

Religious Conversions in Nineteenth-Century Germany:
Clemens Brentano, Georg Büchner, and Heinrich Heine

By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **FBA:** Frankfurter Brentano Ausgabe:

Brentano, Clemens. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurter Brentano Ausgabe)*, edited by Jürgen Behrens, Wolfgang Frühwald, and Detlev Lüders. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974-2014.

2. **MA:** Marburger Ausgabe:

Büchner, Georg. *Sämtliche Werke und Schriften. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe mit Quellendokumentation und Kommentar (Marburger Ausgabe)*, edited by Burghard Dedner. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000-2013.

3. **HSA:** Heine Säkularausgabe:

Heine, Heinrich. *Säkularausgabe: Werke, Briefwechsel, Lebenszeugnisse.*, edited by the Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten der klassischen deutschen Literatur in Weimar (later: Stiftung Weimarer Klassik) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, and Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1979-1984.

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Nietzsche was not the first German author to declare that God was dead, as stated famously by the madman in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882): “Gott ist tot! Gott bleibt tot! Und wir haben ihn getötet!”¹ Nearly fifty years earlier, Heinrich Heine had declared God dead in his essay *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834): “Unsere Brust ist voll von entsetzlichem Mitleid — es ist der alte Jehova selber, der sich zum Tode bereitet” (HSA 8:191). He claimed that Immanuel Kant had initiated “eine geistige Revoluzion in Deutschland” (HSA 8:191) with his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), an irreversible “Bruch mit der Vergangenheit” (HSA 8:191) that meant the downfall of deism. Although Heine would later disavow this claim, he was firm in his belief during the 1830s that God was dying, if not dead already, and that Kant had been the catalyst for the collapse of deism. Bruno Hillebrand has noted that declarations of God’s death such as Nietzsche’s were not new in 1882, but they were in fact “neu erlebt” and “umfassender in ihrer Konsequenz.”² Between the writings of Kant and Nietzsche was a period in which the old religious institutions struggled to find a new role in a society that was radically changing. While these institutions sought renewal and transformation, so did believers on an individual level, as they began to see religion as a private choice that was meant to address their personal needs and reflect their personalities. Belief in God, or in any specific version of a god,³ was no longer a public and obligatory aspect of one’s identity, but simply one option among others. This created a larger number of religious seekers, the natural consequence of which was conversion in its myriad forms: for example, from one mainline religion to

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966), 2:127.

² Bruno Hillebrand, *Ästhetik des Nihilismus: Von der Romantik zum Modernismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), 59.

³ Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the monotheistic God of the Abrahamic religions with an uppercase letter, “God,” while using the lowercase “god” when referring to non-specific or impersonal gods such as in pantheism, deism, and polytheism, or to a god in a broadly theistic sense as it stands in contrast to atheism or non-theism.

another, from orthodoxy to heterodoxy, or from apathy to complete devotion. This dissertation argues that the early nineteenth century was a *time of conversion* in Germany by investigating the constellation of theological, philosophical, and political factors leading up to the time in which three of the most notable converts of this time — Clemens Brentano, Georg Büchner, and Heinrich Heine — grappled with the notion of conversion, not only in their personal writings such as correspondence and memoirs, but also in their literary works. These three authors are only a few examples of the many conversions that began during German Romanticism, one of the most famous of which was Friedrich Schlegel, who turned to Catholicism in 1808. Goethe described Schlegel’s conversion in a letter to Karl Friedrich Reinhard on 22 June 1808 as a “Zeichen der Zeit,”⁴ referring to the many other converts to Catholicism during this time: Friedrich Leopold Stolberg, Adam Müller, Zacharias Werner, Clemens Brentano, Johannes and Philipp Veit, and Johann Friedrich Overbeck, just to name a few. But this “Konversionsbewegung,”⁵ as described by Winfried Eckel and Nikolaus Wegmann, was not limited to Catholicism. This dissertation uncovers the underlying historical and intellectual conditions during the beginning of the nineteenth century that created an environment that was highly conducive to conversions in all directions.

The first chapter explores the diverse definitions of conversion and secularization in the fields of sociology, psychology, theology, and history. Specifically, it addresses contemporary studies in conversion conducted by Lewis R. Rambo, William Bainbridge, John D. Barbour, Heinz Streib, and Charles Taylor. Each of them approaches the religious shifts represented by conversion and secularization in a slightly different way, and a synthesis of these definitions will lead to a working definition to be used throughout the dissertation:

Conversion denotes a reorientation of religious affiliation (switching religions or

⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Briefe. Bd. III: 1805-1812*, ed. Bodo Morawe (Munich: Beck, 1988), 78.

⁵ Winfried Eckel and Nikolaus Wegmann, “Einleitung,” in *Figuren der Konversion. Friedrich Schlegels Übertritt zum Katholizismus im Kontext*, ed. Winfried Eckel and Nikolaus Wegmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 7.

denominations) or a transformation of religious identity (a change in religious role or a dramatic intensification of belief) with characteristics that can fall anywhere along the spectrums of gradual to instantaneous, passive to active, private to public, coerced to voluntary, and emotional to intellectual. This definition is intentionally broad because conversion is ultimately a personal experience that is unique to each religious seeker. Deconversion is a special type of conversion, and shares many characteristics with the concept of conversion in the traditional sense. Deconversions can occur on their own, or as part of a larger deconversion and reversion process resulting in reaffiliation with another religion. The chapter addresses the concept of deconversion in some detail, as outlined in studies by John D. Barbour and Heinz Streib. The relatively new term “deconversion” is a necessary replacement for older discriminatory terms such as “apostasy” and “defection.”

Secularization is defined in this chapter as the phenomenon in which religion became a private rather than a public affair, a shift from “traditional religion” to “individualized religion,”⁶ as Steve Bruce has suggested. Secularization is not simply the decline of religion, but rather a change in how religion is practiced. And according to Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (2007), secularization is “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others.”⁷ This can be traced in the difference in the reactions to writers who were critical of Christianity as time progressed: Reimarus did not dare to publish his *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (1768) during his lifetime in the mid-eighteenth century, but by the early nineteenth century, Strauss and Feuerbach had the courage to publish theirs. They did, however, pay the price for their unorthodox writings in their severely damaged reputations and careers and were ostracized by the academic and

⁶ Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48.

⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

theological communities. By the time Nietzsche continued this demythologizing process by declaring God dead through the mouth of his madman in 1882, he did so in a religious environment that had radically changed from the beginning of the nineteenth century: one in which religion was one option for guidance among others, rather than being the dominant, unproblematic source of authority. God was still alive, but his characteristics had changed; he was no longer the source of ultimate authority and the sole bestower of meaning and purpose in human life. In this sense, it was not only individuals who underwent conversions during the nineteenth century, but the concept of God itself had been transformed as a result of the shifting *Zeitgeist* that sustained him. At the same time that conversions took place in great numbers on an individual level, the concept of God itself was undergoing a conversion in this process of secularization. This phenomenon is symptomatic of modernity, which Eckel and Wegmann define as “den Zerfall übergreifender holistischer Weltbilder, Prozesse der Partikularisierung und Pluralisierung, diskursive oder systematische Differenzierung, zugleich aber auch [...] eine wachsende Freiheit für das Individuum, seinen Weg in einer unübersichtlichen Welt selbst zu bestimmen.”⁸ In this sense, modernity and conversion go hand in hand: the combination of religious pluralism and individual freedom to explore religious options is the ideal environment for a conversion.

Finally, the first chapter elucidates the religious climate of early nineteenth-century Germany and how certain events led to the transformation of religion’s role in society, such as the Protestant Reformation, the Peace of Westphalia, the rise of Pietism and devotional Protestantism, and the vigorous Enlightenment debate about religion as depicted in the texts of Lessing’s *Fragmentenstreit* (1774-1780). The beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by the Napoleonic Wars, the French occupation, the Congress of Vienna, and the rocky *Vormärz* period along with the revolutions that concluded it — all of which contributed

⁸ Eckel and Wegmann, “Einleitung,” 8.

to the shifting role of religious authority. Reforms and revivals in Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism constituted a “Renaissance des Religiösen”⁹ in which religions competed for influence and relevance, while at the same time philosophers and theologians such as David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach conducted historical-critical exegeses of the Bible (*Das Leben Jesu, kritisch betrachtet* [1835] and *Das Wesen des Christentums* [1841], respectively), and, like Hermann Samuel Reimarus with his *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* and others before them, found the Bible to be an unreliable text and proposed other explanations for the miracles described in it. Their rejection of the Bible’s supernatural claims in favor of rational explanations was yet another expression of the impulse for renewal and reform that continued into the nineteenth century. The transformation of religion’s role during this time can be most succinctly encapsulated in the shift from a public, state-sanctioned or even state-mandated, and obligatory function of society, to an individualized form of religiosity that was much more private in what Rebekka Habermas has called an “‘Intimisierung’ der öffentlich praktizierten Religion.”¹⁰ Pietism had prepared the way for this shift, emphasizing that true spirituality took place as a process of rebirth within the believer, and not as part of public worship practices. This has been described as a “Familiarisierung”¹¹ of worship resulting in a “Religion im Privaten,”¹² as the importance of the public side of religious practice began to wane.

Following this discussion of the theoretical premises and the historical environment of religious conversion, the second chapter investigates the fluctuations in Clemens Brentano’s identity as a poet and as a Catholic. Three of the sociological methods presented in the first chapter provide a framework for understanding the nature of Brentano’s conversion in a way

⁹ Hans-Werner Hahn and Helmut Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte. Band 14: Reformen, Restauration und Revolution. 1806-1848/49* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010), 394.

¹⁰ Rebekka Habermas, “‘Weibliche Religiosität – oder: Von der Fragilität bürgerlicher Identitäten,’” in *Wege zur Geschichte des Bürgertums*, ed. Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 128.

¹¹ Habermas, “‘Weibliche Religiosität,’” 128.

¹² Habermas, “‘Weibliche Religiosität,’” 128.

that has not previously been done in Brentano scholarship: the types of conversion and seven stage model of conversion from Lewis R. Rambo's *Understanding Religious Conversion*, and strain theory and social influence theory as applied to religion by William S. Bainbridge. I apply these methods of sociology to interpret Brentano's conversion through his letters and literary works, especially *Godwi oder Das steinerne Bild der Mutter* (1800/1801), and *Das bittere Leiden unsers Herrn Jesu Christi* (1833). Brentano's aesthetic approach for both of these texts mirrors his intensification of religious belief. The goal of *Godwi* is radically different from the goal of *Das bittere Leiden*: while the former is the poetic expression of a Romantic writer exploring sensuality as a religious experience, the latter is an explicitly religious text that aims to edify its readers in a much more orthodox manner. The difference between these two texts can indeed be described as an intensification: the romantic love in *Godwi*, which has religious undertones but ultimately contains a sensualist message, becomes more focused and intensified in *Das bittere Leiden* as Brentano fixates on his relationship with Anna Katharina Emmerick, whose visions provide him with more direct access to the divine. Brentano's conversion, spiritually as well as poetically, reveals how a shift in religious identity often affects every aspect of someone's worldview and forever alters their mode of self-expression.

The third chapter discusses the religious and philosophical explorations in the works of Georg Büchner, who underwent a very different kind of transformation during the same time that Clemens Brentano and many of his contemporaries found their purpose in Catholicism. Strain theory provides one explanatory model for Büchner's loss of faith, but the primary sociological method for understanding Büchner's conversion in greater depth than has previously been achieved is found in two deconversion theories presented in the first chapter by John D. Barbour and Heinz Streib. Büchner's loss of faith stemmed in part from his study of the French Revolution and its historical and moral implications, as described in

his *Fatalismusbrief* (1834) and investigated in more detail in his drama *Danton's Tod* (1835). Revolutions mirror conversions in many ways, and the idea that “die Revolution sei eine Konversion”¹³ was part of the debate about the aftermath of the French Revolution in Büchner's Germany, with pamphlets and brochures that frequently described it with the imagery of rebirth and resurrection. Just as in the Pietist traditions of *Wiedergeburt* from the previous century, this revolutionary rebirth seemed to need never-ending repetition, as the characters of Büchner's drama lament when they call for the revolution to finally end so that the republic can begin.

Büchner's novella fragment *Lenz* (1839) mirrors this process of endless attempts at renewal in the title character's frustrated quest to be truly converted to God. Both *Danton's Tod* and *Lenz* are stories of deconversion preceded by philosophical crises related to the problem of theodicy: neither Lenz nor the Dantonists can justify the existence of a benevolent God who would create a world with such immense and senseless suffering. In the drama, Büchner's version of the historical revolutionary, Thomas Paine (spelled “Payne” by Büchner), describes “Schmerz” as the “Fels des Atheismus” (MA 3,2:49), and in the novel fragment an exhausted Lenz cries to Oberlin: “[A]ber ich, wär' ich allmächtig, sehen Sie, wenn ich so wäre, und ich könnte das Leiden nicht ertragen, ich würde retten, retten” (MA 5:47). Lenz's constant switching between belief and unbelief — his “schizophrene[s] Oszillieren zwischen religiösem Eifer und Atheismus”¹⁴ — leaves him exhausted and bereft of any mental or emotional stability. Lenz's dramatic deconversion reveals something telling about the shifting in religious consciousness during Büchner's time: belief in God was no longer “unchallenged and [...] unproblematic,” but indeed “one option among others.”¹⁵ The increasingly problematized nature of religion is not only the content of Büchner's literary

¹³ François Furet und Mona Ozouf, eds., *Kritisches Wörterbuch der Französischen Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 2:1073.

¹⁴ Sebastian Kaufmann, “Ästhetik des Leidens? Zur antiidealistischen Kunstkonzeption in Georg Büchners *Lenz*,” *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 13 (2013-2015): 195.

¹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

writings; it is also reflected in their form. Büchner's montage technique of copying and pasting from his source material gives the initial impression of presenting a harmonious whole, but the underlying structure is one of disintegration and fragmentation. Büchner's cobbling together of fragments parallels the experience of deconversion. An understanding of human origin and purpose that was once whole and explained is supplanted by a fragmentary, incomplete grasp of a vast, inaccessible universe. The individual is responsible for making their own meaning, rather than receiving it from a cohesive theological system.

Büchner actively partook in the materialist discourses of his time, which sought explanations that were typically supplied by theology instead of the natural sciences, building on eighteenth-century texts such as Paul Henri Thiry Baron d'Holbach's *Système de la nature. Ou des loix du monde physique et du monde moral* (1770) which has been called the "Bibel des Materialismus."¹⁶ In his lecture *Über Schädelnerven* (1836), Büchner rejected the teleology of Christian doctrine, maintaining instead that "[d]ie Natur handelt nicht nach Zwecken, [...] sie ist in allen ihren Äußerungen sich unmittelbar *selbst genug*. Alles, was ist, ist um seiner selbst willen da" (MA 8:153). This philosophized product of anatomy embraced the materialism that his younger brother Ludwig would later advocate in *Kraft und Stoff: Empirisch-naturphilosophische Studien* (1855). Büchner, like earlier eighteenth-century figures such as d'Holbach, Thomas Paine, and Hermann Samuel Reimarus, and like his contemporaries Ludwig Feuerbach and David Friedrich Strauss, sought answers beyond those provided by the biblical narratives of his upbringing. This impulse to look beyond the surface of traditional religious texts in an attempt to uncover their hidden meaning was a hallmark of secularization during the nineteenth century.

¹⁶ Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus. Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998), 86. See also Roland Mortier, "Le 'Système de la nature,' une bible matérialiste," *Beiträge zur Romantischen Philologie* 15 (1976): 43-71. See also Alan Charles Kors, "The Atheism of d'Holbach and Naigeon," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter und David Wooton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 273-300.

The fourth chapter explores the many conversions of Heinrich Heine, who underwent several profound transformations in his religious belief and practice during his lifetime. Because this repeated religious switching requires both deconversion and conversion, the theories of deconversion outlined by Barbour and Streib can also be applied to Heine's religious evolution. Furthermore, the religious economies model of sociologists of religion Rodney Stark and Roger Finke provides a structure for understanding Heine's unending search for a religious identity. From Judaism to Protestantism, from Hegelianism to Saint-Simonianism, from Hellenism to the belief in a personal God as described in the Bible, Heine was above all a syncretist, fusing together the religious and philosophical traditions that appealed to him throughout his life into what Heine scholars have described as "his own unique theology,"¹⁷ a "Privatmythologie,"¹⁸ and "ein persönlicher Synkretismus."¹⁹ This syncretism is one reason that it has been notoriously difficult to make any definitive statements about Heine's identity, especially in the realm of religion. His constantly shifting opinions about theology, philosophy, and politics have earned him the reputation of a master ironist. This refusal to reveal any fixed identity is in fact the definition of irony, as described by Uwe Japp in *Theorie der Ironie*.²⁰ The chapter examines Heine's identities through his use of irony in published literary and poetic works such as *Almansor* (1821), *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* (1824-1840), and *Romanzero* (1851), in addition to his historical-philosophical works such as *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834) and travel writings such as *Die Stadt Lucca* (1830) and *Ideen. Das Buch le Grand* (1827), as well as in his letters. In these works, he described several dramatic moments of conversion, such as his emotional breakdown before the statue of Venus in the Louvre as deconverting from Hellenism, or throwing a manuscript he claimed to have written about Hegel into his

¹⁷ Roger F. Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon. Heinrich Heine's Late Songs and Reflections* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 23.

¹⁸ Manfred Windfuhr, *Heinrich Heine: Revolution und Reflexion* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), 276.

¹⁹ Windfuhr, *Revolution und Reflexion*, 281.

²⁰ Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983).

fireplace in order to symbolize his rejection of his earlier Hegelianism. Heine frequently uses the technique of displacement — projecting his feelings onto literary characters, and also onto the subjects of his travel writings and poems, in order to maintain an ironic distance from his works and protect his freedom of identity. The chapter will investigate instances of ironic displacement in which Heine takes on a “transparent mask”²¹ that allows him to observe all religions from a distance, to criticize them, and to deny his participation in them. While his personal beliefs underwent many changes, his hatred for theocratic governments and forced conversions through missionary imperialism remained consistent throughout his life, as stated in *Die Stadt Lucca*: “Die Religion kann nie schlimmer sinken als wenn sie solchermaßen zur Staatsreligion erhoben wird” (HSA 6:169). Rare moments of sincerity such as this one uncover the closest thing to what could be called Heine’s ‘true identity’: a religious syncretist with a passion for exposing social injustice and fighting for religious and political freedom.

The conversions and deconversions of Brentano, Büchner, and Heine are emblematic for this time of conversion in the first half of the nineteenth century during which religious traditions underwent a dramatic period of renewal, revival, revolution, and transformation in all directions. Because of the “Familiarisierung”²² of religious belief and practice during this time, many people began to see belief as a personal choice that should reflect their personalities and fulfill their individual needs, and this mentality establishes the perfect breeding ground for conversion by creating perpetual religious seekers. This environment also encourages deconversion by causing some people to leave organized religion entirely and embrace materialism, deism, Spinozism, or any number of other non-theistic worldviews. The fact that the three authors on whom this study will focus underwent conversions of such

²¹ Ari Joskowicz, “Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks: Denominational Politics and the Poetics of Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Germany and France,” *German Studies Review* 34.1 (2011): 69-90.

²² Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

different types — Brentano’s intensification deeper into Catholicism, Büchner’s loss of faith and turn toward materialism, and Heine’s creative syncretism — attests to the diversity of religious transformations that flourished as the role of religion shifted under the type of secularization that will be described in the following chapters.

The majority of studies on conversion approach the phenomenon from a purely theological or a purely sociological perspective, as discussed throughout the first chapter of this dissertation. One example of a more interdisciplinary approach is Dong Young Kim’s *Understanding Religious Conversion. The Case of Saint Augustine* (2012), which integrates psychological, sociological, anthropological, and theological perspectives in order to create a deeper understanding of Augustine’s conversion. While studies like these do provide a multilayered lens through which to view conversion, there is one facet of the conversion narrative that remains isolated from these efforts: the question of how to describe the phenomenon of religious conversion from the perspective of the literary scholar. The three authors whose works are analyzed in this dissertation underwent profound shifts in belief that can only be fully understood by tracing the changes in the aesthetics of their literary works such as poems, dramas, and novels, alongside texts that are traditionally seen as non-fictional, for example travel writings, letters, and memoirs. Investigations of their literary texts reveal the perceptible, representational side of conversion that is not accessible through sociological, historical, or theological approaches alone: How does conversion influence and alter aesthetic form? In what way is conversion perceivable on a linguistic level? Does conversion leave an imprint on literary texts? The aesthetic form of conversion not only functions as a mirror of individual experiences, but also symbolizes the larger shift in the role of religion that occurred during the lifetimes of Brentano, Büchner, and Heine.

CHAPTER 1

CONVERSION, DECONVERSION, AND SECULARIZATION IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

Introduction

The question of why people convert from one religion for another — what motivates them to sacrifice a previous set of values, a place in a social group, and an understanding of their purpose on earth — has been the topic of much debate in the fields of history, theology, psychology, and sociology. The definition of conversion varies in these fields, and an investigation of them will lead to a synthesized notion of conversion that takes all of their perspectives into account. In the following chapters, I delineate trends in the existent body of knowledge in order to contribute a new perspective, namely, the aesthetics of conversion as seen from the perspective of literary scholarship. Conversion is ultimately a personal experience, and the literary works of authors not only provide a deeper understanding of the *motivations* for conversion that otherwise would remain hidden, but also provide us with richer material for understanding the *impact* that the conversion ultimately had on these authors. This means that biographical aspects will have to guide an investigation of aesthetic form to a certain degree. Authors' biographies are in fact the matrix for a literary explorations; literary analysis, in return, will provide not only answers as to how texts change under the condition of conversion, but also help to illuminate personal doubts, struggles, and decisions of individuals.

Dong Young Kim's monograph *Understanding Religious Conversion. The Case of Saint Augustine* is one of the best examples of an interdisciplinary approach to conversion. The title of his study is a reference to Lewis R. Rambo's seminal work on the sociology of

conversion, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.²³ Rambo provides the theoretical structure for Kim's analysis of Augustine's conversion portrayed in his famous *Confessions* (397) as well as in his other works. By tracing the intellectual and emotional developments described by Augustine in his *Confessions*, Kim provides greater insight into the nature of conversion than had previously been achieved. Rambo provides the methodological tools for his analysis with his seven stages of conversion, which are described in more detail below. In the same way, this dissertation begins by using tools of sociology, psychology, theology, and history, and supplements their findings with those gained from a close reading of the aesthetic development in the literary works of Brentano, Büchner, and Heine.

Lewis R. Rambo's Systemic Stage Model of Conversion

Lewis R. Rambo, Professor of Psychology and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union of the San Francisco Theological Seminary, takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of conversion, combining aspects of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and theology in his widely-cited book *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993). Rambo stresses that conversion is a process, not an event; it is "very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever."²⁴ He sees gradual conversions as the more interesting and representative cases, while acknowledging that instantaneous conversions also exist. It is only for readability's sake that he uses the noun *conversion* at all; he prefers the progressive form of the verb *converting*, because it emphasizes that the experience is "dynamic and malleable"²⁵ and is comprised of a series of events that are interconnected in complex ways. This definition is rather narrow, but elsewhere in his work, Rambo provides a more general definition: "Conversion is what a particular group says it is.

²³ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993).

²⁴ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1.

²⁵ Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

No one type of conversion can be seen as normative from a psychological point of view.”²⁶

This broad definition of conversion stands in contrast to the more specific definition that

Rambo gives in *Understanding Religious Conversion*:

In this book the word *conversion* will mean several things. [...] It will mean a simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system. It will mean a change of one’s personal orientation toward life, from the haphazards of superstition to the providence of a deity; from a reliance on rote and ritual to a deeper conviction of God’s presence; from belief in a threatening, punitive, judgmental deity to one that is loving, supportive, and desirous of the maximum good. It will mean a spiritual transformation of life, from seeing evil or illusion in everything connected with “this” world to seeing all creation as a manifestation of God’s power and beneficence; from denial of the self in this life in order to gain a holy hereafter; from seeking personal gratification to a determination that the rule of God is what fulfills human beings; from a life geared to one’s personal welfare above all else to a concern for shared and equal justice for all. It will mean a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment, and involvement.²⁷

The fact that neither the simplest nor the most complex definitions seem to do the word justice highlights the complexity of the conversion experience itself. One way to reconcile ideas about conversion that seem contradictory is to keep in mind that the characterizing elements of the experience exist along a spectrum, in any location between the extreme poles of “sudden or gradual, total or partial, active or passive, internal or external.”²⁸

In the first chapter of *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Rambo outlines five types of conversion: defection, intensification, affiliation, institutional transition, and tradition transition. Defection, or apostasy, is defined as “the repudiation of a religious transition or its beliefs by previous members,”²⁹ either with or without the acceptance of a new religion or ideology to replace it. Intensification refers to “the revitalized commitment to a faith with

²⁶ Lewis R. Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1992), 161.

²⁷ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 2.

²⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 2.

²⁹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13.

which the convert has had previous affiliation, formal or informal.”³⁰ This occurs when a nominal member undergoes a shift in priorities that takes religion from the periphery to the central focus of their life. This can be accompanied by explicit declarations of the revitalized commitment to religion, as well as significant lifestyle changes such as entering a monastery or a convent. Although intensification does not entail switching religions, Rambo includes it as a type of conversion because it represents a fundamental transformation in religious identity. The third type of conversion is “affiliation,” involving “the movement of an individual or group from no or minimal religious commitment to full involvement with an institution or community of faith.”³¹ Here the aspect of recruitment is emphasized, especially in recent decades in NRMs. In the fourth type, “institutional transition,” an individual or group changes from one denomination or community to another within a major tradition; for example, a conversion from the Baptist to the Presbyterian Church in American Protestantism is termed “denominational switching,” and this can occur “because of convenience (such as geographical proximity) or significant religious change based upon profound religious experience.”³² The fifth type describes the sort of conversion that usually comes to mind when the term is used with little previous context: “tradition transition,” which entails a movement from one major religious tradition to another.

Rambo’s systemic model of conversion consists of seven stages of conversion. This model is not sequential; rather, each phase is connected to the others in a non-linear way that can have a “spiraling effect — a going back and forth between stages.”³³ The stages are labelled context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. The first stage, context, refers to the environment that encompasses all other stages and in which the conversion transpires, including all of its social, cultural, religious, and personal elements.

³⁰ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13.

³¹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13.

³² Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13-14.

³³ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 17.

The context consists of the macrocontext and the microcontext, and the former is defined as “the cultural and social milieu of the larger environment,”³⁴ which can point to larger historical periods and phenomena such as industrialization, capitalism, or changing power structures. The microcontext refers to “the more immediate world of the family, ethnic group, religious community, and local neighborhood.”³⁵ Each of these contexts can affect the other in various ways; for example, in the event that the macrocontext is antagonistic to a certain religious group, and the microcontext may react to a feeling of isolation from the rest of society by increasing the social ties and sense of camaraderie within the smaller religious group.

The second stage, crisis, is characterized by the experience of frustration and disorientation that prepares the convert for further stages. The crisis can stem from a major life event such as a near-death experience or the death of a loved one, or it can be triggered by a less dramatic event that is only seen as important in retrospect. A vague dissatisfaction with life and the lack of answers in the current religious tradition may build over time, resulting in a crisis phase with no distinct turning point. The response to this crisis, whatever form it may take, is the third stage: quest. The potential convert embarks on an active search with the goal of maximizing meaning and purpose in life. The degree to which the quest is active or passive is a function of the person’s “response style,”³⁶ which can be qualified by further descriptions beyond “active” — “a person looking for new options because of dissatisfaction with the old ways and/or a desire for innovation and/or a search for fulfillment and growth”³⁷ — and “passive” — “someone is so weak and fragile that he or she is easily manipulated by external influences.”³⁸ There is also the “receptive” responder (“a person is

³⁴ Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” 163.

³⁵ Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” 163-164.

³⁶ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 56.

³⁷ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

³⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

‘ready’ for new options for a variety of reasons”³⁹), the “rejecting” responder (“someone consciously rejects the new religion”⁴⁰), and the “apathetic” responder (“someone has no interest in a new religious option”⁴¹).

In the fourth stage, the encounter, the advocate (or missionary) seeks to meet the psychological needs of the potential convert in order to bring the conversion to fruition. The advocate and the potential convert interact dialectically with one another. The advocate’s mode of contact may be public (mass rallies and revival meetings) or private (face-to-face, via friendship and kinship networks), personal or impersonal.⁴² Whatever the mode of contact, it is vital that the potential convert’s specific life situation be addressed, preferably in language that best allows them to relate to the new set of beliefs. Anthropologist Susan Harding gives an example of a potential convert who has recently undergone a life-changing event that needs to be interpreted: “the metaphors of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ may be related to the convert’s recent divorce and the need to ‘resurrect’ to a new life. In this way the convert’s life history is incorporated into the ideology and narrative being presented so that the group’s story becomes the convert’s story in a powerful, personal way.”⁴³

Stage five, interaction, refers to the developing relationship between the potential convert and the larger religious community. They learn more about the teachings, lifestyle, and expectations within the tradition, and gradually become fully incorporated into it. Rambo relies on the encapsulation theory proposed by Arthur Greil and David Rudy in which the subject is physically, socially, and ideologically encapsulated during interaction. In each of these three areas, the encapsulation may fall anywhere along a spectrum of partial to total

³⁹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

⁴⁰ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

⁴¹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

⁴² Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 80.

⁴³ Susan F. Harding, “Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamentalist Baptist Conversion,” *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 167-81. See also Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” 170.

encapsulation, depending on the religious group. A “matrix of transformation”⁴⁴ is created by four strategies by which encapsulation is accomplished: roles, relationships, rituals, and rhetoric.

Rambo describes stage six, commitment, as “the fulcrum of the change process,”⁴⁵ and it is comprised of five common elements: “decision making, rituals, surrender, testimony manifested in language transformation and biographical reconstruction, and motivational reformulation.”⁴⁶ The ritual of baptism is crucial in this stage for those converting to a version of Christianity, for example. Other rituals may involve initiations requiring the mutilation of the body — “circumcision, scarification, beatings, amputation of fingers, or removal of teeth”⁴⁷ — as Alan Morinis’s study has examined.⁴⁸ Morinis proposes that these self-mutilation rituals serve to heighten awareness and to concretize the convert’s sense that “to become a part of the group the individual must sacrifice something of the self.”⁴⁹

The final stage is that of the consequences following the commitment. The convert begins to evaluate the ways in which the new religion is positively or negatively affecting all aspects of daily life. Rambo describes five aspects of the possible consequences: “the role of personal bias in assessment, general observations, in-depth looks at sociocultural and historical consequences, psychological consequences, and theological consequences.”⁵⁰ Here the convert embarks on an often cyclical process, continually reassessing the benefits of the new orientation and weighing them against the sacrifices and expectations prior to conversion.

⁴⁴ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 107.

⁴⁵ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 124.

⁴⁶ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 124.

⁴⁷ Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” 174.

⁴⁸ Alan Morinis, “The Ritual Experience: Pain and the Transformation of Consciousness in Ordeals of Initiation,” *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology* 13 (Summer 1985): 150-174.

⁴⁹ Rambo, “The Psychology of Conversion,” 174.

⁵⁰ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 142.

Strain Theory and Social Influence Theory

Strain theory and social influence theory provide further sociological frameworks that complement the seven stages of Rambo's conversion model. Among the most important sociological studies of conversion during the previous century is John Lofland and Rodney Stark's 1965 report on converts to new religious movements (commonly abbreviated as NRMs), a category of organizations that arose and gained many converts during the 1960s in the United States, such as the Unification Church, Scientology, and Hare Krishna, among others. Lofland and Stark's article, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective,"⁵¹ was so influential in the following decades that Fenggang Yang and Andrew Abel remarked in 2014 in the *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* that "the sociology of conversion up to the 1990s seems like a series of footnotes to Lofland and Stark (1965),"⁵² and it is only since that time that "the sociology of religion now has more on the table."⁵³ Lofland and Stark present a series of case studies about conversion experiences ending in membership in the Divine Precepts (abbreviated D.P., this is the authors' cryptonym for the New Religious Movement they examined; likely the Unification Church headed by Reverend Moon). Interviews with converts to this religion reveal the social conditions that were necessary for an outsider to transition into a full member.

By drawing attention to the perceived problems that potential converts identify in their lives prior to conversion, Lofland and Stark point toward strain theory, also known as theory of deprivation. Without this feeling of strain or deprivation, the conditions necessary for an eventual conversion are usually not met. William S. Bainbridge gives further details about the theories of strain and deprivation and their relationship to conversion by recounting

⁵¹ John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30.6 (1965): 862-875.

⁵² Fenggang Yang and Andrew Abel, "Sociology of Religious Conversion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150.

⁵³ Yang and Abel, "Sociology of Religious Conversion," 150.

the story of his grandfather, William Folwell Bainbridge, who in his book *Around the World Tour of Christian Missions* (1882) attempted to classify the elements of successful Christian conversion projects in the farthest corners of the world.⁵⁴ This work of proto-sociology was one of the earliest studies of conversion of its kind.

Strain theory distinguishes between absolute and relative deprivation. While “absolute” deprivation indicates a lack of something that one objectively needs for survival (e.g., someone dying of a disease experiences an absolute deprivation of good health), “relative” deprivation indicates a lack of something that a person of a different status may possess (e.g., the poor do not have the wealth and power of the elite). The relative deprivation experienced by the poor can cause them to turn to religion and be easily manipulated by promises of a better afterlife in which there is social justice. Bainbridge describes how religion offers a path to transcend this relative deprivation, a “supernatural compensation”⁵⁵ for poverty and lack of status on earth. In some doctrines, such as the teachings of Christ and other religious leaders who discourage the amassing of wealth, relative deprivation is seen as a virtue, as Christ suggests during his Sermon on the Mount as told by Matthew: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19-20); also in the more famous verse in Mark: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25).

Absolute deprivation plays a role in motivating religious involvement, as Bainbridge shows in an analysis of religious commitment. Absolute deprivation is “based on the principle that all persons are severely deprived in an absolute sense, and thus everybody is a

⁵⁴ William Folwell Bainbridge, *Around the World Tour of Christian Missions* (Boston: Lothrop, 1882).

⁵⁵ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 180.

potential convert.”⁵⁶ The Christian doctrine of original sin, for example, posits that all humans are inherently deprived in this absolute sense, and that the only remedy for this deprivation is salvation attained through Christ. Through various strategies — “constant affirmation of salvation, open expression of emotion, informal services, strong fellowship within the congregation, and a continual sense of spiritual regeneration”⁵⁷ — even the rich and powerful can experience a sense of absolute deprivation, along with the poor and powerless. In order to address the feelings of deprivation of the largest number of people, a religion must provide answers to the perceived problems that affect those from all walks of life, and not only those who are underprivileged.⁵⁸

Another sociological theory about conversion is social influence theory, which emphasizes that people join a religion because of strong social ties to current members, while their attachments to non-members are relatively weak. Bainbridge does not see these two theories as competing with, but as complementary to each other. Within the realm of social influence theory, there are two separate schools of thought: first, control theory states that “individuals will act in a conventional way, so long as they possess a powerful bond to the conventional social order.”⁵⁹ As long as an individual is strongly attached to and believes in conventional institutions and activities, it is unlikely that they will step outside of them, but if they lack ties to this type of conformity, experimentation with new affiliations becomes possible. These are often people who are entering a radically different and new phase of life such as “newlyweds, the divorced, the widowed, freshly independent young adults, those who have just changed jobs, or persons experiencing any other major life disruption whether negative or positive in character.”⁶⁰ The second school of thought in social influence theory is

⁵⁶ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 181.

⁵⁷ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 181.

⁵⁸ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 181.

⁵⁹ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 182.

⁶⁰ Bainbridge, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 182.

subculture theory, which asserts that a group of individuals with similar worldviews establishes the thoughts and behaviors of those who belong to or enter the group. Disagreements may cause the group to split, but the remaining members will form opinions that resemble one another's more and more closely as they spend time together. This theory holds true with religious congregations or denominations: as an individual becomes more socially involved with the group, their beliefs begin to match the beliefs of the group more precisely. Data taken from members of several different denominations have shown that those whose friendships are primarily within the congregation also have beliefs that more closely resemble those of the congregation as a whole, while those with many outside friendships often have less conforming or orthodox belief systems.⁶¹ Here Bainbridge provides a synthesis of the two types of social influence theory: control theory states that "a person is socially free to join a new religious group only if he lacks strong ties to some other group,"⁶² and subculture theory states that "to convert to a new religion, such a person must develop strong social relations with persons who are already members."⁶³ This must be further supplemented with strain theory, however, since social influence alone is not sufficient to sustain faith: "[U]nless people have a religious yearning, unless religion offers people something distinctively different from what any social club can give, faith will wither."⁶⁴ The mode of crisis and perception of deprivation outlined by strain theory, complemented by the shifting communal ties described in social influence theory, contribute to a more thorough understanding of possible motivations for conversion.

⁶¹ Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion," 183.

⁶² Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion," 182.

⁶³ Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion," 182.

⁶⁴ Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion," 184.

Theories of Deconversion

Although the study of deconversion is relatively new, it has become clear in recent decades that the study of conversion must also incorporate its opposite as a related phenomenon. Often overlooked, for example, is that the majority of religious conversions must first incorporate deconversions. One must leave the old religion in order to take on the new one, except in cases of syncretism, in which the new beliefs are added to the old to form a unique mixture of the two religions. Ralph W. Hood Jr. and Zhuo Chen speculate in the *Oxford Handbook of Atheism* that future research may indicate that deconversion is “simply the flip side of conversion.”⁶⁵ Heinz Streib, who has published several articles and a monograph on deconversion in which he reports on a study of deconverts conducted in Germany and the United States from 2002 to 2005,⁶⁶ asserts in his chapter on deconversion in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* that it is both appropriate and necessary to include a chapter on deconversion in a handbook on conversion.⁶⁷ This is not only because the deconversion process bears many parallels to that of conversion, but also because deconversion needs to be studied even when, or especially when, it does not include a reaffiliation, “in response to the growing attention to atheists and apostates, especially in the United States.”⁶⁸

Sociologists Fenggang Yang and Andrew Abel see conversion and deconversion as processes that are essentially the same, since they both incorporate as a central feature some version of role-exit.⁶⁹ The word ‘deconversion’ itself is relatively new; beginning in the

⁶⁵ Ralph W. Hood Jr. and Zhuo Chen, “Conversion and Deconversion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 546.

⁶⁶ Heinz Streib, Ralph W. Hood Jr., Barbara Keller, Rosina-Martha Csöff, and Christopher F. Silver, *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

⁶⁷ Streib, “Deconversion” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 271.

⁶⁸ Streib, “Deconversion,” 271.

⁶⁹ Yang and Abel, “Sociology of Religious Conversion,” 151.

1990s, it has increasingly been used especially by deconverts themselves to describe their experience of liberation from a religion into which they have been indoctrinated during childhood. David W. Kling notes that the complexity of the type of movement between religious traditions merits terms that more precisely describe this movement: “[I]f there is conversion there can also be ‘deconversion’ (or ‘apostasy’ as those within the tradition would express it) and, vice versa, what was rejected can also be reaffirmed. A crisis of faith may lead to deconversion; a crisis of doubt may lead to reconversion. Conversion is a movement from something to something.”⁷⁰

In his study of deconversion from New Religious Movements, Stuart Wright outlines the distinctions between the many terms used to describe the process: disillusionment, disaffection, disaffiliation, apostasy, defection, withdrawal, expulsion, and removal.⁷¹ Each of these terms emphasizes a different aspect of deconversion, and they cannot be used interchangeably. Disillusionment, for example, indicates “a process of cognitive disengagement wherein belief is disrupted, seriously challenged, or destroyed,”⁷² and the pre-deconvert struggles to cope with cognitive dissonance produced when trying to reconcile new information that contradicts earlier religious beliefs. Disaffection and disaffiliation refer to distinct aspects of the deconversion phenomenon. The former indicates an emotional withdrawal, an “affective disengagement from the religious group,”⁷³ while the latter points to the pre-deconvert as a member of the church institution, severing organizational ties and membership.⁷⁴ Defection may seem like a more neutral description for leaving, but it does imply a certain risk or “cost,” for example in the case of those seeking political asylum from

⁷⁰ David W. Kling, “Conversion to Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 599.

⁷¹ Stuart A. Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 709.

⁷² Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 709.

⁷³ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 709.

⁷⁴ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 710.

communist countries during the Cold War. Wright notes the connection between using the term defection in both the political and religious contexts: “This nuanced distinction is not insignificant considering the Cold War origins of brainwashing and the prolonged attempt by anti cult actors to frame conversion to new religions as a form of coercive persuasion or thought reform.”⁷⁵ Expulsion, or excommunication, refers to a process in which the member is removed by other members or authority figures within the religion because of dissidence, rule violations, or any other reasons for which the member is deemed undesirable.⁷⁶ Finally, removal is an act of “extraction by external agents — deprogrammers, child protection services, law enforcement.”⁷⁷ One example of this is the 2008 raid on the Yearning for Zion ranch in Texas, during which four hundred and thirty-nine children were removed from the Mormon polygamist community and taken into state custody.⁷⁸

Terms like “apostasy” and “defection” originate from the point of view of those still within the religious tradition. The person who leaves the religion carries a certain amount of blame; they have committed a sin, or even a crime, denoting “a breach of contract” for which “the party at fault must face the consequences.”⁷⁹ Under Muslim law, for example, apostasy is clearly defined as illegal and warrants the death penalty. John D. Barbour describes “apostasy” as a condemnatory word that makes a “normative claim about the truth and authority of the beliefs denied.”⁸⁰ This illustrates the necessity for the “neutral modern word *deconversion*.”⁸¹ This term is preferable because it lacks the discriminatory connotation of

⁷⁵ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 710.

⁷⁶ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 710.

⁷⁷ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 710.

⁷⁸ Wright, “Disengagement and Apostasy in New Religious Movements,” 711.

⁷⁹ Enzo Pace, “Convert, Revert, Pervert,” in *Conversion in the Age of Pluralism*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan. Volume 17 of *Religion and the Social Order. An Official Publication of the Association for the Sociology of Religion*, ed. William H. Swatos, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 192.

⁸⁰ John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 138-139.

⁸¹ Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*, 139.

“apostasy,” which reflects a long-standing power structure in which religious authorities have been able to put on trial and execute those who did not adhere to their beliefs.

Barbour delineates four common characteristics of deconversion autobiographies: 1) intellectual doubt; 2) moral criticism; 3) emotional suffering; and 4) rejection of the religious community. They often, but do not always, occur in this order. In Augustine’s case, intellectual doubt was a particularly important characteristic in his deconversion from Manichaeism — he was “troubled by discrepancies between Manichee doctrines and known astronomical facts,”⁸² which led eventually to his “inability to conceive of God as a spiritual substance.”⁸³ Augustine then developed moral criticism of the Manichee way of life, since the emphasis on the fundamental duality of the universe, of the good and evil in everyone and everything, seemed to absolve the individual of responsibility for their own actions. If there is good and evil in everyone, it seemed to Augustine that he incurred no guilt when acting in evil ways, which was a position which he could not describe as anything but unethical.⁸⁴ The third factor, emotional suffering, refers to a feeling of loss, guilt, and loneliness that may result from the deconversion, and the fourth, rejection of the religious community, indicates a disaffiliation that may or may not include official removal of the deconvert’s name from church records.

The most extensive study on deconversion to date, *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (ed. Heinz Streib et al., 2009) reports the results of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion. The study used a questionnaire along with narrative interviews and faith development interviews not only of deconverts, but also of in-tradition members, i.e. people still active in the religions that the deconverts had left. The study

⁸² John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 12.

⁸³ Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*, 12.

⁸⁴ Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*, 12.

included about one hundred interviews synthesized into five exemplary case studies. In examining their results in conjunction with Barbour's four characteristics of deconversion, the researchers were led to expand on his model by adding one element to the beginning of the list: "the loss of specific religious experiences."⁸⁵

In the interviews, four types of deconversion narratives were identified with the following themes: pursuit of autonomy, debarred from paradise, finding a new frame of reference, and life-long quests. Deconverts in the "pursuit of autonomy" group underwent a typical deconversion path, gradually leaving behind the religious environment that had been imposed on them as children.⁸⁶ Those who were "debarred from paradise" abandoned religion because it had failed to produce desired results such as healing trauma. Those who found "a new frame of reference" were searching for guidance in structuring their lives, which often included leaving a mainline religion in order to join a higher tension group in an oppositional exit.⁸⁷ Finally, deconverts under the theme of "life-long quests" left their religious environments once, or even multiple times, because their needs and expectations were not met.⁸⁸ This last theme highlights how conversion and deconversion go hand-in-hand. Both of these processes are essential to the life-long religious quest.

The Religious Economies Model of Stark and Finke

Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke explain conversion via a model of religious economies, a marketplace of potential converts and religious organizations that seek to attract adherents.⁸⁹ This parallels the religious subsystem of a society to that of the commercial economy in that both involve the "interplay of supply and demand for valued

⁸⁵ Streib et. al., *Deconversion*, 22.

⁸⁶ Streib, "Deconversion," 286.

⁸⁷ Streib, "Deconversion," 287.

⁸⁸ Streib, "Deconversion," 287.

⁸⁹ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 193.

products.”⁹⁰ The “demand” is represented in the current and potential members, the “suppliers” are the religious organizations, and the “products” are the religious doctrines, practices, and rituals that they offer. The religious economy hinges on the contrast between high and low-tension religions, a spectrum along which any religion can be placed according to its characteristics. The interplay of lower and higher tension religions leads to a cyclical process that continually spawns new sects. Some people prefer a low-tension church that demands little of its followers, while others prefer a high-tension sect that demands total commitment. Tension also refers to an organization’s relationship with its outside surroundings. A high-tension group “sustains norms and values different from those of the surrounding culture,”⁹¹ increasing the social divide between members and non-members. Such a divide translates into the necessity that followers sacrifice social ties with those outside the group, which ultimately demands a high level of commitment and thus has a high “cost” for the member: “[T]he higher the tension between a religious group and its surroundings, *the more expensive it is to belong.*”⁹²

The diverse religious tastes of consumers explain the fluctuations of power between low- and high-tension organizations. Stark and Finke describe how the potential converts in the religious marketplace react to the options laid before them. Religious economies are comprised of market niches, defined as “market segments of potential adherents sharing particular religious preferences (needs, tastes, and expectations).”⁹³ While some people prefer the rewards offered by strict, high-tension organizations (and eagerly pay the high costs in time, dedication, money, etc., in order to gain these rewards), others prefer an “inexpensive faith,”⁹⁴ requiring very little of them, while others prefer no religion at all. Stark and Finke see the majority of contemporary Western society as displaying a preference for something in

⁹⁰ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 36.

⁹¹ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 195.

⁹² Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 195.

⁹³ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 195.

⁹⁴ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 196.

the middle, a “religion that maintains some moral reservations vis-à-vis secular life, but not too many.”⁹⁵ In the absence of regulation either by the government or other sources of political power, and given that force and coercion are not widely tolerated, a religious economy will typically be very pluralistic as a result of the diverse needs of those who seek a religious supplier. When a single religious firm succeeds in monopolizing the market, this is largely because a theocratic state “uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy.”⁹⁶

This model is the basis for Stark and Finke’s explanation of the way religions emerge and disappear through sect formation. This is particularly important in the context of conversions and their occurrence on a large scale, i.e. how groups of people move through the religious economy via conversions. Sect movements typically begin as high-tension groups, demanding in many cases that members isolate themselves from society completely, but gradually they continue to grow only by reducing their tension in order to appeal to a larger set of consumers, repositioning their market niche. Stark and Finke refer to this as “the sect-to-church transformation,”⁹⁷ since sects are defined as high-tension and churches as low-tension. This abandonment of the original market niche, however, often compels those members who thought they were signing up for a high-tension experience to break away and form yet another sect, and the process begins once again, resulting in an overall increase in religious pluralism over time. Sects that do not lower their tension, as H. Richard Niebuhr wrote in *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* in 1929, risk failing altogether, but they also have opportunities to grow, if they can gain enough converts in their high-tension form. The phenomenon of members with a preference for high-tension breaking away to form new sects explains why religious growth seems to be concentrated in higher tension organizations.

⁹⁵ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 196.

⁹⁶ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 199.

⁹⁷ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 205.

Lower tension churches, on the other hand, display declining membership and can disappear via mergers.⁹⁸

Secularization and Conversion

The degree to which secularization (and the kind of secularization) took place in nineteenth-century Germany holds the key to understanding the shifting of personal religious beliefs, because the changes cannot be separated from the larger context in which they occurred. A person does not convert in a vacuum; they convert either in opposition to or in line with the dominant religious trends of their environment. While converts often report that their transformations are exclusively personal events, conversion is often also a public and political act, and the tension between these two sides of conversion morphed throughout the nineteenth century. By investigating the nature of secularization, demonstrated in part by the changing role of religion in the public sphere, we can gain insight into the larger backdrop against which personal conversions took place.

In his article, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” José Casanova describes the set of terms as forming “a central modern category”⁹⁹ that serves to “construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from ‘the religious.’”¹⁰⁰ The context in which a given type of secularity is situated determines the distinct character of this opposition; for example, Christopher Hitchens, in recounting the story of his deconversion, noted that his atheism was not just any atheism, but one that oriented itself against the backdrop of his Protestant upbringing: “[M]y particular atheism is a Protestant atheism. It is with the splendid liturgy of the King James Bible and the Cranmer prayer book [...] that I

⁹⁸ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 206.

⁹⁹ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

¹⁰⁰ Casanova, “The Secular,” 54.

first disagreed.”¹⁰¹ Secularism refers to a variety of worldviews that either consciously or unconsciously exclude religion. An example of the conscious, explicit exclusion of religion is the United States Constitution, the First Amendment of which declares that the state shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. Often, however, secularism emerges as a less explicit condition, either on the level of the individual or in larger societies. Secularism in this sense is a worldview that is “held unreflexively or [...] assumed phenomenologically as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern *doxa* or an ‘unthought.’”¹⁰² Steve Bruce predicts that the probable endpoint of the secularization processes will be characterized not by an active opposition to religion, but by the widespread indifference of a world in which religious ideas would be “no more common than would be the case if all minds were wiped blank and people began from scratch to think about the world and their place in it.”¹⁰³ At this point a narrower meaning of ‘secular’ emerges that is self-sufficient, rather than being part of an oppositional relationship such as religious/non-religious or state/church.¹⁰⁴

Secularization, as contrasted with ‘the secular’ and ‘secularism,’ refers to a process that entails the decline of religious authority, which can manifest itself in many different ways. The controversy about the secularization thesis is at least as much about what is actually meant by the term secularization as it is about whether this term can be accurately applied to the historical era commonly referred to as ‘modernity.’ Swatos and Christano recognize that if it were only the simplest, most obvious definition (the process of separating church and state) to which historians and social scientists referred when they evoked the

¹⁰¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great. How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 11-12.

¹⁰² Casanova, “The Secular,” 55.

¹⁰³ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead. Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 42.

¹⁰⁴ Casanova, “The Secular,” 58.

concept of secularization, then there would be “far less excitement about the topic.”¹⁰⁵ It would instead be a statement of a “factual condition”¹⁰⁶ that exists in certain parts of the world today, but not in others. It is not controversial, for example, to use the verb ‘secularize’ to describe institutions that were once affiliated with and operated by religious organizations, but no longer are; for example “a school or hospital may be said to have been ‘secularized in 1983,’ meaning that in that year it went from being under the formal ownership of a religious organization to control by an independent board of trustees or a for-profit corporation.”¹⁰⁷ Casanova provides a useful and concise summary of three different ways of “being secular.”¹⁰⁸ The first is “that of *mere secularity*, that is, the phenomenological experience of living in a secular world and in a secular age, where being religious may be a normal viable option.” The second is “that of *self-sufficient and exclusive secularity*, that is, the phenomenological experience of living without religion as a normal, quasi-natural, taken-for-granted condition.” Finally, he describes “*secularist secularity*, that is, the phenomenological experience not only of being passively free but also actually of having been liberated from ‘religion’ as a condition for human autonomy and human flourishing.”¹⁰⁹

In *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor attempts to synthesize claims about secularization by investigating the question of how Western society, represented primarily by Latin Christendom, had arrived at a point in which exclusive humanism is now seen as a viable outlook on life, worthy of as much respect as religious worldviews. This is not to say that exclusive humanism has replaced religion, but that it has become an option that many more people embrace than has been the case in the past. He chooses the years 1500 and 2000 as general markers of these attitudes that he sees in opposition to one another. For the member of a predominately Christian society in 1500, “it was virtually impossible not to

¹⁰⁵ Swatos and Christiano, “Secularization Theory,” 214.

¹⁰⁶ Swatos and Christiano, “Secularization Theory,” 214.

¹⁰⁷ Swatos and Christiano, “Secularization Theory,” 214.

¹⁰⁸ Casanova, “The Secular,” 60.

¹⁰⁹ Casanova, “The Secular,” 60.

believe in God,”¹¹⁰ while the individual in 2000, even if they happen to be a believer, cannot help but see faith as “one human possibility among others.”¹¹¹

Taylor’s introduction outlines three distinct types of secularity that have shaped the last five centuries. The first is the most straightforward and the easiest to trace and quantify: the removal of references to God or gods in the public sphere. In the realms of the “economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, [and] recreational,”¹¹² no god can or should influence our behavior as we act in these areas; rather, it is “rationality” that determines this behavior.¹¹³ The second type of secularity refers to the decline in religious belief and practice, as evidenced by decreased church attendance and self-reported “turning away from God.”¹¹⁴ This is more difficult to measure, not only because statistics for attendance levels have not always been available during the vast time period that Taylor’s work addresses, but also because self-reports of people’s religiosity and church attendance are often inaccurate because many people report going to church more frequently than they actually do.¹¹⁵

The third sense of secularity (“secularity 3”) focuses on the conditions of belief, indicating “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”¹¹⁶ Here it is less important how many people actually profess to believe, but how this belief is framed by the society as a whole, i.e., as a choice that one makes while consciously excluding many other viable positions. Taylor notes a crucial difference between faith as an option in today’s Christian or “post-Christian”¹¹⁷ societies and

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

¹¹² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

¹¹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

¹¹⁵ Bruce, *Secularization. In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, 16.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

the majority of Muslim societies. Even if statistics for church attendance are similar in these dissimilar types of milieux, the conditions of belief, or “*what it is to believe*,”¹¹⁸ is what differentiates a society in which secularity dominates from one in which it does not.

Taylor’s trajectory of secularization between 1500 and 2000 is based on the distinction between the “porous”¹¹⁹ self of the past into the “buffered”¹²⁰ self of modernity. The pre-modern condition creates a porousness in the self because it exists in an “enchanted” world.¹²¹ He defines the enchanted world as “the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in,”¹²² in which it “just seems so obvious that God is there, acting in the cosmos, founding and sustaining societies, acting as a bulwark against evil.”¹²³ In a world in which dark forces – spirits in the woods with malicious intents, for example – seem to have tangible effects on the natural world, God is seen as the protector, the “good magic”¹²⁴ capable of counteracting the black magic in the world, as long as one continues to believe in him. For the pre-modern porous self, “the prospect of rejecting God does not involve retiring to the safe redoubt of the buffered self, but rather chancing ourselves in the field of forces without him.”¹²⁵ One cannot remain without a protector under these conditions, and “the most likely candidate [for a different protector] is his arch-enemy, Satan.”¹²⁶ Not believing in the correct god is not only a danger for the individual, but for communities as a whole, since one non-believer jeopardizes the collective effort to receive the continued supernatural protection that is necessary for survival. The buffered self of the modern world, by contrast, lives in a disenchanted space in which such protection is no

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

¹²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

¹²¹ Taylor uses the term as a negative corollary to the “disenchanted” world into which modernity has ushered us, as described by Max Weber.

¹²² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

¹²³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

¹²⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

¹²⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41.

¹²⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41.

longer necessary. Taylor describes a gradual transition from the enchanted world into a disenchanted one in which exclusive humanism has become a viable option. Phases in this process included a “sorting out”¹²⁷ of the natural and the supernatural, God’s diminishing role in Providential Deism,¹²⁸ and the “great rise in unbelief”¹²⁹ during the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century was not only a time of conversion, but also a time of secularization, because these two phenomena are closely connected. The definitions of conversion and secularization outlined above provide insight into the conversions that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century in Germany. They not only explain the mechanics of conversion on an individual level, but also the nature of religious shifts on the larger scale of society as a whole in the framework of secularization. The nineteenth century was a time of conversion in Germany, marked by intellectual and theological transformations that left the role of religion in the lives of nineteenth-century Germans permanently changed. Some seminal moments in the history of religion from the previous decades include the beginning of the Protestant Reformation with Martin Luther, the Peace of Westphalia, the rise of new incarnations of Christianity such as Pietism and devotional Protestantism as outlined in works by such theologians as Johann Arndt (1555-1621), Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705), and Heinrich Zschokke (1771-1848). Enlightenment and rationalist discourses such as in the *Fragmentenstreit* texts of Reimarus and Lessing (1774-1780) were met with attempts to reconcile such rationalist readings of the Bible and to renew the importance of religion, as in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Reden über die Religion* (1799). The Napoleonic Wars, French occupation, and the Congress of Vienna left behind major changes in Germany’s religious landscape. The rocky *Vormärz* period was representative of the difficulties of this transformation. Between 1815 and 1848, there was a resurgence of reform and revival

¹²⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 143.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221.

¹²⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 322.

movements in Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, “Renaissance des Religiösen.”¹³⁰

Both the liberal and orthodox representatives of these religions competed for influence and relevance, and some of the most important exercises in historical-critical exegesis took place during this century, most notably by David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, who, following the lead of eighteenth-century predecessors such as Reimarus, dared to conduct critical investigations of the Bible, treating it like any other text. Their attempts to reveal the underlying truths of the Bible were not attempts to destroy Christianity, however. They came rather from the impulse to revive and renew the religion and to reach a genuinely deeper understanding of it.

The most fundamental change in the nature of religion in the early to mid-nineteenth century was a shift from religion as a public, state-sanctioned or even state-mandated, and obligatory function of society, to an individualized form of religiosity that was much more private in what Rebekka Habermas has called an “‘Intimisierung’ der öffentlich praktizierten Religion.”¹³¹ The Pietist tradition had begun this process of distinguishing between ‘church religion’ and ‘private religion,’ while emphasizing that true spirituality took place as a process of rebirth within the believer, and not as part of public worship practices. There was a “Familiarisierung”¹³² of worship resulting in a “Religion im Privaten,”¹³³ and as the public nature of religion began to fade into the background. By the time Strauss and Feuerbach wrote their exegeses on the underlying origins of Christian doctrines, Christianity was no longer the dominant social and political power that it once was. Strauss and Feuerbach attracted much criticism and their careers were irreparably damaged because of their unorthodox writings, but it is significant that they dared to publish them during their lifetimes, since this was not the case with Reimarus several decades earlier. When Nietzsche

¹³⁰ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:394.

