated by this individual are, for Heine, necessarily communal.

To make this clearer, I will read Heine’s remark about the heart of the poet as the center of the world, first published in the third part of 1830’s Reisebilder, alongside 1833’s Verschiedenartige Geschichtsauffassung, a short text in which Heine offers a critique of the two philosophies of history dominant during his time. The first sees history as cyclical and is embodied in the “elegische[r] Indifferentismus der Historiker und Poeten”. (B V, 23) The second understands human progress as linear and can be seen in the “Schwärmerei der Zukunftbeglücker”. (23) Heine finds both schools lacking, as they “wollen nicht recht mit unseren lebendigsten Lebensgefühlen übereinklingen.” (22) In other words, both the cyclical and
linear views of history neglect the subjective, direct experience of the present, viewing the latter as a simple repetition with variation or a mere means to the end of bringing about an idealized future. Daniel Cuonz rightly assigns this passage an important place in Heine’s own thought and in the intellectual history of concepts of modernity, writing that “Heines Rehabilitierung der Gegenwart [bringt] ein erstaunlich frühes Sensorium für die individuelle Erfahbarkeit des rasant fortschreitenden gesellschaftlichen Modernisierungsprozesses zum Ausdruck.[..]”61 This sensitivity to the immediate and experienceable is a result of the centrality Heine assigns to both his own, singular subjectivity and to the collective subjectivity he imputes to members of a Volk. If we analyze Heine’s subjective bent without sufficient attention to his interest in the products of a collective mind, we run the risk of ignoring that which lies between the individual and the universal: the subjectivity of the group.

b. Poetry and prose: a tale of two Heines

Another tendency in Heine’s scholarly reception is to cleave his body of work into two groups: his poetry on the one side, and his critical and journalistic writings on the other. While scholars focusing on Heine’s poetry and poetics often mine his prose writings for insights, those analyzing Heine as a journalist, critic and political thinker have tended, largely, not to bring this dimension of Heine as a writer into conversation with his poetry and his own observations on literature.62 Those studies of Heine as journalist and political thinker tend to therefore conceptualize him primarily in relation to and against the standard of political thinkers and philosophers by whom he was influenced and with whom his work shares affinities, such as

62 There are, of course, exceptions to this. Jeffrey Sammons, one of the most prominent Heine scholars of the 20th century in both the Anglo- and Germanophone worlds, attends carefully to both of these dimensions of Heine’s work, particularly in his sweeping studies, Heinrich Heine: The Elusive Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) and Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
Hegel, Marx and Saint-Simon.\textsuperscript{63} This is also an approach that tends to bracket Heine’s early and later writings, focusing primarily on his middle period in which he did the majority of his political writing and reportage. I intend to show, however, that the insights afforded by this approach can only be sharpened by a more careful attention to the remarks Heine makes on literature and art alongside his political observations, as well as by reading these very observations as literary writings in themselves.

The relation between Heine’s journalistic and literary practices has not been ignored. On the contrary, Heine’s restructuring of the feuilleton has received much critical attention for its stylistic innovation and suppleness as a tool for avoiding the Argus eyes of the censor. The theories of art and literature Heine develops in his critical and journalistic writings is also a frequent focus in Heine scholarship. The most sophisticated examples of this demonstrate how Heine’s evolving theories of art responded to the changes in the material and political realities around him and provide different evaluations as to the success of Heine’s adaptations to these changes.\textsuperscript{64} They view Heine’s journalistic practices as a forum in which he develops his theory of what literature can and should be and in which he carries out his practice thereof. By showing how Heine navigated and commented on the literary and art markets of his day and how he evaded the censors to practice critique, they illuminate both the limitations and innovation of Heine’s work. On the one hand, he was beholden to the demands of the bourgeoisie literary

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{63}{For example, Günter Oesterle’s \textit{Integration und Konflikt: Die Prosa Heinrich Heines im Kontext oppositioneller Literatur der Restaurationsepoche} (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1972) furnishes many important insights into Heine’s development as a political thinker and situates them in the context of the social and economic histories of France and Germany. It does, however, treat Heine mainly in these terms, setting aside his contributions to and thoughts on literature.}

\end{footnotes}
market (particularly in France) and hamstrung by the censor (particularly in Germany). On the other, restrictions beget invention.65 He skillfully deploys irony, satire, and figurative language to entertain and to blunt some of the sharper edges of his critique.

These studies constitute important contributions to scholarship on Heine and 19th century print and reading cultures, and the goal of this chapter is not to contradict but to complement them. Heine’s turn to the common people as inspiration and ideal audience allows him to develop a programmatic notion of the function of literature that is not encompassed by the approach which the works referenced above ably analyze. Due to their attention to the material restrictions within which Heine was forced to work, studies of Heine’s political journalism and art criticism have tended to focus on his actual audience of middle- to upper-middle-class, educated readers,66 rather than the various publics whom he considers not only important subjects of history, but receivers of and contributors to the world of culture and ideas. The common Volk might not have constituted Heine’s own audience (or that of any contemporary writer), but he was alive to the ways in which works of art and even literature were received, modified and produced by them. In other words, the public is, for Heine, not only a reading public, and the reading public was not only made up of those individuals who read his reports for the Allgemeine Zeitung. Even those members of the Volk whom he knew he could not reach directly were not, in his estimation, unreachable, and the question of how literature might

65 Hohendahl convincingly demonstrates this using the example of the famous Article 37 of Lutetia (11 December 1841). According to him, “Heine recognized the contradiction between the form of the feuilleton and his own intentions. He could not remove the contradiction, but he managed to profit from it—he enlisted the feuilleton form to serve the interests of enlightenment.” See Hohendahl, 117f.

66 Kuttenkeuler takes a somewhat broader view of Heine’s intended audience, but only in a footnote: “Gegenüber den Interpretationen von Schanze und Preisendanz ist zu betonen, daß Heine sich nicht nur auf den ‚esoterischen’ Leser ausrichtet, der willens und fähig ist, die in dem ‚Gestus’ der Texte verborgenen Intentionen des Autors zu dechiffrieren, sondern daß er ebenso den ‚exoterischen’ Leser zu erreichen sucht, in dem der Träger der erstrebten Revolution zu sehen ist.” p. 131, n. 92.
interface with them remained a preoccupation of Heine’s throughout his life. It is precisely Heine’s approach to this ideal, utopian public I wish to explore.

“Ich selber bin Volk”: Heine’s poetic persona and self-positioning

Heine was constantly engaged in a self-reflective exercise of positioning himself with regard to his audience. Throughout his works, he makes a number of explicit, programmatic statements about whom he seeks to address and how, and these contain frequent references to the Volk. Although Heine has neither a single Volksbegriff nor a single public, these remarks nevertheless provide important evidence regarding how he sees these various publics interacting and, which of them constitute the Volk, and where he sees himself in relation to them.

One of the more explicit statements Heine offers on the subject of the Volk and his position relative to it appears at the start of 1834’s Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland. As mentioned, this work, along with 1833’s Die romantische Schule, was meant to better acquaint the French reading public with the history and present state of German letters, building upon and correcting Germaine de Staël’s influential De L’Allemagne.67 Telegraphing his aims for Religion und Philosophie, Heine writes that the French cannot claim an understanding of German literature without first familiarizing themselves with the history of religion and philosophy in Germany. Without this, “die Erzeugnisse unserer schönen Literatur bleiben für sie nur stumme Blumen, der ganze deutsche Gedanke bleibt für sie ein unwirtliches Rätsel”. (B. V, 514) Notably, Heine seems to consider this a feature somewhat unique to German

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67 Die romantische Schule was first published serially in the French journal L’Europe littéraire under the title, État Actuel de la littérature en Allemagne. De l’Allemagne depuis Mme. de Staël between March and May of 1833. Its companion piece, Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland appeared first in the journal Revue des deux mondes under the title, De l’Allemagne depuis Luther between November and December of 1843. Heine did not compose the French texts himself but had them translated from the German.
literature – that an appreciation of it requires some understanding of the philosophical and theological landscape of the nation. He clearly believes that German literature cannot simply speak for itself and requires something of an ambassador, a role to which he thinks himself suited. Describing the challenges he faces in this endeavor, Heine remarks that he must avoid a “Schulsprache” unfamiliar to the French reader, and that he has “weder die Subtilitäten der Theologie, noch die der Metaphysik so tief ergründet, daß ich im Stande wäre, dergleichen nach den Bedürfnissen des französischen Publikums, ganz einfach und ganz kurz zu formulieren.” (514) These difficulties do not indicate differences in status or learning between himself and his reader but are rather the challenges of translation from one cultural idiom and style into another.

On the contrary, Heine places himself on equal footing with his audience, in contrast to the great philosophers whose works he describes as “unermeßbar gründlich, […] stupend tiefsinnig, aber eben so unverständlich. Was helfen dem Volke die verschlossenen Kornkammern, wozu es keinen Schlüssel hat? Das Volk hungert nach Wissen und dankt mir für das Stückchen Geistesbrot, das ich Ehrlich mit ihm teile.” (514) It is clear that Heine has in mind a very particular Volksbegriff here: a literate, literarily-minded public sphere, the participants in which nurture a broad, non-specialist interest in history, politics, arts and culture. This delimiting of the concept allows Heine to count himself as merely one of the people. Opposed to this is not an illiterate rural peasantry or industrial, urban working class, but “Gelehrten”.

Immediately following the above paragraph, Heine offers some conjectures about this separation:

Ich glaube, es ist nicht Talentlosigkeit, was die meisten deutschen Gelehrten davon abhält, über Religion und Philosophie sich populär auszusprechen. Ich glaube, es ist Scheu vor den Resultaten ihres eigenen Denkens, die sie nicht wagen, dem Volke mitzuteilen. Ich, ich habe nicht diese Scheu, denn ich bin kein Gelehrter, ich selber bin Volk. Ich bin kein Gelehrter, ich gehöre nicht zu den siebenhundert Weisen Deutschlands. Ich stehe mit dem großen Haufen vor den
Pforten ihrer Weisheit, und ist da irgend eine Wahrheit durchgeschlüpft, und ist diese Wahrheit bis zu mir gelangt, dann ist sie weit genug: – ich schreibe sie mit hübschen Buchstaben auf Papier und gebe sie dem Setzer; der setzt sie in Blei und gibt sie dem Drucker; dieser druckt sie und sie gehört dann der ganzen Welt. (515)

Having declared his membership to the *Volk*, Heine elects himself as liaison between it and the great German intellectuals. All that distinguishes him from the “großen Haufen” is his ability to write in “hübschen Buchstaben” and his connection to the world of publishing and its means of circulation, which enable him to democratize the closely-guarded secrets of the German men of learning.

This is a continuity in Heine’s works. In 1853’s *Götter im Exil*, he describes himself as a kind of archaeologist who has successfully taken the language of the “Gelehrten”, which “das große Publikum […] für ägyptische Hieroglyphen halten dürfte”, and “wieder zum wirklichen Leben heraufbeschworen, durch die Zaubermaßt des allgemein verständlichen Wortes, durch die Schwarzkunst eines gesunden, klaren, volkstümlichen Stiles!” (B. XI, 78) The fact that he describes the act of translation from indecipherable academic jargon into clear, “volkstümlich” prose as “Schwarzkunst” shows that sees himself as uniquely suited to this task. It is no mere translation or gloss he performs, but the creation of life itself. Knowledge, when brought to the *Volk*, comes alive.

He therefore does not share the mistrust of the *Volk* he attributes to scholars and intellectuals and does not feel the need to jealously guard the knowledge they produce and preserve. Heine also deliberately draws attention to the material conditions that lead to the production of popular knowledge, noting that the publication and circulation of a work means that its ownership is no longer private or privileged, but that it then belongs to the entire world. “Die ganze Welt,” for Heine does not merely consist of the literate public sphere but a trans-
temporal, trans-national, imagined public that may never have been the intended audience of a given work. Like the truths that have “slipped through” the gates of wisdom and into Heine’s hands, so too might something of his own output eventually find its way to those members of the “Haufen” which do not constitute his immediate readership.

Heine’s own relationship to this sector of the population, educationally and/or economically far removed from his milieu, was a deeply ambivalent one, which likely accounts for the lack of scholarly attention to Heine’s conception of the Volk as a public. On the one hand, he recognized their importance in the changing social landscape and advocated for the betterment of their material circumstances. On the other, he frequently mocked them, German, French and English alike, and, for the most part, did not seek out social intercourse with them. In 1840’s Ludwig Börne, Heine writes with grudging admiration of the titular Börne’s talent for engaging the lower social strata with his talent for political speech, describing his style as “gut, bündig, überzeugend, volksmäßig; nackte, kunstlose Rede, ganz im Bergpredigerton.” (B. VII, 73) Despite all Börne’s learning and cultivation, he nevertheless knows how to speak convincingly in a manner that is “volksmäßig” – if not identical to, then approaching that of the Volk. This sense of “volksmäßig” comes close to the way that Auerbach understands “volkstümlich”: not precisely mirroring, but nevertheless calling to mind the speech of the Volk.

It is not just style of speech, however, that Heine considers when assessing the demands on the would-be Volksredner, but the entire experience, oral, aural, olfactory, and bodily. Heine considers all of these in a surprising admission that he, himself, is a failed soapbox orator:

Du meinst vielleicht, der höchste Ehrgeiz meines Lebens hätte immer darin bestanden, ein großer Dichter zu werden, etwa gar auf dem Kapitol gekrönt zu werden, wie weiland Messer Francesco Petrarcha … Nein, es waren vielmehr die großen Volksredner, die ich immer beneidete, und ich hätte für mein Leben gern auf öffentlichem Markte, vor einer bunten Versammlung, das große Wort erhoben, welches die Leidenschaften aufwühlt oder besänftigt und immer eine

Heine, who spends so much of this work skewering the poverty of Börne’s abilities as a reader and writer, here confesses that, at least in his earlier days, he would have traded his skill with the pen for Börne’s talent as a speaker and people’s preacher. Still, it is clear that, in Heine’s view, the conditions that enabled the success of Demosthenes, Cicero, and even the relatively recent Mirabeau, great orators equally regarded as great thinkers, are not present in the Germany of his day. As he explains, these conditions are not just material but physical, and concern an immediate bodily experience, real or imagined. This is the realm in which direct dealings with the Volk take place.

Where Heine does see himself capable of intervening in the Volksleben is with poetry – not just his own, but that of other poets like himself who understand the character both of their people and their time. In 1844, shortly after Ludwig Börne, Heine published the satirical epic poem Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen which, in a letter to his publisher, Julius Campe, he described as “ein gereimtes Gedicht, welches … die ganze Gärung unserer deutschen Gegenwart, in der kecksten, persönlichsten Weise ausspricht. Es ist politischromantisch und wird der prosaischbombastischen Tendenzpoesie hoffentlich den Todesstoß geben.” (B. VIII, 1016) In the
introduction to the collection, he makes good on the promise of the “politischromantisch” tone, expressing his ambitions for a better Germany which, as we will see from the opening poem, align with his personal ambitions as a poet:

Indessen, die Elsasser und Lothringer werden sich wieder an Deutschland anschließen, wenn wir das vollenden, was die Franzosen begonnen haben, wenn wir diese überflügeln in der Tat, wie wir es schon getan im Gedanken, wenn wir uns bis zu den letzten Folgerungen desselben emporschwingen, wenn wir die Dienstbarkeit bis in ihrem letzten Schlupfwinkel, dem Himmel, zerstören, wenn wir den Gott, der auf Erden im Menschen wohnt, aus seiner Erniedrigung retten, wenn wir die Erlöser Gottes werden, wenn wir das arme, glückenterbte Volk und den verhöhnten Genius und die geschändete Schönheit wieder in ihre Würde einsetzen, wie unsere großen Meister gesagt und gesungen, und wie wir es wollen, wir die Jünger – ja, nicht bloß Elsaß und Lothringen, sondern ganz Frankreich wird uns alsdann zufallen, ganz Europa, die ganze Welt – die ganze Welt wird deutsch werden! Von dieser Sendung und Universalherrschaft Deutschlands träume ich oft, wenn ich unter Eichen wandle. Das ist mein Patriotismus. (B. VII, 574-5)

Heine is expressing disappointment that the German people have not attained to the position in actuality that they have already achieved in philosophy (as I take him to mean with “Gedanken”). Writing against those self-described patriots who would make the regions of Elsass and Lothringen (Alsace and Lorraine) part of Germany again, he suggests that, rather than pursuing expansionist politics, Germany can attract the world to Germanness via enlightened institutions and freedom of expression, as the French did.

What Heine here refers to as his patriotism I call a nationally inflected cosmopolitanism. Consistently throughout his works, Heine shows himself to be suspicious of a universalism that would level all national and regional differences. Nearly a decade later, in Lutetia, Heine describes what at first seems a utopian vision of “die Weltrevolution, der große Zweikampf der Besitzlosen mit der Aristokratie des Besitzes,” (B. IX, 406) wherein, he anticipates, “wird weder von Nationalität noch von Religion die Rede sein: nur Ein Vaterland wird es geben, nämlich die Erde, und nur Einen Glauben, nämlich das Glück auf Erden.” (406) This, however, appears to
Heine as a nightmare of stubborn conformity in which there will be “nur Einen Hirten und Eine Herde, […] ein freier Hirt mit einem eisernen Hirtenstabe und eine gleichgeschorene, gleichblökende Menschenherde!” (406-7) It is therefore a matter of no small significance that Heine continues to use the term Volk and refer to nations by name – it is not a plea for the creation or persistence of a territorially defined nation state, but for the spread of ideas which he insists on as German in origin.

This passage functions as a programmatic statement for Heine’s political and artistic ambitions for the German people, as well as a declaration of faith. He is determined not to let patriotism remain the province of the political right, but neither is he content to advocate a kind of homogenizing universalism which would make out of humanity mindless herd. Instead, he claims for himself a patriotism in which the entire world may benefit from the best that Germany has to offer. Once again, this finds echoes in Lutetia, in which he predicts that “dem deutschen Volk gehört die Zukunft, und zwar eine sehr lange, bedeutende Zukunft.” (B. IX, 375) What kind of future this is to be seems, for Heine, dependent on the destruction of “Dienstbarkeit” in all its forms – something which he does not think possible if the world is to be transformed into a “Menschenherde”, led by “ein freier Hirt mit einem eisernen Hirtenstabe”. This opposition to “Dienstbarkeit” expresses a certain pantheism or animism, another characteristic feature of Heine’s work after his turn to Saint-Simonianism. Against the servitude demanded by institutionalized monotheism, in which God resides outside of the world, Heine sets the notion that God exists in every person. In this case, the emancipation of humanity would at the same time mean the emancipation of God. That Heine expresses such a lofty ambition at the start of a cycle of poetry reveals the immense potential he accords literature, culture and philosophy.

68 For a detailed account of Heine’s relationship to Saint-Simonianism, see Nina Bodenheimer, Heinrich Heine und der Saint-Simonismus (1830-1835) (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2014).
The Volk, as receptive audience to and co-producer of culture, shows up immediately in the Wintermärchen. Heine suggests that they have an important role to play in the aforementioned emancipation of mankind by making a young Harfenmädchen the focus of the first caput. In it, Heine describes arriving in Germany after an extended absence, and the first words of German he hears are those of her song:

Ein kleines Harfenmädchen sang.
Sie sang mit wahren Gefühle
Und falscher Stimme, doch ward ich sehr
Gerühret von ihrem Spiele.
[…]
Sie sang das alte Entsagungslied,
Das Eiapopeia vom Himmel,
Womit man einlullt, wenn es greint,
Das Volk, den großen Lümmel. (B. VII, 577)

Here, Heine references the common people with his now-familiar mixture of admiration and condescension – he describes them at once as rich in feeling and poor in cultivation, as embodied in the young girl’s “wahren Gefühle” and “falscher Stimme”. She sings a song “vom irdischen Jammertal, / Von Freuden, die bald zerronnen, / Vom Jenseits, wo die Seele schwelgt / Verklärt in ewgen Wonnen.” (577) It is a life and world-denying affirmation of the eternity of heaven, which Heine rejects as benumbing an infantilized people to the troubles of the world around them. All the same, he is deeply moved by the performance and recognizes the power of religious song to stir the feelings of the listener. It is not the religious thrust of the song to which he takes exception, but the hypocrisy of the message, penned by “Herren Verfasser” who “tranken heimlich Wein / Und predigten öffentlich Wasser.” (578) Unlike in the majority of Heine’s discussions of folk songs (which I will examine in more detail below), here he makes

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69 The böhmische Harfenmädchen were storied traveling musicians whose numbers grew in response to the economic downturn occasioned by the decline of the mining industry. For a history of this tradition, see Jiří Kleňha, Das Harfenspiel in Böhmen (Granit: Prague, 2002).
much of the matter of authorship. This song, according to him, is one deliberately composed for nefarious ends.

The final stanza expresses a similar sentiment in a similar formulation to Marx’s declaration that religion is “das Opium des Volkes” from the introduction to his *Kritik der Hegelschen Geschichtsphilosophie*. The latter is also strikingly similar to the following passage from 1840’s *Ludwig Börne*:

Für Menschen, denen die Erde nichts mehr bietet, ward der Himmel erfunden …
Heil dieser Erfindung! Heil einer Religion, die dem leidenden Menschen geschöpft in den bitteren Kelch einige süße, einschläfernde Tropfen goß, geistiges Opium, einige Tropfen Liebe, Hoffnung und Glauben! (B. VII, 111)

What distinguishes Heine’s characterization from Marx’s is, as Paul Peters notes, his positive characterization of religion as a spiritual salve in the absence of the means for material relief. Not only this, but Heine is actively interested in the ways in which religion creates among people a habitus, ethos, and resource for creating culture and community. In recognition of these affordances, the intervention Heine proposes is not material or even necessarily irreligious. Instead,

Ein neues Lied, ein bessres Lied,
O Freunde, will ich Euch dichten!
Wir wollen hier auf Erden schon
Das Himmelreich errichten. (578)

With this new song, Heine puts forth his candidacy as a kind of bard for the socialist (in a generic sense) world revolution. He declares that the people not only need to be liberated from

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70 This text was composed between 1843 and 1844, the same years as the *Wintermärchen* and concurrent with Marx and Heine’s meeting in Paris. Of course, neither Marx nor Heine can claim credit as the originators of the idea of religion as “Opium des Volkes”. Vico, Goethe, the Marquis de Sade, among others, all raised the issue of the potentially numbing effects of religion. It has frequently been speculated, however, that Marx took his formulation from Heine. As Jeffrey Sammons notes, the connection between the two has often been vastly overstated: “at times Heine has been maneuvered into the role of John the Baptist to Marx’s Christ.” See Sammons, *Heine*, pp. 260-265, here 261.

their present physical servitude, but they also require better, more engaged works of art. Heine’s relationship to political art is certainly a complicated one, but it is clear that, when it comes to mass culture, he felt it should at least engender the correct sentiments, rather than make the people insensible to their shared suffering. At the same time, he wishes to make productive use of the habitus and cultural resources furnished by religious belief and practice – he does not suggest giving up on the notion of heaven but, with the help of song, establishing it on earth.

In those passages in Heine’s work where he describes his own position vis à vis the Volk, he positions himself as a kind of cultural ambassador. As such, he is able to move between the upper echelons of the cultural and academic worlds and a middle-to-high brow readership. As a poet, however, he expresses a desire to both produce classics which become part of popular vernacular and to compose a kind of national hymn to replace both the jingoistic folk songs, the likes of Ernst Moritz Arndt’s “Deutschlandlied,” and the “Entsagungslieder” which the common people sing to comfort themselves. His introduction to the Wintermärchen expresses a belief that works composed for the Volk have a greater durability than, for instance, his journalism, which is necessarily limited by its existing audience and by the interests of the day.

Heine on the Volk as common people

a. The German Volk

Given Heine’s exile, he is able to comment extensively on the Volksleben of both the German and the French people, and the differences between them are telling. He writes frequently of their reception of various cultural goods and shows a recognition that, although not
every member of the *Volk* (French or German) belongs to a reading public, they constitute a public nonetheless and should be considered in the composition of literature.

The encounters with the German *Volk* of which Heine gives accounts mostly take place during his travels. The picture he paints is thus, unlike Auerbach’s domestic *Volk*, one of *wanderndes, fahrendes Volk* (recall his encounter with the *Harfenmädchen* in *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* quoted above). Specifically, he associates them with the form of the *Volkslied*, as its innovators and composers.

