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Maike Oergel

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Randfiguren? The Methodological Usefulness of Marginal Figures: Ernst Brandes and Franz Josias von Hendrich on the French Revolution and the Political Potential of the German *Bürgertum*

Maike Oergel

University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

The article discusses two marginal political writers who were widely read and well respected by their contemporaries but are now either forgotten (Hendrich) or reduced to a historical footnote in the history of conservatism (Brandes). The aim is to illustrate the methodological and historical value of studying such figures for gaining a more horizontal perspective of historical periods. The horizontal perspective lets elided contexts and complexities re-emerge, which may in turn modify canonical views. Considering Brandes's and Hendrich's assessments of the French Revolution, published between 1790 and 1796, the investigation shows that in the wake of the revolution both authors hoped and expected that *Bürgertum* and nobility would eventually merge socially and politically. Such hopes, and their reception, suggest that (later) conceptions of 'conservative' and 'liberal' are difficult to apply to their 1790s thinking and that middle-class political power was widely discussed. These findings question aspects of the established narrative of German social and political conservatism, including the absence of middle-class ambition.

KEYWORDS

Ernst Brandes; Franz Josias von Hendrich; marginal writers; French Revolution; *Bürgertum*

This essay seeks to test the methodological and historical value of studying a particular type of marginal writer, those who have become marginal, i.e. have not made it into any kind of canon, despite being widely read and respected in their own time. Franz Josias von Hendrich (1752–1819) and Ernst Brandes (1758–1810) are cases in point; both were well known social and political commentators during the *Goethezeit* but have since been consigned to obscurity, largely in Brandes's case, completely in Hendrich's. Both have a reception history I have tentatively called 'temporary canonicity'.[1]

[1]Maike Oergel, 'Temporary Canonicity and the Horizontal Perspective: Digitization and the Emergence of "Forgotten Canons"', *GYb*, 27 (2020), 215–24.

CONTACT Maike Oergel maike.oergel-dench@nottingham.ac.uk

The methodological value of investigating what such writers said, why it found acclaim, and why they became obscure, rests on the expectation that this will tell us something about their period that we are no longer aware of, while their descent into obscurity is likely to tell us something about the reasons for historical change. The historical value of studying them rests on the concomitant expectation that such investigations will reveal their engagement with views, values, or practices that have become less pressing, relevant, or do not have a strong presence in the established historical narrative. A writer may of course be marginalized because, in the end, others said it better. When this is not the case, though, such figures and their temporary canons give us a new window on their historical moment in at least three different respects. First, they potentially reduce blind spots created by hindsight or the preoccupations of later observers by providing a horizontal perspective across their age, i.e. a perspective that prioritizes their relationships with their contemporaries and contemporary issues, counterbalancing the (often dominant) vertical look at historical development, which focuses on how writers and texts relate to what came before and after them.[2] Second, this perspective offers the chance to recapture (some of) the complexity of the historical moment that may have been lost as such moments are slotted into a historical narrative. Third, in questioning the inevitability of such narratives of development, such writers and their temporarily canonical works present an effective way of interrogating 'canons' or master narratives.

The contentious issue which Hendrich and Brandes address is not obscure: it is the (future) political role and identity of the German bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the aristocracy. Their take on this role is, especially in Hendrich's case, not the 'canonical' one. Hendrich proposes not just that the *Bürgertum* is of pivotal political importance but also that it is politically ready for its (historic) task. Brandes's position is more fluid. He moves from recognizing their importance in 1790 to pronouncing them not ready in 1792 (while obliquely suggesting they are), before, in 1808, resenting their exclusion from a larger role in government. In the German context, discussing the political role of the middle classes always addresses the question of their political weakness and the resulting lack of political modernization in German political culture, which has sometimes been summed up as the 'tragedy of [German] liberalism'.[3]

The lost contemporary complexity recaptured by this investigation is the fluidity with which Hendrich's and Brandes's positions were located on the emerging political spectrum. In the 1790s both were considered politically progressive. Hendrich had to defend himself against accusations of being a Jacobin,

[2] A more familiar example of such dynamics is the reception of August von Kotzebue. Now considered a marginal writer, in his day he was not just an internationally famous but also acclaimed dramatist, styled the 'German Shakespeare' and mentioned in one breath with Schiller. That such evaluations tend to make modern critics marvel at how contemporaries could get it so wrong illustrates the unwillingness to consider the contemporary judgement on its own terms.

[3] Cf. Jörn Leonhard for a critical overview in his *Liberalismus: Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2001), p. 38.

in 1790 Brandes took an almost positive view on popular insurrection in the face of despotism (on which he later backpedalled). Towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, both shared key views with the emerging position of 'liberal (political) ideas', representative of bourgeois elites and enlightened nobility, ideas based on the separation of powers, popular representation, tax reform, political and religious freedom, and freedom of the press.[4] The historical canon, however, has identified Brandes (it holds no view on Hendrich) as a minor 'conservative', as a thinker who opposed, or at least slowed down, progressive political change,[5] a position not entirely compatible with what Brandes's contemporaries thought of him, or what he thought of himself.

It is common to discuss modern political stances as conservative, liberal, or radical. In the context of the 1790s, these (later) labels tend — broadly – to be taken, respectively, as supporting the *ancien régime*, supporting increasing political participation and representation, and supporting the (Jacobin) aims of the revolution. While there can be little suggestion that Brandes or Hendrich were radicals in this sense (although both were exposed to such accusations in the heated contemporary climate), one might ask to what extent they can be considered conservative or liberal. It will, however, become clear that, in the evolving political context of the 1790s, neither term fits comfortably.

Why is Brandes considered a conservative? In his classic study of German conservatism, Klaus Epstein placed only radical viewpoints entirely outside the conservative orbit, because a 'reform conservative' wants moderate political change. Such change, however, should be as minimal as necessary to avoid larger upheaval, i.e. reform occurs within the existing system (Epstein, pp. 9–10). For Epstein, even restoring earlier forms of government in the name of change is part of conservatism (pp. 264–65).[6] In concrete historical terms, Epstein identifies all conservatives of this period as supporters of the *ancien régime* (p. 7). The following will show that it is highly doubtful that Hendrich or Brandes wanted to retain the eighteenth-century political system of the *ancien régime*. Both believed that in too many cases the current way of ruling was an illegitimate, aberrant development that urgently needed correction. Whether this stance makes them 'liberals' depends on the view one takes of the key remedies they

[4]Leonhard, pp. 191–208.

[5]Cf. Klaus Epstein's notion of conservatism as a response to 'progressive challenge'. K. Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. viii. Thus the *Wikipedia* entry on Brandes summarizes: 'Ernst Brandes war von großer Bedeutung für die Entwicklung konservativen Denkens im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution' (<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Brandes> [accessed 5 September 2023]). Epstein considers Brandes an anti-*Aufklärer*, with no belief in progress, but a focus on the moral power of traditional religion (pp. 72–75), prioritizing sentiment and habit over understanding (p. 80), who was, ultimately, 'proaristocratic' (p. 192, note 28). Carl Haase, author of the only in-depth study of Brandes, set out to revise this assessment by pointing to the non-conservative aspects in Brandes's thought: cf. his *Ernst Brandes 1758–1810*, 2 vols (Hildesheim: Lax, 1973–74). Haase put this misreading down to 'misunderstandings', the critics' tendency to equate pragmatism with conservatism, and Brandes's care to avoid falling foul of censorship (I, 312–13).

