Berlin cobweb. The late Heine: Jewish wisdom, Hegelianism

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INTRODUCTION

In 1852, Heine wrote a critical Preface to the second edition of his *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (first edition 1834). The little text is a concise testimony to Heine’s later stance on Hegelianism.\(^1\) One of Heine’s basic aims is to blame some leading radicalizing Hegelians for posing as ‘godless self-gods’. The men in disrepute are Ruge, Marx, Feuerbach, Daumer, and Bruno Bauer.\(^2\) Heine recommends that they all should repent and dwell upon the biblical history of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar who, having boasted of his divine status like he had done himself, was abased into bestiality:

> Alas! Several years later a bodily and intellectual change occurred. How often since that time I have been musing about the story of this Babylonian king, who played the good God, but fell miserably from the zenith of his arrogance, and found himself crawling like an animal over the ground, eating grass (presumably salad). This legend is written in the overwhelmingly grand book of Daniel, the edifying observance of which I would strongly recommend, not only to my dear Ruge, but also to my even more obdurate friend Marx, and, indeed, to Messrs Feuerbach, Daumer, Bruno Bauer, Hengstenberg and the like, those godless self-gods. (DHA V, 171)

The allusion to the ‘bodily and intellectual change’ is significant. The bodily facet signals a public imagery of illness, since in 1848 a long history of ill health culminated in Heine’s physical collapse, and for the remaining eight years of his life he was to be bedridden in what he called his mattress-grave. The intellectual facet relates to Heine’s post-revolutionary reconsiderations of a

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\(^1\) By ‘Hegelianism’ I generally mean the way Hegel’s absolute Idealism and dialectical method constitute a productive challenge to his followers and critics in the 1830s and 1840s. For a concise survey see H. Stuke, lemma ‘Hegelianismus’ in *Histories Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, vol. 3, Darmstadt 1974, 1026-30. Recent research on Heine’s acquaintance with Hegelian philosophy is documented below.

writer's views on writing, which found expression in his 'biblical apostasy' from those radicalizing Hegelians.

Since the 1980s, Heine's later work has steadily found a more and more appreciative readership. Criticism no longer tends to concentrate on his verse and prose up to 1848, putting his post-48 work only second to the younger (the 1820s) and middle period (1830-1848). I too concentrate on his later writings. The present study focuses on the reason why the late Heine (1848-1856) acted so vehemently against Hegelianism. It is obvious that those radicalizing Hegelians reminded him of his lifelong interest in Hegel's philosophy. Heine's acquaintance with Hegelian philosophy has been widely discussed. I will argue that, in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, the major contributing factor to his reassessments was a thorough reappraisal of Jewish wisdom. This wisdom cannot be gauged by the degree of Heine's adherence to the rules which govern Jewish life; rather, Jewish wisdom appears as an inventive transcription of Jewish sources, aiming at the articulation and justification of a living past in actual life, in a language which speaks of diasporic concreteness. For tradition to occur, a person must not just receive a message from the past but be able to translate the wisdom embodied in it.

As we will see, the translation is an act of memorizing. Memory, basically, is knowledge from the past; it is not necessarily knowledge about the past, but it is a preliminary to the formation of knowledge about the present. In Heine's case, memory is shared memory, one which can be expressed in a leg-


4 Ruge, Marx, Feuerbach, Daumer, and Bauer will be studied in Chapter IV, in discussing Heine's revolutionism in the 1840s. For the provocative naming of Hengstenberg, see below in this Introduction, 5.

acy. The obligation to remember comes from the effort of assimilationist forces to forget.\footnote{For the ethical relevance of such obligation, see Avishai Margalit, \textit{The Ethics of Memory}, Cambridge (Ma) 2002.}

It will be shown that Heine’s Jewish wisdom points to a preservation of what is felt distinctly Jewish under the cultural pressure of assimilation relating to the German-Jewish ‘Question’ in the period of political emancipation (1780-1871); it is his literary response to social prejudices against Jewishness, feelings which were articulated with painstaking scrutiny in a public debate about the conditions for the Jews’ ‘acceptability’ to ‘ordinary’ society.\footnote{The tangled relationship between Jews and non-Jews in nineteenth-century Germany is subject of countless studies. Classic are M. Wiener, \textit{Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation}, Berlin 1933, and J. Katz, \textit{Out of the Ghetto}, New York 1978. More recent is H. Bach, \textit{The German Jew: A Synthesis of Judaism and Western Civilization, 1730-1930}, Oxford 1984. I have notably profited from David Sorkin, \textit{The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840}, New York and Oxford 1987, Michael A. Meyer, \textit{Adapting Judaism to the Modern World. Response to Modernity. A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism}, New York 1988, Paul Lawrence Rose, \textit{Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany. From Kant to Wagner}, Princeton 1990, and Julius H. Schoeps, \textit{Deutsch-jüdische Symbiose. Oder die mißglückte Emanzipation}, Darmstadt 1996. A short yet valuable note is Edith Lutz, ‘Die Lage der Juden zur Zeit Heines’, in Joseph A. Kruse, ed., \textit{‘Ich Narr des Glücks.’ Heinrich Heine 1797-1856. Bilder einer Ausstellung}, Stuttgart and Weimar 1997, 31-7.} Pros (few) and cons (many) were discussed in order to find out whether Jews qualified for citizenship in the modern state, no matter how many accoutrements of ‘normal’ life they would acquire. All this is not, it must be stipulated, to remove Heine as a Jew from German literature. Such would be in direct contradiction to Heine’s proud self-esteem as a German writer. In one of his earliest poems, the then seventeen years old poet tried his fortunes with glowing lines on Germany’s glory, after Napoleon’s defeat in the Battle of Belle Alliance:

\begin{quote}
Deutschlands Ruhm will ich besingen.  
Hört meinen schönsten Sang!  
Höher will mein Geist sich schwingen,  
Mich durchbebet Wonnedrang.  
(DHA I/1, 512).
\end{quote}

Though considerably dimmed, his search for belonging would last out even his eventual exile in Paris, where he sought to interpret French revolutionism as a precondition for the political and social amelioration of Germany, till the 1848 fiascos extinguished the last sparks of optimism. Heine had a strong urge to Germanize indeed. Yet his Germanizing does not make him out-and-out German: it pertains to an equivocal articulation of the literary self in a basically alien environment.\footnote{By Heine’s ‘Germanizing’, I mean his stunning mastering of high German in order to achieve both literary and social status in post-Napoleonic Germany. I will discuss the point in Chapter III, 103-6.}  

Heine’s is necessarily strategic writing. For a social being whose civil status is restored by the dominant society remains condemned to exile from his
identity, and therefore, too, from his language. This language, German, is not the natural possession of the writer, it is not his, it is the others’ language of which he has taken possession as his own, to a degree which cannot attain to any native abilities. A concrete reminder of the dissonance is the late Heine’s incapability to write his autobiographical project to an end. His authorship does not allow for a well-finished and durable self-assessment as a German writer. So there is reason to insist on sticking to the suggestion that however brilliantly he Germanized, his Jewishness was not fit for unconditional acceptance as an author, i.e. as member of a cultivated, intellectual elite. I therefore fail to see what makes Heine the ‘unique, momentous example of successful assimilation’ Hannah Arendt is willing to recognize, nor do I understand why ‘the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine’, would be the fabrication of critics and scholars Robert Holub is pinpointing. I view Heine’s texts as part of a complex social and cultural process, in which Germaneness and Jewishness conflict. The literary structure of his writings cannot be separated from their relevant external contexts. For here we come across problems of identity and difference which form the discoursal or contextualized frame of all of Heine’s writings.

Jewish wisdom is Heine’s tentative answer to these problems, leading from defusing to opposition, from incorporation to resistance. It stands apart, directing attention to itself, giving itself publicly to be read in veiled hints and uneasy formulations. By the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification inside, attention is drawn to the specificity of these writings in terms of

14 Contrary to the marrano Briegleb is willing to detect in Heine’s writing, Bei den Wassern Babels, 5-10.
a critical difference: this is what distinguishes their literary presence in the surrounding culture. Such writing is born of distantiation.

The communication of a significant friction, then, is the public message through which all the other messages are marshalled. It is voiced by an ‘I’, a self-stylized, self-dramatized instance which is constructed out of biography and poetic licence, and presented half defensively, half defiantly in the face of convention. It is written down as a fictive, imaginary representation of discourse which differs from commonplace in interrupting it. As such, it is expressive of a lifelong effort at moulding private experience into literary meaning. The practice of interpretation has to concern itself with the nature of the persistence staged by this particular ‘I’.

