Berlin cobweb. The late Heine: Jewish wisdom, Hegelianism

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CHAPTER I. BABYLONIAN WORRIES

The 1848 revolutionary impulse came from Paris, where a campaign for the enlargement of the enfranchisement developed into widespread demonstrations and then, after clashes with troops, into open insurrection on 24 February. In March, Heine wrote four articles for the Augsburg General Gazette, in which he commented on the turbulence; only the first was to be published. They reflect an increasing uneasiness about the course of events. Nowhere the revolution is approved of unconditionally. Fascination and perplexity are jumbled up with critical undertones, yet subdued enough to refrain from direct association with anti-revolutionary reaction, as it became formulated in classical terms by Friedrich Julius Stahl, in his 1852 treatise *On Revolution*:

A revolution is the formation of all public affairs on human volition instead of divine providence, which means that the powers that be are not ordained of God but man, that is, the people, and that society is not all about aiming for the maintenance of God’s sacred Commandments but for self-satisfaction and arbitrary fancies.\(^1\)

In the course of time Heine’s criticism became nevertheless more and more explicit: his opinion of the 48 leaders felt sharply, and prominent revolutionaries were ruthlessly caricatured as failures. Theirs was certainly not the secular message of salvation Heine had recognized in Hegelian philosophy, which he had been engaged on cautiously from the 1820s onward.\(^2\)

To indicate what had caused the 1848 tumabout, Heine is eager to give new interpretations to older texts. Basic themes like history’s Progress, the pantheistic claim to man’s divinity, as well as the poet’s avant-garde status are meticulously reviewed. Man’s worldly deliverance has failed so far; the masses seem doomed to mischance, Heine suggests. Larger prose complexes like the 1854 (German) and 1855 (French) editions of *Lutezia* are merged together in a kind of reflective montages of articles previously publicised (and censored) in the Augsburg General Gazette, an operation which involved yet another self-censoring in view of the post-48 climate.\(^3\) Later versions interpolate present passages, so as to record revolutionary occurrences from the recent past as untimely events.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Stahl (1802-61) was a convert from Judaism who had become one of the principal apologists of Prussian conservatism; cf. Chapter IV, note 89.

\(^3\) As we will see in Chapter III.

\(^4\) For a discussion, see Lämke, *Heines Begriff der Geschichte*, 62-114.

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Heine now sets about interpreting the 48 aftermath in terms of ailing. The terminal illness he suffers from in his mattress-grave reveals itself as a political eye-opener, enabling him to reformulate an intricate pattern in which political fiascos and personal misery are skilfully interwoven. The progressive core of Hegelianism has turned into degeneracy and distress, experienced as what I will term in the next chapter Heine’s bodily conscience. But before entering upon that topic, we must first switch out attention back to the political uncertainties of 1848: in this chapter, therefore, I view the way the late Heine is gradually absorbing the facts about the 48 revolution into an overall revision of his hesitating commitment to radicalizing Hegelianism in his younger and middle period. In order to gain insight in the mental and physical circumstances in which he resumes writing, it will be shown how the thought of fruitless revolutionism is reinscribed in the memorizing mode we pointed at in the Introduction. Here we will go into details about the self-reflective use of such language. This ‘writing backward’ is a prominent feature of his later work; its point of reference is the dimmed aura of the French Revolution.

Heine’s creative memorizing produces a recognizable pattern: it is structured around ‘those fabulous days’ of February 48, when the 1789 repertoire eventually turned to shambles. He now deems the attempt at a reactualization of the bewitching drama to be farcical. The farce becomes pregnant in his view on the inverted Bonapartism of Napoleon III, who carried out a coup d’état in December 1851, and proclaimed himself Emperor. Revolutionary zeal had been vanquished at the barricades by counter-revolutionary calculation. The post-revolutionary stage of the Second Empire is pictured in Heine’s later writings as a world of bestial intrigue and malignity instead of bliss. Hence his preference for the bestiary, a genre, as we will see below, his poem ‘Babylonian Worries’ from the Poems 1853 and 1854 is expressive of. At the same time, this title refers to an experience of exile which is a basic thread running through his writings. Typical of Heine’s historical sense are now the allusions to stagnation and petrification, as the revolution had died down. Yet, Heine confronts his readership with rumours of obstinacy and revenge: his imagination is full of phantasmagoric visions of the present which cannot be censured, since there is still a communist spectre to be reckoned with. The communists are banned to an underground topography, to sinister non-places where Heine plays on prejudices and fears of ‘proletarian rats’. But the ‘radical hordes’ had missed their chance to gather momentum. To Heine, they no longer represent evidence of social progress, like they had done in the 1840s, when they came up to Hegelian expectations much better than the republican movements in the years up to that radicalizing period. Here it must be stipulated that, in the early 1850s, the fate of their history coincides with that of the bedridden author. Within this context, ‘communism’ is a provocative signal of anger. Its revolutionary kudos had eclipsed, but it remains indicative of de-moniac fury.

In his 1854 Dedication for prince Pückler-Muskau, marking the final assembling of the Lutezia-complex, Heine gives a clear picture of the communists’ part in his bestiary:
I often gave a specified account of the demons lurking in society’s lower strata, ready to sally forth from their obscurity when the right day had come. At that time, people would observe these demons – the future is theirs – only through minimizing glasses, which made them appear like mad fleas. But I presented them in real size, and there they were, the most terrible crocodiles ever to have loomed up from the mud. (DHA XIII/1, 18)

The mud can refer to gross physical matter as well as to a metaphorical ‘dirty knowledge’ about an underworld conjuring up the potency of transgressive bodies in all its frightening contagion. The poet claims to have an eye for what goes on below, and he will point at the hidden nooks and crannies of cultural imagination. The rubbish is shocking. Obviously, these ‘monsters’ represent the outlaw. They comprise a species of sinister miscreants exiled from the normative categories of the established system. A species of non-species, as it were. They are the embodiment of ‘epistemic illegitimacy’, ostracised as being ‘mad’ by the guardians of convention. They are the epitome of the ‘unthought’ of any given point of knowledge and representation, the unfamiliar spectre which returns to haunt the secure citadel of civility. The ‘monstrous’ is a synonym of strangeness; and it exposes so-called strangers as those who defy conventional categories of sociability and call up a whole teratology.

It is that strange and estranging dimension of experience deemed vomited by nature we are witnessing in the bestiary. And for this very reason it is considered a treachery to the political and social norms of the time. It must be stressed that the assertion that ‘the future is theirs’ echoes a last-ditch attempt to make a stand against post-revolutionary conditions by invoking something terrifying and disgusting, something directing outwards at society, as the revolution had proved itself a tombola, and not the long-awaited realization of the potentialities for radical change. Because this experience is an underlying feature of Heine’s later writings, attention must be focussed first on his reaction to the revolutionary events of 1848.