[6]This is a surprising stance as unquestionable radicals of the same generation, such as Joseph Priestley or John Thelwall, based their radical demands on the 'restoration of rights'.

propose for an effective check on the absolutist executives: estate-based parliaments, a free press, and a gradual merger of nobility and *Bürgertum*.

Brandes and Hendrich both believed political change was necessary, and both took a favourable view of the early (the bourgeois) stages of the French Revolution, which gave them the opportunity to discuss what needed to be done. Both had a sense of the politically and socially instrumental nature of the 'middle classes' in the process of moving from feudal absolutism towards constitutional representative government, although Brandes appears more pessimistic about bourgeois prospects in Germany than Hendrich. To assess their ideas of the political role of the *Bürgertum*, I will focus on their approaches to constitutional reform and political participation.

Before discussing their views, reputations, and marginality in more detail, a word about my primary sources: my investigation is itself a child of its time. Digital resources, through their sheer volume and easy accessibility, give us the chance to find such marginal figures, their work, and their contemporaries' views of them faster and more conveniently than ever before. Any research of this kind needs to be mindful that no database includes everything, that such data collections are random, that research yet to come will inevitably find biases in different platforms, and that current research questions are conditioned by current preoccupations — in short, that each historical moment has its own blind spots. Notwithstanding, taking advantage of what is available, I will ask the following questions of my materials: what do these two figures say about the French Revolution, and what do their comments add to our understanding of the German reception of the Revolution and of German conceptions of politics and society at the time? How did their contemporaries see them, and how did they present themselves? And, tentatively, why did they not make it into the canon or master narrative?

As neither writer is well known, I start with some biographical background. Brandes was self-consciously upper middle class, Hendrich a member of the nobility who identified with the non-aristocratic interest in political change and felt that his own class needed to adjust to new social realities. Both were high-ranking *Staatsdiener* with successful careers in the administrations of their respective states, and both held strong Enlightenment convictions. The latter are evident in their professed commitment to rational enquiry, on which both base their intellectual (and political) impartiality. Both go to great lengths to establish their judgement as balanced and non-partisan. Brandes stresses his ability to reason and willingness to weigh up information in light of truth.[7] Hendrich points not just to his argumentation or convictions but also to his social position as a wealthy, titled, tax-exempted individual who nevertheless argues for the reduction of (his) privileges.[8]

[7]Ernst Brandes, *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* (Jena: Mauke, 1790), pp. 151–52. Henceforth *PB*.

[8]Anon. [F. J. von Hendrich], *Freymüthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands* (Germanien: [n. pub.], 1794), pp. 9–11. Henceforth *FG* 1794.

Hendrich hailed from the 'liberal' Ernestine duchies of Saxony. Born in Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, he pursued his career in the administration and government of Saxe-Meiningen, rising to *Geheimer Rat*. There is a telling kink in Hendrich's career. In 1806, he resigned from his post as privy councillor over his accusations of corruption against Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld's chief minister, Theodor von Kretschmann.[9] However, in 1815–16 he represented the Saxon principalities at the Congress of Vienna and presented the new Saxe-Weimar constitution (*Grundgesetz der landständischen Verfassung*), one of the few and most liberal post-1815 constitutions, to the Congress in 1816.[10]

Ernst Brandes descends from a well-connected family of high-ranking Hanoverian civil servants, who were established members of the Göttingen intelligentsia. He advanced to *Geheimer Kanzlei-Sekretär* and for most of his career was *Referent der Universität Göttingen*. From his early twenties, he combined his government work with a prolific output of publications on culture, society, and politics. A passionate Anglophile, Brandes travelled to England in the mid-1780s, where, through his Hanoverian connections, he befriended Edmund Burke, with whom he stayed in touch until Burke's death. While I will show that in the early 1790s Brandes had 'liberal' credentials and remained open to moderate political reform throughout his life, his social views were marked by elitism, sexism, and reservations about Jewish emancipation, attitudes not uncommon at the time but increasingly incompatible with liberal political trends. He certainly enjoyed 'temporal canonicity'. By the early 1800s, Goethe and Schiller were reading and discussing Brandes, as were the Schlegel brothers;[11] while the *Minerva*-editor Johann Wilhelm von Archenholtz referred to Brandes as 'der berühmte Schriftsteller'.[12]

Both Brandes and Hendrich felt compelled to react to the revolution in France in print. Brandes published his *Politische Betrachungen über die Französische Revolution* in July 1790, following up with *Über einige bisherige Folgen der Französischen Revolution in Rücksicht auf Deutschland* in 1792.[13] Hendrich published his first and most widely read work, *Freymüthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands*, in 1794; an expanded and revised version followed in 1795/96.[14] Both continued to discuss the revolution in subsequent publications, but here I will discuss only the above. Unlike Brandes, Hendrich published anonymously.

[9] Cf. Hendrich's public defence: Anon., *Vertheidigung gegen die dem vormaligen Sachsen-Meiningischen wirkl. Geheimenrath Franz Josias von Hendrich gemachten Beschuldigungen*, [S.l.] 1806, reviewed *in ALZ*, 15 (16 January 1809), 113–18.

[10] *Rheinische Blätter*, 95, 14 December 1816, 'Verzeichnis der beim Bundestag übergebenen Bittschriften und Gesuche', pp. 389–90 (p. 390).

[11] Cf. Oergel, p. 223.

[12] J. W. v. Archenholtz, 'Betrachtungen über den Zeitgeist in Deutschland', *Minerva*, 2 (1808), 188–90.

[13] Ernst Brandes, *Über einige bisherige Folgen der Französischen Revolution in Rücksicht auf Deutschland* (Hannover: Ritscher, 1792). Henceforth *Folgen*.

[14] Anon. [F. J. von Hendrich], *Freymüthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands*, 3rd, completely rev. and expand. edn, 3 vols (Germanien: [n. pub.], 1795–96). Henceforth *FG* 1795/*FG* 1796.

While Hendrich's zeal for political change did not cool in the mid-90s version of *Freymüthige Gedanken* (if anything, he became more strident in his calls for reform if revolution was to be avoided in Germany), Brandes, by 1792 as the early promise of a constitutional monarchy in France was evaporating, had become more critical of substantial political change. Considering the impact of the revolution on rulers and the ruled in German states, he concluded that thankfully revolution was at the moment unlikely in Germany, but equally he noted with some regret that in the current climate there was little hope of *any* political reform (*Folgen*, pp. 158–59).

