

Thoughts on the Traditional Background to some Works by Johann Peter Hebel, including his “Clandestine Decapitation”

J. B. SMITH

The works of the distinguished Alemannic dialect poet and prose writer Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826) are an invaluable source of information for the student of tradition. The late Lutz Röhrich has for example shown how traditional forms such as fairy tale, popular legend, and jocular tale as well as proverbialisms can be traced in the *Kalendergeschichten* (Calendar Stories), and the poems are no less of a treasurehouse. There are records throughout of contemporary custom, and also of material culture. But in exploiting such records we can perhaps give something back. For instance, we learn from the poem “die Wiese” (River Wiese) that the lads of Zell im Wiesental (Zell in the Valley of the Wiese) were in the habit of gathering, “hoch an der felsige Halde” (high on the rocky slope), the plant *Engelsüss* (Hebel, 2, p. 88), which is *Polypodium vulgare*, the adder’s tongue fern (*HdA*, 2, cols 839-840); Marzell (3, pp. 945-952); Watts (p. 300). In return we can provide a footnote on why. The roots of this fern were dug and eaten as a sweetmeat, which was valued almost as much as liquorice, and were incidentally likely to have been an important source of nourishment in times of famine (*HdA*). But I think that more is on offer than footnotes. In the poem “Gespenst an der Kanderer Strasse” (“Ghost on the Road to Kandern”) a child is trampled by a drunken man and dies. The sorrowing mother does not survive for long, and her spirit comes to haunt the scene of her death in the forest, causing any drunken man, but not a sober one, to go astray and unwittingly retrace his steps instead of returning home (Hebel, 2, pp. 72-73). At the back of this is a long line of folk beliefs that ascribe losing one’s way to some supernatural agency (*HdA*, 4, cols 776-864; cf. Künzig, pp. 70-73). To explore the relationship between such beliefs and Hebel’s poem would tell us much of importance about both poem and poet.

Overall, I would suggest, the student of tradition can shed light on the work of a writer such as Hebel in two main ways. On the one hand one can identify the strands of traditional life and belief from which the writer wove a particular text, and try to show the relationship between raw materials and finished product. What was the writer’s aim in combining particular strands into particular patterns? What did he deliberately add or leave out? Here we are concerned with his conscious artistry. On the other hand, the material he used and the patterns he produced often fit into a wider traditional context of which he may not even have been aware. It will be my argument that to view his texts within this wider context can also be helpful.

An example of this wider, more panoramic view: in his book *The Villages of the White Horse*, published in 1913, the Wiltshire writer Alfred Williams records from the oral tradition of his county a story that has been named “The Puzzled Carter”. In it, while going about his business, the carter of the title takes a drop too much. Resuming his journey, he eventually falls asleep on his waggon. His horses come to a standstill, and he falls off his seat onto the grass. When he awakes, the sun is setting, and rubbing his eyes with stupefaction he

cries out: “Lord a massy! Is it I? Or byent it I? If ’tis I, then I be lost; an’ if chent I, then I ’er found a waggin an’ six ’osses.” (Briggs, A2, p. 244) The student of Hebel will recognise in this the tale of 1815 “Verloren oder gefunden” (“Lost or Found”), in which der Herr Vogt von Trudnbach, drawing up already a little the worse for wear next to a wayside inn, is tempted to spend a convivial evening without the inconvenience of leaving his carriage. When he eventually falls asleep, his drinking companions leave him where he is, but stable his horses. Perplexed at the strange circumstances he finds himself in next morning, he proclaims: “Now everything depends on whether I’m the Vogt of Trudnbach or not. If I am, I’ve lost a horse; if I’m not, I’ve found a carriage.” (Hebel, 1, pp. 214-215)

Williams knew nothing of Hebel, and Hebel cannot have known Williams. But to collect and compare versions like theirs of the same tale-type or motif can help provide insights not only about the processes of transmission, but also about how individual narrators fit into the tradition, and about what they contribute personally and as children of their time. Of course, if in collecting material towards this macroscopic view of things we light upon a prototype or close analogue of something by Hebel, we can proceed to look at this microscopically in the way I outlined earlier on. There is ultimately no conflict between the wide sweep and the focused scrutiny on a particular point within our field of vision.