1. Revolution as Tombola

From February till May 48 Heine spends most of his time in a private clinic in Paris for a course of therapy. Nonetheless, he is very observant of the ill-timed disruptions in February, as roads were barricaded with flagstones, trees, lamp-posts, office desks, and carriages. Acts of violence contrasted sharply with a mood of almost anarchistic gaiety. Whereas public services shut up and shops kept closed, crowded cafés were open all night long, and gangs of urchins were running around with banners. The nocturnal thrill was intensified by myriads of lanterns and torches. Carnival festivities merged with an attempted revival of

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the liturgical repertoire of the 1789 Revolution. The proletarian overall, dressed up in a more civilized linen blouse, became à la mode. On 10 March Heine dispassionately commented in his second article for the Augsburg General Gazette:

The French have now outgrown their poetically royalist livery, romanticized in devotional scarlets and golden galloons. It did not fit them any more, it was bursting at the seams. So they exchanged it for the republican blouse. Baggy as this new suit was, it allowed them to move more freely. For the present they have their republic, no matter how they appreciate it. [...] Today, the French are condemned to be republicans, à perpétuité. They are left with no other costume indeed; and since they cannot go naked into the world, they must dress themselves hastily in order to preserve the decencies. Let everyone make something of it for himself. As for us, to be honest, we have already reconciled ourselves fairly well to our fate [...] (DHA XIV/1, 289)

The redressing of the pseudo-revolutionaries is not mentioned in passing. It shows the latest working-class fashion to be the disguise the bourgeois were struggling with, now that their frock coat and top hat were de trop in the popular atmosphere of February. Heine is obviously alluding to the disguising practices of Shrovetide. The image of carnival allows him to draw a sharp contrast: after Ash Wednesday, the ‘revolutionaries’ in disguise quickened to recover their usual, that is, their pretty composure.

Carnival practices are abundant in Heine’s middle and later works. They constitute an experience which goes beyond the continuum of time. Heine had been fascinated by the libertarian force of carnival; a rupture where normal life is transfixed in ecstasy. It disrupts authority and introduces alternatives. The rush of rapturous delight is illuminative. It points at a revolutionary orgy of destruction which made Heine shudder to consider its consequences, because its agents are not only objects of the author’s word, but subjects of their own significance as well. Heine sees this quality as a kind of dynamic and liberating influence, giving freedom to the individual character and allowing him to subvert ‘authoritarian’ or ‘monologic’ discourse. Year in year out carnival practices recur as premonitory signs. To Heine, however, the February carnival turns out to be a corrupt version of revolutionary expectancy. It clearly offers a clue as to how his views on the 1848 debacle must be interpreted: this revolution is a model of inversion. In defiance of progress, Heine corroborates the

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world turned upside down through inverted folly. Its outlines are fully established in the 1853-4 Confessions:

Had I been sensible in all this topsy-turvy nonsense, things had certainly driven me mad. Insane as I was in those days, however, precisely the reverse was to happen. So, oddly enough, just at the height of general madness the one who came back to his senses was I! (DHA XV, p. 36)

Heine seeks to identify political protagonists as corrupt carnival princes. The masks they are wearing can only be removed by means of hyperbole: the foolish inversion of a crazy world itself, now that history’s revolutionary glamour had evaporated within months.

From February till June, then, Paris was occupied with dramatic swiftness. Right in February, Louis-Philippe panicked, abdicated and fled to Britain. A heterogeneous, reddish-bluish provisional government was installed which gave adult men the vote and set up national workshops for the unemployed. Among its members were Louis Blanc, prominent socialist, and the poet Alphonse de Lamartine. In his report for the Augsburg General Gazette dated 22 March 1848 Heine is heaping praise on them. Yet, his wordings are too mawkish to be taken literally:

What a company! All brave and worthy men, aglow with cosmopolitan charity! Great champions of liberty, chivalrous servants of humanity, a Round Table over which Mr de Lamartine is presiding in laurel wreath! Are there any names sounding more heroic than an Arago, a Carnot, a Crémi eux, a Louis Blanc, a Marast, a Dupont de l’Eure, etc.? Still, I had noticed right away how strangely these names were lumped together. They lack elective affinity [...] Truly, these men were raised on the shield in an instant need of inspiration. (DHA XIV/1, 293)

Heine makes a clever use of tapinosis: a figurative means which belittles by exaggeration. The passage, with its bitchy ‘etc.’, has malicious undertones: this revolution is purely accidental, its heroism is pretentiousness, and all signs of hope are dashed. In the Confessions Heine sums data up:

How bizarre things were those fabulous days in February, when the wisdom of the sages was blighted, and choicest idiots were raised on the shield! (DHA XV, 36)

Whereas Heine’s coverage of the actual events still echoes some revolutionary ardour, things were, in retrospect, the worst mistakes the people ever made, as is indicated in the 1854 Waterloo-fragment:

Never before had the people, this orphaned giant, drawn more miserable numbers in the tombola of revolution than those gentlemen forming the provisional government. (DHA XV, 190)
By terming the people ‘this orphaned giant’ Heine avers its ineffectiveness, caused by the ineptitude of the republican faction Heine viewed with an ingrained mistrust. Finally, the members of the provisional government could only be labelled as ‘comedians’. To Heine, theirs was not the revolutionism Germany was waiting for to be exported. The March revolutions in Baden and Berlin are therefore even more sceptically viewed. In his last article for the *Augsburg General Gazette*, dated 22 March 1848, Heine reports:

> In point of fact, truth has taken off the garb of probability. *Credo quia absurdum est* is the just maxim of the moment. Yet, not only the world has got off its hinges, but also the individual’s common sense. Skulls are bursting, as all of a sudden so much novelty, so much newness intrudes into our mind. How precipately everything occurred! Why on earth did it happen at all? Is this world not ruled by Reason? Is it Fortune, is it just that deliriously joyful urchin, who is our present lord and master? (DHA XV, 292)

Heine’s criticism is levelled in particular at Alphonse de Lamartine and his German counterpart, the poet Georg Herwegh. De Lamartine is upbraided for his flattering championing of the Provisional Government, Herwegh for his abortive acting revolutionary strategist during the upheavals in Baden. Herwegh and De Lamartine are authors whose revolutionary pathos reminds Heine only too well of his own zeal in the years before 1848. In criticizing their illusions Heine blames his revolutionary self.

> Literature, it now seems, is not to be sought on the barricades but in the self-sufficiency of the tongue; significantly, in the midst of the turmoil, Heine collaborates with Gérard de Nerval on French traductions of youth poetry from *North Sea I and II*, and the *Lyric Intermezzo*, to be published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* with an Introduction by Nerval and Gautier. Introduction and translation give the impression of a Heine thriving on fantasy and imagination rather than on revolutionary engagement. Poetry means distance, this posture suggests. As his condition worsened, Heine had rather escape from public life in search for stillness from which, at the outset of his career, he made such efforts to leave. In a letter to Alfred Meißner dated 12 April 1848, Heine suggests that poetry be a flight from revolutionary storms:

> This raging world is entirely foreign to my feelings. Yet I submit to fate for I am too weak to make head against it, though I am much less inclined to kiss the hems of its dress, let alone its... You will not be astonished either that for a moment I was moved tremendously indeed; a shiver ran down my spine, and I was tingling with excitement. Now it is

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past. What irked me as well was the sorry sight of all those Old Romans around me, plus the fact that bathos was compulsory, not to mention Venedey, lion of the day. What I chiefly wish for is a chance to escape from the frightening turmoil outside into the everlasting spring of poetry, the realm of the incorruptible, if only I were able to struggle to my feet from my sickbed. But I have to drag along with my afflictions. They are excruciatingly painful, and you had better hurry up, my dear friend, if you want to see me alive. (HSA XXII, 271)

Instead rising from his sickbed and gloriously passing on to 'the realm of the incorruptible', however, Heine is removed to what he calls his 'villa dolorosa', a summer-house in Passy nearby Paris where he takes up residence from May till September 1848, passing the June-clashes over in silence. He is only to return to the city for his mattress-grave. From now on, in a secluded nook, he has to attend to a private barricade: a barrier to corruption and death. Heine's artistic productivity after 1848 conveys an impression of an amazing endeavour to hang on to life as long as possible; his attention seems too much occupied with writing and publishing to allow death to enter. On 11 February 1856 he sends a letter to Michel Lévy, the publisher of his collected works in French, asking again for correction proofs of Pictures of Travel, which he would return as soon as possible, along with the final sections of the book (HSA XXIII, 481). Six days later he dies.