Both write as political practitioners, as pragmatists drawing on practical experience and professing scepticism towards abstract (political) philosophy — a political, even polemical, stance common among sceptics of new constitutions created from scratch. With the overarching aim to explain what was happening in France, and what this meant for politics in the German principalities and the Empire, their discussions circle around the relationship between the aristocracy and the third estate, especially in relation to the latter's respective roles in society and government. In the end both suggest, to different degrees, that closer alignment between these two groups is necessary.

Although writing at different points during the revolution, neither Brandes in 1790 nor Hendrich in early 1794 was entirely hostile to the revolution. Both suggest that there are useful, even necessary, aspects to the revolution, primarily because both abhor 'despotism', Montesquieu's bête noire of rule. Like Montesquieu, both consider despotic rule an antisocial tyranny, and both detect despotic abuses of power in *ancien régime* practices of rule, including systemic political corruption. For them, despotic rule and corruption are inimical to a fair, public-spirited, and prosperous society.[15]

Both, albeit to different degrees, find the strict enforcement of estate-linked privileges, especially the aristocratic exemption from taxes and preferment for office, problematic. Both think contemporary rulers are complacent and that, in light of despotic abuses of power and unfair class prejudice, the middle classes are justifiably restless. Both have read Abbé Sieyès's *What is the 3rd Estate?* As for Sieyès, for them selfish aristocrats and despotically absolutist princes who, rather than govern, treat their lands and their people as private chattels, are a political and social problem. In 1790, Brandes notes, 'der französische Adel hat sich alles selbst zuzuschreiben' (*PB*, p. 104). In 1794, looking at Germany, Hendrich agrees, adding the issue of absolutist princely power: 'die Gebrechen [unserer deutschen Staatsverfassung] liegen größtentheils in dem Drucke der höhern Stände, in der allzusehr aus dem Gleichgewicht gemäßigter Regierungsformen empor gestiegenen Gewalt der Fürsten' (*FG* 1794, p. 5). He warns that

[15]Neither uses the term 'absolutism', which was not yet in circulation. Instead, they summarize the pernicious side of the *ancien régime* with Montesquieu's pejorative term 'despotism', which in the later eighteenth century acquired the status of a political catchword. Both were keen admirers of the French political philosopher and reverently refer to him throughout their respective works.

'das Volk, das nun seine Rechte, die Pflichten seiner Herrscher und seine Kräfte kennt, wird seinen Nacken nicht ferner so willig unter ein Joch beugen' (p. 157), and asks the reader whether they are for the 'Glück der niedern Stände oder den Fürstendespotismus' (p. 81).

For Brandes, the revolution in France was overdue: 'Bey dem unerhörten Druck jeder Art, der alles, was nicht Protektion von großen oder kleinen Tyrannen genoß […], traf, bleibt es immer beynahe unglaublich, daß ein großes geistreiches Volk ohne einen allgemeinen Aufstand zu erregen, diese Greuel so lange dulden konnte' (*PB*, p. 18). He has no doubt that France needed constitutional change (p. 21) and believes — this is his most radical point — that the National Assembly in summer 1789 needed to be protected by (popular) force because fears of royal duplicity seemed justified. Although an outspoken enemy of revolutionary upheaval, he suggests that the role of the urban Parisian masses (aka the Parisian mob) in protecting the liberty and the work of the Assembly needs to be credited (p. 43).

Instead of despotic practices, both advocate a constitutional monarchy. This, in their view, protects from both types of despotism, that of rulers and that of the mob, from 'Fürstendespotismus' and 'Pöbeldespotismus' (*FG* 1794, p. 14) as Hendrich puts it, or in Brandes's words, from the princely 'Despotismus eines Sultans' and the 'Hydra der Demokratie' (*PB*, p. 8). Both are constitutionalists and believe in the rule of law: rights and duties of both rulers and the governed need to be codified. To safeguard rights and secure duties, there needs to be accountability, i.e. a separation of powers, and (a form of) representation of the people. Brandes declares that a 'schlechte Verfassung' exists 'wo das Volk nicht [mittel- oder unmittelbar] an der Gesetzgebung partizipiert' (*PB*, p. 8). To ensure that the 'Repräsentanten der Nation' remain beholden to the people ('Nation'), can discharge their role as check on the executive, and don't serve their own advantage, they must be elected for a limited period only. This is the only way to avoid the 'Übel der Aristokratie' (p. 12). For Brandes, the eventual convocation of the French General Estates restored a minimal form of constitutional governance in France, which had been suppressed by the absolutist practices of the monarchy for over one hundred and fifty years (pp. 17–21). However, for Brandes, the mechanisms of the *Etats Généraux* were no longer fully fit for purpose (pp. 22–25), hence the emerging National Assembly had been a true chance to introduce constitutional monarchy in France, limited by estate-based representation. This chance was being wrecked from three sides: the intransigent aristocracy in cahoots with royal duplicity, the emerging radical 'democrats', and the weakness of the Assembly in the face of popular unrest (pp. 40–46). Yet even the explosive political rupture of July 1789 could have liberated France from its despotic condition, if the Assembly had chosen the British form of constitutional monarchy as its model (pp. 50–54), rather than abstract theories (pp. 63–66) and the American constitution, which did not fit France's situation (p. 52).

In 1790, Brandes is generous on the franchise, suggesting fifty per cent as appropriate (p. 10), a figure considerably larger than Edmund Burke's four-hundred-thousand-figure for Britain.[16]

For Hendrich, 'die Pflicht, gut zu regieren [schliesst auch ein] dem Staate eine gut organisierte Constitution zu geben' (*FG* 1795, I, 112). The point of government is to provide the basis for happiness for all a state's citizens. A people has the right to 'vernünftige Freiheit' (a key term for both) and 'dauerhaftes Wohl' (*FG* 1794, 52-54). Reasonable freedom includes 'Freyheit gegen willkührliche Gewalt' and 'Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz', both of which Hendrich considers human rights (*FG* 1794, p. 12). Constitutions need to keep up with the times, it is a ruler's duty to make 'zweckmäßige Abänderungen' and adjust the constitution to 'dem vernünftigen Geist des Zeitalters und den gegenwärtigen Bedürfnissen des Volkes', even if these entail sacrifices ('Aufopferungen') for some (p. 58). For Hendrich, this means an improved deal for 'Bürger' and 'Bauern' who, under the currently often exploitative, hence illegitimate, 'Landeshoheit', have no rights, only duties, and who will be easily persuaded that the new French political creed is valid (pp. 150–57). One of Hendrich's most radical points was to maintain, in 1794, that the revolution was based on 'ewig wahre', as well as 'falsche und übertriebene' 'Grundsätze' (pp. 142–43).

Both agree on the principal changes necessary to avoid a further escalation of despotic practices (which would increase the risk of violent revolution) and to establish constitutionalism: abolishing the exemption of the aristocracy from taxation, reducing the size of standing armies, restoring estate-based parliaments (*Landstände*), and a free press. They differ regarding the specifics of some of these measures.

