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The Rhine Crisis of 1840: *Rheinlieder*,
German Nationalism, and the Masses

by Lorie A. Vanchena

2000

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“The Rhine Crisis of 1840: Rheinlieder, German Nationalism, and the Masses.” In *Searching for Common Ground: Diskurse zur deutschen Identität 1750-1871*, edited by Nicholas Vazsonyi. Weimar: Böhlau 2000. 239-51.

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Searching for Common Ground

Diskurse zur deutschen
Identität 1750–1871

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The Rhine Crisis of 1840: *Rheinlieder*, German Nationalism, and the Masses

Lorie A. Vanchena

France's threat in 1840 to reestablish the Rhine as its eastern border proved central to the formation of German national consciousness and identity in the nineteenth century. The Rhine crisis generated intense anti-French, patriotic fervor in the German territories that extended well beyond the Rhineland. One expression of this nationalist sentiment was the poetry written as a direct response to the crisis, the countless *Rheinlieder*. These poems, including those critical of the *Rheinliedbewegung*, functioned as a medium of public debate about the crisis with France. Constituting a literary, journalistic, and political phenomenon, the poems enjoyed widespread popularity and resonance among the German public. The periodic press in particular served as a vehicle for disseminating these poems, thus enabling them to become part of the public dialog on the historical developments they addressed. The *Rheinlieder* exerted considerable influence on the political climate and the imagining of a united Germany in the nineteenth century.¹

The Rhine crisis actually began in the Ottoman Empire during late 1831, when Mehemet Ali, viceroy of Egypt and vassal of Sultan Mahmud II of Turkey, invaded Syria. The Sultan declared war against Mehemet Ali twice, but suffered defeat in April 1832 and again in April 1839. France, seeking to strengthen its presence in North Africa, attempted to secure the viceroy as a future ally by supporting his claims to Syria, but clashed with the aims of the other major European powers – England, Russia, Austria, and Prussia – who wanted to protect the Sultan and the Turkish Empire against the viceroy's expansionist aims. France's policy ultimately failed to influence the negotiations, and on 15 July 1840 the four Great Powers and Turkey, acting without

1 The role of political poetry in shaping German national consciousness in 1840 is the focus of Chapter 2 in: Lorie A. Vanchena, *Political Poetry in Periodicals and the Shaping of German National Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 43-62. Accompanying the book is a CD-ROM that contains several of the poems discussed in this article; for these texts, both the original source and the poem number on the CD-ROM are provided in the footnotes.

France, signed a Convention demanding that Mehemet Ali withdraw from northern Syria or face military retaliation.²

The French government, led by president and foreign minister Adolphe Thiers, denounced the Convention as an insult to French national pride, one that recalled the punitive measures enacted by the anti-French coalition at the Congress of Vienna. News of the Convention unleashed strong public protest in France from both the leftist and conservative press. Desperately wanting to deflect the attention of the French away from this foreign policy debacle, Thiers conducted what Bury and Tombs refer to as a “calculated policy of sabre rattling.”³ His strategy included raising an issue that found immediate and enthusiastic support among the French: the Rhine. Thiers announced plans to reestablish the river as France’s natural eastern border, as it had been before the Congress of Vienna pushed the border back to where it had been in 1792. He in part was seeking to harness patriotic sentiment reawakened in January 1840 by the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine who, in a speech to the Chambers, had declared that France should reclaim the left bank of the Rhine. The transfer of Napoleon’s remains from St. Helena to Paris had also stirred memories among the public of France’s glorious military past.⁴ Thiers and his diplomats suggested that implementing the Convention could lead to war along the Rhine. To lend credibility to the threat, the government mobilized the French army, strengthened garrisons, and started building defenses for Paris. The French leftist press, which had dubbed the incident a “diplomatic Waterloo,” helped underscore the sense of looming conflict.⁵

The German reaction, evident among all social classes, soon recalled the intense nationalistic, anti-French sentiment prevalent during the Wars of Liberation. The shared border between France and the western German states had shifted many times, making the Rhine a contentious issue. Moreover, the river constituted a powerful symbol of German identity, particularly at a time

2 For extensive discussions of the Rhine crisis, see F.R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1815-1914* (New York: Longman, 1980), 55-56, 61-64; William L. Langer, *Political and Social Upheaval 1832-1852* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 285-306; J.P.T. Bury and R.P. Tombs, *Thiers 1797-1877: A Political Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 66-79; Werner Deetjen, *Sie sollen ihn nicht haben! Tatsachen und Stimmungen aus dem Jahre 1840* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1920), 5-12.