In this study, consequently, Heine’s writing is positioned as that which discloses a truth which Hegelian philosophy cannot state: what remains unthought in ‘proper’ thinking is the question of how the presence of the particular is to be understood in terms of Jewishness. Heine is acutely aware of the specific case of Jewish identity: the way identity is constituted entails either that one is delimited by being a Jew or that one belongs to the category of Germaneness. His work runs counter to this claim. It leads him to the recognition that the exclusion is articulated in a philosophical definition of the universal as refusing certain particulars. Throughout this study, critical reading of Heine’s texts is the interrogation of this disparity. I do not want to infer that Heine’s writing is but a mirror of the world. It uses by displacement words, which stem from ‘elsewhere’ – daily life, Romanticism, critique, lore, and biblical miscellany – to name the particularity Heine wants to accentuate. The work bears witness: whatever the ‘I’ says is accompanied by an implicit assertion that all this truly is the case.

Three preliminary remarks may shed some light on Heine’s reappraisal of Jewish wisdom after 1848. It is useful to note first that it is indicative of post-revolutionary writing; we must insist on the literary role the late Heine saw for Jewish wisdom in the formation of prose and poetry. It is a fertile motif, not a fossil belief. Further, it is remarkable that in the 1852 Preface we just cited the ‘godless self-gods’ had to put up with E.W. Hengstenberg, militant spokesman of a Protestant orthodoxy. Naming Hengstenberg is a clear indicator of how much his review of Jewish wisdom differs from authoritarian devotion.

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15 An extensive development of a philosophical understanding of literature is too complicated to enter into here. Useful insights in Andrew Benjamin, Philosophy’s Literature, Manchester 2001.
17 E.W. Hengstenberg had been a frequent object of Heine’s lively ridicule. Hengstenberg was the mouthpiece of a neo-orthodox Protestant circle. His major work Old Testament Christology (Berlin 1829-35) endeavoured to affirm a traditional Christological view of the Old Testament in reaction against the new criticism of that literature. Through the periodical Evangelical Church Review, his ideological bastion, he propagated a Lutheranism supporting the model for two realms, directing the spiritual life of the populace towards unconditional obedience in the secular sphere of the state. Hengstenberg’s powerful ecclesiastical and political influence deeply affected the attitude of the Lutheran Church towards society. The state shares a godly task with
Thirdly, it is well known that still in the mid 1840s Heine had cautiously sympathized with what he now denounced as the revolutionary hubris of Hegelianism. His interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy had been coloured by pantheistic and sensualistic readings; as a matter of fact, already the first edition of History (1834) conveyed a platform from which to campaign for a pantheistic-sensualistic message of a self-godliness which might sprout a rash of revolutionizing forces. At that time, Heine was considered close to a then radicalizing Hegelianism. Hence it is obvious that Heine’s Jewish wisdom implies a fierce self-criticism. The author of the 1852 Preface is clearly not the least of the persons concerned: his former self-godliness now equals atheism in infamy. We will come across this auto-critical attitude throughout the post-48 period.

The 1848 Revolution set Heine off on a reconsideration of the preceding decades back to these formative years in Berlin. The late work echoes candid discussions on Hegelianism and Jewish wisdom Heine had joined as a member of the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies in the early 1820s. I therefore seek to elucidate the complex of religious and philosophical allusions and references his later oeuvre contains by discussing writings from the younger and middle period if necessary. I hold that Heine’s post-48 comments on Hegel fit in a meditative recapitulation of his own literary career: Hegelianism is a painful reminder of revolutionary zeal. After 48 Heine disposed of Hegelian absorptions and renounced the self-godliness for the ‘dogma of a true, personal God beyond nature and not subject to the human mind’, as he wrote to Heinrich Laube in a letter dated 25 January 1850 (HSA XXIII, 24). Had not he been acting a ‘divine biped’ up to 1848? Had not his pantheistic reading of Hegel been a strong argument for that stance? Confined to his mattress-grave in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, his self-assurance had gone, as he indicated in a notice in the Augsburg General Gazette, dated 15 April 1849:

Often, especially when my spine is one spasm of pain, it flashes through my mind that man might not be this divine biped my late professor Hegel told me to rely on twenty-five years ago in Berlin. (DHA XV, 112)

In the 1852 Preface to History, Hegelianism is now labelled as an inert ‘Berlin Cobweb of Dialectics’ (DHA XV, 39). Heine’s post-48 reappraisal of Jewish wisdom is a German-Jewish writer’s productive effort to face a non-emancipatory actuality.


Heine’s membership is studied in Edith Lutz, Der ‘Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden’ und sein Mitglied H. Heine, Stuttgart and Weimar 1997; unfortunately, she does not enter on Heine’s acquaintance with Hegel’s Berlin lectures.
In the following eight sections, I place Heine’s final reorientation in the broader setting of his literary career. Starting with his interest in Hegelian philosophy, I am going to introduce the essentials of Heine’s authorship, before presenting the outline of this study in the ninth section.

1. Heine and Hegelian Philosophy

It can plausibly be argued that Heine attended some of Hegel’s lectures in Berlin from 1821 to 1823, which were by and large based on the speculative method of the 1817 *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. As a student, Heine got familiar with Hegel’s Berlin 1820-1 Aesthetics, Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion in the 1821 summer term lecture series, as well as Hegel’s lectures on the Philosophy of Right, in the 1821-2 winter term. He also attended Hegel’s lectures on the Philosophy of World History in the winter term of 1822-3. Heine’s friends in Berlin included one of Hegel’s most ardent disciples, Eduard Gans. Thus, from direct and indirect sources he had a fair outline knowledge of Hegel’s Berlin philosophy. But it must be said that his reading of Hegel was coloured by a pantheism which stemmed from eclectic interests in ‘Spinozistic resonances’ in the intellectual climate of the 1820s, that is, generally speaking, from the presumption that God is identical with the universe, conceived not as an aggregate of particulars but as an impersonal, unifying totality. Heine’s pantheism appears to have been influenced by patches of Lessing, Goethe, and the young Schelling. It has to be stressed that in


20 Hegel’s Berlin years are analyzed in Martin Bondeli, *Hegel in Berlin*, Bonn 1990.


so far as Hegel inclines to this position as well, he is taking the universe as such to be the ultimate ontological subject.

A full discussion of Hegel's problematic position towards pantheism is clearly beyond the scope of this book. Here one only needs to invoke the fact of Hegel's vulnerability to the charge of pantheism in his Berlin period, a charge virtually indistinguishable from atheism in the eyes of his theistic enemies. If we look back to the 1820-21 Aesthetics, however, we meet with what might be called his proper version of pantheism:

Both Nature and finite Spirit pertain to the divine, though they do not take the form of the godhead because they are bound up with finitude. Spirit yet transcends the bounds of finitude as it rises upwards to the divine, that is, towards absolute harmony.24

Were it not for its air of paradox, this might be termed Hegel's Christian pantheism, as Joseph McCarney rightly stipulates.25 Yet it must be said that in his 1817 Encyclopaedia Hegel explicitly denies Nature's divinization.26 The possibility of knowing and understanding God is of prime importance in Hegel's philosophy, as we will see in the third chapter. But when Hegel is criticizing pantheism, like in his Berlin lectures on the history of philosophy, that attack, for all its vehemence, is almost expressly designed to oppose to an obviously Spinozistic type of pantheism.27

In the turbulent atmosphere of early nineteenth-century pantheism in Germany, we must focus on Heine: between approbation and depreciation a lifelong involvement in Hegelian issues is emerging. Heine studied Hegel over and over again. His private library contained Hegelian texts and commentaries, including 1839, 1840 and 1854 editions.28 Heine's revolutionary pathos is clearly influenced by Hegel's view on the French Revolution. Although Hegel came to deplore, and to give already in his Phenomenology of Spirit a profound analysis of, the 'terrorist' excesses of the French Revolution, he never ceased to regard it as having a positive historical significance. It always remained for him a vital moment in the realization of human freedom. Napoleon was to figure for Hegel as the modern embodiment of the world historical individual. His reverence is articulated in a letter dated 13 October 1806 reporting on the sight of the triumphant Emperor as an epiphany of the world-soul, riding out of the city of Jena after his victory in the battle nearby:

24 Ästhetik, 32.
27 The debate is studied by Pierre Macherey, Hegel ou Spinoza, Paris 1979.
Introduction

It is indeed an exceptional experience to behold such an individual who, contracted to a sole point, astride on a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it.\textsuperscript{29}

