‘AUFENTHALT IM UNERHÖRTEN’:
BLOCH’S READING OF HEBEL (1926–65)

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This article examines the influence of Hebel’s Schatzkästlein on Ernst Bloch, whose engagement with Hebel’s writings spanned four decades. Central ideas in Bloch’s thinking, such as the transgressive nature of thought, the ontology of the ‘not-yet’, concrete utopia, the messianic and the metaphysical and moral significance of outcasts and the oppressed, and sympathy for them, have parallels in the narrative structure employed by Hebel in many of his stories. Hebel emerges as a figure of systematic importance for Bloch’s philosophy, and the form of the Hebelian story as an irreducible medium of Bloch’s philosophical thought.

‘Merke’, note, note down what is to be remembered, note the story told here, for it concerns you: de te fabula narratur. Hebel’s calendar stories (and poems) exercised a peculiar if somewhat subterranean influence on German philosophers of the twentieth century. Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Theodor W. Adorno, Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as Ernst Bloch, all read and responded to them. Without an understanding of this genial, mysteriously direct storyteller, whose tales breathe an atmosphere redolent of a number of philosophical questions, we miss something important about twentieth-century German philosophy. Hebel’s presence in the thought of this period transcends the fame as a popular author that he began to acquire from the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, for Bloch understanding the philosophical dimension of Hebel’s work can help us articulate a dimension of our own existence, as elusive as it is vital, which has become today perhaps more problematic but also more salient than ever before. The questions of what it means to be at home in the world, how the cosmopolitan and the regional are connected, what constitutes social recognition, and how we are part of nature have all acquired renewed urgency in our own times. Hebel’s Hausfreund has something particular to say about all of these questions.

In Hebel’s stories, pathos and logos are in unison. Reflection is as much a matter of the heart as of the head. The philosophical spirit that pervades these stories communicates freely and directly with us, the readers, and presents itself as thoroughly unique. This spirit cannot be reduced to a single idea, as Hebel allows each of his readers to enter into a
dialogue with an unexpected horizon of meaning. For Bloch, Hebel’s method is to allow
this ‘surplus meaning’ to be expressed. His significance lies in his combination of the spirit
of the Enlightenment with the living heritage of a farming and village culture, and his
closeness to the ‘common people’ through his rich variety of characters. His proximity to
the quotidian reaches back many centuries. In these respects Hebel is an example of what
Bloch means by inheriting an ‘unfinished past’: his tales are the meeting point of pre-
capitalist Germany with the ideal of the citoyen.1 In the 1920s and 1930s Hebel also came to
stand in Bloch’s eyes for a ‘good Germany’, for a way of maintaining a meaningful relation
to a pre-industrial past without falling into the trap of nostalgia. Bloch also helped shape
twentieth-century readers’ appreciation of Hebel. Following a request by the Insel Verlag,
Bloch made a selection of the stories, which was published, with an afterword, in 1965.2
This edition was reprinted seven times over the following thirty years, and connected the
names of Hebel and Bloch especially for readers in the former West Germany.

I hope to show that the aspects of Hebel’s writings which pertain to cultural politics
are made possible, in Bloch’s reading, by their more metaphysical and poetic features.
This occurs by means of what I term ‘the humane encounter’ in a mode of temporality
that pervades the stories and which can be classified in Blochian terms as ‘messianic’.
Messianic time is expressed in the narrative form of Hebel’s stories, which also explains
the central role of the story in Bloch’s thinking, and the central place Hebel occupies in
the development of this thinking over the four decades in question. The naturalization of
man and the humanization of nature (including man as a natural phenomenon), as well as
the trace of the messianic in Marx, which was so significant for Bloch, are central concepts
in Bloch’s understanding of the calendar story. The calendar story has a double temporality
of chronology and redemption. I want to see the relationship between the mental worlds of
Hebel and Bloch as interactive. We can understand Bloch better by understanding Hebel,
and vice versa. As I have hinted already, reading Hebel through Bloch may also lead to a
better understanding of our own situation today. A philosophy of the natural environment
and a philosophy of human sociality for the twenty-first century can, in my view, draw
significant inspiration from Hebel and his sensibility.