3 Bury and Tombs, *Thiers*, 70.

4 Horst Johannes Tümmers, *Der Rhein: Ein europäischer Fluß und seine Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1994), 223.

5 Heinrich Lutz, *Zwischen Habsburg und Preußen: Deutschland 1815-1866* (Berlin: Siedler, 1985), 200; Rainer Koch, *Deutsche Geschichte 1815-1848: Restauration oder Vormärz?* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985), 233; Theodor Schieder, *Vom deutschen Bund zum Deutschen Reich 1815-1871* (Munich: dtv, 1975), 63.

when a unified Germany did not yet exist. Even liberals who, as recently as 1830, had recognized France as the vanguard of liberalism, condemned French claims to the Rhine as unjust.⁶ The political developments of 1840 unleashed a public reaction that became a nationalistic mass movement, one that helped overcome particularism in the German territories, if only temporarily. This nationalism radicalized as the fear of war grew and the inadequacy of the German Confederation's military preparations became evident; the sense of a shared German fate, of belonging to a single nation, spread.⁷ Southern liberal newspapers declared the crisis to be of consequence for all Germans; even Austria and Prussia collaborated on a military plan of action.⁸

However, British, Austrian, and Russian troops defeated Mehemet Ali in October 1840, rendering French threats irrelevant. Although the war against France never took place, the German reaction to the crisis remained evident for several months, particularly in the periodic press. German poets also championed the cause of the Rhine, inundating the German public arena with *Rheinlieder*, which both reflected and helped generate an impassioned outburst of nationalism. As Manfred Püschner argues, the *Rheinlieder* constituted one of the most direct expressions of this nationalist movement in the early 1840s.⁹ These poems soon became a genuine popular movement in their own right, functioning as a medium of public debate, an influential and important voice among those shaping German national consciousness.¹⁰

Cultural and social developments along the Rhine had helped create propitious conditions for the *Rheinliedbewegung*. The *Rheinromantik* extolled by writers such as Friedrich Schlegel, Achim von Arnim, and Clemens Brentano in the early 1800s was still thriving in the 1830s and 1840s.¹¹ Many artists, including Carl Gustav Carus, Caspar Nepomuk Johann Scheuren, and Johann Ludwig Bleuler, also propagated the Romantic vision of the river in their paintings. Bleuler's *Der Loreley-Felsen bei St. Goarshausen am Rhein* (ca.

6 See Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 45.

7 Koch, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 232.

8 Hagen Schulze, *Der Weg zum Nationalstaat: Die deutsche Nationalbewegung vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Reichsgründung* (Munich: dtv, 1985), 80; Otto Dann, *Nationalismus und sozialer Wandel* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1987), 114; Schieder, *Vom deutschen Bund*, 64; David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 96.

9 Manfred Püschner, "Die Rheinkrise von 1840/41 und die antifeudale Oppositionsbewegung," *Bourgeoisie und bürgerliche Umwälzung in Deutschland 1789-1871*, Schriften des Zentralinstituts für Geschichte 50 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977), 101-34, here 107.

10 Irmline Veit-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise von 1840: Studien zur deutschen Einheitsbewegung* (Cologne: Kleinkamp, 1967), 131. See also Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 46-47.

11 See Tümmers, *Der Rhein*, 209-212.

1840), for example, typifies the landscape paintings of the Rhine popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. It depicts a single fisherman standing in a boat near the bank of the river, tending to his nets; other boats, lanterns glowing in the dusk, dot the river's surface. Bleuler worked on a series of 80 drawings, topographically accurate studies of the Rhine from its source to its mouth, until 1843.¹² Such works of art are credited with increasing tourism along the Rhine, a phenomenon also aided by improvements in transportation. The first steamship company, founded in Cologne by Prussia and the Rhineland in 1827, allowed for a steady flow of passenger traffic from Rotterdam to Cologne and later to Mainz, making the Rhine a tourist attraction to a degree experienced by no other European river.¹³