The note of awe and reverence is struck again in Heine’s writings, notably in his 1826 \textit{North Sea} and his 1826-7 \textit{Ideas. The Book Le Grand}.\textsuperscript{30} In the 1830s and early 1840s Heine tends to nominate ‘the people’ the actual heir of 1789, though he remains uncertain about the furtherance of its cause by the ‘dear’ words of a poet. In these years Hegel’s system was much debated. Heine, too, was prompt to go over Hegelian issues again. To him, however, Hegelianism is Janus-faced; its revolutionism may favour the case of the Jews through absorbing or elevation, but at the same moment it is qua secularity in tension with the ineluctable otherness of Jewish wisdom. Is pantheism a solution to the puzzle? As we shall see in discussing Heine’s Saint-Simonism, the outer garments for Heine’s problematic revolutionism in the 1830s had indeed been pantheism: Heine’s middle writings alluded critically to its seductiveness. Though revolutionary thoughts were troubled, it was pantheism which made Heine subsequently to become cautiously sympathetic to the cause of the radicalizing Hegelians in the 1840s.\textsuperscript{31}

After 48, however, the ‘Berlin Cobweb’ – Hegelian dialectics – refers to a rationale for an outworn godless self-godliness. Now the pantheism from the 1830s and 1840s is debunked qua atheism, and anti-Hegelian declarations parallel a reaffirmation of Jewish wisdom. The late Heine reacts to the decay of progress in history obviously not with Hegelian cogency but by retreat to the ancient belief in a personal God: ‘Yea, I have returned to God, like the prodigal son, having fed swine among the Hegelians a long time,’ he states in the Epilogue to the 1851 \textit{Romancero} (DHA III/1, 179). What is obvious too, however, is that his late work is full of self-ironies, irreverences, and even blasphemies. They raise doubts about what he wanted to inform his readership of his return. Here it must be stressed that the religious declarations form part of an intricate post-revolutionary literary strategy. An analysis of the late Heine’s reaction to Hegelianism would therefore remain incomplete if not measured against his views about the relationship of literature and modern culture. I will show that these views are coloured by his discussion of Hegelianism as a reservoir of revolutionary ardour, which had attracted a writer determined to emancipate without assimilating unconditionally to the cultural mainstream. Contrary to his former, fragile sympathies, the pantheism of the 1830s and 1840s had lost its attractiveness after 1848 for reasons to be explored in Chapters III and IV. Heine now raised a philosophically unsophisticated notion of God as alien to current history. Against the different critique’s of Hegel’s religious presuppo-

\textsuperscript{29} In Johannes Hoffmeister, ed., \textit{Briefe von und an Hegel}, vol. 1 (1785-1812), Hamburg 1952, 120.
sitions the radicalizing Hegelians had presented from 1840 onward, he con­
trasted his God especially to the philosopher’s God Hegel had reflected over, so as to rewrite his own literary career against the background of lost perspectives.

That philosopher’s God, one may say, had made himself heard in the Berlin auditorium, when Hegel wished to characterize his investigation in the progress of the consciousness of freedom and of its realization in history; he enlisted his central thesis by hinting at divine volition. Against pietism Hegel opted for a theodicy which provides us with philosophical reasons for being reconciled to the way of the world, as it was stipulated in the 1822-3 lectures on the Philosophy of World History:

We have to reflect on world history in general, and on its ultimate object in particular. Its ultimate object conforms to God’s plan for our world. To this end all sacrifices on the altar of the world are made; it is the effective, animating impetus. We know that it is the most perfect, that it is the will of God. What God wants, is the most perfect, which can only be himself and his same, that is, his will. His will does not differ from himself, and this is what we call ‘Idea’ in philosophy.32

I will return to this topic in the third chapter of this study. Suffice to notice here that to the late Heine, the ‘sacrifices on the altar of the world’, to refer to Hegel’s wordings, invalidate the progress towards ‘the ultimate object’ indeed. Whereas time used to open out, shimmering with promise, it now has no dimension, no extension backward of forward. Heine’s later texts are spiced with creative remembrances of things past in the stasis of a perpetual present which is not eternity but a prison, the mattress-grave, or the Fatal Room containing the paralysed body I will view in the second chapter of this study. Jewish wisdom can be seen as memory’s driving force, enabling Heine to look at things from the viewpoint of a stranger. For all his conscious obstinacy, this central injunction still is a powerful articulation of a Germanizing outsider who escapes the dominant categories of the post-Napoleonic world.

2. Outsider

To Heine, Jewishness became symptomatic of his first experiences as a promising poet in constant fear for being denied access to the literary circles he wanted to enter, because he did not respond fully to its German-Christian setting. From the 1820s on, it became clear to Heine that a German-Jewish writer was hardly to be accepted by German society and fully integrated into German culture. People generally took the view that Jews retained something pre-modern in their attitudes, something which contradicted ‘civilized’ life. The chance of successful German-Jewish assimilation was slim, given the emphasis upon forthright Christian principles in the social order characteristic of the Res-

32 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 24.
toration. Incomplete emancipation and partial integration together comprised the conditions under which the young Heine was to turn to writing.

For Heine, access to culture was expressly not through his entry into the Lutheran Church. What Heine drove to become a convert in 1825 was a strong pressure from the Hamburg Heine-clan to enter upon a career in law. In a letter to Moses Moser, dated 30 September 1823, Heine alludes to baptism as a prerequisite for a climb up the social ladder:

That is why you now can see me, headaches notwithstanding, in the final stage of my law readings in order to earn a living. As you can imagine, here baptism comes up. Nobody in the family is against it save for me, and this me is of a very stubborn disposition. Since you know my way of thinking you are right in concluding that the act of baptism is a matter of indifference to me. As far as I am concerned it has no symbolic meaning. Others will hold the same in view of the conditions under which I will be christened. It might allow me to stand up more firmly for the cause of my poor tribesmen. But I consider it below my dignity and indeed a blot on my name to have myself baptized in order to enter upon an office in Prussia. In good old Prussia!!! I really do not see how to handle the situation. I would rather be converted to Catholicism and hang myself out of frustration. But I must quit this fatal theme. As we will meet within a few months, I will give you more details by then. We live in gloomy times. The scoundrel becomes respected, whereas respectable men are coerced into villainy. (HSA XX, 113)

Heine’s aversion is hardly surprising viewed in the light of his straight digression on Christianity in a revealing letter to Immanuel Wohlwill on 7 April 1823. Here he had written of ‘the foul smell’ Christianity had been given off ever since its beginnings to the detriment of ‘the poor Jews we are’, so as to clarify his own position on reform Jewishness:

We have lost the strength to grow a beard, to fast, to hate, and to endure out of hatred. That is the reason for our reformation. Some of us have seen the light through comedians, and they are exerting themselves to lend lustre to Jewry with new dramaturgies and modern settings; the prompter must swap his beard for bands and gown. These people want to pour oceans of thought into a small basin of poor papier-mâché, they

33 See W.O. Shanahan, German Protestants Face the Social Question, vol. 1 (The Conservative Phase, 1815-1871), Notre Dame 1954.
want to dress Hercules on the Cassel Wilhelmshöhe in Little Markus’ wee brown jacket. Others are opting in favour of a smart evangelical branch under Jewish firm, and they have their talles made out of wool from the Lamb of God, and their underwear out of Christian Charity. Then they go bankrupt, and the issue spells: God, Christ & Co. It is quite a mercy that this house will not hold long; its trampling upon philosophy just meet with indignation, and it will bust up in Europe, notwithstanding that some of its African and Asian missions will last a couple of extra ages. Everyday this final breakdown of Christianity is becoming more evident to me. It is plenty and enough for this foul Idea. But when I call Christianity an Idea, which one can I envisage? There is a rotten household of Ideas which have nest in the crevices of this old world of ours, this abandoned bedstead of divine Spirit, like a horde of bugs nesting in the bedstead of a Polish Jew. The moment one crushes a specimen of these Idea-bugs, a stench crops up which can be smelled for millennia. Such an Idea is Christianity; it has already been crushed 1800 years ago, but it still raises a stench to the detriment of the poor Jews we are.

(HSA XX, 72)

Significantly, Wohlwill and ‘Little’ Markus are co-members of Heine in the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies, a body to which I will return further below in this Introduction. Within the present context, it is also remarkable that Heine discusses Christianity with reference to the Hegelian notion of ‘Idea’, a usage which will be viewed in more detail in Chapter III. Here attention must be directed to Heine’s inversion of Christian values; qua Idea, Christianity is pictured in the very epithets of those fetid crawlers ‘uncivilized Jewry’ is often associated with in the cultural climate of Heine. Through this inversion, in other words, Heine is skilfully hinting at his own position as an outsider, given Christianity’s predominance in nineteenth-century German culture, but at the same time he is at pains to dissociate from the ‘real barbarity’ of Eastern European Jewry. In contrast to those ‘absolutely uncultured’ elsewhere in the shtetl, to Heine, being an outsider is inherent to the pressurizing of actual civilized society, which cannot treat him but as a pariah. His Germanizing can be seen as an effort to take control of this stigmatizing. The image is ‘reappropriated’ and reworked into a wide range of literary personae of the outsider, who, thanks to his knowledge about this ‘imposed eccentricity’ is able to criticize publicly the (Christian) conditions, which make him ‘eccentric’ in the language of the ‘cultured public’ he is addressing.