¹³¹ Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

¹³² Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

¹³³ Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

continued this demythologizing process by having his madman in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* declare that God was dead in 1882, he did so in a religious environment that had radically changed from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Pietist and Enlightenment Discourses of Individualism, Rebirth, and Renewal

Eighteenth-century religious discourses were marked by a “Streben nach innerer Erneuerung,”¹³⁴ and one expression of this inclination toward renewal was the growth of Pietism during the eighteenth century. Pietists were inspired by Christian mystics of the seventeenth century such as Johann Arndt, whose devotional book *Wahres Christentum* (1605-1610) focused on the mystical relationship between Christ and his individual followers. The book was so popular that it was second only to the Bible in its circulation among Protestants and is still seen as “the classic devotional book of Protestantism.”¹³⁵ In 1635, it was so widely read that the president of the Strasbourg church Johann Conrad Dannhauer is said to have admonished his congregation that they should not forget to read the Bible in addition to *Wahres Christentum*.¹³⁶ One of the most important biblical passages that informed Arndt’s notion of piety was Luke 17:21, which reveals the location of the kingdom of God. In the Luther Bible of 1545, this verse reads: “[M]an wird auch nicht sagen: Siehe hier! oder: da ist es! Denn sehet, das Reich Gottes ist inwendig in euch.” The kingdom of God resides in the individual believer, and not only in the clergy or in any other institutional entity. For Arndt, God’s kingdom is not a physical place as much as it is symbolic of the process of continual rebirth and renewal that happens in the believer; it is “an event in the human soul.”¹³⁷ This emphasis on personal experience granted believers a new spiritual

¹³⁴ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:406.

¹³⁵ Johannes Wallmann, “Johann Arndt (1555-1621)” in *The Pietist Theologians. An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 21.

¹³⁶ Wallmann, “Johann Arndt,” 21.

¹³⁷ Wallmann, “Johann Arndt,” 30.

independence from the church's authority figures, and Arndt's legacy has been one of a "decisive pioneer on the modern path toward individualization."¹³⁸

Arndt's writings influenced the work of Philipp Jakob Spener, who founded the Pietist movement in order to reform Lutheranism by introducing the notion of "practical Christianity."¹³⁹ Spener emphasized personal religious experience, rebirth, and renewal.¹⁴⁰ His best known work, *Pia Desideria oder Herzliches Verlangen nach gottgefälliger Besserung der wahren evangelischen Kirche* (1675), proposed reforms that focused on a return to the biblical text, which were to be studied in small, private gatherings, as well as on bringing the priesthood to the laity and breaking down hierarchical boundaries. His reform proposals were meant as a continuation of Martin Luther's Reformation, which he saw not as one event, but as a process of continual improvement.¹⁴¹ Just as the church as a whole is in need of never-ending renewal, Spener averred, so also is the individual believer always striving for New Birth, *Wiedergeburt*, which is necessary for salvation.¹⁴² The first *Wiedergeburt* is baptism, which is symbolic of one's literal birth as believers are surrounded by water just as they were surrounded by amniotic fluid as they had awaited their births in the womb. Spener taught that the *Wiedergeburt* had to be complemented by *Erneuerung*, which was repeatable through constant repentance.¹⁴³ All of this happened by means of the believer's personal relationship with God, rather than through the mediation of authorities such as priests or pastors, further cementing the notion that religion was something that happened between an individual and God, and not between an individual and the rest of society.

¹³⁸ Wallmann, "Johann Arndt," 33.

¹³⁹ Williamson, "Protestants, Catholics, and Jews," 213.

¹⁴⁰ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:406.

¹⁴¹ K. James Stein, "Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705)," in *The Pietist Theologians. An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 87.

¹⁴² Stein, "Philipp Jakob Spener," 90.

¹⁴³ Stein, "Philipp Jakob Spener," 92.

Pietism was a manifestation of the development of religion in Germany away from the collective observance of proscribed doctrines and toward the personalized religious experience. It transformed Protestantism, inspiring other Lutherans to begin their own confessions, such as the *Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde* or the Moravian Church. This laid the foundation for the notion that believers should practice the form of religion that best resonated with them personally, rather than accepting dogma from ecclesiastical authorities. This type of secularization, in which religion becomes a matter of personal choice and one option among others, creates the circumstances in which conversion flourishes: when believers are on a constant search for the version of religion that suits their individual needs and aligns with their personal experiences.

Pietism's emphasis on individualism and personal interpretations of scripture helped prepare the way for the historical exegeses that dominated religious debates during the eighteenth century. The debates were part of an Enlightenment discourse that brought dramatic changes to the religious landscape. Following the French Revolution, another powerful turning point in European history,¹⁴⁴ German intellectuals wondered what to make of the Jacobins' program of "dechristianization," which involved "the closing of churches, the imprisonment and execution of refractory clergy, and the institution of a new set of religious cults dedicated to liberty, reason, and other revolutionary virtues."¹⁴⁵ A radical few Germans approved of these policies, but the majority condemned them. What was relatively new, however, was that public debate about religious matters became more common and at least partially tolerated in the public sphere. As David Blackbourn notes, the Enlightenment ushered in new channels of communication, a new reading public, and "even something that

¹⁴⁴ See Ute Planert, "International Conflict, War, and the Making of Modern Germany, 1740-1815," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 100.

¹⁴⁵ Williamson, "Protestants, Catholics, and Jews," 218.

could be described as a public opinion.”¹⁴⁶ Improving methods of communication in the form of books, pamphlets, periodicals, bookshops, reading clubs, masonic lodges, cafés and coffee gardens, and salons like the one orchestrated by Rahel Levin Varnhagen, all contributed to the extensive intellectual exchange during this period. During the final decades of the century, publishers and promoters such as Friedrich Nicolai enabled more writers to earn a living, as demonstrated by the case of Württemberg, where the number of authors more than doubled in a period of sixteen years: 120 in 1774, and 285 in 1790.¹⁴⁷

Certain major texts of the Enlightenment were particularly responsible for fostering the development of these debates, such as Immanuel Kant’s major treatises on religion and reason — *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788), and *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793) — along with the seminal essay “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” (1784), which urged readers to think for themselves in lieu of accepting the claims of established authority figures. Religion could then be investigated and questioned in the same way that any other system of thought could be called into question. Kant ultimately integrated Christianity into his logical framework and affirmed it as a true religion, much to the dismay of some other Enlightenment thinkers such as Friedrich Schiller, who doubted that Kant had done anything productive by defending the Christian religion with philosophical proofs. For Schiller, Christianity was “ein zum Einsturz bereites Gebäude,”¹⁴⁸ a “morsche[s] Gebäude der Dummheit”¹⁴⁹ that Kant had tried to patch up. Despite Kant’s ultimate defense of

¹⁴⁶ David Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany, 1780-1918. The Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), xiv.

¹⁴⁷ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Friedrich Schiller, *Schillers Werke*. Nationalausgabe. Established by Julius Petersen and continued by Lieselotte Blumenthal et al., commissioned by the Klassik-Stiftung Weimar and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, ed. Julius Petersen, Gerhard Fricke, Norbert Oellers, and Siegfried Seidel (Weimar: Böhlau Nachfolger, 1943-2010), 26:219.

¹⁴⁹ Schiller, *Werke*, 26:219.

Christianity, however, the act of scrutiny to which he subjected religion as a moral philosophy and as a tenable worldview was certainly a powerful statement.

The burgeoning intellectual culture promoted by this atmosphere of critical thinking stimulated a fresh look at the Bible and a new type of historical-critical exegesis, and some theologians and philosophers began to interpret holy texts with the same standards by which one would evaluate any other text. The *Fragmentenstreit* (1774-1780) was a debate that consisted of over fifty texts by dozens of theologians, pastors, and even school teachers. The most engaged and well-known of these contributors were Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1758), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), and Johann Melchior Goeze (1717-1786). The text that began the debate, Reimarus's *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (completed in 1768), was not published until after the author's death when Lessing retitled it "Fragmente eines Ungenannten" and published sections of it in 1774 and 1777. In his *Apologie*, Reimarus examined the Bible and Christian doctrine through the lens of reason and logic. He pointed out the many contradictions in a text that claimed to be the infallible word of God, thereby highlighting its historical relativism. Central questions included: If the historical descriptions in the Bible were inaccurate, then in what sense could this book still be the revealed truth of a divine and omniscient being? If the Bible was not the revealed word of God, but was merely a product of historical circumstances, how accurate could this text be in the most central doctrines such as the resurrection of Christ? And if there is reason to doubt that the resurrection actually occurred, how compelling can the central thesis of Christianity be?

Although Lessing only partially shared the views expressed in the fragments of Reimarus he chose to publish, the respondents held him as responsible for their content as their publisher. He defended Christianity by emphasizing its inner, underlying truth that existed independent of the Bible or any other sacred texts: "Die Religion ist nicht wahr, weil

die Evangelisten und Apostel sie lehrten: sondern sie lehrten sie, weil sie wahr ist. Aus ihrer innern Wahrheit müssen die schriftlichen Überlieferungen erklärt werden, und alle schriftliche Überlieferungen können ihr keine innere Wahrheit geben, wenn sie keine hat.”¹⁵⁰

Lessing’s assumption that the gospels must be true even before they have been tested for logical integrity and internal consistency allows him to dismiss any and all criticisms without seriously considering them. Several decades later, nineteenth-century theologians such as David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach would take issue with such assumptions, as will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

Another seminal moment in the history of the debate about religion’s role in the Enlightenment was the publication of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), which was highly influential in theological and philosophical discourses of the time. Schleiermacher’s work, along with that of several of his contemporaries such as Ernst Moritz Arndt and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, displayed a “self-conscious piety”¹⁵¹ in reaction to the “perceived irreligiosity and atheism of their French occupiers.”¹⁵² Schleiermacher’s speeches sought to demonstrate religion’s continued relevance despite the popular idea that its privileging of faith over reason made it incompatible with Enlightenment ideals. Schleiermacher’s notion of religion is far from orthodox, however. He asserted that the Bible and other holy texts were of less importance than conventional, institutionalized religion claimed: “Nicht der hat Religion, der an eine heilige Schrift glaubt, sondern der welcher keiner bedarf, und wohl selbst eine machen könnte.”¹⁵³ Even God himself was not of central importance in Schleiermacher’s view of religion: “In der Religion also steht die Idee von Gott nicht so hoch als Ihr meint, auch gab es

¹⁵⁰ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, ed. Wilfried Barner et. al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag), 8:312-313.

¹⁵¹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 220.

¹⁵² Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 220.

¹⁵³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hermann Fischer, Gerhard Ebeling, Heinz Kimmerle, Günter Meckenstock and Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 12:72.

unter wahrhaft religiösen Menschen nie Eiferer, Enthusiasten oder Schwärmer für das Dasein Gottes; mit großer Gelassenheit haben sie das, was man Atheismus nennt, neben sich gesehen, und es hat immer etwas gegeben, was ihnen irreligiöser scheint als dieses.”¹⁵⁴

Schleiermacher’s version of God was certainly not the tyrannical authority figure described in the Old Testament; it belonged more to a pantheistic universe than a monotheistic one.

Schleiermacher defined religion not as tied to a deity, but as an “Anschauung des Universums.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Christian God did not take precedence over that of other religions. For Schleiermacher, each distinct religion (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Buddhism) was not its own religion, but one branch of a larger entity called “religion,” an “Individuum der Religion.”¹⁵⁶ Here he posited the idea that religion, which was nothing more than “Anschauung des Universums,”¹⁵⁷ encompassed all “religions” in the conventional sense. He used the parable of the blind men touching the elephant: each individual religion possesses a partial truth, and thus can neither describe the entire truth accurately, nor can it claim to take precedence over the truths that others claim to possess. The only reasonable behavior in such a situation is guided by religious tolerance and respect for those of other faiths.

Schleiermacher’s writings represent another step away from orthodoxy toward a personal and individualized relationship between religion and society. Early Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis with their “Kunstreligion” were inspired by Schleiermacher’s extension of religious concepts into a less dogmatic realm in which the aesthetic, that is, the individual’s appreciation of the universe, took precedence over ancient scripture and the authority of the clergy.

¹⁵⁴ Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 12:72.

¹⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 12:72.

¹⁵⁶ Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 12:72.

¹⁵⁷ Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 12:72.

Private or Public? The Conversion of Friedrich Leopold Stolberg

Friedrich Leopold Stolberg's conversion demonstrates how people reacted to conversion during this time, particularly to what degree it was seen as a private or a public act.¹⁵⁸ Stolberg, who had been raised Protestant, traveled to Italy in 1792, where he came into contact with notable Catholics such as Princess Amalie von Gallitzin. In his travel letters from this period, *Reisen in Deutschland, der Schweiz, Italien und Sizilien in den Jahren 1791 und 1792*, he explained that he had seen the truth about Catholicism during this journey. His wife Sophie wrote in a letter to her sister-in-law Luise Stolberg that Friedrich had been undergoing spiritual turmoil for which he sought an answer: "Er bete täglich Gott um Erleuchtung, daß er ihn in die katholische Kirche, wenn diese wirklich die wahre Kirche sei, einführen möge."¹⁵⁹ Because he served under the Protestant Duke of Oldenburg in Eutin, Stolberg resigned from his office after his official conversion to Catholicism on 1 July 1800.¹⁶⁰

While Stolberg saw his conversion as a personal act and attempted to maintain his privacy surrounding the decision, his turn toward Catholicism has had a legacy as "one of the most controversial and public acts of the beginning of the nineteenth century."¹⁶¹ Some of his contemporaries who were more inclined toward Enlightenment saw Protestantism as aligned with progressivism, and interpreted Stolberg's conversion as a step backward into the medieval oppression of Catholic hierarchies. Johann Kaspar Lavater wrote in reaction to Stolberg's conversion, for example: "Ich werde nie katholisch, d.h. *Aufopferer meiner*

¹⁵⁸ I have published previously on Stolberg's conversion, see Lisa Beesley, "Schwärmerei: Kleist, Catholic Conversion, and the End of Enlightenment," in *Religion, Reason, and Culture in the Age of Goethe*, ed. Elizabeth Krimmer (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2013).

¹⁵⁹ Eleoma Joshua, *Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg and the German Romantics* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2005), 21.

¹⁶⁰ Jürgen Behrens, ed., *Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg: Briefe* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1966), 363.

¹⁶¹ Eleoma Joshua, *Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg and the German Romantics* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2005), 137

Denkens- und Gewissensfreiheit.”¹⁶² The most scathing critique of Stolberg’s personal life came from Johann Heinrich Voß, who published a pamphlet titled *Wie ward Fritz Stolberg ein Unfreier?* in 1819, nearly 20 years after Stolberg’s conversion, and only one year before his death. Stolberg defended himself with *Kurze Abfertigung der langen Schmähchrift des Herrn Hofraths Voß wider ihn und Aufforderung an den Herrn Hofrath* (1820), which was published posthumously by his brother Christian. Voß had the last word later that year with one final text, *Bestätigung der Stolbergischen Umtriebe, nebst einem Anhang über persönliche Verhältnisse* (1820). In *Wie ward Fritz Stolberg ein Unfreier?*, Voß described Catholic conversions like Stolberg’s as a “hinraffende[] Geistespest” that had to be stopped: “wir werden nicht leichtsinnig unter das Joch der römischen Willkür zurückkehren.”¹⁶³ Stolberg responded that his conversion was a personal decision and did not warrant the critical opinions of people like Voß, but for all his efforts to keep his decision private, Stolberg’s contemporaries could not help weighing in. Goethe’s poem “Voß contra Stolberg,” written in 1820, highlighted the public nature of their quarrel:

Voß contra Stolberg! ein Proceß
 Von ganz besonderm Wesen,
 Ganz eigener Art; mir ist indeß,
 Das hätt’ ich schon gelesen.
 Mir wird unfrei, mir wird unfroh,
 Wie zwischen Gluth und Welle,
 Als läs’ ich ein Capitolo
 In Dante’s grauser Hölle.¹⁶⁴

Stolberg’s conversion and its aftermath demonstrate the tension between two conflicting understandings of religion’s role within society during this time: religious affiliation as a private practice and a personal choice, versus religious affiliation as a public identity and a political statement. The nineteenth century was a period of transition in which the public

¹⁶² Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Streitschriften über Stolbergs Konversion*, ed. Jürgen Behrens (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1973), 98

¹⁶³ Johann Heinrich Voß, “Wie ward Fritz Stolberg ein Unfreier?” in *Streitschriften über Stolbergs Konversion*, ed. Jürgen Behrens (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1973), 3.

¹⁶⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke: Weimarer Ausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1887-1919), 1:186.

significance of religious affiliation began to recede, as the individualization of religious practice began to dominate, which is our primary definition of secularization: the process in which religion transforms from a public to a private affair. While Stolberg's critics maintained that his conversion was also a public renouncement of political progressivism, Stolberg himself was in fact participating in secularism by searching for the religion that most closely resonated with his individual needs. He anticipated this new role of religion in a more secularized society in which people were to be free to convert to whichever religion best suited their desires, lifestyles, and personalities.

Reforms and Revivals in the *Vormärz*

The many revival and reform movements within Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities were a testament to the profound religious transformations taking place during the nineteenth century. The period between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the political uprisings in 1848 is sometimes referred to as "Restoration Germany," coinciding with the end of French occupation and the beginning of revolutionary unrest, and a restoration of power of the *Ancien Régime* accompanied by oppression, censorship, and political imprisonment.¹⁶⁵ This period is also sometimes referred to as the *Vormärz*, indicating roughly the three decades preceding March of 1848. The fact that the term *Vormärz* defines these years not by what happened in them, but what they anticipated, is telling. It has been widely seen as a period of transition, a hybrid creature, because while the map of German-speaking areas was certainly simpler than it was before the arrival of Napoleon, it was far from a unified land: the Congress of Vienna recognized thirty-nine German states; the largest were monarchies (Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg, Hanover, and Saxony), in addition to Hanseatic

¹⁶⁵ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:534.

cities and smaller principalities, primarily dynastic states, and some had fewer than 100,000 inhabitants.¹⁶⁶

The social crisis leading to the revolutions in 1848 and 1849 was rooted in mass poverty, caused by a dramatically growing population, and outbreaks of often fatal illnesses such as cholera (1830-1831) and typhus (throughout the 1830s and 1840s)¹⁶⁷ – the latter of which was the cause of the early death of Georg Büchner in 1837 – as well as extensive crop failures in 1816-1817 and 1845-1847.¹⁶⁸ These led to food riots, which aggravated the atmosphere of “Verunsicherung und Ausweglosigkeit.”¹⁶⁹ The hardship of this period earned it the nickname of “the hungry forties.”¹⁷⁰ Although Georg Büchner was no longer living to experience this decade, he correctly predicted that a revolution would result from this extreme material deprivation when he wrote to Karl Gutzkow in June of 1836 that the larger portion of society, the poor, could be motivated to revolt by two mechanisms: “materielles Elend und *religiöser Fanatismus*” (MA 10,1:03).

Protesters demanded freedom of the press and freedom of conscience and hoped for a unified nation-state.¹⁷¹ A group of seven professors from the University of Göttingen expressed criticism of their state’s constitution by refusing to swear an oath to Ernest Augustus, the King of Hanover, of whom it was said that he had committed every crime except suicide.¹⁷² The uprisings of the 1840s ended in failure, however, when military force succeeded in crushing the last of them in 1849, and the Prussian King Frederick William IV refused to accept the Crown of a unified, Prussian-led Germany on 24 April 1849.¹⁷³ Leading

¹⁶⁶ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 92.

¹⁶⁷ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 106.

¹⁶⁸ Peter Wende, *A History of Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 91.

¹⁶⁹ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 539.

¹⁷⁰ James M. Brophy, “The End of the Economic Old Order: The Great Transition, 1750-1860” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 183.

¹⁷¹ Wende, *A History of Germany*, 92.

¹⁷² Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 117.

¹⁷³ Wende, *A History of Germany*, 94.

up to this event, attempts at revolutions had had some successes, but were largely crushed by the superior military force of the troops controlled by the various rulers and the Metternich administration. Demonstrations were widely suppressed, censorship reached new heights as thousands of books were banned and many more never made it to print, unless in radically altered form.

During this time, a new wave of political conservatism also emerged that emphasized the legitimacy of authority over the reforms demanded by protesters.¹⁷⁴ Many of these conservative organizations based their claims on religious authority and the supposed natural, divine order of things, as demonstrated by the writings found in Hengstenberg's *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, founded in 1827, and similar publications promoting conservative political value systems.¹⁷⁵ Supporters of liberalism likewise invoked religious imagery in order to legitimize their movement, such as in the case of Friedrich von Sallet's *Laienevangelium* (1842), which updated and rearranged the Sermon on the Mount to coincide with the goals of liberal progressivism. The diversity of political opinions was reflected by the wide-ranging spectrum of attitudes in established religious institutions; liberal Protestant churches formed communities such as the "Lichtfreunde" in opposition to Christian conservatism, while Catholic political activity rose in a revival of popular Catholic piety in the 1830s.¹⁷⁶

Reform Judaism grew significantly during this century, as the slow and sporadic movement towards emancipation brought about a new type of liberal Jewish community in which dietary laws and the injunction to cover the head were not as strictly observed.¹⁷⁷ This was influenced by the *Haskalah* reform movement that had originated in the early eighteenth century with the goal of revitalizing rabbinic scholarship by integrating European philosophy

¹⁷⁴ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 133.

¹⁷⁵ Williamson, "Protestants, Catholics, and Jews," 222. See also Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 134.

¹⁷⁶ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 135.

¹⁷⁷ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 287.

and science.¹⁷⁸ The Jewish identity, both religious and cultural, remained strong among those who embraced Reform Judaism, as demonstrated by the favored self-description used by acculturated Jews: “German citizen of the Jewish faith.”¹⁷⁹ For German Jews, the answer to the question of how to integrate into the larger society was not found in an abandonment of Jewish traditions or beliefs, but in the new freedoms allowed in the context of Reform Judaism. Orthodox Judaism still played a major role, criticizing what it saw as “opportunism”¹⁸⁰ of Reformers. The majority of these conversions, of which there were fewer than 22,000 in the entire nineteenth century,¹⁸¹ were sought at least in part to obtain Christian baptismal certificates that were required for advancements in official and academic careers. These tensions are explored in more detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, which addresses the historical events that led to the baptism of Heinrich Heine and many of his Jewish contemporaries.

Protestantism and Catholicism were also marked by revival and reform movements in the years between 1815 and 1848. The period after 1815 has been called a “Renaissance des Religiösen”¹⁸² and a “Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter,”¹⁸³ a time characterized by “a widespread and, to some degree, spontaneous outpouring of Christian religious engagement and activity.”¹⁸⁴ Ultramontanism in Catholicism and Neo-Pietism in Protestantism both sought to bring enthusiasm to the orthodox sides of their respective confessions, with the aim of “mak[ing] them stronger and more viable.”¹⁸⁵ Ultramontanism, a reform movement within

¹⁷⁸ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 215.

¹⁷⁹ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 289.

¹⁸⁰ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 290.

¹⁸¹ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 289.

¹⁸² Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:394.

¹⁸³ O. Blaschke, “Das 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26.1 (2000): 38-75.

¹⁸⁴ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 221

¹⁸⁵ George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9.

the Catholic Church, emphasized strict obedience to papal authority,¹⁸⁶ and its clergy organized large-scale pilgrimages to sites of piety. Missions led by members of Catholic groups such as the Redemptorists, the Jesuits, and the Franciscans aimed to increase devotion among the German population and to encourage political conservatism, as many of these missions included “an explicit political message of counter-revolution, which declared liberalism and democracy works of the devil and preached obedience to legitimate monarchs.”¹⁸⁷ These projects aimed at spreading religious enthusiasm were not only organized by clergy, but also often by smaller organizations among the laity.¹⁸⁸

The Catholic revival was influenced by Romantic tendencies such as the renewed interest of writers like Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis in medieval art and literature that was infused with Catholic imagery, and of course by the conversion of Schlegel to Catholicism in 1808 along with several of his Romantic contemporaries.¹⁸⁹ While Schlegel and Novalis did not conform to orthodox forms of religion, preferring to emphasize the aesthetic realm and the “creative meditation between the individual and an unseen infinite,”¹⁹⁰ leaders of the revival movement tended toward more orthodox versions of Catholicism, the most influential of which was Johann Michael Sailer (1751-1832). A Jesuit professor in Landshut and later Bishop of Regensburg, Sailer oversaw the training of over a thousand Catholic priests and promoted the authority of the papacy.¹⁹¹

Pilgrimages to sites of Church history or places where miracles were claimed to have occurred were another manifestation of the Catholic revival in the middle of the nineteenth century. David Blackbourn’s study of the Marian visions at Marpingen is one example of this phenomenon. The Virgin Mary enjoyed renewed attention and devotion when Pope Pius IX

¹⁸⁶ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 223.

¹⁸⁷ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 223.

¹⁸⁸ Jürgen Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert: Arbeit, Nation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 13:124.

¹⁸⁹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 222.

¹⁹⁰ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 54.

¹⁹¹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 222.

enunciated the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception in 1854, May was pronounced “Mary’s month,” and her image began to dominate local festivals, replacing in some cases events that still openly displayed their pagan roots.¹⁹² Manufacturers of all kinds of merchandise took advantage of her popularity; she appeared on pictures, postcards, statuettes, rosaries, medallions, candles, and even in the forms of soap and gingerbread.¹⁹³ In the 1840s, the village of Marpingen, known in the 1840s for the unruly and impious behavior of its Catholic population, experienced a transformation after the arrival of an “intensely Mariolatrous”¹⁹⁴ parish priest who was able to increase church attendance and improve behavior. In 1876, the village caused a sensation when three young girls claimed to have seen visions of the Virgin Mary, causing 20,000 pilgrims to flock to the area within a week in order to observe the spot and demonstrate their devotion to Mary. They continued to report apparitions for fourteen months until the Prussian civilian, military, and legal authorities felt it necessary to become involved.¹⁹⁵ Blackbourn describes this demonstration of increased religious fervor as symptomatic of the desperation caused by the anti-Catholic measures of the *Kulturkampf*—these were Catholics searching “for a sign of deliverance.”¹⁹⁶ The reach of this renewed fervor within Catholicism should not be overestimated, as Williamson notes, since there were many areas in Bavaria, the Rhineland, and elsewhere in which Catholics remained largely indifferent.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the revival was a major component in the monumental shift in religious belief and practice that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century.

The impulse to proselytize increased during this time for both Catholics and Protestants; for example, the Basel Missionary Society was founded in 1815 as a training

¹⁹² Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 299.

¹⁹³ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 299.

¹⁹⁴ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 300.

¹⁹⁵ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 300.

¹⁹⁶ Blackbourn, *Fontana History*, 300.

¹⁹⁷ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 223.

center for missionaries to spread Lutheranism abroad. This missionary organization inspired others to launch similar institutions in cities such as Berlin, Leipzig, and Bremen.¹⁹⁸ Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, whose efforts to bring Protestantism into a more conservative realm were mentioned above, was a graduate of the Basel Missionary Society and went on to become the editor of his *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* beginning in 1827 in order to promote Lutheran orthodoxy and attack liberal and rationalist strains of theology. To this end, he organized the dispersal of “tabloid-style reports designed to expose the baseness and immorality of rationalism and of individual rationalists wherever they might threaten the truth faith.”¹⁹⁹

These revivals constitute a certain “Renaissance des Religiösen,”²⁰⁰ but this rebirth of religiosity was distinct from earlier periods of increased religious devotion because the role of religion in Germany during the nineteenth century was very different from its counterpart in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The relationship between the state and the church had been radically transformed by the historical events discussed above, such as the outcomes of the Napoleonic wars. It was the beginning of the end of state-sanctioned religion, and slowly toward the end of the nineteenth century, the religion became less of a public and more of a private affair, centered around the individual and the family.

Nineteenth-century Germans possessed a “größere Wahlfreiheit zwischen den verschiedenen Glaubenslehren”²⁰¹ than in previous centuries, and long-standing religious traditions were becoming more segmented into various sects and movements, in the directions of both orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Yet as more confessions came into existence, there was also a growing “common sense of nationality and a belief that Germany was a ‘Christian state’”²⁰² as divisiveness between Catholics and Protestants subsided somewhat. By the 1890s, after the

¹⁹⁸ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 222.

¹⁹⁹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 222.

²⁰⁰ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:394.

²⁰¹ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:394.

²⁰² Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 229.

conclusion of the *Kulturkampf*, a new “other” was found in the “fourth confession” of the atheist socialist movement, which was often conflated with the third confession, Judaism.²⁰³ The second half of the nineteenth century displayed more instances of “Entkirchlichung”²⁰⁴ and “Dechristianisierung”²⁰⁵ right along side of the “Erneuerung der religiösen Kultur”²⁰⁶ evident in the reform and revival movements.

A common thread in all of these nineteenth-century religious phenomena — the Catholic revival, the Protestant Awakening and Neo-Pietism, Jewish Reform movements, and increased numbers of those who identified as non-religious — was that religious affiliation, belief, and practice began to be seen as matters of private and individual choice, rather than as public obligations. There was an expansion of an “enlightened-bourgeois style of piety”²⁰⁷ that was “oriented around the individual and the family, building on the notion that religion was essentially a private affair, whose purpose was to elevate the soul to God and reaffirm a sense of moral obligation to one’s neighbor and to civil society at large.”²⁰⁸ An example of this increasingly individualized type of piety was Heinrich Zschokke’s *Stunden der Andacht zur Beförderung wahren Christenthums und häuslicher Gottesverehrung*, published between 1809 and 1816. Zschokke proposed that inward faith was to be achieved by worship within the family, painting a picture “of familial devotion in which fathers and mothers taught their children belief in a Christian God who was wise, tolerant, and benevolent,”²⁰⁹ and while it appealed mostly to Protestants, it presented a “non-sectarian version of Christianity”²¹⁰ that resonated with many Catholics as well. The popularity of *Stunden der Andacht* was a product of what Rebekka Habermas has called an “Intimisierung’ der öffentlich praktizierten

²⁰³ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 229.

²⁰⁴ Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert*, 13:123.

²⁰⁵ Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert*, 13:123.

²⁰⁶ Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert*, 13:123.

²⁰⁷ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 224.

²⁰⁸ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 224.

²⁰⁹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 224.

²¹⁰ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 224.

Religion”²¹¹ taking place during the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is a “Familiarisierung”²¹² of worship resulting in a “Religion im Privaten,”²¹³ and as the public nature of religion began to fade into the background, religious celebrations such as Christmas were no longer seen as events that happen primarily in the church building, but rather at home with family. This tendency toward individual religious practice was influenced by the Neologist Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791), who had participated in the *Fragmentenstreit* with a rationalist critique of the Bible. Semler drew a sharp distinction between “church religion” and “private religion” that gained in popularity near the end of the eighteenth century.²¹⁴ Semler’s theology was another manifestation of the attitude reflected in the development of religion during this time: while Germans still considered themselves religious, they “no longer felt beholden to either church doctrine or the churches themselves.”²¹⁵

A result of this turning inward for religious insight was renewed activity in the realm of historical-critical exegesis, as theologians sought to discover the true meanings of the scriptures for themselves, rather than relying on ecclesiastical doctrine. A new type of “Vernunftreligion”²¹⁶ emerged near the end of the eighteenth century, seeking to reconcile rational inquiry with the claims of the Bible, as demonstrated already in the *Fragmentenstreit*. This effort was continued by two important theologians of the early nineteenth century, David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, who investigated Christianity in the context of the quickly transforming religious landscape of their period and came to radically new conclusions about the origins of Christianity. In the same spirit as the various revival and reform movements discussed so far, the works of Strauss and Feuerbach

²¹¹ Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

²¹² Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

²¹³ Habermas, “Weibliche Religiosität,” 128.

²¹⁴ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 215.

²¹⁵ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 215.

²¹⁶ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:406.

also represented a “Streben nach innerer Erneuerung”²¹⁷ and an “Erneuerung der religiösen Kultur”²¹⁸ because they aimed to revitalize the Christian faith by shedding light on its true significance.

David Friedrich Strauss and the Search for the Historical Jesus

Continuing the traditions of Enlightenment interpreters of the Bible such as Reimarus and Lessing, as well as Neologists such as Semler who had tried to sustain the “delicate balance between history and scripture,”²¹⁹ David Friedrich Strauss conducted his own historical-critical exegesis of the Bible, focusing on the early Christians and how they reacted to the events in Christ’s life in order to grow their small Jewish sect into one of the most dominant religions in the world. Strauss was born in 1808 into the same community of Swabian Pietism that had produced such major thinkers as Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin. Early in life he was influenced by the writings of mystics such as Jacob Böhme, and this tradition resonated with him because he believed that Böhme penetrated more deeply into the nature of God than did the Bible.²²⁰ He felt there needed to be a direct, unmediated understanding of the divine, and the Bible had passed through too many hands to be trusted to convey any immediate type of knowledge. He eventually became dissatisfied with his study of Böhme’s texts, however, since he only had contact with him “through the most lifeless of means, the written word,”²²¹ and sought a contemporary personal contact who had spiritual intuition similar to Böhme. In 1825, he began studying in Tübingen with Ferdinand Christian Baur, who argued that religious texts needed to undergo historical criticism in order to

²¹⁷ Hahn and Berding, *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 14:406.

²¹⁸ Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert*, 13:123.

²¹⁹ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 214.

²²⁰ Edwina G. Lawler, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Critics: The Life of Jesus Debate in Early Nineteenth-Century German Journals* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 11.

²²¹ Lawler, *David Friedrich Strauss*, 11.

determine their accuracy.²²² Baur also introduced him to the writings of Spinoza and Schleiermacher. In 1831, Strauss moved to Berlin to study under Hegel, who died only a few weeks later. He found Hegel's claim that the Bible was true historically because it was derived from the concept of absolute religion unsatisfactory; he felt instead that "theologians must deal with the messy positive material of the biblical testimony before engaging in confident abstractions about the Absolute."²²³ Strauss maintained that historical criticism had to take place before the concept of religion could be established and eschewed *a priori* justifications for religious truths.

Faced with the many contradictions and ahistorical claims made in the Bible, Strauss turned to the concept of myth, which had been outlined by the classical philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), a professor at the University of Göttingen. It is significant that Strauss relied on Heyne's writings in his biblical exegesis, because Heyne has been considered the founder of philology, and Strauss's method of interpreting the Bible represents a fundamental shift in the way texts were read. Heinz Schlaffer describes this shift as "[d]ie Einrichtung der Philologie"²²⁴ in which the source of all poetry and knowledge was no longer attributed to the muses, but became the domain of the author: "Von der Poetologie der Musen war alles beantwortet, was den Philologen zur Frage wird. Deshalb muß der Glaube an die Museninspiration erloschen sein, ehe die Untersuchungen des Textes beginnen können."²²⁵ Philology begins when readers begin to ask who the author was, what their motivation could have been, and what their text meant in the historical and cultural context in which they wrote. While the accuracy of texts that originated with muses went unquestioned because it was of divine origin – "[d]as Wort des 'göttlichen' Sängers [war] unbefragt"²²⁶ — a mortal

²²² Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 159.

²²³ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 159.

²²⁴ Heinz Schlaffer, *Poesie und Wissen. Die Entstehung des ästhetischen Bewusstseins und der philologischen Erkenntnis. Erweiterte Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 159.

²²⁵ Schlaffer, *Poesie und Wissen*, 161.

²²⁶ Schlaffer, *Poesie und Wissen*, 161.

author, on the other hand, could be misinformed or dishonest in the composing of a text. Thus the writings of an author elicited a new kind of textual scrutiny, causing the emergence of philology as we know it today. The philological methods of “Textkritik, Quellenforschung, Überlieferungsgeschichte, historischer Kommentar, Biographik”²²⁷ all serve to check the accuracy of a text that is of earthly, and not divine origin. The fact that nineteenth-century theologians such as Strauss increasingly used this philological method of biblical exegesis is key to understanding the shift toward the secular during this century: the supernatural and infallible status of the Bible was supplanted by textual criticism that sought its mundane origins. Although the tools of philology existed prior to Strauss’s time, the historicizing efforts in the critical exegeses of the Bible conducted by Strauss and several of his contemporaries represent a new phase in modern literary criticism. When the origin of a text shifted from the muse to the author, the discourse surrounding the meaning and authenticity of texts, including the Bible, underwent a transformation that is manifest in these historical-critical exegeses.

Strauss relied chiefly on Heyne’s theory of myth, which was based on his conviction that the inhabitants of the ancient world expressed themselves primarily through the mode of myth, a universal language through which they communicated their truths.²²⁸ Strauss saw the mythical mode of communication as the key to understanding how the early Christians assembled the stories that would later become the New Testament. In the preface to *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch betrachtet* (1835), he rejected both the rationalist and the orthodox methods of interpreting the Bible. He discussed the claims of Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, a typical representative of the rationalist approach to Christianity that was popular at the close of the eighteenth century, and referred to the writings of Hermann Olshausen for the

²²⁷ Schlaffer, *Poesie und Wissen*, 161.

²²⁸ Lawler, *David Friedrich Strauss*, 23.

perspective of the Lutheran orthodox theologian.²²⁹ He built on the historical findings of these two scholars, while acknowledging the research of biblical interpreters of the previous hundred and fifty years, as well as of his contemporaries. He summarized the work of others who had tackled the problem of the historical accuracy of the Bible such as Schleiermacher, W. M. L. de Wette, Kant, and Hegel. All of their explanations, however, had failed to uncover the mystery of the relationship between historical fact and the stories in the Bible. The rationalists had engaged in their historical-critical exegeses with the hypothesis that the Gospels were meant to be historical records, but instead were rendered inaccurate for various reasons, while the goal of the historical research for the orthodox apologists had been to reveal that the Gospels were in fact reliable historical records, despite the appearance of ahistoricity, by reconciling the apparent contradictions. Both of these camps, however, had begun with the assumption that the Gospels were intended to be accurate historical documents in the first place.²³⁰

Strauss's interpretation rejected both of these views, relying instead on the theory of myth: "Der neue Standpunkt, der an die Stelle der bezeichneten treten soll, ist der mythische."²³¹ The stories in the Gospels were the result of neither dishonesty nor confusion; they were simply mythical expressions of the story that Christ's early followers needed to tell. This meant that, from a historical point of view, most of the details related in the Gospels never took place at all. Certain details survived the historical scrutiny, however: Christ had in fact existed, and was a great individual around whom "die Bildung von Mythen"²³² had coalesced after his execution. Strauss invited his readers to imagine Christ's followers after his untimely death, having lost their charismatic leader. Armed with "einer Masse neuer

²²⁹ David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969. Reprint Tübingen: Verlag von C. F. Osiander, 1835), 1:IX.

²³⁰ See Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus. Introductory Survey of the Historical Roots of Gospels Criticism* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995), 29.

²³¹ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:IV.

²³² Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:71.

Ideen, die eine Welt umschaffen sollten,”²³³ they took to chronicling these ideas “nicht in der abstrakten Form des Verstandes und Begriffs,”²³⁴ but rather through the primary mode of expression of their time: the myth. Strauss described the verifiable remnants of Christ’s biography as a framework that was adorned “mit den manichfaltigsten und sinnvollsten Gewinden frommer Reflexionen und Phantasieen.”²³⁵ These mythical embellishments to the life of Jesus had come about because the early Christians, under the impression that they had just witnessed the life of the Messiah whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, created myths to correspond to the miraculous events that were foretold to accompany the Messiah. All that was left after their mythologizing efforts were removed were the simplest facts about the historical Jesus: “dass er zu Nazaret aufgewachsen sei, von Johannes sich habe taufen lassen, Jünger gesammelt habe, im jüdischen Lande lehrend umhergezogen sei, überall dem Pharisäismus sich entgegengestellt und zum Messiasreiche eingeladen habe, dass er aber am Ende dem Hass und Neid der pharisäischen Partei erlegen, und am Kreuze gestorben sei.”²³⁶ By the time these stories reached the Evangelists, it was long after Christ’s death, and the myths had been transformed through many iterations of oral transmission.

Strauss anticipated that this would sound like heresy to his contemporaries, so he emphasized that he did believe that the Bible was true at its core: not in its historical details, but in its philosophical humanist message. Like any parable that relates events that did not happen, but rather reveals a truth about humanity through metaphor, the story of Christ was not factually true, but philosophically true. In *Das Leben Jesu*, Strauss merely aimed to reveal this truth by distinguishing between “the outward biblical form of revelation and its inner moral core.”²³⁷ This clarification would, he hoped, render “the Christian faith intelligible, and

²³³ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:71.

²³⁴ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:71.

²³⁵ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:72.

²³⁶ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:72.

²³⁷ Williamson, “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” 215.

therefore credible, to post-Enlightenment men and women,²³⁸ and thus constitute the renewal that Christianity needed to remain relevant in this new age. Strauss argued in the conclusion to *Das Leben Jesu* that the “true” idea behind Christianity was not to be found in the historical Jesus as an individual or as the son of God, but rather in the whole of humanity, which was the authentic expression of the divine. While there were no supernatural miracles in the Gospel stories, there were certainly modern-day miracles to be found in the achievements of humanity, in the “great, historical wonders of science, industry, and culture.”²³⁹

Das Leben Jesu had an irreversibly detrimental effect on Strauss’s reputation and his career. He was fired from his position in Tübingen and never succeeded in securing another academic position. The many responses to his book included members of the clergy who called him the Antichrist, a minister who discovered that the Hebrew letters of Strauss’s name added up to the number 666, and pastors who continually visited him at his home in an attempt to save his soul from damnation.²⁴⁰ By the third edition of *Das Leben Jesu* in 1838, Strauss had made some compromises, but he rescinded them in later works such as *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872), which declared the bankruptcy of theology and no longer attempted to synthesize it with philosophy.²⁴¹ Thus Strauss gained a legacy as the “demystifying theologian *par excellence*.”²⁴²

Although Strauss found a different cause for the contradictions in the Gospels than did Reimarus, both *Das Leben Jesu* and the *Apologie*, as well as the other rationalist texts in the *Fragmentenstreit*, take as their starting points the notion that a historical reconstruction of

²³⁸ Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*, 30.

²³⁹ Thomas Fabisiak, *The “Nocturnal Side of Science” in David Friedrich Strauss’s Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 7. See also Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 164.

²⁴⁰ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 165.

²⁴¹ Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 101-110.

²⁴² Fabisiak, *The “Nocturnal Side of Science,”* 8.

these texts was necessary, and that revealed religion needed to be challenged. What separates the claims about Christianity of Reimarus from those of Strauss most starkly is that they were written in the context very different religious landscapes. Religion, both in private practice and as a public institution, had changed dramatically between the 1770s and the 1830s, as outlined throughout this chapter. In Strauss's time, Christianity no longer enjoyed the same degree of dominance as a cultural and political force; its privileges had been reduced as the church and state became more separate. By the mid-nineteenth century, Christianity had not only lost its "iron grip"²⁴³ of governmental power, it had also lost "the allegiance of a significant portion of the European cultural elite."²⁴⁴ Church and state remained intertwined to some degree, but the growing attitude that religion was a personal, private choice repositioned Christianity as one option among others, rather than a foregone conclusion. The demythologizing process conducted by Strauss, along with the historical-critical exegeses of his predecessors, had undermined the belief in miracles and "rendered the Bible a document of a foreign but still proximate people (the Jews),"²⁴⁵ which had among its effects that many educated elites began to see true religion as separate from the scripture. One manifestation of this was of course the *Kunstreligion* described by Romantics like Schlegel and Schleiermacher, in which religion was found in the artistic expression of the human soul, and not only in approved church doctrine. One of the long-term consequences of Strauss's work, as Williamson notes, was that scholars after him "felt much less inhibited in labeling other sacred truths, be they religious or scientific, with the epithet 'myth.'"²⁴⁶ This "set the stage for for Nietzsche's far more extensive project of unmasking and demythologizing."²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 89.

²⁴⁴ Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 89.

²⁴⁵ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 70.

²⁴⁶ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 178.

²⁴⁷ Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 178.

Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*

Only a few years after the publication of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, Ludwig Feuerbach continued this tradition of searching for historical and philosophical answers to the unsolved contradictions in the Bible with his historical-philosophical text *Das Wesen des Christentums*, written between 1839 and 1841. A decade earlier, he had already expressed his doubt about the supernatural claims of Christianity in *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (1830), in which he rejected the idea of personal immortality and demonstrated theology as a purely human affair, following instead Spinoza's version of immortality as a simple reintegration of the body into the cycle of nature. Feuerbach's understanding of theology as a mere manifestation of anthropological desires was already demonstrated in this early work, as evidenced by his interpretation of the function of the story of Adam and Eve: "Weißt du den Grund, warum in den Apfel gebissen hat Adam? Um der Theologie einen Gefallen zu tun."²⁴⁸ Christian theologians needed a tool to explain human suffering, so they invented the story of the original sin in order to meet this requirement.

In *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Feuerbach offered his analyses of many other features of Christianity in addition to the doctrine of the original sin. The book is divided into two parts: first, "Die Religion in ihrer Übereinstimmung mit dem Wesen des Menschen,"²⁴⁹ and second, "Die Religion in ihrem Widerspruch mit dem Wesen des Menschen."²⁵⁰ In the preface to the first edition, he described his work as "eine[] Philosophie der positiven Religion oder Offenbarung."²⁵¹ His version of religion is not to be confused with the Christianity of his day, which he saw as a religion of revelation only "in dem kindisch phantastischen Sinne unserer christlichen Mythologie, die sich jedes Ammenmärchen der

²⁴⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit aus den Papieren eines Denkers, nebst einem Anhang theologischsatyrischer Xenien, herausgegeben von einem seiner Freunde* (Nürnberg: J. A. Stein, 1830), 63.

²⁴⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 5:75.

²⁵⁰ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:316.

²⁵¹ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:3.

Historie als Tatsache aufbinden läßt.”²⁵² He sought to describe religion as objectively as possible, taking into account the mundane as well as the potentially divine characteristics that formed this phenomenon.

Like Strauss, Feuerbach was also the object of many accusations of heresy. In the second edition, Feuerbach addressed his critics by including more thorough historical evidence in order to make it clear that the analysis was “eine getreue, richtige Übersetzung der christlichen Religion aus der orientalischen Bildersprache der Phantasie in gutes, verständliches Deutsch.”²⁵³ His writing aimed to be nothing more than a faithful rendition of the implications of the Christian religion when viewed in a historical and philosophical context, a way of revealing the hidden meanings of Christianity. This was precisely Feuerbach’s method: to employ his observational capabilities (“die Sinne, vor allem die Augen”²⁵⁴) in order to reach the most accurate conclusions, as opposed to philosophers “welche sich die Augen aus dem Kopfe reißen, um desto besser denken zu können”²⁵⁵ – an approach that Feuerbach saw as highly ineffectual.

Feuerbach saw himself as a “Zuhörer und Dolmetscher”²⁵⁶ of religious phenomena, aiming to uncover the underlying truths available to any careful and, to the greatest extent possible, unbiased investigator: “Nicht zu erfinden — zu entdecken, ‘Dasein zu enthüllen’ war mein einziger Zweck, richtig zu sehen mein einziges Bestreben.”²⁵⁷ Thus, when critics called his text “negativ, irreligiös, atheistisch,” they needed only consider that it was religion itself, not its interpreter, that led to the conclusions presented in the text. Atheism, as defined in this context (God as an idea invented by humans and a manifestation of our traits) was then

²⁵² Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:3.

²⁵³ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:14.

²⁵⁴ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:15.

²⁵⁵ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:14.

²⁵⁶ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:17.

²⁵⁷ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:17.

actually nothing more than “das Geheimnis der Religion selbst.”²⁵⁸ The mystery of religion was revealed through this examination of root of this relationship between the human and the divine, which turned out in Feuerbach’s investigation to be identical. This was the most important distinction in Feuerbach’s book: his claims were only negative in the sense that they reject “das Unmenschliche,”²⁵⁹ that is, they only denied what was already a denial of the awe-inspiring potential of humanity itself. In an introductory essay to an English translation of the book by George Eliot, the Protestant theologian Karl Barth urged believers and students who wished to become spiritual leaders to engage seriously with Feuerbach’s work, despite the fact that it was largely dismissed in Christian communities as a merely negative attempt to dismantle divine doctrines. For Barth, Feuerbach was much more than “a skeptic and a nay-sayer”; on the contrary, he “says ‘Yes’ with great enthusiasm and vigor.”²⁶⁰ The aspect of Feuerbach’s thought that has typically been most threatening to theologians is the claim that theology can be reduced to anthropology, which led to “the idea that there must be inevitably an end to theology.”²⁶¹ It is understandable that, for a theologian, the attempt of anthropologists and sociologists to take on these theological issues, to “transform theology and make *it* into anthropology,”²⁶² would raise suspicion and cause a reaction appropriate to an existential danger. Barth interpreted Feuerbach’s work not as a mere reduction of theology to anthropology, but an exaltation of anthropology to theology.

The first part of Feuerbach’s text introduces his notion that religion in general is an anthropological phenomenon wherein God and man are not separate entities; rather, God is man’s invention. The second part analyzes the contradictions in Christianity specifically, leading to the conclusion that it there is no way to draw clear distinctions between theological

²⁵⁸ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:17.

²⁵⁹ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:17.

²⁶⁰ Karl Barth, “An Introductory Essay,” in Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*. Trans. by George Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), xiv.

²⁶¹ Barth, “An Introductory Essay,” xv.

²⁶² Barth, “An Introductory Essay,” xv.

and anthropological principles. The following passage succinctly conveys the central idea of God as a creation of man's consciousness:

Das Bewußtsein Gottes ist das Selbstbewußtsein des Menschen, die Erkenntnis Gottes ist die Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen. Aus seinem Gotte erkennst du den Menschen und hinwiederum aus dem Menschen seinen Gott; beides ist identisch. Was dem Menschen Gott ist, das ist sein Gott, seine Seele, und was des Menschen Geist, seine Seele, sein Herz, das ist sein Gott: Gott ist das offenbare innere, das ausgesprochne Selbst des Menschen, die Religion ist die feierliche Enthüllung der verborgnen Schätze des Menschen, das Eingeständnis seiner innersten Gedanken, das öffentliche Bekenntnis seiner Liebesgeheimnisse.²⁶³

There are at least two possible interpretations of this passage: first, Feuerbach may have been describing God as a manifestation of human consciousness in a poetic, metaphorical sense, implying that human consciousness “creates” God in the sense that it must be aware of him because of an innate perception of the divine. The objective existence of the divine is not denied explicitly here; it is only combined with human consciousness so that it can no longer exist independently of it. This does not necessarily imply atheism; it merely equates God's existence with man's consciousness. In this view, God can still have an objective, independent existence in the universe, and his existence is identical to our being conscious of his existence. In another interpretation, however, God can be seen as an invention of man, a mere figment of his imagination, with no independent existence, just like all other mythological figures who seem fabricated to those who do not believe in them. According to Christian doctrine, however, God exists independently of anyone believing in him – he existed before humans did – so the implication that God exists only in our imagination is tantamount to the claim that he does not exist at all.

Feuerbach asserted that human beings had invented God due to their tendency to conflate the subjective with the objective. Something subjective (human consciousness and its characteristics) has been transformed into something objective (a divine being, an

²⁶³ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:46.

independent entity, that is projected outside the human realm). By comparing religion to the childhood phase of human development — “Die Religion ist das kindliche Wesen der Menschheit”²⁶⁴ — Feuerbach noted that the child sees everything as an object, even one’s own self: “das Kind sieht sein Wesen, den Menschen, außer sich — als Kind ist der Mensch sich als ein andrer Mensch Gegenstand.”²⁶⁵ The progression of theology’s relationship to the subjective and the objective mirrors the development of children who gradually sort out what is real and what is a product of their imaginations. A key piece of evidence to support the inextricable nature of God and man is the incarnation of God into a human in the form of Christ. God is the manifestation of the ideal traits in humankind, and the best trait of all is love, therefore the bodily manifestation of God must be a perfect incarnation of love in his act of self-sacrifice. The fact that God was capable of taking on the human form serves as further evidence that he is of human, and not divine, origin: “Der Mensch war schon *in* Gott, war schon *Gott selbst*, ehe Gott Mensch wurde. Wie hätte sonst Gott Mensch werden können?”²⁶⁶

The second part of the book, titled “Das unwahre, d. i. theologische Wesen der Religion” in the first edition, was changed in subsequent editions to the somewhat milder “Die Religion in ihrem Widerspruch mit dem Wesen des Menschen.”²⁶⁷ Its central idea is that, while religion is true in the sense that it represents the relationship between the human and its essence, it is false when it is used to conceive of God “als einem andern, aparten, von ihm unterschiedenen, ja entgegengesetzten Wesen.”²⁶⁸ This is the idea from which “das böse Wesen der Religion”²⁶⁹ originates; it is the source of the facets of religion that make it immoral and inhumane. It results in fanaticism and is used as a justification for human

²⁶⁴ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:47.

²⁶⁵ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:47.

²⁶⁶ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:102.

²⁶⁷ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:316.

²⁶⁸ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:316.

²⁶⁹ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:316.

sacrifice, the source of “aller Greuel, aller schauerregenden Szenen in dem Trauerspiel der Religionsgeschichte.”²⁷⁰ An example of a doctrine in Christianity that originates in the misunderstanding of God as separate from humans is revelation: the idea that God only reveals his commandments to certain people at certain historical points in time and chooses to leave others in the dark about what he wants from them, while being prepared to dole out punishments and rewards based on this system, is unjust and immoral.²⁷¹ Any attempt to discern a coherent system of morality or a picture of truth about the world will only be frustrated by a careful reading of the Bible: “Die Bibel widerspricht der Moral, widerspricht der Vernunft, widerspricht sich selbst unzählige Male; aber sie ist das Wort Gottes, die ewige Wahrheit, und ‘die Wahrheit kann und darf sich nicht widersprechen’.”²⁷² Statements like these were the targets of much criticism from orthodox theologians, not only because they called into question the reliability and the moral code of the Bible, but also because they challenged authoritarian structures that relied on a shared Christian worldview. Strauss and Feuerbach were representatives of this “radikale Polemik” as they “rüttelten mit ihrer Bibel- und Mythenkritik an ideologischen Stützfeilern der Feudalherrschaft.”²⁷³ Feuerbach’s thinking represents a shift in the way that his contemporaries, left-Hegelians and intellectuals, related to the concept of God and the authority of religious institutions, which is fundamental to our understanding of what secularization is and to what degree it occurred during this period.

Conclusion

Building on the insights gained from the models of conversion and secularization in the contexts of sociology, psychology, theology, and history described in the first half of this

²⁷⁰ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:316.

²⁷¹ Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:355.

²⁷² Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:357.

²⁷³ Joachim Kahl, “‘Der Fels des Atheismus’. Epikurs und Georg Büchners Kritik an der Theodizee,” *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 2 (1982): 102.

chapter, the following chapters investigate the conversions of three of the most prominent authors from this period. Against the background of Charles Taylor's concept of secularization as the process in which religious affiliation becomes an option rather than an obligation, Brentano, Büchner, and Heine sought answers to their theological questions, and they used their literary works as a forum to experiment with religious ideas and to express their newly found identities. In this sense, the entire oeuvres of each of these writers can be read as conversion narratives, because their works exhibit a phase of the author's transformation of identity.

CHAPTER 2

CLEMENS BRENTANO'S RELIGIOUS INTENSIFICATION: FROM ROMANTIC POET TO CATHOLIC EVANGELIST

Introduction

Beginning around 1816, Clemens Brentano experienced a period of religious intensification that transformed him from a Romantic poet and an average practicing Catholic into an explicitly religious poet and devout Catholic. Intensification is one of the five types of conversion outlined by Lewis R. Rambo in *Understanding Religious Conversion*, defined as “the revitalized commitment to a faith with which the convert has had previous affiliation, formal or informal.”²⁷⁴ An application of Rambo’s seven stage model of conversion adds a previously unexplored dimension to the understanding of Brentano’s conversion. His religious transformation had a profound effect on his self-understanding as an author as demonstrated in one of his early works, *Godwi oder Das steinerne Bild der Mutter* (1800/1801), and a later one, *Das bittere Leiden unsers Herrn Jesu Christi* (1833). While religion plays a major role in *Godwi*, the theme of religion is intensified in his post-conversion works, and the romantic love in his early works like *Godwi* is deepened into a specifically religious passion in *Das bittere Leiden*. Furthermore, the structures of these two texts reveal an intensification: while *Godwi* is a hybrid work and does not hide its fragmentary nature, *Das bittere Leiden* strives to erase the traces of its fragmentary source material and give the impression of a unified, harmonious whole with the explicit goal of edifying its readers and bringing them closer to God.

²⁷⁴ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13.

Brentano's Moments of Crisis and Transformation

Even in his earliest letters, it is clear that Brentano was a relatively religious young man. He complained, for example, to his brother Franz about the lack of religiosity in Langensalza in 1796: “Es ist entsetzlich, wie wenig Religion hier unter jung und alt herrscht, und welcher rasender Jacobinismus das ganze Volk, alt und jung, reich und arm durchfrist” (FBA 29:45). While his religiosity was an important facet of his being, it was clearly not his guiding purpose during this phase of his life, as demonstrated in a letter to Franz in 1798. Here he stated that he had determined that his purpose in life was to acquire the secular vocation of a doctor (FBA 29:147). His “fester unwandelbarer Entschluß” was to receive compensation for the sacrifices he makes for the sake of the world and to educate himself to the greatest extent possible (FBA 29:148) – in short, to help the world while also helping himself: “ich versichere mein Brod zu verdienen, und ein glücklicher Mensch zu werden” (FBA 29:151). His “eisernes mir selbst erwähltes unverükbares Ziel” (FBA 29:149) was to become a better doctor than all the rest; he did not want to be a “Scharfrichter” or “Charlatan” (FBA 29:149) like other doctors, but rather genuine and disciplined.

In his younger years, religion played a relatively minor role in his writings to his family and friends in letters; the most common topics in the years before 1817 were his love interests and friendships. This is also the case for Godwi's letters in the epistolary first volume of the novel named after him. Brentano's relationship with his sister Sophie was among the most important in his early letters, as well as his romantic infatuation with Sophie Mereau beginning in 1796. Of his many friendships, the one with Achim von Arnim remained the most significant throughout most of his life. In a letter to Arnim in 1805, Brentano expressed how much he valued their friendship and wished to spend as much time as possible with him: “Arnim warum bin ich dein Diener nicht, ich könnte dann bei dir sein”

(FBA 31:81). Brentano called himself “ein Waise” (FBA 31:81) without Arnim, and it was only Arnim (as opposed to his other friends such as Friedrich Carl von Savigny, who later became one of the most prominent scholars in law) whom he could trust in times of need: “Savigny kann mir nichts sein, wenn mein Haus brennt, o wer stürzt die Treppen herauf, wer trägt die Geliebte mir von dannen, du bist es, lieber treuer Junge” (FBA 31:81).