What I am calling the microscopic approach, that is the close inspection of how the writer handles and transforms traditional material, now also needs illustration. If we look at Hebel’s poem “das Hexlein” (“The Little Sorceress”) superficially, it appears to be a perhaps rather conventional account of how a lad at his handiwork is bewitched, in the hackneyed, figurative sense of the word, by a passing girl. The handiwork in question is that of cutting fir-splits, or similar slices of other wood, known as “Lichtspäne” or “Kienspäne”, corresponding to the Highland fir-candles described by Grant (pp. 184-185). A brighter or dimmer flame could, incidentally, be obtained by lowering or raising the arm of a special holder, a specimen of which can be seen at the Hebelhaus at Hausen. As the girl passes the lad at his work, she greets him in two ways:

Un wo n i uf em Schniidstuehl sitz
 für Basseltang und Liechtspöö schnitz,
 se chunnt e Hexli wohlgimuet
 un froogt no frey: “Haut’s Messer guet?”

Un sait mer frei no guete Tag!
 Un wo n i lueg, un wo n i sag:
 “’s chönnt besser goh, un grosse Dank!”
 Se wird mer’s Herz uf aimool chrank.

“And as I sit at the woodworker’s bench to pass the time, cutting fir-splits, there comes a little sorceress with good cheer, and without ado asks: ‘Knife cutting well?’ And she without ado says ‘Good day’! And when I look up, saying ‘Could be better’, and ‘Thanks a lot!’, I’m suddenly sick at heart.” (Hebel, 2, pp. 47-48)

Here we have a *Grussformel* (greeting formula) proper: “Guete Tag” (“good day”), preceded by a *Tätigkeitsanrede* (form of address referring to activity): “Haut’s Messer guet?” (“Knife cutting well?”) of a sort that in the village community was, and perhaps to some extent still is, tailored to the activity of the person greeted. One “passes the time of day” (“bietet die Zeit”) by asking someone harvesting fruit or potatoes “Gibt’s aus?” (“Is there plenty?”), someone going for fodder “Wollet ’r Fuetter hole?” (“You fetching fodder?”), someone splitting wood “Teant ’r Holz spalten?” (“You splitting wood?”). Such questions require some sort of answer in the affirmative, whereas a greeting proper just requires thanks (Häfner, pp. 201-202). Our lad provides both types of response in the proper manner, the immediate and unexplained sequel being the heart-sickness of the last line: “se wird mer’s Herz uf eimol chrank.” What is the connection here?

The answer is that Hebel is doubtless referring to something which for him and his villagers was an obvious fact: that the proper response to a witch’s greeting was silence or even obloquy, since to accept anything from such a person, even a greeting, brought with it the risk of succumbing to that person’s influence (*HdA*, 3, cols 1197-1199; *EM*, 6, 1, pp. 274-276). As we see from the rest of the poem, this is precisely what happens to the lad. In the twinkling of an eye he falls under the girl’s spell, and becomes obsessed with her to the extent that he can neither eat nor sleep, nor do anything properly. Hebel thus operates at a figurative and a literal level. To overlook or underestimate the latter is to rob the former of much of its significance, to depolarise the tension between two different planes of expression.

As we see from the account of the greeting ceremony and beliefs surrounding it in “Das Hexlein”, Hebel’s portrayal of the minutiae of folk life is nothing if not authentic. The poem “Der Knabe im Erdbeerschlag” (“The Boy in the Wild-Strawberry Bed”) will provide a further example, in which a greeting, or in this instance the absence of one, also plays a part. The “boy” of the title is an angel, but the “lad” (*Büebli*) we are introduced to at the beginning of the poem is a village lad who goes to pick – and eat – wild strawberries on a Sunday afternoon. When the angel appears to him and asks what he is eating, the lad says, “Nothing”, and fails to doff his cap. Thereupon the angel says: “Heh, if it’s nothing you’re eating, you rude lad, then it won’t do you any good”, and disappears. Since that time, wild strawberries have never satisfied those who pick them, no matter how many they eat (Hebel, 2, pp. 65-66).