In 1840 many German poets found inspiration in the river and its mythology, landscape, and history, even before the actual outbreak of the Rhine crisis in July. For example, "Der Rhein," published 14 March 1840, personifies the river as a wise, old man. Drawing strength from the grapes, ruins, and songs found in its hills, the Rhine flows mightily through its rich landscape, unencumbered by the history of armies that had crossed it in the past. The final stanza seems almost premonitory: "Es hat manch rohes Heer / Mit Füßen tretend Dich verhöhnt; / Nicht Lasten sind Dir schwer – / Die Zeit hat Dich an Druck gewöhnt!"¹⁴ These verses suggest that Lamartine's speech in early 1840 had raised the possibility of armed conflict with France months before Thiers would concretize the threat. Adolf Bube's poem "Seyd einig, Deutsche!" which appeared 18 June 1840, also raises the specter of a war with the western neighbor: "Seyd einig, müßt ihr Druck und Nacht befahren, / Mit Gut und Blut, in ernstest Waffentänzen / Licht, Wahrheit, Recht und Freiheit zu bewahren!"¹⁵

"Der deutsche Rhein," written in the fall of 1840 by Nikolaus Becker, a court clerk in Cologne, is perhaps the most famous *Rheinlied*.¹⁶ The poem and its remarkable history exemplify how poetry influenced the German political

12 Anna Czarnocka, "Johann Ludwig Bleuler," in: *Marianne und Germania 1789-1889: Frankreich und Deutschland. Zwei Welten – Eine Revue*, ed. Marie-Louise von Plessen (Berlin: Argon, 1996), 334. Bleuler's series of Rhine landscapes was titled "Le voyage pittoresque des bords du Rhin et de la Suisse."

13 Marie-Louise von Plessen, "Rheinlied und Dichterstreit," in: *Marianne und Germania*, 327; Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 26. See also Tümmers, *Der Rhein*, 194.

14 Bernstein, "Der Rhein," *Frankfurter Konversationsblatt* 74 (14 March 1840): 293; CD-ROM: poem 1.

15 Adolf Bube, "Seyd einig, Deutsche!" *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* 146 (18 June 1840): 583; CD-ROM: poem 13.

16 Nikolaus Becker, "Der deutsche Rhein," *Frankfurter Konversationsblatt* 305 (4 November 1840): 1220; CD-ROM: poem 5.

climate in 1840 and in the decades to follow. As Veit-Brause argues, the resonance enjoyed by Becker's poem also demonstrates that by 1840 the social basis of the nationalist movement had expanded beyond liberal, intellectual circles to include the masses.¹⁷ The Germans' enthusiastic reception of Becker's poem also helped ensure that the verses would remain part of the public consciousness long after the crisis with France had been resolved.

Becker draws on traditional, Romantic images associated with the Rhine to argue that the river should remain German, as evident in the third and fourth stanzas of his poem:

Sie sollen ihn nicht haben
Den freien deutschen Rhein,
So lang sich Herzen laben
An seinem Feuerwein.

So lang in seinem Strome
Noch fest die Felsen stehn,
So lang sich hohe Dome
In seinem Spiegel sehn.

His poetic depictions of oars striking the waves, a fish raising a fin in the riverbed, or bold lads courting slender lasses are less specific to the Rhine landscape and, indeed, have motivated critics since 1840 to judge the text as "literarisch wie gedanklich unerheblich" and "bestenfalls durchschnittliche, durchweg klischeeüberladene Lyrik."¹⁸ The court clerk's imagery nevertheless contributes to the folk-song character of the poem which, together with the simple rhyme scheme (iambic trimeter) and singability of the text, certainly helped this *Rheinlied* attain an astounding degree of popularity in 1840.¹⁹

First published in the *Trierische Zeitung* on 18 September 1840, "Der deutsche Rhein" immediately took the public arena by storm. According to Hagen Schulze, every German newspaper printed it within only one month.²⁰ Conradin Kreutzer, a music director in Cologne, sold 1200 copies of his musical arrangement for the text in less than two days; other professional and amateur composers submitted hundreds of arrangements to competitions announced in the periodic press. Becker's poem inspired residents in his hometown of Geilenkirchen to organize a torch-lit parade in his honor, and the poem also

17 Veit-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise*, 130.

18 Schulze, *Weg*, 81; Wilhelm Gössmann and Klaus-Hinrich Roth, eds., *Poetisierung – Politisierung. Deutschlandbilder in der Literatur bis 1848* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), 162.

19 Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 49.