Both see the restoration of the *Landstände*, what one might call 'Old Liberty', as a safe and legitimate way to establish a separation of powers and a check on the executive. Hendrich is outspoken in this; he also retains faith in the imperial constitution, which however is in dire need of amendment because it is outdated and has 'sehr tief eingerissene Gebrechen' (*FG* 1794, pp. 62–63). Brandes promotes *Landstände* by making the British system the model of constitutional government, and through his support for the convocation of the French General Estates and the creation of the National Assembly, the latter for him the most promising moment of the French Revolution. Despite the Assembly's failure to produce the constitutional monarchy that Brandes hoped for, by spring 1790 he still believes they will create a more constitutional government than the unchecked despotism they had demolished, and that the new constitution will be an improvement (*PB*, p. 133).

Hendrich connects the weakening or disappearance of the *Landstände* during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the rise of absolutism.

[16]Edmund Burke, *Select Works: Four Letters on the Proposal of Peace with the Regicide Directory of France*, ed. by E. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), pp. 14–15. Burke makes this point in the first Letter in 1796.

His faith in the federal imperial structures, especially in the *Reichsstände*, and the potential of a revised imperial constitution, 'unsere' — currently problem-ridden — 'deutsche Verfassung' (*FG* 1794, p. 5),[17] makes him point to the imperial frame for neutralizing despotic practices and safeguarding the liberties of the people and the legal and constitutional structures of their states. The *Reichstände* need to legislate and debate in 'Einigkeit, Gemeingeist, Bruder- und Vaterlandsliebe' (p. 211). In 1796, discussing the restoration of the *Landstände*, he advocates that townsfolk and *Bauern* need to elect their representatives directly as they currently have no proper representation (*FG* 1796, III, 131–40). He will eventually conclude that 'Gutsbesitzer' without aristocratic privileges make the most suitable representatives of the rural population of the third estate.[18]

Both Brandes and Hendrich are united in their demand to reduce large standing armies under the sole command of the prince. Hendrich calls them 'Stützen des Despotismus' (*FG* 1794, p. 91), and Brandes agrees.[19] Hendrich criticizes the practice of pressing citizens to serve in the prince's army in wars that only serve the ruler's interests and condemns the controversial practice of selling troops to other states to bolster princely coffers. He uses the discourse of slavery to make his point (*FG* 1794, pp. 88–91, 318).

Proposing an estate-based representative body tends to be interpreted as a conservative, if not retrograde, constitutional move even if it limits absolutist power, because it also limits the equality of citizens. However, in the context of Brandes's and Hendrich's insistence on reducing aristocratic privileges and princely absolutism, their suggestion cannot be seen as a wholesale return to early modern or late medieval times.

For Hendrich, reducing aristocratic privileges is necessary for moral and pragmatic reasons: it will improve society, help maintain order and peace, and safeguard property. He sees this as a public-spirited sacrifice by the nobles, equally pragmatic and fair: 'der Adel muss allen den Vortheilen entsagen, deren Genuss dem Staat schädlich ist', especially tax exemption (*FG* 1794, pp. 240–41). '[F]reie Aufopferung einiger […] Vortheile' is necessary 'zum *gemeinen* Besten und *eigener* Ruhe und Sicherheit' (p. 239; italics mine); it will 'Ruhe uns und unsern Nachkommen sichern' and the 'sieche Staatskörper

[17]Hendrich's wish for remedying the German constitution's problems runs through the entire book (*FG* 1794), starting on p. 3.

[18]Cf. F. J. von Hendrich, 'Was sollen Volksrepräsentanten wirken?', *Nemesis: Zeitschrift für Politik und Geschichte*, 3.1 (1814), 239–72. He concludes that men of landed property, *Gutsbesitzer*, make the most useful representatives because as independent citizens without aristocratic privileges they hold their land not as feudal fiefs and by paying tax they contribute to the public purse, i.e. have a keen interest in seeing this money well spent. Making property ownership the only qualifier for political participation, he removes the distinction between nobility and middle-class landowners, and potentially even the *Bauern* themselves. In 1814 Hendrich was willing to publish — now under his own name — in a very liberal outlet: Heinrich Luden's *Nemesis* was closed down in 1818.

[19]'Gegen Auflehnungen oder Associationen […] sicherte [den Fürsten] der um diese Zeit angenommene stehende Soldat'; Ernst Brandes, 'Über den verminderten Sinn des Vergnügens', *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 15 (Spring 1790), 421–75 (p. 425).

[…] heilen' (p. 207). It will also increase the 'Wohlstand der Bürger, besonders in den niederen Ständen' (p. 207). For Hendrich this is 'vernünftige Freiheit'. Brandes makes the same assessment: 'Die Zeiten sind da, wo die privilegirten Stände einigen Vorrechten entsagen müssen, um andere zu behaupten' (*Folgen*, p. 133), but, says Brandes, such changes needs to be implemented 'allmählich'.

Both demand an end to the exemption from taxation. Hendrich calls for 'Gleichheit der Abgaben' (*FG* 1794, p. 264) and would prefer a meritocratic approach when appointing to lucrative offices and commissions (p. 241). In 1796, he even suggests a 'liberalization' of the labour market: there is no reason why aristocrats should not work ('nützlichen Gebrauch seiner Hände [machen]') and 'ein bürgerliches Gewerbe treiben' rather than steal their upkeep from the state or their fellow citizens (*FG* 1796, II, 248–50). Hendrich produces a whole raft of reforms to reduce the feudal practices of *Lehensrecht*, which he, as Enlightener, associates with 'Despotismus' and 'Aberglaube' (*FG* 1794, p. 67–68), even considers a form of slavery. Judging as a pragmatist, these changes are beneficial because they improve productivity and hence prosperity as well as a sense of fairness. Brandes is less strident on tax exemption but also suggests that it would be beneficial generally and advisable for the *Adel* if they want to continue to exist (*Folgen*, p. 133).

Both strongly advocate a free press and the publicity of public affairs and government, a hotly debated issue in 1790s Germany. For Brandes, publicity is a more important corrective to despotic rule than the vote, although in 1790 he also encouraged a broadening of the franchise (*PB*, p. 10). For both, publicity is part of the check on power. 'Man verfolge ja niemanden über seine abstrakten politischen Grundsätze', says Brandes (*Folgen*, p. 156), 'abstract' meaning any such 'Grundsätze' that do not incite concrete insurrection but remain in the realm of theory. Political differences should be settled through evidence-based debate. Similarly, Hendrich suggests that those who espouse republican principles can be loyal subjects to their monarch as there is a 'grosser Abstand zwischen politischen Meynungen und praktischen Gesinnungen' (*FG* 1795, I, 55–57), so republicans should be free to make their theoretical points. Both construct this public sphere as a space for calm and rational debate among those in a position to arrive at an informed judgement.[20]

Compared to the radical equality of the French constitutions of 1791 or 1793, what Hendrich and Brandes suggest is of course a halfway house: by reusing the *Landstände*, they retain traditional social differentiation to bestow historical legitimacy on changes that abolish the worst aspects of

