

Conceptions of Folk and Art in the Age of Goethe: Herder, Wolf, Görres, and Schelling

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Our definition of “folk art” is of special relevance to this symposium entitled “A Cultural History of Faust,”¹ a symposium that does not address Goethe’s major lifework *Faust* (1808/32) itself, but rather the legend of Faust, which stands manifest across various chapbooks (*Volksbücher*, i.e., folk or popular books) published since the 16th century. This symposium focuses on the Faust that was performed for years as a puppet play, a play with which Goethe was familiar as a child, and that has never ceased to inspire social, popular, and artistic imaginations even after the publication of Goethe’s eponymous play. The purpose of this paper is to examine the idea of “folk art” (*Volkskunst*) in the age of Goethe. First, I clarify the concept of “folk books” (*Volksbücher*, an expression coined by Görres in 1807) through which the legend of Faust spread. Next, I deal with Herder’s theory of “folk songs” (in German: *Volkslieder*, an expression coined by Herder in 1773)—by which he primarily understands Homer’s and Ossian’s poems—arguing that it is closely related to the modern idea of the original genius formulated in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Finally, in order to examine the relationship between the folk and original genius in detail, I address the so-called “Homeric Question” concerning sole versus multiple authorship—a question posed by F. A. Wolf in 1795, prompting Schelling to deal speculatively with ancient and modern art in his lecture *Philosophy of Art* (1802/03 and 1804/05).

1. Görres’ Idea of the *Volk*

The legend of Faust first appears in the annals of literary history in October 1587, in a small chapbook bearing the title *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, published anonymously in Frankfurt am Main by the publisher Johann Spies.

In *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* (vol. 1, 1811), Goethe, who was born and raised in Frankfurt am Main, looks back upon the days he spent reading widely from the books published by Johann Spies:

The publication, or rather the manufacturing of those books, which went on to become so well-known and celebrated under the name *Volkschriften*, or *Volksbücher* (popular works or popular books), was continued in Frankfurt. The enormous demand with which they were met led to their being almost illegibly printed from stereotypes on horrible blotting-paper. As children, we were so fortunate to have access to these precious relics of the Middle Ages every day on a little table at the door of a cheap nearby book dealer and to obtain them at the cost of a couple of *kreutzer*.²

¹ This paper is based on my presentation “The Invention of the Folk and the Genesis of Art,” held at the Tokyo University of Arts on October 27, 2019.

² Goethe’s works are cited according to the Weimarer Ausgabe 1887–1919 (abbreviated as WA), or to the

Goethe enumerates the titles of the chapbooks he read in his youth. The “Faust book” is not mentioned, but the description he offers reveals how fascinated he was by them.

Volkschriften or *Volksbücher* (folk/popular works or folk/popular books) refer to the cheaply produced books published in the 15th and 16th centuries along with the spread of type printing. But it was just before the publication of *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* that these two words came into usage. In *Grimm’s Dictionary* we find several examples of the word *Volkschriften* used by Campe and Herder in the 1780s and 1790s; this word, however, ultimately became obsolete. On the other hand, the word *Volksbücher*, coined by Görres, remains in widespread use thanks to his widely read book entitled *German Folk Books: Detailed Evaluation of the Beautiful Chapbooks [Volksbücher] about History, Weather, and Medicine That Have Been Preserved up to Our Time, Partly Owing Their Intrinsic Value and Partly Owing to Chance*, which was published in Heidelberg in 1807. In this book, the author relays 48 popular books, including practical books, and in Chapter 35 he delineates the “Faust book” anonymously published in 1725.³