Berry-picking is a primeval food-gathering activity (see for instance Schorta, pp. 46-61), and it is associated with numerous ancient beliefs and practices, memories of which survive in superstitions, legends, and folk rhymes. Many of these show that wild berries were thought to be guarded by spirits of one kind or another that required appeasement and offerings. There were the Erdmännlein, the Salige Fräulein, the Schwarze Frau, the Beere-Jokili, and a host of others, depending on the area (Hepding, 1-58). In the Niederlausitz, children wanting to pick berries were warned: “Die Anna mit den grossen Zähnen (zubata Anna) sitzt im Walde auf einem Baumstamm, hat die Haare aufgelöst” (Anna Bigtooth is sitting on a tree-stump in the forest, and has let down her hair.) Compare a variant of the same warning to children in the Oberlausitz on July 2nd, the day of the Visitation of Our Lady: “Geht nicht in die Blaubeeren, da sitzt die Maria auf dem Stamm und kämmt sich die Haare.” (“Don’t go picking whortleberries, Mary is sitting on the tree-stump, combing her

hair.”) (p. 8). Hebel’s version is still farther from its pagan origins, but the alteration is obviously not his. There are numerous near-prototypes for his poem. A Romansh version from the Upper Rhine is a wellknown type of jocular tale in which St Peter is made fun of. Going through a wood with Jesus on a hot day, Peter lags behind to gather wild strawberries. When Jesus asks him what he has been doing, he says: “Nothing”. In retribution for such an untruth, Jesus decrees that wild strawberries shall henceforth satisfy no one’s hunger (Büchli, 2, p. 452). But closer to Hebel is a version collected by Ernst Meier in Wurmlingen and other parts of Swabia, in which, as in the Oberlausitz version, the Virgin Mary manifests herself: A child was once seeking strawberries in the forest and had already picked a little basket full, when the Mother of God appeared to the child and asked what it had in its basket. The child replied that it had nothing. Then the Mother of God said: “If it’s nothing, then it shall not satisfy you.” Since then no-one has ever been satisfied from eating strawberries, no matter how many: it is always as if one had eaten nothing. (Meier, pp. 250-251; cf. *HdA*, 2, cols 892-893).

We have seen that according to popular thinking a child seeking whortleberries or wild strawberries was likely to encounter the supernatural guardians, whether benign or malevolent, of those fruits. This is precisely what happens to Eveli Riedliger in Hebel’s poem “Riedligers Tochter” (“Riedliger’s Daughter”). At the age of twelve, she is looking for strawberries in the forest when she meets Erdmännlis Frau (Earth Sprite’s Wife), who did in fact attend at Eveli’s birth, and because of this may justifiably remind us of the fairy godmothers of Romance tradition. But now she reveals something of her character as one of the earth-dwellers of native lore, since she proceeds to guide Eveli via a bramble bush into her subterranean realm, where she offers her a choice of gifts. Here Hebel was drawing on local superstitions surrounding the Erdmannshöhle (“Earth Sprite’s Cavern”), a dripstone cave near Hasel, a few kilometres to the southeast of Hausen. The same superstitions had provided him, in the same year, 1807, with the agent of the supernatural in the story “Drei Wünsche” (“Three Wishes”), that outrageous mixture of the otherworldly and the bourgeois, “die Bergfei, Anna Fritze, die im kristallinen Schloss mitten in den Bergen wohnt” (“the mountain fay Anna Fritze, who dwells in her crystal palace deep in the hills”) (Hebel, 1, pp. 235-238). The poem “Riedligers Tochter” is aimed at witchcraft beliefs, and the character of Erdmännlis Frau serves in the end as an allegory for the virtue and diligence that alone can bring good fortune (Hebel, 2, pp. 106-110). But there can be no doubt that in conveying his message Hebel takes us close to authentic folk traditions, according to which it was possible for mortals to be transported to an otherworldly realm fraught with danger.

Erdmännlis Frau, the Bergfei Anna Fritze, and their kin are mythical denizens of a subterranean world who occasionally surface to interact with humans. Following Reidar Christiansen I shall refer to such beings, since their dwellings are not invariably beneath the earth, as “the hidden people” (pp. 104-117). There are for instance the “Jumpfere usem See” (“maidens from the lake”) alluded to in “Die Überraschung im Garten” (“Surprise in the Garden”), who at midnight leave the waters of their lake and attend “mit frummer Hand” (“with devout hand”) to the surrounding land for the benefit of the worthy owners (Hebel, 2, pp. 16-17).

As Christiansen has shown (pp. 104-117; cf. *EM*, 6, pp. 631-634) one of the best-known folktales throughout Europe and beyond is about how the hidden people require a human midwife for a woman among them who is about to give birth. The midwife is conducted into their realm, successfully performs her task, and having been recompensed in some way is transported back to her home, or somewhere close to it. There are innumerable variations on this theme. In the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen (German Legends)* alone there are nine. The following summary of one of these entitled "Der Wassermann" ("The Merman") will stand for many. This is from Prätorius's *Weltbeschreibung (Description of the World)*, and was told in 1630 or thereabouts by an old midwife near Saalfeld about her mother, who had been a midwife in the same place (Brüder Grimm, no. 49, pp. 53-54).