One year later in another letter to Arnim, Brentano described Arnim’s role in his life by means of a metaphor, an image of that he sketched in the middle of the letter. He compared his life to “ein wunderliches böses Fuhrwerk” (FBA 31:504) that consisted of “zwei Leidenschaften” (FBA 31:504); one pulled him, while the other was pulled by him. The drawing depicts a man – Brentano – in a horizontal position attached by the feet to an axle with two wheels, in front of which is a horse and a rider with a whip. His head, at the rear of the vehicle, is attached to the back axle with two more wheels, and behind his head is a coach, presumably with a passenger in it. Brentano explained that this “Hinterwagen” contained “meine Ehe,” which had been packed “als Koffer” (FBA 31:504). In addition, there is a small dog sitting upright on Brentano’s stomach, symbolizing, according to his letter, “die Poesie” (FBA 31:504). Brentano’s interpretation of his life as a horse-drawn carriage in which his own body is the center piece reveals another facet of the importance of his friendship with Arnim: without him, Brentano would have no means of making progress in his life, no source of motivation or energy. In this image, Arnim is literally carrying Brentano, supporting his body off the ground and giving it direction. Arnim was his source of motivating intensity, or, as described by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, a source of “fullness.”²⁷⁵ While Arnim, his marriage, and poetry are all named as the passions in his life, religion has no place in the drawing, because it was not yet one of the sources of motivating intensity.

²⁷⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5.

Brentano's upbringing as a nominal member of the Catholic Church forms the context of his conversion, which can be seen as the first stage of Rambo's seven stage model. The second phase is a crisis, which is often a death of a loved one, a divorce, or a palpable sense of building dissatisfaction with one's life. Similarly, strain theory applied to religion as described in the work of William S. Bainbridge has revealed that many conversions begin with a crisis, a source of strain that must be relieved. Around 1815, Brentano had reached a moment of crisis in his life. Between the years 1803 and 1814, he underwent two difficult marriages: first to Sophie Mereau (1770-1806), then to Auguste Bußmann (1791-1832). Prior to relenting to Brentano, who tirelessly pursued her, Mereau had begun building an illustrious career as a poet. Friedrich Schiller was one of the most vocal advocates of her talent and published some of her poems in his journal *Die Horen*. After marrying Brentano in 1803, however, she found little time to write, becoming pregnant four times during the last three years of her life with him. One was a miscarriage, two were born but lived to be only a few weeks old, and the last was a stillborn that resulted in Mereau's death as well in 1806. Less than a year later, Brentano married Auguste Bußmann, but they found that they could not live together because of incessant fighting. They lived separately for the majority of their marriage until their formal divorce in 1814, after which Bußmann's family gave her an ultimatum: either to marry again or to enter a convent. Bußmann married again, and after another rocky marriage and bearing four children, committed suicide in 1832.

After the divorce from Bußmann in 1814, Brentano found himself with two failed marriages and four failed attempts to raise a child. We can assume that these crises had a profound effect on him and left a void that he could not seem to fill with his poetry. In a letter to Wilhelm Grimm, Brentano described his emotional state just before he began the journey that would lead him to Anna Katharina Emmerick, his new source of poetic inspiration. On 15 February 1815 he told Grimm that he often had the feeling, "als gehöre ich nicht mehr zu

den lebendigen. Mein ganzes Leben habe ich verlohren theils in Irrthum, theils in Sünde, theils in falschen Bestrebungen” (FBA 33:142). He could hardly look himself in the mirror: “Der Blick auf mich selbst vernichtet mich,” and his only comfort was when he looked up “zu dem Herrn” (FBA 33:142). He had given up his calling as a poet almost entirely: “Meine dichterischen Bestrebungen habe ich geendigt, sie haben mir zu sehr mit dem falschen Wege meiner Natur zusammengehungen, es ist mir alles mislungen” (FBA 33:142-143).²⁷⁶ Artistic endeavors had lost all value for him, “denn man soll das Endliche nicht schmücken mit dem Endlichen um ihm einen Schein des Ewigen zu geben” (FBA 33:143). Even the most successful work of art, “dessen Gegenstand nicht der ewige Gott und seine Wirkung ist, scheint mir ein geschnitztes Bild, das man nicht machen soll, damit es nicht angebetet werde” (FBA 33:143). Here Brentano revealed one of the earliest moments of crisis that comprised his transformation: already in 1815 he began to question the significance of non-religious literature, and had come to the conclusion that his own poetry was no longer worth writing.

After his declarations of renewed dedication to Catholicism, Brentano no longer received his motivating intensity from the constellation of influences depicted above in his letter to Arnim with image of the “Fuhrwerk” (FBA 31:504), but rather in God. Because Arnim did not share his enthusiasm for Catholicism, Brentano did not see how he could maintain both of these relationships equally. He wrote to Arnim in the spring of 1820 that their friendship, while it did consist of “Gutes and Göttliches,” had not been able to find a form “in der es sich würdig opfern könne, keinen Altar, keinen Gott” (FBA 34:139). Together they had taken part in “allerlei Götzen [...] mit Gedanken, Wort und Werk” (FBA 34:139). Brentano now saw their friendship as marked by “die erste Sünde,” which was the case for all human relationships, except for those that were specifically based on “Jesus Christus, durch seine heilige Katholische Kirche” (FBA 34:139-140). At one point Brentano

²⁷⁶ See also Reinhold Steig, *Clemens Brentano und die Brüder Grimm* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1914), 201.

even felt it necessary to apologize to Arnim for his increased religiosity: “Zürne nicht mir, dass ich so katholisch bin, ich konnte nicht anders” (FBA 34:157). He explained that it was God who led him “täglich in schönere und ernstere Wege. Ich konnte nicht anders” (FBA 34:157). Brentano’s emphasis on God’s role and his own passivity corresponds to the Catholic view of conversion described by Deal W. Hudson: “A saving conversion is impossible without the initiative of God.”²⁷⁷ The doctrine of God’s initiation was established by early Catholic documents such as at the proceedings of the Council of Carthage (418) and the Council of Orange (529), which rejected the proposition “that by the force of nature we can right think or choose anything that is good [...] without the Holy Spirit’s illumination,” and affirmed that “God loves us as being such as we are about to become by his gift, not as we are by our own merit.”²⁷⁸ Brentano’s passivity also corresponds to Rambo’s definition of a “genuine”²⁷⁹ conversion that, although it is the result of some “social, cultural, personal, and religious forces,”²⁸⁰ is primarily caused by “the intervention of God.”²⁸¹

A series of letters beginning in 1815 reveals the quest phase of Brentano’s conversion in Rambo’s seven stage model. He explained to his friend Johann Nepomuk von Ringseis that in his youth he did in fact participate in “die Formen des katholischen Kultus,” but in retrospect he found the sincerity of his actions to be lacking; he had “bei Gott nicht anders als ein Götzendiener gebetet” (FBA 33:195-196), admitting that he had little understanding of the true meaning of these forms of Catholic symbolism. Clemens Engling states that Brentano had a latent religiosity that was only waiting to manifest itself fully: “Brentano

²⁷⁷ Deal W. Hudson, “The Catholic View of Conversion,” in *The Handbook of Religious Conversion* ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1992), 111.

²⁷⁸ Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 61.

²⁷⁹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, xii.

²⁸⁰ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, xii.

²⁸¹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, xii.

hatte eine religiöse Anlage, die lange Zeit nicht nach außen trat.“²⁸² Brentano told Ringseis that he would have liked to participate more actively and genuinely, but certain characteristics of organized religion were less than attractive to him: “die Lauheit, Kälte, Leerheit [...] ja oft Abgeschmacktheit der Form, mit und durch welche das Christentum gegeben wird.“²⁸³ He even went as far as to call himself “unchristlich”²⁸⁴ as a young man, describing his early works as “Toilettensünden unchristlicher Jugend”²⁸⁵ and as “Fäbelei aus den Heidnischen Studentenjahren in Jena.”²⁸⁶

Brentano’s phase of commitment in Rambo’s seven stage model consisted of two important steps: the completion of a general confession in 1817, and the sale of his entire personal library except for explicitly religious texts. Arnim described Brentano’s general confession to Ringseis after having spoken with Brentano about it, emphasizing its length and thoroughness: “Klemens hat vor einigen Tagen eine Generalbeichte von 10 Bogen eng geschrieben abgelegt. Sie geht von alten Jahren an. Er versicherte mir, es sei ein ungeheurer Sündenhaufen gewesen.”²⁸⁷ In 1819, Brentano took another significant step in separating himself from the secular world, as he wrote to his brother Christian on April 3: “Ich habe alle meine theologischen Bücher abgesondert und verpacke sie, die andern gebe ich mit allem zum Verkauf.”²⁸⁸ The importance of this act should not be underestimated, because for a poet, there is usually no more important physical possession than a book collection. Given that Brentano’s library was large and the relatively high cost of books at the time, it is likely that this collection was not only his most symbolically valuable possession, but also the most

²⁸² Clemens Engling, *Die Wende im Leben Clemens Brentanos: Folgen der Begegnung mit Anna Katharina Emmerick* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 179.

²⁸³ Engling, *Die Wende*, 179.

²⁸⁴ Hartwig Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg. Die Entfaltung von Brentanos Poetik,” in *Clemens Brentano. 1778-1842. Zum 150 Todestag*, ed. Hartwig Schultz (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 11.

²⁸⁵ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 11.

²⁸⁶ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 11.

²⁸⁷ Hartwig Schultz, *Schmetterling: Zwanzig Kapitel aus dem Leben des romantischen Dichters Clemens Brentano* (Berlin: Berling Verlag, 2000), 379.

²⁸⁸ Engling, *Die Wende*, 216.

expensive. Engling describes how Brentano began to resemble “einem geheimen Theologen,”²⁸⁹ replacing the secular books in his old library that had been auctioned off with theological ones. Brentano also explained in this letter that he had begun the habit of continually seeking out “kompetente theologische Ratgeber”²⁹⁰ as companions. This corresponds to the interaction phase of Rambo’s seven stage model. After distancing himself from non-Catholics such as Arnim, Brentano sought to increase his interaction with those who shared his devotion to God and could provide him with theological guidance.

The most often quoted letter demonstrating Brentano’s conversion deals specifically with his identity as a poet. Brentano claimed that the poet who did not devote himself fully to the service of God was only performing a selfish endeavor, an act of self-sabotage. Secular poetry is not only detrimental to the poet, but to the readers, because it feeds “eine ewig hungernde Schlange in der Brust des Künstlers und der genießenden Welt” (FBA 34:146) and the only way to defeat this snake is to employ the help of “Maria, der Mutter, der Braut, der Kirche, damit die Schlange getödtet werde” (FBA 34:146). While these secular poets believe they are building “ein schuldloses Gartenhäusen” (FBA 34:146), they are in reality building “einen Tempel des Teufels” (FBA 34:146). Brentano concludes: “Ich habe drum gern abgelassen von einem Treiben, mit welchem ich nie Gott gedient, den ich hatte keinen heiligen Geist, ich hatte den bösen Geist der Welt” (FBA 34:146). In his *Geschichte vom braven Kasperl und dem schönen Annerl* (1817), Brentano’s narrator compares poetry to an organ in the body. Every poet has, in addition to a brain, a heart, a stomach, a spleen, and a liver, also a “Poesie im Leibe” (FBA 19:410), and it is possible to overfeed this organ, just like the others. If a writer makes his literary work into an “Erwerbszweig” (FBA 19:410), he should be ashamed: “Einer der von der Poesie lebt, hat das Gleichgewicht verloren” (FBA

²⁸⁹ Engling, *Die Wende*, 187.

²⁹⁰ Engling, *Die Wende*, 187.

19:410). His poetry organ is “eine übergroße Gänseleber” that may be delicious to the reader, but it “setzt jedoch immer eine kranke Gans voraus” (FBA 19:410).

Brentano went from being “a nominal member”²⁹¹ of the Catholic Church — certainly a believer, but with many concerns in his life that trumped religion — until his conversion in 1818, at which point he made his religious commitment the central focus of his life. Because intensification is not included in the narrower definitions of conversion, many Brentano scholars prefer to describe his unique transformation in other terms, for example, as a “Reversion”²⁹² — a ‘tamed’ relative or even opposite of “Konversion.” Engling points out, however, that Brentano’s intensification of belief does not fit the definition of “Reversion” as a “Wiedereingliederung in die volle Gemeinschaft der katholischen Kirche nach einem vorausgegangenen Kirchenaustritt.”²⁹³ Although Catholicism played a less important role in his younger years, at no point did he leave the church, thus he could not “revert” back to it. A more accurate description may be that Brentano experienced a “rediscovery” of Catholicism, not merely in belief but especially in practice, and Engling shows that “der Dichter in den Dülmener Jahren die religiöse Praxis neu entdeckt.”²⁹⁴ The term that seems to best describe Brentano’s new religious orientation is “Wende,” which is the one that Engling chose for the title of his monograph: *Die Wende im Leben Clemens Brentanos. Folgen der Begegnung mit Anna Katharina Emmerick*. Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli places the central moment of this “Wendepunkt” on 27 February 1817, the day of Brentano’s general confession: “Nun war er nicht mehr romantisch-literarischer Katholik, nun hat er eifrig mitgearbeitet an einer Regeneration der durch die Aufklärung geschädigten Kirche.”²⁹⁵ Werner Hoffmann has observed that Brentano’s life cannot be separated neatly into two parts (before the conversion

²⁹¹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13.

²⁹² See for example Schlutz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 379.

²⁹³ Engling, *Die Wende*, 171.

²⁹⁴ Engling, *Die Wende*, 176.

²⁹⁵ Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli, *Clemens Brentano. Ein romantisches Dichterleben* (Freiburg: Herder, 1947), 161.

and after it); rather, there was a shift in the structure of his orientation in which latent aspirations finally came to the surface and became dominant.²⁹⁶ Bernhard Gajek addresses the problem of continuity in the subtitle of his monograph — *Homo Poeta. Zur Kontinuität der Problematik bei Clemens Brentano*²⁹⁷ — and demonstrates that Brentano remained at his core a “homo poeta” throughout his life and that he remained dedicated to art above all other aspects of his life, even religion. It was only insofar as religion could fit into his identity as a poet that it gained significance around 1817.²⁹⁸ Walther Migge expresses a similar point of view, concluding that there has been no “absolute[r] Wendepunkt,” and that “[d]ie Rückkehr wandelt zwar sein Leben, aber nicht sein inneres Temperament.”²⁹⁹ Conceiving of Brentano’s conversion as a “Wende” rather than as a “Trennung,” as some early biographers called it,³⁰⁰ establishes a continuity in his work that creates a more accurate understanding of the relationship between his personal religious convictions and his poetic work.

A more controversial question has been whether the transition had positive or negative effects on the aesthetic quality of his poetry. Schultz points out that the majority of Brentano’s poems that find an audience beyond Brentano specialists have come from his younger years, before 1816.³⁰¹ The early poems such as *Frühlingsschrei eines Knechtes aus der Tiefe* and *Wiegenlied eines jammernnden Herzen* (1816), as well as poems from *Godwi*, belong to the most often received, quoted, and interpreted of Brentano’s works, while the “langatmigen” and “betulichen Texte” such as *Gockel, Hinkel und Gackeleia* (1838) “kaum Resonanz fanden.”³⁰² Schultz sees the “Ehrenrettung des späten Brentanos” as a largely “akademisches Geschäft [...], Ergebnis einer Dialektik der Rezeptionsgeschichte, die

²⁹⁶ Werner Hoffmann, *Clemens Brentano, Leben und Werk* (Bern: Francke, 1966), 300.

²⁹⁷ Bernhard Gajek, *Homo Poeta. Zur Kontinuität der Problematik bei Clemens Brentano* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1971).

²⁹⁸ See also Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 12.

²⁹⁹ Walther Migge, *Clemens Brentano. Leitmotive seiner Existenz* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1968), 47.

³⁰⁰ See Helene M. Kastinger Riley, *Clemens Brentano* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), 12.

³⁰¹ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 13.

³⁰² Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 13-14.

zunächst einseitig den radikalen Bruch und sodann die Kontinuität im Werk Brentanos hervorhob.”³⁰³ Gajek describes this idea that Brentano lost talent when he gained religion as a “Klischee”³⁰⁴ that had to be corrected with much effort. One problem was that it was not until the historical-critical Frankfurt edition, with its first volume published in 1975, that the religious writings were even considered part of Brentano’s collected works.³⁰⁵ Already in 1924, Karl Vietor addressed a then common assertion by Brentano critics that his “schöpferische Kraft abgestorben [war]” with the advent of his “streng[e]r katholische[r] Kirchenfrömmigkeit.”³⁰⁶ After a careful investigation of the “Einwirkung der Wandlung auf die dichterische Produktion,”³⁰⁷ Vietor concludes: “[M]an wird finden, dass sich da zwar ein Anderssein, aber kein Vakuum zeigt.”³⁰⁸

In comparing *Godwi* to *Das bittere Leiden*, the nature of this “Anderssein” becomes clear: the goal of the writing has changed — the focus has become sharper and has intensified — but many other aspects such as the style, the structure, the pacing, and character development have remained largely the same. Frühwald describes the aesthetic transformation as an “Übergang von der Autonomie- zur Zweckästhetik,”³⁰⁹ suggesting that, while there are parallels between the pre- and post-conversion works, they are subject to a fundamentally different aesthetic, as Schultz summarizes: “Brentanos *Bitteres Leiden* kann nicht in die Reihe der großen europäischen Romane des 19. Jahrhunderts gestellt werden, es ist professionell geschriebene Gebrauchsprosa abseits der literarischen

³⁰³ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 14.

³⁰⁴ Bernhard Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter und das Christentum. Clemens Brentanos religiöse Schriften,” in *Clemens Brentano. 1778-1842. Zum 150 Todestag*, ed. Hartwig Schultz (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 109.

³⁰⁵ Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter,” 109.

³⁰⁶ Engling, *Die Wende*, 15.

³⁰⁷ Engling, *Die Wende*, 15.

³⁰⁸ Engling, *Die Wende*, 15.

³⁰⁹ Wolfgang Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk Clemens Brentanos (1815-1842). Romantik im Zeitalter der Metternich’schen Restauration* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1977), XIV.

Entwicklungslinien.”³¹⁰ Heinrich Heine’s commentary in *Die Romantische Schule* (1836) that after 1818 Brentano had become “ein korrespondierendes Mitglied der katholischen Propaganda” (HSA 8:78) has had much influence, and the claim is substantiated by many of Brentano’s writings after this time – not only did he devote the majority of his time to the Emmerick texts, he also researched convents in Germany and France extensively and reported on their importance for society (in *Die barmherzigen Schwestern*), and wrote for the periodical *Der Katholik*, a “Kampfblatt” that engaged in controversial and polemic discussions with Protestant publications.³¹¹

A final important factor in understanding Brentano’s conversion is the fact that he did in fact go on to write some poetry in which religion seemingly plays as small of a role as it did in his earlier works. After meeting the painter Emilie Linder in Munich in 1833, for example, he began writing love poetry for her until his final years, and there are also instances of Brentano continuing to portray the Catholic clergy in a satirical manner near the end of his life.³¹² His advances toward Linder bear similarities to those toward Luise Hensel in the previous phase of his life: not only does he unsuccessfully propose marriage to both of them, but he is also extremely invested in their conversions to Catholicism. This love poetry does not originate in simple feelings of romance; it is intertwined with Brentano’s love for Catholicism, and the ultimate expression of romantic seduction for Brentano is to cause a woman’s conversion. Yet religion remains an undercurrent in these later poems; it is present, but not as explicitly showcased as it is in the Emmerick texts or in *Die barmherzigen Schwestern*. Frühwald notes the similarities here in describing that Brentano, in his later years, also returned to the geographical region in which he grew up.³¹³ Having grown up in the Frankfurt area, he died in neighboring Aschaffenburg, and had returned in a certain sense

³¹⁰ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 13.

³¹¹ Renate Moering, *Clemens Brentanos Engagement für die Zeitschrift Der Katholik in seinen Briefen an Joseph Görres* (Bern: Lang, 1993), 211-250 and 227-228.

³¹² Hartwig Schultz, *Clemens Brentano. 1778-1842* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 7.

³¹³ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 355.

not only to the physical location his youth, but also to a similar place of thought and exploration, integrating the Romantic tendencies of his earlier works with the theological focus he had acquired during his travels.

***Godwi* in the Tradition of Early Romanticism**

Brentano began writing *Godwi oder das steinerne Bild der Mutter: Ein verwilderter Roman* in 1798 while studying medicine in Jena. He informed his brother Franz about the new project in a letter from December of that year, and told him not to worry that his work on the novel might interfere with his studies. In addition to bringing him extra income, Brentano hoped that the novel's publication would bring him the reputation of "einen Menschen von Geschmack, Gefühl und Menschenkenntniß" (FBA 29:152) and signal to readers that he was worthy of the respect that more famous figures of the Early Romanticism movement in Jena such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis typically received. The novel's reception was mixed, but among its admirers was Achim von Arnim, who wrote on 7 December 1801 that *Godwi* achieved something that Novalis failed to do in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: while the two novels are thematically similar in that they both portray a young poet, Arnim preferred the style of Brentano's novel over that of Novalis, comparing the latter to "eine Gänseleberpastete [...] woran man sich leicht den Magen verdirbt," while *Godwi* was "eine ordentliche Tafel, wo man Wein und Braten und auch Gänseleberpastete haben kann" (FBA 29:609). Brentano evidently thought that Arnim gave him too much credit, calling the novel "nur Wasser und Mehl" (FBA 29:554).

In the same letter, he hinted that the novel would be somewhat autobiographical: "Im *Godwi* steht mein Schicksal laut geschrieben," and just as in his own life, he found in the novel both positive and negative traits: "[A]uch ich finde vieles drinn, des sich der Gröste kaum zu schämen brauchte, aber ich finde auch drinn, daß das ganze Buch keine Achtung vor

sich selbst hat” (FBA 29:554). He had become an “Objekt der Kunst” (FBA 29:555), striving to let poetry speak through him, rather than actively creating it. The novel’s narrator, Maria, shared his name with Brentano’s own chosen pseudonym Maria, under which his early works were published. Furthermore, Brentano’s biography and his importance as a poet are the subject of the concluding section of the novel, *Einige Nachrichten von den Lebensumständen des verstorbenen Maria. Mitgeteilt von einem Zurückgebliebenen*, which was not written by Brentano himself, but by Stephan August Winkelmann. Although the Maria in the title of this section seems initially to refer to the narrator of the novel, whose death has just been reported in the previous scene, it becomes clear that the actual subject of the *Nachrichten* is Brentano himself. Several of Brentano’s friends and loved ones are mentioned, though not explicitly: “ein edles Weib, getrennt durch Verhältnisse” (FBA 16:564) points to Sophie Mereau, who shares many traits with Molly von Hodefield, while “Fr. S. und Deiner edlen Freundin” (FBA 16:565) refer to Friedrich Schlegel and Dorothea Veit.

The most significant autobiographical element in *Godwi* is the theme of the deceased mother. Many scholars, among them Benno von Wiese, have seen the novel as Brentano’s search for his own mother, who had died in 1793.³¹⁴ The mother as a symbol of the origin, the source, and the path to salvation is depicted in the stone image referenced in the novel’s subtitle. The image holds the mystery to unlocking Godwi’s past and seems to be his only hope for peace and transcendence. Brentano also pays homage to his sister Sophie, who had recently died in September of 1800, in the eighteenth chapter of the second part of the novel in a poem titled “An S.” (FBA 16:330). Several other characters share traits with figures in Brentano’s life, for example, his other siblings as well as their nanny Claudine Piautaz, who reappears as Joduno, and is called Claudia by her brother Jost (FBA 16:597). These autobiographical traces throughout the novel attest to its function not only as a way for him to

³¹⁴ Benno von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe. Studien zur deutschen Klassik und Romantik* (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1968), 226.

gain a reputation as a poet and develop his poetic identity, but also as a way to work through his grief and address the issues in his romantic relationships.

Godwi has been called a thoroughly “‘romantischer’ Roman”³¹⁵ because it contains an abundance of stylistic elements that were typical of the Early Romantic movement in Jena. Many romantic novels display similar (auto)biographical tendencies such as Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) and Friedrich Schlegel’s *Lucinde* (1799). The motif of travel, displayed more prominently in the second volume of the novel, is also typical of the Bildungsroman, such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) and Tieck’s *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798), which share their numerous discussions of art and landscapes with *Godwi*. The Romantics deemed Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* an exemplary work of art and some novels such as *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* ‘responded’ to Goethe’s aesthetic concept. In Tieck’s *Der gestiefelte Kater* and *Prinz Zerbino* we find a model for the satirical and ironic blows that are dealt to the author’s contemporaries. Furthermore, Tieck’s novel *William Lovell* (1795) resembles the first part of *Godwi* remarkably closely in its structure: an epistolary novel written from many characters’ points of view (FBA 16:599).

Two further characteristics of early Romanticism dominate in *Godwi*, which will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter: first, the “romantische Ironie” that manifests itself various times as the novel turns self-reflexive, referring to itself in a way that disturbs the flow of the internal narrative; and second, the chaotic structure of the novel that seeks to integrate all genres of writing, such as letters, poetry, song, and prose. The prose in *Godwi* is marked by the fantastical: dreams are often the topic of the letters in the first part, and in the second part the characters’ experience of nature often turns into the surreal, bearing a

³¹⁵ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 243.

“musikalische Komposition”³¹⁶ that hints at an “Unendliches.”³¹⁷ Benno von Wiese points out that *Godwi* follows Schlegel’s theory of the romantic novel in almost every one of its criteria, and the result is a “fruchtbare[s] Chaos”³¹⁸ — a confusing web of fragments that ultimately strive to form a harmonious whole, as Schlegel formulated in his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800): the “Witz der romantischen Poesie” consists “nicht in einzelnen Einfällen, sondern in der Konstruktion des Ganzen,” and produces a “künstlich geordnete Verwirrung.”³¹⁹ The productive chaos of the poet results from the “Freisetzung seiner Phantasie,”³²⁰ which allows him to write with “Willkür.”³²¹ These conditions, in the eyes of Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel, are most conducive for the creation of the most authentic form of art.

Lucinde was meant to be the “Prototyp der postulierten neuen Poesie,”³²² and Brentano followed Schlegel’s lead by transplanting and reimagining his real-life romantic relationships onto the pages of his novel, as well as by having these characters discuss one particular topic much more frequently than all others: art and its role in relieving the suffering in the human condition. Through works of art, the characters of this type of romantic novel reach a deeper human experience that manifests itself in “einer neuen universellen Liebe” and in “einer ästhetischen Vermählung aller Dinge.”³²³ *Godwi*’s story revolves around the aesthetic portrayal of his mother in stone, and in the second half, the majority of the conversations between *Godwi*, *Maria*, and *Haber* (also a poet) explicitly reference artworks and their value. In the eighth chapter of the second part, the novel reaches a new level of “romantische Ironie” when the conversation of the three poets leads them to a general

³¹⁶ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 244.

³¹⁷ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 244.

³¹⁸ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 244.

³¹⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 2:318.

³²⁰ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 16.

³²¹ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 246.

³²² Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 17.

³²³ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 17.

discussion of how to define the term “romantisch,” in which they propose various metaphors to this end. Godwi begins: “Alles, was zwischen unserm Auge und einem entfernten zu Sehenden als Mittler steht, uns den entfernten Gegenstand nähert, ihm aber zugleich etwas von dem Seinigen mitgiebt, ist romantisch” (FBA 16:314). He adds later: “das Romantische ist also ein Perspektiv oder vielmehr die Farbe des Glases und die Bestimmung des Gegenstandes durch die Form des Glases” (FBA 16:314). Thus the Romantic demands the “Mitwirken des Subjektes”; the poet is a “Mittler zwischen dem Entfernten und dem Nahen.”³²⁴ The Romantic is a medium through which works of art, with the help of the poet, may pass, rather than a set of rules to which the poet must adhere. This discussion of Romantic aesthetics within a Romantic novel points to Schlegel’s suggestion that a theory of the romantic novel must take place within the novel itself, rather than in a separate, purely theoretical text.

Several instances of romantic irony appear when characters explicitly reference the novel in which they reside; for example, Römer describes a lengthy dream to Godwi in which he finds himself in an inn, “im goldnen X,” for the night (FBA 16:56). He first describes his travels to what he has read from “Nikolai in seiner zwölfbändigen Reisebeschreibung” (FBA 16:59), and goes on to note that he has “wenig gesehen und so viel bemerkt, wie der Verfasser des Romans Godwi” (FBA 16:59). The second volume contains even more self-reflexivity, such as a scene in the eighteenth chapter in which Godwi and Maria collaborate on the first volume while walking through the garden together. It becomes apparent that Godwi has already read at least part of what Maria has written, because he is able to cite a page number from the first volume: “Dies ist der Teich, in den ich Seite 266 im ersten Bande falle” (FBA 16:379). Shortly afterwards, the two poets reach the stone image of the mother, in front of which they discuss Godwi’s relationship with Otilie. Godwi inquires about one of

³²⁴ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 246.

Maria's poetic choices, again with the corresponding page number from the first volume: "Und was wollten Sie Seite 281 mit den stillen Lichtern?" (FBA 16:380). He goes on to connect this question with one of the key concepts of early Romanticism, that of a "neue Mythologie," as articulated in the "Rede über die Mythologie" in Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie*. Godwi thus poses a second question: "Sie wollten doch nicht etwa dem Mädchen eine neue Art Mythologie geben?" (FBA 16:380). Maria replies that he does not yet understand the old one, and Godwi elaborates on the concept of new mythology: "Eine neue Mythologie ist ohnmöglich, so ohnmöglich, wie eine alte, denn jede Mythologie ist ewig; wo man sie alt nennt, sind die Menschen gering geworden, und die, welche von einer sogenannten neuen hervorzuführenden sprechen, prophezeien eine Bildung, die wir nicht erleben" (FBA 16:380). Maria then expands on this:

Sie meinen also, es gäbe keine Mythologie, sondern überhaupt nur Anlage zur Poesie, wirkliche gegenwärtige Poesie, und sinkende Poesie. Mythen sind Ihnen also nichts anderes, als Studien der dichtenden Persönlichkeit überhaupt, und eine Mythologie wäre dann so viel, als eine Kunstschule, so wie eine hinreichende Mythologie, eine hinreichende Kunst, und eine letzte endliche Mythologie, nichts als ein goldnes Zeitalter wäre, wo alles Streben aufhört, und nichts mehr kann gewußt werden, weil dann das Wissen das Leben selbst ist, nicht einmal des Wissen kann dann gewußt werden, da wir keine Einheit mehr denken könnten, indem die Möglichkeit zu zählen in der bloßen Einheit, die allein noch übrig seyn könnte, aufgehoben wäre. (FBA 16:380-381)

Godwi posits that every mythology is an eternal one, and that each iteration of mythology contributes to the project of art. Thus Brentano uses his novel, a work of art itself, as an opportunity to advance and reformulate the theory of romantic art, as Schlegel suggested.

Hartwig Schultz brings our attention to one way in which Brentano in fact deviated from the typical characteristics of the Romantic novel. *Godwi* is replete with poetic verse, and Brentano chose to violate the "Einbettung der Lyrik in die Prosa"³²⁵ by editing and republishing a number of these poems as stand-alone texts, as was the case for *Loreley*, which

³²⁵ Schultz, "Von Jena nach Heidelberg," 19.

appeared in the thirty-sixth chapter of the second volume, as well as later in a collection of poetry edited along with Achim von Arnim titled “Liederbrüder.”³²⁶ It was as an isolated text, and not as an inextricable part of *Godwi*, that this poem had its largest impact on other poets of the nineteenth century such as Heinrich Heine.³²⁷ Despite this methodological aberration from the habits of other Romantic poets, Brentano was very much a part of the literary “Revolution”³²⁸ that romantics sought to bring about. He demonstrated in this poem that he did participate in the Romantic “neuen Mythologie” (even if he had, as described above, already denied the possibility of a new mythology in *Godwi*) by highlighting the figure of Loreley, whose story would become central to the “Weiblichkeitskult” of the nineteenth century.³²⁹

The novel’s second subtitle, “Ein verwilderter Roman von Maria,” reveals much about its structure. In the context of the characteristics of the Romantic novel discussed above, the adjective “verwildet” points to the productively chaotic structure that seeks to melt all genres into one complete work. Rita M. Lennartz elucidates Brentano’s choice of adjective by likening the text to a garden: both consist of carefully chosen elements arranged in order to create a desired effect on the observer/reader. Some gardens appear more artificial or intentional in the French manner, while others are crafted in a more natural, English manner that bears minimal marks of an outside creator. The poet, in creating an ordered environment similar to a garden, generates “das Idealbild einer geordneten Umgebung und friedlichen Lebenswelt,”³³⁰ which he accomplishes with the help of his muses. *Godwi* is not a meticulously manicured garden, but an overgrown wilderness. It is the domain of the poet-

³²⁶ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 20.

³²⁷ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 20.

³²⁸ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 20.

³²⁹ Schultz, “Von Jena nach Heidelberg,” 20.

³³⁰ Rita M. Lennartz, *Inszenierung der Lektüre. Das Zusammenspiel von Buchgestaltung, Narration und Metaphorik in Brentanos “Godwi”* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 225.

gardener who lets nature reign, rather than imposing order and uniformity.³³¹ In *Godwi*, he offers the metaphor of a garden as an alternative model for structuring society, thereby anticipating Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* published eight years later in 1809.

The Chaotically Harmonious Structure of *Godwi*

A closer investigation of the structure of each text demonstrates how the similarities between *Godwi* and *Das bittere Leiden* illuminate previously undiscovered aspects of Brentano's intensification of religious identity. On the broadest level, *Godwi* is divided into two major parts: an epistolary novel, and a more traditional *Erzählroman*. The letters that make up the first volume are preceded by a dedication and a short preface, in which the narrator, Maria, gives a disclaimer for the failings of the work that follows: "Dies Buch hat keine Tendenz, ist nicht ganz gehalten, fällt hie und da in eine falsche Sentimentalität. Ich fühle es izt. Da ich es schrieb, kannte ich alles das noch nicht, ich wollte damals ein Buch machen, und izt erscheint es nur noch, weil ich mir in ihm die erste Stufe, die freilich sehr niedrig ist, gelegt habe" (FBA 16:14). Maria seems to be suffering from the creator's curse: the artist grows and improves while creating something, so each completed piece can only represent a previous, less skilled version of their capabilities, thus they can never be satisfied with their work. This also functions as a rhetorical trope to win over the audience by apologizing for shortcomings while asking them for patience and forgiveness.

The beginning of the second volume echoes this theme, likewise in a dedication followed by a preface in which Maria describes in greater detail how he acquired the letters that constitute the first volume. He explains that he met Römer, whom the readers will recognize "aus meinem Buche" (FBA 16:273), and received a packet of letters with the task of organizing and editing them. Römer hopes that the stories contained within them will help

³³¹ Lennartz, *Inszenierung der Lektüre*, 231.

Maria understand why he should not pursue his love for Römer's daughter, but Maria confesses that he has not yet comprehended how the letters are supposed to be helpful in this regard: "[B]is jetzt habe ich noch nichts gesehen, was zwischen mir und meiner Liebe liegen konnte" (FBA 16:274-275). Here Maria emphasizes once more that his writing is lacking in quality by describing Römer's negative reaction to his initial editing of the letters. Because of Maria's "ungeschickte Behandlung" and "unbeholfne Buchverderberei" (FBA 16:275), Römer forbids him from any further interactions with his daughter, and rescinds a previous offer of publishing an English and Spanish collection of books – a job he would have gotten had he satisfactorily edited the letters. Thus the second volume serves as an apology for the failings of the first, because the narrative that follows this preface demonstrates just how challenging the editing of the letters was for Maria.

Following the dedication and the preface of the first volume are twenty-eight letters written by and addressed to ten different characters: Godwi, Römer, Joduno von Eichenwehen (Claudia), Otilie Senne, Werdo Senne, Lady Hodefield, Jost von Eichenwehen, Sophie Butler, Antonio Firmenti, and Godwi's father. Within each letter, the reader encounters various genres, most notably the poetic verses that are interspersed throughout. These sometimes take the form of song, such as the melancholy lyrics that Werdo sings while playing his harp, and the songs of the boy Eusebio, which serve to intensify and reiterate the Romantic elements of the prose. Godwi describes the effect of one of Eusebio's songs: "Als Eusebio die Worte sang: Liebe eint, / Wenn erscheint / Ohnvermuthet die Freundinn dem Freund, — / fühlte ich, daß sich unsre Hände dichter verschlangen, und daß mein Daseyn in dieser Minute alle Wichtigkeiten meines Lebens aufwog" (FBA 16:134). Brentano also made use of this fusion of prose and poetry in own letters to his friends and family, especially in his younger years, so it is not surprising that this characteristic of early Romanticism became a defining feature of his first attempt at a Romantic novel.

The reader encounters many diary entries within the letters, primarily exchanged between Godwi and Römer, printed either in full or in excerpts that continue in later sections. Finally, a notable stylistic break from the traditional letter format takes place in a series of eight consecutive letters from Godwi to Römer. They contain fragments of Godwi's diary that include not only more poetry, but also dialogues between him and Otilie that are formatted in a dramatic style, many of which have rhyming verses:

I c h .
Wie ist dir, Tillie, sag', warum so stille?

T i l l i e .
Daß ich nicht spreche, ist dein eigener Wille,
Wie konntest du das Alles so erzählen,
Nur diesen hohlen bangen Ton erwählen,
Der wie durch einen dunklen, tiefen Gang
In deiner seltsamen Erzählung klang. (FBA 16:180)

Within these dialogues, which are embedded within diary entries, which are in turn embedded within the letters to Römer, there is yet another layer of embedded text: Godwi's occasional interjections, which provide commentary about what he is thinking during these dialogues, but not saying. After a long speech by Otilie, Godwi explains: "Mich ergriffen ihre Worte heftig [...]. Ich konnte Tillien nicht antworten; ich wußte nichts, gar nichts, und hätte fast vom Wetter gesprochen, hätten mir die Hüttenfenster nicht eine freundliche Unterhaltung angeboten" (FBA 16:181), after which the text returns to dramatic dialogue format and Otilie speaks again, reacting to a statement that Godwi seems to have made about the "Hüttenfenster": "Hier oben — Hüttenfenster, sag, wie ist dir? / Hier oben sind ja keine Hütten" (FBA 16:181), Godwi interjects again to comment on the scene outside of the dialogue: "Die Auflösung meines Irrthums, der sich nun schon eine ganze halbe Stunde lang in meine Gedankenreihe verflochten hatte, vollendete meine Zerstörung" (FBA 16:181). Godwi's interruptions in the dialogues can be likened to the asides in a drama, in which the actor speaks not to the other actors on stage, but suddenly to the audience, and the other

characters cannot hear him — although it seems that Otilie may have heard him without him realizing it. Here he speaks not to an audience in a theater, but perhaps to himself, given that it is a diary entry, or perhaps to Römer, since the diary entry is reprinted within a letter to him. Thus in this one letter all three genres of the first part of the novel appear: the letter, the poem (sometimes in the form of song), and the dramatic dialogue. While this switching between genres may be intended to demonstrate the “unbekümmerte Willkür” of the author, it is also “bewußte Komposition.”³³²

Christa Hinscha proposes that the novel consists of “absolute[n] Einzelstücke[n],”³³³ in which Brentano “in jedem Moment einen Teil seiner selbst reflektiert.”³³⁴ The characters are “Bruchstücke einer einzigen großen Spekulation über psychische Möglichkeiten,”³³⁵ and taken as a whole, the novel has “fast keine Handlung,” consisting instead purely “aus Reflexionen.”³³⁶ This certainly holds true for the novel as a whole, and on a smaller scale we can observe this fragmentary nature as well in Römer’s second letter to Godwi. In it, Römer introduces a dream sequence by first revealing a particular scene of the dream: “ein großes Concert und die allmächtige Stimme eines allmächtigen Weibes” (FBA 16:54). This is followed by a description of how he awoke: “mein Erwachen ist die süße Stimme eines liebenswürdigen Mädchens” (FBA 16:54). But it is only by many detours and digressions that Godwi learns about what happened between these two events. Following the introduction is a story about Godwi’s father that is relatively mundane, and the reader can easily forget in the next few pages that Römer’s letter began with a dream report. It is unclear in which order the dream is being retold, and whether all the parts of the story belong to the dream, or if some of them actually happened; the ordinary is interwoven seamlessly with the surreal.

³³² Helmut Prang, *Die romantische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 48.

³³³ Christa Hinscha, “Stilzwang und Wirklichkeit. Über Brentanos Briefroman *Godwi*,” in *Romananfänge. Versuch einer Poetik des Romans*, ed. Norbert Miller (Berlin: Literarisches Colloquium, 1965), 143.

³³⁴ Hinscha, “Stilzwang und Wirklichkeit,” 143.

³³⁵ Hinscha, “Stilzwang und Wirklichkeit,” 143.

³³⁶ Hinscha, “Stilzwang und Wirklichkeit,” 143.

After many changes of location and encounters with various characters, Römer finally returns to the concert hall described at the beginning of the letter, in which he struggles to find a spot where he can see the singer with the thunderous voice. The dream and the letter consist of “einzelnen Bruchstücken” (FBA 16:43), as Römer admits in the last paragraph. The fragmentary structure of the letter is of course appropriate for the content, given that dreams are seldom recalled all at once or in the correct order.

A larger picture of the novel’s structure begins to emerge in the second volume. The first volume is now situated in the characters’ past, while the second volume describes their present time and can now make references to the first as past events in their lives. Susanne Scharnowski notes that none of the life stories recounted within both parts of the novel is presented in a manner that is “chronologisch, vom Anfang hin zum Ende, geordnet und säuberlich gereiht,”³³⁷ and this chaotic structure prevents the reader from the experience of a typical novel, which provides rising tension, development, and satisfaction of curiosity in some sort of resolution. The endings of the individual stories in *Godwi* are often revealed before the beginnings or middles have appeared.³³⁸ Scharnowski posits that the novel consists not only of a first and second volume, but of four distinct novels: 1) the epistolary novel of the first volume, 2) the “implicit” novel about Godwi Sr., 3) the “explicit” novel about Godwi Jr., which claims to be *the* novel *Godwi*, and 4) the “Roman des Scheiterns” about the narrator Maria in the second volume.³³⁹ The first two fit in thematically and structurally with the novel of the eighteenth century; the third can be seen as the “frühromantische Roman,”³⁴⁰ and the fourth is the “moderne Roman.”³⁴¹ Brad Prager notes that the second volume serves to address a specific problem in the first volume: that it “seems deliberately designed to

³³⁷ Susanne Scharnowski, ‘*Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied.*’ *Clemens Brentanos Roman “Godwi oder das steinerne Bild der Mutter”* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 114-115.

³³⁸ Scharnowski, ‘*Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied.*’ 115.

³³⁹ Scharnowski, ‘*Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied.*’ 119.

³⁴⁰ Scharnowski, ‘*Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied.*’ 120.

³⁴¹ Scharnowski, ‘*Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied.*’ 120.

frustrate its readers,”³⁴² consisting of relationships that “have to be disentangled through guesswork since there is no coherent voice”³⁴³ — by introducing the narrator, Maria, more explicitly, and acknowledging that it is his task to make sense of the letters.

The structure of the second volume initially appears to be more ordered than the first, given that the narrator has revealed himself and his goals seem more transparent, even if the stories of the individual characters are not told in chronological order. Until the thirty-first chapter, the content of the novel appears to share the themes many other Romantic novels, with descriptions of nature, travels, conversations about art and philosophical subjects, and poetry embedded in the narrative, all told from a single narrator’s point of view. After the thirty-first chapter, however, the text breaks off and continues as the “Fragmentarische Fortsetzung dieses Romans während der letzten Krankheit des Verfassers, theils von ihm selbst, theils von seinem Freunde” (FBA 16:487). It begins with Maria’s explanation that he continues to write down as much about Godwi’s life and travels as he can, “so gut es meine Krankheit erlaubt” (FBA 16:487). This continues until the end of the thirty-third chapter, at the end of which Maria reports: “Godwi besuchte mich heute Abend, er hatte selbst weiter geschrieben, und las mir vor, wie folgt.” The thirty-fourth chapter then begins with Godwi as the narrator, recalling memories with Violette and her mother. This same chapter then transitions into a note from Godwi “An den Leser” (FBA 16:520), in which he explains to the reader that Maria’s illness has worsened and that he, Godwi, will continue the novel, requesting that the reader pardon him for his lack of skill in this area: “Zugleich bitte ich den Leser, die Darstellung meines Lebens zu entschuldigen, ich bin nicht geübt, vor das Publikum zu treten” (FBA 16:520). Maria’s voice is still heard after this (he reflects on his mortality) but his words are part of a quotation within Godwi’s narration. After Godwi

³⁴² Brad Prager, *Aesthetic Vision and German Romanticism. Writing Images* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007), 68.

³⁴³ Prager, *Aesthetic Vision*, 68.

assumes the role of narrator, the structure of this “Fragmentarische Fortsetzung” begins to resemble that of the first volume: more poetry is embedded in the narrative, and the dialogues in dramatic style resurface in the thirty-sixth chapter, in which Godwi recounts a conversation between himself and a “jungen Kapuziner-Mönch”:

I c h. Guten Morgen Ihr Hochwürden!
E r. Ich wünsche Ihnen wohl geschlafen zu haben. –
I c h. Sie genießen den angenehmen Morgen. –
E r. Ich bin des Gärtners Bruder, und trete manchmal hier ab, wenn mich mein Beruf vorüberführt: Sie sind wol der Herr, für den das gnädige Fräulein die Blumen holte. (FBA 16:532)

Instead of the songs of Werdo and Eusebio in the first volume, the second volume contains the songs of Violette, most notably the famous Loreley poem that begins with the verse, “Zu Bacharach am Rheine” (FBA 16:535). The rest of this section portrays scenes between Godwi and Violette, and here the reader finds the most detailed account of this relationship.

The last section of the novel, titled “Einige Nachrichten von den Lebensumständen des verstorbenen Maria. Mitgetheilt von einem Zurückgeblieben” (FBA 16:561), not only changes narrators, but actually changes authors. The reader has learned in the previous chapter from Godwi that the narrator of the majority of the novel, Maria, has in fact died of the illness that was described at the beginning of the “Fragmentarische Fortsetzung”; thus it seems abundantly clear that the “verstorbene[r] Maria” (FBA 15:561) in this section heading must refer to this narrator. When this Maria is named as the author of *Gustav Wasa*, however, the reader realizes that this is not a fictional narrator, but seemingly Clemens Brentano himself (FBA 16:566). Well aware of similar instances of authors playing with the role of authorship from internationally acclaimed books such as Laurence Sterne’s *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), as well as nationally distributed novels such as Theodor Gottlieb von Hippels *Lebensläufe in aufsteigender Linie nebst Beilagen* (1778-81) or Jean Pauls *Siebenkäs* (1796-97), Brentano used the figure of the ‘narrated narrator’ to produce authenticity when leaving readers no choice but to believe that it is the author

himself who substitutes the fictitious Maria. Readers are tempted to abandon the difference between the narrator (as a function of the novel) and the author (as a biographical fact). Now it is “Maria,” the pen name of Brentano, and not “Maria,” the fictional narrator of *Godwi*. But in fact it is Brentano’s friend Stephan August Winkelmann who is the actual author of this section, and not Brentano. The narrator/author Winkelmann praises Brentano and his works in prose form as well as in the poems that conclude the novel, the last of which is titled “An Clemens Brentano” (FBA 16:575). It is in these final chapters that *Godwi* is at most “verwildert”; several of the last poems give the names of other authors as well: “von N—M,” “Von A. W—nn,” and “Von K. R.” (FBA 16:570-575).

Religion in *Godwi*

The theme of religion is certainly present in *Godwi*, but it is much less obvious than it is in Brentano’s post-conversion works. The intensification of his religious identity after 1818 is apparent when comparing his earlier with his later works, but the core of his conversion is contained in *Godwi*. In terms of Rambo’s seven stages of conversion, the *context* of Brentano’s conversion is already clear in *Godwi*, but the conversion has not yet begun because the novel predates Brentano’s phase of *crisis*, which was the catalyst for his period of religious intensification. The novel’s name indicates that the figure of God will probably play a role, even if the reader quickly learns that Godwi is not a particularly pious character. His name partakes in the novels’ self-reflexivity as shown in a conversation in an unpublished fragment of a comedic play within the text itself:

Wirth. Ja der sonderbare Herr – ich glaub er heist wie Gott,
 Doctor. Wie Gott?
 Wirth. Nein Gottweißwie, God – godwi ja Godwi. (FBA 16:625)

In a letter to Guido Görres, Brentano gave a slightly different explanation for the name:

“Dieser verwilderte Roman führt den Namen Godwi, damit der Leser gleich sagen kann: Gott

wie dumm!” (FBA 16:625). On a less self-deprecating account, the name indeed reveals a strong religious component. For example, Godwi refers to “Godwin,” meaning “Gottesfreund ” (FBA 16:625), and it connotes a permanent comparison with the divine: Godwi (= ‘wie Gott’). Godwi is in many respects “like God” in that he is stylized as a Christ figure. His mother is named Marie, and her first beloved is named Joseph. Also of note is that Godwi’s most important companion and love interest, Violette, can be likened to Mary Magdalene — a prostitute who experienced a conversion through her encounter with Christ and became more devout than most of his disciples.

Although the constellation of characters surrounding Godwi suggests that he is a Christ-like figure, a closer examination of Godwi’s perspectives about religion and the nature of the human experience reveals how little the two have in common. In a letter to Römer, Godwi states that he does not believe in an afterlife, and that this has several positive effects on the way he lives the only life he knows he has:

Ich hoffe nach nichts nach meinem Tode; dieß ist mir eine Ursache mehr, gut zu seyn. Ich befestige, ich ermuntere mich so in der Maxime, die mich handeln macht, weil sie dadurch ganz menschlich, ganz natürlich, ganz mein Eigenthum wird. Sie heißt Genugthuung, die ich empfinde, mit mir selbst zufrieden zu sein. (FBA 16:46)

He vows to never be ashamed of his “Menschlichkeit” or suppress his “Leidenschaften.” For him, the real “Jenseits” is “[g]eistreiche Freundschaft, geistreiche Liebe, geistreicher Wein und ein Lied an die Freude von Schiller, an deiner Hand, in Joduno’s Arm, in meinem Glase, von Molly gesungen, schöne Natur um mich her, und der Eichbaum über uns” (FBA 16:47). If Godwi can be said to have a religion, then it would only be one in which he worships nature and his romantic partners — much like Brentano in his letters from his younger years. While Brentano does periodically mention his religious devotion in letters before 1816, he spends much more time discussing his romantic pursuits.

Religious imagery appears throughout *Godwi*, but it is seldom connected to any clear value judgements that place one form of religiosity above another. In Römer's extended dream narrative mentioned above, motifs from Islam and Eastern architecture dominate the landscape:

Es war mir wie einem ehrlichen Muselman zu Muthe, der die Wüste Arabiens hinter sich hat, und der Moschee des großen Propheten schon entgegen sieht. Ich ging ruhig den Pfad gegen die Moschee auf. Chinesische Brücken trugen mich über tosende Katarakte. [...] Ich weiß nicht, was ich gefühlt habe, bis mich eine Gestalt, die durch die Säulengänge der prächtigen Moschee, wie die süße Trunkenheit der Andacht und der allmächtige Zauber des Traums einer Religion, hinwallte, mich durch ihre fast handgreifliche Wahrscheinlichkeit aus meinen sonderbaren Reflexionen über die schreckliche Zeit erweckte. (FBA 16:64)

In another part of the dream, Römer describes a woman in a turban and veil who brings him into "die Feerey des Auslands" (FBA 16:65), and he follows her through "alle die zierlichen Irrgänge" (FBA 16:65) of his dreamscape. He finds his way into the mosque and sees "die Gottheit" (FBA 16:65) floating before him. In his bewilderment he compares himself to "eine junge Nonne," who has confused her "heilige Jungfräulichkeit" with her "menschlichen Jungfräulichkeit" (FBA 16:65).

Ultimately the religious symbols in Römer's dream do little to explain what his own religious inclinations may be. Near the end of the first volume, however, he writes to Godwi that Joduno is expected to arrive in the morning, and adds: "Ich eile, wir gehen alle in die Kirche, ich auch, in die katholische Kirche" (FBA 16:253). This "ich auch" seems to imply that Römer rarely attends church, since he must emphasize to Godwi that he *is in fact* going as well. He continues by marveling at the piety of Joduno and her siblings as they kneel at their mother's grave. The most undisguised religious character in the novel, Violette, does not appear until the second volume, in which she is revealed as Godwi's most significant love interest. In the thirty-fourth chapter, Maria speaks with Violette's mother, who expresses "ganz wunderbare Ideen über Religion" (FBA 16:516) at length. Maria reports that Violette's

mother “war im strengsten Katholizismus erzogen” (FBA 16:516) and that Violette was raised in a similar manner.

Thus, Godwi deals with religion in indirect and playful ways: through images in dreams, ironic wordplay, and second- and third-hand accounts about the peripheral characters who take religion much more seriously than the main characters. Religion is depicted from many points of view in an ironic synthesis, and the reader is left with no clear message about whether religion is ultimately portrayed in a positive or negative light. While Brentano addresses the topic of religion in this novel, at the same time he keeps it at a certain distance. In later works, however, he eliminates the distance, taking religion very seriously. The only points of view presented later are those that fit into his new Catholic framework. A shift occurs from aloofness to sincerity that takes Brentano out of the realm of the Romantic poet and places him into the role of the evangelist who writes what he claims to be a truthful and straightforward retelling of the lives of Christ and other holy figures.

Brentano’s Muse for *Das bittere Leiden*

In 1816, at the end of a period of crisis caused by his failed marriages and the four devastating attempts to have a child, Brentano learned about the existence Anna Katharina Emmerick, of a bed-ridden nun in the small town of Dülmen. He was paying a visit to his brother-in-law Karl von Savigny, who was at the time a professor of law at the newly founded university in Berlin, when Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach, one of Savigny’s students, told him that he and Christian von Stolberg had, in April 1815, seen a stigmatized nun in Dülmen. Gerlach reported in his diaries that Brentano reacted with astonishment and great interest, asking: “Was? Das haben Sie gesehen und sitzen hier noch und essen?”³⁴⁴ Three

³⁴⁴ Hans Joachim Schoeps, ed., *Aus den Jahren preußischer Not und Erneuerung. Tagebücher und Briefe der Gebrüder Gerlach und ihres Kreises 1805-1820* (Berlin: Haude & Spenersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 177. See also Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter,” 110.

years later, Brentano left Berlin and moved to Dülmen to find this nun, on 14 September 1818. In her he would find a new muse, as she provided the inspiration for a new series of religious books that would help shape his new theologically oriented poetic identity.

When he arrived in Dülmen and began visiting Emmerick at her bedside, he started to record the visions that came to her when she would go into trance-like states. She was what we would now call eidetically gifted; that is, when in an “ekstatischen Zustände” (FBA 26:112), she described literally seeing and hearing the scenes from Christ’s life. She perceived herself to be physically in these scenes, as an observer who was just as present as those who were historically there. Brentano read the four gospels, along with many other source texts, aloud to her when she was in a more lucid state, in order to provide inspiration. These source texts belonged predominantly to Catholic tradition and apocrypha; major sources were *Das Leben Christi* (1677) by the Capuchin monk Martin von Cochem, the *Vita Christi* (1573) by Adam Walasser, and writings of the mystic Thomas de Jesu and the martyr Philipp a Jesu. Also among his sources were the works of the historians Josephus Flavius and Iacobus de Voragine.³⁴⁵ Brentano took notes while the trances were underway and later edited them into a more finished literary prose while incorporating his other sources. None of these sources are mentioned in the text itself, however, and the fact that he employed the first person — Emmerick speaks from her own point of view in *Das bittere Leiden* — leaves the impression that the text is for the most part a word-for-word protocol of what any listener at her bedside would have heard, for example: “Ich sah das Blut über sein Haupt erbärmlich niederrinnen, und sah ihn dreimal unter dem Schläge ihrer Prügel niedersinken; aber ich sah auch, als erschienen weinende Engel über ihm, welche sein Haupt salbten, und es wurde mir gezeigt, daß diese Schläge ohne diese göttliche Hülfe tödtlich gewesen seyn würden” (FBA 26:237-238). This example also shows that her visions contained elements of the supernatural

³⁴⁵ Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter,” 121.

— the angels anointing Christ’s head — that would not have been visible to an average observer.

The use of the first-person for Emmerick is one of the ways in which traces of the editing process were erased for the final text; Brentano strove to make it appear to a harmonious whole. Luise Hensel’s description of the writing process illumines the nature of the creative exchange between the two:

[Brentano] pflegte morgens etwa 9-10 Uhr zu ihr zu kommen und auf einem Blättchen zu notieren, was sie ihm zu erzählen hatte. [...] Dann schrieb er zu Haus während des Tages ausführlicher auf, was sie erzählt, und kam gegen Abend wieder, es ihr vorzulesen, wo sie dann manches berichtigte. Einmal ward sie unwillig und schalt, daß er etwas ganz anders aufgeschrieben, als sie es gesagt; [...] und drohte, ihm gar nichts mehr zu erzählen, wenn er daran ändern wolle; er mußte alles durchstreichen. (FBA 27,2:62-63)

Arnim expressed similar concerns about how Brentano treated Emmerick. Engling paraphrases Arnim’s perspective: “Er sei schrecklich mit ihr (der Emmerick) umgegangen worden; das kann niemand leugnen [...]. Alles wird der Unglücklichen übel gedeutet.”³⁴⁶ This probably did not only refer to Brentano’s method of recording her visions, but also to the experiments in magnetism that he conducted on her along with his brother Christian and her doctor, Wesener, and Emmerick was not entirely willing: “A. K. Emmerick lässt zwar die Versuche über sich ergehen, steht dem Magnetismus aber ablehnend gegenüber.”³⁴⁷ He may also have been referring to the investigation conducted by the Prussian state to determine the authenticity of the miraculous claims about her. Arnim saw her as a new type of martyr — one that is poked and prodded at because of the mere curiosity of people around her, with little regard for her own well-being: “Es gibt vielleicht ein neues Märtyrertum, in welche die

³⁴⁶ Engling, *Die Wende*, 144.

³⁴⁷ Engling, *Die Wende*, 145.

Leute nicht aus Hass, sondern bloß aus Wissbegierde, um zu sehen, was eine fromme Seele eigentlich sei, in Scheidewasser und Feuer gesteckt, lebendig anatomisiert werden.”³⁴⁸

In addition to chronicling her words, Brentano took great pains to create a record of Emmerick’s continually changing wound patterns. She had the stigmata on her hands, her forehead bore scratches from the crown of thorns, and she had a large wound on her side, mirroring Christ’s lance wound. Her largest wound, however, had the shape of a cross and covered most of her chest. Brentano’s diaries describe as many characteristics of each wound as possible: the color, size, amount and type of blood and other discharge, and how they changed from the previous day (FBA 28,1:58). He also drew sketches of them in his diaries (FBA 28,1:58), and used pieces of white linen to make life-sized impressions of the wounds. His sister Bettina reported to Arnim after a meeting with her brother that he carried around “einen ganzen Koffer voll blutiger Tücher und Binden der Nonne,” and offered them “jedermann zum Anrühren.”³⁴⁹ She observed further that he had become in general more eager to find miracles wherever he possibly could: “[A]ns Übertreiben hat er sich so gewöhnt, daß nichts wie Wunder und Wunder aus nichtsbedeutenden Dingen gemacht werden.”³⁵⁰ Of note here is that Bettina has noticed a change in him: one facet of his transformation was that he became more apt to search for and find instances of miracles.