The non-Pariah life Heine desired to achieve failed to come true. Germanizing offered no secure ground. His new appellation, Heinrich, which Heine himself hardly would pronounce, was not him. It was an identification tag, a disembodied sign pointing to someone who happened to be this writer. The security the young Heine sought in stunning literary brilliance was not forthcoming. Instead, he found himself running the risk of being swallowed up by the forces of obliteration. A foreign language opened into the locus of the Romantic fantastic, of the irrational, into the dark sites of medieval folklore, of
Introduetion

gryphons and unicorns, tempting mermaids and moon-dazed mountain nymphs, of Pan and unbridled Eros, into the realm of chauvinistic nationalism and ethnic prejudice, the constituents of a mainstream culture whose principal defining characteristic was to substitute historical for 'normalized' forms. To Heine, however, they did not swiftly apply to private experiences. Hence his 'contaminated Romanticism', which will be viewed separately below in this Introduction. Here it can be noted that these sequences were not coeval with those layers from which an unquestioned conversation could proceed. Even the simplest adjectives represented a whole system of morality. Heine took great pains to pick from this reservoir the style of wit which fitted, so that it could generate verbal virtuosity.

This language is the language of the present, though it is not the language of the self. On the face of things, the old restrictions felt away, and it seemed now possible to mix up, to overcome the weight of presumption against the other, only if the reassuringly right words were used and phrases had vigour and roundness. But letting Jews 'into' mankind still defined them as having been 'out', so that 'Jew' again came rather to represent a difference from humanity, eventually an opposition to it.37 Things got even 'worse' through Heine's reworking of 'Germanic' mythology into non-illusory writing, which ran counter to mythological corroboration of Teutonism with the same levelling vision, the same brash and stubborn spunk, in a variety of combinations generating new meanings as responses to the surrounding world.38 This process was fuelled by a polemical insistence that writing represents the triumph of change over fixity, disruption over unity, collision over linkage; in the 1820s, Heine began to explore the subversive possibilities within poetic language, which, to him, opened into a place where social codes were undermined, and conditions of coherence questioned.

As I will elaborate in Chapter III, the young Heine endeavoured to absorb private experiences within the political framework of Hegelian philosophy. It was neither assimilation into Christian nationalism nor a full accommodation to reformed Judaism — though Heine valued the vigour of the sermons by the

37 As indicated above, the stage for this 'Jewish Question' was set in the 1780s; things became noticeable in 1781 with the publication of Christian Wilhelm von Dohm's pamphlet Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden in Deutschland, Stettin 1781-83. In the following decades the Jews' civic and social improvement was transposed into moral standards, under the assumption that at the same time a civic and ethical self-improvement on the part of the Jews was necessary. Whereas Kant had already suggested that a 'euthanasia' of Jewishness be the prerequisite condition of the Jews' moral acceptance going through, F.W. Ghillany in 1843 still contended that the Jews ought to give up their 'stubbornness' before gaining entrance to German society. Cf. Immanuel Kant, Streit der Facultäten, ed. Klaus Reich, Hamburg 1975, 96; F.G. Ghillany, Die Judenfrage. Eine Beigabe zu Bruno Bauer’s Abhandlung über diesen Gegenstand, Nuremberg 1843, 47.

38 Heine's manoeuvrings are in conflict with a longing for an almost 'priestly' unity in Germany which would be promoted by Catholic piety, reformed Christianity, and/or renewed Hellenism. This archaizing mentality was shared by different authors such as the Schlegels, Novalis, Schelling, Hölderlin, Kleist, and Fichte. Their common ground is analyzed in Helmut Bachmaier and Thomas Rentsch, eds., Poetische Autonomie? Zur Wechselwirkung von Dichtung und Philosophie in der Epoche Goethes und Hölderlins, Stuttgart 1987.
reformist Leopold Zunz in the early 1820s. Still less was it a ghetto life in uncompromising orthodoxy. It was a commitment to the secularized message of the French Revolution. Judged in perspective, Germany was a deadly quiet cul-de-sac where conservative prejudice against the Jews bossed the show. Heine therefore took evasive action, as he wrote to Moses Moser on 14 October 1826:

There is no doubt at all that I have a strong urge to give my German fatherland a valedictory. My drive is less of a wanderlust than a sense of personal grievance (such as the-never-to-be-cleansed Jew). (HSA XX, 265)

In an unsettling passage, a few lines further, this letter pictures Heine as a permanent Jewish outsider, rooting his ‘drive’ in the history of the Wandering Jew:

How deeply ingrained the myth of the Wandering Jew still is! In the tranquil setting of a wooded valley a mother is telling her children this hair-raising tale, and her little ones huddle around the fire. Outside it is night, the posthorn sounds, and Jewish haggler travel to the Leipzig Fair. And we, the heroes of this legend, we are ignorant about it. No barber can shave away the white beard whose edge has become youthfully black again over time. (ibid.)

Heine sought to surmount German nationalism by shifting to larger perspectives. New tones were set in his Pictures of Travel (1826-31). Travelogues became emblematic of hope for an exodus to liberty, away from rejection. Political satire, scorn for religion, and social criticism mixed with the doctrine of a supra-national sensual liberation, which came to be the core of Heine’s revolutionary challenge to restorative authority. This writing showed the way to the next two decades up to 1848. To Heine, sensualism promised a synthesis of bliss and righteousness in virtue of a Hegelian coincidence of God and revolutionism in history. These dazzling features yet marked an inclination to immunize himself from ever-present doubt over the efficacy of emancipation. For behind the revolutionary zeal lies the Jewish experience of exile: behind the story of triumphant progress is a trace of an other story. Even after Heine had

39 In his sermons Zunz strove for ‘updated, revitalized practises’ which may strengthen the representation of Jews in modern society, Leopold Zunz, Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge, Berlin 1822, 475-6. Heine’s appraisal in his letter to Immanuel Wohlwill, dated 7 April 1823, HSA XX, 71. Zunz is studied in Luitpold Wallach, Liberty and Letters. The Thoughts of Leopold Zunz, London 1959. Though Heine saw much in the Reform movement as an adjustment to what he considered the philistine motives of bourgeois society, he did not oppose himself to the Reform movement as vehemently as is suggested in Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 180. For a moderate view, see further Peter Walter, Heinrich Heines Frühwerk im Spannungsfeld von Deutsch-nationalismus und Judentum, Salzburg 1988, 455-6, and Lutz, Der ‘Verein’, 235-7.

moved to Paris in 1831, the ambit of the French Revolution remained equivocal; though he avoided answering to public bias towards the ‘Jewish character’ of his writing in the 1830s and early 1840s, Ahasverus never deserted his imagination. Relegated to memory, anxiety increased.

3. Jewishness and Judaism

Already in a letter to Immerman, dated 10 June 1823, Heine made no secret of his phobic anxieties about claims that his work was straight out ‘Jewish’:

There is just one gesture which may hurt me deeply indeed: the tendency to reduce the atmosphere of my poetry to history (you know what this word means to me), that is, to the author’s biography. I was annoyed greatly yesterday to gather from a friend’s letter that he was likely to define my poetical essentials by means of ruffia anecdotes, dropping unpleasant clues about life, politics, religion, etc. Had he done so in public, I would have been furious; to my relief, no such thing has occurred as yet. However easily a poet’s history may throw light upon his poetry, however easy it is to point at politics, religion, hatred, bias, and consideration, people should not mention it, at least not in his lifetime. If not, the poem is deflowered, so to speak. You tear its mysterious veil when your remarks are to the point indeed, but if you are smuggling them in, you will disfigure it recklessly. And besides, how seldom the manifest outlines of our history do correspond with our real, inward history! As for myself, at least, they never matched. (HSA XX, 92-3)

In my opinion, Heine’s inclination to Jewish wisdom became and remained a significant part of his artistic consciousness precisely because he did not want his work to be reduced to the sheer prejudice against Jewishness he faced in the friend’s letter about which he wrote Immerman. Instead he sought for a camouflaged yet productive alternative to external pressures: Jewish wisdom was expressive of a careful search for public self-determination. From the beginning, there is this subtle vein of authorship; hence the importance of the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies in the early 1820s. Heine was an active member of the Association in 1822 and 1823; after he left Berlin he kept interested in the Association’s performance. I will return to Heine’s membership in Chapter III. Suffice to say here that within this intellectual context, it was Hegel’s Berlin philosophy which took a critical role in Heine’s formation. The Berlin Association had as its goal the study of the

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42 The Association petered out in the late 1820s.
present, post-Napoleonic state and the history of the Jews in order to provide access to Jewish tradition in modern Europe. For Heine, it stood for the interdependence of Jewish wisdom and political, philosophical, and literary views. It brought him close to an amorphous German Jewry's subculture, which, generally spoken, was in search for an acculturation without assimilation. Here Jewish wisdom referred to the religious tradition of the Jews to be transferred to secular culture, in order to work for the good of mankind. Jewish intellectuals attempted to present it in a sophisticated context so as to press the case for Jewish emancipation on proper terms, that is: in terms of an authentic 'Judaism' in which the transfer from outdated observances to modern conventions would be realized. All this was done under the assumption that it would finally grant them a 'home' in history too.

