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William Wilson, Jill Terry Rudy

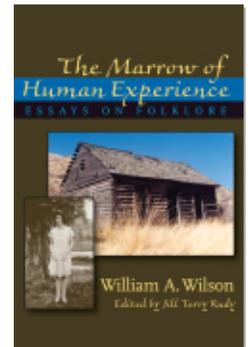
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## HERDER, FOLKLORE, AND ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

When I studied folklore at Indiana University in the early 1960s, Johann Gottfried Herder did not figure at all in the curriculum on the intellectual history of folklore. Constrained by the ideologies of disciplinaryity, my teachers dated the history of the field to the nineteenth-century founders of the systematic, “scientific” folklore (the Brothers Grimm, William John Thoms, Julius and Kaarle Krohn, Sven Grundtvig, Francis James Child, E. B. Tylor), with a predisposition toward the Nordic and German scholars who systematized the philological method or to the British scholars who had the good taste to write in English. Earlier works that made it onto the syllabi were included because they represented classic collections of texts that provided important evidence for the history of particular folklore items.

I was first introduced to Herder, rather, as the foundational figure who provided the intellectual charter for Boasian, Americanist anthropology, with its focus on the nexus of languages, texts, and the particularities of culture histories as “the foundation of all future researches.” This lead was mentioned in passing in Dell Hymes’s first course at the University of Pennsylvania (which I had the good fortune to take), provocatively entitled *The Ethnography of Symbolic Forms*. I read a few brief secondary sources on Herder in the ensuing years, but encountering Bert Wilson’s “Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism” in 1973 was a threshold experience, the true source of an extended engagement I have had with Herder ever since. When I read that article, lights went on all over the place.

First of all, Bert’s argument enabled me to see the powerful affinities between folklore and Americanist anthropology, to that point obscured for me by the vigorous foregrounding by folklorists of the critical differences between the disciplines, an essential part of discipline-building rhetoric. When the Herderian foundations of both Boas’s program and Krohn’s *folkloristische Arbeitsmethode* are recognized,

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disciplinary divisions of intellectual labor seem somehow less important . . . at least to me, if not to more intellectually disciplined colleagues.

Second, Bert's essay crystallized for me the fundamental intellectual differences between rationalist, Enlightenment-based orientations to folklore as anachronistic leftover from a premodern past, and romantic orientations to folklore as expressions of the *Volksgeist* and the foundation of an authentic polity. Moreover, the article suggested, both conceptions were part of the symbolic construction of modernity.

And third, the article made clear that folklore theory was essentially political, that conceptions of folklore and motivations for its study are not neutral strivings toward disinterested knowledge, but are ideologically founded. Folklore is inevitably about the politics of culture, and the uses and abuses of the concept and the discipline are not simply secondary distortions of some purer intellectual mission.

Bert's essay on Herder and his later book on *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (1976a) represent benchmark works in the critical study of folklore's intellectual history, essential reading for all my students. They have certainly shaped my own engagement with the intellectual history of folklore and anthropology, in particular with ideologies of language and oral poetics in the making of modernity and its attendant structures of inequality, culminating in my recent book with Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity* (2003). My reading of Herder differs in some significant respects from Bert's—I am convinced, for example, that many of the ideas Bert attributes to Vico's influence in fact stem from other sources—but without the stimulus of Bert's work, I wouldn't have pursued the inquiries that have led me to this (and so many other) understandings of what folklore and anthropology are about.

—Richard Bauman

*Methinks I see the time coming when we shall return in earnest to our language, to the merits, to the principles and goals of our fathers and learn therefore to value our own gold.* —Johann Gottfried Herder

ENGLISH-AMERICAN FOLKLORE STUDIES BEGAN AS THE LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITY of scholar-gentlemen intrigued by that quaint body of customs, manners, and oral traditions called *popular antiquities*—rebaptized *folklore* in 1846. With the advent of evolutionary anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century and with its emphasis on folklore items as survivals among the peasants of ancient practices and beliefs, folklore became the object of serious study by scholars like Tylor, Lang, and Gomme. Since then both English and American folklorists have devoted much of their time to the study of survivals and to the historical reconstruction of the past or of past forms of present lore.

On the continent serious folklore studies began earlier and followed a different path. There they were from the beginning intimately associated with emergent romantic nationalistic movements in which zealous scholar-patriots

searched the folklore record of the past not just to see how people had lived in bygone days—the principal interest of the antiquarians—but primarily to discover “historical” models on which to reshape the present and build the future. In this paper I shall attempt to show how this marriage of folklore research and nationalistic endeavors occurred and to describe some of its results.