At the end of the introductory section of Spuren (1930), Bloch’s most Hebelian book, is an
aphorism entitled ‘Das Merke’ (GA 1: 16–17). Here Bloch explains that the small things are
what must be noticed, for that which is ‘leicht und seltsam, führt oft am weitesten’. Bloch
focuses on simple Hebel stories of everyday occurrences, such as that of the soldier who
arrives too late for the morning roll call and positions himself next to the officer, who as
a result does not notice that anything is amiss. Here something happens that deserves our
attention: ‘Was war hier, da ging doch etwas, ja, ging auf seine Weise um. Ein Eindruck,
der über das Gehörte nicht zur Ruhe kommen läßt. Ein Eindruck in der Oberfläche des
Lebens, so daß diese reißt, möglicherweise. Kurz, es ist gut, auch fabelnd zu denken.’ If we
think in stories, we allow things to emerge that carry their meanings further, to semantic
destinations as yet unknown. It is a way of noting what escapes our gaze, of which we
have only an intimation. Often, for Bloch, what we note is something which is not right,

1 For a discussion of the role of the unfinished past, see: Ernst Bloch, Gesamtausgabe in 16 Bänden
references to Bloch’s works are by volume and page number to this edition.
2 Johann Peter Hebel, Kalendergeschichten, Auswahl und Nachwort von Ernst Bloch (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel,
1965).
because the world with us in it is not right yet. These things can only be captured in simple stories that avoid a higher register; they happen as an aside or in an aside. The aphorism on ‘Merke’ ends with the puzzling remark: ‘Schließlich ist alles, was einem begegnet und auffällt, dasselbe.’ How can there be an identity in the meaning of these stories, in all their variety, in all their everyday detail and concreteness? How can a sense of the unexpected, which Bloch highlights too, be dependent on a sameness in the ‘Merke’? The meeting point between Bloch and Hebel provides an answer to this question. It helps to clarify both the enigmatic, ‘wonderful’ experience of reading Hebel and the puzzling notion of the utopian in Bloch.

For Bloch historical time is varied and multifarious. It is as if the word can really only be used in the plural: the *times* in which we live. Different historical layers are superimposed on one another, the past is altogether unfinished business, and different time sequences can exist contemporaneously, as in the different forms of life that can be found simultaneously in town and country. This is part of Bloch’s central notion of ‘Ungleichzeitigkeit’. The calendar is not a quantitative enumeration of identical moments in succession — the measure of chronological time — , but the qualitative measure of the dawn of ever new occasions for the realization of finality, the rhythm of *kairos*, of moments suitable for the fulfilment of different hopes, dreams, and aims. ‘Noch ist nicht aller Tage Abend,’ as Bloch so often says, citing a popular saying. In Bloch’s reading of Hebel this could be the epigraph to the *Schatzkästlein*. But, and this is crucial for understanding what Bloch means by ‘the utopian’, there is not only a range of finite hopes, dreams and aims, which are realized in different occurrences and historical epochs. There is also an ultimate finality, the end goal of the process of realization as a whole. That goal has nowhere yet entered into the process of realization itself, as it remains extraterritorial to it. All histories unfolding from an event, which is always a rupture from what has been, are equally far from where they are ultimately headed, from where at the same time they derive their nature as historical process, as goal-directed activity. In the case of individual human existence, the core of the self is not yet part of the forms in which we realize our lives. Collective history or progress, understood as the active realization of what is latently present in lived time, is only made possible by the awareness that redemption is necessary. This was for Bloch a basic insight. History is only history because it stands in the light of its completion, its end. The completion remains outside the efficacy of the historical process itself and yet could not exist without it. Without completion there is no history, no lived novelty, merely the deadening repetition of sameness. Because of this peculiar nature of the process of realization, both individually and collectively, human realization is essentially an ‘Überschreiten’.

Historical reason, we might say, is made possible by the hope that the completion of history is its end, but that end must itself remain unhoped-for as it cannot be extrapolated from history. Historical reason is a form of educated hope, *docta spes*. It exists as the resolve to make things better, understanding that what the historical process in its full latency harbours can never be brought out by historical reason on its own. Thus hope becomes faith.