We therefore need to place the intellectual reappraisal of Jewish wisdom as a secular rearticulation of Judaism in a basically non-friendly milieu. For in the eyes of many of Heine's contemporaries Judaism was superstition. To them, it acted as catalyst of stubbornness setting Jews apart from 'normal' society. Judaism thus became a paradigm of the Jewish Question in Germany. This meant the abandonment of specifically Jewish modes of discourse, the use of acceptable European languages, and the eventual acculturation of the Jews in Germany. Hardly anything from the pre-modern world was sacred in the struggle for legality and sociability. Inevitably, a chasm opened between a genuine spirit of Judaism and what were considered its obsolete principles: ceremonial laws, Kabbalistic mysticism, messianic expectations, the reverence for Hebrew, the usage of Yiddish, the vista of the Promised Land, oral histories, all those aspects of religion which were considered to be 'alien' to modern life. What was asked for, was the good, acceptable and de-Judaized Jew. And so, on the Jewish side, modernity's demands led to a threefold reaction. First we have the determined stand of Orthodoxy against modernization. Then we have the Reform movement, willing to jettison traditional customs in exchange for acceptance in bourgeois society. And finally we have an intellectual wing operating in between these antagonistic currents, in search for a sophisticated expression of that very mediate position of theirs.

45 I will discuss some implications in Chapter I, 51-6, in analyzing Heine's views on the Jews' emancipation in the early 1840s.
Heine’s literary development is closely related to this third variant. In the Berlin Association Hegel’s system was read as a fundamental articulation of the Jews’ acceptability.\(^{47}\) Hegelizing members like Wohlwill and Gans sought an intellectual solution to that ‘question’ via a scholarly detour through Jewish wisdom, which they judged an essential prerequisite of universal emancipation towards a unified and united mankind without separate identities, and therefore finally also without Judaism which was considered a pre-modern relic.\(^{48}\) Thus they inevitably met up with the Judaism Hegel called an ethnic religion, lacking the universal character of Christianity. To Hegel, the ethnic attribute had to be eventually absorbed in the process of sublimation until it reaches, in the line of the development of religions, first Christianity and then in the line of philosophy’s development, as speculative philosophy, Hegel’s own system. Yet Hegel does not suggest a straight connection between the alleged character of Judaism and the Jews’ rights in the modern state, for his philosophy of law and the state led him away from anti-Judaism to a more lenient stance; Hegel found himself defending the right to political emancipation on the ground that the Jews were human beings like any other citizens.\(^{49}\) In the 1830s and 1840s, some of his ideas, directly or indirectly, became central in an extensive controversy which was characterized by an intertwined consideration of Judaism as a religion and the status of the Jews in society.

I suggest that the late Heine reconsiders this controversy in presenting Judaism in terms of Jewish wisdom. To him, Jewish wisdom is a productive post-48 answer to Hegelian philosophy, that is, to him, it makes sense. Its value is twofold. First, it points to a Judaism which is an ethical doctrine built upon the Enlightenment ideal of moral betterment. Before the radicalizing Hegelians Heine now stresses the Jews’ inner civilization they were apt to neglect.\(^{50}\) In this respect he shows affinity with the intellectual wing in German Jewry’s subculture mentioned above. Second, Heine’s literary self-assessment does not rest primarily on the legal or moral content of Judaism but on hidden and disputed aesthetic aspects. His is not necessarily an unconditional affirmation of what the tradition has said previously. To him, Jewish wisdom is a cogent hallmark of writing under post-revolutionary conditions. Yet it is no neat riposte. For how does one stop reading the exterior signs of a ‘foreign tribe’ and step into the inwardsness, the viscera of their meanings in an era of commodification? What is the peculiar restlessness of an imagination, which cannot have faith in its own absoluteness in European modernity? Here, in the multifarious layers of writing, Heine insists on the poet’s distinctiveness. For all its complexity, this second aspect deserves closer attention.


\(^{48}\) To Ludwig Marcuse, this intellectual tour de force was the major cause of the Association’s poor performance, Heinrich Heine. Melancholiker, Streiter in Marx, Epikureer, Rothenberg 1970, 116.


\(^{50}\) Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 709-57, ‘Civilization of the Heart’.
4. Low Greek

In representing the poet’s distinctiveness, the late Heine startles his readership with the Yiddishism ‘schlemihl’ in the second of the ‘Hebrew Melodies’ from the 1851 Romancero, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II. The Jewish-German word is labelling the poet as the outsider we already hinted at. Suffice to state here that the track of Yiddish is divulging that this poet is always bound to be seen as Jew in that conflicted world of culture in which Heine found himself, and in which he was clearly not made welcome.

There is an obvious tension in Yiddishisms between a sense of nostalgia and the connection of this very tongue in the outside world with polemic and aggression, perpetuating Jew-hatred, stereotypes of unpalatable hagglers. Heine is careful to keep his distance from the world of trade and money. Jewish items are often presented in public as gentile dilemmas. Heine’s sensualism is a case in point.\(^{51}\) Heine had always been careful to articulate his sensualistic views in terms of Greekness, so as to set it in a fashionable context; nineteenth-century Germany was raving about the ancient Hellenes.\(^{52}\) Joyous Hellenism is in stark contrast to what Heine characterizes as insipid spiritualism. Yet Heine’s Greekness is not wholly consistent with high culture. It is reminiscent of lower strata. The manoeuvre is exemplified in the conclusion of his 1840 Börne-memoir.

The book ends with the image of Heine dreaming of black-haired, black-eyed, bare-breasted nixes, murmuring a sort of Yiddishe low Greek, of which I understood but very little, for they spoke Greek quite differently than I had learned it in school and from my old professor Wolf thereafter ... I understood only enough to grasp that they complained about the bad times and feared that things would get even worse, and that they intended to flee even deeper into the forest ... Then suddenly, in the distance, vulgar howls arose ... They cried, I no longer know what ... In between I noticed a Catholic bell tinkling for nocturn. My beautiful nixes turned markedly even more pale and thin, before they finally dissolved into mist. And there I was, awakening and yawn-ing. (DHA XI, 132)

Heine’s dreams are as revealing as his awakenings. The text involuntarily betrays a tension between what it manifestly means to say and what it is nonetheless constrained to mean. Out walking in a forest, the ‘I’ hears scraps of voices catching up quickly like weird creatures whose syllables, the sounds, and the intervals between them, are almost lost in the ordinary places of daily life. The forest is a conspicuous refugium away from civilization, where pogrom threatens. It contains traces of other signs which differ from the concept of a romantic yearning for a place where man may commune with Nature. The Nixes are

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\(^{51}\) To be discussed more fully in Chapter IV 136-8.

