PUBLIC WRITERS OF THE GERMAN ENLIGHTENMENT:
STUDIES IN LESSING, ABBT AND HERDER

by

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European Enlightenment culture was a fundamental locus for the emergence and conceptualization of what has come to be called the "modern public sphere." In this study I analyze the figure of "the public" during roughly the third quarter of the eighteenth-century, primarily as refracted in the writings of three prominent German Aufklärer, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Abbt, and Johann Gottfried Herder.

Scholarly discussion about the emergence of a German public sphere and "public opinion" has tended to focus on the latter decades of the eighteenth-century, with little awareness of the fact that earlier on, the notion of a "public" itself was being constituted and contested by "public writers" like Lessing, Abbt and Herder. This occurred within the context of what I am calling "the problem of Publikum," the particular German problem of social and political fragmentation.

The writings of Lessing, Abbt and Herder can be profitably understood as mediating between the wider European Republic of Letters and a more circumscribed, problematical German Publikum. By reading their works in light of Enlightenment discourses of science, sociability, aesthetics and politics--discourses that in one way or another touched upon the issue of a modern "public"--as well as in view of the "problem of Publikum" and the German social and intellectual scene generally, I am able to connect their intellectual content both with wider European currents and local German socio-political concerns.

I argue that Lessing's dramatic and literary-critical work sought to constitute a German public that was both sympathetically responsive yet critically distanced from itself. Abbt, painfully aware of the "problem of Publikum," strove to inscribe a public sphere in the idiom of patriotism and morals. And Herder's intervention in an emerging German public sphere can be understood as building on the work of Abbt and Lessing to theorize the relationship between language, literature and the Publikum in a complex vision.
of "organic enlightenment."

The dissertation employs a variety of primary and secondary sources, including works by an array of European thinkers who played a role in Lessing, Abbt and Herder's intellectual development. And it theorizes the developments profiled in light of contemporary theories of the public sphere and the social-psychology of George H. Mead, engaging questions of personal and social identity, inclusion/exclusion, and gender.
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PREFACE

Chapter 1

Enlightened Publics and the German "Problem of Publikum:" History and Theory

The notions of "the public," "publicity," and "public opinion" are key concepts in western social and political discourse. These terms tend to have a dual character, indicating both the presence of some kind of human collective, and the processes by which ideas, opinions, concerns, and information are represented within that collective. The word "public"—used either as a noun or an adjective—is of central importance. In denoting a body of citizens, it is employed as a crucial point of reference in the evaluation of policy. When used as an adjective, it invokes root processes of western political culture, having to do with openness, accessibility, and transparency. And yet there is more—the range of meanings and usages of such a fundamental term is necessarily broad.

One way to gain a better understanding of the term is to place it in historical context—the notion of "the public" has informed socio-political discourse from the period of high Roman culture to the present day. It is a protean term which has lived diverse lives, yet has maintained enough of an identifiable character to be recognizable, in its various manifestations, to us today. Contemporary understandings of the term began to take shape during the eighteenth-century, helping to lay the foundation for emerging concepts of citizenship and democratic culture generally. It was at this time that it was reconstituted from its ancient, juridical and humanist roots, and contested in the service of a changing socio-political order, marked not least by the rise of middling classes. European Enlightenment culture was thus a fundamental locus for the emergence and conceptualization of what has come to be called the "modern public sphere."

In the present study I focus on this dynamic interaction between
intellectual and material culture in mid-eighteenth century Germany, paying particular attention to the emerging figure of "the public"—das Publikum—in the writings of three formative personalities—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Abbt, and Johann Gottfried Herder. As a work in the field of intellectual history, this study concentrates on their texts, ideas, discourses, intellectual relationships and the like. Yet it will reach beyond the boundaries of the Germanies to embrace aspects of the European Republic of Letters and Enlightenment culture as a whole, and delineate some of the emerging connections between lived experience and the productions of the mind and pen in the modern era.

Approaching the Public Sphere

Twentieth-century scholars first approached the topic of the western European public sphere most directly via the concept of "public opinion." In the early 1920s Ferdinand Tönnies published Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung, a wide-ranging sociological and historical treatment of public opinion. Tönnies established the concept as a subject of analysis in the grand style of the modern sociological tradition, offering various definitions, theories and historical examples. The work contains many insights on the topic, but like other similar works of political sociology, it concentrates on the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, and lacks historical specificity.

Wilhelm Bauer's Die öffentliche Meinung in der Weltgeschichte (1930) offers a broad historical perspective on the topic. The emergence of a periodical press in the eighteenth-century is highlighted as a contribution to an expanded public opinion in Europe at that time. As would become the case with subsequent students of the topic, the later-eighteenth century, and the period of the French Revolution particularly, receives emphasis as a key moment in the emergence and explicit conceptualization of public opinion as a category of social discourse. While such emphasis is undoubtedly justified,
the result has been to make it appear that the rise and conceptualization of a German public sphere was inextricably tied to French developments, and to neglect earlier formative stages in the process, for example the emergence of the social and intellectual construct of "the public" itself. Bauer is vague at best on this question, assuming that such an entity has always been more or less present in its contemporary form. An important postwar work which helped set the stage for further discussion was Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (1959). Koselleck used the notion of public and private spheres to help explain what he saw as a pathological utopianism that grew out of the Enlightenment and led to National Socialism in Germany. In Koselleck's view, Enlightenment forms of sociability and discourse took place outside the public sphere of absolutist politics, giving rise to a moral utopianism that ignored the pragmatic realities attending all political forms. A subversive, parallel public sphere emerged from the private realms of Enlightenment discourse, including for example freemasonry; secrecy helped to give birth to a bourgeois "moral interior" which would in time be set up over and against the state. A "non-political politics" was the result, with a hypocritical Enlightenment criticism becoming the "spokesman" of public opinion. In many ways a seminal work in the analysis of the Enlightenment as a social as well as an intellectual phenomenon, *Critique and Crisis* suffers from an excessively abstract, typological form of argument that breaks down under its own weight. Yet Koselleck's notion of a competing realm of quasi-political discourse that emerged parallel to traditional political structures is a crucial insight into the nature of Enlightenment culture.

The most important work to theorize this parallel realm was Jürgen Habermas's seminal *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962, 1989). Habermas charts the rise of what in translation he calls a "bourgeois public sphere" (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*) in eighteenth-century Europe, the term
"bourgeois" signifying an educated strata of jurists, administrators, doctors, pastors, officers, professors and scholars, as well as a rising capitalist class of merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs and manufacturers. Habermas provides a genealogy of the idea of the "the public," tracing it from connoting the feudal and courtly "representative publicness" of absolutist rulers, to the abstract counterpart of an increasingly depersonalized and bureaucratic state apparatus, to a "bourgeois public sphere" that concretized that abstraction and in the process appropriated state authority for itself. This bourgeois public sphere stood, by the end of the eighteenth-century, between the state and the "private" realm of a growing commercial/civil society. As Habermas puts it:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. And according to Habermas, "The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters," while the latter world itself was coming to be socialized in secondary societies like coffee houses, reading clubs, and in Germany language societies (Sprachgesellschaften). "Critical reasoning" made its way into the daily press, initially via the learned article, during the first half of the century, as an interested reading public began to emerge. The printed word and the periodical press were thus the crucial media fostering a bourgeois public sphere, helping to give rise to "intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was 'human,' in self-knowledge, and in empathy." Thus one aspect of Habermas's argument is that a simultaneous, mutual articulation of (bourgeois) public and private spheres was taking place.

Although the British press was established by the 1730s as an organ of public political debate, in France it was not until the 1770s and the political careers of Turgot, Malesherbes and Necker that a "breach" in the absolutist system was opened that allowed for a public sphere in the political
realm. The Revolution represented the rapid, unstable occasion for the institution of a critical public sphere of debate in political matters. Various circumstances conspired to make the German transition slower and more halting, with a German public opinion emerging only by the 1790s. Thus according to Habermas's periodization, the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere occurred first in England in the early eighteenth-century, followed by France during the third quarter of the century, and Germany towards the end of the century. The discussion of German developments is devoted primarily to an analysis of the works of Kant and Hegel.¹⁰

At least two potentially misleading impressions arise from Habermas's brilliant work: literary and political aspects of Enlightenment culture are neatly separable, and Germans only began to reflect on "the public" in the latter decades of the eighteenth-century. The first impression is based on the assumption that discourse must be directed explicitly at existing institutional or constitutional structures in order to have a "political" dimension.¹¹ One aim of the present study will be to counter these notions by looking at the emerging social/intellectual figure of "the public"—das Publikum—in roughly the third quarter of eighteenth-century Germany, and adducing its socio-political contours in the works of Lessing, Abbt, and Herder, none of whom would be described as a particularly "political" writer.

Although Habermas's work is open to revision on a number of counts, his basic model of an emergent public sphere of private individuals which mediates between the state and civil/economic society has been tremendously fruitful for subsequent scholars.¹² An important theoretical extension of Habermas's thesis has been made by Dena Goodman. She emphasizes the mutual articulation of private and public spheres of life in eighteenth-century Europe, arguing that "We need to get away from rigidly oppositional thinking that assumes two spheres or discourses, one public and the other private." These were not mutually exclusive categories, "when monarchy was predicated on secrecy and a new form of publicity developed within—and precisely because it was within—the private sphere." The eighteenth century was, in other words, "the
historical moment in which public and private spheres were in the process of articulation, such that no stable distinction can...be made between them."\(^{13}\)

Goodman here augments Habermas's thesis that the emergence of a modern public sphere went hand-in-hand with the development of intimate and "human" forms of privatized personality, and the result is a flexible model of the interaction of individual and social development. The spheres of private, individual selfhood and of public sociability emerged, as it were, in concert. This insight is important for understanding the German situation, helping to make better sense of the concerns and approaches of the Aufklärer (Enlighteners) under study. In Germany the appearance of increasingly autonomous, rational or affective "selves" was accompanied by at least the promise of a new sort of social-intellectual structure in which those selves could in a certain sense be "at home." The longing and concern to shape this kind of structure--some kind of relatively inclusive public sphere--informed the works of individuals like Lessing, Abbt and Herder, who were part of an emerging educated order (Stand) of burghers (das gebildete Bürgertum).

The social-psychology of George Herbert Mead helps to give these notions greater conceptual purchase. Mead argued that the human self "arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process."\(^{14}\) Mead posited a "self" that is a social, intersubjective, public construction, co-determined by the individual. As such, individual selves are constituted out of a number of particular responses to varying social situations;

The structure of the complete self is...a reflection of the complete social process. The organization and unification of a social group is identical with the organization and unification of any one of the selves arising within the social process in which that group is engaged.\(^{15}\)

Mead describes a process of individuation in which human beings become conscious of "themselves," of an "I," through a process of interaction with other individuals and eventually social groups as a whole, the latter being represented to the individual self as the "generalized other." Consciousness
(and the construction) of oneself occurs in the process of taking the position of the "other" towards oneself. Language plays a fundamental role in this process since it is the primary medium by which the symbols that concretize this relationship, which give the individual a "mind," are communicated. It is the common currency of "self" and "other," the communal, public medium through which individuals come to self-consciousness and self-definition.\textsuperscript{16}

One does not need to look very hard to find resonances with Mead's ideas in eighteenth-century moral and social discourse. Probably the best example of Mead-like social psychology in the eighteenth-century is Adam Smith's \textit{The Theory of Moral Sentiments} (1759, 1790). Smith's highly reflexive and finely-wrought account of human moral sentiments traces the interplay between individual and social character in a way that suggests parallels to Mead's work, particularly in Smith's account of the "impartial spectator," who looks much like Mead's "generalized other." Smith argues that in order to evaluate our own sentiments and motives, "We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it." By taking the position of "society," the individual is provided with a "mirror" with which "he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind."\textsuperscript{17} Although it is couched in the language of morals, Smith's treatise is very much about the social construction of the individual "self" and the articulation of individual private personality in the intersubjective arena of public life. Thus Mead's symbolic interactionism may be useful for understanding eighteenth-century developments not least because major Enlightenment figures were engaged in similar enterprises.\textsuperscript{18}

Material and intellectual conditions were emerging that helped give rise to this sort of reflection. The growth of commerce, for example, brought with it new forms of sociability and moral-philosophical reflection.\textsuperscript{19} One can broadly characterize the substrate of many new forms of enlightened sociability in terms of the emergence of "civil society," an essentially private sphere of social relations based on an emerging market economy but
inhabited by middling groups ranging from merchants to educated bureaucrats and intellectuals, as well as individuals drawn from the ranks of various elite groups. Whatever its exact human constitution, civil society was an emerging area of social and economic activity relatively distinct from the state. Although direct reflection on the term did not occur until later in the eighteenth-century, and only occasionally and inconsequentially at that, it is useful for understanding broad changes underway in eighteenth-century Europe. Its "discovery" was at the root of a broad Enlightenment discourse on commerce, sociability, and politics, and its presence figured heavily in Habermas's account of the rise of a "bourgeois public sphere."

Scholars interested in scientific culture have begun to draw connections between the new science and this realm of socio-economic life. Margaret Jacob has traced the relationship between Newtonianism, as a scientific movement, and seventeenth-century social and religious developments in England, and more recently has been working to bring scientistic high Enlightenment culture down to earth in the Masonic lodges of England and the Continent, in the process illuminating the contours of emerging forms of sociability and radical political thought. By "behaving in ways that were constitutional and representative...a new version of the public [was created] within enclaves which, on the surface...[might appear] as only private and recreational."

The new science played a crucial role in the simultaneous production of natural knowledge and social order. Whether Cartesian or Newtonian, emerging modes of scientific enquiry could serve as the locus for new kinds of public culture built on agreement about certain "scientific facts." Whether one held "the spring of the air" or the Cartesian "plenum" to be fundamental and indubitable, such articles of faith served to unite and focus a community of thinkers on common problems of potentially unlimited scope, a community that functioned apart from existing ecclesiastical or other institutional structures. In the process new procedures for gaining assent and interacting as autonomous social agents were being explored, new publics were being formed. The Masonic lodges were one type of social expression of this general
scientific movement into civil society, while scientific academies and
societies were another.\textsuperscript{23}

The learned culture of the European Republic of Letters was an important
venue in which the scientific movement achieved intellectual expression, and
it was this strata of the Enlightenment that Ernst Cassirer studied so
fruitfully over sixty years ago.\textsuperscript{24} But he viewed it primarily as a movement
of thought, whereas a more nuanced perspective might see it as both a movement
of ideas and an exemplary form of rational, public sociability. Figures like
Lessing, Abbt and Herder participated in and drew upon this wider "public,"
acting as mediators between it and the more modest German Publikum, which they
sought to constitute and contest in various ways peculiar to them. It is in
this way that the epochal developments in natural philosophy inflected the
discussion and formation of new forms of sociability and public culture.

This new culture was a print culture. In 1775 Malesherbes, former
director of the French book trade, expressed notions which Abbt and Herder had
begun developing a decade or more before: "What the orators of Rome and Athens
were in the midst of a people assembled, men of letters are in the midst of a
people dispersed." A reading public was by its nature not only more
dispersed, but also more individualistic and atomistic than a hearing one.
Despite the fact that new communal gathering places--bookshops, coffee houses,
and reading rooms--were appearing, "literariness still imposed a new kind of
isolation." Important consequences flowed from this fact; it became easier to
regard society as being made up of discrete units, and a sharper division
between private life and public affairs was encouraged. "The nature of man as
a political animal was less likely to conform to classical models after
tribunes of the people were transmuted from orators in public squares to
editors of news-sheets and gazettes."\textsuperscript{25}

Paradoxically, while print on the one hand represented a form of
communication in principle more egalitarian than that of face-to-face contact
in public squares, it also opened readers to intimate instruction on the
author's own terms. Besides pointing to the mutual articulation of private
individuality and publicity, this paradox suggests the transposition of local
ties into larger networks. Communal solidarity was being loosened as
vicarious participation in distant events was growing. Invisible publics
could be addressed from afar, as new forms of community began competing with
older, more localized loyalties. These notions are valuable when looking at
German developments; there the printed word, more than any other medium, was
the vehicle for expanding forms of public life.

The widest new forum that resulted from the expansion of print media was
the European Republic of Letters, an entity both real and rather elusive. If
Pierre Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* came from Rotterdam, the
language of the Republic had changed during the course of the seventeenth-
century from Latin to French. But Amsterdam, rather than Paris, seems to have
been its acknowledged centre, having been the earliest provider of European
newspapers, and continuing to service newspaper readers in France until the
eve of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, "A margin for uncertainty has to
be left when one pinpoints the headquarters or designates the frontiers of
this 'Republic' on real maps. It remained, from the beginning, a somewhat
elusive, often deliberately mysterious, domain." Print shops and publishing houses were micro-centres of this Republic,
"miniature international houses" that fostered an ecumenical ethos of
tolerance and an atmosphere conducive to heterodox ideas. Out of all this
emerged a new class of careerist men of letters who came from diverse strata
of society and urged people to trust their own understanding and to disavow
censorship and superstition. In the final analysis, the printing press
created "a new kind of public for idées forces." Parisian salons must also be seen as central loci of the (French)
Enlightenment Republic of Letters. Traditionally marginalized as frivolous,
feminized centres of diversion from the "serious" project of Enlightenment,
the mid-eighteenth-century salons of figures like Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin,
Julie de Lespinasse, and Marie Du Deffand were in fact important venues in
which Enlightenment discourse was fostered. Philosophes adopted the salons as
focal points for their Republic of Letters, not least because their female "governors" provided the republic with a basis for order. 29

Whatever its location, this new public did not include the vast majority of Europeans. Yet individuals could, through sheer force of will and intellect, find their way into literate print culture: "The age of the hand-press was the first great age of the autodidact--and of the self-appointed tribune of the people who could address a vast public from afar." 30 This new type of educated, lettered individual began to come to the fore in Europe in the period after the Thirty Years War, and sought to unite the educated world above and beyond the borders of estate and nation around urbane ideals and modes of living, as well as the acknowledged qualities of scientific critique. In addition to Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (1684), Christian Thomasius's *Freimuthigen...Gedanken oder Monatgespräche* (1688-89) is an important late-seventeenth century example of this kind of discourse. 31

Perhaps the most well-known example of the new urbane, scientific-critical approach to all manner of topics was Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697-1702), widely viewed as a foundation-text for the European Enlightenment. There Bayle discussed a wide range of primarily religious and literary-philosophical topics in an open, critical and ecumenical spirit that resulted in good deal of controversy. Although Bayle's work typically lacked focus, in a larger sense he was opening a field of discourse premised more or less on the certainties of the new science (for Bayle its Cartesian wing), as he aimed at distinguishing between things like "superstition"--which for Bayle had distinctly Catholic overtones--and certain cold, hard, indubitable facts. The result, in a sociological sense, was a contribution to the formation of an emerging public arena for rational negotiation of human understandings and concerns. That Lessing and Abbt were avid readers of Bayle is therefore of some significance to this study. 32

Scholars have recently begun to question whether such new arenas were as open, harmonious and rational as Habermas, and indeed the foregoing discussion, implies. A conflict model of the public sphere has begun to replace
Habermas's "nostalgic" vision of a relatively inclusive and genteel bourgeois public sphere; the emergence of a modern public sphere, it is argued, involved a good deal of contestation and exclusion of "subaltern groups" like women. Karl Mannheim proposed this sort of model over sixty years ago, in reference to "the meaning of competition in the intellectual domain." According to Mannheim, competing parties in intellectual discussion struggle to make their worldview the dominant "public" worldview; "the competing partners always struggle for the 'public interpretation of being' (an expression of the phenomenologist Heidegger)." Every historical, ideological, sociological form of knowledge--"even if it were the absolute truth"--is embedded in operations of power and the desire for recognition by particular groups, "who want to make their interpretation of the world into the public interpretation of the world."

Enlightened publics were thus not only arenas of sociability and "rational" discussion, but also sites of intense controversy and even the exclusion of various social groups and strata. Individuals could have quite different ideas about what the public was or should be, as we will see later in this chapter in German discussions about the nature of the emerging German Publikum. Indeed, one would expect that in a formative period such as the eighteenth-century, emerging terms and points of reference like "the public" would be open to contestation and refiguration according to the groups and interests at work. This point should not obscure the fact, however, that the quest for greater inclusion and unity or harmony was often present, and could serve a wide range of particular interests as well as more generally-shared concerns.

Contemporary theorists maintain that there is an unresolved tension within the concept of "the public" between a unitary, authoritative body, and a more relaxed, pluralistic public-ness which is a shared feature of many different collectivities. This idea of a tension between unity and diversity has resonance in the eighteenth-century; in the Germanies the general trend was towards overcoming the isolation born of the diversity of
German life with a more coherent, unified and enlightened public sphere. Yet certain questions are worth asking: How were competing voices to be accommodated? Just where was "the public"? Should it consist of one authoritative voice or should it allow a number of voices to be heard? Who was to be included or excluded, and what were its limits?

Feminists have maintained that gender served as a formative category in eighteenth-century public discussion, and particularly that of the French Revolution. Looking at the revived classical republican discourse of Rousseau and the revolutionaries, it is argued that the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public was central to its incarnation. The modern public sphere, in other words, is seen to be "essentially, not just contingently, masculinist."38 Influential contemporary feminist arguments about the modern public sphere have been built on this view,39 yet it has received some searching criticism: the masculinist republican discourse fastened upon by such authors was but one competing conception of the social and political arena imagined as an alternative to the Old Regime.40

It is therefore probably premature to reify any one category of exclusion or contestation as being the central issue at stake in the emergence of the modern public sphere. Not only is it premature, it is deeply problematic; the tendency to divide public and private spheres along the lines of gender may be too much of a repetition of ideological claims, put forward by nineteenth-century writers particularly, to be much use as a category of historical enquiry.41 It may also be that creating a binary opposition between a public sphere which excluded women, and a private, domestic sphere which they inhabited, obscures the fact that "at least in some sense, women had extensive public lives in the eighteenth-century and that language was available to discuss and sometimes even legitimate this fact."42

If it is clear that women were excluded in important ways from the bourgeois public sphere, and particularly its nineteenth-century incarnation, it is an overstatement to say that their exclusion was singularly constitutive of that arena. While it was hardly thinkable in the eighteenth-century that
women should be considered socio-political actors equal in status to men, it was not unthinkable that they too could be considered members of "the public." Among the authors studied in this work, the general impulse was towards inclusion of broader strata of German society in public discourse and as relevant members of the public. There is little evidence to suggest that women were to be excluded apriori from this arena, while at times they are explicitly cited as relevant public actors. Lessing's strong and witty female dramatic characters, Abbt's public-spirited women, and Herder's Volk-Publikum all suggest that there was more at work in the formation of modern, "enlightened" publics than the concerted, conscious effort to exclude women.

This is not to say, however, that status hierarchies did not persist within the emerging public sphere, or that processes of "simultaneous enfranchisement and restriction" of women were not taking place; only that the notion that gender exclusion served as the primary basis for giving rise to a bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth-century obscures the existence of differing circumstances, concerns and conceptions implicated in its emergence. Better to leave "the public" open to a number of possible permutations and competing views, and to realize that "subaltern counter-publics" can emerge from among various subordinated social groups, and that they can themselves "help expand discursive space." Thus although it may be useful to talk about "the bourgeois public sphere" in the singular as a broad conceptual category, it should be assumed that such a sphere could be composed of multiple publics and envisioned in different ways; it was not a unitary phenomenon.

If the emergence of modern public spheres was marked by at least potential conflict and contestation, a certain amount of constituting and shaping of these spheres was also part of the process. These are in a sense two sides of the same coin. But nevertheless there had to be at least the notion of "the public" present in order for there to exist any meaningful sphere of contestation; "the public interpretation of being" assumes both an audience and an open exchange within or in front of that audience. And the
moment of constitution—the formation or envisioning of a public—theoretically precedes that of any contestation within or before it. Schiller stated this problem, in reference to the German theatre, as a paradox: "It is difficult for the stage to form a public before a public has been formed for the stage."  

For Aufklärer (enlighteners) like Lessing, Abbt and Herder, the constitution of a relatively coherent German public, out of the diversity of life in the Germanies, was of central importance. To return to the terminology of Mead, they began to seek to unite various individuals and groups across the feudal spectrum into a higher level of social-intellectual organization, one which in a certain sense answered to the richness and breadth of their own "selves," and more concretely, promised to be a forum for their concerns and endeavours. This process might best be thought of in terms of the "shaping" of a public sphere, with its connotations of both building something up which was imperfectly there, and giving that entity an identifiable character. What will be of interest is not only this process of shaping that was going on, and the visions of Publikum which were part of it, but how it in turn inflected the form and content of enlightened discourse, which was clearly much more than a movement of ideas.

Publics and Politics in England and France

The notion of the rise of a modern public sphere has enabled historians of England and France to broaden the study of politics to include previously neglected developments, and to better understand emergent forms of social and cultural activity. Ian Watt located "the rise of the novel" in an emerging English reading public in the eighteenth-century, a largely middle- to upper-class preserve that had been nurtured on "moral weeklies" like the Tatler (1709) and Spectator (1711), and had an increasing amount of leisure time at its disposal. This type of periodical, which T.H. Green famously called "the
first and best representative of that special style of literature—the only really popular literature of our time—which consists in talking to the public about itself," was widely copied in Germany and similarly aided the rise of a self-conscious, if limited, reading public there. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury exercised a profound influence on German thinking about this emerging public, as we shall see, concerned as he was "to create a new public and gentlemanly culture of criticism" based on emerging notions of sociability and "politeness." The growth of a reading public and increased reflection on the mechanisms of sociability and public life were important features of an expanding political culture in England. J.H. Plumb's work on the "gradual coherence of a self-conscious middle-class public" has furthered understanding of "the cultural changes which enabled something like a free political life to take shape in the course of the eighteenth-century." E.P. Thompson for his part has stimulated reflection on the political relevance of popular culture and on the public sphere "as a structured setting in which certain forms of cultural and ideological contestation may take place rather than as the autonomous and class-specific achievement of the bourgeois citizenry."

Others have demonstrated that the notion of "public opinion" in England was not a French import, as has frequently been supposed, but rather grew out of an English socio-political culture which had long recognized "public spirit" as a central figure in public discourse. But although terms like "the opinion of the public" had political application before mid-century in England, the idea of a public as "a constant political actor" did not emerge until around 1780, when "public opinion" or "-sentiment" began to be perceived to play a role in elections. The press, "the palladium of all other English liberties," was a central factor in this "process of self-recognition in eighteenth-century political thought." A revitalized debate on the press and its freedom in the 1760s and 1770s was tied to the emergence and definition of a popular political culture; a changing political infrastructure and the growing influence of the press gave rise to often controversial
debates on its proper role in English society. This growth of a public political culture after mid-century in England coincided with the stirrings of an enlightened, proto-political "public" in Germany, and helps to conceive of the links, rather more tenuous there, between socio-cultural and political processes.

The movement from a rational-literary public sphere to a more overtly political one has become a topic of much interest among scholars of the French Enlightenment and Revolution. On the one hand, some have looked to a growing, literate "private" culture of salons, cafés and clubs in eighteenth-century France for new forms of sociability which laid the groundwork for an emerging style of rational public discourse and "opinion" that began to appropriate power and authority from the monarchy. "Opinion" had traditionally been cast in a negative light, as a particularized, irrational counterpoint to knowledge born of rational, universal reason--doxa as opposed to gnosis. The salons in particular helped give rise to a notion of "rational public opinion" because it was there that rational rules of discussion and "polite contradiction" served to mediate an "opinion" that was both "rational" and, in a circumscribed sense, "public." This perspective is in fact generalizable to a range of other locations of quasi-public, rational discussion like scientific and literary academies; they too helped to give rise to a species of "opinion" that was a product of extended rational discourse.

Keith Baker's work has been influential in extending the Habermasian theme into French studies of the Enlightenment and Revolution. His *Inventing the French Revolution* (1990) signals a general trend away from Marxist approaches to these topics, and growing interest in the power of language or discourse in shaping events. The public sphere is seen as an alternative "discursive space" which grew up under the Old Regime and provided the conditions in which the Revolution became "thinkable." Baker charts the emergence of three basic discourses or "political languages" which contended with each other, as alternative systems of meaning, within this space, and were blended together in the political discourse of the Revolution.
"Public opinion" was a crucial figure in this emerging politics of contestation, a figure that Baker sees more as a "political invention" than a sociological entity. As a rhetorical figure, public opinion appeared "in the context of a crisis of absolute authority in which actors within an absolutist system appealed to a 'public' beyond as a way of reformulating institutional claims that could no longer be negotiated within the traditional language." Baker's impressionistic work analyses a range of events and polities as formative in the rise of discourses and a public sphere of contestation that together served to break French politics "out of the absolutist mold."55

Others like Robert Darnton concentrate on the printed word as constituting "a new political culture."56 Like Baker, Darnton sees "public opinion" as an important force in later eighteenth-century France, but he focuses less on the linguistic struggle for mastery of it, than on the role of diverse forms of print in shaping, as well as recording, this struggle. This approach concentrates on how "the change from old to new public spheres affect[ed] the products of the printing press, and how...the latter in turn contribute[d] to the transformation of the public sphere."57 This means paying serious attention to the role played by the press and print culture in the development of revolutionary discourse and democratic politics.

The approaches of Darnton and Baker complement more than contradict each other, and they share a common vision of an emerging public sphere of discourse, from mid-century on, that came to have a profound effect upon subsequent social and political events. Sara Maza has contributed to this discussion by demonstrating how the literature of judicial scandal, in conjunction with an emerging bourgeois theatre concerned with the intimate experience of private life, "contributed to the birth of public opinion and a new public sphere in the decades just before the French Revolution."58 In Germany too the growth of print culture and a domestically-oriented theatre helped give rise to a wider forum of public discussion and indeed the "invention" of a "public" and later a "public opinion" which could be the objects of contestation and the loci of new authority.
To a large extent public opinion was debated in France within a "religion of unity;" public opinion was typically seen as an anonymous tribunal of authority, visible to all, that took from traditional religious and monarchical models "components of infallibility, externality, and unity." This sort of unitary "counterforce" to the crown was truly at home in France because it, more than England, was "a country devoted to unity." "Public opinion" arose around 1750 in France as an explicitly recognized entity, and men of letters, academies and the Parlements were seen to be primary carriers of it. Although the emerging public sphere could be a site of contestation, the "archaic dream of integration within the collective" persisted within this new arena, as evidenced by unitary notions of "public opinion." 59

This has resonance in the German context, where particularity was for many intellectuals an obstacle to be overcome, the desire for a more unified German Publikum beginning to be felt from mid-century on. All in all, events surrounding the rise of public spheres in Britain and France are of more than comparative interest to students of German public culture, since German thinkers were often well acquainted with British and French social and intellectual life, and their reflections concerning the rise of modern publics and civil society were typically influenced by wider European developments. 60

Germany and the "Problem of Publikum"

During the eighteenth-century, the German-speaking area of Europe was a patchwork of territories controlled by secular and clerical authorities, of free Imperial Cities and territories held by Imperial Knights. Laid over the top of this veritable constellation of cities, states and provinces was a complicated system of legal rights and duties. German society was characterized by a relatively static if not uniform corporate order--estates--and the prevailing form of government was absolutist, whose fundamental condition and leading idea was that of "social discipline." In this context the primary
units of social movement were specific layers and groupings (e.g. guilds) of particular cities or states. The vast majority of the population--90% in 1800--lived on the land or in villages of less than 5000 people, while the rest lived in the towns or cities. Literacy estimates are low--perhaps 15% of the population were potential readers in 1770, and "songbook, catechism and Bible remained for many the only reading material." 61

The towns and cities were the carriers of Enlightenment in Germany, as elsewhere; feudal inequalities were more easily overcome there, giving them a status exceptional to the general absolutist environment and conducive to the growth of an educated, service elite that helped to foster Enlightenment ideals. Emerging in part from the traditional civic burghers, this rising group achieved, primarily through education, positions in the expanding universities and bureaucracies, in the princely courts and the state churches, or as doctors and legal councillors. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Abbt, and Johann Gottfried Herder were very much a part of this movement, which is generally seen as one of the most important social features of the Aufklärung, a large literature having grown up around the phenomenon of an expanding Bürgertum or third estate. 62

But the German Enlightenment, or Aufklärung, like this new educated Bürgertum, 63 expanded slowly during the course of the eighteenth-century, gaining momentum in its second half, but not really reaching into the lowest orders of society until the nineteenth-century. Change was slow in coming, both in terms of reform and the development of a politically self-conscious mass of "citizens." One cannot speak of a general Bürgertum as carrier of the Aufklärung, rather only specific parts of it here and there, coupled with the not inconsiderable efforts of individual members of the nobility. 64

German society remained paternalistic, based on notions of natural hierarchy, an aristocracy of the educated and well-to-do, and noble/patriarchal authority within a household economy. 65 German political philosophy mirrored this situation by entertaining an ancient notion of "civil society"--a primarily political grouping of citizens who were masters of their
own socio-economic unit, the oikos or household, which could include women, slaves, tenants, day-labourers, etc. With the breakup of the noble/patriarchal household and the onset of privatized socio-economic relations, and the concomitant rationalization and centralization of political authority, the term "civil society" came to be applied (first in the writings of Hegel) to the non-political, primarily economic realm of society.\textsuperscript{66}

This transition, slow and uneven, was accompanied by the emergence of what Habermas termed a "bourgeois public sphere" (bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit), or public sphere of burgher-citizens,\textsuperscript{67} in which private individuals articulated their interests, and which thus mediated between an emerging civil society and the state. But all of this occurred later in Germany than elsewhere in Europe; during the middle of the eighteenth-century and in the decades thereafter this sort of common public sphere, along with a general sense of "state-citizen" (Staatsbürger) in the modern sense, was only beginning to develop.\textsuperscript{68} The lack of a consciousness of citizenship in a larger socio-political entity went hand-in-hand with the lack of a developed German public sphere, what I will call the "problem of Publikum."\textsuperscript{69}

The first stirrings of a wider political consciousness, clearly tied to an expanding Bürgertum, is normally seen to have begun in Germany in the 1770s. Scholars date the beginning of both liberal and conservative "political currents" in Germany from this time, arguing that modern German Liberalism, in particular, has its roots in the Aufklärung.\textsuperscript{70} But if a larger sense of political identity had begun to emerge, the norm at this time remained one of profound divisions—between estates, regions, and even cultures, i.e. the proliferation of dialects and the use of French and Latin among nobles and academics.\textsuperscript{71} The widest gulf existed between the cultured classes of nobility and upper-middle groups of academics, clerics, and administrators, on the one hand, and the large number of farmers, handworkers, labourers and other members of the lowest orders of society. In the middle stood a variously figured burgher (Bürger) order, a term which could describe everyone from the most elevated members of towns and cities to the totality of
town- and city-dwellers in contrast to people living and working on the land. The Bürgertum was hence neither a class nor a "bourgeoisie," being composed of heterogenous layers and groupings within society.\textsuperscript{72}

An important social development in the Aufklärung, one that can be seen in part as a response to the heterogeneity and lack of a common socio-political culture in the Germanies, was the emergence of various enlightened and patriotic societies, reading circles, and clubs. These organizations were "a special point of crystallization and an important forum for enlightened and reformist discourse and activities, as well as bürgerlich self-discovery and class-formation."\textsuperscript{73} These societies, which began to really grow in number after mid-century, were places in which individuals (mostly men) from the middling and upper orders could meet and interact outside of the existing feudal/religious social structures, on a more or less egalitarian, rational basis. Literary and philosophical discussions served both to educate the individual and foster social development and responsibility. At root, the societies served as "a societal frame, in which the members could begin to find, articulate and propagate their common interests." The societies nurtured a "discursive sociability" that stood outside of traditional, corporate structures, allowing the new Bürgertum which composed these societies to begin to fashion a self-understanding drawn from the norms of modern science, the Enlightenment, and burgher morality. On the other hand, most members did not carry this new self-understanding very far beyond the limits of the societies.\textsuperscript{74}

In his path-breaking study of sixty years ago, Ernst Manheim emphasized the importance of these societies and clubs in providing a social basis for the emergence of an enlightened "public" and "public opinion." Manheim argued that these organizations acted both as individuating and socializing agents among the middle and upper orders; and this development was a component in the general process of Vergesellschaftung (society-formation), a "constituent factor" of the modern age.\textsuperscript{75} Although the net effect of these "secondary societies" should not be overestimated,\textsuperscript{76} it is appropriate to view them as
important examples of the interpenetration of Enlightenment and social
development; first steps toward the creation of a wider socio-political
culture and the rise of a German public sphere, a more united, universal forum
that would help overcome the particularly German "problem of Publikum."

Another important feature of the Aufklärung was its religious, primarily
Protestant, cast. Unlike in France, where a certain degree of irreligion
informed the Enlightenment movement, in Germany "enlightenment and piety went
hand in hand." In northern areas, the Aufklärung became a kind of
Protestant lay theology which drew upon the philosophy of the universities and
Lutheran doctrines reinvigorated by Pietism, without being reducible to
them. Pietism played an important role in the reformist measures undertaken
by Friedrich Wilhelm I in early eighteenth-century Prussia; pietism
"powerfully reinforced and helped legitimate [his] fundamental restructuring
of the administrative, military and economic life of his kingdom," by
inculcating obedience, personal morality and discipline, and unconditional
service to the state in the population at large. Rationalist Prussian
theologians and church leaders were essentially public servants of Prussian
reformist absolutism, with their emphasis on tolerance, duty, practical piety
and the devotion to the common good. The generally utilitarian cast of the
Protestant Enlightenment in the Germanies worked well within the existing
socio-political framework: individual self-realization was understood to occur
within a hierarchically structured, paternalistic social milieu.

Although this sense of religious submission to worldly authorities is
clearly traceable to the teachings of Martin Luther, the close relationship
between Protestantism, particularly, and "enlightened absolutism" really took
shape in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War. The social disciplining of
the population through the paternalistic authority of territorial sovereigns
and church authorities now expanded more fully because it met with less
resistance. This had a permanent impact on the social and political
consciousness of the German people, giving rise to "those habits of servility,
of appeal to authority, and of an absent public spirit that was so apparent to
foreign visitors and German critics in the eighteenth-century."

If the Aufklärung was unique in the degree to which religious and paternalistic values reinforced each other, it was also original in its accommodation with cameralism (a German form of mercantilism or statist economic policy), a relationship supported by the sort of Christian social discipline described above. Although "enlightened absolutism" in the Germanies was neither as enlightened nor as absolute as many have thought, aspects of the Aufklärung and the cameralism of absolutist regimes were mutually reinforcing.

But although it is right to assert that absolutism was accepted by most philosophes and Aufklärer, it would be misleading to imply that individuals like Lessing, Abbt and especially Herder were particularly supportive of, or oriented towards, absolutist regimes. Such individuals, as part of a rising class of educated burghers (das gebildete Bürgertum), struggled to help give rise to a public sphere of activity that was eventually to eclipse the tight relationship between church, educated elites, and absolutist regimes. Thus although a pietistically reinvigorated Protestantism was central to the Aufklärung, it will not play a large role in this story because the emergence of a German public sphere in large part represented a gradual shift away from religious and other entrenched bases of authority—which were mutually-reinforcing elements of the prevailing absolutist system—towards an authority rooted in the "enlightened," rational or intuitive social processes of the Publikum itself.

This shift occurred only in fits and starts, however, and for the most part the middling and upper orders maintained a fragmented and ambivalent position in German society. If for example a new order of educated burghers began to take positions within state/princely bureaucracies, the church, and universities, and hence represented a new class of relatively independent-minded individuals, on the other hand it was a portion of the third estate that was largely dependent upon the ruling elites. At centuries' end, Freiherr von Knigge put the matter this way: "In what consists the larger part
of our tiers-etat? In those who serve princes: councillors, secretaries, bureaucrats, officials...advocates, doctors and the like, all of whom live more or less on the crumbs which fall from the master's table."86 Most large merchants and manufacturers were in close contact with the state and nobility, while Kaufleute, or those of middling status engaged in commerce, as well as most other traditional burghers, remained for the most part rather pious, reserved, and narrowly literate in the eighteenth-century.87

The academic estate (Gelehrtenstand) existed somewhat apart from the traditional burgher orders and consisted primarily of university professors, lawyers, jurists, clerics, administrators and the like. Although there had been movement between the middling burgher orders and the Gelehrtenstand since the beginning of the eighteenth-century, it remained a relatively specialized and inward-looking strata of German society; the works of Aufklärer like Lessing, Abbt and Herder were informed with the desire to mediate between this high-flown academic estate--and by extension the Republic of Letters--and the middling and even lower orders of German society. Friedrich Nicolai, Abbt's friend and publisher, wrote in 1773 that the "little Volk" of 20,000 academics "ignores the other 20,000,000 (Germans)...so heartily, that it can hardly gather the energy to write anything for them; and when it does, the result smells so much of the study that no one will touch it."88 Abbt had made similar sorts of comments a decade earlier.89 Thus the opening up of the "Republic of Letters" and the turn towards Publikum had just begun in the third quarter of the eighteenth-century.90

Another important contextual factor is the existence of the Holy Roman Empire as a constitutional framework for German society. By the end of the eighteenth-century the Empire remained, if not much else, a cultural and spiritual point of reference in German socio-political thought, the one universal entity which protected a fundamental set of "German" values, most importantly the constitutional condition which allowed a good measure of local autonomy and individualized forms of expression.91 The Empire has been referred to in this regard as a "constitutional incubator," which in allowing
and even demanding a certain weakness in individual polities, created a relatively stable environment for the growth of highly individualized "hometowns."\textsuperscript{92} If there was a structure present which served to unify all German-speakers, it did so only in the context of providing basic conditions for Germanic diversity.

\textit{Print Culture and the "Public Writer"}

One of the most significant developments in the \textit{Aufklärung} and in the rise of a German public sphere was the expansion, particularly from the mid-eighteenth century, in printed literature of all kinds, and the concomitant emergence of what I will call the "public writer." No other trends did more to establish at least the promise of a common German socio-intellectual form of life, something that could transcend the particularity of the Germanies and serve as the foundation for a common political culture. Part and parcel of this growth in printed literature was the spread of the Enlightenment, a loose consensus of assumptions and beliefs that transcended national and religious boundaries.\textsuperscript{93} Lessing, Abbt and Herder worked as \textit{Aufklärer} within this context of an expanding print culture, and in many respects were involved in the shaping of a broader German \textit{Publikum} as a function of that culture; as such they pioneered the role of the "public writer."

There were both quantitative and qualitative changes in German literary production during the course of the eighteenth-century. Although firm figures are elusive, it is clear that total literary production grew significantly, particularly from mid-century. It is estimated that two-thirds of the 175,000 book titles produced in the eighteenth-century appeared after 1760.\textsuperscript{94} Moral weeklies patterned after the English models of the \textit{Spectator} and \textit{Tatler} flourished during the earlier part of the century into the 1760s,\textsuperscript{95} while a range of new literary, philosophical and even political journals were published during the second half of the century, Lessing's \textit{Briefe, die neueste...
Litteratur betreffend (1759) being an early example of this trend.\textsuperscript{96}

Novels began to be read more widely in Germany from the 1720s on, with a large increase beginning around 1740. Reading societies began to flourish around 1760, as bürgerlich readers began to read much more widely and extensively. The commercialization of literature during the second half of the century led to an increase in the power of writers and publishers to give rise to audiences for their materials and to shape the literary field. The number of writers (Schriftsteller) rose dramatically during the latter decades of the century; it is commonly held that they doubled in number between 1770 and 1790, to around 7000. Yet "The difficulties of developing and bringing to fruition a national and bürgerlich literary programme, in view of...[the prevailing] political and social conditions, are evident. The territorial and social fragmentation of authorship repeated itself in Publikum."\textsuperscript{97} Thus the problem of a fragmented, elusive Publikum must be kept in mind as an obstacle which was not easily, nor by any means immediately, overcome.

Probably the most significant early development which prepared the ground for the emergence of an enlightened German Publikum, however imperfect, was the rise of the moral weekly (moralische Wochenschrift). Many Aufklärer, including Abbt and Lessing, wrote for them at some point in their career, and the growth of the genre, beginning around 1720 and flourishing from 1740-1760, reflected the emergence of bürgerlich public consciousness and growing public participation in the Enlightenment. Patterned particularly after the English Spectator, the moral weeklies initiated the process whereby "virtue" was slowly detached from a more or less private, Christian identity, and given more of a this-worldly, public character. Broad, middling segments of primarily Protestant areas were addressed, by the 100-200 titles which appeared in the course of the eighteenth-century, as equals by fictive characters who preached a practical, community-oriented sense of virtue in simple language.\textsuperscript{98}

The fictive authorship of the periodicals allowed all sorts of new and interesting dynamics to develop; anonymity allowed readers to be addressed
intimately, without embarrassment, as individuals who had public significance. Individuals not used to self-representation in an essentially egalitarian public sphere could encounter one another free of traditional restraints. The moral weeklies were thus important early instruments of both individual and social formation, particularly among the new educated (gebildete) Bürgertum.\textsuperscript{99}

Their originality in this is easily overlooked because of the genre's flat and blandly repetitious character. They were the first periodicals to engage women to any degree, indeed some of them were written primarily for a female audience. Those who argue that the bourgeois public sphere was predicated upon the exclusion of women must come to grips with the fact that the most significant early German form of bürgerlich public discourse had a decidedly feminine cast, and assumed that both sexes would be involved in it. The genre's novelty in publicly addressing issues formerly encompassed by Christian piety and paternalistic obedience was recognized early on by individuals opposed to Hamburg's Patriot, who asked by what right it set itself up as a "disciplinarian" (Zuchtmeister) over "private" affairs that should be governed by pastors and civil authorities. In beginning to bridge the historical chasm between learned and unlearned readers, the moral weeklies pioneered the development of an "educated common language" (gebildete Gemeinsprache) and a broad literary public.\textsuperscript{100}

The moral weeklies helped give rise to a receptive German reading public for the genre of the moral-sentimental novel that began to appear in the 1740s, and is associated with Richardson's Pamela (1740). Translations of English and French works of this type began to be read by the educated Bürgertum as well as members of the nobility, until German literature began to come into its own in the 1770s. By this time the previous division between noble-courtly literature and other forms had dissolved, leaving an expanded (both in terms of numbers and sensibility) novel-reading public encompassing the educated Bürgertum as well as the nobility.\textsuperscript{101}

Rolf Engelsing speaks about the change in reading habits which took
place from mid-century onward in terms of a movement from "intensive" to "extensive" reading and the development of the secular, individual imagination. Writers like Klopstock (1724-1803) and Gellert (1715-1769) were transitional figures in German literature who appealed to the middling classes with a mixture of devotional and non-religious subject matter in a language that those without a strong educational background could understand. The general trend in literary production was unmistakable: the percentage of theological or devotional works declined steadily over the course of the century, while various forms of more worldly literature, including philosophy and belles-lettres, began to command an increased share of the market.102

This change in reading habits signalled a fundamental change in self-understanding; individuals from the middling orders began to break out of traditional religious and paternalistic channels and to cultivate themselves in more aesthetic, philosophical and imaginative ways. But if highly intelligent and educated individuals like Lessing, Abbt and Herder exemplified this trend already in the third quarter of the century, it only began to occur in any widespread sense during its last decades.103

The emergence of such an expanded, literary "bürgerlich intelligence" and the "free writer" in the later eighteenth-century has been a focus of interest for some scholars. But whereas studies done from this perspective tend to focus on the formation and "emancipation" of an enlightened Bürgertum and on the "free writer," the present study will look at these developments in terms of an expanding, problematic Publikum, and the emergence of the "public writer." The difference is subtle but consequential, allowing for the inclusion of wider social strata in the analysis, and recognizing that the "free writer" was more of an ideal than a reality.

Hans Gerth's Bürgerliche Intelligenz um 1800 (1935, 1976), still a useful work on the topic, was in many ways a precursor to Habermas's work. Working within the continental sociological tradition, Gerth charted the rise of bürgerlich "intelligence" in terms of both a growing dichotomy between "Gemeinschaft" and "Gesellschaft" (Tönnies), and the development of an
increasingly politicized, mass press, particularly at the end of the century. Middle-order life came to be divided between the intimate family and public activity, as a more national, "emancipative" literature began to emerge. Diverse types of newspapers were gradually replaced by more universal ones which addressed a wide range of cultural-political questions, some of the most important examples being Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur*, Schlözer's *Staatsanzeiger*, *Das deutsche Museum*, and the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Through the press and the emergence of public opinion as a force to be reckoned with at the end of the century, the burgher orders began to cohere into a self-conscious middle class in which hierarchical divisions were levelled, and the slogans of "freedom" and "liberty"—early liberalism—began to be heard.104

This story-line, though useful, is overly optimistic and teleological. In looking forward to the rise of modern, liberal culture it glosses over the static nature of German life, and the tensions and contradictions between liberal "progress" and the everyday social and political realities faced by Germans. Thus although the press, for example, did take on many of the attributes cited above, writers often overvalued the practical effects of their writings.105 If a certain politicization of the German Enlightenment did begin to occur in the later eighteenth-century via the periodical press and the emergence of an educated reading public and public opinion, the valuation of these entities depended upon one's perspective, and political decisions were still left up to the supposed rational judgement of princes.106 And as will be discussed further below, the notions of Publikum and public opinion were problematical, to say the least, during the second half of the century.

One of the more important recent works that tells the story of the rise of bürgerlich "intelligence" and free writers is Hans Haferkorn's "Zur Entstehung der bürgerlich-literarischen Intelligenz und des Schriftstellers in Deutschland zwischen 1750 und 1800" (1974). But although Haferkorn's detailed study raises a number of central questions concerning the role of the writer and the emergence of a German reading public, his Marxist orientation and emphasis on individual development and "emancipation" obscure some basic
issues. Haferkorn details what has long been a cliché of the later eighteenth-century German literary and philosophical scene: writers and thinkers, increasingly detached from the traditional corporate order, compensated for the lack of an effective socio-political identity by turning inward and developing an apolitical, aesthetic-philosophical sense of "innerness" (Innerlichkeit) which expressed the longings and ambivalent position of an emerging educated, upwardly-mobile Bürgertum. The "free writer" and this new Publikum maintained an ambivalent relationship: the new class of educated burghers produced a new form of writer that expressed the feelings of that class, yet these writers were "homeless" individuals who were not really respected by the Bürgertum, which was basically animated by a desire for material gain.¹⁰⁷

The main problem with this kind of analysis is that the base-superstructure model contributes to a mechanical separation of "society" and "intelligence," the former determining the latter, which for its part is left to flounder in an apolitical realm of abstraction where it never quite attains a stable role or identity. While there is much to be said for seeing later eighteenth-century literary intelligence, particularly, in this light, this perspective tends to obscure the relationship between intellectual and material culture, leaving little room for the power of language and modes of thought—both traditional and novel—to address and shape, indeed to constitute, social and political realities.¹⁰⁸

One cannot doubt the existence, broadly speaking, of a mutually-related process of social and literary development in eighteenth-century Germany, and that the "enlightenment" of wider sections of the population (primarily the "elevated" Bürgertum) was part and parcel of this process. It is typically seen to have occurred in phases, corresponding roughly to the first and second halves of the century, with a middle "Lessing" or "saddle" period occupying the third quarter. The latter decades of the century witnessed a phenomenal explosion of epochal literary and philosophical works, and normally receives the most attention in discussions of the German Enlightenment; that has often
resulted in a view of the Aufklärung as being a grand movement of ideas and the imagination, which it certainly in part was. But as Enlightenment literature is being increasingly interpreted in more concrete ways that pay attention to its social and political valences,\textsuperscript{109} earlier moments in the process of socio-intellectual development take on increased importance, not least because intellectual content had not yet developed to such dizzying heights of abstraction or aesthetic contemplation, heights from which it can be difficult to assess the contours of the land below. By focusing on roughly the third quarter of the eighteenth-century, seen by some as "the most important developmental step" in the national literature of the Aufklärung,\textsuperscript{110} it may be possible to gain a clearer view of some of the fundamental socio-political issues involved.

Werner Rieck has provided a broad developmental schema of the two earlier periods of the Aufklärung as a socio-literary phenomenon, exemplifying the accepted story-line of the rise of bürgerlich intelligence and the "free writer." The period 1720-1750 is characterized as an era of slow consolidation and stabilization of German literature, with J.C. Gottsched appearing as a seminal figure who helped open a broader national forum for literary discussion. At this time there was no social position for the "free writer," or someone who was not attached and hence subservient to a court or some other political body. Rieck argues that Gottsched's classicist literary programme, sometimes denigrated as an obstacle to the rise of a truly "German" literature, was crucial in overcoming a court-oriented literature and directing attention towards the moral and intellectual concerns of the Bürgertum, and helped to advance an ideal of sociability that transcended corporate barriers.\textsuperscript{111}

By the period 1750-1770 the process began to quicken, as "for the first time in modern literary history the striving to employ literature in the social-intellectual war of liberation (Befreiungskampf) became visible." The ideal of the "free writer" began to emerge at this time; Lessing, Klopstock, and Wieland were leading representatives of this literary phase, and were
united in a "common striving for the literary mastery/overcoming of reality (literarischen Bewältigung der Wirklichkeit)." Decisive aesthetic and philosophical-scientific debates began to be broached within a national frame, and many of these concerns were directed to "the constitutive forces of the nation, the bürgerlich strata." Literature began to take on a socially-realistic, reformist, anti-feudal cast, even if it didn't confront absolutism directly. The emerging literature of the Sturm und Drang represented a revolutionary example of the turn towards the lower orders and a growing sense of individuality. Despite a number of qualifications, the narrative structure of Rieck's work, and others like it, conveys a progressive development of bürgerlich "intelligence," social understanding, and so on.\footnote{112}

While useful and in many ways accurate, this approach needs to be balanced by taking greater account of the hesitant, one-step-forward, two-steps-back nature of eighteenth-century German society, and the role that obstacles like the "problem of Publikum" played in enlightened literary discourse. Thus the literary movement of Sturm und Drang, for example, is not easily reducible to any sort of progressive developmental model. Scholars have asked, "How revolutionary was the drama of the Sturm und Drang?"\footnote{113} If its connections to the Aufklärung are becoming increasingly evident, it nevertheless remained a movement full of contradictions, in which democratic impulses existed side-by-side with a pronounced sense of distance from the common people and the socio-political realities of everyday German life.\footnote{114} This is not to say that the striving towards individual expression, autonomy, and wholeness was not indicative of changes under way; a symbolic interactionist perspective leads one to expect new forms of individuality and self-expression to emerge in tandem with social development. Rather, the point is to be careful not to view such forms of behaviour solely in terms of individual or collective "emancipation," be it liberal or Marxist.\footnote{115}

The inherent difficulty of basing analysis on the model of middle-order emancipation is nowhere more evident than in the figure of the "free writer;" for while it may have been an ideal that had resonance then and now, it is
well known that the reality was far removed from the ideal. Lessing himself, often seen as symbolizing the new persona, was not able to realize an independent literary life; nearly all writers of the Aufklärung depended upon institutional support or some kind of paid position to sustain themselves. Instead of talking about the "free" writer and the "emancipation of the burgher-citizen (bürgerliche Emanzipation)," it may be more useful to speak about the hesitant, problematic rise of a Publikum and public sphere, and the appearance of the "public writer" who was involved in its formation and contestation.

The "public" that was addressed was increasingly seen to be a German one. German writers began, around 1750, to turn away from a rationalist, universalist, and (decidedly French) classicist literary model to one based more upon eliciting and answering to "German" character and personality. Under the influence of figures like Du Bos, Blackwell, and Montesquieu, writers like J.E. Schlegel, Herder and Lessing began to reorient literature away from courtly, French models and towards types of writing that appealed more to the German middle orders and an emerging German Publikum. The Seven-Years War (1756-63) may have been a decisive moment in which a new sense of national culture and identity began to emerge; it dovetailed with the growing sense that cultural forms varied according to a wide range of particular circumstances like climate, geography, institutions, mores and customs.