Emmerick’s wounds were not only perceived as a “miracle” in the sense that they did not seem to be caused by any specified illness or injuries and could not be explained with help of the medicine available at the time, but also as a gift directly from God, a sign of favor. Brentano saw her pain and her wounds as an essential part of her eidetic talents, citing “die wunderbare Güte Gottes” as the source of a “Wundenveränderung” (FBA 28,1:153), during which the cross wound began to produce more blood. As the wound grew, so did the

³⁴⁸ Engling, *Die Wende*, 145.

³⁴⁹ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 399.

³⁵⁰ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 399.

scope of her visions, which in turn seemed to give her vitality to continue recounting them. For example, on one occasion she received “Kinderträume, Träume aus ihrer Jugendzeit, durch die sie gestärkt wieder an ihre Arbeit gehen kann” (FBA 28,1:153). Brentano and Emmerick were so grateful for the wounds that they described them as a Christmas gift: “Das Christkind hat mir Weihnachten viele Schmerzen gebracht, und es ist wieder zu mir gekommen gestern Nacht, und brachte noch viel mehr” (FBA 28,1:387). Brentano frequently kissed the wounds and described them as merely another manifestation of Jesus’s wounds, and prayed to them: “Ich küße alle die Wunden und bete zu den Wunden Jesu” (FBA 28,1:136).

In addition to providing him with writing material through her visions, Emmerick performed another useful service for Brentano: he claimed that she could discern the authenticity of religious relics by touching these objects with her right arm or hand.³⁵¹ She was his “Sakrometer,”³⁵² and he considered amputating her hand after her death in order to continue his work of identifying genuine relics. At Brentano’s request, her body was in fact exhumed several times, but the hand was left intact.³⁵³ Brentano did not take part in the exhumation because of his “große[r] Scheu vor Toten.”³⁵⁴ He is said to have convinced Luise Hensel to bribe the gravediggers in Dülmen to allow her to exhume Emmerick.³⁵⁵ The goal was not only to investigate the degree to which her body had decayed (the lack of decay would presumably be considered a miracle and aid in her beatification), but also to determine whether her hand could still detect the authenticity of relics. Luise Hensel described the exhumation in 1824: “[E]inige Reliquien hatte ich bei mir, womit ich ihre rechte Hand

³⁵¹ Brentano describes examples of these instances in his diaries; see for example FBA 28,1:32-33.

³⁵² Engling, *Die Wende*, 147; see also Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 151.

³⁵³ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 412-413.

³⁵⁴ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 151.

³⁵⁵ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 152.

berühren wollte um zu sehn ob die Verheißung, daß dieselbe auch nach dem Tode noch, so wie im Leben, Heiligtümer unterscheiden würde.”³⁵⁶

The creative exchange between Brentano and Emmerick is remarkably similar to the exchange between Godwi, the subject of the story, and Maria, the writer who is charged with chronicling his life in the second volume of the early novel. Just as Brentano reads source texts to Emmerick, Godwi actually reads to Maria, as in the thirty-third chapter in which Maria writes: “Godwi besuchte mich heute Abend, er hatte selbst weiter geschrieben, und las mir vor, wie folgt” (FBA 16:513). The next chapter begins with Godwi narrating in his own first-person — Maria has simply reprinted what Godwi read aloud in the previous chapter, or at least wants to give the impression that it is a word-for-word rendition of what Godwi presented him with. Just as Godwi recounts for Maria throughout the second volume what occurred in the first volume, so does Emmerick lead Brentano through the physical scenes of Christ’s passion. And just as Brentano interrupts the passion narrative to describe the extreme physical suffering that Emmerick has been experiencing while recounting her visions, so does Godwi interrupt Maria’s narrative with his letter “An den Leser” (FBA 16:520) to relate that Maria has been too ill to write.

But whereas *Godwi* was replete with different voices, different points of view that contribute to the ironic distance toward religion in the text, *Das bittere Leiden* now strives for unity by condensing all possible voices into Emmerick’s alone. By relegating his own commentary to the footnotes, her voice is unchallenged in the main text. After his period of religious intensification, Brentano seemed less interested in the playful, ironic tone of *Godwi*, striving instead for a harmonious and straightforward narrative, displaying clear reverence for religious issues, while avoiding any formulations that could be construed as critical of it.

³⁵⁶ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 413.

Brentano's Notions of History and Truth

Efforts to beatify Emmerick began in the 1970s under Pope Paul VI, but it was not until 2004 that she finally received the title "Blessed." One of the major challenges in her beatification process was in fact the questionable accuracy of Brentano's texts about her and her visions. The consensus was that *Das bittere Leiden* was not a book of "Emmerick-Visionen,"³⁵⁷ but rather one of "Brentano-Überarbeitungen."³⁵⁸ Advocates for her beatification omitted much of Brentano's work during the process, especially the passages in which Emmerick calls Brentano her "Bräutigam," which can be confused with her "himmlische Bräutigam," Christ.³⁵⁹ The first attempt at beatification in Rome failed with the inclusion of some of Brentano's texts, and as a consequence they were left entirely out for the second attempt, with the justification that "diese Manuskripte [sind] das Werk eines fantasievollen Poeten und eben keinesfalls verlässliche Protokolle."³⁶⁰ Two distinct questions arise regarding the authenticity of Brentano's Emmerick texts. First, how close is Brentano's text to what Emmerick actually said? Second, how close are Emmerick's visions to the real historical scenes she describes? They conflict in many points with the four biblical gospels, as well as with the apocryphal ones and the other extra-biblical texts among Brentano's sources. All of these texts contain so many contradictions that any attempt to establish a historical truth can seem futile.

In light of the plethora of discrepancies between the canonical gospels and other documents, adding a non-canonical gospel with even more inconsistencies would seem to require justification. Brentano addressed the issue of adding such discrepancies explicitly several times throughout his text, beginning in the introduction. It was important enough to him that, in response to suggestions by his friends Johann Michael Sailer and Apollonia

³⁵⁷ Engling, *Die Wende*, 8.

³⁵⁸ Engling, *Die Wende*, 8.

³⁵⁹ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 403.

³⁶⁰ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 403.

Diepenbrock, who knew him through Luise Hensel,³⁶¹ he provided an explanation in the very first sentence of the introduction: “Sollten die folgenden Betrachtungen unter vielen ähnlichen Früchten der contemplativen Jesusliebe sich irgend auszeichnen, so protestiren sie doch feierlich auch gegen den mindesten Anspruch auf den Charakter historischer Wahrheit” (FBA 26:13). It is clear this early in the text that historical truth should not be expected of it. What then is the relationship between Brentano’s narrative and more contemporary accounts of the events rendered in Emmerick’s visions? Brentano explains the purpose of the “Betrachtungen” as follows:

Sie wollen nichts, als sich demüthig den unzählig verschiedenen Darstellungen des bitteren Leidens durch bildende Künstler und fromme Schriftsteller anschließen, und höchstens für vielleicht eben so unvollkommen aufgefaßte und erzählte, als ungeschickt niedergeschriebene Fastenbetrachtungen einer frommen Klosterfrau gelten, welche solchen Vorstellungen nie einen höhern als einen menschlich gebrechlichen Werth beilegte, und daher einer fortwährenden inneren Mahnung zur Mittheilung nur aus Gehorsam gegen den wiederholten Befehl ehrwürdiger Gewissensführer mit Selbstüberwindung Folge leistete. (FBA 26:13).

Later he emphasizes that Emmerick never explicitly ascribed historical value to her visions (FBA 26:41), noting that she was familiar only with the catechism, the usual biblical stories, celebratory gospels, and psalteria (FBA 26:41). Brentano described instances in which she was “ermüdet [und] ungerne erzählte” (FBA 26:41) and told him: “lesen Sie es doch in der Bibel” (FBA 26:41). She was sometimes surprised to learn, however, “daß dieses nicht darin stehe, man höre ja jezt immer sagen, man solle nur die Bibel lesen, darin stehe ja Alles, u.s.w.” (FBA 26:41). In the introduction to the next section describing Emmerick’s visions of the Last Supper, Brentano reiterates his position once more:

Wer die nachfolgende Betrachtung des heiligen Abendmahles mit der kurzen Geschichte der Evangelien vergleicht, wird vielleicht hie und da sich an einer kleinen Abweichung stoßen. Deßwegen hier nur etwas zum Verständniß mit der wiederholten Protestation, daß durch diese

³⁶¹ Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter,” 120.

Anschauungsweise der heiligen Schrift, wie sie von der Kirche verstanden wird, nichts aufgedrungen werden soll. (FBA 26:67)

He states then that even the four evangelists do not always seem to agree, but this is only a “scheinbar[er] Widerspruch,” and thus, in the same way, Brentano’s own gospel “wird sich bei näherer Untersuchung vielmehr als eine einfache und ganz natürliche Evangelienharmonie zeigen, als daß sie im Wesentlichen von der heil. Schrift abweiche” (FBA 26:68).

After all of his efforts to explain exactly how and why critics should not complain about these inconsistencies, Brentano went on to undermine these statements later in *Das bittere Leiden* while commenting in passing that Emmerick’s retellings might contain actual errors, given that she was constantly under great physical and emotional stress: “Wer sollte daher [because of the immense pain the visions caused her] der in so heftiger Affection des Mitleidens Erkrankten nicht gerne verzeihen, wenn in dem Verlauf ihrer Mittheilungen vielleicht irgend kleine Lücken oder Zeitverwechslung Statt finden möchten” (FBA 26:276). When asked about which account was most accurate – the gospels, the apocryphal literature, other Catholic legends, or Emmerick’s visions – Brentano maintained that “man sich an die Gesichte der Emmerick halten [müßte]” and that these other texts could be corrected by the details provided by Emmerick.³⁶²

Brentano saw Emmerick’s visions as manifestations of “fragmentarische Offenbarungen der einen Wahrheit,”³⁶³ pointing toward one unified “Uroffenbarung,”³⁶⁴ and despite the appearance of contradictions, the fragments would eventually reveal themselves to be harmonious with this “Uroffenbarung.” During the chapter on the “Vorbereitung zum Ostermahl,” Brentano reports that Emmerick “sieht den historischen Tag seiner [Christ’s] Geburt am 25sten November” (FBA 26:69). For a text that is not concerned with historical

³⁶² Gajek, “Der romantische Dichter,” 120.

³⁶³ Engling, *Die Wende*, 155.

³⁶⁴ Engling, *Die Wende*, 155.

accuracy, this seems like an oddly specific claim to make along with the adjective “historisch,” especially since this conflicts with other accounts of Christ’s birthdate, yet it is a simple piece of data that presumably has only one correct answer. *Das bittere Leiden* is replete with these extremely precise minutiae that only multiply the instances in which it contradicts with its many source texts.

The question remains, however, why Brentano expanded the gospels and his other sources into such epic proportion with so many specific details, while at the same time admitting that any of these details might be inaccurate, and that historical accuracy played no role in his understanding of the concept of “Wahrheit” in the first place. The answer is that Brentano wanted his gospel to be unique; his identity as a Romantic poet could not be confined by just one genre, that of the gospel. He did not simply want to mimic the biblical gospels. Instead, he drew on his expertise in literary aesthetics and drew on a variety of genres. Most notably, Brentano employed the structure and style of the Romantic novel that he had begun practicing with *Godwi*. The early Romantics defined the novel as a most versatile genre, a meta-genre that includes the entire history of literary expression. Accordingly, a plethora of styles and forms entered *Das bittere Leiden*, but ultimately Brentano fused these into a much more uniform structure than is found in *Godwi*. The content of *Das bittere Leiden* also has Romantic tendencies: long descriptions of landscapes, characters’ appearances, and dramatic, often gruesome scenes are just as prevalent in this late religious undertaking as in *Godwi* and similar Romantic novels. What has intensified is the intention of the work: While in *Godwi*, readers are left to draw their own conclusions about the message to be received, the intention of *Das bittere Leiden* is focused and unmistakable: it is a piece of edifying literature meant to enhance spirituality.

In a letter to Emilie Linder, Brentano revealed how complicated his relationship with the concept of historical truth was. He criticized followers of Luther for treating the Bible as

if it were a “historisches Buch”³⁶⁵ — an approach that clashes with Brentano’s more Romantic perspective on historical events, as demonstrated in the introduction to *Die Gründung Prags* in which he invokes a “höhere, überzeitliche, ewige poetische Wahrheit” where the “historische Urkunde verstummt.”³⁶⁶ During this same period, some of his contemporaries such as David Friedrich Strauss were searching for empirically verifiable facts about the historical Christ’s life. With *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch betrachtet*, Strauss conducted a historical-critical exegesis of the Bible that interpreted the New Testament Gospels as myths. He took what some orthodox theologians thought to be historical fact, and demonstrated how Christ’s early followers after his death turned the skeleton of his biography into the myth on which Christianity was founded, conducting, in Strauss’s words, a “mythische[] Ausschmückung des Lebens Jesu.”³⁶⁷ Strauss sought to undo this mythologizing process – to demythologize the Gospels and show what was left behind in pure history – by removing these embellishments. What Brentano does, however, is the opposite: he takes the relatively short source texts, primarily the four Gospels, and adds embellishments by recording the plethora of details in Emmerick’s visions, as well as adding a few of his own through his apocryphal and extra-biblical source texts. Instead of taking away the “Ausschmückung” that Strauss claims that early Christians added to history, Brentano adds even more. He is in effect redoing what Strauss has undone: *Das bittere Leiden* is a remythologizing of what has previously been demythologized.

The Structure of *Das bittere Leiden*

Das bittere Leiden shares many of its formal elements with *Godwi*. This link between the two texts provides a clearer picture of the development of Brentano’s aesthetics and his

³⁶⁵ Engling, *Die Wende*, 196.

³⁶⁶ Engling, *Die Wende*, 197.

³⁶⁷ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1:73.

identity as a poet before and after his period of religious intensification. The title page informs the reader of the book's topic as well as one of the key elements of religious experience in the Christian tradition: suffering. The lengthy subtitle of "Das bittere Leiden unserns Herrn Jesu Christi" provides details on the protagonist who is framed as a medium of a divine message: "Nach den Betrachtungen der gottseligen Anna Katharina Emmerich, Augustinerin des Klosters Agnetenberg zu Dülmen, († 9ten Februar 1824)." An initial addition to the subtitle refers to the book itself, for the "Lebensumriss" includes a report by a third party that offers readers insight into the protagonist's life. The mention of an "expanded second edition" reminds one of the textual nature of Emmerick's account: "Nebst dem Lebensumriss dieser Begnadigten durch die Mittheilungen über das letzte Abendmahl vermehrte zweite Auflage" (FBA 26:2). Following the title page is the dedication to "Henricus Suso, Johannes a Cruce und Theresia a Jesu" (FBA 26:3). The author of this dedication describes himself as "ein Pilger" (FBA 26:3), which is the first of the many titles that Brentano employs to include himself throughout the work. The dedication takes the form of a poem spoken by the pilgrim who is resting "zwischen zweier Hirten Grab" (FBA 26:3). The pilgrim speaks an incantation in an alternate rhyme scheme, invoking Catholic imagery such as an altar in a cathedral, before the content turns specifically biblical, describing Christ's wounds, his blood and flesh: "Und sein Blut ist selbst der Trank, / Und sein Fleisch ist wahrlich selbst die Speise, / Da wird Alles heil, was krank, / Da ist Brod und Wein zur letzten Reise!" (FBA 26:4) The "pilgrim" refers to himself explicitly three more times, and near the end of the poem he introduces Emmerick as "seine Braut" (FBA 26:5) – the bride of Christ – who has chosen the "Pilger" (FBA 26:5) for this task.

Following the lyrical dedication is the "Einleitung und Lebensumriß der Anna Katharina Emmerich" (FBA 26:11), a shorter version of the biography that Brentano planned to later write. After the "Lebensumriß," the first section of the accounts of the visions is titled

“Das letzte Abendmahl unsers Herrn Jesu Christi nach den Betrachtungen der heiligen Klosterfrau Anna Katharina Emmerich” (FBA 26:65), which consists of a short preface, which contains the disclaimer about the historical accuracy of *Das bittere Leiden*, followed by a series of scenes from Christ’s life prior to the passion narrative. The following section forms the bulk of the text, titled “Das bittere Leiden unsers Herrn Jesu Christi nach den Betrachtungen der seligen Klosterfrau Anna Emmerich in der heiligen Fastenzeit des Jahres 1823” (FBA 26:109). The chapters within it are of varying length; some are less than half a page, while others span more than ten pages. Frühwald notes that the tableau style is reminiscent of “romantischer Malerei”³⁶⁸ and modeled after “barocker Andachtsplastik,”³⁶⁹ replete with extended descriptions of landscapes, clothing, and the physical beauty of the characters. As the text draws closer to the climax — the crucifixion and then the resurrection — the scenes increase in intensity: “Je näher die Klimax der Erzählung rückt, umso stärker verdichten sich diese Szenen, bis sie zu einer einzigen dramatischen Handlung zusammenfließen, die dem Abschluss zudrängt und kaum noch reflektierende Passagen duldet.”³⁷⁰ This main section of the text winds down into descriptions of the reaction to the resurrection according to the “heiligen Frauen am Grabe” (FBA 26:433) as well as the “Aussagen der Grabwache” (FBA 26:441), in which a “Landpfleger” (FBA 26:441) reveals yet more details about the resurrection in one of Emmerich’s visions. The final sections of the text are three fragments: “Fragment über Joseph von Arimathia” (FBA 26:446), “Fragment über Longinus” (FBA 26:448), and “Fragment über den Centurio Abenadar” (FBA 26:452), which contain accounts of visions that did not fit anywhere else in the book. As discussed above, *Godwi* also ends in a series of fragments. These final fragments that close *Das bittere Leiden* mirror this procedure, but seem out of place because the majority of *Das bittere*

³⁶⁸ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 184.

³⁶⁹ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 184.

³⁷⁰ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 185.

Leiden is a flowing text, until these final fragments. In both cases, the main text gradually disintegrates until it loses its form so thoroughly that all that is left are texts that do not fit anywhere else. The structure of Brentano's writing seems to have increased in precision and focus over the years, so that his post-conversion work only loses its tight form at the very end, unlike *Godwi*, which from the very beginning shows an openness in its structure that never allows for the type of long, uninterrupted narrative that dominates in *Das bittere Leiden*.

Brentano as Pilgrim, Writer, Editor, and Evangelist

Brentano called himself a "Pilger" in the preface to *Das bittere Leiden*. Indeed, he was a pilgrim in the most obvious sense that he had traveled to a remote location in order to witness a miracle and undergo a religiously transformative experience. Brentano even cited Emmerich in his diaries as using this name for him — "meinem lieben Polgram"³⁷¹ — but more often she called him her "Bräutigam."³⁷² Throughout *Das bittere Leiden*, Brentano also frequently refers to himself as "der Schreiber"; for example, in the introduction, he explains how the "writer" has come to learn of Emmerich's existence: "Der Schreiber dieser Blätter erhielt zuerst durch eine Abschrift des obenerwähnten Briefes Stollbergs und später durch einen Freund, der mehrere Wochen bei der Kranken gelebt, eine umfassendere Kenntniß ihres Zustandes" (FBA 26:33). He continues, referring to himself as the "Schreiber" in the third person: "Im September 1818 eingeladen, mit J. M. Sailer, nach langer Trennung, auf dessen Reise zu dem Gr. Fr. L. v. Stollberg in Westphalen zusammen zu treffen, begab er sich nach Sondermühlen zu Letzterem, der ihn nach Münster an Overberg empfahl, und dieser führte ihn durch einen Brief an den Arzt der A. K. Emmerich bei derselben ein" (FBA 26:33).

³⁷¹ Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 401.

³⁷² Schultz, *Schwarzer Schmetterling*, 401.

Brentano goes on to describe his method: “Der Schreiber schieb täglich Alles nieder, was er an ihr bemerkte, oder was sie aus ihrem innern und äußern Leben erzählte” (FBA 26:34). After the introduction and the short biography, Brentano reveals more details about his role as the “Schreiber”: “Sie sprach gewöhnlich niederdeutsch, im ekstatischen Zustande oft auch eine reinere Mundart [...]. Alles Gehörte, das unter den behinderten Verhältnissen in ihrer Gegenwart sehr selten kaum in wenigen Zügen notirt werden konnte, ward unmittelbar zu Haus aufgeschrieben [...]. Der Schreiber that, was er konnte, und spricht in diesem Bewußtseyn den genügsamen Lesen um ein Gebetsalmosen an” (FBA 26:112). On many occasions the “writer” reveals himself to be an editor as well, inserting footnotes in order to explain a change that he has made. For example, as Jesus is being led from the house of Annas to that of Kaiphas, the main text states that the distance between the two houses is “kaum dreihundert Schritte,” but in a footnote the editor Brentano explains: “Die Erzählende bediente sich hier einer Distanzangabe ihres Wohnortes, sie sagte: ‘etwa so weit als von meiner Wohnung bis zum Hause des H. K. Rath M.....n,’ welche Entfernung hier aus der Erinnerung höchstens auf 300 Schritte angeschlagen ist” (FBA 26:178). He makes a point to tell his reader that he has altered something in his text from what Emmerick told him, even though it is relatively trivial; it is merely a conversion of a distance into another unit. The writer is aiming for complete transparency: if he goes out of his way to tell the reader about this minor change, then the reader can assume that he will also include a footnote or some sort of explanation in all other instances in which he deviated from Emmerick’s original statements. But in calling attention to himself as the editor in this particular instance, he is in effect erasing the traces of his editing, because he fails to give footnotes for the many other changes he had made, and gives the reader the impression that anything at all that has been changed would be indicated with a footnote.

He also makes his role as narrator apparent when he interrupts the passion narrative in order to describe Emmerick's physical and mental state during her vision of the Flagellation, in a section titled "Unterbrechung der Passionbilder" (FBA 26:254). The previous scene is one of the bloodiest in the text, and correspondingly this is a time during which Emmerick has "unsäglich gelitten" (FBA 26:254). Brentano depicts her suffering in great detail: "sie zuckte und zitterte, und kroch winselnd auf ihrem Lager hin und wieder, ihr Angesicht glich dem eines unter Martern sterbenden Menschen, blutiger Schweiß ergoß sich mehrmals an ihrer Brust und ihrem Rücken" (FBA 26:254). The graphic description of her pain is on par with the extensive portrayals of Christ's suffering throughout the text — a parallel that is meant to prove the authenticity of her visions.

In addition to the roles of pilgrim, writer, and editor, Brentano is ultimately an evangelist, because *Das bittere Leiden* fits into the genre of the gospel as seen in the New Testament and in apocryphal literature. Instead of relying on his own visions or on professed eye-witness accounts from those who lived during Christ's lifetime, as the other famous evangelists did, Brentano uses a medium — Emmerick — in order to gain access to his gospel material. Frühwald describes *Das bittere Leiden* as "eine dem Werke der Evangelisten vergleichbare, parallele Tätigkeit, die Aufzeichnung eines fünften Evangeliums für die moderne, gebildete Welt."³⁷³ The Gospel of Brentano, however, is quite different from the four gospels in the New Testament, not only in its length (it is longer than all four of them combined), but also in its structure, attention to detail, and narrative style. In fact, *Das bittere Leiden* has much more in common with the genre of the Romantic novel such as *Godwi* than it does with the four gospels.

³⁷³ Frühwald, *Das Spätwerk*, 290.

Romantic Religion and the Aesthetics of Suffering

While *Das bittere Leiden* is similar to the gospels in that it tells the story of Christ's passion, it resembles in many other ways a Romantic novel, especially an epistolary one such as *Godwi*. Although Brentano claimed no historical accuracy for rendering Christ's passion, he attempted to create the impression that his text was a faithful and accurate version of Emmerick's visions. Only minimal indications are evident that he had edited them. This is also the case with the epistolary novel: although it is fiction, it is meant to appear to be an authentic rendition of the exact words of the characters within it. It has a certain "Forderung nach Authentizität"³⁷⁴ and portrays "wirkliche Individua,"³⁷⁵ even if they are fictional. Just as Brentano lets Emmerick speak in the first person in *Das bittere Leiden*, so too do the characters in an epistolary novel speak in the first person, suggesting that the author of the novel is nothing more than a "Schreiber" — one who simply writes down the characters' words without altering them. In an epistolary novel, the first-hand accounts of each of the characters are meant to give better insight into "das Innre des Menschen"³⁷⁶ because they are not filtered through a narrator as in a typical novel. The author's task is only to report what the characters have said, not to interpret it, and this is precisely what happens in *Das bittere Leiden* when Brentano repeatedly refers to himself as the "Schreiber" and not the author or the poet. Ultimately the text is the creation of the author, no matter how much he plays with different narrators or genres in order to create the illusion of distance from his work.

While some epistolary novels contain letters from only one character, *Godwi* consists of letters from many different perspectives. This is paralleled in *Das bittere Leiden*: Although Emmerick is the only one recounting the visions, she provides detailed descriptions of the inner thoughts of several characters in the passion story within these visions — characters

³⁷⁴ Scharnowski, *Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied*, ' 30.

³⁷⁵ Scharnowski, *Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied*, ' 30.

³⁷⁶ Scharnowski, *Ein wildes, gestaltloses Lied*, ' 30.

whose perspectives are never, or only briefly addressed in the four gospels. Judas, for example, receives a much longer treatment in *Das bittere Leiden* in which his motivations and life history are explained along with his betrayal of Christ. He is no longer the stock character of the traitor; rather, we learn that he betrays Christ for money because he was “das mühsame, herumziehende, verfolgte Leben müde” (FBA 26:145) and wanted simply “sich ein Vermögen zu sammeln” (FBA 26:145).

Pontius Pilate’s perspective is described in even greater detail; the reader is granted access to his thoughts in the same way as in an epistolary novel. His motivations are much more clearly outlined in *Das bittere Leiden* than in any of the source texts from which Brentano drew. He is portrayed as a conflicted character, too easily influenced by the many gods he believes in, as well as by the people around him, especially his wife. Their opinions are constantly at war with his own conscience: “Sein Gewissen sagte: Jesus ist unschuldig; sein Weib sagte: Jesus ist heilig; sein Aberglaube sagte: er ist ein Feind deiner Götter; seine Feigheit sagte: er ist selbst ein Gott und wird sich rächen” (FBA 26:276). Even Satan has a direct influence on his thinking: “Er hatte ganz verwirrte Gedanken, und der Satan blies ihm bald dieses, bald jenes ein” (FBA 26:231). He would like to set Jesus free, but he is uncertain due to the competing voices around him, and even Emmerick states through Brentano that Pilate’s thoughts are so confused that she cannot understand him: “Es wogte so Vieles in ihm durch einander, ich konnte den Wirrwarr nicht verstehen, und er selbst wußte auch nicht, was er wollte” (FBA 26:231). Emmerick completes this character arc by returning to Pilate after Christ has been crucified and informing the reader about his condition. In a dramatic scene in which an earthquake shakes the ground and his palace crumbles before him, Pilate, full of regret, is reminiscent of protagonists in other Romantic novels such as *Der blonde Eckbert* (1797) and *Der Sandmann* (1816) whose worlds are so shaken by confusion and remorse that they are forever changed and often do not survive the experience. Pilate’s character

development contributes to the impression that *Das bittere Leiden* fits much more into the genre of Romantic novel than that of any religious text, especially the four gospels.

Another frequent Romantic trope in *Das bittere Leiden* is found in the repeated descriptions of nature and the weather, in particular as direct reflections of plot twists and the emotional states of the characters. One example of this pathetic fallacy occurs just before the crucifixion, when the sky and the moon darken to intensify the somber mood of the scene: “Ueber alles dieses hin ist ein wunderbar ängstlicher Himmel ausgespannt, und wandelt der Mond, drohend, seltsam durch Flecken getrübet, und gleichsam krank und entsetzt, als zage er, voll zu werden, denn dann ist Jesu gemordet” (FBA 26:172). Nature seems to be aware of what is going on around it, and it can react to and anticipate the actions of humans.

Das bittere Leiden contains numerous scenes that are marked by a dream-like quality, another common Romantic trope that it shares with *Godwi*. The entire text is in a certain sense a dream report; the visions that come to Emmerick in her trance state are more or less dreams that she experiences while awake. In one passage she is accompanied by a “freundlicher Knabe” (FBA 26:263) who leads her through various scenes: “die Aecker, worauf die Dornen gewaschen, aus denen die Krone flochten wurde” (FBA 26:263), and the thorns transform magically into roses, after which the two play in the field full of roses. This boy seems to possess a magical power to bend time and space, and is reminiscent of the poetic boy-wonders often found in Romantic novels such as Eusebio in *Godwi*.

Conclusion

Godwi has been described as a “fruchtbare[s] Chaos,”³⁷⁷ a confusing web of fragments that challenge the reader to craft a whole out of the parts, while pointing to a Romantic ideal of the harmonious underlying truth that is waiting to be discovered. *Das*

³⁷⁷ Von Wiese, *Von Lessing bis Grabbe*, 244.

bittere Leiden is also a “fruchtbare[s] Chaos” in that it strives to appear as a harmonious unit, but ultimately its structure unravels at the end of the text, revealing its underlying fragmentary nature. This is a reflection of the origins of the text: Brentano worked with many source texts in addition to the material from Emmerick’s visions, which were anything but an organized, linear narrative. *Das bittere Leiden* parallels many of its source texts, for example the four Gospels, in this respect, because they draw from a plethora of narratives to create a single, unifying myth, as Strauss described them. Both *Godwi* and *Das bittere Leiden* represent a “künstlich geordnete Verwirrung,” (FBA 16:600) to use Schlegel’s term. Just as Maria in *Godwi* receives a packet of letters from Römer and is challenged to make sense of them for the reader in order to transform chaos into harmonious unity, so does Brentano receive the gift of Emmerick’s visions and attempt to create a comprehensible text that contributes to the readers’ understanding of the larger narrative about Christ’s life. Where, then, is Brentano’s conversion to be found in his works? *Godwi* and *Das bittere Leiden* share much in their style, narrative strategy, structure, and the numerous Romantic tropes discussed above. The subject matter, however — romantic love, art, and poetry in *Godwi*, in contrast to the explicitly religious content of *Das bittere Leiden* — has certainly shifted. The romantic love that dominates the plot of *Godwi* takes on a new form in *Das bittere Leiden*: a more distilled, intensified form that finds its focus in religious imagery. This is fitting in light of the period of crisis in Brentano’s life that followed *Godwi* and preceded *Das bittere Leiden*. While religion and sensual love are intertwined in *Godwi* in a loose manner, this relationship intensifies in *Das bittere Leiden*, mirroring Brentano’s own conversion as an intensification of his identity as a specifically Catholic poet.

CHAPTER 3

CONVERSION AND DECONVERSION IN GEORG BÜCHNER'S *DANTON'S TOD* AND *LENZ*

Introduction

Religion plays a major role in Büchner's works, especially in his drama *Danton's Tod* (1835) and his unfinished novel *Lenz* (written 1835, published 1839). Upon further investigation, both of these texts address a more specific aspect of religion: they are stories of conversion and deconversion. This chapter draws on the sociological studies of deconversion by John D. Barbour and Heinz Streib presented in the the first chapter, tracing the steps of Büchner's characters as they undergo a loss of faith and grapple with the questions of theodicy in the wake of materialist philosophy. Barbour's four steps of deconversion and Streib's themes of deconversion narratives lay the foundation for a more thorough analysis of Büchner's evolving attitude toward religion in his literary works. *Danton's Tod* not only contains conversions in the discussions of its characters, but also in one of its larger themes: the revolution. The concepts of revolution and conversion have much in common; the French Revolution is associated with regeneration and transformation, as outlined in the entry for "Erneuerung" in the *Kritisches Wörterbuch der Französischen Revolution*.³⁷⁸ In the early years of the revolution, pamphlets and brochures frequently contained the imagery of rebirth and resurrection through revolutionary activity, promising that a new, stronger people would rise from the ashes of the violence.³⁷⁹ The idea that "die Revolution sei eine Konversion"³⁸⁰ highlights the spiritually transformative nature of this revolutionary fervor. Here there is a

³⁷⁸ François Furet und Mona Ozouf, eds., *Kritisches Wörterbuch der Französischen Revolution*, 2 Vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 2:1071.

³⁷⁹ See Furet and Ozouf, *Kritisches Wörterbuch der Französischen Revolution*, 2:1071, and Patrick Fortmann, *Autopsie von Revolution und Restauration. Georg Büchner und die politische Imagination* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Verlag, 2013), which touches upon the connection between conversion and revolution in passing, see page 222.

³⁸⁰ *Kritisches Wörterbuch der Französischen Revolution*, 2:1073.

parallel between the revolution and the process of continual rebirth associated with religious discourses stemming from Pietism described in the first chapter. It was not enough to convert once and be saved; rather, one had to undergo endless experiences of renewal in order to truly be close to God. Revolution functions in the same way: it is not enough to have *one* revolution; it must be repeated with some frequency, recalling the astronomical sense of the term, which denotes the infinitely repeating revolutions of a planet around a star.

In *Lenz*, the process of continual renewal by attempted conversion dominates the title character's actions throughout the text, in which Büchner explores the theme of deconversion with his literary interpretation of the historical *Sturm und Drang* poet and dramatist Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz. The reader witnesses Lenz as he repeatedly attempts to connect with a God who refuses to answer him, until Lenz must finally accept that this God is not there, just as the reader of *Danton's Tod* observes in Danton, Payne, and other atheists as they tell the stories of their own deconversions. Büchner's works depict characters who struggle with a version of God who fails to meet their needs, and they do this in the context of the secularization described by Charles Taylor as "secularity 3," that is, they see belief as a matter of choice rather than a matter of course, as one option among others. Neither the Dantonists nor Lenz can reconcile the enormous suffering of innocents with the existence of a supposed benevolent god; thus they abandon their Christian doctrines in which they have tried to believe.

This disintegration of the harmonious worldview offered by Christianity is reflected not only in the atheistic content of these two works, but also in their fragmentary structures. They are copied and pasted from Büchner's many source materials into montage texts that give the illusion of wholeness, while at the same time offering only fragmentary glimpses into the history that they depict. *Danton's Tod* contains only four acts, and thus is missing the final fifth act of the classical drama, and *Lenz* ends abruptly before Büchner could finish it.

Thus the deconversions that form the subject matter of these texts are also apparent in their structures: just as the cohesive understanding of meaning and purpose offered by the Christian God is dismantled and shown to be inadequate to meet the needs of Büchner's characters, so do the structures of the texts unravel toward their conclusions, refusing to offer answers to the fundamental theological problems that the protagonists face.

Büchner's Religious Background and Developing Theology

Because of the lack of autobiographical information, it is difficult to say to what extent Büchner himself underwent a process of deconversion. However, his published writings display a clear trajectory from traditional piety to a significantly more critical view of the supernatural and a preference for a materialistic understanding of the universe. Raised in a Protestant household, he attended the Großherzoglichen Gymnasium in Darmstadt, which lists him as "lutherischer Konfession."³⁸¹ His interest and proficiency in the subject of religion is highlighted on his diploma: "Den Religionsstunden hat er mit Aufmerksamkeit beigewohnt und in denselben manche treffliche Beweise von selbstständigem Nachdenken gegeben."³⁸² This independent thought during religious studies, however, was no indication of a pious disposition. Büchner rejected Christianity while still in his school years, writing to a classmate: "Das Christentum gefällt mir nicht – es ist mir zu sanft, es macht lammfromm!"³⁸³ Instead of continuing the tradition in his mother's side of the family of going into the clergy (his uncle Edouard Reuss taught ecclesiastical history at the University of Straßburg³⁸⁴), Büchner was firm in his desire to become a doctor, like his paternal

³⁸¹ Ariane Martin, "Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner," *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 11 (2005-2008): 222.

³⁸² Martin, "Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner," 222.

³⁸³ Carl Seelig, "Lebensbild eines jungen Genies (1944)" in *Georg Büchner und die Moderne. Texte, Analysen, Kommentar*, ed. Dietmar Goltschnigg (Berlin: Schmidt, 2001), 1:449.

³⁸⁴ Martin, "Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner," 223.

relatives.³⁸⁵ His father, Ernst Büchner, was the Grand Ducal official surgeon (*großherzoglicher Amtschirurgus*) in Darmstadt. Carl Seelig writes that it was under the “strengen, pedantischen Herrschaft” of his father that Georg “frühzeitig ein Atheist geworden [ist].”³⁸⁶

While Büchner never explicitly called himself an atheist, a loss of belief can be traced through his letters and literary works. The impact of his Protestant upbringing is apparent in a poem titled “Die Nacht. Ein kleines Weihnachtsgeschenk von G. Büchner für seine guten Eltern,” written in 1828 (MA 1,1: 163). The poem depicts a peaceful scene: “Ruhig schlummernd liegen alle Wesen” (MA 1,1:168), and it continues in the style of a typical Romantic poem (“Willkommen Mond, willkommen sanfter Bote / Der Ruhe in dem rauhen Erdental” [MA 1,1:171]) before it transitions from worshipping nature into worshipping God, again in the style of the Romantics. The moon is described, for example, as “Verkündiger von Gottes Lieb und Gnade, / Des Schirmers in Gefahr und Mühesal” (MA 1,1:171). In the last few stanzas, the poem resembles a hymn: “Ja heil’ger Gott du bist der Herr der Welten, / Du hast den Sonnenball emporgethürmt, / Hast den Planeten ihre Bahn bezeichnet, / Du bist es, der das All mit Allmacht schirmt” (MA 1,1:171). In the final verses, Büchner makes it clear that he is not praising a vaguely deistic or pantheistic god, but specifically the Christian one, when he refers to the son of God: “Erlöse gnädig uns von allem Übel, / Vergib uns liebend jede Missetat, / Laß wandeln uns auf deines Sohnes Wege, / Und siegen über Tod und über Grab” (MA 1,1:172).

This poem, written at age fifteen, reveals two aspects of Büchner’s adolescent years: that he was at least fairly religious at the time, and that he knew that a gift that would please his parents would have to involve an affirmation of his piety. He was likely following this same impulse years later when he wrote to his parents on 28 July 1835 in order to defend

³⁸⁵ Seelig, “Lebensbild eines jungen Genies,” 449.

³⁸⁶ Seelig, “Lebensbild eines jungen Genies,” 449.

against accusations of “Unsittlichkeit” (MA 6,1:66) in *Danton’s Tod*, referring to his inclusion of arguments against God’s existence: “[W]enn ich ihre Gottlosigkeit zeigen wollte, so mußte ich sie eben wie Atheisten sprechen lassen” (MA 6,1:66). In order to quell his parents’ fear that the atheistic tendencies in his dramatic characters was indicative of his own atheism, Büchner had to reaffirm his belief to his parents and distance himself from the heretical statements in his literary creations. He told his parents what they expected to hear, although his work revealed a school of thought that he knew well and shared in great detail. Joachim Kahl demonstrates the disparity of Büchner’s ideas and the different audiences he had in mind when he communicated by comparing *Die Nacht* with a poem written shortly afterwards entitled *Leise hinter düstem Nachtgewölke* (1828), in which God’s status as the benevolent overseer of the universe has disappeared: “Von Gott ist keine Rede mehr.”³⁸⁷

Another text from his years at the Gymnasium, a translation from Marcus Tullius Cicero’s *De Divinatione*, “Ueber den Traum eines Arkadiers” (MA 1,2:13), reveals the beginnings of skeptical thought and a developing preference for a materialistic worldview. Büchner completed this text as an assignment in his Latin studies, and it contains a preface in which Büchner calls attention to a “Wunder-Glauben” prevalent among “den rohen Wilden,” but also still partially present for the “gebildeten Europäer” (MA 1,2:13). He is tempted to call it “Aberglauben,” but does not want to ignore “ein geistiges Band [...], das uns gemeinsam mit allen Erdbewohnern umschlingt, ein Gefühl, das uns alle an die Mutterbrust der Natur drückt” (MA 1,2:13). This “rohe Mensch” sees miracles not only in “den ewigen Phänomen<en> der Natur,” but also in “außergewöhnlichen Fällen des Alltagslebens” (MA 1,2:13), and invents gods to correspond to these events or phenomena. The educated man, “[d]er Gebildete,” does not see miracles or signs of supernatural intervention in natural phenomena, but rather “nur die Wirkungen der unerforschten, unbegriffnen Naturkräfte”

³⁸⁷ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 107.

(MA 1,2:13), that is, he does not fall victim to the god of the gaps fallacy. These phenomena are “Wunder” in the sense that they cannot (yet) be explained, and because of this they point to “ein Urprin<z>ip,” “ein<en> Inbegriff alles Bestehenden,” a type of harmonious natural force, “die Natur” (MA 1,2:13) as a whole. With this introduction, Büchner aims “eine Thatsache zu beurtheilen” (MA 1,2:13) — to shed light on an event that no one has yet been able to fully explain, and that “Niemand vielleicht ganz aufhellen wird” (MA 1,2:13).

Cicero’s tale in Büchner’s translation is brief: only about half as long as the preface that Büchner added to it. It describes two Arcadians, close friends, who arrive together in Megara. One sleeps at an inn, while the other sleeps at another friend’s house as a guest. The latter has a dream in which the friend with whom he had been traveling is pleading for help because the innkeeper is trying to murder him. He wakes up, startled, but goes back to sleep, deciding that it was only “eine Täuschung des Traums” (MA 1,2:13). After falling asleep once more, his friend appears to him in a second dream, this time covered in blood after the innkeeper has murdered him and thrown his corpse into a carriage full of manure to be taken out of the city.

Büchner’s translation ends here, but it is not the end of Cicero’s tale. Büchner leaves his reader in suspense about whether the Arcadian has actually been murdered — whether the dream was prophetic or meaningless — while Cicero reports that after the second dream, the Arcadian rises early and encounters at the city gate an “Ochsentreiber” (MA 1,2:261). He asks the ox driver what is on his carriage, and of course, it is his friend, whose body must be excavated from the dung and identified. The innkeeper is thus discovered and brought to justice. In Cicero’s version, the message is clear: the dream was not just a dream after all, but a form of supernatural communication, and both Arcadians suffer negative consequences because it was not taken seriously. By omitting the ending in which the dream is proven to be an actual psychic bond between the two friends, Büchner rejects the metaphysical

significance of the story. The open ending, combined with the preface in which the reader is asked to consider the difference between “Aberglauben” (MA 1,2:13) and supposed manifestations of a “geistige[s] Band[es]” (MA 1,2:13) that ties all beings in nature together, constitute a refusal to confirm the dream as a miraculous event. In spite of Büchner’s stated goal in his preface to provide a judgment of this occurrence, to come to some sort of conclusion — “eine Thatsache zu beurtheilen” (MA 1,2:13) — he ultimately does the opposite by taking the stance of the skeptic: he withholds judgment, rather than confirming or denying, when there is a lack of information. Büchner’s worldviews are conflicted during his school years: he was highly influenced by his Protestant upbringing, with some amount of belief in the supernatural, but he was also engaging in theological and metaphysical discussions and beginning to display a preference for a rational, skeptical worldview that would eventually lead him to a materialist position.

The extent to which Büchner was an atheist has been a controversial question in Büchner scholarship. He is sometimes seen as a religious author, with the justification that his disillusionment is a sign of longing for a religious answer to his existential crisis. Jost Hermand, for example, sees “hinter Büchners angeblichem Nihilismus die Sehnsucht nach einer neuen metaphysischen Geborgenheit.”³⁸⁸ M. C. Abutille implies that the character Lenz’s breakdown, a result of his frustrated need for a belief in God, is significant for Büchner,³⁸⁹ and while this frustration was certainly present, James Crighton maintains that “there is no evidence that he [Büchner] sought these [certainties] in religion even having regard to his reported death-bed utterances. It is more likely, at the time when he was interesting himself in Lenz, that it was in science that he was seeking some firm anchor.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Jost Hermand, “Extremfall Büchner. Versuch einer politischen Verortung,” *Monatshefte* 92.4 (2000): 402.

³⁸⁹ Mario Carlo Abutille, *Angst und Zynismus bei Georg Büchner* (Bern: Francke 1969), 108-111.

³⁹⁰ James Crighton, *Büchner and Madness: Schizophrenia in Georg Büchner’s Lenz and Woyzeck* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 153.

More recently, scholars such as Hermann Kurzke have attempted to defend Büchner's religiosity by arguing that he lived in a Christian society, in which even a disbelief in God was not enough to take away the tenacious label of "Christian": "Man war Christ; das schloß nicht aus, daß man Gott leugnete oder lästerte."³⁹¹ Kurzke admits that Büchner was "kein orthodoxer Kirchenchrist."³⁹² Yet he maintains that Büchner's criticisms do not amount to a rejection of Christianity and that he is somehow even more Christian because of them: "Man konnte [...] so heterodox sein, daß es weh tat, und war gerade darin Christ."³⁹³ The majority of scholars would call Büchner neither a Christian nor an atheist, but a materialist and a critic of religion. The strong presence of religious themes in his works, when properly contextualized, are not an "Ausdruck von Religiosität," but rather a "kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Religion."³⁹⁴ The attempts to "rechristianisieren"³⁹⁵ him — in other words, "seinem Materialismus die atheistische Spitze abzubrechen"³⁹⁶ — have rested on interpretations of "manche Zitate des Dichters, die, isoliert betrachtet, tatsächlich eine religiöse Deutung gestatten."³⁹⁷ However, many scholars have noted that Büchner's use of religious themes is strategic: "Im Kontext des Gesamtwerkes freilich erweist es sich, daß den zahlreichen pietistischen Sprachelementen und biblischen Anspielungen ein rein historisch-pragmatisches Verhältnis zur Religion zugrundeliegt."³⁹⁸ He uses biblical references "taktisch-didaktisch,"³⁹⁹ and this is especially clear in *Der hessische Landbote* (1834), in which religious motifs are used in a strategic way.⁴⁰⁰ Both Büchner and his co-author

³⁹¹ Hermann Kurzke, *Georg Büchner. Geschichte eines Genies* (Munich: Beck, 2013), 201.

³⁹² Kurzke, *Geschichte eines Genies*, 39.

³⁹³ Kurzke, *Geschichte eines Genies*, 201.

³⁹⁴ Martin, "Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner," 222.

³⁹⁵ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 105.

³⁹⁶ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 105.

³⁹⁷ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 105.

³⁹⁸ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 105.

³⁹⁹ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 103.

⁴⁰⁰ Martin, "Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner," 225.

Friedrich Ludwig Weidig, a theologian, infused the pamphlet with Bible verses,⁴⁰¹ lending it an “authoritative voice.”⁴⁰² In his later works, however, Büchner no longer employed biblical quotations to this same end; rather, he critically contextualized them, sometimes “to the point of blasphemy.”⁴⁰³ Figures who are reminiscent of Christ, for example, play very different roles in *Der hessische Landbote* than they do in Büchner’s later works. In the political pamphlet, they serve to demonstrate the difference between good and evil, while in *Danton’s Tod*, they are more complex and represent differing perspectives that cannot be so easily categorized as moral or immoral.⁴⁰⁴ Robespierre’s nickname, the “Blutmessias” (MA 3,2:28), highlights the moral gray area that comes with a leader who believes that the ends justify the means. Robespierre repeats the words of Christ, but he does not choose the verses about love or kindness, but rather the verses that have puzzled theologians in their attempt to reconcile Christ’s compassionate nature with his more unforgiving side, such as in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Christ specifies to his disciples that sinning does not only happen in deeds, but also in thoughts: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). Robespierre echoes this in his monologue at the end of I/6: “Die Sünde ist im Gedanken. Ob der Gedanke That wird, ob ihn der Körper nachspielt, das ist Zufall” (MA 3,2:27).

Büchner was also critical of dogmatic forms of atheism, as represented in his unflattering portrayal of the “dogmatischer Atheist” (MA 7,2:14) in *Woyzeck*.⁴⁰⁵ Here it is the

⁴⁰¹ It was thought in older scholarship that the biblical references in *Der hessische Landbote* could be solely attributed to Weidig, but later studies have shown that Büchner added some as well. (See Martin, “Religionskritik bei Georg Büchner,” 225.)

⁴⁰² Trina Kae Young, *Büchner and the Bible: Function, Configuration, and Development of Biblical Quotations in the Works of Georg Büchner* (Dissertation: Ph.D. Department of Languages and Literature, University of Utah 2011), 66.

⁴⁰³ Young, *Büchner and the Bible*, 67.

⁴⁰⁴ Young, *Büchner and the Bible*, 67.

⁴⁰⁵ Büchner was “ein materialistischer Religionskritiker, dem jede dogmatische Verhärtung seines Atheismus und jede sektiererische Berühungsangst fremd war.” (Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,”

dogmatism, and not the atheism, that Büchner seeks to expose. The bulk of his social commentary, however, addresses the injustices that stem from authoritarian forms of religion. Dennis Mahoney states that while Büchner's writings may or may not be an "expression of atheism" in an unequivocal sense, they certainly indicate that "the Idealistic certainty of an overriding sense behind human experience has been supplanted."⁴⁰⁶ Christian explanations "are shown [...] to be clearly inadequate for resolving the crisis of the individual in a world growing devoid of meaning."⁴⁰⁷ Whatever his personal beliefs, his works display a "krisenhafte Erfahrung des Atheismus."⁴⁰⁸ Characters such as Danton, Lenz, Leonce, Valerio, and Woyzeck are "Stellvertreter des Atheismus"⁴⁰⁹ through whom Büchner speaks, allowing him to express a materialistic worldview, while shielding himself from those who would hold him accountable for the atheistic conclusions that can be drawn from materialism.

In 1889, Heinrich von Treitschke described the young Büchner as "ein radicaler Atheist,"⁴¹⁰ in contrast to Friedrich Ludwig Weidig, whom he described as a "christlich-germanischen Schwärmer."⁴¹¹ In the context of Büchner's time, Treitschke's description of him as an atheist is accurate in a relative sense, since many of his contemporary revolutionaries were much more orthodox in their beliefs. Contemporary reactions to Büchner were similar to those of Spinoza, whose proposed "heretical ideas in his time,"⁴¹² in

103.) There is also a political motivation for Büchner's distancing himself from atheism: to avoid committing the same error as the Hébertists in the French Revolution: "Sie [die Hébertisten] hatten mit ihrer dogmatisch-atheistischen Propaganda gerade die bäuerlichen Massen in der Provinz verschreckt und dadurch der Revolution entfremdet." (Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 103.)

⁴⁰⁶ Dennis Mahoney, "The Sufferings of Young Lenz: The Function of Parody in Büchner's 'Lenz'," *Monatshefte* 76.4 (1984): 404.

⁴⁰⁷ Mahoney, "The Sufferings of Young Lenz," 404.

⁴⁰⁸ Christoph Zeller, "'Die Welt als Sekundärliteratur.' Atheismus und Collage bei Eich, Büchner, Jean Paul," in *Georg Büchner: Neue Perspektiven zur internationalen Rezeption*, ed. Dieter Sevin (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2007), 93.

⁴⁰⁹ Zeller, "Die Welt als Sekundärliteratur," 98.

⁴¹⁰ Heinrich von Treitschke, "Der radicale Atheist," in *Georg Büchner und die Moderne. Texte, Analysen, Kommentar. Band I: 1875-1945* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2001), 150.

⁴¹¹ Treitschke, "Der radicale Atheist," 150.

⁴¹² John A. McCarthy, "The Little Divine Machine: The Soul/Body Problem Revisited," in *Neuroscience and Religion: Brain, Mind, Self, and Soul*, ed. Volney P. Gay (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 263.

the sense that they were interpreted as atheism, although we would not call them that today. Spinoza's substance monism — “the notion that there is but a single substance with an infinite number of attributes and that all creatures are modifications of this substance”⁴¹³ — was not tantamount to atheism, but from an orthodox and religious point of view, it was close enough.⁴¹⁴ After studying Spinoza extensively, Büchner clearly adopted his anti-Idealism and anti-teleological worldview in his letters and literary works.

Karl Gutzkow and the Alleged Deconverts of Young Germany

Accusations of atheism played a central role in the controversy surrounding the Young Germany movement in the 1830s, instigated by the publication of Karl Gutzkow's novel *Wally, die Zweiflerin* in 1835 — the same year as the publications of both *Danton's Tod* and David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch betrachtet*. Gutzkow was regarded as the “Stimmführer des Jungen Deutschland”⁴¹⁵ and was the target of the majority of its critics, the most vocal of whom was Wolfgang Menzel. In a series of publications in the *Literatur-Blatt* of the Stuttgart newspaper *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, Menzel attacked Gutzkow as the “Haupt des jungen Deutschland”⁴¹⁶ and named him along with authors that he believed to be involved in the movement. Four weeks after the publication of Menzel's invectives against them, Prussian authorities issued a prohibition that forbade “Heinr[ich] Heine, Carl Gutzkow, Heinr[ich] Laube, Ludolph Weinbarg und Theodor Mundt”⁴¹⁷ from

⁴¹³ McCarthy, “The Little Divine Machine,” 263.

⁴¹⁴ “Die atheistischen Konsequenzen dieser Philosophie, die Spinoza ausdrücklich noch nicht zog, wurden von den jüdischen und christlichen Denkern deutlich gespürt und bewußt herausgearbeitet. Spinoza wurde von der feudalklerikalen Reaktion als abscheuerregender ‘Atheistenfürst’ (*princeps atheorum*) verteufelt, dessen Schriften ‘Ausgeburten der Hölle’ seien.” (Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 116.)

⁴¹⁵ Ariane Martin, *Georg Büchner 1835 bis 1845. Dokumente zur frühen Wirkungsgeschichte* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2014), 26.

⁴¹⁶ Martin, *Georg Büchner 1835 bis 1845*, 30.

⁴¹⁷ *Protokolle der Deutschen Bundesversammlung vom Jahre 1835. Loco dictaturae. Sitzung 1 bis 32* (Frankfurt am Main: Bundes-Präsidial-Druckerei, 1835), 1171. See also Martin, *Georg Büchner 1835 bis 1845*, 31.

making any further publications, followed by a recommendation for a prohibition in all thirty-six states.⁴¹⁸ The prohibition extended to all “Verlags- und Commissions-Artikel der Löwenthalschen Buchhandlung in Mannheim,”⁴¹⁹ Gutzkow’s publisher, as well a ban on the journal *Die deutsche Revue*, which had only been recently announced by Gutzkow and Weinberg. Authors such as Heine and Büchner had been asked to write for the journal. Büchner had, with some hesitation, agreed and was preparing “[e]inige Artikel” (MA 6,1:78) for it when the prohibition was announced. Although he wanted to stay out of these debates (“Ich gehe meinen Weg für mich und bleibe auf dem Felde des Dramas, das mit all diesen Streitfragen nichts zu thun hat,” [MA 6,1:79]), he was ultimately considered a member of the scandalous Young Germany movement, even after he explicitly denied that he belonged to the group. Büchner, like Gutzkow, repeatedly rejected the idea that he was to be held responsible for the moral or immoral conduct of his characters: “[I]ch zeichne meine Charaktere, wie ich sie zur Natur und der Geschichte angemessen halte, und lache über die Leute, welche mich für die Moralität oder Immoralität derselben verantwortlich machen wollen” (MA 6,1:79).

Gutzkow, however, was not in a position to distance himself from the movement as Büchner and Heine were, because he was singled out as the leader and the most dangerous of the group. In addition the prohibition of his writings, Gutzkow was sentenced to one month in the Mannheim prison in January 1836 because of his “verächtlicher Darstellung des Glaubens der christlichen Religionsgemeinschaften,”⁴²⁰ after which he was expelled from Baden.

Wally, die Zweiflerin was not the first of his works to portray religion in an unflattering light. In his satirical novel *Maha Guru. Geschichte eines Gottes* (1833), for example, he criticized

⁴¹⁸ Herbert Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin (1835),” in *Romane und Erzählungen zwischen Romantik und Realismus. Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), 184.

⁴¹⁹ Martin, *Georg Büchner 1835 bis 1845*, 30.

⁴²⁰ Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin,” 184.

the Christian doctrine of revelation and the church institution as a whole.⁴²¹ His drama *Nero* (1835) does not depict a benevolent, loving God, but rather one who treats humans as toys,⁴²² so that in the twenty-first scene a resigned Nero must ask what the purpose of God's creation is: "Warum erschuf er uns? Wer bat ihn drum? / Ich nicht – du nicht – Niemand im Publikum."⁴²³

After *Nero*, Gutzkow created another skeptical thinker in Wally,⁴²⁴ who continued the discourse of doubt and rebellion against an unjust god. She was modeled after the writer Charlotte Stieglitz, whose suicide in 1834 had shocked the literary community. While Stieglitz is said to have stabbed herself in the hopes that her husband would achieve poetic greatness as a result of this catastrophic emotional event, Wally's motive for stabbing herself is her existential despair. Similar to the title character in Büchner's *Lenz*, Wally attempts to form a belief in God, but struggles with doubts and cannot believe, even though she would like to. She knows that she would be happier with the certainty of belief, but she cannot force herself, given that the evidence she has found does not support this claim. She asks herself whether the earnest investigation of the question of God's existence at least constitutes a sort of piety, even if it leads to unbelief: "Sie, die Zweiflerin, die Ungewisse, die Feindin Gottes, war sie nicht frömmer als die, welche sich mit einem nicht verstandenen Glauben beruhigen?"⁴²⁵ This question is effectively unanswerable, since we cannot know which trait a

⁴²¹ Kaiser, "Wally, die Zweiflerin," 185.

⁴²² Takanori Teraoka, "Skepsis und Revolte als Grundzug von *Nero* und *Danton's Tod*. Zur thematisch-motivischen Affinität der Dramen Gutzkows und Büchners," *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 9 (1995-1998): 158.

⁴²³ Karl Gutzkow, *Gesammelte Werke. Vollständig umgearbeitete Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Literarische Anstalt, 1845), 1:120.

⁴²⁴ "Die Heldin Wally ist Neros Nachfolgerin. Kein Wunder, daß die Jungdeutschen, Mundt und Kühne, die Kontinuität der beiden Werke festgestellt haben. Mundt wies darauf indirect hin, indem er den Verfasser der *Wally* 'ein kleines Nero-Ungetüm' nannte, das die Welt 'brennen' sehe und 'vor Freuden die Hände darüber' reibe. Kühne meinte, daß Gutzkow in *Nero* und in *Wally* 'mit der Brennfackel seines Grimmes gegen Totes und Lebendige einhertobt.'" (Teraoka, "Skepsis und Revolte," 171-172.)

