

Diderot, Spinoza, and the Question of Virtue

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the French philosopher and writer Denis Diderot (1713-84) and the extent to which, in his portrayal of virtue, he can be said to demonstrate convergences of ideas with Spinoza. The texts that form the primary basis for a consideration of Diderot's post-Spinozist mentality are Le Fils naturel, Le Neveu de Rameau and Mme de la Carlière. As a preliminary to this study, I firstly examine Spinoza's thinking regarding virtue and the necessity of moderation in its exercise, before turning my attention to Diderot's texts. I argue that Diderot's works reveal significant similarities to Spinoza's thinking, which thus highlights Diderot's radicalism and the wide-reaching impact of Spinoza on the Enlightenment.

The over-arching purpose of my thesis is to consider how Lessing and Diderot dealt with the impact of Spinozist thought and to analyze the extent to which they can be said to exemplify a post-Spinozist mentality in their portrayal of three main issues: virtue and vice; freedom; and natural religion. The aim of my thesis is not to demonstrate the direct influence of Spinoza on Lessing since it is notoriously difficult to trace influences in intellectual history. It seeks rather to locate similarities or differences of approach in their treatment of these issues. The originality of my thesis lies in its analysis of Lessing's and Diderot's literary works as the evidence for demonstrating their post-Spinozist mentality, especially as these works have been somewhat neglected in studies of the relationship between these thinkers.

It is increasingly recognized that the Enlightenment was, in many ways, an attempt to come to terms with the challenge posed by Spinoza's philosophy.¹ Spinoza's innovatory writings gave new impetus to a traditional European philosophical reflection on virtue. Significantly, while

¹ See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (University of London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984); Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza: [Un]contemporary Variations*, ed. by Timothy S. Murphy (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); and E. F. Carritt, *Morals and Politics: Theories of their Relation from Hobbes and Spinoza to Marx and Bosanquet* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935) for further discussion of the extent to which the Enlightenment was an attempt to come to terms with Spinoza's radical doctrines.

much research has been conducted into Spinoza's impact on the Enlightenment, a detailed exploration of his impact on the thinking of individual writers is still needed. To redress this imbalance, in this article I examine the way in which Diderot grappled with questions about the nature of virtue in a post-Spinozist world, in which the intellectual climate had undermined traditional moral certainties about virtue and vice.²

The aim of this article is not to demonstrate the direct influence of Spinoza on Diderot, because it is virtually impossible to trace direct influences in intellectual history. Rather, the aim is to locate similarities and differences of approach in their conceptualization of virtue. I will consider the extent to which Diderot can be said to exemplify a post-Spinozist mentality in his portrayal of virtue and vice. The originality of this article lies in my analysis of three of Diderot's literary works from across his career (*Le Fils naturel* (published in 1757); *Le Neveu de Rameau* (composed between 1761-73);² and *Mme de la Carlière* (composed in 1772))³ as the evidence for demonstrating Diderot's post-Spinozist mentality, especially as these works have been neglected in studies of the relationship between these two thinkers. Alongside the nature of virtue and vice, I will also consider Spinoza's and Diderot's investment in the concept of balance when exercising virtue. As a preliminary to this study, I will first examine the received notions of virtue and vice within Diderot's and Spinoza's intellectual context before turning to an examination of the ways in which virtue is conceptualized in their respective works.

With a few exceptions, pre-Enlightenment philosophical traditions tended to regard virtue and vice as absolute categories which could not be reconciled.⁴ The absolute notions of virtue and vice continued to hold sway into the eighteenth century and dictionaries of the time, such as that of Richelet, define 'vice' simply as 'Habitude ou défaut contraire à la vertu' [*Habit or flaw contrary to virtue*].⁵ However, a significant challenge to the absolute nature of virtue and vice appeared in the eighteenth century, when philosophers were adopting new perspectives with

² The first printed edition appeared in 1805, translated by Goethe into German.

³ The first printed edition appeared in 1773.

⁴ Such an opinion was influenced by religious dogma and propagated by such groups as the Stoics who believed that 'good and evil are antithetical'. See Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1985), I: *Stoicism in Classical Latin Literature*, 34. Aristotle was one exception to this trend: he challenged the absolute nature of virtue and vice, claiming that virtue was merely an 'intermediacy between two bad states, one involving excess, the other involving deficiency' (*Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by Sarah Broadie, trans. by Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 117). Aristotle's claim suggests that he saw virtue, not as an absolute value, but as one that could change depending on the context.

⁵ Pierre Richelet, *Dictionnaire portatif de la langue française* (Lyon: Bruyset-Ponthus, 1756), p. 658. Unless otherwise stated translations into English are by the author.

regard to conduct. G. W. Leibniz, for example, distinguished between different types of evil, saying: ‘Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin.’⁶ Leibniz’s division of evil into different sub-categories implies that he did not see evil as a single absolute category, as had traditionally been the view, but rather as a multi-faceted category, with a much more complicated relationship to virtue. Furthermore, Leibniz argued that ‘God wills order and good; but it happens sometimes that what is disorder in the part is order in the whole’.⁷ Whilst he does not claim that all evil necessarily produces a higher good, Leibniz does indicate that partial imperfection may be necessary to bring about ‘the best’.⁸ The Enlightenment *philosophes* also challenged the notion of the absolute nature of virtue and vice. Hence, Julien Offray de La Mettrie wrote that they believed that ‘[i]l n’y a rien d’absolument juste, rien d’absolument injuste. [...] nuls vices, [...] nuls crimes absolus’ [*there is nothing absolutely just, nothing absolutely unjust. [...] no vices [...] no absolute crimes*].⁹

Having considered the intellectual context surrounding Diderot, it is now appropriate to turn our attention to Spinoza’s own doctrine of the nature of virtue and vice, before examining Diderot’s works in the light of the Dutch philosopher’s thinking. Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) wrote extensively about the nature of virtue and vice. In Spinoza’s writings the highest and most absolute form of virtue is ‘blessedness’, a state of union with God that he defines as the highest form of cognition. Consequently, Spinoza equates absolute virtue to happiness since it leads to divine love.¹⁰ However, Spinoza accepts that it is impossible for man to achieve this absolute understanding (and a complete union with God) and, hence, it is impossible for him to achieve absolute virtue. Stuart Hampshire explains it thus: ‘[a] wise man is still only a man, and therefore only relatively wise and (by definition) not perfect or all-powerful; he cannot be wholly free, rational and self-contained’.¹¹ Only God is completely rational, the sole cause of his actions and completely virtuous. By contrast, man constantly has to fight against the effects of external causes and has only a relative virtue and a relative dominion over the emotions, often failing to

⁶ G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (Amsterdam: 1710; repr. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), trans. by E. M. Huggard, p. 136.

⁷ Leibniz, p. 201.

⁸ Leibniz, p. 279.

⁹ Ann Thomson, *Materialism and Society in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: La Mettrie’s ‘Discours Préliminaire’* (Geneva; Paris: Librairie Droz, 1981), p. 223.

¹⁰ See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book V, P42, Dem. repr. in, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) pp. 401-617.

¹¹ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 127.

restrain them.¹² Indeed, in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) Spinoza reveals that the individual's virtue is relative to his ability to know God:

[O]ur highest good and perfection [...] depend solely on the knowledge of God. [...] [K]nowledge and love of God is the highest good. [...] The worldling cannot understand these things [...] because he has too meager a knowledge of God.¹³

Therefore, whilst Spinoza indicates that virtue is itself absolute, he recognizes that it is impossible for man to achieve an absolute attainment of it since it depends on his relative capacity for understanding and improving his intellect.

Whether he is postulating virtue as a relative or absolute concept, the notion of balance is a key factor in Spinoza's exposition of virtue. He sees balance as a vital quality for the successful pursuit of virtue. For example, Spinoza argues that an imbalanced approach to virtue can lead to misery. In his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (1677) Spinoza maintains that many people have suffered 'most miserably' in the pursuit of honour.¹⁴ Significantly, what makes honour dangerous is not honour per se but rather the fact that it is pursued to the exclusion of a 'love toward the eternal and infinite thing'.¹⁵ It is, therefore, an excessive concentration on honour that produces vice; hence, moderation and balance are vital qualities for the successful pursuit of virtue.

Throughout his career, Denis Diderot (1713-1784), in a similar manner to Spinoza, revealed a tension in his thinking between seeing moral concepts as absolute – as 'fixed moral principles' – and as relative, that is, 'judged essentially according to a purely internal, subjective and individual principle'.¹⁶ This bifurcation of his thinking suggests that Diderot swayed between seeing virtue as purely relative and entirely absolute. Diderot swayed between converging and disagreeing with Spinoza's understanding that virtue is a moral absolute: he argues both that virtue is equated to happiness and is thus a moral absolute and later 'questions the identity of

¹² Equally, in his *Short Treatise* Spinoza indicates that virtue has, in reality, a relative dominion over the emotions: 'Though we see that a thing is good or bad, we nevertheless find no power in ourselves to do the good, or omit the bad, while at other times we do [find this power in ourselves]' (*Collected Works of Spinoza*, pp. 46-156 (p. 138)).

¹³ Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. by R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ *Collected Works of Spinoza*, pp. 3-45 (p. 9).

¹⁵ *Collected Works of Spinoza*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Anne R. Larsen, 'Ethical Mutability in Four of Diderot's Tales', *Studies on Voltaire*, 116 (1973), 221-34 (pp. 221-22).

virtue with happiness'.¹⁷ Diderot's struggle over the separability of happiness and virtue is played out in two of his plays, *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in which he came to two very different conclusions. In *Le Fils naturel*, Diderot recognizes virtue and vice to be moral absolutes; hence, the truly unhappy characters are the ones who forsake virtue. Even though the pursuit of virtue may initially require a certain amount of painful sacrifice, Diderot demonstrates that virtue and happiness are ultimately reconciled through that very medium of sacrifice. For example, Dorval is tormented by virtue, so that he even calls it a '[d]ouce et cruelle idée!', and says that virtue is synonymous with sacrifice, not happiness: 'ô vertu! Qu'es-tu, si tu n'exiges aucun sacrifice?' [*O Virtue, what are you if you do not demand any sacrifice?*].¹⁸ Significantly though, these sacrifices are subsequently described as that which links virtue to happiness. Indeed, it is after Dorval accepts that he must sacrifice himself for virtue that he feels happy and envisages being able to experience 'le repos' [*calm*];¹⁹ this reveals the reconciliation of virtue and happiness and thus that virtue and vice are absolute moral categories.

By contrast, Diderot comes to a completely different conclusion as to the relationship between virtue and happiness in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Whereas in *Le Fils naturel*, Diderot ultimately converges with Spinoza's portrayal of virtue and happiness and highlights its absolute moral nature, in this play he highlights the relativity and separability of virtue and happiness and shows a dissimilarity from the Spinozist perspective. He suggests, for example, that happiness is not necessarily solely attained through virtue, since le Neveu gains his happiness from living by his own morally unconventional principles:

[p]uisque je puis faire mon bonheur par des vices qui me sont naturels [...] il serait bien singulier que j'allasse me tourmenter [...] pour [...] me faire autre que je ne suis.²⁰

[*since I can achieve happiness through vices which are natural to me [. . .] it would be very strange for me to torture myself [. . .] so as to make myself quite different from what I am*]

¹⁷ Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot's Politics: A Study of the Evolution of Diderot's Political Thought After the Encyclopédie* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), p.52.

¹⁸ Denis Diderot, *Le Fils naturel*, repr. in Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by H. Dieckmann and J. Varloot 25 vols (Paris: Hermann, 1975-), x, pp. 13-81 (p. 54).

¹⁹ *Le Fils naturel*, p. 55.

²⁰ Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, repr. in *Oeuvres complètes*, xii, pp. 69-196 (pp. 118-19).

This notion that virtue is relative to, and determined by, the individual is further exemplified when Lui says to Moi that ‘il pourrait arriver que vous appellassiez vice ce que j’appelle vertu, et vertu ce que j’appelle vice’²¹ [*it could turn out that what you call vice I call virtue, and that you call virtue what I call vice*]. Diderot, therefore, recognizes that virtue and vice have the potential to be more fluid in meaning and cannot be said to be absolute guides for the individual to follow. Hence, moral conduct may vary from one individual to another, but there are limits which most refuse to cross without feeling remorse or guilt.²²

The importance of balance when exercising and dealing with virtue is particularly well illustrated in Diderot’s *Mme de la Carlière*, which offers a similar outlook to that of Spinoza in showing certain traditionally virtuous characteristics to be dangerous when taken to excess. In this text, the female protagonist’s whole existence seems to revolve around securing her new husband’s absolute fidelity to her. Having been unhappily married before, she decides that she must get a public declaration from Desroches that he will be unswervingly faithful. Failure to do so on his part will lead to his denunciation and the irrevocable end to their marriage. Unfortunately, Desroches does eventually have an affair. Significantly, though, he is not condemned by the narrator for having broken his word, which suggests that the narrator supports and understands Desroches’ actions.²³ Indeed, the narrator excuses Desroches on the basis that Mme de la Carlière ‘voulut absolument [...] nourrir’,²⁴ [*she was determined to breast-feed*] rather than employing a wet-nurse, to the point at which a man of Desroches’ nature was pushed to his limits: ‘Ce fut un long et périlleux intervalle pour un jeune homme d’un tempérament ardent et peu fait à cette espèce de régime’²⁵ [*this was a long and dangerous interval for a hotblooded young man who was not made for such a regime*]. Moreover, the narrator condemns Mme de la Carlière as ‘la vertueuse [...] inflexible et hautaine bégueule’ [*the virtuous [...] inflexible and haughty prude*]. The reference to Mme de la Carlière being haughty suggests that her pursuit of

²¹ *Le Neveu de Rameau*, p. 139.

²² Diderot’s desire to demonstrate the difficulty of making moral judgements, either from a doctrinal or a sentimental point of view, is further illustrated in two of the *Contes*: *Ceci n’est pas un conte* (1772) and the *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1773).

²³ D. J. Adams, ‘A Diderot Triptych Re-examined’, *Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 47-59 (p. 52).

²⁴ Denis Diderot, *Mme de la Carlière*, repr. in *Oeuvres complètes*, XII, pp. 549-75 (p. 559).

²⁵ *Mme de la Carlière*, p. 559.

virtue, in the form of fidelity, has become a matter of supercilious pride.²⁶ This implies that her virtue is deficient since it is uncompromizing in its inhuman refusal to forgive, despite Desroches' obviously sincere repentance for his infidelity.²⁷ Furthermore, the consequences of her attitude result in the complete destruction, not only of Desroches – who is vilified by the public (although there is the possibility that his reputation might recover) – but also of herself and their child, both of whom die.²⁸ These outcomes strongly indicate that virtue, when taken to excess on the basis of a rigid principle, can cause vicious results and therefore should only be pursued with moderation.

From the texts considered it is clear that Diderot's work does not provide a unified depiction of virtue. Ultimately, he appears to provide two answers to the question of whether virtue and vice are absolute or relative categories: the first, illustrated in *Le Fils naturel*, suggests that virtue and vice are absolute categories, while the second, illustrated in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, suggests that they are relative. In terms of the question of whether balance is important when exercising virtue, *Mme de la Carlière* clearly represents Diderot's opinion that moderation and reasonableness should be prioritized in the exercise of virtue. This desire for balance perhaps suggests one reason why Diderot was, throughout his career, torn between a strictly absolute and a more moderate, relative view of virtue. It is, moreover, evident that with regard both to the nature of virtue, and the need for balance when exercising it, Diderot shows affinities to Spinoza's doctrines. Both philosophers embrace the ideal notion that virtue is absolute, whilst acknowledging that in practice it is often relative; they also show the need for balance when pursuing virtue.