[20]Brandes makes clear he writes for the discerning observer of the revolution (*PB*, p. 3); both the *GGA* and *ALZ* reviewers of *Freymüthige Gedanken* (quoted below) praise Hendrich's precaution of using the less common Latin typeface to limit access to the educated only. It appears that this strategy was not entirely successful, cf. Hendrich, *FG* 1795, I, 12: the 'grössere Publikum' read his book (and applauded).

the current social and political inequality. To what extent does taking key privileges from the aristocracy dismantle them as a class, when both reformers are unwilling to abolish the class system itself? While Brandes is adamant that the 'Adel' needs to remain as a distinct class, Hendrich's position is more complex. He insists that 'Gleichheit der Rechte' does not mean 'Gleichheit der Stände' (*FG* 1794, p. 232) — a nobleman should remain a nobleman, and a *Bauer* a *Bauer* (p. 312) — yet leaves the nobility few of their (defining) privileges. For him, certain rights are explicitly non-negotiable: all citizens, including 'gemeine Bürger und Bauern', have the right to elect their representatives, especially as the former are, echoing Sièyes, part of 'der nützlichste Theil der Staatsbürger' (*FG* 1794, p. 16); it is the 'Bürger', der sie [Adel, Fürsten, Geistlichkeit] ernährt' (pp. 211–12). Nevertheless, one cannot help suspecting that Hendrich would, gradually, like to abolish all hereditary privilege: in 1795 he proposes strategies for reducing the number of hereditary titles (*FG* 1796, II, 248).

Brandes spends a considerable part of *Bisherige Folgen* discussing what to do with the aristocracy. Already in *Politische Betrachtungen*, he was conciliatory: while their privileges should be curtailed (pp. 107–08), they should remain as an identifiable social class, and it would be wise to compensate them with an upper house, thus engaging them in the process of change. He is being pragmatic here: Brandes's earlier, and later, work shows that he has strong reservations about the aristocracy but feels that without some compromise the civil strife will not end (*PB*, p. 109). On tax exemption, he also gives an (ostensibly) pragmatic reason to go slowly: Brandes fears that including the *Adel* immediately and fully in taxation would produce a financial and economic crisis because many nobles are already too deep in debt to pay tax. Such a measure would ruin not just them but also their many creditors (*Folgen*, pp. 132–33). Hendrich, interestingly, disagrees with this point (*FG* 1794, p. 267–68). Clearly, Brandes does not want to rock the boat too much.

In different ways, both Hendrich and Brandes suggest that regarding wealth and influence the aristocracy and the middle classes should move towards each other, if not merge. Despite his talk of the '(Un)gleichheit der Stände', Hendrich is keen to increase the number of middle-class 'Gutsbesitzer' and reduce the number of hereditary aristocratic titles. Landed property should just be property, owned by titled or untitled owners who are all liable to taxation and have no automatic social privileges. His notion that aristocrats should work to maintain themselves also speaks to this agenda, as does his belief that untitled and socially diverse *Gutsbesitzer* (or *Grundbesitzer*) should be the key political class. In a mainly pre-industrial economy, a large class of tax-paying and politically enfranchised owners of variably sized landed property would be an effective and responsible break on executive power. For Hendrich, there is no social risk in this, because he considers the middle classes ready for political responsibility. In 1795, he describes a newly self-conscious and influential middle class:

> Aber nicht der Bauer und der gemeine Bürger allein, allgemeiner noch vielleicht ist die grosse [*sic*] so vielen und mannigfaltigen Einfluss habende Klasse unzufrieden, die zwischen ihm [dem Bauern und dem gemeinen Bürger] und dem Adel steht, diese Klasse, die jetzt ein esprit de corps zu verbinden scheint, […] ist nicht nur zahlreich; sie ist auch die reichste an wissenschaftlicher Ausbildung. Sie liefert allein die Lehrer der höheren und niederen Stände, und größtentheils die Schriftsteller der Nation, und lenkt die öffentliche Meynung. (*FG* 1795, I, 284)

He identifies this class as the key force of political reform. In France, they are driving the revolution: 'Sie gründete die Republik […] so ist die Umschaffung der [französischen] Nation doch größtentheils das Werk des Mittelstandes' (*FG* 1795, I, 285). They drive political change that he, ultimately, supports. Although the French 'Umschaffung' was accompanied by 'Greule' [*sic*], it was the response to 'Despotie und aufgehäuften Missbräuche[n]' (p. 284) and holds great promise: 'Ich bin weit entfernt, durch diese Äußerungen einen Schatten oder einen Verdacht auf einen Stand [den Mittelstand] werfen zu wollen, den ich vorzüglich hochschätze. Für das Gute, was einst in Frankreich aus jener Gährung entwachsen muß, die sich nun zu setzen scheint, wird ihm der Dank gebühren' (p. 285).

Hendrich wrote this following the overthrow of the Jacobins; he was hopeful that the Directory represented a moderate development (*FG* 1795, I, 15–16). In 1794, he had already stated that 'Menschenrechte und Herrscherpflichten […] kennt itzt jeder Bürger' (*FG* 1794, p. 141), in fact even '[d]er deutsche Bauer und Bürger ist seiner politischen Unmündigkeit entwachsen' (p. 139). For him, the *Mittelstand*'s increased power is not only based on their economic clout but also on their intellectual and moral power, their skills, and their knowledge.

While Brandes may not have shared Hendrich's enthusiasm about the post-Jacobin developments in France, he fully agrees that educated and propertied citizens should be enfranchised. However, he does not, at least on the surface, share Hendrich's confidence in the political capability of the middle classes. For him, not enough of the German *Bürgertum* are of securely independent financial means to be directly politically active nor do they have the political nous that a 'liberal education' bestows on the English gentleman who populates the British House of Commons. Most educated *Bürger* in princely territories are in the employ of the state/prince which impairs their impartiality (as representatives), or at least that is what detractors would complain about (*Folgen*, p. 134–35). On the face of it, he seems to debar himself from political office. However, obliquely Brandes had suggested a year earlier that the two classes might merge. In his 1791 review of Burke's *Appeal from a New Whig to an Old Whig*, he describes the aristocracy, 'im weitsten [sic] Sinne des Wortes' as a 'Klasse von Menschen, die durch Geburt und Glücksumstände eine bessere Bildung des Geistes […] erhielten *oder sich diese durch angebohrenes Genie zu geben wußten, der Menschen, die solche durch Bedienungen im*

