

Heidegger's *Hausfreund* and the Re-enchantment of the Familiar

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With the post-war publication of such collections as *Holzwege* (1949–50), *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954), and *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959) Heidegger became known for his interpretations of poetry just as much as for his reflections on the Western philosophical tradition. While he had been lecturing in Freiburg on Hölderlin in a sustained way since 1934, prior to the publication of the *Gesamtausgabe* the majority of Heidegger's writings on poetry were delivered as talks that appeared in special publications or narrow academic journals. With the exception of "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," which appeared in 1936 in the National Socialist periodical *Das innere Reich* and established Heidegger as the whipping boy of critic-ideologue Willi Köntzer, up until the late 1960s the only people who took an interest in Heidegger on poetry were philologically oriented *Germanisten*. And then their attitude was one of fascinated horror. As Max Kommerell confides in a letter to Gadamer written after his visit to Heidegger's hut in 1941: "Heidegger sent me his essay ["Wie wenn am Feiertage..."]. It is a productive trainwreck over which those train signalmen of literary history must throw up their hands (to the extent they're honest)."¹ Kommerell *was* one of the honest ones, and had the intellectual integrity to retain some of this language in his later letter to Heidegger. Heidegger's reply:

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“You are right, the piece *is* a ‘wreck,’” and concludes his response with the question, “Is it caprice [*Willkür*] or the highest freedom?”²

However, with the publication of *Unterwegs zur Sprache* in particular, Heidegger’s “Is it caprice or the highest freedom?” was revealed as a sustained concern with the speaking of language that, even if it did not make his readings of individual poems any more palatable, at least showed that he was doing something philosophically innovative. This ambivalence remains in place today: We love Heidegger on language, we just hate him on poetry. The collection also served to add the poets Trakl and George to a Heideggerian canon dominated by Hölderlin, peppered with citations from Goethe, Novalis, and Eichendorff, and marked (or perhaps marred) by a relationship to Rilke that David Farrell Krell has described as “hysteric.” Yet through what is obviously more than the way the timing of publication dictates reception, Heidegger’s numerous talks and references to the Alemannic poet and writer Johann Peter Hebel (1760–1826) garner little interest within his corpus.³ And here it is worth noting that *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* was published by Neske as an independent monograph in 1957, two years prior to *Gelassenheit*, with which it was co-composed, and that in a rare appearance on German television Heidegger reads the talk’s concluding section on the reduction of language to information.⁴ Thus, where Derrida’s “*Geschlecht*” pieces have succeeded in establishing the larger significance of Heidegger’s interpretation of Trakl, and there have been several attempts to account for Heidegger’s “missed interlocution” with Paul Celan,⁵ there is no sustained work of scholarship on Hebel as whom I want to call “the poet of *Gelassenheit*,” which is to say, the poet whose vocation as “friend of the house” both exemplifies and makes manifest what Heidegger means by the phrase “openness to the mystery” (*die Offenheit für das Geheimnis*).⁶

On those few occasions when Heidegger’s interpretations of Hebel are referenced, the tendency is either to trace a direct line from Heidegger’s involvement within National Socialism to an interest in a writer whose provincialism connotes a *Blut und Boden*-style indigeneity – the German word here is *Bodenständigkeit*, which Heidegger

explicitly connects to the notion of “homeland” (*Heimat*) – or to find in Heidegger’s post-war turn to a dialect poet confirmation of an irredeemable nostalgia.⁷

Outside Germany, these critiques demonstrate shockingly little knowledge of the larger literary and cultural significance of Hebel. Hebel is the most democratic and cosmopolitan poet on which Heidegger wrote; the practice of reading aloud Hebel’s *Kalendargeschichten*, one of the few books German peasants possessed, played a significant role in the rise of literacy in the southern Rhine region.⁸ Hebel’s later collection of these stories as the *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* was praised by Benjamin as “one of the purest achievements of the filigree craft of German prose,” and both Kafka and Jean Paul adapted to startling effect aspects of the stories’ compositional style as a formal literary model.⁹ Within Germany, a pedestrian reading of Heidegger on dialect and indigeneity has turned the interpretation of Hebel into a referendum on Heidegger’s rejection of Enlightenment thought, pitting Hebel’s cosmopolitanism against what a figure no less than Goethe identified as his “countrification [*verbauern*] of the universe” (GA 13: 145/HFH 97). This is best exemplified by W. G. Sebald’s posthumously published *Logis in einem Landhaus*, whose opening chapter attempts to rescue the Alemannic Hebel from Heidegger in what Sebald explicitly puts forward as the Jewish Hebel as informed by the interpretations of Benjamin and Bloch.¹⁰

Yet when placed into the context of the immediate significance scholars attached to Heidegger’s remarks on technology in *Gelassenheit*, this failure to engage Heidegger’s interpretations of Hebel as philosophically important or, still more pointedly, to even be able to read them with any degree of sensitivity to Heidegger’s own operative distinctions – and this especially concerns what Heidegger has to say about Nature – reveals something important with respect to tone and urgency. In response to a Germany repressing a new, which for Heidegger meant unprecedentedly uncanny type of *Heimatlosigkeit* through a massive rebuilding campaign, and in place of Paul Celan, Heidegger offers up a poet who is the German equivalent of America’s *Uncle Remus* (minus

the racism) combined with the *Old Farmer's Almanac*. What kind of an answer is this?