The significance of such convergences of opinion between the two philosophers is that they provide an insight into the relationship between Spinoza and Diderot. Whereas Spinoza's conception of the role of virtue remains largely abstract, this paper shows how Diderot concretizes his view of the role of virtue through fiction. His fictional texts depict potential real-life scenarios and play out the tensions between and consequences of relative and absolute views of virtue and vice. In dramatizing these theories he implicitly takes into account human

²⁶ *Mme de la Carlière* reinforces the views expressed in the *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (repr. in *Oeuvres Complètes*, XII, pp. 577-644 (p. 605)) on the issue of fidelity. The Tahitian, Orou, argues that enforced fidelity is contrary to nature and completely unreasonable; given that man's very nature is changeable, he takes the view that he should not be forced to make unchangeable marital vows.

²⁷ *Mme de la Carlière*, p. 569.

²⁸ *Mme de la Carlière*, p. 569, p. 571.

tendencies and emotions and the strains of life to a greater degree than Spinoza, and plays out how this may affect the individual's view of virtue. Furthermore, a study of Diderot's affinities with Spinoza serves to show his growing independence from the philosophical concepts and values which constituted the traditionally accepted pool of thinking in the eighteenth century, and his increasing association with the radical side of the Enlightenment which rebelled against this norm.

‘Botschafter der Musik’:¹ The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Role of Classical Music in Post-War German Identity

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Abstract

This working paper looks at the role of classical music in the establishment of modern German identity. My wider doctoral research project examines the importance of music in shaping differing senses of positive collective identity in both West Germany and Austria since the 1920s, and explores the exclusion of classical music from critical memory narratives, with particular reference to musical autobiographies. This paper focuses more narrowly on the situation in Germany immediately after World War II. While traditional accounts of the period tend to deal with individual musicians, I argue that musical institutions were central to a sense of being German. A brief case study of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra illustrates the tangled relationship between music and politics, and shows the ways in which musical identity was contested. Germans saw positive continuity in their mastery of the classical tradition, while the American occupiers saw the German belief in their musical superiority as a dangerous and unstable base for national restoration. My analysis of the Orchestra reveals that classical music was adopted as a politically neutral source of national pride despite being both highly susceptible to political manipulation and implicated in past militaristic and racist ideologies from which it was supposedly aloof.

Thomas Mann once argued: ‘Soll Faust der Repräsentant der deutschen Seele sein, so müßte er musikalisch sein’.² Since the middle of the nineteenth century, classical music has indeed been the art form most closely identified with the development of the German nation, and musicians and writers have argued that the art form itself belongs to Germany. However, the

¹ ‘Ambassador(s) of Music’. All translations into English are by the current author unless otherwise noted. *Botschafter der Musik*. Dir. Hermann Stöß. Start-Film. 1952. A poster for the film and critical responses to it are reproduced in *Ein hundred Jahre Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester. Darstellung in Dokumenten*, ed. by Peter Muck, 3 vols (Tutzing: Schneider, 1982), II, p. 242.

² ‘If Faust is to represent the German soul, he would have to be German’. Thomas Mann, ‘*Deutschland und die Deutschen*’, in *The Intellectual Tradition of Modern Germany*, ed. by Ronald Taylor, 2 vols (London: Bell & Sons, 1973), II, 235.

importance of music to wider German culture does not merely lie in the accident of birth that led Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to live and work in what is now Germany and Austria. Music's prominence in German society outside the professional sphere owes much to the aesthetic principles of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Their concept of education was focused on the development of the German classical tradition, in which the importance of the creative artist to society played a major part. Artistic mastery would then lead to 'German greatness'. Since music was by definition the most German art, it played a formative role in the creation of a national culture.

The importance of music to identity formation in the nineteenth century has been well established.³ Yet the focus on the period of German unification ignores the continuing appropriation of music to provide a stable and positive sense of 'Germanness' for the modern nation. Moreover, the works that do examine German music since World War II generally explore the roles of individuals,⁴ without acknowledging the vital role of musical institutions. Major orchestras with international reputations such as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra have become the popular standard bearers for classical music at a time when its popularity is otherwise diminishing, and have therefore had an enormous influence on the public perception of musical identity. This working paper uses a case study of the Berlin Philharmonic in the years immediately after 1945 as a key example of the utilization of musical institutions for nation-building ends. It will also investigate the contradictory ways in which the dominant cultural discourse consciously uses music to represent a revitalized nation while simultaneously denying that musical sound can ever be political.

The most explicit expression of German musical nationalism can be found in the writings and music of Richard Wagner. Despite this, instrumental music rather than Wagnerian music drama is more often deemed uniquely German. Instrumental music became prominent as an agent of identity formation precisely because its aesthetic was perceived as less aggressively nationalistic. This sense of the symphony as a manifestation of a peaceful nation is largely illusory, because it still reflects the assumed German mastery of the classical musical tradition. The struggle to justify and de-politicize such an expression of German superiority can be seen in the notebooks of the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, whom the

³ For the work in this area by Celia Applegate see: 'What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation', *German Studies Review*, 15 (1992), 21-32, Celia Applegate, 'How German Is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early Nineteenth Century', *19th-Century Music*, 21 (1998), 274-96, as well as *Music & German National Identity*, ed. by Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴ Individuals who are often discussed include Wilhelm Furtwängler and Daniel Barenboim. See Celia Applegate, 'Saving Music: Enduring Experiences of Culture', *History & Memory*, 17 (2005), 217-37.

Allies saw as the archetypal German musical figure during and after World War II. Furtwängler wrote in 1929:

Denn Deutschland – diese Frage ist rein historisch-objektiv und hat mit Nationalismus irgendwelcher Art nichts zu tun – ist der eigentliche Schöpfer der reinen Instrumentalmusik großen Stils, eine wirkliche Sinfonie ist von Nicht-Deutschen überhaupt nie geschrieben worden.⁵

The conductor's rejection of the link between German creativity and nationalism reflects the way music has been conceptualized in Germany since the nineteenth century. Drawing primarily upon the ideas of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Arthur Schopenhauer and the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, music is seen as leading its listeners to the divine rather than encouraging words and concrete thought. This reluctance to allow for extra-musical influence, coupled with the fleeting nature of sound and a belief in the timeless quality of great compositions, makes it very easy to decontextualize performances and to argue that music operated in a realm beyond worldly concerns. The subsequent conclusion, that music is an untainted and apolitical art, is unsustainable given the myriad instances where musical performances have been staged to invoke particular ideological responses. But the canard that 'absolute instrumental music is wholly incapable of declaring itself for or against a political direction'⁶ is the very reason music was able to regain its national prestige in the first years of the Federal Republic.⁷

In addition to the wider sociological implications of perceived German musical pre-eminence and the denial that music can be manipulated to political ends, the type of German culture and thus identity represented by classical music is also problematic, being deeply antithetical to modernism. By the twentieth century, as Bollenbeck observes, appeals to concepts such as 'German culture', 'German spirit', and 'German art' represented attempts to ward off a perceived cultural crisis, in which German identity was threatened by the internationalism of modernism. This modernist angst ensured bourgeois culture was not

⁵ 'For Germany – this question is purely historical and objective and has nothing to do with any form of nationalism – is the true creator of pure instrumental music in the great style. A real symphony has never been written by a non-German'. Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Aufzeichnungen 1924 – 1954* (Zurich: Atlantis Musikbuch, 1996), p. 64.

⁶ Paul Höffer, quoted in Elizabeth Janik, "'The Golden Hunger Years': Music and Superpower Rivalry in Occupied Berlin", *German History*, 1 (2004), 76-100 (p. 79).

⁷ See Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945-1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) for a complete discussion of this period in both West and East Germany.

immune from Nazi ideology, and was in fact quite susceptible to it.⁸ So the use of music to represent a morally upright Germany that continued to flourish despite the depredations of Nazism is deeply flawed.

Not only were classical institutions and musicians complicit to varying degrees with the Nazi regime, but the enduring German musical tradition they revered was itself extremely reactionary. The Austro-German musical canon as constructed throughout the nineteenth century favoured composers who were able to contribute to the development of musical nationalism on the basis of their racial and stylistic background. This led to the fraught reception of Felix Mendelssohn in Berlin and Leipzig and later Gustav Mahler in Vienna due to their Jewish heritage, regardless of the associations of both with major establishment institutions (the Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Vienna State Opera respectively). Franz Schubert was similarly omitted from the canon for many years as a composer mainly of songs rather than the more appropriately Germanic symphonies. Such failure to embrace outsiders continued into the twentieth century. Although culture in Weimar Germany and particularly Berlin has a radical reputation, the work of members of the Second Viennese School and other local modernists found more appreciation within their own loose musical and critical circle than with either the bulk of subscription concert audiences or those in positions of power, whose musical sympathies were more inclined towards Beethoven and Wagner. Conservative conductors in particular rarely cite inspirations more recent than Anton Bruckner.⁹

This reactionary legacy illustrates why music, generally seen as the major surviving source of modern and untainted German national pride, is actually part of a cultural sphere that is much murkier. As a result, it is difficult to accept a musical institution as a suitably reformed ambassador of 'the good Germany'. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in particular epitomized a conservative cultural agenda that definitely did not fit with the American Occupying Army's intention of 'changing German attitudes and behaviours'.¹⁰ The immediate post-War history of the Orchestra reflects its position as a major site of conflict

⁸ Georg Bollenbeck, 'German Kultur, the Bildungsbürgertum, and its Susceptibility to National Socialism', trans. by Thomas La Presti, *German Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 67-83 (p. 74).

⁹ For accounts of musical modernists in Berlin, see Gottfried von Einem, *Ich hab' unendlich viel erlebt*, ed. by Manfred A. Schmid (Vienna: Ibero & Moldern, 1995) and H.H. Stuckenschmidt, *Zum Hören geboren. Ein Leben mit der Musik unserer Zeit* (Munich: Piper, 1979). On the conservative side, Felix Weingartner, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Vienna: Wiener Literarische Anstalt, 1923), Bruno Walter, *Thema und Variationen. Erinnerungen und Gedanken*, rev. edn (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 1960), and Furtwängler, *Aufzeichnungen 1924 – 1954* provide a sample.

¹⁰ Richard L. Merritt, *Democracy Imposed: US Occupation and the German Public, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 34.

between the American view of music as an art in need of democratization and the German conviction that music represented noble values which had survived the baser instincts of war.¹¹

The Berlin Philharmonic had given the last official concert in the Third Reich on 11 April 1945 with a programme organized for the armament industry. The Nazi Party member Robert Heger conducted the Orchestra in Beethoven's Violin Concerto, and Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, opening the performance with the final scene from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* at Albert Speer's request. But they were not to be absent from the stage for long, and the swift resumption of performances gave rise to the myth that the Orchestra must have been innocent of Nazi complicity, since it had returned to the scene so quickly.¹² Almost as soon as the Red Army had arrived in Berlin, the Philharmonic's *Intendant* Gerhart von Westermann was trying to establish whether the Orchestra was again 'einsatzbereit'.¹³ His enquiry of 8 May was soon followed by a meeting in the flat of the clarinettist Fritz Fischer on 13 May.¹⁴ The first rehearsals were held in the Wilmersdorf Town Hall from 21 May.¹⁵

At first it seemed as though genuine change was in the air. As the first Allied troops to reach Berlin, the Red Army had officially taken control of the movements of the City's citizens, and thus its Orchestra. The Soviet Cultural Officers then engineered the appointment of Leo Borchard as the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Borchard had strong anti-Nazi and anti-fascist credentials, and had been one of few major musicians to reject the idea of 'inner emigration' and to actively resist the regime.¹⁶ The Orchestra had little choice but to accept his appointment, given that their preferred candidate Wilhelm Furtwängler was at the top of the American blacklist.¹⁷

Borchard and the Orchestra's first post-War performance, on 26 May 1945,¹⁸ found a middle ground between tradition, renewal, and appeasing the occupiers. The programme consisted of the return of a previously banned classic in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's*

¹¹ This defence of the noble values of music has in fact been mounted by those most deeply involved with the Nazi regime, as in Elly Ney, *Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen. Mein Leben aus der Musik*, 3rd edn (Aschaffenburg: Pattlock, 1957), p. 193.

¹² For an account of the propaganda role played by the Philharmonic during the Third Reich, see Misha Aster, *Das Reichsorchester: Die Berliner Philharmoniker und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Siedler, 2007).

¹³ 'Ready for action'. Muck, II, p. 187.

¹⁴ Erich Hartmann, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker in der Stunde Null. Erinnerungen an die Zeit des Untergangs der alten Philharmonie vor 50 Jahren* (Berlin: Feja, 1996), p. 36.

¹⁵ Muck, II, p. 187.

¹⁶ Matthias Sträßner, *Der Dirigent Leo Borchard. Eine unvollendete Karriere* (Berlin: Transit Buchverlag, 1999), p. 196.

¹⁷ Michael Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 199.

¹⁸ Klaus Geitel, 'Chronik aus der Geschichte des Berliner Philharmonischen Orchesters', in *100 Jahre Berliner Philharmoniker: Große Deutsche Dirigenten*, ed. by Klaus Geitel (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1981), p. 215.

Dream Overture, part of the Austro-German musical canon with one of Mozart's Violin Concertos, and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony as a nod to the Russians. German audiences certainly approved, travelling hours on foot for the 'memorable occasion'.¹⁹ They were also enthusiastic over the next series of concerts on 10 and 11 June, for which Borchard repeated his national balancing act by leading the Orchestra in Glazunov's Symphonic Poem of 1885, two Debussy Nocturnes and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. But these triumphant early performances created a problem. The Philharmonic's performances trumpeted the message that German culture had survived and encouraged the audience to believe that their identity as proud Germans could be salvaged. The American officer Carlos Mosely agreed that classical music was 'THE ONLY THING left that they can glory in'.²⁰ The occupiers, however, saw any signs of German glory as a negative. The continued German pride in music came from its promulgation of conservative, nationalistic traditions. And this was precisely what the branch of the American Military Government controlling musical, theatrical and literary denazification, the Information Control Division (ICD), was supposed to challenge with its brief to cause a 'revolution' in German thought.²¹ The almost unaltered Orchestra's renewed popularity did not help Information Control's drive to 'make certain that "prestige" organisations [were] one hundred percent clean'.²²

The Berlin Philharmonic had come under American administration later in 1945 after moving its main concert venue to the Titania Palace in Steglitz and its rehearsal rooms to Dahlem. The Americans initially thought orchestral denazification was going to plan, since Borchard's selection had allowed the Orchestra to present a repentant face. Another sign of change was the expulsion of known Nazis. Predictably, these departures dismayed the remaining players, who maintained that such '[Parteigenossen] noch das Wohlwollen des Orchesters besaßen'.²³ Denazification continued nevertheless, and even Borchard's accidental shooting and death on 23 August did not seem to derail the process. After a memorial concert conducted by a former Nazi, ICD ensured the Orchestra selected a new chief conductor who was also politically suitable. Sergiu Celibidache was Romanian by birth and Buddhist by

¹⁹ Anonymous reporter, *L.A.Z.*, Nr. 13, reproduced in Muck, II p. 190.