In his discussions of the *Volkslied*, Heine, like Auerbach, consistently repeats the persistent myth that it originated in the *Volk* as a kind of product of nature with no identifiable author or composer. Whether he genuinely believed this or not, it served his purpose in characterizing the simple *Volk* as a naïve but authentic source of cultural reception and production.\(^{72}\)

In *Die romantische Schule*, Heine expresses his admiration for the poetic gifts of wandering craftsmen. He reserves particular praise for Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim’s collection of *Volkslieder*, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Describing the process of collecting these songs, he writes that they found them

> teils noch im Munde des Volkes, teils auch in fliegenden Blättern und seltenen Druckschriften[...] Dieses Buch kann ich nicht genug rühmen; es enthält die holdseligsten Blüten des deutschen Geistes, und wer das deutsche Volk von einer liebenswürdigen Seite kennen lernen will, der lese diese Volkslieder. In diesem

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\(^{72}\) Wolfgang Suppan, in his history of the collection and study of folk songs, traces the origins of this myth to popular, uncareful readings of Herder’s *Volkslieder* collection and his efforts to integrate folk songs into school curricula. Suppan notes that Herder’s aim here was not to preserve “authenticity”. Nevertheless, his very identification of particular songs as *Volkslieder*, even as he acknowledged that this definition was largely of his own invention, was enough to reify the distinction in the reception of his project. Suppan writes: “Erst die bewußte Hinwendung zum ‘Volk’ einerseits (Rousseau in Frankreich, Lord Byron in England, Hamann und Herder in Deutschland), zu einem überzogenen ‘Kunstkodex’ andererseits beginnt, einen Graben zwischen Hochkultur und Grundsicht auszuheben, der im 20. Jh. zum tiefen, nicht mehr überspringbaren Spalt werden sollte.” See Suppan, *Volkslied: Seine Sammlung und Erforschung* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1978), 54. Heine, while not an originator of this myth, was nevertheless responsible for propagating it during the 19th century. Heine himself even sometimes claimed to have been a collector of folk song, though there is little evidence for this.
Augenblick liegt dieses Buch vor mir, und es ist mir als röche ich den Duft der deutschen Linden. (B. V, 448-49)

Heine demonstrates an appreciation for the various media by which *Volkslieder* are transmitted, both orally and in printed ephemera. He discusses them almost as a product of nature, a flower that blooms from the German spirit. He presents them not as artistic achievements, but as artifacts which the editors collected as one might a bouquet of wildflowers. This image, that of the florilegium, is a common one, and Heine’s use of it at first appears conventional. Still, his association of the *Volk* with the olfactory sense is of note.\(^73\) Not only does he consider these songs products of nature, but in the effects he describes, they act not on his understanding, reason or even his faculty of sight, but on his sense of smell. The collection enables him to replicate a kind of physical presence which, in his exile, is otherwise unavailable. Here, he is also participating in deliberate mythmaking about the origins of the folk song – as Oskar Walzel notes, the songs from the collection he most admired were not “folk songs” at all, but original contributions by Arnim and Brentano\(^74\) – and about Germanness in general. He begins with the assumption of an “authentic” character and then appends to it the adjective “deutsch”.

Heine constructs a dichotomy between “nature” and “art” which allows him to place folk songs firmly in the former camp. Not only this, but he attributes to them a kind of esoteric magic:

> Es liegt in diesen Volksliedern ein sonderbarer Zauber. Die Kunstpoeten wollen diese Naturerzeugnisse nachahmen, in derselben Weise, wie man künstliche Mineralwässer verfertigt. Aber wenn sie auch, durch chemischen Prozeß, die Bestandteile ermittelt, so entgeht ihnen doch die Hauptsache, die unersetzbare sympathetische Naturkraft. In diesen Liedern fühlt man den Herzenschlag des deutschen Volks. Hier offenbart sich all seine düstere Heiterkeit, all seine närrische Vernunft. Hier trommelt der deutsche Zorn, hier pfeift der deutsche

\(^73\) Contrast this with the following in *Ludwig Börne*, wherein he laments: “Man muß in wirkliche Revolutionszeiten das Volk mit eigenen Augen gesehen, mit eignen Nase gerochen haben, man muß mit eignen Ohren anhören, wie dieser souveräne Rattenkönig sich ausspricht, um zu begreifen, was Mirabeau andeutet mit den Worten: ‘Man macht keine Revolution mit Lavendelöl.’” (B. VII, 75) In both cases, the *Volk* is associated with sensory experience, pleasant or unpleasant.

Spott, hier küßt die deutsche Liebe. Hier perlt der echt deutsche Wein und die echt deutsche Träne. Letztere ist manchmal doch noch köstlicher als ersterer; es ist viel Eisen und Salz darin. Welche Naivität in der Treue! In der Untreue, welche Ehrlichkeit! (450)

In this assessment, we again see Heine repeating a familiar, received notion of folk songs as natural phenomena that cannot be reproduced by formally trained poets with the same vitality as when they occur naturally. “Düstere Heiterkeit” and “närrische Vernunft” imply a naiveté about the affects the songs generate – these are affects produced without conscious intention. To some extent, Heine also makes another common assumption: namely, that folk songs are collective products, generated by the *Volk* and not any individual member thereof.

Having quoted a number of verses from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, Heine writes of the often-unknown provenance of such folk songs:

Gewöhnlich ist es aber wanderndes Volk, Vagabunden, Soldaten, fahrende Schüler oder Handwerksburschen, die solch ein Lied gedichtet. Es sind besonders die Handwerksburschen. Gar oft, auf meinen Fußreisen, verkehrte ich mit diesen Leuten und bemerkte, wie sie zuweilen, angeregt von irgend einem ungewöhnlichen Ereignisse, ein Stück Volkslied improvisierten oder in die freie Luft hineinpiffen. Das erlauschten nun die Vögelein, die auf den Baumzweigen saßen; und kam nachher ein anderer Bursch, mit Ränzel und Wanderstab, vorbeigeschlendert, dann pfiffen sie ihm jenes Stücklein ins Ohr, und er sang die fehlenden Verse hinzu, und das Lied war fertig. Die Worte fallen solchen Burschen vom Himmel herab auf die Lippen, und er braucht sie nur auszusprechen, und sie sind dann noch poetischer als all die schönen poetischen Phrasen, die wir aus der Tiefe unseres Herzens hervorgrübeln. Der Charakter jener deutschen Handwerksburschen lebt und webt in dergleichen Volksliedern. (454)

Heine characterizes these folk songs both as the particular province of wandering craftsmen (like the one he describes meeting in the *Harzreise* – see below) and as emblematic of an entire national spirit. The process he elaborates, by which *Volkslieder* supposedly come about, is akin to a *Naturprozess* in which the natural world also participates. The folk songs of which he writes exist in the air as much as in the mouths of the German people – they also come into being in the
open air, not in the closed rooms of the *Kunstpoet*. Heine nevertheless envisions a kind of feedback process between *Volk* and the *Gelehrten* within which literary works circulate. This is neatly illustrated in an episode from 1826’s *Die Harzreise*, in which he discusses how the literary classics enjoy a kind of diffuse reception among the *Volk*.

The *Reisebilder*, of which the *Harzreise* makes up the first section, is the work in which Heine developed the distinct prose style for which he would become known. Although influenced by other poetic travelogues of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this work and the period of its composition see Heine increasingly striking out on his own stylistically. The accounts found therein are therefore to be read with an eye to Heine’s ironic, discursive detachment – rarely does he treat a subject straightforwardly, and the text’s outward appearance as a travelogue should not be taken as a sign that a reliable narration is taking place. More than an opportunity for a thick description of the wandering German *Volk*, Heine’s encounters in the text prepare the ground for his thoughts about the nature of literary publics and audience reception among the *Volk*. This is best illustrated in the example of an interaction Heine has on his way from Osterode to Clausthal with a young man he believes to be a traveling tailor.

Heine describes how his new acquaintance relates the events of the famous verse romance *Herzog Ernst* as a piece of local news. Remarking somewhat patronizingly on this exchange, Heine writes: “Das Volk hat noch immer den traditionell fabelhaften Ideengang, der sich so lieblich ausspricht in seinem ‚Herzog Ernst‘.” (B. III, 111) Heine reads his interlocutor’s retelling as a result of the unconscious internalization of nationally important stories and myths by the *Volk*. This “traditionell fabelhaften” cast of mind, according to Heine, allows the *Volk* to metabolize the marvelous and otherwise unbelievable as part of everyday life. Heine describes his companion as
ein niedlicher, kleiner junger Mensch, so dünn, daß die Sterne durchschimmern konnten, wie durch Ossians Nebelgeister, und im Ganzen eine volkstümlich barocke Mischung von Laune und Wehmut. Dieses äußerte sich besonders in der drollig rührenden Weise, womit er das wunderbare Volkslied sang: „Ein Käfer auf dem Zaun saß; summ, summ!“ (111)

The Ossian reference prefigures numerous moments in the text in which Heine parodies the Ossianic style, a work for which the enthusiasm of many (including Herder) was not diminished by the skepticism of many that the work was a forgery. Indeed, Herder and others continued to celebrate Macpherson’s efforts as a work of Volkspoesie. The element of parody is a hallmark of Heine’s emerging prose style, and one that signals to readers that they are on uncertain ground. It is likely that this is at play when Heine refers to the children’s rhyme his companion sings as a Volkslied. In one stroke, he both ennobles the humble lines and trivializes somewhat the genre of Volkslied of which he counts it as an example. Once again, Heine has his interlocutor reproduce in a naïve and unselfconscious manner the stylistic hallmarks he associates with volkstümlich self-expression. The description of the young man as “eine volkstümlich Barocke Mischung von Laune und Wehmut” evokes the influence of Werther and Sturm und Drang on the cultural landscape; it implies that the Volk function as a kind of mirror of the national moment, its unreflective recipients and (re-)producers.

Heine also notes the particular influence of Goethe on the simple Volk, making clear that their minds are not closed to great literature, they merely receive it in indirect and unpredictable ways:

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75 Although there were many skeptics of Ossian’s authenticity in the Anglophone world early on, Rudolf Tombo dates the first article in German of this kind to 1783 with Johann Jakob Bodmer’s Bodmers Apollinarien. See Tombo, Ossian in Germany: Bibliography, General Survey, Ossian’s Influence upon Klopstock and the Bards (New York: AMS Press, 1901), 23.
76 For a detailed account of Herder’s relationship to the Ossianic material, see Alexander Gillies, Herder und Ossian (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1933).
77 Heine himself composed something of a parody of this rhyme, calling it “Die Launen der Verliebten”. It appeared in the first volume of the collection Vermischte Schriften in 1854.
Wie tief das Goethesche Wort ins Leben des Volks gedrungen, bemerkte ich auch
hier. Mein dünner Weggenosse trillerte ebenfalls zuweilen vor sich hin: „Leidvoll
und freudvoll, Gedanken sind frei!“78 Solche Korruption des Textes ist beim
Volke etwas Gewöhnliches. Er sang auch ein Lied, wo „Lottchen bei dem Grabe
ihres Werthers“79 trauert. Der Schneider zerfloß vor Sentimentalität bei den
Worten: „Einsam wein ich an der Rosenstelle,80 wo uns oft der späte Mond
belauscht! Jammernd irr ich an der Silberquelle, die uns lieblich Wonne
zugerauscht.“ (111)

For the Volk, according to Heine, Goethe’s works exist not as objects of study and textual
exegesis but are part of the same cultural fabric as the aforementioned legends and folk songs.
As such, an accurate recall is not prioritized.81 Just as the young man apparently conflates legend
with real events, Heine’s Volk seems to carry on a generally undifferentiated relationship to
various media and forms, as if all underwent the same process of digestion and, eventually,
reproduction. Nevertheless, amused though Heine is by this encounter, he does not bristle at his
companion’s misquotation; indeed, the entire passage is characterized by a kind of paternalistic
admiration for the poetic and creative spirit of the Volk. Not viewing Goethe’s compositions with
reverence enables the Volk, in some ways, to engage in a more direct relation with them, making
them their own through recitation and productive modification.

Heine’s encounters with the German Volk see him participating in the nexus between
Volk and myth. The account he gives is one of an ever-mythologized body that is itself myth-
making. In his portrayals of the Volk and the works of art they produce, such as the Volkslieder,

78 This is a corrupted quotation from Klärchen’s song in Egmont: “Freudvoll / Und leidvoll, / Gedankenvoll sein”.
79 He is referring to “Lotte bei Werthers Grab” by Karl Ernst von Reitzenstein (1775), one of the many popular
songs which made use of the Werther story.
80 The actual line reads “Einsam wein‘ ich auf der Rasenstelle”.
81 After the publication of the Harzreise, it emerged that Heine’s companion was no “Handwerkerburschen” at all,
but a traveling salesman of some learning named Carl Dörne. The latter described his encounter with Heine in the
Gesellschafter (Nr. 26, 30.8.1826, p. 138), writing that Heine (whom he did not recognize) had introduced himself
as “Peregrinus”, a cosmopolitan traveling at the expense of the Ottoman emperor in order to enlist recruits. Dörne
thus decided to respond in kind, passing himself off as a journeyman tailor, with all that that entailed: “um meine
angefangene Rolle durch zu führen,” he writes, “sang ich allerlei Volkslieder, und ließ es an Korruptionen des
Textes nicht fehlen, bewegte mich auch überhaupt ganz im Geiste eines reisenden Handwerkerburschen.” See
Briegleb’s commentary in B. VI, 756ff.
Heine actively participates in this myth-making. He does more, however, than simply reproduce romantic notions of the Volk. As I will show in the following section, he views the common people as possessing tremendous potential, some of it latent, as historical actors and cultural producers.

b. The French Volk

In contrast to the German Volk, Heine primarily encounters the French Volk in post-revolutionary Paris while reporting on the events there. As such, these are encounters with a largely urban proletariat. Heine’s experience of France is, largely, one of Paris, and he takes the capital city to be representative of the country as a whole – or, more accurately, the only part of it worth lending any serious attention. This certainly aligns with the political arrangements of France and Germany of the day, France being much more centralized than the still-fragmented Germany. The contrast between the German and French peoples in these two texts is therefore primarily one between national cultures, but one between urban and rural populations.

Alongside Volk, Heine employs the term Masse repeatedly in these writings. It expresses a kind of anonymity that attends urban life and which is consistent with his characterizations in the work of the egalitarianism he believed was radiating outward from France and taking hold throughout Europe. The term Masse expresses all of Heine’s ambivalence about this development, as I will analyze below. On the one hand, he greets the emergence of greater social equality between classes. On the other, he laments what he sees as the inevitable end of extraordinary events, achievements, and people.

The events in Paris gave Heine occasion to reflect on national myths, populism and folk heroes. He does so in critical and journalistic writings which he was fully aware would not reach the majority of the Volk. He was therefore acutely concerned with the power of those events and
figures which, however misunderstood, comprise an essential part of the symbolic universe of
the masses. Heine evaluates cultural, literary and political figures in much the same way in terms
of their significance as figures of “Volk” worship. In Französische Zustände, a series of reports
on the situation in France published in the Allgemeine Zeitung throughout 1832, he singles out
Napoleon and Lafayette for this treatment, writing of the former: “‘Napoleon’ ist für die
Franzosen ein Zauberwort, das sie elektrisiert und betäubt.” (B. V, 119) He recounts two stories
involving beggars in order to demonstrate the differences in how the French people (as embodied
by its most modest representatives) honor the dead Napoleon and the living Lafayette.

In the first, he encounters both a young child and an old soldier singing a song “zum
Ruhme des großen Kaisers” (120) in exchange for a sou (a French coin of very low
denomination). In the case of the former, Heine writes, “dieser Ruhm hatte ihm beide Beine
gekostet. Der arme Krüppel bat mich nicht im Namen Gottes, sondern mit gläubigster Innigkeit
flehte er: ‘Au nom de Napoléon, donnez-moi un sou.’” (120) This kind of monumentalist hero-
worship, bordering on religious fanaticism, animates even (and perhaps especially) the lowest
rungs of society in Heine’s account – however, it is by no means limited to them. He writes
generally of the French people’s relationship to Napoleon that “‘Napoleon’ ist für die Franzosen
ein Zauberwort, das sie elektrisiert und betäubt.” (119) The critical tone of this remark cannot be
missed: it implies that the very mention of Napoleon is enough to rob the French of their faculty
of reason. As Heine goes on to write of this particular encounter: “So dient dieser Name auch als
das höchste Beschwörungswort des Volkes, Napoleon ist sein Gott, sein Kultus, seine Religion;
und diese Religion wird am Ende langweilig, wie jede andere.” (120) True to form, when Heine
ascribes religious significance to political figures, it is as much to denigrate the religious as it is
to exalt the political. He is also exercising an incisive critique of populism, and the ways in
which the masses might sacrifice their own interests and, indeed, their lives, in service of the power-political ambitions of men to whom they are insignificant.

Heine’s interest in the cult of Napoleon carries over to other works as well. In 1933’s *Die romantische Schule*, a work meant to instruct his French readership about German literature and the origins of German culture and habitus, he ties this cult to the demise of ancient Greco-Roman and Christian values alike. Instead of many gods or a single, all-powerful God, claims Heine, the French now believe only in one man:

Unter dem Kaiserreich erlosch wieder dieser antike Geist, die griechischen Götter herrschten nur noch im Theater, und die römische Tugend besaß nur noch das Schlachtfeld; ein neuer Glaube war aufgekommen und dieser resumierte sich in dem heiligen Namen: Napoleon! Dieser Glaube herrschte noch immer unter der Masse. Wer daher sagt, das französische Volk sei irreligios, weil es nicht mehr an Christus und seine Heiligen glaubt, hat Unrecht. Man muß vielmehr sagen: die Irrreligiosität der Franzosen besteht darin, daß sie jetzt an einen Menschen glauben, statt an die unsterblichen Götter. (B. V, 497)

It is significant that he points this out in a work meant to correct French misconceptions about the development of the German temperament. He implies that something like religious faith does not simply disappear but is instead sublimated into some other form of devotion. When the religious fervor of the *Volk* is therefore displaced onto an unworthy object, the results are predictably disastrous.

In contrast to the deceased Napoleon, Heine writes that the living Lafayette also “lebt in Bildern und Liedern, aber minder heroisch”. (B. V, 120) To illustrate this, Heine once again relates an encounter with a beggar asking for a sou, to whom he gives him a ten-sou coin:

um seiner nur gleich los zu werden. Aber da näherte er sich mir desto zutraulicher mit den Worten: „Est-ce que vous connaissez le général Lafayette?“ und als ich diese wunderliche Frage bejahte, malte sich das stolzeste Vergnügen auf dem naiv-schmutzigen Gesichte des hübschen Buben, und mit drolligem Ernst sagte er: „Il est de mon pays.“ Er glaubte gewiß, ein Mann, der ihm zehn Sous gegeben, müsse auch ein Verehrer von Lafayette sein, und da hielt er mich zugleich für würdig, sich mir als Landsmann desselben zu präsentieren. (120-121)
The fact that Heine chooses two episodes involving beggars to illustrate the way in which the French people honor their folk heroes demonstrates the influence of these figures even, and perhaps especially, among the lowest sectors of society. Not only this, but Heine lets these beggars act as a kind of unconscious of the French people, implying that, although they may not be asking for sous, other members of French society share this affective attachment to their national heroes. Where they worship Napoleon as a god, they admire Lafayette as a kind of first among equals, content to count themselves as his countrymen.

In these passages, Heine treats the French people as one in the sense that he unites members of disparate classes. His focus on Paris, in part, enables this treatment. This is a focus he makes explicit: “So liegt in dem Patriotismus der Franzosen größtenteils die Vorliebe für Paris […] Aber Paris ist eigentlich Frankreich; dies ist nur die umliegende Gegend von Paris. […] alles, was sich in der Provinz auszeichnet, wandert früh nach der Hauptstadt, dem Foyer alles Lichts und alles Glanzes.” (133) Therefore, the uneducated sector of the French Volk appears to Heine largely in the form of the urban proletariat. His interest in the Volksleben of the French thus does not center the peasantry, and he does not ascribe to them any influence on the cultural life of the nation or people. The Volksleben appears to him as a co-creation of the various classes of Paris (excluding, perhaps, the aristocracy).

Although Französische Zustände and the Romantische Schule are very different works, they do share a common concern: namely, what I call the “remainder” of cultural and political life that reaches those members of the population who do not belong to the literati or intelligentsia. Since, in Französische Zustände, Heine is reporting on the effects of the political situation on the population, it follows that he should be concerned with the population’s relationship to its most prominent political features. France also affords Heine a set of
circumstances particularly suitable to this analysis, given, unlike in his native Germany, the existence of a nation state and Paris as the cultural and political center of gravity. In Germany, he is forced to seek the substrate of German-ness at various way stations, both geographic and cultural.

This remainder ends up playing a crucial role in defining the character of a Volk in Heine’s conception thereof. Although not a racial or biological essentialist, Heine, like many thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries, takes seriously the notion that particular peoples have a distinct national or folk character, and that this is constituted by a complex and highly contingent interplay of factors such as geography, climate, language, religion, education, and interaction with neighboring peoples. When he deploys this concept in his critical and journalistic writings, it is frequently to paint a kind of caricature or unflattering exaggeration of a given trait, though this should not be taken to mean that his belief in national characteristics is not genuine. This comes very strongly to the fore in Französische Zustände, in which the events of the day prompt him not only to examine the political situation in France, but throughout the rest of Europe. In all of these observations, it becomes clear that when Heine discusses the character of a Volk, this has much to do with the cultural universe shared by the majority of, if not the entire people.

One example of this in Französische Zustände is Heine’s discussion of what he sees as the misconception indulged by French republicans that the English are their spiritual and political comrades in arms, asserting “daß das englische Volk selbst durchaus aristokratisch ist[.]” (136) He renews this kind of observation later when claiming that the conditions in Germany hostile to republicanism belong to the very essence of the German spirit. “Deutschland kann keine Republik sein,” he writes, “weil es seinem Wesen nach royalistisch ist. Frankreich ist,
im Gegenteil, seinem Wesen nach republikanisch.” (212) He goes on to elaborate these differences, which he considers utterly opposed:

Der Royalismus eines Volks besteht, dem Wesen nach, darin: daß es Autoritäten achtet, daß es an die Personen glaubt, die jene Autoritäten repräsentieren, daß es in dieser Zuversicht auch der Person selbst anhängt. Der Republikanismus eines Volks besteht, dem Wesen nach, darin: daß der Republikaner an keine Autorität glaubt, daß er nur die Gesetzte hochachtet, daß er von den Vertretern derselben beständig Rechenschaft verlangt, sie mit Mißtrauen beobachtet, sie kontrolliert, daß er also nie den Personen anhängt, und diese vielmehr, je höher sie aus dem Volke hervorragen, desto emsiger mit Widerspruch, Argwohn, Spott und Verfolgung niederzuhalten sucht. (213)

The root of these two temperaments seems, therefore, to consist in a people’s self-regard and regard for its own masses, as opposed to the special regard it reserves for its elites, leaders and representatives. This contrasts somewhat with his earlier characterizations of the French people’s attachment to its folk heroes, however, the two figures he singles out are no longer authorities in the official sense. With Napoleon dead and Lafayette retired from political life, they are free to become talismanic symbols of popular identification. The ascription to the Germans of belief in authority figures, and to the French of skepticism applies to the entire people, not just those who read newspapers and keep up with political life. It refers generally to a prevailing attitudes and habitus of the people. In post 1830-Paris, at least, Heine seems convinced that this includes even those in the lowest strata of society.

This is further supported by the fact that Heine traces these two temperaments to the respective intellectual cultures of the French and German peoples. Of German writers, Heine has this to say:

In früheren Zeiten waren sie entweder Fakultätsgelehrte oder Poeten, sie kümmerten sich wenig um das Volk, für dieses schrieb keiner von beiden, und in dem philosophischen poetischen Deutschland blieb das Volk von der plumpsten Denkweise befangen, und wenn es etwa einmal mit seinen Obrigkeit hatte, so war nur die Rede von rohen Tatsächlichkeiten, materiellen Nöten, Steuerlast, Maut, Wildschaden, Torsperre usw.; – während im praktischen Frankreich das
The contrast of “philosophisches poetisches Deutschland” with “praktisches Frankreich” sets up the political contrast between Germany’s royalist character and France’s republican one. German, the land of Dichter und Denker, celebrates and exalts its intellectual authorities in much the same way as its political ones, in part by keeping them out of reach. By extension, Heine’s argument implies that the French treat their writers as teachers who popularize knowledge and democratize discussions of fundamental, philosophical questions. Heine clearly believes that this had political consequences: a people, like the Germans, unlearned in fundamental and theoretical matters, was reduced to vulgar material facts when discussing its political circumstances. In France, by contrast, the high ideals of political and abstract philosophy constitute an idiom common to all.

This raises the question of what exactly Heine hopes to bring to the French people. It seems clear enough that they are not merely a foil that allow him to bring out the traits he wants to highlight in the German Volk into sharper relief. Heine is constantly dealing in comparisons, but he is no mere observer in France. He is as invested in the political situation there as he is in the one back home. As evidenced by the publication of Die romantische Schule and Religion und Philosophie, he is also concerned with the cultural education of the French public. In the Französische Zustände, he speculates on the role of journalism in this process. Importantly, he considers it a matter of great importance that the political and cultural journalist remain in step with the entire people, not simply those into whose hands this writing might fall.

In this vein, Heine accuses the German republicans of untimeliness with regard to their political messaging. With specific regard to journalist Johann Georg August Wirth, founder of the Deutsche Tribüne, he writes:
Der Schriftsteller, welcher eine soziale Revolution befördern will, darf immerhin seiner Zeit um ein Jahrhundert vorausilen; der Tribun hingegen, welcher eine politische Revolution beabsichtigt, darf sich nicht allzuweit von den Massen entfernen. Überhaupt, in der Politik, wie im Leben, muß man nur das Erreichbare wünschen. (215)

Given the association of “social” revolution with “Schriftsteller” and not journalists, he likely considers it to entail more incremental change, possibly independent of institutions. Political revolutions, by contrast, associated with the “tribune”, seem to concern more immediate goals, for which the support of the “masses” is key. It is therefore essential that this figure remain attuned to the prevailing attitudes (or, as Heine might put it, the character) of said masses.

Although the majority of this nebulous group might not be readers of the Deutsche Tribüne or even participate directly in politics, they nevertheless play a significant and not altogether passive role in shaping the political landscape of the nation. Journalism, thus, cannot ignore this group and the national character they co-create.