Nationalism is a term not easily defined. Hans Kohn calls it an idea, “a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state” (1961, 149). In words of about the same effect, Carlton J. H. Hayes calls it “a fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality” (1960, 2). He defines a nationality as “a group of people who speak either the same language or closely related dialects, who cherish common historical tradition, and who constitute or think they constitute a distinct cultural society” (1926, 5). In other words, the nation-state to which the patriot owes his allegiance is defined according to ethnographic principles. Both as an inspiration for the idea of nationalism and as a means of winning the minds of men to that idea, folklore has served well.

In western Europe and America the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth century was, at least in the beginning, in line with the liberal and humanitarian philosophies of the Enlightenment. It was precipitated in no small degree by Rousseau’s doctrine of popular sovereignty and “by his regard for the common people as the true depository of civilization” (Kohn 1961, 150)—ideas which found their most powerful manifestations in the French and American Revolutions. Adherents of the new nationalistic philosophy looked forward to the day when the entire human community would share in those rights recently won in America and France. To them, as Kohn points out,

the nationalism of the French Revolution . . . was the triumphant expression of a rational faith in common humanity and liberal progress. The famous slogan of “liberty, equality, fraternity” and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen were thought valid not only for the French people, but for all peoples. (1961, 150)

In central and eastern Europe, however, a different kind of movement—romantic nationalism—developed. In these areas, where the people were generally socially and politically less developed than in the West, national boundaries seldom coincided with those of existing states. Hence nationalism here became a movement not so much to protect the individual against the injustices of an authoritarian state, but rather an attempt to redraw political boundaries to fit the contours of ethnic bodies. To be sure, the adherents of this nationalism took over Rousseau’s concept of popular sovereignty, but to it they wedded the idea that each nationality is a distinct organic entity different from all other nations and that the individual can fulfill himself only to the degree that he is true to that national whole of which he is merely a part. Thus individual will

became secondary to national will, and service to the nation-state became the highest endeavor of man. In contradistinction to liberal nationalism, romantic nationalism emphasized passion and instinct instead of reason, national differences instead of common aspirations, and, above all, the building of nations on the traditions and myths of the past—that is, on folklore—instead of on the political realities of the present.

The man most responsible for the creation of this romantic nationalism was the German scholar Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) (see Gillies 1945; Clark 1955; Herder 1967–1968). In its beginning stages, romantic nationalism was little more than the wistful dream of scholars and poets who endeavored through constant education and propaganda to kindle the spark of national consciousness in the hearts of their lethargic countrymen. As Kohn points out, they “became the voice and the conscience of their people, interpreting its history or mission and shaping its character and personality.” And “always they developed a philosophy of history and society, in the center of which stood their own nation and the principle which was to sum up its idea and faith” (1946, 2). Such a man was Herder, whose philosophy of history not only inspired the German nationalistic movement but, for better or for worse, seems to have served as the foundation for most such movements since his time. By showing the German people why their building a national culture on native foundations was not only desirable but absolutely necessary, Herder formulated a set of principles of nationalism that have generally been held applicable to all nations struggling for independent existence.

Some of the principal tenets of his philosophy Herder took from other sources. In 1768 he received a copy of Michael Denis’ *Die Gedichte Ossians, eines alten celtischen Dichters*. The book, a translation of Macpherson’s *Poems of Ossian*, contained elaborate notes which had originally been written by Melchiorre Cesarotti for the Italian translation of Macpherson and which had been taken over by Denis, translated, and added to his own work. In these notes Cesarotti had relied heavily on the *Scienza Nuova* of Giambattista Vico—particularly on Vico’s ideas about poetry and history. From Vico—via these notes—Herder received two ideas that were to become cornerstones of his own philosophy (Clark 1947, 657–59).

The first of these was the idea of different historic ages, each of which evolves naturally out of the preceding age—in other words, the concept of continuity in history. “All things,” said Herder, “rest upon one another and have grown out of another.” And again: the fatherland “has descended from our fathers; it arouses the remembrance of all the meritorious who went before us, and of all the worthy whose fathers we shall be” (1967–1968, 5: 565; 17: 319). This idea was soon to have tremendous national significance.

The second concept that Herder took from Vico was that each historical epoch forms an independent cultural entity whose various parts are integrally related to form an organic whole. Applying this concept of culture patterns to the historical stages of individual nations, Herder was soon to argue that

since each nation was organically different from every other nation, each nation ought to be master of its own destiny. "Every nation," he said, "contains the center of its happiness within itself" (1967–1968, 5: 509).