The turn towards Publikum in the third quarter of the century was thus informed both by a sense of rivalry with other national traditions (particularly the French), and by some of the most innovative terms and ideas emerging from the selfsame European arena, conceived most broadly as the Republic of Letters. Besides offering a model of enlightened sociability that could be translated into more mundane contexts, this republic provided a rich intellectual fund which informed emerging notions of a specifically "German" literature and Publikum.
A Problematic Publikum

The term "Publikum" (spelled with either a "c" or a "k") derived from the Latin "publicus," and gained currency from its French derivation "le public" and the English "publick." The term went from having an early-modern connotation of princely authority--the "realm" of the prince, the addressees of edicts--to a broader usage by the 1760s connoting an audience composed primarily of an emerging educated Bürgertum: an audience of readers, concert- or theatre-goers that served as a judge in aesthetic and literary matters. At the same time, the term retained an older political meaning of "the public thing" (res publicae), the body of citizens or "Volk," or the state as an abstract whole. Thus there were a number possible usages of the term, which would have been available in ancient texts of Roman law and oratory, Humanist texts from the Renaissance, and early modern jurisprudential literature, among other sources.\(^{118}\)

The term only began to gain broad currency in Germany during the second half of the eighteenth-century; at that time it began finding its way into the emerging genre of German dictionaries that attempted to impose some order on the language, a language which had begun in the early part of the century to come into its own as an educated form of social intercourse.\(^{119}\) The sense of a German "public" thus emerged in concert with the development of the German language, the rise of an educated Bürgertum, and the growth of a national print culture, as outlined in the previous sections of this chapter.

This simultaneous intellectual and social development manifested itself "in the emergence of a new concept of social community, that corresponded to neither the political concept of 'state' or 'commonwealth' (Gemeinwesen), nor the traditional designations for the multitudes, like 'parish' (Gemeinde) or 'people' (Volk): the concept of 'Publikum.'" Despite being open to a number of possible meanings, the new term by and large carried with it, at first, a sense of literary audience, and later, by the end of the century, a more overtly political meaning as well. "Öffentlichkeit" (openness, publicity) was
a term which emerged more or less in tandem with "Publikum," appearing by the end of the century as the adjective in "public opinion" (öffentliches Meinung), and by the twentieth century coming to displace Publikum itself as a substantive which could mean "the public."  

With this broad outline in mind, it is helpful to turn to a few contemporary accounts to understand the varied meanings and instability of the term Publikum, a figure which reflected--and worked back upon--an emerging yet mysterious, highly fragmented German public. It is difficult to find much of a discussion about Publikum before mid-century, but an interesting and suggestive usage of the Latin "Publico" in a German text appears at the end of the seventeenth-century, in a book by the jurist and philosopher Christian Thomasius. In the dedication to his 1691 Einleitung zur Vernunftlehre, Thomasius states that he feels the Bürgermeister Stegern is capable of deciding controversies in light of the law of nature and peoples, as well as that of the "Juris Publici" (public law or right, printed in Roman characters). Otherwise there is no mention in the text of Publikum as a specific German entity, Thomasius employing terms like "jedermann" (everyone), "jeder Menschen," (every human being), and "gemein" (common) to refer to any sort of social collective. Thomasius's use of "Publico" stems quite clearly from jurisprudential writings, and is employed only in a broad, abstract-legal sense.  

But the notion of the public as being a judge, a bearer of law or right, or a court of appeal, was to appear often in later German references, and indicates the deep juridical roots of the term.

The earliest extended reflection on the notion of Publikum which I have come across is an essay entitled "Das Publicum" by Friedrich Carl von Moser, written in 1755; the essay quite probably appeared in a small journal that Moser was editing at the time in Frankfurt am Main. Moser, like Thomasius, was a jurist and hence conversant with a wide range of legal writings; he worked as a high-level bureaucrat and princely advisor, and he is known as a man of letters and a proponent of a conception of a renewed Empire.  

Moser was also a staunch Pietist, and his treatise indicates this in its mistrust of
the Publicum as any final sort of judge for human actions.

Moser's essay is important as an early attempt to come to grips with a term which was only then emerging; the essay can be seen as a bridge between usage of "public" as a term of jurisprudence, and as connoting an evolving sociological entity. He starts the essay grandly:

The most important person in the world, and at the same time the greatest martyr of all time, is the Publicum. The monarch appeals to its tribunal, the academic seeks its protection, the merchant is its mentor, the righteous one relies on its insight, and the hypocrite hides behind its weakness... The tyrant comforts his pangs of conscience with the applause of the public, the oppressed sigh for its sympathy, and the Christian alone is in the position to step before it with a true and unfeigned, but nobly indifferent respectfulness.\textsuperscript{123}

He goes on to define Publicum as "the whole of humankind together, or, if one wants to define it more narrowly, the inhabitants of every state together compose a general public." This is related to terms like "polity" or "commonwealth" (gemeine Wesen), and "common good" (gemeine Beste, gemeine Wohlfahrt). He narrows the term further to mean all those people who are especially interested in events of general significance, or who have either the education or the position to judge of the reasons behind such matters. Thus it follows that "every leading class and type of human beings (Haupt-Classe und Gattung der Menschen) compose their own public."\textsuperscript{124}

Moser departs further from a specific sociological conception of the "public" by talking about the Publicum of the sovereign, which is mainly his posterity, but in times of war can include everyone down to the "common man," who must be consulted in such matters. The German "Reichs-Publicum" is composed, in such eventualities particularly, of the whole range of subjects, regardless of their social position. Here Moser is clearly trying to advance a holistic, patriotic, and inclusive notion of the Empire.\textsuperscript{125}

The essay then moves into a consideration of Latin legal terms like Salus publica, Bonum publicum, and Securitas publica, terms which are clearly tied into his notion of the Empire and his research into the "German Constitution." He quotes Hugo Grotius in Latin on Publicum, and notes that all of the above terms can receive a number of definitions.\textsuperscript{126} The essay
lapses at many points into vagueness, the only certainty being that the term Publicum carries with it a certain variability in meaning, depending upon whom one is talking about. The essay climaxes with a point that Moser does make clearly: the search for public esteem is a "sickness," the truly wise man fulfilling his duties out of a virtuous and loving heart, without hunger for praise and fame. Christians have higher calling than to live for worldly applause.127

The essay points in a number of directions, and indicates the openness of "Publicum" to a wide variety of definitions. Moser draws upon jurisprudential usages of the term, and his main points seem to contradict each other: he wants to give a particular purchase to Publicum as relating to the Empire as a whole, yet it can also mean any number of smaller polities, and in the final analysis is an entity whose esteem the true Christian avoids. This last point is crucial, because it points to the fact that the emerging figure of the public represented a new, secular point of reference for behaviour, one which threatened traditional ideological bases of conduct. And Moser points to an emerging sense of the public as being composed of the educated strata of society, those people able to decide for themselves what is actually going on. But in the end the term is left open to a number of possible meanings, and can be used in reference to the whole spectrum of humanity. Like Lessing, Abbt, and Herder, Moser's conception of Publikum is not necessarily tied only to the emerging educated Bürgertum, a fact which points to the need to conceptualize the emergence of the German public sphere in terms broader than that of the emancipation of the burgher-citizen (bürgerliche Emanzipation).

Another early reflection on Publikum was written by the poet F.G. Klopstock, a figure who is typically seen as one of the early pioneers of an indigenous German literature. Klopstock, writing in 1758, argued that it is necessary to distinguish the "Publico" from the "multitudes" (große Haufen), especially when the latter wants to assume that it is part of the Publico. Writing primarily of a literary public, Klopstock maintained that "The actual Publicum consists overall of fewer members than many think, who would gladly
count themselves part of it." Klopstock divides the "true" Publicum into two categories--judges (Richter) and connoisseurs (Kenner), who together arbitrate in matters of aesthetic taste. Klopstock narrows the field further by referring to multiple "Publici," according to the particular sort of cultural activity.\textsuperscript{128}

Klopstock's short essay shows that the term was unstable, and was being applied to a growing sector of the reading public; for him, the primary frame of reference was literary. He seems irritated by the possibility that the term could be used to refer to the totality of a growing readership, and the essay seems aimed at contesting this possibility, with a view towards giving the term a rather exclusive sense--otherwise true "taste" is going to be impaired.

When not the direct object of reflection, "Publikum" was used typically in reference to a reading audience, for example in the preface to C.F. Gellert's \textit{Moral Lectures} (1770): "We hereby deliver to the public a work of the blessed Gellert."\textsuperscript{129} Gellert's "public" was wider than most, however, including lower-middle burghers and women, and had a religious and moral cast to it. Three years after his death in 1769, he was honoured for not being a writer for academics, rather as "a writer for the Publikum, teacher of pure virtue and innocent, simple taste to his nation."\textsuperscript{130} Here common social and moral concerns, instead of educated, aesthetic ones, provide the frame of reference for Publikum, one quite at odds with Klopstock's.

In a work published ten years after Klopstock's essay, the satirist and critic F.J. Riedel developed further the notion of a literary public that served as final arbiter in aesthetic matters, arguing that "Out of the harmonising voices of tasteful readers the voice of the Publicum rings in unison."\textsuperscript{131} But Riedel's characterization of the current status of Publicum in German literary circles points to the multi-valency of the term and the lack of an easily identifiable entity which corresponded to it:

\textit{From all sides the word "Publicum" sounds in my ears, and I hear so many peculiar things said about our dear German Publicum that I have almost begun to have strange thoughts about it myself. One person praises it, because he believes it has praised him; another}
rebukes it because it did not choose to honour him; a third doesn't know where it is, and a fourth begins to doubt if it exists at all.  

Riedel's confusion is understandable. During the second half of the century, educated treatises increasingly appealed to a strengthened Publikum "whose interest was presupposed and sought, and whose taste and critical judgement was assumed," thus becoming an almost mythical "golden calf" of the Aufklärung.  

It was just such a quasi-fictive entity that C.M. Wieland addressed in 1773, in the foreword to the first volume of his influential journal Der Teutsche Merkur. Wieland there seems intent on crafting a notion of a Publikum that is high-minded and critical yet fair, a tribunal of enlightened readers which, although often misled in the short term, eventually makes the right judgement on literary matters. Wieland refers to the public both as a worthy audience for good journalism, and as a non-partisan court of appeal, of which the Merkur is only the organ — "the Publicum alone is the judge."

In short, we wish to acquire for the Teutsche Merkur the regard accorded to the Athenian Areopagus, which was not based on compulsion but rather on the glory of wisdom and integrity, and was hence so firmly grounded that the Gods themselves would not hesitate to let their disputes be decided in front of this honorable senate.

Wieland's appeal is clearly responding to the fact that, in his view, 

The learned republic in Germany has for some time now taken on the shape of a tumultuous democracy, in which anyone who has something in his craw, or doesn't have anything better to do, thrusts himself forward as a speaker, speaks good or ill about matters of state, and, when it can't happen because of merit, he makes himself important through intrigues, cabals, and rakish schemes.  

The foreword thus has two sides; on the one hand Wieland criticizes what he sees to be a growing field of chaotic, partisan speakers, and a Publicum that often rewards mediocre works and ignores what is truly good, while on the other hand he puts forward his own, high-minded notion of Publicum, which his journal is going to seek to foster. It is worth noting that he points to the English as being further along than the Germans in coming to a unitary, non-partisan viewpoint on literary matters, and he cites Pope's "Essay on Criticism" as a programmatic statement of the Merkur's editorial policy.
Wieland's foreword illustrates many of the ambivalent features of Publikum, as both a concept and a growing sociological entity, in third quarter-century Germany. He acknowledges that the reading public is becoming "daily more numerous," yet he laments, as did many others at the time, the fragmented nature of the Germanies and the lack of a common German "centre:"

We have no capital, which could serve as a general academy of the nation's virtuosi and the lawgiver of taste. We have no permanent national theater; our best actors, writers, poets and artists are strewn throughout all the regions of the German Empire, and are in large part robbed of the advantages of closer contact and the sharing of insights, judgments, proposals, etc., which would contribute much to the perfection of their work.\(^{136}\)

He goes on to state that the Merkur will attempt to present a truly "national" perspective, one which will help to enrich the artistic fund of the "nation." The "nation" is inadvertently identified with the "Publico," as that body capable of judging works as to their (national) value.\(^{137}\) Thus although Wieland's musings are framed primarily in terms of literary-aesthetic matters, they take on a certain proto-political quality, a sense that German-speakers need to be brought together into a common forum of discussion; a forum which would, over time, take on a more overtly political self-understanding.

Wieland's acknowledgement of a splintered, problematical Publikum--an entity that was not only disunited, but open to being manipulated by rakes and misled by a range of partisan concerns--and his attempt to shape the term according to rational precepts and judicial models, illustrates both the nature of what I am calling the "problem of Publikum," and the way in which that problematical status led to attempts rhetorically to constitute and contest Publikum. Riedel's essay displayed much the same character, as he too acknowledged the basic "problem:"

Where is that Publicum whose utterance counts, and serves to determine the value and ranking of a writer? Is it in a city or province? in Berlin, in Leipzig, in Copenhagen, or in Zurich? Hardly! We have no common capital city; no middle-point, in which the core of our best heads are gathered, on whose final judgement the periphery waits; Germany is a realm divided into multiple provinces, which exist for themselves and have their own interests, which often go against that of the whole...\(^{138}\)

Hence the basic problem: the public was emerging as a figure of some interest, but where was it to be found? It appeared to be more of a rhetorical figure
than anything. One doesn't have to look hard for evidence that this problem was widely recognized; Hamann, Abbt, Herder, and even Justus Möser made similar utterances about it around this time. Most contemporary scholars point out the basic problems of a lack of a socio-cultural centre of German life, and its fragmented and diverse character, but the "problem of Publikum," as I am calling it, has not been explored deeply as a key factor in enlightened intellectual production. By the end of the century, when the number of writers and publicists had doubled from mid-century to around 7000, Georg Forster could still complain;

Sure we have 7000 writers, but that aside, just as we have no common German spirit, so there is no German public opinion. Indeed these words are so new, so strange, that everyone pushes forward their own definitions and explanations; while no Englishman misunderstands another who speaks of "public spirit," no Frenchman misunderstands another when the talk is of "opinion publique." In 1785 Johann Wilhelm von Archenholtz had made a similar comparison between Germany and England; and a quarter-century later Madame de Stael famously insisted on the backward character of German public life, and its effect on works of the imagination:

Only a few basic characteristics are held in common by the entire German nation, for the diversities of this country are such that one is at a loss to combine from one viewpoint religions, governments, climates, and even peoples so different...This domain had no common centre of enlightenment and public spirit; it was not a solid nation, for the separate elements were not tied together. This division of Germany, fatal to her political influence, was nevertheless very favorable to all efforts of talent and imagination.

While de Staël was right about the basic "problem of Publikum," her insight helped to direct attention away from the socio-political valences of works written by enlightened individuals who were confronted with this problem. "Enlightenment," in this context, actually takes on a very practical dimension: the shaping of a public and public sphere of discourse in which it was possible to carry on discerning discussion about matters of common interest.

Some scholars of the Aufklärung are beginning to explore its socio-political dimensions in greater detail, and to draw important connections
between Enlightenment, the growth in print culture, the rise of a public sphere, and processes of politicization, among other things. Ulrich Herrmann and Hans Erich Bodeker, particularly, have urged a reappraisal of the Aufklärung from this perspective, as a highly complex movement of socio-political consciousness-formation that was tied very closely to material realities and events; a comprehensive reform movement which encompassed all aspects of life. The printed word is seen as having been the most important medium of this process, a process of social formation that involved the emergence of an enlightened public.¹⁴⁴

Frederick Beiser has argued similarly that "far from being impractical and apolitical," the Aufklärung was an essentially practical and, broadly speaking, "political" movement. "The fundamental aim of the Aufklärung was to enlighten or educate the public...its objective was the emancipation of the public, its liberation from the shackles of tradition, superstition, and despotism."¹⁴⁵ In working this perspective through his analysis of some of the major figures of the high German Enlightenment, Beiser, like most scholars, concentrates on the last decades of the eighteenth-century and employs a narrative of emancipation. By focusing less on the emancipation of the public, and more on its constitution and contestation, I hope to provide a more nuanced account of what was at work in a process that blended reform with tradition, emancipation with corporatist understandings of society.

In the following chapters I explore this topic in relation to three figures who had much in common, yet were engaged in differing projects, giving the account a focused yet wide-ranging character. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Abbt, and Johann Gottfried Herder were individuals who shared a common north-central German geography and intellectual landscape; and except for the fact that Abbt died too early to learn much if anything about the work of Herder, each knew of and appreciated the other, and moved in orbits with Berlin and the Briefe, die neueste Litterature betreffend roughly at their centre. Lessing, who dominated the German intellectual scene during the third-quarter century, was an important touchstone for both Abbt and Herder.
And the work of Abbt, as I will show, had an enormous—and indeed undervalued—impact on Herder's perspective on the related themes of "Language, Literature, and Publikum."

But although these three individuals had much in common, each was relatively mobile, read widely, and pursued varied concerns and interests. Thus a common thematic will be analyzed in differing yet overlapping socio-intellectual contexts. Each chapter is a separate essay on my chosen figures and their respective domains, yet explores links with the others in a thematic and roughly logical sequence. Chapter Two (Lessing) begins at mid-century and concentrates on drama and aesthetic-literary matters; Chapter Three (Abbt) deals with more overtly social and political themes, and Chapter Four (Herder) brings together the aesthetic-literary with the socio-political themes of the previous two chapters.

Others certainly could have been chosen as subjects for this study; but taken together, the oeuvres of these three prominent writers provide a helpful window onto formative stages of the Aufklärung and the emergence and figuration of an enlightened German public. In the concluding chapter I relate the themes and figures explored to some of the later and more well-known musings on the public sphere, including those of Immanuel Kant. By doing this I hope to show that such reflection on the "public" and public sphere was built upon a discourse which had roots in the third-quarter century and the work of seminal figures like Lessing, Abbt and Herder.

It might be objected that given the fractured and highly diverse nature of German life, it is problematic to talk about a German "problem of Publikum" or to see Lessing, Abbt, and Herder as in any way representative of a wider thematic. There are several ways to answer this objection. One is to point out, as I have, that these figures had a broad intellectual perspective and were highly mobile. Another is to indicate that "the problem of Publikum" was one of the few things that these sorts of figures had in common. It seems cogent to argue, as Mack Walker has done in the case of German "hometowns," that the dispersed nature of German life allows one to generalize from that
fact: if nothing else, everyone shared a common experience of disunity and fragmentation. Furthermore, by devoting individual chapters to each person, particular circumstances and individual concerns are given their due, and can be measured in relation to the larger theme. And finally, given the broad trend, documented above, towards a more coherent German public sphere, it seems valid to accept the possibility that individuals in the period under study were in fact groping towards a new forum and a wider vision of German society, and that their activities can be conceptualized as such. In the chapters which follow I demonstrate the ways in which Lessing, Abbt and Herder indeed embodied the new figure of the enlightened "public writer."
NOTES

1. For ease of expression I will at times speak of "Germany," even though it was not a united political entity at this time. The area referred to more or less conforms to the present-day German nation, although central and northern Germany will be the primary loci for analysis.

2. Ferdinand Tönnies, Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung (Berlin, 1922).


5. Ibid., p. 232. The extent of this oversight is plainly evident in Frederick Hertz's The Development of the German Public Mind (1962). Although Hertz makes an otherwise laudable attempt to go beyond the history of high politics, he never analyzes critically his central subject or its genesis, taking the public for granted as a static, trans-historical entity. See Frederick Hertz, The Development of the German Public Mind: A Social History of German Political Sentiments, Aspirations and Ideas (London, 1962).


9. Ibid., pp. 30-31; 25, 38; 16, 50-51.

10. Ibid., p. 25, 57ff, 69ff, 102ff.


12. See, for example, the collection of essays in Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1992). See also La Vopa, "Conceiving a Public." For a recent work that traces the Habermasian theme in early America see Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (Cambridge, Mass, 1990).


15. Ibid., p. 144.


18. The relevance of Mead's social psychology to the present study will be discussed further in the final chapter. My aim in invoking a symbolic interactionist model is to provide a broad conceptual framework for understanding developments during the period under study, rather than to be reductive. Movements like pietism and sentimentalism clearly played a part in the growth in subjectivity and the "inner life," as did the spread of rationalist and "enlightened" modes of thinking. But there is no reason why these well-understood trends can not be integrated into the model I am proposing.


33. Bruce Robbins, "Introduction" to a special issue of *Social Text* on the Public Sphere, no. 25/26 (1990):3.


39. See Nancy Fraser's much reprinted essay, cited above, which draws heavily upon Landes and Eley: "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."


43. Kathryn Shevelow, quoted in Laugero, "Publicity, Gender and Genre," p. 433. Pateman cogently states that "Women have never been completely excluded, of course, from public life; but the way in which women are included is grounded, as firmly as their position in the domestic sphere, in patriarchal beliefs and practices." Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," p. 132.

44. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," p. 67ff. Bovenschen, who generally insists on the exclusionary hypothesis, is forced to admit this very point vis-a-vis the growing number of women writers of domestic fiction in the later eighteenth-century. See Bovenschen, Die imaginerte Weiblichkeit, passim, p. 211. For analysis of some of the first tentative statements of feminist consciousness in later eighteenth-century Germany see Ruth Dawson, "'And this shield is called--self-reliance:' Emerging Feminist Consciousness in the late Eighteenth-Century," in Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes, eds., German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 157-74.


46. See Mead, Mind, Self and Society, pp. 256-57.


48. Klein, Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness, p. 8. For more on Shaftesbury see Chapters 2 & 3 below.


50. Eley, "Rethinking the Political," p. 434.

52. Hellmuth, "'The Palladium of all other English liberties,'" p. 469ff.


54. See Keith M. Baker, Condorcet, as well as his Inventing the French Revolution, chapter 7, "Science and Politics at the end of the Old Regime." Dena Goodman makes a strong case for seeing the Parisian salons as important centres of Enlightenment discourse, in a manner similar to Gordon. See Goodman, The Republic of Letters, Chapters 3 & 4.


60. See for example Michael Maurer, Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland (Göttingen, 1987); Norbert Waszek, The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of 'Civil Society' (Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1988). The impact of French writers like Montesquieu and Rousseau on German social and political thought is well-known. Specific British and French influences on the figures profiled in this study will be detailed in the following chapters.


62. See for example Rudolf Vierhaus, ed., Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im Zeitalter der Aufklärung (Heidelberg, 1981); Kopitzsch, ed., Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland; Hans Geth, Bürgerliche Intelligenz um 1800: Zur Soziologie des deutschen Frühloliberalismus (Göttingen, 1976);
Richard von Düllmann, Der Gesellschaft der Aufklärer: zur Bürgerlichen Emanzipation und aufklärerischen Kultur in Deutschland (Frankfurt am Main, 1986). It is rather difficult to translate the adjectives Bürgerlich and Bürgerlichkeit; they are perhaps best rendered as expressing qualities of an expanding, middling civil order.

63. As Vierhaus points out, this new educated Bürgertum should not be confused with traditional town-dwelling burghers; on the other hand, there were connections between these two groups, and the former shared the traditional burgher "mentality, worldview, and lifestyle." Vierhaus, Germany in the Age of Absolutism, p. 55ff, 84.


67. I will use the term "burgher-citizen" to translate Bürger, which connoted both a middling to upper middling social status and a political identity.


69. As Manfred Riedel has put it, "The particular problematic that characterized the German concept of Bürger (citizen) from the mid-eighteenth-century was caused by the fact that on the fissured surface of the Old Regime an autonomous consciousness of citizenship (Bürgerbewusstsein) could hardly be developed." Manfred Riedel, "Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum," Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe Band 1, p. 686.


71. According to Rudolf Vierhaus, "diversity, tension, and contrariety" characterized the eighteenth-century German scene. Vierhaus, Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert," p. 176. See also Vierhaus, Germany in the Age of Absolutism, p. vii, 68-71; Kopitzsch, "Die Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Aufklärung," passim. In general, both Vierhaus and Kopitzsch emphasize the social, political and cultural fragmentation of the Germanies at this time.

72. Kopitzsch, "Die Sozialgeschichte," pp. 34-37, passim; See also Riedel, "Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum," esp. p. 681ff. The formal, scholarly meaning of Bürger was "citizen," as employed in classical political philosophy.


82. Ibid., p. 112; Vierhaus, *Germany in the Age of Absolutism*, p. 8.

83. For more on cameralism see Vierhaus, *Germany in the Age of Absolutism*, pp. 28-30. Cameralism's object "was to improve the economic infrastructure in the service of higher state revenues. The most significant administrative measures involved increasing population size, industrial production, and exports." Being not only a form of state economic policy, cameralism--German mercantilism--was also a theory of state economic administration. Thus it "placed the administration of the princely estate at its center. The goal was to increase both the revenues of the chamber of accounts, or Rechenkammer, from the princely properties and the legal rights of the territorial prince."


85. As Ingrao does in the case of Lessing. Abbt, as we'll see, did indeed express support and excitement for Frederick the Great during the period of the Seven Years War. This does not mean much, however, given the circumstances of the war and the widespread support for the monarch at that time. Abbt's primary concerns lay elsewhere. See Chapter 3.


99. Ibid., p. 31ff; 150ff.

100. Ibid., p. 102, 141ff.


105. Vierhaus, "Die aufgeklärten Schriftsteller."

106. See Hans Erich Bodeker, "Journals and Public Opinion," esp. pp. 425 & 442. The radical Jacobin Georg Forster, cited below, doubted at century's end whether the terms "public spirit" or "public opinion" had any real meaning in Germany.


108. Thus Haferkorn believes that he has discovered the "political" significance of literary works in their being, in his view, entirely apolitical. Ibid., pp. 168-69. This is little more than a gloss on Madame de Stael's famous pronouncement that because of the lack of a coherent socio-political life, Germans should be characterized by their "imagination"-rather than their "understanding" (*l'esprit proprement dit*). Madame de Stael, *De l'Allemagne* (Garnier Freres, Paris), pp. 18-20. This perspective continues to be employed as a powerful explanatory model for understanding the general character of German literature: see for example Hans Meyer's survey, *Das Unglückliche Bewußtsein: Zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte von Lessing bis Heine* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986). While this kind of explanation clearly has its uses, I do not believe it addresses adequately the figures and issues at stake in the present study; a balanced appraisal, I believe, involves taking seriously the socio-political realities of the time without consigning to oblivion individual efforts at enlightenment and reform.


113. Helmut Schmiedt, "Wie revolutionär ist das Drama des Sturm und Drang," *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 29 (1985):48-61. In Schmiedt's view, although the genre was innovative and somewhat revolutionary, its programme was not carried through in any consequential fashion. Dramatists seemed sceptical of real change, and portrayed neither the stark realities of social problems nor their possible solutions. Schmiedt argues that *formal* innovations are not directly or easily tied to social revolution,
without major qualification. For a critique of the idea that the Sturm und Drang represented a clean break with tradition, see Thomas Salumets, "Unterwanderte 'Normendestruktion': Zur Poetologie des Sturm-und-Drang-Dramas" Euphorion: Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte 85:1 (1991): 70-84.


115. For example, a unilinear developmental perspective ignores the fact that a classicist poetic allowed a certain freedom of individual expression to occur within its conventions, while the new "Genieästhetik" of the later eighteenth-century carried with it its own norms and expectations; if increasing social differentiation led, on the one hand, to greater freedom of choice for authors, on the other hand it demanded a certain degree of integration of the various available roles and forms of literary expression. See Thomas Anz, "Literarische Norm und Autonomie. Individualitäts-spielräume in der modernisierten Literaturgesellschaft des 18. Jahrhunderts," in Wilfried Barner, ed., Tradition, Norm, Innovation: Soziales und literarischer Traditionserhalten in der Frühzeit der deutschen Aufklärung (München, 1989), pp. 71-88. See also Salumets, "Unterwanderte 'Normendestruktion.'"


117. Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Vom universalen zum nationalen Literaturmodell im deutsch-französischen Konkurrenzkampf (1680-1770)," in Barner, ed., Tradition, Norm, Innovation, pp. 33-67. Scholars are increasingly seeing the decade of the 1760s as a crucial turning point in German social and intellectual life. Two recent works which assume this as an outcome of modern research are Barner, ed., Tradition, Norm, Innovation and Eckhart Hellmuth, ed., The Transformation of Political Culture. See also Hans Erich Bödeker, "Prozesse und Strukturen politischer Bewußtseinsbildung der deutschen Aufklärung," p. 16.


119. See Hölischer, Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis, p. 81ff.


121. See Christian Thomasius, Einleitung zur Vernunftlehre (Halle, 1691; Hildesheim, 1968).


124. Ibid., pp. 203-204.
125. Ibid., pp. 206-212.
126. Ibid., pp. 213-16.
127. Ibid., pp. 222-233.


130. Quoted in Engelsing, Der Bürger als Leser, p. 193; Schleelen and Heyern, Gellerts moralische Vorlesungen vol. 1, preface. For an example of Gellert's concerns about writing for a wide audience see his comments on Basedow, of whom Gellert approved as a writer with a "popular" approach suitable for "Hoffmann, Kauffmann und Bürger, und selbst das andre Geschlecht..." Ibid., p. 238.


132. Ibid., p. 12.
135. Ibid., p. XI, XV-XVI.
136. Ibid., p. XX, VI.
137. Ibid., pp. VI-VIII.
138. Riedel, Ueber das Publicum, p. 113.

139. For Hamann, see his Socratic Memorabilia (1759), which he mockingly dedicated "To the Publicum, or Nobody, the Well-Known." James C. O'Flaherty, Hamanns' Socratic Memorabilia: A Translation and Commentary (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 139. See also the analysis of Hamann and Publikum in Hans Dietrich Irmischer, "Herder über das Verhältnis des Autors zum Publikum," in J.G. Maltusch, ed., Büchseburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder (Rinteln, 1976), pp. 103-106. In the early 1760s Thomas Abbt asked "Where is 'the Volk'? Where are the assembled provinces?...Where is public deliberation about war and peace?" (See Chapter 3); For Herder, "Publikum" had become a "puzzling name" (See Chapter 4); Mösé, who was active from the 1740s, left behind an undated poem entitled "Man sollte das Publikum zum Lande hinausjagen" (The public should be chased off the land), which featured the refrain, "Tell me truly, my friend: who are you? has often been

140. Kiesel and Münch have come closest, in my view, to identifying the "problem of Publikum" in all its complexity as a factor in Enlightenment literary production. Unlike the present study, however, their book does not explore the content of enlightened writings vis-a-vis this question. See Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert, Part II.

141. Quoted in Kopitzsch, p. 58.

142. See Maurer, Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland, p. 196ff.


146. While my argument is different than Walker's, there is a methodological commonality on this point. See Walker, German Home Towns, p. 5ff.
Chapter 2

United And Yet Divided: Lessing's Constitution
of an Enlightened German Public

In a well-known passage written towards the end of his life, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote that civil society "cannot unite men without dividing them; not divide them, without establishing rifts between them, without putting walls among them." Removed from its immediate context, this paradoxical statement is emblematic of Lessing's approach to the "problem of Publikum," representing a dialectical relationship between differing tendencies in his work. On the one hand, in his dramatic and dramaturgical works particularly, Lessing advanced an ideal of sociability based upon the sympathetic, affective identification of social actors with one another; a united public sphere of sympathetically responsive and hence virtuous individuals. On the other hand, throughout his life Lessing emphatically practiced a scholarly, rational-critical "search for truth" that could spawn controversy and alienation; a public sphere of individual "self-thinking heads" potentially united around common standards of "taste" and common methods of empirical fact production and rational critique, yet critically distanced from itself.

These differing tendencies in Lessing's work--a more emotive "coming together" and a more analytical "breaking apart"--constituted the most salient aspects of his intervention in an emerging German public sphere. Underwritten by an enlightened, relatively inclusivist set of humanitarian ideals and notions, they combined to produce an image of a German Publikum conscious of itself as a cohesive entity made up of highly-individuated parts. As such it was a complex image that combined sentiments of humane sociability and national identity with Enlightenment notions of rational dialogue and religious tolerance, not to mention cosmopolitan humanitarianism.
But although it is conceptually useful to highlight differing tendencies in Lessing's oeuvre, they are by no means mechanically separable components of it. Indeed, Lessing's dramatic works have an analytical-rational side to them, and his critical works can be quite dramatic and dialogical. Lessing's dialogical style was in fact an important feature of his writing, serving to involve readers in an open process of scholarly discussion and debate; a process of Publikum-formation with both affective and rational-critical features. The notion of a public sphere "united and yet divided" serves only to highlight the presence of both of these elements in Lessing's work, while confronting a basic problem in Lessing scholarship; understanding the relationship between "rational" and "irrational" tendencies in his work. Such a confrontation involves relating Lessing's more nationalistic side with his enlightened cosmopolitanism; "the public," I believe, stood somewhere between the two, absorbing elements of each. In mediating between (German) Bürgerlichkeit and (European) Gelehrtheit, Lessing strove to conceptualize and constitute a more inclusive public sphere of enlightened interaction, inhabited by a public able to develop and improve itself morally and culturally, confident and cognizant of its own identity yet aware of its close relationship to humanity at large. It is in this way that Lessing, more obliquely perhaps than Abbt and Herder, contributed to emerging understandings of what it meant—or could mean—to be a citizen of a modern polity.

If much of Lessing's work was directed towards a scholarly audience, he nevertheless entertained unmistakable sympathies for more common folk—the Volk—a move towards inclusion that was underlined by his concern for "human," "natural" values and a clear, unadorned style of writing, as well as a commitment to conducting highly contentious debate in front of an expanding German public. Active in a period of transition from a scholarly ideal of cloistered Gelehrtheit (learnedness) to one of open participation in educated discourse in front of an expanding national public, Lessing took important, influential steps toward mediating between the two realms, shaping in the process emerging notions of "Publikum" and enlightened sociability generally.
Lessing, like Abbt and Herder, was a participant both in wider European and more local German discussions on a range of topics, and it was out of this multi-layered intellectual identity that he forged a novel vision of a modern German public sphere. Lessing was arguably Germany's first major "public writer."

Widening Horizons: "Publikum" and "Taste" in Lessing's Early Writings

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born in 1729 in the small town of Kamenz, located in the Electorate of Saxony, about 30 kilometres northeast of Dresden. He received his first (Latin) schooling in Kamenz, before moving to St. Afra's school in Meissen, where he studied Latin, religion, Greek, French, mathematics, history and geography. From 1746 to 1748 Lessing studied at the University of Leipzig. Although he began by studying theology, his interests lay elsewhere--in philosophy, philology, archaeology and medicine. Leipzig was a bustling, cosmopolitan centre of trade and learning, and thanks to Gottsched and his associates, boasted the most progressive German theater of the time. The young Lessing began to associate with actors and to write comedies for the stage, causing a good deal of consternation to his parents. In 1748 he joined his cousin Mylius in Berlin, which became the social and intellectual centre of his activities over the next twelve years. While in Berlin Lessing distinguished himself as a leading scholar/critic/dramatist, producing a large body of work that can most easily be subsumed under the category of belles-lettres, as well as a number of translations.

From 1760-65 Lessing worked as Secretary to the Prussian General Tauentzien in Breslau, mainly for needed income and a break from Berlin life. His literary output remained fairly constant, although he did take time during these years to gamble in the officer's casino and visit the local theatre. From his early years in Leipzig Lessing had striven to develop himself as a
sociable, public person, a fact that shouldn't be forgotten when assessing his career as a whole. From 1767 to 1769 Lessing's physical and literary presence as a public persona reached its zenith, as he occupied the position of dramatist and consultant to the newly-opened Hamburg National Theater. Upon its demise Lessing retreated into a more cloistered setting, as Head Librarian at the Ducal Library in Wolfenbüttel, where he remained until his death in February 1781. The last years of Lessing's life were spent in relative isolation and loneliness, compounded by the death of his recent bride Eva König in January of 1778. At the time of his death he was engaged in a bitter theological controversy that tainted him with the aura of heterodoxy and freethinking. His publication of the drama Nathan der Weise in 1779 epitomized both his lifelong commitment to humanitarian ideals and the rational, tolerant and irect side of the European Enlightenment as a whole.

Early in his career as a public writer Lessing began making characteristic pronouncements on aesthetic judgement—often under the rubric of "taste"—that signalled a more inclusive, naturalistic turn in aesthetic discussion. At the same time, he began fitfully to employ the novel term "Publico" or "Publikum" in reference to his German audience. The new terms correlated to a new aesthetic sensibility; together they helped constitute the parameters of an expanding reading public, one which Lessing obviously hoped would support him in his endeavours. At this early stage in the emergence of a modern German public sphere, aesthetics served as one of the primary bases for socially-oriented discourse.

Modern European aesthetics began with the emergence in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries of the notion of "taste." The Spaniard Baltasar Gracian (1601-58) was one of the earliest exponents of taste as a relatively subjective property of judgement. And in Gracian already it is understood as a common, rather than an educated, elevated property of judgement (iudicium commune). Others were not so inclusive—for some, "good taste" was the possession of a minority of connoisseurs living in civilized ages. As the concept was elaborated in Spain, Italy and France it moved between the poles
of rationalism—taste as the ability to perceive universally-valid rules of aesthetics, and a subjective relativism—what tastes (or intuitively feels) right to me.8

Germans only began to reflect on "taste" in the third decade of the eighteenth-century, and often in reference to models developed by French, Italian, English and other writers. By mid-century the "science of aesthetics" was emerging as an independent area of inquiry, with figures like Bodmer, Baumgarten, Meier, Mendelssohn and eventually Herder assuming a leading role in the discussion. Thus by Lessing's time the notion had gained currency among German-speakers, but was still relatively open to interpretation, as a socio-aesthetic concept; one which was difficult to theorize without a certain social vision, and indeed acted as a vehicle for sociological discussion.

Lessing's early concerns and attitudes on taste are evident in his work as a book reviewer for the Berlinische Privilegierte Zeitung (BPZ) and other periodicals, from 1749 to 1755. In his 1751 review of C.F. Gellert's Briefe, nebst einer praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen (1751), Lessing was clearly excited by Gellert's naturalistic approach to letter-writing, one which eschewed "artifice" (Kunst) for "sound order in thinking, lively wit, knowledge of the world, a sensitive heart, [and] felicity of expression," things that "Germans would lack less, if one could learn them in school."9 Gellert's letters themselves were "masterpieces" of "lovely nature" (schöne Natur) and "sweet feelings, enlivened by the most praiseworthy sentiments (rühmlichsten Gesinnungen)." All this was enough to make Gellert "Germany's pleasure" (das Vergnügen Deutschlands).10

Lessing quotes approvingly from a passage in the Abhandlung, in which a conversational, "natural" form of writing is recommended in place of a pedantic, stuffy approach to personal expression.11 Lessing's own prose generally exhibited a relatively direct, conversational character, creating in his work a sense of forum lacking in more formal, stilted prose.12 Gellert's Treatise, in fact, took its point of departure from the ancient canons of
rhetoric--Cicero and Quintillian, specifically, whom he cites at the outset. The rules of letter-writing are best learned from examples of good letters, according to Gellert--good taste is best acquired by individuals who learn to perceive it for themselves; in this way one will be more sure of it in one's own writing, as an intuitive understanding develops. Furthermore, a letter is closest to a "conversation" (Gespräch); a "free imitation of a good conversation" that avoids an overly careful and tidy writing style. (Gellert) Gellert's standards of judgement are clearly taken from "common life" (gemeinen Leben), as when he points out that "A woman of sound taste, who is not however at all conversant with the rules of art, will easily feel what is unnatural...[in a letter]. One doesn't speak that way, that will be her critique." (138)

Gellert distinguishes carefully between a letter that too closely mimics common language, and one that follows and improves upon it, steering a course between unnatural and overly naturalistic discourse; the "truly natural" (wahre natürliche). He goes on to emphasize the need for letters to emerge from one's own experience, and to be immediate, perceptive, and lively, rather than too orderly, thought-out, and rule-bound; women, again, are particularly suited to this task. (166ff) And when it comes to expressing a certain affect--sadness, compassion/sympathy (Mitleiden), joy, love, etc., "Let one's heart speak more than one's intellect (Verstand)...One knows [in this sort of letter] no art, no order..."(169)

Gellert's careful balancing of rules and feeling, art and "nature," prefigures in important ways Lessing's own literary-critical position, which must have received some impulses from Gellert's work. Gellert's complaints of a lack of German "taste" in letter-writing, and literature generally, would have struck a chord with the iconoclastic young writer, as would Gellert's expansive and inclusive, "common" and "natural" perspective on aesthetic judgement. Here was an opening towards new forms of personal expression and a wider, more "human" field of aesthetic judgement, one which could clearly include women and men who were not privy to the stringent rules of (French)
classicist poetics. Although it may be the case that such an "opening" for women, particularly, should not be exaggerated, it nevertheless represented a more inclusive turn in aesthetic discussion.

The Treatise came at a time of increasing letter-writing among the middle-orders, due in part to an improved postal delivery system. Letter-writing began to assume greater importance at this time among educated (Gebildete) persons particularly, serving as a basis for new forms of sociability (e.g. "friendship") among individuals who were breaking free of traditional social restraints and structures, and who were cultivating among themselves an expanded subjectivity. Lessing, Abbt and Herder all experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation, due at least in part to their pursuit of relatively unconventional (i.e. literary) careers, and hence their correspondence often became a crucial form of social and intellectual interaction. Increasingly autonomous individuals felt the need for the kind of direct, easygoing communication advocated by Gellert, and this is likely at least partly why Gellert's treatise struck such a responsive chord with Lessing.

Lessing's interest in the development and improvement of German taste was ongoing. And he was painfully aware of French stereotyping of German "backwardness" when it came to cultivated taste: "Can't a couple of French wits have an argument without letting it slip at least once or twice that Germans lack wit and taste? Do we always accuse them of lacking sound and sober understanding (gesunden und gesetzten Verstande)?" It was certain that Rivery's translation of Gellert into French did a favour to "the whole German nation," yet the French had a nasty habit of stereotyping Germans either as drunks or empty-headed pedants.23

The emerging German discussion of national character, in which Lessing clearly played a leading role, was informed by the climatological anthropology of the abbé Dubos, the abbé d'Espiard, and Montesquieu, among others. Although Lessing seems to have ignored the climatological sections while reading Dubos' Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture (1719),
in 1752 he translated Huarte's *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* from the Spanish, which read like a compendium of observations and arguments about "national" character and psychology.²⁴ And in 1753 Lessing reviewed d’Espiard's *L'Esprit des Nations*, remarking that "To speak truthfully there are nothing other than physical causes for national differences in passions, talents, and bodily skills; for what are called moral causes are nothing but the consequences of physical ones;" "physical" here clearly referring to climate.²⁵ These sorts of understandings would have made it easier to envision a specifically German Publikum, with its own potential strengths, character and taste.

An important aspect of Lessing's approach to developing an authentic "German" taste was his ongoing realignment of cultural loyalty from French to English models. And an early example of Lessing's deep affinity for "English" approaches to culture, one which has gone largely unnoticed, was his enthusiastic endorsement of the painter William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty, Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of Taste* (1753). Lessing's cousin Mylius translated the piece in 1754, and Lessing reviewed it a couple of times in the *BPZ* in the same year.

The aesthetic sensibility contained in the treatise was tied to an inclusive, harmonizing social one, as Lessing recognized:

As I've said, [this work] contains a set of teachings (*Lehrgebäude*) which is singularly capable of bringing some certainty to the various concepts of what pleases people, and of banning that miserable saying from the mouths of the mob (*Pübel*) and academics (*Gelehrten*), that one is neither able nor allowed to argue about taste...All arts and sciences...will be able to acquire new insights [from the book]. The philosopher, the naturalist, the antiquarian, the speaker upon the chancel and the stage, the painter, the sculptor, the dancer--all should consider it an almost indispensable book.

The book can even help set standards in the world of fashion, Lessing believes.²⁶ Lessing obviously felt that Hogarth's treatise asserted a tasteful middle ground, one which transcended the clichés of both low and high culture, and opened out into society at large. And this indeed was Hogarth's intent. In offering his "short essay" to "the public," Hogarth states that he has little hope of gaining a favourable reaction from those who have already
had a more "fashionable" introduction to art, or from those who are set against doctrines which "teach us to see with our own eyes." He instead assures his readers that "They are in a much fairer way, ladies, as well as gentlemen, of gaining a perfect knowledge of the elegant and beautiful in artificial, as well as natural forms...than those who have been prepossessed by dogmatic rules, taken from the performances of art only."(3) A prevalent problem, in fact, is the degree to which gentlemen, painters, and other experts are often encumbered with preconceived ideas or pay too much attention to mechanical details--the "manners" of art.(4-6) It is non-experts in fact who are best suited to judge of "the principles laid down in the following pages."(6)

In order to make aesthetic principles such as "fitness," "variety," and "uniformity" more "familiar," Hogarth just speaks of them "in the way they are daily put into practice, and may be seen, in every dress that is worn; and we shall find not only that ladies of fashion, but that women of every rank, who are said to dress prettily, have known their force, without considering them as principles."(34) Hogarth's commitment to fashioning a sense of taste consonant with the intersubjective negotiations of public display is unmistakable. "Fitness," for example, is considered by women "as knowing that their dresses are useful, commodious, and fitted to their different ages; as rich, airy, and loose, agreeable to the character they would give out to the public by their dress."

Hence although Hogarth's discussion of the "peculiar qualities of serpentine lines" may or may not have been intelligible to the average reader, he strives in the Analysis to give "a plain and general idea" of them.(52) Hogarth goes so far to as to presume that "Even a butcher, thus skill'd, shews himself a considerable critic in proportion," and "I firmly believe, that one of our common proficients in the athletic art, would be able to instruct and direct the best sculptor living."(80) It is thus that "almost everyone is farther advanced in the knowledge of this speculative part of proportion than he imagines."(79)
It would be difficult to imagine a more "public-spirited" approach to aesthetic judgement, and it seems significant that Lessing chose to praise Hogarth's treatise in such strong terms. One likely reason is that Hogarth posed a direct challenge to the august, learned arbiters of neo-classicist taste like Gottsched, whose views on the drama, particularly, Lessing famously repudiated. Although Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766) spoke of "taste" and of people with "good taste," his criticism remained attuned to a rationalistic universalism that precluded ascribing much importance to individual and "common" perceptions of taste. Correct aesthetic judgement derived ultimately from an objective set of rules which were recognizable in individual works of art, but were not dependent upon the subjective judgement of individuals or groups. As more subjective, feeling-oriented theories gained currency (e.g. those of Dubos), Gottsched backed away from "taste" and emphasized "intellect" (Verstand); he spoke with disgust of the "obstinate" or "wrongheaded" Volk that judged without rhyme or reason, and whose taste was the most inconstant in the world. Thus if he had begun to include a widened audience in aesthetic discussion, Gottsched himself still dictated what good taste was. Given the relatively undeveloped intellectual scene in the Germanies during the time he was active, there were good reasons for the introduction of inflexible standards; by mid-century, however, the socio-intellectual landscape had begun to change, and his approach began to appear elitist and restrictive.28

The shift in perspective, and indeed situation, from Gottsched to Lessing, is reflected in the emergence and employment of the term "Publikum." While it is true that some essential sociological categories and concepts of which Lessing made use, in reference both to the German and larger European public spheres, had already been employed by Gottsched—terms like "Nation," "Volk," and "die Deutschen"—"Publikum" was not one of them.30 One of the earliest such uses of the term was made by the Swiss critic Bodmer, when in 1740 he wrote of the "judgement of the so-called public" (Urteil des so genannten Publici), "public" clearly stemming from the Latin, printed as it
By mid-century the Gottsched school in fact began distancing itself from the emerging concept, representing as it did a source of argument ad populum that threatened to overturn norms of the classicist aesthetic canon. In the 1755 edition of *Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit* there appeared a translation of an article, entitled "Doubts about the Existence of a Public," which had appeared in *Mercure de France*. This article posited a time, thirty or so years in the past, in which there had been a learned, harmonious "public" that had been able to come to non-partisan agreement on issues of taste and learning; nowadays it was becoming fractured into a number of competing, self-interested voices with little real learning or judgement. Everyone now wanted to become both writer and judge; little despots with neither understanding nor respect were assuming the role of lawgivers. A footnote attached to the article asked, "Are things at all different among us [Germans]?") Later, in the 1760 edition of the same journal, a reviewer of Lessing’s *Fables* implied that Lessing had been nurtured by an audience, "in Berlin the thing is called *Publicum,*" which had approved of his work as a mother approves of the precocious utterances of a rebellious child, utterances which lose their charm when the child grows up.33

Lessing’s first recorded use of "the public" (*Publico*) occurred in a letter written from Wittenberg to G. S. Nicolai in June 1752.34 Later that year his first printed use of the word occurred in one of Lessing’s reviews for the *Berlinische Privilegierte Zeitung*.35 By the next year Lessing confidently employed the term in the preface to his (very prematurely) collected works: "Such are writers. The public (*Publikum*) gives them a finger, and they take the hand." In the same breath he wrote of parading his works before the "eyes of the serious world (*ernsthaften Welt*)" and the "eyes of the whole world." Lessing went on to state that he was opening his works to the *Publico* "in complete trust."36 In the preface to the third part of his collection (1754), Lessing began to develop a notion of the public as a critical forum, and source of support and stimulation:
I am vain enough to commend myself for the small bit of applause which the first two parts of my writings have here and there received. I would give the public a very tactless compliment, if I were to claim that I didn't at all deserve it. That kind of abasement mocks its insight, and one insults it rather than paying it a compliment. But it is also far...[from my intention] to fail to appreciate its indulgence, and to look upon the encouragement that it metes out to a writer, who seeks to contribute a little something to [the public's] pleasure, as being his due.

Lessing goes on to speak of himself as "an author of the German nation," a self-understanding that correlated to his increasing appeal to "the public," an entity which his writings began to constitute at a time, as we saw in Chapter 1, when the term was just beginning to be employed by German writers.

As such, the public was educable; in a 1755 reference to a poem written in memory of the poet Hagdorn, Lessing stated that making a formal eulogy "would teach the public nothing new, in considering the splendid skill of this poet." Gottsched did the public a "disservice" by writing an unsolicited preface to Mylius' translation of Lucian, whereas Lessing hoped Mendelssohn's forthcoming translation of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality "will be agreeable to the public." In one of his earliest uses of the term, in July 1753, Lessing mused that "We don't know whether the public outside of Leipzig knows or not, that for a while now the taste, which appears to dominate that stage, has occasioned a number of polemics (Streitschriften)."

In 1755 Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn jointly published a biting, satirical reply to the Berlin Academy of Sciences prize question for that year, which asked for an analysis of Alexander Pope's "system," obviously stemming from his Essay on Man (1734), contained in the statement that "everything is good." The question was another obvious attempt by the President of the Academy Maupertuis to discredit the philosophy of Leibniz (particularly the thesis of "the best of all possible worlds"), and Lessing and Mendelssohn aimed to ridicule--in front of the educated German public--the whole enterprise. With barely concealed glee they attacked the question itself as non-sensical and unphilosophical--a "poet" can be said to espouse a philosophical "system"?--and generally had a field day exposing the fact that the question was poorly framed, and for perfidious reasons.
The preface, generally attributed to Lessing, states that it is useless to deny that the treatise was occasioned by the Academy's prize question; but if the reader were to think that the treatise was like a "lovely women" (Schöne) who gives herself over to "the public" out of vexation, because she was rebuffed by her intended fiancée, the reader would be mistaken. That is to say, Lessing and Mendelssohn weren't bringing the work to the public because it had been previously rejected by the Academy; Lessing states rather that certain "circumstances" had hindered its being ever sent in. Privately, it was clear that neither he nor Mendelssohn had any desire to be known as the piece's authors, choosing rather to play the (anonymous) "unself-interested sages." But although their choice to "go public" with the piece was hence at least partly based on the desire for anonymity, the fact remains that taking a work critical of a highly-regarded academic institution directly and specifically to "the public" was now seen as a viable option.

In Lessing's correspondence with Mendelssohn at this time "the public" figured unmistakably as just such a critical audience: in discussing plays which he was currently conceiving and writing for "the serious Germany" (das ernsthafte Deutschland), Lessing responded to the possible accusation that he was becoming too prolific:

Should the public want to humble me a little for being a too-busy writer, should it therefore also deny its applause, because I have all too often sought to receive it, I will bribe it with the promise that, from the coming Easter forward, three whole years will go by without it seeing or hearing anything from me."

There is no doubt that "the public" was for Lessing a variegated entity; as he remarked in the preface to the third part of his collected works, in regard to the theatre-going public, the positive reception of his play Der junge Gelehrte may be due to the fact that "the mob (Pöbel) without taste [often] laughs loudest...where connoisseurs (Kenner) prefer to cry..."

Lessing's early comedies like Die Juden, in fact, were meant to display "virtue" to the "folk" (Volk) in places "where it doesn't at all suspect it [to be]." Reflecting already the differing tendencies in Lessing's work as a whole, the public on the one hand was an entity in need of education and
guidance—a positive shaping or forming towards good taste and virtue. On the other hand it was itself a patronizing, critical audience that could serve as a judge in vexatious intellectual disputes. Lessing's dispute with the pastor Lange around this time was premised on this sort of dual understanding.  

Such an understanding is clearly present in some of Lessing's early statements on the social role of the writer. "Virtuous" writers are not to allow their desire to appear witty lead them into painting too attractive a picture of "vice" and "voluptuousness" (Wollust), leading the reader astray in the process. On the other hand, the Frenchman Massuet is to be congratulated for leaving it up to readers to decide philosophical disputes for themselves:  

And how much more correct is Mr. Massuet, who in all those matters in which the worldly-wise (Weltweisen) are disunited, to take no sides; the grounds for and against in all their strength [are] displayed, and [it is] left to the reader to apportion his applause, or what is the best, [the matter] is put off until new knowledge (Erfahrungen) shines a brighter light on...[it].

Written early in his career (1752), the statement exemplifies Lessing's lifelong critical approach, one which was counterbalanced by a decidedly didactic tendency to instill social virtues, "good taste," and "enlightenment" generally, into an emerging, broadly-based German public.  

That Lessing conceived of the "public" in terms of "humanity," and not a particular class or estate, should already be evident. But he gave evidence, early on, of his broad social vision. In a 1751 review of a book about life at court, Lessing expressed an attitude towards society that indicates why it is problematical to view him (and others like him) as merely representing the interests of a particular estate: "Human beings are, in court, in towns, and in the country humans; creatures in which good and evil weigh against each other." If one wants to flee weakness and vice one "must not leave courts behind, but life itself. Such things are merely more dangerous at court, due to their general influence upon other estates, but [are] not greater." A few years later, in reference to the stage, Lessing stated with some force that "Nothing is more unfair than ridiculing a whole estate in the person of an individual, on whom one piles the vices of all its
members [taken] together." Reacting in part to traditional satirical comedy, Lessing is seeking to transcend social representations which merely reinforce corporate stereotypes.