Bloch reads Hebel’s stories as expressing precisely this *docta spes*, and indeed he links Hebel’s practical wisdom to the idea of *tao*, the path or way of being. The ‘sameness’ in the...
‘Merke’ can be identified with this utopian core as it is in the process of realizing itself. Thus Bloch indicates where the significance of Hebel’s story-telling can be located.

Hebel’s stories manifest what Bloch calls ‘Überschreiten’ in an almost systematic way. They typically turn on the crossing of a boundary or a stepping outside of socially or even metaphysically mediated structures, which brings human communication and encounters between individuals back into a situation that is no longer alienated, thus saving it and the people in it. We are reminded of the servant couple in ‘Eine Edelfrau schlaflose Nacht’, the people of Leiden in ‘Unglück der Stadt Leiden’, to name just two of the stories in which this is the narrative structure. In ‘Eine Edelfrau schlaflose Nacht’ a situation which, in Hebel’s time, was socially unacceptable, whereby a child is born outside wedlock to two people in bonded service, is resolved precisely because of the child, whose presence (in Blochian terminology) ‘interrupts’ the noblewoman’s consciousness. In this story, the sympathy with newly born life acts both as a measure by which to judge individual morality and to disrupt an alienated situation. It is also a form of the ‘Merke’ as discussed above: speaking of an obligation on the part of those involved to protect and accept the child does not exhaust the utopian dimension elicited by the child’s sudden presence. Rather, the story as a whole becomes an emblem of a state of fulfilment that is all-encompassing, in which humanity itself finds a home: ‘Ein Gemüt, das zum Guten bewegt ist und sich der Elenden annimmt und die Gefallenen aufrichtet, ein solches Gemüt zieht nämlich das Ebenbild Gottes an’ (265).

In ‘Unglück der Stadt Leiden’ the basic structure is the same, but the occasion is very different. The story takes place during a war between the Netherlands and England. A ship in the harbour, laden with gunpowder, explodes and all but destroys the city. It is from London, however, that aid subsequently comes to the people of Leiden, ‘und das ist schön — denn der Krieg soll nie ins Herz der Menschen kommen. Es ist schlimm genug, wenn er außen vor allen Toren und vor allen Seehäfen donnert’ (104). Hebel highlights, again, the sympathy with suffering that unites humanity and that remains unaffected by a situation to which it is incommensurable, as in this case involving war. Moreover, the ‘surplus’ in the situation, which Hebel calls beautiful, is explicitly designated as the ‘heart of people’, expressing the close connection between pathos and logos mentioned above, which is as characteristic of Bloch’s thought as it is of Hebel’s method.

The crossing-over or semantic ‘Überschreiten’ can also be the fortuitous result of a mistake, and in that case, Hebel seems to be saying, we gain despite ourselves, as in the story ‘Kannitverstan’ (51–53). Here it is the mistaken identity of the rich merchant from Amsterdam, Herr Kannitverstan — another, now ironic, manifestation of the sameness of the ‘Merke’ — by which the protagonist of the story, the poor ‘Handwerksbursche’ is freed from a false attachment to material goods. The horizon of mortality, which breaks open every human situation, discloses itself to him. The story becomes a metaphor for desire’s false fixation on this or that particular object.5

5 This is, admittedly, a very benevolent reading of the story. Bloch, in a late radio appearance, expressed his dislike of it because it apparently preaches acceptance and contentment instead of dissatisfaction. See Giuseppe Bevilacqua, ‘...wie sind die Worte richtig gesetzt’: Zwei unveröffentlichte Hebel-Kommentare Ernst Blochs’, Text + Kritik, 151 (2001), 11–22.
‘Der gläserne Jude’ (154), demonstrates the same effect but this time it is achieved through humour. A Jew, seeking refuge from a hussar he has cheated, is hidden by his brother-in-law inside a large sack. The hussar asks what is in the sack and is given the answer: glass. The soldier starts to belabour the sack with the sabre. In a quandary, the occupant deliberates:

‘Ich will meinen Schwager nicht stecken lassen, mich noch weniger’, und machte unaufhörlich mit reiner Stimme kling, kling, daß der Husar meinen sollte, er höre Glas klingeln. Item, es half etwas. Denn der Einfall kam dem Husaren selbst so lächerlich vor, daß schon sein halber Zorn gebrochen war.