2. Napoleon III, Liberticide

The disappointing results of 1848 affected Heine's political views profoundly. Indicative of the reorientation is his evaluation of Napoleon III. To analyze his estimation of the Emperor, we must go back to the April 48 elections in France, which returned a moderate majority deciding on a showdown with Socialism and proceeding to dissolve the workshops. Social contradictions flourished with peculiar virulence again. Reformers and revolutionaries disbanded. This provoked the improvised insurrection of 23-26 June in which some fifty thousand workers took up arms. Paris was now divided up into two clear-cut camps, bourgeois and the urban working class. The geography of the revolt coincided with the boundary of poverty. Barricading and fighting concentrated in the heavily populated eastern neighbourhoods of the city. The government ordered the insurrection to be crushed by armed forces under general Cavaignac. Hundreds of workers were killed and thousands arrested.

In a letter to his brother Maximilian, dated 3 December 1848 (HSA XXII, 303), Heine speaks about the recent developments in France and Germany with dismay. The political uncertainty that followed helped Louis Napoleon, a nephew of the Emperor, to enter the political limelight. In December 1848 he was elected President of France, winning 74 per cent of the vote.

In December 1851 Louis Napoleon, assured of the unconditional support of the army, carried out a coup d'État and proclaimed himself Emperor. Insur-
gents were shot in the streets. The French judged the military actions with disfavour, yet reacted disinterestedly to what they considered basically a political melodrama. Their adherence to the Assembly had actually been reduced to almost nil previously. Clever propaganda did the rest: for lack of alternatives the intimidated population sanctioned the dictatorial takeover in the 1851 and 1852 plebiscites. The imposition of government censorship in 1852 indicated that things would soon get back to 'normality'. To a critical observer like Heine, however, the unenviable conditions of the mattress-grave from this time on clearly matched a mental emigration to a realm of silenced expectancy, now that Bonapartism had lost its messianic aura.  

Napoleon III cultivated the conspirational tactics he had used before in bohemian circles. Puzzling proclamations, sudden polemics, esoteric parlance and bewildering mockery were of daily occurrence in the Second Empire. Following events from Britain, Marx, referring to Hegel, commented that the tragic heroism of the first French Revolution was now being repeated as farce, with the nephew in place of the uncle. Like Heine, he felt back back on notions about the oddities and absurdities of the present. They both characterized the Second Empire as a comedy nullifying the historical drama of 1789, but unlike Heine, Marx remained optimistic about the prospects for revolution. The imperial government set out on a wholesale, deliberate policy of repression behind the camouflage of grandiose balls and the mystery, awe, and pomp surrounding royalty. Its aura of military glamour brightened things up even more brilliantly after the capture of Sebastopol in the Crimean War, 13 September 1855. Thanksgiving ceremonies were arranged, free spectacles staged, streets impressively illuminated, as massive fireworks reverberated through the evening air. That same year, the regime attained a zenith through the second Universal Exposition, held from May till November.

As the restoration of the Empire marks the caricatured end of the revolutionary opposition to the bourgeois state, Heine's image of Napoleon III, the little dictator, entails a caricaturization of the public, which authorized this regime through manipulated plebiscite. For this people will idolize the rogue

who knows well enough the slogans they applaud, while they loathe the honourable fellow who appeals to reason in order to enlighten and civi-
lize them. As with Paris, so with Jerusalem. If the choice is between a shining example of righteousness and the epitome of villainy, be sure that the people will cry for Barabbas: ‘Vivat Barabbas!’ (DHA XV, 31)

The density of the argument is obvious. There is the weakness of reasonable argument against the irrational royalism of the people. And there are the subtleties of Messianism and pseudo-Messianism, skilfully interwoven in Heine’s unfavourable estimation of Bonapartism, which, for reasons of censoring, is deliberately kept subdued. The French version of Lutezia informs us in the same critical tones about militarization and propaganda:

Again, society will be regulated by the steady drone of Glory, with its Te Deum laudamus, illuminations, gold epaulets at heroic shoulders, and triumphant salvoes! (DHA XIII/1, 279)

To weigh the argument fully, we must point at Heine’s lifelong interest in Napoleonic mythology. To Heine, Napoleon had briefly embodied a synthesis of revolutionary collectivism and individual liberty. These promises had collapsed with Napoleon’s 1815 banishment to St. Helena. But the ‘Napoleonic synthesis’ kept Heine ruminating over its realization.17 As we saw in our Introduction, it was an important influence in his formative years in Berlin, where he heard Hegel. Anticipating here a more detailed analysis of Heine’s revolutionism, one may even say that, to him, a ‘Messianic Napoleon’ would have been the only guarantee of a genuine breakthrough in history. For Napoleon once truly represented ‘Young France’ before ‘Old Europe’; in him, the French people was feting itself, as Heine had indicated in his Lutezia.18

Heine therefore came to see the 1851 coup d’état as the perverted version of Napoleonic Messianism. Napoleon III is the embodiment of libertinicide. The epigonism of the nephew, ‘whose standards with gilded eagles on top are shining upon the heights of power’ (DHA XV, 182), reminds him at first sight of the uncle’s treachery on the 18th Brumaire. To that, Louis Napoleon lacks historical importance. The fiasco is complete; both this ‘people’ and this ‘people’s emperor’ are shameless pieces of plagiarism, now that Bonapartism has become synonymous with wholesale repression, though the equivalence of these values cannot be stated plainly under the political circumstances which existed in France by then.19 After Louis Napoleon’s takeover, Heine indicates in a letter to Kolb dated 13 February 1852:

18 Lutezia, tenth article, dated 30 May 1840, DHA XIII/1, 54-7.
Really, he was a lion in the skin of an ass, which he shed off one early morning to the horror of the entire menagerie in Parliament. It is hard to decide to what extent the provocations in the Chamber justified his coup d’état. Those blockheads, Parliamentary colleagues of Mr Savoye, were goading and prodding our hero, who held yet the blank sword of the executive power, while they had got only its legal sheath. The delusion was incomprehensible, and I stopped wondering about the spectacle. But my heart was bleeding, and that old Bonapartism of mine did not stand up to the sorrow which overwhelmed me when I noticed the consequences of the event. The noble ideals of political morality, legality, public virtue, liberty, and equality, these rosy dreams of tomorrow from the eighteenth century, for which our fathers sacrificed themselves so bravely, to be dreamed on as valiantly by us – there they lie shattered at our feet, dashed to pieces like porcelain pottery, like tailors being shot – but I must hold my tongue, and you know why. (HSA XXIII, 181)

Confronted with onslaught and repression, words are lacking to register objectively the writer’s horror; he is struck dumb with desolation. The act of silencing can yet be worded poetically, as a subjective, parodical transmission of rage. We will come upon such rendering below, in discussing Heine’s poem ‘In October 1849’.