20 Schulze, *Weg*, 81.

accompanied numerous public occasions. Ludolf Camphausen, president of Cologne's chamber of commerce, read the text during a speech he gave on national unity at the dedication of the new Mannheim harbor – a clear indication that the liberal businessman and his audience connected the poem with the idea of a German nation state.²¹

Tümmers correctly observes that the widespread popularity of the poem among the German masses helped transform – almost overnight – the fear of war into a wave of intense patriotism.²² Becker undoubtedly viewed his writing of the text as a patriotic, political act. He penned it after reading an article on the Rhine crisis printed in the *Augsburger Allgemeine*. When the *Rheinisches Jahrbuch* published the poem in 1840, Becker preceded it with the line “An Alphonse de Lamartine.”²³ A text accompanying the poem in the *Frankfurter Konversationsblatt* of 4 November 1840 affirms the success of “Der deutsche Rhein” while attributing an important political function to such poetry:

Das Lied erschalle den Anwohnern des Rheines als ein Ruf zu rechter Zeit, und den deutschen Dichtern, die ein Herz haben für das Vaterland und die da wissen, was die höchste Aufgabe der jetzigen Lyrik ist, als eine Mahnung, zu singen und zu sagen, was die Gegenwart erhebt und zu einer großen Zukunft Deutschland's führt.²⁴

The writer was not the only contemporary observer to recognize the potential of the *Rheinlieder* to influence political conditions in the German territories; major political figures also embraced the patriotic sentiment expressed by this poetry. In October 1840 Becker's poem was sung in Cologne at the birthday celebration of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who later offered its author an honorarium of 1000 taler. King Ludwig I of Bavaria presented Becker with a silver cup engraved with “Der Pfalzgraf des Rheins dem Sänger des Rheins.”²⁵

In his review of “Der deutsche Rhein,” published in the Young Hegelian journal *Hallische Jahrbücher für Deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, editor Arnold Ruge clearly did not expect the poem to have any long-term significance. He nonetheless considered it a manifestation of a rebirth, although a weak one, of the German political spirit: “Sie ist ein Heraustreten des politischen Geistes

21 Veit-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise*, 122-23, 126.

22 Tümmers, *Der Rhein*, 223.

23 Deetjen, *Sie sollen*, 14.

24 Becker, “Der deutsche Rhein,” 1,220.

25 Christian Petzet, *Die Blütezeit der deutschen politischen Lyrik von 1840 bis 1850: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur- und Nationalgeschichte* (Munich: J.F. Lehmann, 1903), 18. Becker's moment in the spotlight proved relatively brief; a volume of his poetry published in 1841, *Gedichte von Nikolaus Becker*, failed to find an audience. Becker died only four years later, on 28 August 1845, at the age of thirty-six.

der Deutschen aus jener langjährigen Interesselosigkeit und Philisterei, in welche er sich durch die offizielle Abkühlung der Freiheitsbegeisterung von 1813 und 1815 gestürzt sah."²⁶ Significantly, Ruge notes an important contradiction between the nature of the nationalism embodied in the poem and the political role attributed to it by many Germans: "[...] seine friedliche und negative Begeisterung, seine mehr spielende als auch nur entfernt kriegerische Bewegung, sein gänzlicher Mangel an einem feurigen Freiheitsdrange [reicht] nicht aus, um die Bestimmung auszufüllen, die man ihm zu geben sucht."²⁷

As Ruge observed, the poem's tone is hardly oppositional in terms of German politics in 1840, a fact that does partially explain its popularity and why even absolutist rulers eagerly employed the text for their own purposes.²⁸ As Jonathan Sperber notes, Prussian authorities not only tolerated but also actively supported performances of the *Rheinlieder*, "since they presented their state in its existing, authoritarian form, as the bulwark of Germany against a radical France."²⁹ Censors who had previously sought to hinder any expression of liberal, oppositional nationalism that could be deemed threatening to the existing political order now allowed Becker's poem and hundreds like it to be printed, read, and performed.³⁰ According to Robert Prutz, even the police tolerated the song: "[Das Lied] wurde jetzt öffentlich auf allen Straßen, in allen Kneipen betoastet und besungen: und die Gendarmen selbst schlugen den Takt dazu."³¹ In 1840 many considered the poem to be the German national anthem, even referring to it as the "Deutsche Marseillaise"; the conservative brand of nationalism in Becker's poem, however, actually contrasts sharply with the revolutionary character of the French anthem.³²

The considerable influence exerted by Becker's poem on the German political mood in the 1840s is evidenced in part by the countless *Rheinlieder* it inspired. Numerous poems disseminated among the German public by means of the periodic press or anthologies are dedicated to Becker or make explicit references to his immensely popular poem. "Dem Dichter des Rheinliedes," one of over 70 poems in the anthology *Klänge aus der Zeit: Hervorgerufen durch die neuesten politischen Ereignisse und zunächst durch das Becker'sche Rheinlied*,

26 Arnold Ruge, (review) "Rheinlied von Nic. Becker; Der Rhein: Gedicht von R.E. Prutz," *Hallische Jahrbücher für Deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst* 311 (12 December 1840): 2485-88.