From the writings of Charles de Montesquieu, Herder received further support for his concept of independent culture types. From them he also received a new idea—that these culture types are to a large degree determined by the physical environment in which nations are located. "Nature," said Herder, paraphrasing Montesquieu,

has sketched with the mountain ranges she formed and with the rivers she made flow from them the rough but definite outline of the entire history of man. . . . One height created a nation of hunters, thus supporting and necessitating a savage state; another, more spread out and mild, provided a field for shepherd peoples and supplied them with tame animals; another made agriculture easy and essential; and still another began with navigation and fishing and led finally to trade. . . . In many regions the customs and ways of life have continued for millennia; in others they have changed, . . . but always in harmony with the terrain from which the change came. . . . Oceans, mountain chains, and rivers are the most natural boundaries not only of lands, but also of peoples, customs, languages, and empires; and even in the greatest revolutions of human affairs they have been the guiding lines and the limits of world history. (1967–1968, 13: 37–38)

Herder contended, then, that from the varying circumstances of nations' physical environments had emerged national differences and that these, enhanced over the years by historical developments, had gradually evolved into distinct national units, the organic structures of which he considered to be reflected in what he called national characters, or national souls. "Those peculiar national characters," he said,

which are so deeply implanted in the oldest peoples, unmistakably manifest themselves in all their activities on earth. As a spring derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavor from the soil through which it flows, so the ancient characters of nations arose from family traits, from the climate, from the way of life and education [for Herder education and tradition were synonymous], from the early transactions and deeds peculiar to them. The customs of the fathers took deep root and became the internal prototypes of the race. (1967–1968, 14: 84)

Since no two nations had shared common environments and common histories, then no two nations could share common characters.

Herder next argued that since each nationality was, in effect, created by nature and history, man's duty was not, as the advocates of the Enlightenment maintained, to work for the creation of a common community of nations governed by universal, rational law, but rather to develop each nation along those lines laid down by nature and history. In bold defiance of the Enlightenment, he declared: "Every [nationality] carries within itself the standard of its own perfection, which can in no way be compared with that of others." He insisted that "we do justice to no nation by forcing upon it a foreign pattern of learning." And over and over again he proclaimed that "the most natural state is *one* people with *one* national character." Therefore, nothing seemed to him so unnatural as "the wild mixtures of various breeds and nations under one sceptre" (1967–1968, 14: 227; 13: 384; italics mine).

In advocating this position Herder was again influenced by Montesquieu. In the *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), Montesquieu had argued that the laws of a nation are merely the necessary relations arising from the nature of that nation's social character and geographical environment. Since these factors vary from place to place, there are no universal laws—only national laws. The laws of a nation best suit itself and only by chance can be applied to other nations.

Herder took over this relativistic position and made it a central part of his philosophy. "O, that another Montesquieu," he said, "would enable us to enter into the spirit of the laws and governments on this round world of ours" (1967–1968, 13: 386). Throughout his works Herder himself tried to become this other Montesquieu—though the real Montesquieu may not have agreed with the image—and repeatedly reminded his readers that every nationality must develop in accord with its own innate abilities, in line with its own culture pattern. As Alexander Gillies points out, Herder attempted

to show and assess the value of what had of necessity to emerge, and to point out the universal moral, for peoples as for individuals, namely that each must fulfill nature's intention, indeed cooperate with her, by achieving what it is possible to achieve in given circumstances. (1945, 87)

For a nation to do otherwise—to attempt to develop on a cultural foundation other than its own—meant breaking the continuity of past development and disrupting the nation's organic unity. The consequences would be the stultification of native cultural forms and ultimately the death of the nation itself. "The stability of a nation," said Herder,

which does not forsake itself, but builds and continues to build upon itself, gives a definite direction to all the endeavors of its members. But other peoples, because they have not found themselves, must seek their salvation in foreign nations, serving them, thinking their thoughts; they forget even the times of their glory,

of their own proven feats, always desiring, never succeeding, always lingering on the threshold. (1967–1968, 23: 160–61)

I should emphasize that, as the above quotation indicates, when Herder spoke of self-fulfillment he spoke of peoples, not of people, and of nations, not of individuals. Inherent within his philosophy was the idea that the individual could receive his fullest development only as an integral part of his particular nation. “Since man originates from and within one race,” he said, “his development, education, and way of thinking are genetic.” Thus “every human perfection is national,” and the individual achieves his own salvation only through the salvation of his nation (1967–1968, 14: 84; 5: 505).

Like Vico, Herder sought to explain the nature of a thing by studying its origin. But also like Vico—and like Aristotle—he put the nature of a thing in its end, in its final cause. Aristotle said man was made for life in the city-state. Vico said he was made for civilization. Herder said he was made for humanity (*Humanität*). “Humanity,” said Herder, “is the character of our race. . . . We do not bring it with us ready-made into the world. But in the world it must be the goal of our strivings, the sum of our exercises, our guiding value” (1967–1968, 17: 138).