Behind the politico-cultural façade of the Second Empire, life is brutish as ever. Visions of utopia are nowhere to be gathered. In these circumstances terms of hope would sound utterly naive. To the late Heine, this is a central paradox: not to be able to formulate unequivocally one’s longing for what is unlikely yet without resigning to what seems to be inevitable. The paradox is even intensified through Heine’s insistence on it in writing, be it completely illusion-less and elliptical. As a consequence, his later poetry is full of incongruencies, since history has nothing left to compromise with. Such incongruencies are maliciously expressed in bizarre images, among which the preponderance of the ‘animal instinct’ over ‘good manners’ is conspicuously trenchant. In the Second Empire, there are parallels between beast and man in abundance, Heine suggests. Parisian society can be put on a par with wildlife. The semblance of order is really a bestial survival of the fittest. The role this ‘fauna’ plays in Heine’s writing deserves closer examination.

3. Parisian Fauna

Famed for the magnitude of the architectural changes and the flowering of metropolitan life in the early 1850s, Paris acquired a reputation as a modern Babylon, full of unending hedonistic delight.20 Heine too was sensitive to the

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20 The 48 insurrections being suppressed, destitution lasted. One in three Parisians lived out their lives under subsistence level. Their already difficult situation was aggravated by the severe 1849 outbreaks of cholera. For reasons of hygiene, surveillance and prestige, plans were made for radical slum clearances and an efficient traffic system. Demolitions and reconstructions were
Babylonian Worries

Babylonian look of Paris. Three lines in his poem ‘Babylonian Worries’ from the Poems 1853 and 1854 crystallized the urban hedonism:

Pariser, die leuchtende Haupstadt der Welt,
Das singende, springende, schöne Paris,
Die Hölle der Engel, der Teufel Paradies –
(DHA III/1, 190)

Babylonian imagery is part of what could be called a veritable Parisian mythology, eloquently fostered by so many writers in the Second Empire. By now Paris became widely pictured as the Verminous City which was smothered in lushness. It was a melting pot of life, where individuals were hopelessly caught in the mêlée of anonymity, mesmerized by the success of its economic miracles. It cloaked in mysteries of good and evil which ignorant neophytes had to learn by bitter experience. The hedonistic dimension became preponderant in much of the metropolitan poetry and prose of the 1850s. Heine’s ‘Babylonian Worries’ is no exception. Though it mentions Paris explicitly only in the fragment just cited, all of the poem’s lines hint at the Parisian scenario. Because it is precisely for that reason typical of Heine’s reaction to the revolutionary misfortunes of 1848, it is worthwhile to give the poem in full.

Mich ruft der Tod – Ich wollt’, o Süße,
Daß ich dich in einem Wald verließe,
In einem jener Tannenforsten,
Wo Wölfe heulen, Geyer horsten
Und schrecklich grunzt die wilde Sau,
Des blonden Ebers Ehefrau.

Mich ruft der Tod – Es wär’ noch besser,
Müßt’ ich auf hohem Seegewässer
Verlassen dich, mein Weib, mein Kind,
Wenn gleich der tolle Nordpol-Wind
Dort peitscht die Wellen, und aus den Tiefen
Die Ungethüme, die dort schliefen,
Haifisch’ und Crokodile, kommen
Mit offnem Rachen emporgeschwommen –
Glaub mir, mein Kind, mein Weib, Mathilde,
Nicht so gefährlich ist das wilde,

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1. To start under the supervision of the prefect of the Seine, Baron Haussmann. Most of it took place after Heine’s death.
Erzürnte Meer und der trotzige Wald,
Als unser jetziger Aufenthalt!
Wie schrecklich auf der Wolf und der Geyer,
Haifische und sonstige Meerungeheuer:
Viel grimmere, schlimmere Bestien enthält
Paris, die leuchtende Hauptstadt der Welt,
Das singende, springende, schöne Paris,
Der Hölle der Engel, der Teufel Paradies –
Daß ich dich hier verlassen soll,
Das macht mich verrückt, das macht mich toll!

Mit spöttischem Sumsen mein Bett umschwirrn
Die schwarzen Fliegen; auf Nas’ und Stirn
Setzen sie sich – fatales Gelichter!
Etwelche haben wie Menschengesichter,
Auch Elephantenrüssel daran,
Wie Gott Ganesa in Hindostan. – –
In meinem Hirne rumort es und knackt,
Ich glaube da wird ein Koffer gepackt,
Und mein Verstand reist ab – o wehe –
Noch früher als ich selber gehe.

(DHA III/1, 189-90)

Paris is omnipresent here, in the milieu of the mattress-grave evocated in the last strophe. The metropolis makes its presence heard through a polarizing bestiary. The splendid capital of the modern world is suggested to be the habitat of far more ferocious beasts than the raging sea and the impenetrable forest. Which creatures, however, is not specified. Whereas in the first and second strophe wild nature shows both Teutonic and exotic features in abundance, the Parisian fauna is only indirectly referred to. It remains unclear which monsters the dying poet fears in leaving ‘his wife’ in Paris. Instead, the third strophe concludes the poem with a view of its author going mad on his deathbed swarming with flies buzzing around his head. Closer inspection reveals that they bear a comic like-ness to human beings.

In accordance with Heine’s elliptical mode of writing, there hovers round this post-48 bestiary a phantasmagoria of dream-like thoughts of vengeance. To catch its innuendoes, we must keep in mind that, in general, the bestiary could express the conflicting formation of modern bourgeois society. In the 1830s and early 1840s, its main targets were philistinism, egalitarianism, and mock heroism, as shown in the engravings by Grandville so inspiring for Heine. Grandville was famous for his personifications of industrial and technical change, and for his presentation of society as animal world. Heine seems to know his illustrations in the 1838 edition of La Fontaine’s fables. Though animal caricaturization of bourgeois society was standard practice, the mayhem

of 1848 set a distinctly strident tone to the genre of the bestiary. Heine is ready to liken metropolitan life to natural items such as dark woods, frightening creatures or turbulent seas. In their ‘wildness’ the masses represent a hybrid force defying the ‘mission’ of civilization as propagated by the victors.

To Heine, certain beasts could embody the sudden awakening of public opinion to the proletarian hazard. Bourgeois press railed against ‘the Reds’ as rioting hordes of pigs, rats, hounds, wolves and the like. Much of the hedonistic imagery became the subsequent disguising of the impending dangers just faced. Hence it obviously repressed another prominent facet of Parisian mythology: Paris being the nineteenth-century forum for the revolution, the New Jerusalem of a secularized eschatology. Heine’s poem, however, senses the camouflaged violence with meticulous care. In making ‘Mathilde’ a potential victim of a new order which, for reasons of censure, one cannot but allude to in terms of a sybaritic hedonism, Heine revivies the still existing threats to the security of the Empire, as he is suggesting that he had better deliver her into the claws of the masses hiding in their inhospitable shelters. Heine shows himself a master of provocation: in spite of ‘imperial order’, Parisian society is confronted with rumours of beastly violence, of which the raging sea and the impenetrable forest are the powerful reminders. This ‘nature’ transformed into apocalypse exemplifies a ‘disturbing’ literature, which relies on the discomfort and unconfessed fears of the sensitive reader.