There is no need to go into the details of Görres’ book. What is relevant, rather, is how he defines *Volksbücher* and what he understands by *Volk* (the folk or the people). He defines *Volksbücher* as the literature that “went beyond the exclusive circles of the upper classes, penetrated the lower classes, stuck with them, and became the flesh and life of the people (*Volk*).”⁴ *Volksbücher*, therefore, constitute “the trunk of the whole of literature, the core of its own life, and the innate foundation of its substantial existence.”⁵ Not the literature of the upper classes, but rather that of the lower classes is legitimized as the nucleus of literature in its entirety. This reevaluation of lower class literature in contrast with that of the upper classes is based upon Görres’ conviction that the “people’s spirit” (*Völkgeist*) can and should be distinguished from the “rabble” (*Pöbelhaftigkeit*).⁶ Görres, thus, idealizes the people as follows: “Anyone who has a pure heart and sincere mind belongs to the people (*Volk*). This permeates all classes, thereby ennobling all the humble. The people constitute the innermost core and character of every class.”⁷ The idealized “people (*Volk*),” consisting of those with “pure heart and sincere mind,” transcends the hierarchical differences marked by class or rank, as well as the non-hierarchical differences that characterize people, such as those who consider themselves “French,” or “German” (*das französisch oder teutsche Volk*).⁸ The German word “*Volk*” is, as is shown later in this paper, used as both an uncountable noun and a countable noun, and the idealized notion of “*Volk*” described above, which transcends both the hierarchical and non-hierarchical differences between people, pertains to the first usage.⁹ This idealization of the people gives

Hamburger Ausgabe, 1948–60 (abbreviated as HA). Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, HA IX, 35–36. *The Auto-biography of Goethe. Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life*, translated by John Oxenford, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848, p. 23 – slightly modified.

³ Joseph Görres, *Die teutschen Volksbücher. Nähere Würdigung der schönen Historien-, Wetter- und Arzneibüchlein, welche teils innerer Wert, teils Zufall, Jahrhunderte hindurch bis auf unsere Zeit erhalten*, Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1807, pp. 207–209.

⁴ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, p. 1 – my translation.

⁵ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, p. 2 – my translation.

⁶ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, p. 5 – my translation.

⁷ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7 – my translation.

⁸ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7 – my translation.

⁹ The German word “*Volk*” is to be compared to the English word “people,” which is used in two ways: first, as

way to the idea of the *Volksliteratur* (the folk's literature or the literature of the people): "The great nation of literature (in German: *Literaturstaat*) has [not only a House of Lords but] also a House of Commons in which the nation is immediately represented."¹⁰

2. Herder's Theory of Folk Songs

Görres' idealization of the people (*Volk*) has its roots during the 18th century, during which Herder played an influential role in the matter, insisting in the *Preface to the "Ancient Folk Songs"* (1774) that "the human soul, in its formative years, is the *soul of the folk*."¹¹ Görres' distinction between the people and the rabble is most likely based on Herder's *Preface to the Second Part of the "Folk Songs"* (1779), in which he states, "Being of the folk does not refer to the rabble on the backstreet (*der Pöbel auf den Gassen*), who never sing or create poetry, but instead cry out and torture the language."¹² The idealization of "the people" leads to its generalization, freeing it from being limited to a certain people.

According to Adelung's *Dictionary* (1780), the word "folk" (*Volk*) is "used in two ways": first, as "a collective noun without plurals," and, second, to express "a whole that consists of a large number of people," e.g., a "nation," with "plurals."¹³ The two meanings together constitute a theme of *unity* and *multiplicity*.¹⁴ The idealization or generalization of *folk* pertains to the first usage and has nothing to do with nationalism that is based on the second usage. Likely referring to Herder's work, Adelung continues as follows: "Some recent authors have tried to ennoble this word as referring to the largest but lowest parts of a nation or a civil society; it is to be hoped that this expression will be met with approval because we currently lack a word to denote the largest, and yet the most unfairly denigrated, constituent of a nation in a noble and innocuous way. [E.g.] Romans for the folk, folk romans, folk songs."¹⁵ The concept of "folk songs" is thus a manifestation of this new movement in Germany.¹⁶

a noun missing a singular form, and second, as a noun exhibiting singular and plural forms.

¹⁰ Joseph Görres, *op. cit.*, p. 9 – my translation.

¹¹ Herder's works are cited according to the *Sämtliche Werke*, 33 vols. (ed. by Bernhard Suphan, Berlin: 1877–1913, abbreviated as SWS) and *Werke*, 10 vols. (ed. by Günter Arnold et al., Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000, abbreviated as FHA). Johann Gottfried Herder, *Alte Volkslieder*, Erstes Buch, Vorrede, SWS vol. 25, p. 12 = FHA vol. 3, p. 24. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism*, ed. and translated by Philip V. Bohlman, Oakland: University of California Press, p. 34 – slightly modified.

¹² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volkslieder*, Zweiter Teil, Vorrede, SWS vol. 25, p. 323 = FHA vol. 3, p. 239. Herder, *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (see note 11), p. 58 – slightly modified.