One dark night this elder midwife is called out. A man is waiting below. Not only does he allow her no light, but he blindfolds her. Thus she accompanies him, and she is aware that he eventually strikes water with his rod. They pass through until they come to a room with only one occupant, a woman about to give birth. Freed of her blindfold, the midwife delivers the woman of a child, and does all else that is necessary. The woman secretly confides that she is a mortal who has been abducted by the merman, and that on the third day after its birth he devours every child she bears him. If the midwife goes to the pond near her house on the third day, she will see, as evidence of this, the water transformed into blood. Moreover, the midwife is not to accept more money than usual for her work, otherwise the merman will wring her neck. The midwife follows this last piece of advice, and is conducted back home safely. But she is too afraid to go to the pond on the third day (Brüder Grimm, no. 49, pp. 53-54. Other relevant numbers are 41, 58, 65- 69, 304).

Now how are we to interpret this story and the characters in it? First of all, the man, or rather merman. He is one of the demonic tribe of hidden people, who live apart from humans but depend upon them, for like Hecate and Lamia in classical tradition, like the giant of "Jack the Giant-Killer" and his German counterpart ("Ich rieche, rieche Menschenfleisch"), or like the witches who derived their magical ointments from the bodies of unbaptised infants, he batters on human flesh, and notably the flesh of innocent children (See e.g. Hartland, pp. 100-101 and references there; *HdA*, 2, cols 1373-1377 and 1601-1602; *EM*, 2, pp. 509-511; Buss, pp. 247-254). Of these he has ensured a regular supply through the device of abducting a human to be his wife, so that in his watery realm she will bear him the children he is to devour. But it seems that such kidnapped mortals cannot be brought to bed of a child without human intervention, and thus it is that our midwife is called in to assist at the birth.

In other versions of what is essentially the same story, the child is not devoured by its father, but is cast by him, or by those surrounding him, into the flames of a fire burning on a nearby hearth. The implication is that the resulting ashes will form the basis of an unguent providing the hidden people with magical powers. Such variants of the story seem to have been common in Britain and Ireland. Of great importance for present purposes is, for instance, one from County Galway, in which, when the child is born, it is put on the back of a fire burning in the room where the confinement has taken place. The ashes are then collected and placed in a dish. When the inhabitants of the household dip their fingers into this and

transfer the contents to their eyes, the girl who has been brought in as a midwife secretly copies their action, and in this way acquires a kind of second sight. She is later allowed to return to her home (Christiansen, pp. 111-112. For the original and details of its provenance etc. see O’Sullivan, pp. 169-171 and 21-72). What I would now like to argue is that at some point one such story, perhaps because it was no longer understood or accepted on its own terms, was interpreted literally, demythologised, so to speak (cf. Westwood, p. 70), and took on a new lease of life as a historical legend of which Hebel’s “Heimliche Enthauptung” (“Clandestine Decapitation”) is a late representative.

The earliest demythologised version I can trace takes the form of a deposition made in the late 1570s, shortly before her death, by a midwife called Mother Barnes, of Shefford in Berkshire, to a magistrate called Anthony Bridges, of Great Shefford in the same county. The events narrated, which are said to have taken place in the same decade, are as follows: late one night, two servants come to Mother Barnes’s house, allegedly on behalf of a Mrs Knevett, the wife of Sir Henry Knevett, Knight of Wyltesh, who urgently requires the services of a midwife. Mother Barnes rides with them for most of the night, in what is perhaps a north-easterly direction. They cross a long bridge over a river she takes to be the Thames, and toward day they arrive at a house. Here a “tall, slender gentleman, having upon hym a long gounne of blacke velvett” receives her and leads her up a staircase, through two rooms, each with a large fire, and into a third containing a rich bed surrounded by curtains. Promising her a reward in the event of a successful confinement, but death if there is a miscarriage, the gentleman commands the midwife to deliver a lady who is lying in the bed. The lady, whose face is covered, shortly afterwards gives birth to a man child, which for lack of other clothes, has to be wrapped in the midwife’s apron. In search of more suitable apparel for the infant, the midwife carries it into one of the adjoining rooms. Here she is met by the gentleman, who commands her to cast the child on to the fire. On her knees she begs rather to be allowed to keep it as her own. Despite this it meets its death in the flames. The midwife remains with the lady all day, and during the following night is taken back as she has come, except that she is set down at some distance from her house (Long, pp. 390-396).