⁴²⁵ Karl Gutzkow, *Wally, die Zweiflerin. Roman*. Reprinted from the first edition of 1835 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 305.

hypothetical god values more: authentic disbelief, or blind and unexamined faith. Does he applaud the desire to discover the truth by means of an honest investigation of the world around us, or does he prefer those who follow him uncritically, never being able to explain why they believe? For Wally, finding out what is true is not the same as finding out how to lead a happy life: “Sie hatte die tiefe Ueberzeugung in sich, daß ohne Religion das Leben des Menschen elend ist. Sie ging nun damit um, dem ihrigen ein Ende zu machen.”⁴²⁶ It is not only the Christian faith that is implied here with the term “Religion,” but in a more general sense the “metaphysische Beziehungsunmittelbarkeit, die eine menschliche Wahrheit begründen könnte,”⁴²⁷ as in the case of the Romantic religiosity found in Schleiermacher’s writings. In *Wally*, Gutzkow succeeded in striking “den Nerv der Zeit,”⁴²⁸ and his works as a whole represent an important current of secularization that ensued at the end of the Romantic era. The novel is “eine alle Widersprüche der Zeit umfassende Station der säkularen Entwicklung von der Idee zum Leben,”⁴²⁹ in which the characters attempt “Transzendentalität und Allgemeinheit, gewissermaßen die Fixpunkte des Idealismus, in die Immanenz der Historie zu übersetzen.”⁴³⁰ In this sense, Gutzkow is anticipating the materialist discourse that would occupy the rest of the nineteenth century, in which the immanent, the meaning found in this worldly life, would begin to overshadow the transcendent.

The fact that Wolfgang Menzel and his conservative contemporaries reacted so strongly against *Wally, die Zweiflerin* and the other works they associated with the Young Germany movement further demonstrates that these young authors truly struck a nerve, bringing tensions into view that had previously remained hidden. Menzel accused them of

⁴²⁶ Gutzkow, *Wally, die Zweiflerin*, 305.

⁴²⁷ Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin,” 195.

⁴²⁸ Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin,” 199.

⁴²⁹ Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin,” 199.

⁴³⁰ Kaiser, “Wally, die Zweiflerin,” 199.

immoral behavior, referring repeatedly to their “Unzucht,”⁴³¹ not only as portrayed in their literary works, but also in their daily conduct. Menzel was convinced that sensuality and religion could not coexist, and that the sensual should not act as an expression of divinity, as Romantic authors such as Schlegel had suggested. Menzel asserted that Friedrich Schlegel’s *Lucinde*, “die aus der Wollust ein Sakrament machte,”⁴³² was in the same tradition as *Wally*, “die im Namen des Geistes und der Freiheit jeder edeln Sitte, als einer alten Dummheit, den Krieg erklärt.”⁴³³

Menzel accused the authors associated with Young Germany movement of seeking to undermine Christianity and the authoritative institutions that kept it in power, inspired by the revolt against religion in the French Revolution. He described *Wally* as “das Modell einer neuen Vernunftgöttin, wie sie die Sansculotten damals einführten.”⁴³⁴ Menzel was uncertain of Gutzkow’s desired intention was with the publication of *Wally*, but he did know that he was fervently against it: “Was will er damit? Will er das Christenthum umstürzen? [...] Will er selbst eine neue Religion gründen? Will er die ganze Welt umgestalten?”⁴³⁵ Menzel guessed that Gutzkow’s goal might be to sow the seeds of “Unglauben” and “Entsittlichung” in order to justify his own “Unzucht.”⁴³⁶ Menzel concluded by dubbing *Wally, die Zweiflerin* “eine neue Bibel der Schwäche und des Lasters,”⁴³⁷ and turned to “der alten Bibel der Kraft und der Heiligkeit”⁴³⁸ in an attempt to convert Gutzkow: “daß das Herz in ihm

⁴³¹ Wolfgang Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” in *Politische Avantgarde. 1830-1840. Eine Dokumentation zum “Jungen Deutschland,”* ed. Alfred Estermann (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), 2:43.

⁴³² Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 45.

⁴³³ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 45.

⁴³⁴ Menzel, “Die junge Literatur,” 168.

⁴³⁵ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 46.

⁴³⁶ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 46.

⁴³⁷ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 50.

⁴³⁸ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 50.

erschrecke.”⁴³⁹ To this end, Menzel finished this text by citing three pages of Bible verses that threaten sinners with eternal torture in hell.

Gutzkow defended himself against Menzel’s accusations with several of his own publications, including an “Erklärung gegen Menzel”⁴⁴⁰ and a “Vertheidigung gegen Menzel und Berichtigung einiger Urtheile im Publikum.”⁴⁴¹ Gutzkow stated explicitly: “Ich glaube an Gott,”⁴⁴² in order to ward off future accusations of atheism, which would have come with further negative consequences. He clarified a statement from a dialogue in his *Vorrede to Schleiermachers Vertraute Briefe über die Lucinde*, in which he told his fictitious son that humanity would have been happier if they had never known about God: “Sprich: Wer ist Gott? / Du weißt es nicht: unschuldiger Atheist! philosophisches Kind! / Ach! hätte auch die Welt nie von Gott gewußt, sie würde glücklicher seyn!”⁴⁴³ Gutzkow made the distinction that this is not to say that he does not believe in God, but rather that he thinks that the knowledge of God has done more harm than good:

Glücklicher würde sie seyn, [...] wenn sie von Gott niemals gewußt hätte; glücklicher, wenn keine Betrüger aufgestanden wären und die Völker an den Aberglauben geschmiedet hätten; glücklicher, wenn der Fanatismus keine Scheiterhaufen hätte anzünden können; glücklicher, wenn niemals blutige Religionskriege wären geführt worden.⁴⁴⁴

Because this peace and harmony among humankind is only imaginary, however, Gutzkow instead decided to portray in *Wally* the reality of the harm that religion has done: “Welchen Kummer man um die Religion haben kann, versucht’ ich in meiner Wally zu schildern.”⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁹ Menzel, “Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow,” 50.

⁴⁴⁰ Karl Gutzkow, “Erklärung gegen Menzel,” in *Politische Avantgarde. 1830-1840. Eine Dokumentation zum “Jungen Deutschland,”* ed. Alfred Estermann (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), 2:67-70.

⁴⁴¹ Karl Gutzkow, “Vertheidigung gegen Menzel und Berichtigung einiger Urtheile im Publikum,” in *Politische Avantgarde. 1830-1840. Eine Dokumentation zum “Jungen Deutschland,”* ed. Alfred Estermann (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), 2:70-85.

⁴⁴² Gutzkow, “Vertheidigung gegen Menzel,” 81.

⁴⁴³ Karl Gutzkow, *Schleiermachers Vertraute Briefe über die Lucinde* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1835), XXXVI.

⁴⁴⁴ Gutzkow, “Vertheidigung gegen Menzel,” 81.

⁴⁴⁵ Gutzkow, “Vertheidigung gegen Menzel,” 81.

Gutzkow refused to answer Menzel's question above: "Was will er damit?"⁴⁴⁶ instead asking readers to decide for themselves what role religion should play in humanity's well-being: "Meine *Wally* gibt dir kein Resultat: kehre auf dich selbst zurück [...]. Religion ist Persönlichkeit. Religion ist Alles, was du erlebt hast. Religion ist deine Jugend, deine Vergangenheit."⁴⁴⁷ In another short publication, "Appellation an den gesunden Menschenverstand," Gutzkow defended *Wally* in a way that recalls Büchner's justification for his atheist characters in *Danton's Tod* ("wenn ich ihre Gottlosigkeit zeigen wollte, so mußte ich sie eben wie Atheisten sprechen lassen" [MA 6,1:66]). Gutzkow similarly explained that his characters speak and act in a way that corresponds to the reality in which they live: "Mein Roman schildert Charaktere, die den Haltpunkt ihres Lebens verloren haben und als Hauptcharakter eine Person, die ihn zu finden sucht. Welchen Ton sollt' ich nun anschlagen, um hier den rechten zu treffen? Ich glaube meine Figuren deutlich genug gezeichnet zu haben."⁴⁴⁸

Fatalism, Determinism, Materialism, and the *Fatalismusbrief*

Seldom do a literary work and a personal letter from an author complement one another as well as Büchner's drama *Danton's Tod* and his famous letter to Wilhelmine Jaeglé in March of 1834. Often called the *Fatalismusbrief*, this letter outlines the philosophical and existential problems that preoccupied Büchner in the final years of his life. It contains his rejection of the teleological version of history offered by Christianity, and in this sense the letter is a demonstration of the first phase of deconversion described by John D. Barbour: intellectual doubt. While reading about the history of the French Revolution, Büchner began to doubt the teleological worldview presented to him through his Christian upbringing, and

⁴⁴⁶ Menzel, "Drei Abfertigungen des Dr. Gutzkow," 46.

⁴⁴⁷ Gutzkow, "Vertheidigung gegen Menzel," 84.

⁴⁴⁸ Karl Gutzkow, "Appellation an den gesunden Menschenverstand," in *Politische Avantgarde. 1830-1840. Eine Dokumentation zum "Jungen Deutschland,"* ed. Alfred Estermann (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), 2:95.

continued this intellectual pursuit in an attempt to reconstruct his understanding of history. In the letter, he describes the metaphorical and emotional landscape in which he finds himself: “Hier ist kein Berg, wo Aussicht frei sei. Hügel hinter Hügel und breite Thäler, eine hohle Mittelmäßigkeit in Allem” (MA 6,1:30). He then divulges the subject of his recent readings, the source of his depression: “Ich studierte die Geschichte der Revolution. Ich fühlte mich wie zernichtet unter dem gräßlichen Fatalismus der Geschichte” (MA 6,1:30). Büchner’s understanding of “Fatalismus” entails an annihilation of the meaning of the life of the individual; each person is “nur Schaum auf der Welle,” and existence as a whole is “ein bloßer Zufall” (MA 6,1:30). In this fatalistic worldview, the individual has no control over their life due to the fact that all events are controlled by fate, not by the individual. The *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* defines fatalism as an “absolute blinde Notwendigkeit jedes Geschehens”⁴⁴⁹ that leaves no room for “das geistige Prinzip der Freiheit.”⁴⁵⁰ Implicit in this type of fatalism is, according to the *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, “die praktische Kausalität, d. h. die Bestimmung des Handelns nach Normen,”⁴⁵¹ and this causality can be seen as originating in a supernatural intelligence – a “Kausalität eines höchsten Wesens.”⁴⁵² When fatalism is attributed to a god, it can take the form of theological determinism or predestination, in which the god determines (predestines) all events in history. Predeterminism usually implies that there is an omniscient being, an agent with a teleological intent. Alternatively, this causality can be seen as not stemming from a higher power, but rather from the inner mechanism of physical events. Every event has a cause that preceded it, such that each event is a direct result of preceding conditions, and events are governed by the laws of physics — and in this case, it is similar to

⁴⁴⁹ Jürgen Ruhnau, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, Rudolf Eisler et. al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), 2:913.

⁴⁵⁰ Ruhnau, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:913.

⁴⁵¹ Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, ed. Jürgen Mittelstraß (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 2:478.

⁴⁵² Mittelstraß, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 2:478.

determinism. In yet another understanding of fatalism, fate can also be seen as wielding an arbitrary power that need neither be the source of a higher intelligence, nor a manifestation of predictable causal or deterministic imperatives, but simply a mysterious and impenetrable source from which the events in the universe derive. Büchner's version of "Fatalismus" is fixated on historical events — he sees himself as subjugated to "dem gräßlichen Fatalismus der Geschichte," (MA 6,1:30) which highlights the inescapable causality of previous events, rather than looking forward by considering how past events might shape the future. He seems to have given up the plausibility of free will; he acts only according to the mechanistic processes that control him: "Ich bin ein Automat; die Seele ist mir genommen" (MA 6,1:31). Here Büchner's fatalism reveals that it stems from a deterministic worldview, which in turn is a result of the discourse surrounding materialism that began in ancient Greece.

In 1726, J. G. Walch defined materialism in Spinozistic terms, which maintained that there was only one type of substance, *natura naturans*, and that the infinite substance was God or nature. In substance monism, God or nature is the substance with all possible attributes, and is thus the only substance that exists. Spinoza's monism stands in contrast to dualism, which posits the material and immaterial as separately existing realms.⁴⁵³ Although Spinoza's substance monism is not identical to materialism in the strict sense, it resonated with eighteenth-century materialists such as Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751), who agreed with his rejection of dualism and teleology. La Mettrie's *Histoire naturelle de l'âme* (1745) investigates the sensory capacity of the central nervous system and neurological processes that allow humans to understand their physical surroundings, and concludes that human consciousness originates in the material body.⁴⁵⁴

Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach's *Système de la nature. Ou des loix du monde physique et du monde moral* (1770) systematically summarized the positions of sensualism,

⁴⁵³ Wolfgang Knispel, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 5:842.

⁴⁵⁴ Martin Carrier, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 5:249-250.

materialism, naturalism, determinism, and atheism, all of which played a significant role in French scientific thinking of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵⁵ While earlier Enlightenment era works often restricted themselves to critiques of specific religious doctrines, without, as in the case of Voltaire, calling religion as a whole into question or challenging its social function,⁴⁵⁶ d’Holbach went further in *Système de la nature*, which has been called the “Bibel des Materialismus.”⁴⁵⁷ It rejected the concepts of the soul and any form of supernatural deity and saw human free will as an illusion due to the strict deterministic causality of the universe. The only notion of a god that d’Holbach could support was one in which the deity was equated with “the moving power in nature.”⁴⁵⁸ The work took aim at religion specifically, especially in the second volume in the third and sixth chapters: “Idées confuses et contradictoires de la théologie” and “Du panthéisme ou idées naturelles de la divinité.”⁴⁵⁹ Similar to Feuerbach in the following century, Holbach saw gods as a product of the human imagination, and for him they were clearly an instrument of political control. Diderot praised d’Holbach’s unapologetically atheistic stance in his *Réfutation suivie de l’ouvrage d’Helvétius intitulé L’Homme*: “J’aime une philosophie claire, nette et franche, telle qu’elle est dans le *Système de la nature* et plus encore dans le *Bon Sens*. J’aurais dit à Epicure, Si tu ne crois pas aux dieux, pourquoi les reléguer dans les intervalles des mondes? L’auteur du *Système de la nature*, n’est pas athée dans une page, déiste dans une autre. Sa philosophie est

⁴⁵⁵ Carrier, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 5:250.

⁴⁵⁶ Bodo Morawe, “Heine und Holbach. Zur Religionskritik der radikalen Aufklärung und über zwei zentrale Probleme der Büchner-Forschung,” *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 11 (2005-2008): 241.

⁴⁵⁷ Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus. Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998), 86. See also Roland Mortier, “Le ‘Système de la nature,’ une bible matérialiste,” *Beiträge zur Romantischen Philologie* 15 (1976): 43-71. See also Alan Charles Kors, *The Atheism of d’Holbach and Naigeon*, in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter und David Wooton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 273-300.

⁴⁵⁸ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 112.

⁴⁵⁹ See Morawe, “Heine und Holbach,” 241.

tout d'une pièce."⁴⁶⁰ The materialism of the French Enlightenment had a substantial influence on nineteenth-century thinkers throughout Europe; for example, Karl Marx saw it not only as a fight against the existing political institutions, including religious ones, but also as the downfall of the metaphysical worldview in a broader sense.⁴⁶¹

Materialism stands in contrast to idealism, in which the spirit, the mind, and the realm of ideas are the primary state of reality, while the material world is secondary. Idealism prioritizes the mind and the world of ideas over the material. Novack remarks: "Nature may be the mother but there is a God-Father who transcends her."⁴⁶² For materialists, on the other hand, it is matter that is "the primordial substance, the essence, of reality."⁴⁶³ The natural world is the source of everything "from the galactic systems to the most intimate feelings and boldest thoughts of *homo sapiens*."⁴⁶⁴ The mind is a product of matter, and it cannot exist independently of matter. The material world is an autonomous entity that may contain minds, ideas, and thinking, but only as a result of material interactions. The necessary implication is that immaterial or supernatural entities such as gods, spirits, or souls cannot exist, and certainly cannot have an influence on the natural world. The materialist standpoint is "essentially hostile to religion and the antagonist of all the gods."⁴⁶⁵ While atheism is not synonymous with materialism, it is its logical conclusion: "Atheism is contained in materialism as the fruit is potential in the seed."⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁰ Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes. Édition critique et annotée*, ed. Jean Th. De Booy, Roland Desné, Georges Dulac et. al. (Paris: Hermann, 2004), 24:669.

⁴⁶¹ Knispel, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 5:844.

⁴⁶² Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 6.

⁴⁶³ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 108.

⁴⁶⁶ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 108.

Anti-Teleology in Büchner's Scientific Writings

Büchner's *Probevorlesung* entitled *Über Schädelnerven*, delivered in Zürich on 5 November 1836, situates him within this materialist discourse, and his training as a natural scientist contributed to the phase of intellectual doubt in his deconversion. Büchner moved to Straßburg in 1831 to study medicine at the Académie until 1833 while living with his great uncle Edouard Reuß. There he attended lectures given by the zoologist Georges-Louis Duverney, the physiologist Ernst Alexander Lauth, and other prominent figures in the fields of anatomy and chemistry.⁴⁶⁷ His "atheistischer Materialismus," as Joachim Kahl writes, can be attributed partially to this scientific education in Straßburg, to "seiner naturwissenschaftlichen Forschertätigkeit als Mediziner, als vergleichender Anatom."⁴⁶⁸ The other significant influence was, of course, his ongoing research on the history of the French Revolution. Karl Gutzkow saw Büchner's talent in medicine and natural sciences as one of his greatest strengths. Gutzkow wrote to Büchner on 6 October 1836 after hearing that he was considering leaving the field of medicine:

Sie scheinen die Arzneykunst verlassen zu wollen, womit Sie, wie ich höre, Ihrem Vater keine Freude machen. Seyen Sie nicht ungerecht gegen dies Studium; denn diesem scheinen Sie mir Ihre hauptsächliche Force zu verdanken, ich meine, Ihre seltene Unbefangenheit, fast möcht' ich sagen, Ihre Autopsie, die aus allem spricht, was Sie schreiben. Wenn Sie mit dieser Ungenirtheit unter die deutschen Philosophen treten, muß es einen neuen Effekt geben.⁴⁶⁹

It is not surprising that Büchner's study of medicine influenced his worldview in the direction of materialism. Hippocrates, the most famous of all doctors, was an adherent of Democritus's atomism, in which diseases were finally seen not as directly sent from God, but as the result of natural causes and predictable physiological processes in the body and environmental influences. Epilepsy, for example, had generally been considered a "heilige

⁴⁶⁷ Roland Borgards and Harald Neumeyer, eds., *Büchner-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2009), 381.

⁴⁶⁸ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 104.

⁴⁶⁹ Michael Will, "Autopsie" und "reproduktive Phantasie": *Quellenstudien zu Georg Büchners Erzählung "Lenz"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 13.

Krankheit”⁴⁷⁰ caused by evil spirits until Hippocrates was able to observe the natural neural processes that explained it. The more that doctors investigated the human body, the less they needed to attribute the symptoms of diseases to supernatural causes, as Kahl explains: “Denn eine körperlose Seele zeigte sich nirgends unter dem Messer des Chirugen, wohl aber die unlösbare Verbindung allen Denkens und Fühlens mit körperlichen Abläufen.”⁴⁷¹ This materialism, informed by an education in medicine and natural sciences, is what Georg Büchner had in common with his brother Ludwig, who was eleven years younger and wrote his infamous work *Kraft und Stoff* in 1855. Shortly after its publication, the Württemberg authorities revoked Ludwig’s teaching license as a *Privatdozent* at the University of Tübingen. He was able to earn a living as a practicing doctor in Darmstadt, but he remained a societal outcast due to his reputation as a materialist and an atheist, and was barred from acquiring any university position.⁴⁷² Following the failed revolution in 1848, the Württemberg authorities had little tolerance for anything seen as an attack on religion, “[d]enn ein Angriff auf die Religion war ein Angriff auf die ideologische Hauptstütze der Fürstentherrschaft,”⁴⁷³ since their power was based on the principle of divine right.

Ludwig Büchner held a deep admiration for his older brother’s writings, which he saw as far ahead of their time. He commented that Georg Büchner’s *Mémoire sur le système nerveux du barbeau* contained “eine sehr deutliche Vorahnung der heutzutage herrschend gewordenen und die ganze organische Welt in *einen* großen Gedanken zusammenfassenden *Entwicklungs-Theorie*.”⁴⁷⁴ He went on to compare Georg Büchner to Darwin, speculating on the great contributions his older brother may have made, had he lived longer: “B. würde *vielleicht*, wenn er am Leben geblieben wäre und seine wissenschaftliche Laufbahn weiter

⁴⁷⁰ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 104.

⁴⁷¹ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 104.

⁴⁷² Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 101-102.

⁴⁷³ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 102.

⁴⁷⁴ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 100.

verfolgt hätte, derselbe große Reformator der organischen Naturwissenschaften geworden sein, welchen wir jetzt in *Darwin* verehren.”⁴⁷⁵

Prior to delivering his *Probevorlesung, Über Schädelnerven* and earning a position as a *Privatdozent* at the university in Zürich,⁴⁷⁶ Georg Büchner had already gained some recognition as a natural scientist with a lecture delivered at the *Société d’histoire naturelle* entitled “Sur les nerfs des poissons,” finally published posthumously as *Mémoire sur le système nerveux du barbeau*.⁴⁷⁷ Reports about the lecture were published shortly after Büchner gave it, however, both in well-known scientific journals in French (*L’Institut*) and in German (*Notizen aus dem Gebiete der Natur- und Heilkunde*).⁴⁷⁸ *Über Schädelnerven* is not simply a report of scientific findings; it is also a philosophical text that contains the strongest rejection of teleology in any of Büchner’s works. This philosophized product of anatomy embraces the materialism that Ludwig Büchner later echoed in *Kraft und Stoff*. In *Über Schädelnerven*, the older brother writes: “Die Natur handelt nicht nach Zwecken, [...] sie ist in allen ihren Äußerungen sich unmittelbar *selbst genug*. Alles, was ist, ist um seiner selbst willen da” (MA 8:153), and Ludwig expresses the same idea two decades later in the chapter “Die Zweckmäßigkeit in der Natur (Teleologie)” of *Kraft und Stoff*:

Es kann keinen andern Zweck des Daseins im Einzelnen, wie im Ganzen geben, als das Dasein selbst; und jedes vorhandene Ding oder Leben erfüllt voll und ganz seine Aufgabe, indem es innerhalb seiner individuellen Sphäre Theil nimmt an dem ewigen Leben des in

⁴⁷⁵ Kahl, “Der Fels des Atheismus,” 100.

⁴⁷⁶ Büchner’s relocation to Zürich marks a caesura in his life that is difficult to explain because his interest in political activities seemed to end abruptly, and during this same time he dedicated himself fully to the natural sciences. After his move to Zürich, he never wrote to Karl Gutzkow again, who had been his long-time confidant and fellow political activist. Gutzkow had to learn from a newspaper of Büchner’s death. (Peter Demetz, “Karl Gutzkow und Georg Büchner: Szenen aus dem Vormärz,” in *Literatur und Kritik. Aus Anlaß des 60. Geburtstages von Marcel Reich-Ranicki*, ed. Walter Jens (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980), 216.

⁴⁷⁷ Borgards and Neumeyer, eds., *Büchner-Handbuch*, 386.

⁴⁷⁸ Martin, *Georg Büchner 1835 bis 1845*, 38.

ununterbrochenem Kreislauf sich bewegenden Ganzen oder des Weltalls.⁴⁷⁹

In the opening paragraph of *Über Schädelnerven*, Büchner aims to refute a theory that was popular among his contemporaries in France and England: namely, that behind natural phenomena there lies a teleological principle, originating from outside of nature itself, a sort of guiding principle capable of dictating nature to act in purposeful ways. If the question is: “What determines the way in which living organisms behave?” then the answer is, according to this teleological viewpoint: “sie findet die Lösung des Räthsels in dem Zweck der Wirkung, in dem Nutzen der Verrichtung eines Organs” (MA 8:153). The teleological method observes the way a given organ is used, and instead of seeing it merely as its application, it declares it the purpose of the organ’s existence, and not the result of its existence. In other words, the teleological explanation of nature mistakes the “Wirkung” for the “Zweck.” (MA 8:153). Most succinctly expressed, Büchner’s viewpoint is the inverse of this teleological one: “[W]ir haben nicht Hände, damit wir greifen können, sondern wir greifen, weil wir Hände haben” (MA 8:153). Büchner notes another problem with the teleological method: it results in an infinite regress: “Die *größtmögliche Zweckmäßigkeit* ist das einzige Gesetz der teleologischen Methode; nun fragt man aber natürlich nach dem Zwecke dieses Zweckes, und so macht sie auch ebenso natürlich bei jeder Frage einen *progressus ad infinitum*” (MA 8:153).

In *Über Schädelnerven*, Büchner argues for a “philosophy of monistic materialism”⁴⁸⁰ that was not only broadly inspired by the scientific discourses surrounding materialism at the time, but was also immediately influenced by Goethe’s *Urbildtheorie*, as proposed in his essay *Erster Entwurf einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend*

⁴⁷⁹ Ludwig Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff, oder Grundzüge der natürlichen Weltordnung. Nebst einer darauf gebauten Moral oder Sittenlehre*, 19th edition (Leipzig: Verlag von Theod. Thomas, 1898), 237-238.

⁴⁸⁰ Rodney Taylor, “Georg Büchner’s Materialist Critique of Rationalist Metaphysics,” *Seminar* 22.3 (1986): 189.

von der Osteologie (1795), which in turn built on the work of the French naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire.⁴⁸¹ The *Probevorlesung* also draws from Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677), in which nature is rendered indistinguishable from God, meaning that there can be no purposes in nature: "But if things which are immediately produced by God were made in order that He might obtain the end He had in view, then the last things [...] must be the most perfect of all [...]. [T]his doctrine does away with God's perfection."⁴⁸² This is reflected in Büchner's assertion that nature is not made to follow purposeful rules imposed on it from some external source; rather, it is "sich unmittelbar *selbst genug*" (MA 8:153), existing for its own sake. Ludwig Büchner's comparison of his brother to Darwin is particularly apt here, since two decades after Büchner's *Probevorlesung*, Darwin's discovery of the principle of natural selection would confirm Büchner's anti-teleological point of view. In *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin provided an unprecedented explanation for the vast diversity of life on our planet and deepened our understanding of why nature *appears* to have a hidden, purposeful principle behind it. Individual organisms do in fact have a goal: to survive long enough to reproduce. But this cannot be equated with the type of teleology that Büchner rejects, since it does not originate from an outside source, but rather is encoded into the genetic makeup of the individual. Through the cycles of random genetic mutation, reproduction, and death, it is the organisms that make the best use of their own bodies and their environments whose traits become more prevalent. To use Büchner's own metaphor: we don't have hands *so that* we may grasp things, we grasp things *because we have* hands, and we have those hands because those of our ancestors who, through genetic variations, had appendages that were gradually more hand-like, were able to use them to their advantage and had more offspring, thus passing on the traits for ever more functional hand-like features.

⁴⁸¹ Taylor, "Georg Büchner's Materialist Critique," 193.

⁴⁸² Taylor, "Georg Büchner's Materialist Critique," 195.

While hands are useful and appear to have been designed by a creator, they are in reality not a part of any teleological process.

Determinism and Free Will

One consequence of this anti-teleological, deterministic, ultimately fatalistic worldview is that the concept of free will becomes problematic. Büchner's *Fatalismusbrief* makes it clear that he did at one point subscribe to fatalism as an accurate understanding of history, but to what degree was he also a determinist? Fatalism and determinism overlap in certain ways, and differ in others. They generally agree that human actions are determined by causal events that can be traced back to prior events (even in some cases all the way back to the beginning of the universe); however, determinists do not stress the need to submit to fate, even if the future will inevitably be determined by the chain of events that preceded it. In classical mechanics, determinism refers to a state in which "die Naturgesetze bei vollständig gegebenen Anfangsbedingungen und Randbedingungen die Zeitentwicklung physikalischer Systeme (bei Kontrolle äußerer Einflüsse) eindeutig festlegen."⁴⁸³ In a closed system, if one mass point is given, then every past and future state can theoretically be determined by the Hamiltonian differential equation.⁴⁸⁴ The addition of quantum mechanics into this scenario does add uncertainty, but in the context of determinism and free will, it does not change the ultimate outcome, because despite all of the quantum events that happen on the subatomic level of a human being, the human being is not in control of those events, thus they cannot be said to have free will because of that uncertainty.

The question of whether humans have free will, given what we know now (and what was known in Büchner's time) about the way the physical universe follows natural laws, is the juncture at which determinism conflicts with certain theological doctrines, such as the

⁴⁸³ Klaus Mainzer, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 2:167.

⁴⁸⁴ Mainzer, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 2:167.

versions of Christianity in which free will is required for God to be able to judge human actions and either punish or reward them accordingly. If human actions are simply the result of natural laws, “so kann der Mensch in seinen Entscheidungen nicht frei und für seine Taten nicht wirklich verantwortlich sein.”⁴⁸⁵ In order to keep the freedom of choice intact, and thus be able to justifiably hold humans responsible for their actions, humans would have to have some sort of control over these natural laws, some way to override the combination of their genetics and the sum of their experiences. This is the classic dilemma in which Thomas Aquinas found himself: How can God be in control of the entire universe, presumably also of the humans that he created, and already know how every event will occur, how every human will make every decision, while leaving room for the human to have genuine freedom of choice?⁴⁸⁶ As we saw in chapter three, certain Protestant denominations abandon the need to preserve this freedom of choice, such as Calvinism with its doctrine of predestination. Any freedom to choose one’s own actions, independent of God’s control, would infringe on God’s ultimate power and freedom to create the universe exactly as he wanted it. As Max Weber argues in *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, however, this doctrine left Calvinists in a state of anxiety. The lack of control over their eternal fate resulted in “ein Gefühl einer unerhörten inneren *Vereinsamung des einzelnen Individuums*.”⁴⁸⁷ Thus it is understandable that the Protestant denominations of today have largely abandoned this doctrine of strict predestination, but this leaves them with the unsolved problem of reconciling God’s role as an omniscient and omnipotent creator with the presumed free will of the human that is necessary for God to fairly judge them.

Causal determination does not necessarily negate the individual’s responsibility for their actions, however. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) maintained that free will can exist

⁴⁸⁵ Rainer Kuhlen, Christa Seidel, and Nelly Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁸⁶ Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁸⁷ Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 93.

independently of the causality of natural laws, an “absence of all the impediments to action that are not contained in nature.”⁴⁸⁸ Leibniz attempts to reconcile determinism and free will by distinguishing between “absoluter und hypothetischer Notwendigkeit.”⁴⁸⁹ While the future is determined by past events, it is only the “Vernunftwahrheiten”⁴⁹⁰ that bring about inevitable, necessary events, while the “Tatsachenwahrheiten”⁴⁹¹ are only hypothetically necessary events, and can be changed in a way contrary to deterministic laws. Kant makes another distinction between “‘physicalischem und moralischem’ Zwang”⁴⁹² — the former is unchangeable and deterministic, while the latter is a determination of the will, a self-determination, or a freedom to follow one’s own motivation. This is a kind of compatibilism, which defines free will not as the freedom to act in any possible way, even contradictory to one’s own inclinations (which are products of genetics and past experiences). Compatibilism is deterministic in this aspect, since one’s actions are determined by their own motivation, but free will is still present in this situation. Free will is absent, however, when one’s own motivation is hindered by other individuals or institutions. Modern courts of law operate under this type of compatibilism. Regardless of the causal determinism that created a person’s motivations, a defendant is still responsible for their actions in the event that no outside force compelled those actions. The theme of causal determinism that dominates the *Fatalismus-Brief* and recurs throughout *Danton’s Tod* reflects a palpable shift in Büchner’s understanding of history and the human’s role in it, as Erich Fried notes: “Büchner [war] vom idealistischen Glauben an die Willensfreiheit in Wirklichkeit schon längst zum Determinismus übergegangen, zum grimmigen Materialismus der Geschichtsbetrachtung.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁸ Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁸⁹ Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁹⁰ Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁹¹ Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁹² Kuhlen, Seidel, and Tsouyopoulos, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 2:151.

⁴⁹³ Erich Fried, “Von der Nachfolge dieses jungen Menschen, der nie mehr alt wird,” in *Georg Büchner und die Moderne. Texte, Analysen, Kommentar. Band 3 1980-2002*, ed. Dietmar Goltschnigg (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2004), 3:411.

Theodicy and Deconversion in *Danton's Tod*

Danton's Tod appeared in early July 1835, but only after having been shortened and censored, and with the added subtitle “Dramatische Bilder aus Frankreichs Schreckensherrschaft,”⁴⁹⁴ ostensibly to emphasize that the characters in the play — atheists and revolutionaries — were not to be imitated, but pitied, feared, and reviled. Already in the first scene, Danton calls the Christian version of the afterlife into question, hoping simply for “Ruhe” instead of heaven, and he associates this restful state after death with the sensual pleasures of Julie’s body: “Die Leute sagen im Grab sey Ruhe und Grab und Ruhe seyen eins. Wenn das ist, lieg’ ich in deinem Schooß schon unter der Erde. Du süßes Grab, deine Lippen sind Todtenglocken, deine Stimme ist mein Grabgeläute, deine Brust mein Grabhügel und dein Herz mein Sarg” (MA 3,2:5). “Ruhe” is the one thing that Danton actively desires, as he mentions several times; for example in III/7 when Phillippeau asks him: “Was willst du denn?” (MA 3,2:64) to which Danton replies simply “Ruhe” (MA 3,2:64). Phillippeau suggests that Ruhe is to be found “in Gott” (MA 3,2:64), and Danton responds, “Im Nichts” (MA 3,2:64). This seems to either assert that tranquility is only to be found in nothingness, and not in God, or that God does not exist, i.e. that “in Gott” and “im Nichts” are equivalent: “wenn die höchste Ruhe Gott ist, ist nicht das Nichts Gott? Aber ich bin ein Atheist” (MA 3,2:65). Danton is not afraid of oblivion after his death; rather, he thinks that a complete “Vernichtung” would be ideal. He is not optimistic enough to expect this nothingness, however, and anticipates instead that death will be “nur eine einfachere, das Leben eine verwickeltere, organisirtere Fäulniß” (MA 3,2:64). For Danton, death is nothing more than a short transition “[v]on einem Misthaufen auf den andern” (MA 3,2:65).

The theodicy discussion among Thomas Payne and the other Dantonists in III/1 occupies a central thematic position in the drama, and the fact that Büchner features this

⁴⁹⁴ Borgards and Neumeyer, eds., *Büchner-Handbuch*, 386.

theological dilemma so prominently here, as well as in *Lenz*, indicates that it was a problem that was of some importance to him. In this scene, the prisoners in the Luxembourg palace choose to use their final hours to debate the likelihood of a god's existence. It introduces three new characters: Payne, Mercier, and Chaumette, all of whom do not play a significant role after this scene concludes. The discussion could easily be removed from the drama without disturbing the course of the plot, since it is philosophical rather than political. This then raises the question of why Büchner did in fact include the scene. Joachim Kahl posits that the purpose of III/1 is to provide a forum "für eine wichtige weltanschauliche Aussage [...]": *'Es giebt keinen Gott.'*" Given that this is the only sentence in the entire drama that Büchner highlighted through the use of expanded spacing or *Sperrung*,⁴⁹⁵ it certainly warrants more careful investigation. Theodicy is in fact a moral problem: How can it be morally permissible for an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God to allow his creations to needlessly suffer? Büchner's depiction of theodicy is indicative of Barbour's second phase of deconversion: moral criticism. When the actions of God are suspected to be immoral, a rejection of God is often not far behind.

The theodicy discussion begins when Payne offers to distract Chaumette from his headache by discussing various "Schlüsse" (MA 3,2:47) with him.⁴⁹⁶ Payne offers: "So komm Philosoph Anaxagoras ich will dich katechisiren. *Es giebt keinen Gott*" (MA 3,2:47) after which he lays out his philosophical proofs for God's non-existence. The first rests on

⁴⁹⁵ Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 112.

⁴⁹⁶ Büchner's inclusion of the character Thomas Payne, or Paine, as the historical figure's name was spelled, reminds readers of the rationalist position of Deists during the French Revolution. Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794-1807) included many positions also articulated by skeptics of miracles such as Hermann Samuel Reimarus. As did David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach after him, Thomas Paine treated the Bible as a text to be interpreted like all other texts, and determined that its supernatural claims were not reliable. Like Feuerbach, he rejected any religion that depended on revelation as a means for a deity to communicate with humans, and like Strauss, he found that there was more mythology than history in the stories of the New Testament. When Büchner wrote *Danton's Tod* several decades after the publication of Paine's *Age of Reason*, it was with the knowledge of how much Paine's rationalist reading of the Bible had influenced religious discourses in Germany in the following years at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

the inconsistency in the claim that God is perfect, but is also the creator of an observably imperfect world. God must be the creator of the world, or else he would not qualify as “God.” And if God is “ewig” (MA 3,2:48) then so must his creation be. An eternal God cannot have performed an action that is anchored in time because this would constitute “eine Veränderung” (MA 3,2:48) which cannot exist for a being that knows no time. Thus God cannot have created the world. We can through the power of observation discern that the world exists, so it must have been created at some point in time, but not by anything with the attribute “ewig” (MA 3,2:48) — thus the existence of the world would rule out the existence of God. Mercier suggests that creation might in fact be “ewig” (MA 3,2:48) but Payne, apparently referring to Spinoza’s substance monism, responds: “Dann ist sie schon keine Schöpfung mehr, dann ist sie Eins mit Gott oder ein Attribut desselben” (MA 3,2:48). Spinoza’s version of God is an radically different being from the version of God proposed by the monotheistic religions of the world such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This is why Spinoza, although he was not an atheist in the strict sense, was frequently accused of atheism.⁴⁹⁷ It was enough that the writings of nonconformist thinkers such as Spinoza contained “a materialist bent in their criticisms of the prevailing religious and idealist doctrines to render them suspect of unorthodoxy and susceptible to punishment.”⁴⁹⁸

Payne’s refutation of God’s existence due to the inconsistency between the claims that he is eternal, but also the creator of the world, ultimately has less impact than the refutation for God’s existence that follows, which hinges on the question of theodicy: “Merke Dir es, Anaxagoras, warum leide ich? Das ist der Fels des Atheismus. Das leiseste Zucken des Schmerzes und rege es sich nur in einem Atom, macht einen Riß in der Schöpfung von

⁴⁹⁷ The fates of Roger Bacon and Giordano Bruno are among the most famous, but there are hundreds of examples “from the expulsion of Descartes from France through Spinoza’s excommunication from the Jewish community of Amsterdam to the attacks upon Hobbes and Joseph Priestley in England” (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, xx).

⁴⁹⁸ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, xxi.

oben bis unten” (MA 3,2:49).⁴⁹⁹ The fact that Büchner has a character named Payne expound on the problem of pain underscores how important this unsolvable conundrum was for him. In his school notebooks, the topic of pain appears in his notes about his Spinoza readings: “Wenn man auf die Definition [...] von Gott eingeht, so muß man auch das Daseyn Gottes zugeben. Was berechtigt uns aber, diese Definition zu machen? Der *Verstand*? Er kennt das Vollkommene. Das *Gefühl*? Es kennt den Schmerz” (MA 9,2:12). “Schmerz” is here a philosophical impasse that prevents any god theory from ringing true. Büchner’s inclusion of a theodicy, an attempt to solve this problem of pain and suffering, in *Danton’s Tod* recalls the writings of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who first coined the term in his *Essais de Théodicée* (1710), although ancient philosophers and religious apologists had for centuries attempted to address the same question without giving it a name. From the Greek Θεός (“God”) and δίκη (“trial” or “judgement”), a theodicy attempts to justify the existence of evil and needless suffering in the presence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent deity.⁵⁰⁰ This “trilemma” was expressed by Epicurus in the 2nd century BCE: “Is God willing to prevent

⁴⁹⁹ Anaxagoras, a philosopher of the Ionian school in the fifth century, was condemned for irreligion and forced into exile for claiming that the sun was a “glowing mass of stone” (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, xx) and the moon was of the same material as the earth, contradicting the popular view of the time that the sun and the moon were divine beings. He also devised experiments that demonstrated that physical processes could take place beyond the level of our sensory perception, such as one in which he “took two vessels, one containing a white liquid and the other a black, and then transferred the liquid from one into the other drop by drop. Although physically there must be a change of color with each drop, this change is not discernible until several drops have been mingled. From these experiments, Anaxagoras drew the conclusion that the senses are not exact judges of real conditions, although their perceptions are not wholly misleading. The evidence of sense-perception must be used in order to arrive at the truth: to grasp the invisible, as in a gradual change in color, we must rely on the visible” (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 135). Although this hardly sounds like a heretical experiment, it represents a shift in thinking that would spell the end of animism and a gradual adoption of a materialistic understanding of the universe. The deities of the ancient Greeks were frequently linked to the physical world, such as the god Oceanus, to whom Homer attributed the origin of all things. Thales, the founder of materialism, likewise saw the root of everything in water, but for Thales, this “primal substance is a visible part of the experienced world, a purely natural element.” Eventually the personification of water was no longer deemed necessary, and materialism was all that remained: “*Between the god Oceanus as the first parent, and water, the physical thing, as the basis of explanation, is the decisive shift from animism to materialism, from religion to philosophy*” (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 87).

⁵⁰⁰ Andrea Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy. The “Essais” of Leibniz* (London: Springer, 2013), 3-4.

evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”⁵⁰¹ A common response is that evil is the result of human actions, for which God cannot be held accountable. Because free will is part of a higher good (human freedom), then the evil that is committed in the context of that freedom is necessary. This ignores, however, that much of the suffering in the world is not the result of human actions, but rather of natural disasters, disease, and random happenstance. The death and destruction that occurs after a hurricane or an earthquake is the result of an *act of God*, not an act of man, and few theologians will go as far as to assert that natural disasters are in fact God’s way of punishing humans for abusing their free will by sinning. Payne actually makes this distinction between evil and suffering in *Danton’s Tod*: “Man kann das Böse leugnen, aber nicht den Schmerz” (MA 3,2:49). The existence of evil can be explained away – as part of a larger good, or as the result of human free will and sin – but what of *suffering*? The question, “warum leide ich,” is “der Fels des Atheismus” (MA 3,2:49). Senseless, inexplicable suffering undeniably exists, and for Payne, this is enough to destroy the concept of a benevolent creator: “Das leiseste Zucken des Schmerzes und rege es sich nur in einem Atom, macht einen Riß in der Schöpfung von oben bis unten” (MA 3,2:49). While suffering is the impetus for atheism in *Danton’s Tod*, it has the opposite effect on the theological leanings of Heinrich Heine, which is discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this dissertation. It is under great physical suffering, paralyzed in his bed for the last eight years of his life, that Heine embraced the personal God of the Bible, because he thought that this was the only type of god who could comfort him while he suffered.

Leibniz’s explanation of God in the context of the theodicy problem rests on arguments that are fundamentally *a priori*, not *a posteriori*, because God’s existence, as well

⁵⁰¹ Cited in John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 310.

as his traits as all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful are not the conclusion to the *Theodicee*, but rather its premise.⁵⁰² Instead of observing the world and deducing the characteristics of its creator through it, Leibniz makes several assumptions, and attributes any inconsistencies that result from them to the concept of mystery, which he sees as an essential facet of the Christian faith. He makes two initial claims: first, that we live in the best of all possible worlds, second, that all good is relative. If something appears to be evil, it is only because our perspective is too restricted, and if we were able to see the larger scope, we would determine that that evil was necessary in order to prevent a more significant evil, or to contribute to a larger good, because good always outweighs evil.⁵⁰³ Leibniz's position requires us to accept that the Christian faith is ultimately mysterious, and that it must remain that way.⁵⁰⁴ His declaration that some facets of theodicy are inherently mysterious and cannot be explained through reason ultimately places his essay in the category of apologetics, and not of philosophy. Andrea Poma notes that Leibniz's assumptions – “that ours is the best of all possible worlds despite the existence of evil,”⁵⁰⁵ based on “the premise that a good, wise and powerful God exists who freely willed and created it”⁵⁰⁶ – lack any convincing philosophical underpinnings: “Yet how can philosophy legitimately assume such a premise? Or must philosophy, perhaps, on this point, deny itself and bow down before revealed faith?”⁵⁰⁷

Despite the efforts of many philosophers and theologians, the theodicy problem is still considered unresolved. The result is that many of them, such as Stendhal, conclude that the failure to convincingly explain this paradox is evidence for God's non-existence: “God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist.”⁵⁰⁸ Seen another way, the problem with theodicy is that God is in fact claimed to have a *fourth* characteristic beyond omniscience, omnipotence,

⁵⁰² Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 201.

⁵⁰³ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 103.

⁵⁰⁴ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 29.

⁵⁰⁵ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 201.

⁵⁰⁶ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 201.

⁵⁰⁷ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 201.

⁵⁰⁸ Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy*, 9.

omnibenevolence: *existence*. Taking away any of these solves the puzzle, but because the authors of the canonical Christian scriptures claim in countless verses that God possesses the first three traits,⁵⁰⁹ then the only remaining trait to remove from God is his existence. It is not a vaguely deist version of God whose existence needs to be proven, but specifically the Christian one, which means that the biblical claims of his omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence must be addressed. This is why theodicy is not a problem in many other religious doctrines, which make no claims about the omnibenevolence of their god, or in the case of polytheism, in which gods are fallible, with some bearing responsibility for good, and others for evil.

The importance of the theodicy discussion in the Luxembourg scene is further underscored by the fact that Epicurus, one of the most prominent philosophers to address this conundrum, is mentioned by name several times in *Danton's Tod*, and traces of Epicurean thought are a consistent undercurrent throughout the drama. Epicurean philosophy, one of the later incarnations of materialism in antiquity that had the most followers from about the 4th century BCE to the 2nd century CE, built on the Atomists of the preceding centuries such as Leucippus and Democritus.⁵¹⁰ While Epicureans were materialists, they were not atheists; they believed that gods existed, but not in any supernatural sense. These gods lived “in the spaces between the worlds, occupied with themselves and not bothering about the affairs of

⁵⁰⁹ Claims of God’s omniscience are found in verses such as: “For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens” (Job 28:25) and “By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19-20). Biblical authors claim that God is omnipotent each time they use the descriptor “Almighty,” simply a synonym for “omnipotent,” as in: “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns” (1 John 3:19-20). While it is clear that God punishes sinners, he is considered omnibenevolent in cases when there is no sin involved; for example, he is equated with the concept of love itself: “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Other verses, however, complicate this already ambiguous claim, for example: “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things” (Isaiah 45:7). Here, God claims responsibility for evil, which negates his omnibenevolence. Despite these contradictory biblical claims, Christian tradition ultimately maintains that God is an all-loving creator.

⁵¹⁰ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 249.

men,”⁵¹¹ and were, like everything else in the purely material universe, composed of atoms. The idea of gods that were uninterested in human behavior was so heretical in the eyes of monotheists, however, that it might as well have been atheism; thus the term “Epicurean” began to be used synonymously with “atheism,” such as in the case of orthodox Jews, who adopted as the rabbinical term *Apikoras* (Epicurean) to denote “apostate.”⁵¹²

Another common usage of the term equates it with “sensualism, deliberate indulgence in coarse pleasures, [and] submergence in bodily appetites.”⁵¹³ This definition actually corresponds to the school of hedonism founded by Aristippus, and not to Epicurean teachings. By Büchner’s time, however, an epicure had come to denote something like a hedonist.⁵¹⁴ Historically, the Epicureans emphasized the self-sufficiency of the individual, in contrast to the self-sufficiency of the city-state, as idealists such as Plato promoted, and they sought to undermine the use of religion as a method of subjugating the masses.⁵¹⁵ The indifferent gods of the Epicureans were a threat to religious authorities, who derived their power from the claim that they knew the will of God and were justified in punishing those who did not follow it. Epicurus, like Büchner, rejected teleology: “The heavenly bodies had been created without any purpose in view and so had the organs of mankind.”⁵¹⁶

The conflation of the Epicureans with the hedonists stems from the Epicurean emphasis on reaching happiness by avoiding pain and achieving calm, withdrawing from public life in order to “cultivate [one’s] own garden.”⁵¹⁷ In the absence of any governing deities, the highest good could be reached only by looking after one’s own well-being. This doctrine of self-interest does not imply a lack of ethical behavior; rather, it allows each individual to act in ways that bring them pleasure, which are often altruistic. Büchner rejects

⁵¹¹ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 249.

⁵¹² Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 249.

⁵¹³ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 248.

⁵¹⁴ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 249.

⁵¹⁵ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 252.

⁵¹⁶ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 253.

⁵¹⁷ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 252-253.

this notion that acting solely in one's self-interest corresponds with immorality when Danton answers Robespierre's question in I/6: "Du leugnest die Tugend?" (MA 3,2:25) The categories of "Tugend" and "Laster" are meaningless for Danton: "Es giebt nur Epicuräer und zwar grobe und feine, Christus war der feinste; das ist der einzige Unterschied, den ich zwischen den Menschen herausbringen kann. Jeder handelt seiner Natur gemäß d. h. er thut, was ihm wohl thut" (MA 3,2:25). Büchner did not mean "Epicuräer" in the merely hedonistic sense, since he was familiar with the broader historical context of the Epicurean school in antiquity.⁵¹⁸ Danton's statement indicates that an "Epicuräer" signifies more to him than simply a hedonist, especially in its most often used pejorative sense. Danton sees Christ as the most subtle, the most refined of Epicureans because Christ most closely followed the principles of achieving calm and cultivating his own garden,⁵¹⁹ merely by following his own impulses, rather than subjecting himself to the will of the authorities. All other humans are also Epicureans, but they are "grob" in their execution of it; that is, their impulses lead them to coarser pleasures. Ultimately, however, everyone is the same in that they do what brings them pleasure; the only distinction is that people derive pleasure from different kinds of activities.

Marion expresses this same idea more explicitly in I/5: "Es läuft auf eins hinaus, an was man seine Freude hat, an Leibern, Christusbildern, Blumen oder Kinderspielsachen, es ist das nemliche Gefühl, wer am Meisten genießt, betet am Meisten" (MA 3,2:19-20). Each individual's decisions are rooted in essentially the same motivation: where there is pleasure to be gained. Those who spend their days praying are not displaying more self-control than those who spend their days in the brothel; they simply derive more pleasure from praying than others do. Thus religion ends up in the same category as sensual pleasure, which recalls

⁵¹⁸ Joachim Kahl notes that Büchner was familiar with Epicurean philosophy "in ihrer ganzen Breite," as demonstrated by Büchner's excerpts from the philosophical history of Wilhelm Gottlieb Tenneman (Kahl, "Der Fels des Atheismus," 119.)

⁵¹⁹ Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, 252-253.

the Romantic understanding of sensuality as an expression of the divine. Margaret Jacobs, in her edition of *Danton's Tod*, links Marion's statement to a statement made by Violette's mother in Brentano's *Godwi*: "Religion sei nichts als unbestimmte Sinnlichkeit, das Gebet ihre Äußerung" (FBA 16.1:517). Brentano's statement, however, lacks the Epicurean implication found in Marion's. For Brentano, surrender to religious feelings results in pleasure because the divine is the source of all pleasure, while for Marion, religious practices are merely one option in the pursuit of pleasure. Equal pleasure can be gained from non-religious activities; the divine is not privileged over the physical gratification of the material world. Marion seems to imply not only that physical pleasures are equal to metaphysical ones, but also that the pleasure one gets from praying essentially boils down to the sensual experience that accompanies religious practices. In a materialist view, there is no antenna to the divine: the pleasure comes from within, not from without. Marion's allusion to Epicureanism is situated at the end of the first act, and, as Cowen notes, it establishes an important theme for the rest of drama: "the theme of man's captivity in the world of his senses."⁵²⁰

Traditional religious notions of morality no longer make sense in this framework, because every person's action has the same intention — pleasure — and so cannot be judged as good or evil. This leads us back to determinism: individuals act only in ways that are dictated by their genetics and past experiences, leaving little room for a notion of free will. In the absence of this absolute free will, the concepts of morality and immorality begin to crumble. When Robespierre asks Danton if he denies virtue, the latter answers that he recognizes neither virtue nor vice, since "[j]eder handelt seiner Natur gemäß" (MA 3,2:25). This is a significant aspect of determinism: one cannot act contrary to one's nature, and one's nature is the sum of one's genetics and past experiences.

⁵²⁰ Roy C. Cowen, "Grabbe's *Don Juan und Faust* and Georg Bücher's *Dantons Tod*: Epicurianism and *Weltschmerz*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 82.5 (1967): 349.

In the Luxembourg scene, Payne echoes Danton's earlier denial of the concepts of Christian? vice and virtue. Payne rejects the idea of a fixed morality that requires humans to adjust their actions accordingly: "Ich weiß nicht ob es an und für sich was Böses oder was Gutes giebt, und habe deßwegen doch nicht nöthig meine Handlungsweise zu ändern" (MA 3,2:49-50). He then repeats Danton's earlier statement almost verbatim, merely changing the impersonal pronoun that Danton uses into the first person, speaking about himself: "Ich handle meiner Natur gemäß" (MA 3,2:50). As in Epicurean teachings, Payne rejects the idea of a governing force, a supernatural deity that judges the actions of human beings as good or evil.

The Revolutionaries as Objects of the Revolution

Another theme related to determinism in *Danton's Tod* is that of the human as a doll or a puppet, which had been popular in Romanticism and was famously embodied in Olimpia, the wooden simulacrum in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816). Büchner had already begun to see himself as an automaton in his *Fatalismusbrief* — "Ich bin ein Automat; die Seele ist mir genommen" (MA 6,1:31) — and he continued to explore this idea in the drama, in which humans are continually presented as objects, as material entities whose primary purpose lies in their usefulness as a means to an ideological end. Danton's resignation throughout the drama is a result of his sense of powerlessness, which he shared with Büchner himself as demonstrated in the *Fatalismusbrief*. This resignation corresponds to the third phase in Barbour's theory of deconversion: emotional suffering. Indeed, all of the characters in *Danton's Tod* who feel that they are objects of the revolution, instead of autonomous agents, display this emotional suffering to some degree. In believing in the revolution, they exhibit the features of a conversion, or specifically, a deconversion, and experience the emotional suffering that accompanies it.

This is demonstrated in II/2 in an exchange between Simon and an unnamed citizen, who tells the former: “Meine gute Cornelia hat mich mit einem Knäblein erfreut” (MA 3,2:33). Simon corrects him: “Hat der Republik einen Sohn geboren” (MA 3,2:33). The citizen replies that this sounds “zu allgemein,” and Simon clarifies that that is precisely his meaning: “Das ist’s gerade, das Einzelne muß sich dem Allgemeinen” – and presumably he would have continued with a verb such as “opfern,” but the citizen interrupts him to say that he has heard this argument before: “Ach ja, das sagt meine Frau auch” (MA 3,2:33). In the eyes of the revolution, there is no such thing as an individual; each revolutionary belongs to the revolution in the way that each atom that makes up a human being is not autonomous, but exists exclusively to serve the larger entity.

Danton repeatedly expresses that he sees himself as an object rather than as a subject; for example, he calls himself a relic: “Ich bin eine Reliquie und Reliquien wirft man auf die Gasse” (MA 3,2:30). Not only is he an object, no different from all other objects in the material world, but he is also an object that has lost its utility and deserves to be thrown away. Given the religious connotations of the word “Reliquie,” this may also be a commentary of the obsolescence of religion and its claim to meaning in Danton’s eyes: relics are no longer to be preserved and treasured, but thrown away on the street. In III/7, Danton describes the human body as an object in terms of its usefulness to the revolution; human flesh has become a sort of currency: “Man arbeitet heut zu Tag Alles in Menschenfleisch. Das ist der Fluch unserer Zeit. Mein Leib wird jetzt auch verbraucht” (MA 3,2:53). The revolution is the sentient being, the decision-maker, while the revolutionaries are the clay with which it molds the future. When Herrmann asks for Danton’s name in III/4, Danton again places the revolution in the role of the agent, and sees himself as the passive recipient of the action, whose relevance as individual is quickly waning: “Die Revolution nennt meinen Namen. Meine Wohnung ist bald im Nichts und mein Name im Pantheon der

Geschichte” (MA 3,2:54). II/5 contains Danton’s most succinct expression of the revolution as agent: “Wir haben nicht die Revolution, sondern die Revolution hat uns gemacht” (MA 3,2:31). He again declares his passive role in the revolution when reflecting on his regrets after the *Septembemorde*: “ich will lieber guillotiniert werden, als guillotiniere lassen” (MA 3,2:31). He would much rather be the object of murderous act, than be in the position to murder others. His reference to the guillotine is symbolic: it is a simple apparatus that employs the laws of physics — gravity — to rearrange objects in the material world (separating heads from bodies), which ultimately not only has an effect on the physical world, but also changes the realm of ideas, shifting political power and strengthening ideologies in its wake. The guillotine as an agent – an arm of the revolution – is ultimately evidence that materialism is the accurate way to view the universe: ideas only exist as a result of what happens in the material world, such as the decisive action taken by the guillotine.

The agency of the revolution, as an external force acting upon the people, leads to a further dimension in which the revolution is a form of conversion. Conversion is often not defined as an action taken by an individual, but rather a result of God’s decision to convert them. The origin of the transformation — whether it is a revolution or a religious conversion – can be seen both ways: as originating within the individual, or as being imposed on the individual by an amorphous, possibly supernatural force. Paul, for example, emphasized in his New Testament writings that his conversion did not originate from his own searching, nor from the teachings of any of Christ’s followers, but he “received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Just as Danton believes that “wir haben nicht die Revolution, sondern die Revolution hat uns gemacht” (MA 3,2:31). Paul did not *convert*, but *was converted*.

Danton again expresses his lack of agency and materialistic outlook with a metaphor about mill machinery. Several of the most important catchwords in the tradition of

materialism appear in a single sentence: “[E]s ist mir, als wäre ich in ein Mühlwerk gefallen und die Glieder würden mir langsam systematisch von der kalten physischen Gewalt abgedreht: So mechanisch getötet zu werden!” (MA 3,2:64) In this image, Danton’s body is being pulled about by mechanistic processes, but elsewhere he sees his body itself as a machine: “So ein armseeliges Instrument zu seyn, auf dem eine Saite immer nur einen Ton angiebt!” (MA 3,2:21) A stringed instrument does not in any way have free will; it cannot *decide* which note to make when played, and humans, just like these instruments, are objects in the material universe, made of atoms that are subject to the laws of physics.