¹³ Adelung, *Versuch eines vollständigen grammatisch-kritischen Wörterbuches der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, vol. 4, cols. 1612–1614.

¹⁴ See Peter V. Zima, "Einheit und Vielheit. Zwischen Romantik und Moderne," *Volk – Nation – Europa. Zur Romantisierung und Entromantisierung Politischer Begriffe*, ed. by Alexander von Bormann, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998, pp. 107–116.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 1613. For the idea of the populace in the Age of Enlightenment, see Tanehisa Otabe, "From 'Clothing' to 'Organ of Reason': An Essay on the Theories of Metaphor in German Philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment," *From a Metaphorical Point of View. A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Cognitive Content of Metaphor*, ed. by Zdravko Radman, de Gruyter: Berlin/New York, 1995, pp. 7–25.

¹⁶ For the idea of the folk, see Alexander von Bormann, "Volk als Idee. Zur Semiotisierung des Volksbegriffs,"

The word “Volkslied” (folk song) was coined by Herder in a 1773 essay, entitled “Correspondence about Ossian and the Song of Ancient Peoples,” which was published with his essay “Shakespeare” in *German Art and Character*. In this essay, Herder emphasizes the fact that Ossian’s poems were orally transmitted by the folk: “Ossian’s poems [are] *Songs, Songs of the Folk, Songs* of an uneducated but sensitive people (*Volk*),¹⁷ who have been able to sing them over the course of the historical *longue durée* in the tongue of their forefathers’ tradition.”¹⁸ Dennis’ hexametric translation “that reveals so much hard work and good taste,”¹⁹ however, does not match Ossian’s original:

Homer’s rhapsodies and Ossian’s songs were generated on an impromptu basis, for during their time, oratory was always impromptu. . . . Finally, Art arrived and extinguished Nature. From our youth, we torment ourselves learning foreign languages and spelling out the syllabic quantity of their verses, to which our ear and nature can no longer respond; we work according to rules, virtually none of which a genius would acknowledge as rules of Nature. . . . we admire Art instead of Nature in these ancient poems; we find too much or too little Art in them, according to our predisposition, and we rarely have ears to hear the voice that sings in them, the voice [Spirit – T. O.] of Nature.²⁰

Here Herder expresses in nuce his philosophical thought on nature and art. Herder argues that we, as modern people, tend to judge artworks according to the rules that regulate artistic creation. This view of art, however, cannot be applied to ancient artworks that were produced naturally. This comes only as a result of later eras in which people could not appreciate ancient artworks according to their naturalness, clinging to artificial rules that were formulated French classicism and had nothing to do with ancient natural art. Dennis translated Ossian using hexameter, thereby projecting his refined conception of art onto Ossian’s work and thus trampling on its nature. Furthermore, the “old songs that appear in Shakespeare,” a modern poet who is to be compared to Ossian, cannot be translated “into the hexameter used by Denis” either.²¹

Volk – Nation – Europa. Zur Romantisierung und Entromantisierung Politischer Begriffe (see note 14), pp. 35–56.

¹⁷ In this sentence, Ulrich Gaier, the editor of the third volume of Frankfurt Herder Ausgabe (FHA), notes the double meaning of the word “folk” (*Volk*): first, as an uncountable noun (in “*Songs of the Folk*”), and, second, as a countable noun (in “*Songs* of an uneducated but sensitive people [*Volk*]”). Gaier, “‘Volk’ und ‘Völker,’” FHA vol. 3, pp. 865–878, here 865–866.

¹⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker,” SWS vol. 5, 160 = FHA vol. 2, 448. Herder, “Correspondence about Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples,” *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (see note 11), p. 141.

¹⁹ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker,” SWS vol. 5, p. 159 = FHA vol. 3, p. 447. Herder, “Correspondence . . .,” *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (see note 11), p. 140.

²⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker,” SWS vol. 5, p. 182 = FHA vol. 3, pp. 473–474. Herder, “Ossian and the Song of Ancient Peoples,” *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe*, ed. by N. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 158 – slightly modified.

²¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker,” SWS vol. 5, pp. 161–162 = FHA vol. 2, p. 447. Herder, “Correspondence . . .,” *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (see note 11), p. 142.