Like Prätorius’s account, this English one purports to have been taken down from the words of a midwife. But the similarities do not stop at that. Indeed, if we were asked to secularise the German legend, stripping it of its supernatural elements and retelling it in “realistic” terms, we should arrive at something very like Mother Barnes’s story, but at the price of certain striking inconsistencies. In the new, “historical”, version, which is chronologically older, but in its implicit rejection of the supernatural rather more modern, the implication is that the father is a nobleman who requires the death of his illegitimate offspring. But if the father is keen to be rid of his child, why does he call in a midwife, whom he will reward if she succeeds, but will put to death if she fails? Surely he would be better served by a miscarriage than by a successful delivery followed by a murder in the presence of a witness whom he then permits to depart unscathed (cf. Long, p. 395). Despite all this, the story in its new form continues to be told, by John Aubrey for instance, who happily pins it on a contemporary of Mother Barnes, “Wild” William Darrell of Littlecote House, a few miles to the southwest of Shefford (Aubrey, pp. 407-408). Admittedly, later versions than

Aubrey's partially dispose of this inconsistency. In these the midwife is no longer a witness to the murder, but her suspicions are aroused by the smell of singed flesh as she leaves her client's house (Rede, pp. 240-248; Burke, 2, pp. xii-xiii).

Further adjustments and transformations are of course to take place before the story reaches Hebel. Of importance here is an Edinburgh version recounted by Walter Scott and said to have taken place in the early eighteenth century. In this version the midwife is replaced by a priest, who is blindfolded and brought at pistol point in a sedan chair to a lodging in a distant part of the city at midnight. Here he is to say the office for the dead over a lady and her newly born infant. As he is subsequently being hurried away, he hears a pistol shot. Not long after, the lodging and its inmates are consumed by fire (Scott, pp. 407-408).

Still more significant, however, are changes the story undergoes on the Continent. In a work published in 1815, Nathaniel Wraxall recounts a variant he claims to have heard from Lady Hamilton at Portici. According to this, about the year 1743 an Irish surgeon named Ogilvie, who lived in Rome, being called from his bed one night to an allegedly urgent case, was conducted blindfold to a place where, it turned out, he was to bleed to death a lady of rank who was said to have dishonoured her family. There is now no longer any mention of a child or a conflagration, nor is there in Wraxall's next memoir, which concerns events alleged to have taken place in 1774 or 1775. One night in one of those years, the public executioner of Strasburg is called out and driven over the river to Kehl. Here he is blindfolded and made to continue his journey, until "on the second day" he and his escorts reach a moated castle, where he is to decapitate with his sword of office a veiled woman habited in deep mourning (Wraxall, 1, pp. 255-266).

Bernhard Baader's *Volkssagen aus dem Lande Baden (Folk-Tales from the Province of Baden)*, published in 1851, contains substantially the same story, with an indication that it happened at much the same time as Wraxall's, namely in the mid-1770s. It begins with the executioner, not of Strasburg, but of Landau, being called upon by two unknown men at night, and it proceeds much as in Wraxall, except that, having noted details of his journey and counted the steps he mounts in the building to which he is taken, the executioner is subsequently able to identify this as the Palace of Mannheim, and the victim of his sword as a lady belonging to the court there (Baader, no. 332, p. 304). This account of the ruses that lead to the scene of the crime and other relevant information being discovered is in fact common to most variants of the legend from Aubrey onwards. Many also end up with some sort of ghost story, according to which victim or perpetrator come to haunt the locus delicti. Not so Hebel's version, which we now summarise.