After all, as Heine makes clear later on in his remarks on the June Rebellion of 1832, the Volk is, if not the revolutionary subject of history, then certainly the hero of the age. Echoing his characterization of the “republicanism” of the French people, Heine states several times in the reports that make up the Zustände that, if there are fewer prominent names in the French public sphere, it is not for any lack of notable individuals. Rather, so many otherwise average people have become exceptional, that it has become impracticable and unnecessary to single them out.

Expanding this view further, he writes:

Überhaupt scheint die Weltperiode vorbei zu sein, wo die Taten der Einzeln hervorragen; die Völker, die Parteien, die Massen selber sind die Helden der neuern Zeit; die moderne Tragödie unterscheidet sich von der antiken dadurch, daß jetzt die Chöre agieren und die eigentlichen Hauptrollen spielen, während die Götter, Heroen, und Tyrannen, die früherhin die handelnden Personen waren, jetzt zu mäßigen Repräsentanten des Parteiwillens und der Volkstat herabsinken, und zur schwatzenden Betrachtung hingestellt sind, als Thronredner, als Gastmahlpräsidenten, Landtagsabgeordnete, Minister, Tribune, usw. (219)
Here, Heine extends his claim about the French to all, peoples, parties and masses of the modern age. He announces, in other words, the end of a kind of monumentalist history and the beginning of a more diffuse distribution of notable and heroic acts. Those actors who previously stood above the passive masses, not only as leaders and exemplars but as the sole subjects of history, have been reduced to a primarily representative role. Their function is now less to act than to narrate, observe, deliver speeches and execute various symbolic duties, while history is propelled along by forces outside of their control. Heine seems to accord little importance to these figures as demagogues, capable of influencing and directing the behavior of the masses. In this way, Heine’s *Tribute* functions in much the same way as the *Schriftsteller*: more a commentator on than a driver of political action.

This was not at all an uncommon sentiment during the period in which Heine was writing the reports that make up the *Französische Zustände*. Viewing these remarks in hindsight might make them appear hopelessly naïve; indeed, even Heine’s contemporary, Georg Büchner, famously wrote of the so-called “Junges Deutschland”, explicitly associating it with Heine and Karl Gutzkow, “Nur ein völliges Mißkennen unserer gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse konnte die Leute glauben machen, daß durch die Tagesliteratur eine völlige Umgestaltung unserer religiösen und gesellschaftlichen Ideen möglich sei.”\(^82\) Nevertheless, this is not what Heine claims journalism or political writing of any kind can or should aim to achieve. Quite the contrary, his assertion that the “Tribune” must take pains to remain in step with the masses strictly circumscribes the role of journalism to a much more modest one. If anything, Heine’s optimism attaches to the masses, not political authorities or thought-leaders. Unlike Marx, Heine’s notion

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of the people-as-revolutionary-subject is national and general, rather than international and tied to labor. This is crucial to understanding both Heine’s notion of Volk and his vision for the role of journalism in influencing public opinion and public events. As a journalist and critic himself, he seems remarkably skeptical of the purchase of journalism in the public sphere and greater cultural landscape of a nation or people.

Heine, however, does not think of himself as a mere “Tribune” but as a kind of intellectual ambassador. It is with this in mind that I read his remark in Religion und Philosophie that “ich bin kein Gelehrter, ich selber bin Volk.” Michael Perraudin interprets this remark to mean “that he is a seer who knows deeply the mind of the people, even to an extent that they themselves do not, and he bespeaks their future.” (Perraudin 109) Perraudin is referring to Heine’s program for his poetic activity, but I would include his journalistic practices as well. Heine envisions a kind of cultural and political journalism that is not mere reportage or Meinungsmache but contains a messianic element. The “Tribune” might be content simply not to run afoul of the masses, but Heine has loftier ambitions. He seeks to penetrate and deeply understand the character of the Volk, be it French or German, and this involves much more than the opinions and worldviews of the literate reading public.

Heine also seeks to put his writerly talents in service of the cause of revolution in France, as evidenced by texts written just prior to the publication of Französische Zustände. 1840’s Ludwig Böne. Eine Denkschrift consists, in part, of a series of diary entries (or letters to Rahel Varnhagen – it has never been finally determined) during the 1830 July Revolution in France, known as the Helgoländer Briefe. These letters, which contain the most theoretically dense passages of the work, see Heine oscillating between a wish to retreat entirely from the world of politics and expressions of earnest, revolutionary zeal. Here, he is not writing in the mode of a
journalist or reporter, but of poet and philosopher. Those scholars arguing that, in Heine’s later work, he turned increasingly to an aesthetics emphasizing the autonomy of art should keep in mind that his relationship to engaged works of art was always ambivalent.83 Nowhere is this made clearer than in the Helgoländer Briefe. In a letter dated August 1, he writes: “Ja, ich will die Politik und die Philosophie an den Nagel hängen und mich wieder der Naturbetrachtung und der Kunst hingeben.” (B. VII, 49) On the tenth of August, however, he writes the following:

Lafayette, die dreifarbige Fahne, die Marseillaise …
Fort ist meine Sehnsucht nach Ruhe. Ich weiß jetzt wieder was ich will, was ich soll, was ich muß … Ich bin der Sohn der Revolution und greife wieder zu den gefeiten Waffen, worüber meine Mutter ihren Zaubersegens ausgesprochen …
Blumen! Blumen! Ich will mein Haupt bekränzen zum Todeskampf. Und auch die Leier, reicht mir die Leier, damit ich ein Schlachtlied singe … Worte gleich flammenden Sternen die aus der Höhe herabschießen und die Paläste verbrennen und die Hütten erleuchten … Worte gleich blanken Wurfspeeren, die bis in den siebenten Himmel hinauschwirren und die frommen Heuchler treffen, die sich dort eingeschlichen ins Allerheiligstes … Ich bin ganz Freude und Gesang, ganz Schwert und Flamme! (53)

Here, Heine appears to have resolved (or suspended for the moment) the conflict between art and politics he alludes to in the earlier letter. The trinity of symbols which moves him to this conclusion – Lafayette, the Tricolore and the Marseillaise – all affect him the way that he speaks about them affecting the French Volk in works like Französische Zustände. And the weapons for which he reaches are flowers and the lyre, in order to compose a battle song that will burn palaces and bring down the gods themselves. This stands out as one among several instances in which Heine expresses an ambition of composing a work (usually a song) which would have

83 Michael Mann makes this argument in the introduction to his edition of the Zeitungsberichte über Musik und Malerei, ed. Michael Mann (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1964). Horst Krüger does the same in Die freie Kunst als ästhetisches Prinzip bei Heinrich Heine. Hohendahl argues that this change in Heine’s work did take place but develops a more sophisticated understanding of “autonomy”, relating it to Heine’s resistance to the commercialization of art in bourgeoise society. See Hohendahl, “The Aesthetic Theory of the Later Heine”.

political purchase. Such a work must, by definition, be popular, and popularity, for Heine, is inextricable from *Volkstümlichkeit*.

In a note appended to the end of the second book of *Ludwig Börne* (the book containing the *Helgoländer Briefe*), Heine explains that in the time between his first and second encounters with Börne, the July revolution takes place, “welche unsere Zeit gleichsam in zwei Hälften auseinander sprengte.” (59) He clarifies that he has inserted the letters to give a sense of his internal state during this significant period and because, without them, the transition between the first and third books would be too abrupt. He also owns that his observations from afar proved laughably rosy as soon as he arrived in post-revolutionary Paris. Echoing some of the motifs explored in *Französische Zutsände*, Heine writes:

> Das Silberhaar, das ich um die Schulter Lafayettes, des Helden beider Welten, so majestatisch flattern sah, verwandelt sich bei näherer Betrachtung in eine braune Perücke, die einen engen Schädel kläglich bedeckte. Und gar der Hund Medor, den ich auf dem Hofe des Louvre besuchte, und der, gelagert unter dreifarbigem Fahnen und Trophäen, sich ruhig füttern ließ: er war gar nicht der rechte Hund, sondern eine ganz gewöhnliche Bestie, die sich fremde Verdienste anmaßte, wie bei den Franzosen oft geschieht, und eben so wie viele andre exploitierte er den Ruhm der Juliusrevolution … Er ward gehätschelt, gefördert, vielleicht zu den höchsten Ehrenstellen erhoben, während der wahre Medor, einige Tage nach dem Siege, bescheiden davon geschlichen war, wie das wahre Volk, das die Revolution gemacht … (60)

As in the *Zustände*, Heine exploits for comic relief the contrast between the silver-haired Lafayette of myth and the rather ridiculous, wig-clad figure he cuts in the flesh. Not only is the real Lafayette a pale shadow of his magisterial counterpart in folk legend, but he possesses an “engen Schädel”, likely housing a narrow mind.

Another mythological figure, the dog Medor, famous for not leaving his master’s side after the latter was killed in the storming of the Louvre, also comes in for scrutiny. The same dog
about which Börne, in the *Briefe aus Paris*,

waxed poetic, Heine accuses of being a fraud. On
the one hand, this false Medor displays a typically French greed for “fremde Verdienste”, and on
the other, he is contrasted with the “wahres Volk”, who do not seek to profit from the glory of
the revolution. Heine appears to want to have it both ways: he allows himself to both deride the
French, while also setting aside a protected section of the population, the true *Volk*, whose
integrity he does not question.

In this case, Heine shows clear distress at the treatment of the people and their betrayal
by the bourgeoisie following the revolution. In a passage unusually absent any obvious irony, he
laments:

> Armes Volk! Armer Hund!
> Es ist eine schon ältliche Geschichte. Nicht für sich, seit undenklicher Zeit, nicht
> für sich hat das Volk geblutet und gelitten, sondern für andere. Im Juli 1830
> erfocht es den Sieg für jene Bourgeoisie, die eben so wenig taugt wie jene
> Noblesse, an deren Stelle sie trat, mit demselben Egoismus … Das Volk hat
> nichts gewonnen durch seinen Sieg, als Reue und größere Not. Aber seid
> überzeugt, wenn wieder die Sturmglocke geläutet wird und das Volk zur Flinte
greift, diesmal kämpft es für sich selber und verlangt den wohlverdienten Lohn.
> Diesmal wird der wahre, echte Medor geehrt und gefüttert werden … (60)

Heine expresses the plight of the French *Volk* as that of every people (those with no distinctions
to their name other than membership to a *Volk*) since time immemorial: to fight for an unworthy
cause that is not their own. He only hopes that this time, their disenchantment with the
bourgeoisie and any other forces who purport to represent them will be so total, that they will
finally take up their own cause.

Despite some evidence of political disenchantment by the time Heine composed the later
*Lutetia* project, he still recognized the central importance of the lowest strata of society partaking
in their own emancipation. In an entry from 1843, he writes:

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Heine is practicing a well-worn critique of an over-emphasis on abstract principles that neglects concrete realities. However, his particular recommendation that freedom must “Volk werden” deserves attention. It is not enough that a few individuals internalize the liberal principle of freedom, but that it becomes part of the Volksleben. This does not just mean dissemination to the lowest rungs of society, but integration into the existing, unique cultural life of a people. This is not an indictment of the principles themselves – the “word” is the precondition for the entire operation, but it must first be made flesh, i.e. grounded in the lived reality of the Volk.

It thus seems that the object of Heine’s critique is not folk heroes or myths as such, but the kind of myths which lead the Volk to develop what we might call false consciousness: faith in figures or movements with are against their own interest or, in the case of the Entsagungslied, which discourage them from seeking their own liberation. He wishes to offer them better symbols and songs by which to understand their world.

How, then, does Heine view himself with regard to the French Volk? What does he have to offer them of his poetic talents? His role as cultural ambassador between the French and German publics has been well documented. In addition to the two works he originally composed for a French audience (Romantische Schule and Religion und Philosophie), he also had the writings he published during his stay in Paris translated into French. As the Helgoländer Briefe testify, it was not only his journalism which he wished to bring to the French people, but his
poetic voice as well (indeed, a neat separation between the two does not obtain). In these writings, he shows renewed sensitivity to the fact that literature and other cultural artifacts have the ability to reach even the lowest strata of society. Heine’s remarks in the *Französische Zustände* and the *Helgoländer Briefe* make clear that he believes that these strata are also responsible for co-constituting a people’s cultural life. In the case of the metropolitan masses, they also are stepping into their role as historical agent. As such, he hopes that his work might also find a diffuse reception among even those who do not constitute his immediate reading public, German and French alike, and wants to offer them something better than what is currently available to them: a font of literary goods that encourage them to take an active role in their own destinies and in determining the course history is to take.

**Spiritualism, sensualism and the arc of history**

Just what kind of historical change, then, does Heine hope the *Volk* will bring about? The answer lies in one of the central philosophical ideas of Heine’s oeuvre: the opposition between spiritualism and sensualism. This dichotomy also goes under the names of “idealism” and “materialism,” and “Nazarenism” and “Hellenism” his various works. Still, the tendency described is the same. Although he sometimes associates these terms with particular peoples to illustrate them more vividly (usually comparing the spiritualist Germans to the sensualist French), they nevertheless describe extra-national temperaments, meaning that they neither rely on the existence of a geographically contiguous nation state, nor is their appearance isolated to a given *Volk*.

The dichotomy first shows up in the two concurrent works, 1833’s *Die romantische Schule* and 1834’s *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*. As early as
1823, Heine expressed an ambition to familiarize the French public with the history of and recent developments in German literature, and to correct mistaken impressions they had developed as a result of Germaine de Staël-Holstein’s influential work, *De l’Allemagne* (1813). Although the primary audience for these works was French, Heine did not forget his countrymen either. As Klaus Briegleb writes: “Daneben war freilich auch beabsichtigt, auf das deutsche Geistesleben einzuwirken.” (B. VI, 844)

Heine begins *Die romantische Schule* by briefly summarizing the debate then swirling around the latest developments in German literature, not least of which being Goethe’s death in 1832:

Die meisten glauben mit dem Tode Goethes beginne in Deutschland eine neue literarische Periode, mit ihm sei auch das alte Deutschland zu Grabe gegangen, die aristokratische Zeit der Literatur sei zu Ende, die demokratische beginne, oder, wie sich ein französischer Journalist jüngst ausdrückte: „der Geist der Einzelnen habe aufgehört, der Geist Aller habe angefangen“. (B. V, 360)

He is setting the stakes for what at first seems a somewhat niche debate: the periodization of literature in Germany. At second glance, however, the political implications of this debate are clear, as is the continuity between this remark and the one from * Französische Zustände* quoted above, in which he speculates that the masses, not individual actors, are the real heroes of the new age. If Goethe represented the era of “aristocratic literature”, which Heine calls the “Goethesche Kunstperiode”, and that era is now at an end, it must represent larger developments in the German temperament which bear implications larger than literature. The quotation Heine appends to the end of this first paragraph is telling: it implies that, in the newly inaugurated, “democratic” literary period, works of literature are no longer the output of a single mind or genius, but rather are products and reflections of a kind of collective spirit.
Heine then announces his intention to disabuse his public of any mistaken notions they may have developed as a result of Madame de Staël’s work, which he nevertheless praises. The chief fault of her otherwise illuminating literary sociology, Heine explains, is its admiration of what he calls “die romantische Schule”:

Sobald sie aber fremden Einflüsterungen gehorcht, sobald sie einer Schule huldigt, deren Wesen ihr ganz fremd und unbegreifbar ist, sobald sie durch die Anpreisung dieser Schule gewisse ultramontane Tendenzen befördert, die mit ihrer protestantischen Klarheit in direktem Widerspruche sind: da ist ihr Buch kläglich und ungenießbar. Dazu kommt noch, daß sie außer den unbewußten, auch noch bewußte Parteilichkeiten ausübt, daß sie, durch die Lobpreisung des geistigen Lebens, des Idealismus in Deutschland, eigentlich den damaligen Realismus der Franzosen, die materielle Herrlichkeit der Kaiserperiode, frondieren will. Ihr Buch „de l’Allemagne“ gleicht in dieser Hinsicht der „Germania“ des Tacitus, der vielleicht ebenfalls, durch seine Apologie der Deutschen, eine indirekte Satire gegen seine Landsleute schreiben wollte. (361)

Heine sets up several conceptual oppositions here: Protestantism and papism, Germany and France, idealism and realism. By “idealism”, Heine does not refer to the philosophical movement, but rather a general disposition given to abstraction over observable reality, and to the elevation of the spirit over the flesh. With “realism” he refers to the opposite: a life-affirming materialism. De Staël’s distaste for the latter disposition among her countrymen and a desire to rebel has led her, according to Heine, to mistakenly praise the former. Heine’s quarrel here is not with idealism itself, but with what he views as an imbalance between it and materialism.

Moreover, he sees the struggle between these two tendencies as one of world-historical import. Heine elaborates this opposition into a kind of cultural theory of history and human development, responsible for major political and societal developments, including, for example, the fall of Rome. The process he describes is a kind of dialectic in which a dominant tendency is eventually overtaken by the dominated one. It is a concept of history that assumes constant
change, and seeks to isolate the aspects of each historical development in terms of their salutary or adverse effects on the health and vitality of the human race:

Nicht durch die Trennung in zwei Reiche ging Rom zu Grunde; am Bosphoros wie an der Tiber ward Rom verzehrt von demselben judäischen Spiritualismus, und hier wie dort ward die römische Geschichte ein langsames Dahinsterben, eine Agonie die Jahrhunderte dauerte. Hat etwa das gemeuchelte Judäa, indem es den Römern seinen Spiritualismus bescherte, sich an dem siegenden Feinde rächen wollen, wie einst der sterbende Centaur, der dem Sohne Jupiters das verderbliche Gewand, das mit dem eingen Blute vergiftet war, so listig zu überliefern wußte? Wahrlich, Rom, der Herkules unter den Völkern, wurde durch das judäische Gift so wirksam verheizt, daß Helm und Harnische seinen welkenden Gliedern entsanken, und seine imperatorische Schlachtstimme herabseichte zu betendem Pfaffengewimmer und Kastratengetriller. (363)

In spite of Heine’s own admiration for Greco-Roman materialism, this is hardly a materialist analysis of history. In the significance with which he vests intellectual and cultural tendencies, Heine is often compared to Hegel. While it is true that Heine credits Hegel as an influence, strains of Heine scholarship seeking to link his thought, through Hegel, more explicitly to Marx, tend to make too much of this connection. Unlike Hegel’s, Heine’s theory of history does not have a particular telos, nor does he necessarily see progress as its guiding tendency.

The language he uses, as noted, is overwhelmingly that of health and vitality. These are the ends he wishes to promote and he sees the excesses of both spiritualism and sensualism as a potential danger. That cultures and peoples rise up and pass away seems, for Heine, to be a simple, historical fact. As he goes on to write:

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86 Georg Lukács’ effort to portray Heine as a transitional figure between Hegel and Marx has been very influential in this discourse. See Lukács, Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts (Berlin: Aufbauverlag, 1952), pp. 113-18. Furthermore, as Sammons notes, “untangling the elements of Hegel from those of Saint-Simonianism in Heine’s thinking is a very difficult, perhaps insoluble, task. Heine himself tended to conflate the two[.]” See Sammons, Heine, 159.
Aber was den Greis entkräftet, das stärkt den Jüngling. Jener Spiritualismus wirkte heilsam auf die übergesunden Völker des Nordens; die allzuvolllültigen barbarischen Leiber wurden christlich vergeistigt; es begann die europäische Zivilisation. Das ist eine preiswürdige, heilige Seite des Christentums. (363-4)

There is, according to Heine, such a thing as an overly healthy, overly robust people – some tempering is needed in order for civilization to come about. One impulse checks the other, and the result is a salutary blend of temperaments. Furthermore, his understanding of religion is inextricably bound up with his concept of culture, and when he refers to “Judaism,” “Christianity” or simply “spiritualism”, he is describing a tendency in popular and high culture as well as in religious practices.

Although Heine frequently subjects Judeo-Christianity to harsh criticism, he clearly observes different tendencies within it. In assessing religions and religious art, Heine’s is not chiefly concerned with the truth claims of a given faith or the truth content of a work of religious art, but with the effect they produce in the believer or observer. The multiplicity contained in Christianity, even in Protestantism alone, is clear from the following passage:

Die Maler Italiens polemisierten gegen das Pfaffentum vielleicht weit wirksamer als die sächsischen Theologen. Das blühende Fleisch auf den Gemälden des Tizian, das ist alles Protestantismus. Die Lenden seiner Venus sind viel gründlichere Thesen, als die welche der deutsche Mönch an die Kirchentüre von Wittenberg angeklebt. (370)

Here, Heine begins to draw out the division between Southern and Northern Europe, associating the former, even in its practice of Protestantism, with the flesh and the latter with the spirit. This is also the first mention of Luther as one of the chief spiritualizing forces in European history, with all of the ambivalence Heine associates therewith. In spite of all Heine’s admiration for Luther (which I will discuss below), he nevertheless makes him responsible for the preeminence of spiritualism in Germany and Northern Europe, a development which he believes needs correction.
In Zur Geschichte, Heine discusses Luther’s error in supplanting the sensual in Catholicism. He attributes this to a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of Catholicism in keeping the peace between the flesh and spirit:

Denn Luther hatte nicht begriffen, daß die Idee des Christentums, die Vernichtung der Sinnlichkeit, gar zu sehr in Widerspurch war mit der menschlichen Natur, als daß sie jemals im Leben ganz ausführbar gewesen sei; er hatte nicht begriffen, daß der Katholizismus gleichsam ein Konkordat war zwischen Gott und dem Teufel, d.h. zwischen dem Geist und der Materie, wodurch die Alleinherrschaft des Geistes in der Theorie ausgesprochen wird, aber die Materie in den Stand gesetzt wird alle ihre annullierten Rechte in der Praxis auszuüben. Daher ein kluges System von Zugeständnissen, welche die Kirche zum Besten der Sinnlichkeit gemacht hat, obgleich immer unter Formen, welche jeden Akt der Sinnlichkeit fletrieren und dem Geiste seine höhnischen Usurpationen verwahren. (B. V, 531)

In the Catholic Church, there was already a kind of gentleman’s agreement between spiritualism and sensualism which eventually gave way to a struggle for supremacy: “den der Spiritualismus begann, als er einsah, daß er nur de jure herrschte, während der Sensualismus, durch hergebrachten Unterschleif, die wirkliche Herrschaft ausübte und de facto herrschte[.]” (533)

Heine’s critique relies on the basic assumption that human nature consist of a mixture of the spiritual and the sensual, the ideal and the real. He makes a similar point to Marx in Die deutsche Ideologie, in which he opposes idealism to materialism in the spheres of philosophy and politics. Heine, however, also sees this opposition as operative in culture and the arts, and, rather than declaring himself for one side, emphasizes the crucial role of balance between the two. His approach to this question differs from Marx’s in that, rather than viewing one development as the necessary outcome of the other, he declares both tendencies to have been present and in constant competition from the beginning.

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Later on in *Religion und Philosophie*, Heine makes explicit not only the relation of idealism on the one side, materialism on the other, to religion, but the national character of both as well. Complicating remarks he made in the earlier *Romantische Schule*, he asserts that both Goethe and the early romantics nurtured (knowingly or not) a combination of their Germanic ancestors’ pantheism and the Christianity which absorbed many of its elements. In spite of the many critical remarks he makes of the Catholicism of the middle ages in *Die romantische Schule*, in *Religion und Philosophie* he acknowledges that in seeking to preserve this Catholicism, the romantics were really showing

ihre Verehrung und Vorliebe für die Überlieferungen des Mittelalters, für dessen Volksgläuben, Teufeltum, Zauberwesen, Hexerei … alles das war eine bei ihnen plötzlich erwachte aber unbegriffene Zurückneigung nach dem Pantheismus der alten Germanen, und in der schnöde beschmutzten und boshaft verstümmelten Gestalt liebten sie eigentlich nur die vorchristliche Religion ihrer Väter. (619)

The crucial point here is that these are not competing philosophical schools or even religious institutions which are driving the greatest upheavals in religion and history, but attachments to fundamentally different *Volk* traditions. They are collections of myths, superstitions, and rituals over which codified systems of belief and religious doctrines were later overlaid. Heine then traces their development into philosophical schools, such as Fichtean idealism. 88

Heine’s treatment of religion in these texts reveals that he views it not merely as a system of belief or practice, nor merely the acknowledgement of a god or gods. Religion is, for Heine, an important component of cultural practice and of the temperament, habitus, and character of a *Volk*. What began as a set of cultural practices, the means by which early *Völker* made sense of their world, eventually grew out into religion, literature and philosophy. It then became subject

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88 Heine does not consider Fichte’s philosophy particularly noteworthy in itself, but rather that: “Nur in so fern sie eine der merkwürdigsten Phasen der deutschen Philosophie überhaupt ist, nur in so fern sie die Unfruchtbarkeit des Idealismus in seiner letzten Konsequenz beurkundet, und nur in so fern sie den notwendigen Übergang zur heutigen Naturphilosophie bildet, ist der Inhalt der Fichteschen Lehre von einigem Interesse.” (B V, 608)
to distortion by artists, religious figures, and cultural movements – indeed, this is the heart of Heine’s critique of Romanticism. It is for this reason that he takes such pains to identify Judeo-Christianity with idealism, on the one hand, and ancient Greco-Roman religion with materialism on the other. Heine is not literal in his application of the terms “Jewish,” “Christian” or “pagan” to particular figures or schools of thought. Rather, he uses them to bring relevant features into relief: a life-affirming vitality and embrace of physical reality on the one side and a life-denying drive to abstraction on the other.