²⁰ David Monod, *German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 208.

²¹ David Monod, 'Verklärte Nacht: Denazifying Musicians under American Control', in *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933-1945*, ed. by Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2003), p. 297

²² General Robert McClure, quoted in Monod, 'Verklärte Nacht', p. 307.

²³ '[Party members] still had the goodwill of the Orchestra'. Hartmann, p. 9.

inclination, and had never supported the Nazi regime.²⁴ ICD also arranged for ‘*der farbige Dirigent*’ Rudolph Weber to conduct the Orchestra in Weber’s Overture to *Oberon*, W. Grant Still’s Afro-American Symphony and Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony on 2 and 3 September 1945, in an optimistic but ultimately token gesture.

Celibidache’s youth and nationality were supposed to suggest a break with German cultural traditions. This was only partly true. His first concert on 29 August 1945, which was a great success, consisted inoffensively of Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* Overture, Weber’s Bassoon Concerto and Dvorák’s *New World* Symphony. His second on 15 September was a more peculiar mixture of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Germans. The Andante from Mendelssohn’s Italian Symphony shared the programme with one of the earliest prominent post-War performances of Wagner, with the Overture to *Tannhäuser*. This should have been a problem, since in many ways Wagner was the most tainted musician of them all. But his steady reintroduction met with surprisingly little comment in the German media, and little resistance from the ICD.²⁵ Their policy was not to comment on the ethnicity or nationality of composers, whether to emphasize positively or to condemn, as this was considered too reminiscent of the Nazis’ own racial ideology. But the uncontroversial performance of Wagner actually served to reinforce the belief that musical culture did not need reforming at all, as did the rapturous crowds the Orchestra had been drawing.

This conflict between the German wish for cultural continuity and the Allied programme for cultural transformation came to a head in 1946, when the members of the Philharmonic, rather irritated by Celibidache’s rehearsal techniques and his general inexperience,²⁶ began to agitate for Wilhelm Furtwängler’s return.²⁷ Furtwängler’s massive public profile meant that he could not be rehabilitated lightly. In the eyes of Germany and indeed much of the musical world, he represented the old German nation, even before his behaviour under the Nazis was taken into account. This conflation of musical and political identity convinced Information Control that any swift continuation of Furtwängler’s career would indicate that elements of the Nazi past and traditional conservatism had bled into the new era.²⁸ Yet a speedy rehabilitation was exactly what the public demanded. They wanted Furtwängler back as a manifestation of positive German achievement in his own right, as well

²⁴ Klaus Lang, *Lieber Herr Celibidache...: Wilhelm Furtwängler und sein Statthalter – ein philharmonischer Konflikt in der Berliner Nachkriegszeit* (Zurich: M&T Verlag, 1988), p. 8.

²⁵ Wagner’s works were not among those most frequently performed in Berlin between May 1945 and August 1946, but there were 53 Wagner performances between September 1946 and December 1947. Elizabeth Janik, *Recomposing German Music: Politics and Musical Tradition in Cold War Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 315.

²⁶ Hartmann, pp. 43-44.

²⁷ Lang, p. 110.

²⁸ Monod, ‘Verklärte Nacht’, p. 307.

as for the reinforcement his fame would bring the Berlin Philharmonic as a source of positive identity. The Orchestra was again, as concert programmes proudly noted, ‘ein maßgebender Faktor im europäischen Musikleben’, with ‘[die] edelste Aufgabe..., die Brücken zwischen den Menschen erneut zu schlagen’.²⁹ ICD desperately maintained that Furtwängler’s only contribution to the revitalization of German and European musical life would be a negative one,³⁰ but after the intervention of the American Military Governor, General Clay, the conductor’s clearance was confirmed in April 1947.³¹

The centrality of the Furtwängler case to the entire process of musical denazification highlights the importance of the Orchestra he led to both occupying and local authorities. American anxiety over the impact Furtwängler’s artistic reunion with the Berlin Philharmonic would have on prospects for the development of a non-national conception of German music were justified when the German public greeted his return to the podium on 22 May 1947 with ‘eine minutenlange Ovation’.³² One audience member proclaimed: ‘at last we could truly believe...that the war was finally over’.³³ Indeed, the concert did mark a return to pre-War patterns of cultural life. Furtwängler rejected American-inspired changes in musical direction by rejoining the Orchestra with a programme that was all Beethoven, comprising his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, as well as the politically-charged Overture to *Egmont*.³⁴

While the restoration of the classical German culture represented by Beethoven to the centre of German life was emphatically not what the Americans wanted, it was central to various indigenous plans for reconstruction. According to the historian Friedrich Meinecke, classical art forms offered Germans an anchor in a time of misfortune,³⁵ and reflected the ‘inner German soul’ that had remained in opposition to the Nazis.³⁶ Meinecke argued in *The German Catastrophe* in 1946 that Germany’s spiritual culture needed to be nourished in order for Germany to regain a place in the international community.³⁷ The ethics of such cultural continuity were secondary to the need to promote stability and redevelopment. For the Berlin

²⁹ ‘A decisive factor in European music life’, with ‘[the] most noble job of once again building bridges between people’. Anon., ‘Auftakt’, *Programmheft*, September 1946, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 201.

³⁰ Monod, ‘Verklärte Nacht’, p. 308.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ‘A minute-long ovation’. Anon., ‘Pfingstgeschenk für Berlin: Furtwänglers Wiederkehr’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 May 1947, reproduced in Muck, p. 207

³³ An anonymous audience member, quoted in John Ardoin, *The Furtwängler Record* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 60.

³⁴ Daniel Gillis, *Furtwängler and America*, (New York: Manyland Books, 1970), p. 89.

³⁵ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, trans. by Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 112.

³⁶ Meinecke, p. 115.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 116-17.

Philharmonic, this justified their role in the reconstruction of Germany's reputation and their excusal from dealing with the past.

The long-term culture of disengagement paradoxically enabled the Berlin Philharmonic's political agency to become more apparent. The vagaries of post-War history allowed its exculpation from Nazi involvement, and restored its place as an honourable cultural institution close to the heart of all Germans, and as a suitable representative of the nation. The Orchestra's first international appearance as an agent of cultural restitution was its 1948 English tour, organized after an invitation from the Oxford Committee for promoting friendship and understanding with Europe the previous year.³⁸ There were no objections to receiving the orchestral personnel as honoured guests, and the tour was so successful that the Philharmonic was subsequently invited to perform at the newly founded Edinburgh Festival in 1949. The Festival's stated aim was to 'provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit',³⁹ and the Orchestra's burgeoning international success similarly provided a platform for national pride to be re-expressed. Konrad Adenauer recognized this, taking an active involvement in sponsoring the Philharmonic as a source of international renown as its first post-War tour to America was being arranged. He wrote directly to Furtwängler in July 1953 to express his delight 'dass damit Berlin...als Botschafter deutscher Kultur in Amerika auftritt'.⁴⁰ The American authorities did not share Adenauer's enthusiasm for the Orchestra as positive ambassador, preventing Furtwängler from entering the country. But the ban was the final attempt at reinforcing a different conception of culture, something that had long been abandoned elsewhere. Walter Legge, for example, masterminding swathes of new recordings from London by artists he had recruited semi-legally in the ruins of Vienna, argued that his aim was to sell records, and his 'best-selling artists [had] had no choice as to which side of the fence they should temporarily sit'.⁴¹ Wilhelm Furtwängler's death in November 1954 and the intensifying of the Cold War provided the final justification for the normalization of cultural relations with Germany, and in 1955 the Americans let the Berliners back in under their new conductor, Herbert von Karajan.

This action illustrates how far and how quickly the reformist goals of cultural denazification had evaporated, as well as the speed with which the Berlin Philharmonic had

³⁸ Letter from Ernst Fischer to Tom Hutton, dated 11 October 1948, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 218

³⁹ This expression is generally attributed to the Festival's first director, Rudolf Bing, and is still used in both tourist information and official Festival documents.

⁴⁰ 'That with the tour Berlin...[would] appear as an ambassador of German culture in America.' Letter from Konrad Adenauer to Wilhelm Furtwängler, dated 13 July 1953, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 256

⁴¹ Walter Legge, quoted in Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, *On and off the Record: A Memoir of Walter Legge* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 73.

reacquired respectability, transforming itself from Nazi cultural flagship into neutral ambassador. Unlike Furtwängler, Karajan had been an active if rather unpopular member of the Nazi party, but this did not prevent his transformation into the leader of a group of artists officially unaffected by the politics of the past. Any German qualms over his appointment related to his demand for a lifetime contract rather than his former Party membership.⁴² However, the senator Joachim Tiburtius convinced the Berlin Senate that a life-long appointment would be enormously helpful in providing the continuity of classical culture they craved.⁴³

As an orchestral policy, cultural continuity met with approval on both sides of the political fence. It also demonstrated the Philharmonic's ability to be simultaneously political and apolitical. The reason Jewish and other persecuted musicians such as Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer and Paul Hindemith returned to work with the Philharmonic again, without facing the disapproval from American Jewish lobby groups that had derailed Yehudi Menuhin's American career after his early appearance with Furtwängler and the Orchestra in 1947, was music's apparent ability to transcend political differences. Yet the material fact of their return made the extremely political point that the Germany represented by music was again an acceptable member of the international community. In administration, the *Intendant* appointed in 1960, Wolfgang Stresemann, was certainly happy to view the Orchestra as a diplomatic as well as artistic entity. Although he was the first émigré rather than supposed 'inner emigrant' to take on a guiding role with the Philharmonic, and even though his experiences in America and as the son of Gustav Stresemann had given him a different political perspective to its autocratic chief conductor Karajan, they shared the belief that the Austro-German classics were the ultimate expressions of all musical possibilities.⁴⁴ Stresemann also remained convinced that the music of the Berlin Philharmonic could help to rebuild Germany's international reputation, and was involved in the arrangements which saw the Orchestra play at the dedication of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral in June 1962. Herbert von Karajan disliked concerts which were supposed to carry political messages, and refused to conduct for the occasion, but the Orchestral management were still eager to accept such opportunities.⁴⁵

⁴² Herbert von Karajan and Richard Osborne, *Conversations with Karajan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 75.

⁴³ Klaus Lang, *The Karajan Dossier*, trans. by Stuart Spencer (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 25-26.

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Stresemann, *...und abends in die Philharmonie. Erinnerungen an große Dirigenten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1994), p. 247.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Stresemann, *Zeiten und Klänge. Ein Leben zwischen Musik und Politik* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997), pp. 301-02.

The actions of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra as a supposedly politically neutral ‘ambassador of music’ in the immediate aftermath of World War II, representing the Federal Republic of Germany abroad at a time when it had neither a Foreign Ministry nor a diplomatic corps,⁴⁶ highlight the extent to which the Americans’ challenge to the sense of German superiority derived from music had failed, leaving the sublime idea of music to triumph. More broadly, the narrative account of the Orchestra’s reconstruction reveals the public and political support for it as a way to maintain a traditional sense of national identity. Owing to music’s admittedly ephemeral nature and ostensibly apolitical aesthetic, this form of identity also contained a built-in excuse for not dealing with the past. Writers have argued against the idea that a close national relationship with music is productive, beginning with Thomas Mann in *Dr Faustus* and continuing more powerfully in Austria with Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard. Yet the notion that a sense of identity based on classical music is not an ideal foundation for a modern society has not been assimilated into wider political discourse. Even though classical music no longer dominates Germany’s cultural scene to the extent it once did, the ‘Germanness’ of a composition or performer still acts as the ultimate litmus test. The classical music scene is still a place where proclamations of German superiority are unlikely to meet with a negative response.

⁴⁶ *Wilhelm Furtwängler: Dokumente. Berichte und Bilder. Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Karla Höcker (Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1968), p. 125.

Germany's Identity Problems as Reflected in Nineteenth-Century Literature

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Abstract

This article assesses the reception of western concepts of nation as portrayed during the French Revolution of 1789, both in the literature of Schubart, Bürger, Klopstock and Wieland and in the philosophy of Herder and Fichte. The development of this concept of nationality during the wars against Napoleon and the policies of the Vormärz, up to the 1848 Revolutions is examined with special reference to the more collective, exclusive and authoritarian tendencies after 1848 and during a period of Realpolitik. Part two of the paper examines how literature and in particular popular histories of literature have reflected on these developments. The paper concludes that major elements of existing western concepts of national identity were not met by the establishment of the German nation state in 1871 and that these concepts were fulfilled only after Germany's 'second unification' in 1990.

This paper aims to re-examine Johann Gottfried Herder's concept of *Volk* in accordance with his view of the French Revolution and concurrent statements by other writers on nation and patriotism. Since much of Herder's work is not readily available in translation, scholars all too often regurgitate old accounts which tend to portray Herder as a Romantic and even a possible precursor of National Socialism.¹ Even German scholars have for too long seen Herder and his contemporaries as nationalists and the paper will examine the extent to which literary critics, in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, perpetuated this misconception, thereby contributing to the failure in 1871 to establish a democratically inspired national identity in the new nation state. My approach will therefore be interdisciplinary, connecting historical with literary and philosophical aspects.

¹ Cf. for example *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.

In the context of this paper, the subject of national identity will be restricted to the western world, where it forms part of a cognitive process with its roots in the European Enlightenment. The Abbé de Sieyès, a disciple of Rousseau, addressing the French National Assembly in 1789, equated the third estate with the nation and demanded that it should be given full recognition.² His definition was based on a well-established political structure, as existed in France and other western states; it could not be adopted in central and eastern Europe. While welcoming the emerging concept of a nationality based on universal laws and a clearly defined will of the people, these countries had to forge alternative concepts, often based on such all-inclusive denominators as language and a common tradition. They were, as Helmuth Plessner put it with reference to Germany, ‘late developers’.³ Plessner’s notion of Germany’s special path has been questioned in recent years, since we can recognize national ‘peculiarities’ in all nations.⁴ Indeed, all forms of identity are created ‘through the relation to the other’ and are ‘more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity’.⁵ Today, the concept of national ‘identity’ is generally defined by its plurality. Stuart Hall describes these identities as ‘points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us’.⁶ It seems that in our globalized world national identities have become ‘hybridized’; they can no longer stipulate uniqueness.⁷

With reference to this paper, however, certain perceived west-European identity claims will be applied, since their ‘normative’ values have shaped the modern democratic nation state. I am therefore taking a critical stance towards some postmodern theories which have adopted a de-centred, merely ‘referential’ perspective, rendering all identity claims relative. Such definitions tend to concentrate on fringe groups: minorities who seek to displace dominant positions within a process of ‘disidentification’.⁸ They may have their validity in explaining the emergence of post-colonial nation states, but they should not be applied to eighteenth-century definitions of nationality that favour an element of inclusivity

² Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, ‘What Is the Third Estate?’, quoted in Norbert Elias, *Studien über die Deutschen: Machtkämpfe und Habitusentwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 186.

³ Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation: Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1959), pp. 13-19

⁴ Cf. David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 3-14

⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity?”’, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*

and welcome different 'ethnies' within their nation, provided they share their ideas and values.

As far as my own deliberations are concerned, I am greatly indebted to Anthony Smith, whose 'working definition' understands national identities as 'the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements'.⁹ Symbols, myths and common memories, real or imagined, have contributed to that composite organization we call nationality. Their impact has to be superimposed on any cognitive process of nation building since they themselves are the product of national literatures and national historiographies, especially where 'special traditions', such as national festivals, ceremonies for national heroes, flags and anthems are concerned.¹⁰ Our investigation into Germany's identity problems can only be sketched out here in the shape of a rapid journey through German history during the nineteenth century; its main focus is to examine how they became reflected in standard works of German literary criticism during this period.