One probable early source for Lessing's employment of the term *Publikum* was Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750). Lessing received the iconoclastic work as an acknowledged masterpiece, an engaging critique of the excesses of high (French) culture, but with a few excesses of its own as well. What is noteworthy about the *Discourse* is that Rousseau wrote not only about "fatherland" but also "the public" and "public opinion." As he states in the preface: "Running counter to everything that men admire today, I can expect only universal blame; and the fact of having been honored by the approval of a few wise men does not allow me to count on the approval of the public." Later, in a high rant about men of letters, learning, and the sciences generally, Rousseau states that:

> These vain and futile declaimers go everywhere armed with their deadly paradoxes, undermining the foundations of faith, and annihilating virtue...Not that at bottom they hate either virtue or our dogmas; they are enemies of public opinion, and to bring them to the foot of altars it would suffice to send them among atheists. (50)

Thus in the treatise Rousseau began employing "the public" and "public opinion" as independent entities, pointing to a forum which stood apart from learned culture--was in fact opposed by it--and which could mete out its own praise or blame. Distancing himself from the "Republic of Letters," it is perhaps fair to say that Rousseau felt the need to enlist the aid of a neutral "public" with its own "opinion" as a counterbalance to the august canons of learning. It is widely acknowledged that the quoted passage was the first printed use of "public opinion" in France.

In addition to providing Lessing with an image of a "public" that stood apart from the learned excesses of French high culture, and by extension the Republic of Letters, Rousseau counted the Germans among the simple "virtuous nations"--an agreeable image that ran counter to the typical barbs uttered by French writers. The *Discourse* was clearly an important stimulus in the emerging revaluation of "learned" culture and the constitution of a more
mundane, "public" forum, one which had more to do with "virtuous Germans" than corrupt, learned Frenchmen.

Rousseau's next salvo, the Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (1755), which also received a favourable review by Lessing, continued the public-oriented discussion. Rousseau offers to his fatherland Geneva "public homage;" if he'd had his way, he'd have been born in "a state where, all the individuals knowing one another, neither the obscure maneuvers of vice nor the modesty of virtue could be hidden from the notice and judgement of the public." He writes of a citizenry active in "public affairs" and concerned with "public repose," and magistrates who serve with a view towards "public utility." On the other hand, the first step towards inequality occurred when individuals began to assemble, "to look at others and to want to be looked at [themselves], and public esteem had a value." Nevertheless, it is clear that Rousseau values the "natural pity" which causes human beings to join together in commiseration; the bulk of the argument is aimed at exposing the roots of people's turning away from one another and into themselves as rational, vain, self-interested creatures. As I will demonstrate, such a perspective could be employed in a harmonizing, inclusive vision of a "sympathetic" public, one which Rousseau himself outlines in his opening remarks to the Discourse. For his part, Lessing called Rousseau "a man of insight and taste," and he hoped the forthcoming translation (by Moses Mendelssohn) would be "acceptable to the public."

Another very probable source for Lessing's early acquaintance with "Publikum" is his 1753 translation (from the French) of Frederick the Great's Letters to the Public. These anonymously published "letters," which aroused great interest among the Berlin reading public, contain a hilarious satire of state power relations, centring on the refusal of the Prussian court to allow the performance of a French minuet. The Letters were apparently meant as a warning to the Austrian court that the Prussian monarch was aware of a secret article in a Russo-Austrian defensive alliance. What is of interest
here, however, is the fact that these "letters" were framed as an address to "the public," and that Frederick communicated a certain idea of that entity to his audience, at a time when it was only beginning to be widely spoken about. He opened the first letter with a long address aimed directly at "the public:"

I have always loved your taste and paid attention to your inclinations. I am familiar with your insatiable desire for novelties and harbor the ambition to satisfy them. Normal events, as they are reported to you twice a week by [your] correspondents, have become boring to you. You want something special, you want astounding novelties...you love political secrets.(182)

The letter continues in this mode of address, before detailing the supposed diplomatic events. Then, in the third and final letter, the King's interest in "the public" and public discourse again becomes evident. He has a Prussian minister respond to the charge that highly-sensitive documents are being allowed into print in the monarch's own city:

You can be sure that here everyone strongly condemns private people who offend sovereigns through their writings...All governing heads must be respected by the public...one is to speak of them only [in a seemly manner]...For a while now the misuse of the press has risen to new heights. Private people have made complaints about the perfidiousness of writers, and more than one ruling power has been insulted by them...But, dear Count, nobody believes the news that they spread [anyway], and since they have all too often led the public astray, their reports have lost their credibility.(189)

Here the King is addressing a "public" of "private people" that to some degree stands alone; it requires some disciplining by authorities which it doesn't always respect, yet it appears to contain its own mechanisms for dealing with excessive or offensive remarks made by public writers. As his opening remarks indicate, Frederick seems amused by the public, to which he ascribes a certain curiosity about affairs of state, and he appears generally unconcerned about its potential as a rival socio-political force.

The Letters to the Public thus present an analysis of the emerging public sphere of the press; more than just addressing the public in a more traditional mode as a passive recipient of princely edict, the King in a sense plays a "cat and mouse" game with it. This treatment was in keeping with an emerging image of the public as an autonomous entity comprised of reflective individuals, one which would gain increasing visibility as a player in German
socio-political life. That Lessing began employing the term with greater frequency and force around the time he was translating these "letters" seems less than coincidental.

A Sympathetic Publikum: Lessing's Early Dramaturgy

Lessing exhibited a keen interest in drama and the theatre throughout his career, and his early work exhibited important impulses towards the constitution of a tasteful, virtuous, and cohesive German Publikum. If print was the primary medium by which a modern public sphere was being constituted in the eighteenth-century, the essential mode of communication by which enlightened publics were being formed in the face of the particularly German "problem of Publikum," the theatre offered the possibility of addressing and shaping an assembled flesh-and-blood public. Anyone who has attended the theatre knows that the experience can be much more electrifying than reading a book; viewing and responding to a piece of drama is a much more lively, sociable, public event. A modern German theatre was in its infancy when Lessing was maturing, and it is thus unsurprising that despite some ambivalence towards the theatre, Lessing was engaged in drama, in one form or another, for most of his life.

As in his other writings, Lessing's dramaturgy exhibited an inclusive spirit, a move towards the depiction of "human" qualities that transcended caste and class, finding a middle ground between the low farce of the "mob" and the stilted tragedy of the nobility. In constituting a theatre that elicited sympathetic identification from its audience, and hence cohesion among an emerging public, Lessing drew upon a wide range of sources and impulses, including everything from the Poetics and Rhetorics of Aristotle to the sentimentalist notions of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Rousseau. What emerges is a distinctive vision of the social role of the theatre, one which remained central to Lessing's later dramaturgy.
Germany did not possess an extensive theatre-tradition in the first half of the eighteenth-century. Foreign-language works, predominantly French, tended to dominate court theatres and opera houses; otherwise there were two main types of theatre--the Wanderbühne (travelling troupes) and the school-theatres. The former were devoted to amusement: low comedy, acrobatics, farces, and the like, while the latter was a type of drama devoted to the didactic presentation of moral-religious "truths." The first major development in German theatre began around 1730, with Gottsched's attempt to "purify" the German stage and establish a regularized drama based upon the rule-canon of French classicism. Although Gottsched has traditionally suffered under a good deal of criticism (beginning with Lessing) for his approach, it is increasingly clear that his dramaturgy had a very strong social dimension, aiming at the establishment of a more universal drama that inculcated middle-order values and stood apart from traditional forms of representation. Horst Steinmetz has argued, in fact, that Gottsched and his school were an early high-point in socially activist bürgerlich drama, from which later sentimental dramas, with their tendency to turn inward towards domestic relationships and personal feeling, retreated. Whatever the case, the fact remains that Lessing's dramaturgical work emerged out of the context of the Leipzig Gottsched-school of drama, with its emphasis on social improvement, its reformist vision, and middle-order sensibility.62

But although the Gottsched-school represented an important development in German theatre, it remained tied to the classicist tradition, with its sharply-delimited genres, elevated characters and themes (in tragedy), emphasis on rationally-discernible rules, and dependence on foreign (mainly French) works. Gottsched's notion of "Mitleid" retained much in common with Aristotelian "catharsis."63 Other currents were flowing as well, most notably the emergence of the French comédie larmoyant (sentimental or touching comedy) and the English "domestic tragedy." Both tended to blur the lines between traditional genres like tragedy and comedy, and were aspects of a general movement of sentimentalism that featured middle-order characters as vehicles
of its effect, and provided a vocabulary of sympathetic identification that helped give rise, in Lessing's work, to a dramaturgy constitutive of a broadly-based yet cohesive German Publikum.64

Lessing wrote a number of comedies before 1750, most notably Der junge Gelehrte, Der Freygeist and Die Juden. All can be said to have some social significance; in Der junge Gelehrte, for example, the main character Damis is ridiculed for cutting himself off from love and life, preferring instead the "dead society" of books.65 But although the pedantic Damis is generally portrayed as a figure of satire, his bitter speech at the end of the play, castigating Germans for not nurturing their own "geniuses," must be taken at least partly seriously.66 Nevertheless, Damis is more or less the author of his own fate, a fact which points to Lessing's lifelong tendency not to bemoan the difficult circumstances faced by people like himself, rather to try to change them. Hence Damis appears ridiculous, in a conversation with his servant Anton, for positing an abstract "Republic of Scholars" (Republik der Gelehrten) as his refuge, given his inability to connect his learning to common human concerns, and to identify with his own German "fatherland."67 The gap to be covered between a European Republic of Letters and an emerging German Publikum could not have been portrayed more clearly.

Lessing's other two early comedies have been interpreted as "the consequent realization of the principle of enlightened, social-critical education."68 These "critical examinations of controversial issues of the day"69 represented a move towards a more serious comedy; the realization of Gottsched's socio-critical, "enlightened" drama model in a form more amenable to middle-order representation (as comedy had always been).70

Lessing also displayed an early interest in tragedy, publishing an incomplete fragment in Alexandrine verse, Samuel Henzi, in the first volume of his collected writings in 1753. The play was based upon the case of a Swiss journalist who was beheaded in 1749 for plotting against the Bern oligarchy. Although Lessing doesn't employ the term Publikum in the play, it thematizes public-spirited behaviour vs. the private egoistic designs of the city's
governors. As Robert Jamison puts it, "The cast of characters and the setting of the play dramatize the fundamental dichotomy between the res publica, which paradoxically the conspirators defend in private, and the res privata, which the Senate has made public policy [by following their own self-interest in governing the city]." Lessing didn't frame his intentions in quite these terms, but nevertheless the fragment does exhibit, in both form and content, a strong sense of opposition between a public sphere of "virtue"—referred to by Lessing typically in terms of "the people" (Volk) and "fatherland"—and a private realm of "self-interest" (Eigennutz). The hero, Henzi, makes it clear that his own personal, private interest is the public interest; if only Bern were governed properly, he would have no desire to thrust himself into the limelight. Although left unfinished, and written in rather stilted, amateurish verse, the play indicates Lessing's growing sense of a public sphere of virtuous behaviour that stood apart from existing forms of elite authority, forms which traditionally had been representative of the "public" domain.

Lessing's first serious written reflections on the drama were contained in the Beiträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters (1749), a journal which he co-edited with his cousin Mylius, considered to be the first German journal devoted to the theatre. In the preface, Lessing lays out what amounts to a program for the German theatre. It displays a concern with making "good taste" in drama "general" or "universal" (allgemein), a task which requires some tact, since to raise standards too quickly may do more harm than good—children need milk, not wine. It is time to introduce Germans to works other than those of French origin, and particularly to English drama, which comes closer to German sensibilities. The Beiträge are clearly aimed at furthering a distinctively German theatre; up to now there have been too few German pieces which might have helped to define what was peculiar to the German people (Volk), since "Nothing better defines what is natural to a people, than its dramatic poetry." Typically, Lessing opens this project up to his readership, which he
obviously hopes to draw into the discussion in greater numbers and from all social stations. Readers are given the "right" to judge the Beiträge, and the "masses" (Menge) are assumed to be potential consumers of theatre entertainment. Although the "common herd" (gemeine Haufen) is a rather insensitive lot, educated clergymen who write against the theatre are prejudiced snobs who mislead the "mob" (Pöbel), a social group whose judgement may one day soon eclipse that of the clergy. It will finally be up to the "well-disposed reader" (geneigte Leser) to judge whether the authors fulfill their promises to highlight good drama, both old and new, and provide a forum for the furtherance of taste and quality in German drama. Thus although the masses of common people are included as potential participants in German cultural life, it is nevertheless up to more informed readers--the emerging "public" which Lessing had identified early on as a critical audience--to take the lead.

According to Lessing public speaking has been on the decline, and the rules of drama, which the Beiträge will seek out, can help improve standards in a variety of (public) fora. The eloquence of the ancients can once again be introduced, via the general improvement of the theatre. In his treatise on Plautus, Lessing states that the primary intention of comedies should be to improve the morals of audiences; at the same time he argues for a social realism in the depiction of characters, which may mean that characters from the lower orders will speak in a rough and unseemly manner.

Thus Lessing's first theoretical contributions to the German theatre display some of his basic tendencies in the formation of an enlightened German public: the inclusion of diverse social strata in opinion formation; a didactic desire to improve standards of taste and instill moral virtues in a relatively rough, undeveloped culture, counterbalanced by a clear mandate given to readers to decide matters for themselves; a turn towards more "natural," realistic or authentic forms of expression and representation, and a realignment from French to English models.

Lessing's next major reflections on drama occur in his continuation of
the Beiträge, the Theatralische Bibliothek (1754-55, 1759). In explaining why the Beiträge came to an untimely end, Lessing indicates that he didn't trust his cousin's judgment and was worried that reader-trust would also have been impaired. This despite the fact that "people of insight and taste" had "publicly" expressed their wish for the Beiträge to continue. Nevertheless, the Theatralische Bibliothek represented a continuation of his original intention to assemble a "critical history" of the theater, paying attention to what was best in all times and places; essentially he is going to discuss a range of works intelligently in front of an interested public.

Of most interest here is his "Abhandlungen von dem weinerlichen oder rührenden Lustspiele," in which he translates essays on the topic, pro and contra, before arriving at his own position vis-a-vis the emerging genre. Lessing begins the treatise by talking about the need for non-partisanship in aesthetic discussion; in presenting both sides of the issue in the essay, Lessing is obviously trying to model what he considers to be fair critical exchange, a type of discussion which presumes the presence of a thoughtful audience capable of hearing both sides of an issue and making its own judgement. He notes the emergence of both the "tearful/touching comedy" and the "domestic tragedy," pointing out in regards to the latter that people no longer feel it is fair to allow only princes and persons of high rank to be the subjects of tragedy; "one searches out heroes from the middle orders (Mittelstände), and slaps the tragic boots on them..." In addition, Lessing talks about tragedy as evoking "terror and pity" (Schrecken und Mitleiden), in a clear reference to Aristotelian criteria. As time went on, however, Lessing focused more heavily on the evocation "Mitleid" as a fundamental feature of tragedy, transforming it from a simple emotion of pity or compassion that needed to be purged (as Aristotle had argued), to an all-embracing movement of sympathetic identification.

Lessing identifies the "natural" characteristics of the French with the touching comedy, and the English with domestic tragedy. In elevating what had traditionally been a rather low form to the heights of refined sentiment, the
French displayed their tendency always to appear greater than they are. On the other hand, "The Englishman is...one who wants to draw all that is great down to...[his level]." He believes that powerful passions and elevated thoughts are not only for the great, but for everyone. In preferring this "English" perspective, Lessing's desire to shape a more inclusive public sphere of cultural understanding is again evident.

Lessing goes on to present a translation of an essay by Pierre de Chassiron critical of the touching comedy, followed by a translation of another essay (from the Latin) by C.F. Gellert defending the genre. Gellert was the foremost exponent of the genre in Germany, having written a number of sentimental comedies by mid-century. After presenting what he considers to be both sides of the issue, Lessing gives his own reckoning of the matter. He concludes that comedies which mix tears and laughter are not properly at issue; the real controversy surrounds "comedies" which are entirely sentimental, instigating no laughter whatsoever. While these probably shouldn't be called "comedies," they can still be useful and agreeable forms of theatre. (54-55) Lessing next offers his definition of what comprises "true comedy;" dramas which portray "both virtues and vices, propriety as well as indecency, because through this blending they come closest to their original, human life." (55) Society is a mixture of all types of people, and comedies must imitate its heterogeneity, portraying not just what the "people" (Volk) must either avoid or pay attention to, but both together in a single light, where they can be contrasted. The low farces of the "mob" (Pöbel) miss this by being completely oriented towards laughter and foolishness, while the more refined, "tearful comedies" favoured by individuals of high estate tend to portray nothing but virtue and uprightness, and seek only to be emotionally moving. The "true comedy" (wahre Komödie) ranges over both types of affect, creating in the process a theatre for the Volk at large: "The true comedy alone is for the people, and [is] alone capable of obtaining universal applause, and consequently also of being of general use. (56) Although he doesn't use the term "the public" in this piece (he was, as we have seen, just
beginning to employ the term in 1754), Lessing nevertheless presents a very public-spirited point of view, one highly amenable to his emerging vision of a broadly-based Publikum. His dramatic vision was closely tied to a social one; new forms of public representation were to mirror—indeed, help give rise to and shape—an emerging, trans-corporate public. This relationship was further theorized by Lessing during the next few years, the same period in which he began to speak more confidently of "the public," in his famous correspondence with Mendelssohn and Nicolai on tragedy (1756-57), in which he developed his concept of "sympathy" (Mitleid).

The discussion on tragedy between the three friends began with Nicolai's "Essay on Tragedy;" there, Nicolai took issue with the basic Aristotelian idea that the goal of tragedy was to "purify" the passions and provide moral education. Nicolai argued, following Dubos, that the primary goal of tragedy was simply to arouse passions, good or bad. It was around this principle that Nicolai sought to unify all aspects of tragedy, displacing, in the process, such traditional features as the "great" tragic figure.77

Lessing agreed with Nicolai that "tragedy should arouse the passions," but he pointed out that this didn't annul the notion that tragedy should also "improve," morally, its audience. The question for Lessing, however, is which passion tragedy should excite; and for him, "I find no other passion, which tragedy excites, than sympathy (Mitleiden)." Terror and admiration are for Lessing nothing more than functions of sympathy: we feel terror or admiration through our sympathetic identification with the hero/tragic figure.78 Lessing then summarizes his argument:

If it is therefore true, [that] the whole art of the tragic poet is based on the arousal and sustaining of...sympathy, so I now say that the nature (Bestimmung) of tragedy is this: it should expand our ability to feel sympathy (Mitleid). It shouldn't merely teach us to feel pity (Mitleid) for this or that unfortunate one, rather it should make us much more feeling, so that the unfortunate in all times and places touch us and must win our favour...The most sympathetic human being is the best human being (Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch), [the one] most inclined towards social virtues and all kinds of magnanimity (Großmut). Who therefore makes us more sympathetic, makes us better and more virtuous, and the tragedy that does the former, accomplishes also the latter.79
Lessing never retreated from this position; in further correspondence he continued to emphasize the centrality of sympathy in tragedy, downplaying the effectiveness or importance of "admiration" and "fear" as elements of the genre, or classing them as sub-species of sympathy. Admiration for a character on the stage improves an audience to the degree that its members want to imitate that character; but this requires an image of perfection not possessed by everyone. "Sympathy on the other hand improves immediately; improves, without us having to contribute anything; improves the man of intellect as well as the idiot (Dummkopf)."

Lessing was developing a notion of tragedy aimed at forging a broadly-based society--read "public"--of responsive, sympathetic individuals. Much of his discussion with Mendelssohn and Nicolai at this time, which Lessing likened to the "exploration of an unknown land," concerned the appropriate representation of various feelings and emotions on the stage, and as such can be seen as steps towards reconciling private individuality with public personality. The stage provided a public point of reference for the development of self-understandings, a place where individual feelings and perceptions came into contact with one another, and hence acted as an important forum for both individual and social formation.

In a letter to Mendelssohn from early 1757, Lessing makes reference to this dual function, when he posits two levels of dramatic affect; one more personal and individual, and one more social. When someone sees an actor affected unpleasantly, on a purely personal level this affect is pleasurable because it is a vicarious experience, one which makes us more aware of our own "reality" without us having to suffer anything directly. On another level, however, a new affect--sympathy--is produced, one which is the product of our identification with that person in their situation, and is not the simple replication of the affect that they are experiencing. In the previous year Lessing had stated that "The only intention of tragedy...[is the evocation of] tears of sympathy and the self-reflexive feeling of humanity (sich fühlenden Menschlichkeit), or it has none." Mitleid is a socially-produced affect
which serves to humanize individuals, making them more self-aware as belonging to a wider human community. Schiller would say much the same thing, using "Sympathie," nearly thirty years later."

Taken together, there is much in the correspondence on tragedy to indicate that a mutual articulation of individuality and sociality was taking place, an exploration of individual sentiment vis-a-vis public representation that was aimed at not only "improving" an existing audience, but in Lessing's case at least, a reconfiguration of both tragedy and its public around the notion of sympathetic identification between all members of society. Involved in this reconfiguration was a critique of some of the central Aristotelian tenets of tragedy, and a movement in the direction of an emerging European-wide movement of sentimentalism, a movement with which Lessing by now was very familiar, and which offered resources for envisioning a "public" of sensitized, sympathetic individuals.

Early in the exchange Lessing had said to Nicolai that Aristotle's ideas on tragedy shouldn't be written off too easily, and throughout his theoretical writings on the drama he displayed an intimate acquaintance with them, as set forth both in the Poetics and the Rhetorica. Lessing draws upon Aristotelian notions in his discussion of tragedy, yet he also advances his own understandings of Mitleid particularly. Aristotle had defined tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language...; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear [what we call] the cartharsis of such emotions." Lessing objects a couple of times in the correspondence to Aristotle's concept of "pity;" in both cases he expands Aristotle's more passive, self-referential "pity" to a more active movement of an all-embracing "sympathy." In the process Lessing is moving tragedy out of the world of great persons driven down by "fate" and into one of "human beings" sharing intimately-felt emotions and perceptions.

Lessing's interest in exploring the relationship between sentiment and sociability was in keeping with wider European developments. Sentimentalism
(Empfindsamkeit) was part and parcel of the Enlightenment as a whole, and was tied to the growing prominence of middling classes. It was less a product of pietism than a general trend towards the secularization of feeling, mediated through aesthetic-philosophical discussion (e.g. Shaftesbury, the Scottish Enlightenment) as well as the emerging genres of the novel (e.g. Richardson and Sterne) and the moral weeklies. Rousseau was an important figure in the growing valuation of sentiment, as were the dramatic genres of "touching comedy" and "domestic tragedy" (e.g. Gellert, Lillo).

The development and refinement of concepts like "sympathy" was very much at the heart of a number of discussions, most prominently the "moral sense" tradition of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith, and in Germany of Mendelssohn, Lessing and Abbt. Terms like sympathy and benevolence became key signifiers of "natural" sources of sociability that put the lie to the Hobbes/Mandeville thesis. Sympathy figured in the "production of society" for such writers, albeit in varying ways and intensities—Hume, for example, strayed far from Hutcheson's innate "moral sense" as being determinative of morals. In the German context, "Mitleid" evolved from carrying a religious connotation of "suffering-with" Christ and one's fellow human beings—sharing the suffering of the "fallen world"—into a more thoroughly secularized Sympathie itself, thanks particularly to Herder and Wieland. Thus Lessing's expansive employment of Mitleid, a term typically defined as the sharing or participation in another's pain or suffering, must be seen as part of a European-wide discussion of "natural" forms of sympathetic identification in which "sympathy" itself came to be a central term, in Germany a bit later than elsewhere.

Mendelssohn, himself influenced by Shaftesbury and Rousseau, wrote about Mitleid in his Briefe über die Empfindungen, which Lessing helped to publish in 1755 and had, by Lessing's own admission, helped shape Lessing's understanding of Mitleid. There Mendelssohn had posited Mitleid as the sole "unpleasant sensation" (unangenehme Empfindung) which attracts (reizt) us; a bittersweet sensation of love for someone mixed with unhappiness at their ill-
fortune. Lessing appropriated what was an exception to Mendelssohn's theory of "unpleasant sensations" and made it into the centrepiece of his theory of tragedy, although Mendelssohn had hinted at this possibility himself. It is worth noting that Thomas Abbt, also a close friend of Mendelssohn, translated the treatise into French in 1764. The text represented a further psychologization of aesthetic discussion, one which attempted to reconcile individual sensations and perceptions with moral sociability, and is traceable in the German setting to Leibnizian ideas on "imperceptible notions" (unmerkliche Vorstellungen) and a "preestablished harmony," notions which opened aesthetic discussion towards "feeling" and the harmonization of discord within an all-embracing vision of the "whole."

The writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, were crucial in this regard for both Mendelssohn and Lessing. Lessing is known to have put Shaftesbury's writings in Mendelssohn's hands early in their acquaintance, an act which stimulated Mendelssohn to write his first book, the Philosophische Gespräche (1755). In their joint essay of 1755, "Pope ein Metaphysiker!," Lessing and Mendelssohn quoted directly from Shaftesbury's The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody (1709) in critiquing Pope's "system," the point being to show that it was not a "system" worthy of the name. According to them, Pope had obviously drawn upon Shaftesbury's writings, but he would have put them to better use "if he had properly understood [Shaftesbury]."

Shaftesbury was a far deeper and more systematic thinker than the poet; "Had Pope followed him, so would his ideas look more like a system; he would have come much closer to [both] the truth and Leibniz." The authors go on to quote from The Moralists to the effect that Nature is one harmonious system: "'Tis on the contrary, from this Order of inferior and superior Things that we admire the world's Beauty, founded thus on contrariety: whilst from such various and disagreeing Principles a Universal Concord is established.'" Shaftesbury had a perfectly correct idea of this order of things;

He called it 'a Coherence or Sympathizing of Things;' and immediately after that 'a Consent and Correspondence in all.'
This connection (Zusammenhang), this sympathizing (Sympathisieren), this agreement (Übereinstimmung) is completely different than the poet's imaginary graduated system (Staffelordnung), which one can at most appreciate as poetically lovely. 

Lessing and Mendelssohn were obviously aware of, and interested in, Shaftesbury's notions of a sympathetic correspondence of all things in a harmonious "whole." In his Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit (1711) such a "correspondence" was worked out between "private" affections or interests and the good of the "Publick;" Shaftesbury did his best to erase any inherent contradiction between the two, arguing that "to be well affected towards the Publick Interest and one's own, is not only consistent, but inseparable." In The Moralists Shaftesbury generally wrote at a more philosophical/theological level, although he did state that "To deserve well of the Publick, and to be justly styl'd the Friend of Mankind, requires no more than to be good and virtuous; Terms which for one's own sake one would naturally covet." This allusion to the reconcilability of self-interest with public interest points to the fact that Shaftesbury's philosophical system of a coherent, divinized "nature" in which discordant parts nevertheless fit into a harmonious whole, was tied to a harmonizing social vision of private interests that were reconcilable with the good of "the Publick." His was of course not the Mandevillean thesis that private vices contributed to public benefit, but rather that individual affections (including benevolence, fellow-feeling, etc. as well as supposedly "selfish" desires) were in the end conducive to public morality—"virtue."

That Lessing and Mendelssohn focused on Shaftesbury's idea of the "sympathizing" of all things at the time that they were developing the notion of Mitleid, and that Lessing was more confidently speaking of "the public" in an inclusive sense, suggests an emerging linkage between these entities. Not that Shaftesbury presented a unitary notion of "sympathy" in the Characteristicks: for Shaftesbury the term was used both in the sense of a "contagion" which can spread harmful passions (normally in the context of the lower social orders), and as the pleasurable "sharing of sentiments" (as among gentleman-friends of higher rank). It was this latter species of sympathy,
found in "polite" society, that Shaftesbury posited as a natural affection leading to "the Good of THE PUBLICK." 110

Another source relevant to Lessing's discussion of sympathy is Francis Hutcheson's posthumously published A System of Moral Philosophy (1755), which Lessing translated in 1755-56, immediately before his correspondence on tragedy with Nicolai and Mendelssohn. This text has been largely ignored by Lessing scholars, most likely because Lessing appears never to have mentioned Hutcheson in any of his writings. Nevertheless, Hutcheson's discussion of sympathy and the "sympathetic pleasures," occurring as it did within a rhetoric of "publick interest" and the good of "the Publick," is important given Lessing's understanding of Mitleid as productive of social virtues, and his expanding sense of Publikum generally.

Hutcheson's book represented his final answer to the "selfish systems" of "Hobbes, Bayle, [and] Lucretius," 111 and most certainly Mandeville as well, whom Hutcheson was known roundly to criticize at every opportunity. In it he makes one last effort to extricate an unself-interested "moral sense"--"an original calm determination toward a publick interest"(51)--from purely selfish "private interest of any kind."(41,49) He posits two basic "calm natural determinations of the will": an impulse towards one's own happiness--self-love--and an impulse towards the happiness of others--benevolence.(9-10) Delineating the contours of the latter "impulse" was his primary object, and he did so with the help of "sympathy," "by which, when we apprehend the state of others, our hearts naturally have a fellow-feeling with them."(19) Such a "fellow-feeling" is all-inclusive, "the rudest of mankind" displaying such "benevolent affections...requisite for the publick good..."(24-25) Thus Hutcheson mixes in equal proportions discussion of "sympathy"(47ff) and the "sympathetic pleasures"(109,129) and "pains"(142ff), with a rhetoric of "publick Good"(25,92,141), "publick Interest"(51,60,68,73), "the Publick" (72,90) and "publick Happiness"(77). In essence, the benevolent, sympathetic side of human nature gives rise to "a calm determination toward... publick Good without any reference to the private interest of the agent."(140-41)
Hutcheson thus unmistakably situated sympathetic identification with others within a rhetoric of "public interest" and "the public," and even offered a few remarks on how tragic performances were to be understood from this viewpoint. (145-46)\textsuperscript{112}

"Sympathy" was clearly a contemporary subject of interest, particularly among British writers, and Lessing's interest in the topic was ongoing. In a 1758 letter to Mendelssohn, for example, Lessing chastized Edmund Burke for excluding, in his \textit{Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful} (1756), thought-processes from the workings of "sympathy." Burke had argued that sympathy is more a product of our physical constitution than our reasoning faculty, and Lessing was upset by this imbalance.\textsuperscript{113} In Lessing's \textit{Laokoon} (1766), published ten years after the correspondence on tragedy, Lessing critiqued Adam Smith's notion of sympathy, in a discussion of Sophocles' depiction of the mythical character Philoctetes. Lessing argued that Sophocles had purposely heightened Philoctetes' suffering in order to accentuate the sympathy felt for him by the audience; Greek heroes were unabashedly portrayed as being capable of expressing great anguish, something which stoical Romans and refined Europeans had learned how to suppress, to their own detriment. Smith had argued, in a section of \textit{The Theory of Moral Sentiments} (1761) cited by Lessing, that excessive expressions of pain such as Philoctetes' represent a "breach of decorum" that only disgusts the beholder, who cannot sympathetically "go along" with such excessive emotion. Lessing disagreed with this attempt at formulating "general rules for our sentiments"--there are many situations in which we don't despise powerful expressions of anguish; and when such expressions are dampened, as they were in Roman gladiatorial spectacles, the audience is conditioned to turn away from "nature." But the slightest expression of feeling "would have awakened sympathy (\textit{Mitleiden}), and frequently aroused sympathy would have made an end of these...cruel performances." But what here is not to be aroused, "is the single intention of the tragic stage...Its heroes must show feeling, must express their pain, and let Nature itself
accomplish its effect." Lessing thus reaffirms his doctrine of Mitleid in direct reference to Smith's "sympathy," a term which Smith had inherited from the moral sense tradition and made a focus of his moral philosophy.\footnote{114}

Another source of sentimentalist notions for Lessing's discussion of sympathy was the writings of Rousseau, particularly the Discourse on Inequality. As I have already mentioned, Lessing gave the treatise a critically favourable review in 1755, the year in which he published Miss Sara Sampson, one of the first German examples of "domestic tragedy." Rousseau not only employed the term "public" in the essay; he also wrote about "natural pity" as an antidote to Hobbesian selfishness, a "virtue" which worked to strengthen social ties.\footnote{115} Sentimentalist notions were thus in the air by the early to mid-1750s, notions which were to aid Lessing in his reconfiguration of both tragedy and its public around the principle of sympathetic identification between all members of society.\footnote{116}

Lessing indicated awareness of the English dramatic genre of "domestic tragedy" in 1754,\footnote{117} and he made a positive reference in 1756 to Lillo's The London Merchant (1731) as bringing forth tears of sympathy and "the self-reflexive feeling of humanity" (der sich fühlenden Menschlichkeit) which was, according to Lessing, the goal of tragedy.\footnote{118} Such an effect was clearly Lessing's intention in his own domestic tragedy, Miss Sara Sampson, which was based on English models and was published and first performed in 1755.\footnote{119} The play, which "inaugurated the dramaturgy of German sentimentalism,"\footnote{120} is about a woman from the lower fringes of the English Gentry who elopes with the aristocrat Mellefont to an English country inn. Eventually Marwood, a Medea-like former lover of Mellefont, arrives on the scene and, after much heartfelt dialogue, manages to poison Sara, after which Mellefont stabs himself.

That Sara was written and performed a year before the correspondence on tragedy suggests that the experience of writing the play and seeing it performed must have had an impact on Lessing's subsequent views. The play seems aimed at arousing a good deal of sympathetic identification from its audience for the main characters, most notably Sara, the virtuous heroine
whose only flaw was to follow her passion. And this it seems to have done, given the emotional response evoked by its early performances. Here was a tragedy featuring (upper) middle-order characters, presented in relatively unstilted prose dialogue. Not very much happens during most of the play; instead there is a lot of discussion of sentiments, hopes for the future, and events which happened in the past. There is mention of love, lust, and even illicit sex and bastard offspring—not much different from contemporary daytime soap-operas, loaded as they are with the language of feeling.

But the dialogue is generally more about feeling—talking about it, reflecting on it, analyzing it—than directly expressive of it. Lessing's analytical side is present here too, as he stages a sort of emotional algebra which prefigures the later "dramatic algebra" famously attributed by Friedrich Schlegel to Emilia Galotti. Nevertheless, the reader/audience of Miss Sara Sampson is made to feel sympathetic towards most of the characters in the play; even Marwood's behaviour, though wicked, is understandable, given her circumstances. And although the drama takes place in the private space of rooms at a country inn, and explores the (tragic) personal relationships of relatively ordinary human beings, it would be wrong to conclude that Lessing was simply supplying an "opportunity for...communal indulgence in private emotion." Rather, this "opportunity" was itself constitutive of a new sort of public; one comprised of middle-order (read "human") characters with a developed sense of themselves as moral social actors. The very act of bringing such "private" material to the "public" at large represents an important step towards a new understanding of just what counted as issues of public concern, and thereby what sorts of people constituted "the public." A public of private individuals was in the process of being formed, reflected in the public representation of an increasingly articulate private sphere of individual perception and emotion.

There are, then, at least two levels of interpretation available for analyzing Lessing's dramas. On the one hand, there is the play itself, and its representation of public and private spheres via plot, setting,
characters, etc. On the other hand, there is the larger question of what was involved in dramatizing the private sphere of middle-order characters. In Sara, as in some of Lessing's other plays, the private sphere is portrayed as a possible refuge from the weight of public demands; Sara, for example, sensing that Mellefont's reason for putting off their marriage—the desire for a proper, expensive public display—is a pretence, states boldly that "A sacred act does not acquire more force through ceremonies." Marwood is concerned about possible "public disgrace," and an underlying tension in the play concerns the "improper" position that Sara finds herself in. In retreating to a country inn at a distant locale, Sara and Mellefont are indeed withdrawing into a private refuge in which human feeling alone can reign supreme. Rather than actively engaging wider societal forces, the powerless bürgerlich hero must withdraw, and suffer stoically. Or, as a feminist critique would have it, the intimate sphere of the family, while ostensibly the site of an emerging superior (bürgerlich) moral universe, internalizes repression with the father-figure dominating the (female) family members via heightened moral and filial demands. Sara's fate, like Emilia's in Emilia Galotti, does in fact point to a critique of withdrawal from the public sphere: it is the women who bear the brunt of the turn "inward" to a sentimental, highly moralized middle-order familial sphere.

Such perspectives, valid as they are, need to be qualified by the second level of interpretation: strictly internal readings of the play neglect significant dimensions of what was occurring in the performance of such dramas. The suffering heroine, with all of her sentiments and desires and virtues, calls forth a sympathetic response from an audience that can identify with her feelings, including those of powerlessness; an audience that is beginning to conceive of itself as being comprised of individuated moral actors who share common feelings and perceptions, a "public" of "private" individuals. As Sarah Maza has argued, the emerging genre of melodrama (and Miss Sara Sampson must be counted as a proto-melodrama) was a radically democratic way in which writers sought morally to "reach out to, and shape, an
emergent 'public sphere'" in an increasingly de-sacralized moral universe.\textsuperscript{129}

Given Lessing's ongoing theorization of sympathetic identification as the goal of tragedy, occurring as it did within the context of both the German "problem of Publikum" and wider European discourses of sentimentalism in which "sympathy" and "the public" played major role, it is important to recognize this dimension of his tragedies, and particularly Miss Sara Sampson. The existing public sphere of personal and socio-political relations was unacceptable; that fact was a point of reference for the dramaturgical constitution of a tasteful, virtuous and cohesive German Publikum, at mid-century. Not surprisingly, from the date of Sara's publication onward, Lessing began to assume the position of leading German writer in the consciousness of the reading public.\textsuperscript{130}

A Critical Public Sphere: Lessing's Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend

Besides involving himself in drama, Lessing was a literary critic, and in this capacity he developed modes of critical analysis which cut against the grain of a harmonious public sphere of sympathetic actors. Here Lessing's method, inherited in part from Pierre Bayle, could just as easily lead to antipathy and alienation, as his many literary feuds demonstrate. If individuals were to feel sentimentally attached to a larger social whole, they were to be critically detached from the oversimplified truths and mediocrity that were its currency. In practicing a method of analysis that prized rational critique over uncritical acceptance of literary "truths," Lessing was not, however, intent upon undoing the work of his dramaturgy; rather, such an approach served to lift the project of Publikum-formation entailed there to a higher plane, one of critical distance.

Lessing seemed to be instinctively aware that objectivity requires some measure of critical distance; and if the newly-emerging German public was to
be competent as a judge of matters of concern, it would need to develop protocols of discussion which allowed for dispute and disagreement without calling into question the whole enterprise of public discourse, and without descending to the level of personal attack. Lessing's dialogical approach to this task helped establish a surer foundation for public discourse on the bedrock of empirically-verifiable literary "facts" that everyone could be sure to agree upon. This tack shifted emphasis from the stature of the writer to the subject-matter itself; anyone could participate in the discussion, as long as they were willing and able to penetrate to the core, to the niggling details and obscure facts that served to anchor discussion and give rise to widely agreed conclusions. Lessing's critical writings were guides to this nether-world, guides which were, in today's parlance, "interactive," and hence conducive to a sense of participation in a shared enterprise, one which was ultimately subject to the judgement of the larger critical public.

It was in this way that the skeptical, empirical, rational-critical currents of the new science entered most directly into Lessing's constitution of an "enlightened" German public sphere. Besides pointing to the general impact of the new science on literary criticism in the eighteenth-century, one can cite the works of Pierre Bayle as an important conduit for imparting a (broadly speaking) "scientific" outlook to the German intellectual scene, and to Lessing's literary-critical work particularly. Bayle's four-volume Dictionnaire historique et critique (1696, 1702) made an enormous impact in Germany, even before its first German translation appeared in 1741. It was particularly well-known in Leipzig intellectual circles, but "There was hardly a German writer who did not at least become acquainted with Bayle's Dictionary during their school and university years." Its importance lay less in its discovery of errors and filling of gaps in received knowledge, than in "the introduction of a new historical-critical method." Scholars have documented the influence of this method on Lessing's own literary-critical approach, leaving little doubt that despite showing some ambivalence towards Bayle as a religious skeptic of some notoriety, Lessing
self-consciously adopted Bayle's general method of inquiry, most notably in his "rehabilitations" (Rettungen) of Horace and Hieronymous Cardanus, and in his corrections to Jöcher's Allgemeines Gelehrt-Lexicon, but also in more subtle ways throughout his critical oeuvre. Both writers shared a stress on erudition and a delight in seemingly insignificant facts. They were both preoccupied with the classics, and Lessing's studies of Plautus and Sophocles were intended to fill gaps in Bayle's Dictionary. The thought of each writer tended to be occasional in character and critical of received dogma. They were, in other words, "kindred spirits." ¹³³

Both writers were thus comfortable in engaging in an open-ended search for "the truth" or "the facts" which resisted closure, particularly that dictated by religious orthodoxy or social stature. Such an approach had deep roots in the spirit of enquiry exemplified by figures like Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, and provided a foundation for a new form of critical sociability, a "public" of critical thinkers able to discuss rationally and civilly matters of common interest. ¹³⁴

Lessing's Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend (1759-65) are a significant example of his mature literary-critical approach. These "letters" have been called "the decisive arbiters in German literature" ¹³⁵ during the years in which Lessing was the chief contributor (Nicolai and Mendelssohn also collaborated), inspiring figures like Abbt (who wrote for the periodical upon Lessing's departure) and Herder with a stimulating example of lively, concise and yet deeply learned literary criticism.¹³⁶ The Briefe were framed as a "response to a Prussian officer's desire to keep abreast of developments in literature, while he was recuperating from wounds sustained during the Seven Years War. Lessing's choice of this fictional device indicates his orientation towards a wider reading public: "How I, the publisher, have gotten hold of...[these] letters, is a matter of indifference to the public. I am passing them along to it because I believe that they can be of use to the writing as well as reading segments of the so-called scholars." ¹³⁷ Instead of an officer learning from rarefied scholarly journals, "so-called scholars"
were to be instructed from letters written for the man of action; a subtle but important shift in orientation. Lessing's general view in the Briefe is that German scholarship and letters are in a "sorry state;" the muses in Germany don't have many "fiery friends," and genius finds little support. (31-32; 42; 160)

Lessing begins attacking this problem by critiquing current translations of European works; the translator of Alexander Pope is shown to have made a number of errors, (33-34) and Lessing takes particular umbrage at a translation of Bolingbroke: "And now you tell me, is the German public not to deplore [it]? A Bolingbroke falls into the hands of [these] lads... Will then a bear not come forward, and throttle the rascals? Bergmann must not only not know English; he must know nothing at all." (39) One could argue that this sort of diatribe, engaging as it is, does little to further rational public discussion; and it must be admitted that Lessing could provoke others seemingly unnecessarily. Yet such writing was meant to stir up the intellectual scene (which it certainly did) with the dramatic flair of a circus act performing in front of a dazzled audience—the public. And a clue to the dividing-line in Lessing's mind between proper and improper criticism occurs soon after the passage cited above, where Lessing chides Wieland for his harsh attack upon Utz: "Mr. Wieland holds himself to be offended, and instead of likewise attacking his opponent from the side of the writer, he fastens upon the moral character of same with a pious gall, [and] a pietistic pride..." (43) It was acceptable to attack someone upon the same grounds on which they wrote—as a "writer" or purveyor of knowledge, but not on the grounds of moral character.

Lessing made other, similar sorts of distinctions in the Briefe. After publishing a review critical of a book of verses by J.A. Cramer, Lessing was in turn attacked by the moralist and pedagogue J.B. Basedow in another periodical for his criticism of Cramer. Lessing replied disdainfully to what he considered a low personal attack; and he turned the tables on Basedow, arguing that Cramer himself had taken the criticism better than Basedow. And
besides, "Mr. Cramer is to be sure a meritorious theologian...But Mr. Cramer
is a human being; could he not have...[written something] that was out of
character? And when I criticize him for this and that, do I therefore deny
him all merit?" (270-71) Lessing goes on to argue that in calling Cramer a
"splendid versifier," he had meant it as a compliment; true poetic geniuses
are rare, and hence one should not indiscriminately apply the term "poet" to
everyone who writes verses; it alone takes a good deal of wit, taste and
understanding to make a "splendid versifier." (272-73)

The deflation of pretension was an obvious goal in Lessing's Briefe.
Cramer's position as a respected theologian was not to determine the reception
of his writings. What someone has written in the past should not affect
present judgement. (280) Lessing even applies this standard to the leading
poet of the time, Klopstock:

Am I supposed to conclude that because Mr. Klopstock has written
this or that lovely piece, all of his pieces must be lovely?...Because I hold him to be a great genius, must he always be right
by me?...Exactly the opposite: because I hold him to be a great
genius, I am on my guard. (305)

And "on his guard" Lessing was; a real gadfly, someone who would check a
writer's sources, line by line. Early on, for example, he asks whether
Wieland was right, in his Plan einer Akademie zur Bildung des Verstandes und
Herzens junger Leute, in saying that the ancient Greeks really instructed
their youth in the "wise sayings" of Homer? Lessing isn't sure, and goes back
to the texts used by Wieland. It seems more probable that Homer was as little
understood by all Greeks as Klopstock is by all Germans. The Greeks were not
as superior as Wieland supposes; the philosophy which was generally studied,
for example, was not the "true" philosophy (according to Aristotle), but that
of the Sophists; the main interest was in learning to speak well. Thus "It
arouses no trust for Mr. Wieland, when one obviously sees that he is intent on
flinging dust in his readers' eyes." (50) Wieland must have thought that his
"bad and rash thoughts were good enough for the Germans. The patriotic
contempt that he has for his nation leads me to suppose it." (52)

Germans deserved better, and this could only be accomplished by raising
standards of criticism. The Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freien Künste, Nicolai's first major journal, had prompted accusations of "partisanship and censoriousness (Tadelsucht);" but according to Lessing, the mediocre writers who had been criticized could respond differently. These men, "who so gladly decry every court of criticism to be an awful inquisition," say that the critic should only point out the good aspects of a work. Lessing agrees that this might hold true for accepted classics, or for when "critics merely want to educate good readers, and not good writers as well."(68) Lessing's object clearly was to do both, and his critique of mediocrity extended to the genre of moral weeklies.

Cramer's Nordische Aufseher, which appeared in both Leipzig and Copenhagen, had piqued Lessing's interest, even though "I have almost made it a rule to leave our weekly moralists unread."(160) Earlier, in the third "letter" of the Vermischte Schriften des Hrn. Christlob Mylius, Lessing remarked that German moral weeklies had fallen far below the standard set by the English; German imitators of the genre were for the most part young "wiseacres" (Witzlinge) who "have here and there read a few things, and what is the most troubling, must make their sheets into a kind of pension." In the Briefe, Lessing engaged the genre by discussing what he considered to be good and bad attributes of a moral writer; a good moralist recognizes that well-known truths are not necessarily useful or beneficial, and vice-versa; a poor one conflates the two. And if a moralist can't even clothe everyday banalities in an original way, then he doesn't deserve one's interest in the least.(172-73)

It has been argued that Lessing's attitude towards moral weeklies was indicative of a general lack of interest in "popular" enlightenment, and that Lessing really belongs in the camp of the academics (Gelehrte). This is true only if one ignores the larger question of Lessing's intervention in an emerging public sphere of debate; as I have been attempting to demonstrate, Lessing was indeed concerned with the larger societal frame in his role as "enlightener." His standards were high, however, and he obviously did not
feel it did the Volk much good to read endlessly recycled, banal moral
truisms. Yet he did all he could to draw in readers not familiar with the
subject matter, sometimes even asking them for their patience, as he committed
the necessary evil of grubbing around in the minutiae of antiquarian
scholarship.(89)

Lessing wrote as though his readers were sitting across from him at a
table, and he was speaking directly to them. "It could easily be, that I name
here a man completely unknown to you."(108) "What should I say to you? I
haven't read the Sketches, only paged through it..."(126) "And why is it, you
ask, that this repeated attempt to introduce the ancient Greek meter into
British poetry has remained fruitless?"(119) Lessing's "impartial reader"(93)
was a passenger on a critical journey, very often through a house of horrors:
"But [here is] another example of the strange notions which Mr. Dusch makes
out of this science..."(133) And it could be an extended tour; three weeks
later, Lessing is still exploring the mediocrities of Dusch: "Mr. Dusch does
not possess enough wit and inventiveness to be a poet; and not enough
thoroughness and sharpness of mind to be a philosopher. But he has enough of
each to make a passable didactic moral poem."(144)

But if Lessing did not fail to show his readers the full spectrum of
mediocrity, he also set forth his own notions on what makes for good
scholarship. Early on he argued, against Wieland, that "All sciences share
principles with each other, and must either be pursued at once, or each
one...[in depth]."(50) If Wieland had read Bacon he would know "how much this
sage gave rise to a science in which the general principles of all human
knowledge are taught..."(51) Does Wieland know of a better intellectual
exercise, than to have young people abstract truths from particular sciences,
then learn to apply them to particular cases?(52) Each science left to its
own field neither improves the soul nor contributes to the perfection of
humankind; "only the ability to quickly raise every particular instance to
general principles" can form the "great spirit," the "true hero in virtue and
the inventive genius in the arts and sciences."(52)
Lessing thus acknowledges the debt owed by his own literary-critical approach to the methods of the new science as epitomized in Bacon's writings. And this approach was obviously at root empirical, taking as its point of departure the material artefact rather than received opinion or rational demonstration. Lessing's famous letter 17 of the *Briebe*, which emphatically attacked Gottsched for his "Frenchifying" exercise in the theatre, was premised on the notion that Germans would have been better served if they had been exposed to Shakespeare rather than French writers; besides being more suited to "German" sensibilities, his works would have been productive of better "taste" among Germans, as models, and would have helped awaken German "Genies." (72) Good examples, not "correct" ones which adhered to a flawed set of rules, were required for cultural advancement.

Klopstock's changes to his *Messias* deserved to be studied with great care, since "One studies therein the finest rules of art; because what the masters of art...find to be good, those are rules." (79) The "Publikum" was thus the loser in a cheap reprint of the *Messias*, since only the second volume was printed. (79) Later, Lessing argues that the introduction of new art forms is better done by example than by argument, since "the public in such cases would rather let itself be...[convinced by example] than persuaded [with arguments]." (119) If Milton had chosen to write *Paradise Lost* in hexameter, then "it would have long been the favorite form of verse...[among the English], also when the poet had not said a word in its favor." (120)

When it came to scholarship, Lessing was always concerned to secure the "facts" of the case; in this way only could reader trust be built. While discussing the "poor state" of historiography in the Germanies, Lessing emphasizes the difficulty of getting at the "bald, dry facts" (*Kahlen, trockenen Faktums*, 185), which raise the discipline beyond mere speculation. Because of this difficulty, Lessing takes the extreme position that "true historians" are only those who describe events of their own times and places. (186) In addition, historians should seek not to take sides in their accounts; it is up to the reader to decide the case. (193) Although Lessing
himself took sides in his own criticism, he nevertheless was always at pains to present the reader with all the facts, and he assumed that readers were ultimately capable of judging the outcome for themselves.

Useful insights, rules and generalizations could only be built upon a solid foundation, whether it be the texts of great poetic geniuses, or historical or textual details. That is why good translations were so important to Lessing; how could Germans begin to cultivate an authentic indigenous literature when chosen models were not presented in the proper idiom? On the other hand, if it was important to start from a firm empirical foundation, it was also necessary to analyze critically and discuss rationally the matter in question. This imperative is evident throughout the Briefe, but Lessing makes explicit reference to it when, for example, he writes about the need for rational reflection to test religious sentiments,(46-47;171-72) or the need to anchor the affective aspects of public speaking in thought and the intellect.(57-59) The greatest secret in perfecting the human soul exists solely in "maintaining it in constant striving, to arrive at the truth through one's own reflection."(53) This striving towards truth is aided by the socratic method of searching for proper definitions,(55) and may result in "divisions" among "our best heads;" this is nevertheless not to be regretted, since they've never been united anyway.(93)

But if Lessing posited here a public sphere of divided, critical "heads" engaged in a "search for truth," it was a common search; he didn't mention "the public" often, but it was assumed throughout the Briefe to be the ultimate participant-judge. It was towards the end of Lessing's major involvement with the periodical that he made his most explicit reference to this assumption, in a number written by Mendelssohn but quoting Lessing. The issue at stake concerned the degree of control an author can expect to have over his work; can others print "corrected" editions without the author's permission? Lessing's reply argues that

Whoever publicly publishes his writings, makes them through this act publici juris, and so therefore it is open to anyone to outfit them more comfortably for the public, according to their own insights. The more so since the author suffers no infringement of
This statement seems doubly suggestive, given Lessing's own problems with pirated editions of his works. Yet he had, together with Rammler, published an "improved" edition of Logau's poetry, and so had his own reasons for feeling as he did. Nonetheless, Lessing here encapsulates his basic literary-critical stance towards "the public," an emerging entity which he himself had been working to constitute and shape in the Briefe. Although, as he stated in the Laokoon, one shouldn't expect the Publikum to be as learned as "connoisseurs" (Kenner),140 it was an entity to be relied upon, given all the facts, to pass fair judgement. It was comprised of individuals capable of analyzing critically matters of common interest, and as such was open to the prospect of division and disagreement; such acrimony was to be limited by certain rules of discourse, however, like not attacking someone else's moral character in the place of their intellectual abilities. Lessing's criticism in the Briefe models and advances this ideal; and he draws upon the "scientific," "critical" method of figures like Bayle and Bacon as crucial points of reference in this project. If in his early dramaturgy Lessing strove to constitute a public of sympathetic moral actors, in literary-critical writings like the Briefe he inserted some space between them, as rational-critical thinkers. As such he incorporated some of the leading currents emanating from the European Republic of Letters in an emerging vision of an enlightened German public.

The Hamburgische Dramaturgie

The story of the rise and fall of the Hamburg Nationaltheater is well known, as is Lessing's participation in the enterprise as literary adviser and publisher of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie, meant to be a "critical register"
of the plays performed as well as a commentary on drama in general. Some have seen the whole episode as a concrete example of the existing gap in German life between intellectual developments and social reality; aimed at an expanding national Bürgertum, and emerging from the mental universe of this loose social grouping, the theatre was unable to garner the support of its intended audience, which did not possess enough of the material and intellectual resources required to maintain such an ambitious enterprise. It was, in other words, a localized example of the German "problem of Publikum," and Lessing recognized it as such.

The journal appeared in twice-weekly numbers starting in May 1767, although from number 32 onward they appeared sporadically, and numbers 83–104 appeared in 1769, after the Nationaltheater had been dissolved. Like much of Lessing's writings the journal ranged widely over a number of topics, mostly related to the theatre, engaging the reader in lively dialogue. For present purposes the Dramaturgie may be seen as bringing together in one format the various aspects of Lessing's works discussed thus far: within the rubric of instilling "taste" in a nascent public, Lessing advances both the notion of a sympathetic identification between social actors, and an ideal of critical analysis and striving towards "truth" which introduced an element of critical distance between such actors. The main difference now is that Lessing's primary adversary is not German mediocrity, but rather French mediocrity. The Hamburg experiment was to be a "national" one, and Lessing was clearly concerned to formulate an indigenous dramaturgy that would help give rise to a more self-confident and self-conscious German public.

The Dramaturgie begins, as it ends, with an extended, direct reference to the nature and role of the public vis-a-vis the whole enterprise; by now Lessing was more confidently aware of the entity, and of his role as its preeminent German agent. He begins by stating that if nothing more has been accomplished than an association of friends having "combined to work according to a common plan for the public good," much will have been gained. "For out of this first change, even with only meagre encouragement from the public, all
other improvements needed by our theatre could quickly and easily spring."

Every effort will be made to make the venture a success, but

whether taste and judgement will be wanting only time can teach. And is it not in the hands of the public to improve and redress whatever it may here find defective? Only let it come, and see and hear, and examine and judge! Its voice shall never be contemptuously ignored, its judgement shall always be respectfully heard.

