

It was a beautiful, soft golden September day in Tübingen when I set out for the Wurmlinger Kappelle.

Located in the hills between Tübingen and the neighbouring town of Wurmlingen, the little chapel was the setting for an elegaic poem by Ludwig Uhland. Today would not be the first time I had set out to visit it. On my previous attempt, I had strode confidently up into the woods, only to become quickly lost in the deceptively complex maze of narrow, shady paths branching and separating under the trees. There were signs directing me towards the Kapelle, marked with the traditional cockleshell of the pilgrim's route, but they seemed to spin like weathercocks and point themselves in new directions whenever my back was turned. I re-emerged into the valley some hours later, footsore, weary, and defeated.

This time, I hoped, it would be different. My route took me through Tübingen's imposing but eerily deserted Schloss Hohentübingen, through its open gates, across its courtyard, and into the woods on the far side. The woods were quiet, the greenery shot through here and there with shafts of mellow sunlight. Here and there along the trail, signs had been placed with poems composed by various different noted writers who, like Uhland himself, had lived in and been inspired by Tübingen and the Neckar valley. Tübingen, with its cobbled medieval streets and timber-framed houses, has always had a magnetic quality to a certain type of dreamy, sensitive temperament. I remembered my German teacher describing it, with a mixture of exasperation and affection, as a kind of a refuge and refuelling station for life's misfits, waifs and strays.

My faith in my pathfinding abilities was vindicated by discovering the Schwärzlocher Hof more or less where I expected it to be. A rambling farmhouse tavern, the Schwärzlocher Hof is famous for its home-brewed cider and its hand-rearing of the animals intended for its dinner table. Children can come to the Schwärzlocher Hof, play with the baby animals roaming around the farmyard, then enjoy those animals' elder siblings in a rather different way inside the house. But I, a man on a mission, simply refreshed myself with a glass of the Schwärzlocher's strong, cloudy cider before plunging back into the woods.

I was now sure that I understood my earlier errors in navigation. As though responding to y newfound certainty, the signs for the Kappelle obliged me by remaining stationary. My course took me through the woods, and out into the bright sunshine on the far side. I could now see my destination – a little whitewashed chapel perched at the top of a steep hill, a path up to it winding through vineyards.

After I reached the top, I sat down on a low wall and looked out over the view of the valley beyond, a breath-taking expanse of field and forest. It is a traditional rite of passage among Tübingen students to read out the Uhland poem aloud on this spot. This, perhaps self-conscious about my German pronunciation, I did not do. But when I think back to my semester abroad in south Germany, my walk through the woods to the Wurmlinger Kappelle is one of my clearest and happiest memories.

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