Abbé de Sieyès's revolutionary equation of nation with the third estate was certainly known east of the Rhine, though its author may not have been acknowledged. Sieyès himself was much indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose formula of a *volonté générale* departed from well-known concepts of parliamentary democracy.¹¹ Sieyès believed that the English model had brought about 'the waning of patriotism, the activity of private interest, the immensity of States, conquests'; it had surrendered the nation's freedom to members of parliament rather than to its citizens.¹² The new French concept of patriotism was founded on the trinity of freedom, equality and fraternity; it was incompatible with monarchical rule, a two-chamber parliament and existing social divisions. It was based on neither ethnicity nor language and defined foreigners as those who did not wish to be integrated into the nation. It also shared many aspects with the American Declaration of Independence; both are based on a spirit of inclusivity and on cosmopolitan universal rights, and both hoped for the overthrow of the old autocratic and feudal systems in Europe. Although notions of a general

⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism, Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 18.

¹⁰ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 14-46.

¹¹ Cf. John Smith, 'Thesen über den "deutschen Willen"', in *Die nationale Identität der Deutschen: Philosophische Imaginationen und historische Mentalitäten*, ed. by Wolfgang Bialas (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002), pp. 231-47.

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ed. by Roger D. Masters, trans. by Judith R. Masters (New York: St Martin's Press, 1978), p. 102.

emancipation and a one and indivisible nation soon lost much of their impact, its cosmopolitan principles survived.

French and American ideas of emancipation within nationhood had a profound impact on German writers and philosophers. The storming of the Bastille became a symbol of freedom for Ludwig van Beethoven, who dedicated his *Eroica* to this event. Friedrich Schiller, newly appointed professor of history at Jena University, considered moving to the ‘rejuvenated Gaul’¹³ and Johann Gottlieb Fichte proclaimed himself ‘an admirer of political freedom and the idea of the nation which promises to spread freedom’.¹⁴ The aged Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock welcomed the Revolution as ‘the century’s most noble deed’ and praised the National Assembly as an historic achievement.¹⁵ While responses by major German writers are recognized, little is known of the attitude of more obscure intellectuals. Only a few figures can be cited here. Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart declared himself a ‘patriot’,¹⁶ thereby anticipating aspects of the French Revolution. He was concerned with social and political reforms and lamented the lack of a patriotic spirit in his own ‘fatherland’. Schubart gained inspiration from the American War of Independence and referred to the many thousands of Germans sold to the British armed forces as a ‘fertile sermon for patriots’ whose hearts throb ‘when their fellow citizens share the fate of negro slaves, as they are sent abroad, sacrificed in an alien land’.¹⁷ The beginning of the French Revolution had an even greater impact on German patriots. In one of his last publications Schubart acknowledges its rejuvenating vigour, no longer perceiving his French neighbours as decadent, vain and cowardly, but as ‘the genius of freedom, greatness and truthfulness’.¹⁸

Gottfried August Bürger (1747-94) wrote in a similar spirit, imploring his fellow citizens to open their eyes and understand that their fatherland had been taken from them by their German princes.¹⁹ In 1789 Joachim Heinrich Campe, philanthropist and pedagogue, rushed to Paris to witness the end of despotism. Recognizing the cosmopolitan character of the French nation state, he believed that it could also be adopted in Germany. Georg Forster

¹³ Cf. *Noch ist Deutschland nicht verloren*, ed. by Walter Grab and Uwe Friesel (Munich: Hanser, 1970), p. 19. [Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by the author.]

¹⁴ Quoted in Otto Dann, *Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770-1990* (Munich: Beck, 1993), p. 54.

¹⁵ Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, ‘Kennet Euch selbst’, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. by K. A. Schleiden (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), p. 140.

¹⁶ *Deutsche Chronik auf das Jahr 1774*: 46. Stück, ed. by Christian F. D. Schubart (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1975), p. 365.

¹⁷ *Chronik auf das Jahr 1776*: 25. Stück, ed. by Christian F. D. Schubart, p. 194.

¹⁸ Schubart, *Chronik auf das Jahr 1789*: 55. Stück, quoted in Wilfried F. Schoeller, *Schubart. Leben und Meinungen eines schwäbischen Rebellen* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1979), p. 165. (The reprographic reprint of the *Chronik* ends in 1777.)

¹⁹ Gottfried August Bürger, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Günter Häntzschel and Hiltrud Häntzschel (Munich: Hanser, 1987), p. 462.

(1754-94) became a founder member of the Mainz Jacobin Club, which was open to everyone who wanted to contribute 'to the happiness of the fatherland and to a mankind that sighed under the chains of slavery'.²⁰ Members of the Club called themselves 'patriots', their journal was *Der Patriot* and their 'fatherland' was not their birthplace or home, but a political entity, where citizens enjoyed full rights of self-determination.²¹ Christoph Martin Wieland in his 'Cosmopolitan Address to the French National Assembly' (October 1789) acknowledged the new patriotism and blamed Germany's lack of national spirit on the country's particularistic nature. He hoped that German writers might create 'a genuine patriotism which would be enhanced through the cultivation of a patriotic history'.²²

In view of Germany's political fragmentation, some specifically cultural prerequisites were added to Sieyès's cosmopolitan ideas. They turned the emphasis more in the direction of Rousseau, reinforcing the importance of history and language for the establishment of national identity and rendering it slightly more exclusive. The new emphasis on ethno-linguistic elements has often been overstated or seen in isolation. Napoleon's occupation of large parts of Germany and the subsequent Wars of Liberation were bound to elicit anti-French, even chauvinistic sentiments, but the democratic spirit of the Revolution survived.

The two most important philosophers to promote a German nationality concept were Herder and Fichte. Historians and literary critics have in the past often blamed both of them for preparing the ground for German nationalism. Even recent studies tend to overstate the difference between their concept of nationhood and that of their French counterparts.²³ A re-examination of Herder's concept of *Volk* and Fichte's perception of *Nation* will illustrate how both philosophers sought to combine revolutionary aspects of patriotism, based on cosmopolitan qualities of an inclusive humanism, together with a cultural ethnicity, derived from linguistic and cultural developments.

Herder shared Immanuel Kant's general interest in the nature of humankind, accepting a cognitive process of emancipation as part of an organic development, but opposed his abstract, universal categories in favour of a more empirical and consequently also more inclusive approach to public life. For Herder, the organic development of humankind emanates from early family structures via a simple community life towards societies with a

²⁰ Quoted in Grab and Friesel, p. 18.

²¹ Cf. Franz Dumont, 'The Rhineland', in *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. by Otto Dann and John Dinwiddy (London: Hambledon, 1988), pp. 160-61.

²² Christoph Martin Wieland, 'Der allgemeine Mangel deutschen Gemeinsinnes und Nationalgeistes und Mittel zu deren Erweckung und Belebung', in *Deutschland! Deutschland? Texte aus 500 Jahren von Martin Luther bis Günter Grass*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002), pp. 159-64.

²³ Bhabha, p. 1; Hagen Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism*, trans. by William E. Yuill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 156-58; Anthony D. Smith, p. 21.

highly developed moral sensibility. He dissociated himself even more than Sieyès or Rousseau from the mainstay of a rational analysis of constitutional matters and sought instead a return to earlier forms of organization and a general regeneration based on each community's individual culture, language and customs. Herder's appreciation of the Revolution is set out in the original version of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1783-90), in which he describes the Revolution as 'the greatest event in our history', predicting that it would promote 'justice, wisdom, fairness and harmony'.²⁴ His poem on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille hails the transformation of 'Franks' into brothers who, as a new 'chosen people', would also renew humankind.²⁵ He employs the well known theological concept of *palingenesis*²⁶ in order to illustrate this rejuvenation within the context of the Revolution and suggests that the revolution would return humankind to its natural state, thereby cleansing it from political despotism.²⁷ Herder's concept of *Volk* should therefore be understood as a corrective to the rationalism of Enlightenment thought. By rejecting the rational view of history as a linear progression along some abstract and universal principles in favour of a comprehensive, individualizing process, Herder sees history as a function of specific conditions of climate, geography and time. Each *Volk* is therefore conditioned by its coexistence and interchange with other cultures. The implicit danger in Herder's formula centres on his understanding of national identity: by relating it to a number of historical, organically developed values, he inevitably weakens the Enlightenment cluster of identity-values in favour of greater uniformity, thereby also reducing each individual's responsibility in preference to the collective *Volk*.

Herder's observations on the Jewish people in ancient Israel will illustrate this. While he acknowledges the origins of the Jews in the emerging tribe of Abraham, he gives a specific priority to their language and religion which become their legal and cultural foundation. Each individual is integrated into a holistic system of language and culture, with education playing a pivotal role.²⁸ Language becomes a vehicle for self-expression; the reciprocity of thinking and speaking will strengthen the community and emphasize its national identity. This

²⁴ J. G. Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by B. Suphan, 33 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913), xviii, 317. Cf. also Richard Critchfield, 'Revolution and the Creative Arts: Towards a Reappraisal of Herder's Defence of the French Revolution', in *Johann Gottfried Herder: Innovator through the Ages*, ed. by Wulf Koepke and Samson B. Knoll (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), pp. 190-91.

²⁵ 'Auf den 14. Juli 1790', in Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, xxix, 659-60.

²⁶ Some historians have employed this concept exclusively within the context of fascism, thereby distorting its broader philosophical meaning. Cf. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991), pp. 32-36.

²⁷ Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, xiii, 28.

²⁸ Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, v, 131-34.

perception of *Volk* is neither nationalistic nor Euro-centric; it favours a peaceful coexistence of individual nations as different components of humankind.

Fichte also takes his cue from the Revolution and in particular from Rousseau's concept of *volonté générale*. Three of his early works attempt to apply revolutionary principles to the situation in Germany.²⁹ He links his central argument to the concept of human rights, insisting that nobody must impinge on an individual's freedom and that the 'realm of selfishness' must be overcome and replaced by a new regime of freedom which will provide universal self-determination. Best known among Fichte's works is his *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, delivered in 1807/8 in the aftermath of Napoleon's victory over Prussia and Austria. The *Reden* not only reflect his disappointment with the new French emperor, but also radiate optimism, anticipating that the German nation might shake off its discredited old governments. Fichte conceives the national identity of a people not primarily in geographical terms or as attached to the political concept of statehood, but as founded on language's spiritual character. He is, however, not interested in the grammatical structure of language, but focuses on etymology, at pains to illustrate how the German language, like ancient Greek, has retained its creativity and sensuality, while other European languages have lost these faculties when adopting foreign words without actually acquiring their true meaning. Fichte's argument therefore reveals a certain tension between his cosmopolitan revolutionary conviction and an implicitly exclusive nationalism which was to reach its climax during the subsequent age of imperialism. While he sought to distinguish carefully between both concepts, as the extract from his *Pädagogische Dialoge* indicates, later generations ignored this balance in favour of blind chauvinism:

Cosmopolitanism is the dominant force for expressing the purpose of human existence within the human race. Patriotism is the force by which this purpose will be achieved first and foremost in that nation of which we ourselves are members, from whence its achievement will spread throughout the human race.³⁰

²⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Der Patriotismus und sein Gegenteil', in J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. by Reinhard Lauth and others, 35 vols (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1962), II, 9, pp. 387-447; 'Zurückforderung der Freiheit von den Fürsten Europas' in *ibid.*, II, 2, pp. 199-249 and *Beitrag zur Berichtigung des Urteils des Publikums über die Französische Revolution*, ed. by R. Schottky (Hamburg: Suhrkamp, 1973).

³⁰ Quoted in Nico Wallner, *Fichte als politischer Denker: Werden und Wesen seiner Gedanken über den Staat* (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1926), p. 193.

The re-emergence of reactionary regimes in 1815 ended all hopes for the establishment of a democratic German nation state and of citizenship as exemplified during the French Revolution. The defeat of Napoleon resulted in two competing movements: while the liberal and democratic spirit of the Wars of Liberation had become indicative of a national revolution, amounting to some kind of *levée en masse*, the recovery of pre-revolutionary forces at the Vienna Congress culminated in the establishment of the Holy Alliance, soon to reveal an illiberal, anti-national and counter-democratic conservatism. It subverted the august revolutionary principles of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* in favour of an autocratic monarchic concept, gaining support from an ecclesiastic system that upheld the union of church and state and supported ‘a bond of true and indissoluble brotherhood while considering [its] own people and armies as subjects in a paternal spirit’.³¹

Progressive, national elements were oppressed, but gained support from the universities, from students and professors. The Wartburg Festival of 1817 centred on the universities; it sought to remind the German people that the defeat of Napoleon had been the work of ordinary citizens, rather than the heroic achievement of a monarch. It also celebrated Martin Luther as a national leader who had stood up against oppression and had devoted his energies to a revival of German language and culture. The *Burschenschaften* (student fraternities) that had emerged during the Wars of Liberation became an important force of opposition; they turned the festival into a protest against the Alliance and displayed a strange mixture of eighteenth-century enlightened attitudes and irrational romantic sentiments. They not only introduced Germany’s national tricolour of black, red and gold, but also published a set of ‘principles and conclusions’ meant to enlighten fellow citizens as to the true nature of the fatherland, ‘to purify and strengthen their minds’ and facilitate an awareness of ‘morality, politics and history’.³² The Karlsbad Decrees, instituted by the Austrian Chancellor Klemens W. L. von Metternich, sought to control political action across the German Federation; they suspended the *Burschenschaften* and enforced the dismissal and expulsion of ‘subversive’ university teachers and students. Such actions did little to intimidate the republican national spirit, while the French July Revolution of 1830 rekindled political action among young German *literati* who turned against existing monarchic governments, demanding democratic self determination and freedom of expression. The poet and revolutionary Georg Herwegh declared:

³¹ *The Holy Alliance*, Article 1, quoted in Walter Mönch, *Deutsche Kultur von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Hueber, 1971), p. 258.

³² Cf. Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 27.

Our faith is at one with the faith of mankind; fine talks and sweet dreams are over [...] It is the defining mark of modern literature that it is the child of politics, or, in plain German, the child of the French July Revolution.³³

The Hambach Festival of 1832 became a central event for political activists; it coordinated German efforts into creating a nation state and linked them with similar actions elsewhere. The Festival was attended by over 20,000 supporters, mostly students and journeymen from the southwest. The event itself had been sparked off by the French July Revolution of 1830 and by several disturbances in Brunswick, Saxony and Hesse-Darmstadt as well as by urban unrest in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt and Vienna. The choice of Hambach in the Palatinate was significant, since the Palatinate had been part of the French Republic. When it came under the rule of the Bavarian crown in 1815, its citizens lost many of those political rights which they had acquired back in 1789. Johann Georg Wirth, chief organizer of the Festival, and the radical poet Philipp Jakob Siebenpfeiffer recognized a broad pan-European desire for national independence:

We shall help to free Greece from her tyrannical yoke, we toast the re-emergence of Poland and we become angry when the despotism of kings cripples the fervour of the peoples of Spain, Italy and France, we anxiously watch the progress of the Reform Bill in England, we praise the strength and wisdom of the Sultan who is involved in the rebirth of his people, we envy the North Americans their good fortune, which they themselves have bravely brought about.³⁴

A veritable rush of sympathy greeted the Polish uprising, not least since the powers of the Holy Alliance had defeated their earlier struggle for national independence. The Polish delegation was enthusiastically welcomed at Hambach, the Polish national flag was hoisted alongside the German tricolour and Festival goers greeted each other with the motto 'Poland is free'.³⁵ The Polish people, who less than a generation earlier had been described by Forster

³³ Georg Herwegh, *Werke in einem Band*, ed. by Hans-Georg Werner, 3rd edn (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1977), p. 318.