But every minor critic must not deem himself the public, for not every amateur is a connoisseur. Not every one who can feel the beauties of one drama, the correct play of one actor, can on that account estimate the value of all others. To have a one-sided taste is to have none at all. True taste is general.143

Here Lessing advances, more clearly than ever, a vision of the public as interlocutor and judge, a self-reflexive entity capable of producing criticism which will aid in its own refinement. Although it is a relatively inclusive vision, or perhaps because it is, not every amateur critic with a pen and an opinion may count himself to speak for this public; the judgement of the Publikum as a whole must be mediated by the true connoisseur who is able to range over the entire realm of taste, making its possession more general. As he stated at the outset, the "finer portion of the public" may be expected to approve of all exertions made for the "general good;"(231) the aim must be general socio-cultural improvement, not the advancement of any one set of narrow interests.

Lessing opens the Dramaturgie, then, by setting the agenda for a public still in the early stages of its constitution; he tells it, in effect, what it is and what its role will be in the impending project of socio-cultural formation. This project is not simply "cultural," because as Lessing states in an early number, the theatre is the "school of the moral world."(239) A "good [dramatic] writer" always has "the most enlightened (erleuchtesten) and the best of his time and place in view;" when he condescends to the level of the mob, he does so only to "enlighten and improve [it]."(238-39) The public, for its part, is to "demand the truth;" "A public that judges otherwise does not merit the name."(423) As it is, the taste of the German Parterre is too
rough—it tends to respond to lots of commotion and overacting. (257) Only in Athens was the mob truly moralized vis-a-vis the theatre. (242)

Lessing clearly entertained an idealized vision of the theatre-public relationship among the ancient Greeks, an ideal which can be traced to his reading of Diderot and which found expression in both the Briefe and the Dramaturgie as a point of reference in evaluating modern publics. In the Briefe, Lessing quoted from Diderot's Entretiens sur le Fils Naturel (1757) on the vast gulf separating ancient and modern theatre: while ancient drama engaged the attention of whole peoples, modern drama consists of entertaining a few hundred people in a darkened room. And, Lessing adds, this is a Frenchman talking! Whereas the French at least have a stage, "the Germans hardly have a market-stall (Bude). The stage of the French is at least the pleasure of a whole city; whereas in the leading German cities the Bude is the laughing-stock of the mob." (144)

In no. 80 of the Dramaturgie Lessing again compared ancient and modern (German) theatre; while the Greeks and Romans were intent upon their tragic spectacles, desiring to experience extraordinary emotions again and again, "Most of us go to the theatre from idle curiosity, from fashion, from ennui, to see people, from desire to see and be seen, and only a few, and those few very seldom, go from any other motive." (145) Earlier Lessing had argued that since ancient tragedies were performed "in open, public places, in the midst of a curious mass of people," the language needed to be restrained and elevated; moderns, on the other hand, having taken tragedy indoors and gotten rid of the chorus, have no need for restraint and rhetorical elevation, especially since passion has its own eloquence, "and is understood as well by the uneducated as by the most polished." (504) Put another way, Lessing here answers his previous conundrum: there was sufficient interest and understanding among the ancients to develop an elevated dramatic language, but if tragedy was to have any resonance at all with the mass of modern people, a more direct language of the passions is called for, one which excites sympathy and fear from a public that has had to "put up with" anything but such
"Sympathy" remains for Lessing the primary emotional medium for moralizing the "mob" into a cohesive and virtuous public, in tragic performances; and now he uses "Mitleid" and "Sympathie" interchangeably. He speaks at the beginning of the Dramaturgie of the need to let passions rise before the eyes of the spectator in a steadily-growing measure, so that the spectator must "sympathize" (sympathisieren) with it. And the sympathetic bond is one between "human beings" as such;

The names of princes and heroes can lend pomp and majesty to a piece; but they contribute nothing to moving [us]. The misfortune of those whose circumstances are similar to ours naturally penetrates most deeply into our souls; and when we sympathize with kings (mit Königen Mitleid haben), we do so as with human beings, and not kings. If their position makes their fall more important, it doesn't make it more interesting. Whole peoples may be involved, [but] our sympathy (Sympathie) requires a single object, and a state is a far too abstract concept for our sentiments.

Lessing's discussion of sympathy occurs in reference to Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, which Lessing seems intent on embedding in his own. He consequently now gives greater priority to "fear," or "sympathy referred onto ourselves," as a central element in tragedy. But unlike Aristotle, Lessing's discussion is aimed at "the removal of any psychological distance between spectator and hero," and thus reinforces and elaborates the basic view put forth in his earlier writings on the topic.

This identification of spectator with actor entails creating characters "exactly like us," i.e. Aristotelian "middle characters" who are neither too virtuous or too base, and certainly not too elevated in social rank. Lessing follows Aristotle in the assumption that individual characters should properly portray the universal, probable qualities of a certain character; and for all these reasons he rejects Diderot's assertion that "serious comedy" should now concern itself with depicting characters as a function of social standing, or what we would call "class." The problem, according to Lessing, is that such a conception limits characters' universality--they become too much the expression of a single point of view, or become too finely drawn to appeal to audience members.
sphere was to be populated in principle by all people, "human beings" who shared the same passions and sentiments, the same "natural music of the heart." (270) His rejection of a class-oriented drama was due not merely to an inability to perceive "distinctions and definitions which seem obvious to us," but rather because of his own socio-cultural answer to the "problem of Publikum." (152)

It did not take a great leap of the imagination to transpose discourse about the theatre onto society at large: when Lessing argues for universal, natural, probable characters whom we can relate to as fellow human beings; (239, 294, 318, 385) when he asserts that the "small actions" of a "private person" can illuminate character as well as any; (273) when he dismisses the notion that kings and princes should engage our sympathies more than others; (294) and when he argues for a stage-language understandable by the uneducated as well as the educated, (504) he is advancing a profound sociological vision, all the more gripping because of its tangible portrayal upon a (real or imagined) stage. The distance between theater and world, as Lessing himself states, need not be great. (489)

And as ever, Lessing in the Dramaturgie advances his own notions in an open-ended, scholarly, and critically engaging manner, with the obvious aim of educating the public to new levels of understanding:

In truth I pity my readers who promised to themselves in this journal a theatrical newspaper as varied and manifold, as amusing and comical as a theatrical newspaper should be!... [They are instead getting] long, serious, dry criticisms of old well-known plays; ponderous examinations of what tragedy should or should not be, at times even expositions of Aristotle. Are they to read this? (153)

The pieces contained in the Dramaturgie could indeed become over-detailed at points, but they remained consistently educative without being condescending, and would have served to help its readers become better acquainted with what they were seeing and experiencing in the theatre, and to be more discerning when it came to judging dramatic works. At one point Lessing confronts the possibility, raised by others, that too much criticism could damage the nascent German theatre, and oppress emerging genius. Such "wise gentlemen"
know little what they want when they "lament so amusingly over the unfavourable impression which criticism makes on the public." They are of the kind who would like to persuade us that no one any longer thinks butterflies to be beautiful "since the evil magnifying glass has shown us that these colors are but dust." It seems significant that in discounting such complaints, Lessing chooses an analogy from the natural sciences to illustrate his point. He goes on to say that "Whoever reasons rightly, also invents; and whoever wants to invent, must also be able to reason." The right kind of critical rationality—the Baconian/Baylean kind which Lessing sets forth in the *Dramaturgie*, with its empirical basis and attention to detail—can help clarify and improve dramatic works (it did Lessing's own, he admits), as well as their reception by the public.

But the Hamburg public was not ready to support a high-minded *National-theater*, and for this and other reasons the consortium running the theatre was disbanded in early 1769, and the theatre reverted to actor-management. Lessing could not resist a parting-shot, however, and thus no.'s 101-104 of the *Dramaturgie* were framed as an "after-play" to the main dramatic event. In some ways the piece can be read as a settling of accounts between Lessing and the "public" he had been striving to shape and educate. And it involves a good deal of self-revelation, something which Lessing did not often do in such a direct manner. It is as though Lessing seeks to make his own intentions clear, and by so doing model a degree of self-knowledge and maturity still lacking in the larger German Publikum.

At first his comments appear to betray false modesty: he can't understand why the project's backers might have thought he could be useful to their undertaking; he was just standing "idly in the marketplace" because of his singular uselessness, and his "indifference" towards all occupations. This of course is only partly true, but there is enough ambivalence in his career path to suggest that he wasn't being entirely disingenuous. Then he goes on to assert, employing (among others) a Cartesian physiological metaphor, that if he is a dramatic poet of any calibre, it is only because of "criticism":
...I must force everything out of myself by pressure and pipes. I would be poor, cold, [and] shortsighted if I had not learnt in certain measure to borrow foreign treasures, to warm myself at foreign fires, and to strengthen my eyes through the glasses of art. I have therefore always been ashamed or annoyed, when I [have] heard or read anything in disparagement of criticism. It is said to suppress genius, and I flattered myself that I had gained from it something very nearly approaching genius.(694-95)

Lessing in effect represents himself as fully-realized because of being fully (self-) criticized; the critically self-conscious public actor, the basic unit of an enlightened public sphere.

The close connection between this enlightened self and the public sphere is indicated by the way in which Lessing goes on to mock Isaac Casaubon's assessment of Aristotle's Didaskalia, which were short reports on the plays of the Greek stage. Casaubon had argued that Aristotle's chief aim in these notices had been the rectification of chronology. What an "everlasting disgrace to Aristotle," Lessing replies, "if he had concerned himself more with the poetical value of plays, with the influence of customs, with the education of taste, than with...the years of the Olympiads and the names of the archons under which they were first performed!" Lessing's sarcasm underlines his own sense of the important social role of the theatre--its "education of taste" and "influence of customs," or put differently, its "public" relevance. The theatre served as a point of intersection between individual and social perceptions, a place in which the broad spectrum of society could be moralized as sympathetic, virtuous social actors. And as Lessing states early in the Dramaturgie, this is no longer a religious enterprise;(281) it is now, as we have seen, "natural" and "human," based upon emerging European currents of sentimentalism and scientific rationality.

Yet the German public is not ready for this:

If the public asks, "What has been done?" [to further dramatic poetry], and answers itself with a sarcastic "nothing," then I ask on my part, "What has the public done in order that something might be achieved?" Nothing also, ay, and something worse than nothing. Not enough that it did not help on the work, it did not even permit to it its natural life-course. Out [with] the good-natured idea to procure for the Germans a national theatre, when we Germans are not yet a nation! I do not speak of our political constitution, but only of our social character. It might almost be said that this consists in not desiring to have an individual one. We are still the sworn copyists of all that is foreign."159
Thus at the end of one of Lessing's greatest, most "public-spirited" undertakings, the "problem of Publikum" remains.\textsuperscript{160} Even though such "stale" ravings were obviously not to Lessing's liking,\textsuperscript{(699)} he obviously felt the need to express his frustration openly, in a way echoed by others in the third quarter of the eighteenth-century. Despite his best efforts, Germans did not yet possess enough of a cohesive social identity, were not yet enough of an "enlightened public," to contribute to their own improvement. Or so, in his darkest of moments, Lessing believed. Yet he had begun a process of socio-cultural formation that was to continue, a process aided not only by his prose criticism, but also by his dramatic works, including notably \textit{Minna von Barnhelm} and \textit{Emilia Galotti}.

\textit{Minna von Barnhelm and Emilia Galotti}

Both \textit{Minna von Barnhelm} (1767) and \textit{Emilia Galotti} (1772) were important events in the emergence of modern German theater, and in German intellectual life generally. \textit{Minna}, Lessing's most popular play, expressed an invigorated German self-consciousness and -confidence in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, and \textit{Emilia} was to become an inspiration to a whole generation of German intellectuals; it was the play left open on Werther's desk when he committed one of the most famous of modern suicides. Both plays quickly became central points of reference in German consciousness, helping to consolidate an emerging German public sphere; Lessing practiced what he preached, providing concrete examples of what he considered to be passable dramatic works.

It is well-established that \textit{Minna}, as the most successful piece performed in the Hamburg \textit{Nationaltheater}, represented a new stage in German self-awareness. The excitement with which the play was received was due to Lessing's ability to problematize the German socio-political situation. It brought current subject-matter with political relevance to the stage, thematizing for the first time contemporary life and the recognizable trend of
Ill social change in a drama. And it "paraded before the eyes of the public...a bürgerlich-human morality with which one could easily identify." The most salient aspect of Lessing's dramatic reconfiguration lays in Minna's deflation of the pretension of Tellheim's "honour," and her assertion that "Equality alone is the firm bond of love." Tied though it may be to material concerns, noble "honour" appears pitiable and shortsighted, thwarting authentic human interaction. In having a bright, assertive Saxon woman deflate the noble but misguided pretensions of a Prussian man, and establish an essentially egalitarian relationship on the ruins of these pretensions, Lessing sets forth a harmonizing vision of German sociability based upon fundamentally "human" qualities. Present again is the overwhelming weight of public demands (Tellheim the man seems obscured by his high public reputation), and the desire to retreat to a more private idyll, but the happy ending suggests that it is indeed possible to bridge private happiness with public esteem, via the production of more authentic, egalitarian social relations.

Emilia Galotti presents a darker vision, pushing a few clouds into the bright sky of the Aufklärung, as one critic has put it. Although set in a remote time and place, the play was distinctly modern in its critical depiction of the abuses of absolute authority; and this is achieved by showing how simple human desires become magnified beyond all proportion by the machinations of unbridled power. The prince comes across more as a pathetic figure than a villain, a human being with desires like everyone else, but whose position keeps him from mature self-understandings and relationships. Viewed from this perspective, the play's central theme is expressed in Emilia's question/statement, "Who can compel a human being." That there is no escape from the domination of public authority, no avoiding the conflicts and contradictions of a highly stratified society, does point to a critical grappling with the progressive, optimistic side of the Enlightenment. Yet it must be remembered that Emilia was a tragedy, meant to evoke a strong sympathetic identification from its audience, making members more self-aware
of their own social and moral position. If the prince had attained what he wanted, then it might be safe to argue that the play shows no way out of the dilemma it poses. Yet the prince ends up as unhappy as everyone else: everyone suffers under the current socio-political arrangement, and hence it is in everyone's interest to move towards more humane social structures. It is worth asking whether the reform-minded Joseph II would have attended the play's Vienna debut twice if it purveyed an entirely hopeless, Machiavellian outlook.165

Both plays contain at their core representations of the dilemmas and hopes of a culture in the process of emerging from feudal social relations. Individual, "human" consciousness has begun to strip away the layers of custom and usage that support such a system, and in so doing projects the possibility of a new sphere of social relations, one characterised by enlightened ideals of "nature" and "humanity." The dramatic genre of comedy leads Minna towards harmonious resolution; tragedy takes Emilia towards dissonance and dissolution. The processes of decomposition and reconstruction are simultaneous and ongoing, and are played out before an interested public that now begins to negotiate such understandings within itself.

Or does it? Some have argued that despite any such socio-political intentions on Lessing's part, the reception of these plays was by no means uniform or terribly cognizant of their socio-political dimensions. Aesthetic and moral concerns seem to have dominated reactions to the plays, and as time went on their socio-political valences were ignored almost entirely, as aesthetic preoccupations (regarding the plays themselves as well as the acting performances) came to dominate an increasingly abstracted cultural elite. There was, properly speaking, no Publikum for Lessing's mature drama.166 Yet although explicit recognition of what, in hindsight, are some of the more important features of these dramas, was largely lacking at first, we do know that these plays enjoyed a certain reputation and prominence as decisively German cultural artefacts, receiving widespread critical praise.167 German-speakers were beginning to respond to themes and characters that reflected
contemporary concerns and feelings. If all of the ramifications of plot, character and action were not always perceived or discussed, the fact remains that a more universal, "human" moral sociability was being represented in front of an increasingly self-conscious and -confident German public. And despite the fact that such a Publikum could be less educated and thankful than Lessing wished (as he put it regarding the Vienna public in 1772), it was nevertheless a rising force in German life.

That this public was composed exclusively of men is belied by the titles of Lessing's major plays--"Miss Sara Sampson," "Minna von Barnhelm," "Emilia Galotti." From his earliest comedies Lessing had featured "emancipated" women characters with "wit" and "heart," and Minna von Barnhelm goes beyond earlier such characters in being assertive, humorous, common-sensical and intelligent. She is not perfect--she gets duped by the crafty Frenchman Riccault, but she is clearly brighter and more level-headed than the stolid Tellheim, who careens from stoic reserve to miserable pleading in the course of the play. Sara and Emilia are more passive, suffering heroines, but they exhibit an honesty and strength of character that shines through the darkness of their circumstances, and their "virtue" prevails in the end.

Wherefore all these women? Lessing himself asked the question in a letter to Gleim in 1772: "Do you think that in the end I make too much of the girls? Sara! Minna! Emilia!" There is good reason to suppose that Lessing was not entirely comfortable with his heroines. In the Dramaturgie he in effect argued that men are more properly portrayed as being ambitious with (noble) pride, and women as tender, loving and (ignobly) jealous. An ambitious and prideful woman is "against nature;" "offended love" is a more suitable motive for harsh actions taken by a woman. And in 1772 Lessing made similar sorts of remarks in response to queries by his brother Karl about Emilia's character, which Karl found to be too "pious and obedient." Lessing replied that just because the play was called "Emilia" didn't mean that she needed to be the most prominent, striking character. And furthermore, "The virginal heroines and Philosophinen are not at all to my taste...I know of no
higher virtue of an unmarried girl, than piety and obedience." If characters like Minna von Barnhelm belie this stern, defensive pronouncement, Lessing's major tragic heroines do indeed struggle with the values of filial piety and obedience, as feminist scholars have observed. An internalized, sentimentalized ideal of human relations is characterized by the dependence of female characters on the value systems of their fathers.

At this level of interpretation, Lessing was ambivalent about the role of women; his intentions are difficult to isolate, and indeed feminist scholars tend to steer clear of this question. It seems obvious however that by framing these stories as tragedies, Lessing was not unaware of the negative implications of his heroines' fate. Rather than supporting a repressive ideal, Lessing was portraying the catastrophic result of total withdrawal into the intimate family sphere, in front of an emerging middle-order "public" of individuals who were becoming familiar with this modernised "private" domain. As such he is raising to public consciousness some of the main pitfalls of life in the private sphere, as well as the inadequacy of public life (and power relations) which were then extant. More intimate, egalitarian, "human" relations were not an unproblematic feature of a private sphere which remained in the thrall of feudal social and political relations.

Yet as I have mentioned, the plays' initial critics did not give them the searching readings that modern scholars do; the contemporary theatre-goer probably received dramas like Minna and Emilia on a fairly mundane level. Sympathetic middle-order were characters engaged in humorous or tragic situations, situations with contemporary German relevance. Women characters were featured prominently; although it is possible to view some of them as undergoing a process of simultaneous public "enfranchisement and restriction," they were nonetheless front and centre stage, and in a certain sense stood for both middle-order powerlessness and an "enlightened," "human" and "natural" morality. Pure motives sullied by debilitating circumstances are the stuff of tragedy, and there is no reason to suppose that Lessing was doing anything other than writing good tragedy when he juxtaposed bürgerschlich
morality with a repressive social environment. As he made clear in his literary-critical writings, he was more interested in portraying general aspects of the human condition, as he saw it, than those of social position. As such his "public" included both women and men, princes and subjects.

**Publikum: A Contested Domain**

From the later 1760s to the end of his life Lessing engaged in scholarly, polemical debates with a variety of adversaries. There he explicitly set forth his views on the proper parameters of public debate and the nature of the Publikum itself. This entailed contestant the veneer of "politeness" which covered over real incoherencies, as well as restrictive, limiting notions of "the public" and what constituted proper subject matter for public debate. In general terms, Lessing advocated a direct, blunt style of address that made the merits of the case being argued in front of the public the focal point; and this "public" was in principle to include everyone. Lessing's turn towards cosmopolitanism in his later years is much remarked upon, in opposition to his earlier German nationalism. Yet it seems less understood that Lessing's Publikum occupied a position between these two poles: as a relatively inclusive, critical entity, it combined German "heads" with the highest ideals of enlightened discourse, ways of operating that would preclude unreflective tribalism and the abuse of power and authority generally. Lessing's contestation of Publikum and the parameters of public debate, towards the end of his life, underlines his lifelong devotion to constituting and shaping an entity that stood somewhere between "nation" and "humanity."

The Briefe, antiquarischen Inhalts (1768-69) were a response to criticisms of Lessing's Laokoon, and particularly those made by Adolf Klotz, a superficial scholar who offended Lessing deeply by his supercilious remarks. The Briefe not only engage Klotz in trenchant critical battle, but also
prescribe standards of scholarly debate. Klotz becomes a negative foil for Lessing: polite yet scheming, pompous and superficial, dismissive of opponents with little sound basis, presumptuous in speaking for the public. Lessing argues, conversely, for "Roman urbanity" instead of "modern politeness;" i.e. for unadorned, direct speech that relies on the merits of the argument to sway the judgement of the public. He presents himself as being open to instruction, but only on the proper terms; and addresses his readers directly, engaging them in dialogue over the merits of his case against Klotz.

Lessing expends a good deal of energy defending the vigor of his response to what could appear to be rather trivial matters, particularly in the 51st letter, where the argument comes to a head:

As soon as [Klotz] had seen only the beginning of the Briefe in the public press, he made a grand effort to speak with all the solemn coolness of a person of rank (Standesperson). It put him off, that I could be so sensitive about a few doubts that he had brought forward with all modesty; he affirmed that his awareness of [his own] irreproachable intentions did not allow him to fear...my wrath; he clarified that our quarrel would be of little interest to the public, in whose sight I had stepped in order to educate him, [and] that he doesn't see what benefits the arts and sciences would gain therefrom...Mr. Klotz says, "Our quarrel interests the public little."--But even when I think of the public as judge? A judge must hear all quarrels, and be aware of them all, including the basest; they may interest him, or not.

Lessing goes on to ask just who constitutes, in this case, their "public"? His answer is ironic: it is probably a handful of diverse "individua" who are impertinently called "the public;" even so, they at least are interested in the full dimensions of the matter. For Lessing, "true modesty" is evident in people's ability to recognize their limitations; in their willingness to try to understand an argument before contradicting it; in their not accusing others of over-sensitiveness or triviality before the eyes of the public when they themselves engage in the selfsame activity. Klotz's disdainful, dismissive manner offended Lessing; it suggested closure instead of openness, of sovereignty (by a most unqualified dictator) over a public that should be allowed to judge matters for itself.

This becomes even clearer later in the Briefe, when Lessing reaches
something of a summit of critical invective:

Mr. Klotz went from being a man who only sought to pour a German broth, warmed up for the seventy-seventh time, over a cabbage, instantaneously to a universal critic/judge (Kunstrichter) of the liberal arts! Under the pretext that he and his friends were dissatisfied with various judgements which had been made of works of genius, he didn't merely draw his rectifications to the attention of the public, rather himself erected a tribunal; and what a tribunal!

He, the head! He, namely! And not without his civil title!--Who is this Mr. Klotz, who thrusts himself forward, to hold court over a Klopstock, and Moses, and Rammler, and Gerstenberg?--It is Mr. Klotz, the Privy Councillor.--Very well; with that a sentry to a Prussian fortress must be satisfied: but [must] also the reader? (394)

Lessing goes on to argue that an anonymous critic deserves a place as one voice emerging from the public, whereas the critic who names himself (in such an imposing manner) expects not merely to be a voice of the public, but to speak for it, determining its perspective. In that case, the public requires that this be a proven name, a name which has earned the public's trust through the merit of its own works; even if Mr. Klotz were a minister of state and the greatest philologist in Europe, that would make no difference. "Here we want to know what of merit he has done for the German liberal arts...What has he bequeathed to our language, which could make it proud vis-a-vis other languages?"(395). And the same goes for Klotz's followers: "It is not who they are which helps us to judge what they write,"(395) but rather the contrary. This was in keeping with comments made in the Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend, as were subsequent distinctions between critical attacks on a writer as writer, and attacks on a writer as a moral being.(396-97)

Lessing followed up the foregoing remarks in another work inspired by the controversy with Klotz, the essay Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet (1769). There, he stated that although he was disgusted by the events which had occasioned publication of the essay, he didn't think the public was justified in holding itself above such disputes:

[The public] appears to want to forget that the enlightenment of many important points has simple contradiction to thank, and that human beings would not yet be united over anything, if they hadn't ever squabbled over anything...If that part of the public which doesn't want to have anything to do with polemical writings happens to be largely composed of writers themselves, then it may be more than politesse that doesn't want to suffer the polemical
tone. It [makes] self-love and self-deception so uncomfortable! It is so dangerous to phony names!"

"The truth" wins out by every argument, even if only by the exposure of untruths; and there is in principle no difference between more and less important truths: "As a product of our understanding, one truth is as important as another." (407) The crucial matter is to maintain a forum in which truth can emerge. And this forum, with its processes of "fact" or "truth" production, is not coercive: each individual must judge the matter for himself, apart from any controversy which may have inspired it. (408) Lessing, whose own reputation as a leading critic had long been secured, was concerned in these essays to consolidate a view which he had been developing all along as to the nature and function of rational-critical public debate. His position was plausible and convincing in that he was not seeking to use his considerable reputation to coerce acceptance of his judgements, instead to guarantee a fair and open process of debate. The ferocity of his attacks on Klotz was due not only to his offended pride, but also to the threat posed by Klotz (and others like him) to the integrity of the public sphere itself. And in the theological controversies which occupied him in his final years, he not only carried forward his vision of a critical public engaged in an open-ended "search for truth," but also re-articulated the inclusivist ideals which had always been present in his work: the "public" included in principle everyone.

An important issue in these final controversies was the degree to which the common "Volk" should be included in contentious theological discussion. Lessing consciously aimed at involving the widest possible Publikum in the debate, as adjudicator; he thus forced his opponents, however unwillingly, to make their own appeals to this widened public. While they felt that open discussion about the contradictions of the Scriptures would be harmful to the Volk at large, Lessing argued that true religion requires intellectual engagement, and that such engagement should be as widespread as possible, leading to the "enlightenment" and improvement of the "mob," whom he explicitly included in his conception of Publikum. Linked to this was his notion of a public sphere of rational discussion engaged in an ongoing search
for "truth," a search adjudicated by present and future publics, ultimately comprised of "humanity" at large. And as he had throughout his life, he presented himself as an enlightened subject of discourse, one who was not unaware of his own limitations and of the need for open public discussion; this in opposition to his unenlightened opponents, who in their dogmatic approach betrayed a lack of self-awareness and hence understanding of the fallibility of their own theological position.180

Thus towards the end of his life Lessing was as concerned as ever with constituting a united and yet critically divided "public." And by now this project involved explicit contestation of competing visions of the public domain. More conservative individuals took issue with Lessing's open conception of Publikum when it came to theological matters, and "little dictators" like Klotz contested Lessing's literary-critical approach, again in the direction of closure and exclusion. When viewed from this perspective, Lessing's vehemence in these later controversies stems not only from offended pride or other personal motives, but from a perceived threat to the form of enlightened sociability he had been advancing throughout his career as a public writer. If one adds a sociological dimension to his writings, then such controversies appear to be less about personalities than about fundamental questions of socio-cultural and even -political interaction. And Lessing's view of an enlightened Publikum ultimately comprised of humanity at large provided a link between his earlier efforts at shaping an authentic "German" national identity and his lifelong cosmopolitan ideals. Publikum was a flexible term that could carry both local/national and universal connotations, with a concrete, albeit slowly-emerging, referent that was both subject and object of enlightened discourse.

Scholars who have recognized at least some of the many facets of Lessing's work as a public writer have tended to remain at a fairly high level of generality in their discussions, or have focused on a relatively discrete set of writings or period.181 Others who deal with the public/private question emphasize the privatizing, individualizing moment in Lessing's work, missing
That Lessing's work gave the individual more "air," as Alfred Bäumler put it, is indubitable--his writings exhibit an expansive subjectivity, coupled with an invitation for others to engage themselves similarly. But this subjectivity emerges vis-a-vis a new form of publicity, a new public sphere in which, so to speak, it lives and moves and has its being. Modern selves, as Mandeville so aptly recognized, exist in performative tension with the norms and gaze of "the public" at large. Therefore it follows that an individual like Lessing, who in another age could have existed quite comfortably in bookish, antiquarian exile from the world, expended so much intellectual energy on the theatre. His theorization of sympathy, and his dramaturgy generally, served both to conceptualize the relationship between increasingly complex individual perception and emotion and their public representation, and to provide a forum in which a cohesive, sensitized "public" of "private individuals" could take shape.

Herder recognized Lessing's stature as a "leading light" of "this bleary-eyed fog-land" (dumpsichten Nebellande), praising Lessing's efforts toward establishing sound taste and judgement in the Germanies, as well as his "philosophical critique" and dialogical writing style, a style which Herder himself took to its outer limits. And it wasn't Lessing's fault if "the public" hadn't benefitted as much as he had intended from his later theological controversies. For his part, after meeting with Herder for a few days in early 1770, Lessing stated that he was "well-satisfied" with the young writer. Lessing and Abbt met briefly in 1765, and although their personal relationship was slight, they appear to have shared a mutual respect. Both writers, as we shall see, continued Lessing's project of intervening profoundly in an emerging modern German public sphere.


7. For a good discussion of the moribund state of philosophy in Germany at mid-century see Manfred Kuehn, Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy (Kingston & Montreal, 1987), pp. 36-40. The European-wide movement of sentimentalism clearly played a role in this discussion, and will be treated in more detail below.


9. Berlinische Privilegierte Zeitung (henceforth BPZ), 8 May 1751, in Werke vol. 3, p. 55. As indicated above in note 1, unless otherwise indicated all translations in this chapter are my own. German terms which are not easily translated or are in some way significant are included in the text.

10. Ibid., p. 56.

11. Ibid., pp. 56-57.

12. This point will be elaborated further in subsequent sections of this chapter. See also Wilfried Barner, "Lessing und sein Publikum in den frühen kritischen Schriften," in Edward P. Harris and Richard E. Schade, eds., Lessing in heutiger Sicht: Beiträge zur Internationalen Lessing-Konferenz Cincinnati, Ohio 1976 (Bremen u. Wolfenbüttel, 1976), p. 329.

13. "It doesn't require a lot of effort to identify what is good and bad in a letter...One needs only to take into account...[its nature and intention], and enlist the aid of a few principles of eloquence (Beredsamkeit)." C.F. Gellert, "Praktische Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke


15. "Classicism," "French classicism," or "neo-classicism" are terms commonly used to describe the tradition of rational reflection on aesthetics stretching from Aristotle through figures like Scaliger, Boileau, and Gottsched, aimed at deriving certain foundational rules for correct moral/artistic expression. See for example the discussion in F.J. Lamport, German Classical Drama: Theatre, humanity and nation 1750-1870 (Cambridge, 1990), Chapter 1: Classicism and neo-classicism: Germany and the European tradition. See also Jürgen Jacobs, "Die Klassistische Drama der Frühauflärung" in Walter Hinck, ed., Handbuch des Deutschen Dramas (Düsseldorf, 1980), pp. 61-75.

16. See the discussion of Gellert's treatise in Silvia Bovenschen, Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu Kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), p. 206ff. Although Bovenschen rightly points out that despite this kind of opening "Der Schritt aus dem Haus ist nicht geplant [for women]," she also admits that it did represent a "chance" for greater female self-expression and participation in literature.


19. In 1754 Lessing reviewed a similar book, Freundschaftliche Briefe von J.S. Patzke (1754), thanking him for his directions to those who want to write "confidential" letters; "The title indicates already what sort of language is contained therein; it is the language of friendship which one hears among cultivated spirits (schönen Geistern) of tender sensibilities." BPZ, 27 July 1754, Werke vol. 3, p. 215.

20. In September 1751 he announced that "The epoch of a purified (gereinigten) taste among the Germans has begun with splendid didactic poems." (BPZ, 7 Sept. 1751, Werke vol. 3, p. 70.) In 1753 he mentioned that it might not be so bad to allow contemporary fashionable tastes, fleeting as they might be, to be joined to more permanent, essential beauties, in order to ensure both contemporary and future applause. (Ibid., 15 March 1753, p. 160.) All works of Alexander Pope are worthy of "readers of taste," an expression which he increasingly employed. (E.g. 12 July 1753, p. 173; 7 August 1753, p. 177; 4 July 1754, p. 212.)


22. Ibid., 6 March 1755, p. 239.


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25. BPZ, 2 January 1753, p. 151.

26. BPZ, 22 June 1754, p. 209. See also the reviews of 30 May and 4 July, 1754.


28. See Bäumler, Das Irrationalitätsproblem, p. 60ff; Wilfried Barner, Gunter Grimm, Helmut Kiesel & Martin Kramer, Lessing: Epoche--Werk--Wirkung (München, 1981), pp. 140-44; Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Vom universalen zum nationalen Literaturmodell in deutsch-französischen Konkurrenzkampf (1680-1770)," in Wilfried Barner, ed., Tradition, Norm, Innovation: Soziales and literarisches Traditionsverhalten in der Frühzeit der deutschen Aufklärung (München, 1989), esp. pp. 37-40; Reinhart Meyer, "Restaurative Innovation. Theologische Tradition und poetische Freiheit in der Poetik Bodmers und Breitingers," in Christa Bürger, Peter Bürger & Jochen Schulte-Sasse, eds., Aufklärung und literarische Öffentlichkeit (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), pp. 39-82. Gottsched's theatre reforms, for example, occurred in the context of a relatively chaotic and undeveloped German theatre scene; there was a felt need to impose some order on the variety of inherited dramatic forms in order to raise aesthetic standards and foster a national, bürgerlich theatre. See Horst Steinmetz, Das Deutsche Drama von Gottsched bis Lessing (Stuttgart, 1987); Jacobs, "Die klassistische Drama der Frühaufklärung."


33. Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit (1760), pp. 748-52.

34. The term was used in reference to a controversy involving Georg Bose, professor of physical sciences at the University of Wittenberg; "You will have without doubt seen the sheets against prof. Bose which the local theological faculty has displayed to the public (dem Publico aufgehangen hat)." (9 June 1752, in Kiesel, ed., Briefe von und an Lessing, p. 39.)
35. Towards the end of a review of a translation of a text on musical harmony, Lessing stated that the translation was well-done, the translator deserving thanks both from musicians and the "Publico." (BPZ, 25 Nov. 1752, Werke vol. 3, p. 144.)


37. Ibid., pp. 521-22.


40. BPZ, 10 July 1755, Werke vol. 3, p. 252.

41. Ibid., 21 July 1753, p. 173.


43. See Werke, vol. 3., pp. 787-89.


47. BPZ, 23 May 1754, Werke vol. 3, p. 205.


49. It is true, of course, that "humanity" for people like Lessing was ultimately theorized from the perspective of the burgher classes; but this does not preclude the possibility that his humanitarian ideals did indeed transcend immediate middle-order concerns.

50. Ibid., 21 Aug. 1751, p. 68.

51. Ibid., 26 Feb. 1754, p. 200.

52. See the review, which combined high praise with some significant objections to Rousseau's attack on the arts and sciences, in Das Neueste aus dem Reiche des Witzes, als eine Beilage zu den Berlinischen Staats- und Gelehrten Zeitungen, April 1751, Werke vol. 3, p. 84ff.


55. *BPZ*, 10 July 1755, p. 252.


57. *BPZ*, 10 July 1755, p. 252.

58. As Lessing himself noted in a letter to his father: "It is a satire, without anyone actually knowing what it is about. Because the King has written it, it has given rise to much interest and various interpretations." Letter to J.G. Lessing, 29 May 1753, in Kiesel, ed., *Briefe*, p. 52. The "letters" were published separately in March 1753.


60. See Ibid., p. 182. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

61. I use the term in reference both to his dramas and his writings on drama.


64. For more on emerging French and English dramatic genres and Lessing, see Lamport, *Lessing and the Drama*, chaps. 2 & 3.


68. Steinmetz, *Das Deutsche Drama*, p. 58.


70. See Steinmetz, *Das Deutsche Drama*, p. 54ff.


72. According to Lessing, his goal was to show the opposition between "the agitator (Aufführer) and the patriot, and the tyrant and the true leader." *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 764.

73. See *Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 371-89, esp. 373-74.

74. *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 355-56. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.
75. *Werke*, vol. 4, p. 10. Further page citations will be made in the text.

76. More on this below. For Aristotle's comments on tragedy, see the *Poetics*, James Hutton trans. (New York, 1982), p. 50.

77. See Nicolai's letter to Lessing, 31 Aug. 1756, *Werke* vol. 4, pp. 155-57. Subsequent citations of this correspondence will be made according to date and page number in *Werke* vol. 4.


79. Ibid., p. 163.


81. 28 Nov. 1756, p. 175.

82. 2 Feb. 1757, p. 201.

83. Most of the letters in this exchange can be read this way, but see especially Lessing's letters of 29 Nov. 1756, p. 176ff; 2 Feb. 1757, p. 201ff. Martin Schenkel has argued similarly that the "universal" quality of Lessing's concept of *Mitleid* gives it its socio-political dimension; by overstepping the boundaries of the "private" subject of drama it assumes a "public," societal dimension. See Martin Schenkel, *Lessing's Poetik des Mitleids* (Bonn, 1984), p. 62.

84. For a similar argument in the context of pre-revolutionary France, see Sara Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célebres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley and L.A., 1993). Maza demonstrates how the publication of "private" stories of injustice, whether on stage or in the courtroom (via judicial memoires), "contributed to the birth of public opinion and a new public sphere in the decades before the French Revolution." (2-3) "A central feature of this 'public sphere'...paradoxically [was] a preoccupation with matters common to the scattered 'subjectivities' of its inhabitants and which we would call 'private'--communication, criticism, and debate about intimate matters such as love, marriage, child-rearing, and family life." (13)

85. 2 Feb. 1757, p. 201ff.

86. "Vorrede: Des Herrn Jakob Thomsons sämtliche Trauerspiele" (1756), *Werke* vol. 4, p. 144.


89. See for example his comments in the PPZ, 23 August 1753, Werke vol. 3, p. 181; letter to Nicolai, 2 April 1757, Werke vol. 4, p. 209. Aristotle's presence in the Hamburgische Dramaturgie will be discussed below.


91. Thus he objects to Aristotle's notion that "revulsion" is the affect produced in us when we observe good men passing from prosperity to misfortune; it should be Mitleid. That is to say that instead of being repulsed and thrown back onto ourselves by something pitiful, we are drawn sympathetically to it. (18 Dec. 1756, p. 192) See also the Poetics, p. 57. Later, in keeping with his early pronouncement (following Mendelssohn) that "terror" was a sub-species of sympathy (the "sudden surprise" of it), Lessing criticizing Aristotle for over-emphasizing "fear" as the medium of sympathy--fear for ourselves being what excites our "pity" for others. Lessing felt that "sympathizing (Das Mitleiden) purifies (reinigt) our passions, but not through the medium of fear, a notion which led Aristotle to his false notion of 'Mitleid.'" See Mendelssohn's Briefe über die Empfindungen, in Moritz Brash, ed., Moses Mendelssohn: Schriften zur Philosophie, Aesthetik und Apologetik vol. II Hildesheim, 1968), p. 79; Lessing's letter to Nicolai, Nov. 1756, p. 162; 2 April 1757, pp. 209-210; Aristotle, Rhetorics, John Henry Freese trans. (London, 1947), II, viii, pp. 225-29.


93. Although Hume and Smith departed from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson's emphasis on an innate "moral sense" of one kind or another, they were still very much a part of this tradition of philosophizing, particularly in their stress on "sympathy" as a natural instinct of sociability. See Sauder, Empfindsamkeit, p. 73ff. See also D.D. Raphael, "Moral Sense," in Philip P. Wiener, ed., Dictionary of the History of Ideas vol. III (New York, 1973), pp. 230-35; Hans Jürgen Schings, Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch: Poetik des Mitleidens von Lessing bis Büchner (München, 1980).

94. See Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability, chap. 1, "Sympathy and the Production of Society;" Sauder, Empfindsamkeit, p. 73ff.

95. Sauder, Empfindsamkeit, p. 184.


97. For detailed analysis of Lessing's concept of Mitleid, see Schenkel, Lessings Poetik des Mitleids; Schings, Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch. Schenkel's analysis is hindered by arcane literary-critical jargon, while Schings pays little attention to social dimensions of the term.

98. He translated the Discourse on Inequality soon after it was published, and his Briefe über die Empfindungen imitated Shaftesbury's The Moralists quite closely. See Brash, ed., Moses Mendelssohn Schriften, p. 5. See also Sauder, Empfindsamkeit, p. 185ff.


100. Mendelssohn, Briefe über die Empfindungen, pp. 79-80.


103. See Schenkel, Lessings Poetik, chap. 3.1., p. 189ff; Bäumler, Das Irrationalitätsproblem, p. 38ff. The heading of one section of Mendelssohn's treatise reads: "Beauty presumes unity in multiplicity...perfection doesn't require unity, rather the agreement (Übereinstimmung) of multiplicity." p. 28.

104. There are two separate third-party accounts of this in Richard Daunicht, ed., Lessing im Gespräch (München, 1971), pp. 85-86.

105. Werke vol. 3, p. 665. Further page citations from the essay will be made in the text.

106. Shaftesbury, Characteristicks vol II. (1732), p. 81. See chapter 3 for more on Shaftesbury.

107. Ibid., pp. 246-47.

108. Section IV of The Moralists, for example, can be read as a philosophical background to the "Inquiry" as well as to "Sensus Communis: An Essay on Wit and Humour," both discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.


110. Quoted in Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability, p. 28.

111. Francis Hutcheson, A System of Moral Philosophy (London, 1755), p. 111. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

112. An objection which can be made, however, is that in Lessing's translation of Hutcheson he rendered "sympathy" as "Sympathie," not "Mitleid," employing the latter term in fact to translate "pity." (See Franz Hutchesons Sittenlehre der Vernunft aus dem Englischen übersetzt (Leipzig, bey Johann Wendler, 1756), e.g. pp. 65-67.) It is nevertheless important to remember that Hutcheson himself used "pity" and "sympathy" interchangeably (e.g.20-21), and that in Germanicizing "sympathy" Lessing pointed to its singularity and newness to German discussion; the traditional association of Mitleid with suffering--"suffering with"--allied it more closely with "pity." Hutcheson's "sympathy" carried with it many positive, pleasurable associations, in its employment as a general aspect of sociability. In the year after translating Hutcheson Lessing began to explore Mitleid as a similar general aspect of sociability, albeit more expressly connected with suffering. My intention in translating Mitleid as "sympathy" is to point to this fact, and to the wider intellectual context; present-day notions of "pity" do not convey the issues at stake. Mendelssohn, for example, complained to Lessing in 1768 that if a critic of his had understood his use of Mitleid to convey "Sympathie für Andre," the critic's difficulty would have largely been avoided. (Letter to Lessing, Nov. 1768, Kiesel, ed., Briefe, p. 565.) And, as we shall see, by the later 1760s Lessing himself was employing Mitleid interchangeably with Sympathie.


Mitleid in this discussion. See E.C. Beasley & Helen Zimmern, trans.,


116. There were of course other sources for Lessing's acquaintance with
sentimentalism by 1756. He gave a favourable review to Voltaire's sentimental
tragedy Amalie in 1752 (BPZ, 14 Dec. 1752, Werke vol. 3, p. 145); he was well-
acquainted with the novels of Richardson (BPZ, 17 May 1753, Ibid. p. 165; 9
May 1754, pp. 202-03), as he was with "tearful comedies" like Madame de
Grafigny's Cenie (1751), which he called a "masterpiece" of the genre. (BPZ,
24 May 1753, Ibid. pp. 167-68.) And he wrote of Matthew Prior's "commendable"
ability to speak "the language of sentiment" (Sprache der Empfindung) in his
poem Henry and Emma (1719). (BPZ, 27 Sept. 1753, Ibid. p. 185.)


118. Des Herrn Jakob Thomson Sämtliche Traerspiele, "Vorrede," Werke
vol. 4, p. 144.

119. The most important source is believed to be Thomas Shadwell's The

120. Schenkel, Lessings Poetik des Mitleids, p. 6.

121. See Barner et al, Lessing, p. 172, 336.

122. Ibid., p. 172; Lamport, Lessing and the Drama, p. 88.

123. Lamport, Lessing and the Drama, p. 84.

124. Others have adopted this viewpoint as well: see Barner et al,
Lessing, p. 143, 164. Helmut Peitsch, using the paradigm of "bürgerliche
Emanzipation," has argued that the depiction of a moralized "private"
humanity--in opposition to the feudal-absolutist public sphere--was a step
towards the formation of middle-order class consciousness. This perspective
has much in common with the one taken in this study, but it shares the
weaknesses inherent in the emphasis on bürgerliche Emanzipation as outlined in
Chapter 1, and it does not go far enough in acknowledging that such depictions
of "private humanity" were themselves constitutive of a new public sphere.
See Helmut Peitsch, "Private Humanität und bürgerlicher Emanzipationskampf:
Lessings 'Miß Sara Sampson'," in Gert Mattenklott & Klaus R. Scherpe, eds.,
Literatur der bürgerlichen Emanzipation im 18. Jahrhundert (Kronberg, 1973),
pp. 179-92.

125. Miss Sara Sampson, in Two Plays by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Ernest
Bell, trans. (Bath, 1990), p. 19.

126. Ibid., p. 75.

127. Steinmetz, Das Deutsche Drama, p. 10, 72ff; 77.

128. Karin A. Wurst, Familiale Liebe ist die 'Wahre Gewalt': Die
Repräsentation der Familie in G.E. Lessings dramatischen Werke (Amsterdam,
1988).

use of work done on melodrama by Peter Brooks in making this argument. See
Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama,


137. Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend, 1759, "Einleitung," in Werke vol. 5, p. 30. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


140. Werke, vol. 6, p. 88.


142. See Lamport, Lessing and the Drama, Chapter 5, for an introduction to the general situation, as well as a useful synopsis of the contents of the Dramaturgie.


146. See numbers 74 onward, in Werke vol. 4, p. 574ff. See also the discussion in Lamport, Lessing and the Drama, p. 129ff.

147. Lamport, Lessing and the Drama, p. 137.

148. With some changes in emphasis. The essential feature of tragedy remains, however, the arousal of Mitleid. See Werke vol. 4, p. 574ff; Lamport, p. 138; Barner et al, Lessing, pp. 190-91.
149. See numbers 19, 32, 34, 86-91.

150. See numbers 86-91.


152. Wolfgang Martens argues more generally that it is problematical to view the German drama of the Enlightenment as an ideological expression of the values of a single burgher estate; as in Lessing's work, the perspective is "standestranszendierend." See Wolfgang Martens, "Die deutsche Schaubühne im 18. Jahrhundert--moralische Anstalt mit politischer Relevanz?" in H.E. Bödeker & Ulrich Herrman, eds., *Aufklärung als Politisierung--Politisierung der Aufklärung* (Hamburg, 1987), esp. p. 93.


154. Ibid., p. 482. I have substituted "evil" for "large" in the translation; see *Werke*, vol. 4, p. 673.


156. See the discussion in Steinmetz, *Das Deutsche Drama*, p. 108ff.

157. And his letters reveal an ample sense of ambivalence and dissatisfaction with all the possibilities open to him. See for example his letter to Karl Lessing, 14 Nov. 1771, in Kiesel ed., *Briehe* vol. 2, pp. 262-63.


160. For a wide-ranging look at this "problem" vis-a-vis the German theatre, see T.J. Reed, "Theatre, Enlightenment and Nation: A German Problem," *FMLS* XIV (1978):143-64. Reed theorizes the "problem of Publikum" in regards to the German theatre without calling it that.


163. Steinmetz, *Das Deutsche Drama*, p. 127.


166. Wulf Rüskaum, *Dramaturgie ohne Publikum: Lessings Dramentheorie und die zeitgenössische Rezepion von Minna von Barnhelm und Emilia Galotti* (Koln, Wien, 1984). Although Rüskaum overstates the case, his study points to the German "problem of Publikum," and hence to why the constitution and contestation of an enlightened, cohesive German Publikum was so pressing.
167. See Barner et al., Lessing, p. 259ff; Rüskamp, Dramaturgie ohne Publikum, passim; For Eva König's comments on the positive reception of Emilia Galotti by the Viennese public see Kiesel, Briefe vol. 2, p. 442.


171. See the Dramaturgie, numbers 30 & 31, Werke vol. 4, p. 367ff.


174. Helga Slessar cogently argues that: "Die Frage, ob Lessing dieses Bedauern über die Sonderstellung der Frau geteilt hat, ließe sich, wenn überhaupt, nur aufgrund seines ganzen Werkes beantworten. Vielleicht ist aber die Aufgabe, Lessings persönliche Stellungnahme zur Abhängigkeit der Frau zu erschließen, überhaupt unlösbar weil die Gesamtheit seines Aussagen zu doppeldeutig ist." Helga Slessarer, "Doppelte Moral" in der Sozialisation der Töchter bei Joachim Heinrich Campe und Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," in Freimark et al, eds., Lessing und die Toleranz, pp. 353-54. Wurst does not attempt to gauge Lessing's own intentions or position on this question in her otherwise helpful study, preferring instead to remain at the level of internal textual criticism. See Wurst, Die familiare Liebe ist die 'wahre Gewalt'.


178. Werke, vol. 6, pp. 191-92, 372-73. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

179. Werke, vol. 6, p. 407. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


186. See Oskar Claus, Die historisch-politischen Anschauungen Thomas Abfts (Gotha, 1905), p. 10.
Chapter 3

Inscribing a Public Sphere of Citizens: Thomas Abbt's Response to the "Problem of Publikum"

If Lessing's approach to the "problem of Publikum" requires a good deal of careful exegesis, Thomas Abbt's (1738-66) was plain and simple, and indeed overt--Abbt was by nature interested in issues of social and political culture. If Lessing's engagement with such issues was mediated by literary/aesthetic activity, Abbt's was more straightforwardly couched in discourses of patriotism and moral sociability. In Abbt the question of citizenship, only lurking in the wings of Lessing's writings, takes centre stage.

Drawing on a variety of European sources, Thomas Abbt--an academic with broad interests--strived in vom Tode für das Vaterland (1761), vom Verdienste (1765), and in his contributions to the journal started by Lessing, the Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend, to conceptualize and in fact create a sense of citizenship and the "common good" which cut across the various divisions of German society, uniting all estates and orders into a greater and harmonious whole, a true German Publikum. While Prussian patriotism was behind his initial foray into the topic of the public sphere in vom Tode für das Vaterland, his major work vom Verdienste reveals an expansion in perspective, and with it the emergence of "the public" as a moral and socio-political point of reference. There is a good degree of continuity, however, between the two texts, concerned as they are with overcoming the basic German "problem of Publikum" with enlightened arguments which would lead readers to locate themselves and their well-being in an enlarged societal frame.

The written word, as we have seen, was the primary vehicle available for this simultaneous movement of enlightenment and socialization, and Abbt's works reflect this fact in both form and content. They represent, in short, an early attempt to inscribe a public sphere--to create a space in which it
became possible for individuals to think, talk and act as citizens of a larger socio-political whole. Abbt, like Lessing, was pioneering the role of the "public writer." While at least one commentator has argued that Abbt was seeking to write for the common German Volk,¹ his primary audience was clearly that of the middling and higher orders: despite a populist polemic, and an obvious desire to fashion the broadest possible concept of citizenship and Publikum, Abbt's writings belong in the context of educated Enlightenment discussion.² His general project, however, involved reconciling Enlightenment and reform with the entire spectrum of German society. This in turn entailed the exploration of relatively informal and inclusive terms (e.g. Vaterland, Publikum) and modes of address, an exploration informed by a range of wider Enlightenment moral and socio-political discourses.

It is in this sense that Abbt was original and influential. Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Nicolai, Moses Mendelssohn, J.G. Zimmerman and others were affected in one way or another by Abbt's writings.³ Herder was particularly moved by Abbt's works, and his oeuvre, as we shall see in Chapter 4, was informed by the same kinds of socio-political concerns outlined here in relation to Abbt. Writing at mid-century, Abbt stood near the beginning of the slow dissolution of a feudal-absolutist culture. While pointing towards the future, however, his works were strongly rooted in the eighteenth-century, and any attempt to paint him as a harbinger of liberal democracy and the "emancipation" of the burgher-citizen (bürgerliche Emanzipation)⁴ must be heavily qualified.

A more accurate picture of Abbt emerges if the heuristic of middle-order emancipation is complemented by attention to the German "problem of Publikum:" in this way the inegalitarian, illiberal and religious dimensions of his work can find their place as components of a larger vision, rather than merely troublesome vestiges of the past.⁵ Attention to the "problem of Publikum" serves to bring the dialectic of individual and social development into relief: Abbt was as concerned with giving rise to what he considered to be a healthy social organism as with his own individual development or the
emancipation of the burgher-citizen. Dena Goodman's insistence that during the eighteenth-century public and private spheres were related in a mutual process of articulation, and that "no stable distinction can be made between them," bears renewed emphasis here: for Abbt the emergence of enlightened (private) citizens was dependent upon awareness of their relation to a larger (public) social whole.

As we have seen, this concept of a common, relatively inclusive public sphere in German society was still undeveloped in the early 1760s; Abbt was one of the first to confront this problem directly in his writings. What emerges is a picture of an individual who forged a singular vision out of interaction with a wide range of texts and discourses, one that represented a decisive move away from traditional religious and authoritarian structures toward an inclusive and engaged understanding of citizenship and socio-political life.

Thomas Abbt was born in 1738 in the imperial city of Ulm, and died at the age of 27, in 1766, of an intestinal illness. His background was essentially bürgerlich, his grandfather having served in military and civic capacities, his father a wig-maker. Abbt was a precocious student, learning to read in a number of languages and mastering a broad range of subjects. In 1756 he began theological studies at the University of Halle, but excelled in the areas of mathematics and the liberal arts. In 1760, at the height of the Seven Years War, he took on a partial professorship at the University of Frankfurt a.d. Oder, and it was at this time that he wrote the patriotic work vom Tode für das Vaterland (1761).

The little booklet brought Abbt instant recognition; he was called to a full professorship in mathematics and philosophy at the University of Rinteln, and also came into contact with the Berlin Aufklärer Friedrich Nicolai and Moses Mendelssohn, who asked him to become a regular contributor to the Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend, in part to fill the vacancy left by Lessing. This he did enthusiastically, the writing activity and friendship with Nicolai and Mendelssohn compensating somewhat for the dullness and
pedantry of academic life at Rinteln. In 1765 Abbt published his most important work, *vom Verdienste*, which aroused the interest of the Margrave of Schaumburg-Lippe, an enlightened prince who offered Abbt a court position as territorial- and administrative-councillor. Abbt accepted, and spent the last year of his life in deepening friendship with the prince. In his short life Abbt had risen to the top of German academic life and beyond to a more satisfying position of enlightened administration and relatively free scholarly activity. His death was widely mourned, Herder felt, because Abbt "died for Germany and for his language too early!"  

The "Problem of Publikum" in Light of the Ancients: the Ciceronian Model

Abbt explicitly recognized what I am calling the German "problem of Publikum," typically expressing it in contrast to an idealized vision of ancient public life with its public-spirited figures like Demosthenes and Cicero, a vision forcefully presented in Cicero's *De Officiis*. In *vom Tode für das Vaterland*, for example, Abbt opened the book with the statement that "We have no public places where we can assemble for common deliberations; there is no Demosthenes or Cicero among us to make us aware of the general feeling; we see few statues that impart the teaching: die for the fatherland." In 1761 Abbt wrote in the *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend* (henceforth *Briefe*) that the Germanies lacked a common "German interest," and asked rhetorically: "Where is the Volk? Where are the assembled provinces?...Where is public deliberation about war and peace?" In the present system the Volk simply pays its dues and isn't consulted on how they are to be spent. It is rather in Cabinet where decisions are taken, and subjects must merely heed the order. "So their Demosthenes and Ciceros trudge home...leav[ing] the little marketplace behind." Abbt goes on regretfully to argue that modern conditions were not
favourable to the kind of ancient public speaking practiced by figures like Cicero. And in vom Verdienste Abbt mentions, in the midst of a discussion of merit in "private life," how the ancient practice of visiting the marketplace had given individuals many opportunities to be of service to each other; in so doing he binds "every class of private life" together into the public life of the ancient-style marketplace (agora).