On June 17th, in an unnamed year, the Landau executioner received a letter in which he was bidden to travel to Nancy with his great sword. Once there, he would be informed of his mission and paid well for performing it. A coach was already standing at his door, and, thinking it to be his duty, he entered and set out. At sunset, when they were an hour's ride from Nancy, the coachman stopped, and they were joined by three powerfully built armed men, who told the executioner he must now be blindfolded. It seemed to him that the journey now continued for another good twelve hours, he knew not whither. Finally, they reached a

mansion, where, after he had been given refreshment, he was led upstairs and downstairs, until they reached a great hall, and the blindfold was removed. The hall was draped with black cloths, and on the table candles were burning. In the middle of the hall, on a chair, sat a female with bared neck, her face covered with a mask. Having had something thrust into her mouth, she could not speak, but was sobbing. Standing against the walls were several gentlemen in black, their faces hidden behind veils of black crepe. One of these, handing the executioner his great sword, bade him behead the woman. Horrified, he declared that his sword was dedicated to the service of justice, and could not be profaned with a murderous act. Thereupon, one of the gentlemen, pointing a pistol at him, said, "Either, or! If you fail to do what is bidden, you will never see Landau church tower again!" Thinking of wife and children, and stating that not he was guilty of spilling innocent blood, he struck off the woman's head. After being well paid, he was blindfolded again, and set out on the return journey. On arrival, he found himself where the three strangers had joined him, an hour from Nancy. The coach departed at speed. No one knows who the victim was, what wrong she had done, and where her grave is (Hebel, 1, pp. 81-82).

Although there is no direct relationship between Hebel's version of the story on the one hand and Wraxall's and Baader's on the other, all three are so close to each other in content and sometimes even turn of phrase that some at least of Hebel's divergences can be claimed with a fair degree of assurance to result from his own intervention. Let me now move towards a "microscopic" approach and pick out some of those things that bear his mark and are further attested as his by a careful comparison of the relevant texts.

What such a comparison strongly suggests is that ever and again Hebel fills the interstices of the story with details which are on the face of it no more than that, but which are nevertheless charged with significance, or at least give body to the narrative. That the executioner is joined by an armed escort early on in his journey is of course traditional. But note how Hebel leads up to it with a powerful image, making what is apparently harmless seem menacing: "Es war schon Abend, und die Sonne ging in blutroten Wolken unter, und der Kutscher hielt inne, und sagte: 'Wir bekommen morgen wieder schön Wetter', da standen auf einmal drei starke bewaffnete Männer an der Strasse." ("It was already evening, and the sun was setting amidst blood-red clouds, and the coachman stopped, and was saying: 'We shall be getting fine weather again tomorrow', when suddenly there, at the side of the road, stood three powerfully built armed men.") During the subsequent twelve hours of their journey, the creeping passage of time is marked by the hooting of owls, the crowing of cocks, and the ringing of matutinal bells. During his journey the executioner is no longer, as in many versions, busy collecting sensory evidence that will later help him retrace his steps. As we shall see, this is not part of Hebel's scheme of things. He prefers to make us experience with the executioner the tedium of the journey. We even share his fleeting sense of comfort and relief when, on arrival, he is given "eins zu trinken, und einen guten Wurstwecken dazu" ("something to drink, and a good sausage bap to go with it"). Again, whereas in other versions the victim is impassive, or even assures the executioner that she embraces her fate, in Hebel, although she is deprived of speech by something that has been thrust into her mouth, she sobs aloud.

But what strikes us most about Hebel's version is his constant presence as a narrator, who nevertheless stands back to the extent of making an aside on why his artist's illustration does not agree with the text. Hebel points to things, but leaves his readers to draw their own conclusions. He does not know whether the executioner of Landau, when saying the Lord's prayer on June 17th of an unnamed year, recited the sentence "And lead us not into temptation" with proper devotion, but if he did not, the letter from Nancy came at the right moment. Again, right at the end, Hebel refuses to speculate on who the victim was or what her crime, let alone to add anything in the nature of a ghost story. The centre of gravity of his tale thus shifts to the moral predicament of the executioner, who has begun by accepting his task with unthinking enthusiasm: "Der Scharfrichter dachte: 'Das ist meines Amts', und setzte sich in die Kutsche." ("The executioner thought, 'That is my duty', and sat himself in the coach.") How different things are when that duty confronts him: "Da ward's dem armen Scharfrichter, als wenn er auf einmal im eiskalten Wasser stünde bis übers Herz." ("It then seemed to the poor executioner as if suddenly he was standing in ice-cold water up to and above his heart".) The compassion, the uncompromising imagery, and the sense of foreboding are unmistakably Hebel's. In his hands, without losing any of its popular appeal, a mysterious piece of gossip, a sensational rumour, becomes a vehicle for questions about violence, responsibility, and the nature of justice.