**Hellenes, Nazarenes, and the role of literature**

Heine’s 1840 tribute, *Ludwig Börne. Eine Denkschrift* represents a further development of the idealism/materialism opposition in his thought. In this work, he gives the two temperaments in this central opposition the names of *Hellenen* and *Nazarener*. Here, a brief conceptual history will be necessary, as well as an examination of what Heine gains theoretically by deploying these terms. Heine uses Nazarener, first and foremost, to describe a worldview which he ties to Judeo-Christianity. However, it also came to refer to members of an artistic movement of German-speaking artists that grew up in Vienna and Rome at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Artists who were identified with this movement, such as members of the Wiener Kunstakademie and the Lukasbund, aimed primarily to exalt the Christian religion in their art and were strongly influenced by early Renaissance painters.

This term emerged in Rome as a somewhat derisive nickname – it was never used by the artists themselves. It appears in Goethe’s correspondence with Johann Heinrich Meyer, and in

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Meyer’s manuscript for the essay he likely co-authored with Goethe, “Neu-deutsche religios-patriotische Kunst”, for the second issue of the latter’s Über Kunst und Altertum in den Rhein- und Mayn-Gegenden in 1817. This essay aims to discover the origins of this new development in the visual arts and critique its potentially deleterious effects on the arts as a whole. In a passage from Meyer’s manuscript that was omitted from the published version, the authors write of the painters Friedrich Overbeck and Peter von Cornelius, that they “werden als die Häupter über der im Scherz so genannten Sache der Nazarener betrachtet, d. h. derjenigen Künstler, welche mystisch-religiöse Darstellungen für den einzig wahren Beruf halten und im Geschmack die Meister der früheren Schulen nachzuahmen befliessen sind.” Although the term “Nazarener” does not appear in the print version of the essay, the disapproving tone remained the same. In the print version, the authors report that, in Munich, this movement had found champions primarily in younger art students, “worüber Unliebe zwischen ihnen und den hellenisch gesinnten Meistern entstanden.” The opposition between “Hellenes” and “Nazarenes” for which Heine is known was therefore not entirely of his invention, as Goethe and Meyer were already thinking in these terms with regard, at least, to the visual arts.

The essay locates the origins of this “romantic” art movement not only in the work of the old masters, but in contemporary literature as well. “Die fernern Ereignisse nunmehr betrachtend”, write the authors, “halten wir uns für hinlänglich überzeugt, daß ein litterarisches Product, welches wenig später, nämlich 1797 erschienen, den Hang, die Vorliebe für alte Meister

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90 The authorship of this essay has been a matter of some controversy, with some scholars attributing it either exclusively to Meyer or Goethe. Frank Büttner makes a convincing case for a collaboration of the two in his “Der Streit um die „Neudeutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst“, Aurora: Jahrbuch der Eichendorff-Gesellschaft 43 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), pp. 55-76, here 56f. The essay was published anonymously under the name “Weimarerische Kunstfreunde”.
91 Quoted in Büttner, p. 55.
und ihre Werke, wo nicht vollständig entwickelt, doch der Entwicklung um vieles näher entgegen geführt habe.” (112) The work they are referring to is none other than Tieck and Wackenroder’s *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, (1796) which Heine criticizes on similar grounds as Goethe and Meyer in *Die romantische Schule*.93 (B. V, 377f.) Indeed, Heine follows Goethe and Meyer’s essay in many of its critiques of the movement, even obliquely citing it: “Als endlich der deutsche Patriotismus und die deutsche Nationalität vollständig siegte, triumphierte auch definitiv die volkstümlich germanisch christlich romantische Schule, die ‚neu-deutsch-religiös-patriotische Kunst‘.” (380) Heine offers his own term, “die romantische Schule”, as a synonym and further elaboration of the term Goethe and Meyer apply to the art movement for which their essay is named. Without giving explicit credit, Heine expands their critique of the movement to include tendencies (to which they already gesture) in literature, philosophy and religious practices.

Opposed to this romantic, Christian, Germanic tendency is, in both Heine’s writings and Meyer and Goethe’s essay, a classical, pagan, Greek conception of art. This has its origins, of course, in the life and work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who first proposed the imitation of the Greeks as the only way the Germans could hope to achieve greatness.94 Heine’s styling of Goethe as “der große Hellene” is based, in part, on his admiration of Winckelmann and the influence this was to have on Weimar Classicism.95 Wincklemann saw in the imitation of the Greeks the potential for a deep cultural intervention that would change the German national ethos. As Suzanne Marchand writes, “The [Greek’s] republican simplicity, naïve sensuality, and

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93 Heine nevertheless seems to have done so without proper knowledge of the texts themselves; as he writes of the authors, “Von Raffael wollte man nichts mehr wissen,” (B. V, 377) although the title page of the *Herzensergießungen* included an image of the “göttlichen Raffael”.


aesthetic nobility would be an ideal counterweight to the baroque, Frenchified, imperial power [of Prussia]." For Meyer and Goethe as well as Heine, the “romantic” movement in the arts represented a turn away from these values as the highest ideals. Indeed, Meyer and Goethe observe with relief the fact that the sculptural arts were spared the “ungünstige Folgen” of this movement, “und daß sie nicht von dem Wege abwich den sie seit Mengs und Winkelmann [sic] eingeschlagen.” (Goethe, 51) Heine’s task in Die romantische Schule and especially in the later Ludwig Börne is to show that these are not only tendencies in the arts, but, à la Winckelmann, function as the governing and competing temperaments of all of Europe in religion, culture, arts and politics, none of which can be neatly separated from the others.

As mentioned, Heine most clearly and extensively develops this typology of temperaments in 1840’s Ludwig Börne. Eine Denkschrift. Here, Heine’s ambitions for a world revolution, as well as his contempt for some of the figures involved in attempting to bring it about, are on full display. Early on in the first book, Heine introduces the central opposition which he goes on to elaborate throughout the work: that of the Nazarene and Hellene temperaments. His occasion for this is Börne’s hatred of Goethe, which Heine describes thus:

Hier wirkte keine kleinliche Scheelsucht, sondern ein uneigennütziger Widerwille, der angebornen Trieben gehorcht, ein Hader, welcher, alt wie die Welt, sich in allen Geschichten des Menschengeschlechts kund gibt und am grellsten hervortrat in dem Zweikampfe, welchen der judäische Spiritualismus gegen hellenische Lebensherrlichkeit führte, ein Zweikampf, der noch immer nicht entschieden ist und vielleicht nie ausgekämpft wird: der kleine Nazarener haßte den großen Griechen, der noch dazu ein griechischer Gott war. (B. VII, 17)

In this initial introduction, Heine chooses Börne to embody the Nazarene and Goethe the Hellene temperament, showing that, unlike in previous writings (such as Die romantische Schule or Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland), he does not intend to compare

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national temperaments but rather a much deeper and more significant opposition. The drives which this opposition embodies are “angeboren” and not mere political constructs. Though the duel between spiritualism and sensualism is by now a familiar theme Heine’s oeuvre, in this text it receives its most thorough and theoretically developed articulation.

Heine then enlarges on the extra-nationality of the two temperaments, and the fact that the Nazarene temperament is not purely “Judaic”:


“Jew” and “Christian” are, for Heine, not primarily religious or even cultural identities, but dispositions and ways of relating to the world. They, along with “Hellene” describe tendencies that are learned as much as they are inborn. Heine suggests here that one’s cultivation and habituation also plays a role in shaping one’s identity as belonging to either of the two world-historical spiritual dispositions. To the one he attributes asceticism, a hatred of art, and a tendency to spiritualize and de-materialize; to the other he ascribes a love of life, a proud, creative spirit and realism: a thoroughly this-worldly attitude. Heine’s choice to refer, in the final sentence, to “Jews” born in Athens and possibly related to Theseus suggests that Jewishness is, in fact, the defining feature of Nazareneism and that Christianity, for the purposes of his taxonomy, is a kind of sect of Judaism (as it was at its origin).
As I have mentioned, the second book of the *Denkschrift* consists of diary entries Heine composes on Helgoland (the so-called “Helgoländer Briefe”) during the 1830 July Revolution in France. This is the most abstract and philosophically dense part of the work, in which he reflects on his overlapping interests in Saint-Simonianism and Hegelianism and expresses solidarity with the revolutionaries. Many scholars have commented on these aspects of the works, as well as on Heine’s “pantheism” during this period (a feature often associated with his Saint-Simonian sympathies). While I certainly do not disagree with these characterizations, I have instead chosen to examine Heine’s theoretical reflections on literature. These can by no means be separated from his theological, social and philosophical remarks, but by reading the “Helgoländer Briefe” as a proving ground for Heine’s *Literaturbegriff*, we can better understand the role he envisions for literature in relation to the political and social exigencies with which he was concerned. His insights concern the power of literature to both constitute and disrupt *Volkstümlichkeit*, and to contribute to both national identities and cross-national identification.

Having only a few sources of reading material available to him on Helgoland, Heine begins reading the Bible out of boredom and desperation. He admits that:

… und ich gestehe es dir, trotz dem, daß ich ein heimlicher Hellene bin, hat mich das Buch nicht bloß gut unterhalten, sondern auch weidlich erbaut. Welch ein Buch! groß und weit wie die Welt, wurzelnd in die Abgründe der Schöpfung und hinaufragend in die blauen Geheimnisse des Himmels … Sonnenaufgang und Sonnenuntergang, Verheißung und Erfüllung, Geburt und Tod, das ganze Drama der Menschheit, alles ist in diesem Buche … Es ist das Buch der Bücher, Biblia. Die Juden sollten sich leicht trösten, daß sie Jerusalem und den Tempel und die Bundeslade und die goldenen Geräte und Kleinodien Salomonis eingebüßt haben … solcher Verlust ist doch nur geringfügig in Vergleichung mit der Bibel, dem unzerstörbaren Schatze, den sie gerettet. (39-40)

Firstly, Heine cleverly inverts the trope of the crypto-Jew by describing himself, a Jewish intellectual, as a crypto-Greek. He confers on the Bible the status both of *Unterhaltungs-* and *Erbauungsliteratur*. As the “book of books”, it anticipates every later literary development.
Heine’s description of the Bible as “wurzelnd in die Abgründe der Schöpfung” is also curious – it implies a kind of rootedness in nothingness, or at least not in any discoverable place of origin. It also reaches into the “Geheimnisse des Himmels”, another unknown (and unknowable) realm. Next to it, earthly treasures seem quite dispensable.

Heine goes on to characterize the Jews according to their allegiance to this book over any worldly sovereign or homeland:

Wenn ich nicht irre, war es Mahomet, welcher die Juden „das Volk des Buches“ nannte, ein Name, der ihnen bis heutigen Tag im Oriente verblieben und tiefesinnig bezeichnend ist. Ein Buch ist ihr Vaterland, ihr Besitz, ihr Herrscher, ihr Glück und ihr Unglück. Sie leben in den umfriedeten Marken dieses Buches, hier üben sie ihr unveräußerliches Bürgerrecht, hier kann man sie nicht verjagen, nicht verachten, hier sind sie stark und bewunderungswürdig. Versenkt in der Lektüre dieses Buches, merken sie wenig von den Veränderungen, die um sie her in der wirklichen Welt vorfielen; Völker erhuben sich und schwanden, Staaten blühten empor und erloschen, Revolutionen stürmten über den Erdboden … sie aber, die Juden, lagen gebeugt über ihrem Buche und merkten nichts von der wilden Jagd der Zeit, die über ihre Häupter dahinzog! (40)

Here, Heine deploys some mainstays of anti-Semitic rhetoric about the rootlessness of the Jews – beholden to a book and not to any earthly sovereignty or power, they do not involve themselves in the affairs of the peoples among whom they live. As people of the book, so goes the story, they cannot really belong to any given nation or principality, and as such the events of the world simply pass them by. Heine does, however, suggest that this immersion in the text of the Bible has also functioned as a kind of retreat from a world which has consistently treated them with contempt, robbing them of whatever they might have possessed in the way of earthly pleasures and property. It provided a much-needed respite from a world of suffering; across his works, Heine is consistent in this positive appraisal of the palliative function of religion (see also Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen).
Heine very quickly makes the connection between this fealty to a book and the kind of spiritualism he describes as characteristic of the Nazarene temperament.


Drawing on Hegel, Heine describes the Jews as a people devoted to pure abstraction, to dualism and to the absolute separation of spirit and material. The “dialectic” which he sees at the center of the Jewish religion consists in splitting rather than synthesis – it takes the unity of the world and the human being and separates it indelibly into the abstract and the concrete, the spiritual and the material, with the former categories clearly elevated over the latter. There is to be no synthesis with a moment of Aufhebung in this dialectical operation, according to Heine – rather, the work of the religion is in keeping the two continually separate. Rather than seeing in this penchant for abstraction and resistance to symbols and images the civilizing operation that Hegel does, Heine portrays the Jews as out of step with their environs; these were populated, he elaborates, with cultures rich in images and who embraced material world rather than consigning it to subordinate status.

Completing the Hegelian turn of the passage, Heine describes how Jewish spiritualism reaches its apex in Christianity:

Es ist ein merkwürdiges Schauspiel, wie das Volk des Geistes sich allmählich ganz von der Materie befreit, sich ganz spiritualisiert. Moses gab dem Geiste

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97 The phrase “Volk des Geistes” does not appear in the print edition of Hegel’s Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte; Heine is likely drawing on his own recollections, having heard the lectures in Berlin.

98 Hegel reserves most of his praise for Christianity (his remarks on Judaism are more ambiguous), but the abstraction/conceptualization of God is key.
Heine expresses the belief that the Jewish people under Moses necessarily lived with some share
of both spirit and matter, given their existence as both as a community of believers and as a
nation. They also had to give outward signs of their chosenness and resulting separateness from
other peoples though various practices that had no function other than the ceremonial (such as
circumcision). Heine offers an interpretation of Christ’s intervention inflected through the
Pauline Epistles (and, likely, Luther’s reading of them): namely, that, after Christ, justification
(being made acceptable to God) does not occur through the law. The self-styling of Christianity
(a term applied well after Christ’s death) as a religion of universal humanity renders adherence to
ceremonial laws and with them, Jewish national identity, obsolete. However, calling Christ’s act
of extending Jewish citizenship to all of humanity an “emancipation” is done with a wink. It is a
classic Heinean inversion, whereby humankind is emancipated by becoming Jewish, rather than
Jews by shrugging off their Jewishness.

Importantly, this passage also sees Heine betray his own vexed relationship to
cosmopolitanism and nationalism. As early as the period of the *Reisebilder*’s composition, Heine
expresses contempt for “vagen, kosmopolitischen Ideen”\textsuperscript{99} while consistently remaining an advocate for ideas of universal humanity, even calling himself “der inkarnierte Kosmopolitismus”\textsuperscript{100}. All the same, the tone and attitude of the Denkschrift is one of thoroughgoing anti-nationalism. This is one of the many passages in Heine’s oeuvre which highlight his complicated relationship to these opposed concepts – one the one hand, he greets the dissolution of nationality as a welcome development. On the other, he holds it responsible for helping to complete the turn toward spiritualization and the demotion of the material world to, at best, a second-order reality or at worst, a non-reality.

The phrase, seemingly tacked on to the end of the quoted passage, “der Pöbel verspottete ihn” also deserves attention. Here and elsewhere, Heine associates state violence with a kind of stubborn materialism and irrationalism. In Religion und Philosophie, he refers to Frederick the Great as “gekrönte[r] Materialismus”, which “nur an Kanonen glaubte.” (B. V, 579) In the case of Christ’s crucifixion, it is the last gasp of a reactionary materialism, its vulgarity only emphasized by the behavior of the rabble. Heine, unlike Börne,\textsuperscript{101} shows little optimism about the potential role of the common people in cases of state suppression of revolution. He clearly believes that in such cases, the people can easily be made the handmaidens of state violence.

This resistance, this stubborn and violent materialism on the part of the state would prove a to be its final act. As Heine goes on to elaborate:

\begin{quote}
Aber nur der Leib ward verspottet und gekreuzigt, der Geist ward verherrlicht, und das Märtyrturn des Triumphantors, der dem Geiste die Weltherrschaft erwarb, ward Sinnbild dieses Sieges, und die ganze Menschheit strebte seitdem, in imitationem Christi, nach leiblicher Abtötung und übersinnlichem Aufgehen im absoluten Geiste … (41)
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{100} See HSA vol. 21, letter 427 to an unknown addressee, April 1833.

\textsuperscript{101} Börne believed that one could avert this reaction of the people in an unemancipated society simply through better leadership. See Börne, Sämtliche Schriften III, ed. Inge and Peter Rippmann (Düsseldorf: Melzer, 1964), 517.
As Heine maintains that the separation between spirit and matter had already been achieved by the Jewish religion (of which the Jesus movement was at this point a sect), it follows that the punishment of a materialist sovereign and the derision of a materialist people could only touch the body, leaving the soul intact. Indeed, this act became the symbolic embodiment of the spirit’s victory over the flesh, the foundation myth of its regime. “Imitation of Christ” has come to mean, for Heine, pursuit of absolute spirituality to the exclusion of all things worldly and at the expense of the flesh. The “dialectic”, as Heine calls it, is complete, and Heine concludes with a critique of the Hegelian view that the abstraction of God, the universalizing of Christianity, constitutes a step toward the realization of reason in world history. It is not that Heine disputes the rationality of this development – reason is not of primary interest to him in this work. Rather, he seeks to point out the losses that have occurred as a result of the absolute separation of spirit and matter, and the consignment of the latter to a kind of secondary reality.

At the end of the entry, Heine expresses what I take to be the overarching thesis of the work: that a reconciliation of the two categories, and not the supremacy of one over the other, is the solution he seeks:

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\text{Wann wird die Harmonie wieder eintreten, wann wird die Welt wieder gesunden von dem einseitigen Streben nach Vergeistigung, dem tollen Irrtum, wodurch sowohl Seele wie Körper erkrankten! Ein großes Heilmittel liegt in der politischen Bewegung und in der Kunst. Napoleon und Goethe haben trefflich gewirkt. Jener, indem er die Völker zwang, sich allerlei gesunde Körperbewegungen zu gestatten; dieser, indem er uns wieder für griechische Kunst empfänglich machte und solide Werke schuf, woran wir uns, wie an marmornen Götterbildern festklammern können, um nicht unterzugehen im Nebelmeer des absoluten Geistes … (41)
\]

102 Heine is likely referencing the 15th century devotional work by Thomas à Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi*. Klaus Briegleb describes this as an “Anleitung zu einem tätigen Christentum, das man noch zu H.s Zeit das „werkätige“ nennt, das aber auf verinnerlichten Vorstellungen von einem guten, unpolitischen Leben beruht.” See B. VIII, 807-8.
If Heine’s sympathies seem, throughout the work, to lie with the Hellene camp, it is both because of his own aesthetic predispositions – he is a “heimlicher Hellene” after all – and because he believes it to be on the historical backfoot. His own Hellenism remains “heimlich” because it might prove dangerous or at least inexpedient to identify oneself with the losing side. If he wishes to come to the aid of the Hellenes in this work, it is to restore a kind of symmetry and disrupt the hegemony of pure spirit.

The other antidotes to this one-sided spiritualism he identifies – in politics and in art – represent two sides of materialism in Heine’s work. On the one hand, Goethe stands with the Greeks as a representative of Greek superiority in the arts. Napoleon, on the other, embodies a more ambivalent iteration of the kind of materialism Heine associates with Frederick the Great. The use of the word “Völker” also emphasizes the power Heine attributed to Napoleon for constituting nations – both his own and others in opposition to him. The “gesunde Körperbewegungen” are not only those of military drills practiced in his own ranks, but those of enemy armies as well. As Heine has remarked before (see *Französische Zustände, Die romantische Schule*, etc.), Napoleon awakened, among the Germany principalities he conquered, both extreme national feeling and the deepest shame – both reminders of concerns lying quite outside of the realm of the spiritual.

Heine’s further entries make clear, however, that although the struggle of Nazarenism and Hellenism plays out, in part, on the stages of international power politics, this is not where a solution is to be sought. Instead, he identifies literature as the source for potential reconciliation. He does this in an extended comparison of the Homeric epics to the Bible: the two great literary bulwarks of Hellenism and Nazarenism, respectively:

Ich habe wieder im alten Testamente gelesen. Welch ein großes Buch!
Merkwürdiger noch als der Inhalt ist für mich diese Darstellung, wo das Wort
Heine draws a clear distinction between products of the human spirit (such as the Homeric epics and other works of art) and products of nature. As such, the tools of the Geisteswissenschaften and any aesthetic judgements are out of place. In fact, Heine rejects all value judgements with regard to the Bibles aesthetic features. It contains extra-human truths, presented as fact, quite artlessly and without embellishment – any addition of art would, he seems to assert, only detract from its truth-value. One can only, as Heine does in this epistle, register and describe the effect of the text on one’s own mind and disposition. This aesthetic assessment also recalls some of Heine’s descriptions of folk songs, which he characterizes more as natural phenomena than works of art. For him, there is clearly a relationship between proximity to the Volk (the Bible is, after all, the Volksbuch par excellence103) and naturalness.

This passage also contains key insights into Heine’s Literatur- and Kunstbegriff. The very decision to assess the Nazarene and Hellene temperaments based on representative texts

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suggests that these texts hold the status of founding documents. The Homeric epics, which Heine celebrates as the embodiment of art and “Menschenwitz,” use reality as their raw material but refine it in the crucible of the human spirit. An event, therefore, when related by a human narrator, is consequently also the product of human endeavor and art – a construct. He thus places the Bible, by contrast, in a different category entirely. His descriptions of its style indicate that he would view any attempt to read and evaluate it on literary grounds as misled and misleading.

Reconciliation and the role of the poet and public

Following Heine’s discussion of the style of the Old Testament, he finally hints at the possibility of a reconciliation between the two basic temperaments, at least in the arts. It is the rare artist who can unite the two dispositions, and such a one, according to Heine, was Shakespeare:

Nur bei einem einzigen Schriftsteller finde ich etwas, was an jenen unmittelbaren Stil der Bibel erinnert. Das ist Shakespeare. Auch bei ihm tritt das Wort manchmal in jener schauerlichen Nacktheit hervor, die uns erschreckt und erschüttert; in den Shakespeareschen Werken sehen wir manchmal die leibhaftere Wahrheit ohne Kunstgewand. Aber das geschieht nur in einzelnen Momenten; der Genius der Kunst, vielleicht seine Ohnmacht fühlend, überließ hier der Natur sein Amt auf einige Augenblicke, und behauptet hernach um so eifersüchtiger seine Herrschaft in der plastischen Gestaltung und in der witzigen Verknüpfung des Dramas. Shakespeare ist zu gleicher Zeit Jude und Grieche, oder vielmehr beide Elemente, der Spiritualismus und die Kunst, haben sich in ihm versöhnungsvoll durchdrungen, und zu einem höheren Ganzen entfaltet. (46-7)

The defining characteristic of the Bible’s Naturlauten is its Unmittelbarkeit, and this is the feature he ascribes to Shakespeare’s writing. He thus credits him not only with the power of refining and transfiguring reality (i.e. the power of the artist) but also with that of a direct, unmediated connection to nature. Heine describes the moments in which this occurs as
containing “leibhaftige Wahrheit”, the word made flesh. It is curious that, in the same breath with which Heine elaborates this spiritualist form of writing, he also attributes to it the quality of _Leibhaftigkeit_, embodiment. By Heine’s account, the word, in Shakespeare, seems to undergo a kind of figural transformation from mere truth to flesh. Just as when he characterizes the word in the Bible as “wie ein Baum, wie eine Blume, wie das Meer, wie die Sterne, wie er Mensch selbst”, Heine exhibits a pantheistic, even animistic, rather than strictly spiritualistic understanding of the word of God. Instead of the Nazarene spiritualism which extracts spirit and God from the world, Heine sees in both the Bible and Shakespeare depictions of a world shot through with God (which recalls his description of the pagan world as “durchgöttert” in _Die romantische Schule_). It is an almost pagan reading of the Bible and the biblical features of Shakespeare’s work. It also provides further evidence that the temperaments around which Heine builds his critique are related to, but not identical with religious beliefs, texts or practices. Rather, they come from the philosophies, cosmologies and worldviews that grow up around these features of religious life.

Although Heine describes the marriage of the Jewish and Greek elements in Shakespeare as harmonious and “versöhnungsvoll”, he nevertheless characterizes its manifestation in his work as a struggle. The two elements, artistic genius and nature, do not seem able to occupy the same space, but must alternatingly cede territory to one another. Nevertheless, the coexistence of these two elements in a single body and body of work results in something greater than either of the constituent parts.

This felicitous marriage clearly has implications for Heine that reach far beyond literature and the arts, and into the destiny of the European continent itself. He asks:

_Ist vielleicht solche harmonische Vermischung der beiden Elemente die Aufgabe der ganzen europäischen Zivilisation? Wir sind noch sehr weit entfernt von einem_
solchen Resultate. Der Griech Goethe und mit ihm die ganze poetische Partei, hat in jüngster Zeit seine Antipathie gegen Jerusalem fast leidenschaftlich ausgesprochen. Die Gegenpartei, die keinen großen Namen an ihrer Spitze hat, sondern nur einige Schreiähnle, wie z.B. der Jude Pustkuchen, der Jude Wolfgang Menzel, der Jude Hengstenberg, diese erheben ihr pharisäisches Zeter um so krächzender gegen Athen und den großen Heiden. (47)

Again, although Heine uses the term “Nazarene” to refer to both Christians and Jews, we see him continually falling back on the appellation of “Jew”. He applies this term, with characteristic irony, to all of the members of this party (as he now refers to the two belligerents), who were not in fact Jews but noted anti-Semites who attacked Heine and his fellow Young Germans on the basis of their “un-German” and “indecent” writings. Commentators have speculated that this remark about Goethe comes both from Heine’s engagement with the Goethe-Schiller correspondence, as well as with Meyer and Goethe’s essay “Neu-deutsche religiöse-patriotische Kunst”.104 As I discuss above, Heine follows the latter essay in nearly all of its point of criticism of the attempts in Germany to found a new romantic, Christian artistic movement. Although this essay acknowledges the implications that this movement and the competing “Hellenistic” tendency have on politics and the wider culture, Heine elaborates them more fully. It follows that the so-called “Greek” party would have an advantage in the arts and that the so-called “Jews”, raising complaints against the arts on non-artistic grounds, would seem ridiculous and fanatical by comparison. In politics, however, Heine appears concerned that the spiritualist party is winning decisively.