The quotation cited above from the Briefe was made in the midst of reviewing a new German translation of Cicero's De Oratore, an effort which Abbt warmly welcomed. The text deals with public speaking within the context of public life, conveying a strong sense of what it means not only to belong to a political community, but to represent oneself and one's arguments publicly within that community. A more widely-read (and wide-ranging) Ciceronian text was De Officiis; it had exercised an enormous influence in the history of social and political thought, from the Church Fathers through the Renaissance and beyond to the eighteenth-century, providing a rich blend of natural jurisprudential and civic-humanist perspectives. It was printed as early as 1466 at Mainz, ranking among the earliest printings of classical texts in Europe, and Frederick the Great felt that no better book of morals had ever been written.

Abbt would have been familiar with the public-spirited text, which lays out the duties of the classical citizen in public and private life, arguing that all citizens are bound together in the knot of fellowship: "We are not born for ourselves alone, to use Plato's splendid words, but our country claims for itself one part of our birth, and our friends another." Cicero's frequent use of "res publica" in the text was multi-faceted: the term, literally translated as "the public thing," could stand for "nation," "community," "political community," "public life," etc., depending upon the context. In general, "Cicero uses res publica to refer primarily to different aspects of one and the same thing: a type of political activity that constituted the political community at its best." Thus Cicero states:

But when you have surveyed every thing with reason and spirit, of all fellowships none is more serious, and none dearer, than that
Cicero unequivocally assumes that public life is the highest sphere of activity: "Those...who have adapted themselves to great achievements in the service of the res publica, lead lives more profitable to mankind and more suited to grandeur and fame" than those who withdraw from public life. The emphasis is on practical action over contemplation, and individual good is defined to be a function of public good.

In confronting the German "problem of Publikum," Abbt was clearly informed by the ancient Ciceronian model of active public life. Cicero's stirring vision of the res publica as the most important locus of individual meaning and self-expression served as a model against which to judge contemporary socio-political conditions, and Abbt found them wanting. But as we shall see, his attempt to inscribe a modern German public sphere involved much more than a simple adoption of ancient or renaissance "classical republican" points of reference; modern writers also had begun to reflect on the "res publica" as a crucial category of socio-political life, transforming it in the process into a more modern idiom, one which Abbt eagerly took up and developed according to his own concerns.

The Legacy of Shaftesbury, Helvétius and Pope

If Abbt thus recognized the problematic nature of German public life in contrast to ancient conditions and the public-spiritedness of figures like Cicero, contemporary European writers provided a vocabulary and conceptual framework for envisioning a distinctly modern German public sphere. The writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, are one key source for understanding some of the main thrusts of Abbt's project. Abbt once attributed his writing style to Shaftesbury, "whom I have long and often read." And in a remark in the Briefe on the role of the writer in society
that epitomized his concerns, as well as the centrality of Shaftesburyean ideas in shaping them, Abbt states that "The sensus communis, as Shaftesbury says, is the sensation of what contributes to the order and welfare of the whole, and must be made known to the citizen." In the early 1760s Abbt and Moses Mendelssohn had been engaged in a translation of Shaftesbury, in particular the *Sensus Communis: An Essay on Wit and Humour* (1709) to which Abbt, in the above quotation, makes reference. Although the translation was not completed, Abbt enjoyed the project and revelled in the prospect of its publication.

The essay, which appeared in Shaftesbury's much reprinted *Character-istics* (1711), sheds light on the roots of some of Abbt's fundamental notions, indicating how one position in the evolving Enlightenment discourse of self-interest, virtue and sociability was appropriated and adapted to the German environment. Shaftesbury's self-consciously witty moral philosophy, which drew connections between virtue and sociability in a rhetoric of the "Publick," and which opposed "common sense" to the "pedantry" and "philosophy" of the schools, is an important discourse informing Abbt's work. The essay takes as its point of departure the question of the appropriate place of wit and humour in social intercourse, but ranges far beyond to a theory of virtue based on humankind's natural sociability, as opposed to the "selfish philosophy" espoused by the likes of Hobbes and La Rochefoucault. The essay thus has a decidedly sociable and friendly air to it, and none of the stern, religious moralism that critics of disinterested virtue liked to ascribe to its champions. The pleasurable back-and-forth of friendly raillery is the real ground for rational discussion, in contrast to the rambling pedantry of schoolmen and "philosophers." Men must be able to "reason freely," as this gives rise not only to understanding, but also sociability—"politeness." The discussion soon turns to consider the place of wit and humour in "publick Company;" here it becomes clear that the "Publick" at large demands a more serious tone than that of smaller groupings:

The Publick is not, on any account, to be laughed at, to its face; or so reprehended for its Follies, as to make it think it-self
contemned. The lovers of Mankind respect and honour Conventions and Society's of Men... 'Tis a breach of the Harmony of publick Conversation, to take things in such a key, as is above the common Reach, puts others to silence, and robs them of their Privilege of Turn.  

As the reference to "common reach" implies, Shaftesbury identifies morality with "common sense"—"sensus communis," or to put it another way, "the sense of the community;" i.e. neither that of dry academicians nor high-spirited gentlemen-friends, but of simple, unreflective common understandings.

After examining and rejecting a few of the more traditional bases of "common sense," Shaftesbury moves into a wide-ranging discussion of the realm of the "Publick" as the place in which virtue is realized as a result of common sense, now defined as a

Sense of the publick Weal, and of the common Interest; Love of the Community or Society, natural Affection, Humanity, Obligingness, or that sort of Civility which rises from a just Sense of the common Rights of Mankind, and the natural Equality there is among those of the same Species.(104)

For Shaftesbury, then, "public spirit" can only come "from a social Feeling or Sense of Partnership" with humankind. And "There is no real Love of Virtue, without the Knowledge of Publick Good. And where absolute Power is, there is no Publick." On the other hand, Shaftesbury asserts that even in the worst despotic states, a "publick Principle" can still operate, however "perverted and depressed" it may be. Indeed, people naturally desire some kind of "publick Parent" to "cherish and protect 'em," indicating "how natural an Affection there is towards Government and Order among Mankind."(107-108)

Shaftesbury's emphasis on adherence to law as a criterion for good government leaves further room for public spirit in a monarchy, and Abbt's injunctions for the monarch to submit himself to law in vom Tode für das Vaterland, as a precondition for the existence of a "fatherland" in a monarchy, are in keeping with Shaftesbury's notions here.  

Thus although Shaftesbury locates a "Publick" in a free and relatively egalitarian society, he leaves plenty of room for it in moderate absolutist states.

For Shaftesbury, a common sense in morals provides the foundation for a common sense in politics, the former necessarily existing in a state of nature
as a precondition for a social contract. The effect of this is to imply that a public sphere is a natural entity; indeed, Shaftesbury argues at length that humans are naturally sociable, having a propensity to "herd" and "combine" whatever their situation. It is this condition that gives rise to common understandings of virtue, which then underlie any sort of political system that arises. Abbt's vision of an informal public sphere existing more or less independently of government, based on natural, human impulses, resonates with Shaftesbury in this regard. Shaftesbury presents a hypothetical, "natural" history of virtue, sociability, and the public sphere in the essay, showing how basic natural impulses, including sexual attraction, the rearing of families, and so on, result in an ever-widening sense of fellowship and the recognition of "a Publick."(110-12)

In taking up the challenge of the philosophers of self-interest, Shaftesbury argues that to deny the reality or practice of virtue is to contradict what is naturally sociable about us, and hence to abuse ourselves.(121) The "modern projectors" of selfishness are depicted as solitary, speculative men who want to "new-frame the human Heart"(116) by creating unnatural systems of "improved selfishness."(124) Against these Shaftesbury poses the "common sense" of the average man, who "undisturbed by Philosophy and subtle Reasonings about his Interest, gives no other Answer to the thought of Villainy, than that he can't possibly find it in his Heart to set about it."(132)

The sociable heart, rather than the solitary head, is the source of virtue and common, "public" sense for both Shaftesbury and Abbt. The "Sensus Communis" essay, and likely others by Shaftesbury such as "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit,"30 provide an important textual background for Abbt's published work. One of the most important elements of Shaftesbury's discussion for Abbt's work consists in his extended reflections on the nature of a "Publick" and its importance in establishing a sense of virtue and the common good, and hence citizenship. This was, as Lawrence Klein has pointed out, one of the most "striking" things about Shaftesbury's philosophy: his
"concern with publicity, with public space and public discourse." Shaftesbury's cultural politics of politeness emerged in the face of an expanding English public sphere, as a way to reorder a new discursive environment that was becoming independent of Court and Church. Related to this was Shaftesbury's desire, as another commentator puts it, "to insinuate a spirit of generous devotion toward the social whole in the English people." This involved, in both "Sensus Communis" and the "Inquiry Concerning Virtue," making explicit the identity of "private" and "public" interest. For figures such as Abbt, this kind of discussion offered fresh terms and ideas that addressed the German "problem of Publikum," and he employed them accordingly.

The highly controversial book by C.A. Helvétius, De l'Esprit (1758), seems also to have had a strong effect upon Abbt. The book is mentioned in both of his major works, and Abbt echoes its emphasis on the interest of the public as the measure of all "true" virtue. Thus in vom Tode für das Vaterland Abbt mentions that "Helvétius has shown that probity always exists in reference to the common good, but that it is often descried by smaller societies as injustice, when it goes against their particular advantage," and a similar reference is made in vom Verdienste. Furthermore, during the interval between publication of these two works Abbt appears to have reread De l'Esprit, praising it heartily to his friend Friedrich Nicolai: "Hear ye! You are aware that Helvétius has written a splendid book. Should a person not be able to write one from the heart, which remains murky on so many points?"

Although he conceded to Nicolai that the book did have some weaknesses, Abbt remained convinced that it was a "good book, and we have no one in Germany who equals him, in prose writing. That doesn't mean a person therefore gives up." Abbt sent Nicolai and Mendelssohn an outline of such a book of "heated insights" and "heartfelt truths," which eventually came to be vom Verdienste. An important connection which Abbt was concerned to make in that book was between the human "heart" and social utility or, more generally,
sociability. Helvétius' text, in reducing knowledge and intellect to the operations of sensations and passions (i.e. the "heart"), on the one hand, and formulating an ethics based on public utility, on the other, provided a naturalistic basis for uniting all individuals, regardless of education or social standing, into a harmonious "public." As Abbt pointed out at the beginning of his chapter on the "good heart," the latter is a property which can be shared by all human beings and which "forgets all differences of estate (Stand)." Helvétius in effect offered an intellectually satisfying way to draw connections between common human traits and a public sphere of merit or virtue.

Helvétius' work is typically discussed in the context of eighteenth-century philosophical materialism and sensationalist epistemology. As a social theorist he is described as a proponent of a utilitarian ethics who made social utility the ultimate criterion of all human values. Although these are undoubtedly central elements to Helvétius' work, and were clearly echoed in Abbt's writing, such terms tend to obscure the generally discursive nature of Helvétius' writing and, more importantly, his contribution as a philosopher of "the public." Although his philosophy is based ultimately on the premise that human beings are selfish individuals, driven by their passions in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and that the higher faculties are rooted in physical sensations, it also goes far in determining how individual interests can be reconciled in a larger public sphere. He analyses "merit," "probity" and "virtue" as social constructs that help to facilitate this reconciliation in the "public," a term repeatedly invokes as a touchstone for determining right moral action. Hence the perspective from which Helvétius writes is essentially public and common, rather than private and individual.

Helvétius' text thus moves from an initial discussion of "the mind considered in itself" to a view of the "public," being nothing more than an aggregate of individuals, as the final arbiter of values: "Every individual judges of things and persons, by the agreeable or disagreeable impressions he
receives from them; and the public is no more than an assemblage of all individuals; therefore it cannot fail of making its interest the rule of its decisions. Helvétius felt that his identification of virtue with public interest held the key to a universal law of human ethics. Various historical and cross-cultural examples are used to make his case, giving the book an engaging, discursive style. The principle of public utility allows Helvétius to argue that morals can and indeed do change, as a nation does; the interest of states, like that of humans, are "subject to a thousand revolutions." While this kind of relativistic argument was rejected by Abbt, who explicitly parted company with Helvétius on the question of the singularity of virtue, the general notion of the "public" as arbiter of values was a central feature of *vom Verdienste.*

Abbt's excitement for *De l'Esprit* was likely rooted in the fact that Helvétius offered a non-theological, quasi-scientific, distinctly human vision of man in society. As Helvétius states in his preface:

> The knowledge of the mind, when we consider it in its utmost extent, is so closely connected with the knowledge of the heart, and of the passions of men, that it is impossible to write on this subject, without treating, on that part of morality at least, which is common to men of all nations, and which in all governments can have no other object in view than the public advantage.

Here Helvétius unites head, heart, and the "public" into a universal, cross-cultural moral entity. In arguing that "A profound knowledge of the human heart" opens mankind "to the principles of a humane and mild morality," Helvétius offered Abbt a stimulating vision of how German society might be brought closer together into a harmonious *Publikum.* *De l'Esprit*'s stature in French society as the "epitome of all the dangerous philosophic trends of the age" did not deter Abbt, who was able to draw from the European Republic of Letters those notions which suited his own particular social and intellectual concerns.

The work of Alexander Pope also had an impact on Abbt, who cited Pope occasionally and whose worldview reflects the one put forward by Pope in his famous prose-poem *An Essay on Man* (1734). The *Essay*, lauded by the likes of
Voltaire and Kant,\textsuperscript{52} presents a vision of world and society as an ordered whole, a chain of being made up of a multitude of seemingly discordant parts. As such it is an engaging theodicy, leading the reader from the many paradoxes of earthly life "toward a vision elevated and comprehensive enough to recognize the existence of God's vast, intricate, and harmonious order--not only beyond but \textit{within} the fragments of a broken world."\textsuperscript{53}

This vision appealed to Abbt--in \textit{vom Tode für das Vaterland} he cites the \textit{Essay} in the midst of a key discussion on the relation of the individual citizen to the fatherland. Individuals are to consider themselves both as ends, and as means toward the perfection of the whole--"a principle that makes us obedient to the Creator, and into citizens of the whole world." Abbt argues that this is the essential teaching of Pope's \textit{Essay}, citing the following passage: "Remember, Man, the universal cause: Acts not by partial, but by general Laws." Abbt then goes on to state:

> The human being wishes to see everything destroyed that gets in his meandering way. Suddenly the voice of the Fatherland rings out...lifts us up to a higher plane, sets us aright, and lets us see everything in its true form, and the whole in its grand interconnection. We had previously considered our proud "I" as the final goal; now we recognize ourselves as means to another... [end]; we wanted only to let others live for us; now we learn also to die for others.\textsuperscript{54}

Here Newton's law of universal gravitation, put into by verse by Pope, becomes the basis for conceiving of an expanded socio-political identity. Individual human beings, like the planets, are now seen to be parts of a larger system. In \textit{vom Verdienste} Abbt makes a similar reference to the \textit{Essay}: "Pope's verses must be assessed in view of this possibility of earning merit in every estate (\textit{Stand}), in every occupation: 'Worth makes the \textit{Man} and want of it the \textit{Fellow}. The rest is all but \textit{Leather} or \textit{Prunella}'.\textsuperscript{55} It is clear that Abbt's perspective was attuned to the traditional social structure; the point was not radically to change the structure, rather to conceptualize common moral entities--"merit" and "love of fatherland"--that cut across it, uniting all into a greater "Publikum." Pope's \textit{Essay} provided a compelling vision of such an entity.

As we have seen, Pope had achieved renown in Germany by the 1750s, the
Prussian Royal Academy offering a prize in 1755 for an essay on Pope's 'system.' The Essay's "Leibnizian" parallels found resonance among Germans, with Kant even arguing that Pope's aposteriori mode of reasoning surpassed Leibniz's apriori method. The Essay thus dovetailed with important philosophical trends of the Aufklärung, providing a practical, poetic narrative of cosmic harmony that lent direction to the emerging discussion of socio-political identity in the Germanies. Abbt must have encountered the Essay in the later 1750s, just as he was coming of age intellectually, and it would appear that the Essay went far in shaping his general philosophical outlook. The Essay can be said to have provided an elemental philosophical reference-point in Abbt's response to the German "problem of Publikum."

A related reason for Abbt's interest in the Essay likely stemmed from its engaging, aphoristic style. The Essay employs a number of tropes—paradox among them—that serve to lead the reader from puzzlement and disorientation to a transformed sense of harmonious interaction between part and whole. Pope thus "expresses his vision and beliefs within a language that makes unusual demands on the reader. It is a language that seeks to awaken us with its strangeness and to reconcile—even within a single phrase—opposing perspectives." Abbt's work, as we will see, similarly sought to stimulate its readers, in an often demanding and puzzling writing style, into thoughts and actions that transcended the fragmentary conditions of eighteenth-century German society.

Finally, Pope's treatment of "man and society" in Epistle III of the Essay provided a Shaftesburyean reconciliation of self-love with sociability in concise, gripping form: "Each loves itself, but not itself alone/ Each sex desires alike, till two are one/ Nor ends the pleasure with the fierce embrace/ They love themselves, a third time, in their race." Life in society leads self-love to find "the private in the public good," a good that emerges as a harmony from discord, and is dependent upon good administration rather than a particular form of government. This last notion, along with discussions of how kingly interests become harmonisable with the "common
interest,” would have appealed to Abbt. And Pope’s adumbration of the role of the thinker and poet in giving rise to social harmony must have inspired public-spiritedness in the young scholar:

’Twas then, the studious head or gen’rous mind,
Follow’r of God or friend of humankind,
Poet or Patriot, rose but to restore
The Faith and Moral, Nature gave before;
Relumed her ancient light, not kindled new;
If not God’s image, yet his shadow drew:
Taught Pow’r’s due use to People and to Kings,
Taught not to slack, nor strain its tender strings,
The less, or greater, set so justly true,
That touching one must strike the other too;
Till jarring interests of themselves create
Th’ according music of a well-mixed State. 41

Abbt’s work exhibited this imperative to forge a sense of common public identity, to harmonise the disparate elements of German society. In so doing he was responding to the German "problem of Publikum" as well as to impulses, ideas and terms being generated by the larger European Enlightenment. It is to his works that we now turn.

War as a Catalyst for Public Spirit:
Abbt’s Vom Tode für das Vaterland

The ostensible purpose of vom Tode für das Vaterland was to rouse Abbt’s fellow-citizens to sacrificial duty for their Prussian fatherland. But although it must therefore be read within the context of the Seven Years War (as Abbt’s friend Nicolai warned62), the text can also be viewed as a novel attempt to instill a sense of public-spiritedness among his fellow citizens of every estate, to inscribe a broadly based public sphere in a monarchical society. Like Abbt’s major work vom Verdienste, vom Tode für das Vaterland (henceforth vom Tode) seeks to bring readers to a sense of their place or role in the larger social whole, and to inspire virtuous action based on a sense of belonging to this informal socio-political entity. While "Vaterland" denotes this entity in the earlier work, "Publikum" bears the weight of this association in the later text. Much of vom Tode is devoted to showing how
love for the fatherland (and hence public-spiritedness\(^6\)) can and should occur in a monarchy, given certain conditions such as the pre-eminence of law, the goodwill of the monarch to his subjects, and so on. The text, in other words, was by no means simply a pamphlet of Prussian propaganda; neither Prussia nor Frederick the Great is explicitly named in the text, although their presence is unmistakable, as is the ongoing struggle which came to be known as the Seven Years War (1756-63).

The conflict was a colonial war between France and England, on the one hand, and a continental territorial struggle between Prussia and Habsburg Austria, on the other. Prussia formed an alliance with England, while Austria allied itself with France, Russia and Sweden. The roots of the continental conflict went back to Frederick's invasion of the Habsburg possession of Silesia in 1740; the Peace of Dresden in 1745 had guaranteed Prussian possession of Silesia, but by the mid-1750s shifting alliances bespoke the imminent resumption of hostilities, causing Frederick to preemptively invade Saxony in 1756. Prussia experienced a string of victories (amidst some setbacks) in 1756-57, most famously at Roßbach over a combined force of French and Imperial troops. The tide turned in 1759 at Kunersdorf against an army of Russians and Austrians, and for a period thereafter Berlin was occupied by Russian troops. By 1760 the war had become one of diplomacy and attrition, and in early 1762 Prussia was spared defeat by the death of the Russian Czarina Elizabeth I, which led to Russia's making peace with Prussia and to the general cessation of hostilities. The Peace of Hubertusburg in early 1763 left Prussia in possession of Silesia, with no other territorial changes. Prussia's leading role on the continental stage was confirmed, as was Austro-Prussian dualism within the Empire.\(^4\)

The impact of these events upon Germans was not uniform. On the one hand, Prussian victories under Frederick the Great over France and Habsburg Austria inspired many Germans both inside and beyond Prussia's borders with a nascent sense of national pride and confidence. To a certain degree as well the war was seen as a struggle between Protestant Prussia and Catholic
Austria. But if Frederick achieved renown as an enlightened prince who had given many Germans reason to feel proud, affection for the Empire was not dead, particularly in southern and western areas of the Germanies, and even among important Protestant figures like F.C. von Moser, as we shall see below. If the victory at Roßbach resulted in a good deal of nationally tinged jubilation, thoughts of a unified nation-state were still a thing of the future; Frederick himself thought more in terms of Prussia and the House of Hohenzollerer than of "Germany" as a whole. The general result was "a kind of political disarray within the Empire, in which exhaustion and mutual suspicions combined to produce a condition resembling multiple isolationism which...was...inimical to a revitalization of imperial cooperation on any broader basis." Neither Prussia nor Austria "was capable of inspiring the sort of confidence that could attract and keep friends," and thus "the Empire after 1763 fell into a sort of quiet and polite, but also watchful, anarchy." Hence despite an invigoration of "German" consciousness thanks to the victories of Frederick the Great, old divisions remained, and a new German dualism had emerged. Hints of German greatness and unity could only have intensified awareness of the deeply-entrenched "problem of Publikum."

A work which served as an inspiration for vom Tode was written by the Swiss doctor and philosopher J.G. Zimmerman, entitled vom Nationalstolze (1758). Abbt wrote to Zimmerman that "In 1759 I read your book on national pride, and found in it the first model in German of the kind of book I wanted to write." In the first edition of his book Zimmerman maintained that love of fatherland could only be found in republics, whereas in later editions he seems to have followed Abbt's suggestion that monarchies too, given the right conditions, could be a distinctly modern locus of freedom, civic spirit, love of fatherland, and pride.

As he explains at the beginning of vom Tode, Abbt's purpose is to help the reader see the presence of a fatherland in "well-ordered monarchies." Love for a fatherland in a monarchy is a stronger impetus to sacrifice than is a desire for honour, and Abbt intends to show how it is possible to achieve
this without the taint of fanaticism. If thereby the text spurs even a few fellow-citizens into service for their fatherland, Abbt will enjoy the greatest happiness of a writer, "To have thought and written usefully for the state in which he lives." 69

Abbt argues that although republics can inspire the greatest passion and love for a fatherland, they are subject to various forms of corruption; while monarchies on the other hand can inspire and unite its citizen-subjects in a common life of devotion to a fatherland. If the monarch upholds the laws of the land, and serves his subjects with alacrity, there is no cause to deny a fatherland to a monarchy. Indeed, the physical, sensuous presence of a king can do more to excite the passions of subjects for the fatherland (which the king represents), than the less tangible existence of a fatherland itself. The figure of Frederick the Great, whom Abbt admired intensely, looms over the text in this regard. 70

Part of Abbt's attempt to forge a new, more inclusive sense of citizenship in a monarchy involves an explicit critique of the Montesquieuan notion of noble "honour" as being the pre-eminent "spring" of a monarchy. (95ff) A major problem with the idea, according to Abbt, is that the lower orders have no part in the achievement of honour. In response Abbt argues that love of fatherland is a greater spring to action, in any polity; he also suggests that the best way to ennoble all souls in a polity is to join honour to love of fatherland. Abbt widens the scope of citizenship in a monarchy by emphasizing love of fatherland, a sentiment open to all "hearts," as a medium of citizenship: "All hearts are capable of love for the fatherland, because this love is directly bound up with their own happiness. One needs only to make this connection visible." (99-101)

Abbt makes the connection visible not only by numerous rhetorical flourishes and examples drawn from history, but also through critique of the divisive consequences of the separated social orders in monarchical society, and reorientation of citizenship around a "single political virtue:"

Perhaps some of the necessary divisions of estates in monarchies have been behind the dissolution of the linkage between one's
efforts for oneself and for the general good...If a general good is ever to occur, however,...there must be only one political virtue. Seen from this perspective, the differences between farmer, burgher, soldier and nobleman disappear. Everything becomes united, aligning itself behind the formerly majestic name of "citizen" (Bürger). (20)

Such reflections were designed to encourage a new "way of thinking" about the "connectedness" between individual and society, part and whole, and indeed they did. Whatever the form of government, in every society there is a deep, original relationship between each individual and the whole, a relation which over time becomes forgotten, displaced by self-love. The new "way of thinking," inspired by great deeds and examples of sacrifice for the fatherland, will give rise to great actions among all citizens in every aspect of life. Abbt asserts the equality of all members of society to act meritoriously for the social whole, a theme which would become paramount in vom Verdienste. In this way a measure of republican virtue (and, one might add, public spirit) can be transplanted into a monarchy. On the other hand, Abbt reassures the reader that there is no reason to worry about the dissolution of the corporate orders (Stände)--they have their own reasons for being that will continue to justify their existence.

Thus besides containing a good deal of patriotic rhetoric, vom Tode für das Vaterland also presents a fairly wide-ranging discussion of citizenship. The state of war was only a particularly compelling occasion for reflection on the kind of socio-political order and sense of public spirit that Abbt desired. Shaftesbury had remarked that "Tis in War that the knot of Fellowship is closest drawn;" Abbt was mindful of this fact, noting that when a "particular circumstance" such as war occurred in a polity, the normally slackened bonds of loyalty were tightened, and divisions between the various social orders disappeared, all uniting as "citizens" in a common cause. Moses Mendelssohn, also a student of Shaftesbury, commented approvingly that

[Abbt's] study puts war in a monarchy in a whole new light. The evil, which accompanies [it], is also bound to the important advantage that the distance between the various orders is lessened, and the citizens are brought nearer to republican equality. In a warring monarchy all are citizens--one's merit and
not one's birth determines one's position; the state is like a republic that has chosen the king as its dictator.\textsuperscript{75}

Abbt, Mendelssohn and Shaftesbury were far from recommending war for the purpose of strengthening social solidarity; the situation was rather that given the early-modern "problem of Publikum," the circumstances of war could serve as an example of its possible amelioration. \textit{Vom Tode für das Vaterland} should thus be seen neither as an occasional piece of patriotic rhetoric, nor an even-handed political treatise, but rather a blend the two, written by an impressionable 22 year-old who desired social acceptance and a position in his newly-adopted fatherland. War has always been a catalyst for reflection, as well as action; it was in the context of the Seven Years War that Abbt was led to begin expressing a relatively novel, public-spirited vision of a united and harmonious German "fatherland." Abbt's subsequent work indicates the degree to which his concerns went beyond the Prussian cause.

**Patriotism and the Public Sphere:**

\textit{the Briefe} and F.C. von Moser

In a few short years Abbt moved from touting a patriotic "love of fatherland" in \textit{vom Tode} to a more general "merit" in service of the "common good" of a German Volk or Publikum, in \textit{vom Verdienste} (1765). The two books were related in their emphasis on self-sacrifice for the common good, and the need for public-spirited behaviour, yet the latter text exhibits a clear progression and expansion in Abbt's thinking, and was universally regarded to be his most important work.\textsuperscript{76}

This development was possible because of the open-ended, heterogeneous nature of eighteenth-century German patriotism, and indeed of German society as a whole. Terms like "patriot," "fatherland" and "nation" were by no means uniformly employed in eighteenth-century Germany, and can only be tentatively linked to later nationalism(s). Rhetoric of the "fatherland" or "nation" emerged before the formulation of a specifically "national" political
consciousness, and such terms were often used as synonyms that did not refer to the "German nation" as a whole; but then again, in this period of fundamental social and intellectual change, they could also have more expansive connotations. "Patriotism could be directed towards the hometown, towards the state in which the "patriot" lived, towards the Empire and towards humanity," but also towards the "German nation," not as a unified state but as "a substrate of the Empire and, in distinction to other nations, as a linguistic-cultural unity."  

Although regents could use the language of patriotism to serve their own ends, it was also employed by educated individuals of middling rank to find a broader resonance for their concerns and convictions; as such it "doubtless articulated the perception of a lack of a common political destiny."  
Patriotic writers generally were oriented towards some kind of enlightened absolutism, employing an "enlightened" language of morals and politics to try to convince governments and nascent public opinion (not yet explicitly recognized as such) of the desirability of reform. German patriotic writers, under the influence of the Enlightenment, observed in their midst a deficit of common spirit and interest in the improvement of socio-political life, and sought both self-affirmation and reform via public-spirited, patriotic writings. Abbt falls squarely into this category of "enlightened patriot." If in vom Tode für das Vaterland the concrete point of reference was Prussia, the discussion was framed in general, Montesquieuian terms--"monarchies," "republics," "despotism," etc.--and it is assumed that "fatherland" can be applied to any number of polities. In Abbt's contributions to the Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend, starting in 1761, the point of view is more clearly that of the "Deutsche Nation" as a whole; here Abbt speaks patriotically about "wir Deutsche" and does his best to continue the project begun by Lessing of raising "German" cultural standards.

Thus in mid-1762 Abbt argued that German writers were too dependent upon foreign models, and he complained about poorly-written books that at most served as negative foils in directing the "nation" to its true taste. Germans
"do not recognize [their] own genius," and require works of the spirit which will bring the nation to feel secure in its own sensibility. German "brotherly love," among other things, has helped give rise to a shared scientific shorthand which outsiders not schooled in the language perceive as being dark and muddled. At the same time, foreigners seize upon the kind of logical concepts churned out by Germans and dress them up so everyone can understand them. If Germans should be proud of their depth of thought and "seriousness," they should also attempt to make themselves understood by the "public": "Skeletons in your study, and fleshy bodies with heightened colour in front of the Publikum."82

In the midst of this discussion Abbt points to Frederick the Great as a German king who has given Germans a reason to feel proud; he asks whether a nation "which has so many [such] examples to leave to its children and grandchildren ...[should] not feel a general spirit, and should not its writers thus speak with original tongues?" Abbt goes on to point out the lack of a German "capital city;" but once one emerges in which a number of "leading spirits" (Geister) can speak the truth from their "heated breasts," "the others will join them and assert their right, that they too are Germans."83

Abbt was moving from Prussian patriotism to a more universal "German" one; in fact, the two were not mutually exclusive. What is important to recognize, however, is that the focus is not on power-politics and the emergence of nation-states, but upon morals and society, i.e. sociability. Thus in the same number of the Briefe examined above, when Abbt moves into a discussion of the role that the "philosopher" should play in politics, he states that he is not concerned with the secrets of cabinets and the mechanical workings of states, their interrelations, etc;

But if one understands under "politics" the nature of civil societies (bürgerlichen Gesellschaften), their laws and their true benefits, according to the needs, powers and tendencies of real living human beings: then I can't conceive of why the Philosoph should be excluded from such understandings.84

The "morals/customs" (Sitten) of a Volk were therefore a crucial aspect of a population and should be fostered in such a way as to be advantageous to the
"state," or more generally, the "whole." Elsewhere this "whole" is signified by "Volks"--Abbt obviously did not have a single specific entity in mind. But he was, as indicated above, beginning to speak about "the public" as a common social entity that served as an audience/judge for enlightened discourse. While Abbt had mentioned "the public" only once in vom Tode in a footnote, he began to recognize it as a significant force in the Briefe, before according it a central role in vom Verdienste. In September 1762, for example, Abbt noted in the Briefe that "As often as a new path is opened, we in Germany must worry about the throng of imitators...[But] the public, before whom one appears with such a work, is too large and too partisan, for anyone to be able to long remain bad and unpunished [for it]." In another passage, however, Abbt mentions the possibility that "the murmured praises of the public audience" can lead a writer astray.

Abbt's move toward conceptualizing a public sphere was clearly motivated by his concern for involving the "common man" in socio-political discussion (as he had defined it); writings need to be sociable, to point out the connection between citizens (Bürger) so that they will strive to serve the whole in whatever position they find themselves. This message was begun in reference to the (Prussian) "fatherland" in vom Tode, but was increasingly directed towards "Germans" as a whole; "the public" emerged in the process as a non-political point of reference, a more neutral mediating factor.

Abbt's ongoing thinking on these matters occurred at least partly in interaction with a text entitled Beherzügungen by Friedrich Carl von Moser, whose essay "Das Publicum" was discussed in Chapter 1. Abbt reviewed Beherzügungen in the Briefe in July 1761, and his comments indicate that Moser had stimulated him to think further about patriotism and sociability. The long, rambling treatise on morals, politics and society moved within the thought-world of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Helvétius, among others; the two primary elements of the book which Abbt fastened upon in his review were Moser's pietist religious perspective, and his discussion of patriotism and "national interest."
As to the former, Moser is emphatically of the opinion that religion—Christianity in particular—is crucial to the proper functioning of polities; it keeps princes and subjects responsive to each other and to the well-being of the "whole fatherland." Moser begins the book by asserting the importance of the divine-human relationship, and throughout emphasizes the key role of religion in a well-ordered state, from princes on down the social ladder; a state without a connection to religion is in trouble, since "Christianity makes good regents...good subjects, righteous lower-level authorities, concerned parents, [and] well-behaved children..."93

Moser's religious perspective is in fact tied to his harmonizing discussion of patriotism and national interest; it is ultimately God who draws together all the disparate elements of German society into a harmonious whole, and it is religious principles which undergird the actions of the "true patriot" who has overcome the "spirit of faction" to a broader vision of the German "nation," in Moser's discourse.94 Moser begins this discussion by distinguishing between "love of fatherland" and "patriotism." The former term represents basic habitual bonds to one's country of origin, the emotional and physical predisposition to favour one's own milieu.(237-39) Patriotism, on the other hand, is a matter of choice and insight, and seeks to advance the most elevated species of the "common good;"

[Patriotism] transforms the blind prejudice for the name of a nation into fiery wishes for its constant well-being...[and] into a certain conviction of the true merits of the fatherland, [and] it emerges from insightful and tested understanding of the value of the law...It is inflamed by love for humankind and eagerness for the common good...[and] is esteemed in love and thankfulness by the righteous public (rechtschaffene Publicum)...(242)

Unfortunately, Germany is "afflicted" with as many types of "patriot" as coinage; it is certain that no stranger political creature can be imagined than a "German patriot," since "He who is honoured with this splendid name in one place, will be called a bad apple a few miles further down the road, an enemy, a traitor to the fatherland..."(243) Moser goes on to argue that "patriotism" has come to mean whatever is in one's immediate, local self-interest, with little sense of the good of the whole Empire. "And since there
are at least a few hundred sovereign Lords in Germany, each with their own system and interests, it follows that there is an incredible multitude of patriots..."(244) Moser's own "Reichspatriotismus," only hinted at in *Beherzigungen*, would be elaborated in his later works, most famously von dem Deutschen Nationalgeist (1765)."95

For the time being, however, Moser was content to critique current patriotism, and hint at the need to develop a broader "national" interest. Contemporary "fashionable patriots" (*Patrioten nach der Mode*) hold "blindly" to the party to which they belong by birth and duty, defending and justifying it out of self-interest and instinct, while hatefully attacking all other parties and systems.(245) They forget that

> We live under one and the same laws and on the same earth; [and] they give foreign nations, which visit the wrath of the Almighty upon us from east, south and north, the right to despise us, and thereby...the spirit of faction brings one German Volk to condemn another to destruction.(246)

Later on Moser makes a similar reference to the Seven Years War, there condemning the spirit of religious intolerance and faction which figured in the conflict.(254) Instead of plunging Germany into "fire and flames",(254) patriots should be concerned about the larger (German) whole. The lamentable "spirit of faction"--and not least religious faction--that divided Germans needed to be overcome.(259-65) A true German patriot must never forget that "he is a German, and not a Greek, Roman or Briton."(268)

But how to decide between parties in a German dispute? God is the ultimate judge, while law is the proximate one.(273) And if the law does not speak to an issue, it is best solved by taking into account "the peaceful repose and well-being of the entire [German] fatherland."(274) But although Moser here and elsewhere stresses the importance of the rule of law, and the need to keep the interest of the entire "nation" in view, his discourse has a strongly traditionalist, authoritarian moral/religious cast. That is to say that although his perspective implies socio-political change in the direction of a unified nation-state of rights-bearing citizens, he remains wedded to traditional authoritarian power structures, underwritten by divine sanction.
Thus if he recognizes that a "national interest" presupposes a "Volk" with some say in matters of common concern, he also says that authorities are ordained by God and should be obeyed accordingly, and that the "political freedom" of a Volk essentially lies in their having a fair and concerned "Obrigkeit." Like Abbt, Moser argues that political freedom was not only the preserve of republics, contra Montesquieu, but unlike Abbt he rejected the Montesquieuian concept of "political virtue" if it was understood to be divorced from religious virtue.

Abbt disagreed with Moser on this point in his review of Beherzungen in the Briefe, arguing that virtue is a social construct that emerges when human beings come together in society. Whereas Moser maintained that Christian virtue was the key to a healthy society, Abbt argues that "social" virtue set the boundaries which "moral" (i.e. religious) virtue must not transgress. "Sectarian virtue" (Societätsverwustung) must take precedence over sectarian behaviour: "Be politically virtuous, and then live how you want." Christian virtue should complement and support "sectarian virtue," and never place the "Christian" in opposition to the "citizen." Abbt goes on to agree with Moser that a prince who acts in the spirit of Christianity will treat his subjects well, but he adds that an irreligious prince may not necessarily be bad--the important thing is action for the common good. A weak, pious prince who has given over all governmental authority to priests would be much less desirable than "an enemy of all revealed religion [who] himself governed with...insight and eagerness for the common good." The spirit of Pierre Bayle seems to be lurking behind these comments, which is not surprising given the fact that Abbt, like Lessing, was an avid reader of Bayle. He had informed Mendelssohn that Bayle was a man of "thoroughly correct intellect" (durchaus richtigen Verstand), and he invoked Bayle's "spectre" (Schattengestalt) in his critical review of the neologist J.J. Spalding's Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen in the Briefe: "So I say to you [Bayle]...you, the enemy of systems, [who] lurks about,
spreading your doubts: so I call you here to me, to help clarify important matters by making objections." Abbt may not have read Bayle's "First Clarification" to his *Dictionnaire*, where Bayle made explicit what was implicit in some of its entries, namely that "The fear and love of God are not always the most active principles of human actions." It is clear that Abbt entertained a Baylean perspective in shifting the focus from divinity to society in his critique of Moser, and indeed in his later reflections on the subject in *vom Verdienste*.

Abbt saw Moser as something of a calculating religious hypocrite, one who "hid behind" piety to score socio-political critique, and he defined himself in opposition as one who spoke from the heart without the encumbrances of religious piety. As he put it in a 1762 letter in which he mentioned a "plan" for what was to become *vom Verdienste*:

> I flatter myself to have a few special ideas; at least a few [that are] better than average; to show Mr. Moser that there is a difference between digested concepts and heated insights, or pious complaints. You will see from my plan that I have in mind material in which I can, and will, speak heartfelt truths, especially in contrast our pious hypocrites (Scheinheilige).

But Abbt also called Moser an "upright patriot" and a "good genius," and it is clear that Moser's patriotic reflections stimulated Abbt to think further about sociability and national identity. In his review of Moser Abbt began to engage in the kind of reflection on sociability in general that characterizes *vom Verdienste*, and he criticized Moser for not identifying just what it was that Germans had in common:

> What sort of man does Mr. Moser want? The world citizen? This will doubtless elicit the good wishes of all human beings...The German citizen? He must first establish a German interest in which all subjects of the various German princes can...partake, according to common laws. But as soon as we have Prussian and Austrian subjects whose regents have diverging interests, it is no longer the duty of either Prussian or Austrian subjects to find out exactly what the German Empire demands of them.

It is rather up to them to obey the laws of their own fatherland; princes can cultivate a Reichspatriotismus, but subjects should not be expected to identify such an interest in the midst of intra-German conflict. These comments probably led Moser to re-think his position; and
indeed, in Moser's next book, von dem Deutschen Nationalgeist, he responds directly to the dilemma raised by Abbt. And significantly, he now addresses princes and leading figures as his primary audience--the focus is now much more explicitly upon bringing leaders to a common German (imperial) perspective. Abbt, on the other hand, pursued his own, "non-political" approach to the dilemma he had raised, one which was directed towards the entire spectrum of German society. Abbt's critique of Moser raised, in a gripping way, one aspect of the general "problem of Publikum." Moser's reply consisted in reaffirming traditional corporate and authoritarian structures, supported as they were by religion and precedent. Abbt on the other hand moved towards the further development of an enlightened German public sphere organized around the principle of individual merit.

"Merit" and the Public Sphere

In vom Verdienste (1765), Abbt's patriotism gives way to a fairly wide-ranging moral philosophy. Published a year before his death in 1766, the book represents an important early attempt to conceptualize and give rise to a common sphere of public life in German society. "Merit" (Verdienst) is employed as a term that unites individual actions to public norms; based on a utilitarian conception of the "common good," it becomes a standard by which individual actions can be judged, each according to their place in the social whole. It is the term which unites "citizens" across the various societal divisions into a common Publikum, without overtly challenging latent hierarchies or the viability of religious beliefs and loyalties. "Publikum" is hence used to connote a broad, informal socio-political entity, capable of judging actions according to a basic, universal conception of merit; at times it appears to be synonymous with "Volk." Thus a quarter-century before the musings of Kant and Forster, Abbt began to reflect upon the related entities of an "enlightened public" and "public opinion" (without using the latter
Abbt insists on the necessity of grounding moral discussion in the common understandings of the mass of humankind—the Volk—rather than that of a particular estate (Stand), as the surest avenue to moral knowledge.\textsuperscript{107} This is not to say that the Volk does not need instruction; rather that moral judgements are best made on the basis of "plain, good sense" (quoted in English), by which Abbt characterizes the German "nation" as a whole.\textsuperscript{108} He thus begins the book by taking a point of view which recognizes all Germans as being capable of participating in moral reasoning and hence public life. This perspective surfaces at various key points in the text, and is joined to Abbt's widened conception of an "enlightened public."

The more something is judged to be good according to the whole Publikum, the greater will [it]...be esteemed... When [individual] insights agree with the judgement of the enlightened Publikum, goodwill has reached the highest level. And who comprises the enlightened Publikum? All humankind; but with the second row of their thoughts. That means, when each thinks for himself what his most desired good would be, then that which is left that agrees with the wishes of others become the highest good.\textsuperscript{179}

In passages like this one Abbt is clearly attempting to fashion a notion of "the public" as an inclusive, enlightened forum of judgement for moral behaviour and discussion, one accessible to all people, given the right use of their inborn faculty of "plain, good sense."

If the Volk as a whole has a role in judging merit, its various members also have the ability to achieve it, each according to his or her station. Abbt defines merit thus: "Actions, or in general activities, that are useful to others, stemming from a free decision and pure intentions...to an elevated end through powers of the soul...Hence for every human being there are some forms of merit possible."\textsuperscript{109} The book is in many ways a catalogue of merit, giving place to everyone from the aunt who cares for others, to the highest geniuses who act for the good of humankind.\textsuperscript{14ff,141}

There is no qualitative distinction between men and women in Abbt's discourse, when it comes to achieving merit—Abbt states this explicitly, in a section on "merit in private life": "Our century is not the first in which we may look for strong women...But I'm not going to talk about that [here]. They
are made out of the same stuff as the great man. In the soul, sex
disappears."(317-18) Abbt does go on to speak about the merit of the "matron"
(Matrone--mother-figure) as a private person, indeed as the "worthiest" of all
private persons, despite the fact that "the world is silent about her."(320)
The implication is that she performs a service of (unacknowledged) public
significance. And by talking about a particular female role as being a
private one, he is thus careful not to assume that the role of all women is
the same or, for that matter, a particularly private one. On the other hand,
it is obvious that Abbt assumes "public" figures (in the sense of public
servants) to be men. It could hardly have been otherwise. What is important
to recognize is that Abbt assumes women to be relevant members of the informal
public sphere of merit--and indeed the "public"--which he is eager to
inscribe, possessing, for example, a "strength of soul" equal to men.(75-76)

In his discussion of merit in private life Abbt seeks to show that even
though those who hold some sort of public office or position are in a sense
nearer to merit and the achievement of the common good, and most private
persons largely pursue their own interests, there are nevertheless plenty of
opportunities for the latter to achieve merit, particularly when they gather
together in public spaces as did the ancients:

Every class of private life, every class of public service has,
into the bargain, the possibility to act in a thousand ways that
give rise to good and merit. How many instances do not appear in
which we can be of assistance, in word and deed, to our neighbors?
The frequent visit to the marketplace by the ancients was no idle
life. They always found opportunities there to be of service to
each other: witnesses before court, posting bail, and countless
other good turns.(313)

So, besides achieving merit by nurturing each other in the home, itself an act
with public significance, private citizens can achieve merit in the public
sphere of civil society, one increasingly characterized by market relations.
And pursuing one's occupation or role honestly and diligently will, in one way
or another, redound to the "common good." Most happy is the one who is able
to combine merit in both public service and private life.(299-317)

Two key terms in Abbt's discussion which serve to provide a common basis
for the achievement of merit are "good-heartedness" and "goodwill." Abbt
begins by asserting that a good heart, which gives rise to goodwill, is what unites humankind, including Volk and master, in a common bond. Abbt then analyses the French terms *sentiment* and *sensation*, seeking to find corresponding terms in German. The aim of the discussion is clearly to move beyond the self-interested passions of the "I" (*das Ich*) to the other-regarding sentiments shared by all. Abbt's attempt to coin German terms for *sentiment* and *sensation* was the subject of some debate between Abbt and his mentors Nicolai and Mendelssohn—Abbt habitually innovated in his use of language, and received much abuse from his friends for it. He finally relented and used existing terms in his discussion. But his attempt to coin new words for these notions indicates his desire to forge a new discussion in the German context on the relationship of common, individual feelings and perceptions to a larger social whole.

But although Abbt's musings are often murky and disjointed, his purpose is not: the discussion moves from looking at how sentiments can become focused in the self, to seeing how they also express their nature in caring for others—Abbt thus distinguishes between the self-regarding sentiments, which he calls "mostly passions," and the other-regarding sentiments, "which make up...the good heart." He emphasizes the pleasure and greatness of giving play to the other-directed sentiments, or good-heartedness. We belong to more than just ourselves, but to others as well. Our senses tend toward identifying similarities between ourselves and others: the eyes seek out visible similarities; the ear is tuned to harmonies; and feelings press to find a similar nature.

The works of La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, in addition to those of Shaftesbury, Helvétius, and Pope, appear to stand behind much of the discussion, Abbt citing them to the effect that people become more sociable "through the properties of the heart rather than through those of the intellect." He differentiates between good-heartedness and sentimentality, noting that the former is distinguished more by "tired feet" than by "wet eyes." The good heart, enlightened as to its place in the scheme of
things, gives rise to goodwill and hence good actions, leading from intimate relations to participation in a larger, mutually-reinforcing whole:

There, where the transformation of the good heart into goodwill is to go forward, must the cocoon first be cast off. We may no longer crawl from one nearby being to another—we must be able to take off into flight, in order to comprehend all that lives, works, and is below; particularly on our own patch of earth. And how is this possible? Through our clear recognition that we all belong to one and the same Lord, that we are all created for peace as neighbor-subjects, through thousands of bonds united, through every tightened bond happier, through every good deed more perfect, for all things outside of ourselves necessarily thankful, because they constantly make us better... As a result of such reflection a particular manner of thinking may be identified, in which a friendly drive towards all humankind always remains active within us, and our effort to serve it is at the same time visible to everyone else. Both finally meet halfway, like a habit or an unreflected natural drive.(165-66)

This passage is a good example of Abbt's approach—metaphorical, rhetorical, and designed to connect the reader emotionally, intellectually and morally to a larger public sphere of social activity. And as such it exhibits his basic view of Enlightenment, and its relation to human nature.

In previous years Abbt had engaged in a protracted discussion by letter with Moses Mendelssohn on the "determination" or "destiny" of humankind (Bestimmung der Menschen),\textsuperscript{111} in an attempt to develop a philosophical—as opposed to strictly theological—understanding of the nature and purpose of human beings. Two elements of Abbt's basic orientation become clear in the long, often rambling correspondence. One is that while he does not reject traditional theological understandings out of hand, he feels that the entire breadth of human life can only be understood in terms of one's experience of the natural, visible world order, of the "relationship of every worldly body one to the other."\textsuperscript{112} The other, related proposition is that this determination must be made known to each individual—"Humankind must at least come to the point where they can become conscious of their determination."\textsuperscript{113} In \textit{vom Verdienste} both concerns are evident, as Abbt seeks, often in great rhetorical flights, to make individuals aware of their intimate, moral connection to an ever-widening social whole.

The impetus for Abbt's reflections on this topic was a 1748 tract by J.J. Spalding (1714-1804), entitled \textit{Betrachtung über die Bestimmung der
Menschen. Spalding was a theologian and moral writer who, along with other neologists like Jerusalem, Semler and Ernesti, began to modify traditional Christian theological understandings by moderately "enlightened," rationalistic criteria of evidence and argumentation, and an emphasis on systems of practical morality. As such they battled against both orthodoxy and pietism. Spalding, like Abbt, was an eager student and translator of Shaftesbury, and his work consequently has a decidedly deistic flavour. Nevertheless, his concern was to unite enlightenment with existing churchly traditions, rather than abandoning them. His later works, particularly Von der Nutzbarkeit des Predigtamtes und deren Beförderung (1772), put forth a view of the pastor as a practical Volkserzieher, a teacher of wisdom and virtue who identified closely with common people.¹¹⁴

The Bestimmung essay, which was reprinted 13 times before the end of the century, reads like a Cartesian meditation on human existence, albeit from a decidedly Christian perspective. It proceeds via simple, logical reflection on sensuous, moral and rational perceptions to determine the nature of the "I" which can reflect on these things. Spalding first acknowledges the reality and function of sensual pleasure and pain, before moving on to an exploration of higher, "spiritual" pleasures and finally to a discussion of the soul's place in the (God-given) rational order of things, and its place in eternity. Spalding's tract emphasized (in Shaftesburyean fashion) the other-directed impulses which make up the human "I," in addition to the self-serving ones, and thus the inherent sociability of human beings. But in the end his tract takes on an otherworldly character, emphasizing the vanity and emptiness of this life and its standards vis-a-vis those of the next one.¹¹⁵

Abbt modified Spalding's perspective not only in his correspondence with Mendelssohn, but also in an essay entitled "Zweifel über die Bestimmung der Menschen," which was published in the Briefe in 1764. Although Abbt appreciated Spalding's tract as a "monologue of an educated and thoughtful man," he criticized him for an overly intellectualistic approach which the average person would not be able to follow.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, although Spalding
makes a helpful attempt to point to other-directed (sociable) impulses, his perspective is entirely too otherworldly, according to Abbt. Should I be ashamed, he asks, "to see other creatures united and in community with myself here in [this] world?" Abbt's interaction with Spalding further illustrates his movement away from theocentric approaches to human nature and sociability, no matter how "enlightened" they might be.

But although Abbt was clearly distancing himself from traditional, theological understandings of moral issues--and he was criticized by Gellert for it--established religion retained a place via its contribution to the common good, becoming in the process more or less a civil religion. It would therefore be incorrect to imply that Abbt posed a choice between "man as citizen" and "man as Christian;" as he put it in *vom Verdienste*, the common man needs

neither a metaphysic of the human heart, nor the foolish version of the same without philosophy. To become loyal and busy in his work; to obey his superiors; to avoid becoming a slave to his passions; trust in God--in Him find joy and comfort... This must he learn, this must be clarified to him, of this he must be convinced; his edification will consist in that which is useful to him and his neighbor. No singers in the place of workers!...no imagined spiritual battles instead of sweat on the brow! no visionary in the place of the citizen, who gives his due to the authorities; in short, no sighing scoundrels in the place of righteous subjects, who live for the good of all. Turn to the good! Christian citizen, civil Christian!(277)

Hence although elsewhere in the text Abbt defends "true religion" from those who would overemphasize its weaknesses, what remains is simply another medium in the constitution of the common good--a civil religion. It functions in many respects as an agent of social solidarity and discipline, in Abbt's discourse, with pastors functioning basically as moral overseers (*Sittenaufseher*).(293)

In the midst of Abbt's ongoing rhetoric of common interest and holistic intention, he devotes plenty of space to the role of the "genius," "great soul," "lawgiver" etc., in forming *Publikum* and contributing to the common good. Individuals who display "largeness of soul" and "greatness of spirit" dot Abbt's pages. Julius Caesar, Henry IV, William of Orange, Newton, Locke, Descartes, William Penn, Alexander the Great, Raleigh, Hannibal and other
worthies are trotted out in various contexts as examples of great merit. Abbt believes that greatness is generally "inborn" but is best recognized by those whom it serves--the Volk--and not by educated critics. At the same time, there is a place for the truly wise, far above the crowd of academics, to "swing out over the human race" and see farther, formulating the concepts and principles which the rest employ.\textsuperscript{120}

Abbt is clearly less interested in reducing everyone to the same level of merit than showing how all orders of society can contribute, from their own particular social position, to the common good. In this there is certainly a tension, and in this tension lies the dramatic action of the text--how to reconcile a hierarchical view of human nature and society with a communalist ethics and epistemology. Is it possible to retain individual and social distinctions in a relatively egalitarian public sphere of merit? Abbt clearly entertains both perspectives, despite a brief nod to classical republicanism. (325ff) The tension is resolved by a juxtaposition of citizenship to the common good, Bürgerlichkeit to Publikum. In defining citizenship in relation to the common good, rather than individual rights, Abbt opens up a space in which individual differences are resolved by the assumption of complementary positions within the larger social whole, the Publikum which he is eager to inscribe.

Contemporary interpreters have tended to overemphasize Abbt's brief, heavily qualified remarks on forms of government and citizenship at the end of vom Verdienste, making Abbt into a harbinger of democracy and the "emancipated" burgher-citizen.\textsuperscript{121} For while Abbt does approve of democratic, republican forms of government, and argues for the basic protection of human freedoms through the common status of "citizen," to overemphasize these utterances is not only to miss Abbt's inegalitarian and illiberal side, but also the main point of much of his writing. Abbt's treatment of forms of government is not much more than a Montesqueuian exercise in determining the degree and types of merit that are possible in various kinds of polities. While he does feel that democratic forms of government are conducive to the
widest practice of merit, he also allows that a good degree of merit is possible in all polities. (322-35)

In private correspondence Abbtt downplayed his overtly political comments, saying "It seems nauseating to me to dwell on forms of government, of which so many people babble;" and "I don't want to go too deeply into political reflections, they tend either to be laughable or hated." In the Briefe Abbtt had argued that forms of government do not necessarily determine the nature of the population--citizens of a republic are not necessarily the better for it; other criteria, like the status of a priestly class, can be more important in shaping a polity. And of course the bulk of vom Tode für das Vaterland is devoted to the idea that monarchies can indeed inspire a good measure of republican civic spirit.