Heidegger offers an important clue toward the end of *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* when he writes as the summation of a series of statements that each begin with the refrain, “What is worthy of question...”:

We are errant today in a world which is a house without a friend, that is, which lacks that house-friend who in equal manner and with equal force is inclined toward [*zugeneigt*] both the technologically constructed World-Edifice and the world as the house for a more original dwelling. Missing is that friend of the house who is able to re-entrust [*zurückbergen*] the calculability and technology of nature to the open mystery of a newly experienced naturalness of nature.¹¹

The key word in the above citation is “re-entrust” (*zurückbergen*), which might be more literally rendered as a “re-sheltering” or “sheltering back.” In the context of Heidegger’s writings on Hebel, the re-entrusting of technology to “a newly experienced naturalness of Nature” takes place through, of all things, “enchantment” – *Zauber* – which makes manifest the order of the invisible as the proper orientation toward “the rule of mystery.” As Heidegger writes in his September 5, 1954 Zähringen talk on Hebel in describing “true and high poetry” (his concern is that Hebel’s folksiness makes him a low art form):

[Poetry] brings into appearance the invisible [*bringt das Unscheinbare zum Scheinen*]. However, the invisible always remains that which prevails through and determines everything that is familiar and superficial. But then the invisible only comes to appear and before our view when we step back [*zurücktreten*] from it, when we are sufficiently remote from it. (GA 16: 494)

The word *unscheinbar* is one of the most important throughout the Hebel talks, and I’m translating it as “invisible” rather than Foltz and

Heim's "inconspicuous" because of something important Heidegger goes on to do with the dark of the moon. In his vocation as "house-friend," Hebel lets be seen the presencing of the invisible or alien element that not only inhabits the familiar but whose very withdrawal within the structure of appearance first allows it to *be* familiar.

Though this insight into the counter-turning between the foreign and the at-home, of course, pervades Heidegger's thought beginning already in *Sein und Zeit*, what distinguishes *das Unheimliche* from *das Geheimnis*, the uncanny from mystery, lies in the specific modality of the revelation of the foreign and the experience of displacement that occurs as its recasting of the familiar. Thus where the uncanny for Heidegger is most often disclosed as a threat that thrusts Dasein back onto itself through the collapse of world, the enchanted delights and even bewitches. The "step back" that invites what is remote to draw near reveals world anew as seduction, world transfigured through Hebel's language as though seen by moonlight and accessed through a "secret door" – in Alemannic, *gheimi Tür* – whose shining back at us points into the essence of "things" understood in a Heideggerian sense. This experience of delight is captured in readers' consistent response to the *Schatzkästlein* as "charming," and in Heidegger's important and repeated use of the word *neigen*, "to incline" or "tend toward," which I want to suggest is his reinterpretation of *philia* precisely as it moves in the direction of *charis* as Heidegger defines it at the conclusion of "...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...": friendliness understood in the way that kindness ever calls forth kindness.¹² It is the charity Hebel extends when he addresses the reader as "kind reader" (*geneigte Leser*) so that we, for our part, might incline toward the world to whose house he is friend.

Before turning to my interpretation, an initial point of clarification is necessary concerning Heidegger's texts. Between 1954 and 1960, Heidegger gave no less than four talks on Hebel of varying lengths that revised and expanded upon material drawn from his first Hebel talk delivered in Zähringen on September 5, 1954. The 1957 Neske edition, *Hebel – Der Hausfreund*, is in fact a revision of insights introduced in that first talk that Heidegger still further revised for a 1955 speech he

gave in Lörrach. (While the 1960 “Sprache und Heimat” focuses on Hebel’s *Alemannische Gedichte*, Heidegger’s insights into dialect were also prefigured in the Zähringen talk.) Indeed, I believe part of the reason Heidegger’s interpretation of Hebel has been neglected is because *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* suffers from being a compilation; some of Heidegger’s most provocative formulations, which link his Hebel interpretation to “...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...” and “Das Ding,” were edited out to the detriment of an interpretation unique in the way it explicitly connects a meditation on poetry to what it means to say “yes” and “no” to technology.