In his 1773 essay “Shakespeare,” Herder deals with the so-called three unities of the Greeks—the artificial canons or tenets imposed as a symptom of French classicism—insisting that “the artificiality of their rules was—not artifice at all! it was Nature!”²² Herder urges us to grasp and feel as nature what seems to be artificial from our later point of view.

It is worth noting that, at certain points, Herder’s conceptualization of *folk* art corresponds to the theorization of *fine* art according to modern aesthetics at the end of the 18th century. In section 46 of the third *Critique* (1790), Kant writes the following:

Every piece of art presupposes rules which first lay the foundation by means of which a product that is to be called artistic is first represented as being possible. The concept of beautiful art (fine art – T. O.), however, does not allow for judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a concept for its determining ground and thus has as its foundation a concept of how it is possible. . . . Yet, because without a preceding rule a product can never be called art, *nature* in the subject (and by means of the disposition of its faculties) must give the rule to art, i.e., beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius.²³

Here Kant elaborates on the specific difference that distinguishes fine art (as a species) from art (as a genus): As a kind of art in general, fine art is to be based upon rules. These rules should not, however, be conceptually formulated, otherwise fine art could not be distinguished from mechanical art. The criterion for fine art must, therefore, be that which “nature in the subject” (i.e., natural endowment) affords the art, and fine art must be the art of naturally endowed genius. It follows that Kant legitimizes fine art as an art whose rules are given by nature.

Kant’s theory of *fine* art and Herder’s theory of *folk* art have in common that they consider the relevant rules to be something natural and disregard artificial rules. In other words, both Kant and Herder presuppose the modern idea of genius,²⁴ so that, even though Herder’s *folk* underlines premodern characteristics, it is a result of the modern era, as is Kant’s concept of *fine* art.

Certainly, we should not overlook the differences between Kant and Herder. Contrary to Herder, Kant is concerned with the transcendental or a priori conditions for fine art and lacks a historical interest. Kant, who insists that “a genius” makes possible a “new rule,”²⁵ emphasizes the historical

²² Johann Gottfried Herder, “Shakespear [sic!],” SWS vol. 5, p. 210 = FHA vol. 2, p. 501. Herder, “Shakespeare,” *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe*, ed. by N. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 163. As for Herder’s essay “Shakespeare,” see Tanehisa Otabe, “Entstehung der modernen Kunstauffassung aus dem nordischen Geist 1,” *JTLA* vol. 22 (1997), pp. 95–109, here pp. 107–109.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Akademie-Ausgabe, Berlin: Georg Reimer 1908, vol. 5, p. 307. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900, p. 184 – slightly modified and emphasis added.

²⁴ As quoted above, Herder points out that “from our youth, we have tormented ourselves . . . working according to rules virtually none of which a *genius* would acknowledge as rules of Nature” (SWS vol. 5, p. 182 = FHA vol. 3, pp. 473–474, Herder, “Ossian and the Song of Ancient Peoples,” *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe*, p. 158 – emphasis added).

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (see note 23), p. 318. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (see note 23), p. 196.

discontinuity of art.²⁶ Herder, on the other hand, who very often refers to “genius,” is not interested in a genius as an individual. Homer and Ossian are individuals whose poems have been orally transmitted by folk and by whom people find themselves represented: “Ossian’s poems [are] *Songs, Songs of the Folk, Songs* of an uneducated but sensitive people (*Volk*).”²⁷ An individual genius becomes integrated into a historical process that transcends generations. According to Goethe, who reflects upon his Strasbourg days in *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* (vol. 2, 1812), Herder persuaded him that “poetry in general was a gift to the world and to nations (*eine Welt- und Völkergabe*), and not the private inheritance of a few refined, cultivated men.”²⁸

3. The Homeric Question

Herder’s theory of folk art is based upon his philosophical conviction that the universal, including *folk*, exists concretized in the individual, and not *per se* as something abstract. In the mid-1790s, however, this harmony between the universal and the individual came under scrutiny; the Homeric Question, formulated by Friedrich August Wolf in his *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795), was precisely the question of whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which were attributed to a single poet named Homer, were of sole or multiple authorship. The question addresses the theme of *unity* versus *multiplicity*.

Investigating philologically the texts attributed to Homer, Wolf comes to the conclusion that “Homer was not the creator of all his—so to speak—oeuvres, but rather this artistic structure was introduced by later ages. For we find that this was not done suddenly by chance, but that, instead, the energies of several ages and men were joined together in this activity,”²⁹ dissolving the epics that owed their unity to the individuality of Homer into multiple, heterogeneous constructs.