Herder defined humanity in a number of ways, but in each case, as Gillies says, it was clearly “something of which man alone is capable, and which he must learn to develop for himself in this life” (1945, 80). The important point for our purposes is that Herder believed that humanity was something man could achieve only as a member of a nation (1967–1968, 1: 366; 13: 159, 343, 346; 14: 83, 84, 227) and that nations could arrive at humanity only if they remained true to their national characters, or souls. Each nation, then, by developing its own language, art, literature, religion, customs, and laws—all of which were expressions of the national soul—would be working not only for its own strength and unity, but also for the well-being of civilization as a whole. Each nation had a special “mission” to perform in the progress of man toward humanity—the cultivation of its own national characteristics. “All nations,” said Herder, “each in its place, should weave [their part of] the great veil of Minerva” (1967–1968, 17: 212).

But as Herder looked around he was greatly distressed to see that his own land was not fulfilling its mission—was not developing along nationalistic lines. At the close of the sixteenth century, German intellectual life, which had once held such great promise, had begun to decline. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, after suffering through the disruptions caused by the Reformation, the Counter Reformation, and the Thirty Years’ War, “Germany was a masterpiece of partition, entanglement, and confusion” (Ergang 1966, 13). The country was divided into 1,800 different territories with an equal number of rulers. There was no unity in commerce and industry, and the air was rife with religious feuds.

Worse still, the people had abandoned their own native cultural forms for foreign models—particularly those of the French. The German nobility, to

Herder's despair, had widely imitated the brilliant court life of Versailles with the unfortunate consequence that French ideas and customs had filtered down to the middle classes and had widened the gap between them and the common people. French was the language of refinement and culture, and the German of the common people was considered vulgar. Those who had to use it padded it with so many foreignisms that it was scarcely recognizable to the lower classes. In literature, matters were equally bad. German writers not only used French as their principal medium of expression; they also based the form and content of their works on French and classical models and extolled the cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment.

All this spelled disaster to Herder. He insisted that Germany must return to her own foundations—and do so immediately—or Germany was doomed. “The remains of all living folk (or national) thought,” he warned, “are rolling with an accelerated final plunge into the abyss of oblivion. The light of the so-called culture [Enlightenment] is eating around itself like a cancer. For half a century we have been ashamed of everything that has to do with the fatherland” (1967–1968, 25: 11). He begged his countrymen not to abandon their native traditions in favor of those of other nationalities, but rather to cherish their own ways of life inherited from their fathers and to build upon them. And to those who found delight in aping foreign models, he declared: “Now seek in Germany the character of the nation, the manner of thinking peculiar to it, the genuine mood of its language” (1967–1968, 1: 366).

The point at which Germany had begun to lose the true spirit of its nationality and to ignore its historical antecedents had been, thought Herder, the end of the Middle Ages. At this time native traditions had been interrupted by foreign influences introduced by the Renaissance. To regain its lost national soul, then, Germans would have to return to the Middle Ages—to the point where the break had taken place—and resume their cultural development from there. A healthy, durable culture, Herder repeated again and again, must be built on a native foundation. He did not suggest, I must add, that the Golden Age lay in the past. For him, with his concept of humanity, the Golden Age was in the future. It was just that Germany had unfortunately gotten off the only cultural track that would lead it to humanity, and, for its own salvation, had to be put back on. As Robert Ergang points out, Herder wished to lead his people to the national past, the spring of the national sentiment, “so that they might refresh themselves by clear draughts and then go onward to a great future” (1966, 232).

But how were the Germans to bridge the chasm between the present and the past? How were they to rediscover their lost soul? For Herder there was only one way—through folk poetry.

To understand Herder's concept of folk poetry we must turn once again to Vico. For Vico, mythos equaled history. The first poets, he claimed, were actually historians who spoke in metaphorical language. Later ages distorted and misunderstood their meaning, but originally the poems of Greek

mythology were descriptions of actual events. Thus for Vico, and for Herder, who accepted Vico's point of view, poetry could be used to explain history—to get otherwise unobtainable data about past epochs. Applying Vico's thesis to the Bible, Herder concluded that the creation story in Genesis was a glossing dealing with the institution of the Sabbath, that the Song of Solomon was a collection of folksongs of Solomonic antiquity, and that Revelations was, as Robert T. Clark puts it, merely “the historical reaction of the aged Apostle John to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans—which John might conceivably have seen—and an application of images from the prophecies and from this terrible event to the Second Coming” (Clark 1955, 163, 255–57, 269). Thus from these Biblical folk poems it was possible to learn a great deal about past events. In the same way, argued Herder, Germans could learn the events of their own history by studying the folk poems that still survived among the peasants.

Still more important, Vico claimed that folk poetry reflected the sociocultural pattern of the society in which it originated. Homer, he said, was nothing more than a projection of Greece—a disguised name for the people. He

composed the *Iliad* in his youth, that is, when Greece was young and consequently seething with sublime passions, such as pride, wrath, and lust for vengeance, passions which do not tolerate dissimulation but which love magnanimity; and hence this Greece admired Achilles, the hero of violence. But he wrote the *Odyssey* in his old age, that is, when the spirits of Greece had been somewhat cooled by reflection, which is the mother of prudence, so that it admired Ulysses, the hero of wisdom. (1961, 270)

Thus “Homer was an idea or a heroic character of Grecian men insofar as they told their histories in song” (Vico 1961, 269), or, in the idiom of Herder, Homer was the summation of the national soul expressed in the poems of the folk.