On other occasions, the *volta* that destabilizes social roles is performed by a ruse. In ‘Franziska’ a ‘vornehme Frau’ engineers a semantic slip which forces her cousin to express his love for the eponymous chamber-maid, whom he subsequently marries: ‘“wie gefällt dir dieser Rosenstock?” fragte die Tante; der Vetter sagte: “Sie ist schön, sehr schön.” Die Tante sagte: “Vetter, du redest irr. Wer ist schön? Ich frage ja nach dem Rosenstock.” Der Vetter erwiderte: “Die Rose” — “oder vielmehr die Franziska?” fragte die Tante’ (275).

In ‘Das schlaue Mädchen’ (131–32), which I will discuss in more detail below, a girl collecting alms for the poor uses her charm in a cunning and witty way to extract more money from a rich gentleman than he planned to give her. Here sympathy appears in a different form, as flirtation. Finally, in ‘Verloren oder gefunden’ (214–15), ‘der Herr Vogt von Trudenbach’ wakes up in the morning from a drunken sleep, sitting in his carriage without a horse. In that moment of estrangement he experiences the openness in his identity: ‘Jetzt kommt alles darauf an, ob ich der Vogt von Trudenbach bin oder nicht. Denn bin ichs, so hab ich ein Rößlein verloren, bin ichs aber nicht, so hab ich ein Kaleschlein gefunden’ (215). These stories, in which the sun, as it were, suddenly breaks through the clouds, become emblems of a world and a human life that have found themselves. They are both real and remain an expectation, a promise that is the same and remains open in all cases. The utopian and the real need each other. They make the time of Hebel’s calendar into the epochal, messianic time of expectation, the ‘time that is left’. It is their relatedness that, in the last instance, makes up the peculiarly charming, enchanted, and genial character of Hebel’s world, in which something like the Kingdom of God is always near and almost there, ready to break into a situation like a saving grace.6 Time, as measured on Hebel’s calendar, is multidimensional.

In most of Hebel’s stories, the characters initiating the rupture take a risk because their actions could end up not being recognized for what they are. In all cases, the rupture of the normal course of events, which makes a space for something unexpected, releases the instinctive sympathy between people, irrespective of their social role. This in Hebel’s view is the basis for morality. Hebel, the storyteller of ‘Überschreiten’, articulates the core of humanity: ‘Überall, schlicht oder groß, ist die Sprache aus dem Volk und gemeindet ein, was sie erzählt, doch ebenso ein feiner, ferner Wind weht drüber her’ (GA ix: 373). Bloch emphasizes that the language of sympathy is not the same as the rosy and illusory mentality of the bourgeois or the Biedermeier, with which Hebel had been identified for so long:

In dem Autor des Satzes ‘Es gibt Untaten, über welche kein Gras wächst’ nur den Hausfreund und bieder-beschaulichen Erzähler zu sehen, heißt Hebel jener Tradition

The ruptures on which many of the stories depend are revolts, upsurges of humane behaviour, changes of heart. Hebel speaks of concrete events with concrete, common words, but everywhere a wind from afar is blowing on the present — the utopian moment is the conjunction of the far and the near. Hebel’s language is popular in two senses. It is from the people and for the people. It shows human possibilities external to class and hierarchy and which tell of a future as much as of the present, and of a sense of being at home in the world, which involves the world viewed through the lens of the humane community.