27 Ruge, "Rheinlied," 2,485-86.

28 Viet-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise*, 134.

29 Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-49* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 114.

30 Püschner, "Die Rheinkrise," 105.

31 Robert Prutz, *Zehn Jahre: Geschichte der neuesten Zeit. 1840-1850* (Leipzig: Weber, 1850-56), 1:305.

32 Sperber, *Rhineland*, 114.

begins by quoting the entire last stanza of "Der deutsche Rhein"; it then praises both the poet and his poem for mobilizing the Germans for a war against France: "Und gilt es einst zu streiten, / Zu sterben für den Rhein, / Dein Lied wird uns geleiten, / Zum Sieg die Losung sein."³³ Transforming a quote from Ernst Moritz Arndt's "Des Deutschen Vaterland," the poet furthermore confirms that the influence of Becker's verses extended well beyond the Rhine: "So schallt's an seinem Strande, / So weit er deutsch sich nennt; / So schallt's in jedem Lande / Das deutsche Treu bekennt!"³⁴ J.G. Keller, in his song of praise "An Nicolaus Becker," defines the area in which Becker's poem resonated by what he holds to be Germany's natural borders: "Vom Rhein zu den Karpathen, / Vom Brenner bis zum Belt / Hat's uns zum Sang geladen, / Der Feindes Ohr durchgellt." Keller also believes that Becker's *Rheinlied* would accompany the Germans in battle against the French: "Es kling' im Schlachtgewühle / Dein gottbegeistert Lied, / In schönem Hochgeföhle, / Wenn uns auch Tod umzieht."³⁵ A third poem, "An Nic. Becker," argues in nationalistic terms that the French could not possibly squelch German freedom: "Und wenn sie [die Franzosen] ihn auch hätten, / Den freien deutschen Rhein: / Das könnten keine Ketten / Für deutsche Freiheit seyn."³⁶ Otto Müller's "Des Rheines Hort" begins with a variation of Becker's verses: "Ja ja, sie sollen ihn haben, / Den Rhein, so weit er fließt; / Doch erst, wenn keine deutsche / Kehle mehr durstig ist."³⁷ While the first line reveals impatience with Becker's poem, Müller also cites the river's wine culture as a reason for keeping the Rhine in German hands. But Müller's poem has a more aggressive tone, with the impending war appearing as a realistic outcome of the political crisis with France: "Vom Gotthard bis zum Meere / Wallt dann die stolze Flut. / Nicht 'deutscher Rhein' mehr heißt sie, / Dann heißt sie: 'Deutsches Blut.'"³⁸

These poets, in establishing an explicit link between their texts and Becker's, contributed to the formation of a literary phenomenon that constituted a collective, political voice in the public debate on the Rhine crisis and on

33 [Anon.], "Dem Dichter des Rheinliedes." *Klänge aus der Zeit: Hervorgerufen durch die neuesten politischen Ereignisse und zunächst durch das Becker'sche Rheinlied*, Z. Funck, comp. and ed. (Erlangen: Palm, 1841), 6.

34 Ernst Moritz Arndt, "Des Deutschen Vaterland," in: *Gedichte: Vollständige Sammlung* (Leipzig: Pfau, 1982), 18-22: "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland? / So nenne mir das große Land! / So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt / Und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt, / Das soll es sein! / Das, wackrer Deutscher, nenne dein!"

35 J. G. Keller, "An Nicolaus Becker," Funck, *Klänge*, 7-8.

36 [Anon.], "An Nic. Becker," Funck, *Klänge*, 12.

37 Otto Müller, "Des Rheines Hort," *Frankfurter Konversationsblatt* 306 (5 November 1840): 1224; CD-ROM: poem 306.

38 Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 55.