The bestiary, to Heine, is a spectral presentiment of disaster, a Double to whom decent society is fatally Siamised. It is a demoniac fury beyond civilization, outside history, something which ought to have remained secret and hidden but presents itself as a sphinxlike threat to the citadel of modern life, in the form of the uncanny which invades daily life with increasing force. Precisely for that reason, it is expressive of the invalidation of concepts like culture and progress. In its marginality, however, rests the preservation of its ghostly ‘otherness’. The ‘extra-historical’ bestiary represents ‘rejected people’.

Through his deliberate use of Babylonian imagery Heine cautiously articulates a secret reminiscence representing the violent aspect of Parisian revolutionary mythology the hedonistic discourse generally tended to suppress in the 1850s. For him, hedonism is only part of a larger Parisian mythology indeed, not its post-revolutionary fulfilment. Nevertheless, those ‘radical hordes’ are but a panic-stricken crowd, a reservoir of primitive ire. In this sense, it is decisive that the bestiary has at its centre a notion of impropriety. The Beast is, in fact, something which as such belongs to no one but represents something which can never be tamed and appropriated. It is an allegory not so much of evil as of evil’s elusiveness, such that its only true evil is nothing than the useless attempt to capture it and make it domesticated. Heine’s composition is a clever ruse for rendering these violent masses almost unknowable through the patent metaphor of the third strophe, to which the first two seem just a preamble. But their monstrous appearance involves the retention of a counter-strike. Heine’s hyperbole is concealing a secret from censorship. However disillusioned he may be, he still seems anxious to stir up a memory of that old fomenting Paris. What the uncivilized ‘wildernesses’ tell us, the poem discreetly implies, is that there
are yet other vistas in contrast to that triumphantly ‘New Babylon’ the Second Empire created in order to pacify unwelcome unrest. The dithyrambic scenery is therefore Parisian as can be: it calls for wider terms of reference than sheer hedonism. Babylonian worries are veiled threats to the status quo. A trained hearing is required to sense the variety of noises as keenly as the poet in his mattress-grave, who is turning over metropolitan ‘landscape’ to the mental imagery of ‘something frightening’.

The Second Empire’s pacification, therefore, did not subdue Heine’s temper. In fact, no peace is given to him at all. The calls from death are disturbed by that fantastic menagerie, of which the black flies in the last strophe are the most bewildering rabble. This is what occurs during a hallucinatory experiencing of desire, which presents itself as a reaction to a lost perspective, affirmed by post-48 reality, but which the writer must caricaturize because otherwise the loss would be unbearable.24 It is through this distortion of the real that those phantasms come to be pictured as a virtual reality in the metaphorical dehumanization of poetic language. Their ‘identity’ is metamorphozing from humanoid into an elephantine parody of Ganesa, the Hindu god of wisdom, marriage, commerce, travelling and thieving, whose trunk is an indelible mark of his phallic nature. There might also be a spiteful reference to the plaster elephant, which stood on the site of the Bastille between 1814 and 1846, erected by Napoleon in commemoration of the Great Revolution. By 1830, it was already in an advanced state of decomposition. Till the final collapse (1846) it had remained a sign of revolutionary amnesia.25 Moreover, the attentive contemporary reader could associate the swarm of flies in Heine’s poem with some of the leading politicians who paved the way for the Second Empire: Thiers, Montalambert, Berryer and Molé were caricatured like flies by Daumier in 1850.26

4. Downfall

Bestial intrigue and malignity, then, had ruled out reasonableness and progress. They became representative of the author’s despondency. A concise articulation of the feelings Heine came to have about the eventual eclipse of revolutionary history is the poem ‘In October 1849’ from the 1851 Romancero. By referring to the abortive Hungarian revolution, it contrasts Hungary’s repressed heroism with the triumphant non-heroism in post-revolutionary Germany:

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24 For the ‘melancholic consequences’ of the loss, see Chapter V, 176-7.
Babylonian Worries

Gelegt hat sich der starke Wind,
Und wieder stille wird’s daheime;
Germania, das große Kind,
Erfreut sich wieder seiner Weihnachtsbäume.

Wir treiben jetzt Familienglück –
Was höher lockt, das ist vom Uebel –
Die Friedensschwalbe kehrt zurück,
Die einst genistet in des Hauses Giebel.

Symptomatic of Heine’s political sense are allusions to illusionary rest. Calm descended once again on Germany as the revolutionary storm had subsided, as if things sprang naturally out of an everlasting order again. Yet, a shadow of menace is looming, for another storm might still be brewing against the status quo. The poem suggests that feelings of insecurity are subdued through the myth of an unchanging idyll of family life. It evocates a pastoral scenery, in which the harmonious relationships of the idealized family are transposed to Nature itself.

The image is typical of Heine’s ‘contaminated Romanticism’ we pointed at in the Introduction to this study. For in German Romanticism, Nature had strongly been associated with the concept of a ‘wholeness’ maturing into national characteristics. Man’s supposedly apparent disposition to natural order served as a cogent argument that subjects should reconcile themselves to the objectives of the state. In Heine’s poem, on the contrary, Nature’s charms are wickedly distorted:

Gemütlich ruhen Wald und Fluß,
Von sanftem Mondschein übergossen;
Nur manchmal knallt’s – Ist das ein Schuß? –
Es ist vielleicht ein Freund, den man erschossen.

Vielleicht mit Waffen in der Hand
Hat man den Tollkopf angetroffen,
(Nicht jeder hat so viel Verstand
wie Flaccus, der so kühn davongeloffen).

Es knallt. Es ist ein Fest vielleicht,
Ein Feuerwerk zur Goethefeyer! –
Die Sontag, die dem Grab entsteigt,
Begrüßt Raketenlärm – die alte Leyer.

The distortion, however, is swiftly moderated. Man’s ‘natural disposition’ has to be forcibly restored. Revolutionary elements are effectively isolated, and the shot is incorporated into a firework display on the occasion of the centenary of
Goethe’s birth. The celebration clearly serves conservative purposes: Goethe is functioning as a cornice of restoration. But Heine knows how to point at the shaky basis of the German idyll. Since its raison d’être, after all, is fear for uncontrollable ‘roaring’, it contrasts sharply with Hungarian heroism:

Wenn ich den Namen Ungarn hör’,
Wird mir das deutsche Wams zu enge,
Es braust darunter wie ein Meer,
Mir ist als grüßten mich Trompetenklänge!
(DHA III/1, 118)

The uncomfortably tight jacket is expressive of Heine’s feelings towards the ideological narrowness of post-48 Germany caricaturized in the first strophes of the poem. He had rather distance himself from what he resented in German patriotism. Since his passion is for the already dead, however, all the poet can do to honour their bravery is to refer to Germany’s national epic of the Nibelungs, of which the downfall of powerful heroes is a central motif:

Es kliert mir wieder im Gemüth
Die Heldensage, längst verklungen,
Das eisern wilde Kämpenlieid –
Das Lied vom Untergang der Nibelungen.

Es ist dasselbe heldenloos,
Es sind dieselben alten Mährren,
Die Namen sind verändert bloß,
Doch sind’s dieselben “Helden Lobebaren.”

Es ist dasselbe Schicksal auch –
Wie stolz und frey die Fahnen fliegen,
Es muß der Held, nach altem Brauch,
Den thierisch rohen Mächten unterliegen.