³⁴ Quoted in *1848: Erinnerungen, Urkunden, Berichte, Briefe*, ed. by Tim Klein (Leipzig: W. Langewiesche-Brandt, 1914), p. 44.

³⁵ Cf. Grab and Friesel, pp. 107-36.

as lazy and uncivilized, not fit to form their own nation,³⁶ were now celebrated as heroic, filled with sincere national fervour.

The 1848 revolutions in Germany proved to be a climax and watershed of German efforts at creating a free and democratic nation. Three broad groups of revolutionaries can be distinguished: a radical, republican wing with its roots reaching back to the revolutionary tradition, an irrational grouping closely associated with the latter phase of the romantic movement, but essentially unfamiliar with the cosmopolitan ambitions of Herder and Fichte and, lastly, a national-liberal faction, which favoured a constitutional monarchy and ultimately succumbed to the reactionary policies of the Prussian government. The revolutions had initially been inspired by the Paris February Revolution. Southern German activists imported its republican, socialist and nationalist programme and employed it in the Rhineland, in Baden and the Palatinate, but also in large industrial centres such as Vienna, Berlin and Frankfurt. Whereas the Vienna revolution was initiated by university students, the Berlin revolution was a more ‘proletarian’ working class movement, exhibiting fierce hatred of the monarchy and the military establishment.

Already during the early stages of the revolutions the more radical wing became marginalized; neither Hecker nor Struwe gained seats in the Paulskirche Parliament, which was installed as Germany’s first democratic assembly, charged with the drafting of a democratic national constitution. National aspirations became diverted when the Schleswig-Holstein conflict focused attention on the war against Denmark. The issue was of central importance to the survival of the Parliament, which was under attack from reactionary Prussia and from external forces such as Britain and France, who sided with Denmark.³⁷ From then on, the revolution lost its momentum; it sought a compromise solution, based on a constitutional monarchy, with the Prussian monarch as leader of a ‘lesser German’ nation. It is probably not an exaggeration to conclude that the revolutionaries surrendered to the power of the Holy Alliance.

A fundamental change of values was the result, best illustrated by the rise of *Realpolitik*, a term coined by August Ludwig von Rochau. Assessing the political events of the 1830s and 1840s, Rochau concluded that ‘the law of power exercises a similar dominance

³⁶ Forster: *Ein Lesebuch für unsere Zeit*, ed. by Gerhard Steiner and Manfred Häckel (Weimar: Thüringer Volksverlag, 1954), p. 203.

³⁷ Cf. Wolfram Siemann, *Die deutsche Revolution von 1848/49* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 153-57.

on matters of state as the law of gravity does over bodies'.³⁸ *Realpolitik* should therefore be seen as part of the new debate on positivism, which – in political terms – invests all power in the state and surrenders all legislative matters to the state government, often regardless of basic human rights. Within the context of our discussion so far, this means that all forms of a subjective, national identity were rejected in favour of a nationalism entirely based on state power: 'To rule means to exercise power and this can only be done by those in possession of power. The immediate connection between power and domination forms the basic truth of all politics and the key to all history.'³⁹ *Realpolitik* had an unwholesome influence on German nationalism; it rejected all forms of self-determination, putting the interests of the 'nation' above those of its citizens. The Posen issue is just one example. The Prussian province of Posen had a majority of Polish speakers and during the early phase of the revolution was considered part of a free Polish state. In the latter phase of the revolution, speakers claimed that a 'healthy national egoism' required that it remained part of Germany in accordance with 'the right of the strong, the right of the conqueror'.⁴⁰ The establishment of the German nation state under Bismarck was based on this philosophy and will be dealt with later.

Having so far mapped out important aspects in the history of Germany's search for national identity, we shall now examine to what extent the literary historiography reflected this. Within these parameters our observations will be limited to the specific authors discussed so far, while acknowledging that a younger generation of political writers such as Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, Georg Büchner and others will have to be ignored. None of them actually witnessed the French Revolution of 1789, though their work falls into the category of progressive involvement in the democratic politics of their own age.

The nineteenth century witnessed a fundamental change in the understanding of literature and its attitudes to contemporary life. While the eighteenth century still viewed literature as being central to the comprehension of human knowledge, the early nineteenth century developed two separate schools: on the one hand the growth of a national literature, influenced by Herder's philosophy and the Romantics,⁴¹ and, on the other hand, a literature that was influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's aesthetics and Schiller's idealism.

³⁸ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewandt auf die Zustände Deutschlands*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Göpel, 1859), I, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen constituierenden Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main*, ed. by Franz Wigard, 9 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Sauerländer, 1848), II, 1143-46.

⁴¹ The German term for this school of literature is *Nationalliteratur*; for further study cf. Walter Jens, *Nationalliteratur und Weltliteratur – von Goethe aus gesehen* (Munich: Kindler, 1988) or H. J. Hahn, *German Thought and Culture: From the Holy Roman Empire to the Present Day* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 82-107.

Herder saw poetry as a key to the understanding and formation of a national character and Friedrich Schlegel developed Herder's ideas further, describing history and literature as an inseparable union that was to shape a country's national identity. Such an interpretation gave the collective, national forces priority over individual self determination, thus moving further away from the principles of the 1789 revolution. Literature became an important tool in a nation's search for identity, reviving earlier claims for a national theatre and for the formation of a German *Kulturnation*.⁴² Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* focused entirely on cosmopolitan issues and Schiller's philosophy of the aesthetic education of humankind transformed the political concepts of the French Revolution by 'elevating' them into the realm of beauty, thereby cleansing them of human passion.⁴³ While Schiller's revolutionary message, expressed in his *Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, maintained that we have the right 'to seize with violence our human rights which have been taken from us forcefully and unfairly',⁴⁴ his famous play *Don Carlos* distilled this concept into freedom of thought⁴⁵ while his last completed play, *Wilhelm Tell*, sublimated the revolutionary element into an idyll with its hero seen as the non-political man who abhors violence.⁴⁶

The social and political function of the history of literature after the 1848 revolutions developed both schools of literature further. It is important to recognize that the national school, influenced by demands of *Realpolitik*, developed increasingly more chauvinistic forms of representation, while 'aesthetic' interpretations were reduced to a 'moralistic' tone, moving towards a new 'Borussian' form of nationalism. Representatives of a national literature often anticipated aspects of the political developments after 1848. The emancipation from a hitherto dominant Latinate Catholicism was now viewed as a major achievement of German national literature: Luther, Hans Sachs and representatives of Weimar classicism were seen as national liberators and the *Sturm und Drang* generation was one-sidedly interpreted as having strengthened national elements against a 'Latinate' French cultural hegemony. As a result, Protestant and 'Prussian' features gained in importance.⁴⁷

⁴² Hahn, *German Thought and Culture*, pp. 93-95.

⁴³ Cf. Friedrich Schiller, 'Öffentliche Ankündigung', *Die Horen*, in *Schillers Werke* (Nationalausgabe), ed. by Herbert Meyer, 22 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1958), xxii, 106.

⁴⁴ *Schillers Werke*, xx, 319.

⁴⁵ Whereas Schiller considered freedom of thought as a means towards a more liberal, humane society, the popular interpretation usually failed to make this connection. *Gedankenfreiheit* became the most frequently quoted Schiller passage. Cf. Georg Büchmann, *Geflügelte Worte: Der Zitatenschatz des deutschen Volkes*, 25th edn (Berlin: Haude & Spensersche Buchhandlung, 1912), p. 174.

⁴⁶ H. J. Hahn, 'Schiller's *Tell* – eine revolutionäre Idylle oder eine idyllische Revolution?', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 75 (2006), 37-43 (p. 37).

⁴⁷ Cf. Robert E. Prutz, 'Deutschlands Einheit und die deutsche Literatur', in Robert E. Prutz, *Neue Schriften zur deutschen Literatur- und Kunstgeschichte*, 2 vols (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1854), II, 1-61, Hermann Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte der Goethezeit*, ed. by Johannes Anderegg (Munich: Beck, 1970), and Joseph

However, there were also voices of opposition to such an interpretation and the literary history of Georg Gottfried Gervinus presented nationalism in the tradition of Herder and Rousseau. Gervinus was one of the first literary historians to concentrate on German literature as a nation-building force. German literature, he believed, compensated Germans for the lack of political emancipation. The mapping out of a national German literature was to facilitate the development of the German nation. Rather than focusing on individual authors or specific social groups Gervinus concentrated on the *Volk* as the main agent of Germany's national identity; it was to become the actual revolutionary force against the aristocracy. He recognizes in all European states 'a regular progress [...] from the intellectual and civil freedom of one alone, to that of the few and of the many',⁴⁸ a progress 'always labouring towards the greater equality of man, and of his relations to life' with the result that 'since the French Revolution monarchy has lost the power of its spell'.⁴⁹ In similar manner to Sieyès, Gervinus recognizes the development of 'a national direction' which has made education 'accessible to all classes' so that 'patriotism was roused, with the desire for freedom and equality of rights; and if democracy was not established in all its forms, it was, at least, in all essentials'.⁵⁰ The political aim of modern Germany was 'to dissolve the great [German] monarchies into Federal states, which would combine the advantages of both great and small states, and offer a secure pledge for universal freedom and for the peaceful dissemination of every kind of knowledge'.⁵¹ Gervinus saw the current state of Germany as that of a *Kulturnation*; anticipating that its aesthetic emancipation would transform a merely cultural into a political identity. Lessing is credited with having liberated German culture from French domination, but also from the German aristocracy and an all too scholarly emphasis on theoretical knowledge. He welcomes Lessing's endeavour to create a national theatre as a precondition for the creation of a German national identity.⁵² Unlike his contemporaries, who celebrated Frederick the Great as Germany's national leader, Gervinus rejected this 'lesser Germany' tradition and returned to Herder's and ultimately Rousseau's concept of *volonté générale*. Discarding the concept of constitutional monarchy in favour of republicanism, he held up the

Hillebrand, *Die deutsche Nationalliteratur seit dem Anfang des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1845/6). For a general overview, cf. Jürgen Fohrmann, *Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Entstehung und Scheitern einer nationalen Poesiegeschichtsschreibung zwischen Humanismus und Deutschem Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), pp. 149-70.

⁴⁸ Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Introduction to the History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Moritz Sernau (London: Bohn, 1853), p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

⁵⁰ Gervinus, *Introduction*, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁵² Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen*, 3 vols (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1846), I, 9.

American Declaration of Independence as a model for a future German nation state: 'by introducing the general franchise for all citizens as equal participants within the state, the great democratic principle was pronounced: the rule of the will of the people was expressed in the form of a law.'⁵³ This makes it apparent that Gervinus saw the nation not as an aim in itself and he certainly did not wish to promote some kind of national will that would be superimposed above the will of the individual. He compares the democratic development in Germany to that of other 'divided nations' such as 'Judea, Greece, and modern Italy' and emphasizes its cosmopolitan nature so that it will 'be satisfied with the moral benefits we had bestowed on the human race'.⁵⁴ Such views brought Gervinus into conflict with the authorities of his time; he was tried for high treason and lost his *venia legendi* at Heidelberg University.⁵⁵

The second school of historians of German literature appears at a first glance less 'nationalistic', since they emphasize the moral aspects of Germany's literary development. Rudolph Gottschall concentrates on 'the development of individual writers' rather than on common national trends.⁵⁶ Weimar classicism in particular, with its establishment of 'eternal values', is embraced within the treasures of German poetry. Concealed behind such trends is a new conservatism which serves to promote Prussia and its Protestant tradition. Wilhelm Scherer, possibly the most famous literary historian of his time, celebrated Frederick the Great as having presided over 'a period of unparalleled literary and aesthetic progress'. According to Scherer, 'the rise of modern German literature is connected with the Seven Years War, just as the rise of Middle-High-German chivalrous poetry was connected with the first Italian campaigns of Frederick Barbarossa'.⁵⁷ The connection between Frederick the Great and Barbarossa was typical of a reactionary monarchic policy that sought to direct German national history towards the Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty, thus preparing the path for Bismarck's German Unification in 1871. This falsification of national history was accompanied by strong anti-revolutionary, anti-republican sentiments. While the 'literary revolution' of the *Sturm und Drang* 'demanded emancipation from rules, and was, in its political aspect, a movement of opposition to established authorities', it apparently failed: 'The poets were obliged to submit themselves again to the sway of rules and their political

⁵³ Gervinus, *Introduction*, p. 94. Cf. also Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions*, pp. 196-97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Cf. Gervinus's presentation of his case in his dedication to the brothers Grimm and to Dahlmann in *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung*, 5th edn, 5 vols (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1853), I, p. vii.

⁵⁶ Cf. Fohrmann, p. 173.

⁵⁷ Wilhelm Scherer, *A History of German Literature from the Accession of Frederick the Great to the Death of Goethe*, trans. by F. C. Conybeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 1.

declamations had not the slightest direct effect'.⁵⁸ Schubart is therefore praised by Scherer as 'an ardent worshipper of Frederick the Great', and 'his best work is to be found in his popular songs'. He singles out the *Fürstengruft* as 'an attack on tyrants, reproaching them with their crimes against humanity' but relates this attack exclusively to the Duke of Württemberg.⁵⁹ Scherer is more critical of Bürger, since 'his imagination failed him in the world of tender feeling, and he tried to replace the want of poetic motives by high sounding words and empty jingle. [...] He ruined his life by profligacy and the severe form in which he sometimes clothes passionate feeling [...] could not take the place of inward nobility of feeling'.⁶⁰

With the rise of a German *Bildungsbürgertum* German literature gained a hitherto unprecedented popularity and several literary historians sought to satisfy the new demand for a more accessible history of German literature. We shall have to restrict ourselves to just two examples. Robert Koenig's *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte* in its extravagantly sumptuous binding is dedicated to the German home. It has no great scholarly ambitions, but wishes 'to steep our generation' in the world of its forefathers. Koenig sees his history as a 'book of inheritance' that 'takes its place in the bookcase of the German home next to the Bible and the family chronicle'.⁶¹ He emphasizes the moral, edifying values of literature, and condenses his understanding of patriotism into an unprecedented admiration for Prussia and the new nation state.

Klopstock's veneration for the French Revolution is seen as an error of judgement which the 'bard' sincerely repented in later years. Wieland is singled out for his 'Francophile fashion'.⁶² The *Sturm und Drang* generation is defined as 'the loutish years of German poetry' that spelled ruination for many a man of genius.⁶³ The passage on Schubart deplores his drifting into 'the tangled and raw life' and his 'vulgar outbursts' are loosely associated with his editorship of a 'politically subversive journal'. Schubart's *Preußenlied*, described as an ode to Frederick the Great, gets singled out for praise, while the remainder of his work is 'deservedly forgotten'.⁶⁴ Bürger fares little better. Koenig also refers to his 'tangled, dissolute life-style' and his 'undignified and immoral conduct' that prevented him from turning into a genuine 'Volksdichter'.⁶⁵ Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* by contrast is celebrated 'for not advocating

⁵⁸ Scherer, p. 114.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶¹ Robert Koenig, *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, 12th edn (Bielefeld: Velhagen und Klasing, 1882), dedication [n.p.].