Staate oder dem Obliegen einer veredelten Wissenschaft bekamen'.[21] Such a class included the educated upper middle classes (and himself). He has not given up on this idea in 1792. In *Bisherige Folgen* Brandes seems to make the small number of independent and educated middle-class citizens the reason why restoring the *Landstände*, i.e. retaining the classes as they are, is, despite their shortcomings, the only way to introduce a separation of powers legitimately and successfully (*Folgen*, p. 134). And yet in his conclusion, he includes the middle classes, again obliquely, in the political elite when he proposes, as the minimal constitutional check on power, a convocation of notables, the 'aufgeklärteste, einsichtvollste, angesehenste […] Theil der Nation' (pp. 158–59), who, albeit convened by the ruler, meet publicly for a set time 'zur öffentlichen Berathschlagung über die inneren Angelegenheiten des Staates' (pp. 158–59). Regrettably, even this minimalist solution is unlikely to be considered by German rulers in the present climate. So he professes to invest hope in gradual enlightenment: the different *Stände* need to realize their mutual dependence 'durch wechselseitige Aufklärung über das gemeinsame Interesse' and develop public spirit ('lebhafter Gemein-Geist', p. 137). Meanwhile any selfish or corrupt activities will, he hopes, be reined in by impartial princes (p. 137). I am inclined to consider such somewhat pious hopes, just like his obliqueness about direct middle-class inclusion in political decision-making, camouflage, veiling his actual (positive) views on middle-class political participation. By 1808, he would be outspoken on the political incompetence (even untrustworthiness) of princes and ruling (aristocratic) elites, attesting thorough failure to an intransigent political class who continued to abet the 'Missverhältnisse' between the 'Stände', between aristocracy and *Bürgertum*.[22]

To the modern reader, Brandes's and Hendrich's lines of argument may often appear uneven. Hendrich supports equal rights for individuals and is dubious about hereditary titles but seems happy with the inequality created by caste-like classes; Brandes expresses exasperation at the intransigence of the upper classes and feels no pity for the fate of the French nobility but deprivileging the German aristocracy can't go slowly and softly enough; Hendrich is outspokenly anti-feudal but *Gutsbesitzer* remain his favoured political class; Brandes dismisses, at least superficially, the middle classes politically while hoping for a *Notablenversammlung* where the most qualified representatives, titled or untitled, work together; he professes to trust in enlightened princes while fearing the de facto power of their standing armies. These 'inconsistencies' provide a glimpse of the complexity of the contemporary political landscape, which does not yet fit neatly into later, more clearly delineated party positions of conservative and liberal. Haase has pointed out the need for camouflage and tactical writing under later eighteenth-century censorship

[21]Ernst Brandes, review of Edmund Burke, *Appeal from a New Whig to an Old Whig*, *GGA*, 190. Stück (26. November 1791), 1897-1911 (p. 1911), [italics mine].
[22]Cf. Ernst Brandes, *Betrachtungen über den Zeitgeist in Deutschland* (Hanover: Hahn, 1808), sections 208–11.

(I, pp. 313–14). Both Brandes and Hendrich were performing a political *Gratwanderung* by advancing progressive ideas potentially deemed radical by supporters of the *ancien régime*, while assuring their readers that they were loyal subjects who should be allowed to speak truth to power.

This *Gratwanderung*, balancing their calls for political change with the risk of being discredited as radicals, is also evident in the extent to which both Brandes and Hendrich engaged in political self-positioning. Their reference points are the contemporary political labels of 'Aristokrat' and 'Demokrat'. Considering these opposing positions, both present themselves as occupying the (reasonable and impartial) middle ground between them. At the same time, they profess to expect that each side will consider them an enemy, thus deflecting criticism and revealing themselves again as adroit rhetorical strategists.[23]

Hendrich outlines his 'politisches Glaubensbekenntnis' (*FG* 1794, pp. 12–14), which is 'frey von Partheygeist und Schwärmerey' (p. 14), and asks the reader to judge whether he is an 'Aristocrat' [sic] or 'Democrat', or neither (p. 12). He defines these two political positions as insisting the aristocracy retain their class privileges versus wanting to abolish unfair privileging (p. 29, note c cont.). Hendrich is aware that these labels are also used as powerfully simplified political shorthand in contested and evolving situations: Condorcet, he reminds his readers, was excluded as a dangerous 'Democrat' from the Berlin *Akademie der Wissenschaften* and later as a treacherous 'Aristocrat' by the Jacobins (p. 28, note c). By 1795, Hendrich himself has reason to defend himself against being denounced as an ultra-democrat, an 'Illuminat[…] und Jakobiner' (*FG* 1795, I, 7).

Brandes addresses the aristocrat/democrat divide in *Politische Betrachtungen*. He uses the terms as labels for political creeds without giving definitions. They predate the revolution: in Germany, both 'aristocrats' and 'democrats' watched the events of 1789 with 'innigster Theilnahme' (p. 5). He, however, is impartial, defining his position as pro-liberty and pro-mankind, 'Freiheit' is 'seine Sache', his 'einzige Vorliebe […] die Sache der Menschheit' (p. 151). Like Hendrich, he says he is concerned not with party, but with reasoned truth: 'Vielen Grundsätzen der Demokraten werde ich eben so eifrig als denen der Aristokraten und der Anhänger des Despotismus entgegenstreben' (p. 151). His position, however, is principled, 'bisher glaube ich nicht, dass mich Anhänger des Despotismus zu ihren Freunden gerechnet haben, und nie werden sie, zur Vertheidung ihrer Grundsätze, auf mich rechnen können' (p. 152). Because he prefers the British constitution to what the French National Assembly is currently producing, some will call him an 'Aristokrat' (p. 152). Like Hendrich, he calls on unbiased readers to judge him.

[23]Cf. Hendrich, *FG* 1794, p. 14; Brandes, *PB*, p. 152.

Arguing for a revival of the *Landstände* (and imperial structures, in Hendrich's case) may in the mid-1790s, in addition to being pragmatic, indeed have been Brandes's and Hendrich's tactic to make change more acceptable, to give their modernized version of estate-based representation the best possible chance of success. It should not be overlooked how innovative their improved constitutional (and social) vision is, in which aristocracy and *Bürgertum* are moving — socially, politically, and economically — towards each other, eventually forming one big class of widely differing wealth but on increasingly equal terms regarding rights before the law, political representation and participation, taxation, occupation (for Hendrich), and with gradually increasing numbers of property owners.

Hendrich's proposals for political and social reform (dismantling feudal practices, broadening the franchise), are clearly more far-reaching than Brandes's, so his need for camouflage, or reassuring credentials, would be high. He tackles this by quoting non-suspect sources in support, such as Friedrich Gentz (who by then, 1795, had become a staunch adversary of the revolution) and, interestingly, Brandes himself, because 'deren Urtheil um so unverdächtiger seyn muss […] als erklärte Gegner der Apostel des neuen politischen Glaubens oder Unglaubens' (*FG* 1795, I, 293).

What did their contemporaries make of them? Hendrich's *Freymüthige Gedanken* sold well: two editions sold out within a year (*FG* 1795, I, 14). The extended edition of 1795–96, in addition to giving Hendrich the opportunity to edit his arguments and respond to his critics, is testimony to the publisher's confidence in the book. This expanded version would be included in the three-volume collection of Hendrich's 'works' in 1806.[24] The 1795 preface reveals the 'Illuminat und Jacobin' attack on Hendrich by Christian Gottfried Gruner, *Geheimer Hofrath* in Jena (*FG* 1795, I, 7–8). Gruner found Hendrich's view on aristocratic privileges Jacobinical.[25] Hendrich would have felt especially defamed as he had pointed out on the opening pages that he had shown the manuscript to his prince (*FG* 1794, p. 8).