This idea—that the national soul, or the cultural pattern, of a people expresses itself best in that people's folk poetry—is found everywhere in Herder. “Poetry,” he said, “is the expression of the weaknesses and perfections of a nationality, a mirror of its sentiments, the expression of the highest to which it aspired.” Folk poems he called “the archives of a nationality,” “the imprints of the soul” of a nation, “the living voice of the nationalities.” From them “one can learn the mode of thought of a nationality and its language of feeling” (1967–1968, 28: 137; 9: 532; 3: 29; 24: 266; 9: 530; Ergang 1966, 198, 220). What better place, then, could a man go to discover the soul of a nation than to its folk poetry?

But who were these “folk” poets whose poems were the key to national character? They were, said Herder, those who were organically one with their culture—those most in tune with the national soul. Through the free use of their imaginations and through reliance upon their emotions—instead of their

reason—they allowed the creative force of the folk character to work through them and thus became the producers of truly national poetry—poetry which bore the stamp of both the physical and cultural environment in which it had been created. Herder wrote:

To . . . chain and to interrogate the Proteus which is usually called national character and which manifests itself no less in writings than in usages and actions, this is a noble and fine philosophy. It is practised with greatest certainty in the works of poetry, i.e., of imagination and feeling, because in these the entire soul of a nation reveals itself most freely. (Gillies 1945, 105)

Folk poets, then, were national poets—the agents through whom the true character of a nation made itself manifest.

These folk poets, I must emphasize, did not have to be anonymous, nor did they have to speak from hoary antiquity. For Herder the only requirement was that the folk poet reflect the culture in which he lived. “The most indispensable explanation of a poet,” he insisted, “especially is the explanation of the customs of his age and nation” (Gillies 1945, 28). Homer and Shakespeare he considered two of history’s greatest folk poets because they had so adequately expressed their own nations in their poetry. Of Homer he wrote, in words strongly reminiscent of Vico, “I consider him the most successful poetic mind of his century, of his nation. . . . But I do not look for the source of his happy genius outside of his nature and of the age that shaped him” (1967–1968, 3: 202). Again he emphasized that the great folk poets of Greece—Homer, Aeschylus and Sophocles—had succeeded because they “wrote with a Greek pen, on Greek faith, for Greece” (1967–1968, 2: 114).

Herder would have been only too glad to turn to contemporary German folk poets to seek guidance for his country, but unfortunately there were none. With the exception of perhaps Klopstock, they had all bartered their German birthright for a mess of French pottage. For this reason it was essential to turn to the peasants, to those Germans who had remained the most unspoiled by foreign influence and who had kept on their lips those songs created by folk poets in the days when German culture had rested on its own foundation. Of these old poets, Herder said, they “are our fathers, their language the source of our language, and their unrefined songs the mirror of the ancient German soul” (1967–1968, 2: 246). In their works, then, lay the road to salvation.

As the above quotation indicates, folk poetry had still another value for Herder: it had retained the national language in its most perfect form. National language was extremely important because, according to Herder’s organic view of culture, only through it could one think naturally and respond to and express the national soul. “Every language,” he wrote, “has its definite national character, and therefore nature obliges us to learn only our native tongue, which is the

most appropriate to our character, and which is most commensurate with our way of thought” (1967–1968, 1: 2; Kohn 1967, 432–33; see also Herder 1967–1968, 1: 366; 2: 13, 19; 17: 286). Therefore, he argued that

a nation . . . has nothing more valuable than the language of its fathers. In it lives its entire spiritual treasury of tradition, history, religion, and principles of life, all its heart and soul. To deprive such a nation of its language, or to demean it, is to deprive it of its sole immortal possession transmitted from parents to children. (1967–1968, 17: 58)

But, unfortunately, the language of the fathers had been demeaned. Latin and French instruction in the schools and the general use of French by members of polite society had, as has been pointed out, so loaded it down with cumbersome foreignisms that it was hardly recognizable. Only in folk poetry had it retained the pristine beauty found in the literature of the Middle Ages. Hence only to this earlier literature or to folk poetry could the poet wishing to remain true to the idiom of the fathers go for inspiration.