The ‘time that is left’ can be seen at work in the structure of the story ‘Das schlaue Mädchen’ (131–32). Here a group of rich gentlemen are having a day out. They are enjoying themselves, when ‘ein hübsch und nett gekleidetes Mädchen’ asks them to make a donation to the poor. One of the gentlemen puts two golden coins on the plate the girl is carrying, and says they are for her two beautiful blue eyes. The girl takes advantage of the situation, pretends to have misunderstood him and asks him to please also give something for the poor (this is itself an instance of transgression). The man does so, and, laughing, pinches the girl in her cheeks. His friends make fun of him, they all drink to the girl’s health, ‘und die Musikanten machten Tusch’. The story is full of Hebel-tones and Hebel-sentiments, and also of the peculiar wonder I have been circling around in this essay. What is so special about the story? The erotic attraction, which achieves more than the man’s sense of charity, is one thing. The game that all involved in the scene are playing, knowingly, is another. With a minimum of words, Hebel shows us the inside of a familiar situation, and discloses a constellation of different components of human motivation. The girl acts on the behalf of others. Through her actions we receive a premonition of a better, livelier, and more interactive world. At the end of the story, the scene is swallowed up in the loud music of a brass band, which overpowers the voices and brings the people together in a raucous but good-hearted joy. The reader hears the sounds fade away during the encounter of the girl and the man, their exchange of glances and words, only to hear them coming back all the more loudly afterwards. What has happened? Within the time of the story, the encounter between the girl and the man constitutes an interruption, an ‘Überschreiten’, which opens up another temporal dimension. Using Bloch’s philosophy, we can say that the time of the encounter, an almost insignificant aside, is an indication of the messianic ‘time that is left’. It is a time of silence and slowness, outside normal time, which creates a momentary sojourn in the ultimate dimension cited in the other examples I have given. It is a specifically philosophical time, which Bloch associates with the adagio and the andante in music, which are followed by an allegro or scherzo — as is the case here. It is practical as well as contemplative — in opening up a space for the intimation of the messianic expectation, it also constitutes a basis for (social or political) action.8
We can gloss these temporalities as follows. Philosophy ‘sammelt und bedenkt’ all forms of ‘Überschreiten’ (GA IX: 392). It is the not-forgetting of the whole amid local forms of realization. It follows life in all its manifestations, at all the junctures where it breaks through its encrusted shell and becomes expression of what is not yet. Philosophy interprets human activity, in all its spheres, and shows the utopian horizon at work in it. In this philosophy, music occupies a central place, not only as an object of reflection, but as a mode of philosophical thought. Music, for Bloch, is the utopian art form par excellence in which something we cannot yet express in words or ideas, but which centrally concerns us, finds expression. In different musical temporalities the multifariousness of the historical process finds a reflection. Bloch describes the tempos andante and adagio as ‘Aufenthalt im Unerhörten’, their time is that of completion as well as abiding, ‘verweilen’. We can speak of a friendship with what is not yet, or as Bloch says with regard to the adagio: ‘Etwas fehlt: Kunst mit Stille des Sichentgegengehen weicht dem Finden am wenigsten aus’.9 The narrativity of Hebel, the Hausfreund after all, speaks from this ontological adagio. ‘Freundlich ist es, von Hebel zuerst an die Hand genommen zu werden’ (GA IX: 373). In the story of the clever girl, that is what creates the moment of interruption in the joyful, carnivalesque atmosphere of the scene. The encounter, in the name of sympathy, attraction, and indeed ‘the poor’ happens in the space of the adagio, which finds its literary equivalent here. The scene becomes an emblem of platonic Eros, the son of poverty and riches and, like docta spes, the form of human desire.

It is difficult to assess when Bloch’s engagement with Hebel began. We may assume that Bloch knew at least some of Hebel’s stories from an early age, as some of them had become a fixed part of the school curriculum in Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century, when Bloch was of school-going age. Hebel is not mentioned in Bloch’s début, Geist der Utopie of 1918, nor does he figure in the revised second edition, of 1923. After that, though, Bloch begins to allude to Hebel regularly but only in passing. Spuren, a collection of stories and aphorisms, bears the obvious stamp of Hebel, now combined with that of the Chassidic tradition of storytelling. An example of the way in which Bloch combines Hebelian and Chassidic storytelling elements is ‘Der Berg’ (GA I: 218). The story is based on an Austrian folk tale but Bloch changed it considerably.10 It tells of a hunter who after disappearing while on a trip in the mountains and returning unexpectedly several weeks later, precisely at the moment when a mass is being said in his memory, is unable to speak about what happened to him. He says he may only break his silence in the confessional. The archbishop of Salzburg hears his confession. In Bloch’s version of the story both the hunter and the bishop fall completely silent, and the bishop even resigns; in the folk tale they merely do not speak about the occurrence. Bloch transforms a story about a miraculous event into a story about a trace of the utopian which acts as a critique of religion itself.