Introduction

picted as survivors. The church bell might mean more than it usually means. The black, bituminous terror of the dream solders itself to the chemical base of stammering, pulling out of the reader the act of attention which may bring ‘some otherness’ to light here. Heine’s non-Greek Nixes are an affront to the cultivated Philhellenes. But they are also an appeal to the assimilated Jew who had forgotten his identity; the nixes’ low Greek parallels the low German of the unrefined Eastern European Jew Heine had pictured almost twenty years earlier, in his 1822 About Poland:

I still prefer the Polish Jew with his smutty fur, with his lousy beard, with his garlic breath, and his Yiddish to many others in state-paper grandeur. (DHA VI, 62)

Heine’s image of Moses Lump, alias Lümpchen, from Hamburg, in his 1830 Baths of Lucca, gives a similar impression. This rag-and-bone man living in a blind alley is the incorporation of Eastern Jewry, with all the paraphernalia of an uncivilized status, resting in the arms of a religion which spares him worry about culture:

He roves around from day to day, in all weathers, loaded with sacks, in order to make his couple of marks. When he returns home on Friday evenings, he finds the seven-armed candelabra lit, a white cloth on the table. Then he drops his load and stops worrying, and he sits down for dinner with his squinting wife and even more squinting daughter, enjoying together a wonderful meal of fish stewed in a tasty, creamy garlic sauce. He sings the most splendid lieder of King David, rejoices greatly at the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, rejoicing also that all the miscreants who behaved wickedly toward them eventually died, that King Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Antiochus, Titus, and the likes of them are dead, while Lümpchen is still alive and partaking of fish with his wife and offspring – And I assure you, doctor, the fish is delicious, and the man is happy, he does not have to fret about culture, he sits wrapped up in his religion and his green dressing-gown, a contented Diogenes in his tub, gazing cheerfully at his holder which he does not even have to polish up himself ... (DHA VII/I, 117)

This nostalgic evocation has serious undertones. Against the background of assimilation and acculturation Heine keeps remembering the difference. What matters to him is the force of language. He envies the Hamburg Jew with his simple pleasures and his nonorthographic language because he is free from the ordeal of civility. Not all the Hebrews are austere, he implies. Some know perfectly well how to taste the Lord’s goodness amid a mood of hostility and hatred.

A key to this understanding is Heine’s laborious Bacherach-project (1824-40), the unfinished work of ‘faction’ about a 1489 pogrom, concentrating
on the feast of Passover. Here Heine shows great interest for Haggadic patterns, which are expressive of an idiosyncratic way of coping with life: Jewish wisdom is characterized not in terms of religious law and strict observances but through folklore. Heine prefers the liveliness of Haggadah, with its anecdotal speech and its allusive flow, to what he deems obsolete Halakhah. His preference was rooted in childhood experiences. The ever-popular Passover Haggadah had affected him profoundly, as the seder was the most important domestic ritual, a disruption of everything ordinary, when the entire family would gather around the table. Edith Lutz has convincingly showed that Heine’s interest in haggadic themes from domestic seder was aroused again by Leopold Zunz in the early 1820s, to be incorporated in the Bacherach-project in the following years. At its core lay the Haggadah schel Pessach. Though sensualist perspectives are distorted in the aftermath of 1848, the poet’s distinctiveness still rests on his ability to rework the unsuitable, of which the ‘exotic’ world of Haggadah is a precious paradigm.

5. Memorizing

What the late Heine gains from Jewish wisdom, then, is a deposit of otherness. As a writer whose persona was informed in a conscious manner by that metaphorical language which restructures memory, Heine was concerned with the capability of literature to politicize the private. The suffering of memorizing lies in the memory of suffering. Much of Heine’s later writing is an attempt to transpose autobiography (his ‘secret history’) into matter of public interest, even were it in conflict with general ideas about a ‘correct’ way to write poetry or prose. As the full weight of isolation fell upon him in the 1850s, Heine is left to his own literary resources, facing mental and physical stupor, like in the ‘Dragonfly’ from the Poems 1853 and 1854:

Jetzt sind meine armen Flügel verbrannt;
Ich kann nicht zurück in’s Vaterland,
Ich bin ein Wurm, und ich verrecke

53 For a detailed analysis see DHA V, 498-612; further Höhn, 436-45.
54 Halakha was the primary rabbinic foundation for religious life and communal and individual identity until the modern period. Traditionally, it functioned as a matrix of Judaism. For a modern orthodox view in philosophical terms see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Halakhic Mind, New York 1986 (repr. 1944). Haggadah generally refers to Jewish folklore; for its ‘humorous’ tenor see P. Tomson, ‘Oud-Joodse humor of: anekdotische theologie’ (‘Old-Jewish humour, or: anecdotal theology’), Ter Herkenning 13 (1995), 238-51. See also Briegleb, Bei den Wassern Babylios, 239-51. I return to Haggadic patterns in Chapter V.
Und ich verfaule im fremden Drecke
(DHA III/1, 207)

The last line is expressive of Heine’s ‘incorrectness’: the dirt brings about a serious discrepancy between the moralizing tone of the fable – love blinds – and the display of bitterness. It could be felt that this writer strained himself and protested too much. His ‘untuneful mind’ leads him to ‘vulgarity’. What the late Heine concerns most is to keep reinscribing these private feelings in an exposure of the defects of the present, where paralysis threatens and throats tighten. Heine’s 1853-4 Memoirs point at a cross section of both his inner life and the times he lived in:

These pages artlessly divulge all that matters to me. The interaction of public affairs and private feelings will manifest itself to you as the signature of my very being. (DHA XV, 59)

What could that signature be? Heine is at pains to memorize its implicit texture: would he lift the veil from his soul, he states, one saw nothing but wounds. Finally, in his 1853-4 Confessions, Heine shows himself fully aware of what ‘the signature of his being’ is pointing at. Signature is stigma:

So it is. The Negro king wants to be painted white. But you had better not laugh at this poor African – the Negro king is everywhere, we all are desperate to present ourselves to the world in a colour quite different from the one Fate has coated our skin with. (DHA XV, 15)

For its exclusiveness, the ‘we’ is unsettling; it has the effect of making readers feel that they have very little in common with the narrator or persona in question. They do not share their knowledge of the world with that of the writer and his Negro king. Because it is undeniable there in the social structure, the equation is presented as a perpetual state of separation: Heine’s ‘we’ is basically different from ‘them’, and irrevocably on the ‘wrong’ side. Whenever the subject of Jewishness comes up, there is a gap from which larger rupturings proceed. In my view, the Confessions are a painful documentation of this ‘colour bar’. They represent the effort ‘to articulate as seriously as possible my personality’ (DHA XV, 15). This ‘personality’ is conditioned by the world in which it grew up; Heine’s late writings are therefore not ‘just’ that of the wronged and suffering poet, but rather that of public recollection and reassessment.

In his physical isolation from society Heine falls back upon a reservoir of extant motives, which have to be adapted to the present as a report of a literary journey through contemporary history. After 1848 he looks back on his documentary reports about socialism and communism in the early 1840s as a

57 Heine’s usage of the animal fable will be discussed in Chapter II, 74-6.
‘prelude’ to post-revolutionary texts.\textsuperscript{58} Its point of reference is the lost aura of the French Revolution. Revolutionary ‘memoranda’ make up the melancholic tenor of Heine’s later writings.\textsuperscript{59} The tone is set by mourning; it is strengthened in terms of martyrdom. In these works it is not unusual for such themes, constellations, or even individual words, phrases, and rhyme constructions to reappear as ciphers for a large complex of ‘reproductive memory’.\textsuperscript{60} His later work, in sum, displays the practise of ‘writing backward’. Any attempt to decipher those references will be vain unless related to earlier texts which may, in their turn, elucidate the reflective density of the post-48 writings.\textsuperscript{61} Among them, we find significant hints at the ‘contaminated Romanticism’ mentioned earlier in this Introduction. Because they are indicative of Heine’s authorship, this topic must be discussed separately.

6. Romanticism

Heine had been wrestling with the intricacies of the Romantic Movement in Germany throughout his career.\textsuperscript{62} To him, Romanticism, thanks to its imaginative potential, was especially of use in discussing Goethean paradigms, which he considered obstacles to realizing the revolutionary sensualism we pointed at above. What distinguishes Heine from missionary Romantics, how-

\textsuperscript{58} In a letter to Campe dated 24 August 1852, HSA XXIII, 230. In the early 1840s Heine is one of the few correspondents who recognized the communists’ potential. See Barbara Remmel-Gortat, \textit{Deutscher Journalismus im Vormärz. Die Berichterstattung der “Allgemeinen Zeitung” von 1840-1843 und Heines “Lutezia”}, Düsseldorf 1991. As we will see in discussing Heine’s Saint-Simonianism (Chapter IV), the communists, to Heine, were destined to become the executioners of the ‘old world order’ of exploitation the Saint-Simonians had criticized, cf. Ortwin Lämke, \textit{Heines Begriff der Geschichte. Der Journalist Heine und die Julimonarchie}, Stuttgart and Weimar 1977, 80, 84.

\textsuperscript{59} As I will set out in Chapter V, 176.