Much of the stimulation for Herder’s work with folk poetry came from his reading of Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and James Macpherson’s fraudulent *Poems of Ossian*, both of which were published in England in 1765. These works—particularly the Ossianic poems—convinced Herder that the earliest Celts, Germans, and Norsemen (at first no distinction was made between these races) had possessed cultural values equal to those of the Greeks (Clark 1955, 144, 194–95). English literature had become great—and consequently also the English nation—because it had developed continuously out of these ancient cultural values. For example, Shakespeare had, believed Herder, based many of his works on ancient popular ballads, stories, and myths (see Gillies 1937). On the other hand, German literature—and so too the German nation—had languished because German poets, unlike the English, had ceased to remain true to their native traditions. Herder said:

From ancient times we have absolutely no living poetry on which our newer poetic art might grow as a branch upon the national stem. Other nations have progressed with the centuries and have developed on their own foundations, . . . from the beliefs and tastes of the people, from the remains of the past. In this way their literature and language have become national. The voice of the people has been used and cherished, and they have in these matters acquired a much larger public than we have. We poor Germans have been destined from the beginning never to be ourselves, always the lawgivers and servants of foreign nations, the directors of their fate and their bartered, bleeding, impoverished slaves. (1967–1968, 9: 528)

It was in emulation of the success of the English, then, that Herder began his campaign to revive his nation's past and to make it the basis for a new German literature and a new German way of life. The first and most important step in this campaign was to collect and publish the surviving folk poetry—"to make available," as Gillies says, "the lost treasures of the past as a foundation for future writers to build upon; to bring about in contemporary Germany a set of literary conditions similar to those of Elizabethan England, out of which new Shakespeares and Spensers might grow" (Gillies 1945, 52). With the taking of this step, European folklore scholarship was officially begun.

Herder made one of his first pleas to collect folklore in 1773 in an essay called "Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker" (1967–1968, 5: 159–207). The essay awakened an immediate interest in folklore and inspired G. A. Brüger to write his *Herzensguss über Volkpoesie*, published in 1776. Then in 1777 in his essay "Von Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst," Herder wrote a moving call to arms:

Great empire! Empire of ten peoples, Germany! You have no Shakespeare. Have you also no songs of your forebears of which you can boast? Swiss, Swabians, Franks, Bavarians, Westphalians, Saxons, Wends, Prussians—have all of you together nothing? The voice of your fathers has faded and lies silent in the dust. Nation of heroic customs, of noble virtues and language, you have no impressions of your soul from the past?

Without doubt they once existed and perchance still do, but they lie under the mire, unrecognized and despised. . . . Lend a hand then, my brothers, and show our nation what it is and is not, how it thought and felt or how it thinks and feels. (1967–1968, 9: 530–31)

In typical form, Herder set an excellent example for his countrymen by answering his own call. As a young man he had begun collecting folk poems and had continued the practice over the years. In 1778 and 1779 he published part of these poems in his now famous *Volklieder* (after his death retitled by his editors *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*). This work, along with his continued admonitions to save the nation's old literature, finally overcame the opposition of those who looked with scorn on songs of the "common" people, and folklore collecting began in earnest.

Two of the first to respond to Herder's call were Friedrich David Gräter and Christian Gottfried Böckh who, inspired by Herder's writings, founded a periodical called *Bragur, ein literarisches Magazin für deutsche and nordische Vergangenheit*, which was dedicated to the collection and publication of folklore. In the ensuing years others joined the cause. In 1803 Ludwig Tieck published *Minnelieder aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitalter*. From 1805 to 1808 Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim published three volumes of folksongs entitled *Des*

*Knaben Wunderhorn: alte deutsche Lieder*. In 1807 Josef Görres published the results of his studies of almanacs and old storybooks. In 1812 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm edited ancient fragments of the *Hildebrandslied* and the *Weissenbrunner Gebet* and then from 1812 to 1815 published their famous collection of folktales, *Kinder-und-Hausmärchen*. In 1815 they brought out a volume of the Poetic Eddas and from 1816 to 1818 published *Deutsche Sagen*, an analysis of the oldest Germanic epic tradition. Jacob Grimm's attitude toward his material is typical of the period and shows the strong influence of Herder. He wrote:

Having observed that her Language, Laws and Antiquities were greatly underrated, I was wishful to exalt my native land. . . . Perhaps my books will have more influence in a quiet happy time which will come back some day; yet they ought to belong to the present too, which I cannot think of without our Past reflecting its radiance upon it, and on which the Future will avenge any depreciation of the olden time. (Grimm 1883, iv)

From the time of the Grimms on, folklore collecting continued unabated and with increasing enthusiasm.