Despite its good sales, *Freymüthige Gedanken* garnered comparatively few reviews. The *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* did review it promptly in August 1794: generally, though not entirely, favourably and intent on taking the sting out of Hendrich's programme.[26] It is 'freymüthig' while still measured and careful, and well-meaning (p. 1261). Fortunately, the author has taken precautions to avoid the book being read by 'Volk' (by using the Latin typeface), as it is only useful for the 'gebildete Theile' (pp. 1261-62). Hendrich's suggestions regarding taxation and the imperial judiciary are played down, they are

[24]Anon. [F. J. von Hendrich], *Historisch-politische Schriften*, 3 vols (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1806).
[25]Christian Gottfried Gruner, 'Können die Gelehrten Empörung predigen und Revolutionen bewirken?', in *Almanach für Ärzte und Nicht-Ärzte*, ed. by C. F. Gruner (Jena: Cuno's Erben, 1795), pp. 238–42. It was the beginning of a long public spat about political and social change between the two.
[26]Anon., review of [F. J. von Hendrich], *Freymüthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands*, *GGA*, 126. Stück (9 August 1794), 1261–64.

apparently already in place. Besides, the reviewer finds, just as many irregularities in the *Staatsmaschine* are due to the governed as to the rulers, while much of the rest is due to federalism. However, wanting to abolish standing armies identifies the author as given to 'politische Träumereien' (p. 1263). The *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* discussed *Freymüthige Gedanken* only in December 1796, after the extended edition had appeared. Its review reads like a promotion exercise that deliberately elides the more radical aspects of the book. Apologizing for the ALZ's tardiness, the reviewer begins by acknowledging the book's success and praises its content — it cheers the 'Menschenfreund' and 'treuen Freund des Vaterlandes'[27] — without going into detail (its content is too well known, apparently). The book is simply a good summary of the general reform discussion, already in 1794 it brought 'wenig neues und vielleicht unerhörtes' (p. 674). Like *GGA*, the reviewer commends the author for keeping the book out of reach of 'gemeine und ungebildete Leser' who would only misunderstand its points; it is only useful for 'vorbereitete Männer' in positions of influence (p. 673).

Speaking of the wide public response to the book, Hendrich comments on the paucity of reviews in 1795 and suggests that *Freymüthige Gedanken* was considered either not important enough or too dangerous, but too true to be condemned outright (*FG* 1795, I, 14). He may have been right; Goethe, an early reader of the 1794 edition, thought Hendrich (though not without merit) a political troublemaker who was fanning the flames 'mit Blasebälgen' when it would be better 'nach Wassereimern zu greifen'.[28]

By the time *Politische Betrachtungen* came out, Brandes was well known. Reviews are mixed, casting him as both a reformer and not reform-minded enough. The *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* review in January 1791 is full of praise: nothing 'Sachkundigeres, Billigeres oder Scharfsinnigeres' has been said about the events in France.[29] The reviewer was the reform-friendly Ludwig Spittler who would soon leave academia to embark on a reform-minded career in the government of his native Württemberg.[30] Spittler disagrees on one point: splitting the National Assembly into upper and lower house, he fears, would have prevented some of the necessary legislation due to the new aristocratic power base in the upper house (p. 75). Friedrich Nicolai's Enlightened and reform-friendly *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, also in 1791, is generally favourable but somewhat condescending. Brandes is an eminent writer, whose sexist views have not dimmed his eminence. The book's plan

[27] Anon., review of [F. J. von Hendrich], *Freymüthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands*, *ALZ*, no. 392 (19 December 1796), 673–76 (p. 673).
[28] Letter to Hufeland, 24 July 1794, quoted in Ulrich Stadler, 'Zeitgeisterbeschwörungen um 1800', in *Kollektive Gespenster: Die Masse, der Zeitgeist und andere unfassbare Körper*, ed. by Michael Gamper and Peter Schnyder (Freiburg/Breisgau: Rombach, 2006), pp. 265–84, (p. 271, note 14).
[29] Anon. [Ludwig Spittler], review of Ernst Brandes, *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution*, *GGA*, 8. Stück (13 January 1791), 73–80 (p. 73).
[30] Spittler is identified by Haase (I, 335).

and structure are 'meisterhaft und zweckmäßig',[31] his criticism of the National Assembly and fair judgement of the French king provide new insights, although not everything he says is new. For the reviewer Brandes is not liberal enough, they take umbrage (p. 477) at a footnote where Brandes expresses reservations about giving the German middle-classes access to high-level political office while doing this is fine in France (or Britain) because both countries have a well-developed public opinion (*PB*, pp. 105–06). There is praise from unexpected quarters: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his 1793 defence of the revolution, *Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publicums über die französische Revolution*, praises Brandes's independent and impartial thinking on the revolution — 'man hört doch den selbstdenkenden und ehrlichen Mann.'[32]

Bisherige Folgen was very promptly reviewed in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, again by Spittler. It is one of the 'wohlthätigsten Schriften' to appear in Germany recently, containing 'große, wichtige Wahrheiten' that will produce a 'herrlichen Effekt zur allgemeinen Beruhigung' without selling out on (careful) political change, which is necessary in the face of 'erschlichenen, landesherrlichen Despotismus'.[33] Spittler, however, thinks Brandes takes too dim a view of the prospects of the middle classes and points to an unnamed German state — Haase suggests Würthemberg (I, 387) — that is managing well without aristocracy in its *Landstände* (p. 814). The *Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitungen* reviewed *Bisherige Folgen* in December 1792, agreeing with Brandes especially on his liberal concern about repressive measures, e.g. curtailment of press freedom, and his antimilitary stance. However, the reviewer feels that Brandes underestimates the moderate changes rulers have made.[34] The *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, again slow off the mark, publishes a 'Sammelrezension' of *Politische Betrachtungen* and both editions of *Bisherige Folgen* only in 1797, criticizing Brandes's discussion of equality as disingenuously undifferentiated. Riled by what they consider pro-aristocratic bias, the reviewer disagrees with, as they see it, Brandes's ridiculous suggestion that the revolution has fostered a predilection for 'absolute equality' in Germany when the public has simply been voicing legitimate criticism of unconstitutional aristocratic privilege.[35] Slightly uncharitably, the *ALZ* considers Brandes's change of heart between 1790 and 1792 regarding the initial promise of the revolution as a contradiction rather than the result of a journey (p. 773). By 1793 Brandes

[31] Anon., review of Ernst Brandes, *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution*, *ADB* (1791), 476–78 (p. 477).
[32] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Fichtes Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by I. H. Fichte, VI: *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publicums über die französische Revolution* (Berlin: Veit, 1845–46), pp. 37–288 (pp. 54–55).
[33] Anon. [Ludwig Spittler], review of Ernst Brandes, *Über einige bisherige Folgen der Französischen Revolution in Rücksicht auf Deutschland*, *GGA*, 81. Stück (21 May 1792), 809–16 (pp. 809, 810).
[34] Anon., review of Ernst Brandes, *Über einige bisherige Folgen der Französischen Revolution in Rücksicht auf Deutschland*, *Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitungen*, 99. Stück, 12 December 1792, pp. 913–19.
[35] Anon., review of Ernst Brandes, *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* and *Über einige bisherige Folgen der Französischen Revolution in Rücksicht auf* Deutschland, *ALZ*, 199 (24 June 1797), 769–773 (p. 772).

felt the need to explain his changed position. In the substantial preface to the reprint of *Bisherige Folgen*, he takes back his radical pronouncement that the involvement of the people of Paris in the summer of 1789 was necessary and right: he had not been in full possession of the facts.[36]

In the large and diverse group of those wanting political change, the battle lines focused on the degree to which the *ancien régime* was to be reconstituted and how to package those demands for change. It was not lost on their reviewers (and readers) that Brandes and Hendrich negotiated a complex terrain advocating the opportunities and rights of the middle classes without abolishing the existing social structures outright. In this negotiation they could be liberal in some respects and conservative in others.