Despite their sometimes significant differences in content, all of Heidegger’s talks on Hebel are structured around his posing the question, “Who is Johann Peter Hebel?” Given the fact that many of these speeches were delivered on the occasion of celebratory gatherings, and that selections from the *Alemannische Gedichte* and *Kalendargeschichten* were standard fare within a German primary and secondary school education, the question can hardly be considered provocative. And on the surface Heidegger intends it to fill in the biography of a poet referred to as the “Homer of Wiesental.”¹⁵ However, in his first speech on Hebel, “Johann Peter Hebel,” Heidegger uses this question to resist Hebel’s easy categorization as a “provincial poet” (*Heimatsdichter*) and instead defines him as “the poet of the homeland” (*der Dichter der Heimat*) (GA 16: 494). Though this characterization might also seem merely descriptive, the structure of this type of genitive – Heidegger adopts it in characterizing Hölderlin as the “poet of the Germans” – serves as an anticipatory deflection whose provocation is to place Hebel’s relevance into the future. As Heidegger writes in the 1954 Zähringen talk:

For that reason, the time in which Hebel’s poems truly “penetrate the soul” [citing Hebel] may first still be to come; then, namely, when the progressive desolation of the modern world is no longer able to be endured by the human being; then, namely, when the human being is everywhere – and that means nowhere any longer – at home. And so when we look ahead it is more fitting for

us to say that we do not yet know Hebel's *Alemannische Gedichte* instead of bemoaning that we no longer know them. (GA 16: 494)

The significance of Heidegger's insistence that "we do not yet know" Hebel is twofold: First, the context in which the meaning of Hebel's vocation as "house-friend" initially becomes available is not the time in which Hebel was actually writing but the now current epoch, which is distinguished by an experience whose "right name" Heidegger claims we also do not know but that he decisively characterizes in terms of the "setting against one another" and "racing further and further apart" of calculable Nature and natural Nature as "alien realms" (*fremde Bezirke*) (GA 13: 146/HFH 97–8). Rather than a sentimentalizing return to the past, Heidegger finds in Hebel the poet who not only brings these two realms together but whose attunement to the invisible allows him to reciprocally articulate them in terms of one another. Second – and the two points are internally related – the homeland of which Hebel is poet is not in fact given but something whose future possibility first emerges from out of his vocation as "house-friend" as he "inclines" the reader toward what Heidegger, in a startling reduplication, refers to as "the naturalness of Nature," *die Natürlichkeit der Natur*. As this formulation intimates, such "naturalness" is not an undifferentiated immediacy but a poetically recuperative one whose letting be seen as enchanted "saves" the disclosive structure of appearance through the capturing-making manifest in language of the mystery that constitutes Nature's own event.

Heidegger's understanding of Hebel as equally inclined toward calculable Nature and natural Nature emerges in his focus on Hebel's positioning himself in the *Schatzkästlein* as a "stargazer and investigator of Nature" or, as Foltz and Heim more prosaically translate, as an "astronomer and physicist" (GA 13: 144/HFH 93). To the extent that Heidegger is at all interested in the Enlightenment Hebel, it is the Hebel who, in adopting the model of the "upright Copernicus," speaks the language of modern science in representing Nature in "numbers, diagrams, and laws." As Heidegger notes, the *Schatzkästlein* is very carefully ordered,

and includes observations on cosmology, adventure stories, reports on disasters and revolutions, cleverly executed moral teachings, practical farm advice, jokes, poems, riddles, and so on. Yet with the exception of his 1954 Zähringen talk, Heidegger's remarks are exclusively focused on Hebel's various meditations on the "World-Edifice" (*Weltgebäude*), which concern what Hebel characterizes in traditional theological terms as the "Book of the Heavens."¹⁴ Hebel calls *die Sterne* "the golden letters in the Book," and in describing the activity of the "house-friend" as secretly placing "little golden kernels" – they are kernels of wisdom – it becomes clear that Hebel understands the *Schatzkästlein* to be scattering stars whose sparkling enchants but whose fixity he intends to provide moral guidance. Though this is not a point Heidegger addresses (it is important for my later discussion of dialect), in his opening "General Meditation" Hebel importantly positions himself as a *dolmetscher*, or "oral translator" – the word derives from the Uralic *tolmács*, and means "the person who stands between" – structuring his meditations as a series of numbered observations that begin by addressing the relationship between the Earth and sun, and that then progress to the moon, planets, stars, and comets. In contrast to the stories, whose perfected self-containment Benjamin claims makes them "utterly forgettable," Hebel's observations on the different heavenly bodies either begin or end with the word "continued" (*fortgesetzt*), which creates the narrative arc that enables the *Schatzkästlein* to be a progressive and cosmological whole rather than a mere almanac. Though Heidegger only gestures toward this connection, Hebel's narrative spanning of the Heavens by translating scientific facts and numerical statistics measures out the "between" (*zwischen*) of the world that Heidegger describes as the "human sojourn between Earth and sky, between birth and death, between work and word" (GA 13: 144/ HFH 93). In a surprising variation of his analysis of the "dimension" in "...dichterisch wohnt der Mensch. . .," Hebel's poetic compassing of the "between" is not only presented as compatible with numerical calculation but in fact takes place in terms of it, at the same time those numbers are themselves given measure in being placed into the context of that mortal spanning that is human dwelling.