Somewhat surprisingly, the other figure to which Heine attributes a mixture of spiritualism and sensualism is Luther. Having previously accused Luther of misunderstanding both human nature and the Catholic Church for its felicitous marriage of flesh and spirit in *Religion und Philosophie* (the original French title of which is *De L’Allemagne depuis Luther*),

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104 See Klaus Briegleb’s commentary in B. VIII, pp. 810-811.
Heine goes on to devote considerable attention to praising him and correcting the French’s misapprehensions of him. To this end, he writes:

Wie von der Reformation, so hat man auch von ihren Helden sehr falsche Begriffe in Frankreich. Die nächste Ursache dieses Nichtbegreifens liegt wohl darin, daß Luther nicht bloß der größte, sondern auch der deutscheste Mann unserer Geschichte ist; daß in seinem Charakter alle Tugenden und Fehler der Deutschen aufs großartigste vereinigt sind, daß er auch persönlich das wunderbare Deutschland repräsentiert. Dann hatte er auch Eigenschaften, die wir selten vereinigt finden, und die wir gewöhnlich sogar als feindliche Gegensätze antreffen. Er war zugleich ein träumerischer Mystiker und ein praktischer Mann in der Tat. Seine Gedanken hatten nicht bloß Flügel, sondern auch Hände; er sprach und handelte. Er war nicht bloß die Zunge, sondern auch das Schwert seiner Zeit. Auch war er zugleich ein kalter scholastischer Wortklauber und ein begeisterter, gottberauschter Prophet. (B. V, 538)

This passage makes clear not only that Heine sees Luther as some combination of spirit and flesh, but that he holds a similar view of the German people as such. For Heine, the contradictions and multiplicities which the latter embodies are its characteristic features – so, too, with Luther. It seems therefore, that Luther’s significance as a figure lies both in his ability to unite these two disparate dispositions, and in his representative function for the German people.

As to the former aspect of Luther’s greatness, the duality of his disposition, Heine presents this quality as one not of resolution, but of co-existence. The various, perhaps contradictory aspects of his disposition do not negate one another, nor are they resolved, but exist in tension:

The term “ein absoluter Mensch” reads as a play on Hegel’s absolute spirit, a notion which, in the Heinean idiom, represents an exclusion of all that is matter and flesh. The notion of an “absoluter Mensch”, therefore, expresses, for Heine, the only real absolute that exits: a salutary mixture of spiritualism and sensualism. Unlike with Shakespeare, however, Heine characterizes these qualities of Luther’s largely as artless ones. Where Shakespeare embodies the artistic spirit of the Hellene temperament, Luther seems to possess a kind of naïve sensualism. In spite of all his achievements on behalf of the spirit, Heine insists on drawing attention to the importance of the flesh in evaluating his legacy.

In addition to the beneficial combination of spirit and matter Heine attributes to Luther, he also credits him with the creation of the German language via his Bible translations. In this, too, he continues to make use of the spirit/flesh dichotomy:

Ich habe oben gezeigt, wie wir durch ihn zur größten Denkfreiheit gelangt. Aber dieser Martin Luther gab uns nicht bloß die Freiheit der Bewegung, sondern auch das Mittel der Bewegung, dem Geist gab er nämlich einen Leib. Er gab dem Gedanken auch das Wort. Er schuf die deutsche Sprache. Dieses Geschah, indem er die Bibel übersetzte. In der Tat, der göttliche Verfasser dieses Buchs scheint es eben so gut wie wir andere gewußt zu haben, daß es gar nicht gleichgültig ist durch wen man übersetzt wird, und er wählte selber seinen Übersetzer, und verlieh ihm die wundersame Kraft, aus einer toten Sprache, die gleichsam schon begraben war, in eine andere Sprache zu übersetzen, die noch gar nicht lebte. (544-54)

If thoughts are products of the spirit, then, this passage seems to conclude, the written word is a product of the body. In this, he attributes to Luther an almost divine creative capacity. This emphasizes, in turn, the spiritual and sensuous elements of the creative act. Heine also expresses, once again, his own belief in the ability of cultural artifacts (this is how he chiefly regards the Bible) to affect the health of a people, for better or for worse.
Heine elaborates on just what Luther’s Bible has done for the German people in a later passage, in which he expresses confusion about the origins of Luther’s language. In it, he reveals much about his view of *Volksbücher* and their cultural and political potential:


Although its origins are opaque, it seems clear to Heine that the language of Luther’s Bible is a palimpsest, since it cannot be traced back to any one dialect. Therein lies its strength: just as the Hebrew Bible provided a home to Jews, scattered in their exile, so too did the German Bible provide a kind of unity and shared identity to a fragmented people. Its lack of a single, linguistic origin protected it from purely regional identification and allowed it to become the literary language of the entire German people. Further, the text still constitutes a font from which this same people can continually draw inspiration and “Verjüngung”. Because it is a *Volksbuch*, in the hands of even society’s meanest classes, it lends a literary quality to the speech and writing of the entire people. As Jonathan Sheehan puts it, “translations were political events that helped to produce the historical entities that we call nations and peoples, by establishing what is the same, and what is different. […] translations produced a moment of self-confrontation and self-definition.” (Sheehan 171) It is perhaps because of this that Heine shows such appreciation for
German folk songs – they are both themselves a source of literary language from which the Volk can draw, and are, to a large degree, in an already highly literary Volkssprache by dint of their Lutheran heritage. Heine clearly also believes that this democratization of literary language has political potential, as he writes that: “Dieser Umstand wird, wenn bei uns die politische Revolution ausbricht, gar merkwürdige Erscheinungen zur Folge haben. Die Freiheit wird überall sprechen können und ihre Sprache wird biblisch sein.” (546) Should a revolution ever occur in Germany, he seems to propose, the language of liberation will belong to all.

Conclusion

If, in Heine’s view, the task of civilization is to unite the two disparate temperaments between which the whole of humanity is divided – spiritualism and sensualism, idealism and materialism, Nazarenism and Hellenism – then the role of the poet and artist is to accomplish this at the level of culture. This is impossible however, without understanding and addressing the Volk as the life source of from which all culture proceeds and which furnishes the raw materials out of which literature is forged. What the artist produces is then received and re-metabolized by the Volk, and so on. This artistic production is therefore of paramount importance for Heine, as he sees it as determining the conditions for the possibility of all works of art to come.

Heine’s focus on literary classics makes perfect sense in the context of this model of artistic reception and production. Far from a retreat to the autonomy of art, it is an affirmation that the significance of art goes far beyond passing interests like elections, or even revolutions. Heine therefore conceives of the Volk as an addressee both utopian and ideal. That he is not in a position to reach them in the manner of Börne the Volksprediger is, for him, of secondary significance. As his own output is concerned, Heine understandably identifies his poems and
songs as the likeliest works to reach as far as the lower rungs of the Volk – and, indeed, many of his poems and songs have reached the status of literary classics that are read in schools and commemorated on public monuments. He does not exclude the possibility, however, that his critical and journalistic writings might also attain popular significance, albeit in an unpredictable manner. As his stated ambitions in Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen reveal, here, too, he wishes to correct the life-denying sensualism inculcated by the traditional Entsagungslieder. His ambitions here are cultural as well as political. To be sure, Heine nurtures a conflicted populism that, while viewing the common people at a distance, nevertheless empathizes with their struggles and aims to inspire them to improve their material lot. Heine’s materialism is, however, indelibly bound up with his artistic convictions and his ambitions for the cultural life of all peoples (perhaps his in particular). By offering the people better works of art, those in which spirit and matter, ideal and real are united, Heine aims to improve not only the lives of the Volk and Völker, but to further the aims of civilization itself.
Of the three authors discussed in this dissertation, Johann Gottfried Herder wrote most famously and extensively on the concept of *Volk* and is still considered one of its key theorists. Much has already been written on the subject, and I do not intend an exhaustive treatment of Herder’s evolving relationship to the *Volk* and *Volksliteratur*. Instead, I propose to analyze his efforts for the betterment of German literature as attempts to create a popular, ideal public (one that does not yet exist) by addressing it. In doing so, I will connect two ideas, *Volk* (people) and *Publikum* (public), critical to Herder’s thought but which have not been sufficiently examined in relation to one another. Though not interchangeable concepts, they overlap in key ways which enable Herder to imagine a more expansive notion of *Volk* than has often been concluded, and which insists on a plurality of speakers, users and producers of a language and culture.

By approaching Herder this way, I will explore the following questions: How does Herder’s compilation practice aim at injecting something of the *Volk*’s vitality into the life of the educated German reading public? To what extent is the *Volk* real or ideal? What does Herder purport to give back to the *Volk*? What is the relationship between *Volk* and *Publikum*, and is this public active or passive? How does Herder’s language philosophy bear on his *Literaturbegriff* in general and on *Volksliteratur* in particular?

Although Herder’s work with the *Volk*-concept spans his entire oeuvre, I have chosen to focus primarily on several of his early texts: *Über die neure deutsche Literatur: Fragmente* (1767/68) and the *Volkslieder* project105 (1774, 1778/9). I isolate these texts because they show

105 Herder first titled this project *Alte Volkslieder* in 1775. In 1778 it then appeared under the title of *Volkslieder*, the title I will use throughout. In 1807, after Herder’s death, a second version of the collection appeared, entitled *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern.*
Herder, above all, in the mode of curator and mediator of literary works by, for and of the Volk with the aim of Volkserziehung. To clarify the relationship between Volk and public, I will also analyze the two versions of the essay, “Haben wir noch jetzt das Publikum und Vaterland der Alten?” from 1765 and 1795. The constellation of these two essays, one of Herder’s earliest and latest, establish certain continuities in his thinking about Volk and public amid many important changes. Furthermore, the notions of Volk and public explored in these texts are part of two larger practices that defined Herder’s life and work: his activity as a preacher and as an educator and Volksschullehrer. In light of this, I propose to read the corpus of texts I have isolated, in part, in light of their envisioned pedagogical function.

I will begin the chapter with a brief review of the relevant Herder scholarship and outline how I will build on and depart from it. I will then move to a close reading of the two versions of the “Publikum und Vaterland” essay in order to set up how his notions of the “real” and “ideal” public can be made productive in thinking through his Volksbegriff. The following section will explore Herder’s language philosophy as outlined in the Fragmente, how it builds on the model for language development synthesized by Condillac and how this motivates his later preoccupation with Volkslieder. I will then discuss Herder’s theory of translation explored in the Fragmente, the concept of Nachahmung on which it relies, and how it motivates some of the editorial choices of the Volkslieder collections. The final section will analyze the Volkslieder in two parts: the first gives a description of the project, its organization and the practices of Aneignung it carries out; the second unpacks the terms “Volk,” “Pöbel” and “Menge” in the work, and what kind of Volksbegriff they ultimately define.

**Herder’s reception in Germanophone and Anglophone scholarship**
There are distinct strains of Herder’s reception in the Germanophone and Anglophone worlds, and there is, for the most part, little interchange between them. The Anglophone Herder reception is highly influenced by Isaiah Berlin’s work, particularly the study *Vico and Herder* first published in 1976. The political scientist Frederick M. Barnard’s extensive work on Herder has also been influential, although it primarily treats Herder as a political thinker. Michael Forster represents a rare exception to this rule, having published prolifically on Herder in both German and English. Of the huge volume of Herder scholarship in the German-speaking world, I have relied most heavily on the work of Hans Adler, Martin Bollacher, Ulrich Gaier, and Hans Dietrich Irmscher.

One of the most contentious topics in Herder scholarship is his anthropology, and whether it can be subsumed under proto-Nazi racial ideology. The fact that this did occur under National Socialism should neither be ignored nor considered a kind of “smoking gun.” Between 1933 and 1939, Friedrich Berger, Martin Redeker and Benno von Wiese all make the claim that Herder’s notions of *Volk, Geschlecht* and *Stamm* approach and are amenable to Nazi ideas of race and racial hierarchy. Others celebrated Herder as the “Überwinder der Aufklärung.” Since then, scholars writing both in German and English have taken pains to show that such appropriations of Herder represent a fundamental misreading of his philosophies of humanity and the differences between peoples, frequently citing the passages in *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1785) in which he criticizes Kant’s division of the human

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species into four fixed, distinct races in the 1775 text, *Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen*. Others, such as Jost Schneider, have maintained that Nazi authors seized on an ambivalence that is indeed present in Herder’s writings themselves. Indeed, the prevailing trends in the reception of this aspect of Herder’s work seem to change with passing fashions. As Michael Maurer points out, postmodern critics in France and the United States sought, in the 1980s through the early 2000s, to portray Herder as “Nationalisten, Kulturschauvanisten, ja Rassisten.”

This debate is too extensive to recapitulate here, nor do I propose to offer the final word. Instead, I mean to emphasize Herder’s notions of plurality not only among different peoples, but within a single *Volk* as world-making, culture-defining entity. In this, I mean not only to follow in the footsteps of the many able scholars who have refuted claims that Herder was a proto-nationalist or racial chauvinist; I also aim to show that Herder’s notion of the *Volk* as cultural producer is not so limited as some critics have argued. I intend to argue that the “ideal” public (in the sense articulated in the 1795 essay), for him, is not only a reading public, but a participating public of speakers and listeners belonging both to present and future generations.

In arguing that Herder embraced a notion of the *Volk* that, indeed, included the *Pöbel*, I aim to address what I view as an incomplete reading on the part of scholars with whom I am

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111 Sonia Sikka helpfully traces this debate in *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 126-159. She ultimately argues that, although Herder did ground some of his thoughts on *Volk* in biology and Eurocentric hierarchy, he nevertheless embraced a single concept of humanity, under which all members deserved moral consideration and treatment.
otherwise in agreement. This includes Barnard,\textsuperscript{112} Renata Schellenberg and Michael Perraudin.\textsuperscript{113} In my insistence on thinking Herder’s concept of \textit{Volk} together with that of the ideal \textit{Publikum}, I propose not so much to correct as to augment the work of Gaier, who edited the editions of both the \textit{Fragmente} and the \textit{Volkslieder} which I use and whose commentary and original research on these texts is indispensable.

\textbf{Herder’s concept of the \textit{Publikum}}

Although Herder’s work with the concept of \textit{Volk} has received considerable attention, his notion of a public, or \textit{Publikum}, has been less thoroughly examined. Despite the fact that these are distinct ideas for Herder, if we consider them together we gain a greater understanding of the reach Herder imagined for literature than a merely philological account can give us. Herder first deals extensively with this topic in the 1765 essay, “Haben wir noch jetzt das Publikum und Vaterland der Alten?” This essay, published on the occasion of the institution of Riga’s new courthouse, is written as if it were the text of a speech delivered at the courthouse’s opening. As Dorothea von Mücke points out, Herder thus already interpellates his readers as an audience, “witnesses of the inauguration of a whole new understanding of what it means to be a modern public.”\textsuperscript{114} In answer to the question the title of the essay poses, Herder contends that, in his day, there neither exists the public nor the fatherland, nor even the \textit{Volk} of the ancient Greeks and Romans. For all this, however, Herder does not assert that modern peoples should strive to return to these ancient social structures – on the contrary, the \textit{Publikum der Alten} was vulnerable to

\textsuperscript{112} See Barnard, \textit{Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History} (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{113} See Schellenberg, “The Impact of Ossian” and Perraudin, “Class Nation and the German Folk Revival” in \textit{The Voice of the People}.
tyrants, demagogues, and the constant threat of war. In its stead, he argues, we have a milder, more moderate Volk, which has traded participation in public affairs for the privilege of enjoying private pleasures. As Ulrich Gaier points out, the category of Volk developed here “bildet das notwendige Komplement dieses privatisierten ’Publikums‘ zur Herstellung einer organischen Konzeption von Staat, Jurisdiktion, Religion und Literatur, die sich in diesem frühen Aufsatz ankündigt.”¹¹⁵ (FHA I, 919) This is not yet the robust notion of Volk he elaborates in later work, but it helps clarify the relationship between the so-called “public” and the social whole.

Herder’s characterization of the modern Volk first appears as a kind of lament that the word and the social body it describes have lost something of their former dignity. However, we must pay close attention to Herder’s inflection of the term at different points. Describing the ways in which government has changed, he writes:

selbst das Volk ist nicht mehr dasselbe. Dort war dieser Name ehrwürdig: er begriff alle Bürger, Rat und Priester ausgenommen: jetzo ist er gemeiniglich so viel als Pöbel und Canaille. Dort waren alle Bürger gleich: sie waren Soldaten, Ackersleute, und Staatsräte zusammen; heut zu Tage sondert man Ackerbau, und Soldatenstand, ja gemeiniglich auch die Regierung vom Bürgerstande ab: man setzt Kaufmann und Handwerker dagegen. (FHA I, 45)

What Volk means “gemeiniglich” is quite distinct from the meaning Herder would ascribe to it. His account of downfall of “Volk” in this case refers more to the word in common use than it does to what Herder would actually take it to mean. In the second section of the essay, which he devotes to the question “Haben wir noch ein Vaterland?”, Herder consoles his audience for their losses with the considerable gains they have achieved. On the question of freedom, he explains

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¹¹⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, Über die neuere deutsche Literatur I in Werke in zehn Bänden, Bd. I, ed. Ulrich Gaier (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), 919. References to this edition of Herder’s works will hereafter appear as in-text citations using the abbreviation “FHA” followed by volume number (Roman) and page number (Arabic).
that, for the ancients, freedom meant an unchecked imperative to rule, while, in our more
egalitarian times, it has taken on a different meaning:

der Charakter unseres Volks ist nicht mehr die dreuste Wildheit der Alten; 
sondern eine feinere und mäßigere Freiheit, die Freiheit des Gewissens, ein 
ehrlicher Mann und ein Christ sein zu dürfen, die Freiheit unter dem Schatten des 
Thrones, seine Hütte und Weinstock in Ruhe genießen zu können, und die Frucht 
seines Schweifes zu besitzen; die Freiheit, der Schöpfer seines Glückes und seiner 
Bequemlichkeit, der Freund seiner Vertrauten, und der Vater und 
Bestimmer seiner Kinder sein zu können, dies ist die Freiheit, die gemäßigte 
Freiheit, die sich heut zu Tage jeder Patriot wünschet[.] (50)

The Volk of this passage is not the rabble of the previous section, but one made up of a series of 
patriarchs, each in charge of his own, small sphere of influence and content with his lot. These 
private goods are not merely private, however, as they are both enabled by public institutions 
(like the one Herder is writing to celebrate) and enjoyed by “patriots” who recognize the 
connection between the private and public well-being.

This is not the final word on the subject, however, as Herder re-wrote and expanded this 
essay much later as part of the *Humanitätsbriefe* in 1795. As von Mücke points out, this essay 
comes after Herder has had a chance to witness the excesses of the French Revolution and must 
rethink whether the role of large, public gathers is beneficial for the production of collectivities. 
(von Mücke, 205) In this later essay, he defines two kinds of publics, the real and ideal:

Es gibt ein reales und ideales Publikum; jenes, das gegenwärtig um uns ist, und 
uns seine Stimme wo nicht zukommen läßt, so doch zukommen lassen kann; das 
ideale Publikum ist zuweilen so zerstreut, so verbreitet, daß kein Lüftchen uns aus 
der Entfernung oder aus der Nachwelt, den Laut seiner Gedanken zuführen mag. 
Bei jeder Gattung des Publikums aber denkt man sich ein verständiges,
*moralisches Wesen*, das an unsern Gedanken, an unsern Vortrage, – an unsern 
Handlungen Teil nimmt, ihren Wert und Unwert zu schätzen vermag, das billiget 
oder mißbilliget, das wir also auch zu unterrichten, eines Bessern zu belehren, in 
Ansehung seines Geschmackes zu bilden und fortzubilden uns unterfangen 
dürfen. (FHA VII, 302)
Examples of a “real” public are easy enough to imagine: a theater audience, a church congregation, even a loose group of enfranchised citizens able, at the very least, to make their voice heard in the form of a vote. An “ideal” public, by contrast, must be imagined by the speaker, and, encompasses any reader or listener who might, now or later, receive his or her words. As Herder explains later in the essay, with the advent of print, the ideal public has the potential to multiply infinitely. What is crucial in either case is a kind of theory of mind of the audience – this audience, real or imagined must be 1) intelligent and moral, and 2) interested, teilnehmend. Whether or not one stands in front of an audience and can receive its immediate reaction and judgement, this participation is always already part of the speech act.

Herder argues that it was the existence of a real, live audience in ancient Greece which provided the conditions for the possibility of an imagined audience in the first place, and for the development of the arts altogether. However, having once been created, he believes that this ideal public is here to stay. What remains crucial is the Teilnahme of this audience. Herder describes this participation differently with regard to different literary genres:

wollen ein Publikum, aus welchem sie gleichsam hervor- und auf welches sie zurückgehen, aus welchem sie die Regel ihrer Kunst nahmen. (309)

First of all, Herder affirms the ability of a poet to call an audience into being where not yet exists – without at least an imagined audience, his words vanish as soon as they are spoken. Even with such an audience, the element of feedback and participation is still a necessary part of the exercise. The epic poet must see to it that his audience follows the scene he describes with “interest”; the historian must tell his stories such that they provoke his public’s “judgement”; the lyric poet must seek his audience’s “participation”. Herder calls these the “Regel ihrer Kunst” which the artists takes from his or her audience. These rules are not the learned conventions of academic writers, nor the logic of the market – indeed, on this subject, Herder insists that no author, if he can help it, should “sich unwürdig, (wie man sagt,) zum Publikum herabstimmen, oder seinem lüsternen, falschen Geschmack frönen. Der Schriftsteller soll das Publikum, nicht des den Schriftsteller bilden.” (326-27) The rules Herder lays out in the above passage are those of the particular public’s Gemüt and Verstand. They are not universal, like the laws of Vernunft, (315-16) but belong to the Volk which he addresses and the genre in which he addresses it.

Keeping this notion of the public in mind, it is possible to shed light on some of Herder’s remarks from the Fragmente in which he circumscribes the role of the poet in relation to the Volk. Although the terms Volk and Publikum are not interchangeable, it is the Volk as public which the poet engages:

Er [der Dichter] weckt das auf, was in ihnen [dem Volk] schläft, er greift ihre Seele bei der schwächsten Seite an, und erinnert sie an ihre Begriffe der Erziehung, mit denen sich ihre Einbildungskraft gleichsam zusammen geformt hat: an die Traditionen ihrer Väter, die also auch ihre Lieblingsvorurteile geworden sind, weil sie sich nach dem Naturell ihres Denkens, ihres Klima und ihrer Sprache richten. Daraus entsteht alsdenn für die Dichter eine heilige Mythologie: die national ist, und ihnen jederzeit eine Zauberquelle war, um Fiktionen zu schöpfen, und Bilder zu erheben, in die sie, die zu den ersten Zeiten
des Volks, auch Propheten und Richter waren, ihre sinnreiche Weltweisheit, Tugend- und Lobsprüche einkleideten. (FHA I, 281-82)

The poet addresses himself to the faculty of “Einbildungskraft” and reminds the Volk of its “ Traditionen” and “Vorurteile,” out of which arises a “Mythologie” and “Zauberquelle.” Poet and Volk thus stand in a reciprocal relation to one another. Where the Volk provides the font of inspiration and repository for cultural production, the poet must draw it out and clothe his “Weltweisheit, Tugend- und Lobsprüche.” These are not the products of Kunstpoesie but of common wisdom and virtue. Even before the compilation of what would eventually become the Volkslieder, Herder describes the task of the poet as thoroughly volkstümlich. The Volk is his source of his inspiration which instructs him on how it should be addressed as Publikum.

These two versions of the “Publikum und Vaterland” essay provide a crucial backdrop for my analysis of Herder’s notions of Volk and Volkstümlichkeit. They help clarify the questions of what Herder hopes to inject into the German Volk and what he aims to receive in return. In his practices of collection, curation and translation he not only means to create a public, but he is calling one forth by the very act of addressing it. In the case of the Volkslieder, this public would give Herder the “Regeln” of an art which, by his own admission, does not yet properly exist in Germany. It is not within the scope of this chapter to trace larger transformations in Herder’s thought and, to be sure, the reality of the French Revolution had a sobering effect on some of his thinking about the potential of the Volk as public. Nevertheless, this late essay reveals that the potential the early Herder imagined for the Volk as a literary public was still present in the thought of the late Herder; indeed, in this later Herder provides a critical motivation for the earlier Herder’s work with Volkslieder.

Herder’s Volksbegriff and philosophy of language
It cannot be disputed that Herder was one of the 18th century’s leading philosophers of language. In addition to those works such as the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1771/72), several of Herder’s works on literature, such as the *Volkslieder* project and the collections of fragments, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1767/68), function as disquisitions on the nature of language and the character of particular languages. As he writes in the first volume of the latter collection, “Der Genius der Sprache ist also auch der Genius von der Literatur einer Nation.” (FHA I, 177) In order to assess the literature of a people, Herder argues that one must begin with the very fundamentals of their language. Indeed, the literature of a people in turn furnishes the would-be philosopher of language with the materials for his or her investigation.