Und diesmal hat der Ochse gar
Mit Bären einen Bund geschlossen –
(DHA III/1, 118)

Post-revolutionary history has confined the poet to a dead end where there is no heroism whatsoever. Again, the poem continues, a violent bestiary comes to the fore, invalidating claims to good manners and cultural standards:

Du fällst; doch tröste dich, Magyar,
Wir Andre haben schlimm’re Schmach genossen.

Anständ’ge Bestien sind es doch,
Die ganz honett dich überwunden;
Doch wir gerathen in das Joch
Von Wölfen, Schweinen und gemeinen Hunden.

Das heult und bellt und grunzt – ich kann
Ertragen kaum den Duft der Sieger.
Doch still, Poet, das greift dich an –
Du bist so krank und schweigen wäre klüger.

(DHA III/1, 118-19)

Characteristically, Heine now projects the victors as the same feral animals they would term their revolutionary adversaries. He clearly takes no interest in prudent taciturnity. In the last two lines, prudence is even riposted by rendering it suavely into the literary gesture of a pastiche, in referring to the weakling, the versifier who would rather stick to ‘due’ diligence and ‘proper’ reasononability. If people knew this poet they would see through this imposture straight away. By venturing the act of silencing, the poet ventilates his anger. In view of universal bestial malignity and intrigue, this last strophe suggests, a literary shrewdness is requested which helps the writer point to the ‘shadow of menace’ I will discuss presently.

5. Proletarian Iconoclasts

From 1848 on, Heine feels the image of a blissful future to be very troublesome. As indicated above, the brilliance of the revolutionary Paris has been obscured by the Second Empire. Still, Heine’s uncomfortably joking about his fears in his ‘Babylonian Worries’ might preserve a glimmer of desire, like a nightmare full of spectres could express most secret longings for revenge. Such dreams are the basis on which what may be called this spectropoetic recollection is structured. It gives the poem a hallucinatory clarity. Disenchantment with reality is converted to a poetic memento of the revolutionary Paris Napoleon III had sought to eradicate so thoroughly that it only could be preserved from complete oblivion as an evil and sinister non-place. There is a weirdness about this topography which permeates poetry like ‘The Migrant Rats’ or the prose passages revealing Heine’s provocative abhorrence of proletarian iconoclasts. Yet Heine’s Angst is feigned. His rhetorical warnings are slipping into the camouflage of status quo slogans, which draws the reader out with him into a pondering over the phenomenon of the homeless drifters. The 48-revolutions, especially the June revolts, marked their miserable history. After 1848, constant

27 Briegleb, Opfer Heine?, 328-9.
28 Cf. Though Heine had lost contact with Marx after a last visit on 12 August 1849, there are some similarities in what may be called their post-revolutionary spectropoetics. Marx spoke of a spectre against which ‘all the powers of old Europe have joined into a holy hunt’, as the 1848 Communist Manifesto states it, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei, MEW/4, Berlin 1974, 459-93. Cf. Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, Paris, 1993. Heine’s acquaintance with communism will be elaborated in Chapter IV, 154-6. For the problematic relationship between Marx and Heine see Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, ‘L’ami Heine’, Revue philosophique 1989/2, 179-220.
vigilance is required: what has disappeared appears still to be there, and its apparition is frightening.

Here it is appropriate to point at the Preface to the 1855 French edition of Lutezia. For these lines are Heine’s ultimate provocation. Hackneyed impressions of communist iconoclasm and the subsequent decline and fall of the romantic world are only preliminary to a pro-communist peroration. Communism, Heine states, manages to enchant him through its siren song. The song has two motifs. The first is the undeniable logic of the conclusion that all men have the right to food, which is a formidable slight on real existing injustice. The second is the violent grief, destructive, and full of hate for the status quo, which is the amplification of Heine’s contempt for the nationalistic rise in Germany. Both motifs are conducive to this approval:

Out of hatred of those nationalists I could almost dote on the communists. At least they are not the kind of hypocrites who are mouthing time and again religious platitudes and Christian virtues. Communists, admittedlly, have no religion (we all have our little failings), they are even atheists (a deadly sin indeed), but apart from that they profess the principle dogma of unconditional cosmopolitanism, universal love for mankind, global fraternity among all people, free inhabitants of the earth. This fundamental dogma accords in every respect with the teachings of the Gospels. Ergo, communists are basically and truly far more Christian than our so-called Germanic braggarts, those narrow-minded champions of nationalistic pride. (DHA XIII/1, 168)

The literary aggressivity of a frail poet intending to frighten the strong and to rouse the weak with memories is a gesture of defiance against repressive and authoritarian forces of the restoration. Communism is a provocative signal of anger. Though it is a non sequitur from what is going on in politics, it still allows for phantasmagoric visions of the present which cannot be censored.

Heine’s post-48 writings contrast communism with well-fed and complacent characters which are pictured as originators of everlasting crime and inhumanity in history. Their portrayal is an insult to the audience’s belief in progress. The poet is aggressively ready to pounce on their fortune. His aggression is the articulation of an illusion-less resistance, which transforms subdued contradictions into literary motifs expressing nonconformity and dissent; because they cannot be subsumed within a wider concept of Progress, they remain fragmentary, and expressive of transition. The poet’s ‘fear’ of the masses generates effective metaphors by which the self-righteousness of the winners is counteracted, as they are rather hinting at the problematic relation between poet and educated readership than at the non-existing relation between poet and illiterates. The powers that be are provocatively confronted with rumours of anarchical obstinacy and revenge. Communists are told to be the potential destroyers of a Romanticism they consider their very own cultural heritage:
Yea, I can only tremble with fear at the thought of the day when those sinister iconoclasts will take power. With their barbarous fists they will then knock all the marbles in my beloved art world to pieces, they will wreck all those fantastical burlesques the poet is favouring, and they will fell my laurel woods for potatoes. Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet even King Solomon was not arrayed like one of these – they will be pulled up from society unless they start spinning willingly. The roses and the virtuous nightingales’ brides, these unprofitable singers, they are chased away, and alas! the grocer will utilize my Book of Songs for paper bags in which he may pour coffee beans and snuff for the old maids of the future. Yea, I foresee all these things, and unutterable sorrow grips me when I imagine the imminent downfall of my poetry as well as the old romantic world through Communism. (DHA XIII/1, 294)

Romanticism is ‘contaminated’ through political caricature. Exaggerated feelings about romantic clichés of laurel and lilies, roses and nightingales are a calculated effort to put down the raree-show of restoration.

Heine shows himself very sensitive to the tenacious image of that ‘old romantic world’. As the post-revolutionary course was conditioned by Louis Napoleon, it was haunted itself by the quasi-paternal spectre of Napoleon Bonaparte, chasing the revolution, like a phantasmagoria, by means of a diabolical, non-apparent exorcism. The stronger the new order, the more was borrowed from the old. Antiquarianisms thrived. Audiences were persuaded toward completeness of illusion by vast historical panoramas with special effects, by detailed historical paintings. From the justifiable illusion of theatres, from the investiture of old houses as ancestral homes, from national romance with frontier life and family trees, from the chivalry of tournament and the endowment of folkways with the power to heal, came the historical pageant.

Reacting on the 48 revolution in Germany, Heine’s poem ‘James I’ from the Poems 1853 and 1854 depicts the present as a weird household from Gothic tales:

Im Jahre acht und vierzig hiel,
Zur Zeit der großen Erhitzung,
Das Parlament des deutschen Volks
Zu Frankfurt seine Sitzung.