Finally, why might Brandes and Hendrich have lost their canonicity? Brandes may have been overshadowed by his friends, who have been assigned more pivotal roles in the historical narrative and hence had more lasting, canonizing receptions: Edmund Burke, Freiherr vom Stein, and possibly even August von Rehberg.[37] Brandes, Stein, and Rehberg were close friends from their Göttingen student days in the 1770s.[38] Stein went on to acquire canonical status as a key mover in the German/Prussian efforts to effect 'reform from above' and 'from within' during the Wars of Liberation, an approach Brandes had promoted long before the German resistance took shape.[39] Burke achieved canonicity in modern political history as a key defender of what, post-1789, might be called 'Old Liberty', intent on preserving pre-absolutist (proto-)liberal institutions. It has frequently been assumed that Brandes was influenced by Burke.[40] While it is reasonable to assume that the young Brandes drew on the older Burke, in 1790 they diverged sharply on the French *ancien régime*, despite their shared general political outlook. In *Politische Betrachtungen*, Brandes was highly critical of what he saw as France's despotism, whereas Burke, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which appeared four months after Brandes's volume, was considerably more forgiving, a divergence that is doubtlessly due to their different aims. While Burke wanted to safeguard the British political status quo, Brandes wanted change in Germany. Ironically, when Brandes quotes Burke in *Politische Betrachtungen*, he uses passages from Burke's (published) parliamentary speech of 9 February 1790, in which

[36]E. Brandes, *Über einige bisherige Folgen […]*, 2nd edn (Hannover: Ritscher, 1793), pp. VIII–IX.
[37]Epstein, for example, entitles the relevant chapter '*Rehberg* and the Hanoverian School', p. 547.
[38]Haase, I, 32–33, 41–42.
[39]Cf. Heinz Duchhardt, *Mythos Stein: Vom Nachleben, von der Stilisierung und von der Instrumentalisierung des preußischen Reformers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). Haase suggested that Brandes deserves more credit here, making a case that the three friends were equal partners in an intellectual exchange that continued until Brandes's death in 1810. He finds it likely that Brandes had a hand in formulating these ideas. (I, 41–48).
[40]Frieda Braune called him a 'wirksamer Verbreiter Burkscher Weltanschauung in Deutschland' in her *Edmund Burke in Deutschland, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des historisch-politischen Denkens* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1917), pp. 112–13. Stephan Skalweit considered him an 'Adepten Burkscher Ideen' in his 'Edmund Burke, Ernst Brandes und Hannover', *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 28 (1956), 15–72 (p. 16).

Burke, while strongly critical of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, (still) attacked the *ancien régime* as tyrannical and despotic (*PB*, p. 67).

Hendrich became uncanonical to the extent that he, without close association to canonized figures, was simply forgotten. He was still mentioned favourably until the 1830s, perhaps due to the increasing 'liberal' turn in the political and constitutional climate. One wonders whether Hendrich was difficult to place politically and hence hard to 'use' in the historical narrative. He did not fit the master narrative that in Germany the middle classes were (considered) powerless. His clearly articulated vision of an emerging propertied class in which nobility and bourgeoisie merge, presented by a member of the nobility, would not have suited his own class in the nineteenth century nor would it appeal to the emerging working-class movement, although this merger was broadly what happened over the following century. His faith in the old imperial structures would not have held much appeal for mid-nineteenth-century national liberals. Post-1945, his vision of a large, propertied, and politically active class did not fit the long-range explanations of the rise of fascist totalitarianism. More work is needed to determine whether Hendrich was an outlier, an exception that proves the rule, or part of unacknowledged or camouflaged voices. Brandes, who subtly promotes the same merger, seems to be one such more camouflaged voice.

Not fitting into established narratives may have affected both Hendrich's and Brandes's reception histories. The complexity of their published stances between progressiveness, pragmatism, and camouflage is difficult to reconstruct and pin down in retrospect. Unless one takes the horizontal perspective, the fluidity of the political situation between 1789 and 1820 creates considerable difficulties in 'nailing' them down: opinions were being formed and reformed (Brandes on the involvement of the 'mob'); invective distorted points by oversimplification (Hendrich was a Jacobin), and changed target (were the 'democrats' or the 'aristocrats' to blame for the course of the revolution and the subsequent political instability?). The different political language — *Aristokrat* versus *Demokrat*, despotism instead of absolutism (which obscures the attack on the *ancien régime*) — may also have contributed to veiling their aims for later readers.

It has become evident that, in the 1790s, the boundaries between what was later designated as liberalism and conservatism were fluid: Brandes and Hendrich suggested to use *Ständestaat* mechanisms to make fundamental changes to the estate-based political system. Intent on ending the despotic abuses of power under the *ancien régime*, both proposed a modified type of 'Old Liberty' to integrate political middle-class ambition and potential into governance (thus making revolutionary upheaval unnecessary). Brandes formulates an anti-despotic project of moderate reform in which middle-class capability is gradually integrated into the political elite. Hendrich, coming from the other end, envisages the emergence of an expanding, property-

owning *Mittelstand*, a politically active citizen class with political representation and a say in political decisions, whose backbone are increasingly untitled landowners.

What has, in short, been gained by investigating these two marginal figures? It has helped to make the political and rhetorical complexity, the yet undetermined openness of the historical moment, re-emerge. This complexity and openness show that the traditional narratives of the paths of German liberalism and conservatism have tended to overlook (or misread) these early proposals for constructive political reform by political practitioners.

Notes on Contributor

Maike Oergel is the director of the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at Nottingham. Her research centres on Anglo-German intellectual and cultural relations 1750–1850 and cultural transfer processes. She has published widely on constructions of national and European identities in literature, historiography, and philosophy. Her books include *The Return of King Arthur and the Nibelungen: National Myth in Nineteenth-Century English and German Literature* (1998), *Culture and Identity: Historicity in German Literature and Thought 1770–1815* (2006), *Zeitgeist: How Ideas Travel: Culture, Politics and the Public in the Age of Revolution* (2019), and, as editor, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Cultural Transfer in 1790s Germany*, *Britain and France* (2012).