Wolf’s argument was met with mixed responses.³⁰ In their correspondence, Goethe and Schiller repeatedly criticized Wolf. Shortly after the publication of Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, Goethe remarked that Wolf would “waste the most productive gardens of the realm of aesthetics.”³¹ On Schiller’s view:

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (see note 23), p. 318. *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (see note 23), p. 196. See Tanehisa Otabe, “Das Exemplarische und die Originalität: Schellings Kunstphilosophie im begriffsgeschichtlichen Kontext,” *Athenäum – Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel Gesellschaft*, vol. 30 (2020), in press.

²⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker,” SWS vol. 5, p. 160 = FHA vol. 2, p. 448. Herder, “Correspondence about Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples,” *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (see note 11), p. 141.

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, HA vol. 9, pp. 408–409. *The Autobiography of Goethe. Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life*, translated by John Oxenford, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848, p. 192.

²⁹ August Wolf, *Prolegomena ad Homerum etc.*, 1795, Chap. 31, p. 134; *Prolegomena to Homer, 1795*, translated by Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most and James E. G. Zetzel, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 131.

³⁰ See Jutta Osinski, “Homer-Bilder im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Autorschaft. Positionen und Revisionen. DFG-Symposion 2001*, Berlin 2002, pp. 202–219, here pp. 205–206.

³¹ Goethe to Schiller, Weimar, May 17, 1795. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, WA IV, vol. 10, pp. 260–261. *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, translated by L. Dora Schmitz, London: George Bell and Sons, 1877, vol. 1, p. 70.

“After having read through a few cantos, the idea of a rhapsodical concatenation, and of their origins having been different must necessarily strike one as barbarous; for the glorious continuity and reciprocity of the whole and of its parts is one of its most effective beauties,”³² Goethe reacts as follows: “I am more than ever convinced of the unity and inseparableness of the poem (i.e., the *Iliad*). . . . The *Iliad* seems to me so round and so perfect—let people say what they will—that nothing can be added to or taken from it.”³³ We find classicistic belief in the unity of both an author and her work.

Compared to Goethe and Schiller, Herder is much more favorable to Wolf’s theory.³⁴ After reading Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, Herder writes to Schiller as follows: “I have shared many of Wolf’s ideas for a long time.”³⁵ His comments are not without basis: Karl August Böttinger, one of Herder’s friends, transcribes his 1794 conversation with Herder as follows: Herder offers his “conjecture” that “Homer is perhaps only a nomen collectivum, and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are a wreath of blossoms artificially composed by many lost poets.”³⁶ He illustrates the differences between the two epic poems by pointing out, for example, that the messenger of the former is Iris, while that of the latter is Hermes.³⁷ Herder, however, does not deny the unity of Homer. In his 1795 essay “Homer as a Favorite of Time,” he argues:

How were Homer’s songs preserved in the mouth of rhapsodists? . . . A story is hardly recited with the same words twice, especially when orators are caught up in the inspiration of the moment. The songs and metrics that imposed limits on singers were so broad that they could not have become speaking machines unalterably repeating the same tones. We are driven, by our nature, to add something of our own to what we have learned. . . . All folk songs on the earth vary in this way; no province sings her folk songs without variation.³⁸

Herder considers the unity of Homer in relation to the multiplicity of the rhapsodists or Homerids. The relationship between Homer and the rhapsodists is thus compared to the relationship between a theme and its variations, so that the unity of Homer is never dissolved. Although the Homeric Question posed by Wolf makes Herder conscious of the variations accompanying oral traditions, he still stands by the unity of both Homer and his works, though not in the same way as did Goethe and Schiller.

³² Schiller’s works are cited according to the Nationalausgabe (Berlin, 1948–, abbreviated as NA). Schiller to Goethe, Jena, April 27, 1798. Johann Friedrich Schiller, NA vol. 29, p. 228. *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, translated by L. Dora Schmitz, London: George Bell and Sons, 1890, vol. 2, p. 81.

³³ Goethe to Schiller, Weimar, May 16, 1798. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, WA IV, vol. 13, p. 148. *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, vol. 2, p. 99 – slightly modified.

³⁴ As for the relationship between Wolf and Herder, see Robert T. Clark, Jr., *Herder: His Life and Thought*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955, p. 375.