Apart from the influence Hebel exercised on Spuren, there are two essays that deal explicitly with Hebel: the ‘Nachwort’ to the 1965 edition of the calendar stories (GA IX: 172–83), and a much older essay, ‘Hebel, Gotthelf und bäurisches Tao’ (GA IX: 365–84).


10 The original story was included by Ludwig Bechstein in his Deutsches Sagenbuch (Leipzig: Wigand, 1853), pp. 803–04 under the title ‘Der verlorene Jäger’. In it, a hunter stays a short time in the mountains and comes out to find that a year has passed.
The version in the Gesamtausgabe was published in 1965, but Bloch wrote ‘1926’ underneath the title, without further explanation. 1926 was the centenary of Hebel’s death, which led to considerable attention being paid to his work, but this essay was not published at all until 1962.11 On 16 May 1928, Bloch wrote to Siegfried Kracauer:


The idea of a dialectic of origins and belongings (‘Bodenständigkeit’, ‘Sage’) and utopia (‘Utopie’, ‘Märchen’, ‘Jahrmarkt’) is an early version of the guiding idea of Das Prinzip Hoffnung (1938–48). The idea of tao occupies Bloch in these years in other contexts as well, most importantly in his attempt to develop the traditional idea of wisdom.13 In the essay on Hebel, Gotthelf, and tao, Bloch examines the culture of the peasant village as it developed from the late Middle Ages and was able to maintain its defence against the onset of capitalism for so long in Germany. He contrasts the friendly, enlightened, open Hebel as a voice of peasant culture, with the pietist, guilt-ridden mentality of Gotthelf and cannot help making a reference to the meanings of the names of the two writers. Hebel is the lever, human and secular, Gotthelf the transcendent helper (GA ix: 367). Whereas Hebel’s village spans the horizon of the whole world, Gotthelf’s peasant lives in an isolated, strictly vertical relation to God. But the two worlds share a common basis, the economy of peasant culture, resilient still, at the time, and very stable. It is a way of life based on the calendar, on seasons, on the weather, and on the timing of what is necessary to make the fields yield their crops. Man is dependent on the harmony between his own affairs and those of nature, on a balance between all things. Bloch refers to the Alemannic word ‘Wäge’:

Genau darin, im Pathos dieses Gedeihlichen, und nicht im Biblischen, gar Pfäffischen, das Hebel völlig fehlt, haben also Hebel und Gotthelf ein tief Gemeinsames, auch im Einzelnen oft derart Nachweisbares, daß Hebel, etwa in der Geschichte vom strebsam-rechtschaffenen ‘Jakob Humbel’, fast Gotthelfisch spricht und Gotthelf, etwa in der ‘Käserei in der Verhreude’ und ihren vielen schurchigen Menschlichkeiten, fast Hebelisch. Das ‘Wäge’ aber, in das das knappe Anekdotenwerk Hebels, das riesige Fortunawerk Gotthelfs eingebettet ist und reguliert wird, berührt sich letztthin mit nichts Geringerem als mit dem weisen subjektiven Einklang, den die Stoiker mit dem angeraten hatten, was sie Natur nannten, die Chinesen aber mit dem nicht so Unverbundenen, was die Weltakt oder Tao nannten. Tao, ein Wort ganz aus diesem bäurischen, familiären Volk heraus, das Haus gut im Gang, das Leben und sein Streben gut im Lauf (GA ix: 372).

For Bloch, writing in the 1930s, the relevance of going back to examine the structure of