Abbt's writing was directed not to the promotion of a particular form of government, but to establishing a cohesive public sphere within the existing (and reformable) "modern" political parameters--monarchy. He is clearly taken with "great leaders" and their close relationship to the Volk, at times eerily so, given modern German history; at one point in vom Verdiensste the "strong soul" is praised as a natural leader who is raised above the Volk without ever having its permission: "In front of [strong souls, the Volk] humbles itself without a murmur...Every gathering, every uproar, every wild cry of the Volk loses itself in their presence: one word from their lips is holy like law." Rather than taking a strongly democratic, egalitarian position, Abbt is intent on crafting a picture of an interacting whole, in which each plays their part: the part of the Volk is to use its common faculties to recognize and follow greatness; the part of the "great one" is to advance the common good. This vision is clearly rooted in traditional paternalism, and leaves the established order essentially intact. At first glance, the difference between Abbt's position and that of someone like Friedrich Carl von Moser might not appear to be that great. As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, however, Abbt's public-spirited enterprise, though also paternalistic, was of a different order than Moser's, representing something
of a middle position between divine-right monarchism and democratic republicanism.

Abbt's discussion of the role of the writer sheds further light on his basic concerns. Writers, like everyone else, are judged in relation to their contribution to the common good. This consists in furthering a sense of public-spiritedness, as well as imparting knowledge that is in one way or another useful to the polity. Judging writers according to the common good is not easy, however, because their contribution may not be directly useful; in many cases the route to merit is one fraught with detours and changes of direction. Nevertheless, if Abbt were to rank types of writings he would put "edifying writings" (Erbauungsschriften) at the top of the list:

Right on top go edifying writings...that are written along religious lines to the good of the civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft), for the salvation of souls, calming for the heart and enlightening for the most common understanding. Of such writings one can rightly say that they are produced for the Publikum; and also are of use to the Publikum. Then what kind of a Publikum have all the witty masters and writers?(268–70)

Abbt points out that the vast majority of people in Germany are not privy to the "witty writings" consumed by the educated orders, whom he judges to constitute 1/250th of Germany's 20,000,000 people. It is here that Abbt's attempt to give Publikum a broad purchase is most visible, as he orients it away from a contracted world of readers to the widest possible array of citizens. He complains that most writings are simply not accessible to the common man, both financially and intellectually--he is always 80 to 100 years behind the language of the "finer world." On the other hand, Abbt does not deny the place of "finer writings," and warns against judging books by the use which has been made of them.125

The second most important kind of writings are those that serve to enlighten kings, rulers and their highest adjutants to love and be merciful to their subjects, tolerate religious differences, be careful with state monies, have the highest respect for the freedom of men and citizens, gain insights into the laws, and learn to love peace.(278) Abbt cites the works of Tissot and Las Casas as examples of writings which helped to dispel prejudices and
further the good of the common people. A general rule for moralists and writers of the more elevated variety is to do nothing to impair existing morals and customs, if they do not in fact serve to improve them. And if there is a place for "finer writings," Abbt concludes that the general merit of writers consists in their contribution to the common good. Abbt's friend Moses Mendelssohn was not at all satisfied with this ranking, and took him to task for it in their correspondence:

There is a nobler part of the nation, whose manner of thinking and action has an influence on [even] the most negligible [members] of a state. This nobler portion must be enlightened, if the basic broth (Grundsuppe) is not to be as raw and barbaric as the Iroquois or Hottentots. Various kinds of books serve to enlighten and edify this nobler part, to which belong not only kings and civil servants, rather all who can read and write; and in order that these [books] are not all too wretched, we must also have geniuses and original works. The merit of the trivial writer is therefore indeed of somewhat greater extension, but on the other hand the merit of the great teachers of virtue and wisdom...is of far greater intension. I fear that the citizen of Geneva has humbled the academies of arts and sciences far too much in your eyes, even though you don't go so far as to assign greater merit to bakers than to founders of academies. Abbt's perspective clearly challenged, pace Rousseau, prevailing conceptions of the nature and function of Enlightenment as a useful and healthy emanation of the cultured classes; he had even written an essay in 1763 that argued for the preservation of the prejudices of common people if they served a beneficial societal function and didn't lead to chauvinism. But although Abbt was conversant with Rousseau's first Discourse, Mendelssohn's criticism was not entirely fair: elsewhere in the text Abbt took Rousseau to task for wanting to turn men into cattle, and he argued that even a Rousseau must admit the need for a few individuals to climb mountain peaks in search of truths, in order to strike the rock of legislation, releasing its "sweet water" for the Volk below. And in the Briefe he had criticized the genre of moral weeklies for their bland and repetitive character; while they may not impair morals, they certainly had a negative effect on German taste, churned out as they were in countless numbers.

Abbt envisions a type of writing that leaves a lasting impression on the reader, bringing him or her to resolution and action, to the love of humankind
and the perfection of civil society. Abbt praises works that "awaken, nourish and through posterity re-seed" the "public spirit" spoken of by the English, which leads everyone to think of the common element in the highest of terms. Abbt's own writings are clearly meant as a kind of "Erweckungsliteratur," with their inclusive rhetoric, metaphorical style, and exhortative nature. They are written as much for the heart as for the head, being filled with models and stories from all kinds of literature, and composed in short segments, each with their own moral or insight.

Abbt's unusual writing style was often found remarkable—and troubling—by his commentators. He himself reflected at length, in the Briefe particularly, on the development of a writing style that would do justice to the German character and to the breadth of German society, including the "common man" and "burgher." As such he was involved in pioneering a discussion on the role of the "public writer," a role he himself had begun to play. And as I have indicated, behind this discussion stood an awareness of ancient models of public discourse, particularly public speaking on the Ciceronian model; whether in the Briefe, vom Tode für das Vaterland, or vom Verdienste, the classical vision of public speaking and interaction in a forum or marketplace is present as an ideal of public life for Abbt.

Abbt's allusive and metaphorical writing style was thus at least partly due to his ideas on the role of the public writer, the modern equivalent of the ancient public speaker. This is evident in a suggestive contribution to the Briefe, where Abbt reflects at length on the state of public speaking in the Germanies. According to Abbt, Germans have no forum for the eloquence practiced by the ancients, "not even a shadow of it," because the political composition of the Germanies does not allow it. The eloquence of the ancient courts of law is lacking in modern times, and academic lectures are nothing more than dry, abstract dissertations. Public speaking in the churches, while one of the few remaining forms of public address, is hindered by certain
conventions and conditions peculiar to it, and hence does not begin to approach the heights of public speaking of the ancient Forum. In sum, modern conditions are essentially inappropriate for the kind of public speaking of a Cicero. Nevertheless,

The writings of a Tullius (Cicero) or a Quintillian...have in view of their well-spokenness a use for us, even if we aren't able to reach their level. His comments and teachings can be applied to all manner of writing, where here and there oratorical power must be applied; and if we don't triumph with him, so can we at least go with him on the attack.134

Thus in Abbt's works the ancient, Ciceronian ideal of public oratory becomes translated into the available medium of the day--the written word.

This is not surprising, given the fact that as Abbt himself realized, there were few real chances for public-spirited address in German society. In addition, rhetoric as an academic discipline was in decline, due in large part to the decline of Latin and the emergence of national languages as media for educated discourse. What political rhetoric there was came to be expressed in "polite company" or in print (like Abbt's), and Germany had no equivalent to the "elocutionary movement" in England, which was itself more concerned with turning out refined aristocrats for public careers than developing a political oratory directed at the masses.135

Abbt's desire to reach and inspire an audience to a greater sense of their connection and relationship to a larger socio-political whole is evident throughout his writings, as is his concern to break out of the conventions of German academic writing style.136 He was well aware of the impact of writing style upon audience, as the discussion at various points above has indicated,137 and he was concerned that readers be moved by what they read: unsettled, touched, enlightened.138 He felt that "raw" languages like German were better suited towards dramatic, metaphorical expression,139 and that German writers needed to exhibit more "enthusiasm! nothing without this..."140 Lively writings "for the citizen" were needed that instilled social duties and attitudes--writings that duplicated the simplicity of style which characterized "greek eloquence," and which addressed the will, as the ancients had done, rather than the (modern) intellect. Not everyone can grasp
concepts, but everyone has a will, and a will that has been excited opens a path to the intellect.\textsuperscript{141}

Abbt's prose is a prose of desire—a desire, ultimately, to reach the reader and to inscribe a cohesive public sphere, and as such his writing could seem, as Mendelssohn put it, "forced": "I must confess that your writing seems to take on a forced quality, for which your genius might be to blame. You always want to be new, compact, always vital/noble (edel), and become thereby at times extraordinarily murky and affected."\textsuperscript{142} Abbt felt enormously isolated at Rinteln, and this fact could have been partly responsible not only for his "forced" style but also for his desire for company generally.\textsuperscript{143} He himself blamed problems with his style on his isolation: "I accept your (Mendelssohn's) comments about my writing style. I feel that it's awkward: but the feather falls from my hand when I attempt to work here, without anyone to encourage me to improve it."\textsuperscript{144} Abbt's perspective and approach probably reflected his own personal experience of the "problem of Publikum," one that caused him at times stylistically to overreach himself.

While Nicolai and Mendelssohn generally found fault with Abbt's writing style, they also praised it for its "fiery" and "vital" qualities.\textsuperscript{145} J.G. Herder was enthusiastic about Abbt's style: he saw Abbt as an imitator of the "Latin brevity" of Tacitus (one of Abbt's favourite ancient writers), writing in an imaginative, sprightly, picturesque and forceful style, and described him as an "emphatic Spartan with words" who brought out the truly "German" Qualities of the language:

If a person reads our dull, watery writers, who drown every idea in a flood of words, and chew over and regurgitate every image; and thereupon returns to Abbt's style, the style of some few German writers: --where better does he find the German strength (Stärke) and emphasis (Nachdruck).\textsuperscript{146}

Furthermore, Herder makes a connection between Abbt's style and his constant desire to write in view of the "whole":

Unexpected expressions: agreeable twists and turns in style:
sudden insights: whimsical mockery: [and] lively jumps distinguish ...him...[as having] a view that always falls upon the whole, flying from one side to the other, and where not penetrating, keeping the whole surface in his eye.\textsuperscript{147}
This is a valuable insight, and indicates the degree to which Herder had reflected on Abbt's work and approach. In general Herder felt that Abbt was "A writer for humanity, and a sage of the common man;" not the kind of writer who lives and dies among books, rather one who knew how to bring the learned classes down into the other, lower orders. He was able to be a "teacher of humanity" without affecting the vanity of Rousseau, and never lost sight of the good of the "whole" and of human nature. Abbt is lauded for his emphasis on the simple, natural "good/common sense" (gesunden Verstand) of the average person, and for distinguishing "plain, good sense" (quoted in English) as constituting the national character of Germans.\[^{148}\]

Abbt's openness to linguistic innovation undoubtedly contributed to his growing use of the relatively novel "Publikum." Whereas in his earlier writings Abbt employs the term infrequently (if increasingly), in \textit{vom Verdienste} he uses it fairly often, in a wide sense—wider than was warranted by actual social conditions. Abbt used other, more traditional terms for the social collectivity as well—"Pöbel" (rabble/crowd), "Volk" (folk/people), "Menschen" (humankind), "grosse Haufen" (multitudes/masses),\[^{149}\] terms which however did not connote the kind of common, public sphere of life and judgement that he envisioned, and he thus moves "Publikum" to centre stage. "A man can, in that art or science to which he has devoted himself, possess great merit in comparison to his co-workers; that does not necessarily imply great merit in view of the Publikum."\[^{150}\] Publikum is a new, more inclusive, detached, and informal term which is able to contain all of the various orders of society in a "whole" as a locus of common life and judgement.

While Abbt's work in many ways signalled the emergence of a new order of burgher-citizen, it was not solely an expression of the "consciousness" of that new order; it also represents an important, early attempt to come to grips with the lack of a common sphere of public life in German society, a public sphere that was seen to have existed among the ancients and was in the process of being reconceptualised by moderns of the European Enlightenment. If Lessing, one of the leading figures on the German intellectual scene during
Abbt's brief life, had begun to take steps towards conceptualizing "the public" within the scholarly idiom of what we now call "the arts," Abbt did so by engaging emerging discourses of patriotism and enlightened sociability. Herder, as we'll see, caught the spirit of Abbt's writings, understanding the close relationship between their form and content. In many ways he carried forward the work begun by Abbt, as well as Lessing, as a "public writer," albeit in his own way and with his own conception of "organic enlightenment."

2. The active reading public at the time did not comprise the lowest orders of society, as Abbt himself noted in vom Verdienste, and hence could not have been his primary audience. See Friedrich Nicolai, ed., Thomas Abbts vermischte Werke (Frankfurt und Leipzig: 1783) vol. 1, p. 270ff. Henceforth indicated by VW. See also Ibid. pp. 226-27 for an indication of Abbt's assumed audience--"judges, lawyers, doctors, syndics."

3. For Abbt's effect on Herder see below Chapter 4; Bender, Thomas Abbt, p. 129ff; Ulrich Gaier, ed., Johann Gottfried Herder. Frühe Schriften 1764-1772 Bd. 1. (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), p. 1005; Johann Gottfried Herder, "Das Bild Abbts: im Torso," in Bernhard Suphan, ed., Herders Sämtliche Werke (Berlin, 1877-1913), vol. II. pp. 268-73. Schiller is known to have been an avid reader of Abbt as a youth. See Frederick Beiser, Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790-1800 (Cambridge & London, 1992), p. 85. For Nicolai see Friedrich Nicolai, Ehrengedächtnis Herrn Thomas Abbts (Berlin und Stettin, 1767); Oskar Claus, Die historisch-politischen Anschauungen Thomas Abbts (Gotha: Perthes, 1905), p. 9. For Mendelssohn see his review of Abbt's vom Tode für das Vaterland in the Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend XI, p. 39ff. See also his letter to Abbt in VW vol. III, p. 277. For Zimmerman and the general reception of Abbt's works, and his imitators, see Claus, pp. 8-10, 20-25.


5. Here too Abbt has been misinterpreted. In a typical analysis informed by the perspective of the emancipation of the Bürger-citizen, Abbt is mentioned only in regard to his book vom Tode für das Vaterland, as a misguided apologist for feudalism. See Werner Rieck, "Literaturgesellschaftliche Aspekte der Lessing-Phase in der deutschen Aufklärung," in Franklin Kopitzsch, ed., Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland (München, 1976), p. 400.


7. The best and most reliable short description of Abbt's life is by Friedrich Nicolai, Ehrengedächtnis Herrn Thomas Abbts (Berlin & Stettin, 1767). Works from this century with extensive biographical information are Oskar Claus, Die historisch-politischen Anschauungen Thomas Abbts (Gotha, 1905), and Annie Bender, Thomas Abbt: Ein Beitrag zur Darstellung des erwachenden Lebensgefühls im 18. Jahrhundert (Bonn, 1922). The more recent article by Hans Erich Bödeker is also written in an essentially biographical format. See Bödeker, "Thomas Abbt; Patriot, Bürger und bürgerliches Bewußtsein."


10. Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend XI, p. 27. This statement occurred in reference to the writings of Friedrich Carl von Moser, and will be discussed in greater detail below.


12. Ibid., pp. 115-16. This notion will be discussed further below, in reference to the eighteenth-century decline in rhetoric and public speaking, and Abbt's stylistic response. Other references to Cicero in the Briefe which indicate his symbolic importance to Abbt occur in no. X, pp. 197-98; XII, pp. 258-59.

13. VW vol. 1, p. 313.


17. While De Oratore was explicitly discussed by Abbt in the Briefe, his other references to Cicero are more in keeping with the tenor of Cicero's more well-known text. De Officiis deals more broadly with public life than De Oratore, which is mainly concerned with the art of speaking well in public.


19. Ibid., p. xliv.

20. Ibid., p. 23. As in the following quotation, I have changed the translator's rendering of "res publica" back into Latin.

21. Ibid., p. 28.

22. E.g. ibid., pp. 59-60, but the emphasis is clear throughout. The latter point is argued most forcefully in Book III.


26. Abbt mirthfully stated in a letter that "I am really curious to see what our theologians will say, when a Lord, a merchant and a professor; a free-thinker, a Jew, and a Christian, appear hand in hand: Shaftesbury, Moses [Mendelssohn] and Abbt. Truly a splendid association." VW vol. 3, p. 45. See also ibid. p. 33, 51, 95, 131.


29. VW vol. 2, pp. 22-26, 63-64, 114-115.

30. See the Characteristicks, vol. 2.


32. Klein, Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness, p. 8ff.


34. For helpful comments on the "Inquiry", as well as on Shaftesbury's ideas on sociability in general, see Stanley Grean, Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm (Columbus, 1967), chapters 9-10. See also "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit" in the Characteristicks vol. II, p. 5ff, and especially, p. 81, where Shaftesbury states "That to be well affected towards the Publick Interest and one's own, is not only consistent, but inseparable."


36. vom Tode: VW vol. 2, p. 63. vom Verdienste: VW vol. 1, p. 213. Two other direct citations are found in vom Verdienste, p. 218 and p. 327.

37. VW vol. 3, p. 47, 50, 56.

38. Ibid., p. 48.

40. VW vol. 1, pp. 116-17.


43. Ferdinand Tönnies makes a brief reference to Helvétius in his Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung as having been involved in the conceptualization of "public opinion." See Tönnies, p. 295. See also Campbell, "Helvétius and the Roots of the Closed Society."

44. Helvétius, De l'Esprit, Discours I-II; Campbell, p. 161.


47. Helvétius, De l'Esprit, p. 123.

48. in vom Verdienste, VW vol. 1, pp. 213-14.


54. VW vol. 2, pp. 58-60.

55. VW vol. 1, pp. 316-17.


57. Morris, p. 174.


59. Ibid., line 282; 269ff.
60. Ibid., lines 199-214; 269-82.

61. Ibid., lines 283-94.


63. Although the terms "public" and "public spirit" are not used by Abbt to any degree in this text, Publikum occurring only once in a footnote (p.69), it is appropriate to speak of the treatise as being concerned, in large measure, with "public-spiritedness," as employed by English writers at the time. The frontispiece, after all, featured a quote from Addison's Cato: "What pity it is, That we can die but once to serve our country."


68. For discussion of the differences between first (1758) and second (1760) editions of Zimmerman's book see the Briefe IX, p. 21ff. See also Frederick Hertz, The Development of the German Public Mind (London, 1962), p. 356. I have used a later edition. See J.G. Zimmerman, vom Nationalstolze (Karlsruhe, 1783).


74. VW vol. 2, pp. 20-21, 110-11.

75. Mendelssohn, Briefe XI, p. 43.
76. Nicolai, for example, located it right at the front of Abbt's collected works. See VW, vol. 1. And in his Ehrengedächtnis Herrn Thomas Abbt Nicolai wrote that vom Verdienste was Abbt's "best and most well-received book." See Ehrengedächtnis, p. 20. See also the Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1875-1912), p. 3.


78. Ibid., p. 16.


80. Briefe XV, p. 55; on p. 61 "nation" is used in reference to the whole of "Deutschland."

81. This concern was evident from the beginning of Abbt's involvement with the Briefe. See his initial contribution in no. IX, 1761, p. 97ff, esp. 150-51.

82. Briefe XV, p. 60.

83. Ibid., pp. 56-57.

84. Ibid., p. 70.

85. Ibid., p. 117, 126.

86. e.g. Ibid., p. 56.

87. VW vol. 2, p. 69.

88. Briefe XV, p. 145; ibid., p. 161. See also the reference to "Publikum" in ibid., pp. 102-03.

89. Ibid., pp. 140-43.


91. Briefe IX, p. 3ff. Discussed further below.

92. At the outset Moser states that he has "deeply studied" works by Montesquieu and Rousseau (pp. 14-15), and he frequently engages Helvétius's book de l'Esprit (passim).

93. Ibid., p. 205. See also p. 148, 163-68, 186, 189-206, 228, 249ff., 273, passim.
94. See ibid. p. 236ff, 243ff, 248, 253, 273. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

95. See Friedrich Carl von Moser, von dem Deutschen Nationalgeist (1766), esp. p. 8, 10ff, 20ff, 25, 32ff, 37.

96. Briefe XI, p. 14ff. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


98. Briefe XIX, p. 9. Abbt's interaction with Spalding's work will be discussed further below. The important point here is that Abbt saw himself as a Baylean figure in his critique of religious perspectives.


100. VW vol. 3, p. 48. See also Briefe XI, p. 26ff, esp. 32.

101. Briefe XI, p. 5; Briefe XVIII, p. 47.

102. Abbt had even conceived of a plan to write a "Gegenbeherzigungen," but never completed it, probably because vom Verdienste was conceived in part (as the above quote indicates) as a response to Moser. See VW vol. 6, p. xxxix.

103. See Briefe XI, p. 15ff, esp. pp. 19-20, where he mentions Shaftesbury.


105. Gagliardo, Reich and Nation, p. 54.

106. See Moser, von dem Deutschen Nationalgeist, passim, and esp. p. 34ff, 45.

107. VW vol. 1, pp. 5-6.

108. Ibid., "Vorbericht". Some subsequent page references to vom Verdienste will be made in the text. For background to notions of "common sense" and "plain, good sense" in Germany, see Manfred Kuehn, Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy (Kingston & Montreal, 1987), esp. "Appendix: Common Sense in the German Background," p. 251ff.

109. Ibid., pp. 5-6. For a discussion of "merit" and debates on meritocracy in Germany, see Anthony J. La Vopa, Grace, Talent, and Merit: Poor Students, Clerical Careers, and Professional Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Germany (Cambridge, 1989).

110. See their correspondence in VW vol. 3, pp. 262-85. Nicolai and Mendelssohn upbraided Abbt repeatedly during the early 1760s for his troubling writing style; see ibid., p. 101, 108, 157, 265ff, 275, 284, 325, 340. The relationship between Abbt's style and his larger project is discussed further below.
111. "Determination" is Moses Mendelssohn's recommended English translation. See his annotations to Abbts letters, in VW vol. 3, p. 13 (appendix). The notion as used by Abbts combines a sense of both "character" and "goal/purpose."

112. VW vol. 3, p. 176, 190, quote from pp. 238-239.

113. Ibid., p. 282. The discussion begins around November, 1762, and continues on into 1765. See ibid., pp. 126-335.


117. Ibid., pp. 22-23, 35-37, quote from p. 38.


119. Bödeker, "Thomas Abbts: Patriot, Bürger, und bürgerliches Bewußtsein," p. 233. This is another result of too much emphasis on "bürgerliche Emanzipation" as the central concern of Aufklärer like Abbts.


121. See above note 4.

122. VW vol. 3, pp. 304-305.

123. Briefe XV, pp. 92-93.

124. In addition to the many clear statements indicating this in vom Verdienste (e.g. p. 277), see also the Briefe XV, pp. 140-41. There, in a typical discussion of the need for writings for the "common man," Abbts asks: "How should love of fatherland, devotion in the raising of children, steadfastness in one's assigned service, contentedness with one's own estate (Stand), how should all of these grand societal virtues become both known and loved?"

125. Ibid., pp. 271-85. Abbts polemics against the pedantry of German academic life are well known. See the discussion in Bödeker, "Thomas Abbts: Patriot, Bürger" p. 225ff. For a wide-ranging discussion of the problems and critiques of pedanticism in German academic life from the seventeenth-century onward, see Wilhelm Kühmann, Gelehrtenrepublik und Fürstenstaat: Entwicklung und Kritik des dt. Späthumanismus in der Literatur des Barockzeitalters (Tübingen, 1982). Abbts critique was part of a long tradition in this respect.

126. VW vol. 3, p. 341.
127. See "Abhandlung über die Frage: Finden sich dergleichen Vorurtheile, die Ehrerbietung verdienen, und die ein guter Bürger öffentlich anzugreifen sich ein Bedenken machen soll?" in VW vol. 4. The essay was written in response to a contest sponsored by the Basel Patriotic Society, answering one of four questions posed by the society. This question of useful vs. harmful prejudices was of course quite pertinent at the time, and Abbt was far from alone in his view, particularly in the German context.

128. see vom Verdienste. VW vol. 1, pp. 168-69.


130. VW vol. 1, pp. 112-13, 172-73, 204.

131. E.g. Nicolai, Ehrengedächtnis, p. 13, 20-21, 31; Herder, "Das Bild Abbt's: Im Torso," SW II, pp. 273-77; Gellert, Moralische Vorlesungen, pp. 247-48; Mendelssohn, Briefe, p. 39, 56; Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie vol. 1, pp. 2-3. In Abbt's correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn, the "problem" of his writing style was a steady theme. See above note 110. While Nicolai and Mendelssohn generally found fault with it, they also praised his style for its "fiery" and "vital" qualities. Herder, as we shall see, found Abbt's style particularly engaging.

132. See for example the Briefe IX, pp. 81-152, esp. 97-107, 123-28; X, pp. 191-244, esp. 197-98, 212-13; XI, pp. 1-38, esp. 4-7; XIII, passim; XV, passim. As indicated above, this thematic is also present in vom Verdienste.

133. Besides Briefe letter XIII, p. 97ff. (discussed below), see X, pp. 197-98; XV, p. 142. For vom Tode, see for example VW vol. 2, p. 9, 19, 56. For vom Verdienste, VW vol. 1, p. 313.

134. Briefe XIII, pp. 106-117; quote from p. 117.


136. While these concerns are evident in almost all his works, they surface most often in his contributions to the Briefe. Besides no. XIII, referred to above, see for example IX, pp. 81-152; X, pp. 191-244; XI, pp. 1-38; XV, pp. 53-171. See also comments made in his letters, VW vol. 3, p. 111, 137.

137. Also, in the Briefe, he remarks that "It is clear that the reader whom one has before one's eye [when writing] determines the material and style." XV, p. 138.

138. E.g. Briefe XII, p. 274.

140. Briefe XV, p. 56. There are more than a few echoes of Shaftesbury here—both Mendelssohn and Abbt drew stylistic parallels between Abbt and Shaftesbury. See VW vol. 3, p. 101, 284.

141. Briefe XV, pp. 140-43.

142. VW vol. 3, p. 164.

143. See remarks made in his letters, VW vol. 3, p. 109ff, 114, 128.

144. VW vol. 3, p. 157.


147. Ibid., p. 277.

148. Ibid., pp. 268-73.

149. VW vol. 1, p. 6, 175, 193, 216 respectively.

150. Ibid., p. 209.
Throughout his career, Johann Gottfried Herder entertained wide-ranging ideas on the relationship between language, letters, and the formation of a united and harmonious German "Publikum" or citizenry. Like Lessing and Abbt, Herder's language of "the public" was ultimately a discourse about citizenship. While rejecting many components of the prevailing Enlightenment culture, especially cosmopolitanism and anything which smacked of abstract philosophy, Herder advanced his own ideas on the role of the educator or "enlightener" which, like much of his thought, were expressed in organic metaphors and images. These notions, which underwent a change in emphasis but not in substance during Herder's life, are in turn organically related to his larger literary and philosophical project.

Herder was convinced from the beginning of his writing career that literature was central in the development of a national consciousness which would lift Germany out of its backward state; the political arena as it then existed, besides having little appeal to Herder's way of thinking, could only be reformed through a deeper transformation of the thinking and character of the German "Volk." It is no accident that Herder didn't write to any great extent on political and economic subjects. The key to human society was language, and its development and appropriate use constituted the primary prerequisite for socio-political reform. Added to this, Herder's mistrust of public speaking led him to see the "public" of letters as a more appropriate forum of interaction, one that would preclude the demagoguery and mass hysteria which were possible effects of his goal of a more unified Publikum. Herder's literary career was as much a product of his ideas on reform and public life as the fact that there were few other viable avenues open to him.
In 1765, at the age of twenty-one, Herder wrote a Festschrift entitled "Haben wir noch jetzt das Publikum und Vaterland der Alten?" celebrating the dedication of a new courthouse in Riga, a port city on the Baltic Sea where he resided from 1764 to 1769. Thirty years later he published an essay with the same title in the fifth collection of the Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität. These essays provide a framework in which to examine Herder's earlier and later ideas on what I have chosen to call "organic enlightenment." When they are examined within the context of his other writings, the work of Abbt and Lessing, the events of the French Revolution, and the "problem of Publikum" generally, they reveal an organic conception of education/enlightenment and a tendency to view writing as the most appropriate means of reform and of building a cohesive German Publikum. The essays differ in that the earlier writings exhibit a tendency to conceive of enlightenment in individualistic terms, and they articulate a kind of sensuous nationalism, while later works indicate that Herder's ideas on enlightenment had become more pluralistic and universal.

Although literature is depicted by Herder in some contexts as being derivative (of speech), it emerges in the long run as the most suitable medium of public life. There is clearly a tension in Herder's thought between privileging the living, spoken word over the "dead letter," and recognizing the value of the written word as a crucial form of modern public interaction. In general, as we'll see, Herder was too historically-minded to believe that ancient or primitive conditions of immediate, spoken communication among the members of the socio-political community could or should be replicated by moderns.

As in the case of Abbt and Lessing, although Herder was an important early example of a self-consciously public writer, his writings as whole were not popular in a contemporary sense, tending instead to be aimed towards the educated layers of the population. Like his forerunners, he had little patience with the bland type of writing contained in the popular moral weeklies, preferring rather to aim higher in his attempts at socio-cultural
development. Yet he took his role as an enlightened pastor to the Volk seriously, preferring to address congregations in practical, ethical homilies, and he published works aimed directly at women as consumers of Enlightenment literature. Herder's notions of "Volk," "Nation" and "Publikum" were predicated on a relatively inclusive vision of bringing all social orders into a common form of enlightened social and intellectual life, as they were for Abbt and Lessing; although his rhetoric was often quite populist, it should not be confused with later class-specific populisms (e.g. Marxism). Despite significant variations, Herder's highly suggestive, synthetic vision of the organic relationship between language, literature and Publikum incorporated and built upon the foundations of public-oriented discourse laid by Abbt and Lessing, among others.

Johann Gottfried Herder was born in August 1744 in the town of Mohrungen (Morag) in East Prussia. His father was a teacher, organist and church warden, and his family was of limited means. The young Herder excelled in the local Latin school, and at the age of 16 he moved into the quarters of a pastor named Trescho, receiving free lodging in return for his labours as a copyist. The main benefit to Herder from this arrangement was access to Trescho's relatively extensive library. In 1762 Herder moved to Königsberg to pursue medical studies, but he soon switched to the study of theology. While in Königsberg he became friends with J.G. Hamann, and attended lectures given by Immanuel Kant; both relationships played a formative role in Herder's prodigious intellectual development.

From 1764 to 1769 he worked as a teacher and preacher in Riga, then under Russian control. Although experiencing success in his duties at the Domschule, and increasing fame for his writings in the wider German world, Herder became increasingly uncomfortable in Riga and voyaged to France in 1769. In 1770 he travelled to Hamburg, where he met with Lessing, before beginning an abortive "grand tour" of Europe with the prince of Holstein-Gottorp. In Darmstadt he met Karoline Flachsland, whom he would marry in 1773. Herder famously met and impressed Goethe in Strassburg in 1770, the
same year in which he won a prize from the Berlin Academy for his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*.

From 1771 to 1776 Herder assumed the roles of court preacher and church official in the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe; this period has come to be known as Herder's "Bückeburg exile." Herder feeling isolated and unable to establish the kind of cordial relationship with the enlightened Count Wilhelm which Thomas Abbt had been able to achieve during his tenure there. During this time he wrote his famous historicist text *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) and published the important collection of "German"-oriented essays by Goethe, Möser and himself entitled *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773).

In 1776 Herder and his family moved to Weimar, where he assumed the roles of general-superintendent, consistorial councilor and pastor of the court church. Herder remained in Weimar for the rest of his life, maintaining an ambivalent relationship with Goethe and others in the Weimar circle. Towards the end of his life he became engaged in a bitter, public quarrel with his former teacher Kant. Despite having shared some common interests and perspectives in earlier years, as time passed the two men had developed sharply differing approaches and sensibilities. While in Weimar Herder continued his voluminous literary output, including the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91) and the *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (1793–97). Johann Gottfried Herder died in December 1803, survived by his wife Karoline and their children.

The Impact of Abbt and Lessing

Herder was a voracious reader, and made numerous references in his works to a vast array of writers, both ancient and modern, in a number of fields of inquiry. And as an avid reader of the *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend* (henceforth *Briefe*) during his formative years, he was in an
important sense an inheritor of the intellectual legacies of Abbt, Lessing, and the Berlin circle generally. Scholars (such as Rudolf Haym) have traditionally emphasized the impact of Kant and Hamann on Herder during his Königsberg years; but while there is no reason to doubt that these figures exercised a considerable personal influence on Herder, it does not follow that the writings and approach of Abbt and Lessing, who embodied the emerging figure of the "public writer," were of any less importance in shaping Herder's own career as an influential, publicly-oriented writer.

Haym portrayed Herder as a pre-critical Kantian who never quite made the Kantian "turn;" Kant progressed in his thinking while Herder didn't, remaining a philosophical "dilettante" for the rest of his life.\(^{10}\) Equally misleading is Haym's insistence that Herder's own practical, socratic, "menschlich" approach to philosophy was due primarily to the influence of Kant.\(^{11}\) Haym's rigorous scholarship led him, however, to make mention of Abbt, albeit in passing, as another influence in this regard, and to contradict himself later in the biography by saying that Abbt, after all, must be given priority for Herder's conception of the "Volksschriftsteller".\(^{12}\) Even though Haym overvalued Kant's impact on Herder, he laid even more stress on the Hamann-Herder relationship, an emphasis which has helped to marginalize Herder into the so-called "Counter-Enlightenment."\(^{13}\)

Ulrich Gaier has more convincingly argued that Herder's thinking should be seen both as an "irrationalistic complement" to that of Kant, and a "rationalisitc complement" to that of Hamann.\(^{14}\) Gaier's view points to Herder as one who combined rationalistic (i.e. reasoned and analytical) with more sentimental, holistic and expressive currents, in his own way and according to his own particular concerns and perspective. An individual, in other words, capable of propounding a coherent vision of "organic enlightenment" that is not reducible to the influence of either Kant or Hamann. But if Herder's work in a certain sense transcended the antipodes of Kant and Hamann, it did so under the impact of Abbt and Lessing. If Kant and Hamann were important personal influences on Herder, Abbt and Lessing were
important to Herder as German "public writers" and "enlighteners." Abbt's impact in this regard occurred early in Herder's career, while Herder's appreciation for Lessing grew in later years, corresponding to the universalist, humanitarian turn in his thinking. But from the beginning of Herder's career he was conversant with the work of both writers, preoccupied as he was with the Briefe, and each can be said to have made a strong impression on the eclectic author.

Herder made copious written extracts from the Briefe during his Königsberg school years, feeling that his taste more or less "grew up" with his reading of the periodical. Furthermore, his first major publication, Über die neuere deutsche Litteratur: Fragmente (1767-68, henceforth Fragmente), was conceived and published as a "Beilage" or appendix to the Briefe. Although Herder at this stage entertained a deep respect for Lessing, it was Abbt who stimulated him the most, and to whom he felt closest. In September 1765 he warmly reviewed vom Verdienste in the Königsbergschen Gelehrten und Politischen Zeitungen, calling the book an "original" work in which "heart and mind, philosophe, human being and citizen can speak sincerely." The book struck Herder as "half philosophical and half political: but also overall, in Rousseauian terms, humanly (menschlich) written." Herder appreciated Abbt's "analytical" method, by which he meant the analysis of individual components of a concept before assembling them to create a coherent picture. This understanding of "analysis" was rooted in Newtonian method and propounded by Herder's teacher Kant; Abbt had practiced it by analyzing the component parts of "merit" systematically. Yet as we have seen, Abbt's writing style was anything but systematic, beyond the general division of merit into that of the "great soul," the "good heart," the "writer" etc. And Herder appreciated this aspect of Abbt's writing: "His style is new, picturesque, lively, often too daring, here entangled (verschlugen) and there fragmented. He is thrown into the fire of the imagination, and thereby the same feeling that the writer received from his material glows in the reader." Herder saw in Abbt someone able to combine
systematic, inductive analysis with feeling and imagination—i.e. heart and
mind, human being and citizen, politics and philosophy—in a type of writing
that drew the reader into the discussion in a compelling way. And this
occurred within a distinctly "German" framework:

[Abbt] is throughout [the text] a philosophe of good/common sense
(gesunden Verstandes), which he holds to be the German national
character; we agree with him on this: and that is precisely why
metaphysics has become the field of the Germans, and yet remains
an Olympic wreath held above him...who would develop a worldly-
wisdom of good/common sense. 19

In the ensuing years Herder continued to write about his strong feelings for
Abbt and to provide further evidence that he felt himself to be following in
Abbt's footsteps, which he literally did when he assumed Abbt's former post at
Bückeburg. Abbt's death in 1766 moved Herder to begin thinking about erecting
a written "monument" to him as well as to A.G. Baumgarten and J.D. Heilmann,
both of whom had predeceased Abbt by a few years. Herder's "sketch" for the
project was heartfelt and mystical, and indicates the degree to which he could
be moved by written works; although he never personally met these men, "their
spirits survive their bodies: it breathes in their writings; it takes these
written words as its shell, in order to appear to you, to affect your soul,
and enliven you." 20 People tend to undervalue the written legacy of writers,
forgetting that "In his works a writer leaves an impression of his spirit,
precious relics that can perform miracles, making us into their students and
followers...This is the true metempsychosis of spirits." (679-80) When
Baumgarten and Heilmann died, Herder felt sad, but didn't say anything. "Only
when I heard about the sudden death of my Abbt; then I could no longer
suppress my voice: I cried over him, and saw his shadow...[and] decided to go
to their graves and erect a monument." (678) Since the ancient, "symbolic" era
of festivals and statues is gone, what remains for Herder is to erect a
written monument to his departed heroes.

Such a monument did eventually appear, in 1768, entitled Über Thomas
Abbts Schriften. Der Torso von einem Denkmaal, an seinem Grabe errichtet.
Herder's plan to write on all three authors was narrowed to an extended
treatise on Abbt. Herder repeated the kinds of comments he had made in his
review of *vom Verdienste*, but went much further in detailing the strengths, as well as weaknesses, of Abbt's work. By now Abbt was firmly fixed in Herder's mind as a philosopher of the common people, of "good/common sense," (gesunder Verstand), who had begun the task of bringing philosophical thinking into the everyday world of all Germans; a writer oriented towards Menschen instead of other writers. Abbt, rather than Kant, was in Herder's mind the leading example in Germany of the eighteenth-century "Copernican revolution" in thought towards "man." But it was not "man" as an individual, but rather a social, historical and linguistic creature, that Herder felt Abbt had begun to address.

Thus besides praising Abbt for constantly keeping sight of the social "whole," (269ff, 277) he also praises the "historical spirit" of Abbt's works, "because it is precisely through the pragmatic use of history that Abbt's thinking gains solidity." (273) Abbt's use of a wide range of historical examples, in other words, provided a firm ground for thought, a ground which Herder would spend the rest of his life cultivating. Herder had already (in the *Fragmente*) been developing a historicized conception of language, and now he names Abbt's innovative writing style as appropriate to modern conditions. While the Greeks had practiced a form of "complete and simple expression" (ganzen einfältigen Ausdrucks), Abbt had developed a style of "abridgement" (Verkürzungen) that was more suitable because less "tiresome" to moderns than more drawn-out forms of expression. (278-79) Abbt's style served to awaken "Genies," calling forth sentiments and ideas in the reader rather than merely telling them explicitly what to think. (280) Because language is the "soil" of thought, (281) it must be cultivated idiomatically--i.e. using and developing indigenous German idioms—in order to improve the intellect and call forth true geniuses. And Abbt, in Herder's eyes, did this like no other: "He knew the ins and outs of [our language], and looked for powerful words to shape (prägen), old precepts (Machtwörter) to bring forward, and employed syntax according to his purpose and the uniqueness of our language." (281) The idiomatic quality of Abbt's writing style worked against excessive British and
French influences on the language, helping strengthen his own; "The weaknesses of Abbt's style are more precious to me than if he hadn't had any: attempts that must be made if our...undeveloped language is to be given richness, depth and ease of expression."

Writers like Abbt must be received with greater eagerness and attention, if Germans ever want to have "classical," "national" writers:

And if I have done nothing more in these reflections than made us eager for the honour to be national writers, to unearth, purify, and use the innermost part of our language: made us more eager to be witnesses to the honour of such national writers...or made us more eager for the honour to be German in the language, in whose womb many unknown treasures lay, waiting for the hand of geniuses and artists! Abbt died too early to become a classical writer for us...too early, to break a new path in the philosophy of our language; but there still hangs the wreath for him who strives after it.

That same year, in the second edition of the **Fragmente**, Herder similarly asked "Who will dare to become a true writer for the people, to capture the highest wreath [which] Abbt strove for in all his [works]? We must get away from our everyday sermons, our moral weeklies, our academic history writers..." Herder goes on to point out that by "classical" he doesn't mean "academic" works like those by Gottsched and Mosheim;

Classical writings? for whom then? when I think of classical writings I imagine a different Publikum than academic apprentices! And to believe that the only classical treasures of the German nation are to be found in textbooks, a whole Publikum made into schoolboys--here I feel myself beginning to blush!

Herder demands instead writers who work from the depths of the language for the "nation" or "Publikum" as a whole: "Academies and schools are not the only seats of the muses...; then what is more foreign to the character of a national writer, than when he speaks down to the Publikum, as to school children, from the lectern?" It is not only a matter of style of address, but also of being able to teach without seeming to teach, shaping or forming (bilden) without instructing.

It therefore seems appropriate to view Herder as a self-conscious heir to Abbt's legacy as a writer oriented towards the Volk, Nation, and indeed Publikum. As we will see below, Herder's early reflections on the public sphere were tinged with references to Abbt as an example of a public-spirited
writer. As for the Fragmenten, Herder ascribed the bulk of the reflections therein to ideas and understandings first broached by Abbt, and indeed Abbt looms large in that crucial early text. There Herder not only engages Abbt's contributions to the Briefe, but also quotes extensively from vom Verdienste, at one point (significantly enough) from Abbt's musings on the role of the writer in society.

In the Torso Herder advances a vision of Abbt as an expressive genius who spoke "through an inner sense," with a fecund imagination and strong, perceptive feelings. "He had a strong feeling for the beautiful, the human and the moral; thus his aesthetic taste, his humanitarian and moral judgement are based on sensation (Empfindung), not on unfeeling moral and artistic codes and rules." All in all, it is clear that Abbt provided Herder with strong impulses towards developing an outlook which combined an expressive sensibility with an awareness of the possibilities of language, and the written word particularly, to touch, shape and "enlighten" the socio-political community, bringing it to a better and more cohesive sense of itself. Abbt stimulated Herder in the same way that Herder is known to have stimulated others with his work. As he said in reference to Abbt, "A fruitful soul gives birth to ideas; it is left to others to nurture and develop them." Herder noted elsewhere, in this regard, that Abbt was a writer "[of] whom I can't read enough."

Herder's enthusiasm for Lessing was more restrained, seeming to grow with the passage of time; yet already in the Fragmenten (1767) Herder names Lessing along with Abbt as being prose writers who worked in a particularly German idiom, anticipating Justus Möser's comment that Lessing was the first German writer "who was...successful in nationalizing provincial expressions and words." "Who writes more original German," Herder asked in 1781, "than Luther or Lessing?" In an unpublished 1766 essay on the German theatre, Herder quoted extensively (and approvingly) from Lessing's famous 17th letter in the Briefe, where he had castigated Gottsched's "frenchifying" exercise in the theatre. Herder argued that Lessing was indeed on the right track,
because a truly "German" national theatre must be allowed to emerge on its own terms, organically as it were, according to indigenous social and cultural conditions. Lessing was in Herder's view a thorough, scholarly and yet tasteful writer who had done much to further good taste and sound judgement in his own country: "No modern writer has had a greater effect upon Germany in matters of taste and precise, thorough judgement, when it comes to literature, than Lessing." Unsurprisingly, Lessing, along with Abbt, exercised a profound influence upon Herder's early understanding and usage of the term "nation."

Herder engaged Lessing's Laokoon extensively in the first "grove" of his kritische Wälder (1769), inspiring and encouraging Lessing, who had also appreciated Herder's Fragmente. Herder admired Lessing's later plays; in fact, Minna von Barnhelm and Emilia Galotti were important points of discussion in Herder's courtship with Karoline Flachsland, disagreement over the former almost leading to a rift in the relationship. Herder was enthusiastic about Nathan der Weise and Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts, and he sided with Lessing in the Reimarus fragment controversy, urging him to publish Reimarus' entire heterodox work. H.S. Reimarus was a Hamburg schoolmaster who, when he died, left behind a rationalistic treatise which called into question a number of orthodoxies, including the infallibility of the Bible; Lessing began to publish fragments from the treatise in 1774, eventually unleashing a storm of theological controversy. All of this has led a recent Herder biographer to assert that "For Herder, Lessing, rather than Goethe or Schiller, was the most important German writer of the age. He argued in his books with Lessing's ideas, he praised his works." Others have concluded that the two writers were complementary figures, sharing common concerns and perspectives yet often differing in their approaches and sensibilities. Both, for example, were critical of modern states and sought later in life to envision alternative communities of a universal "humanity," yet Lessing's view was more in keeping with high-Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, while Herder sought to historicize the concept, to make it
compatible with the uniqueness of individual peoples in differing times and places.\textsuperscript{37}

Both Lessing and Abbt, then, were formative factors in Herder's intellectual development; crucial, inspiring examples of the emerging figure of the "public writer" who was oriented towards the German "people," "nation," and indeed "public;" writers who were helping reformulate the contours of German social and intellectual life. Herder's excitement for Abbt, particularly, can only be understood in this context; otherwise it can be puzzling.\textsuperscript{38} His affinity for Lessing, while more immediately understandable as a byproduct of Lessing's brilliance, must also be seen from this angle, to be fully understood. Despite their differences, both writers were engaged in a similar project of "public"-formation and -enlightenment.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Early Writings}

The original version of the essay "Haben wir noch jetzt das Publikum und Vaterland der Alten?" (written 1765, published 1766) presents a challenge to interpreters because it was likely at least partially a "Renommierstück,"\textsuperscript{40} a piece meant to gain favour with the authorities. While a wide range of interpretations has been advanced,\textsuperscript{41} none has captured the flavour of this early example of the rich Herderian dish. In my view, the essay is both rhetorical and topical: a chance to try out some of his ideas on rhetorical writing in a civic sphere, as well as a critical treatment of the subject.

The essay begins with an elevated description of the function of public edifices. The prose is dramatic--after a few paragraphs of rising eloquence Herder asks: "Who is a patriot who can remain cold in this place? No! Every citizen whose blood doesn't just flow through his tongue, but also warms his heart ... joins in with gladness."\textsuperscript{42} This sets the tone for much of the essay, and indeed for much of Herder's writing, which is always calculated to involve his readers in the construction of a knowledge suited to their own
circumstances, and to serve as a starting point for action. Herder's sensuous conception of language affected his early prose, causing him to write in a way which played on the senses. He used an emphatic, rhythmic, cumulative style which allowed him to analyze without fragmenting the subject, and impart a sense of "feeling one's way towards a description rather than ratiocinating in tranquillity."44

The essay compares the ancients with the moderns; although modern states, having passed through various "revolutions" (in the planetary sense) are milder, quieter, and less "wild," there is no longer a "Publikum" which can make the kind of democracy practiced by the ancients possible. An irresponsible "mob" has replaced "Volk," making a public administration of affairs inadvisable. In ancient times, all were equal as citizens, and government and army were not separated from Publikum; nowadays the public sphere is splintered into classes, trades, governments and citizens. However, in complex situations, even the ancients were misled by "orators, oracles and priests." Too much hung on public speaking, especially, where merely a botched argument or a poorly chosen confession could bring a death sentence. The "quiet summit" of modern states is due to the fact that the oratorical magic of a charlatan cannot lead a Publikum to determine the course of events through the narrow-headedness of the moment, the "whirl of passion," since there is no centralized public life. Instead, modern times are more just, thoughtful and wise; if a judge is bribed, he lets his hand instead of his ear be tickled.(42-46)

This ironic comment indicates Herder's approach to the problem. Clearly, he was wielding a two-edged sword--both periods had their own forms of corruption. The ancients had a real Volk, an active Publikum, yet it was subject to the follies and superstitions of the gathered crowd. The moderns were a lower order of citizen, yet because of this, they could not be misled in the same way. However, there was no longer any form of civic life at all. Herder bemoans the loss of a public of the speaker, the theater, and literature, while putting certain limitations on public speaking that are
echoed in his essay "Der Redner Gottes." In both essays it is clear that the orator is not to use the "greasepaint" of the ancient speakers, or to please, flatter, or mislead; rather to edify with moving homilies that "awaken the heart" while illustrating the message in its practical dimensions. A new Cicero cannot emerge, Herder states (echoing Abbt), because there is no Publikum of Cicero. "Publikum" itself has become a "puzzling name."(47)

Herder is most mournful in describing the loss of a literary public: "Poor, wise folios, you are all written, sweated over, scrawled for the public: Who is your public? The still, learned, critical moths!"(47) The Publikum of letters thus emerges from the essay as a neglected modern forum. While it is undeniable that a tensive relationship exists throughout Herder's writings between lived and "bookish" experience, as a tool of language and a form of public interaction, literature was an important, indispensable medium.

The second part of the essay deals with the question, "Do we still have the fatherland of the ancients?" Having answered the question of Publikum in the negative, the question of fatherland receives an affirmative response--here too Abbt's influence is evident. Rebuked on the Publikum issue, the audience is now presented with a stirring homily which will surely gain assent. True to Herder's philosophical perspective, the terms are concrete, sensuous, emotional. The essay ends with a graphic ode: the blond hero strides into the field and gives his hearts-blood to the fatherland in jubilation, before dying.(53)

While writing in such terms about the love of fatherland, Herder makes the same kind of distinctions between ancients and moderns as he had done in writing about Publikum: the ancients, while being more unified, were also in certain senses "untamed," and their religion was less universal and more political, superstitious and subject to manipulation. The modern character is a "finer and more moderate freedom, the freedom of conscience...the freedom to enjoy one's cottage and vineyard in peace and quiet under the shadow of the throne."(50) The image of the shadow recurs throughout Herder's writings,
usually as protective and nurturing, sometimes stifling.  

Here and elsewhere in the essay he refers positively to absolutist government, if the people being ruled are happy. These references have been seen as early support for enlightened despotism, but I believe they are part of a broader vision; in this and other contexts the giver of shade is an essentially passive element which can help to give rise to growth and development from below. The context of the essay also allows for a bit of gratuitous flattery.

In general, the language, tone and rhythm of the piece emphasize the physical and spiritual connection between citizens and their land. The content and style combine in the service of forming a Publikum: while seeming to affirm the existing power structure as productive of an individualistic harmony and peace (the latter being things he did value and which led him to consider literature as the medium most conducive to forming sound views), Herder was in fact aiming to inspire a stronger and more unified and educated German public that would be more able to manage its own affairs.

The most important work for understanding the first "Publikum" essay and Herder's early view of organic enlightenment is the essay "Wie die Philosophie zum Besten des Volks allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann," from early 1765. The unpublished piece was a response to one of a set of prize questions posed by the Patriotic Society of Bern in 1763, and advertised in the Briefe. The seven questions offered for consideration included queries on how best to reinvigorate the morals of a people; which people was the happiest of all time; how eagerness for the common good can be furthered so as to replicate that of the ancient republics; whether some prejudices are worth preserving, and so on. It seems significant that Herder chose to answer the question which confronted most directly the gulf between "enlightenment" and "the people:" how can the "truths" of philosophy be made the most general and useful to the people? Herder's response jettisoned the notion of "truths" and concentrated on philosophy as a discipline or practice.

In the essay, philosophy as an abstract science is posed against the "good/common sense" (gesunder Verstand) of "the most venerable part of the
The people do not need to bring themselves to understand abstract principles of logic; rather philosophy needs to come to them, making the Volk its "Mittelpunkt." The argument follows Rousseau's distinction between artificial and natural knowledge, as Herder himself admits. To rationalize morality is to remove it from the sphere of instinct and action to the level of abstract thought, which is harmful for the Volk, as it in turn inhibits moral certainty. The task of philosophy is to discover a new logic which orders imagination and sense-perception, and directs the Volk "back to the source of good/common sense" without raising it to the level of philosophe.(113-16)

The philosopher who brings to the Volk this "philosophy of the common people" is himself a "martyr of truth" who has sacrificed the certainty and peace of his own heart, along with the simple unconscious pleasures of life, to free people from learned thinking while leading them over "fields of flowers." Thus although Herder seems to be suggesting that enlightenment must come in a certain sense from above (the enlightener), this knowledge is itself corrosive and removed from reality, and must furnish a "negative logic" which destroys itself as it comes into contact with and helps to further more natural, "human" ways of thinking. Here Herder presents the image of the philosopher lending his shadow, to foster growth from underneath.(113-23)

Herder in turn connects this relationship to political reform. "Here philosophy must perform miracles: the state must be improved from underneath." Although there are no gathering places in German society for the citizen to be made into a patriot, as there are in republics, there is still the possibility, in books such as those written by Thomas Abbt, as well as in the context of sermons and within families, to bind citizens together.(130) An emphasis on moral change as being the prerequisite for political change is apparent throughout the essay. At one point Herder warns against violent and massive changes to the structure of the state--to do this is to sink into a barbarism which is worse than the evil which was replaced. Herder was here probably influenced by Jacob Wegelin, professor of history at the Berlin Royal
Academy, who had maintained that great changes in states never happen without a corresponding change in morality. It is worth noting that Wegelin wrote many of his treatises for the Academy in French, which was just the sort of practice that Herder identified as being divisive to the German Publikum.

Reform was to come about through an organic, cultural and social process of enlightenment, aided by literature. In a section entitled "A finer Volk out of Books," Herder outlines his ideas on the place of books in his scheme: "More books need to be played into the hands of women--books have to be written accordingly." Books have their place, but need to be written appropriately for the Volk, which requires a writing directed towards its way of thinking: "The book must not only be written for the intellectual, but also for those who surround him." In ancient times there was no differentiation in language; since then, it had divided into the language of the common citizen and the language of the learned. It was this rift which Herder sought to mend, and his "drawing of philosophy onto anthropology" set forth in the essay clearly indicates that it was at least as necessary for the philosopher to negate his abstracted modes of thinking as it was for the Volk to simply develop its thinking in ways which were natural to it.(131-34)

Herder's essay "Von der Ode," from the same period, is an attempt to explore the natural language of the senses which the Volk could readily understand. As such it is a comment on what Herder was trying to do with the ode presented in his "Publikum" essay. The genius of the artist consists in being able morally to touch the heart of the audience first, and only secondarily to "widen concepts." The ode serves this end by being "The most perfectly sensuous language of an unmixed perception." Words are inherently conceptual, and are the first step in removing human beings from nature, feeling and action. Therefore those that are sensuous and affective are closest to nature and most effective in touching the human heart. In "Wie die Philosophie zum besten des Volkes" Herder frames his ideas with the same emphasis on feelings and the senses. Education needs to be directed towards the teaching of thinking based on the senses, not rules based on speculation.
Instead of sowing words, Herder remarks, "I plant thoughts and prospects. I will leave the development, growth, and gathering of the fruit to others." This is organic enlightenment. Elsewhere in the essay Herder reiterates this educational theme:

In the place of logic and ethics, form them with a philosophical spirit to think for themselves, and in the feeling of virtue: in the place of politics form patriotic citizens who act; instead of useless metaphysics lay before them the really delightful and amusing: the immediate.54

All of this points to an early conception of thought and learning as being part of an ongoing, organic relationship between educator and educated, abstraction and concrete experience. The written word is an elemental medium in this process.