The determinism implied in Büchner’s depictions of humans as automata leads him to a fundamental conclusion about free will: in all human actions, there is a “Muß” (MA 3,2:41) that cannot be avoided. No matter how much Danton desires for everyone to have peace — “Wir sollten uns nebeneinander setzen und Ruhe haben” (MA 3,2:31) — there is a fundamental flaw in the way human beings are configured: “Es wurde ein Fehler gemacht, wie wir geschaffen worden, es fehlt uns was, ich habe keinen Namen dafür, wir werden es uns einander nicht aus den Eingeweiden herauswühlen, was sollen wir uns drum die Leiber aufbrechen?” (MA 3,2:31) Violence seems to be hard-wired, so that we desire peace, but are deterministically forced to wage war on one another. In his *Fatalismusbrief*, Büchner expresses this same idea that violence seems to be unavoidable: “Ich gewöhnte mein Auge ans Blut,” and also his desire for humanity to overcome it: “Aber ich bin kein Guillotinenmesser” (MA 6,1:30). Danton says that there is deeply rooted a “Fehler” in human nature, and asks “Was ist das, was in uns hurt, lügt, stiehlt und mordet?” (MA 3,2:41). Büchner had already asked this question in his *Fatalismusbrief* with almost the exact same wording: “Was ist das, was in uns lügt, mordet, stiehlt?” (MA 6,1:31) Our inclination to cause harm to one another, Büchner suggests, seems so universal that it must be part of our programming.

In the *Fatalismusbrief*, as well as in *Danton's Tod*, these two ideas come one after the other: a lamentation that violence is inevitable (emotional suffering), followed by an affirmation of determinism and a negation of free will. In his drama, Danton rejects the concept of free will when Julie tries to make him see the optimistic side of the *Septembormorde* by reminding him that there was a positive outcome: “Du hast das Vaterland gerettet” (MA 3,2:41). Danton admits that the deaths had to take place because they occurred out of “Nothwehr” (MA 3,2:41). but instead of viewing them as a reason to feel less guilty, they seem to him evidence that we live in a deterministic universe. Here he uses a biblical reference: “Der Mann am Kreuze hat sich's bequem gemacht: es muß ja Aergerniß kommen, doch wehe dem, durch welchen Aergerniß kommt” (MA 3,2:41). The *Fatalismusbrief* contains the same statement, with Büchner's commentary: “Der Ausspruch: es muß ja Ärgernis kommen, aber wehe dem, durch den es kommt, – ist schauderhaft” (MA 6,1:31).

These two references to an inexorable “Ärgernis” are an almost verbatim citation from the Book of Matthew: “Es muß ja Ärgernis kommen; doch weh dem Menschen, durch welchen Ärgernis kommt!”⁵²¹ It also alludes to Luke, in which Jesus says to his disciples: “Es ist unmöglich, daß nicht Ärgernisse kommen; weh aber dem, durch welchen sie kommen!”⁵²² These verses highlight the basic conflict in the fact that God's plan contains sin, while he at the same time expects humans not to sin and is prepared to torture them eternally when they are unlucky enough to play the role of the sinner in his plan, even though they could not have done otherwise. Most forms of Christianity maintain the doctrine that God has a plan that humans cannot influence, but also that humans have free will, because free will is necessary if God's judgment and doling out of rewards and punishments is to be deemed fair and moral,

⁵²¹ Matthew 18:7. Here I cite Martin Luther's translation of the Bible in order to emphasize the similarities between the biblical language and Büchner's writing.

⁵²² Luke 17:1, Martin Luther's translation.

as discussed above. In other words, “[p]ersönliche Verantwortlichkeit und Vorausbestimmung, welche eigentlich alles freie Handeln ausschließt, widerstreiten einander.”⁵²³ In the context of the New Testament, the sin that is an immutable part of God’s plan is the crucifixion of Christ. This execution must take place — it is an absolutely essential component in God’s plan — but whoever happens to be the agent of it is essentially being forced by God to sin. Danton recognizes this contradiction and cannot find a solution to it: “Wer will der Hand fluchen, auf die der Fluch des Muß gefallen? Wer hat das *Muß* gesprochen, wer?” (MA 3,2:41) His only explanation is that we are all “Puppen,” “von unbekanntem Gewalten am Draht gezogen” (MA 3,2:41), and this leaves no room for the Christian doctrine of free will. The string attached to the marionette has the same function as the string on the “armseeliges Instrument” (MA 3,2:21) mentioned above. It acts only according to the laws of physics or other unknown forces; in no sense does it have a will of its own. Since the marionette has no control over the intentions of these “unbekanntem Gewalten” (MA 3,2:41), the best it can do is hope that it is chosen to play the hero in the story, and not the villain.

Gutzkow’s drama *Nero* uses this same marionette motif to expose the injustice of a God whose creations are designed to sin, yet still punishes them for it:

O Gott, er läßt uns tief im Koth, im Trüben,
 Und verlangt noch, ihn zu lieben.
 Man spricht vom Unterschied des Guten und des Bösen,
 Und Jeder müsse sich durch sich selbst erlösen,
 Das nennt man die einstige Vergeltung,
 Als wäre der Mensch nicht Gottes eigne Verweltung,
 Als wär’ es göttlich, uns entstehen lassen,
 Und dann zuletzt uns bei Wort und That zu fassen.
 Es wäre doch, wie man Komödie spielt,
 Wenn uns der Himmel deßhalb hätt’ erzielt,
 Daß wir gleich Puppen machen unser Wesen,

⁵²³ Anneliese Bach, “Verantwortlichkeit und Fatalismus in Georg Büchners Drama *Dantons Tod*,” *Wirkendes Wort* 6 (1955/56): 224.

Und dann hingegen zur Belohnung des Guten und Bösen.⁵²⁴

Danton agrees with Nero that humans are merely God's puppets, and he determines that, given this deplorable situation, the best one can hope for is to be God's favorite puppet. He sees Christ's role as the crucified victim as the most enviable one — "Der Mann am Kreuze hat sich's bequem gemacht" (MA 3,2:41) — because it is the others who will be held accountable for the sin of murder, and not Christ himself, recalling Danton's earlier statement that he would prefer to be the passive recipient of violence, rather than the agent of it: "[I]ch will lieber guillotiniert werden, als guillotiniere lassen" (MA 3,2:31). Robespierre, the Christ-figure with blood on his hands, recognizes this same duality: if violence must be done, then one must choose whether to be the perpetrator or the victim. Robespierre compares himself to Christ, wondering whether it is easier to be the crucifier or the crucified: "Ja wohl, Blutmessias, der opfert und nicht geopfert wird. — Er hat sie mit seinem Blut erlöst und ich erlöse sie mit ihrem eignen. Er hat sie sündigen gemacht und ich nehme die Sünde auf mich. Er hatte die Wollust des Schmerzes und ich habe die Quaal des Henkers. Wer hat sich mehr verleugnet, Ich oder er?" (MA 3,2:29) Ultimately Danton sees no way out of the deterministic progression of history that precludes his free will, and he concludes that it is better to abstain from action completely, as Takanori Teraoka describes it: "Nicht nur bringt das Puppen-Motiv die Mechanik der Geschichte und der Natur ans Licht, die jede idealistische These von dem freien Willen des Menschen vereitelt, vielmehr entzieht sich Danton dem Befehl des 'Muß' dadurch, daß er nicht mehr handelt."⁵²⁵

This philosophical exercise in sorting out God's plan from the claim that humans have free will yields a similar result as the theodicy discussion in III/3: God may exist, but he cannot have all of the characteristics that are attributed to him. In both cases, the most

⁵²⁴ Karl Gutzkow, *Gesammelte Werke. Vollständig umgearbeitete Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Literarische Anstalt, 1845), 1:120.

⁵²⁵ Teraoka, "Skepsis und Revolte," 159.

plausible answer is that the creator of a universe like ours is not a benevolent one. In the context of Danton's revelation that free will is an illusion, the conclusion is the same: if God exists, he would be malevolent. This realization that an existing God cannot be benevolent is another example of moral criticism, the second phase in Barbour's deconversion model. The fact that Büchner leaves this discussion open, rather than providing any satisfying conclusion, indicates that this moral criticism played a role in his deconversion.

Conversion and Deconversion in *Lenz*

In *Lenz*, Büchner revisits many of the prominent themes from *Danton's Tod*, especially concerning religion, and his title character displays behavior that corresponds to all four of Barbour's phases of deconversion: intellectual doubt, moral criticism, emotional suffering, and rejection of the religious community. His intellectual doubt begins when his repeated attempts to study the Bible do not provide him the clarity that he seeks. And just as in *Danton's Tod*, moral criticism appears in the form of theodicy when Lenz cries to Oberlin: "[A]ber ich, wär' ich allmächtig, sehen Sie, wenn ich so wäre, und ich könnte das Leiden nicht ertragen, ich würde retten, retten" (MA 5:47). His emotional suffering permeates the novel fragment so deeply that there are far too many examples to cite them all: "Schmerz" appears nine times, "Leid" appears seven times, and "Qual" appears six times. Finally, Lenz rejects the religious community by fleeing civilization and attempting suicide, demonstrating that he believes they cannot help him any longer.

Büchner depicts in *Lenz* his literary interpretation of the historical *Sturm und Drang* poet and dramatist Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, whose "religiöse[] Quälereien" (MA 5:42) occupy a central thematic position. The text relies to a large degree on the report written by the pastor Jean Frédéric Oberlin, who attributes Lenz's mental anguish to his inability to develop a relationship with God. When Lenz tells Oberlin that he is dependent on him for

spiritual guidance, and is lost without him (“Nur in Ihnen ist der Weg zu Gott. Doch mit mir ist’s aus! Ich bin abgefallen, verdammt in Ewigkeit, ich bin der ewige Jude” [MA 5:43]), Oberlin comforts him, as Büchner paraphrases: “[D]afür sey Jesus gestorben, er möge sich brünstig an ihn wenden, und er würde Theil haben an seiner Gnade” (MA 5:43). Later, Oberlin proposes as a solution for Lenz’s purposelessness: “er möge sich zu Gott wenden” (MA 5:44), and as a remedy for his insomnia: “wenn er nicht schlafen könne, sich mit Gott zu unterhalten” (MA 5:46). In response to Lenz’s self-flagellation, Oberlin tells him to turn to God once again: “er möchte ruhig seyn, seine Sachen in Gott allein ausmachen, alle möglichen Schläge würden keine einzige seiner Sünden tilgen; dafür hätte Jesus gesorgt, zu dem möchte er sich wenden” (MA 5:44). When Lenz comes to him with anxieties about death, Oberlin has a similar answer: “es möge seyn, wie es wolle, so könne und werde Gott, wenn er sich zu ihm bekehrt haben würde, diese Person auf sein Gebet und Thränen soviel Gutes erweisen, daß der Nutzen, den sie alsdann von ihm hätten, den Schaden, den er ihnen zugefügt, vielleicht weit überwiegen würde” (MA 5:44). This statement is, like many others, taken almost verbatim from Oberlin’s report.⁵²⁶ Here, the verb “bekehren” reveals that Lenz is in fact a conversion story – or more precisely, a deconversion story.

The text’s action consists almost entirely of Lenz’s frustrated efforts to overcome his inability to cope with religious challenges, and his primary strategy is to improve his spirituality by consulting Oberlin, reading the Bible, delivering a sermon, and attempting to raise a child from the dead. Lenz does have marginal success in his quest and experiences some amount of relief, but it is only in a church courtyard – the graveyard – that he feels “[e]in süßes Gefühl unendlichen Wohls” (MA 5:35). Although this scene takes place on a spring morning, Lenz’s sense of connection to God is overshadowed by the fact that it is in

⁵²⁶ August Stöber, “Der Dichter Lenz, im Steinthale,” in *Der Text, der (produktive) Unverstand des Abschreibers und die Literaturgeschichte. Johann Friedrich Oberlins Bericht Herr L..... und die Textüberlieferung bis zu Georg Büchners Lenz-Entwurf*, ed. Hubert Gersch (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 42.

the company of the dead that he feels if encompassed by “eine harmonische Welle” (MA 5:35), thus the scene is a dark commentary on Lenz’s short-lived spirituality. The sense of calm and levity in the scene quickly transforms into something more ominous as soon as Lenz enters the church. The church music causes a “tiefen unnennbaren Schmerz” (MA 5:35), and when he returns home and enters his room, he is overwhelmed by the intensity of this stimulus: “Er war allein, allein! Da rauschte die Quelle, Ströme brachen aus seinen Augen, er krümmte sich in sich, es zuckten seine Glieder, es war ihm als müsse er sich auflösen, er konnte kein Ende finden der Wollust” (MA 5:35).

The question then arises: Why do both Oberlin and Lenz, despite their prolonged and concentrated efforts, fail to instill in Lenz a genuine belief in God? A closer investigation suggests that Lenz cannot be cured by religious methods because his problem was never a spiritual one; that is, it is not rooted in the supernatural realm, but in the natural, physical world of materialism. Scholars have recognized in Büchner’s *Lenz* a case of mental illness, specifically one of schizophrenia, and it is apparent that Büchner was a keen observer of mental illnesses and studied their symptoms to the best of his ability during his time.⁵²⁷ As in so many other instances since the advent of modern science, a phenomenon that was once thought to have supernatural origins proves to be a result of natural processes. In this case, Lenz’s “religiöse[] Quälereien” (MA 5:42) turn out to be the result of chemical imbalances in his brain, and no amount of prayer can remedy them. The scene in which he attempts to reanimate the dead child demonstrates the futility of his efforts to feel a connection to God:

Das Kind kam ihm so verlassen vor, und er sich so allein und einsam; er warf sich über die Leiche nieder; der Tod erschreckte ihn, ein heftiger

⁵²⁷ In *Lenz*, “Büchner describes the physical manifestations of what is now referred to as hebephrenia, the most common form of schizophrenia. The subject becomes increasingly detached from reality, exhibits abnormal mannerisms and gives evidence of untidiness and indifferences about personal appearance. Schizophrenia victims also tend to lose control of their senses or confuse and misinterpret the impulses sent to their brain. This dissociation can be readily seen in Lenz’ fear of blindness, his impression that his senses are failing him or that his limbs are growing weak” (William Charles Reeve, *Materialistic and Realistic Elements in the Works of Georg Büchner*, Cornell University Thesis in Philosophy 1970, 176.)

Schmerz faßte ihn an, diese Züge, dieses stille Gesicht sollte verwesen, er warf sich nieder, er betete mit allem Jammer der Verzweiflung, daß Gott ein Zeichen an ihm thue, und das Kind beleben möge, wie er schwach und unglücklich sey [...]. (MA 5:42)

After his incantation, “Stehe auf und wandle” (MA 5:42), is met with an empty echo and an unchanged corpse, he flees into the mountains.⁵²⁸ There he finally undergoes a fundamental transformation, but not one of turning toward God, as he had been hoping. In fact, this is the final step in his deconversion: his flight into the mountains constitutes a rejection of the religious community, in Barbour’s deconversion model. He feels in his breast “ein Triumph-Gesang der Hölle” (MA 5:43), and he laughs aloud: “Lenz mußte laut lachen, und mit diesem Lachen griff der Atheismus in ihn und faßte ihn ganz sicher und ruhig und fest” (MA 5:43). This spontaneous laughter as a result of a traumatic event is reminiscent of the Sunday scene mentioned above in which Lenz experiences both “Schmerz” and “Wollust” (MA 5:35) simultaneously. Bruno Hillebrand sees these contrasting sensations as an “analytische[n] Griff des Poeten Büchner”⁵²⁹ that communicates the message: “Der Nihilismus wurde zum Lusterlebnis.”⁵³⁰

This moment of atheistic laughter marks a point of no return that makes it clear that what began as a story of attempted conversion has instead become a story of deconversion. Just as in *Danton’s Tod*, atheism results when the problem of theodicy proves unsolvable. In the drama, “Schmerz” is identified as the “Fels des Atheismus” (MA 3,2:49) after Payne has determined that there is no way to explain how a benevolent god would allow such immense suffering to exist. The theme of suffering also occupies a central position in *Lenz*; for example, it is the subject of the hymn that Lenz finds so moving in the church scene:

Laß in mir die heil’gen Schmerzen,

⁵²⁸ This phrase appears several times in the New Testament in various contexts. In John, for example, Jesus heals a sick man who has been bedridden for thirty-eight years: “Jesus spricht zu ihm: Stehe auf, nimm dein Bett und gehe hin!” (John 5:8, Luther Bible) See also Matthew 9:5, Mark 2:9-11, Mark 5:39-41, and Luke 5:23.

⁵²⁹ Hillebrand, *Ästhetik des Nihilismus*, 47.

⁵³⁰ Hillebrand, *Ästhetik des Nihilismus*, 47.

Tiefe Brunnen ganz aufbrechen;
Leiden sey all' mein Gewinnst,
Leiden sey mein Gottesdienst. (MA 5:35)

As much as Lenz would like to reconcile the idea of suffering with the claim that God is benevolent, ultimately he cannot do this. Near the end of the text, he looks at Oberlin “mit einem Ausdruck unendlichen Leidens” (MA 5:47) and utters a sentence that expresses both the moral criticism and emotional suffering in his deconversion: “[A]ber ich, wär' ich allmächtig, sehen Sie, wenn ich so wäre, und ich könnte das Leiden nicht ertragen, ich würde retten, retten” (MA 5:47) after which he expresses his desire for “Ruhe” (MA 5:47) just as Danton did.⁵³¹

Lenz is not brought closer to God because of his suffering, as was the case for Heinrich Heine near the end of his life, as we shall see, but rather finds that his suffering leaves him no option but atheism, just as in the Luxembourg prisoners in *Danton's Tod*. Hermann Kurzke proposes in his biography of Büchner that suffering is in fact one of God's strategies for making his creatures believe in him: “Aber war das Leiden wirklich der Fels des Atheismus? Das könnte man doch auch ganz anders sehen. Wo es einen Riß gibt, kommt Licht herein.”⁵³² God demands that we suffer in order to learn to worship him properly: “Not lehrt beten, Wohlsein nicht.”⁵³³ Kurzke claims that Büchner knows that “Gott ist groß im Schmerz, nicht in Zeiten der Schmerzlosigkeit,”⁵³⁴ which he substantiates by noting that Lenz sings the verse of the hymn “Leiden sei mein Gottesdienst.”⁵³⁵ But Lenz, however fervently

⁵³¹ Abutille identifies as an important contributory factor to Lenz's breakdown his frustrated need for belief in God (Mario Carlo Abutille, *Angst und Zynismus bei Georg Büchner* [Bern: Francke 1969], 108-11), and implies that this was of some significance for Büchner. While it is true that the turbulence that marked his increasing political disillusion must have sometimes led him to a wish for certainties, there is no evidence that he sought these in religion even having regard to his reported death-bed utterances. It is more likely, at the time when he was interesting himself in Lenz, that it was in science that he was seeking some firm anchor.” (James Crichton, *Büchner and Madness: Schizophrenia in Georg Büchner's Lenz and Woyzeck* [New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998], 153.)

⁵³² Hermann Kurzke, *Georg Büchner: Geschichte eines Genies* (Munich: Beck, 2013), 204.

⁵³³ Kurzke, *Georg Büchner: Geschichte eines Genies*, 204.

⁵³⁴ Kurzke, *Georg Büchner: Geschichte eines Genies*, 204.

⁵³⁵ Kurzke, *Georg Büchner: Geschichte eines Genies*, 204.

he would like to imagine that suffering and love of God go hand in hand, ultimately does not believe the words that he sings. A sadistic god, one who creates imperfect beings only to then use suffering to teach them a lesson, is not the benevolent god with whom Lenz aspires to make a connection.

Several Büchner scholars have noted that Lenz anticipates the proclamation by Nietzsche's madman in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) by also declaring God dead as a result of what Sylvain Guarda calls "die Ursache [...], an der jeder Gott stirbt: der Ohnmacht gegenüber dem menschlichen Darben."⁵³⁶ Just as in *Danton's Tod*, God's failure to intervene in the face of the horrific suffering of innocents means his ultimate demise. William Collins Donahue proposes that the unsolved theodicy in *Lenz* could also result in the reader's own theological crisis: "Büchner will attempt to make this theodicy crisis our own too by incorporating into the narrative tragic episodes that seriously challenge conceptions of the goodness and omnipotence of God."⁵³⁷ This allows the reader to identify with the character Lenz in his crisis, while also harboring questions about his sanity: "the author both draws us toward and yet always keeps us at a critical distance from his mentally unstable protagonist."⁵³⁸

Georg Lukács's characterization of the modern person in a state of "transzendente Obdachlosigkeit" is also found in Büchner's Lenz, who is left without the shelter of a benevolent god to protect him.⁵³⁹ He gradually loses his sense of purpose in a process of transformation that consists of a "schizophrenen Oszillieren zwischen religiösem Eifer und

⁵³⁶ Sylvain Guarda, "Büchners 'Lenz': Eine kindliche Pastorale im Muttergeiste Rousseaus," *Monatshefte* 101.3 (2009): 358.

⁵³⁷ William Collins Donahue, "The Aesthetic 'Theology' of Büchner's *Lenz*," in *Commitment and Compassion: Essays on Georg Büchner*, ed. Patrick Fortmann and Martha Helfer (New York: Rodopi, 2012), 120.

⁵³⁸ Donahue, "The Aesthetic 'Theology,'" 120.

⁵³⁹ See Sebastian Kaufmann, "Ästhetik des Leidens? Zur antiidealistischen Kunstkonzeption in Georg Büchners *Lenz*," *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 13 (2013-2015): 195.

Atheismus”⁵⁴⁰ that concludes in an “absolute[n] Sinnleere.”⁵⁴¹ His last attempt to attain a state of spirituality, the failed revivification of the dead child, “becomes proof to him that the universe is empty and meaningless.”⁵⁴² This constant oscillating between “moments of ecstatic spirituality and disengaged lethargy, between theism and atheism”⁵⁴³ is an exhausting way to live. A transformation as profound as a religious conversion requires a great deal of mental and emotional energy, and Lenz’s repeated conversions and deconversions leave him in a state of emptiness because they are fundamentally “unsustainable.”⁵⁴⁴ In this sense, Lenz also represents one of the themes of deconversion narratives described in Heinz Streib’s study of deconversion: debarred from paradise. Despite the efforts of Lenz and the members of his religious community, religion fails to produce the desired results in him, namely, to heal his trauma.⁵⁴⁵ When he flees into the mountains and leaves the pious village behind, he is not only metaphorically debarred from paradise, but also finds himself literally expelled from the physical space that he hoped would be a reassuring paradise in which to live.

Lenz’s critique of idealism also situates him in the discourse of materialism, and this is abundantly clear in a dialogue with Kaufmann, who enjoys “die idealistische Periode” (MA 5:37) in literature, while Lenz finds it abhorrent. He echoes Leibniz’s concept of the best of all possible worlds to justify his rejection of idealistic writing: “Der liebe Gott hat die Welt wohl gemacht wie sie seyn soll, und wir können wohl nicht was Bessers klecksen, unser einziges Bestreben soll seyn, ihm ein wenig nachzuschaffen” (MA 5:37). His primary criterium for artistic depictions of human beings, whether in literature or painting, is that they have “Leben” (MA 5:37). If they are not convincingly alive, it does not matter whether they are “schön” or “häßlich” (MA 5:37). Idealism creates only lifeless figures that Lenz describes

⁵⁴⁰ Kaufmann, “Ästhetik des Leidens,” 195.

⁵⁴¹ Kaufmann, “Ästhetik des Leidens,” 195.

⁵⁴² Donahue, “The Aesthetic ‘Theology,’” 121.

⁵⁴³ Donahue, “The Aesthetic ‘Theology,’” 115.

⁵⁴⁴ Donahue, “The Aesthetic ‘Theology,’” 120.

⁵⁴⁵ Streib, “Deconversion,” 287.

as “Holzpuppen” (MA 5:37) — and here the theme of humans as automata reappears in Büchner’s last work, just as it did in his earlier ones. Because idealism is incompatible with reality, it fails to create plausible representations of reality. In an ironic twist, the idealistic artist’s attempt to reproduce lifelike elements of the world ultimately results in the materialistic image of the automaton.

Conclusion

The theme of materialism that occupies such a central position in Büchner’s works, especially in *Danton’s Tod* and *Lenz* as described in this chapter, ultimately impacts not only their content, but also their structure. Büchner’s works are montage texts, copied and pasted from numerous sources that are usually not cited, creating an initial impression of wholeness, but upon closer investigation, the structures of the texts are anything but whole. *Danton’s Tod* consists of four acts and does not tie off the loose ends in a concluding fifth act, as would be the case in the classic form of the drama. In *Danton’s Tod*, Büchner reveals “the fragmentary episodicity of his dramaturgy,” which is, according to Matthew S. Buckley, “perhaps his most significant formal contribution to radical modernist drama.”⁵⁴⁶ There is no “Spannungsbogen”⁵⁴⁷ that can be recognized in the scenes of *Danton’s Tod* – the drama is fragmentary, just like the physical environment and the historical context that make up its setting. Anneliese Bach notes that the drama is in fact divided into two halves, with Danton’s “Ärgerniß”⁵⁴⁸ statement in the direct center: “Genau in der formalen Mitte der Tragödie befindet sich die Szene des Dialogs zwischen Danton und Julie, in der es ausgesprochen

⁵⁴⁶ Matthew S. Buckley, “Making a Whore of Freedom: Büchner’s Marion Episode,” *Modern Drama* 53.2 (2010): 245.

⁵⁴⁷ Jürgen Hillesheim, “Geschichtspessimismus und fatalistische Vitalität: Georg Büchners *Dantons Tod* und Bertolt Brechts *Baal* im Horizont der Philosophie Arthur Schopenhauers,” *Literatur für Leser* 4 (1993): 175.

⁵⁴⁸ Bach, “Verantwortlichkeit und Fatalismus,” 220.

wird. Zu dieser Szene hin steigt die Spannung an, von ihr ab fällt sie.”⁵⁴⁹ This moment is central to the viewer’s (or the reader’s) understanding of Danton’s loss of belief, because the paradox of a supposedly benevolent god who demands this “Ärgerniß” and thus robs his creations of their free will is the explanation for Danton’s atheism and thus his resignation.

Lenz is a fragmentary text not only because Büchner died before he could finish it, but also because it is pieced together from Oberlin’s reports, and even the portions that seem more or less finished are difficult to follow, with a stream-of-consciousness style that causes the reader to question to what degree *Lenz*’s perception coincides with the real world around him. This interrupted flow of writing and cobbling together of fragments in Büchner’s style mirrors the experience that many atheists undergo during their deconversions: an understanding of human experience that was once whole and explained is supplanted by a fragmentary, incomplete grasp of a vast, inaccessible universe. The abrupt endings of both *Lenz* and *Danton’s Tod* refuse to offer the reader any comfort or solutions. There is no longer a unifying supernatural force, but only the lonely individual in the text as well as the reader, trying to make meaning out of a patchwork text. As this religious, teleological interpretation of history dissolves, so does the sense of teleology in Büchner’s writing style. If there can be said to be any purpose in human existence, it certainly does not originate with a supernatural deity; it must be created within the realm of the material world – here the text as the result of ideas that manifest in print – and cultivated by the individual alone.

⁵⁴⁹ Bach, “Verantwortlichkeit und Fatalismus,” 219.

CHAPTER 4

HEINRICH HEINE'S MANY CONVERSIONS AS IRONIC DISPLACEMENT OF IDENTITY

Introduction: Heine, the Ironist

Almost no other German author is as closely associated with the concept of irony as Heinrich Heine. Irony, in its most distilled sense, refers to a rhetorical trope in which “der eine Ausdruck (Substituendum) durch einen semantisch entgegengesetzten Ausdruck (Substituens) ersetzt [ist].”⁵⁵⁰ The underlying meaning is still distinguishable despite this substitution; thus the true message is the hidden opposite of what is openly said: “So wird Lob durch Tadel und Tadel durch Lob ausgedrückt.”⁵⁵¹ In *Theorie der Ironie*, Uwe Japp describes ironic language as an “indirekte Maßnahme” that penetrates into “die Ordnung der Bedeutung,”⁵⁵² and this shifting of meaning then necessitates a “nachträgliche Übersetzung in eine direkte Sprache.”⁵⁵³ Aristotle described irony in his *Ethics* (350 BCE) as a form of understatement, because the intended meaning is hidden and guarded.⁵⁵⁴ Japp proposes, however, that irony is not only a form of subtracting meaning through understatement, but also of supplementing with additional meaning, because there exists “sowohl die fehlende als auch die zusätzliche Bedeutung in der Indirektheit des Bedeuten.”⁵⁵⁵ At the core of irony is the gap between the actual world and the possible world, “zwischen Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit,”⁵⁵⁶ and the humor stems from the hidden meaning revealed in the contrast

⁵⁵⁰ Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe, ed. Ansgar Nünning (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008), 333.

⁵⁵¹ Nünning, ed., Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie, 333. Friedrich Schlegel presented a new form of irony in the *Athenäum* called romantic irony, which upon this definition by expressing in poetic form “den Widerstreit zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit” through the technique of breaking apart aesthetic illusions. (Nünning, ed., Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie, 333.)

⁵⁵² Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), 9.

⁵⁵³ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 9.

⁵⁵⁴ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 9.

⁵⁵⁵ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 9-10.

⁵⁵⁶ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 16.

between these two ideas. This juxtaposition recalls Leibniz's examination of the relationship between the actual world and possible worlds in his *Theodicee*, as discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. A strange quandary of this oppositional relationship is that the actual world and the possible worlds imagined within it are not mutually exclusive, because imagined worlds are a component of the real world. This is where the imaginary worlds created in literature and art come into play: "diese Welten sind zwar nicht mit der wirklichen Welt identisch, aber sie sind ein Teil von ihr."⁵⁵⁷ When new, invented worlds come into existence through literature, they do not necessarily become immediately integrated into the actual world, but they certainly expand the possibilities of reality. In this way, irony performs the same function as literature: "So wie die Literatur mögliche Welten erfindet, so auch die Ironie."⁵⁵⁸ They both expose the connection between possibility and actuality, and thereby leave a palpable impact on the real world.

What can be said of the ironist who uses this technique? In Heine's time, irony was not only an aesthetic choice, but a necessity for authors who wished to express themselves under the censorship of the repressive state under which they wrote. "Es ist der einzige Ausweg, welcher der Ehrlichkeit noch übrig geblieben," writes Justus Fetscher, "und in der humoristisch ironischen Verstellung offenbart sich diese Ehrlichkeit noch am rührendsten."⁵⁵⁹ But Heine's frequent use of irony was not only a strategy for evading censorship; it was also deeply rooted in his identity as a poet. The concept of identity is in fact interwoven with irony, as Japp describes:

Der Ironiker meint etwas anderes, als er sagt. Dies ist die klassische Formulierung, derzufolge die Ironie als *dissimulatio* aufzufassen sei. Identität dagegen wird als das Sich-Selbst-Gleichsein des Individuums vorgestellt, mithin als Einheit oder "Einklang." Offenkundig kann nun derjenige, der sich (ständig) verstellt, nicht sich selbst gleich sein.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 18.

⁵⁵⁸ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 20.

⁵⁵⁹ Justus Fetscher, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et. al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 3:223.

⁵⁶⁰ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 24.

Identity consists in an entity being equal to itself, i.e., “Die klassische Formel der Identität lautet: $A = A$.”⁵⁶¹ Irony, however, is a “Verstellung” or “*dissimulatio*,” whose formula is “ $A = A/B$.”⁵⁶² The ironist’s identity remains hidden behind this displacement of meaning, so that the reader (or censor) cannot hold them responsible for any of their claims, which is especially useful for addressing controversial topics. Ironic language can send the identity of the ironist through many transformations – the identity can be contradicted, dissolved, or completely negated.⁵⁶³ This type of shifting identity — “[d]ieser Vorgang eines Unwirklichwerdens der Wirklichkeit”⁵⁶⁴ — is symptomatic of the experience of modernity,

[w]eil die Identität des Menschen nicht länger, wie in der Antike, von den vielen Göttern mitgetragen und nicht länger, wie im Mittelalter, von dem einen Gott mitgestiftet wird, sondern nach der Theodizee und mit der Aufklärung vom Menschen selbstverantwortlich gesucht werden muß, ist Identität in der Neuzeit nicht länger selbstverständlich, sondern problematisch.⁵⁶⁵

Japp proposes that there is an inverse relationship between the level of security in one’s identity and the extent to which irony is used: “[J]e weniger selbstverständlich die Identität ist, um so mehr wird der Ironie zugetraut.”⁵⁶⁶ When identity disintegrates, the indirect mode of expression found in irony presents itself as “einen möglichen Ausweg.”⁵⁶⁷

This process of continually shifting and self-negating identity that constitutes irony is also characteristic of religious conversion and deconversion. Thus it is only fitting that Heine, the master of irony and the poet of many different and sometimes contradictory identities, also underwent many transformations in his religious identity. Although his formal conversion, his baptism into Protestantism in 1825, is his best-known conversion among Germanists today, several other theological revisions were in fact more significant for him.

⁵⁶¹ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 27.

⁵⁶² Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 27.

⁵⁶³ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 24.

⁵⁶⁴ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 24.

⁵⁶⁵ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 24-25.

⁵⁶⁶ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 25.

⁵⁶⁷ Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 25.

This chapter describes the periods in his life during which he was devoted to many different worldviews, from the realms of politics to philosophy to theology. It explores Heine's identities through the use of irony in his published literary and poetic works *Almansor* (1821), *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* (1824-1840), and *Romanzero* (1851); his historical-philosophical work *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834), and travel writings *Die Stadt Lucca* (1830) and *Ideen. Das Buch le Grand* (1827), and his personal correspondence. Via analysis of these works, I seek to demonstrate that his many conversions were a consequence of his need to escape a specific identity, a consequence of which was his preference for ironic language over sincerity.

The works described in this chapter reveal many facets of the theories of deconversion by Barbour and Streib. Barbour's stages in the deconversion narrative can be traced in Heine's literary development as he underwent each of his deconversions (intellectual doubt, moral criticism, emotional suffering, and a rejection of the religious community) before he converted to the next religious phase of his life. The four themes of deconversion presented by Streib (pursuit of autonomy, being debarred from paradise, finding a new frame of reference, and life-long quests) give further structure for understanding Heine's spiritual trajectory. Finally, the religious economies model of Stark and Finke provides insight into Heine's conversions and deconversions, because Heine continually pursued a type of spirituality that could meet his needs during different phases of his life, searching for a form of belief that filled the market niche that spoke to him as a religious consumer. He believed that religion should not be judged based on whether or not it was objectively *true*, but by whether it could offer a happy life to its adherents and to the world. Reading Heine's works in conjunction with the religious economies model of Stark and Finke is particularly instructive because the theme of religions filling certain market niches

and offering diverse spiritual experiences to potential adherents is a consistent undercurrent in Heine's concept of religion.

The Advocate for Religious Tolerance: *Almansor*

Written several years before his baptism into Protestantism, Heine's tragedy *Almansor* constitutes his first major engagement with the theme of conversion. In depicting the forced conversions of Muslims in medieval Spain, Heine contemplated the meaning of conversion and, through this historical lens, voiced his views about the status of Jews in contemporary Germany. *Almansor* can be seen as an imagined rehearsal for his own conversion, a work in which he analyzed the options available to religious minorities living in a Christian state. He began writing in the summer of 1820 and continued with some interruptions until the spring of 1823. Entering into the winter of 1820, Heine thought he would soon finish, writing to his friends Steinmann and Rousseau in Bonn (HSA 20:29). While he was unsure of how the play would be received, he anticipated that it would at least draw a great deal of attention: "Wenn das Stück auch nicht gefallen wird, so wird es doch wenigstens ein großes Aufsehen erregen" (HSA 20:29), and he was certain that it would be performed in a theater at some point, "gleichviel wann" (HSA 20:29). August Klingemann offered to direct a production of it in Braunschweig, where it was performed only once, on 20 August 1823. The performance was interrupted by "Publikumsproteste in der Schlußszene, deren Ursache bis heute noch nicht eindeutig geklärt ist,"⁵⁶⁸ possibly because of "konfessionelle Empfindlichkeiten."⁵⁶⁹ Heine was correct when he predicted that the drama would at least elicit "ein großes Aufsehen" (HSA 20:29), even if it did not receive much praise.

⁵⁶⁸ Jan-Christoph Hauschild and Michael Werner, "Der Zweck des Lebens ist das Leben selbst." *Heinrich Heine. Eine Biographie* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1997), 59.

⁵⁶⁹ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 59.

Heine's library records from Bonn show that he had conducted extensive research on the history of Christianity and Islam in medieval Spain, having checked out titles such as Esprit Fléchier's *Histoire du Cardinale Ximenes* (1693), Heinrich Matthias August Cramer's *Briefe über Inquisitionsgericht und Ketzerverfolgung in der römischen Kirche* (1692), and an essay by the Altona pastor Pluer on the "Ursprung und Absichten der Inquisition, besonders der spanischen," which had appeared in Anton Friedrich Büsching's "Magazin für die neue Historie und Geographie" (1767-1788). In these works, some written from Protestant and others from Catholic perspectives, Heine learned about the Spanish King Ferdinand, who had married Isabella in 1469, conquered Granada, and presided over the forced conversion of the Moors who resided there. Heine read about Cardinal Ximenes, who led the inquisition, baptizing Muslim Imams by force or through bribery (HSA 4K:67). The conversions of these religious leaders influenced some of the Muslim population, who looked to them for spiritual guidance. One of Heine's sources, Fléchiers, describes this phenomenon in his *Histoire du Cardinal Ximenes*:

Ceux-cy [les Alfaquis] se voyant libres, & familiers même avec leurs vainqueurs, se rasseurent peu-à-peu; & après avoir embrassé la Foy, ils persuadèrent au Peuple d'abjurer la Religion de Mahoment, & de reconnoître Jesus-Christ pour le vray Dieu. Le succès fut grand & si prompt, qu'en peu de jours il y eut près de quatre-milles Maures, qui demandèrent le Baptême. (HSA 4K:67)⁵⁷⁰

Another of Heine's sources, Ignaz Aurelius Feßler, reported in *Ein Völkerspiegel* that the Muslims in Granada were forced to choose "zwischen der Taufe und dem Tode" (HSA 4K:53), and while many chose the former, there were also "tausende, die den Cultus eines treulosen und ungerechten Königs verschmäheten, wurden durch das Schwert hingerichtet,

⁵⁷⁰ Fléchier notes among the specific examples of such cases a member of the Zegri family, "un Cavalier de la race d'Abenhamar nommé Zégri," who was captured and tortured until he agreed to a baptism. His esteemed reputation among the Moors caused many to seek baptism, who were apparently unaware of the coercion that caused their leader's conversion: "Cette conversion avança fort le dessein des Archevesques: car aussi-tost qu'on apprit que Zégri s'estoit fait Chrétien, les Maures vinrent en foule demander le Baptesme, & l'exemple de cet homme accredité parmi le Peupe, déterminâ les plus opinâtres à renoncer à leurs erreurs." (HSA 4K:68)

ihre Weiber und Kinder zur Slaverrey verkauft” (HSA 4K:53). A third group chose to go into exile in Africa rather than to convert or be executed, and Heine’s eponymous hero in *Almansor* is an example of one of them.

The drama opens with a poem that is not spoken by any specific character, and it addresses the audience directly – “Glaubt nicht, es sey so ganz und gar phantastisch / Das hübsche Lied, das ich Euch freundlich biete!” (HSA 4:7) – and describes the play that they are about to see. These first lines fall into the category of Romantic Irony as the speaker calls attention to the genre of the play that is about to be performed, in content as well as form: “Hört zu: es ist halb episch und halb drastisch, / Dazwischen blüht manch lyrisch zarte Blüthe; / Romantisch ist der Stoff, die Form ist plastisch” (HSA 4:7). By definition, Romantic Irony is a form of poetic self-reflection, providing a meta-level of observation that mirrors the text itself. Although it is fictional, the ‘voice’ claims to come from outside the text or makes itself heard as a voice above all (extra-diegetic). The theory of Romantic Irony is commonly associated with Friedrich Schlegel’s definition of “Progressive Universalpoesie” in his number 116 of his *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798):

Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen.⁵⁷¹

The final verses of Heine’s opening poem reveal the primary message of the drama and suggest a happy ending, despite Heine’s subtitle *Eine Tragödie*: “Es kämpfen Christ und Moslem, Nord und Süden, / Die Liebe kommt am End’ und macht den Frieden” (HSA 4:7). This recalls Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* and introduces the overarching theme of religious tolerance that is present in every scene, suggesting that love can ultimately conquer all

⁵⁷¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler (Ferdinand Schöningh: Paderborn, 1967), 2:182-183.

denominational differences and heal all wounds. While *Almanson* and *Nathan der Weise* share the thematic realm of religious tolerance, Heine's play does not end in reconciliation between the characters of different religions coupled with the reinforcement of the Enlightenment ideal of genuine religious tolerance. Instead, *Almanson* follows the Romantic formula of leading its protagonists to the conclusion that a leap into a dark chasm to their deaths is the only way in which they may remain united in their love.

Almanson explores the different reactions of Moors when faced with the Reconquista forces in fifteenth-century Spain: Almanson, who flees to the land of his predecessors; Aly and Zuleima, who convert to Christianity and attempt to assimilate into Catholic society; and the countless others who are executed when they resist being baptized. Hassan, the former servant of Almanson's family, also resists conversion and represents the orthodox Muslim who warns against the dangers of assimilation. Almanson opens the first scene with a monologue in which he reflects on his childhood while walking through the deserted, crumbling palace in which the Moors once lived. He laments that the families who once resided there, "unsre Gomeles und Ganzuls / Abenkeragen und hochmüth'ge Zegris" (HSA 4:7) have not proven to be "[s]o treu wie diese Säulen hier" (HSA 4:7). After reuniting with his family's former servant, Almanson recounts the many conversions that have taken place, such as "der große Zegri," who, "[i]n feiger Todesangst, das Kreuz umklammert" (HSA 4:15), the result of which was that "viele Volk dem Beyspiel Großer folgte, / Und Tausende ihr Haupt zur Taufe beugten" (HSA 4:15). He tells of how he heard that the terrible Ximenes had thrown the Koran "[i]n eines Scheiterhaufens Flamme" (HSA 4:15), to which Hassan gives the famous response: "Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher / Verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen" (HSA 4:15). This "am Ende" could lead the reader to think that Hassan is making a prediction about future executions at the stake, but he is not referring to a merely hypothetical situation based on this book burning. The Inquisition

burned thousands of people at the stake; one of Heine's sources gives the figure of six thousand (HSA 4K:68). For Heine's contemporary audience, this book burning called to mind the Wartburg festival of 18 October 1817, during which "undeutsche" works such as the Napoleonic Code were thrown into the fire.⁵⁷² Twentieth and twenty-first century readers are of course reminded of the Nazi book burnings of the 1930s.

Almanson then describes the "allerschlimmste" (HSA 4:15) of the news he has received: "Daß auch er gute Aly Christ geworden" (HSA 4:15). Aly appears to go through a mourning period after this traumatic forced conversion: "Dort saß er schweigend, ohne Speis' und Trank, / Drey Tage lang" (HSA 4:16), until he finally emerges on the other side of the experience "wie umgewandelt" (HSA 4:16), seemingly calm and having accepted his fate. When Aly describes his conversion in his own words, he frames it as an act of loyalty to his foster daughter Zuleima, whose "sanftes Herz" (HSA 4:23) had first been won by Christianity: "Ich ging denselben Weg, dem eignen Herzen / Und der geliebten Pflgetochter folgend" (HSA 4:23). Later the chorus reveals his motivation in more detail: faced with the choice "[e]ntweder Christ zu werden, oder fort / Aus Spanien nach Afrika zu fliehn" (HSA 4:49), Aly chose to become Christian. The chorus refers to the countries in North Africa as the "dunkle Land der Barbarey" (HSA 4:49), in contrast to Spain with its "edle Sitte, Kunst / Und Wissenschaft" (HSA 4:49). Almanson is a Spanish Moor, thus he feels a "Vaterlandesliebe" (HSA 4:49) for Spain, and not for the land of his ancestors. As much as Almanson, like Aly, loved Zuleima, and as much as he desired to stay in Spain, when faced with the same choice, he opted for exile over conversion.

An integral part of the converts' transition from Islam to Christianity in *Almanson* is the changing of their names. Just as Harry Heine would later become Heinrich Heine through his baptism two years after the publication of *Almanson*, we learn in the drama that Zuleima

⁵⁷² Gerhard Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch: Zeit, Person, Werk* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), 9.

and the other converts have also taken on new names. Aly, who took the new name Don Gonzalvo, describes Zuleima's new name as if it were a precious gift she received: "Und durch der Taufe hail'ges Sakrament / Den schönen Namen Clara sich gewann" (HSA 4:23). Pedrillo warns Almansor to be careful when talking to Aly and to only call him Don Gonzalvo rather than Aly, "denn Don Gonzalvo zürnt, / Wenn man ihn noch den guten Aly nennt" (HSA 4:27). In his next sentence, however, Pedrillo uses Zuleima's old name and corrects himself:

Zuleima nur,
(Schlägt sich vor der Stirne.)
wollt' sagen Donna Clara,
Darf noch den Namen Aly nennen. Aly,
Der irr't sich auch, und nennt sie oft Zuleima. (HSA 4:27)

It is not only Pedrillo who gets the new names wrong, but also Aly. And in certain cases — when Zuleima is speaking with Aly, for example — the new converts have given up on using them altogether. These new names cause nothing but confusion because they represent artificial Christian identities that have been imposed upon the Moors. Pedrillo was not always Pedrillo of course, as he describes to Almansor: "Auch ich, ich heiße jetzt nicht mehr Hamahmah" (HSA 4:27), having taken the name Pedrillo, the diminutive of Peter, which refers to Saint Peter's childhood name. Indeed, Aly's entire household has changed their names to reflect their new Christian identities: their cook Habahbah, for example, is now Petronella, like the wife of Saint Peter. Near the end of the drama, Pedrillo confuses the Christian and Muslim names again, but this time they are not the names of recent converts, but the name of God himself: "Oh Allah! Jesus!" (HSA 4:63) Pedrillo's mentioning of these two separate names for God one after the other calls to mind the common theological claim that every religion is in fact referencing the same god, and that only the names are different. The ring parable in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* suggests this: in the end, the real ring is not one of the replicas that was given to the brothers, and it is irrelevant which one is real, just as

the question of which religion or denomination is true is also irrelevant. In the context of these name changes, whether God is called “Allah” or “Jesus” should be of little consequence for those who take this inclusive, Enlightenment-oriented stance on the veracity of each religion.

In reality, however, these names do make a difference: Cardinal Ximenes is willing to murder people so that they call God “Jesus” instead of “Allah.” These gods have different characteristics and commandments, and in order to please one of them, one must reject the other. For Almansor, returning home to find that the people he once knew have changed their names is of no small consequence; it represents a major shift in how he relates to them:

“Verändert sind die Namen und die Menschen; / Was eh’ mals Liebe hieß, heißt jetzo Haß” (HSA 4:63). Once he finds Zuleima, however, Almansor seems to have faith in the idea that these changes of names and of religious affiliations are not so consequential after all. His devotion to Islam is now secondary to his devotion to Zuleima, and he claims to be ready to make any religious proclamations necessary in order to be with her:

Dein Himmel nur, Zuleimas Himmel nur,
Sey auch Almansors Himmel, und dein Gott
Sey auch Almansors Gott, Zuleimas Kreuz
Sey auch Almansors Hort, dein Christus sey
Almansors Heiland auch, und beten will ich
In jener Kirche, wo Zuleima betet. (HSA 4:46)

Here the Romantic tendencies of the drama become clear: For Almansor, there is no clear line between love and religion. They both represent sensual pleasures in which he loses himself: “Beseligt schwimm’ ich wie in Liebeswellen, / Von weichen Harfenlauten süß umklungen” (HSA 4:46). He imagines himself surrounded by “Bäume,” “Englein,” and “Blüthenstaub,” carrying him up to heaven, suggesting that the divine is intimately connected to nature and calling the pantheistic tendencies of Romanticism to mind. Almansor would like to meld the religions together in typical Romantic fashion, to deny their differences, but Zuleima reminds him that it is not that simple in a scene in which she mistakenly believes

they are both in heaven. “Wenn das der Seel’gen Wohnung ist,” she asks him, “So sage mir, wie bist du hergekommen? / Denn unser frommer Abt hat mir versichert: / Daß nur wer Christ ist seelig werden kann” (HSA 4:68). Almansor has no answer for her, except for to reassure her that he is in fact “seelig, dreimal seelig” (HSA 4:68), because his love for her transcends any doctrinal requirements she may have heard about on Earth. Zuleima replies that the best part of this heaven is that she is allowed to be with Almansor and openly declare her love for him, because “in dem Himmel / Bedarf es der Verstellungskünste nicht” (HSA 4:69). Zuleima’s reference to “Verstellungskünste” here reveals something about her relationship to her own spirituality: her conversion and her Christian identity have actually been a ruse. Although she does proclaim to have genuinely adopted the Christian faith, her elation at being able to shake off these “Verstellungskünste” that controlled her life on Earth suggests that she did not fully identify as a Christian and that she saw it merely as a necessary step in order to avoid exile and ensure her survival. Her survival, however, is anything but secured when Almansor returns and Zuleima believes, if only for a short time, that confessional differences are no longer of any consequence. The two lovers are interrupted by incoming Spanish troops in the final scene. In order to avoid being captured by them, Almansor takes Zuleima with him as he leaps off a cliff.

A letter from Heine to his friends Steinmann and Rousseau on 29 October 1820, during the period in which he was first writing *Almansor*, reveals that he had a very personal connection to his drama: “In diesem Stücke habe ich mein eignes Selbst hineingeworfen, mit sammt meinen Paradoxen, meiner Weisheit, meiner Liebe, meinem Hasse und meiner ganzen Verrücktheit” (HSA 20:29). Although he did sometimes express annoyance at his readers looking for biographical connections in his works,⁵⁷³ this statement that he has put his own

⁵⁷³ He wrote that he wanted to avoid a reading of his play “als Allegorie” and that the eponymous hero of *Almansor* was meant to be understood strictly as a Muslim, and not as a “verkappter Jude.” (Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 57.) Similarly, he wrote to Karl Immermann on 10

“Selbst” into *Almansor* certainly warrants an investigation of the traces of his own life and his identity that made their way into the drama. At the very least, the play represents a clear statement “gegen die Monopolstellung der christlichen Staatsreligion,”⁵⁷⁴ advocating instead religious pluralism and freedom of belief. Robert Holub sees in *Almansor* Heine’s use of the Muslim people, “who were persecuted at the same time as the Jews, as a cipher for the plight of the Jews in modern Europe.”⁵⁷⁵ By depicting Muslims instead of Jews as the persecuted religious group, Heine is able to maintain an ironic distance and make a statement about the lack of equality during his own time without having to say it outright, especially in this early phase of his career when the idea of his own conversion was not something that he openly discussed.

While Heine, unlike *Almansor*, was not forced to choose between conversion, exile, and execution, he lived in a society that was dominated by the Christian faith and could not fully participate in it professionally without a conversion. In the religious wars of the Spanish Reconquista era, Heine recognized a mirror of Restoration-era Germany. Although the two cases are very different, both Heine and his character *Almansor* both represented religious minorities who were forced to make major life decisions based on their governments’ privileging of Christians over non-Christians.⁵⁷⁶ Heine, “wie sein Held,” stood “vor einer geschlossenen Gesellschaft, die ihm keinen Eintritt gewährt,”⁵⁷⁷ recalling the scene in which

June 1823 that he objected to an autobiographical “Rekonstruktion” of his poems by stating that “man entjungfer[e] damit gleichsam das Gedicht.” (HSA 20:92)

⁵⁷⁴ Christoph Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 41.

⁵⁷⁵ Robert C. Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate: Heine’s Conversion and Its Psychic Displacement,” in *Heinrich Heine’s Contested Identities. Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 75.

⁵⁷⁶ Spain appears throughout Heine’s work as the land of religious conflict in which those who do not subscribe to the dominant religion are oppressed. After the publication of *Almansor*, Heine revisited its setting in his *Buch der Lieder* in the poem *Donna Clara*. In *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, the convert who appears near the conclusion of the tale is Spanish, and in the *Romanzero*, Heine again features the Moors in Spain (*Der Möhrenkönig*). See Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, 49.

⁵⁷⁷ Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, 48.

Almanson begs for entrance into his father's palace. This image of the young man who has refused to convert being denied entry into the social space where he once thought he belonged illustrates the dilemma with which Heine was faced in the years leading up to his conversion in 1825. He had to either convert, or be locked out. Bartscherer notes that both Heine and Almanson share a sense of "Heimatlosigkeit,"⁵⁷⁸ since their religious identities clash with their desire to feel at home in their countries of birth. Heine hoped to avoid this homelessness by converting and attempting to integrate into German culture more fully, but like Almanson, Heine also found that assimilation into a Christian state was all but impossible. Even after surrendering to the authorities by converting, Heine still felt locked out of this society, and he eventually chose exile to Paris, just as Almanson had chosen exile.

The German-Jewish Poet

Heine's relationship with Judaism and his own Jewishness was, as Jeffrey Sammons succinctly expresses it, complicated.⁵⁷⁹ Heine was raised in a liberal Jewish household, often described as largely assimilated into German society, but the fact that his family was Jewish was common knowledge in his community, and he experienced no little amount of discrimination because of it, according to reports about his classmates and teachers mocking him.⁵⁸⁰ Sammons describes Heine at the beginning of his career as "not particularly exercised about his Jewishness,"⁵⁸¹ given that his class and level of education meant that he experienced his Jewish identity differently than those who grew up in a ghetto, and saw himself as "under the protection, so to speak, of the brotherhood of Lessing and

⁵⁷⁸ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 41.

⁵⁷⁹ Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Who Did Heine Think He Was?" in *Heinrich Heine's Contested Identities: Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 9.

⁵⁸⁰ See Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 36.

⁵⁸¹ Sammons, "Who Did Heine Think He Was," 9.

Mendelssohn.”⁵⁸² Christhard Hoffmann notes that Heine’s relationship with Judaism is a “specifically modern”⁵⁸³ one, “not determined by a vitally-mediating, unbroken continuum of tradition, but by a rupture in tradition.”⁵⁸⁴ Heine continually distanced himself from religious labels, just as he did from political and philosophical ones. Although he understood himself very much as part of the Jewish people, it is not clear that he ever identified with the religion on a theological level. His interest in Jewish history resulted from his desire to make sense of the rupture in tradition; it was an attempt to reconcile his self-understanding as a Jew with his apathy about the theological doctrine attached to it. He wrote in a letter to Moritz Embden in 1823 that he was an “Indifferentist” (HSA 20:82) in religious matters, and throughout his life he distanced himself from the Jewish religion (as well as from other religions), while maintaining a “tiefes Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zum jüdischen Volk.”⁵⁸⁵

Despite his indifference about the spiritual side of Judaism, Heine was in fact involved in the struggle for political and social emancipation of the Jewish people in Germany; his activism was “weniger religiös als emanzipatorisch.”⁵⁸⁶ Much tension existed between German and Jewish communities during Heine’s early adulthood: after the Napoleonic Code included advances in civil equality for Jews in 1806, Chancellor Hardenberg’s Edict Concerning the Civil Relations of the Jews, enacted on 11 March 1812, constituted a major step toward Jewish emancipation in that it, in principle, made Prussian Jews into citizens and gave them access to professions in civil society from which they were previously barred, ranging from positions as professors and elsewhere in academia, to doctors in hospitals, to lawyers. In the following years, Anti-Semitic sentiments increased as the economy worsened, until in 1819 violence erupted throughout Germany in the Hep-Hep riots,

⁵⁸² Sammons, “Who Did Heine Think He Was,” 9.

⁵⁸³ Christhard Hoffmann, “History versus Memory: Heinrich Heine and the Jewish Past,” in *Heinrich Heine’s Contested Identities: Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 43.

⁵⁸⁴ Hoffmann, “History versus Memory,” 43.

⁵⁸⁵ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 146.

⁵⁸⁶ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 34.

which were only sporadically addressed by Prussian authorities.⁵⁸⁷ Then in 1822, the Hardenberg Edict of emancipation was repealed by a cabinet order of Friedrich Wilhelm III, and Jews were no longer allowed to hold certain professions. This had a profound effect on Heine, who had recently moved to Berlin and was planning an academic career, hoping to become a professor of philosophy there.⁵⁸⁸ The reactionary Prussian government, responding to deep resentments against Jews in general, but especially in academia, had destroyed Heine's plan in one fell swoop. For Heine, as well as for many other Jews who planned academic careers, this repeal meant that he either had to give up his professional aspirations, or to accept it as "Taufzwang."⁵⁸⁹ In a bitter letter to Immanuel Wohlwill in 1823, Heine revealed how much he had been affected by the reversal of the edict of emancipation, describing Christianity as "eine Idee" that belongs to the category of "schmutzige[n] Ideenfamilien, die in den Ritzen dieser alten Welt, der verlassenen Bettstelle des göttlichen Geistes, sich eingenistet, wie sich Wanzenfamilien einnisten in der Bettstelle eines polnischen Juden" (HSA 20:71). The act of squashing this bug leaves behind "einen Gestank [...], der Jahrhunderte lang riechbar ist" (HSA 20:71), and Christianity, after the many squashing attempts throughout the preceding 1800 years, continued to contaminate the air. Heine was never afraid to criticize religion, which is why it is surprising that he added an apology following this metaphor: "Verzeih mir diese Bitterkeit; Dich hat der Schlag des aufgehobenen Edikts nicht getroffen" (HSA 20:71). This event fundamentally changed his attitude toward Berlin and Prussia; he had seen Berlin as a progressive city, and felt deceived by this "preußischen Scheinliberalismus."⁵⁹⁰ Berlin had become for him a "falsches Nest."⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁷ Christian Liedtke, *Heinrich Heine* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1998), 56.

⁵⁸⁸ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 39.

⁵⁸⁹ Itta Shedletzky, "'Niemals von jüdischen Verhältnissen sprechen...'" Zum jüdischen Subtext in Heines "Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand," in *Das Jerusalemer Heine-Symposium. Gedächtnis, Mythos, Modernität*, ed. Klaus Briegleb und Itta Shedletzky (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2001), 56.

⁵⁹⁰ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 79.

⁵⁹¹ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 79.

In the same year as the repeal of the edict of emancipation, Heine became a member of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* after arriving in Berlin. The *Verein* had been founded not long before, in 1821, by Jewish intellectuals who felt the pressure of an ever-increasing atmosphere of Anti-Semitism, as demonstrated by the recent Hep-Hep riots. The original name of the group was the *Verein zur Verbesserung des Zustandes der Juden im deutschen Bundesstaate*, and among the founding members were Moses Moser, Leopold Zunz, and Eduard Gans.⁵⁹² In 1822, Heine had gained entrance to Rahel Levin Varnhagen's salon, where he expanded his social circle in the communities of both Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals, and through his acquaintance with Eduard Gans, he joined the *Verein*. Even while not in Berlin – while travelling in Poland in 1822, and after his move to Göttingen in 1824 – it is evident from letters to Moses Moser that Heine remained involved with the group until its dissolution in 1824.⁵⁹³ The *Verein* was an “openly assimilationist organization”⁵⁹⁴ led by “enlightened Hegelians,”⁵⁹⁵ and it saw Judaism as a facet of modern European culture and thought. It avoided the notion of a separatist Jewish identity, emphasizing the shared aspects of Jewish and German cultures, rather than their differences.