The following section will examine the *Fragmente* and the language philosophy Herder advances therein as attempts to define a *Volksbegriff*. I wish to explore the following questions: How do translations and encounters with other languages contribute, according to Herder, to the process of *Sprachbildung*? How does this process, in turn, come to constitute the character of a *Volk*? Finally, how does the existence of metaphors and figurative language contribute to *Volkslitartur* in particular?

I will first analyze the developmental model of languages Herder offers in the first volume of the *Fragmente*. In it, he enumerates the various “stages” through which a language (and with it, the intellectual life of its speakers) must pass: at first, “Eine Nation in ihrem ersten wilden Ursprunge starret, wie ein Kind, alle Gegenstände an; Schrecken, Furcht und alsdenn Bewunderung sind die Empfindungen, derer beide allein fähig sind, und die Sprache dieser Empfindungen sind Töne, – und Geberden.” (181-82) Even at this as yet undeveloped stage, speakers of this language have particular aptitudes: “sie sind größerer Leidenschaften fähig, weil
ihre Lebensart voll Gefahr und Tod und Wildheit ist: sie verstehen also die Sprache des Affekts mehr als wir, die wir dies Zeitalter nur aus spätern Berichten und Schlüssen kennen.” (182)

Those who have advanced past this phase (among which Herder counts all contemporary peoples), have, in achieving greater security, sacrificed something of the feeling and passions of this earlier phase. Herder, here as elsewhere, is an early observer of the reciprocal relationship between language and cognition – or, more precisely in this case, language and feeling.

From this early stage, according to Herder, the language of tones and gestures becomes one of song. “Man nahm Begriffe, die nicht sinnlich waren, in die Sprache; man nannte sie aber, wie von selbst zu vermuten ist, mit bekannten sinnlichen Namen; daher müssten die ersten Sprachen bildervoll, und reich an Metaphern gewesen sein.” (182-83) Herder calls this both the “youth” and the “poetic” age of language, in which peoples commemorated acts and events through song. The youthful age is therefore followed by the “männlich”, in which language undergoes a transformation from poetry into “schöne Prose”. (183) Herder describes this period as one of refinement and art, tempering the passions of the previous era and binding them to particular laws. “Je mehr man am Perioden¹¹⁶ künstelt, je mehr die Inversionen abschaffet, je mehr bürgerliche und abstrakte Wörter eingeführet warden, je mehr Regeln eine Sprache enthält: desto vollkommener wird sie zwar, aber desto mehr verliert die wahre Poesie.” (183) Herder praises this stage of development as a kind of golden age, extracting as it does the greatest advantage from both the preceding and succeeding eras. Herder is making use of a well-worn opposition: namely, between refinement and poetic authenticity. The felicitous combination thereof makes this the era, for Herder:

¹¹⁶ By “Periode”, Herder refers to the composition of the sentence according to particular aesthetic and poetic conventions.
mäßigte, ohne doch noch die Fesseln einer philosophischen Konstruktion über sich zu nehmen, die den poetischen Rhythmus zum Wohlklang der Prose herunter stimmte, und die vorher freie Anordnung der Worte mehr in die Runde eines Perioden einschloß. (184)

Herder thus considers this stage as language at its most artistic, uniting the vitality of youth to the moderation and wisdom conferred by age. He seems to place the development of a language along a spectrum from greater to lesser freedom. This is particular understanding of poetry and poetic language, one which considers first and foremost its orality and proximity to music, rather than the rules and conventions which give rise to particular verse forms. The constraints placed on language, on the other hand, he calls “philosophical” and argues that they have not yet taken hold at this stage. As in the life of an individual human being, however, this zenith must inevitably precede a decline.

Herder finally characterizes the “old age” of language as “philosophical”. Instead of beauty, it knows only “Richtigkeit” (184). He describes this development thus: “je mehr der Weltweise die Synonymen zu unterscheiden, oder wegzuwerfen sucht, je mehr er statt der uneigentlichen eigentliche Worte einführen kann; je mehr verlieret die Sprache Reize: aber auch desto weniger wird sie sündigen.” (184) Herder is describing what Joachim Ritter calls a “Cartesian” progression by which a language loses its figurative, continent qualities (and with them, its history) as it achieves a greater degree of philosophical precision, eventually coming to consist of pure concepts.117 Herder, however, views this development not as an example of progress but of decay. He dismisses the efforts of those “Sprachvebesserer”, such as Johann Georg Sulzer, who would strip the German language of all its inconsistencies, ambiguities, and superfluity. “Ja, wären wir ganz Geist: so sprächen wir bloß Begriffe, und Richtigkeit wäre das

einzige Augenmerk; aber in einer sinnlichen Sprache müssen uneigentliche Wörter, Synonymen, Inversionen, Idiotismen sein.” (189) Those sensuous qualities of language which account, among other things, for the existence of metaphors, are not merely ornamental for Herder, but essential, at least as long as a language remains in the age of “fine prose”.

Herder is by no means the first to propose such a model of development for language, nor to contend that highest point of a language’s development occurs somewhere between imaginative freedom and philosophical precision. In many respects, the model Herder elaborates owes much to Étienne Bonnot de Condillac’s 1746 Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines. Herder’s similarity to Condillac has often gone unacknowledged due, in part, to its incompatibility with what Werner Bahner calls “dem traditionellen, auf dem betonten Gegensatz zur französischen Aufklärung aufbauenden Herderbild.”118 This also owes to the fact that, in Herder’s own Über den Ursprung der Sprache, he criticizes Condillac for not distinguishing sufficiently between human beings and animals with regard to the origin of language.119 (W. I, 708-711) Herder, however, in the postscript to the first three volumes of the Fragmente, notes that, through the Deutsche Bibliothek, he became aware of the second part of Condillac’s Essay and writes that it “enthält Betrachtungen, die mein Fragment von den Lebensaltern der Sprache sehr ins Licht setzen.” (W. I., 537) If we compare these passages in the Fragmente with the second part of Condillac’s Essay, the affinity between the two becomes abundantly clear. In it, Condillac seeks to explain the development of language from its conjectural beginnings with

119 Hans Aarsleff points out that Herder likely was not familiar with the first part of Condillac’s Essay, in which he elaborates the relationship between the capacity for reflection (which he denies animals) and language. See “The Tradition of Condillac: The Problem of the Origin of Language in the Eighteenth Century and the Debate in the Berlin Academy Before Herder” in Aarslaf, From Locke to Saussure. Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 146-209.
“two children, one of either sex [who], sometime after the deluge [in Genesis], had gotten lost in the desert before they would have known the use of any sign.” In so doing, Condillac both synthesizes the dominant language philosophies that preceded him and develops his own.

Like Herder, Condillac imagines that, at first, these children would have developed a system of gestures which he calls the “language of action” (Condillac 115). He then infers that the first speech “partook of the quality of chant” (121), which he chides several of his fellow language philosophers for mistaking for “music” in the modern sense. At this stage, and in the language of the ancient Greeks and Romans, he argues, gesture was still indispensable in making oneself understood. (131-137) Only once the patterns of this language were discovered and subordinated to principles did music become possible. (138-140) His explanation for the origin of poetry is more complex than Herder’s. Where Herder sees language passing naturally from song into poetry, Condillac sees the genius of the poets at work:

> At its origin, style was poetic because it began by painting ideas in the most sensible images and in addition was marked by its strongly rhythmic quality. But as languages became more copious, the language of action gradually dissolved, variation of voice became more moderate, and, for reasons that I will explain, a taste for figures and metaphors imperceptibly declined as the style began to resemble our prose. But writers all the same preferred the old language, as more forceful and better suited to inscribe itself on the memory, as the sole means they then had of passing their works on to posterity. They devised different forms for this language, making a particular art of inventing rules to increase its harmony. The need to follow these rules gave rise to the lasting belief that all composition must be in verse. So long as mankind lacked letters to write down their thoughts, this belief was based on the fact that verse is easier to learn and retain than prose, but this bias persisted long after it had lost its rationale. At long last a philosopher who did not wish to submit to the rules of poetry became the first who ventured to write in prose. (150-51)

By tracing the development of spoken and written language separately, Condillac is able to differentiate between music, poetry and prose not only in terms of their greater or lesser degree

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of philosophical precision. Poetry, for him, is not simply the stage of development between song and prose, but a particular innovation of poets (curiously, he calls them “writers” while still placing the origin of poetry before that of the written word). Although the language itself was becoming less poetic, these figures deliberately arranged their thoughts rhythmically and with figurative language so as to make a stronger impression on the memory. He believes that rhyme, too, was an invention of the “cold and phlegmatic northern nations,” who “could not retain such a strictly measured prosody when the initial conditions for it no longer prevailed.” (151) Thus poetry, for Condillac, is a somewhat more artificial creation than chant, music or even prose. Herein lies one key difference between his and Herder’s language philosophies.

Condillac also traces the development of language alongside that of social and political institutions in more detail than Herder does in the *Fragmente*. He conceptualizes poetry and music not only in terms of their places in his developmental model, but in terms of their societal function. “Poetry and music,” he writes, “were cultivated only to proclaim religion and laws and to preserve the memory of great men and the services they had rendered to society.” (152) Thus the fact that verse was more easily remembered than prose served a pedagogic function. Rather than simply giving way to prose with time, Condillac argues that poetry began to serve different functions and became increasingly distinct from prose: “As prosody and style became simpler, prose moved farther and farther away from poetry. On the other hand, as poetry with the progress of mind gained new images, it distanced itself from the language in common use, thereby losing contact with the people and becoming less suited for instruction.” (152) Condillac thus explains how poetry began to develop separately the language of everyday expression (which became increasingly prosaic), as a genre with specialized rules and norms. What it gained in
sophistication, by this analysis, it lost in popularity and pedagogic potential. This is a development which Herder, in the *Fragmente*, does not fully trace.

Condillac, like Herder, held that languages, in the course of their development, must reach an apex and eventually decline. Unlike Herder, however, he does not attribute this decline simply to the increasingly analytical, philosophical nature of language, but, as with the advent of poetry, to the intervention of artists:

> Finally, after all these revolutions, figures were employed to embellish discourse when people had acquired so exact and extensive a knowledge of the arts and sciences as to draw images from them which, without ever doing harm to the clarity, were as cheerful, dignified, and sublime as the subject required. Thereafter languages could only lose in the course of the revolutions they underwent. We even find that the epoch of their decadence occurred at the time when they seemed to aspire to the greatest beauties. We see figures and metaphors piling up and overloading the style with ornamentations, to the point where the foundation merely seems accessory. When this time comes, we can slow down, but we cannot prevent, the decline of a language. In things moral as well as physical there is a peak of growth after which they decay. (183-84)

Condillac does not make this the fault of those poets and writers who, seeing the figurative richness their languages has achieved, seek to further improve upon it. Nevertheless, he clearly believes there to be a point after which ornamentation begins to weigh down a language and obscure what is actually being expressed. Importantly, he traces the origin of these ornaments to an increased knowledge of the arts and sciences, and therefore a greater ability of language users to make sense of their world. When employed in service of “beauty,” however, he argues, this can have its excesses.

Another cause of decline Condillac identifies is the genius who must face increasing difficulty in becoming original and striking out on his own the more original writers his language boasts. Not content to equal them, Condillac argues, the genius tries to surpass them and “be the first in his genre.” (193) However, he has simply come too late:
But since all the styles analogous to the character of the language and to his own have already been used by his predecessors, he has no choice but to keep his distance from the analogy. Thus in order to be original he is obliged to contribute to the ruin of a language whose progress a century sooner he would have hastened along. (193)

This argument relies on a belief in the “character” of a language which, like Herder, Condillac takes as undeniable fact. Thus the best works in a language must be composed according to this character, and a language begins to decline when its users forget this. The decline, Condillac maintains, does not stop with the would-be genius who brings it about, for he cannot help but inspire imitators. “It is at this point that we see the emergence of a preponderance of subtle and twisted conceits, of overdone antitheses, eye-popping paradoxes, frivolous turns of phrase, far-fetched expressions, newfangled words, and in short the jargon of would-be clever minds spoiled by bad metaphysics.” (193) As such a style gains in popularity, Condillac explains, it exercises a corrosive influence on the tastes of the public and thus on the language as a whole. Decline, for Condillac, is thus brought about precisely by those seeking to push the boundaries of a language and spur it on to greater heights – exactly the kinds of figures who, had they been born earlier on in their language’s development, might have advanced it. He therefore imagines a greater degree of individual intervention than Herder does in the *Fragmente*, wherein he does not attribute a language’s transformations to any particular agent or agents.

Both thinkers are nevertheless in agreement that, between the extremes of freedom and philosophical/mathematical correctness, lies the ideal degree of development for a language. For Herder, it is “schöne Prose.” Condillac, though offering a more thorough explanation, is less clear in precisely where he locates this point. He instructs the reader to imagine two languages: “one would give so much freedom of exercise to the imagination that the people who spoke it would talk nonsense incessantly; the other, by contrast, would practice analysis so fiercely that
the people for whom it was natural would conduct themselves even in their pleasures like geometricians seeking the solution to a problem.” (192) These are similar extremes to those Herder envisions, proving that, for all their differences, they do indeed envision the greatest possible degree of philosophical precision as the final stage of language. Without characterizing the ideal stage, Condillac states simply that “the most perfect language lies in the middle, and the people who speak it will be a nation of great men.” (192) This perfect language would therefore combine the advantages of both extremes in exactly equal measure.

For Herder, the development of “schöne Prosa” is not merely a question of balance between sensuousness and accuracy, but a temporal matter as well. The height of a people’s poetic achievement occurs, according to Herder, sometime before the full development of its language. It is sentiments such as these which give Herder his reputation for a certain kind of primitivism. In the *Briefwechsel über Ossian*, he similarly asserts that certain poetic aptitudes are available only to so-called “primitive” (“wild”) peoples:

> Wissen Sie also, daß, je wilder, d. i. je lebendiger, je freiwirkender ein Volk ist (denn mehr heißt dies Wort doch nicht!), desto wilder, d. i. desto lebendiger, freier, sinnlicher, lyrisch handelnder müssen auch, wenn es Lieder hat, seine Lieder sein! Je entfernter von künstlicher, wissenschaftlicher Denkart, Sprache und Letternart das Volk ist: desto weniger müssen auch seine Lieder fürs Papier gemacht, und tote Lettern-Verse sein: vom Lyrischen, vom Lebendigen und gleichsam Tanzmäßigen des Gesanges, von lebendiger Gegenwart der Bilder, vom Zusammenhange und gleichsam Notdrange des Inhalts, der Empfindungen, von Symmetrie der Worte, der Silben, bei manchen sogar der Buchstaben, vom Gange der Melodie, und von hundert andern Sachen, die zur lebendigen Welt, zum Spruch- und Nationalliebe gehören, und mit diesem verschwinden – davon, und davon allein hängt das Wesen, der Zweck, die ganze wunderhätige Kraft ab, den diese Lieder haben, die Entzückung, die Triebfeder, der ewige Erb- und Lustgesang des Volks zu sein! (FHA II, 452)

Here, Herder is making a larger point regarding the influence of a people’s temperament on their poetry and song. Similar to the way in which Condillac distinguishes between poetry meant to instruct and poetry which, having distanced itself from ordinary language, loses its direct relation
to the people, Herder differentiates between “living” songs and “dead letters.” Like Condillac, he also connects the lyrical to the “tanzmäßig,” establishing that truly living song still retains something of the gestural language of old. Herder also uses the curious phrase “Notdrang des Inhalts, der Empfindungen” implying an urgency and emotional immediacy to the content, not the comfort of contemplation. It is not only the freedom of the language, however, that he emphasizes, but its organization as well. The power of the song lies in the “symmetry” of the words, the syllables, even the letters – this is not a plea for the spoken word of the written one. Rather, what distinguishes living song from “tote Lettern-Verse” is the medium envisioned in their composition. Those songs composed without a living voice in mind, according to Herder, are dead on the page. Recalling the 1795 “Publikum und Vaterland” essay, it is the nature of the imagined audience that is at issue here. Drawing on his earlier remarks in the Über die neuere deutsche Literatur, I conclude that Herder imagines living song to engage the senses of its audience, real or imagined, while verses composed only with the written form in mind address only the Geist.

The language model herder proposes in the Fragmente does not understand language as merely a symbolic system, but primarily considers languages in the plural as entities with distinct histories and which furnish their users with the capacity to learn, participate in and build their world. Hans Adler summarizes this position succinctly:

Anzumerken wäre, dass der Begriff „Sprache“ bei Herder sowohl Sprachsystem (langue) wie auch Sprachvorkommen (parole) umfasst, mit einer deutlichen favorisierung der Dimension des Sprachvorkommens – zum einen. Zum anderen kommt Sprache bei ihm nicht im leeren Raum vor, sondern gewinnt ihr Profil über die lexikalische Dimension hinaus durch Elemente, die über lange Zeit hinweg als ‘paralinguistisch’ eingestuft worden sind, um dann schließlich in der linguistischen Pragmatik einen systematischen Ort zu finden: wie z. B. Ton, Tempo, Intensität, Stillage, aber auch Mimik, Gestik, u. a.121

121 See Adler, “Übersetzen als Kulturtransfer” in Übersetzen bei Herder, 47.
In addition to the elements Adler calls “paralinguistic,” I would add environmental factors, such as climate, which, for Herder as for Montesquieu, form the conditions which enable language and culture to arise in the first place. Situating Herder’s concepts of nationality and Volk within his larger idea of humanity, it becomes clear that it is these conditions which make distinct peoples out of all of humanity. Herder holds that there is “eine Symbolik, die allen Menschen gemein ist – eine große Schatzkammer, in welcher die Känntnisse aufbewahrt liegen, die dem ganzen Menschengeschlechte gehören.” (FHA I, 553) This pre-linguistic symbolic repertoire, which we only ever access partially through the languages we master, is the material out of which we create our own reality. Although language is specific and sometimes national, “Symbolik” and the knowledge it represents is universal. “Jede Nation hat ein eignes Vorratshaus solcher zu Zeichen gewordenen Gedanken, dies ist ihre Nationalsprache.” (553)

Once a thought enters this inventory by becoming a sign, it is always already particular, nationally inflected.

**Translation, imitation and affinity between languages**

Given Herder’s attentiveness to the distinct character of different languages, he is highly sensitive to the affordances and difficulties of translation, particularly of literary texts. In this he seeks to make two key interventions in the practices of translation and imitation in the German-language literature of his day: 1) he aims to discourage the kind of fanatic classicism that holds the imitation of the Greeks as the highest aim of the arts, and 2) he wants to encourage, above all, practices of translation and imitation (*Nachahmung*) that benefit the German language and its literature. How he makes these interventions and what they have to do with the *Volk* as public will be the focus of this section.
I will begin by analyzing some of Herder’s remarks on translation in the *Auszüge aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker*, part of the volume of essays published in 1773 as *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*. The *Ossian-Briefwechsel* was a kind of forerunner of the *Volkslieder* project, in which he analyzed the songs of “primitive” peoples and published translations of two Peruvian poems. The Ossian cycle is, for Herder, of interest precisely because of its existence as an authentic witness to the wild, unrefined temperament of a people to whom he and his contemporaries would not otherwise have access. This is the foundation for his criticism of the then-available German translation of the Ossian poems by Michael Denis, which he decries as too refined to capture the spirit of the coarse, primitive original. He accuses Denis of imposing on the source material a logic and a style (one Herder finds reminiscent of Klopstock) that is not its own and which dilutes precisely that aspect of the text which is of greatest interest (and potentially, utility) to a modern audience. “Hätte Herr D. die eigentliche Manier Ossians nur etwas auch mit dem innern Ohre überlegt – Ossian so kurz, stark, abgebrochen in Bildern und Empfindungen – Klopstocks Manier, so ausmalend, so vortrefflich, Empfindungen ganz ausströmen […] – welch ein Unterschied!” (FHA II, 456) He urges fidelity to the source material, but not in the name of “authenticity”, as Patricia Rehm argues, characterizing Herder’s position in the following way: “Jede Übersetzung soll sich auch in Ton, Syntax, Rhythmik und Idiomatik soweit es geht an den Ursprungstext anpassen und diesen nachahmen.”122 To what extent this is necessary depends, for Herder, both on the material being translated and the receiving language. Throughout the *Fragmente*, he describes the ideal translator variously as “der beste Erklärer” (FHA I, 292), as “Philosoph, Dichter und Philolog […] der Morgenstern einer neuen Epoche in unsrer Literatur” (293) and as “Kundschafter”

(307), depending on the context. Far from urging “authenticity” at any cost, Herder implores the would-be translator to consider the affinities of the two languages and what the source material can achieve for the language into which it is being translated.

Herder devotes a great deal of attention in the *Fragmente* to the possibility of translating from languages such as Greek, Latin, and the “Oriental” languages. When it comes to modern European languages (primarily French and English), the question is not so much whether translation is possible or desirable, but what should be translated and to what end. To assist his analysis, Herder takes recourse to the developmental language model he elaborates earlier on in the work. Herder places the *Genie* of the German language between the French and English, but nonetheless maintains that “unser Genie sich mehr auf die britische Seite neigt.” (FHA I, 239)

He describes the disadvantages of each: German is barbaric and raw, due to its consonants, while French is unsure of foot due to its elisions. From the French, he believes, the German language can learn “das Lächerliche” (238), and from English, it can learn “poetische Prose.” The forms best suited to the German language, however, he calls “Prose des guten, gesunden Verstandes” and “philosophische Poesie” (240). For Herder, to guard against mere imitation or *Nachäfferei*, it is critical that a language remain true to its own essential qualities. As much as he admires the greater affective and figurative force of more “primitive” languages and their poetry, he cautions against any act of emulation that does not proceed from a thorough understanding of these qualities.

When it comes to those languages less similar to German, such as those he calls “orientalisch” and “morgenländisch,” Herder is wary of imitation and translation, both due to the large chasm to be bridged and to the paucity of sufficient knowledge of the original language on the part of most of his German contemporaries. Instead of attempting to capture the essence of
these cultures in writing or imitate their particular styles, he believes that more Germans (and
Europeans in general) should attempt to visit these regions in order to better understand the
particular habitus and culture that informs their literature:

Käme es nur erst so weit, daß niemand schreibe, was er nicht verstünde:
befleißigten wir uns mehr, den Orient zu beschauen, die heiligen Gedichte zu
verstehen, und wirklich erklären zu können: so würden wir es gewiß verlernen,
mit orientalischen Mastkälbern zu pflügen; wir würden uns, wenn wir ihre Kunst
nur ganz einsehen, zu Schilderern unsrer eigenen Natur ausbilden. (279)

Instead of more accurate imitations of “oriental” poetry, Herder believes that a deeper
understanding of the spirit and character of these peoples would be of greater value in assisting
authors working in German to express themselves authentically, according to their own distinct
nature. In place of imitation, he here recommends “verstehen,” “erklären,” “einseihen” in order,
ultimately, to develop oneself (“sich ausbilden”) enough to do justice to one’s own nature. With
regard to Greek and Latin literature, Herder also advises, first and foremost, that German poets
and readers get to know the works on their own terms in order to come closer to oneself: “Man
zeige uns das wahre Ideal der Griechen in jeder ihrer Dichtarten zur Nachbildung, und ihre
individuelle, National- und Lokalschönheiten, um uns von solchen Nachahmungen zu
entwöhnen, und uns zur Nachahmung unsrer selbst aufzumuntern.” (311) This encouragement to
imitate oneself, while similar to the inducement to become “Schilderern unsrer eigenen Natur,”
also clarifies the complexity of “Nachahmung” for Herder: it can either describe the kind of
blind imitation he discourages, or constitute a true act of mimetic representation, arising from a
deep understanding of the object depicted.

In regard to the imitation of Greek verse, this concern shows up again. Although Herder
is well acquainted with the debates of the day surrounding the grammatical, metrical and
rhythmic qualities of Greek and Latin translations, or original works seeking to borrow from this
style, he ultimately deems these concerns secondary to the question of what is suitable and natural to the target language. In the *Hexameterstreit* between Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock and Johann Heinrich Voß, Herder championed “freies Silbenmaß” of Klopstock\(^\text{123}\) as the “natürlichste und ursprünglichste Poesie” (232). What appears to him to be natural to the German language is prioritized over what might be correct or accurate with regard to ancient work being translated or evoked. The question, for him, is not what is possible in a given language, but “ists unser Sprache natürlich, Hexamer zu machen? Und wie weit müssen wir Zwang großen Zwecken aufopfern? Natürlich! und wie ist das zu sehen? Entweder aus der Natur der Sprache, oder aus Versuchen.” (229) While this does not offer an exact standard for the poet and/or translator to follow, it calls for both a deep, intuitive understanding of one’s own language and experimentation (“Versuchen”). In considering what is natural, the poetic genius must not only consider his or her own aesthetic sensibilities, but the entire community of speakers. In this question, as in so many others, the imagined public has a crucial role to play.