Herder's use of organistic imagery to envision the process of education/enlightenment likely had its roots first and foremost in the Leibnizian-Shaftesburyean philosophical nexus, a vision of the universe as a sympathetically interacting whole which, as we have seen, had an impact on Lessing's constitution of a German Publikum. But Herder's view went beyond such cosmologies by eliminating their more mechanistic (Leibnizian) and static (Shaftesburyean) elements, substituting instead a profoundly historical and developmental sensibility. Aristotelian developmentalism must not be forgotten as an important factor in any organistic theory of development in the early modern period, but Aristotle's view was strongly infused with the teleological idea that the process was one of striving towards a pre-existent form, a striving that could be thwarted by external factors but not unduly influenced by them. Herder rarely mentioned Aristotle. Yet the valence of the notion of an unfolding of an original "genius" that lies within, an idea that was consonant with the analogy of a seed that develops into a mature plant (which Aristotle had employed), must be ascribed at least in part to the long European tradition of Aristotelian thinking.55

Of more immediate influence on the young Herder was the work of Abbt, who (as we have seen) Herder felt was engaged in nurturing the German "genius" from within, in a naturalistic manner analogous to that of a fruit-bearing
plant. In 1766 Herder cited the abbé Dubos on how tragic genius comes "to fruition" before comic genius in a nation, and in 1767 Herder indicated that he had read Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), a text which has long been recognized as signalling a turn in literary theory towards the conceptualization of poetic/artistic production in organistic terms and images. "A striking aspect of Young's essay is his persistent, if unsystematic, way of alluding to the invisible architectonics of original invention in metaphors of vegetable growth." Young's essay pointed to an unconscious realm of the human mind as the source of "genius," an inborn realm that could come to fruition in the creative process. Herder applied this developmental notion of "genius" not only to individuals, but to the "people," "public" or "nation" as a whole; true enlightenment in Germany would come from fostering, primarily via literature properly conceived, the growth of an indigenous "genius."

There were other factors in Herder's organicism, including the obvious influence of Hamann, who bridled at the high Enlightenment's orientation towards mechanistic rationalism, and Albrecht van Haller's *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani* (1759-63). But Herder likely did not read the *Elementa* until 1773 or 1774, years after he had begun to employ organistic/biologic images in his writings. It is probably safe to say that Herder had a natural affinity for these images; he reveals himself everywhere in his writings as one attuned to the natural world--the living, sensuous world of plants, animals, bodies, life. His original academic interest, it should not be forgotten, was in medicine.

By 1785, in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Herder had come to an explicit conception of "organic enlightenment." There he argued that the development of human capacities occurs as a complex interaction between individual capabilities and tradition, community and physical circumstances:

So little do human beings give birth to themselves; so little are they self-born in the employment of their intellectual powers. Not only is the seed of our inner capabilities genetic, as is our physical body: rather also the development of this seed is
dependent upon the destiny that planted us here or there and according to time and years laid beside us the aids to education/development (Bildung). Ultimately, all of humanity is tied together in a long chain of familial tradition, history, and physical circumstance, a chain of "education" (Erziehung) which contributes to who we are as individuals. The principles of the philosophy of history, according to Herder, are "tradition and organic powers." All education comes through imitation and practice, hence through the process of moving from "Vorbild" to "Nachbild." "The imitator, however, must have powers to take in and transform what is given into his own nature, as in the digestion of food." Thus the education/development (Bildung) of our species is genetic and organic in a double sense:

Genetic through the communication (Mittheilung), organic through the absorption and employment of the communicated. Whether we wanted to talk about this second genesis of human beings, which permeates their whole lives, via [the image of] the working of a field Culture (Cultur), or using the image of light Enlightenment (Aufklärung), is an open question; the chain of Culture and Enlightenment in any case reaches to the ends of the earth.

Herder's transposition of organistic imagery with that of "Enlightenment" points to a reorientation of the latter from a static, rationalistic (and ultimately authoritarian) vision to a more cooperative, interactive and de-centralised one: a perspective more capable of giving rise to authentic, indigenous forms of knowledge and expression (i.e. "genius") and by extension socio-political community.

In a 1791 address entitled "Schools, a public matter for the common good" Herder linked organic enlightenment with the role of teachers as public persons. Teachers work not only for the present, but for the future good of the youth entrusted to them. Their memory and their teachings live on in their pupils. They should be encouraged to realize that

Their efforts are not a private, rather a universal, public, eternal work, a work that encompasses [their] town, region and descendants, whose seed sprouts with germinating reason (dessen Saame mit der keimenden Vernunft fortkeimet), growing with the sciences and humanity (Humanität), yes in every new soil drawing new power (Kraft), and producing new blooms and fruit.

This organist perspective was, as we have seen, evident in Herder's earliest writings, including an unpublished essay on the theatre from 1766,
entitled "Haben wir eine Französische Bühne?" There Herder begins by excerpting long passages from the Briefe written by Friedrich Nicolai, passages which detail the "problem of Publikum" vis-a-vis the German theatre. In comparison to England and France, Germany "hardly has a theatre," according to Nicolai, and what is more, "Where do we have a Parterre or a Publikum, that takes interest in dramatic pieces?" There is little interest or support for the theatre in Germany, with most efforts going unnoticed by the majority of Germans, while those who are interested display a "childish" taste. And this situation will not change, so long as Germany remains divided into numerous provinces without a single "Hauptstadt" and a prince who will erect a truly public theatre. Such a centralized theatre would help to overcome the many differences in German taste, customs and language. Princely sympathy for French drama and actors, combined with the multiplicity of German socio-cultural life, contributes to the general lack of interest in and development of a truly German theatre.

Herder responds by arguing that good theatre has never been aided by central authority—"One shouldn't imagine that even a Louis XIV is a necessary part in the making of a golden age of the stage."

I believe...that Corneilles and Racines, even without Richelieus and Colberts, would germinate as well as Crebillons and Voltaire's, as Shakespears and Fletchers; I believe in fact that if no courtly taste had reigned they would have been greater than they were...they would have taken more risks, trusted themselves more to their own powers...they would have been less regular, more susceptible to errors, but much more original.

Herder continues the organicist image by stating that "A moderate, natural warmth, and a spring sun, that often covers itself under clouds and...as the rabble (Pöbel) says, draws water, brings forth the best fruit." The best reward for good theatre is not prizes offered by kings—that is not how one awakens genius; rather, a well-developed theatre and theatre-audience is its own reward, offering an inner sense of satisfaction. And the end of winter for the German theatre has already been heralded by the Lessings and Cronegks, the Schlegels and Gellerts who have emerged.

Secondly, it is wrong to suppose that the way to overcome German
diversity is by setting up a centralized arbiter of taste and custom—a Paris, as it were, of the German theatre. Such a lawgiving stage would remain a foreign model to its "vassals," and would bring forth a warped taste. Instead, let two poets from every province emerge on their own, and then what is authentically German will come to the fore. "In order to establish the temper of a nation, the character of a theatre, may I even say the distinguishing tone (unterscheidenden Hauptton) of its own genius, one must always begin with the raw and coarse (Grobe)." One shouldn't even exclude the old German Harlequin—it is still too early for that. Germany is still in the age of attempts and trials, attempts which will lay the foundation for the poet who, when the time is right, is born to give the theatre a name, to bring the character of a whole nation upon the stage and make his taste the taste of the people. "Germany will never come to this point, indeed will not even espy its character from a distance, if one city, one theatre, one set of critics becomes too early and without the necessary calling the model, lawgiver and judge for the whole of Germany."(213) Since Germany consists of many provinces, the national taste of its theatre must emerge naturally out of a mixture of the various provincial ingredients. Instead of a "despotic model" for the theatre, a "republican" sense of contest will enliven the German theatre.(214) And it must cultivate German characters, even if that means that German comedy, for example, will be coarser than French comedy.(218ff) In the midst of this discussion Herder cites both Abbt and Lessing as figures who have led the way in these kinds of reflections.(214-15;225-26)

Herder's early attempt to come to grips with the "problem of Publikum" as it related to the theatre is a good example of his lifelong vision of organic enlightenment, albeit applied to a particular facet of German socio-cultural life. Herder's essay also reflects the degree to which discussion about the theatre, as propounded by the Berlin circle, had become a way of approaching larger socio-cultural issues and problems. And although Herder never completed any dramas of substance, he did write a number of incomplete "public-spirited" plays which "translate his moral and philosophical concerns
into social art." His idea of the theatre as expressed in these plays "tended
toward a kind of 'Gesamtkunstwerk,' a 'Festspiel' employing all the arts to
celebrate the communal spirit, just as he envisioned classical theatre."

But Herder's enduring interest lay in the field of belles-lettres,
"literature" broadly defined and including poetry, novels, history, criticism,
creation epics, travelogue and other forms of prose narrative. Literature--
easily circulated, widely accessible, personally engaging yet non-coercive--
remained Herder's great passion, and was a medium that accorded well with his
evolving ideas on enlightenment and socio-political formation. In the Torso,
as we have seen, Herder looked to Abbt as an example of a public-spirited,
"national" and idiomatic yet proto-classic writer whose work served to nourish
and awaken genius. But he also reflected on the varieties of literature then
available, including elegies, novels, and moral weeklies; and in each case an
Abbtian orientation towards the German Volk and/or Publikum is evident.

Elegies, for their part, are a kind of mini-novel, not always suited for
the Publikum, "more for the affected private person, and love elegies are most
pleasing to the objects of love themselves." In the Fragmenten the year
before, Herder had stated similarly that "One cannot always demand, without
impudence, that the public should let laments be whimpered in front of it.--
And when they are wholly the laments of a lover!" In elegies, unlike novels,
what is mainly played out is the effect which the loved one has upon the
writer; larger issues and contexts are excluded, so that if readers are not
directly flattered by the elegy they are left out of the picture, and may even
become angry.

In a section of the Torso entitled "A Few Observations on the Novel,"
Herder chides Abbt on his own terms: misleading the public and neglecting to
judge a writer's proper merit. Abbt had applauded a parodist who had attacked
some "errors" perpetrated by Richardson in his novels; Herder didn't like the
fact that Abbt approved, at second hand, of attacking a few failings everyone
seemed to exaggerate:

This would have been the right place to guide our poor German
Publikum, which is pulled this way and that, and soon doesn't know
where it stands; the parodist deserves a just appraisal of his work, but limits [should be] set to his impertinent judgement of Richardson; encourage him on his way, but yet draw the lines which show how far he, how far his merit can go. (321)

Herder, for his part, defends Richardson against such trivial attacks. (322)

And in a section entitled "On the Prose of Good Sense" (guten Verstands), Herder outlines his position on moral weeklies. He begins by chiding Abbt again, this time for spending too much time in the Briefe pointing out what everyone already knows: that German moral weeklies are a wretched lot, purveyed by "miserable scribblers." (325) Nothing is more just than this criticism: "And when we extend it beyond the wretched to the mediocre: how little is left over?" It would be difficult to find the patience to sift through "this giant mountain of dust and ashes" in order to find a few nuggets of gold. "That our illiterate public for the most part still has so little culture--among many other causes I would always say that we have so few good writings for the common man." And yet a truly worthwhile moral weekly would in fact be able to contribute much to the education/formation (Bildung) of a city, or at least a number of readers in a city. "The largest part of those whom we count as the common people read and hear little more than devotional books and sermons: and yet these so unreliable schools of taste contribute more to an orderly and somewhat higher manner of thinking than most think." (325-26)

Clearly, the existing genre of moral weeklies did little to raise standards and constitute an educated "public," but that did not mean that good writings/teachings for the common people were any less needed. Herder goes on to outline the qualities of the good preacher; these include coming down from the academic heights and speaking to his hearers as "brethren," imparting understandable teachings and reasonable duties in an orderly manner: "So are they the moral custodians (Sittenlehrer) of the Volk, who keep the ground of its soul soft...and open the intellect." (326) A pastor as he should be (but rarely is) is one who speaks to the "good/common sense" (gesunden Verstand) of the Volk, taking his teaching not always from heaven but also from the realms of education, commerce, etc., and who knows how to penetrate into the inner
thought processes of his audience, taking his teaching only so far that each one can learn, according to their own spiritual and physical circumstances, to think for themself. (326-27) Such comments point to the fact that "As Herder conceived it, the sermon was emblematic of a new bonding between a modern clerisy and its national Publikum."  

Herder wishes for a type of moral weekly that takes over where the pastor must leave off, if he is not to impair his spiritual calling:

[The writer] would make it into his first duty to penetrate into the manner of thinking (Denkart) and prejudices of his nation, his time, his region, and to clear up (aufraumen) what the spiritual speaker must leave alone. He would place himself in the circumstances and various situations of life, and...here and there lurk in the human heart: here and there attack false taste: never disregarding the national and local aspects of taste and manner of thinking: and drawing, only so far as necessary for his immediate purpose, from philosophy, history, from acquaintance with nature and books...[and] from noteworthy events and discoveries. (327)

Unsurprisingly, Herder's own writings can in many respects be read as an elevated version of what he describes here, which he goes on to characterize as a kind of "Demopädie," a form of instruction which is still far from being realized in contemporary moral writings. "One can hardly believe how far our best [moral weeklies] are from this ambitious goal, and how useless it is to look to them for a Demopädie, a school of taste and morals/customs (Sitten)." (328) Moral weeklies are still far from providing such a forum in which "common-sense" (quoted in English) can find its own tone; (330) Herder then points to Abbt as a purveyor of such writings, and quotes him, significantly enough, on how translators "should themselves become authors; [they] should adapt the best thoughts of their mother-tongue to the model of a more perfect language; in this way can they develop it, make it classic." (331) It seems that even Herder's well-known and -appreciated concept of "Nachdichtung" received important early impulses from Abbt.  

And it is organically linked to his general concern to foster writings that spoke directly to Germans as educable citizens, with powers and capabilities of their own for enlightenment and the development of more comprehensive and elevated forms of public life.

In Herder's anonymously published, widely noticed über die neuere deutsche Literatur: Fragmenten (1767) the themes of language, literature and
Publikum come together in a fairly developed scheme. Herder begins by asserting the importance of language as a tool of the sciences, a precondition for good writing and thinking. Words and ideas are intimately related—through language we learn to think properly. The conclusion is then drawn that the genius of a language is directly related to the genius of its literature. Through one the other is improved, because "their perfection advances in step with each other."  

Herder then puts the development of language into historical and political perspective, arguing that people need to be in touch with whatever stage they're living in, and develop their language accordingly. Herder was here working with ideas and terms that had been developed by other eighteenth-century thinkers, including Thomas Blackwell and Etienne Condillac, both of whom Herder had read. According to Herder, the youth of language was poetical; as it became older, the accumulation of wisdom and law gave it a "manly" character. Poetry became "art," leaving behind natural forms of expression, because "The more developed and political the morals and customs become, and the less the passions are in play, the more poetry loses its subject matter." Herder's was the age of "beautiful prose." The coming of this age was marked by greater perfection and differentiation. The force, sensuousness and fullness of language was sacrificed to greater perfection and order, mirroring changes in society. In a remarkable passage Herder juxtaposes the changes undergone by nation and language:

For the sake of clarity the precepts (Machtwörter) were rewritten, the synonyms searched out, determined, discarded, the idioms softened: just like law became fixed in the state, so also in language: one language was formed according to the other, with which it associated. There emerged a nobility, a mob and a middle class of words, as there did in society. 

Prose is for the Germans of Herder's time the single natural language. German prose will be improved by combining both poetic and philosophic language, using neither to the exclusion of the other. Thus Herder's linguistic vision is clearly related to his social one. A reintegration of language along these lines parallels a reintegration and development of the social order. Literature figures prominently in this transformation--the age of
prose is the age of the "Schriftsteller" or writer. In the context of communal interaction, "language" and "literature" are hardly differentiated in Herder's discourse. And the "public", as I have already indicated above, was present in the discussion, as both audience and forum:

When will our public cease to be this three-headed apocalyptic animal, at once badly Greek, French and British? When will someone take the seat, one which our nation deserves, of writing prose of good/common sense (guten, gesunden Verstandes), and philosophical poetry?¹⁴

The interpenetration of language and literature within a public context is very evident in Herder's revision of the Fragmente (1768), where he strongly emphasizes the place of literature as an extension of language in the long patrimony of ideas and in the formation of a national spirit, along with the role of the philologist in sifting through this great national treasure to the greater benefit of the nation. Books and languages are seen as great gardens with all sorts of flora and fauna growing in them, the writer/philologist being the gardener. Literature served as a bridge between matter and spirit for Herder, and as such was a carrier and medium of spiritual elements in an organic, material process. This does not discount the primary place accorded to speech in Herder's theoretical writings, rather complements it and brings it into the material world.

Another image that emerges is that of the "true idiot," i.e. master of idiom, who wanders as a foreigner among peoples and nations, learning foreign languages in order to speak wisely about his own. When this person is cognizant of the state, he will ponder what effect all of the various (German) dialects have on the whole, how to bring them all together into a "familial neighborhood," and how general laws can govern which impair neither the individual members nor the larger body politic. The "noteworthy writers" who are of most use to the republic are not those who write and think outside the limits of their own language, or those of leading and popular stature who live off of the work of others; rather it is they who live under their own fig tree, modestly and quietly plying their trade with the materials they have been given. This is not change from above, rather a prescription for organic
change, enlightenment from within, and it is directly tied to literature.\textsuperscript{75}

The foregoing calls into question the generally accepted view that "The wide range of Herder's writings is in inverse proportion to the small range of social activities that were permitted to him."\textsuperscript{76} Related to this, any attempts at periodizing Herder's life too distinctly are also suspect. If, from the beginning of his career, when he was still hopeful about the possibilities open to him to act significantly and positively for reform, his ideas on the important place of writing were already forming, then it can't be said that the choice of a literary career was entirely involuntary. It is probably more valid to see his ideas as confirming the frustrating position he eventually found himself in, rather than being occasioned by them. This was the case especially in Bückeburg, where he resided from 1771-76, and where he experienced the isolation and fragmentation of the modern public sphere which he had described earlier.\textsuperscript{77} Herder's outbursts against writing in his travel journal and \textit{Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte}\textsuperscript{78} must be seen as expressions of dissatisfaction both with the existing "paper culture" and the lack of visible effects of his own efforts: the kind of deep, broad transformation he envisioned is undoubtedly the result of a long, slow process. His negative feelings, for example, did not prevent him from calling in 1772 for the greater circulation of printed materials pertaining to public matters.\textsuperscript{79}

Herder's ambivalent feeling towards writing reflects his ambivalence towards human contact and experience in general. His was an intense, excitable nature. Early on, when considering a medical career, he fainted at the sight of a patient being operated on. In his travel journal he described the shudder which accompanied his psychological discoveries, and then stated:

\begin{quote}
I see and feel at a distance and hinder my own enjoyment through premature anticipation and through weakness and foolishness in the moment of experience itself. In friendships and society I feel in advance a premature anxiety or an excessive, strange expectation, the former making it difficult for me to enter into a relationship, the latter always deceiving and making a fool of me...So am I even in love: which I feel platonically, in absence more than in the present moment, in fear and hope more than in enjoyment, in abstraction...more than in reality.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

For Herder, writing was his "presence in absence," a medium of interaction by
which he could communicate in an intense, binding way while still leaving the reader and himself free from an immediacy which he naturally avoided. He was well aware of the effect the presence of others could have on the normal processes of the senses and mind. In his theoretical works, the ability of speech to evoke a powerful response is emphasized, as is the special nature of hearing. In this light his distrust of the irrational passions aroused by public speaking becomes more understandable. The modern age, with its individualism and splintered public sphere, did allow for cooler thinking to take place. This Herder links with greater freedom in his first "Publikum" essay. At the same time, there was a need for greater cohesion, the creation of a sense of "belonging", as Isaiah Berlin put it. Herder's "spoken" prose not only aims at overcoming the natural tendency of prose towards linear, logical construction, but also seeks to move readers to a greater attachment or connection with their own circumstances and community, while maintaining the distance afforded by the written document and allowing undisturbed meditation, "healthy" reasoning, and indeed "enlightenment" to prevail. In the second "Publikum" essay he articulated this thought more explicitly; before examining it however, it is worthwhile to consider some of Herder's mature works from the present perspective.

Language, Literature and the Public Sphere: Herder's Social-Historical Perspective

In the decade after he left Riga Herder continued to probe into the congeries of subjects which had engaged him from the start of his career, including aesthetics and cultural production, language, literature, historical change, and national or Volk identity. Generally speaking, Herder applied a profoundly social and historical perspective to the organically related entities of language, literature and Publikum (or, more abstractly, the public sphere). Thus language is at once the prime medium of sociability and an
historically conditioned object; literature, as an extension of language, tends over time towards abstraction but can be revivified by writers cognizant of its role in public life; and the social or public sphere of activity, as mediated by linguistic/literary communication, must not become too diffused, rather must have its own centre of gravity, its "Mittelpunkt" rooted in tradition, custom and physical proximity in order for its members to develop an authentic identity.

If Herder recognized the inherent sociality of language and developed the notion of bounded "spheres" of social activity and understanding, he also emphasized the importance of historical change--it would be wrong for moderns to attempt to replicate the closely-knit polities of earlier or more primitive peoples: one cannot go back to the (admittedly attractive) world of ancient orators and poets, who communicated directly with "the people" in a vivid fashion. Much as he seemed to approve of such forms of socio-political community, Herder was too cognizant of historical change ever seriously to advocate a return to such forms of life. Rather, he simply assumed that the present era was the age of writers and literature; and social change, development, and enlightenment would necessarily come via appropriate forms of writing. The important distinction, moreover, was not between speech and writing, rather between concretion and abstraction, immediate expression and over-refinement, local community and cosmopolitan society. Although the historical advent of writing brought with it a movement away from original, expressive forms of communication, this does not mean that literature cannot be directed back to its roots in the concrete, lived world of the senses and the Volk, and to its basic moral purpose. Such notions, as we have seen, were already present in some of Herder's earliest writings; as time passed he returned to them again and again, albeit often more subtly and within more specific treatises on language, history, poetry, the arts and sciences (Wissenschaften) and theology.

Herder's Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache, which won the prize offered by the Prussian Royal Academy in 1770, articulates his view of human
language as a distinctly social blend of natural expression and reflection that is suited to humankind's extended sphere of activity. Herder begins by asserting the inherent sociality of language, and its ability to strike a sympathetic chord with other creatures. Sentient beings are unable to confine vivid sensations within themselves, instead they must give spontaneous, sociable expression to them. "Nature" in a sense speaks through these immediate forms of expression; but as time passes and the processes of "civilization" and "humanization" take place, a precise metaphysical language emerges that obscures the true origins of language and its original vitality. The living spirit is transformed into dead letter; "The more lively a language, the less it has been fastened into letters...[and] can be written." What is more unwritable, than the inarticulate tones of nature? Here Herder pursues a vision of primitive peoples responsive to each other at a basic, natural level, one unperturbed by the reflexivity associated with the written word.

Yet reason and understanding must intervene to enable us to make conscious use of these sounds—otherwise human language would never rise above that of the animals. Thus although Herder obviously feels an affinity for the most basic forms of tribal communication, and seems to privilege the immediacy of unreflective, spoken expression, he acknowledges the inherent rationality of human language and hence also the emergence of writing as part of what makes us human. After spending the opening pages of the treatise aligning human beings with animals, Herder thus moves into a discussion of their differences. This he does by distinguishing between "spheres" (Kreise, Sphäre; 22ff) of activity, arriving at the axiom that there is an inverse relationship between the level of instinct and the extent of a creature's sphere of activity. Instinct takes the place of a developed language in lower creatures, confined as they are to a circumscribed sphere of activity; human beings, born into the world with few instincts and a necessarily wide sphere of activity, require language to survive and prosper.

Next Herder explores the interrelation between language and the inborn
human capacity for reflection (Besonnenheit).(26ff) Reflection or "reason" (Vernunft) and language, in a word, go hand in hand--there is no abstracted reasoning that takes place without the distinguishing, sensuous symbols or "marks" (Zeichen, Merkmale) of language.(39) Reasoned expression--language--is always a dialogue, either with oneself or with others.(47) A striking feature of the rest of the essay is the degree to which Herder is at pains to portray language as a natural, constitutive element of human society; it is the medium by which group identity is formed, maintained and perpetuated--thoughts and feelings that define ourselves and our "universe" are encased or embodied in language.(113ff)

Herder thus applies a thoroughgoing sociological and historical perspective to language in the essay, a perspective indebted to the Locke/Condillac tradition of language theory. He embeds language, as a sensuous object, in the human mind, society and history. And significantly, he theorizes it as a natural medium appropriate to the human "sphere" of interaction--the public sphere? Such a theorization of "spheres" of linguistic interaction is pregnant with socio-political possibility--Herder in effect attempts to give a relatively "scientific," empirical/analytical grounding to his conviction, expressed previously, that the development and improvement of a nation's language is the key to enlightened social, cultural and even political development. And despite his theoretical privileging of the immediacy of spoken communication, Herder leaves open a role for literature on at least two counts. First, he acknowledges that "reflection" or "reason" is an inherent component of human language, thus leaving open the possibility that inherently abstractive, rationalizing writing has a role to play in human communication; the problem, it would seem, is not that writing is abstractive or rationalizing, rather that the process of abstraction inherent in writing comes to choke off the equally important element of natural, sensuous expression. Secondly, the fact that language in a sense contains the traditions and manner of thinking of a people means that literature can function as an important reminder of socio-cultural identity, a
chest that stores the treasures of a national language.

This latter view, as we have seen, was clearly present in the Fragmento, while the former points to an ongoing concern in Herder's writings to privilege the concrete and immediate over the abstract and mediated, usually by a creative subordination of the latter to the former, directing rationality, as he had said early on, back towards the senses, the Volck, and basic human feelings and perceptions—the sources of "good/common sense" (gesunden Verstandes). Herder was able to accept rationality (and hence abstract forms of expression like writing) by historicizing it; historical thinking and understanding made possible the differentiation and relativization of "reason" for Herder, and also a certain "polyperspectivalism." Thus Herder could idealize ancient and primitive forms of communication, and yet realize that his own era required different tools and modes of communication to effect reform and enlightenment in a manner appropriate to it.

If the treatise on language emphasized the sociality of language, Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit (1774) asserted the historicity of human cultures, against what Herder felt was an increasingly universalized, mechanistic and hence despotic European civilization, with little sense of the nature or roots of individual identities. Herder decried the spread of uniformity and despotism under the banner of a single ideal of virtue and happiness, positing instead individual, "national" cultures that must have their own "centre of happiness, just as every sphere (Kugel) has its centre of gravity." Qualifying somewhat his position in his treatise on language, Herder now argues that human beings have a limited horizon of perception—their sphere of activity and understanding is not infinite. Mother nature’s aim "is only to force me back on myself so that I find satisfaction in my own centre." (510) The piece consequently has a very Rousseauian tenor, with the difference that Herder's vision is more pluralistic and historically-minded than Rousseau's, who had posited a basic opposition between "savage" and "civilized" cultures in his Discourse on Inequality.
Two aspects of the essay merit emphasis here: Herder's continued theorization of "spheres" of activity, and more importantly, his emphatic historicization of peoples and cultures. As to the former, the problem with cosmopolitanism is that it diffuses natural energies and affinities so widely that human beings become disoriented, easily losing their identity in a despotic state-machine.(513ff) This trend can only be countered by a recognition and return to the bounds of time and place; to be what one now is, according to local custom and tradition, rather than trying to be "Orientals, Greeks, and Romans all at once."(554) It is impossible for a civilization to take a step backward in time, in order to become again what it once was; "The path of destiny is inflexible, iron."(565) What emerges is an image of discrete "national" socio-cultural spheres that are conditioned by history and locale; nevertheless, "Within the variably changing husk, the same kernel of [human] substance and happiness can, and according to all human expectation does, remain virtually the same."(558) Even here, in Herder's most iconoclastic attack on high Enlightenment thinking, he does not part with the notion of a basic, shared human nature, the same "pliant clay which assumes a different shape according to situation and need."(509) And he ends with his own vision of organic enlightenment:

And when we finally attain the standpoint from which we can survey the whole of our race!...[watching the] chain between peoples and continents form slowly at first, then with increasing clamour wind its way through nations and finally softly but firmly draw the nations together?...Will we then see the distinctive ripening of the seed sown at random among the peoples of the earth, its manifold flowering, its uncertain harvest? Shall we then taste for ourselves the sourdough which has been leavening for so long...to be finally brought forward, full of taste, for the general education/formation (Bildung) of humankind?(586)

The place of poetic expression in the leavening process of human culture(s) is dealt with in Herder's 1778 prize-winning essay Ueber die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker in alten und neuen Zeiten. Here Herder explores a number of historical constellations of peoples and their poetry and poetic literature. He posits a basic historical progression away from poetic expression as a fundamental medium of communal life, a shaper of morals and conduit of culture, towards increasing artifice and irrelevance.
As he makes clear from the outset, his goal in the essay is to find ways in which to restore poetic expression to its former heights and value. Spoken poetry had once been the "canal" through which nature, "the whole world of passion and action," worked through the poet to have an effect on the hearts of his brethren. And the more people that poetry touched, the more warmth and illumination (Erleuchtung) was communicated from one person to another, like rays of the sun; "The poet's belief can then become the belief of the people; action, morals/customs (Sitten), character are shared to the common detriment or happiness." As an "affective language of nature," poetry is a gift of God that is good, but can also be misused.

The Hebrews are for Herder the greatest example of a people who lived through their poetry; they lived in close relationship with God, a relationship mediated by their Volk-poetry. Christendom, a shoot from the trunk of Judaism, continues to draw sap from this nourishing source of images and language. Its all-encompassing "national poetry" (Nationaldicht-kunst) was foreign to "pure abstractions" and "philosophical ponderings"; "Just as God spoke to them through nature and all the events of their history: so the spirit of their poetry sought to speak to them, to the heart, for the senses and the whole human being. In pictures could be said what in stark naked abstractions never could." But the chosen people fell away from this godly poetry, leaving only the "misunderstood, misinterpreted letter." Clearly the Hebrew/Christian distinction between dead letter and living spirit had an impact on Herder's thinking—but what better way to inject life and spirit back into dead letters, as Herder's own writings always demonstrate, than to infuse words with enthusiasm, emotion, concrete images and verbal expressions?

The Greeks fare similarly with Herder; poets "saw, what they sang, or had perceived it vividly...and then opened [their] mouths and spoke wonders and truth. The circle around [them] was astounded, paid heed, learned, sang." Morals, manners, customs, ways of thinking, language, and the arts were drawn into the stream of poetic wisdom; and yet the Greeks...
always remained to a certain extent children, who should not necessarily be
imitated. (373-75) By the time of the Middle Ages, people started to read
about the great exploits of knights and lords, helping to spread (among
clearly more dispersed polities) notions of courage, honour, love, and common
Christian purpose. (400) The Renaissance, rather than signalling a rebirth of
ancient culture for Herder, in fact began the modern process by which the
poetic arts became separated from the life of the Volk. Individuals began
imitating ancient works without their inner spirit or purpose, and academics
wrote only for other academics; the original relationship between poetry and
the people, the common life, and the heart, was lost, and now only rules of
composition remained, as that "dear woman," the mother-tongue, fell into
neglect. Since the common people didn't know ancient languages, the poetic
arts could have no effect on them. (407)

Individual powers began to decline, as did freedom, nature and unique
customs and manners, while centralizing monarchical states reared their heads;
mechanical order replaced the living substance of poetry. (409) Religion
declined in importance along with poetry, unsurprisingly, since they go
together, while the rise of commerce did nothing for the poetic arts. (410-11)
The printing press receives a mixed review: while it has done much good, it
has also "robbed" poetry of much of its lively effect. "Once poetry resounded
in living circles, enlivened by the heart and...voice of the singer or poet;
now it just stands there in black and white." (411) There is a great
difference between hearing and reading something; where poets once affected
their audience and customs/morals directly and vividly, they must now
carefully order their writing through meter and rhyme, period and comma, in
order to achieve something like the same effect. And, unfortunately, poets
now write for the "dear, classical paper-eternity," the bookshelf having taken
the place of memory. (412) Poetry, Herder wistfully concludes, has become
"literature: a paradise full of beautiful flowers and merry (lachender)
fruits." (415)

Moreover, modern writers like Voltaire no longer even attempt to form
morals; "He seeks fame, he follows the mood...he amuses." (418) The English have done better—look at how Shakespeare, particularly, has created a vital world full of character, power, passion, and morals, which can still work within us; "What a national treasure it is to have a Shakespeare, a book of morals/customs (Sitten) and human scenes!" (420) Contemporary poetic and moral writing reached a peak with Pope, Swift, Addison and Steele. They set the standard for moral writings, and Addison particularly was a "Socrates of his people." (420) The main problem with the spirit of the age is that it requires over-refinement in writing; it must always be dressed-up as a poem, periodical or moral weekly, thus often losing its immediacy and effectiveness. (421) What ultimately counts is how we read moral literature—is it a joke or to be taken seriously? Why do so many writers have to act like the only thing that matters is our amusement and praise? (422) Fielding merits praise as one able, in his novels, to "open the eye...to truth," yet the genre in which he writes spends too much time exposing the weaknesses of human nature. (424-25)

Finally Herder turns to the German scene, and predictably he finds that much is lacking, and essentially recapitulates the "problem of Publikum" as set forth in his "Publikum" essay. (423-27) Of all the peoples treated in the essay, Germans have been the least affected by the poetic arts. As he put it in an earlier draft of the essay, "Since we are actually not a Volk, and have no common living language, so we have even less a national poetry (National-dichtkunst)." (424) Germany has had the fate of being overwhelmed from without and divided within; making matters worse, censors in many areas "have closed the door to many books...under the pretext of religion and other considerations." A national poetry develops slowly in such a situation. (425) In most areas the "Nation" and "Volk" receive little consideration from writers, who write instead for booksellers, bookworms, critics and newspaper-writers, not to mention academics. (426) "And who wants to lie in the arms of such a courtesan (Buhlerin)? and is not the Publikum, for which we write, the most enervated and wanton courtesan of all?" But if one writes solely for academics, one discovers that "they are either incapable of any poetry, or
they stand under the rod of...the critics." (427)

Herder was a bit more restrained in the final draft of the essay, but he said basically the same thing: the current "public" excludes the Volk and is splintered into a host of factions: booksellers, academics, critics, and those elevated readers who have only recently learned, from the French, that Germany does in fact have poets of its own. (428-29) Despite his criticisms, Herder doesn't want to discount the work of such poets as Gellert and Hagedorn, Kleist and Geßner, who have displayed sound German character by choosing to be minor poets, rather than unwise and amoral ones who pander to the miserable condition of letters in Germany. (431)

Indeed, there is much that we demand from the dear muses of the Holy Roman Empire, and extremely little, that we, the reading public, grant in return...Give us other times, other morals/customs (Sitten), other male and female readers, other writings that form readers, and the poetic arts will not resist them. (433)

Written in the middle of his career, the essay explores and re-states themes that Herder had been developing all along. Although he is wistful about ancient and primitive forms of communal poetic expression, he ends the essay not by advocating a return to such forms, but by linking the "problem of Publikum" with the dismal state of contemporary letters, and calling for new, invigorated forms of writing that combine, as ancient peoples did, the beauties of language with communal values, shaping and giving rise to a more coherent and broadly-based Publikum of both male and female readers.

In 1779 Herder again received a prize from the Royal Academy, this time for his essay *Vom Einfluß der Regierung auf die Wissenschaften, und der Wissenschaften auf die Regierung*. The essay, which exhibits a wide-ranging, Montesquieuian quality, present further insight into Herder's views on public enlightenment, this time framed within the context of the development of the arts and sciences. As one would expect, organicist metaphors are employed to describe the interrelation between such things as climate, national character, political constitutions (broadly defined) and the advancement of the arts and sciences. Interestingly, although Herder asserts that "free," republican polities like those of Athens and Rome are most conducive to the arts and
sciences,(324ff) he associates "despotism" with cities, presenting instead a positive vision of dispersed, secluded forms of life as most conducive to the emergence of the arts and of genius.(314-15;353) There is hence some tension between the possibilities of an (urban) Athens and (rural) Arcadia in the essay, a tension resolved by Herder's historicist perspective.

This is plainly evident in his remarks on ancient vs. modern oratory. In ancient Athens, all the people would gather together and decide public affairs on the spot:

What a field for eloquence that was! What a school! Talk would range over business, expeditions, the health and troubles of the state--not over words [themselves]...The orator spoke to his people, a circle that he knew; not for foreigners and despots: to the Athenian people, a mass that had been educated through poetry, song, arts and drama in the finest language of the world...Is it possible to compare any other eloquence, [public] sphere of oratory (Rednerkreis) [or] political constitution (with the exception of Rome) to this? and in particular with things of a disparate nature? Speeches and compliments in front of despots, chattering to a "Volk" that is no "Volk" at all...without purpose or intention[?] Create an Athens for us here; the Demosthenes and Pericles will emerge on their own.(325)

Whereas in certain antique republican city-states the arts of oratory (among others) flourished amidst a free and educated people, modern cities are places in which they are employed in the service of despots or diluted in front of an incoherent rabble.

It is not surprising then that later in the essay, when Herder speaks of "the public" as "judge" in deciding matters of learning in the modern world, it is a public of "private persons" who, dispersed across the land, judge inventions and great ideas produced in "quiet seclusion."(349-53) This discussion occurs in a section entitled "Vom Einfluß der Regierung in die Wissenschaft nach Wiederauflebung der Literatur;" clearly, modern advancement in the arts and sciences has occurred within the context of the "reinvigoration" of literature. Herder trots out all the usual figures in his pantheon of modern learning--Bacon, Grotius, Hobbes, Descartes, Galileo, Kepler, Boyle and Newton, among others, arguing that their discoveries emerged within what can be called the early-modern Republic of Letters, although he doesn't call it that here. His basic point is that the previous constellation of
governments and the arts and sciences had become moribund, and real learning and progress had taken place as a result of private individuals pursuing their ideas in relative seclusion—true genius always emerges on its own—and helped along by the free circulation of printed literature, as well as by various academies of learning that had grown up with some princely support. The natural sciences, moreover, had begun to provide a solid basis for lasting, certain knowledge. (350-52) If German academies can be accused of certain shortcomings and of partisanship, one can be sure of the fact that

Every human being has their [own] horizon/perspective (Gesichtskreis), and consequently also every gathering of even the most enlightened (erleuchtetsten) people. It gives out the questions, and these determine the solutions: with this it becomes itself a party, and the public, world and posterity, is judge. No God on earth has ever been able to put everyone in perfect agreement; the God of the arts and sciences does not want, nor should it want, to achieve this. (352)

Such a god plays a lyre with many strings, many tones. Academies have corrected themselves on more than one occasion. Every prize question posed by an academy brings forth a great volume of writings; "the public can enjoy and choose from them all." (353) Since the greatest discoveries are perfected in quiet seclusion, and without direct impetus from without, it would be better if academies offered general prizes for whatever discoveries it deemed to be the most noteworthy. (353)

Censorship only impedes the process of enlightenment (Erleuchtung), which is the only path to true improvement. (357-58) The more that a state is grounded in its principles, the less it has to fear from the winds of opinion; and all the more will it grant the freedom of thought and writing "by which truth wins out in the end." (361) Later Herder underlines the distance between the ancient world of orators (including sophists) and the modern, dispersed public of lettered individuals:

Just as one cannot reverse the flow of years and the condition of the world (Weltverfassung), as no lawgiver can conjure up a Rome, Athens or Greece with a magic wand, where it doesn't exist...so it would be unreasonable, out of love for ancient times, to repudiate and miss out on one's own...The popular government in Athens, the Roman constitution, in which the arts and sciences flourished magnificently, had aspects which we would not wish to bring back, even for the sake of their orators and poets...Some arts and sciences are the lovely blossoms of thorny plants, splendid grapes
growing from a weak vine; a rich cornfield is for us more necessary and better, even though it doesn't look so lovely...
Hence let us become what we can be according to our own situation. (376-77)

Some of the aspects of ancient polities which Herder did not wish to see replicated in the present included, as he had stated in the "Publikum" essay, the possibility that public speakers could mislead "the people" in various ways: in this essay Herder praised Socrates for deflating the "ornamental armour" (Panzerschmuck) of the speaker's platform and the false wisdom of the sophists by taking philosophical discussion into Athenian homes where a "true Volks- and practical-wisdom" could be propagated. (326) Even Herder's glowing remarks about ancient public speaking were qualified by reservations about possible abuses and injustices arising out of public speaking in tightly-gathered polities.

Herder's Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend (1781/1786) also provide insight into his mature social-historical vision of language, literature and the public sphere, this time within the context of "letters" written to a budding theological student. Early on, Herder asserts that there is no real conflict between "nature and scripture (Schrift), nature and grace, reason and revelation," arguing instead that they are "different paths... more or less to one goal." (284) He writes at length about the complementary roles of revelation, reason and "nature"; human rationality must have preceded scripture, helping make possible God's initial education of the human race: "God's teaching is more than rabbinical...how young are the oldest scriptures, compared to the origins of the human race!" (286) He argues in a similar vein that nature is in a certain sense a "readable text from God to the human race." (292) But nature is not God. It is imperfect, and in a sense mute, requiring the commentary of God's direct revelation to humankind--through Jesus Christ and the scriptures--to be fully understood. (294ff) Scripture clarifies the text of nature, nature that of scripture. (297)

But just as he had emphasized that Godly instruction to humankind occurred directly, through experience and history, before being congealed by custom and tradition into scripture, Herder is at pains in the essay to
emphasize the need for pastors and theologians to go beyond scripture to the living, everyday world of their audience/parishioners, to engage them with down-to-earth, practical teachings that affect them in their own milieu. Wordy, bookish piety is to be avoided; one should speak with one's congregation, clarifying the language of the Bible in terms which they can understand. (324ff) The Bible is multi-faceted garden of different genres of writing that should be read as a living text, with application to everyday life. Sermons should be preached directly from the Bible and one's own experience, in simple homilies. One shouldn't fasten onto individual words or fragments of text—the Bible should be preached as a living whole. (18)

Herder recommends reading ancient Greek texts of oratory in order to learn about public speaking, but points out the socio-political gulf which separates ancients from moderns and the need to understand their circumstances and the inner spirit of their teachings. (34-35) Moderns only have eloquence in their writings; (36) consequently writers can exercise a great influence on the manner of thinking (Denkart) of their nation. (39) Just as the ancients were men of action, however, moderns must learn to tie their writings to action and experience. (40-41) The best sort of instruction is verbal or, even better, through action. (60) One must avoid too much reading; better instead to read carefully a few good books. (96) Herder devotes quite a bit of space in the essay to recommending good books and writers because "Our era is the century of reading (Lese-Jahrhundert): You hear about these books, named [and] praised (often without justice), and as is the custom the newest is praised the most. Thus I must deal with...what lays before you." (97)

Nonetheless, readers must try their best to "taste the spirit" of an author: "The spirit of the author alone is the educative/shaping (bildende) form." (98) Here once again Herder deals with the tension between speech and writing, a tension which he resolves by his historicist perspective, and an injunction to enliven literature with the living spirit. He has no illusions about the possibilities for contemporary public speaking; indeed, to speak to congregations as though one were Cicero speaking to the Roman Senate would be
grossly inappropriate.

Herder returns again and again, in the foregoing pieces, to a social-historical understanding of language, literature and the public sphere, a perspective that is in full harmony with his quest for "organic enlightenment." While he recognizes the inherent sociality of language and develops the notion of bounded spheres of social activity and understanding, Herder also emphasizes the importance of historical change--it would be wrong for modern Europeans to act as though they were members of the closely-knit polities of earlier or more primitive peoples. The present era was the age of writers and literature; and social change, development, and enlightenment would necessarily come via appropriate forms of writing.

The crucial distinction was not between speech and writing per se, rather between concretion and abstraction, immediate expression and over-refinement, local community and cosmopolitan society. Although the advent of writing brought with it a movement away from original, expressive forms of communication, this does not mean that literature cannot be directed back to its roots in the concrete, lived world of the senses and the Volk, and to its basic moral purpose. Nor does it mean that the written word does not serve a crucial purpose in serving as a storehouse of language and, indeed, of God's teachings to humankind. It must always, however, be seen as a vehicle for something more than dry, dead abstractions or rules: the living spirit of the author. Herder's own prose expresses well this conviction, with its emotional, picturesque character, its jumps and exclamations, frequent asides and questions. Where Abbt was often murky, however, Herder is more straightforward and concise. And he reveals himself everywhere as a superior warden of the treasure-trove of language, as mediated by a broad spectrum of literatures; his range of reference and allusion is often astounding, indicating a capacious memory that complemented well his expressive, sensual personality.
The Public Sphere Revisited: Herder's Second Version of the "Publikum" Essay

The second version of the "Publikum" essay was published thirty years after the first, in the fifth collection of the *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1795; henceforth *Briefe...der Humanität*). These "letters" represent a continuation of Herder's great work, the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91). The ongoing polemic in the *Ideen* against the "conventional feudal-absolutist conception of the state" could not have been carried into an analysis of more recent times, especially after the events of 1789. Herder strongly identified with the events of the French Revolution until the Terror, and remained in sympathy with it to a lesser degree thereafter. He chose not to publish the first collection of *Briefe...der Humanität*, written in 1792 and lauding the Revolution, in the reactionary atmosphere which followed the execution of Louis XVI in January of 1793. Goethe and Herder's own patron, Duke Carl August of Sachsen Weimar, participated in the Prussian campaign against the French in the fall of 1792, and in the siege of Mainz in 1793. The first published collection of the *Briefe...der Humanität* (1793) contains no nominal references to the revolution, but it is clear that it was uppermost in Herder's mind through choice of subject matter and many allusions.

The decision not to publish the original collection had other motivations as well. One can follow in Herder's letters a gradual cooling of enthusiasm for the Revolution in the Herder household. By March 1793 Herder wrote that only time could judge the spirit of events, and hoped that heaven would dampen the fury of both the French and the Germans. The evil, he implied, existed on both sides: "How weak and miserable is humanity, especially when it acts 'in corpore'!" Despite his uncertainty as to the true nature of the events, Herder was deeply concerned that they be allowed to play themselves out naturally, that the "Zeitgeist" would prevail, and that Germans would learn from events west of the Rhein.
The Briefe...der Humanität indicate that when confronted with the barbaric revolutionary passions of the French, as well as the Habsburg reaction and the conflict between the German and French nations, Herder steered permanently away from seeing any positive change coming from concentrated political action. He reaffirmed literature as an organic, universal medium of enlightenment and public life, and did much to tone down the sensuous, emotional binding of individual to fatherland contained in the initial "Publikum" essay, instead emphasizing the commonalities between nations. The figure of the great individual genius, the "martyr of truth," has faded into the background somewhat, the universal play of language in literature having taken his place.

The second "Publikum" essay is much longer than the first, and is completely rewritten. Herder divides his analysis of the public into five parts: the public of the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Christianity and literature. Significantly, the Publikum of literature receives the most extended treatment. The prose is more straightforward, less effusive and dramatic, and more directly pedagogical. It is also less ironic: the view toward the possibility of belonging to a contemporary Publikum is more positive, although the public sphere is still fractured, divided into multiple publics. Language is a godly organ of instruction which links a common Volk as well as the larger Publikum of nations, insofar as foreign expressions find their way into the local language. From one's own local experience one speaks to a wider, transnational audience, a "mystical person or gathering, an enlightened or enlightening unity." 97

Nations are formed in the midst of language, and thus one who exalts the national language, by clarifying its ability to express perceptions and thoughts, will help "the widest and most beautiful Publikum to spread, or to become more unified and anchored in itself." This is an important key to Herder's project, and helps to explain why his writings were consistently "cultural" instead of (overtly) "political". Simply put, the political entity was conditioned by the cultural one. 98 That he saw a direct connection is
obvious: Herder immediately goes on to point out that Germany is divided because no one understands each other: provinces, regions, even classes can't properly communicate, due to the proliferation of dialects and the upper-class use of French. Without a common land- and mother-tongue, in which all classes are nurtured as shoots of one tree, "There is no true meeting of minds, no common patriotic formation, no common perceptions, no Publikum of the fatherland." (287-89) The interposition of "land" and "mother" as defining language indicates that basic sensuous and emotional ties are still aspects of Herder's concept of Bildung. On the other hand, instead of the "martyr of truth," language itself is now the medium which will foster healthy growth.

While still using sensuous and organic imagery in discussion of Publikum and Vaterland, Herder does much in the essay to redefine the connection between the two. The bonds between the citizen and fatherland are seen as more universal, less emotional: although we are emotionally attached to the fatherland, Herder states, this attachment can be misused. The ancient enthusiasm for fatherland had negative consequences. A fatherland is worthy of praise so long as it causes us to do good deeds and ensures freedom and security. A wild "spirit of conquest" is a perversion of love for the fatherland. All the peoples of Europe must move together in time, only barbarians try to hang back when others are moving forward. Every fatherland shares the same moral characteristics, is held together by the same bonds—what is to keep these great families from laying side by side in peace? Herder ends the discussion of fatherland by connecting international conflict with language: "Fatherlands against fatherlands in bloody battles is the worst barbarism of the human language." (311-19)

Herder's self-limitation to primarily literary, "cultural" matters in the Briefe... der Humanität was due not only to his observation that a barbaric socio-cultural entity would be barbaric in its relationship with other nations and unable to keep in step with the "Zeitgeist;" i.e. that Germans would have to be educated and united morally and linguistically before true political change could come about. There is also evidence that he came to entertain a
negative view of the events of the French National Assembly, and with it public speaking and the "whirl of passion" of the gathered community. While as we have seen Herder tended to emphasize the distance between ancient and modern public life and oratory, with the advent of the Revolution it seems that Herder felt a "new Athens" might be emerging. In the unpublished Briefe...der Humanität (1792) he makes several comments which indicate that he saw in the French National Assembly a modern Publikum of the orator developing. After the events of January 1793, however, there is a perceptible shift back towards distrust of the gathered public forum in Herder's writings, his literary life seems once again justified, and writing is reaffirmed as the great medium of organic enlightenment.

Thus in the first collection of published Briefe...der Humanität (1793), Herder lauds Benjamin Franklin as a "writer of the people" in much the same terms as those used earlier to describe Thomas Abbt.(7-9). Franklin's "good/common sense," (gesunden Verstand) "sense of humanity," and "socratic method" in bringing ideas to the people were enough to garner him the title "the noblest writer for the people of our century."(7) A bit further he remarks that although Germany does not have a common place of assembly, the better kind of insights take place in the open country anyway. The free circulation of thoughts and opinions throughout the "open land" is all that is necessary; thoughts will awaken thoughts, perceptions and opinions will drive the discourse ever onward, as it develops what is in germ form in all of us. To upright and dutiful Germans everywhere Herder wishes "an altar of worthiness" where their spirit and hearts may gather. This altar can only exist in writings, "and what excellent writings those would be!"(25-27)

It seems less than coincidental that in taking up the subject of Frederick the Great, Herder quotes him approvingly on the function of the author: "'Authors,' he says, 'are the lawgivers of the human race; their writings are distributed around the world; they manifest ideas that form others.'" The author forms good citizens who avoid insurrection.(29) Herder's attitude towards mixing in political affairs becomes even more
apparent in another letter, where he states that although poets should express the strivings of the nation and the spirit of the age, they should stay on a higher plane, because truth is not always apparent in the short run. Here the long view is in the ascendant, time is the arbiter. While it is important to be sensitive to the age in which one is living, the Revolution no longer seems to be representative of the Zeitgeist—it was a clamour, and a clamour can only die away. Later on Herder reiterates this theme: "The germinating seeds of humanity in Europe wish for mild, life-giving rain; no storms."(64-68)

In another letter, Herder deals with contemporary events through a discussion of delusion, bringing together his concern for political events gone out of control with his ideas on language and his mistrust of public gatherings. A mass of people is delusive, and like nothing better than to act on its delusions. Delusion itself is infectious, able to be transmitted by being together with the deluded. Nations tend towards their own types of group delusion or madness, which only becomes stronger when challenged. As well, delusion can become firmly attached to words; in an obvious reference to the Revolution, Herder notes what a "frenzy" the words "humanity," "freedom," and "equality" had inspired in a lively Volk, what "hate and suspicion" the words "democrat" and "aristocrat" had aroused both within and outside its borders. The only way to deal with these delusions is to avoid public manifestations of them. Truth, Herder affirms, has never had anything to do with politics. Describing a dialectical process, Herder proposes that truth will only emerge in a free search from all sides. Censorship only impedes the process.(229-33)

Alienated from the events in France as a new Athens was not taking shape, Herder reaffirmed his view that political, international problems would best be affected in alternative, extra-political ways. Christianity, in the second "Publikum" essay, emerges as a unifying element which transcends national boundaries. Christianity makes possible a common culture among disparate peoples; through mutual needs and strivings they have become indispensable to each other. In addition, thoughts, discoveries and
inventions have passed from nation to nation like seeds, causing them to grow closer over time into a more universal Publikum. Enlightenment on an individual level is also described in organic terms, as it had been from the beginning. The goal of true philosophy is "Selbstbildung;" The teacher can only be a midwife of our thoughts, one who plants principles and ideas which then take on a life of their own. (295-302)

Finally, an even greater Publikum has been created by the printing press. Literature is a "great gift, an irrevocable privilege for human society, and an enormous medium of Providence." If all the monarchs in the world were to ally themselves, they would not be able to destroy this "asylum and... telegraph of human thoughts." Who would want to destroy something which had, along with some evil, done so much good? Here Herder compares writing to public speaking, clarifying statements made in the first "Publikum" essay: "The orator deafens me; the writer speaks low and soft; I can read him thoughtfully. The orator blinds me with his appearance, with his retinue and prestige; the writer speaks unseen, and it is my fault if I am misled by the splendour of his words." (305) In the section on the Greeks Herder had repeated his mistrust of public speaking, noting that they were "Through speech bound, through the arts of oratory driven and steered." (290) The Publikum of literature, on the other hand, is unique:

Unseen and omnipresent, often deaf, often dumb, and yet after years, after centuries perhaps very loud and active...One can't ever settle with it; his book is never closed, the process...is never ended; it is always learning, and never comes to a final outcome. (306)

The essay also includes discussions of the moral responsibility of the writer to form and educate the public, as well as injunctions for the German Publikum to awaken and make something of its language before it is completely overrun by others.

Thus by 1795 Herder mistrusted public speaking more than ever; censorship and intervention in foreign affairs are condemned, being in effect two sides of the same coin, that of German rejection of the emerging Zeitgeist. The events of the French Revolution, like his experience in
Bückeburg, confirmed Herder's preference for literature as the most appropriate medium in his organic conception of enlightenment, and for the "Publikum der Literatur" as the most appropriate public forum. Bückeburg had confirmed that the German public was fragmented; the Revolution exposed the inherent weakness of an absolutist society suddenly brought together in a public forum, and of politics and actions taken "in corpore" generally.

Hence although Herder's work was aimed at unifying the German Volk into a more intimate, cohesive Publikum, and he nurtured (in his earlier writings) the tradition of the "Volks-clarifier" which would bear such bitter fruit in modern Germany, he also strove to develop a conception of enlightenment and reform which would avoid what he deemed to be the excesses of nationalism and would prevent the emergence of demagogues and tyrants, endowing the common people with powers and propensities crucial to their own education and enlightenment.