German identity. In 1840 and 1841, however, many poets and writers from the left of the political spectrum dissented from the dominant public opinion, finding fault with “Der deutsche Rhein” and the *Rheinliedbewegung*.³⁹ Wary of the intensely chauvinistic, anti-French sentiment evident in this poetry, its critics feared that the blind patriotism and conservative nationalism espoused in such literature could deflect attention and energy from more important domestic political issues.⁴⁰ An article published in September 1841 in the *Hallische Jahrbücher*, “Die politische Bedeutung des Rheinliedes von Niclas Becker,” addresses one aspect of this problem:

Wenn man das Volk das Beckersche Rheinlied singen hörte, hätte man nicht glauben sollen, Deutschland wäre vollgepfropft von Patrioten und Vaterlands-
liebe strömte dort über und dränge aus allen Poren heraus? Täuscht Euch nicht;
es giebt keine Vaterlands-
liebe in Deutschland, denn es giebt dort kein Vater-
land.⁴¹

Many liberals also felt anti-French hatred was an unworthy accompaniment to German nationalist political efforts, as evident in Ellissen’s review of Prutz’s poetry, in which he deplores the anti-French rhetoric: “Das Beckersche, wie wir gern glauben wollen von reinem Patriotismus dictirt, der sich aber leider nur in der beliebten Form schnaubenden Franzosenhasses kund zu geben wußte [...]”⁴² Karl Gutzkow, who refused to publish Becker’s text in his journal, *Telegraph für Deutschland*, questioned the wisdom of basing German patriotism upon anti-French sentiment, writing in the foreword to Ferdinand Freimund’s satirical play about Nikolaus Becker: “Nicht jede Wahrheit, die ersprießlich im Munde des Einen ist, ist auch ersprießlich im Munde des Andern.”⁴³

Robert Prutz, originally an advocate of the nationalism embodied by “Der deutsche Rhein,” soon became one of its harshest critics. In condemning Becker’s poem, he also took aim at the Germans whose enthusiasm had made it a popular hit: “Bald flog es von Stadt zu Stadt; gerade was die Schwäche des Liedes war, sein bloß negativer Inhalt, seine bloße triviale Versicherung, daß man sich nicht nehmen lassen wolle, was man habe, machte sein Glück: es war so ganz das Pathos des damaligen deutschen Publikums!”⁴⁴ Prutz’s strongest

39 Schulze, *Weg*, 82.

40 Veit-Bräuse, *Die deutsch-französische Krise*, 207.

41 [Anon.], “Die politische Bedeutung des Rheinliedes von Niclas Becker,” *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst* 74 (25 September 1841): 294.

42 A. Ellissen, (review) “Gedichte von Robert Prutz,” *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst* 116 (13 November 1841): 465. See also Püschner, “Die Rheinkrise,” 114.

43 Karl Gutzkow, “Vorwort,” *Sie sollen ihn nicht haben, oder des Dichters Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft: Eine Farce*. Freimund Pfeiffer (Bremen: Geisler, 1841), 3-4.

44 Prutz, *Zehn Jahre*, 3:304.

criticism of the *Rheinliedbewegung* is found in one of his own poems, “Der Rhein”; published in 1841 by Otto Wigand in Leipzig, it quickly became a success. Although it did not achieve the resonance enjoyed by Becker’s poem, over six thousand copies sold in just a few weeks – evidence that in the early 1840s different types of nationalist voices were being heard among those shaping the German political climate. Ellissen compares the two poems in his review from 1841, noting that Prutz’s poem served as a more sober counterpart to “Der deutsche Rhein”:

Weit entfernt von jener, wir möchten sagen, monströsen Popularität blieb das Rheinlied von Prutz, das, von eben so reiner und dabei unbefangener, geläuterter Vaterlandsliebe durchglüht, das freie Wort über den freien Rhein setzend und als dessen Bedingung hinstellend, wohl in den Herzen mancher gleichgesinnten geistesfreien Deutschen hellen freudigen Anklang fand, auf eine gleich enthusiastische Bewunderung jedoch von Seiten des großen Publicums schon vermöge seines größeren Umfangs, seiner abstractern Form und seiner Unsingbarkeit keinen Anspruch machen durfte.⁴⁵

Prutz distances himself from poets like Becker, reproving those *Rheinlied* poets who tried to copy Becker’s poem: “Ja wolltet Ihr erwägen und bedenken, / Welch stolzes Wort von Eurer Lippe kam, / Ihr müßtet ja die Augen nieder senken / Mit bittern Thränen, voller Zorn und Scham.”⁴⁶ Further, Prutz argues that the real battle is against not the French but those at home repressing freedom, particularly that of the press. Borrowing imagery from Becker’s text, he points out the uselessness of the *Rheinlieder* in winning the political battles facing the German populace: “Nicht jene Burgen würden niedersteigen, / Die Mädchen küssen, aber kämpfen nicht / Die stummen Fische, glaubt mir, würden schweigen, / Und Ruder brechen, wo ein Reich zerbricht.”