³⁵ Herder’s letters are cited according to *Briefe. Gesamtausgabe 1763–1803*, Weimar 1977–88 (abbreviated as DA). Johann Gottfried Herder, DA, vol. 7, pp. 163–164, cf. FHA vol. 8, p. 995.

³⁶ Goethe, *Begegnungen und Gespräche*, begründet von Ernst Grumach und Renate Grumach, Berlin 1980, vol. 4, p. 66 – my translation.

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 67.

³⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Homer, ein Günstling der Zeit,” SWS vol. 18, pp. 425, 426–427 = FHA vol. 8, pp. 94, 95 – my translation.

4. The Final Homer: Schelling's Philosophy of Art

The issue Herder is faced with boils down to the question of how an artist as a collective being and an artist as an individual are related. These two conceptions can be represented by Homer and Shakespeare, respectively. The question thus pertains to the so-called quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. In his lecture, "Philosophy of Art" (1802/03 and 1804/05), Schelling tackles this issue from his speculative point of view, whereby the Homeric Question plays a decisive role.

Summarizing "Wolf's hypothesis" by saying that "Homer, in his original form, was not the work of a single person, but rather of several individuals driven by the same spirit,"³⁹ Schelling characterizes the ancient mythology as follows:

*Mythology can be neither the work of an individual person nor of a species nor of the genus (to the extent that the latter is merely a composite of individuals), but rather it is the work exclusively of the species to the extent that it itself constitutes an individual and is the equal of an individual person.*⁴⁰

Homer is an individual who embodies the species in himself. This is because "Homer was already involved in the first poetic products of mythology and was, as it were, potentially present."⁴¹ The rhapsodes who sang the epics of Homer, also known as the Homerids, are to Homer what actuality is to potentiality. This means that what the Homerids performed was a poem that was present in Homer, "perhaps not empirically," but "archetypally."⁴² This is why Homer was "exemplary"⁴³ in ancient art. And the "species" refers here to a specific folk (or a people), concretely, the Greek.

Modern art begins when the particular "wrests itself loose" from the universal.⁴⁴ "Change and transformation," or "succession," is, therefore, the condition of modernity.⁴⁵ The originality that characterizes modern art is that particularity which "molds itself from the particular to the general or universal,"⁴⁶ so that "modern poetry is no longer a poetry merely for one particular folk (or people) (*ein besonderes Volk*) that has formed into a genus, but rather must be the poetry for the entire species."⁴⁷ A modern artist creates her works not for the sake of a certain folk (or a people), but for the whole species, namely human beings. And modern art successively developed by original artists will aim at the following moment:

³⁹ Schelling's works are cited according to the Akademieausgabe (Stuttgart: fromann-holzboog, 1976–, abbreviated as AA). Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst und weitere Schriften (1796–1805)*, AA II 6, 1, p. 151. *Philosophy of Art*, ed. by Douglas W. Stott, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 51–52.

⁴⁰ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 151. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 51—slightly modified.

⁴¹ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 152–153. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 52.

⁴² AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 152–153. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 52.

⁴³ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 186. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 81.

⁴⁴ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 161. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 177. *Philosophy of Art*, pp. 73, 74.

⁴⁶ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 186. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 82 – slightly modified.

⁴⁷ AA II vol. 6, 1, p. 175. *Philosophy of Art*, p. 72 – slightly modified.

The modern world must end with a Homer, as the ancient world began with Homer. The true epic will finish the modern world—a tremendous poem that the world spirit strives for.⁴⁸

Thus, the whole of history is marked by Homer: the Homer who is the point of departure and the final Homer who is to come. While the former represents one particular folk, namely a Greek people, the latter will stand for all people. In the Homer who is to come, we hear an echo of the idealized people (or *Volk*).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ AA II vol. 6, 2. p. 600 to p. 181, l. 13 – my translation. See further: “Homerus who in the art of antiquity was the first, will be the final (or last) one in modern art and will complete the ultimate destiny and calling of that art” (AA II vol. 6, 2. p. 364, *Philosophy of Art*, p. 238).

⁴⁹ See Tanehisa Otabe, Das „Exemplarische“ und die „Originalität“. Schellings Kunstphilosophie im begriffsgeschichtlichen Kontext, in *Athenäum. Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel-Gesellschaft*, 29 (2021), pp. 95–109.