While Heine's initial experiences in Berlin provided him with evidence that a certain compatibility of Germanness and Jewishness under enlightened, modern Prussian conditions was possible, after 1822 he seemed less convinced that one could retain a Jewish identity while fully participating in German society. There is no indication that Heine considered baptism for himself before his move to Berlin, but after his arrival, he began to describe it as a potentially practical step for his own future, especially in light of the reversal of the edict of

⁵⁹² Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 34.

⁵⁹³ Robert C. Holub, “Personal Roots and German Traditions. The Jewish Element in Heine's Turn Against Romanticism” in *Heinrich Heine und die Romantik. Erträge eines Symposiums an der Pennsylvania State University (21.-23. September 1995)*, ed. Markus Winkler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 42.

⁵⁹⁴ Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 72.

⁵⁹⁵ Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 72.

emancipation.⁵⁹⁶ A significant number of Heine's Jewish friends and acquaintances converted to Protestantism during this period, and statistics show that there were so many converts that Deborah Hertz writes about a "conversion wave"⁵⁹⁷ in Berlin during the 1820s and 1830s. There was pressure from non-Jewish members of academia for Jews to convert in order to fully integrate; for example, Christian Friedrich Rühs, a professor of history in Berlin, rejected the idea opening these professions to Jews who refused baptism, insisting that full membership of a Christian state required conversion to that religion. While there were many opponents of his ideas, he attracted much support as well.⁵⁹⁸ Heine was also influenced by the fact that many prominent Jews had converted, such as four of the six children of Moses Mendelssohn (two sons became Protestants, two daughters became Catholics),⁵⁹⁹ Heinrich Marx (the father of Karl Marx), and Rahel Levin Varnhagen, who had converted in order to marry Karl August Varnhagen in 1814, several years before Heine began attending her salon. The conversion of Eduard Gans seems to have had the most profound effect on Heine. Thus while his years in Berlin were an exploration of how a German-Jewish synthesis could be achieved, he also learned by way of these examples that baptism was "the next logical step toward full integration in the Christian state."⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁶ See Holub, "Confessions of an Apostate," 72.

⁵⁹⁷ Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans. The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 101. See also Deborah Hertz, "Why Did the Christian Gentleman Assault the Jüdischer Elegant?: Four Conversion Stories from Berlin. 1816-1825," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 40.1 (1995), 85-106. See also Jacob Toury, *Soziale und Politische Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 1847-1871: Zwischen Revolution, Reaktion und Emanzipation* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977), 51-68.

⁵⁹⁸ See Holub, "Confessions of an Apostate," 72.

⁵⁹⁹ Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 47.

⁶⁰⁰ Holub, "Confessions of an Apostate," 73.

The Protestant Convert

In May of 1825, Heine began making concrete plans for his own baptism and visited the Protestant minister Gottlob Christian Grimm in Heiligenstadt for “Religionsunterricht.”⁶⁰¹ Shortly before receiving his doctoral degree in jurisprudence at the University of Göttingen, Heine traveled to Heiligenstadt on the morning of 28 June 1825. After he successfully completed the “Taufexamen”⁶⁰² required for baptism, Grimm gave a fifteen-minute baptism speech, baptized him, and entered his name into the baptismal register.⁶⁰³ He entered the pastor’s house as Harry Heine, and left it as Christian Johann Heinrich Heine. He chose the three new forenames for himself, and kept his surname.⁶⁰⁴ In a letter written fifteen years later, in 1840, Heine seemed to have almost forgotten about his first name being “Heinrich,” after habitually writing only “H. Heine” for so many years. When Campe used Heine’s forename “Heinrich” on the title page of his *Denkschrift* on Ludwig Börne (*Heinrich Heine über Ludwig Börne*), Heine reacted with surprise: “Ich weiß nicht warum, aber das Ganzauschreiben meines Vornamens Heinrich schockirte mich hier.”⁶⁰⁵

Heine’s decision to travel almost 40 kilometers away to an obscure spa town warrants further examination, as Bartscherer points out: “Warum dieses seltsame Ausweichen in eine fremde Stadt für einen Festakt, den man im Normalfall feierlich im Kreise seiner Familie oder Freunde begeht?”⁶⁰⁶ Heine’s conversion is, of course, in no way “normal,” so it is fitting that he would conduct it in secret. Grimm described Heine’s baptism to authorities in Erfurt in a report that reveals that Heine explicitly communicated that matters surrounding his religious identity were to remain as private as possible:

Ein Israelit aus Düsseldorf Namens Harry Heine [...] hat sich zur Taufe bei mir gemeldet. Er studirt in Göttingen die Rechte und will nicht dort,

⁶⁰¹ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 199.

⁶⁰² Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 34.

⁶⁰³ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 34.

⁶⁰⁴ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 35.

⁶⁰⁵ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 101.

⁶⁰⁶ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 35.

wo man ihn kenne, sondern hier, wo er fremd sey, die Taufe empfangen, und zwar in aller Stille, damit seine Abstammung von Jüdischen Eltern, die er schon als Knabe [...] verheimlicht habe, nicht bekannt, und er, der immer für einen Christen sich ausgegeben und bisher dafür gegolten habe, nicht erst nach seinem Scheiden aus der Jüdischen Gemeinde ein Jude genannt und mit dem Namen eines getauften Juden bezeichnet werde.⁶⁰⁷

Heine had told Grimm not only that he wanted his baptism to remain a secret, but that he had hidden his Jewish identity since his childhood. Grimm's report is one example of the great lengths to which Heine would go in order to avoid religious labels being applied to him. It is impossible to know to what degree Heine took the baptism seriously, but he was able to convince Grimm and the two witnesses present that he really did want to become a Christian. It is, however, uncertain what kind of standard they held him to in order to determine his sincerity.

Here we reach one of the fundamental questions surrounding the definition of conversion: Is it still a conversion if there is no change in personal belief in a god or a set of theological doctrines, but only baptism performed for practical or professional reasons? Or should it generate some amount of "Mißtrauen"⁶⁰⁸ instead? Bartscherer concludes that, in light of Heine's letters and the history leading up to his baptism, there remain "wahrhaftig Zweifel an der Aufrichtigkeit des Täuflings."⁶⁰⁹ Jewish conversions in modern Europe, as well as the forced conversions that have taken place as long as proselytizing religions have existed, certainly occupy a unique position in history, as they bear little resemblance to those conversions that occur under the free will of the convert and constitute a genuine change of heart. This uniqueness, however, does not necessarily exclude such acts from falling under the term "conversion." For example, Jacob Katz notes in his book *Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation* that there were three main reasons for conversion during Heine's period:

⁶⁰⁷ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 35-36.

⁶⁰⁸ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 35.

⁶⁰⁹ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 35.

religious conviction, material gain, and ideological belief.⁶¹⁰ Although these three categories of motivation are very different from one another, they ultimately all constitute a change in religious affiliation and fall under the larger definition of conversion. There are as many motives for conversion as there are converts, and the ability to fulfill a professional aspiration is one of these motives. Heine's conversion to Protestantism required no small amount of "Selbstverleugnung,"⁶¹¹ since nowhere in his writings does he mention that he believed in a specifically Christian God. Robert Holub writes that "Heine's conversion was certainly of the insincere variety,"⁶¹² but it was a conversion nonetheless. He did embrace some aspects of Protestantism during his early career, but it was more in contrast to Catholicism that he saw its virtues. The political and intellectual implications of Protestantism seemed more palatable to Heine than did those of Catholicism. It was commonly held to be the most progressive religion of the time; thus Heine's conversion was in this respect "weniger ein religiöses als ein politisches Bekenntnis."⁶¹³ In 1835 Heine wrote in a letter to Philarète Chasles:

[L]e protestantisme n'était pour moi seulement une religion libérale, mais aussi le point de départ de la révolution allemande, et j'appartenais à la confession luthérienne, non-seulement par acte de baptême, mais aussi par un enthousiasme batailleur qui me fit prendre part aux luttes de cette église militante. (HSA 21:95)

This description implies a causal relationship between Protestantism and the revolution, i.e., that the revolution could not have happened without the fracturing of the church. Heine became a participant in this political event, this struggle for liberation that he deemed worth

⁶¹⁰ Jakob Katz, *Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 37-38.

⁶¹¹ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 35.

⁶¹² Holub, "Confessions of an Apostate," 70.

⁶¹³ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 79.

fighting for. Protestantism was in a certain sense “die Religion der Zukunft,”⁶¹⁴ and Heine was on the side of “den fortschrittlichen geistigen Kräften.”⁶¹⁵

One of the Protestant figures with whom Heine could identify, and whom he greatly admired, was Martin Luther. In 1828, he depicted him as a revolutionary in a critical response to Wolfgang Menzel’s *Die Deutsche Literatur*, commonly called the “Menzelrezension.” Heine described mysticism as a means of challenging the establishment and as a generally progressive force in history. He discussed two mystics, the second of whom is unmistakably Luther: “Ein Mystiker aus der Sekte der Essäer war jener Rabbi, der in sich selbst die Offenbarung des Vaters erkannte und die Welt erlöste von der blinden Autorität steinerne Gesetze und schlauer Priester; ein Mystiker war jener deutsche Mönch, der in seinem einsamen Gemüte die Wahrheit ahnte, die längst aus der Kirche verschwunden war.”⁶¹⁶ Christ freed the world from the blind authority of archaic laws, and Luther restored a truth that had been hidden by the dogmatism of the institution. Heine’s conception of Luther here is one of a “proto-*Aufklärer* [...] who breaks the bonds of intellectual narrow-mindedness.”⁶¹⁷

Seven years later, in 1835, Heine discussed his view of Luther’s contribution to European progress at length in his essay *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*. In the first book, Heine investigated the fundamental “Idee” (HSA 8:132) of Christianity – an idea that, according to the author, few have understood, which has rendered Christianity a mysterious and all but invincible religion that will remain “unzerstörbar und unsterblich” (HSA 8:132) until the secret of the idea is revealed. This idea is “urindisch” (HSA 8:134) and rooted in a “gnostische[n] Weltansicht” (HSA 8:134). It is the teaching

⁶¹⁴ Wilhelm Gössmann, “Formen der literarischen Religionskritik Heines” in *Der späte Heine, 1848-1856. Literatur – Politik – Religion*, ed. Wilhelm Gössmann and Joseph A. Kruse (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe/Heinrich Heine Verlag, 1982), 186.

⁶¹⁵ Gössmann, “Formen der literarischen Religionskritik Heines,” 186.

⁶¹⁶ F. Corey Roberts, “Heine’s ‘Lutherbild’ and the Singularity of the Historical Moment,” *German Studies Review* 28.3 (2005): 584.

⁶¹⁷ Roberts, “Heine’s ‘Lutherbild,’” 586.

“von der Abtödtung des Fleisches, vom geistigen In sich selbst versenken” (HSA 8:134), the pure spiritualism promoted by the Catholic Church prior to the Reformation. Spiritualism, by valuing only the realm of ideas and rejecting the material, sensual, and physical world, is for Heine an “ansteckende Krankheit” (HSA 8:134) that can only be healed “wenn der Friede zwischen Leib und Seele wieder hergestellt, und sie wieder in ursprünglicher Harmonie sich durchdringen” (HSA 8:134-135). Pure spiritualism is an inherently unsustainable way of understanding reality because it stands “zu sehr in Widerspruch [...] mit der menschlichen Natur” (HSA 8:145), and Heine has faith that future generations will reject it: “[d]ie glücklichern und schöneren Generationen” (HSA 8:134) will pity their predecessors for denying themselves the sensual pleasures of the world because of this bad idea. Heine has an optimistically teleological view of humanity in this essay; he is certain that these future generations will be happier than his contemporaries when he states: “ich glaube an den Fortschritt, ich glaube, die Menschheit ist zur Glückseligkeit bestimmt” (HSA 8:135). He believes that human beings deserve to enjoy their lives here on earth and to benefit from “die Segnungen freier politischer und industrieller Institutionen” (HSA 8:135). The pinnacle of spiritualism’s domination over Catholic Europe was the sale of indulgences, which were used to build St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. Here, the physical and the immanent — money that would normally be used to improve the quality of life here on earth — are sacrificed for the ideal and the spiritual. This “subjugation of all forms of sensualism”⁶¹⁸ has led to an imbalance that Heine explains with a metaphor about rose oil, which is an item of great value. This does not mean, however, that we should destroy every rose on earth in order to produce rose oil, no matter how prized it is. Spiritualism, like rose oil, is best enjoyed in moderation: “Wir sind vielmehr wie die Nachtigallen, die sich gern an der Rose selber ergötzen, und von ihrer erröthend blühenden Erscheinung eben so beseligt werden, wie von

⁶¹⁸ F. Corey Roberts, “Heine’s ‘Lutherbild’ and the Singularity of the Historical Moment,” *German Studies Review* 28.3 (2005): 587.

ihrem unsichtbaren Dufte” (HSA 8:148). Heine’s rejection of overemphasized spiritualism is in no way an endorsement of materialism, but it is certainly reminiscent of Büchner’s refutation of idealism discussed in the previous chapter. As Danton says to Julie in the first scene of *Danton’s Tod*, we can never truly gain access to this domain of ideas, even if we were to break open each other’s skulls, so it is ludicrous to show such a preference for the ideal over the material.

It is in this context of the dichotomy between spiritualism and sensualism that Heine praises Martin Luther. He sees Luther as a new type of revolutionary figure, a human manifestation of the balance that needed to be restored to Europe: “Er war zugleich ein träumerischer Mystiker und ein praktischer Mann in der That, [...] ein kalter scholastischer Wortklauber und ein begeisterter, gottberauschter Prophet, [...] manchmal wild wie der Sturm, der die Eiche entwurzelt, und dann war er wieder sanft wie der Zephyr, der mit Veilchen kos’t” (HSA 8:150). Most importantly, he incorporated the perfect equilibrium between spirituality and sensuality: “[E]r konnte sich ganz versenken in’s reine Geistthum; und dennoch kannte er sehr gut die Herrlichkeiten dieser Erde, und wußte sie zu schätzen, und aus seinem Mund erblühte der famose Wahlspruch: Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weiber und Gesang, der bleibt ein Narr sein Lebenlang” (HSA 8:150). It is hard to imagine Heine paying anyone a higher compliment than when he called Luther “ein kompletter Mensch, [...] ein absoluter Mensch, in welchem Geist und Materie nicht getrennt sind” (HSA 8:150). Under Luther’s new evangelical version of Christianity, the priest could become a human again, could marry and have children, “wie es Gott verlangt” (HSA 8:151). In the subsequent centuries, Protestantism had the effect that people became “tugendhafter und edler” (HSA 8:151), and ultimately Heine credits Protestantism for making “Geistesfreiheit” and “Denkfreiheit” (HSA 8:153) possible for the first time in Germany. He adds, however, that

these freedoms have receded considerably in his own time due to the strict censorship under which he and his contemporaries had to publish.

Heine's writings about Protestantism and especially about Luther as a revolutionary, along with his consistent anti-Catholic statements found throughout his works and letters, provide a reasonably clear picture of why he chose Protestantism over Catholicism in his conversion to Christianity, once he determined that the baptism was necessary for his professional future. It is not so clear, however, what kind of a psychological impact his baptism may have had on him, since he portrays the consequences of his conversion in variable, sometimes contradictory terms in his private correspondence as well as in his published writings. Heine scholars have varying perspectives about the extent of its impact on him; for example, Jeffrey Sammons describes the baptism as "a sacrifice of personal dignity that he was soon to regret,"⁶¹⁹ and maintains that Wilhelm Gössmann takes it too lightly when he writes that Heine "did not need to undergo any inner conversion, any radical renunciation or any radical turn"⁶²⁰ and that his baptism was simply "a conscious affirmation of a secularized cultural Christianity, of a humanistic religion that had established itself literarily in European intellectual history since Lessing."⁶²¹

His letters contain only a few references to the baptism during these years. In 1823, he wrote to Moser that he considered "die Taufe ein gleichgültiger Akt" (HSA 20:113) with little symbolic significance. He mused that a baptism, if he were to have one, would perhaps have "die Bedeutung daß ich mich der Verfechtung der Rechte meiner unglücklichen Stammgenossen mehr weihen würde" (HSA 20:113). He ended this hypothetical reflection of what it would mean for him to convert by suggesting that he would never seriously consider it: "Aber dennoch halte ich es unter meiner Würde und meine Ehre befleckend wenn

⁶¹⁹ Sammons, "Who Did Heine Think He Was," 6.

⁶²⁰ Wilhelm Gössmann, "Verschiedene Konversionen?" in *"Ich Narr des Glücks." Heinrich Heine 1797-1856. Bilder einer Ausstellung*, ed. Joseph A. Kruse et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 309.

⁶²¹ Gössmann, "Verschiedene Konversionen," 309.

ich, um ein Amt in Preußen anzunehmen, mich taufen ließen. Im lieben Preußen!!!” (HSA 20:113) At times he tried to downplay the importance of his conversion, stating that he found it much more difficult to have a tooth pulled than to change his religion.⁶²² In a famous quote from his *Aphorismen und Fragmente* in 1830, he portrayed it in a matter-of-fact way: “Der Taufzettel ist das Entre Billet zur Europäischen Kultur” (HSA 12:246). A few months after his baptism, however, he expressed some amount of regret to Moser: “Wenn die Gesetze das Stehlen silberner Löffel erlaubt hätten, so würde ich mich nicht getauft haben” (HSA 20:227), implying not only that his decision to be baptized was because of the laws restricting the rights of Jews, but also that he would have rather have not converted, all things being equal. One month later, at the beginning of 1826, he described much more explicitly that he regarded his baptism as a mistake: “Ich bin jetzt bey Christ und Jude verhaßt. Ich bereue sehr, daß ich mich getauft hab; ich sehe noch gar nicht ein, daß es mir seitdem besser gegangen sey, im Gegentheile, ich habe seitdem nichts als Unglück” (HSA 20:234).

Heine’s sense of remorse and conflict about his baptism also found expression in *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand*, which he was in the process of writing in 1825 at the same time as he was preparing for the baptism. The beginning of the first chapter contains a striking scene in which Heine depicts the contrast between heaven and hell in order to later describe the hellish conditions of inequality in society. Hell is “wie eine große bürgerliche Küche, mit einem unendlich langen Ofen, worauf drei Reihen eiserne Töpfe standen, und in diesen saßen die Verdammten und wurden gebraten” (HSA 5:87). In one row are the Christian sinners, whose numbers are “nicht allzuklein” (HSA 5:87), and underneath them the demons are fanning the fires “mit besonderer Geschäftigkeit” (HSA 5:87). In another row are “die Heiden, die, eben so wie die Juden, der Seligkeit nicht teilhaftig werden können, und ewig brennen müssen” (HSA 5:87). One of these is Socrates, who begs to be spared, but the

⁶²² Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 42.

demons are in no position to make an exception. In the row between the Christians and the heathens sit “die Juden, die beständig schrieen und von den Teufeln zuweilen geneckt wurden” (HSA 5:87), and when one of them complains about the heat, a demon pours a bucket of cold water over him, “damit er sähe, daß die Taufe eine wahre erfrischende Wohltat sei” (HSA 5:87). As an analogy for Heine’s society, this scene shows that it is hell for everyone: Christians, Jews, and heathens alike. The Jews, however, experience this hell in a different way, because instead of merely being tortured, they are also mocked. This baptism with cold water brings no relief; it only makes the flames feel hotter. Shedletzky describes its effect as “eher ein[] Schock, eine Abkühlung der Illusion, daß sich mit der Taufe etwas zum besseren ändert.”⁶²³ This ineffectual baptism that only worsens the Jews’ situation in the long term is reminiscent of Heine’s letter cited above in which he laments that his life has not improved in the slightest since the conversion: “ich habe seitdem nichts als Unglück” (HSA 20:234).

Passages like this demonstrate the profound psychological effect that the conversion must have had on him, along with its implications for his place in society. Holub writes about the “heavy toll”⁶²⁴ that it took on him because it signaled “the end of the German-Jewish synthesis that he had tried to perpetuate during the early 1820s.”⁶²⁵ During this time, he largely avoided the topic of his own conversion; only in a handful of private letters to friends such as those cited above did he address it explicitly. After the letter to Moser from January 1826, he was generally silent about it, “preferring to include his reflections on the topic in a somewhat distorted, and often humorous or satirical form in his literary works.”⁶²⁶ Much later in his life, after his shift in religious thinking — his second major conversion — in 1848, he

⁶²³ Shedletzky, “Niemals von jüdischen Verhältnissen sprechen,” 58.

⁶²⁴ Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 70.

⁶²⁵ Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 70.

⁶²⁶ Robert C. Holub, “Heine’s Conversion: Reflections from the ‘Matratzengruft,’” *The Germanic Review* 74.4 (1999): 285.

began to address it more openly.⁶²⁷ In the 1820s, however, he had much more to say about the conversions of others than his own. Eduard Gans, then the president of the *Verein für die Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*, began considering converting for the same reasons as Heine – in order to reach his professional goals — after being denied a professorship on the grounds that he was Jewish. The members of the *Verein* were troubled by this, and this was the beginning of the end for the group — or, as Bartscherer writes: “De facto bedeutete das das Todesurteil für den Verein.”⁶²⁸ After having made his intentions public, at least to the members of the *Verein*, over a period of several months, Gans was baptized on 12 December 1825, six months after Heine.⁶²⁹ While Gans did in fact receive the professorship that he anticipated his baptism would make possible, Heine’s conversion did not land him the career that he hoped for. It is therefore conceivable that Heine’s criticism of Gans for doing exactly what he himself had done was the result of some bitterness that Heine carried for having made this sacrifice in vain.⁶³⁰

Heine expressed his criticism of Gans most overtly in a poem titled “Einem Abtrünnigen.” Gans’s name does not appear in the poem, but it was written at the end of 1825, shortly after Heine learned of Gans’s decision, and Heine scholars agree that the apostate of the poem refers to Gans.⁶³¹ It begins by calling to mind the “Jugendmut[.]” (HSA 1:261) of the apostate, who has allowed himself to be “gebändigt” and surrendered to the Lord:

Und du bist zu Kreuz gekrochen,
 Zu dem Kreuz, das du verachtetest,
 Das du noch vor wenigen Wochen
 In den Staub zu treten dachtest! (HSA 1:261)

⁶²⁷ See Holub, “Heine’s Conversion,” 291.

⁶²⁸ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 42.

⁶²⁹ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 43.

⁶³⁰ Bartscherer describes this as “die eigentliche Tragik von Heines Taufe.” (Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 44.)

⁶³¹ See Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 44-46, and Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 78.

Heine then attributes this surprising turn toward Christianity to the reading of “Schlegel, Haller, Burke” (HSA 1:261). The first two are also converts, from Protestantism to Catholicism: Friedrich Schlegel in 1808 and Karl Ludwig von Haller in 1820. Edmund Burke, who underwent no conversion, is “oddly out of place.”⁶³² He shares his conservative thinking with Schlegel and Haller, but not with Gans. Holub proposes that this strange grouping of reactionaries “reflects Heine’s momentary anger with his friend more than any true political affinities.”⁶³³ Heine concludes the poem by lamenting that the apostate has lost the heroic status he once had: “Gestern noch ein Held gewesen, / Ist man heute schon ein Schurke” (HSA 1:261).

In the first two stanzas, Heine addresses the apostate as “du,” but in these final two lines he uses the impersonal “man,” distancing his critique from the individual and rendering it more generalized – Gans is one of many Jews who turned to Christianity during this time, just like Heine himself. Heine is mourning the fact that so many Jews had to relinquish this part of their Jewish identity, and he is speaking as much to himself as he is to Gans: this critique of Gans is “natürlich auch Selbstkritik.”⁶³⁴ The poem is a “kompensatorische[r] Akt der Schuldverdrängung,”⁶³⁵ that Heine commits “um sich selbst zu entlasten.”⁶³⁶ A letter to Moses Moser from this same period demonstrates the self-loathing for which Heine was seeking an outlet; after mentioning Gans, he tells Moser: “Verzeih mir den Unmut, er ist zumeist gegen mich selbst gerichtet. Ich steh oft auf des Nachts und stelle mich vor den Spiegel und schimpfe mich aus. Vielleicht sehe ich des Freundes Seele jetzt für einen solchen Spiegel an; aber es kommt mir vor als sey er nicht mehr so klar wie sonst” (HSA 20:240).

⁶³² Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 79.

⁶³³ Holub, “Confessions of an Apostate,” 79.

⁶³⁴ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 100.

⁶³⁵ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 44.

⁶³⁶ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 44.

“Einem Abtrünnigen” is an example of how Heine discusses Jewish apostasy “in a series of distortions, displacements, and refractions,”⁶³⁷ projecting his feelings about himself not only onto characters in his literary works, but also on his friends and acquaintances. This displacement is a form of the ironic distance that characterized Heine’s writing, and it seems to have been Heine’s primary method of coping with the disappointment and inner conflict spurred by his baptism and its consequences on his life. The irony here consists in the fact that when Heine criticizes others, he is actually criticizing himself. In creating this distance, he takes on a disguise that allows him to displace the feelings of guilt about giving up this part of his identity.

The Jewish Historian: *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*

The phase in Heine’s life that was marked by an increased participation in Jewish culture through the *Verein* overlaps with an important development in his literary aesthetics, as Robert Holub notes: “From a purely temporal vantage point, therefore, the beginnings of his disillusionment with romanticism and his involvement with Judaism coincide.”⁶³⁸ In his historical novel, *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, we see Heine’s attempt to incorporate both of these interests into the same work. The novel represents another attempt to preserve his Jewish identity while at the same time distancing himself from it.

Heine began writing this prose text, which would remain a fragment, in May of 1824, and by July of that year he had finished the first chapter and begun the second. In the year that followed, until about June of 1825, he wrote the second chapter and started developing a plan for the third chapter, which he would not add until fifteen years later. This means that in the year preceding June of 1825, he was both preparing for his baptism into Protestantism as well as engaging more heavily in Jewish history and culture than probably any other time in

⁶³⁷ Holub, “Heine’s Conversion,” 285-286.

⁶³⁸ Holub, “Personal Roots and German Traditions,” 43.

his life.⁶³⁹ He conducted extensive research in order to craft a confident historical narrator for *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, as he described to Moses Moser in a letter from June of 1824: “Außerdem treibe ich viel Chronikenstudium und ganz besonders viel historia judaica. Letztere wegen Berührung mit dem Rabbi, und vielleicht auch wegen inneren Bedürfnisses” (HSA 20:167). This research was not only the result of scholarly interest, but also because of his desire to have a more personal connection with Jewish history. He experienced a range of emotions during this exploration of Jewish texts with which he had relatively little prior engagement: “Ganz eigene Gefühle bewegen mich wenn ich jene traurige Analen durchblättere; eine Fülle der Belehrung und des Schmerzes. Der Geist der jüdischen Geschichte offenbart sich mir immer mehr und mehr, und diese geistige Rüstung wird mir gewiß in der Folge sehr zu statten kommen” (HSA 20:167). His emotional connection to the work is again clear in a letter from the following October, in which he described his progress on the *Rabbi* to Moser: “Es wird aber sehr groß, wohl ein dicker Band, und mit unsäglicher Liebe trage ich das ganze Werk in der Brust. Ist es ja doch ganz aus der Liebe hervorgehend, nicht als eitel Ruhmgier” (HSA 20:176). Despite his indifference about the novel making him famous, he expressed his hope that it would have a widespread and momentous reception, that it would become “ein unsterbliches Buch [...], eine ewige Lampe im Dome Gottes, kein verpraßelndes Theaterlicht” (HSA 20:176). A few months later, in July of 1825, he wrote to Moser once more about the *Rabbi*, expressing the same amount of enthusiasm about its reception and the role it might play in the future of Jewish literature: “Ende dieses Jahres denke ich den Rabbi fertig zu haben. Es wird ein Buch seyn das von den Zünzen aller Jahrhunderte als *Quelle* genannt wird” (HSA 20:204). The fact that Heine was so involved in Jewish history immediately following his baptism demonstrates the psychological distance he kept from that decision, since Heine himself had defined the “Quellenbegriff” of Leopold

⁶³⁹ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 99.

Zunz as limited to “Werke jüdischer Autoren,”⁶⁴⁰ suggesting that he still considered himself Jewish after his conversion. This is one example of the conflict that marked Heine’s religious self-identification between the years of 1825 and 1848, a conflict “zwischen dem Lebemenschen und dem Idealisten,”⁶⁴¹ and a conflict that led him to a certain attitude of denial about what he had sacrificed in allowing himself to be baptized. It is not surprising that the literary works of an author who was distanced from any concrete sense of identity would be so marked by ironic language.

Heine did not finish the *Rabbi* at the end of 1825, as he had optimistically reported to Moser, but abandoned it at some point during the fall of that year. In 1840, he decided to return to the novel after hearing of the Damascus affair, in which thirteen members of the Jewish community in Syria were accused of murdering a Capuchin monk in a religious ritual, and were arrested and tortured by the Ottoman authorities.⁶⁴² These accusations resulted in additional charges of blood libel and pogroms in other Jewish communities, and waves of anti-Semitic violence caused Heine to take “sofort und entschieden Partei für die Opfer.”⁶⁴³ In his *Französische Zustände*, he reacted to the Damascus affair by commenting on the great harm that religious fanaticism had brought to the world: “Erscheinungen dieser Art sind ein Unglück, dessen Folgen unberechenbar. Der Fanatismus ist ein ansteckendes Uebel, das sich unter den verschiedensten Formen verbreitet, und am Ende gegen uns Alle wüthet” (HSA 10:30).

These events motivated him to revisit *Der Rabbi*, the subject matter of which was inspired by what had happened in Damascus, and to finally prepare the novel for publication. He added the planned third chapter, but even after this addition, he could not bring it to a

⁶⁴⁰ Anne Maximiliane Jäger, “Bacherach – Frankfurt – Toledo. Heines ‘Rabbi von Bacherach’ als literarisches Projekt der jüdischen Aufklärung,” in *Aufklärung und Skepsis. Internationaler Heine-Kongreß 1997 zum 200. Geburtstag*, ed. Joseph A. Kruse, Bernd Witte, and Karin Füllner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 335.

⁶⁴¹ Jäger, “Bacherach – Frankfurt – Toledo,” 346.

⁶⁴² Jäger, “Bacherach – Frankfurt – Toledo,” 335.

⁶⁴³ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 359.

cohesive conclusion, opting instead for a timely publication with the subtitle “Ein Fragment.” In the first chapter, the narrator frequently plays the role of historian, imparting the information that Heine gathered during his extensive research for *Der Rabbi*. He describes the long history of “Judenverfolgung” (HSA 9:55) beginning with the crusades. It was at its worst during the fourteenth century, “am Ende der großen Pest, die, wie jedes andre öffentliche Unglück, durch die Juden entstanden seyn sollte” (HSA 9:55). Christians, claiming that Jews had brought “den Zorn Gottes” (HSA 9:55) down onto them, traveled through the Rhine region and southern Germany and murdered or forcibly baptized thousands of Jews, all the while “zur Buße sich selbst geißelnd und ein tolles Marienlied singend” (HSA 9:55). The narrator introduces the topic of blood libel, explaining that it is the accusation that Jews “an ihrem Paschafeste Christenkinder schlachteten, um das Blut derselben bey ihrem nächtlichen Gottesdienste zu gebrauchen” (HSA 9:55). He describes how the Jews were virtually powerless to defend themselves against such accusations:

Die Juden, hinlänglich verhaßt wegen ihres Glaubens, ihre Reichthums, und ihrer Schuldbücher, waren an jenem Festtage ganz in den Händen ihrer Feinde, die ihr Verderben nur gar zu leicht bewirken konnten, wenn sie das Gerücht eines solchen Kindermords verbreiteten, vielleicht gar einen blutigen Kinderleichnam in das verfehnte Haus eines Juden heimlich hineinschwärzten, und dort nächtlich die betende Judenfamilie überfielen; wo alsdann gemordet, geplündert und getauft wurde, und große Wunder geschahen durch das vorgefundene todte Kind, welches die Kirche am Ende gar kanonsirte. (HSA 9:55)

Again, murder and baptism are mentioned together, highlighting that their only hope for survival was often a baptism by coercion. The narrator then begins to describe more specifically the Jewish community in Bacherach, who had been victims of this blood libel on multiple occasions. The result of these accusations has been that Jewish communities tended to turn inward, and become more rooted in their Jewish identities: “Je mehr aber der Haß sie von außen bedrängte, desto inniger und traulicher wurde das häusliche Zusammenleben, desto tiefer wurzelte die Frömmigkeit und Gottesfurcht der Juden von Bacherach” (HSA

9:56). This phenomenon is part of the religious economies model of Stark and Finke: the Jewish community of Bacherach responds to these attacks by becoming more isolated, and thus a higher tension group than it had been previously. High-tension organizations are marked by a greater social divide between members and non-members, sustaining “norms and values different from those of the surrounding culture.”⁶⁴⁴ This social divide constitutes a greater sacrifice for members of the high tension group, thus it demands a greater commitment of its members and has a high “cost” for them, as Stark and Finke write: “[T]he higher the tension between a religious group and its surroundings, *the more expensive it is to belong.*”⁶⁴⁵

The narrator of *Der Rabbi* begins very generally by describing the situation of Jewish communities in Europe, and then speaks more specifically about the Jews in Bacherach, until finally he turns to the circumstances of the main characters, Sara and Abraham, who are hosting a *seder*, an evening of rituals that Heine describes in some detail. After Abraham abruptly flees the *seder*, taking Sara with him with no explanation, he explains to her that he saw the corpse of a child hidden under the table, and knew that blood libel was taking place and that everyone present was about to be attacked. He suspects that two mysterious guests have set them up: “Da merkte ich [...], daß unsre zwey späte Gäste nicht von der Gemeine Israels waren, sondern von der Versammlung der Gottlosen, die sich berathen hatten jenen Leichnahm heimlich in unser Haus zu schaffen, um uns des Kindermordes zu beschuldigen und das Volk aufzureizen uns zu plündern und zu ermorden” (HSA 9:61).

Following this scene, the narrator takes a step back and switches once again into historian mode, describing the geographical and political circumstances that led to the location of “das heute Judenquartier” (HSA 9:69). He describes the various attacks on this community, naming the years of important events, as a historian would: “Im Jahr 1240 hatte

⁶⁴⁴ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 195.

⁶⁴⁵ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 195.

das entzügelte Volk ein großes Blutbad unter ihnen angerichtet, welches man die erste Judenschlacht nannte” (HSA 9:69), followed “im Jahr 1349” (HSA 9:69) by the “zweite Judenschlacht” (HSA 9:69), in which Jewish homes were burned and the majority of the people were murdered. As the novel progresses, however, this historian narrator begins to fade into the background as the text focuses more on the experiences of Abraham and Sara. Sammons notes that the perspective of the narrator changes from one chapter to the next: in the first we find “a narrator who is a passionate partisan of the Jews,”⁶⁴⁶ and through the “illusion of dry objectivity in the exposition,”⁶⁴⁷ this narrator establishes a historical context in order to prepare the reader for the blood libel against the Jews of Bacherach. In the second chapter, the narrator gains a sense of “satire and irony,”⁶⁴⁸ maintaining a certain distance from the events in the novel, but in a different way by exhibiting “features of an informed observer who describes the visible characteristics of curious customs.”⁶⁴⁹

In *Der Rabbi*, Heine attempts to synthesize the Romantic form with Jewish subject matter, combining the competing elements of his “doppelten literarisch-kulturellen Identität,”⁶⁵⁰ that of the German-Jewish poet striving to find common ground in “sein Judentum und seine Schriftstellerrolle.”⁶⁵¹ *Der Rabbi* contains many references to traditional German Romanticism: “the moonlit Rhine landscape of the flight with its reference to the hoard of the Nibelungs, the mysterious mute boatman who gazes on Sara with unexplained significance, the folktales of the Teufelskährich and Wispertal remembered by Sara from her childhood, [and] the tournament staged by Kaiser Max in Frankfurt.”⁶⁵² The characters, however, are Jewish, and the *seder* in the first chapter takes place in a Jewish setting. But

⁶⁴⁶ Jeffrey L. Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach: The Unresolved Tensions,” *The German Quarterly* 37.1 (1964): 37.

⁶⁴⁷ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 37.

⁶⁴⁸ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 37.

⁶⁴⁹ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 37.

⁶⁵⁰ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 97.

⁶⁵¹ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 98.

⁶⁵² Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 35.

even this Jewish environment is rendered more familiar to a German audience, as Jeffrey Grossman explains, because the narrator “limits the use of Hebrew terms”⁶⁵³ while describing it, “relying on German expressions to translate the rituals, symbols, and Haggadic tales.”⁶⁵⁴ The *seder* is not only described on its own terms, but is called an “Abendfeier” and “Abendmahlzeit” — terms that stem from the Christian tradition.⁶⁵⁵

Despite the narrator’s attempt to reduce the “foreignness”⁶⁵⁶ of the Jewish material, the fact that they not a natural fit for the Romantic form remains obvious. Several Heine scholars have noticed this contrast; for example, Sammons observes that the characters seem out of place in their environment: “The Romantic landscape belongs to Christian Europe; the Jews of the fifteenth century do not live in it.”⁶⁵⁷ The contrast is particularly noticeable in the moment when Rabbi Abraham takes “das silberne Becken” (HSA 9:62) from Sara’s hands and tosses it into the chasm, “damit uns das Unglück nicht verfolge” (HSA 9:62). Here he is not behaving as a Jew would, but his action contributes to the Romantic atmosphere in the novel: “This bit of primitive magic, though romantically appealing, has no place in the mainstream of Jewish thought, which does not include sacrifice to appease an irrationally angry God, and thus jars badly with Rabbi Abraham’s symbolic character and the tenor of Jewish ritual elsewhere in the fragment.”⁶⁵⁸ The Romantic tradition also appears in the series of visions or hallucinations that come to Sara during their flight up the Rhine. Typical of Romanticism is the exploration of the liminal spaces between the real and the imaginary, the consciously known and the subconsciously desired, and our inability to distinguish between these realms.

⁶⁵³ Jeffrey Grossman, “Heine and Jewish Culture: The Poetics of Appropriation,” in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. Roger F. Cook (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 267.

⁶⁵⁴ Grossman, “Heine and Jewish Culture,” 267.

⁶⁵⁵ Grossman, “Heine and Jewish Culture,” 267.

⁶⁵⁶ Grossman, “Heine and Jewish Culture,” 267.

⁶⁵⁷ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 35-36.

⁶⁵⁸ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 36.

This unsuccessful synthesis of Romantic form and Jewish material ultimately reveals that Heine was not only in a place of aesthetic conflict in his writing, but also in a place of conflict about his identity as a German and as a Jew. The novel highlights the connections between the two cultures, which is particularly evident in Sara's state of reverie, in which it is "the Rhine, ever-popular symbol of Germany, and not the Red Sea, [that] whispers the melody of the Hagadah."⁶⁵⁹ The two cultures are interwoven so tightly for Sara that they appear together in the deepest recesses of Sara's mind; they are "integrated on the level of memory"⁶⁶⁰ in a dynamic relationship with one another. But while they cannot be separated from one another on this most fundamental level of the individual, the harsh reality is made clear: on a societal level, they can never be fully at peace with one another, which is why these Jews are forced into exile in the first place.

Just as in *Almansor*, the persecuted minority religious group is presented with three alternatives when confronted with the authoritarian Christian church-state: exile, conversion, or execution. In both of these works, Heine explores the motivations of characters who choose each of these paths, and in *Der Rabbi*, the sudden exile of Abraham and Sara does not come without ethical and psychological consequences. It can be initially disconcerting when the reader realizes that Abraham has saved only himself and his wife, with no attempt to warn the others. Given the fact, however, that whoever planted the corpse under the table was still in the room, a safe and undetected exit for everyone would have been logistically impossible. Nevertheless, the reader may wonder to what extent this sudden exile affects him psychologically. Abraham assures Sara that the others would only be plundered, and not killed, but given the historical background with which the narrator has provided us, this claim seems too optimistic. Furthermore, on the next day in the synagogue he recites the prayer for

⁶⁵⁹ Jennifer Kapczynski, Kristin Kopp, Paul B. Reitter, Daniel Sakaguchi, "The Polish Question and Heine's Exilic Identity," in *Heinrich Heine's Contested Identities. Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 147.

⁶⁶⁰ Kapczynski et. al., "The Polish Question and Heine's Exilic Identity," 147.

the dead, suggesting that he believed all along that they would be killed, which renders him, in Sammons's interpretation, "not only a coward but a liar."⁶⁶¹ He shows no signs of remorse for the remainder of the text, although we cannot say what would have happened if Heine had been able to complete the novel. Sammons suggests two possible readings of the Rabbi's surprising lack of mental conflict about this: "either the question of the Rabbi's guilt is entirely bypassed because it inconveniently arises out of the mechanism which motivates his flight, or the reaction to this guilty act is delayed and postponed to bear fruit later, while the Rabbi's cheerfulness represents only a repression of torment."⁶⁶² The ethical complexity in the Rabbi's decision to go into exile and abandon his community remains unresolved because Heine himself could never find a satisfactory solution to the problem of exile. The treatment of the idea of exile in *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* "is fundamentally dialectical: born of conflict, produced from within and without, and simultaneously positive and negative."⁶⁶³ Similarly, *Almansor* presents exile as a problem with no satisfactory resolution, as demonstrated by the eponymous hero's suicide. After having gone into exile and found it an unacceptable way to live, Almansor saw his choices reduced to two — conversion or execution — and chose the latter.

While the first two chapters of *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* explore the theme of exile, the third chapter introduces conversion in the character of Don Isaak. It is worth noting that these first two chapters were written in 1824, just prior to Heine's own conversion (and also prior to his exile in 1831), while the third chapter was written in 1840, fifteen years after his baptism into Protestantism. The third chapter addresses conversion in a way that Heine was not able to do while his baptism was so near; he appears to have needed some temporal distance in order to introduce a Jewish convert to Christianity into a literary work. Heine

⁶⁶¹ Sammons, "Heine's Rabbi von Bacherach," 33.

⁶⁶² Sammons, "Heine's Rabbi von Bacherach," 33.

⁶⁶³ Kapczynski et. al., "The Polish Question and Heine's Exilic Identity," 148.

researched the historical figure of Don Isaak Abarbanel in particular detail.⁶⁶⁴ When Rabbi Abraham encounters him in the third chapter, it is a meeting of old friends; they have not seen one another in seven years. Abraham is surprised to find that Don Isaak is no longer a pious Jew, but a self-described “Heide” (HSA 9:85) who is more interested in the Jewish cuisine than the Jewish religion. In contrast to the Abraham, “the traditional pious Jew,” Isaak represents “the worldly, chivalrous apostate.”⁶⁶⁵ He is exemplary of a certain type of Jewishness with which Heine identified, “des Judentums an der Schwelle zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit.”⁶⁶⁶ Don Isaak is portrayed as an agreeable, successful, and carefree apostate who shows little remorse, and asks for forgiveness only in jest — “Unsre liebe Frau von Sidon, die heilige Astarte, mag es mir verzeihen, daß ich vor der schmerzenreichen Mutter des Gekreuzigten niederknie und bete” (HSA 9:85) — before quickly changing the subject back to food: “Aber schau nicht so sauer [...] schau mich nicht an mit Abscheu. Meine Nase ist nicht abtrünnig geworden” (HSA 9:85) as he continues by describing his favorite Jewish meals.

Heine’s portrayal of Don Isaak as a light-hearted and sympathetic apostate stands in sharp contrast to the treatment that Eduard Gans received in “Einem Abtrünnigen.” This difference lends insight into the way Heine thought about Jewish apostasy in 1824, when his own conversion was a heavy psychological burden on him, and 1840, when he had had over fifteen years to work through his regret. While bitterness and remorse dominate the poem in an act of displacement of blame, the character of Don Isaak is a reflection of Heine’s new identity: “Heine versteht sich, wie Abarbanel, als sinnenfroher ‘Hellene’, der seine jüdische Identität aber keineswegs verleugnet.”⁶⁶⁷ The fact that the majority of the humor in the novel comes from the mouth of Don Isaak is further evidence that Heine identified with him and

⁶⁶⁴ See Jäger, “Bacherach – Frankfurt – Toledo,” 339.

⁶⁶⁵ Sammons, “Heine’s Rabbi von Bacherach,” 37.

⁶⁶⁶ Jäger, “Bacherach – Frankfurt – Toledo,” 339.

⁶⁶⁷ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 442.

used him as a means of expressing the evolving facets of religious and political identity with confidence. In “Einem Abtrünnigen,” the irony is found in the hidden meaning of the poem – that Heine was actually criticizing himself – while in the character of Don Isaak, the irony appears in Don Isaak’s willingness to make fun of his own identity as a Jewish apostate.

The Critic of Religion

Heine went through so many religious changes in his lifetime that some of his interpreters have claimed that he also went through a period of atheism, though the irony and ambiguity in his writing makes it difficult to prove or disprove such an assertion. It has been a controversial topic among Heine scholars. Whenever the topic of “Heines Atheismus” is raised, “beeilt sich die Forschung, das religiöse Gefühl des Dichters zu beschwören, ihn zu einem ‘homo religiosus’ zu stilisieren, ja, ihn als den unumstrittenen Gewährsmann der ‘Religion nach der Aufklärung’ zu betrachten.”⁶⁶⁸ Sigmund Freud, a self-described atheist, seemed to think that Heine had a similar lack of belief, calling him “unsere[n] Unglaubensgenossen”⁶⁶⁹ in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927), with the knowledge, of course, that Heine used this same term to describe Spinoza in the second volume of the *Reisebilder* (*Nordsee III*).⁶⁷⁰ Whether Heine meant to call Spinoza an “atheist” with the term “Unglaubensgenosse” is questionable, however, because he was fully aware that Spinoza was not an atheist in any strict sense of the word. What Heine shared with Spinoza was his monism, i.e. his rejection of dualism and teleology, and his localization of the divine in the natural world. Heine did come close to calling himself an atheist on a few occasions; for

⁶⁶⁸ Morawe, “Heine und Holbach,” 237. See also Hermann Lübke, “Heinrich Heine und die Religion nach der Aufklärung,” in *Der Späte Heine 1848-1856. Literatur, Politik, Religion*, ed. Wilhelm Gössmann and Joseph A. Kruse (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1982).

⁶⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke, chronologisch geordnet. Vierzehnter Band, Werke aus den Jahren 1925-1931* (London: Imago Publishing Co, 1948), 14:374.

⁶⁷⁰ See Morawe, “Heine und Holbach,” 242. See also Michael Mack, *Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity: The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 199-200.

example, in 1826 in the *Buch Le Grand* he described his reading materials from years past: “[I]ch war damals sehr irreligiös und las den Thomas Paine, das Système de la nature, den westphälischen Anzeiger und den Schleiermacher, und ließ mir den Bart und den Verstand wachsen, und wollte unter die Rationalisten gehen” (HSA 5:133). Heine’s admission that he read Thomas Paine and d’Holbach, two of the most famous atheists in history, while describing himself as “irreligiös,” can certainly be read as an implication of atheism. He distanced himself from the statement, however, by emphasizing that it was only his past self who was interested in such things. He never declared that he had any current leanings toward atheism, and thus was able to defend himself against any accusations of godlessness, as Bodo Morawe writes: “Dieses ‘damals, nicht jetzt’ hat offensichtlich dem Selbstschutz gedient.”⁶⁷¹ He used this same maneuver in his *Geständnisse*, describing his irreligiosity in retrospect, while simultaneously renouncing any inclination toward atheism at the time of writing the *Geständnisse* in 1854:

Wir haben jetzt fanatische Mönche des Atheismus, Großinquisitoren des Unglaubens, die den Herrn von Voltair verbrennen lassen würden, weil er doch im Herzen ein verstockter Deist gewesen. [...] Als der Atheismus anfang, sehr stark nach Käse, Branntwein und Tabak zu stinken: da gingen mir plötzlich die Augen auf, und was ich nicht durch meinen Verstand begriffen hatte, das begriff ich jetzt durch den Geruchssinn, durch das Mißbehagen des Ekels, und mit meinem Atheismus hatte es, gottlob! ein Ende. (HSA 12:59)

This passage implies that Heine did in fact subscribe to an earlier version of atheism — the kind that existed before it was commandeered by the fanatics.⁶⁷² His use of the possessive “mit meinem Atheismus” suggests that he did at some point call atheism his own. Moreover,

⁶⁷¹ Morawe, “Heine und Holbach,” 247.

⁶⁷² Heine adds that it was not simply this instinctive feeling of “Ekel” (HSA 12:59) that caused him to turn away from atheism, but also his concerns about what effect it would have on the political landscape in Germany: “[I]ch sah nämlich, daß der Atheismus ein mehr oder minder geheimes Bündniß geschlossen mit dem schauderhaft nacktesten, ganz feigenblattlosen, communen Communismus” (HSA 12:59). While the greatest task of his generation has been “die Emancipation des Volkes” (HSA 12:60) – “wir haben dafür gerungen und namenloses Elend ertragen, in der Heimath wie im Exile” (HSA 12:60) – he fears that giving too much power to the “Volk” is not the answer: “Das Volk, dessen Güte so sehr gepriesen wird, ist gar nicht gut; es ist manchmal so böse wie einige andere Potentaten” (HSA 12:60).

the fact that his atheism had “ein Ende” means, of course, that it must have existed at some point. Similarly, he wrote in a letter to François Mignet in January of 1849: “j’ai déserté l’athéisme allemand, et je suis à la veille de rentrer dans le giron des croyances les plus banales” (HSA 22:306). In order to be a deserter, one must have first been a subscriber. While it is not clear which version of atheism Heine identified with and exactly what he came to reject, it is worth noting that Heine described the end of this period of atheism in terms that are typical of conversion narratives: “da gingen mir plötzlich die Augen auf” (HSA 12:59). He was blind, and then he saw. In the “Vorbericht” to *Zur Geschichte der neueren schönen Literatur in Deutschland*, he explicitly rejected materialism and atheism, emphasizing instead his sensualist worldview: “Ich gehöre nicht zu den Materialisten, die den Geist verkörpern; ich gebe vielmehr den Körpern ihren Geist zurück, ich durchgeistige sie wieder, ich heilige sie. Ich gehöre nicht zu den Atheisten, die da verneinen; ich bejahe” (HSA 8:238). Materialism and atheism lack the balance between the “spiritualistischem Idealismus und mechanistischem Materialismus”⁶⁷³ that Heine strove to achieve, as described in more detail in his essay *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*.

Perhaps the most decisive factor in interpretations of Heine as an atheist lies in the fact that he doled out criticism for every religion about which he ever wrote. He had specific criticisms for each religion, condemning the various doctrines and their ill effect on humanity, but he also criticized religion in general as an oppressive force, especially when it was combined with the state. *Die Stadt Lucca* not only provides examples of these critiques, but it also portrays a character who expresses serious doubts about the existence of a god, an afterlife, or an earthly religion that is telling the truth. Mylady Mathilde tells Heine’s narrator, Doktor Heine, how even as a child she already found the idea of heaven implausible:

Als ich noch klein war, in Dublin, lag ich oft auf dem Rücken im Gras,
und sah in den Himmel, und dachte nach: ob wohl der Himmel wirklich so

⁶⁷³ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 353.

viele Herrlichkeiten enthalten mag, wie man davon rühmt? Aber, dacht ich, wie kommts, daß von diesen Herrlichkeiten niemals etwas herunterfällt, etwa ein brillantener Ohrring, oder eine Schnur Perlen oder wenigstens ein Stückchen Ananaskuchen, und daß immer nur Hagel oder Schnee oder gewöhnlicher Regen uns von oben herabbeschert wird? Das ist nicht ganz richtig, dacht ich – (HSA 6:158)

Their discussion then turns to the subject of conversion – the narrator is worried that Mathilde will cause others to doubt heaven’s existence as well: “Warum sagen Sie das, Mylady? Warum diese Zweifel nicht lieber verschweigen? Ungläubige, die keinen Himmel glauben, sollten nicht Proseliten machen” (HSA 6:158). He asks her what unbelievers such as herself could have to offer that would compete with the heavenly pleasures offered by Catholic priests and Protestant ministers as a compensation for their followers’ suffering on earth: “Zu welchen Genüssen aber kann der Ungläubige jemanden einladen?” (HSA 6:159) Mathilde’s answer reveals that while Heine may not himself have been an atheist, he certainly understood and sympathized with the sense of relief that many converts feel when they confidently reject the religion they have been taught: “Zu nichts, Doktor, als zu einem langen ruhigen Schläfe, der aber zuweilen für einen Unglücklichen sehr wünschenswerth seyn kann, besonders wenn er vorher mit zudringlichen Himmelseinladungen gar zu sehr geplagt worden” (HSA 6:159). This afterlife consisting of a peaceful slumber is the same heaven for which Danton hopes in the first scene of Büchner’s play, when he yearns for “Ruhe” (MA 3,2:5) instead of heaven. Mathilde sees the idea of an eternal afterlife in heaven not only as improbable, but also as the product of a conceited and presumptuous attitude: “Ich denke, Doktor, es gehört eine beträchtliche Porzion Eitelkeit und Anmaßung dazu, nachdem wir schon so viel Gutes und Schönes auf dieser Erde genossen, noch obendrein vom lieben Gott die Unsterblichkeit zu verlangen!” (HSA 6:159)

While this deconvert is portrayed in a relatively flattering light, the portraits of religion’s most vocal proponents in *Die Stadt Lucca* are mostly satirical, and they instigated

conservative critics such as Wolfgang Menzel to come to the church's defense.⁶⁷⁴ Prussian censorship authorities banned the *Reisebilder* in April 1831, citing its political content and blasphemous "Glaubenslehre."⁶⁷⁵ Among the material considered blasphemous was likely the scene in which the narrator receives a kiss from the pious Franscheska, but he knows that her kisses are only meant for someone equally as pious as she is. He takes her kisses and "secularizes" them: "Als Protestant machte ich mir kein Gewissen daraus, mir die Güter der katholischen Geistlichkeit zuzueignen, und auf der Stelle säkularisirte ich die frommen Küsse Franscheskas" (HSA 6:152). The first irony in this sentence is that Heine, while he was a Protestant by baptism, did not in fact have a strong sense of identity as a Protestant, as demonstrated by his letters following 1825 cited above in which he described the baptism as an entrance ticket into European culture, followed by the statements of disappointment when he realized that his life had not improved following the conversion. Thus when Heine speaks of himself "als Protestant," the underlying irony is that he is in fact speaking as "a Jew who appears in the guise of a Protestant."⁶⁷⁶ Heine, writing through his narrator, is much more willing to call himself a Protestant here, speaking through his narrator Doktor Heine, than he is elsewhere in his writings where the irony is not as apparent. In this scene from *Die Bäder von Lucca*, Heine puts on "a transparent mask"⁶⁷⁷ and claims "to be Protestant for comic effect and satirized the very act of donning masks."⁶⁷⁸ Through the secularization of her

⁶⁷⁴ See Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 358.

⁶⁷⁵ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 256.

⁶⁷⁶ "While Heine certainly was a certified Protestant by baptism, he quickly came to regret his decision to undergo baptism, as it, ironically, stamped him 'indelibly' a Jew, a Jew whose Jewishness could not be washed off by holy water. 'As a Protestant' thus covertly signals 'as a Jew.' As a Jew and Protestant, or, rather, a Jew who appears in the guise of a Protestant, the narrator appropriates the properties of the Catholic authorities without hesitations, secularizing them on the spot right then and there, inside the sanctuary of the sacred sphere of the church." (Willi Goetschel, "Heine's Critical Secularism," *boundary 2* 31.2 [2004]: 158.)

⁶⁷⁷ Ari Joskowicz, "Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks: Denominational Politics and the Poetics of Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Germany and France," *German Studies Review* 34.1 (2011): 69-90.

⁶⁷⁸ Joskowicz, "Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks," 77.

Catholic kisses, Heine succeeds in “satirically undoing Catholicism,”⁶⁷⁹ while distancing himself “from the politics he identified with it while at the same time hinting at his fascination with Catholicism's aesthetic and erotic appeal.”⁶⁸⁰ By seeing the world through various masks, he maintains the distance from each of these identities required in order to create a sense of irony. His position is always “not quite Protestant, not quite Jewish, and clearly not Catholic.”⁶⁸¹

It is ultimately of little consequence whether Franscheska's kisses are Catholic or Protestant, because Heine's only religion at this point in his life is the sensual, which transcended all confessional boundaries. When the narrator fails to receive further physical attention from her, he pounds on the door to her room and promises that he will convert to Catholicism, if that will gain him entry: “für diese einzige Nacht, die du mir noch gewährst, will ich selbst katholisch werden – aber auch nur für diese einzige Nacht!” (HSA 6:153) This is another instance of the pre-convert being locked out – just as Almansor begged for entry into his father's palace, so does Doktor Heine beg for entrance into Franscheskas room, and is denied because he has the wrong religion.

Conversion becomes the mere vehicle for temporary sensual pleasure, and Heine's narrator claims he will become “seelig” (HSA 6:153) through his access to her body. He makes no secret of the fact that this is a temporary conversion for personal gain, telling Franscheska: “[A]ber sobald ich des anderen Morgens erwache, reibe ich mir den Schlaf und den Katholizismus aus den Augen, und sehe wieder klar in die Sonne und in die Bibel, und bin wieder protestantisch vernünftig und nüchtern, nach wie vor” (HSA 6:153). The fact that Heine can so easily convert between denominations here highlights one of the fundamental ways in which he understands religion: It exists in order to fill the needs of the believer, and

⁶⁷⁹ Joskowicz, “Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks,” 76.

⁶⁸⁰ Joskowicz, “Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks,” 76.

⁶⁸¹ Joskowicz, “Heinrich Heine's Transparent Masks,” 78.

not the other way around. This evokes the religious economies model of Stark and Finke by answering the question of who is responsible for the religious offerings in the marketplace: Do the religions change in order to meet the needs of the consumer, or do the consumers only think of their needs in the context of the religions that are presented to them? When religions compete in a marketplace, the suppliers (the churches and their leaders) must meet the needs of their potential buyers (members). Stark and Finke maintain that “supply-side transformations”⁶⁸² must take place in order to remain competitive, which results in more religious diversity, and a freer and stronger religious marketplace overall. Thus the suppliers are responding to the preferences expressed by the consumers, and transform themselves as necessary. For Heine as well, the consumer was in control, and religions that did not keep up with the needs of potential adherents did not deserve to remain in existence.