Other critical voices found expression in parodies of “Der deutsche Rhein” and the anti-French chauvinism it represented. The second stanza of “Jam satis!!!” points out the irony underlying the success of Becker’s poem: “Es schallt aus allen Ecken, / Es schreit aus Süd und Nord, / Man muß vor’m Lärm erschrecken, / Wenn auch kein Feind am Ort.”⁴⁷ On a similar note, the anonymous poem “An die neuen Franzosenfresser” does not criticize Becker so much as the masses singing the *Rheinlieder*: “Sie sollen ihn nicht haben / Den freien deutschen Rhein! / Doch müßt ihr nicht wie Knaben / Euch darum

45 Ellissen, “Gedichte,” 465.

46 Robert Prutz, *Gedichte: Neue Sammlung* (Zürich & Winterthur: Literarisches Comptoir, 1843), 36-37.

47 [Anon.], “Jam satis!!!” *Der Freischütz* 49 (5 December 1840): 769-70; CD-ROM: poem 10.

heiser schrei'n!"⁴⁸ The poem ends on an ironic note, bemoaning the uselessness of threatening the French: "Wie schön die Verse tönen: / Der Franke hört sie nicht!" In another parody, while the poet confirms that "wackre Knaben" and "Männerbaß" had joined in singing Becker's song, he sharply attacks the naive understanding of the Rhine crisis evident in Becker's poem: "Wir wunderbar bescheiden / Spricht nicht das Lied uns an: / Mehr wollen wir nicht leiden / Als was man uns gethan."⁴⁹ In "Der deutsche Rhein an die Poeten," C.H. W...n turns the tables by having the Rhine address the poets: "Daß sie mich noch nicht haben, / Dieß freut mich ungemein; / Doch mir mißfällt der Knaben / So sinnverwirrtes Schrei'n."⁵⁰

After 1840 the periodic press remained an effective vehicle for distributing *Rheinlieder* among the German public, enabling these texts to become part of the public debate on the political issues addressed in the poetry. Numerous poems published in newspapers and journals during the revolutions of 1848-49 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 borrow Becker's patriotic language and imagery to comment upon current political developments. In the spring of 1848, for example, many Austrians feared that nationalists in northern Italy would succeed in separating southern Tyrol from the German Confederation. Weller's "Tiroler-Lied," published in the Austrian journal *Carinthia* on 22 April 1848, imitates the initial verse of Becker's poem to take a stance on the issue of the Italian border: "Sie sollen sie nicht haben, / Des Brenners Scheidewand! / Sie sollen erst sich graben / Ihr Grab in unserm Land!"⁵¹ Another poem focuses on the Frankfurt National Assembly, after reactionary forces had reconquered both Berlin and Vienna in the fall of 1848, by admonishing readers to reject not only reactionary politicians but the reaction itself: "Wir wollen sie nicht haben, / So lang' noch unser Herz / Gedenkt, was wir begraben / Im Frühlingsmonat März!"⁵² In March 1848 Georg Herwegh also appropriated Becker's imagery of the greedy ravens to write a poem not about the French but about freedom of the press, which had just been declared in Prussia. "Das freie Wort!" transforms Becker's opening verse into an affirmation: "Sie sollen Alle singen / Nach ihres Herzens Lust; / Doch mir soll fürder klingen / Ein Lied nur aus der Brust."⁵³ "Aux armes citoyens!" published on the front page

48 [Anon.], "An die neuen Franzosenfresser," Funck, *Klänge*, 89-90.

49 [Anon.], "Der Rhein und die heutigen Rheinsänger," *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* 296 (11 December 1840): 1181-82; CD-ROM: poem 18.

50 C.H. W...n, "Der deutsche Rhein an die Poeten," Funck, *Klänge*, 90-91.

51 Weller, "Tiroler Lied," *Carinthia* 17 (22 April 1848): 69-70; CD-ROM: poem 104.

52 [Anon.], "Volkslied für die bevorstehenden Wahlversammlungen," *Freie Blätter: Illustrierte politisch-humoristische Zeitung* 54 (December 1848): 246-47; CD-ROM: poem 174.

53 Georg Herwegh, "Das freie Wort," *Hannoversches Volksblatt* 1 Beil. (18 March 1848): n. pag.

of *Der Industrielle Humorist* in June 1870, also imitates Becker's initial verse. Convinced that a representative parliament for a united Germany would be elected after the Franco-Prussian War, the poet states his expectations for those officials: "Sie sollen uns erringen / Der Freiheit Sacrament. / Sie sollen's uns erzwingen / Im neuen Parlament."⁵⁴ This last example illustrates that in 1870, Becker's poem was still being associated with the issue of German national identity.