References

- Aubrey, John, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1949, rpt 1978.
- Baader, Bernhard, *Volkssagen aus dem Lande Baden und den angrenzenden Gegenden*, Karlsruhe, Verlag der Herder'schen Buchhandlung, 1851, rpt Hildesheim, Olms, 1973.
- Briggs, Katharine M., *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language*, London and New York, Routledge, 1970-71.
- Büchli, Arnold, *Mythologische Landeskunde Graubündens: ein Bergvolk erzählt*, Vol. 2, Disentis, Desertina Verlag, 1992.
- Burke, John, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4 vols, London, for Henry Colburn, by R. Bentley; Bell and Bradfute, Edinburgh; J. Cumming, Dublin, 1835-38, Vol. 2, pp. xii-xiii.
- Buss, Hedwig, *Was die Alten einst erzählten: von Sympathiedoktoren, Hexen, und Schröksli. Geschichten aus dem mittleren Schwarzwald*, Waldkirch, Waldkircher Verlag, 1994.
- Christiansen, Reidar Th., "Midwife to the Hidden People: a Migratory Legend as told from Ireland to Kurdistan", *Lochlann*, 6, 1974, 104-117; *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, (EM), 6, pp. 631-634.
- EM = Ranke, Kurt, ed., *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1994.
- Evans, E. Estyn, *Irish Folk Ways*, London, Routledge, 1957, rpt London, Routledge, 1988.
- Grant, I. F., *Highland Folk Ways*, Edinburgh, Birlinn, 1995.
- Grimm, Brüder, *Deutsche Sagen*, 2 vols, Berlin, in der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1816-18, rpt Munich, Goldmann, 1966.
- Grimm, Jakob, *Deutsche Mythologie*, Göttingen, Dietrich, 1835, 4th edn, Vol. 1, Berlin, Meyer, 1875-78, rpt Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965.

- Häfner, Karl, *Heimatsprache: eine Mundartenkunde Südwestdeutschlands*, Stuttgart, Muthschen Verlag-Buchhandlung, 1951, rpt Reutlingen, Knödler, 1981.
- HdA = Hoffmann-Krayer. E., and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, Berlin and Leipzig, de Gruyter, 1927-42.
- Hartland, Edwin Sidney, *The Science of Fairy Tales: an inquiry into fairy mythology*, London, Walter Scott, 1891.
- Hebel, Johann Peter, *Werke*, 2 vols, Frankfurt am Main, Insel, 1968.
- Hepding, Hugo, “Die Heidelbeere im Volksbrauch”, *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde*, Vol. 22, 1923.
- Künzig, Johannes, ed., *Schwarzwaldsagen*, 2nd edn, Berlin, Eugen Diederichs, 1930, rpt. Berlin, Eugen Diederichs, 1965.
- Long, C[haries] E[dward], “Wild Darell of Littlecote”, *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 6 (1860), 390-396.
- Marzell, Heinrich, *Wörterbuch der deutschen Pflanzennamen*, Leipzig/Stuttgart, Hirzel, and Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1943-79.
- Meier, Ernst, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1852.
- Müller, Josef, *Sagen aus Uri*, Basel, Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, 1945, rpt Basel, Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, 1978.
- O’Sullivan, Sean, *Folktales of Ireland*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Rede, L[eman] T[homas], *Anecdotes and Biography*, 2nd edn, London, for R. Pitkeathley, 1799.
- Röhrich, Lutz, *Johann Peter Hebels Kalendergeschichten zwischen Volksdichtung und Literatur*, Schriftenreihe des Hebelbundes, No. 21, Lörrach, Hebelbund, n.d.
- Schorta, Andrea, “Süsse Beeren und ihre Namen”, in *Bündner Jahrbuch 1992*, Chur, Tardis Verlag, 1992, pp. 46-60.
- Scott, Walter, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. J. Logie Robertson, London, Oxford University Press, 1904.
- Smith, J. B., “Johann Peter Hebels ‘Heimliche Enthauptung’: Querverbindungen zur mündlichen Überlieferung”, *Badische Heimat*, 65, 1 (1985), 213-222.
- Watts, Donald C., *Elsevier’s Dictionary of Plant Lore*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2007.
- Westwood, Jennifer, *Albion: a Guide to Legendary Britain*, London, Granada, 1985, rpt London, Paladin, 1987.
- Wraxall, Sir N[athaniel] William, *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time*, 2 vols., London, for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1815.

Independent Researcher, Chester
johnbersmith@gmail.com