Heidegger makes precisely this point in what, according to my interpretation, is an essential passage he edited from the 1955 Lörrach version of *Hebel – Der Hausfreund*:

What Hebel offers, then, in his meditations is a lesson on the findings of modern natural science. The house-friend speaks instructively as nature observer but not as poet. But – what remains decisive is the way, *how* Hebel places these observations about Nature before and upon the heart of the reader in order to maintain his inclining in its true light and bring it to its appropriate path. Hebel restores scientifically represented Nature back [*holt zurück*] to the immediately lived world in which the sun rises and sets, the rose blooms, springs rush forth, and fountains flow. Hebel does not think to dissolve the world as it appears to the eye into a mere appearance in order to abandon it as the untrue world in favor of the modern scientific one as the supposed solely true world. But neither does Hebel let the world as it appears to the eye stand unmediated next to the presumably solely correct representation of Nature. Still less does it occur to Hebel to, in retrospect, piece together into one two separate realms. Hebel looks poetically into what is inseparable from its inception [*ein anfänglich Ungetrenntes*].

In his reflectively contemplating the world as house-friend, his poetic gaze has already taken back [*zurückgenommen*] the scientifically represented world into the daily-nightly appearing world. This comes to appear thus renewed and saved in the fullness of the illuminating, sounding, smelling, surging, and resting for the dwelling of human beings. (GA 16: 534)

The movement outlined in this quotation importantly complicates the position from which the house-friend's "sheltering" or "restoring back"

is understood to occur. For as Heidegger here makes clear, Hebel does not bring together two realms of Nature originally separate – the mediation implied in Heidegger’s repetition of the word *zurück* does not culminate in the return of a Hegelian synthesis – but instead makes manifest a “reciprocal seeing in terms of” that nonetheless privileges Hebel’s “poetic gaze” (*dichterischer Blick*) in its inclination toward the invisible.

In responding to Goethe’s statement that Hebel “countrifies the universe,” Heidegger articulates this “reciprocal seeing in terms of” as a “mirror-play” (*Spiegel-Spiel*), which is, of course, the term Heidegger adopts to describe the ex-appropriating appropriation of the fourfold in his 1950 talk “Das Ding.” When Hebel speaks in numbers as a natural scientist, he does so in terms of Nature as it appears to the eye – whence Heidegger’s claim that Hebel “restores scientifically represented Nature back to the immediately lived world” in what later becomes a description of Nature as *physis*.¹⁵ However, the immediacy of the immediately lived world is in turn reciprocally transformed by this “restoring back,” whose mirroring “seeing in terms of” brings forward in its concealment what remains hidden within the givenness of Nature when regarded as a separate realm. Surprisingly, then, it is the mediation and “sheltering back” of calculable Nature that allows what is natural about Nature to be disclosed in the taking back of what is hidden, precisely in the coming to appear of the invisible as mystery. Heidegger makes exactly this point in his revision of this passage in *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* when he comments, “[The] naturalness of Nature never grows directly out of Nature itself,” and it also comes forward in the paradoxical temporality that emerges in Heidegger’s statement that the “restoring back” (*zurückholen*) of the poetic gaze has “already taken back” (*schon zurückgenommen*) the scientific representation of Nature into the sensuously lived world. Indeed, this temporality effects a kind of poetic rescue, whose letting appear “as though for the first time” renews and saves the world for dwelling. As a re-seeing that sees “as though for the first time,” the phenomenological structure of enchantment is always the delight of a re-enchantment.

Hebel's mediating between calculable Nature and the naturalness of Nature from out of the order of the invisible connects his vocation as house-friend to that heavenly body that Hebel himself identifies as the "actual house-friend" (*der eigentliche Hausfreund*) – namely, the moon. Not surprisingly, given the period in which he was writing, this meditation is the most statistically rich and includes, for example, the height of the lunar mountain range, even as the calculations Hebel reports are now known to be wildly inaccurate. Yet what distinguishes this particular meditation on the "World-Edifice" is not so much Hebel's numbers as his complicated shifting back and forth between Earth, sun, and moon in explaining the relations between them as they become manifest in the moon's phases. Here, mirror-play is seen to operate as a triangulated, which means differential, reflection that thwarts any notion of a "unified" original or even an original itself. Crediting the moon with being the "first calendar-maker" and the entity from which he derives his poetic vocation as "house-friend," Hebel emphasizes the moon's watchfulness in the night sky: Its changing aspects cyclically measure the progression of lived time in the alternation of day and night – indeed, Heidegger remarks in *Sein und Zeit* that "'time' shows itself in the sky" (GA 2: 554/SZ 419) – and the softness of the moon's reflected light recasts the space of the familiar into the mutual inclining of seduction, whose mortal order is realized in the way all mortal orders should be: with a kiss. To quote the final point in Hebel's meditation on the moon, which is the sole passage Heidegger cites in *Hebel – Der Hausfreund*:

Eighth and final point: What function does the moon in heaven really perform? Answer: Whatever it is that the Earth performs. So much at least is certain: the moon illuminates our night with soft light reflected back from its sun, and the moon watches how boys kiss girls. It is the actual house-friend and first calendar-maker of our Earth, and the highest ranking official night watchman when other watchmen are asleep.
(GA 13: 145/HFH 96)

In responding to this point, Heidegger, on the one hand, focuses on the triangulation of the moon's reflected light for "whatever it is the Earth performs," and, on the other, on what he identifies as those "unique characteristics" that the moon as "house-friend" and Hebel as "house-friend" share between them. Within the larger compositional arc of the *Schatzkästlein*, Hebel's meditation on the moon thus occupies a privileged place because it is in Hebel's seeing his own activity as calendar-maker in terms of the moon that Hebel comes into his poetic vocation as *Hausfreund* – as the one who re-casts the invisible in an Earthly, which is to say, mortal light. As such, this reciprocal "seeing in terms of" operates not as the mirroring of a self-reference but as a *dolmetschen*, an oral translating, in which Hebel's ability to *read* what is written on the face of the moon in its phases allows him to translate the moon's light into his style of writing, whose use of dialect and everyday rhythms enchants – and thereby inclines – the reader toward him.

Yet before turning to Heidegger's treatment of dialect and writing, I want to address his interpretation of the moon, whose darkness allows the mirror-play between sun and Earth. Heidegger writes: "The moon brings light into our nights. But it has not lit the light it brings. The light is only a reflection [*Wiederschein*] of the light the moon previously received from the sun whose brilliance shines onto the Earth, too" (GA 13: 140–41/HFH 94). As this passage indicates, what enables the moon to "reflect" or "shine back" is precisely its own darkness, which withdraws itself as its receptivity to the sun's light. Thus where the moon's light is not original to it, is not something it has "lit" itself, its self-withdrawal into its own darkness *is*, and leads Heidegger to comment (and he intends this description to also characterize Hebel's language): "The phases, stance, and motion of the house-friend are a single uniquely restrained and at once wakeful shining that puts all things into a soft, scarcely noticeable light" (GA 13: 141/HFH 94). Self-withdrawal shows up as self-withholding as the moon yields its darkness to the reflection of the sun's light. The moon's restraint – which is directly tied to its wakefulness – has a dual effect, and serves to generate what Heidegger, citing Hölderlin's "Remembrance" in his first "Freiburg Lecture," calls

“dark light” (*dunkles Licht*): The moon’s darkness softens the brightness of the sun’s glare, which as Plato duly noted can never be looked at directly, and so allows the sun’s light to be seen in the only way it can be seen – as infused with darkness.¹⁶ However, the insubstantiality of that “dark light” also draws forward the realm of the invisible that the bright light of the day hides and that itself only becomes visible through the transfiguration of the familiar when seen by moonlight. In what is no doubt an unusual connection, Nathaniel Hawthorne addresses this phenomenon at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* in discussing moonlight as the medium of the romance writer in its creation of the interface or threshold in which the actual and the imaginary meet:

Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showcasing all its figures so distinctly, – making every object so minute visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility ... whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though it is still almost as vividly present as by daylight.¹⁷

The experience of “remoteness” within what is nonetheless a distinct visibility accomplishes what Heidegger in the 1954 Zähringen talk describes as a “stepping back” whose disclosure of the alien within the familiar allows what is invisible to come to appearance in the always already inclining of the hidden toward us. Heidegger makes this same point still more strikingly when he writes in a strange appropriation of the Thracian maid’s jest: “Mortal thinking must let itself down into the dark depths of the well if it is to see the stars by day” (GA 79: 94/89).

Hebel’s poetic vocation as “house-friend” accomplishes exactly this – allows the stars to be seen by day, plants them even – in the way the disclosivity of his language “relays” or “gives on” the moon’s reflected light within the specific context of Earthly dwelling. Prior to his analysis of the moon, Heidegger consistently describes Hebel’s language as in effect “moonlit” in its softness, charm, and playful humor. Yet in