Damals ließ auch auf den Römer dort
Sich sehen die weiße Dame,
Das unheilkündende Gespenst;
Die Schaffnerinn ist sein Name.

Man sagt, sie lasse sich jedesmal
Des Nachts auf dem Römer sehen,
So oft einen großen Narrenstreich.
This poem gives a clear indication of ‘unhealthy’ Romanticism. It echoes not only tales of mystery and horror, heroes and heroines in the direst of imaginable straits – in fact, the whole apparatus of medieval imagery – but it is also a politi­cal stratagem.

The ‘Gothic associations’ are a resumption of well-known ciphers. Where Gothic could symbolize British and French nationhood, in Germany it was emblematic of a lost unity. Not until the end of the Napoleonic Wars did reviving Gothic as a symbolic focus of national unification. In Prussia, Gothic was identified with nationalism; in Cologne, Prussia acquired a ready-made metaphor for the whole mission of German unification. In the patriotic enthusiasm following Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815 the idea of finishing the cathedral was embraced. The building did not actually begin until the 1840s. The arguments over the Prussian initiative brought August Reichensperger (1808-95) to the forefront of the German Revival. Completing Cologne, he claimed, would affirm pan-German culture, symbolized in an actualized, politicized version of ‘Christian Germanic Architecture’. Bourgeois culture was quarrying the Middle Ages for themes and models. Far from being consigned to the past, the Middle Ages, with Gothic in the vanguard, were dynamically engaged in the post-48 present, so much so that medievalism’s meanings, and the significances attached to Gothic, were everywhere charged by the traumas of 1848.

These traumatic effects mark Heine’s ‘contaminated Romanticism’. Significantly, the poem ‘Castle Contumely’ ends the first cycle of the Poems 1853 and 1854; the subsequent cycle focuses on Lazarus. Before the reader is asked to lend his ear to the demands of the rejected, ‘Castle Contumely’ pictures Romanticism in terms of a cursed rather than a paradisiacal garden:

Vermaledeiter Garten! Ja,
Es war, als ob ein Fluch drauf laste;
Manchmal am hellen lichten Tag
Mich dort Gespensterfurcht erfaßte.

Mich grinste an der grüne Spuk
Er schien mich grausam zu verhöhnen,

When the green curtain is lifted, an imagery of terror, death, and destruction opens up. Enchantment transforms into horror: what we see is a smirking relic. As such, it is decrepit but still alive. It does apparently manage to linger on between absurdities and ghastliness, because as a relic it mirrors real existing circumstances. Its ‘unreality’ is as real as can be. For the Second Empire itself is an absurd and ghastly relic, which is yet the only reason for its appearance. It renders Progress senseless. It does not consist any more in calling for the advent, a parousia in the near real-world future. ‘Castle Contumely’ articulates Heine’s attempt to ward off its dreadful permanence, although its chains are not likely to be unlocked in the near future:

Mit Neid sah ich die Schiffe ziehn
Vorüber nach beglückten Landen –
Doch mich hielt das verdammte Schloß
Gefesselt in verfluchten Banden.

The ‘departure for Cythera’ of those vessels contrasts sharply with the ‘damned trammels’ of the poet. The Castle is paradigmatic of suffering, and thus of hell – taking ‘hell’ to be more than a universal symbol of intense grief, irredeemable loss, acute fear, and physical pain, for the actual hells of the mid nineteenth century were the gaols, the madhouses, the slums and bedlams: social counterparts to the nightmare world of Heine’s ‘prison’. The Elysian perspective is of no avail, except for stressing Heine’s desolation. To fathom its meaning, we must contrast it briefly with Heine’s views about emancipation in the years up to 1848, the period when he sympathized with the radicalizing Hegelians we mentioned in our Introduction. For Heine too had paid tribute to the radical revolutionisms of the 1840s, where he had harboured his longings for ‘bliss’. It had been intensified by the growth of what in his view passed for ‘communism’.

6. Liberty for All

In those revolutionary years, the 1840s, Heine held strongly to the notion that ‘the communists’ substantiated the justification of history, in that they would have an uplifting effect on the have-nots in due course of time. Anticipating here a more detailed account in Chapter IV, it must be stressed that though Heine had a clear idea of the communist groups emerging in France, he yet tends to present ‘French communism’ to his German readership in terms of a general principle or doctrine relating to the bare needs of the proletarians. Needless to say that German censors were not too tolerant in letting his coverage pass through untouched. Yet it is clear that whereas Heine himself wrote
cautiously about the role of communism on the European scene, he favoured the
communists above the republicans, for communism has (Hegelian) history on
its side while it insists on social justice.

In the first article on communism he sent to the Augsburg General Ga-
zette, the fourth article from Lutezia, dated 30 April 1840, Heine drew a careful
distinction between communist doctrine and republican platitudes:

For our Republicans there is little to worry about a doctrine which re-
gards all social questions from a superior viewpoint, and differs from
hackneyed republicanism as splendidly as imperial purple from uniform
grey, because these days, like the Republicans, the masses, too, are still
far remote from it. (DHA XIII/1, 32-3)

Were the masses more familiar with communist doctrine, national chauvinism
and religious bigotry would soon come to an end. Equally, anti-Semitism could
then optimistically be interpreted in terms of anti-capitalistic feelings only, and
not of sheer discrimination. In his 1844 Eulogy on Ludwig Markus, Heine
predicted that the Jew-hatred among the lower class was to change into wide-
spread dissatisfaction with exploitation. Heine’s obituary on the orientalist
Ludwig Markus (1798-1843), co-member of the Berlin Association for the
Advancement of Jewish Studies in the early 1820s, is a witness to the dynamics
of the ‘Jewish Question’ among radicalizing Hegelians like Bruno Bauer and
Karl Marx in the early 1840s. 30 The origin of that ‘question’ was pointed at in
the Introduction to this study. I will briefly return to it further below. Philo-
sophically spoken, the preoccupation with the entry of the Jews in modern
society was already evident in the theories of Kant and Hegel, systems which
set what Nathan Rotenstreich called the intellectual parameters of the ensuing
encounter. 31 According to them, the ‘question’ was primarily a matter of Judais-
ism.

For Kant, Judaism has to be criticized because of its ‘heteronymous’
character, being a religious code of statutory laws imposed by a divine legislator
and therefore not fitting into the ethical framework which outlines the
autonomous state of the human will. 32 For Hegel, Judaism has to be interpreted
by means of the true, philosophical concept of religion, modelled according to
an idealistic idea of Christianity as the prototype of the essential bond between
God and man. 33 It must be noted that Kant excluded Judaism even as a stage in
the development of religious convictions towards a rational theology, while
Hegel theorized it within the philosophical framework of Spirit. 34

31 Rotenstreich, Jews and German Philosophy, 73-101. Unfortunately, Rotenstreich mentions
Heine only in passing, commenting on Karl Rosenkranz’ interpretation of Judaism, 135.
32 Kant, Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft, Karl Vorländer, ed., Hamburg
1978, 139-41; see Introduction, 13, note 37.
33 Hegel, Religionsphilosophie, 606.
34 A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this study. More details in Rotenstreich, The Recur-
rent Pattern, 23-69.
Considering Heine’s position in the early 1840s, it is relevant to concentrate briefly on the way the ‘question’ was discussed among radicalizing Hegelians. Marx’ pronouncement on the topic, in his 1843-4 ‘On the Jewish Question’, is known to have been provoked by Bruno Bauer’s 1843 essay on the same subject.\(^{35}\) It was written immediately after he finished his ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’ and it thus continued his enquiry into the conditions of the modern state and society begun in that work. Attention was centred on the Jews’ Judaism which, according to Bauer, was a premodern remnant excluding them from nineteenth-century social structures, because ‘a-historical’ Judaism subordinated man to an extraneous divine authority. Therefore Bauer declared Judaism not fit and suitable for this modern world. Yet it is well known that Bauer directed his shafts not only against Judaism as religion but also against the political aspirations of contemporary German Jewry, more particularly against their claim for emancipation.\(^{36}\) He fought the presumptions which would make emancipation feasible for, to him, Judaism represented an irrational conception, the Law, which counted them out from the general pattern of history.