⁶² Ibid., p. 374.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 432.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 344.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 353.

the overthrow of the present order, but for preserving an original state'. He interprets the play as 'a national deed' that represents 'German freedom against French violation and oppression' and as Germany's national liberation from Austria.⁶⁶

Koenig compares the Young Germany movement with the *Sturm und Drang* in its efforts to undermine the moral principles of human society. He dismisses their admiration for the French July Revolution, which sought to raise French values over German morality and replaced German idealism with French sensualism. Anti-semitic sentiments gain the upper hand and Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne are classed as representatives of Saint Simonism who delighted in rejecting all Christian and Germanic values and who 'denigrate our nation again and again in favour of the higher glory of France'.⁶⁷ The political authors of the 1848 revolutions are severely criticized; Herwegh in particular is taken to task for his 'tactless, childish and rebellious letter to the noble monarch [Frederick William IV of Prussia], in which he protested against the banning of his journal *Europa*'.⁶⁸

Georg Büchmann's *Geflügelte Worte*, first published in 1864, does not seem to fit into the category of bourgeois nationalist propaganda, since this compendium of quotations includes entries from the Bible as well as from the literatures of many European and some Oriental nations. However, its 25th edition of 1912 is dedicated to 'His Majesty the German Kaiser and King of Prussia Wilhelm II' and its subtitle reads: 'The German People's Treasured Quotations'. Later editions refine this title further, defining a 'geflügeltes Wort' as 'a saying, expression or name that is used in the wider circle of the fatherland, regardless of its language and whose author or literary origin can be traced'.⁶⁹ The book's preface highlights two major themes which guided its editors over the years: 'the world-wide German spirit of industriousness' and German dedication to 'progress' which is conceived as an essential ingredient for every life.⁷⁰ A preliminary analysis of its contents indicates that quotations by German authors command the lion's share, as is to be expected in a book for German readers. German authors occupy 172 pages, with an additional 75 pages from 'Luther's Bible'. French and English quotations cover 24 and 19 pages respectively, while other modern languages take up between one to four pages. Greek and Roman authors are the exception, taking up 31 and 69 pages and reflecting the importance which a classical education had for the German bourgeoisie. Among the German quotations the neoclassical

⁶⁶ Koenig, p. 500.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 638.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 661.

⁶⁹ Büchmann, p. xviii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

period, dominated by Goethe and Schiller, holds a commanding position. We recognize a clear preference for moralizing statements, but also a strong emphasis on ‘fatherland’ and on German virtues. Quotations from history reflect a similar picture, with German history dominated by statements from Bismarck, Luther and Frederick the Great, thereby again emphasizing the ‘Borussian’ spirit of the new Germany.

The various examples from key reference works on German literature give a representative overview of the direction in which German ‘mandarins’ were moving. They reveal a tendency observed already in the political changes during the later stages of the 1848 revolutions and their immediate aftermath. The republican, democratic nationality concept as reflected in Herder, Fichte and among *Vormärz* writers gave way to a new nationality which identified Germany with Prussia and its reactionary monarchic order. It effectively reversed the famous statement by Wilhelm IV of Prussia, made in March 1848, that Prussia would be subsumed into a united Germany and instead sought to absorb Germany within the Prussian monarchy. Our concluding remarks on the founding of the German nation state in 1871 will further illustrate this trend.

These observations on attempts to establish a German national identity during the nineteenth century – though by no means exhaustive – have illustrated a general move away from the Enlightenment concept of a democratic, inclusive identity, based on the free choice of commitment to this identity, towards a collective nationality concept that was entirely founded on a narrow set of norms which subsumed each member of the nation under the dictate of language, culture and a narrow ‘Lutheran’ morality, closely associated with the House of Hohenzollern. While comparable trends can be observed in other European nations who also employed their own kind of *Realpolitik* in order to pursue their imperialist aims, the situation in Germany was perhaps more problematic, since the establishment of a nation state fell into a period which sacrificed the plurality of a hybrid national identity in favour of an authoritarian nation state with scant respect for its many diverse minorities. The proclamation of the *Reich* at Versailles illustrated this. The ceremony was attended only by princes and military leaders, with no civilians or civic representatives present, as the famous painting by Anton von Werner illustrates.⁷¹ Ordinary Germans played no part in the proceedings; German unification had been a ‘revolution from above’.⁷² The all-important choice of active commitment to one’s nation, which is part of modern citizenship, was absent. Those

⁷¹ Cf. Matthew Jefferies, *Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871-1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 44-53.

⁷² Cf. David Blackbourn, *The Fontana History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), p. 256.

revolutionary aspects, as seen in Herder and Fichte, tended to get overlooked and the political writers of the century's first decades were either forgotten or vilified as Francophile. Our examination of key works by literary historians has demonstrated this: literature and literary criticism became the hand maiden of the new nation builders. They perceived their role as bearers of culture, a view that reached its climax in the famous declaration, issued at the start of World War I. This 'manifesto', signed by ninety-three eminent scientists and other public figures, in response to British propaganda that German culture and Prussian militarism were at odds with one another, stressed the unity of 'the German army and the German people' and solemnly proclaimed that 'we will fight this struggle to its end as a cultured nation to which the legacy of Goethe, Beethoven and Kant is just as sacred as our hearth and native soil'.⁷³ Far from participating in a meaningful nation-building process, this academic elite of 'mandarins' sought to accommodate themselves under the protection of the military and of the imperial court. By shielding themselves from international influence, they progressively abandoned what liberal and democratic values remained and contributed to the alleged 'encirclement' of Germany. Very few figures of international rank followed Nietzsche's vigorous opposition to the new political system; most of the German intelligentsia supported the new order.⁷⁴ While it could be argued that the establishment of the Second Reich failed to give Germans a genuine, workable national identity, its advocates failed to recognize the full implications of Germany's identity problem, as history was to illustrate in the following decades.

An examination of Germany's identity problem in the twentieth century goes beyond the scope of this paper. Neither the Weimar Republic, riven by political dissent and economic disaster, nor the one-party Third Reich could summon the political energies to give their country a new identity. It was only in the aftermath of World War II and under the guidance of her (western) allies that Germany began to adopt the kind of political culture which enabled it to find some kind of national identity. Indeed, it may have been fortunate that this development was delayed by Germany's division, giving this process sufficient time to mature. The role of German historians and literary critics has also changed. A new *Streitkultur* has replaced the mandarin desire to act as *Kulturträger*; their successors no longer desire the mandate to speak 'for the nation'. Instead, they have become critical guardians of a

⁷³ Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf 'An die Kulturwelt!'. Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg: mit einer Dokumentation* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996), pp. 158 and 160.

⁷⁴ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Erste unzeitgemäße Betrachtung. Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. by Karl Schlechta, 3 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1962), I, 135.

pluralist and liberal society which subsumes 'national interests' within a much wider spectrum of cultural and political values.

The Translation of Identity: Subtitling the Vernacular of the French *cit *

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Abstract

This paper looks at how the process of translation impacts on the relocation of identity in the field of audiovisual translation, more specifically in that of subtitling. The language used by the three protagonists in the French film La Haine¹ is remarkable both linguistically and culturally, and is clearly a means for them to assert their identity. In using such a variety of French, the three young people in the film not only assert their belonging to a very specific community of practice, but also exclude whoever does not belong to their group. This paper looks at the particular case of La Haine, and comments on what is achieved – as well as what is not achieved – by the English subtitles written by Alexander Whitelaw and Stephen O’Shea in the Tartan Video version (1996). The paper will analyse the implications of using a variety of English such as African American Vernacular English to translate a variety of French such as the one spoken in the cit s (projects). The use of a dialect-for-dialect approach means that all cultural references in the original are transposed to the target culture. The implication of this is that the original undergoes a displacement of identity in the process of translation. I question whether the identity thus fabricated by the translators matches the images shown on screen, and subsequently if this approach is, in this particular context, successful or not. This paper draws on my MA dissertation, the wider purpose of which is to analyse the various reasons why a dialect-for-dialect approach may not necessarily work when it comes to audiovisual translation, through the study of the two sets of subtitles available for La Haine.

By studying the dialogue of the French film *La Haine* and its translation into English through subtitling, this paper will examine how the process of translation impacts on the relocation of identity. The paper will first focus on the analysis of the linguistic and social mechanisms of the language used by the three protagonists in the film so as to have a better understanding of the way in which the language works and of the ways in which its speakers are stigmatized. French street culture appears to be connected to its American counterpart at various different

¹ *La Haine*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Lazennec. 1995.

levels, which may justify the translator's strategy of translating *banlieue* French into African American Vernacular English (henceforth AAVE). Finally, bearing in mind the constraints related to subtitling, this paper will also explain the reasons for which the film *La Haine* did not enjoy great commercial success in the United States, and why the subtitles were often deemed responsible for the film's relative commercial failure, despite the interesting – if ambitious – subtitling strategy used by the translator.

La Haine revolves around three young people: Hubert, the calmest of the three, seeks to support his single black mother with the money he earns as a drug dealer; Saïd is a lively youth, who somehow always manages to get the other two in trouble; and finally Vinz is an edgy and nervous character from a Jewish family, who has just found a gun lost by a police officer during the riots in the housing estate. Kassovitz attempts to convey the situation of the marginalized suburban immigrant population that is left at the outskirts of both the city and society itself, and as such, the film carries an important political message. The film was very successful when it was shown at the Cannes film festival in 1996, when English subtitles were provided to cater for Anglophone journalists.

It should be noted that the most important features of the language used by the main characters in the film are not only linguistic, but also social. Whilst sociolinguists have disputed which term should be used to denote the type of language spoken by the protagonists, experts such as Jean-Pierre Goudaillier agree that it is a distinguishable variety of French. Goudaillier refers to this language as '*banlieue* French', a term which I have adopted here for the sake of simplicity.² The term '*banlieue*' is difficult to translate. Geographically speaking, it is the space that surrounds the city, but by '*banlieue* French', Goudaillier refers to a variety of French spoken specifically in the economically deprived areas that are usually located at the periphery of major cities. This terminology has social as well as geographical connotations. Social networks appear to be a key to speaking and understanding *banlieue* French, which arises in close-knit, dense networks such as those found within the *banlieue*'s adolescent population. According to Mikaël Jamin, who draws on Goudaillier's work, *banlieue* French is distinguished by its threefold function.³ First, *banlieue* French has a cryptic function. The extended use of slang and of features such as *verlan* makes the language difficult to understand for outsiders.⁴ When *La Haine* was shown in Cannes,

² ~~Jean-Pierre Goudaillier, *Comment tu tchatches! Dictionnaire du français contemporain des cités* (Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 1997).~~

³ Mikaël Jamin, forthcoming (Presses Universitaires de Pau).

⁴ *Le verlan* basically consists of inverting two syllables of a word (*le verlan*, for instance, comes from *l'envers* which means backwards). *Verlan* is fairly widespread, and is used mostly by teenagers so as not to be

French people in the audience said they needed the English subtitles, as it helped them understand the dialogue. Some of the scenes in the film even had to be post-synchronized due to the extensive use of *verlan* in the original dialogue, and because they were too difficult to understand. Second, counter to standard linguistic forms, *banlieue* French constitutes a rejection of the dominant social model. It can even be argued that such a use of language constitutes a political message in itself. Third, *banlieue* French is an alternative linguistic variety that allows French young people to play with the dominant language, be it at the morphological level (like *le verlan*) or at the interactional level, through language games, for instance, of which David Lepoutre gives a fairly exhaustive account in his book *Coeur de Banlieue*.⁵ Sociolinguists such as Suzanne Romaine⁶ and Dennis Ager have shown that young people like those depicted in *La Haine* are the most likely to develop vernacular forms: ‘Adolescents are hence likely to have a wide active vocabulary, relating to the terms of their interests, to develop new terms and expressions and thus be open to linguistic innovation.’⁷

Banlieue French is used as a means of asserting one’s membership in a community or peer group at the expense of whoever does not belong in the group. A consequence of these collective practices, involving mostly young people in poor areas, is that their language is clearly recognizable. In *La Haine*, the protagonists employ a number of non-standard features that linguists such as Bernard Conein and Françoise Gadet have shown to be characteristic of *banlieue* French, the most prominent of which is probably *verlan*.⁸ When they are talking amongst themselves, the protagonists make extensive use of it:

‘J’étais à *téco* [côté], ils m’ont même pas *méfil* [filmé]!’ (subtitled as ‘I was over there, they missed me!’)

‘C’est de la *demer* [merde] ton truc là!’ (subtitled as ‘This TV sucks.’)

understood by outsiders, and also as a means of strengthening in-group bonds. Countless examples of *verlan* can be heard in *La Haine*, and, needless to say, *verlan* represents a major challenge for translators, since no such morphological process exists in English.

⁵ David Lepoutre, *Cœur de banlieue: Codes, rites et langages* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1997), pp. 173-99. In the second section of his book, Lepoutre describes not only the violence, but also the inventiveness of the verbal prowess of a class of teenagers in La Courneuve, in the suburbs of Paris. He shows that *l’argot* (slang), *le verlan*, insults and obscene language are used in a codified way, mostly to determine who belongs in the group and who is a *bouffon* (lame).

⁶ Suzanne Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 80.

⁷ Dennis Ager, *Sociolinguistics and Contemporary French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 117.

⁸ Bernard Conein and Françoise Gadet, ‘Français populaire? Français des banlieues?’, *Black, blanc, beur: youth language and identity in France*, ed. by Farid Aitsiselmi (Bradford: University of Bradford Department of Modern Languages, 2000), pp. 39-49.

‘T’es *relou* [lourd] avec ces conneries!’ (subtitled as ‘You’re a fuckin’ pain!’)

The protagonists also use a lot of slang and insults, and rather imaginative combinations of all of the above:

‘Pauvre petit reubeu en carton.’ (subtitled as ‘You bogus Arab’ – ‘*reubeu*’ is a further example of *verlan*, standing for ‘Arabe’).

‘Ça t’arracherait les poils du cul de dire bonjour?’ (subtitled as ‘Can’t fuckin’ say hello?’)

The above examples demonstrate some of the distinctive linguistic expression of *banlieue* French speakers. The vulgarity of the language they use, along with *verlan* itself, stigmatizes them in the eyes of the viewer because they speak a variety of French that is so clearly non-standard and so easily recognizable that they find themselves socially marginalized by their unconventional use of the French language. Due to the very high proportion of French people of African descent, a public perception of a multi-ethnic French youth – more particularly in the *cités* – has developed, often referred to in the media as *black-blanc-beur*.⁹ It is important to note that the language and culture of the French youth in the *cités* are greatly influenced by African-American street culture, and this is true both in the film and in reality.¹⁰

Examples of the influence of Anglo-American culture can be found throughout *La Haine*. The film opens with Bob Marley’s song ‘Burning and A-Looting Tonight’, with background images of riots, most likely in a French *cit *, in the background. Vinz replays a classic scene from American director Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*, and the walls of Hubert’s room are covered with posters of Muhammad Ali. There is a clip of break-dancing about halfway through the film, improvised in a basement, and the dress code of the young people living in French *cit s* – and therefore in *La Haine* – is clearly influenced by the African-American young people who live in ghettos, and who are represented on screen in films such as those directed by Spike Lee. The parallel between French *cit s* and American

⁹ The term *black-blanc-beur* was used particularly often during the Football World Cup in 1998 to refer to the French team who included people from a variety of origins. It put the emphasis on the diversity of backgrounds in the French population, and also on the possibility of a successful melting-pot.