As Herder had hoped it would, the folk poetry revival moved German literature away from the rationalism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, which Herder believed had led to a sterile uniformity, and based it on the irrational and creative force of the people. He had once said that unless our literature is based on the folk, "we shall have no public, no nation, no language, and no poetry of our own. . . . We shall write forever for chamber scholars and disgusting critics from whose mouths and stomachs we get back what we have written" (1967–1968, 9: 529). But now the longed-for day had arrived. Men like Novalis and Fichte steeped themselves in folk traditions and wrote literary *Märchen* and ballads. And the young Goethe, who was to set the tone for many others, learned from Herder that German literature, to become great, must derive its inspiration and form from the poetry which had survived from the nation's own past. At Herder's insistence, Goethe even collected folksongs and, as Gillies says, "learned to listen through them to the voice of nature from which they sprang" (1945, 19).

The first literary men to follow Herder's footsteps were the members of the *Sturm und Drang* school. Like Herder, they revolted against the authority of the Enlightenment and stressed spontaneity and originality, and, also like Herder, they considered the folk the principal source of genuine poetry. To them creative genius and *Volk* became almost synonymous. Shortly after the turn of the century the Romanticists also focused their attention on the folk. Under the leadership of men like Friedrich Schlegel, who was strongly influenced by Herder, they turned to the literature of the past—to medieval and to folk poetry—to find ideals for the present and future. And on the basis of this material they created a body of literature which—so they believed—once again

expressed the national soul, a literature to which a people seeking its national identity could turn for strength and inspiration.

We realize today, of course, that the past to which the followers of Herder turned was, for the most part, a mythic past, that the great and noble nation they wished to re-create was in the main the product of their own fruitful imaginations. But the important point to remember is that the people involved believed that there had once been such a Germany. And believing so, they made it so—that is, they actually created a new nation in the image of what they thought the old one had been. Looking back at this period some fifty years later, T. Benfey assessed the role folklore had played in the creation of this new Germany:

The recognition of the great value of the German folk song awakened an interest in the other creations and expressions of the German folk soul. With equal zeal, legends, fairy tales, manners and customs began to be investigated, collected, and studied. The influence of the folk soul upon the other fields of human development—law, state, religion, all forms of life—was recognized and traced. From this, assisted by many other factors, there arose not only an entirely new conception of the history of civilization, but above all a reverence and love for our people, such as had long been lost in Germany. The recognition that the individual must be rooted in his own people, that he must feel himself at one with it and with its spirit, and that only on this sod must he ripen to independence, blossomed into full consciousness, into shape and into active life. It became evident where they had erred and what ignominious consequences the lack of patriotism had incurred. The feeling of duty toward the nationality grew strong with the love for it. The whole people became engrossed in the idea of marshalling all its powers to regain the independence so nearly lost and to make secure its nationality by means of the re-establishment of its unity. (1869, 318)

The work of Herder had not been in vain.

The seed of nationalism planted by Herder bore fruit in many lands. The concept that each individual nation could contribute to the progress of humanity only by developing on its own cultural foundation was eagerly accepted by underdeveloped ethnic groups in central and eastern Europe. It meant “that each could feel a messianic quality within itself” (Gillies 1945, 129). Herder did all he could to engender this feeling and to make these groups nationally conscious, particularly by encouraging them to cultivate their own national literatures. In *Volkslieder* he again set the example by publishing folksongs from many other lands in addition to his German songs. In 1803 he announced his intention to publish a new collection of folk poems which were to be arranged

according to nationality and which, he hoped, would further the cause of humanity, but he died before he could complete the project. Throughout his life he insisted on the right of each nation to determine its own destiny in accord with its own innate potentialities.

Perhaps Herder's influence was strongest among the Slavs, whose origins he idealized and whose folk poetry he greatly admired. He frequently urged the collection of this poetry, along with old customs and traditions, that the gap between past and present might be spanned and that the Slavic nations might then go on to a glorious future. Herder's works were published in the Slavic countries in both the original German and in translation and were instrumental in stimulating Slavic patriotism. As A. Fischel says, Herder is justly called "the real father of the renaissance of the Slavic peoples," for he "was the creator of their philosophy of culture. They saw the course of their historical development up to the present with his eyes, they drew from his promises the certainty of their future high destiny" (Ergang 1966, 261).

The Slavs responded to Herder's call to action with great enthusiasm. A few examples will illustrate. In 1822 the Slovak Jan Kollar, who had studied at Jena and was thoroughly acquainted with Herder's philosophy, preached nationalistic sermons in Budapest. He pleaded for the creation of a common Slavic literature and urged the scattered peoples to unite and fulfill their mission. In 1834 and 1835 he published two volumes of folksongs. From 1823 to 1827 another Slovak, Pavel Josef Šafařík, published folksongs and in 1826 brought out his *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache and Literatur*. In 1822 the Czech Frantizšek Ladislav Čelakovský, a great admirer of Herder, published a collection of folksongs from the Slavic peoples. Like his teacher Herder, he claimed they expressed the true spirit of the Slavic nationality. In Serbia, folksongs were collected by Vuk Karadžić, and in Poland by Kazimierz Bordziński. Folk poems of the Cashubians, Ruthenians, and Ukrainians were also collected and studied. All this activity led to a literary nationalism which became pan-Slavic in scope. In Slavic lands, then, as in Germany, patriots sought goals for the future in their past; and they sought their past in their folklore.