Heine’s narrator in *Die Bäder von Lucca* has no qualms about changing his own religion at a moment’s notice, and his right to do so is one facet of the freedom of belief, the importance of which he stressed throughout his works. Doktor Heine describes his view of conversion at some length, lamenting that most people spend their time fighting about which religion is correct — which is almost always the religion “die man ihnen früh beigebracht” (HSA 6:168). He longs for a time when it was “anders,” when “keiner [sich] einfallen [ließ], die Lehre und die Feyer seiner Religion besonders anzupreisen, oder gar sie jemanden aufzudringen” (HSA 6:168). He describes a time when religion was part of one’s culture, passed on through the generations like “Familiensakra des Volks” (HSA 6:168). Religion was so intertwined with one’s heritage that the idea of a foreigner attempting to convert to this kind of religion seemed unnatural and appropriative, as in the example of the ancient Greeks: “einem Griechen wäre es ein Greuel gewesen, wenn ein Fremder, der nicht von seinem Geschlechte, eine Religionsgenossenschaft mit ihm verlangt hätte” (HSA 6:168). While an

⁶⁸² Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 193.

outsider desiring conversion into a new religion seems questionable, the idea of forcing one's own religion on outsiders is nothing less than an "Unmenschlichkeit" (HSA 6:168). Heine sees a fundamental shift in religion at the moment that people began to proselytize, and he names the Jews as the first group to do this:

Da kam aber ein Volk aus Egypten, dem Vaterland der Krokodile und des Priesterthums, und außer den Hautkrankheiten und den gestohlenen Gold- und Silbergeschirren, brachte es auch eine sogenannte positive Religion mit, eine sogenannte Kirche, ein Gerüste von Dogmen, an die man glauben, und heiliger Ceremonien, die man feyern mußte, ein Vorbild der späteren Staatsreligionen. (HSA 6:168-169)

Here Heine points out the gravity and the implications of the difference between proselytizing and non-proselytizing religions. His description of the ancient Greeks who regarded those who wished to convert to their religion with suspicion and distrust echoes the reluctance with which spiritual leaders in Hinduism react to those who wish to convert, such as Sri Chandrasehara Bharati Swami, who tells an American who wishes to become Hindu that he must first fully understand the religion into which he was born: "It is no freak that you were born a Christian. God ordained it that way because by the *samskara* acquired through your actions (*karma*) in previous births your soul has taken a pattern which will find its richest fulfillment in the Christian way of life. Therefore your salvation lies there and not in some other religion."⁶⁸³

This non-proselytizing version of Hinduism stands in contrast to Heine's depiction of early Judaism, and with it the beginnings of monotheism. He calls monotheism the original "positive Religion," and it is out of this kind of proselytizing religion that the later church-state entities that Heine so abhorred were able to take hold. This development of "Proselitenmachen" and "Glaubenszwang" is responsible for "so viel Blut und Thränen" (HSA 6:169) in the history of humanity. He means here of course not only Judaism, but also every proselytizing religion that followed it, most notably Christianity. The most extreme

⁶⁸³ Sharma, "Hinduism and Conversion," 431-432.

form of proselytizing is the establishment of theocracy, which is the worst possible form of religion for Heine: “Die Religion kann nie schlimmer sinken als wenn sie solchermaßen zur Staatsreligion erhoben wird” (HSA 6:169). Heine compares religions to the economy, advocating a free market in which all are allowed to compete: “Wie den Gewerben ist auch den Religionen das Monopolsystem schädlich, durch freye Conkurrenz bleiben sie kräftig” (HSA 6:171). Here Heine articulates another facet of the religious economies model of Stark and Finke: religions are at their best when they are allowed to compete in a free market, without restraints imposed by theocratic governments. Heine envisions a complete “politische Gleichheit der Gottesdienste,” a “Gewerbefreyheit der Götter” (HSA 6:172), in which the state in no way interferes with religion. In other words, Heine’s ideal government is a secular one. In the context of Heine’s own baptism, this critique of an official state religion is not merely abstract, but a personal indictment of the repressive Christian state in which he lived, which still lacked equality for non-Christians despite the reforms that were introduced to Prussia by Napoleon and submitted by Karl Freiherr vom Stein and Karl August Fürst von Hardenberg.

The *Exgott*

Heine’s life changed dramatically in 1848 when he began to suffer from *tubes dorsalis*, also known as *syphilis myelopathy*, a degeneration of nerves in the spinal cords. This left him paralyzed in his bed for his final eight years until his death in 1856. In his “Matratzengruft” (HSA 27:212), as he called it, he suffered not only from a complete paralysis of his lower extremities, but also from cramps and painful colics of the gastrointestinal tract. He also experienced frequent coughing fits, persistent constipation, difficulty seeing and hearing, difficulty using his tongue and eyelids, and shooting pains

through his spine.⁶⁸⁴ Pathographers who have investigated Heine's writings along with the medical context of his time have suggested a wide array of more accurate diagnoses of Heine's illness: besides venereal infection (syphilis, *tabes dorsalis*), also multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, acute intermittent porphyria, chronic polioencephalitis, tuberculosis with subsequent meningoencephalitis, and lead poisoning.⁶⁸⁵ While we cannot know for certain which, if any, of these would have been the correct diagnosis, it is ultimately of little consequence, as Kruse notes, because "their effects and symptoms are equally gruesome."⁶⁸⁶

In order to alleviate his pain, Heine took large amounts of opium, which he also valued for its antitussive effect. Because of its addictive quality, Heine had begun to abuse the morphine over the years until an enormous dose caused him an uncontrolled vomiting crisis that lasted several days before his death.⁶⁸⁷ The diagnosis of syphilis, which was not called into question until nearly a century after Heine's death, is problematic for the significant reason that he remained mentally capable and intellectually lucid for the duration of his physical symptoms, and it is, as Ernst Pawel writes, "exceedingly rare for a syphilitic disease to reach an advanced state such as, in this instance, *tabes dorsalis*, without gravely affecting the mental faculties and emotional stability of the patient."⁶⁸⁸ Pawel also notes that Heine lived with his wife "in what certainly was no platonic relationship," yet she lived "in provocatively robust health until 1883."⁶⁸⁹ Heine's mental clarity is well documented, not only in the fact that he remained a prolific poet during this period, but also in his personal correspondence, such as in a letter to Campe in July of 1848: "Meine Krankheit wird täglich

⁶⁸⁴ Christoph auf der Horst and Alfons Labisch, "Did Heine Have Syphilis?" *Der Hautarzt* (2007): 107. See also Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 540.

⁶⁸⁵ Horst and Labisch, "Did Heine Have Syphilis," 107. See also Ernst Pawel, *The Poet Dying. Heinrich Heine's Last Years in Paris* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 6.

⁶⁸⁶ Joseph A. Kruse, "Late Thoughts: Reconsiderations from the 'Matratzengruft,'" in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. Roger F. Cook (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 328.

⁶⁸⁷ Horst and Labisch, "Did Heine Have Syphilis," 118-119. See also Kruse, "Late Thoughts," 328.

⁶⁸⁸ Pawel, *The Poet Dying*, 6.

⁶⁸⁹ Pawel, *The Poet Dying*, 6.

unerträglicher, und ich schreibe nur mit äußerster Anstrengung. Kann die eignen Schriftzüge nicht sehen. Dabey aber geistig stark, geweckt, ja geweckt, wie ich es nie vorher gewesen” (HSA 22:287). Two years later, he wrote to Betty Heine to reaffirm his intellectual awakeness: “Ich arbeite wenig, aber mein Geist war nie aufgeweckter, thätiger und rüstiger wie jetzt” (HSA 23:47). He also drew a connection between his physical demise and the great political failure of the February Revolution, two events that coincidentally happened concurrently. Already in June of 1848, he wrote to Edouard de la Grange: “Mes jambes n’ont pas survécu à la chute de la royauté” (HSA 22:284). After 1848, neither Germany’s political landscape nor the religious and philosophical worldview of one of its most prominent poets, Heine, would ever be the same again.

The two most revealing texts for understanding the nature of Heine’s religious shift after 1848 are the afterword to the *Romanzero*, which appeared in 1851, and the preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*. This essay was originally written in 1833 and 1834, but while preparing the second edition in 1852, Heine felt the need to add a preface in which he made it abundantly clear that his worldview had changed dramatically and that he did not want to be held responsible for certain ideas about religion that appear in the essay. In this preface, he admits that he would prefer for the text to never have reached the eyes of the public: “Ehrlich gestanden, es wäre mir lieb, wenn ich das Buch ganz ungedruckt lassen könnte” (HSA 8:127), because his views “über manche Dinge, besonders über göttliche Dinge” (HSA 8:127) have undergone a significant transformation: “[M]anches, was ich behauptete, widerspricht jetzt meiner bessern Ueberzeugung” (HSA 8:127). However, just as the arrow does not belong to the archer once it has left his bow, “das Wort gehört nicht mehr dem Sprecher, sobald es seiner Lippe entsprungen und gar durch die Presse vervielfältigt worden” (HSA 8:127), thus Heine is content to revise his religious claims in the form of this preface. Every writer reserves the right, “seinen Irrtum offen zu

gestehen” (HSA 8:127), and Heine does so here “ohne Scheu” (HSA 8:127), writing that “alles, was in diesem Buche namentlich auf die große Gottesfrage Bezug hat, ebenso falsch wie unbesonnen ist” (HSA 8:127). Specifically, he rescinds his claim that deism is dead in Germany, having been destroyed by Hegelian philosophers. He no longer believes “that German idealism had bled deism to death.”⁶⁹⁰ Instead he emphasizes that deism is alive and well: “Der Deismus lebt, lebt sein lebendigstes Leben, er ist nicht tot, und am allerwenigsten hat ihn die neueste deutsche Philosophie getötet” (HSA 8:127). He interprets his earlier willingness to believe in the teachings of the Hegelian school as the result of the self-apotheosis he engaged in through this philosophy, which suited the vanity and pride that marked his personality during those years:

Ich war nie abstracter Denker, und ich nahm die Synthese der Hegel’schen Doctrin ungeprüft an, da ihre Folgerungen meiner Eitelkeit schmeichelten. Ich war jung und stolz, und es that meinem Hochmuth wohl, als ich von Hegel erfuhr, daß nicht, wie meine Großmutter meinte, der liebe Gott, der im Himmel residirt, sondern ich selbst hier auf Erden der liebe Gott sei. (HSA 12:64-65)

Thus Hegel becomes the “Sündenbock,”⁶⁹¹ as Gerhard Höhn describes, upon which Heine lays his blame for the prideful sins of his youth. The extent to which Heine rejected these former views is demonstrated by a story that he tells in his *Geständnisse* in which he takes his “Manuscript über die Hegel’sche Philosophie” and throws it into the flames in his fireplace (HSA 12:67).

Several Heine scholars have noted the problematic nature of Heine’s characterization of Hegel’s philosophy as atheistic and thus as the source of Heine’s own godlessness, such as Roger F. Cook, who sees this connection between Hegel and atheism as “erroneous and misleading.”⁶⁹² Manfred Windfuhr has argued that because Hegel did in fact postulate the

⁶⁹⁰ Peter Heinegg, “Heine’s Conversion and the Critics,” *German Life and Letters* 30.1 (1976): 46.

⁶⁹¹ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 487.

⁶⁹² Roger F. Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon. Heinrich Heine’s Late Songs and Reflections* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 28.

existence of God in his published works, we are dealing with more of an “Absage an die Hegelianer,”⁶⁹³ rather than an “Absage an Hegel.”⁶⁹⁴ Jeffrey Sammons sees in Heine’s interpretation of Hegel “a doctrine [...] of hyperbolic atheism and deification of man,”⁶⁹⁵ turning “Hegel into something of a straw man.”⁶⁹⁶ Cook has pointed out that there are two distinct definitions of atheism in play here: not only the “normal sense of lacking faith in the existence of an all-powerful God,”⁶⁹⁷ but also “the illusion that he [Heine] himself (and humankind as a whole) is a self-sufficient, godlike being capable of directing and determining his own destiny.”⁶⁹⁸ The fact that Heine refers to himself as “ich armer Exgott” (HSA 12:66) in his *Geständnisse* suggests that his idea of atheism fits into this context. In a certain sense, this rejection of Hegel represents a deconversion from the Hegelian philosophy that had clear theological implications for Heine. Having deconverted from Hegelianism, Heine was ready to undergo another conversion, taking on a firm belief in an explicitly personal God for the first time in his life.

The Converted Babylonian King

There is a tone of relief in Heine’s writing as he describes having given up his divine status; he describes in the *Geständnisse* that he now feels free from a burden: “ich bin froh, meiner angemäßen Glorie entledigt zu sein, und kein Philosoph wird mir jemals wieder einreden, daß ich ein Gott sei!” (HSA 12:66) Playing the role of one’s own god entails the upkeep of many “Repräsentationskosten” (HSA 12:66), namely, “viel Geld und Gesundheit” (HSA 12:66). Heine describes a day in February of 1848 when it happened that “diese beide

⁶⁹³ Manfred Windfuhr, “Heine und Hegel. Rezeption und Produktion,” 261-280 in *Internationaler Heine Kongress, Düsseldorf*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1972), 278-279.

⁶⁹⁴ Windfuhr, “Heine und Hegel,” 278-279.

⁶⁹⁵ Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 307.

⁶⁹⁶ Sammons, *A Modern Biography*, 307.

⁶⁹⁷ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 28.

⁶⁹⁸ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 28.

Requisiten mir abhanden kamen, und meine Göttlichkeit gerieth dadurch sehr in Stocken” (HSA 12:66). All that is left behind after his illness has robbed him of his “Göttlichkeit” is, as Renate Schlesier describes, “das Mensch-Sein,”⁶⁹⁹ and, as becomes clear later in the *Geständnisse*, also “das Jude-Sein”⁷⁰⁰ that Heine seemed to have left behind in his Berlin years. In the 1852 preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Heine compared his younger self to the overconfident kings of Babylon before their inevitable demise: “In der That, ich war damals noch gesund und feist, ich stand im Zenith meines Fettes, und war so übermütig wie der König Nebukadnezar vor seinem Sturze” (HSA 8:128). Heine spent much time reflecting on “die Geschichte dieses babylonischen Königs, der sich selbst für den lieben Gott hielt, aber von der Höhe seines Dünkels erbärmlich herabstürzte, wie ein Thier am Boden kroch und Gras aß” (HSA 8:128), citing the story from the Old Testament Book of Daniel. Heine was in fact making a reference here to another Babylonian king — Belshazzar — about whom he had written a poem at the beginning of his career: “Belsazar” appeared in the cycle “Junge Leiden” of the *Buch der Lieder* from 1820. Heine’s version of this biblical story also depicts King Belshazzar and his court at a royal feast. The king, blinded by his seemingly limitless power, “lästert die Gottheit mit sündigem Wort” (HSA 1:47), and declares himself mightier than God: “Jehovah! dir künd’ ich auf ewig Hohn, — / Ich bin der König von Babylon!” (HSA 1:48) God responds to this blasphemy with the proverbial writing on the wall, rendered even more threatening because it is made of flames: “Und sieh! und sieh! an weißer Wand / Da kam’s hervor wie Menschenhand; / Und schrieb, und schrieb an weißer Wand / Buchstaben von Feuer, und schrieb und schwand” (HSA 1:48). The final two verses of the poem reveal that Belshazzar’s self-deification will spell his end: “Belsazar ward aber in selbiger Nacht / Von seinen Knechten umgebracht”

⁶⁹⁹ Renate Schlesier, “Heinrich Heines exilierte Götter,” in *Das Jerusalemer Heine-Symposium. Gedächtnis, Mythos, Modernität*, ed. Klaus Briegleb und Itta Shedletzky (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2001), 94.

⁷⁰⁰ Schlesier, “Heinrich Heines exilierte Götter,” 94.

(HSA 1:48). From Heine’s vantage point of 1852, he sees the story of Belshazzar’s egoism as a clear warning, and recommends it as educational reading for his friends “Ruge, [...] Marx, [...] Feuerbach, Daumer, Bruno Bauer, Hengstenberg und wie sie alle heißen mögen, diese gottlosen Selbstgötter” (HSA 8:128). One significant difference between the narrative in the fourth chapter of Daniel and Heine’s retelling in the *Buch der Lieder* is the impetus for the writing on the wall. In Daniel, the writing appears immediately following the verse: “They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (Daniel 5:4), suggesting that they are being punished for worshipping the wrong (pagan) gods. Only after the writing has appeared on the wall does Belshazzar begin to cower in fear. In Heine’s poem, however, Belshazzar is struck with terror immediately after taunting Jehovah, and only then does the writing appear. Jakob Hessing notes that this “scheinbar nur geringe Gewichtsverschiebung [...] weitreichende Folgen [hat].”⁷⁰¹ The emphasis is shifted such that self-deification is the sin committed here, and that the punishment for considering oneself a god comes swiftly and decisively.

In the version of Belshazzar’s story in the Book of Daniel, the King is given a chance to reform before he is punished. Daniel appears and speaks to him, interpreting the writing on the wall and urging him to humble himself and convert, as his father⁷⁰² did:

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. [...] But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet

⁷⁰¹ Jakob Hessing, “Heil und Unheil. Zur Umformung religiöser Motive in Heinrich Heines früher Lyrik,” in *Das Jerusalemer Heine-Symposium. Gedächtnis, Mythos, Modernität*, ed. Klaus Briegleb und Itta Shedletzky (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2001), 76.

⁷⁰² The author of the Book of Daniel incorrectly names Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar’s son; it is possible that he was his grandson, but it is more likely that they were not close relatives and that this use of the term “father” refers only to the fact that he was his royal predecessor. See Raymond Philip Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar, a Study of the Closing Events of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1929), 43.

with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored. (Daniel 5:18-23)

Belshazzar does not heed this warning, and is killed that very night, just as in Heine's poem.

But in Heine's version, the Babylonian king's downfall is not his paganism, but his declaration that he is more powerful than Jehovah, that he is a god himself. Heine shifts the pre-conversion attitude of Nebuchadnezzar onto Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar boasts in Daniel 4: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30) Immediately after he says these words, a voice from heaven admonishes him for his pride and tells him he will be punished, and finally, at the end of this ordeal, he declares that his sanity and humility have returned to him: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (Daniel 4:37). Thus Heine replaces Belshazzar's sin of worshipping pagan gods, as described in Daniel, with Nebuchadnezzar's sin of pride and self-deification.

It is telling that Heine identifies with the converted Babylonian King in the preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie*, rather than the king who was killed when he refused to be humbled: "[Ich] war so übermütig wie der König Nebukadnezar vor seinem Sturze" (HSA 8:128). While he had the luxury of good health to write poetry about the unconverted Belshazzar in his younger years, he found a kindred spirit in one of the Bible's famous converts, Nebuchadnezzar, in his later years. This is also the case in his *Geständnisse*, in which he states that he identifies with perhaps the most famous convert in

European history, Saint Augustine, whose *Confessions* served as an inspiration for Heine's autobiography.

Even in these later years, when Heine seemed to write more candidly about his religious identity, he reminds his reader at the beginning of his *Geständnisse* that it is in fact impossible to give an accurate depiction of oneself: "Die Abfassung einer Selbstcharakteristik wäre nicht bloß eine sehr verfängliche, sondern sogar eine unmögliche Arbeit [...]. [M]it dem besten Willen der Treuherzigkeit kann kein Mensch über sich selbst die Wahrheit sagen" (HSA 12:44). Although his *Geständnisse* belong to a genre that is "traditionally intended to professing where one stands on decisive moral or religious issues,"⁷⁰³ even here Heine is not prepared to relinquish the ironic distance that has protected his identity throughout the years.

Heine mentions another famous biblical convert in the 1852 preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie*: Saul, who became Paul. However, he does not point out ways in which he identifies with him, as he does with Nebuchadnezzar and Augustine; he mentions him in order to highlight a difference between them. While Paul had his conversion moment on the road to Damascus, Heine assures his readers that his own conversion was of a very different sort: "ich reiste niemals nach Damascus," and adds that the only reason he has even heard of the place is because "jüngst die dortigen Juden beschuldigt worden, sie fräßen alte Kapuziner, und der Name der Stadt wäre mir vielleicht ganz unbekannt, hätte ich nicht das Hohe Lied gelesen, wo der König Salomo die Nase seiner Geliebten mit einem Turm vergleicht, der gen Damaskus schaut" (HSA 8:129). Here Heine emphasizes his knowledge of Jewish history, referencing the Damascus affair that motivated him to write *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, while distancing himself from the contents of the New Testament, i.e., Paul's conversion.

⁷⁰³ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 26.

The Syncretist

Heine's turn toward a personal god does not fit into traditional definitions of conversion; it was not, as Bartscherer describes, a conversion "im landläufigen Sinn des Wortes,"⁷⁰⁴ which is only fitting for Heine's unconventional personality. The closest experience that Heine had to a single moment of conversion, a blinding light on the road to Damascus, is described in his afterword to the *Romanzero*, in which he throws himself down before the statue of Venus de Milo in the Louvre in Paris:

Es war im Mai 1848, an dem Tage, wo ich zum letzten Male ausging, als ich Abschied nahm von den holden Idolen, die ich angebetet in den Zeiten meines Glücks. Nur mit Mühe schleppte ich mich bis zum Louvre, und ich brach zusammen, als ich in den erhabenen Saal trat, wo die hochgebenedeite Göttin der Schönheit, Unsere liebe Frau von Milo, auf ihrem Postamente steht. Zu ihren Füßen lag ich lange und ich weinte so heftig, daß sich dessen ein Stein erbarmen mußte. Auch schaute die Göttin mitleidig auf mich herab, doch zugleich so trostlos als wollte sie sagen: siehst Du denn nicht, daß ich keine Arme habe und also nicht helfen kann? (HSA 3:156)

After this moment, Heine ceased to praise the gods of Greece and no longer saw himself as on par with any divine beings. In this passage, Heine "reworks a process that took many months into a single dramatic encounter,"⁷⁰⁵ depicting his break with Hellenism as a disappointing realization within a dialogue with the goddess. Even more than a conversion this is a moment of deconversion: Heine had to first deconvert from his previous religious feelings before he could convert to the personal god that he recognized during his final eight years.⁷⁰⁶ Heine placed the blame on Venus, the goddess of beauty, sex, and desire, for what he believed to be a venereal infection that humbled him not only physically but also

⁷⁰⁴ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 595-596.

⁷⁰⁵ Heinegg, "Heine's Conversion and the Critics," 45.

⁷⁰⁶ As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, conversions usually entail a moment of deconversion as well, because one must rid oneself of the old religion in order to take on a new one; for example, Augustine devotes much of his *Confessions* to explaining why he no longer subscribed to Manichaeism before he embraced Christianity. See Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*, 12. An exception to this model in which deconversion from one religion must take place before conversion to another is possible would be the case of syncretism, in which facets of the new religion are integrated into the previous set of beliefs – an "acceptance with modifications." See Tippett, "The Cultural Anthropology of Conversion."

spiritually. His disease represented “das Versagen seiner Schutzheiligen,”⁷⁰⁷ and her armlessness in the Louvre constitutes “ein poetisches Sinnbild der Ohnmacht und Hilflosigkeit der Göttin.”⁷⁰⁸ In a poem from the “Zum Lazarus” section of *Gedichte. 1853 und 1854*, Heine depicts her as “die schwarze Frau” (HSA 3:171) whom he had embraced with all his heart. Her kisses proved to be only a short-lived source of pleasure, however: “Sie küßte mich lahm, sie küßte mich krank, / Sie küßte mir blind die Augen; / Das Mark aus meinem Rückgrat trank / Ihr Mund mit wildem Saugen” (HSA 3:171). Instead of giving him life, Venus is a “Personifikation des Todes,”⁷⁰⁹ a vampiric “Alter ego und Doppelgängerin der Syphilis.”⁷¹⁰ After Heine’s encounter with her, he laments: “Mein Leib ist jetzt ein Leichnam, worin / Der Geist ist eingekerkert” (HSA 3:171). She admits to him that she cannot help him now, and thus began Heine’s search for “einen Gott [...], der zu helfen vermag” (HSA 3:155). After 1848, he ceased to refer to “the gods” as a general reference to a higher power, and began saying “God” instead, as in a letter to Campe on 30 April 1849: “Nie haben die Götter, oder vielmehr der liebe Gott (wie ich jetzt zu sagen pflege), einen Menschen ärger heimgesucht” (HSA 22:314). This moment of breakdown before the statue of Venus is one manifestation of the phase of deconversion that Barbour calls “emotional suffering.”⁷¹¹ After having undergone a period of moral criticism of Hellenism (the realization that it relied too much on the sensual, and not enough on the spiritual, which was the opposite of Christianity), Heine experienced the emotional suffering of losing a relationship with a goddess who he thought could protect him.

After deconverting from Hellenism, Heine began to construct a syncretistic god of his own to which he could then convert. This personal god to whom he prayed during the years in his mattress grave did not fit the mold of any specific religion, but he does make certain

⁷⁰⁷ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 545.

⁷⁰⁸ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 546.

⁷⁰⁹ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 547.

⁷¹⁰ Bartscherer, *Heinrich Heines Religiöse Revolte*, 548.

⁷¹¹ Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*, 12.

characteristics of this god clear in his later writings. One of the most succinct and transparent descriptions of Heine's religious attitude after 1848 can be found in a letter to Heinrich Laube, dated 25 January 1850, which he began by addressing rumors surrounding his conversion, "Unsinn" and "Böswilligkeit" (HSA 23:23) that he is eager to refute. As elsewhere in his writings – in his *Geständnisse*, the preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, and in the afterword to the *Romanzero* – Heine stressed that he had not undergone a conventional conversion: "Es hat sich in meiner religiösen Gefühlsweise gar keine so große Veränderung zugetragen" (HSA 23:23). His thinking had merely undergone a February Revolution: "[D]as einzige innere Ereigniß, wovon ich Dir mit Bestimmtheit und mit Selbstbewußtseyn etwas melden kann, besteht darin, daß auch in meinen religiösen Ansichten und Gedanken eine FebruarRevolution eingetreten ist, wo ich an der Stelle eines frühern Prinzips, das mich doch früherhin ziemlich indifferent ließ, ein neues Prinzip aufstellte" (HSA 23:23-24). This is of course reminiscent of the parallel between conversion and revolution in *Danton's Tod* as explored in the previous chapter of this dissertation. Heine stated that he was not fanatically attached to his new principles, however, and that his conversion had little effect on his state of mind, and concluded with the most direct explanation of his conversion in his writings: "[I]ch habe nämlich, um Dir die Sache mit einem Worte zu verdeutlichen, den Hegelschen Gott oder vielmehr die Hegelsche Gottlosigkeit aufgegeben und an dessen Stelle das Dogma von einem wirklichen, persönlichen Gotte, der außerhalb der Natur und des Menschen Gemüthes ist, wieder hervorgezogen" (HSA 23:34). This letter rules out the possibility that Heine espoused some sort of deism in his last years, as is sometimes suspected because of his refusal to subscribe to any specific religion, as well as his defense of deism in the 1852 preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, in which he retracted his claim that deism was dead. Gerhard Höhn investigates the question, "ob die theologische Revision eine

Rehabilitierung des Deismus beinhaltet,⁷¹² and concludes that the answer is no: “Der Krüppel in der Matrazengruft hätte mit dem fernen Gott des Deismus auch gar nichts anfangen können, denn er braucht einen menschnahen Gott, dem er seine Leiden mitteilen durfte und der Trost spendet.”⁷¹³ While Heine’s beliefs at the end of his life did resemble deism in their unconventionality, there is simply no way to reconcile the impersonal, indifferent god of deism with Heine’s description of his god as a personal one who brings him great comfort during the time of his greatest need. Only a personal god, and not the indifferent god of deism, could hear Heine’s prayers and give him the sense that he was not alone during his years of isolation, as he described in the *Geständnisse*: “Ich bin nur ein armer Mensch, der obendrein nicht mehr ganz gesund und sogar sehr krank ist. In diesem Zustand ist es eine wahre Wohlthat für mich, daß es Jemand im Himmel giebt, dem ich beständig die Litanei meiner Leiden vorwimmern kann, besonders nach Mitternacht, wenn Mathilde sich zur Ruhe begeben” (HSA 12:66-67). He also quipped that his new belief in a personal god not only alleviated his physical suffering, but also his financial suffering: “Die Existenz eines Gottes [...] überhob mich auch aller jener quälersichen Rechnungsgeschäfte, die mir so verhaßt, und ich verdanke ihr die größten Ersparnisse” (HSA 12:66). These savings came from the fact that he no longer spent anything on the “Unterstützung von Hilfsbedürftigen” (HSA 12:66). His new humility before his omniscient personal god and his relinquishment of the title of “Nachäffer Gottes” (HSA 12:66) meant that he trusted God’s plan enough to refrain from meddling in it: “ich bin zu bescheiden, als daß ich der göttlichen Fürsorge wie ehemals in’s Handwerk pfuschen wollte” (HSA 12:66).

Here Heine employs irony in order to distance himself from the appearance of having become too sincere or sentimental. At the same time as he declares his humility and his loyalty to his god, he mocks the idea of Christian charities by pointing out that it makes no

⁷¹² Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 489.

⁷¹³ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 490.

sense to try to change the plan of a god who does not take suggestions from mere humans.

Roger F. Cook recognizes this tendency in Heine's work, which displays "the coexistence of professed beliefs and irreverence for them, the conjunction of elaborate self-fashioning and the immediate rupture of the self-image just proffered."⁷¹⁴ This type of ironic posturing "serves to thwart those who would distill his work into a static system of thoughts and beliefs."⁷¹⁵

Because Heine uses this technique of ironic distancing so often, moments of honesty and transparency appear all the more conspicuous, such as when he plainly states in the 1852 preface to *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* what the impetus for his conversion was. It was neither "eine Vision, noch eine seraphitische Verzückung, noch eine Stimme vom Himmel, auch kein merkwürdiger Traum oder sonst ein Wunderspuk" (HSA 8:129), because these are all external forces that would have left Heine little free will in his new beliefs. He emphasizes that it was his own choice and the result of nothing more than "Lectüre eines Buches" (HSA 8:129) — i.e., the Bible, which he describes in the *Geständnisse* as "eben so sehr eine Quelle des Heils, als ein Gegenstand der frömmigsten Bewunderung" (HSA 12:69). He marvels at the unusual trajectory that his religious beliefs have taken throughout his life:

Sonderbar! Nachdem ich mein ganzes Leben hindurch mich auf allen Tanzböden der Philosophie herumgetrieben, allen Orgien des Geistes mich hingegeben, mit allen möglichen Systemen gebuhlt, ohne befriedigt worden zu sein, wie Messaline nach einer lüderlichen Nacht – jetzt befinde ich mich plötzlich auf demselben Standpunkt, worauf auch der Onkel Tom steht, auf dem der Bibel, und ich kniee neben dem schwarzen Betbruder nieder in derselben Andacht. (HSA 12:69)

Heine's deconversion and conversion narratives follow the theme of "life-long quests" in Streib's study on deconversion: he abandons his religious affiliations multiple times, always

⁷¹⁴ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 25.

⁷¹⁵ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 25.

when he perceives that his needs are no longer being met.⁷¹⁶ This final religious stage in his life shows him coming full circle – not only in his return to the Bible, but also in his rediscovery of Jewish culture and a renewed appreciation of the role that his ancestors played in history. While his admiration for the ancient Greeks has subsided — “Ich sehe jetzt, die Griechen waren nur schöne Jünglinge” (HSA 12:71) — he now regards the early Jews as “immer Männer, gewaltige, unbeugsame Männer” (HSA 12:71). And this does not only apply to the Jews of the past; contemporary Jews also display exceptional fortitude, “bis auf den heutigen Tag, trotz achtzehn Jahrhunderten der Verfolgen und des Elends” (HSA 12:71). In contrast with the ancient Greeks, the early Jews possessed a “Sittlichkeit”⁷¹⁷ that served as a model for moral behavior in the doctrines of future religions. Heine’s “neue jüdische Identität”⁷¹⁸ appears also in a publication in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* on 15 April 1849 entitled “Berichtigung,” in which he goes as far as to call himself a Jew, which is a rare occurrence throughout his writings: “[I]ch bin kein göttlicher Bipede mehr; [...] ich bin kein lebensfreudiger etwas wohlbeleibter Hellene mehr, der auf trübsinnige Nazarener herablächelte — ich bin jetzt nur ein armer todtkranker Jude, ein abgezehrttes Bild des Jammers, ein unglücklicher Mensch!” (HSA 33:310-311) This return to Judaism is also present in his later literary works, in which Jewish material again plays a major role, such as in the final cycle of the *Romanzero*, *Hebräische Melodien*. Its central poem, *Jehuda ben Halevy*, contemplates the contributions of Jewish poets and attests to Heine’s “‘Neuentdeckung’ [...] der jüdischen Literatur des mittelalterlichen Spaniens.”⁷¹⁹ The *Hebräische Melodien* revive the themes of exiled and converted Jews that Heine portrayed in *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, and of the oppressed religious minorities, the Muslims, in

⁷¹⁶ Streib, “Deconversion,” 287.

⁷¹⁷ Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, 490.

⁷¹⁸ Hauschild and Werner, *Der Zweck des Lebens*, 534.

⁷¹⁹ Hartmut Steinecke, “‘Wir stammen von Schlemihl’. Jüdische Dichter-Bilder in Heines Spätwerk von Jehuda ben Halevy bis Rabbi Faibisch,” in Kruse, Witte and Karin Füllner, eds., *Aufklärung und Skepsis: Internationaler Heine-Kongress 1997 zum 200. Geburtstag*, ed. Joseph A. Kruse, Bernd Witte, and Karin Füllner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 304.

Almansor. The historical Jehuda Halevi was born in Spain and is regarded as one of the greatest Hebrew poets, and Heine revered him as “den Dichter schlechthin.”⁷²⁰

Louis Cuby goes so far as to describe the personal god whom Heine now recognized as “der Gott der Juden,”⁷²¹ although Heine made it clear that he never belonged to any religious group. Even after officially converting to Protestantism in 1825, he refuted any attempts to label him as a member of the Protestant Church. When rumors began to circulate after his return to a personal god in 1848 that he was no longer a Protestant simply “in lauer, officieller Weise,” but that he had become a passionate and authentic Protestant in belief as well as on paper, he rejected them in the *Geständnisse*, writing that he was in no way “dem evangelischen Glauben angehörig” (HSA 12:71). He refused to give a direct answer: “entspricht jetzt die lutherische Glaubens-Uniform einigermaßen meinem innersten Gedanken? In wie weit ist das officielle Bekenntniß zur Wahrheit geworden? solcher Frage will ich durch keine directe Beantwortung begegnen” (HSA 12:72). Instead, he used this question as an opportunity to outline the merits and faults of each religion according to their effects on society, inviting the reader to guess based on this whether he has become a genuine believer in the Protestant faith.

He credited Protestantism with the “Eroberung der Denkfreiheit” (HSA 12:72) and saw “die Reformation als den Anfang der deutschen Philosophie” (HSA 12:72). In his younger years, the political implications of Protestantism and its role as the most progressive confession had been of particular importance to him. At the time of writing the *Geständnisse*, however, “in meinen spätern und reifern Tagen, wo das religiöse Gefühl wieder überwältigend in mir aufwogt,” and with his renewed appreciation for the Bible, he showed his gratitude for “die Auffindung und Verbreitung des heiligen Buches” (HSA 12:72), since

⁷²⁰ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 147.

⁷²¹ Louis Cuby, “Die theologische Revision in Heines Spätzeit”, in *Internationaler Heine-Kongress, Düsseldorf 1972: Referate und Diskussionen*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1973).

the Jews “hielten diesen Schatz sorgsam verborgen in ihrem Ghetto” (HSA 12:72), rather than attempting to spread the book far and wide, as the Protestants did. He characterizes Protestant conversion efforts as noble and necessary: “Diese Verbreitung hat die segenreichsten Früchte hervorgebracht, und dauert noch bis auf heutigen Tag, wo die Propaganda der Bibelgesellschaft eine providentielle Sendung erfüllt” (HSA 12:73). Given his portrayal of the misery caused by forced conversions in early works such as *Almansor* and *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, as well of his scathing criticism of the concept of the “Staatsreligion” in *Die Stadt Lucca*, this new position comes as a surprise. He relativized this praise of Protestant missionaries in the *Geständnisse* by differentiating between missionaries who bring “eine kleine, enge Dogmatik” (HSA 12:73) – this will lead to “den Untergang aller protestantischen Secten” (HSA 12:73) — and those who try to democratically distribute the Bible without any dogma attached to it — those who teach “nicht durch dogmatische Begriffsformeln [...], sondern durch Bild und Beispiel” (HSA 12:74). He then listed the societal contributions of Catholicism and Judaism, careful to anchor each religion in the earthly realm, maintaining that they were all “weltliche Institutionen.”⁷²² None of them had the right to make exclusive truth claims about the universe; none of them constituted “a system of beliefs that reflects the eternal order of things.”⁷²³ The religious position in which Heine found himself near the end of his life was not one that he felt others should accept as well; it was merely “the current, and probably final, stage in an individual path of intellectual development whose course was determined by specific historical forces of his age but also by a much older, universally shared past.”⁷²⁴ His religious views were a highly personal, syncretistic fusion of the many intellectual influences on him throughout his life. Heine

⁷²² Jean McGregor Chick, *Eine Untersuchung zu Heines ‘Geständnissen’* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987), 62.

⁷²³ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 24.

⁷²⁴ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 25.

scholars have described it as “his own unique theology,”⁷²⁵ a “Privatmythologie,”⁷²⁶ and “ein persönlicher Synkretismus.”⁷²⁷

He continually emphasized that his conversion was an intellectual one, writing to Campe in 1850 that his “religiöse Umwälzung” (HSA 23:43) was “mehr ein Akt meines Denkens als des seligen Empfindelns” (HSA 23:43). He maintained that it came from thoughts within himself, not from supernatural forces: “Es sind große, erhabne, schauerliche Gedanken über mich gekommen, aber es waren Gedanken, Blitze des Lichtes und nicht Phosphordünste der Glaubensspisse” (HSA 23:43). This allowed him to retain a critical distance from religion, and in particular to distance himself from religious doctrines that make universal claims about their exclusive access to truth. His theological revision was less “the embracing of a religious belief,”⁷²⁸ as would be the case in a conventional conversion, and more “a change in his views *on* religion,”⁷²⁹ from an intellectual point of view. Of utmost importance for Heine was that no one could apply a label to him.⁷³⁰ He continually reminded his readers of what he was *not*, and almost never said anything about what he *was*, which created the ironic distance that was central to his writing: the ironist has no firm identity, always shifting from one position to the next. In a passage from the *Geständnisse*, for example, he lists all of the titles that he never acquired: “[W]ie du wohl weißt, geneigter Leser, ich bin kein Papst geworden, auch kein Cardinal, nicht mal en römischer Nuntius, und wie in der weltlichen, so auch in der geistlichen Hierarchie habe ich weder Amt noch Würden errungen. Ich habe es, wie die Leute sagen, auf dieser schönen Erde zu nichts gebracht” (HSA 12:83). He concludes: “Es ist nichts aus mir geworden, nichts als ein Dichter” (HSA

⁷²⁵ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 23.

⁷²⁶ Manfred Windfuhr, *Heinrich Heine: Revolution und Reflexion* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), 276.

⁷²⁷ Windfuhr, *Revolution und Reflexion*, 281.

⁷²⁸ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 56.

⁷²⁹ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 56.

⁷³⁰ Ari Joskowicz notes that labels that others applied to Heine, often had a consistent theme – they all defined him as outsider: “The labels that stuck to him – not just Heine the Jew, but also Heine the convert, the atheist, the pantheist, and the German (once he moved to France) – consistently defined him as an outsider.” (Joskowicz, “Heinrich Heine’s Transparent Masks,” 70.)

12:83). While Heine continually resisted the labels that others tried to apply to him, the one exception was that of the “Dichter,” the only title with which he fully identified himself and from which he felt no need to create an ironic distance.

The Suffering Leper

In the Lazarus cycle of the *Romanzero*, Heine gave poetic expression to his contemplation of his physical suffering and reflects on the meaning of this torment. The Lazarus of these poems is not Lazarus of Bethany, whose revivication by Jesus is the subject of John 11, but rather the Lazarus whose story appears in Luke 16, a beggar who sat at the gate of a rich man, hoping to receive some table scraps at the end of the day. His body is covered in “Schwären,”⁷³¹ suggesting that he was not only destitute, but a leper as well. When both Lazarus and the rich man die, Lazarus is granted eternal life — he “ward getragen von den Engeln in Abrahams Schoß”⁷³² — while the rich man is tortured in hell. When he pleads with Abraham to lessen his pain, Abraham answers: “Gedenke, Sohn, daß du dein Gutes empfangen hast in deinem Leben, und Lazarus dagegen hat Böses empfangen; nun aber wird er getröstet, und du wirst gepeinigt.”⁷³³ It appears that pleasure and pain are part of a zero-sum game in the moral system presented in the New Testament; everyone must suffer sooner or later.

The *Romanzero* focuses on those who suffer during this earthly life, “die Opfer und Paria der Geschichte,”⁷³⁴ such as the victims of war in *Der Möhrenkönig*, the slaves in *Der Asra*, and of course the stories of martyrdom in the *Hebräische Melodien*. The theme of suffering dominates the *Romanzero*, and the first-person narrator of the Lazarus cycle in the

⁷³¹ Luke 16:20, Martin Luther’s translation.

⁷³² Luke 16:22, Martin Luther’s translation.

⁷³³ Luke 16:25, Martin Luther’s translation.

⁷³⁴ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 142.

Lamentationen is “das elendste Opfer von allen.”⁷³⁵ Heine does not make many specific references to the biblical character in the poems that carry his name; rather, Heine uses the name “to help give unity and an appearance of objectivity to poems which might otherwise have seemed excessively personal,”⁷³⁶ that is, as yet another device for creating ironic distance and masking himself in order to protect his identity. By transferring his miserable condition, marked by poverty and disease, onto this fictional character, Heine could examine the intense anguish of his final eight years through a poetic lens in an attempt to understand the meaning of his suffering. In the poem “Rückschau,” the narrator reflects on the pleasures of his youth: “Ich habe gerochen alle Gerüche / In dieser holden Erdenküche; / Was man genießen kann in der Welt, / Das hab’ ich genossen wie je ein Held!” (HSA 3:90-91). He consumed cakes and coffee, enjoyed the company of beautiful women, and these indulgences seemed to come to him through no effort of his own, as if by magic: “Mir flogen gebrat’ne Tauben in’s Maul, / Und Englein kamen, und aus den Taschen / Sie zogen hervor Champagnerflaschen” (HSA 3:91). The champagne bubbles prove to be nothing more than “Visionen, Seifenblasen” (HSA 3:91) that burst and leave him “auf feuchtem Rasen” (HSA 3:91) with limbs that are “rheumatisch gelähmt” (HSA 3:91) and a soul that is “tief beschämt” (HSA 3:91). He has incurred debts from “reichen Buben und alten Vetteln” (HSA 3:91) and become a beggar, like Lazarus at the gates of the rich man. All that is left for him is to go to his grave, and he looks forward to an afterlife where he will see his “christlichen Brüder” (HSA 3:91). The lamentation of lost youth and health dominates the Lazarus cycle thematically; for example, it is also the subject of “Der Abgekühlte,” in which the narrator wonders if he might enjoy some of the pleasures of his past just one more time: “Noch

⁷³⁵ Höhn, ed., *Heine-Handbuch*, 141.

⁷³⁶ Alistair Elliot, *The Lazarus Poems. With English Versions by Alistair Elliot* (Ashington: Mid Northumberland Arts Group, 1979), 2.

einmal, eh' mein Lebenslicht / Erlöschet, eh' mein Herze bricht – / Noch eimal möcht' ich vor dem Sterben / Um Frauenhuld beseligt werden" (HSA 3:96).

In his *Gedichte. 1853 und 1854*, Heine once again spoke through his Lazarus character. The poem "Zum Lazarus" is dedicated to the problem of theodicy and the lack of justice that Heine sees in a world that is supposedly governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent god. When Heine described his new, personal God in the afterword to the *Romanzero*, he mentioned these three attributes as necessary in a god who would be able to comfort him: "Wenn man einen Gott begehrt, der zu helfen vermag — und das ist doch die Hauptsache — so muß man auch seine Persönlichkeit, seine Außerweltlichkeit und seine heiligen Attribute, die Allgüte, die Allweisheit, die Allgerechtigkeit u.s.w. annehmen" (HSA 3:155). In the "Zum Lazarus" poem, Heine cannot seem to reconcile the "Allgerechtigkeit" of God with the lack of justice in the observable world: "Warum schleppt sich blutend, elend, / Unter Kreuzlast der Gerechte, / Während glücklich als ein Sieger / Trabt auf hohem Roß der Schlechte?" (HSA 3:171) The poet wonders whether god really possesses the characteristics that are ascribed to him, questioning his omnipotence and his omnibenevolence: "Ist etwa / Unser Herr nicht ganz allmächtig? / Oder treibt er selbst den Unfug? / Ach, das wäre niederträchtig" (HSA 3:171). The poem leaves the problem of theodicy unsolved by concluding with a question: "Also fragen wir beständig, / Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll / Erde endlich stopft die Mäuler – / Aber ist das eine Antwort?" (HSA 3:171) This unsatisfying conclusion in which those who question god's motives are silenced by authority figures suggests that it is perhaps the case that god is not benevolent. When Heine believed in the gods of Greece, the unjust suffering in the world did not constitute a logical inconsistency, since it was no secret that the Greek gods did in fact conduct "Unfug" on a regular basis. A benevolent god in a monotheistic system, however, is harder to reconcile with the reality of suffering. Several years before grappling with theodicy in "Zum Lazarus," Heine questioned

God's benevolence in a letter to Laube on 12 October 1850: "Ich liege zusammengekrümmt, Tag und Nacht in Schmerzen, und wenn ich auch an einen Gott glaube, so glaube ich doch manchmal nicht an einen guten Gott. Die Hand dieses großen Thierquälers liegt schwer auf mir" (HSA 23:56). Here Heine is also incapable of offering a solution, and the quandary of theodicy remains a mystery. This is also the case in *Danton's Tod*, as described in the previous chapter of this dissertation. The difference is that the Dantonists, upon reaching this impasse, conclude that no benevolent god exists. It may seem paradoxical that Heine, after describing God as the great "Thierquäler," would turn to him for comfort instead of rejecting him. Nevertheless, Heine does not reject God as the Dantonists do; rather, he reaches out to him for comfort, choosing to believe in a deity, "der zu helfen vermag" (HSA 3:155).

Conclusion

Heine viewed religion as a coping mechanism in the face of suffering and despair. In *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, he wrote that "[d]ie Menschheit ist vielleicht zu ewigen Elend bestimmt, die Völker sind vielleicht auf ewig verdammt von Despoten zertreten, von den Spießgesellen derselben exploitirt, und von den Lakaien verhöhnt zu werden" (HSA 8:135). Given that suffering is inevitable, human beings must find comfort wherever possible, and he saw Christianity as historically filling this role. It was "eine Wohlthat für die leidende Menschheit während achtzehn Jahrhunderten, sie war providentiell, göttlich, heilig" (HSA 8:135). Here he revealed that he did not think of religions as true or false, but as beneficial or detrimental to the well-being of society, in the same way as political or philosophical schools of thought should be evaluated based on whether they impact humanity in a positive or negative way. Because there is so much suffering in the world, Heine wrote, "in diesem Falle müßte man das Christenthum, selbst wenn man es als Irrthum erkannt, dennoch zu erhalten suchen" (HSA 8:135). If Christianity

is to survive, it is not because it is true, but because it is useful: “Das endliche Schicksal des Christenthums ist also davon abhängig, ob wir dessen noch bedürfen” (HSA 8:135). Here again Heine’s thinking about religions corresponds to the religious economies model of Stark and Finke: religions only exist if they offer value to potential consumers, and as the needs of consumers change, so too do the offerings of the suppliers change in order to meet their needs.

The fact that Heine cared more about how his personal god could comfort him than about whether this god existed in any absolute sense has led some Heine scholars to question the authenticity of his final conversion. Hermann J. Weigand uses an excessively narrow definition of “conversion” – “essentially a new attitude of mind prompted by an act of divine grace”⁷³⁷ characterized by “suddenness”⁷³⁸ and “the acceptance of a more or less definite religious orthodoxy” accompanied “by an overwhelming sense of sin.” This leads Weigand to assert that “discretion forbids the use of the term ‘conversion’”⁷³⁹ in Heine’s case because it does not fulfill these criteria, calling it instead a “fundamental veering-about of Heine on the basic question of eternal values, during the last decade of his life.”⁷⁴⁰ Heinegg writes that Weigand’s requisites for a “conversion” are too strict, and that we can certainly speak of a conversion in Heine’s case: “Not everyone can fall from his horse and hear a voice from heaven on the road to Damascus. Heine’s conversion, as he himself said, was no lightning-like mystical vision, but the result of deliberate reflection, beginning with his breakdown in the Louvre.”⁷⁴¹ The larger problem with his conversion is not its suddenness or his lack of guilt for having sinned, but the lack of evidence that he thought his God actually existed in any objective sense. Cook notes that Heine’s unabashed declaration that he believed in a God who alleviated his suffering, rather than a God he thought was real, seems motivated by

⁷³⁷ Hermann J. Weigand, “Heine’s Return to God,” *Modern Philology* 18.6 (1920): 77.

⁷³⁸ Weigand, “Heine’s Return to God,” 77.

⁷³⁹ Weigand, “Heine’s Return to God,” 77.

⁷⁴⁰ Weigand, “Heine’s Return to God,” 77.

⁷⁴¹ Heinegg, “Heine’s Conversion and the Critics,” 48.

“hypocritical self-interest”⁷⁴² as seen from our perspective in “a culture that believes in absolute answers, whether provided by revelations from an omnipotent God or by a divinely inspired reason within.”⁷⁴³ These absolute answers did not interest Heine as they do many people, thus the choosing of one’s religion based on one’s needs seemed perfectly natural and justifiable for him. Heinegg suggests that we should not “reproach him for selfishly exploiting religion,” just as “[w]e do not reproach the drowning man for clutching at a proffered hand,”⁷⁴⁴ and he concludes that Heine’s conversion was “on the whole a serious, responsible, and meaningful act.”⁷⁴⁵ For Heine, religion was a set of worldviews that helped give meaning and coherence to his sense of identity, while also fulfilling certain psychological and social needs. His many conversions reflect the fact that as his identity and his needs changed throughout his life, so did the religious beliefs that resonated with him. Each of his conversions represented a transformation in his identity – an identity that he constantly strove to protect through the use of ironic distance throughout his literary works as well as his essays and memoirs.

⁷⁴² Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 60.

⁷⁴³ Cook, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 60.

⁷⁴⁴ Heinegg, “Heine’s Conversion and the Critics,” 49.

⁷⁴⁵ Heinegg, “Heine’s Conversion and the Critics,” 50.

CONCLUSION

The previous three chapters have revealed one common element that is conspicuously present in the conversion experiences of Clemens Brentano, Georg Büchner, and Heinrich Heine: how to deal with the meaning of pain and suffering. In all three cases, the experience of devastating pain leads to a reevaluation of the authors' metaphysical worldviews and consequently of their religious identities. In Rambo's seven stage model of conversion, this suffering is part of the crisis phase that so often triggers a conversion. The hours that Brentano spent at Anna Katharina Emmerick's bedside while meditating on her corporal suffering deepened his relationship not only with her, but also with the Catholic God whom he had rediscovered. Her wounds were the physical manifestation of her direct connection with God, and Brentano saw these lesions as a precious gift from God, describing the source of her wounds as "die wunderbare Güte Gottes" (FBA 28,1:153). Emmerick's suffering became integrated into Brentano's Romantic aesthetic. Her wounds became his portal to the divine, giving him access to a previously untapped realm of poetic material as he recorded her visions in his notebooks, transforming her words into what would eventually become *Das bittere Leiden*. Furthermore, the bloody depictions of violence in *Das bittere Leiden* reflect Brentano's fixation on suffering and what it meant for his newfound identity as a devout Catholic. Theodicy was not an unsolvable dilemma for Brentano as it was for Büchner, because Brentano believed in God. He saw pain not as punishment or neglect by a malevolent God, but as an opportunity to draw closer to a benevolent God.

The experience of pain leads to a radically different conclusion for Büchner than it does for Brentano. Büchner saw poverty and political oppression all around him, and with these came a great deal of physical and emotional suffering. "Warum leide ich?" is the "Fels des Atheismus" (MA 3,2:49), as Payne states in *Danton's Tod*. Büchner continued to be

consumed by the problem of pain in *Lenz*, a text that depicts the senseless and undeserved suffering of its title character on every page. Oberlin repeatedly tells him to turn to God to alleviate his suffering, but it simply does not work, which causes yet more psychological turmoil as Lenz realizes that religion does not have the same palliative effect on him that it seems to have on everyone else around him. After many failed attempts to believe, he can do nothing more than look at Oberlin “mit einem Ausdruck unendlichen Leidens” (MA 5:47) and articulate the problem of theodicy to the best of his ability: “[A]ber ich, wär’ ich allmächtig, sehen Sie, wenn ich so wäre, und ich könnte das Leiden nicht ertragen, ich würde retten, retten” (MA 5:47). For Lenz, the suggestion that his suffering should somehow bring him closer to God seems absurd, because the more he fails to connect with God, the more he loses his ability to cope with the world, and eventually his sanity.

Heine’s experience of pain also caused a conversion in him, but of yet another type. While Brentano found that witnessing Emmerick’s pain intensified his Catholic religiosity, and while Büchner concluded that the consequence of the inexplicable suffering in the human condition was atheism, Heine took his period of pain in his “Matratzengruft” (HSA 27:212) as an opportunity to reexamine his spiritual beliefs and form them into his own syncretistic religion, a creative theology that was best suited to comfort him during his time of need. Fashioning himself as the destitute and diseased Lazarus figure in the late poetry of his *Romanzero*, Heine reacted to his excruciating pain by searching for “einen Gott [...], der zu helfen vermag” (HSA 3:155), having determined that the versions of god to which he had previously adhered were no longer able to help him. He was grateful for the “wahre Wohlthat, [...] daß es Jemand im Himmel giebt, dem ich beständig die Litanei meiner Leiden vorwimmern kann, besonders nach Mitternacht, wenn Mathilde sich zur Ruhe begeben” (HSA 12:66-67). No matter how alone he felt as he spent the final eight years of his life

confined to his bed, his personal god was there, not as the culprit for his pain, but as the only one who could offer any relief.

It is ultimately not surprising that a preoccupation with suffering would lead to various types of religious conversions, because dealing with pain is one of the primary functions of religion. In moments of emotional or physical pain, religion seems to provide comfort in a way that secular worldviews can seldom match. The most ambitious offer that religion puts on the table is a solution to what is perhaps the most intense suffering that humans can experience: the knowledge of our mortality. By conceiving of the soul as an immortal entity that may reside eternally in heaven, religion offers comfort: there is more to life than unbearable pain. The question remains, however, as to why these religious answers to existential problems fail to resonate with the atheists depicted by Büchner in *Danton's Tod* and *Lenz*, who find no comfort in doctrines of immortality and no satisfactory answer to the crisis of theodicy. What makes them capable of rejecting religion, when it seems to be the only escape from the endless pain of existence? The answer may lie in an interpretation of *Danton's Tod* by Martina Lauster and David Horrocks: While Payne's declaration that pain leaves no other option than atheism is a fundamentally negative one, this negativity creates space for something new: "Aus dieser Negativität führt eine neue Schöpfung, nämlich die der Kunst."⁷⁴⁶ Having let go of the complex theological dogmas that have proven so ineffective for him, Büchner takes this moment of freedom as an "Ausgangspunkt einer positiven, diesseitigen Ästhetik."⁷⁴⁷ While religion can sometimes fail to provide respite for those who suffer, the creation of art and an engagement in this positive, earthly aesthetic remain reliable methods of coping with the unpredictable and unjust ways in which people suffer.

⁷⁴⁶ Martina Lauster und David Horrocks, "Büchner und Gutzkow: Affinitäten auf den zweiten Blick" *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 13 (2013-2015): 55.

⁷⁴⁷ Lauster und Horrocks, "Büchner und Gutzkow," 55.

Art, like conversion, hinges on the concept of transformation, depicting moments of change, rebirth, and revolution. The narratological elements that make a piece of literature compelling have to do with transformation: character development, epiphanies, and progress through creative forces. Novels and dramas are particularly salient examples of the aesthetic requirement for transformation in literature: the more profound the transformation, the more captivating the narrative. Even in static forms of art such as painting, the goal is to elicit a feeling of transformation in the viewer by depicting a moment of transition, such as in Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1818), which has become emblematic of Romanticism. The viewer imagines the wanderer as he reaches the top of the cliff after many hours of walking, and discovers the valley of clouds and mountain peaks before him. It is a quiet moment of self-reflection, but it is anything but static: the fog appears to be moving toward the right, and the fact that it obscures the path ahead underscores the sense that a vital transformation is about to occur. Viewers feel connected to the wanderer in observing his will to transform, evoking an impulse to transcend and evolve past the confines of the physical world that contains so much suffering.

Suffering is, in a sense, a frustrated desire to transform: either into restored physical or mental health, or into death. Anguish is our signal that a transformation needs to take place, in one direction or another. This is why death — the ultimate physical and spiritual transformation — figures so prominently in the narratives that resonate most deeply with their readers. Death is not only the conversion of the physical body into another type of matter as it decomposes and is consumed by other life forms, but also the only true relief of the emotional suffering that dominates in literature. Transformation is fundamental to the human experience, which is why the promise of eternal life so frequently offered by religions proves empty and unsatisfactory: no matter how joyous an occasion, it inevitably becomes

unbearable if it has to go on forever. In this sense, an eternity spent in heaven would not be a reward, but a punishment.

Conversion can be seen as a common method of easing suffering, and it has proven to be an effective one, even if it can only provide short-term relief. Brentano, Büchner, and Heine lived in a time of suffering — politically, physically, and emotionally. They found themselves surrounded by pain and injustice. Thus while transformation is fundamental to the human experience, certain epochs contain conditions that are particularly favorable to conversion. The suffering of the early nineteenth century, coupled with secularization of this period — the emerging notion that an individual’s choice in religion was one option among others rather than a foregone conclusion — created the ideal breeding ground for conversion. When Goethe called Schlegel’s conversion a “Zeichen der Zeit,”⁷⁴⁸ he was not describing a singular event, but a phenomenon that would eventually become a “Konversionsbewegung [...], die bis weit ins 20. Jahrhundert hineinreicht.”⁷⁴⁹ While this time of conversion began during Romanticism, it has had no clear end point, because it is at its core a manifestation of modernity, which is marked by the “one option among others”⁷⁵⁰ type of secularization. Brentano, Büchner, Heine, and their contemporaries were not the only ones who lived in a time of conversion; we are still living in one today.

⁷⁴⁸ Goethe, *Goethes Briefe*, 78.

⁷⁴⁹ Eckel and Wegmann, “Einleitung,” 7.

⁷⁵⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

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