¹⁰ Herv  Vieillard-Baron, *Les Banlieues* ( vreux: Flammarion, 1996), p. 46.

projects – or housing estates as they are known in the UK – has often been drawn, particularly with respect to Chicago. Indeed, some specialists of French *banlieue* history such as Hervé Vieillard-Baron have shown that Chicago plays a particular, almost mythical role in the imagination of French young people in the *cités*. Chicago embodies the American dream, a paradoxical form of exoticism and ghettoisation, but also of crime and violence.¹¹ In other words, the identity of French youths living in the *cités* is defined partly in relation to their African-American counterparts, the parallel culture in the US.

This connection has been clearly acknowledged and exploited by the translator-subtitlers in *La Haine*, as illustrated by their decision to translate *banlieue* French into a form of AAVE in the Tartan Video version of the film. The translators also chose to transpose cultural references in the script in order to give the text an American feel. For instance, ‘kro’ (for Kronenbourg, a brand of beer) in the original dialogue is turned into ‘bud’ – note that the morphological process, the truncation, is kept – ‘les schtroumpfs’ (although known in the Anglophone world as the smurfs) become ‘Donald Duck’, ‘Darty’ becomes ‘Walmart’, and even Malik Oussekine, a young male victim of police violence in France, is translated as Rodney King. The overall strategy of the translators thus consisted in transforming French references into American ones. This translation strategy can be seen to displace the identity of the characters, since the language used for the subtitles is evocative of American street culture, and puts the viewer under the impression that the action has been relocated.

This transposition confronts the American viewer with notions and cultural references that he/she is familiar with, and as a result, the strategy of the translators can be called domesticating. They domesticate the original by bringing it closer to the culture of the language into which they translate. Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian and philosopher, argued in 1813 that there are only two methods of translation. In André Lefevere’s words, ‘Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.’¹² In the case of *La Haine*, it is clearly the author, or the film itself, that is moved towards the American viewer (although one may argue that as far as these two strategies are concerned, it is not so much a matter of ‘either/or’, as a question of ‘more or less’), and in the case of *La Haine*, the American viewer is confronted with a language that he/she is familiar with, one that carries the same social stigma as *banlieue* French. The translators have been very consistent in the use of a domesticating strategy for *La Haine*, and

¹¹ Vieillard-Baron, p. 46.

¹² Cited in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 19-20.

have, in fact, taken domestication to the extreme, opting for what is known as a dialect-for-dialect approach. This approach consists of replacing a vernacular in the original with another vernacular, and all cultural references in the original are subsequently transposed to the target culture.

As a general rule, translators tend to reject the option of dialect-for-dialect translation, given the relative impossibility of finding a vernacular form in the target language with features identical to or even approximating those present in another, vernacular forms being, by nature, geographically and socially idiosyncratic. In some respects, because of the stress placed on the vernacular character of the language – both in the French film and in real life in the French *cités* – and also because of the parallel that can be drawn between French and American street cultures, we might reasonably argue that the translator's decision to translate *banlieue* French with AAVE was justified. However, the visual dissonance between the subtitles and the pictures was not foreseen by the translators. In a very informative article about the reception of *La Haine* by Anglophone audiences, Anne Jäckel suggests that 'critics usually attribute the French failure to penetrate the American market to the resistance of American audiences to subtitling (and dubbing) and/or to the poor quality of language transfer'.¹³ She finds some support for blaming the subtitles in the words of a critic who complained that 'a sloppy pastiche of black American slang hinders rather than helps an understanding [...] of the film'.¹⁴ However, the subtitles' failure has less to do with the quality of the translation than with the limits of the dialect-for-dialect approach. The translators have used many features of AAVE in the subtitles, such as the phonetic corruption of words ending in *-er* ('gangsta', 'motherfucka') as well as that of pronouns ('Whadda ya mean?'), or the omission of the verb *to be* ('You a movie star'). Rather than call it a 'sloppy pastiche', one might find that they have been very consistent in the use of a dialect-for-dialect strategy. However, the understanding of the film is definitely hindered by the use of AAVE, and by the transposition of cultural references. In fact, the result of this transposition/translation of the film to fit American culture is that the American viewer is confronted with a language that belongs to his/her national culture, and yet is not given the means to apprehend the specificity of the French situation. The American audience is confronted with a recognizable language that is traditionally associated with African American people, but which is superimposed onto pictures of the French *black-blanc-beur*

¹³ Anne Jäckel, 'The subtitling of *La Haine*: A Case Study', in *(Multi) Media Translation: Concepts, Practices and Research*, ed. by Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb (Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins, 2001), pp.223-35 (p. 233).

¹⁴ Cited in Jäckel, p. 227.

trio of characters. This conceptual synthesis is rather incongruous. As a result, the American audience failed to relate to the protagonists: as one critic has said, ‘The media hysteria about a stray revolver in a housing project might appear touching to a society in which prepubescents tote Uzis, but not to American youths for whom the young men’s inability to drive would be “quaint”.’¹⁵ The clash between the pictures and the subtitles is explained by the fact that the connotations of the variety of language used in the subtitles, namely AAVE, are not compatible with what the viewer sees on screen. Hence, in this particular case, the relocation of identity that was attempted by the translators was rather unsuccessful; whilst they endeavoured to move the film towards the viewer – to recycle Schleiermacher’s metaphor – by using the subtitles the viewer finds him/herself somewhat brutally moved back towards the original by the images.

However interesting, bold, and even – to a certain extent – appropriate the dialect-for-dialect approach used for subtitling *La Haine* may be, it does not work because of the stark discrepancy that exists between what the viewer reads and the pictures he/she sees. For example, during a scene in which some young people from the *cités* (mostly from North Africa) have improvised a picnic on the roof of a building, Saïd steals a sausage from the barbecue and the victim then tells Saïd’s brother: ‘Ton frère il vient de piquer une merguez!’. This sentence is subtitled ‘Your bro stole a dog!’, which may seem incongruous to the American viewer who would naturally picture an African-American person making such an utterance. Although the translation is denotatively accurate, the Anglophone viewer is put under the impression that the action is taking place in a Harlem project, because the language used in the subtitles almost systematically bears a different connotation than the original dialogue. There are a countless number of such examples in the subtitles: ‘une racaille’ becomes a ‘gangsta’ in the subtitles, ‘un enculé’ is turned into a ‘mothafucka’, and Vinz’s ‘amis’ become his ‘homeys’. Because of this process of relocation, the translation fails to convey the film director’s symbolic resistance to the traditional notion of Frenchness, and the film is not so much about French youngsters in their *cit * as it is about ‘bros in the hood’. The specificity of the situation of the French *cités* does not survive the process of translation, and Kassovitz’s political message about the exclusion of an entire strata of the population left both at the periphery of the city and of French society, is definitely weakened if not altogether lost.

To conclude, although the parallels between *banlieue* French and AAVE mean that they are potentially viable equivalents for translation projects, in the case of *La Haine*, the

¹⁵ Cited in Jäckel, p. 233.

match between the subtitles and the pictures should probably have been considered more closely. Through the subtitles, the translators have created a new identity, one that does not exist in the original. *La Haine*'s director Mathieu Kassovitz himself asked for new subtitles to be written for the tenth anniversary DVD that came out in 2006. The dialect-for-dialect approach was abandoned, and the new subtitles were written in a much less marked form of English. By opting for a more neutral form of English, the translators for the tenth anniversary edition avoided the visual dissonance of the original subtitles. As far as audiovisual translation is concerned, a dialect-for-dialect approach appears rather ambitious, because it presupposes not only linguistic, but also cultural, and certainly functional, equivalences. Whether the dialect-for-dialect approach fails or succeeds, however, what remains true is that translation – and particularly the translation of a specific vernacular – is but one way of trying to apprehend the Other. This is particularly apparent when using a dialect-for-dialect approach, in the attempt to make this 'Otherness' – that which is foreign or merely different – resemble something known.

The Leibnizian Monad and the Self through the Lens of Carlo Emilio Gadda's and Samuel Beckett's Writings

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Abstract

This paper examines the reinterpretation of the Leibnizian notion of the monad in relation to the concept of the self by two contemporary twentieth-century European authors, Carlo Emilio Gadda and Samuel Beckett. By analyzing how far they both refashion and distort the rationalist philosopher's terminology and its basic tenets, in particular those relating to the concept of identity, I intend to show how a comparative approach to these two artistic processes brings to light some essential features of both Gadda's and Beckett's notion of identity and its disintegration. As I shall argue, the contrast which transpires between the Leibnizian, divinely inspired theory of pre-established harmony and the two modern authors' critique of the latter highlights some of the main characteristics of the modernist crisis of the unitary idea of the self, and it crystallizes a number of unexpected parallel traits in the oeuvre of the two writers. For this purpose, particular attention will be given to Gadda's early theoretical writings and Beckett's early fiction up to the French Trilogy.

My wider research project centres on a comparative study of the concept of artistic creation in the work of both authors, with a particular focus on their individual techniques of linguistic and narrative displacement. The potential parallels between the two authors have hardly been discussed in secondary literature to date, and Gadda in particular, who is often considered an isolated phenomenon in a national literary context, has not received due attention on a European literary platform.

This paper will examine the refashioning and reinterpretation of the seventeenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's concept of the *monad* in the writings of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Samuel Beckett. The aim is to show how the two authors' distortion of the rationalist's notion of the monadic self highlights some of the intrinsically modernist traits of their oeuvre regarding the disintegration of the individual, and how this process is mirrored in their writings. In Charles Taylor's words, 'the need for an escape from the restrictions of the unitary self has [...] become

an important recurring theme in this [the twentieth] century'.¹ Whereas the traditional 'ideal of disengaged reason', as Taylor further argues, 'requires a tight centre of control which dominates experience and is capable of constructing the orders of reason by which we can direct thought and life',² Gadda and Beckett explore the very fragmentation of this purported centre of the individual. My main argument is based on the claim that the modernists' departure from the unitary concept of the self is precisely what lies at the basis of the two authors' reinterpretation of the Leibnizian notion of the monad.³ By assessing the affinities between the two accounts, I intend to show that despite their diverse cultural and formative backgrounds there are a number of unexpected parallels in their work which situate both of them in the tradition of European modernism. The potential points of contact in their oeuvres have not received due attention so far, and especially Gaddian criticism is often confined to a prevalently Italian literary setting.

Carlo Emilio Gadda's acquaintance with Leibniz's works is based on his early study of the thinker at an academic level, which prompted him to write his university dissertation on the *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*.⁴ Notwithstanding his background knowledge of the topic, Gadda's approach to theoretical discourse has often been characterized as intrinsically literary. Even though his 1928 philosophical treatise *Meditazione milanese* takes inspiration from Leibnizian combinatorial metaphysics, there is no systematic discussion of the philosopher's concepts in his works. Beckett's interest in the German philosopher, on the other hand, is of quite a different nature. Rather than providing an intellectual resource of ideas, Beckett claims that his reading of the *Monadology*⁵ furnished him with a creative source of images, as he puts it in the following letter to Thomas McGreevy in 1933: 'Leibniz a great cod, but full of splendid little

¹ *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 463.

² Taylor, p. 462.

³ What I am referring to here is the characteristic idea of the modernist movement that the self is not part of an *a priori* unity. One of the first thinkers to pronounce this thought was Nietzsche, who is often considered one of the most important precursors of the modernist period. Writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Robert Musil and Marcel Proust, the latter of which speaks of the self as 'plusieurs personnes superposées' (in 'Contre Sainte-Beuve', quoted in R. Quiñones, *Mapping Literary Modernism: time and development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 146), all explore the need to escape the limitations of the traditional idea of the unitary self in their writings.

⁴ When embarking on the study of philosophy, Gadda had already obtained a degree in engineering. He never formally graduated in the former subject, though. The dissertation was never handed in and it remains in draft form. Its original title is 'La teoria della conoscenza nei "Nuovi saggi" di G. W. Leibniz', and it was only recently published in *I Quaderni dell'Ingegnere*, ed. by Riccardo Stracuzzi (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), pp. 5-44.

⁵ As recent empirical scholarship has revealed, the Irish author's acquaintance with Leibniz appears to have been not only based on the original text, but significantly filtered through W. Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*, from which he copied large sections into a notebook, commonly referred to as the 'Philosophy Notes', in the 1930s. See Matthew Feldman, 'Beckett's Poss and the Dog's Dinner: An Empirical Survey of the 1930s "Psychology" and "Philosophy Notes"', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 13 (2004), 69-94.

pictures.⁶ Lacking any particular enthusiasm for Leibnizian philosophical ideas, Beckett appropriates these ‘pictures’ as a reserve of inspiration in a prevalently figurative sense.

Let us briefly clarify Leibniz’s original meaning of the central notion of the *monad*. The term was first adopted to designate the notion of an individual substance in the late 1690s, and it is introduced as a reaction to Descartes’ concept of the ‘extended substance’ (*res extensa*) in the *Monadology* (1714).⁷ The main properties of monads are defined as follows: they are the source of their own activity and they cannot be altered or changed by the direct action of others. Being impervious to any external influence exerted by other monads, the philosopher describes them as ‘windowless’: ‘The Monads have no windows, through which anything could come in or go out.’⁸ The Leibnizian emphasis on the absence of windows frequently resurfaces in Beckett’s writings. Moreover, for Leibniz the concept of the monad does not exclusively apply to the rational self: he distinguishes carefully between rational souls, like ours, and monads with lesser degrees of consciousness and rationality – what he sometimes calls ‘bare monads’ – such as animals and ‘simple substances’ possessing the basic properties of perception and ‘appetition’. In order to account for the relations that hold between one substance and another, Leibniz argues that each individual substance or monad reflects the entire world of which it is part, a thesis closely connected with his famous hypothesis of pre-established harmony. All monads are ‘pre-programmed’ by God even before creation, allowing a perfect coordination and harmony between them.⁹ What distinguishes one monad from the other is its individual, momentary perceptions and appetitions. Overall, God is the ordering principle of the multiplicity of relations which constitutes the external world in the Leibnizian universe.

In Gadda’s texts, the notion of the monad as the rational self is discussed on several occasions, in particular in *Meditazione milanese*. What transpires in his remarks is a distinct departure from the concept of the monad as a well-delineated, closed (‘windowless’) unit. His idea of the self as a system as such does not entirely part with the Leibnizian theory, but it

⁶ Letter to MacGreevy, 6 December 1933, in C. J. Ackerley, ‘Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy’, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 7 (1997/1998), p. 103.

⁷ The monad’s basic characterization in the *Monadology* reads as follows: ‘The monad [...] is nothing but a simple substance, which enters into compounds. By “simple” is meant “without parts”. And there must be simple substances, since there are compounds; for a compound is nothing but a collection or aggregatum of simple things. Now where there are no parts, there can be neither extension nor form [figure] nor divisibility. These Monads are the real atoms of nature and, in a word, the elements of things’. *The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings*, trans. by Robert Latta (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), para. 1-3.

⁸ Leibniz, para. 7.