\textsuperscript{60} For its literary articulation see Siegfried Lenz, \textit{Über das Gedächtnis. Reden und Aufsätze}, Hamburg 1992, 11-15, 185-87.


ever, is his scorn for those concerned with consolidating and validating German ‘identity’ by focussing on Germany as the site par excellence of the Divine.\textsuperscript{63}

This ‘contaminated Romanticism’ of Heine is never affirmative; it is criticism, insofar as criticism is a form of negativity at work in a process of division and recombination which fails to measure up to cohesiveness, by showing an awareness that the writer cannot expect his work to be taken wholly seriously. He conveys this tone and attitude by being at once critically sensible of what he is doing and why he is doing it. However imaginatively his writing alludes to promises of euphoric freedom from conventions, it operates at the risk of condemnation and isolation, which yields not release from constraints but madness. This criticism is in fact nothing other than the process of its own ironic self-negation: as such, it is an intensification of precisely that self-annihilating nothing Hegel objected to in the work of the Schlegel-brothers, Solger, Novalis, Jean Paul, and other theoreticians of Romantic irony.\textsuperscript{64}

To Hegel, Romanticism was a style in which great attention was paid to the outward form or appearance rather than to the inner reality or true significance of things. It was no longer ‘essential’, because it lacked ‘objectiveness’, and it remained stalled at nothingness and would thus have ended by making of the least artistic a principle of art.\textsuperscript{65}

To the Romantics, however, the negativity of irony is not a provisional negative of a dialectic in which the magic wand of sublation is always already in the act of metamorphosing into a positive, but an absolute and irretrievable negativity which does not, for that, renounces knowledge. In Friedrich Schlegel it is the totally arbitrary nature of irony which is responsible for erupting, revolting, or suddenly breaking in on things; here, Romanticism becomes neither mere literature nor simply a theory of literature, but rather knowledge as literature or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own knowledge, which is expressive of a ‘chemical’ union of the conditioned and the unconditioned.\textsuperscript{66}

In Heine’s ‘contaminated Romanticism’, such knowledge is shaped by assuring its strangeness: a warehouse of jetsam where the uncanny comes to light, like in the fantastic creatures of Hoffmann and Poe, and the animated objects and animal caricatures of Grandville and Tenniel. Heine’s ‘contaminated Romanticism’ is therefore a disassembled structure which could be reset masterly for functions completely at variance with its mystical, emblematic origins but, for that mastery, is still presented as high level Romanticism in the \textit{Confessions} (DHA XV, 13). Yet both artistic expression and aesthetic pleasure are intimately bound up with the subversive trans-


\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ästhetik}, 181.

formations of existing codes. Heine’s ‘contaminated Romanticism’ is full of appropriations, aiming to subtle-ties which had not been codified, tending to move beyond Romanticism while exploring its possible mutations and extensions. Here Heine’s style has its out-rageous spectacle, away from teeth-gritting harmony.

After 48, Romanticism gives Heine a chance even to gain in strangeness; it becomes an alien element stressing the distinctiveness of poetry and, as such, an ‘eerie’ response to intolerable disillusionment. Though language is hardly amenable to initiative, we should not underestimate the power of this writing as an actual mechanism of disturbance: a kind of momentous blockage. For Heine’s ‘destiny’ is no longer going to pull him towards Glory, as if he were sitting in a chariot driven by supernatural, ‘Dionysian’ powers, like the triumphal car pictured in ‘Jehuda ben Halevy’, the poetical elegy in the ‘Hebrew Melodies’, which form the third section of the 1851 Romancero:

Still davon – gebrochen liegt
Jetzt mein stolzer Siegeswagen,
Und die Panther, die ihn zogen,
Sind verreckt, so wie die Weber,

Die mit Pauk’ und Zimbelklängen
Mich umtanzten, und ich selbst
Wälze mich am Boden elend,
Krüppel elend – still davon –
(DHA III/1, 145)

Heine makes intensive use of aposiopesis: a poetical device in which speech is broken off abruptly. With deliberate coarseness, panegyric rhetorics are debilitated. This poetry does not call us to fulsome praise. It summons to sorrow. The poet has sunk into the brutish state of Nebuchadnezzar, whose fate we already learnt of at the beginning of this Introduction.

Accordingly, commemorative features are essential constituents of Heine’s authorship. In their poetic articulation, he tries to preserve a language which is in serious danger, a language over and above function, of which poetry is a faint reminder. But poetry is incongruous with the prosaic format of reality, and poetic diction can only artificially be reproduced, because its natural origin had faded away in modern society. Only thanks to poetical skill it continues to exist ‘in art’, that is, artificially, in spite of being nearly destroyed or made extinct. Heine’s late poetry is an eloquent witness of this artificiality, so full of ‘unreality’ scenery, so void of Arcadian vistas. It is poesis, restricted to the realm of the constructed or manipulated, a witness to lost naturalness. In well-known verses from the posthumously published ‘Bimini’ (1852-3?), its fabric is compared to shipbuilding:

Fürchtet nichts, Ihr Herrn und Damen,
Sehr solide ist mein Schiff
Aus Trocheen stark wie Eichen
Sind gezimmert Kiel und Planken.

Fantasie sitzt an dem Steuer,
Gute Laune bläht die Segel,
Schiffsjung ist der Witz, der flinke;
Ob Verstand an Bord? Ich weiß nicht!

Meine Raen sind Metaphern
Die Hyperbel ist mein Mastbaum
Schwartz roth gold ist meine Flagge,
Fabelfarben der Romantik –
(DHA III/1, 367)

These lines attest to the emergence into the foreground of the making as an attempt to reify, in the format of the barcarole, the non-reifiable. Foregrounding is the art which reveals a sort of literariness rather than concealing it. Heine persistently calls the reader’s attention to what he is doing. Any show of skill is construed as artificiality.

In Heine’s writings, the loss of naturalness is registered in the emblematic victory of modern technology, as nightingales are driven away by steam locomotives. Nature is disenchanted, and speech is trivialized as a device for daily demand. Here, creative activity and creator cannot be spared the process of alienation. As a consequence, Heine’s late poems often symbolize poetry’s fragile power: a non-prosaic urge to name what should be. All this pertains to their poetical character, a quality which yet raises the question as to whether or not they are compatible with the aforementioned reworking of private feelings in terms of social criticism. Therefore we must turn back to Heine’s authorship once more.

7. Clairvoyance

For all his ‘artfulness’, Heine had always been driven by a strong desire to present himself as a historian of the actual world, capable of indicating the portents of a new era. The author owes his clairvoyance to a mix of revolutionary engagement and artistic mission. Acting as artist, apostle, and tribune, he pretends not only to imagine, respectively to prophesize the novel, but also to further its cause as an agent. In order to fulfil these obligations, Heine is prepared to play many literary roles.67 The way in which they influence each other is facilitated by the vates, the theopneustic or prophetic figure embodying an emblematic blend of poetry and daily life. For it is the vates who knows how to read signs which are incomprehensible to ordinary people. He is ‘reactualizing’ the past into the present by ‘evoking’ its momentum here and

now. The poet, by virtue of this fundamental insight, is exempt from institutional rules, duties, or obligations. Social conventions may be more of a hindrance than an asset to him. Authorial responsibilities clash with modern culture, which must be blamed for that very reason. For if the poet is not at home in the present, who else will? Here, in a fold of incongruity, we have the provocative impetus for all of Heine’s writing. Consequently, Heine claims that his prose and his poetry stem from one source, as is indicated in the 1837 Preface to the second edition of the Book of Songs:

I would only observe that my poetical no less than my political, theological, and philosophical writings originate from one and the same concept. Hence it is impossible to condemn the one without disavowing the other. (DHA 1/1, 566)

At first sight, we could associate this basic ‘concept’ with the attempt at a project of an organic, ‘universal progressive poetry’ the Jena Group envisaged in the abolition of the distinction between poetry and metaphysics. But the aesthetic and political implications of Heine’s ‘deferral’ are evident; his ‘concept’ foregoes, indeed undermines, the organic qualities which, in early-nineteenth century German culture, define a system. The nexus between system and organicity is simply assumed whenever the idea of a totality is invoked. We may speculate that the seductive charge of the organic lies in offering a coherent and homogenous picture of German society at precisely the time when the political and cultural Germanization of that society was in full swing. As Heine’s writing is directed against organicity, solidity, stringent architectonics, and above all purity, his ‘non-system’ does not so much tolerate difference as consists of it, both in prose and in poetry. From this perspective, one can grasp the proper meaning of the interlacing of fantasy, desire, disillusionment, and critique, in which Heine’s writing constructs its own authority by becoming, itself, a set of exceptions to conventional rule. The exceptional is the basis of social criticism. For criticism is born when words come loose from their neat arrangements. It makes writing an eyewitness comment on the present by virtue of its marginality.