Amidst all else, it is clear that Herder was self-consciously engaged in a project of reform and enlightenment indebted to the legacy of "public writers"—notably Abbt and Lessing—and that he was interested in furthering a kind of writing which would develop a language that organically enlightened and united all classes into a common Volk, a true German Publikum. As such, there was a large measure of continuity in his career. This is not to say that this was his only motivation, by any means. However, he began and ended his career with the notion that moral and socio-cultural reform were preconditions to political reform, and throughout entertained a deep love of letters and the spirit that could be transmitted through them. Herder, as an active participant and exponent of the trans-national Republic of Letters, was also keenly aware of the need for a more mundane, localized version of this kind of discourse. In attempting to mediate between the European Republic of Letters and the emerging German Publikum der Literatur, he joined broad notions of "enlightenment" to a distinctive, organicist vision of individual and social development, one informed by a strong sense of the place of history, language, and concrete physical circumstances in shaping human
identity. And his creative employment and theorization of "Publikum" as a new term for the socio-political community, along with his more abstract theorization of "spheres" of activity, point to the fact that Herder was engaged in conceptualizing what we now call the modern public sphere.

Given the German pedigree of the printing press, Herder could claim his literary vision of enlightenment as a distinctly "German" one. This sentiment, expressed in a poem written towards the end of his life entitled "Der Deutsche Nationalruhm," provides an emblem for Herder's career as a whole:

"I'm surprised that you don't praise the printing press; The Germans are proud of that!" Not proud; only thankful. Does it not give the word Omnipresence, common utility, eternity? It binds times to the times, joins Thoughts to thoughts, effort to effort; A genius of growing reason The bond of separated souls, it, the writing Of writings, unifies all human hearts And sense and spirit; it repels barbarism And mocks the law of nature, that So quickly buries every individual. In writings live the better part of him, Through them immortal."
NOTES

1. In a letter to Hamann in May, 1765, Herder wrote: "I trust myself not as a mechanical genius, and am perhaps a bit shortsighted when it comes to political and physical matters." Wilhelm Dobbek and Günter Arnold, eds., Johann Gottfried Herder Briefe: Erster Band, April 1763 -- April 1771 (Weimar, 1977), pp. 43-44. All translations in this chapter are my own.

2. For a recent study that provides support for this view, see Horst Dreitzel, "Herders politische Konzepte," in Gerhard Sauder, ed., Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803 (Hamburg, 1987), pp. 267-98.

3. As Otto Dann puts it, "Herder proved himself to be one of the first among his contemporaries to point to the importance of the language, literature and culture of a people for their coming to national self-consciousness and emancipation." Otto Dann, "Herder und die Deutsche Bewegung," in Sauder, ed., Johann Gottfried Herder, p. 332. Although the articles by Dreitzel and Dann provide fresh support for the perspective taken in this chapter, both have different agendas and neither thematizes the important role played by the notion (and emerging reality) of the "public" in Herder's discourse.

4. Rudolf Haym cogently maintains that the piece was an unsolicited "Festschrift" and that there is little evidence it was actually given in the form of an address, although it has been claimed that it was. See Rudolf Haym, Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken dargestellt vol. 1 (Berlin, 1954), p. 126.

5. Herder himself wrote of enlightenment and "Bildung" as an organic process in the Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit (Book 9, discussed below).

6. The meaning of "individualistic" and "pluralistic" will become clear in the course of my analysis. Secondly, although I will be looking at a fairly wide range of Herder's writings, I make no claim for comprehensiveness; Herder was a multi-faceted thinker who can be approached from many perspectives. My aim here is to locate Herder in the discourse of the "public" which I have been establishing in previous chapters. I believe that this analysis is important for understanding Herder's work in some of its broadest outlines and intentions, and its relationship to German socio-political and cultural conditions, but there was of course much more to his enterprise than I can possibly cover here.


9. I use the term in this chapter to connote Herder's emphasis on the uniqueness and specificity of historical eras and peoples as coherent and valuable wholes, conditioned by internal processes of development, as opposed to forms of analysis that undermined this perspective. This is in keeping with the definition recently employed by F.R. Ankersmit, in which "the nature of a thing lies in its history; if we wish to grasp the nature of a nation, a people, an institution, or an idea, the historicist will require us to consider its historical development." F.R. Ankersmit, "Historicism: An Attempt at Synthesis," History and Theory 34, 3 (1995):144.


12. Ibid., p. 57, 65, 112.


18. SW 1, p. 80.

19. Ibid.

20. Gaier, p. 678. Subsequent page citations from this work are made in the text.

21. See the Torso, SW 2, pp. 268-77. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

22. Gaier, p. 588, 595.

23. Ibid., pp. 596-97.


26. Gaier, p. 399; see also p. 318, 349, 480.

27. SW 2, p. 291. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

28. In the first edition of the *Fragmente*; see Gaier, p. 399.


32. SW 15, p. 486.

33. SW 15, p. 486.

34. Michael Zaremba, Johann Gottfried Herders humanitaires Nations- und Volksverständnis (Berlin, 1985), p. 120. Zaremba outlines three "phases" of Herder's usage of the word "nation": phase one (1764-1768), which concerns us here, "zeigt das Wort im Zusammenhang mit literaturkritischen und sprach-philosophischen Reflexionen. Herder entlehnt es der lateinischen Literatur wie den französischer Aufklärer und vertieft es in der Nachfolge Lessings, Abbts und anderer in neuer Weise."


37. Ibid., p. 81ff.

38. As Robert Clark has inadvertently demonstrated. In arguing that Herder was "mistaken" in his enthusiasm for Abbé, Clark highlights the weakness of his own approach. See Clark, Herder, p. 63, 76-77.

39. Thus it is unfortunate that in a recent study of Herder's aesthetics, Robert Norton mistakenly poses a "deductive"-thinking Lessing against an "inductive" Herder; besides misrepresenting Lessing's "method" of analysis (his approach exhibited a decisive turning-away from deductive approaches, as we have seen), such an opposition ignores the affinities (and grounds thereof) shared by the two writers. See Norton, Herder's Aesthetics, p. 129.

40. See Gaier's comments in Gaier, p. 918.

41. Wulf Koepke sees it as being "primarily about public speaking." Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder, p. 10. This, as I will show, is untenable. Rudolf Haym described it as a patriotic attempt to win a new fatherland for Herder in the Hanseatic city, after having left his native Prussia behind. Haym, Herder Bd. 1, pp. 126ff. While some comments suggest that Herder was trying to gain favour with the essay, this is an over-simplistic view. Robert Clark characterized the essay as being part of Herder's early "rationalistic" works, and as a patriotic reaction to Frederick II of Prussia's neglect of local talent. Clark, Herder, p. 55. Although Clark's meaning of "rationalistic" when describing Herder was meant to be broad (see pp. 3-4), it is still misleading to characterize any of Herder's works with the term.
42. Gaier, p. 41. Subsequent page citations from this essay will be made in the text.

43. Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder, p. 8; Gaier, pp. 822, 828.

44. Eric A. Blackall, "The Imprint of Herder's Linguistic Theory Upon His Early Prose Style," PMLA 76 (1961):518. Ulrich Gaier agrees, noting that Herder's "spoken writing style" is directed towards the "senses, the passions, and the feelings of the reader," and against every limitation of his or her humanity. See "Der Frühe Herder" in Gaier, p. 813ff. The impact of Abbt in all of this should by now be clear.

45. Gaier, p. 46; SW 32, pp. 4-9.

46. I am thus disagreeing with Koepke, who maintains that public speaking was for Herder an "essential ingredient" for the formation of public spirit; Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder, p. 11. Clark's assertion that "Throughout Herder's life he insisted that the proper matrix of the arts of language was the democratic forum" is equally untenable. Clark, Herder, p. 55. Here Herder writes of the ancients playing with the people as with a "blind cow", and of the irrational elements of the gathered Publikum in general. Gaier, pp. 44-5. Hans Dietrich Irmscher has interpreted the passage on books laying unread in libraries as an early negative comment on the secondary, fixative quality of writing, and thus its weakness as a tool for reform. With this Irmscher wants to cast the early Herder as an indirect advocate of enlightened despotism who saw the possibility for change coming "solely in the political arena." My reading of course contradicts this view. See Hans Dietrich Irmscher, "Herder über das Verhältnis des Autors zum Publikum" in J.G. Maltusch, ed., Bückeburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder (Rinteln, 1976), pp. 99-138.

47. For negative comments by Herder on bookish "paper-culture" vs. immediate communication and action see for example SW 4, pp. 346-48; 362-63; 408-09; SW 5, pp. 541-45. In general, one goal of this chapter is to show that despite any ambivalence Herder may have felt towards writing, his conception of the role of literature in public life was an integral aspect of his work as a whole.

48. For an example of the latter, in the context of despotism, see SW 9, p. 319. In his early essay "Uber den Fleiss in mehrern gelehrten Sprachen" Herder refers to the Greek language as having grown into a great tree "Under whose shadow the nations...planted seeds of literature." Gaier, pp. 25-28. This is not only an early example of the shadow image, but also of Herder's conception of the role that literature played in the great organic movement of language and thought.

49. See above note 46.


51. Gaier, pp. 108-11, 134. Subsequent page citations from this essay will be made in the text.

52. Following the suggestion of Gaier. See Gaier, p. 983.

53. Gaier, p. 65; 96.

54. Ibid., p. 109; 122.
55. It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to explore the roots of Herder's organicism in detail. More work remains to be done on this topic; the reflections contained in this paragraph and following were stimulated by the following sources, as well as my own understanding of the thought of Leibniz, Shaftesbury and Aristotle. See M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953; New York, 1958), esp. p. 184ff; Edgar B. Schick, Metaphorical Organicism in Herder's Early Works: A Study of the Relation of Herder's Literary Idiom to His World-View (The Hague, Paris, 1971); Henry, Herder und Lessing: Umrisse ihrer Beziehung, pp. 5-6.

56. SW 2, p. 217. Dubos also likely had an impact on Herder's extensive if opportunistic employment of climatic theory. For more see Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Von Winckelmann bis Herder. Die deutsche Klimatheorie in europäischer Perspektive," in Sauder, ed., Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803, pp. 156-76. Fink lays out a wide range of texts through which Herder would have become acquainted with notions that Dubos had pioneered, but one shouldn't ignore Herder's own reading of Dubos.

57. See Gaier, p. 275.


59. Schick, Metaphorical Organicism, p. 111.

60. SW 13, p. 344. It should be noted that Herder intersperses mechanistic metaphors in this discussion: he talks about human beings in terms of "mechanisms" and "machines," but as machines that can learn.(344-45) Here and elsewhere Herder may have consciously been attempting to transform mechanistic images into a more positive, living idiom, because he clearly was opposed to prevailing reductively mechanistic understandings of nature and society. Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte, for example, can be read as one long attack on this conception. See SW 5, p. 475ff.


62. Ibid., p. 348.

63. SW 30, p. 187.

64. SW 2, p. 207. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


66. Torso, SW 2, pp. 301-302. Subsequent page citations to the Torso will be made in the text.


69. For more see Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder p. 107ff.

70. Gaier, pp. 177-81; 178.
71. See Robert E. Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment*, esp. Chapter 2. Obviously, Hamann's notions on language, and specifically his dictum that poetry was the "mother-tongue of the human race" should also not be overlooked here, although Norton argues that this was a commonplace by mid-century. Norton's study is a valuable addition to the English literature on Herder. In commenting on Herder's general motivation, however, he tends to overvalue intellectual preoccupations (epistemology and the creation of a "science of aesthetics") to the detriment of the broader kinds of socio-political concerns outlined in this chapter. This leads Norton to offer rather weak hypotheses as to why Herder did not pursue his early interest in a "science of aesthetics."

72. Gaier, p. 186.

73. The foregoing discussion is contained in Gaier, pp. 182-87. Many of these ideas were present, in less developed form, in Herder's essay "Von der Ode." See Gaier, p. 57ff.

74. Gaier, p. 240.

75. See Gaier, pp. 548-55.

76. Koepke, *Johann Gottfried Herder*, p. 8. See also Clark, p. 104. Irmscher feels that Herder's experience in Bückeburg (1771-76) caused his conception of reform to change from being effected by individuals from above to a more egalitarian, universal vision which gave greater place to the effectiveness of literature in occasioning change. See Irmscher, "Herder über das Verhältnis des Autors zum Publikum."

77. Irmscher, p. 124.

78. See *SW* 4, pp. 346-48; 362-63; 408-09; *SW* 5, pp. 541-45.


80. *SW* 4, pp. 446-47.

81. E.g. in his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, *SW* 5, pp. 5-17; *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, *SW* 13, pp. 142-50, 154-58.


83. See *SW* 5, pp. 5-6. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


85. See Gaier, "Der frühe Herder," p. 825.

86. *SW* 5, p. 501ff; 509. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

87. *SW* 8, p. 334ff. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

88. *SW* 9, pp. 311-12. Subsequent page citations from the essay will be made in the text.
89. SW 10, p. 284. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

90. SW 11, pp. 6-9. Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.

91. SW 11, p. 17ff. (The Briefe are continued from SW 10.) Subsequent page citations will be made in the text.


94. Compare Caroline Herder's remarks of November 1792, in Dobbek & Arnold vol. 6, p. 290, with those of April 1793 in vol. 7, p. 32.

95. Ibid., vol. 7, p. 31. By the end of 1793 Herder wrote a scathing poem about the quickening pace of the revolt and the execution of the French King and Queen, in a letter to a friend. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

96. See for example letter 17 in the original, unpublished collection of the Briefe, in SW 18, pp. 314-17. The published references are a bit more indirect, but present nonetheless. See for example SW 17, pp. 311-19.

97. SW 17, p. 285. Subsequent page citations to this volume will be made in the text.

98. There is some confusion among scholars about this. Brian Whitton has mistakenly argued that Herder abstracted cultural formation from other spheres of human action. See Brian J. Whitton, "Herder's Critique of the Enlightenment," History and Theory 63 (May 1988):162. Heinz Stolpe asserts that the French Revolution inspired Herder to begin conceiving his project in practical political and social terms, citing the second "Publikum" essay to prove it. See Stolpe, "Humanität," p. 568. He goes on to write that Herder was forced by circumstances to limit himself to only consolidating Germany as a cultural entity. (Ibid, p. 575.) What the second "Publikum" essay in fact shows is that Herder was as convinced as ever that in Germany a precondition for solving political problems lay in the development of German language and literature.

99. See SW 18, pp. 316-20. A great assembly, using the most widely known and fluid language, was giving birth to a new nation. Amidst the misery of the Revolution, "There has also opened a general school of the arts of reasoning and speech; who can speak, speaks, and is heard by all of Europe."

100. Indeed, in his very last work, Adrastea, Herder includes a discussion of the place of writing in society which underlines the importance that the medium held for him as a socio-political instrument. The state is to exercise a critical and directive influence on writing and criticism which transcends the heretofore simple dichotomy between strict censorship and complete freedom of the press. Learned societies are to take part in this process. The diversity of the German states would ensure that oppression would not occur, as an overly censorious state would isolate itself from the others. Writings can prepare the minds of the people for great reforms
which transcend current social and political structures—rational thinking thereby ranges out in front of the current laws. Essentially, critique of the state must be a function of the state, working in harmony with writers and thinkers so as to occasion gradual but significant socio-political transformation. For this to work, the state must encourage writers, and make literature an important priority in statecraft. See SW 24, pp. 168-173.

101. SW 18, p. 215.
In the foregoing chapters I have detailed the ways in which three leading figures of the Aufklärung were engaged, in roughly the third quarter-century, in a loosely-shared project of theorizing and shaping an emergent German Publikum. The question to be considered, in conclusion, is the larger significance of this project in view of some of the notions discussed at the outset, and what it can tell us about the general relationship between the Aufklärung—and by extension the European Enlightenment as a whole—and the question of "the public".

As we have seen, it was during the eighteenth-century that the term "the public" was reconstituted from its ancient, juridical and humanist roots, and contested in the service of a changing socio-political order. European Enlightenment culture was a fundamental locus for the emergence and conceptualization of what has come to be called the modern public sphere, a topic which twentieth-century scholars first approached via the concept of public opinion. Jürgen Habermas's schema of the rise of a bourgeois public sphere, augmented, critiqued, and modified by contemporary scholars, is a helpful general starting-point for analysis. One of the main modifications of his narrative is to see the emergence of a modern public sphere as a less than unitary, harmonious process—contestation and exclusion were central features of its constitution. Karl Mannheim's notion of the "public interpretation of being," with its emphasis on contention and conflict as fundamental aspects of public discussion, is helpful for theorizing this process. While some feminists have argued that women were to be excluded apriori from the emerging modern public arena, it is probably premature to reify any one category of exclusion or contestation as the basis for the constitution of modern publics.
And although it may be useful to talk about "the bourgeois public sphere" in the singular as a broad conceptual category, it should be assumed that such a sphere could be composed of multiple publics and envisioned in different ways; it was not a unitary phenomenon.

Another theoretical elaboration concerns the mutual articulation of public and private realms, a process only hinted at by Habermas. The symbolic-interactionism of the social-psychologist George Herbert Mead is a fruitful way in which to understand the psychological dimensions present in the emergence of modern publics. This model, employed heuristically, gives grounds for the expectation that social formation (the emergence of a new sort of public and public sphere of interaction) goes hand in hand with individual development (a more nuanced, privatized sense of self, a more complex personality), providing a suggestive perspective on the work of individual Aufklärer like Lessing, Abbt, and Herder. As enlightened "public writers" they represented a new kind of individual, concerned and able to mediate between various publics and hence to begin to bridge some of the fundamental divisions of German society, helping constitute and shape an emerging German Publikum.

The rise of civil society and print culture were important aspects of the rise of modern publics, as were the European Republic of Letters and the new science. The latter two can be seen as modern, secular polities that provided models of "enlightened" social interaction as well as new notions and epistemologies that helped to anchor changing social understandings; understandings brought about in part by the rise of a primarily economic realm of relations among middling groups--commercial- or civil society--and the explosion in printed material, including moral weeklies and other periodicals, that occurred in the latter half of the eighteenth-century. A host of secondary societies and clubs which grew up at the same time were important loci for emerging forms of Enlightenment sociability. But if middling groups were gathering together in ever greater numbers, print culture in general was relatively dispersed, atomistic and individualistic; writers addressed readers
Scholarly discussions about the rise of a modern public sphere in England and France are helpful for understanding the German situation, both by comparison and as formative influences on German intellectual life. Although all three countries had differing levels of socio-political involvement, and possessed different traditions and forms of interaction, each experienced a quickening of socio-political life from mid-century, with England the most "advanced", politically, followed by France and then Germany. Works by Gunn, Hellmuth, Baker, Darnton and others serve to link the activities of an expanding public sphere to politics and hence give greater purchase to terms like "political culture," an arena of socio-political activity broader than that conveyed by traditional accounts. This growth of a public political culture after mid-century in England and France coincided with the stirrings of an enlightened, proto-political "public" in the Germanies, indicating shared links between socio-cultural and political processes.

In tracing the contours of German social and intellectual life during the eighteenth-century, the figure of a modern German Publikum appears problematic, and was recognized by contemporaries as such. German society was highly fragmented and heterogenous, calling into question the referent for terms such as "the public," as it emerged in a process of socio-intellectual constitution and contestation beginning in the formative third-quarter of the century. The term arose in concert with the development of the German language, the rise of an educated Bürgertum, and the growth of a national print culture. Despite being multi-valent and unstable, the term Publikum carried with it at first a sense of literary audience, and later, by the end of the century, a more overtly political meaning as well.

These developments were accompanied by the appearance of the "public writer," a term more adequately describing the character and orientation of authors like Lessing, Abbt and Herder than is captured by the traditional notion of an emancipated, "free writer." By taking account of the emancipative potential of the developments profiled, yet subjecting that potential
to a less teleological narrative, one is able to give a more nuanced account of the work of Aufklärer like Lessing, Abbt and Herder, thereby reinscribing the Aufklärung as a movement of socio-political, public import blending reform with tradition, emancipation with corporatist understandings of society.

Given this framework, Lessing's writings can be viewed as interventions in an emerging German public sphere of interaction, engaging the German "problem of Publikum" while employing wider European discourses of "the public," sentimentalism, scientific empiricism, and drama, among others. If one is less concerned with the rich and variegated content of Lessing's work, than with its form, one recognizes the emergence of the term Publikum as a socio-aesthetic category in his early writings. Aesthetic discussion was the setting out of which a number of key social and historical concepts emerged in the European Enlightenment, not least among them "the public" as arbiter of proper "taste," as "judge" of what should pass for good art. In Lessing's early works we see "Publikum" and "taste" often discussed in tandem with each other, and with an emerging sense of discrete national cultures, each with its own particular characteristics as expressed in their cultural artefacts.

If Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* is an example of socio-aesthetic discussion that drew connections between aesthetic judgement and a more inclusive public of which Lessing approved, the writings of figures like Rousseau and Frederick the Great provided conceptual resources for envisioning the public as a more purely sociological category that stood apart from both the Crown and the elevated culture of the Republic of Letters. In his early writings we see Lessing toying with the term in a variety of contexts; it appears as both critical judge/interlocutor and as object of education and the instilling of good taste. It appears as the patron of his early collected works, and a willing court of appeal in the matter of the Berlin Academy prize question; "the (German) public" serves as audience/judge for critique of the (Frenchified) Academy.

Lessing's concept of "sympathy" (Mitleid), the central feature of his theory of tragedy, was employed in the service of constituting a sensitized,
sympathetic public sphere of social actors; moralized individuals with an expanded personal and social awareness. The concept of sympathy, as one aspect of a growing sentimentalist movement, was gaining prominence among British writers in particular as a basic, "natural" building-block of sociability, often employed within a rhetoric of "the public," "public interest," and so on. Lessing was steeped in such writings at precisely the moment that his dramaturgy was taking shape, and the latter shows it.

Lessing's literary-critical works appear, in contrast, to advance a more alienating vision of the public sphere; a public of critical thinkers which operates on the basis of contention. Yet this vision of the public sphere existed in creative tension with his dramaturgical view, qualifying it rather than negating it. If individuals were to be sympathetically responsive to each other as members of the public, they were also to be critically detached, able to weigh and judge matters of common concern for themselves, and not according to custom or social standing. Such a conception was also relatively inclusive, but according to analytical rather than sentimental criteria. Individuals were called to rigorous empirical analysis and rational discussion of cultural artefacts, to get at "the facts" and critically consider works of art as products of genius rather than of rationally-deducible rules.

In this quest the norms of the new science, as expressed by Bacon and put into literary-critical practice by Bayle, served as methodological guidelines for the simultaneous production of agreed-upon facts or "truths" (or at least untruths) and a social body capable of adjudicating such matters, the public at large. Lessing's dialogical writing style aimed at engaging a widened audience, as he moved between the poles of the elevated mental universe of the Republic of Letters and an emerging German Publikum, using clear, simple language and an affective writing style to discuss a variety of sometimes obscure intellectual topics.

Lessing's mature dramas played an important role in his project of socio-cultural formation, problematizing the socio-political context and representing middle-order, "human" and "German" characters on the public stage.
in a gripping fashion. The tragedies sought to evoke sympathetic identifi-
cation from a broadly-based audience, while Minna von Barnhelm projected a new
order of egalitarian social relations that promised to bridge the gap between
private happiness and public esteem. If on the one hand the public often came
across as a burdensome entity, the act of public representation of such
dilemmas was an important first step towards forging a new public sphere. And
just as Lessing's literary-critical writings had an affective, dramatic side
to them, his dramas featured a certain analytical component, in their analysis
of feeling and concepts such as honour.

By the time of the Hamburger Dramaturgie and his later academic and
theological disputes Lessing appealed more directly and clearly to "the
public" as a crucial entity in enlightened socio-cultural discourse. Notions
which Lessing had been developing all along of inclusion, the education of
"taste," sympathetic identification, and rational criticism were all present
in his articulation of the parameters of public interaction, whether vis-a-vis
the theater or the (German) world at large--the dividing-line separating the
two was not, by his own admission, terribly wide.

The ferocity of Lessing's later attacks on figures like Klotz is
traceable in part to the challenge they posed to the integrity of the public
sphere, for here Lessing vigorously contested what he considered to be
authoritarian and exclusivist modes of public discourse. In their place he
empirically substituted his by now well-developed form of open, critical
discussion, one that relied less on who was speaking than what was being said.
In his final theological controversies Lessing explicitly included the "mob"
in the process of public discussion, in Publikum itself, putting a seal on a
lifelong project of giving shape and guidance to an emerging sociological
fact.

Thomas Abbt, who followed upon Lessing's departure from the Briefe, die
die neueste Litteratur betreffend, displayed a more overt response to the German
"problem of Publikum," a response which was inflected by a number of factors.
The works of ancient public-spirited figures like Cicero imparted an ideal
vision of public socio-political life that stood behind much of Abbt's patriotic and public-spirited rhetoric. The writings of moderns like Shaftesbury, Helvétius, and Pope provided him with perspectives and terminologies attuned to modern conditions, ways of thinking and talking about sociability that updated ancient notions of the res publica. The Seven Years War served as a catalyst for Abbt's initial foray into the topic of the public sphere, in vom Tode für das Vaterland. There he began to craft a patriotic notion of "fatherland" that went beyond Prussian circumstances toward the conceptualization of public-spirited life in monarchical societies.

Abbt's subsequent writings in the Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend and his interaction with the writings of Friedrich Carl von Moser and J.J. Spalding signalled further movement towards a conception of citizenship and sociability that confronted German conditions in toto, without the aid of traditional theological and authoritarian structures. While Abbt did not challenge the latter, he nevertheless began to construct a moral and socio-political philosophy that stood outside of existing political frameworks; one that drew upon the judgement of "the people" to decide, in a public sphere of deliberation, what counted as proper conduct (of whatever kind), and which encouraged behaviour in accordance with the norms of an emergent public.

In vom Verdienste, Abbt's most acclaimed work, he articulated this philosophy within the framework of an analysis of "merit." The treatise is a discursive, highly rhetorical attempt to give rise to a notion of merit that cut across the various divisions of German society, with an increased use of "Publikum" as an inclusive point of reference in judging merit. Abbt drew upon discourses of sentiment and the passions propounded by figures like Helvétius, La Bruyère, and La Rochefoucauld to give his notions a quasi-physiological basis, that of the "(good) heart," which was generalizable to all people. At the same time he recognized the role of genius in socio-political life, expending a good deal of ink on examples of "greatness." Yet he makes clear that recognition of such greatness is dependent upon the
judgement of "the people," upon a Shaftesburyean "sensus communis."

Abbt's texts can be read in many ways as written speeches, attempts to speak through the written word in an altogether more gripping fashion than most other contemporary texts. This is indicated not only by his explicit statements on the matter, but also by his rampantly rhetorical, metaphorical writing style. Abbt obviously felt that the prevailing German academic style was inappropriate to contemporary conditions and readers, and he sought to innovate in almost everything he wrote, often resulting in murkiness and confusion. Nevertheless, a figure no less than Herder recognized what Abbt was doing in his texts, and they were generally received with acclaim. Reading him today, one gets just such a sense of someone keenly desirous of forging connections not only between himself and his readers, but between the Volk as a whole, in an ever-expanding community or "public" of "citizens."

Herder carried forward the work begun by Lessing and Abbt as "public writers," albeit within his own conception of organic enlightenment. Throughout his literary career Herder entertained wide-ranging ideas on the relationship between language, letters, and the formation of a united and harmonious German Publikum. "Enlightenment" emerges as a complex process of education and social development typically expressed in organicist metaphors and images, and mediated in the modern age via literature, which was hence of central importance in the development of a national consciousness that would lift Germany out of its backward state.

The key to human society was language, and its development and appropriate use constituted the primary pre-requisite for socio-political reform and the emergence of an authentic German Publikum. Although Herder prized the tightly-gathered, expressive nature of primitive polities, his historicist outlook and distrust of public speaking led him to see the dispersed public of letters as a more appropriate modern forum of interaction. Literature may have been depicted by Herder in some contexts as being derivative, but in the long run it emerges as the most suitable medium of public life.
Although Kant and Hamann were important influences on the young Herder, Lessing and Abbt impressed Herder as public writers and enlighteners. Abbt's influence occurred early in Herder's career, while his appreciation for Lessing grew in later years, corresponding to the more universalist, humanitarian turn in his thinking. Abbt's writings and perspective were particularly important to the young Herder, who expressed strong feelings for Abbt and felt himself to be following in the footsteps of the prematurely departed writer. Abbt's stance as a philosopher of "the people" and "good/common sense," and his general public-spiritedness and orientation towards the public exercised an enormous impact on Herder, who began in some of his earliest writings to reflect on the fragmented nature of modern publics and the need to bring philosophy to the Volk, albeit in a way which negated abstract modes of thinking and encouraged enlightenment as an organic growth from within the Volk and Nation.

In major works written in the decade after he left Riga, Herder continued to probe into the topics of aesthetics and cultural production, language, literature, historical change, and national or Volk identity. Generally speaking, Herder applied a profoundly social and historical perspective to the organically related entities of language, literature, and Publikum or, more abstractly, the public sphere. Thus language is depicted as both the prime medium of sociability and an historically conditioned object; literature, as an extension of language, tends over time towards abstraction but can be revivified by writers cognizant of its role in public life; and the social or public sphere of activity, as mediated by linguistic/literary communication, must not become too diffused, rather must have its own centre of gravity, its "middle-point" rooted in tradition, custom and physical proximity in order for its members to develop an authentic identity.

But if Herder recognized the inherent sociality of language and developed the notion of bounded "spheres" of social activity and understanding, his historicist perspective led him to argue that it would be wrong for moderns to attempt to replicate the closely-knit polities of earlier or more
primitive peoples: one unfortunately cannot go back to the world of ancient orators and poets, who communicated directly with "the people" in a vivid fashion. Much as he seemed to approve of such forms of socio-political community, Herder was too cognizant of historical change ever seriously to advocate a return to such forms of life. Rather, he simply assumed that the present era was the age of writers and literature; and social change, development, and enlightenment would come via appropriate forms of writing.

The important distinction, moreover, was not between speech and writing, rather between concretion and abstraction, immediate expression and over-refinement, local community and cosmopolitan society. Although the historical advent of writing brought with it a movement away from original, expressive forms of communication, this does not mean that literature cannot be directed back to its roots in the concrete, lived world of the senses and the Volk, and to its basic moral purpose. Nor does it mean that the written word does not serve a crucial function as a storehouse of language and, indeed, of God's teachings to humankind. It must always, however, be seen as a vehicle for something more than dry, dead abstractions or rules: the living spirit of the author. Herder's own prose expresses well this conviction, with its emotional, picturesque character, its jumps and exclamations, frequent asides and questions. Where Abbt was often murky, however, Herder is more straightforward and concise. And he reveals himself as a superior warden of the treasure-trove of language, as mediated by a broad spectrum of literatures.

The second version of the "Publikum" essay was published thirty years after the first, in the fifth collection of the Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität. These "letters" indicate that when confronted with the barbaric revolutionary passions of the French, as well as the Habsburg reaction and the conflict between the German and French peoples, Herder steered permanently away from seeing any positive change coming from concentrated political action. He reaffirmed literature as an organic, universal medium of enlightenment and public life, and did much to tone down the sensuous, emotional binding of individual to fatherland which he had earlier advanced,
instead emphasizing the commonalities between nations. The figure of the
great individual genius, the "martyr of truth," has faded into the background,
the universal play of language in literature having taken his place.

The second "Publikum" essay, much longer than the first, is also less
ironic—the view toward the possibility of belonging to a contemporary
Publikum is more positive, although the public sphere is still fractured,
divided into multiple publics. Significantly, the Publikum of literature
receives the most extended treatment, and is lauded as a "great gift, an
irrevocable privilege for human society, and an enormous medium of
Providence." While the orator deafens his audience, the writer speaks in a
way which allows reasoned thinking to take place. Literature is an active,
going "asylum and telegraph of human thoughts," an elemental medium in the
process of learning and enlightenment that is never ended.

Thus Herder was self-consciously engaged in a project of reform and
enlightenment indebted to the legacy of "public writers"—notably Abbt and
Lessing—and he was interested in developing language in a kind of writing
that organically enlightened and united all classes into a common Volk, a true
German Publikum. As such, there was a large measure of continuity in his
career: he began and ended it with the notion that moral and socio-cultural
reform were preconditions to political reform, and entertained a deep love of
letters and the spirit that could be transmitted through them. As an active
participant and exponent of the trans-national Republic of Letters, Herder was
also keenly aware of the need for a more mundane, localized version of this
kind of discourse. In attempting to mediate between the European Republic of
Letters and the emerging German Publikum der Literatur, he joined broad
notions of enlightenment to a distinctive, organicist vision of individual and
social development, one informed by a strong sense of the place of history,
language, and concrete physical circumstances in shaping human identity. And
his creative employment and theorization of Publikum as a new term for the
socio-political community, along with his more abstract theorization of
"spheres" of activity, point to the fact that Herder was engaged in concept-
ualizing what we now call the modern public sphere.

Taken together, the oeuvres of Lessing, Abbt and Herder provide a helpful window onto a formative stage of the Aufklärung and the emergence and figuration of an enlightened German public. Given the social-historical context--and the "problem of Publikum" particularly--Aufklärung for these writers had a very practical dimension: the shaping of a "public" and public sphere of discourse in which it were possible to carry on discerning discussion about matters of common interest. As we have seen, the constitution of an enlightened, coherent German public, out of the diversity of life in the Germanies, was of central importance to each of them. Using the language of Mead, they began seeking to unite various individuals and groups across the feudal spectrum into a higher level of socio-intellectual organization, one which in a certain sense answered to the richness and breadth of their own "selves," and more concretely, promised to be a forum for their concerns and endeavours.

According to Mead, the process of individuation, of acquiring an ever richer and more nuanced "self", is fluid, and depends upon various social and biological conditions, including the pre-existence of "some sort of an ongoing social process in which human beings were implicated." In its normative state, it involves the incorporation of increasingly general perspectives, culminating in a self which is both fully conscious of its own individuality and able to comprehend and productively engage in common social activities and institutions. While Mead at times seems to imply that fully developed selves are not much more than socially constructed automata, he is careful to state that "Out of this process [of self-development] there may in turn develop a more elaborate organization than that out of which the self has arisen." That is to say that once an individual has become self-conscious through taking the position of the "other" or "generalized other," it can continue to develop in relative isolation. Thus although the "social" is in an important sense the ultimate ground of the "individual," "however creative he may be in his thinking or behavior,"
Occasionally a person arises who is able to take in more than others of an act in process, who can put himself in relation with whole groups in the community whose attitudes have not entered into the lives of others in the community...Classes under a feudal order may be so separate from each other that, while they can act in certain traditional circumstances, they cannot understand each other; and then there may arise an individual who is capable of entering into the attitudes of other members of the group. Figures of that sort become of enormous importance because they make possible communication between groups otherwise completely separated from each other.4

Thus as Mead himself realized, his model is potentially useful for understanding some of the social-psychological dynamics present in the transition from feudal to modern culture. Indeed, as a general theoretical schema, it provides an interpretive framework for conceptualizing the mutual articulation of public and private spheres in eighteenth-century Europe, and more particularly what was at work among figures like Lessing, Abbt and Herder who, in occupying a position between a waning feudal culture and a highly developed Republic of Letters, longed for a new arena of activity--a German public sphere--that answered to their expanding sense of self. The various social, material, and spiritual/intellectual changes underway were of course conditioning factors in this development.5

One does not need to look very hard to find resonances with Mead's ideas in eighteenth-century moral and social discourse. E.J. Hundert has recently charted a tradition of reflection, stretching from seventeenth-century Dutch and French moralists through Bernard Mandeville and into French and Scottish high Enlightenment culture, that revolved around the public, intersubjective construction of personal identity. Whether they agreed with Mandeville's rather cynical transcription of virtuous intention and the integrated personality into the unstable products of ongoing negotiations between biological drives and public esteem, most major Enlightenment figures felt they had to come to grips with it.6 Enlightenment moralists, prodded by Mandeville, began taking note of the impact of emerging forms of modern public life on individual identity.

And as we have seen, reflections upon and interventions within this public sphere were, in an important sense, concerned with citizenship. That
is to say that "public writers" like Lessing, Abbt and Herder were engaged in developing a proto-political sense of what it meant to be a citizen of a modern polity. And it seems obvious that the kind of modern polity envisioned by these writers, while not identical with modern democracies, shared many of their values, including an emphasis on inclusion and a roughly egalitarian outlook. But at the same time, it is important to recognize the fundamental differences which were also present; if such individuals were in an important sense politically "progressive," they were also attuned to their own time and place, and to the traditions which weighed heavily upon them. The narrative of individualistic, middle-order emancipation must be complemented with an awareness of the fact that group identities and traditions were an equally important feature of the mental landscape, and that consequently an emerging Publikum—whether actual or merely envisioned—was a crucial point of reference during a time of rapid transition.

Lessing, Abbt and Herder were not the only German intellectuals who were starting to grapple with the nature of an emerging modern public sphere, with the character and location of "the public" and their relation to it. Figures as diverse as F.C. von Moser, Klopstock, Riedel, Wieland, Hamann, and Justus Möser reflected on this entity as well. Klopstock, as we have seen, was not at all pleased with the open-ended nature of the public as arbiter of aesthetic matters, and sought in his 1758 essay "Von dem Publico" to restrict the right to judge to certain qualified individuals. Later, in his much-anticipated Die Deutsche Gelehrtenrepublik (1774), Klopstock propounded a Baroque vision of a hierarchical republic of scholars more in keeping with Bacon's The New Atlantis than with the emerging German Publikum. Klopstock's ideal republic of learning, with its aristocratic, exclusivist and apolitical outlook, pointed towards the past, and the contemporary educated German public—with some notable exceptions—was greatly disappointed in the work.

That certain Stürmer und Dränger—Goethe included—received the work with enthusiasm may point to the possibility that an expanded subjectivity and sense of self did not necessarily entail an orientation towards modern
publics. But it is important to emphasize that I am employing a symbolic interactionist perspective as a heuristic device or model; although it seems helpful in understanding the careers of Lessing, Abbt and Herder as "public writers," its range of application may be limited. Yet a figure of no less importance to the Sturm und Drang than J.M.R. Lenz stated in a letter that "It is very much worth pondering...that my public is the whole of the Volk; that I can exclude the mob as little as I can persons of taste and education." 8

British writers and periodicals, and its political culture generally, clearly exercised a profound impact on the emerging German discourse of the public. Works by Shaftesbury, Pope, Hogarth, Young, Hutcheson and others helped to shape Lessing, Abbt and Herder's thinking and terminology on the subject. Early moral weeklies like The Spectator served as models of public-oriented discussion, while the much-heralded British sense of "public spirit" stimulated Germans to begin thinking about the possibilities for public life in their own milieu. In 1775 Justus Möser asked whether writers for moral weeklies ought not, like the English, deal with "public matters of state" (öffentlichen Staatsangelegenheiten), in order to "impart to the public actions of regional parliaments (Landtagshandlungen) and other public... matters," instead of the usual moral lessons. 9 In his travelogue England und Italien (1785), Johann Wilhelm von Archenholtz painted an attractive picture of British freedoms, rights, and movement towards egalitarian social relations, mediated by newspapers and finding expression in "public spirit": "The chief characteristic of the British is their... 'public spirit'; a virtue so unknown in all [other] countries that no one... has a name for it." The term "national spirit" (Nationalgeist) signifies this noble British quality only very imperfectly, for Archenholtz. "It is actually the will, or the eager striving of individual people, to effect the common good." 10 "Public spirit" had become a common term among English writers by the early eighteenth-century, 11 and as we have seen, had begun to seep into German consciousness by the third-quarter century.

French culture also played a role in the shaping of a German Publikum,
albeit at times by way of reaction; Lessing worked to steer interest away from French drama, literature and criticism, and towards English models and the fostering of an indigenous German literature. Herder, too, formulated notions of German national identity and letters in opposition to that of the high French Enlightenment. But Lessing, Abbt and Herder also drew upon French writings in their attempts to come to grips with an emerging German public sphere. Terms and ideas given expression by Rousseau, Helvétius, Bayle, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Dubos, Montesquieu and others played a formative role in their works.

Lessing, Abbt and Herder were thus involved in a European conversation, a discussion about moral, social and aesthetic matters—and "the public" and public sphere particularly—which transcended borders, taking place within the context of the trans-national Republic of Letters. British and French writings were beginning to reflect a host of material and intellectual developments which Germans too began to recognize; the emergence of terms like "the public" and "public spirit" (among others), articulated in a decidedly modern idiom, were suggestive of possibilities in the German-speaking lands, and consequently German writers too began to toy with such notions.

And in the Germanies, public spirit and an orientation towards the public was typically conceived as a quality expressed in writing—by the "public writer." Ludwig Wekhrlin was a tireless champion of such a role, stating in 1781 that

\[\text{It is to [writers'] courage and genius that we owe the fact that kings have respect for the public voice (daß die Könige Ehrfurcht vor dem öffentlichen Ruf haben), and that the printing press is an iron mace [held] at the necks of tyrants...in that it draws abuses in front of the judgement-seat of the public.}\]

Two years later Wekhrlin continued the thought, saying that "There must be people who awaken the ideas of the public; there must be voices whose resonance expresses the demands of universal reason; there must be a middle-point, where abuses are battled with the power of evidence." As long as writers write, the public will not be misled—"it is a proven authority." A 1785 article in the Schwäbisches Museum maintained similarly that "The
office of the writer is one of the most honourable in the state, and his duty is one of the most important...If he wants to fulfill his destiny, then he must be effective, that means he must take an active part in the actual improvement of the public." And in 1791 C.M. Wieland triumphantly praised the influence of writers on the public and thereby on the nation;

They are in a manner of speaking the actual "men of the nation" (Männer der Nation), because their immediate sphere of activity (Wirkungskreis) is the whole of Germany; they are read everywhere, their writings slowly but surely penetrate into the smallest towns, and through them [the public] begins to assemble, in places which 25 years ago lay in the thickest darkness.

To be sure, such grand statements exaggerated the importance of writers and the presence of a broadly-based German public.

This was the other side of the coin—as the nineteenth-century dawned the "problem of Publikum" remained, despite a by now well-developed awareness of the author-Publikum relationship. An anonymous piece published in the Neuen Museum in 1804 summarizes this neatly:

A literature is and remains...the joint work of writer and public. The spirit of a nation's whole treasure-trove of books depends on the reaction of the world of readers (Lesewelt) to the world of authors...I see writers now in Germany everywhere; and more than enough readers. But the public, the German public, where is it?

Whatever unity and sense of common purpose the German Publikum had possessed (or at least was perceived to have possessed), as a relatively cohesive and enlightened entity, began breaking down during the last decade of the century. The growing number of writers, readers, and books, accompanied by the commodification of literature, the expansion of the book market, and the growing power of publishers, led to a sense that the public sphere was fracturing along the lines of "high" and "low" culture, and between various literary camps which, concerned with selling their publications, couldn't be counted upon to give each other a fair reading. The controversy surrounding the publication of Schiller's Xenien, and the Klassik doctrine of artistic autonomy, fed into the perception, at least, that serious literature was becoming de-politicized and simultaneously commodified as "art". According to Christa Bürger, in describing the crisis in literature at the end of the century, contemporary writers agreed on some basic points:
The breakdown in the unity of the literary public sphere expressed itself in the area of critical discussion as a battle of rival literary circles for a share of the market and artistic recognition, [and] at the level of reception as the division of the public into an elite of competent readers and a mass of mere consumers of literature.

It was a widely-shared perception that this negative development occurred within the context of the material conditions of the literary market, and there was widespread skepticism over the possibilities of further spreading a trans-corporate Enlightenment. The "withdrawal" of elites from popular culture, to use the language of Peter Burke, was by 1800 nearly complete. But Burke failed to recognize the emergence of the entity which at least promised to bridge the widening gap: das Publikum. Significantly enough, Lessing now became an example for some of a writer who had oriented himself to a wider public; an example, in other words, of an ideal "public writer."

But if writers were beginning to hearken back to a more harmonious era, to a more unitary and inclusive literary public sphere, it was one which could only have been projected by Aufklärer like Lessing, Abbt and Herder. Their general stance, as we have seen, was itself predicated on an elusive, fragmented public. What writers were lamenting was the fact that the project begun by figures such as these, in the third-quarter century, was not being carried-through by the acknowledged masters of the literary scene. The career of Friedrich Schiller is an example of how an ambivalent relationship with the public eventually culminated in a sense of alienation from it, as one's "sovereign" and "confidante," as he had put it in 1784. An avid reader of Abbt in his student years, Schiller early on advocated a drama with a strong moral, educational and social purpose. But despite numerous pronouncements signalling his public spirit, Schiller became increasingly ambivalent about the Publikum, eventually stating that "The single relationship with the public, that one can't regret, is that of war." Schiller was joined by Goethe in this "war against the public" (as it was called); "The public's taste, not favourable to the classicists, appeared to be a factor that had either to be changed, 'educated,' or eliminated altogether from aesthetics."

Seen from this perspective, there is no contradiction between a
symbolic-interactionist model and the ambivalence felt towards the public by some of the most complex and brilliant individuals of the era. As they emerged out of an increasingly complex and variegated social and intellectual milieu, such individuals found it difficult to reconcile themselves with a hoped-for public which could appreciate the breadth and nature of their achievements. For Lessing, Abbt and Herder "das Publikum" was primarily a vision or ideal which seemed to hold unlimited promise; when a real flesh-and-blood German reading public began to take shape, at the end of the century, writers were confronted with an entity that did not, could not, answer to the ideal. If one did not want to lower one's standards to appeal to the mass of readers, to debase "oneself," then other notions of literary identity were required; the role of "public writer" no longer seemed so promising.

Yet individual Aufklärer continued to orient themselves towards the public, and to constitute and contest that entity in ways which seemed suitable to them. Despite Schiller's ambivalence, his Briefe über die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen (1795) can be read as a foundational attempt not only at educating the public by reconciling "natural man" and "spiritual man" via art, but at giving rise to a "third state" of individual and social being which transcended the contemporary dichotomies between low and high culture, fleeting taste and enduring ideals. A state of being, in other words, in which public opinion was not "despotic" but rather something genuinely to be feared, a judgement emanating from a people for whom "actual life [is] governed by the ideal, honour triumphant over possessions, thought over enjoyment, dreams of immortality over existence." While Schiller's Briefe should be read as a profound response to some of the fundamental social, intellectual and political problems of the age, including of course the events of the French Revolution, they can also be read as an attempt to resolve the contradictions and tensions of the German public sphere into an all-encompassing vision of public life and the role of the artist/intellectual in that life.

Herder as we have seen maintained his organic vision of language,
literature and Publikum into the 1790s. And Immanuel Kant, first Herder's teacher and then his nemesis, also integrated "the public" into his philosophy, primarily via a theory of publicity. Kant is probably the most well-known German Aufklärer to have theorized the modern public sphere, Habermas even asserting that in Kant "the idea of the bourgeois public sphere attained its theoretically fully developed form." Kant's theory of publicity, according to Habermas, served to bridge morality (encompassing notions of "nature" and "reason") with politics. Kant is credited with having rehabilitated moral reasoning as an act with public, political significance, bridging the gap between an emerging civil society and the state. In Kant's vision of a "republican constitution" the public sphere of private individuals engaged in rational-critical debate served to anchor civil society and the rights of individuals through the production of general (rational) laws; their empirical origin lay in the agreement of the public engaged in critical debate. Kant's notion of popular sovereignty differed from Rousseau's on this fundamental point—it must be based upon the public use of reason.

According to Habermas, the public sphere was at once the principle of legal order and the method of enlightenment for Kant. Enlightenment was to be mediated by the public sphere: "Thinking for oneself seemed to coincide with thinking aloud and the use of reason with its public use." Having rejected noumenal forms of authority as grounds for ascertaining "truth," Kant proposed a pragmatic test of truth: "the public consensus arrived at by those engaged in rational-critical debate with one another." In Kant's words, "The touchstone whereby we decide whether our holding a thing to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore external, namely the possibility of communicating it and of finding it to be valid for all human reason."

Kant equated the "rational" with the "interpretable" and hence the "communicable." Freedom of expression is thus an existential requirement for reason—it must be publicizable in order to undergo its own test of critique. As Onora O'Neill argues,
Reason's authority consists simply in the fact that the principles of reason are the ones that are neither self-stultifying nor self-defeating in use. The best way to find which principles have this character is to encourage the increasing public use of reason... Toleration, at least of incipiently public uses of reason, has then a quite fundamental status in Kant's thought. Without it the authority of reason ebbs.28

For Kant, "sensus communis" meant "public sense," the "collective reason of humankind" which avoided "the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions."29 This notion of "public sense" gives rise to certain "maxims of common human understanding"--maxims which have a symbolic-interactionist ring to them. The first is "to think for oneself"--"the very motto of enlightenment" according to Kant. Secondly, "to think from the standpoint of everyone else"--the "maxim of enlarged thought." And third, "always think consistently"--the "maxim of consistent thought."30 Like Adam Smith, Kant theorized the emerging modern public sphere as an interchange between (consistently-thinking, rational) individual selves and the (rationalizing) "generalized other."31

John Laursen has argued that Kant's politics of publicity was in part a response to philosophical scepticism; only by the open and ongoing testing of rational "truths" could doubts as to their validity be quelled.32 This may be the case, but as Laursen has elsewhere argued, a vocabulary of "the public" and "publicity" also served a somewhat subversive political purpose--the empowerment of middling strata of the population with moral and political authority.33 Yet Kant's notion of just who composed "the public" and qualified as actors in public debate was somewhat exclusive: it was first and foremost "Gelehrte" who were to be involved in public debate, and it was from their discussion that (in Habermas's words) "the flames of enlightenment [were to] spread."34 And as Iring Fetscher has demonstrated, Kant advanced a "bürgerlicher Reformismus" with a decidedly gradualist and authoritarian cast; it was based upon a liberal belief in socio-economic "progress," a belief in the possibility of the rational and moral enlightenment of monarchs, the rejection of massive political upheaval and the acceptance of the need for reform from above, and the conviction that "men are animals...who need a
master." If one wants to look for subversion, one should look to Herder, who countered Kant's claim by stating, "The human being who needs a master is an animal." It was Herder's vision of "organic enlightenment," rather than Kant's "bürgerlicher Reformismus," which was truly subversive.

Kant's famous essay, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" provides the clearest picture of how Kant tied Aufklärung to Publicum and the public sphere. "Enlightenment," according to Kant, "is the exit (Ausgang) of the human being out of his self-incurred tutelage/immaturity (selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit)." However, it is difficult for individuals to work themselves out of this state on their own. "But that a public [can] enlighten itself, is more possible; it is in fact, when one only allows it freedom, almost inevitable."(162) This is so because there will always be leading individuals who can spread the ability to think for oneself among the many. But the public can hinder removal of its own yoke, if prejudices have been planted in it; therefore a public can only arrive at enlightenment slowly--not through revolution, which only replaces old prejudices with new ones.(162)

The only requirement is freedom, "and indeed the least harmful of all...[freedoms is] the public use of one's reason in all of its aspects."(162) But here Kant makes a potentially confusing distinction: the public use of reason is that of Gelehrte addressing "the world of readers" (Lesewelt). The "private" use consists in the activity of bürgerlich individuals in their official/public posts; in this capacity one should keep one's critical thoughts to oneself. This is necessary because of the need to maintain the "mechanism" of order and government--"here reasoning is certainly not allowed; rather one must obey."(163) Kant obviously wants rational discourse to take place in a public sphere, but he does not want such discussion overtly to challenge existing systems of power and authority. This is a very Lutheran, "two hats" doctrine of citizenship. It is notable for its gradualistic reformist tenor, and for the fact that it posits educated individuals communicating their thoughts publicly via print, and not in the context of their civil and religious posts. The "public" one addresses in print is
really "the world" at large;(164) Kant's Publicum in the essay is not necessarily the German public spoken about by Lessing, Abbt and Herder--it has a certain cosmopolitan, universal quality about it.

The abstract category of "publicity" is what is really important to Kant. It is through (written) public discussion that problems and possible reforms can be brought in front of "throne[s]," that a "Volk" can determine its own destiny.(165) Once a monarch recognizes that a proposal is in his people's best interest, it is only a matter of leaving it up to them to do what is necessary for their own good.(166) If monarchs have nothing to fear in allowing the people to decide religious matters rationally for themselves, they should recognize that the public exercise of reason concerning matters of legal right also poses no danger.(167)

When Kant discussed (in other texts) the social and material basis for the achievement of a republican constitution, he opted for a public of male property-holders (including artisans, soldiers and others whose "property" consisted in a skill), supported by a free-market, commercial economy. Individual, private antagonisms were to be reconciled in a civil constitution that administered justice universally, resulting in harmonious public conduct. "Only property-owning private people were admitted to a public engaged in critical political debate, for their autonomy was rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange and hence was joined to the interest in its preservation as a private sphere." Such a view took its starting-point in Hobbesian individualism; the initial theoretical units of society, for Kant, were isolated, egoistic individuals vying with each other in a state of nature. This corresponds to Kant's general perspective on the public sphere: rational thought exists first as a function of individual minds, but in order to transcend the arbitrariness of private thought processes it must be communicable and interpretable to others, in a public sphere of rational-critical debate and discussion.

Herder's perspective was diametrically opposed to this. If Kant posited isolated, egoistic yet rational individuals as his analytical starting-point,
Herder began with cultural communities engaged in various forms of communication and expression. If Kant was engaged primarily in a reform of consciousness, Herder was engaged in the reform of language. If Kant focused on the abstract notion of publicity, Herder spoke more about the embodied Publikum. If Kant's form of rational public enlightenment had a somewhat authoritarian, "top-down" character, Herder's "organic enlightenment" was grounded in the experience of ordinary people--the Volk--and consequently had a more subversive tenor. If Kant's approach was primarily philosophical, Herder's was historical. But despite these differences, both Aufklärer were in an important sense "public writers." It is a strong testament to the centrality of the question of Publikum and the public sphere in Enlightenment Germany that two of the greatest minds of the era, whose approaches differed so fundamentally, can nevertheless be classed together in this way.

But it was Lessing and Abbt who truly pioneered the role of "public writer" in Enlightenment Germany. Abbt provided Herder with important impulses in this direction early in his career, while Lessing's impact was more long-term and subtle. And as Germany's first major "public writer," Lessing set the tone for "enlightened" writers who came after him. In his work the poles of Kant and Herder coexisted in dialectical tension; it was to him that diverse writers looked for guidance in constituting and contesting a modern German public and public sphere. And it was the tension in his work between the quest for society and the requirements of individual thought and expression that best characterizes the ambiguous state of the Germanies in the latter half of the eighteenth-century.

2. Ibid., pp. 154-55, 164.

3. Ibid., p. 140.

4. Ibid., p. 222, 256-257.

5. That is to say that I am only employing Mead's social psychology in a most general and abstract way, as a broad interpretive framework which can comprehend the many specific developments in process.


14. Quoted in Ibid., p. 57. Translation is my own.


22. Ibid., p. 99.


25. Ibid., p.199, XXVI.12.

26. Frederick Beiser's chapter on Schiller, in his Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism (Cambridge, Mass, 1992), is excellent in this regard.


29. Kant quoted in translation in Ibid., p. 45.

30. Ibid., pp. 46-47.

31. See Chapter 1 for more on Smith viewed from a symbolic interactionist perspective.


37. Kant, "Was ist Aufklärung," p. 161. Translation is my own. Subsequent page references to the essay will be made in the text.


41. Ibid., p. 71.
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