But Herder's influence was by no means confined to Germany and to the Slavic countries. In Finland, which had become united with Russia in 1809, Herder's philosophy became the guiding light for a small group of patriotic intellectuals who, concerned over the possibility of a forced Russification of their language and culture, turned to their past to find strength for the future. One of this group said, in words that sound as though they were copied directly from Herder:

No independent nation can exist without folk poetry. Poetry is nothing more than the crystal in which a nationality can mirror itself; it is the spring which brings to the surface the truly original in the folk soul. (Wuorinen 1931, 69)

Another argued that if Finns would collect their folk poems and work them into an organized whole “a new Homer, Ossian, or *Nibelungenlied*” might be the result; and, “exalted, the Finnish nationality, in the luster and glory of its own uniqueness and adorned with the awareness of its own development, would arouse the admiration of the present and of the future” (Gottlund 1817, 394). In 1835 Elias Lönnrot fulfilled this prophecy with the publication of the epic *Kalevala*, which he created from his huge collection of folk poems. In the following years, Finnish patriots attempted to restore to the Finnish people, who had been divided and suppressed by years of foreign domination, the national characteristics and cultural values depicted in the epic.

In Norway, during the middle of the nineteenth century, much the same story was repeated. For centuries the country had been under either Danish or Swedish domination. Now it was time, argued a small group of romantic nationalists, for Norwegians to be Norwegians. The influence of the Enlightenment and the infiltration of foreign influences had, they believed, corrupted large sections of the population, causing them to abandon native traditions and to lose contact with the national Idea. Only among the peasants, who were considered the custodians of the national character, could the traditions of the fathers be found. Hence it was to these traditions that the nation must turn for its salvation. Oscar J. Falnes sums up the feeling of the time with phrases that bear the strong imprint of Herder:

No part of the peasant's heritage gave such adequate expression to nationality as his literary tradition; it was considered preeminent in this respect partly because it was related so intimately to the folk character. The folk tales, it was said, had “grown organically” from within the peculiarity of each people, they were the clearest revelation of the folk spirit. The folk-literature having sprung from the people's “innermost uniqueness” belonged “to us and to no one else”; in it was enshrined the “soul of the nation.” (1933, 250)

To recapture this national soul and to put the country back on its own cultural foundation, scholars began seriously to collect and publish folklore. From 1841 to 1844 P. C. Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe published their collection of folktales, *Norske Folke-eventyr*. In 1845 and 1848 Asbjørnsen published a collection of fairy tales and folk legends, *Norske Huldre-eventyr og Folkesagen*. And in 1852 L. Lanstad published his famous collection of folk ballads, *Norske Folkeviser*. These works were generally received with enthusiasm, particularly by the press, and helped convince the people that Norway had had a glorious past and that by reviving the spirit of this past the nation could have an equally glorious future. To this task the nationalists dedicated themselves in the years to come.

Though Herder himself is now remembered mostly by specialists, his philosophy of history lives on. The list of nations in which this philosophy has

inspired, or is still inspiring, romantic nationalistic movements could be greatly extended, but in each case the story would be about the same. Whenever nations turn to their folkloristic past to find faith in themselves and courage for the future, they are following lines laid down by Herder.

That romantic nationalism is, by definition, a folklore movement should by now be obvious. As we have seen, Herder taught that each nation is by nature and by history a distinct organic unit with its own unique culture; that a nation, to survive as a nation, as well as to contribute to the development of humanity as a whole, must cultivate this national culture, developing it along lines laid down by past experience; that the total cultural and historical pattern of a people—the national soul—is expressed best in folk poetry; and that should the continuity of a nation's development be interrupted, the only road to salvation lies in collecting the folk poetry surviving from the time of the break, using it to restore to the nation its national soul, and thus making possible its future development on its own foundation.

Romantic nationalists, then, like English-American folklorists, have studied folklore items as survivals from the past. But while the latter have been content merely to work out historical reconstructions based on these survivals, the former have attempted not only to reconstruct the past, but also to revive it—to make it the model for the development of their nations. Having once achieved their goals, they have often moved on to other endeavors, but their past accomplishments have remained to inspire other dependent nations seeking historical justification for their separatist policies. Consequently the same stirring phrases about glorious national pasts and noble destinies that once moved Europeans to action are today to be heard echoing throughout Africa and Asia. Those who see folklore not just as a body of tradition to be classified and catalogued but also as a dynamic force in the lives of men would do well to study and learn from the nationalistic movements of the past century; for it appears that for some time to come the story of nationalism will continue to be an oft-told story and that folklore will remain one of its most important chapters.