The poems from 1848-49 and 1870-71 confirm not only that Becker's impact extended beyond the single historical moment of the Rhine crisis but that, in the ensuing decades, a poetic discourse emerged that built upon and revised its own traditions.⁵⁵ In this manner the *Rheinlieder* continued to influence the political climate in nineteenth-century Germany. A special edition of Becker's "Der deutsche Rhein" from 1898 provides further evidence of how this poem reflected national consciousness long after German unification had become a reality. A Berlin publisher commemorated Emperor Wilhelm I's centenary by reproducing a copy of Becker's poem that Wilhelm had hand-written in 1840, when he was still the Prince of Prussia. The three-page publication includes a text by Parey, the publisher, in which he draws a connection between the still popular *Rheinlied* and the fulfillment of the long-standing dream of a united Germany:

Des zum Zeugnis sei heute [...] auch diese Nachbildung Seiner Rheinlied-Niederschrift [...] hinausgesandt, den Alten als eine Erinnerung an die Erfüllung der Geschicke, den Jungen aber als eine Mahnung, im Wechsel der Zeiten stets festzustehen in patriotischer Gesinnung und niemals zu wanken in der Treue zu Kaiser und Reich.⁵⁶

References to Becker's poem are also incorporated into the illustration on the first page, which depicts Germania standing on a craggy cliff above the Rhine, holding up the imperial crown, while an eagle at her feet shoos the "gier'ge Raben" back towards France. The drawing establishes yet another connection between "Der deutsche Rhein" and German unification: a banner wrapped around the trunk of an oak tree proclaims "Einigkeit macht stark," while the verse "Sie sollen ihn nicht haben" fills a banner stretching across the page from the same tree. Coats of arms from every German state frame two portraits of Wilhelm, one of him as a prince, the other as emperor. Parey's publication

54 [Anon.], "Aux armes citoyens!" *Der Industrielle Humorist* 25 (1870): 193; CD-ROM: poem 902.

55 Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 6.

56 Nikolaus Becker, "Sie sollen ihn nicht haben, den freien deutschen Rhein" (Berlin: Parey, 1898), n. pag.

associates the most popular *Rheinlied* of 1840, nearly fifty years after it was written, with a unified Germany – a political reality that poets in 1840 could only imagine.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, poets quoted or varied Becker's verses to convey political opinions with the degree of rhetorical and emotional effectiveness achieved by the poem in 1840.⁵⁷ They built upon a poetic tradition, extending the legacy of "Der deutsche Rhein" beyond the historical moment for which it had been written. Of course, poets expected readers to recognize references to the earlier texts.⁵⁸ Poems such as those by Becker reflected the intense nationalist sentiment that dominated the German political climate in the early 1840s, but they helped generate nationalism, too. During and long after the crisis with France, the *Rheinlieder* played an important role in shaping a sense of national identity among the German masses.

57 Another poem from 1840, Max Schneckenburger's "Die Wacht am Rhein," attained a degree of relevance in 1870-71 that far surpassed the popularity it enjoyed in 1840, demonstrating that the poem, like Becker's, had entered the public consciousness in 1840 and had remained part of this public arena for decades to follow.

58 Vanchena, *Political Poetry*, 62.

Die Frage nach der deutschen Nationalidentität hat im Laufe der letzten Jahre vermehrte Aufmerksamkeit innerhalb der Kulturwissenschaften gefunden. Zu oft blieben dabei jedoch die Anfänge dieses Diskurses, die weit in das 18. Jahrhundert zurückreichen, unberücksichtigt. Hier wird darum erstmalig der interdisziplinäre Versuch unternommen, die Herausbildung einer nationalen Identität vor 1871 auszuleuchten.

Achtzehn namhafte Wissenschaftler der Germanistik, Geschichte, Kunstgeschichte, Philosophie sowie der Musik- und Kulturwissenschaft kommen in diesem Band zu Wort. In ihren deutsch- und englischsprachigen Beiträgen setzen sie sich mit aktuellen soziologischen, politologischen und kulturhistorischen Theorien zum Thema auseinander. Auf originelle Weise wird so ein Diskurs zur nationalen Identität sichtbar, der sich kontinuierlich bis ins 19. Jahrhundert fortsetzte und der sich in der Literatur, Musik und bildenden Kunst ebenso niederschlug wie auf dem Theater.



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