**Volkslied and who constitutes the Volk**

a. The *Volkslieder* collections and their use of translation and *Aneignung*

The above discussion of Herder’s philosophy on translation prepares the ground for a treatment of his *Volkslieder* project, in which the practices of translation and *Nachahmung* are front and center. In this section, I will analyze how, in and with the *Volkslieder*, Herder seeks to enhance the wealth of symbolic goods available to users of the German language for cultural

\(^{123}\) The Klopstock hexameter is characterized by the replacement of the dactyl (a metrical foot consisting of one long syllable, followed by two short: --- ∪ ∪ with the spondee (long-long: --- ---) and trochee (long-short: ― ∪). Voß, on the other hand, argued that the ancient Hexameter, with its regular distribution of short and long syllables, should be followed as closely as possible in German translation and in original epic poetry. He therefore deemed that Klopstock’s verse, as seen in his epic *Messias*, was no hexameter at all.
production and world-making and, at the same time, defines an ideal *Volksbegriff*, centered on
the notion of a public, that envisions the inclusion of all speakers of a language.

Herder began printing the first volume of the collection in 1775 under the title *Alte Volkslieder* but discontinued the printing after the first sheet. In 1778 and 1779, the collection then appeared under the name *Volkslieder*. In 1807, a second version of the work was published posthumously as *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*. This title did not originate from Herder himself, but from Johann von Müller. It was meant to draw attention to the fact that the work included songs from many different nations, each of which expressed, in some fashion, the “voice” of its people. Hereafter, when referring generally to Herder’s project of compiling, curating and translating folk songs, I will use the title *Volkslieder*. When specifically discussing the first collection, *Alte Volkslieder*, I will refer to it as such.

The first collection, *Alte Volkslieder*, which was never published in full, was to consist of two volumes, each of which contained two books. Each of these opens with a foreword by Herder explaining the inclusion of particular songs and exploring some of the difficulties he faced as compiler and translator, i.e. in the foreword to the second book, “Wäre Shakespeare unübersetzbar?” The first book of the first volume was to contain folk songs from English and German, the second “Lieder aus Shakespeare,” (both dialogue from the tragedies and standalone songs). The first book of the second volume contains more songs from English and German, and the second “Nordische Lieder,” including songs of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Lappish, Greenlandic and Icelandic origin.

The second collection, titled *Volkslieder*, also consists of two volumes, each of which is divided into three books. The first volume, in place of a foreword, opens with a series of “Zeugnisse über Volkslieder.” These are quotations from various luminaries such as Montagne,
Milton, Luther and Lessing, arranged almost as a modern publisher would print blurbs in praise of a given volume on its dust jacket. To give an example, the first quotation, from Montagne, reads “Die Volkspoesie, ganz Natur, wie sie ist, hat Naiveten und Reize, duch die sie sich der Hauptschönheit der künstlichvollkommensten Poesie gleichet.” (FHA III, 71) The second volume begins with a foreword from Herder. In contrast to the *Alte Volkslieder*, the songs in this volume are not arranged according to language of origin, but instead German songs are followed by Spanish, English by Lithuanian, etc. All are nevertheless identified by their original language, and no melodies are given. Of the 55 songs originally intended for the *Alte Volkslieder*, all but ten appear in this collection. While no ordering principle is given, Gaier argues persuasively that their organization is thematic:

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<th>Buch</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Passivität/Aktivität in Natur- und Wunderbeziehungen</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>Befreiung in Liebe, Kampf und Kunst</td>
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<td>III</td>
<td>Äußerer und innerer Mensch</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Authentizität und Künstlichkeit</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>Bestimmung und Selbstbestimmung (FHA III, 922)</td>
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Gaier describes this as “Entfaltung eines anthropologischen Grundproblems im Sinne der von Herder in der *Ältesten Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* beschriebenen Schöpfungshieroglyphe.” (921) This is the principle which, in that essay, Herder takes to be the “höchstes und simpelstes Ideal der Dichtkunst” (921), according to which all works of art depicting fundamental struggles of human beings with love, death, fear, passion, power, etc., are created. This affirmation of the anthropological, universally human, taken alongside the fact that the each song is identified, not by author (except in the case of Shakespeare), but by nationality, illustrates only too aptly one of Herder’s fundamental themes: the preservation of cultural and national particularity alongside a recognition of the fundamentally human.
Both collections served as occasions for Herder to stage encounters between languages and cultures, all with an eye to the enrichment of the German Volkslied tradition. This goal is particularly evident in the Alte Volkslieder. In the foreword to the first book, Herder bemoans the lack of German folk song, describing the German spirit as a “Mietlingsgeist” (FHA III, 23) and the lot of the German people heretofore as “die Mutter und Dienerin fremder Nationen, ihre Regentin, Gesetzgeberin, Schicksalsentscheiderin und fast immer zugleich ihre blutende Sklavin und Kräterschöpfende Säugamme zu werden, die übel belohnt ward.” (21) He assumes here a degree of existing group identity but seeks to correct what he perceives as a dearth of a shared symbolic repertoire. It is not entirely clear whether this description refers to the German Volk as a political or cultural entity. It seems likely that, at least in part, Herder has in mind the historical role of German soldiers and mercenaries in maintaining European powers and their borders. At the same time, “Regentin, Gesetzgeberin, Schicksalsentscheiderin” could refer to the wealth of intellectual goods the German people have contributed to the world of ideas. If so, these are developments belonging to the German language as a philosophical language, precise and suitable to abstraction. Herder’s lament about the lack of German folk song would then imply that these achievements have been of service to other peoples but have not strengthened the German Geist and the life of the people – for that, one needs folk song.

Herder freights the folk song with particular significance because, for him, it has a unique ability to constitute the spirit of a people. As Ulrich Gaier writes, “Volkslied in diesem Sinne wird alles, was im Prozeß der Humanisierung, der Integration des und der Menschen zum Volk, Zweck und Mittel wird und damit auch den typischen Aneignungsprozessen („Zersingen“,

Bearbeitung, Pastiche) unterworfen ist.” (FHA III, 872) Gaier rightly emphasizes the active role that the *Volk*, ideally, should play in making the folk song its own. Crucially, he also explicitly connects “Humanisierung” to the “Integration des und der Menschen zum Volk.” This illuminates a key feature of Herder’s *Humanitätsbegriff* – for Herder, humanity is not a vague universality, but expresses its totality in each distinct *Volk* and their cultural output. Becoming human is, therefore, for the individual as for the collective, inextricable from becoming a *Volk*.

In the “Aneignungsprozesse” that attend this development, authenticity and faithful recitation are out of place. Instead, the *Volk* must actively work with the songs, altering and transforming them as needed.

With regard to the Ossian poems, Herder defends what he took to be Macpherson’s translation decisions on the grounds that they represented a necessary *Aneignungsprozess*. For him, Macpherson was not merely a faithful translator but a creative talent in his own right:

> Er that, wie ein kluger Mann thun mußte. […] der Geist seines Vaterlandes, seiner Vorfahren, der Geist seiner Sprache und der in ihr gesungenen Lieder ergriff ihn. In sie legte er also den Schatz vieler, sowohl aus andern Zeitaltern gesammelten Schönheiten als der Empfindungen seines eigenen Herzens. Daß er dies unter der Maske Ossians that, ist ihm sodann nicht nur zu verzeihen, sondern es war für ihn vielleicht eine Pflicht der Dankbarkeit und der Noth[.]125

Herder refers to Macpherson’s “Dankbarkeit” for the songs of his homeland and the “Not” which compelled him to resist the contemporary fashions of English poetry. For Herder (and for many of his contemporaries), Macpherson’s modifications to the original, including what Gaier calls “die Einführung empfindsam subjektiver Innenperspektive” (FHA III, 858) were more than justified by the final product. Once again, Herder justifies authenticity giving way to necessity.

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and, in part, to style. He who wishes to influence the Volksleben of his day must make some concessions to tastes of his audience.¹²⁶

For Herder, “Nachahmung” is also a necessary Aneignungsprozess. In the later Humanitätsbriefe, Herder makes a case for the importance of borrowing from and emulating other peoples. In it, he seems to have arrived at a rosier view of the status of the German people among its neighbors. He writes:

Alle Kunst ist Nachahmung; nur durch Nachahmung ist der Mensch zur Kunst gelanget; nur durch sie ist er Mensch worden. Wäre also auch Nachahmung der Charakter unserer Nation, und wir ahmten nur mit Besonnenheit nach: so gereichte dieses Wort uns zur Ehre. Wenn wir von allen Völkern ihr Bestes uns eigen machten: so wären wir unter ihnen das, was der Mensch gegen alle die Neben- und Mitgeschöpfe ist, von denen er Künste gelernt hat. Er kam zuletzt, sah Jeden seine Art ab, und übertrifft oder regiert sie alle. (FHA VII, 551)

If imitation is what sets humanity above all other life forms, then a nation of imitators would be both the most human of its fellows as well as their superior. Originality, by this logic, is not necessarily a virtue in itself; the advantage lies, on the contrary, with the latecomer whose overview of all the various peoples affords it the ability to recognize the best of each and integrate it into its own identity. There is also an ambivalence inherent in the word “Nachahmung” – on the one hand, it may be used, pejoratively or otherwise, to refer to mimicry or imitation. On the other, with regard to the arts, it might refer to something more like mimesis. Making the best of each people one’s own would not mean simply aping their particular artistic achievements, but would occur in a series of Aneignungsprozesse, and the resulting product would constitute an original work all its own.

¹²⁶ When confronted with the totality of the evidence against Ossian’s authenticity, Herder simply refused to believe it. In his Briefwechsel über Ossian, he responds to skepticism about the work with appeals to “inneres Zeugnis” and “den Geist des Werkes selbst […]”, der uns mit weissagender Stimme zusagte: „so etwas kann Macpherson unmöglich gedichtet haben! so was läßt sich in unserem Jahrhunderte nicht dichten!” (FHA II, 448)
In the *Volkslieder* collection, the issue of imitation, particularly of the Greeks, comes up again. In both volumes of the collection, Herder makes repeated appeals to his contemporaries to eschew the Greeks as the ideal aesthetic standard against which any artistic undertaking must measure itself, and that the artist’s highest aim is to imitate them. This is not because he does not value the contributions of the Greeks to the arts and to literature in particular – he is instead concerned with the compatibility of the Greek tradition and language with his own. By way of elaboration on his translation choices for the collection, he laments the fact that practical artistic considerations have prevented him from including the Greek classics in his collection:

*Homer, Hesiodus, Orpheus*, ich sehe eure Schatten dort vor mir auf den Inseln der Glückseligen unter der Menge und höre den Nachhall eurer Lieder; aber mir fehlt das Schiff von euch in mein Land und meine Sprache. Die Wellen auf dem Meer der Wiederfahrt verdumpfen die Harfe und der Wind weht eure Lieder zurück, wo sie in amaranten Lauben unter ewigen Tänzen und Festen nie verhallen werden. (FHA III, 233)

Clearly Herder believes that there does not exist sufficient affinity in the languages and cultures of the two peoples for Greek literature to be made useful for the encouragement and production of German folk song. Why? This not only has to do with the individual geniuses to whom the works are attributed, but with the entire people from which they arose. Their song, Herder writes, “lebte im Ohr des Volks, auf den Lippen und der Harfe lebendiger Sänger.” (230) The audience here was not a passive one but a receptive, creative public which gave life to the songs with their aural reception and oral, musical rendition. Herder writes of Homer’s “einartigen Beiwörtern und Kadenzen”, repeated expressions characteristic of orally transmitted verse, “wie sie das Ohr des Volks liebte.” (231) As *Volksdichter*, these poets not only stood out from the common people as singular geniuses, but they composed according to the tastes and passions of their *Volk*, their public. These tastes dictated the bounds within which they could exercise their genius.
The metaphor Herder employs, comparing the task of translating from Greek into German as a treacherous sea voyage for which he lacks a suitable vessel is one he repeats later on in the same foreword: “Auch beim Übersetzen ist das schwerste, diesen Ton, den Gesangton einer fremden Sprache zu übertragen, wie hundert gescheiterte Lieder und lyrische Fahrzeuge am Ufer unsrer und fremden Sprachen zeigen.” (247) Given the proliferation of travelogues and proto-ethnographies during the time of Herder’s literary activity, the practice of bringing an unfamiliar culture back home to one’s compatriots by ship was well established and would have been immediately familiar to any reader. Herder was critical of many examples of this practice (see below p. x) for their tendency to exoticize the cultures that serve as their objects and their failure to even attempt to capture the real lives and attitudes of fellow human beings. With this context in mind, it follows that Herder would liken even certain well-intentioned attempts at translation to an ill-fated sea voyage. This passage also returns to the thematic of the Hexameterstreit, and the possibility or impossibility of conveying the Ton and metrical style of a foreign work in one’s own language. In this, the oral, musical qualities of the work are the chief concern. If they cannot be replicated in the target language, the translation fails.

b. Volk, Pöbel and Menge

Much has been made of Herder’s comments in the Volkslieder as they pertain to Herder’s Volksbegriff and who does and does not count as Volk. Frederick M. Barnard, on the strength of these comments, even goes so far as to suggest that Herder prefigures Marx’s thinking that the “rabble […] clearly form no part of the people.”127 I, however, will argue that Herder remained committed to a more expansive notion of the Volk, in spite of singling out particular sectors of the population as Pöbel.

127 Frederick M. Barnard, Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History, 31.
The passage that would seem to support the reading of Herder’s *Volksbegriff* as excluding the *Pöbel* comes in the foreword to the second volume of the *Volkslieder*. In it, he writes: “Zum Volkssänger gehört nicht, daß er aus dem Pöbel sein muß, oder für den Pöbel singt; so wenig es die edelste Dichtkunst beschimpft, daß sie im Munde des Volks tönet. Volk heißt nicht, der Pöbel auf den Gassen, der singt und dichtet niemals, sondern schreit und verstümmelt.” (FHA III, 239) This should not, however, be taken as an exclusion of the *Pöbel* from the *Volk* per se.\(^{128}\) I argue instead that, in Herder’s ideal world, the *Volk* would include all speakers of the German language that can reasonably designate themselves members of a German *Nation*. “Volk heißt nicht” refers, rather, to the *Volk* of *Volkssänger* and *Volkslied*. The rabble seems to refer, in this instance, to the urban poor. This group, Herder insists, simply do not produce the cultural goods that make up the symbolic universe of a people. Thus, the terms *Volk* and *Volkslied* are as aspirational as they are descriptive: folk songs, for Herder, should exist to help elevate an entire people to a *Volk*. As Ulrich Gaier writes, “Volkslieder sind also nicht nur Lieder aus dem Volk, sondern Lieder fürs Volk zur Bildung zum Volk.” (871) His project is therefore no mere compilation of artifacts for an existing public, but part of an effort to create one.

Herder remains committed to this ideal *Volk* and public in the 1795 version of “Publikum und Vaterland,” in which he argues:

> Was uns nicht genommen werden konnte, ist *Deutsche Sprache, Deutscher Verstand und guter Wille*; diese werden, wenn und sobald sie es vermögen, einmal ein deutsches Publikum bilden. Die *Vernunft* geht auch ihres Weges fort und ist in allen Zeiten und Erdräumen nur Eine. Der *Geschmack* endlich ist eine *Nationalpflanze*; wo sie nicht gepflegt wird, oder des Bodens und Klima wegen

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\(^{128}\) Renata Schellenberg, in an otherwise excellent chapter covering Herder’s *Volk* concept and Ossian reception, takes Herder here to define the *Volk* “in generic terms by alluding to the folk’s creative vitality, rather than to its cultural or geographical specificity.” See Schellenberg, “The Impact of Ossian: Johann Gottfried Herder’s Literary Legacy” in *The Voice of the People: Writing the European Folk Revival 1760-1914*, ed. Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 12. By contrast, I read this as a narrower definition of what constitutes folk literature.
Although Publikum is not identical with Volk or Nation, in this passage he explicitly connects the formation of a “German public” (not simply a “public of German-speakers”) with the native national plant of Geschmack. Moreover, those qualities (language, understanding and good will) particular to the German nation and common to the entire Volk will one day form the basis of the German public.

The context of Herder’s remark about the Pöbel should also be considered in its context. It is embedded in a discussion of the Meister- and Minnesänger, of whom he writes: “Sie waren Volkssänger und waren auch nicht, wie man die Sache nimmt.” (FHA III, 238-9) Herder thereby anticipates the obvious question as to why he has chosen to largely ignore figures like Hans Sachs and Walther von der Vogelweide and their poetic output in his collection. One can speculate as to the reasons for Herder’s ambivalence in considering them Volkssänger, but the assertion that, to be called such, one does not necessarily need to come from the Pöbel, makes clear that the presumptive social status of these Sänger is not the operative issue. Key for Herder is that “ihre Sprache und Weise wenig Lyrisches für uns hat.” (239) Since Herder’s collection aims to deliver – and inspire the composition of – songs that will not merely be circulated in print but sung and incorporated into a living canon, the fitness of a given song for this end is crucial. He clarifies that, in order to make the available Meister- and Minnelieder suitable to the spoken and lyrical German of his day, he would have “erst den Perioden der Strophen, folglich Melodie und Wesen ändern müssen.” Such extensive revision would mean “verstümmeln”, (239) a mutilation of the original works. “Verstümmeln” is also the verb he uses to describe the self-expression of the “Pöbel auf den Gassen” – this corruption can thus be enacted by the meanest or
most refined of readers and consumers.\textsuperscript{129} The exclusion of these particular works is therefore, above all, a practical consideration, one which the forewords and prefaces to the various books of the collection see Herder make again and again. He consistently shows far less concern for the origin of the works than for their viability in becoming part of or furthering the available canon of German folk song.

At this point, a disambiguation is also necessary. By \textit{Pöbel}, Herder does not mean \textit{Menge} or even \textit{Masse}. I also doubt that Herder deploys and inflects the term \textit{Pöbel} in the same way across the \textit{Volkslieder} and his prefaces and commentary thereupon. In the above passage, I read in it the importance of a particular context: specifically, that of the urban and rural poor in the German-speaking (and possible other) lands of his day. As he writes in the preface to the first volume of the collection, the \textit{Pöbel} has indeed, at points, fulfilled an important function in the formation of the \textit{Volksseele}:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

By “\textit{Wahrheit}” he clearly understands not a universal truth, but a felt and experientially affirmed sense of reality. This is expressed not in logical syllogisms but in song. The repository on which

\textsuperscript{129} In discussing his selection and translation choices at the end of the foreword, Herder writes: “Immer ists alsdann aber besser, neue bessere Lieder zu geben, als verbesserte, d. i. verstümmelte alte.” (VL 248) Herder’s repeated use of “verstümmeln” in these introductory materials shows that it can occur in all registers and contexts of reception, whether out the mouths of the rabble or the pen of the critics.
these songs draw lies in “den sogenannten Pöbelvorurteilen, im Wahn, der Mythologie, der Tradition, der Sprache, den Gebräuchen,” etc. In comparing this passage with the one in which he declares that the Volk is not the Pöbel, a key distinction emerges between the repertoire of cultural production out of which songs are composed and the songs themselves. I also see Herder as drawing a distinction between the Pöbel of earlier days and of his own present, in which he perceives a greater division between the intelligentsia and the masses.

There is therefore, for Herder, sometimes a distinction between the poet and the people to whom he or she belongs. The latter (sometimes unselfconsciously) produce the font of cultural wealth on which the former draw. The kinds of imaginative productivity Herder lists are not rational in nature – indeed, he seems to deliberately list anti- or irrational mental operations as the province of these cultural producers: “Vorurteile”, “Wahn”, and “Hirngespinste” are set against categories of philosophical inquiry: “Logiken”, “Ästhetiken”, “Ethiken” und “Politiken”.

Further, Herder argues that examples of these irrational categories, if properly collected, can do more for “dem menschlichen Verstand” than any philosophical tract. This is an argument not only for the artistic merit of these particular categories of cultural production associated with “Wilden”, but for their potential scientific merit as well. This passage therefore further clarifies Herder’s remark from the second foreword that the Pöbel and the Volk are not to be conflated. Der Volkssänger becomes such by recognizing the poetic value in the inner and symbolic lives of the Pöbel and distilling it into a poetically viable concentrate. This does not mean, as Herder makes clear, that he or she must therefore come from or write primarily for this group.\footnote{In this, Herder’s program for enriching the available repository of Volkslieder differs decidedly from Auerbach’s for encouraging the production of a volkstümliche Literatur. Since the latter is supposed to represent the Volksleben narratively, Auerbach argues, one who composes it must understand this mode of life from inside. To compose Volkslieder, on the other hand, according to Herder, one needs to have studied the cultural artifacts that afford an insight into the inner life of the Volk. Neither views this Volk necessarily as the audience for the kind of work they wish to encourage. While both hold an intimate knowledge of this life source as a vital ingredient for literary production, Auerbach emphasizes experience and Herder careful study.}
Besides *Volk* and *Pöbel*, there is another term that must be addressed in order to clarify Herder’s understanding of the kinds of collectivities out of which folk song emerges and which are to be addressed by it: *Menge*. At the start of the foreword to the second volume, Herder makes clear that this term is of paramount importance when considering the origins of folk song and poetry in general:

Es ist wohl nicht zu zweifeln, daß *Poesie* und insonderheit *Lied* im Anfang ganz *Volksartig* d. i. leicht, einfach, aus Gegenständen und in der Sprache der Menge, so wie der reichen und für alle fühlbaren Natur gewesen. Gesang liebt Menge, die Zusammenstimmung vieler: er fördert das Ohr des Hörers und Chorus der Stimmen und Gemüter. Als Buchstaben- und Sylbenkunst, als ein Gemälde der Zusammensetzung und Farben für Leser auf dem Polster, wäre er gewiß nie entstanden, oder nie, was er unter allen Völkern ist, worden. Alle Welt und Sprache, insonderheit der älteste, graue Orient liefert von diesem Ursprunge Spuren die Menge, wenn es solche vorzuführen und aufzuzählen Not wäre. (230)

Herder is making not only a poetic point, but an historical one as well.\(^{131}\) *Poesie*, as he would have it, has its origins not in the work of poetically inclined individuals, but emerges as a decidedly collective art form characterized by plurality. Not only does Herder describe these early songs as in the language of the many, the *Menge*, but he insists that they are a product of this many, the polyphony of their many voices. In this context, I interpret *Menge* as having the same significance as *Volk*, when the former comes together to express the simple truths of their lives in song. The *Pöbel*, which Herder characterizes later on in the same foreword as unproductive of song, is thus clearly a later development. The early beginnings of song, according to Herder, are necessarily popular in nature and are the immediate product of a people with a shared language and set of objects; in other words, they are, by definition, folk songs.

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\(^{131}\) As Gaier points out, Herder is continuing a set of observations on the origins of poetry which he began in the fragments *Von der Ode* (1764) and developed further in the Versuch einer Geschichte der lyrischen Dichtkunst (1766), the Ossian-Briefwechsel (1773) and the essay Von Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst (1777), along with many scattered remarks throughout the fragments Über die neuere deutsche Literatur and the Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts (1774). See Gaier’s Stellenkommentar to the Volkslieder, p. 1063.
This passage also contrasts the “leicht” and “einfach” nature of early song, created out of “Gegenständen und in der Sprache der Menge” with “Buchstaben- und Sylbenkunst” composed as “ein Gemälde der Zusammensetzung und Farben für Leser auf dem Polster”. With this, Herder draws attention the orality and musicality of the folk song, an element just as important as the register and spirit in which it is composed. Although the very existence of the collection implicitly endorses the utility of committing to paper and compiling folk songs, this makes clear that they are not composed expressly for this end.

This is obvious enough, but the analogy to a “Gemälde der Zusammensetzung und Farben” reveals a further aspect of Herder’s conjectural origin of the folk song. It implies a direct, experiential element in folk song that can neither be conveyed by a static representation (like a painting or piece of writing) nor received through simple contemplation. It conveys a sense of togetherness in shared space which one must be physically present, either as a listener or participant, in order to access. At the end of the foreword, he deploys this analogy once again, using very similar constructions. Enlarging on what he considers “das Wesen des Liedes” (246), he writes:

Herder repeats several words and phrases here: “Zusammensetzung”, “Gemälde”, “niedlich” and “Niedlichkeit” in reference to “Farben”. These all refer to the artistic sophistication and aesthetic refinement that goes into the composition of a work, visual or literary. The use of “niedlich” seems almost to diminish these particular aesthetic values as external to a work, freighted it with artificial and, ultimately, frivolous ornamentation and polish, like the powder room of a courtly lady.

The repeated emphasis on the distinction of song from painting also seems likely to be an attempt on Herder’s part to downplay the representative, mimetic function of song in favor of its musical qualities. This is supported by Herder’s insistence on the supremacy of the “Weise” and “Geist” of the songs over their content. He does not elaborate on how one might evaluate these elements, only that they are more essential to the essence of the song and to its potential as *Gesang* than their mimetic content (“Bilder”), the lyrics or even the syllables themselves. “Lied muß gehört werden, nicht gesehen; gehört mit dem Ohr der Seele, das nicht einzelne Sylben allein zählt und mißt und wäget, sondern auf Fortklang horcht und in ihm fortschwimmt.” (VL 247) At each turn, Herder resists reducing the singular quality of a given *Volkslied* to any one element, particularly when it comes to measuring or weighing it according to artistic laws of composition or accepted aesthetic criteria.

Herder devotes part of the foreword to the second volume of the *Volkslieder* to addressing certain criticism of the *Alte Volkslieder* he received from those skeptical of the aesthetic value of folk songs (most prominently from Friedrich Nicolai and Herder’s own teacher, Johann Georg Hamann). In defense of the project, Herder clarifies some of his editorial choices.