Hebel – Der Hausfreund's most dense claim, Heidegger seeks to connect the heavenly compassing of the World-Edifice to his statement in the "Letter on Humanism" that "language is the house of Being" in referring to Hebel's poetic telling as itself an "image" (*Bild*) of the moon's shining (GA 7: 194/233). It is important to be clear that Heidegger's use of the word "image" here is not to be interpreted as a reversion to the language of traditional poetics (and especially not Platonic poetics), but instead hearkens back to what he calls an "authentic image" (*das eigentliche Bild*) in "...dichterish wohnet der Mensch....": "...poetic images are imaginings in a distinctive sense: not mere fancies and illusions but imaginings that are the visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar" (GA 7: 197–98/223–24). What makes Heidegger's characterization of Hebel's language as an "image" of the moon's shining particularly complicated is the way he understands Hebel to have not only come into his vocation as "house-friend" through the moon, but the manner in which Hebel's language reflects back the moon's own reflecting so as to enable its specifically mortal extension. Indeed, this is how the function "the moon performs" echoes and thereby reveals "the function that the Earth performs." In a highly compacted sentence propelled forward by the repetition of the word *wieder* – the prefix "re-" in English – Heidegger states: "The reflected light of the sun [*Widerschein*] softened by the moon and re-given to the Earth [*wieder geben*] is the image [*Bild*] of the saying addressed to the house-friend so that he, thus illuminated, re-tells [*sagt wieder*] what has been addressed to *him* to those who inhabit the Earth with him" (GA 13: 141/HFH 94). The triangulation of the moon's reflecting back takes place as the re-giving of the light it has previously received, a reception and a re-giving whose reflection is in turn taken up and extended by Hebel into the realm of an "inhabiting with," or *Mitsein*, through a telling whose re-telling makes manifest the relationship between Earth, sun, and moon. As the extension of the peculiar manner in which the moon companions the Earth in the watchfulness of its scarcely noticeable light, the moon's house-friendliness is relayed by Hebel's poetic house-friendliness as the condition for a neighborly dwelling.

I want to turn in conclusion to the way Heidegger interprets Hebel's use of dialect (*Mundart*), which still further re-inflects the structure of an "authentic image" in what Heidegger refers to in his 1954 Zähringen speech as a "pure echo" (*reines Echo*). Needless to say, what Heidegger elaborates here substantially complicates the critique of his privileging of oral discourse; notions like "mirror-play," "original image," "pure echo" do not accommodate themselves to binary schemas whose structures compel critics to misread the Heideggerian "between" as the givenness of an opposition or dialectic. As suggested earlier, in speaking as an "observer of Nature" Hebel understands himself to be acting as a *Dolmetscher* in translating the "Book of Nature" into familiar terms, which in this case means softened by the playful rhythms of spoken forms. Significantly, this act of translation occurs not only in what Heidegger understands to be Hebel's "restoring back" of calculable Nature to natural Nature but also in Hebel's translating dialect back into written language. And here the mistake critics make is in acting as though Heidegger understands the indigenouslyness of dialect as a form of direct (and therefore essentialist) transcription rather than a mirror-play that reciprocally sees the oral and the written in terms of one another. Heidegger addresses this in his assertion that Hebel's "simplicity" is the expression of an "elevated" or "intensified" (*gesteigert*) language that stems from his ability to hear the welling up of the hidden source of language. Reminiscent of the way Hebel's poetic gaze allows him to see "calculable Nature" in terms of "natural Nature," Hebel can *write* dialect because he can hear the way oral discourse is already operative in written language in a manner that similarly "restores" or "takes it back." In answer to the question, "Wherein lies the mystery of Hebel's language?" Heidegger replies:

The mystery of Hebel's language in the *Schatzkästlein* rests in the fact that Hebel was able to capture the Alemannic dialect in written language, and allows this, written language, to ring out as the pure echo of that, dialect. It certainly belongs to a patient and careful listening [*Lauschen*: eavesdropping] in order to truly

hear this singular resounding of dialect in high speech.
If we succeed in that, we have a passing intimation of
how Hebel, now going in the opposite direction, hears
in dialect the concealed treasure of high and written
speech. (GA 16: 496–97)

In the 1960 “Sprache und Heimat,” Heidegger provocatively asserts that “there is no such thing as ‘language,’” by which he means that the way we speak of “language” already reflects a decontextualization from its lived source – a claim that is as much an argument against purity as it is against philosophical abstraction. High and written German is a translation of dialect, but as a translation it also retains what about dialect specifically lends itself to the written. What Hebel already has to hear in order for his writing in *Alemannisch* to sound “natural” – and this is the word Kafka uses, and the stylistic effect he himself strives to create in the uncanny realism of his own stories – is the way writing is already a kind of *dolmetschen*. Hebel’s “pure echo,” then, is to let resonate through his use of dialect the presence of oral speech constantly being heard and overheard in writing. Analogous to the moon’s “reflecting back” the light of the sun, the pure echo of dialect within the written gives back the speaking of the oral to be heard in the only way it can be heard – through writing.

What is arguably Heidegger’s most important interpretation of Hebel’s use of dialect is to be found in the brief speech he gives on the occasion of his acceptance of the Hebel Memorial Prize on May 10, 1960. In this speech Heidegger reads the concluding lines from Hebel’s final poem in the *Alemannische Gedichte*, which concerns death.

und s’ sin no Sachen ehne dra.
nämlich uf dr andere Sitte von stille Grab im chüele
Grund.
Sel Plätzli het e gheimi Tür,
und s’ sin no Sachen ehne dra.

and there's no thing any longer there.
namely on the other side of the still grave in the cold
 ground.
 its place has a secret door,
 and there's no thing any longer there. (GA 16: 565)