⁹ Leibniz, para. 4-7.

distances itself from the claim of an inherent harmony and order subsisting in the monad. In *Meditazione milanese*, which is partly structured around a fictional dialogue between the author and a *critico*, the latter reprimands his interlocutor, claiming that his ideas concerning the ‘sistema’ are ‘antileibniziani’, as they depart too far from the philosopher’s original concepts:

I vostri concetti artificiosi sono antileibniziani e rivelano una ignoranza crassa degli elementi d’ogni vera filosofia. Non ricordate che monade o io è un assolutamente semplice: e che la monade è la casa buia senza finestre?...È il chiuso pensiero, puro io, che non ha bisogno di luce dal di fuori, ché ha in sé la luce?¹⁰

[Your artificial concepts are anti-Leibnizian and they reveal a crass ignorance of the elements of every genuine philosophy. Do you not remember that the monad or the self is absolutely simple: that the monad is a dark house without any windows?...It is a closed thought, pure self, which does not require any light from the outside, because the light originates in itself?]

This purportedly Leibnizian view is then contrasted with Gadda’s own acceptance of the term, which stands in stark contrast to that of the seventeenth-century philosopher. Aware of transgressing the territory of his rationalist predecessor, the author consciously distinguishes his idea of the monad from its original meaning. His terminology is distinctly literary:

Un sistema è invece, secondo le vostre espressioni, un mostro indescrivibile, che fa pettegolezzi con tutti, come certe serve che coinvolgono nella loro curiosità malefica tutti i coinquilini. E qui, presso di voi, si tratta di coinquilini nella casa del mondo universo.

[According to your words, though, a system is an indescribable monster, which gossips with anyone, just like certain servants do who involve all tenants in their

¹⁰ *Meditazione milanese* in *Scritti vari e postumi*, ed. by Dante Isella (Milan: Garzanti, 1993), p. 804. All translations in this paper marked by *[italics]* are by the author. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

morbid curiosity. And in your case, we are talking about the tenants of the house of the entire world.] (p. 804)

The penetrability of the Gaddian system/individual is thereby held against the ‘pure sphere of the self’ which the Leibnizian monad represents for the writer. While the philosopher’s version provides a clear-cut definition of the individual, Gadda rejects this claim on the basis of his doubts concerning the very feasibility of a definite determination of the self. The latter has rather blurred contours, and he even refers to it as ‘una deformazione perenne, che mai non è identic[a] a se stess[a], se non nella grossa apparenza (e qui Leibniz protesterebbe)’ [*a perennial deformation, which is at no point identical to itself but in its overall appearance (and here Leibniz would object)*] (p. 760). Hence for Gadda the self is a system in constant movement, an agglomeration of relations which are defined only with reference to their particular spatial and temporal allocation. It lacks a definite substance and cannot be conceived as a unity. He is aware that Leibniz would not agree with his interpretation of the monad as a continuously changing collection of attributes, whereas the philosopher would consent to his idea of the self as a system divided into further sub-systems. The difference lies in the rational order of the Leibnizian self, which stands in stark contrast to the Gaddian ‘impossibilità di chiusura di un sistema (di cui) qualcosa rimane sempre di inspiegato, [...] sia esso l’Io di Fichte; o il Dio di Spinoza; [...]; o la monade bruniana o leibniziana’. [*impossibility of closure of a system, a part of which always remains unexplained, [...] be it Fichte’s self; or Spinoza’s God; [...] or the Brunian or the Leibnizian monad*] (p. 741). It is precisely the rejection of the idea of hermetic closure which differentiates the Leibnizian and the Gaddian monad, and which finds its most unequivocal expression in a note added to the ‘Obiezioni critiche’ [*Critical objections*] in *Meditazione milanese*:

La mia monade e il mio io sono delle baracche sconquassate rispetto alle pure sfere d’acciaio di Leibniz e hanno mille finestre e mille fessure.

[*My monad and my self are shattered barracks compared to Leibniz’s pure spheres of steel, and they have a thousand windows and a thousand cracks.*] (p. 832)

The contrast between the idea of the ‘permeable’ monad with an infinite number of windows and cracks and the antithetically opposed ‘windowlessness’ of the Leibnizian monadic sphere is further developed in the recently published draft of Gadda’s 1929 university dissertation, which confirms the author’s continued interest in the philosopher:

Superordinarsi delle monadi oltre l’io – molteplicità dei significati del fatto percettivo e in genere del fatto storico – ecco due punti d’arrivo già estranei a Leibniz. [...] L’unità [dell’anima umana] esiste, la monade esiste: ma sta a vedere se l’anima è una sola monade o un campo nel quale più monadi si superordinano. Ciò mi premeva di accennare.¹¹

[The superordination of monads beyond the self – multiplicity of meanings of the perceptual fact and in general of the historical fact – these are two points of arrival which are already foreign to Leibniz. [...] The unity [of the human soul] exists, and the monad exists; but it remains to be seen whether the soul is a single monad or a field in which several monads superordinate themselves. I was keen on emphasizing that.]

Once more, the emphasis here is on the complex and multifaceted nature of the writer’s version of the monad, which contradicts the notion of closure that Leibniz attributed to it. Gadda applies the concept of the monad to his theory of the dissolution of the self, thereby underlining the extent to which his idea of the individual contrasts with that of his rationalist predecessor. Whereas Leibniz’s monad represents an impenetrable unity, reflected in the traditionally homogeneous concept of the self, Gadda’s monad dissolves through the many windows and holes that symbolize the lack of a cohesive self, which is one of the central thematics of the author’s writings and of modernism as such.

As far as Samuel Beckett’s appropriation of the concept of the monad is concerned, the Leibnizian term seems to assume the role of furnishing him with a ‘splendid little picture’ which

¹¹ C. E. Gadda, ‘La teoria della conoscenza nei “Nuovi saggi” di G. W. Leibniz’, in *I Quaderni dell’Ingegnere*, ed. by Riccardo Stracuzzi (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), p. 20.

is then refashioned or comically distorted, and applied to his poetic purposes. There are two main issues that seem to have captured the writer's interest in the philosopher: while adopting (at least to a certain extent) Leibniz's claim that the monad is 'windowless' and therefore a 'hermetically closed sphere', he rejects the idea of a 'pre-established harmony' of divine origin which purportedly enables the perfect coordination between the world and the individual self/monad. As Garin Dowd argues, Beckett's specific interest in several seventeenth-century thinkers (such as Leibniz, Berkeley and Descartes) shows a 'predominant affection' for the 'impasses and their paradox-laden contours',¹² to which the most important representatives of the Age of Reason took philosophy, rather than in the actual content of their theories. This paradox in Leibniz's work arises in the arguable incompatibility of the monad as a 'hermetically closed sphere' on the one hand, independent of all external interaction, and the apparent interaction with the universe and knowledge of the infinite on the other. Leibniz's system collapses without the function of the divine creator who guarantees the smooth coordination of the world's entities. Beckett's interest in the philosopher's theories, according to Dowd, stems from the realization of this lack of the linking element between the monad and the universe, and the consequent collapse of the teleological system. In fact, the resulting breakdown of causality is creatively explored in several of his writings, and it is the starting point for the solipsism and the lack of purpose suffered by his fictional monads.

In Beckett's works, the monad is at times illustrated by a spatial metaphor, most frequently that of a closed room with a small window (or no window at all), recalling the 'hermetic closure' of Leibnizian origin. By seizing on the limited space of the monad, symbolized by spatial confinement, Beckett underlines the lack of interaction (or solipsism) of the individual with the rest of the world; at the same time, he posits an indefinable 'otherness' in the world outside which does not give his protagonists any comfort or points of reference. The hermetic closure of the system/self, which was so fiercely objected to by the Italian author, is one of the central tenets of Beckett's adoption of the philosophical term.

The monad is a key concept in the central sixth chapter of his early novel *Murphy* (first published in 1938), where the reader is presented with a survey of the protagonist's mind which is clearly suffused with Leibnizian terminology:

¹² Garin Dowd, 'Nomadology: Reading the Beckettian Baroque' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 8 (1998), 15-49 (p. 16).

Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it.¹³

Beckett here adopts and at the same time distorts the original conception of the Leibnizian monad. While embracing the notion of the 'universe' reflected in the microcosm of the monad and its description as a 'closed sphere', he reverses the philosopher's term *plenum* into *vacuum*, which is mirrored in the 'hollow' sphere. According to Leibniz, the monad expresses the entire universe through the relations which form its *plenum* (that is, space without empty place):

As this body [represented by the Monad] expresses the whole universe through the connexion of all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing this body, which belongs to it in a special way.¹⁴

Beckett inverts this claim, and consequently the Leibnizian state of near perfection in the hermetically closed entity of the monad finds itself in *disharmony* with the universe instead of representing part of it. This distortion is further emphasized in the description of Murphy's garret with its minuscule window, which is put into direct relation with the 'windowlessness' of the monad:

No system of ventilation appeared to dispel the illusion of respirable vacuum. The compartment was windowless, like a monad, except for the shuttered judas in the door [...]. Within the narrow limits of domestic architecture he had never been able to imagine a more creditable representation of what he kept on calling,

¹³ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p.107. In the French translation of *Murphy*, Beckett explicitly mentions Murphy's interest in Leibniz in this passage. See *Murphy* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1947), p. 119.

¹⁴ Leibniz, p. 253, para. 62.

indefatigably, the little world.¹⁵

The author here again opposes the ‘vacuum’ of Murphy’s monad-like habitat to Leibniz’s harmonious ‘plenum’. Moreover, the reference to ‘the little world’ seems to mock the Leibnizian notion of the ‘universe in the monad’, which is closely related to the theory of ‘pre-established harmony’.

A further ‘windowless space’ in Beckett’s prose is the protagonist’s room or ‘den’ in the 1951 novel *Malone Dies*.¹⁶ The vacuum is here once more associated with the monadic room/womb or skull-like space of the second novel of the *Trilogy*:

The light is there, outside, the air sparkles, the granite wall across the way glitters with all its mica, the light is against my window, but it does not come through. [...]. A kind of air circulates, I must have said so, and when all goes still I hear it beating against the walls and being beaten back by them. [...] And in the skull is it a vacuum?¹⁷

The skull-like space in this passage assumes similar features to the monadic enclosures which characterize a large number of Beckett’s settings,¹⁸ and once more the ‘windowlessness’ and the vacuum are linked to the solipsism of the character.

While on the one hand Beckett adopts the conceptual framework of the monad, on the other he denies its inner order as well as its harmonious reflection of the outside world. What the Beckettian monad lacks is both the harmony and the teleological nature which were central to Leibniz’s system. The absence of a rational order is further reflected in the lack of synthetic ability of the protagonist of *The Unnamable*, who is confined to a glass jar, strikingly reminiscent of the spatial closure of the monad. As Dowd maintains, the protagonist of the novel fails to cross the threshold of reason, and in this very deficit distinguishes himself from the Leibnizian hierarchical structure of the ‘human’ monad, who is in full possession of his intellectual

¹⁵ *Murphy*, p. 181.

¹⁶ See ‘Malone Dies’ in Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy* (London: Calder, 1994), p. 220.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-22.

¹⁸ See Naoya Mori, ‘Beckett’s Windows and the Windowless Self’, in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui: After Beckett/D’après Beckett*, ed. by A. Uhlmann, S. Houppermans and B. Clement (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 357-70, for further examples of ‘windowless’ spaces in Beckett’s works, such as *Endgame* and *Watt*.

capacities.¹⁹ In fact, as Leibniz argues concerning the distinctive features of human beings in the *Monadology*,

It is the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths that distinguishes us from the mere animals and gives us Reason and the sciences, raising us to the knowledge of ourselves and of God.²⁰

The Unnamable, on the contrary, is 'bereft of purpose', with 'no knowledge of anything, no history and no prospects, buried under the seconds, saying any old thing [...]'.²¹ Deprived of all rational faculties, the protagonist forms a striking counterpoint to the Leibnizian monad, an inadequacy which is further mirrored in his physical crippling, leaving him without even a hand with which to write. The Beckettian vacuum has engulfed the Leibnizian plenum of meaning and purposefulness, reducing the protagonist to a transitional state of identity symbolized by the membrane or 'tympanum' which separates the self from the outside world:

I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either.²²

The Beckettian monad has regressed from the Leibnizian self-sufficient, rational entity presided over by a divine creator to a de-centred self which lacks '[any] differential mechanism of reciprocal determination'.²³

Beckett creatively employs and refashions the concept of the monad to express his critique of the self as a rational unity. He seizes on the paradox into which a godless, Leibnizian universe is thrust and underlines its lack of purpose and rationale. The Beckettian

¹⁹ See Dowd, pp. 30-34.

²⁰ Leibniz, p. 233, para. 29. See also para. 30: 'It is also through the knowledge of necessary truths, and through their abstracted expression, that we rise to acts of reflexion, which make us think of what is called I, and observe this or that is within us: and thus, thinking of ourselves, we think of being, of substance, of the simple and the compound, of the immaterial, and of God Himself, conceiving that what is limited in us is in Him without limits. And these acts of reflexion furnish the chief objects of our reasoning.'

²¹ 'The Unnamable' in *Trilogy*, p. 388, p. 393.

²² 'The Unnamable', p. 386.

²³ Dowd, p. 41.

monad/individual is bereft of spatial location and of intellectual capacities, and it vegetates in a state of utter solitude. Gadda on the other hand, who also quite clearly contrasts his own concept of the monad with Leibniz's, vehemently refutes the notion of 'windowlessness', positing an 'impossibile chiusura di un sistema' [*impossible closure of a system*] instead. The most prominent characteristic of his version of the monad/individual is its porosity, which at surface level stands in contrast to the Beckettian adaptation of a 'hermetically closed' sphere of the self, and which underlines the impossibility of a clear definition of the individual's identity.

Despite these divergences in the process of re-interpretation, though, there is a common factor in both Gadda's and Beckett's refashioning of the notion of the monad: the most drastic departure from the Leibnizian theory in both cases occurs with regards to the unitary concept of the self, which undergoes a process of utter disintegration in the two authors' writings. What their appropriations of the philosopher's terminology share is the affirmation of the fragmented self, which on the one hand appears as unstable and subject to a multiplicity of external and internal influences, while on the other features as an inner vacuum shielded from the outer world as a hollow sphere bereft of its rational faculties. The concept of the monad as a reflection of the plenum subsisting in a pre-established harmony with the rest of the universe dissolves in both accounts, either by being deprived of its comprehensive unity or by cutting off all communication with the outer world and losing its inner complexity. The Gaddian thinker is left with the 'baracca sconquassata' [*shattered barrack*] of the self, just as the Beckettian individual is left with a vacuous skull.

What is compelling in the comparative study of the two authors' interpretation of Leibniz's monad is the affinity of their departure from the original meaning. The creative refashioning of the philosophical concept in their works reveals their disillusionment with the traditional idea of the unitary self, which plays an important role in the definition of the Leibnizian individual. Both Gadda's and Beckett's accounts of the monad epitomize the modernist individual's identity crisis: they adopt and reinterpret the Leibnizian concept of the monad as a metaphor for their own theories of the self, which affects both the role of the narrator and of the narrated in their works. The employment of subversive linguistic and narrative techniques which upset the traditional structure of the text and the conventional role of the narrator is a distinctive feature of their writings. The direct contrast with the rationalist predecessor's concept of the monad explored in this paper testifies to the affinity of their

criticisms, which both highlight some of the central characteristics of the modernist critique of the unitary self.