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132 Gaier points out that “Die Vorstellung vom unsterblichen Geist, der ‚Gemüter zum Chor regt’, ist an der Geistvorstellung der christlichen Anthropologie orientiert, die den individuellen, dem Adam eingeblasenen Geist mit dem göttlichen Geist substanziell identifiziert, der auch als pfingstlicher Geist die Individuen in einer Ek-stasis vereinigt.” (FHA III, 1082-3)
choices, such as his own translations from Percy’s *Reliques of ancient Poetry* and the Shakespearean “Lieder,” which, he owns, do not conform to any widely accepted definition of “Volkslied.” In response to these criticisms, he explains:

> Das ist auch die Ursache, warum ich den Ton dieses Teils ganz verändert und hie und da Stücke geliefert habe, die freilich, wie es mir niemand demonstrieren darf, nicht Volkslieder sind, meinethalb auch nimmer Volkslieder werden mögen. Ich sah leider! beim ersten Teil, welche armelige Gestalt die gute Feldblume mache, wenn sie nun im Gartenbeet des weißen Papiers dasteht und vom honetten Publikum durchaus als Schmuck- und Kaiserblume gefälligst beäugt, zerpflückt und zergliedert werden soll, wie gern und inständig sie dieses verbäte! Man hat einmal keinen andern Begriff von Lied und Leserei, als: was da ist, muß zur Parade da sein; an Not und einfältiges Bedürfnis ist kein Gedanke. Ich habe also in diesem Teil die artigen Leser und Kunstrichter, so viel ich konnte, geschont, von Englischen Balladen kaum zwei oder drei mehr geliefert, und auch zu diesen lieber die historischen Stücke, über deren Wert keine Frage mehr ist, z. E. Percy, Murray u. dgl. gewähllet. (244)

This passage and its heavily ironic tone reveal the depth of Herder’s contempt for those who make the category error (as he sees it) of evaluating folk songs by the same criteria as those composed according to formal conventions. He is also addressing the most obvious (and for that, all the more difficult) problem of committing folk songs to paper. Printing, he seems to suggest, has a tyrannical and homogenizing effect: once a folk song has been written out, typeset and published, it takes on the outward appearance of a *Kunstgedicht* and is thus subjected to the kinds of critical evaluations normally reserved for such. The “Feldblume”, therefore, perfectly inconspicuous as long as it remains in its native soil, is made vulnerable to all manner of scrutiny when relocated to a garden plot where one would expect to see various ornamental flowers in its stead. Herder indicts the limited vision of those who would hold such obviously different works to the same standard, while reserving some implicit criticism of himself for failing to foresee this development. Writing of the folk songs he has included, his tone is already somewhat defensive: “Sie erscheinen unter dem bescheidensten Namen, ’Volkslieder‘; mehr also wie Materialien zur
Dichtkunst, als daß sie Dichtkunst selbst wären.” (245) This was already, to a certain extent, the intent of the first volume: to provide materials that would enrich the reserve of existing poetry available in German, and on which the would-be poet might draw. In making explicit that these songs are not necessarily Dichtkunst themselves, Herder almost concedes a rhetorical point to his skeptics.

Gaier, in his commentary on the Volkslieder, raises a point of criticism of his own with regard to Herder’s selection of particular songs according to their greater or lesser lyrical, rhythmic quality: “lyrisch in seinem Sinne kann nur wenig Vollendetes sein, keinesfalls alles, was in Vers- und Strophenform auftritt.” (1082) This definition of lyrical, which Gaier takes to be inconveniently strict, necessarily limits the scope of the project and its intended public. It also, he argues, traps Herder in a kind of circular logic: “Sofern der natürliche Mensch, das ‚Volk‘ im idealen Sinne, die Fähigkeit zum Lyrischen in idealer Vollkommenheit besitzen muß, sind Volkslieder = lyrische Dichtungen aus dem (idealen) Volk für die Erziehung zum (idealen) Volk.” (1082) In other words, if the Volk is supposed to already possess the greatest degree of lyrical sensibility, what can a collection of Volkslieder do to further promote it? I believe the answer to this question lies with Herder’s notion of the Publikum. Gaier is right to conclude that the Volk which produces Volkslieder is ideal, as opposed to real. So too is the Volk he hopes to help create with the proliferation of these songs. Both are, in some senses, imagined. If we conceive of the ideal Volk as an ideal public, in the sense Herder establishes in the second version of “Publikum und Vaterland,” it then becomes a community of addressees potentially extant for all of time, or at least as long as the German language exists. Until German ceases to be used and understood as a language, the Volkslieder have an ideal public and, with it, the potential to create an ideal Volk.
It is not simply a vague notion of the *Volksleben* which Herder proposes to enhance by making a rich store of folk songs available in German. Returning to one of the themes of the *Fragmente*, he also claims that proper respect, even reverence, for one’s people’s own folk songs and those of foreign peoples enables the production of great works of literature – those that might be considered both national and world literature. Herder uses the example of the English, to whom he most often compares the Germans in the work due to affinities between the two languages and peoples, to support this point:

Die größten Sänger und Günstlinge der Musen, *Chaucer* und *Spencer*, *Shakespear* und *Milton*, *Philipp Sidnei* und *Selden* – was kann, was soll ich alle nennen? waren *Enthusiasten der alten Lieder*, und der Beweis wäre nicht schwer, daß das *Lyrische*, *Mythische*, *Dramatische* und *Epische*, wodurch sich die Englische Dichtkunst *national* unterscheidet, aus diesen alten Resten alter Sänger und Dichter entstanden sei. (18-19)

Not only were the great national poets of England venerated of the old folk songs, but it was, according to Herder, their debt to these songs which gave English literature its distinctly national character. This passage also points to the fractured heritage constituted by folk songs – he does not make the claim that these great English luminaries had curated collections of songs on which to draw (the like of which he envisions for the *Volkslieder* compilation he is introducing), but “alte Resten” – fragments, remnants of bardic poetry that happened to survive the vagaries of time. Herder does not describe folk songs as making their way wholesale into classic works of literature. Rather, the productive, myth-making potential of the popular imagination provides a font of endless refreshment to the *Volk* and their poets who recognize its value. This potential constitutes the “Denkart des Stamms oder gleichsam selbst Stamm und Mark der Nation” (19), into which the poet must have deeply penetrated in order to compose works of national literature.

Herder’s audience in the prefaces to this work is clear: his fellow poets and collectors of poetry. The collection at hand, these prefaces seem to say, should be but a modest beginning.
What he advocates is not the recapture of a former glory or the return to a period of prosperity, but the inauguration of a new age of poetic glory which has not yet arrived and may fail to materialize:


It is not that Herder, in this extended analogy, aims to beg his “wealthier” fellow countrymen for a richer selection of songs than the “Handvoll Wasser” he brings to the table. Rather, he wishes to touch their sense of national pride and awaken in them shame and envy when faced with the comparison of their own cultural goods to the feast represented, primarily, by that of their French and English neighbors. It is a curious way to begin and introduce such an undertaking – he means not so much to inspire his fellow Germans with the power of his example, but rather to embarrass them with the paucity of the goods he is able to bring forth.

At the heart of this appeal lies a belief in indispensability of the early phases of a people’s development. Herder repeats several of the theoretical points made in the earlier Fragmente: first, that a people’s language, at its origin, thinks and expresses itself in tones that resolve into images and, eventually, into refined and abstract ideas. Second, that one cannot bypass any of the phases along the way in order to achieve greater precision and clarity of expression. As with the “Sprachverbesserer” who seek to make German into a more philosophically suitable language, so too must those who seek to prematurely refine German literature attend to its coarser, but nevertheless more essential, origins:

This paragraph, with which Herder ends the foreword to the first volume of the Alte Volkslieder, contains several important programmatic statements which I will analyze one by one.

First of all, the above-quoted passage complicates Herder’s understanding of Volk expressed in the statement that “Volk heißt nicht, die Pöbel auf den Gassen” (239). The above passage clarifies that Pöbel, for Herder, constitutes the receiving, not the productive sector of the Volk – where poetic production and world-making are concerned, they must be included in an understanding of Volk. If a prevailing attitude or cast of mind is dominant enough, he argues, it will penetrate down into even the lowest depths of society, into the illiterate masses.

Further, Herder here describes the Volk not so much as a political or even social body constituted by a sense of collective identity and organization, but rather a sensual community
defined by its possession of a shared foundation of cultural building blocks. Where this foundation is strong and well-preserved, abstraction and precision are sure to follow. Reading this passage together with the developmental language model offered in the *Fragmente* makes clear that, for Herder, refinement and accuracy of expression are inevitable in the life of a language. There is therefore not only no need to bring these developments about prematurely, but to do so is to proceed without solid foundation, a process that can only result in linguistic and artistic expressions that are refined and sophisticated by spiritually empty.

Finally, as he does in the *Ossian-Briefwechsel*, Herder ends by criticizing those of his contemporaries who hold their own ideas of art, morality and customs for “die Einzigen”. This is not only an argument that discourages abstraction and precision for its own sake, but which encourages pluralism and a degree of relativism. Herder’s suggestion that there is no “einzige Moral”, and that “rührende, treue gute Geschichten” might ultimately be more salutary for the life of a *Volk*, amounts to a denial of universal morality. This is more striking than the claim that there is no “einzige Musik”, as it ties Herder’s efforts for the promotion of folk song to an opposition to certain homogenizing tendencies of the Enlightenment. This is further evidence that Herder’s project is, at its core, one that embraces alterity and plurality of temperaments and worldviews.133

In this vein, as I have discussed, one of Herder’s aims with the *Volkslieder* collection is to displace the supremacy of ancient Greek letters in the estimation of his learned

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133 This is further reinforced in the introduction to the fourth book of *Alte Volkslieder*, “Lieder fremder Völker”, in which Herder makes a case for all that can be learned from foreign and “gar wilder oder halbwilder Völker”: “Daß wir mehr Völker des Erd bodens kennen, als die Alten kannte; ist Vorzug unserer Zeit[.].” He also criticizes the tendency of the travelogues of the day to exotizise foreign peoples and emphasize their physical and cultural differences from the domestic audience: “Denn muß man sich nicht bloß um Nase, Gestalt und unwesentliche Stücke der äußern Lebensart der Wilden oder Halbwilden bekümmern! nicht bloß reden, was ihr Land bringt, und wie sie noch besser unterjocht, genutzt, gequält, gehandelt und verdorben werden können: nicht reden bloß von dem was sie nicht sind – Menschen wie wir! policirte Nationen!! und Christen!! – sondern was sie sind?” (FHA III, 59-60)
contemporaries. He believes that the latter have been misled in the belief that Greek poetry, tragedy and epic represent the height of artistic achievement, writing:


Herder sees in Homer the naïve expression of a rich, though nevertheless raw and unbridled nature, rather than the studied verses of a technical master. It is this very artlessness that make Homer, “der größte Sänger der Griechen” at the same time “der größte Volksdichter.” (231) As seen in his engagement with Shakespeare, Herder consistently displays a predilection for literary figures and works which not only embody what has come to be known as world literature, but which he also considers national in the sense that they embody the essential features of the folk-temperament from which they emerge. With regard to Homer, this is central to his claim that the ancient Greeks do not represent a universal standard against which all national literatures should measure themselves and which one should aim, above all, to imitate.

As should by now be evident, this characterization of Homer is hardly meant to denigrate the greatness of his works; on the contrary, the lack of refinement Herder perceives represents, for him, proof of the vitality of the life source from which these works emerge. This is what

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134 “Man hat von einem kleinen Erdstriche, den wir erleuchtet nennen, Proben, Muster, Meisterstücke, Regeln des Geschmacks fast in allen Arten der Literatur, Dichtkunst und Menschenbildung erhalten, denen man mit Ausschließung alles andern folgt. Sehr gut! denn diese Erdstriche waren wirklich von feiner Bildung und sehr glücklicher Lage! Aber auch nicht sehr gut! wenn man dumm folgt!” (63)
135 David Damrosch identifies three general, sometimes overlapping conceptions of world literature: “as an established body of classics, as an evolving canon of masterpieces, or as multiple windows on the world.” See Damrosch, What is world literature? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 15. I take definition to be more or less representative of the current body of thought on world literature.
136 He shares this predilection with Heine – see previous chapter.
distinguishes him as a *Volksdichter*, and his works as a living organism in the cultural ecosystem of his time:

Sein herrliches Ganze ist nicht Epopee, sondern επος, Märchen, Sage, lebendige Volksgeschichte. Er setzte sich nicht auf Sammet nieder, ein *Heldengedicht* in zweimal vier- und zwanzig Gesängen nach Aristoteles Regel oder, so die Muse wollte, über die Regel hinaus, zu schreiben, sondern sang was er gehöret, stellte dar was er gesehen und lebendig erfaßt hatte: seine Rhapsodien blieben nicht in Buchläden und auf den Lumpen unsres Papiers, sondern im Ohr und im Herzen lebendiger Sänger und Hörer, aus denen sie spät gesammlet wurden und zuletzt, überhäuft mit Glossen und Vorurteilen, zu uns kamen. Homers Vers, so umfassend wie der blaue Himmel und so vielfach sich mitteilend, allem, was unter ihm wohnt, ist kein Schulen- und Kunsthexameter, sondern das Metrum der Griechen, das in ihrem reinen und feinen Ohr, in ihrer klingenden Sprache zum Gebrauch bereit lag und gleichsam als bildsamer Leim auf Götter- und Heldengestalten wartete. (231)

Herder emphasizes that it was not aesthetic conventions which guided the composition of Homer’s great epics, but the unmediated depiction of the poet’s own perceptions. If there is any art in them, so goes Herder’s argument, it is because the Greeks in general and their greatest poet in particular possessed a pure and discerning ear and a language which needed only to be taken up and animated with images of gods and heroes. They owe their greatness, not just to Homer’s genius, but to the naturally fine aesthetic judgement of the Greek *Volk* and *Publikum*.

It is in this regard that Herder distinguishes himself from so many of his contemporaries: rather than dividing the earth into *Kultur-* and *Naturmenschen*, he argues that there exists in all people a “primitive” base atop which “culture” is gradually overlaid, not which is liquidated by it. This primitiveness is therefore not something to be overcome but understood and embraced, no matter the level of cultivation achieved by a people and its literature. Culture and art, by extension, are not different in kind from this foundation – human nature, rather, is always culture-producing potential.
Conclusion

Herder’s ambitions for the German *Volk* are both national and cosmopolitan: national in the sense that he wishes to bring about a world in which his own national literature can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with that of its neighbors (primarily the French, English and Italians). It is cosmopolitan in the sense that it embraces difference and attempts to further an appreciation of each national language and literature for its unique features and affordances, not blind imitation according to the fashion of the day. Although he has the receiving context in mind, he encourages a study of even the languages and literatures he considers fundamentally unsuited for translation and adaptation into German, as a greater understanding of their particularity can only further the poet’s own powers of expression in his or her own language.

In all of this, the *Volk* has an important role to play. Although Herder’s *Volksbegriff* may seem to be a moving target, two strains emerge: Herder’s ideal *Volk*, all-encompassing and irrespective of differences in education and social standing, and the actual *Volk*, which he defines variously according to the cultural production in which it actively partakes. I have attempted to show that Herder’s early work with the concept of *Volk* and *Nation* can be clarified by a recourse to his later concept of an ideal public. This concept allows Herder to embrace a capacious idea of who the *Volk* can include: even the *Pöbel* have an important role to play. Ideally, for Herder, all would join in the composition, appreciation and furtherance of German literature, be it through reading, writing, listening or singing. Herder does not purport, with the *Volkslieder* or any of his writings on the concept of the *Volk*, to address the people directly. Rather, his modesty as to his own position leads him to place it at two levels of remove: he has in mind the creation of a kind of literary canon that would be pedagogically viable for the entire people (not necessarily a *Lehrbuch*, as he does not want to be restricted to the media of writing and print). He does not
offer up his own collection as this canon, but aims, with it, to inspire and encourage those who
might undertake this project, either as literary producers themselves or as collectors, translators
and teachers. As such, Herder’s efforts are thoroughly *volkstümlich* – he theorizes, defines and
hopes to educate a *Volk* both real and ideal, with an understanding that, in order to do so, one
must abandon all notions of purity and wholeness, and aim to bring a public into existence by
first addressing it.

**Conclusion**
In this dissertation, I have pursued several goals. I have attempted to trace the contributions three authors, Auerbach, Heine and Herder, to theorizing concept of *Volk*, and how each developed an approach to addressing and depicting the life of this mythologized social body. I have analyzed how each of them conceives of the *Volk* as a public and addressee of literature, as well as co-producer of it. I have attempted to show that, in different ways, *Volkstümlichkeit* allows all three to envision an entire people, across classes and levels of education, as engaged in the creation and reception of literature.

My first chapter traces how Berthold Auerbach conceived of *volkstümliche Literatur* as something that could bridge the gap between the common people and the learned, and between urban and rural populations. For him, *volkstücklich* precisely describes the middle position between these groups: the author of *volkstümliche Literatur* must come from the *Volk* but have enough distance from it to depict it at a remove. *Volkstümlichkeit*, in his literary program, is the potential to connect the *Volk* to *Literatur* and, in so doing, see itself in a new light. The *Volk*, for Auerbach, is a real audience with an existing set of reading practices from which he takes his cues in his own writing. He imagines them encountering literary works in the private space of the home, reading them aloud or in silence, perhaps even returning to them again and again as sources of entertainment and enrichment. For Auerbach, the *Volk* represented not only an ideal object for literary depiction, but an addressee to be taken seriously.

Analyzing Heine in my second chapter offered the opportunity for a productive comparison between them. Although his position vis a vis the *Volk* is as different from Auerbach’s as his prose style, he, too, is concerned with the *Volk* as an audience. I have attempted to show this almost by reading Heine against the grain of his own writing. To be sure,
his explicit statements on the *Volk*, French and German, are often mocking and dismissive, and he certainly did not feel at home among them. However, if we examine the totality of Heine’s thought on the subject of the common people, their relationship to culture and their role in history, it emerges that, through all the historical change he witnessed, his belief in their importance remains a strong through-line. At times, he makes this explicit, while at other times he betrays this conviction in ways that only become apparent with a careful reading. Unlike Auerbach, the *Volk* as addressee is, for Heine, more ideal than real. He is under no illusion that they belong to his immediate audience, nor do they perhaps constitute an audience at all in their present state. What they do represent for him is an immense store of largely untapped potential for shaping culture and driving historical change. As producers, they generate, both consciously and unconsciously, the repertoire of symbols and myth that make all cultural production possible. As consumers, they metabolize the arts and culture in a diffuse and unpredictable manner, playfully and naively modifying it to suit their purposes.

The role of the poet (conceived of broadly to include such diverse figures as Shakespeare and Luther) is, then, to intervene in this cycle by offering them literary works that recognize emerging role of the *Volk* as historical actor. This role goes beyond the political interests of the day but concerns the fate of civilization itself. Just as Auerbach sought to remedy the fissures between social groups (*Volk* and *Gelehrten*, urban and rural), Heine aimed to reconcile the opposition between spiritualism and sensualism which he saw as the definitive struggle of history. Whatever they might be in the present, he envisioned the *Volk* as ultimately stepping into a decisive role in bringing this reconciliation about.

Herder’s approach to addressing and depicting the *Volk*, which I analyze in my third chapter, remains one of the most influential to date. Heine lists him as one of his favorite
German literary figures, and Auerbach’s debt to him is apparent. Herder shares with both a keen interest in the Volk as public, and sought to use this public’s potential as cultural producers to create and inspire works of literature that would allow the German tradition to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its neighbors in France, England, Italy, etc. As preacher and pedagogue invested in Volkserziehung, he, like Auerbach, is interested in activating an existing audience and furnishing them with a popular canon. In many respects, however, he is closer to Heine. In the works of his I analyze, mostly from his early period, he hopes primarily to call a public into existence by addressing it. His notion of the ideal Publikum, as elaborated in the later “Publikum und Vaterland,” is key to understanding his vision for literature as received and co-produced by the Volk. The Volk is, for him, not just an imagined audience, but an audience that has not yet fully come into being. Like Heine, however, he considers them indispensable to the production of art and culture the world over. In promoting German letters, therefore, he sees himself as working toward the ultimate good of humanity.

Although all three authors deal with different forms, there are a number of parallels between them. Heine and Herder both extensively discuss the role of orality and physical co-presence in the life of the Volk. Both also take seriously the notion that different peoples have developed different Volkscharakter without basing their Volksbegriff on biological essentialism. Auerbach and Heine both openly criticize Romanticism’s approach to harnessing the life source of Volk culture as backward-looking. Both were also politically progressive Jewish intellectuals who became disillusioned with the illiberal politics of their day. Auerbach and Herder conceptualize the Volk as occupying an earlier stage of human development than the educated

urbanite and argue for the vitality that this position enables and its potential to enrich the arts and culture of the entire people. What unites all three is the co-existence of their national and cosmopolitan ambitions and the fact that each seriously considers the Volk as a public and endeavors to discovery how best they can be reached, cultivated, and tapped as a limitless resource for cultural production and renewal.

Why, then, the focus on Volkstümlichkeit? If it represents anything other than a mere historical interest, it must have some significance looking forward. Has the purpose of this dissertation been the rehabilitation (or Rettung, à la Lessing) of a political concept that has been largely abandoned due to its violent history? Certainly, a belief in the political purchase of Volkstümlichkeit has informed the selection of the authors and texts on which I have focused my analysis. I have consciously chosen authors who embrace a non-totalitarian notion of Volk and Volkstümlichkeit that delights in differences between national, ethnic and linguistic groups. Foregrounding these particular figures may indeed read as an attempt to show that things might have gone differently – that the relation between political invocations of Volk and ethno-nationalism and racism is one of contingency rather than necessity, and that Volkstümlichkeit might indeed have a place in a politics committed to the social and economic betterment of all of humanity.

Recent turns toward nationalism among left-wing intellectuals and political parties, such as the “Aufstehen” initiative organized within Die Linke in Germany, or the UK Labor party’s 2019 declaration against freedom of movement (one they would later reverse), show that the traditional alignment of nationalism with the political right is no longer taken for granted. In light of these developments, it might indeed behoove scholars to remain sensitive to identitarian tendencies within the left. This has not, however, been the principle motivation for this
dissertation, either in its selection of texts or theoretical approach. For one, the movements listed hardly represent an encouraging tendency to wrest national feeling from the clutches of right-wring extremism – on the contrary, they seem, to my mind, far more like a concession to the right than a viable alternative. As Felix Anderl summarizes in a recent article, these left-wing critics of cosmopolitanism “argue that cosmopolitan thinking, by assuming ‘sameness’ across borders, flattens differences and hence tends to be imperialist, forcing an image of the self on the world at large.”138 This runs precisely contrary to the embrace of Volkstümlichkeit represented in the works of Herder, Heine and Auerbach. Their attention to and insistence on difference across languages, ethnicities, nationalities, and borders decidedly does not exclude the possibility of cross-cultural solidarity. Is such a “national cosmopolitanism” (if it may be so called) achievable or even desirable? While this is certainly a question that this dissertation might provoke, it is likely better left to the social and political sciences than to literary studies.

What, then, does this project have to say about literary studies and, potentially, its embattled future? As a literary scholar, it is difficult for me not to read in my own work a plaidoyer for the continued importance of literature and the arts in the ways in which people come together and how they understand themselves doing so as individuals and collectives. The notion of literature that I have sought to explore here, however, includes popular forms, venues and modes of transmission not always traditionally considered objects of literary study. This not only means “popular” or “entertainment” literature, the likes of which Auerbach published in his Volkskalender, but ephemeral forms such as songs, chants, slogans, pamphlets. These are forms which may be oral or written, and the primary function of which might be to address a subject’s sense of self or collective belonging rather than convey information. They might also represent

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works of reception (adaptations, pastiches, translations, even misremembered quotations) of
literary classics, as in the case of Heine’s descriptions of how members of the Volk receive and
quote Goethe or Herder’s Shakespeare translations, re-packaged as Volkslieder. This approach to
literature has as much to do with the works themselves as how they are received by everyday
audiences, and the various Aneignungsprozesse these audience members subject them to.

This kind of diffuse reception is difficult to trace and does not necessarily involve a
stable audience. Herein lies both its great advantage and the challenge in studying it. I believe,
however, that all three of the authors I have studied invested their hopes in this potential of
literature and its reach beyond their immediate audiences and even the ones they could imagine.
As far as literary studies are concerned, technology has likely made tracing such a reception
conceivable. But what of close reading? As I have tried to demonstrate, popular practices of
reception and audience formation merit serious, scholarly attention and need theorizing. Such
phenomena are, of course, not purely literary but also contain a political element. As Heine
might have it, literary works contribute to the subject-formation and self-understanding of
individuals, classes and peoples. We should, therefore, take an interest in the kinds of works they
are being offered and which move them, though we can never precisely anticipate the impact that
literature and the arts might have.

I have chosen to focus on Volkstümlichkeit precisely because it disrupts binaries between
engaged literature and the autonomy of art, between “high” and “low” literature, canonical and
popular works, and between real and ideal audiences. Volkstümlichkeit sits at the nexus of all of
these highly contested terms and reveals their deep interrelation. The inherent figurativeness of
the term itself makes it available for literary uses and makes literary studies uniquely suited to
study it, bringing its contours into relief in a way that the history of concepts is unable to. Above
all, *Volkstümlichkeit* shows that literature has inherent political potential, although not in the ways we might think. i.e. direct and deliberate use to affect a particular kind of change or engender a particular view among an audience or population. Rather, its power lies precisely in its resistance to this kind of direct deployment – its reach is unpredictable and difficult to direct.

It is for this reason that it deserves careful study, not apart from but in concert with other disciplines.
Bibliography

Primary Literature


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Secondary Literature