To Heine, then, writing is documentary evidence per se. There is a fundamental affinity between the wronged author and the wrong world he lives in, Heine is making clear. Only autonomous minds are capable of grasping this affinity intuitively. Autonomy is not simply elitist, but claims disagreement, poetical subjectivity, mourning, and otherness. Hence the compatibility of poetical autonomy and social criticism, a combination which even grows stronger after 1848, when private misery interferes with revolutionary dismay in a literary metaphor of illness. Indeed, compared to the candour and decent com-

prehensibility of much post-48 verse, Heine’s later poetry does hardly make sense. His oeuvre abstains from exercising the social virtue of being easy to be with, which is precisely what Heine is playing on by gestures of defiance against morality. To the professional critic, its ‘senselessness’ was an alarming dissent from realist paradigms which became preponderant in the 1850s. What made Heine so provocative? The answer to that question lies in Heine’s reaction to the 1848 fiascos, registered in terms of bodily conscience, as we will see presently.

8. 1848

The 1848 revolutions in France and Germany proved a profound disappointment to Heine. Neither the ambiguous objectives of the provisional government in Paris nor the frail blossoming of German patriotism met the basic needs of his revolutionism. His optimism about the feasibility of revolutionary principles ceased. Great expectations were abandoned, boundless ambitions thwarted. Heine had always been subscribing to the values of the 1789 French Revolution, favouring its social-utopian rather than its political-republican dimensions. To him, revolutionary promises were still far from being fulfilled. In the 1830s and 1840s the longing for revolutionary parousia is often frustrated by an almost obsessive anxiety about premature attempts to have it prompted. Hence his mistrust of republican factions in Germany and France, which he used to find at best insipid philistines, at worst false prophets. Such feelings were documented in large Parisian panoramas like the 1832-3 French Conditions, the 1833-40 Salons I-IV, and the 1840-54 Lutezia.

As indicated above, in his younger and middle period, Hegelianism had been informing him of the revolutionary course of history, furnishing him with an intellectual means to grasp the teleological sense of reality in terms of a secular message of salvation. In 1848, however, the idea of Progress crumbled into ruins. The people’s nascent liberty, to which Heine had dedicated himself a lifetime, started to decay. The secularized eschatology of the Revolution

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71 Realism is discussed in Chapter II, 75-6.
74 Lämke, *Heines Begriff der Geschichte*, 30, 37, 56, and 60.
75 The concept of ‘the people’ deserves closer attention. In Heine’s writings it has a wide range. Cf. Chapter IV, 162-3. It includes references to lower and higher strata, ranging from ‘masses’ and ‘hordes’ to ‘nation’. Here we can find the plebs, the mob, and the proletarians as well as the middle and even upper classes, the third estate in general, the Republicans or the French. In his Parisian years Heine is expressly pointing at two antagonistic forces among the people,
fizzled out after five troubled months. Now '1848' is the confirmation of his fears for abortive attempts to reactualize 1798.

Along with the revolutionary events, the rapid aggravation of his physical condition set a significant divide in Heine's oeuvre. As it was generally understood, the worsening was due to syphilis. Consequently, contemporary literary criticism gravitated towards biographical curiosity for his private fate. It almost became commonplace to hold that these circumstances provided a moral key to Heine's later work. By the 1850s sickness and Jewishness became intrinsically interlinked in an atmosphere of indignation over his post-revolutionary writings. They were being measured as a scandalous setback against supposedly 'healthier' conditions. In the Confessions this public image was fostered by Heine's self-styled characteristic of a romantique défrôqué (DHA XV, 13), i.e. an indecent romantic who revealed his contempt for the critics who shunned him. After 48 not only did his preoccupation with the poet's psyche coincide with his physical degradation, but he was (wrongly) convinced as well that his illness had been caused by a venereal disease which was an obvious warp in his record. Heine's provocative expressions of the unavoidable conflict between sexual urges and decent representations of the desired object gave rise to alarmist views, swelling into a chorus of widespread discrediting among the literary critics in the 1850s.

9. Outline

Against the broader setting of Heine's literary career sketched above, this study is focussed on the late Heine's creative memorizing of Jewish wisdom as a means to distantice himself from his lifelong interest in Hegel's Berlin philosophy and its radicalizing acolytes. It can be summed up as follows.

To grasp the meaning of Heine's final views on Hegelianism, we must survey first and foremost the mental and physical circumstances in which the late Heine is writing. For here lies the ground for the recollecting so characteristic of the final years. In Chapter I, Heine's reaction to the revolutionary misfortunes of 1848 in France and Germany is studied; I will focus on the Parisian milieu in which Heine comments on the revolutionary misfortunes of 1848. His notion of history's irrationality is analyzed, and 'Babylonian Worries' are shown to be expressive of these feelings. Chapter II turns to the literary posture the later Heine adopted against being paralyzed, emerging from the mental and physical conditions of the mattress-grave. His use of 'illness' as a metaphor for post-48 reality is discussed in detail. By point-

Introduction

ing to the poetical adaptation of the Jewish-German persona of the schlemihl, I emphasize Heine’s configuration of martyrdom. The ‘conscience of the body’ is shown to be a crucial factor determining this stance.\(^\text{78}\)

To analyze Heine’s creative memorizing more precisely, I first return to his formative years in Berlin, then the revolutionary years in Paris are scrutinized. In Berlin Heine gained insight into the ideological circumstances surrounding his authorship. Chapter III therefore elucidates Heine’s actual acquaintance with Hegel’s Berlin philosophy, which forms part of a complex of post-Napoleonic reactions to the unfulfilled promises of the French Revolution, as well as to experiences of Jewishness. Special attention is paid to the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies. In this formative period, Heine’s authorship develops into an effort at salvaging what he could from revolutionary misfortune. Hegelianism is seen as an intellectual means to grasp the meaning of the present. It is acclaimed for its historical impact, but it is open to question whether Jews could benefit from its emancipatory dynamic without sacrificing their wisdom. A sensualistic reading of Hegelianism is Heine’s tentative answer to claims of subjectivity and heterogeneity. To overcome his German miseries, Heine feels it necessary to emigrate to Paris, where he expects to further the cause of the French Revolution. In those radicalizing years up to 1848 he is putting his Berlin know-how up-to-date. Chapter IV concentrates on the revolutionary pantheism Heine formed of Hegel’s philosophy in his Paris years. Heine’s radicalizing views are analyzed with special reference to Saint-Simonism in the early 1830s. Saint-Simonian sympathies are reworked into the radicalizing Hegelianism of the late 1830s and early 1840s. It will be stipulated that Heine yet insists on an aristocratic messianism which sets the writer apart from vigorous activists. True writers break off, only to resume their prophetical vocation to point ‘further’, that is, to the ‘communists’ Heine saw emerging in Germany and France. To the Heine of the 1840s, the early communist movement embodies most radically the urge for universal emancipation.

After 1848, however, as we will see in Chapter V, they are haunting his memories as an underground species defying the great fanfares which announced the arrival of a new post-revolutionary era. The proletarians express Heine’s nightmarish longings for revenge at a moment when revolutionary prospects were remoter as ever. Degeneracy and distress set Heine off on a careful reconsideration of the preceding decades back to his formative years in Berlin. He now distanciates from radicalizing Hegelianism through Jewish wisdom – a textual signal of ‘heterogeneity’. The ‘Berlin Cobweb’ had lost its beneficial potency; it left Heine with a residue of disillusionment which cannot be ignored. I will make clear that Heine’s estimation of scriptural vistas is es-

\(^{78}\) Cf. Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage politique. L’avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé*, Paris 1974, 168-9. Though Kristeva focuses attention to the state of poetry in post-1870 France, she hints at parallels with that of post-1848 as well, some of which I think of use in analyzing Heine’s later work, especially when she discusses the relationship between the orderly/rational and the heterogeneous/irrational, between the conscious and the unconscious, the ‘normal’ and the ‘poetic’.
sentential for his final reorientation, because here social criticism and literary self-esteem are merging into 'unheroic writing'. I will point out the effectiveness of this wisdom, which represents examples of righteousness and injustice. Heine's insistence on the sublimity of the Mosaic teachings as well as his articulation of anger and grief are discussed, and I conclude the final chapter in analyzing the way Heine externalizes his marginality in the act of public writing in terms of referrals back to a living past. A story of Jewishness and artistry is interwoven into a pattern of grief. Heine learnt the lesson the hard way: the consistency and continuity of dominant culture hang on expulsion and exclusion of otherness. Hence Heine's allusions to the Wandering Jew, that liminal being who calls into question the fundamental categories of modernity's 'new society'.