Heidegger's focus is on the word *e Sach*, which he writes is "something astonishing because filled with mystery." Some time during this same period, and in what is still a different kind of translation, he exclaims to Heinrich Petzet that this *e Sach* is the "ontological difference put into Todtnaubergish!"¹⁸ In a restatement of the way he understands poetry to make visible the invisible, he continues: "Insofar as no thing is understood on its own, everything is an *e Sach*. In its essence every being *het e gheimi Tür* – has a secret door – into mystery through which it comes forth and shines back towards us. The vocation of the poet is the following: to point in the direction of this secret door in all things or even to lead us through it" (GA 16: 566). As a variation of the wonder that underlies the experience "that there are beings and not rather nothing," Hebel's enchantment is to make visible the secret door of things always shining back at us, always beckoning us from within the familiar as a nearness which becomes available only through that stepping back that is a stepping through into moonlight. Yet as also a mortal door, Hebel's friendship – and the kindness he does us – is to incline us toward our essence and our dwelling as the threshold of mystery.

The initial prompt for this paper came from conversations I had with students on Heidegger and poetry at the 2013 Collegium Phenomenologicum, "Heidegger: Gelassenheit, Ethical Life, Ereignis 1933–1946." These conversations led Kate Davies – also my student at Whitman College – to extend the gracious invitation to be the keynote speaker for Emory's 2014 graduate student conference on friendship. I want to thank that amazing cohort of students at Emory for their manifold generosity, and I dedicate this piece to them.

NOTES

- 1 Max Kommerell, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1919–1944*, ed. Inge Jens (Olten and Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter Verlag, 1967), 403.
- 2 Kommerell, *Briefe*, 405.
- 3 Hebel was born in Basel in 1760 and attended grammar school in Lörrach until the age of thirteen when he was orphaned by the death of his mother. He went on to read theology at the university in Erlangen before returning to the Gymnasium at which he studied in Karlsruhe, where he served as both teacher and subdeacon. He wrote the dialect poems *Alemannische Gedichte* (*Alemannic Poems*) in 1801 after returning home to the Black Forest and Basel. In 1808 he took over writing the Lutheran almanac for Baden, which at the time every household was required to purchase, re-titling it *Der Rheinländische Hausfreund* (*The Rhenish House-Friend*). (It is more frequently referred to as the *Kalendargeschichten*, or *Calendar Stories*). The stories included in the almanac were widely circulated throughout Germany, and drew the attention and praise of Goethe. Hebel was approached by the German publisher Cotta to put together a selection of the stories for wider publication within Germany, which were collected in 1811 under the title *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* (*Treasure Chest of the Rhenish House-Friend*). Unfortunately, there remains scant information available on Hebel in English. John Hibberd's introduction to his translation of a selection from the *Schatzkästlein* provides a helpful overview, and includes a list of "Further Reading" of primarily German sources. See *The Treasure Chest*, introduced and translated by John Hibberd (New York: Penguin, 1994), ix-xxvii. Here, it needs to be noted that Hibberd's selection does not include the astronomical observations important to Heidegger's interpretation of the moon. More recently, Bernard Viel has published an updated and comprehensive biography of Hebel entitled *Johann Peter Hebel oder Das Glück der Vergänglichkeit* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2010). Heidegger's piece on the *Alemannische Gedichte*, "Sprache und

Heimat" (in GA 16), was included as part of a tribute volume commemorating the 200th anniversary of Hebel's birth, and communicates something of Hebel's reception in the early 1960s. See Theodor Heuss, Carl J. Burckhardt, et al., *Über Johann Peter Hebel* (Tübingen: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1964). The Project Gutenberg – DE site includes a nice survey of Hebel's works in German at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/autor/251>.

- 4 The source text for *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* and "Sprache und Heimat" was a speech Heidegger gave in Zähringen on September 5, 1954 that predates "Gelassenheit" by slightly more than a year. ("Gelassenheit" was delivered on October 30, 1955). The two texts are closely related in their composition, and Heidegger went on to give a revised version of his Zähringen talk at a *Volkhochschule* in Göppingen just ten days after delivering "Gelassenheit." With the exception of *Hebel – Der Hausfreund*, "Sprache und Heimat," and "Die Sprache Johann Peter Hebels," which are included in GA 13, all of Heidegger's speeches on Hebel can be found in GA 16. The *Nachweise* of these two volumes include helpful notes on when, where, and in what context talks were given (GA 16: 810, GA 13: 248–49).

The primary text to which I'll be referring throughout this article is *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* (Pfullingen: Günter Neske, 1957), translated as "Hebel – Friend of the House" by Bruce V. Foltz and Michael Heim. I have modified Foltz and Heim's translation throughout. An abbreviated version of *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* focusing on the reduction of language to information aired on the German television station SWF on May 10, 1960. The clip can be found on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7kj4kAyRXA>. This clip draws heavily from the November 9, 1955 talk, "Johann Peter Hebel," that Heidegger delivered at a *Volkhochschule* in Göppingen, which he then revised in conjunction with the Zähringen talk in composing *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* (see GA 16: 530–33).