13 The essay ‘Über den Begriff Weisheit’ was begun in the 1920s and finally completed in the 1950s. It appears in GA x: 355–85. ‘Tao oder die Einfachheit’ is one of the characteristics of Bloch’s conception of wisdom as it is developed there.
peasant culture lay in the struggle against National Socialism. In the essays of the 1920s, especially the brilliant ‘Bodenständigkeit als Blasphemie’ (1920, GA xi: 74–83), Bloch had still written from the point of view of a ‘Vaterland in der Zeit’ rather than in space, and had compared cultures to thunder clouds, ‘metaphysical force fields’, moving over the lands, ignoring all boundaries. For all those who are not bourgeois and ‘ruined’, he writes, ‘Bodenständigkeit’, both as rootedness in native soil and as being down to earth, has become sacrilege (GA xi: 80–81). While we need a patch to stand on, especially if we want to lift the world off its hinges (GA xi: 74), the lever is found in time rather than space. But it had become more and more clear to Bloch after 1920 that there is a dialectical relation between originary place and utopia, and that it was the task of a utopian philosophy to inherit and interpret renditions and manifestations of place in terms of its utopian ‘Licht [...] und Recht’ (GA xi: 302). In the letter to Kracauer he gave a preliminary list of the headings that were to be covered in an exploration of that dialectic, and one of them was ‘Hebel’. In the essay on Hebel, Gotthelf, and tao Bloch traced the dialectical movement from origin to utopia and back in Hebel — firstly in terms of the question of the ‘Vaterland’ in time and place, but secondly also in the more metaphysical context I have elaborated above. It is this dialectic that makes the farewell to transcendence possible, and that forms the basis of a philosophical understanding of desire and its conditions of fulfilment. From a still rather abstract understanding of the utopian, the idea of a movement between place and non-place had given Bloch the fundamental outline of the idea of Überschreiten and its ethics of the ‘aufrechter Gang’. As pointed out at the beginning, Hebel comes to prefigure the naturalization of man and humanization of nature, and this reading is possible on the basis of the ontology of temporal realization and its messianic structure.

In 1965, after spending some forty years thinking about Hebel, Bloch reassesses his relation to him in a way which embodies the ‘Wäge’. He uses seven headings: ‘Nähe’; ‘Atem’; ‘Sprache’; ‘Komposition’; ‘Gesinnung’; ‘Nochmals Aufklärung, Unebenes, Ebenes’; ‘Unter der Spiegelrahme’. Hebel is not only of the past, he comes to us and wants to be heard, not just read. Under the heading ‘Komposition’ (GA ix: 175–79), Bloch returns to the ‘Merke’ and its function as the trace of the surplus of meaning in the story. But Bloch uses his favourite story, ‘Unverhofftes Wiedersehen’ (271–73), to indicate that in the confrontation with the anti-utopia of death, the ‘Merke’ is no longer an answer to a question as it is in most stories, but is now entirely undecidedness, a hope and an openness. The note at the end is a corrective, a regulative idea, and an invariant of the direction of the utopian process (‘Invariante der Richtung’ is Bloch’s standard phrase for the way the ultimate utopian expectation is implicated in history).

Bloch also reaffirms Hebel’s fundamental support of the repressed, the poor, and the excluded: ‘Lautere Sympathie atmet in den Ausführungsbestimmungen zu dem Titel: “Wie der Zundel-Frieder eines Tages aus dem Zuchthaus entwich und glücklich über die Grenze kam”’ (GA ix: 179). The inability to conform was something Bloch knew all too well from personal experience; in the calendar story it is interpreted metaphysically as the sensitivity for revolt and for the surplus of meaning in any given situation. The tendency to break out, the surplus of truth that motivates the narrative and makes it into a story that is worth being told, now comes to stand in a dialectical relation to the ‘Wäge’, the peasant tao of harmony and direction ‘quer durch diese Welt’ (GA ix: 182). Hebel is, in the last

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instance, ‘lebensfrömmigkeit’ (GA ix: 182). ‘Lebensfrömmigkeit’ is a form of piety that carries the disruptive within it, for it is always at odds with the forms and situations in which life is oppressed, exploited, and instrumentalized. It is not simply at odds with the world, it is the world at odds with itself, the openness to an unexpected event. Bloch sees this aspect of Hebel’s treasure chest manifested in ‘Merkwürdige Gespenstergeschichte’, where the protagonist, waiting for the ghosts to come out, picks up a copy of the calendar and starts to read it. Is it a copy with that very story in it, implying an infinite mirror game of *omnia ubique*? Hebel *does not say*, which is all that Bloch brings to bear on that question before adding: ‘das Spiel ist also doch komplett’ (GA ix: 183). The identity of author and work, the storyteller becoming part of the story itself, is still outstanding and hoped-for. The question, the task, and the hope, are passed on to the reader. In that gesture Bloch himself becomes a reader of Hebel and makes us readers of Hebel by handing these haunted stories over to us, and an idea that lies at the heart of his philosophy becomes a gloss on the stories of the *Hausfreund*: the world is a question, we have to answer it.

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