- 5 This is Veronique Fóti's phrase in *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Techne* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992). See Chapter Six, "A Missed Interlocution: Heidegger and Celan," 78–88. In a provocative and otherwise comprehensive treatment of Heidegger's engagement with poets, it is notable that Fóti omits Hebel.
- 6 My characterization of Hebel as "the poet of *Gelassenheit*" is intentionally ambiguous. On the one hand, I intend it to refer to Hebel as the poet who concretely makes manifest what "openness to the mystery" looks like in its orientation between the familiar world and technology. On the other, I mean this phrase literally: Heidegger makes explicit reference to Hebel in "Gelassenheit," and concludes the talk with a reference to "We are plants" as exemplifying the "rootedness" (*Bodenständigkeit*) of creative flourishing. See "Gelassenheit" (GA 16: 517–29), translated as "Memorial Address" in *Discourse on Thinking* by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 43–57. I have modified Anderson and Freund's translation throughout.
- 7 This thesis was first and most forcefully put forward by Robert Minder in "Heidegger und Hebel oder Die Sprache von Messkirch" in *Dichter in der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1966), 211–14. Minder's knowledge of the full scope of Heidegger's engagement with Hebel was limited, and he reduces – if not entirely misreads – the complexity of what Heidegger is doing with dialect vis-à-vis written language. Charles Bambach reprises a version of this same argument (without apparent knowledge of Minder) in his piece "Heidegger, Technology, and the Homeland," *The Germanic Review* 78:4 (Fall 2003): 267–82, which he then revised for his book *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 329–35. Robert Metcalf goes on to offer a nuanced reply to Bambach in his article "Rethinking 'Bodenständigkeit' in the Technological Age," *Research in Phenomenology* 43 (2012): 49–66. While Metcalf gestures toward the importance of Hebel,

he does not offer an interpretation of what Heidegger actually says about Hebel as a poet.

- 8 See James M. Brophy's treatment of Hebel in *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The chapter "Reading," pp. 18–53, includes a discussion of politicized calendars and the practice of reading Hebel out loud. The cover of the 1808 edition of *Der Rheinländische Hausfreund* shows the house-friend as a public figure rather than a domesticated and interior one. As Heidegger remarks in responding to Hebel, the house-friend styles himself as a type of preacher (GA 13: 143/HFH 96).
- 9 *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913–1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 428. Benjamin has two short pieces on Hebel, "Johann Peter Hebel (I): On the Centenary of his Death," 428–31, and "Johann Peter Hebel (II): A Picture Puzzle on the Centenary of his Death," 432–34.
- 10 W. G. Sebald, *Logis in einem Landhaus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2002), translated by Jo Caitlin as *A Place in the Country* (New York: Random House, 2013). Sebald's first chapter, "A Comet in the Heavens," is on Hebel, and is vehemently critical of Heidegger. Wonderful as Sebald is, it is about as consummate a misreading of *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* as is possible.
- 11 GA 13: 146/HFH 97. This passage was also singled out by Roger Munier in the seven questions on technology that he posed to Heidegger in the Le Thor seminars that took place in the late 1960s (GA 15: 77/FS 44).
- 12 See GA 7: 197–98/PLT 226–27. Heidegger's remarks here are a gloss on Hölderlin's reference to "friendliness" (*Freundlichkeit*) in "In lovely blueness. . .," which he interprets by way of Hölderlin's translation of *charis* in a line from Sophocles' *Ajax*.
- 13 "Homer aus Wiesental" is the title Benno Reifenberg gave to his contribution to the commemorative volume *Johann Peter Hebel*

- (55–64). The essay was originally published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on May 10, 1960.
- 14 Heidegger is the only reader of Hebel of whom I am aware to focus on Hebel’s cosmology, and it is absolutely essential to following out what is at stake in his interpretation. To not understand this, and – still more specifically – to not understand the role Nature as *physis* plays in that cosmology is to misread Heidegger. Here, it is significant that Hebel’s meditations on the “World-Edifice” tend to be left out of German anthologies on Hebel, and that none of these meditations have been translated into English, which includes Hibberd’s version of the *Treasure Chest*.
- 15 In *Hebel – Der Hausfreund* Heidegger in fact replaces this entire passage with a reference to *physis*, writing: “The naturalness of Nature never grows directly out of Nature itself; rather, it is caught sight of expressly in that to which the ancient Greek thinkers once gave the name *physis*” (GA 13: 146/HFH 97).
- 16 In citing Hölderlin, Heidegger interestingly draws the connection not to Plato but to Oppenheimer’s quotation of the *Bhagavad Gita* in reference to the detonation of the first atomic bomb: “The light is no longer an illuminated clearing when the light diffuses into mere ‘brighter than a thousand suns’” (GA 79: 93/88–89).
- 17 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 3rd ed., ed. Seymour Gross (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 27–28.
- 18 Heinrich Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 126. See also Petzet’s account of Heidegger’s relationship to Hebel in the section entitled “A Hebel Day,” pp. 200–204.