Bauer spoke in Hegelian terms; dynamic consciousness and liberty were central to his argumentation. By pointing out the Jewish features in Christianity, however, his attack was directed simultaneously against the present Christian state, which, according to him was not founded on the principles of free and critical human consciousness but on privileges, for Christianity, as modernized Judaism, too, retained barriers and thus perpetuates Jewish exclusiveness.\(^{37}\) Nevertheless, the state was right to turn down the Jews, Bauer thought, because their ‘irredeemable’ Judaism could be held accountable for precisely the accumulation of privilege by the present Christian state.\(^{38}\)

At first sight, Marx’ conception of Judaism in his ‘On the Jewish Question’ seems clearly different from Bauer’s; according to Marx, it was possible to attain political emancipation without totally extricating oneself from Judaism.\(^{39}\) Marx criticized the concept of political emancipation as such because it contained a separatist element which made it invalid for human emancipation. He extended the model of Christian personhood to all concepts of personhood outside the one socialized notion of personality as collective human species-being. With the exception of social personality, the notion of personhood threatened to become synonymous with heteronomy and alienation. The nonsocialized person, along with the social and political structures which support it, came to appear as theological; such a subject derived its substance from its metaphorical connection to the construction of divine personality which was to be condemned as anti-social. The hostility towards this isolated ego culminated in Marx’s demand that human subjects be enfranchised to elect their full social being,

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\(^{37}\) Ibid., 18, 59.

\(^{38}\) Rotenstreich, *Jews and German Philosophy*, 83.

away from separatism.\textsuperscript{40} It is important to note that the central measure of political modernity is secularization, or, more precisely, the degree to which a state and a society have established a secular relationship to each other.

This issue lay at the heart of Marx’s response to Bruno Bauer’s attempt to resolve the problem of Jewish emancipation. Marx could fully endorse Bauer’s insistence that the emancipation of the Jews should be linked with the emancipation of humanity as such from religion. He did not accept Bauer’s view that the political abolition of religion is identical with the abolition of religion as such. Marx held that the political state emancipated the Jew and the Christian as citizens while remaining indifferent to their private beliefs. This meant that the state emancipated itself from religion while leaving the private person in the chains of religious illusion. As Marx famously declared, political emancipation is not identical with human emancipation.\textsuperscript{41}

In the second part of his essay, however, separatism is simply identified with Judaism, the epitome of egoism. Judaism reached its full development in bourgeois society which, in its turn, attained perfection only in the Christian world. Christianity evolved from Judaism but eventually returned to it and became submerged in it.\textsuperscript{42} In Marx’s view, then, the emancipation of the Jews depends on the emancipation of society from the Jews, inasmuch as the emancipation from Judaism means emancipation from bourgeois society and from human egoism.\textsuperscript{43} As such, in my opinion, Marx presents a more sophisticated version of Bauer’s rudely psychological conception of Judaism, in view of an overall emancipation of man which goes beyond the limits of ‘bourgeois society’, by identifying ‘Judaism’ with the vices of unbounded capitalism.\textsuperscript{44} Yet, Marx fluctuates constantly between ‘Judaism’ as a purely metaphorical characterization of modern life and as an obviously depreciating term for actual Jewishness.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, he demonstrates philosophical and propagandistic talents to reduce concrete Jewry to the emblem of all the world’s greed and wrangle. Does that make Marx an arch-chief of modern anti-Semitism? Paul Lawrence Rose contends that Marx’ critique is indeed the foundation of an entirely secularized form of Jew-hatred far more systematic in its theory than the other revolutionary efforts of Bauer and company.\textsuperscript{46} Alain Finkelkraut, too, holds that in his ‘On the Jewish Question’ the young Marx displays ‘eminently modern anti-Semitism’ which he never recanted explicitly, though later on, in his mature system, he would totally overcome the narrow-ness of sheer anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{40} I will return to the theologico-political discourse of the early 1840s in Chapter IV, in discussing the radicalizing Hegelians.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Zur Judenfrage}, 353.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 374.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 376-7, cf Rotenstreich, \textit{Jews and German Philosophy}, 97-8.
\textsuperscript{44} Marx, \textit{Zur Judenfrage}, 370. 
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 377.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany. From Kant to Wagner}, Princeton (NJ) 1990, 301-2.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Le Juif imaginaire}, Paris 1980, 98-9, italics Finkelkraut’s.
A full assessment of Marx’ view on Jewishness and Judaism is clearly beyond the scope of this book. With respect to Heine’s position in the early 1840s it is important to note that both Marx and Bauer argued that the essence of Christianity is precisely the essence of modern Jewry, not in an abstract but in an expressedly empirical form of Judaism. Like Bauer, Heine, too, is ready to agree on how similar Christianity and Judaism were, though, it must be stressed, not as empirical instances but as religious cases of a spiritualized, ascetic Nazarenism he had pictured in his 1834 *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. To him, a sweeping purge of asceticism was a prerequisite for a sensualistic, hedonistic Hellenism he gushed about in the 1830s. Here we have the reason why, in the 1840s, Heine came to share some of Marx’ views on the Jews’ total emancipation, as he tended to identify individual freedom and self-actualization with the individual’s participation in humanity’s collective social life. His trust in Progress made him not only optimistic about the end of nationalistic bigotry, but also biased towards what he now saw as obsolete, fossilized ways of a Judaism, which, to him, qua Nazarene religion was to be secularized. In the 1844 *Eulogy on Ludwig Marcus*, he contended that the cause of the Jews had become deeply embedded in political and social Progress. Revolutionary proceedings of ‘workers from all nations’ would even put an end to the rising nationalist Germanic Jew-hatred, as Heine put it in his draft of the aforesaid *Eulogy*, in a passage which was eventually suppressed for reasons of (self-)censure:

Is a complete fusion with the Jews really detrimental to German nationality? Our nationalists, would-be patriots whose minds are full of race, blood, and all that horse-breeding stuff – these stragglers from the Middle Ages will soon encounter adversaries who are determined to make short work of all their reveries about Germanic, Romanic, and Slavonic national character, so that it will not occur to them again to nag about the Jew’s Germanness. What I am alluding to in particular is the fraternization of workers from all nations, to that wild host, only too ready to annihilate whatever nationalism in order to realize its goal throughout Europe: the realization of genuine democracy. (DHA XIV/1, 276)

In these revolutionary years, then, Heine came to support Jewish emancipation as part of a universal history of a struggle for human liberty for all peoples. Though this brings him close to the young Marx, such views were not novel in his earlier writings. Previously, in his 1830 *Journey from Munich to Genoa*, Heine had stated that emancipation was to be regarded as the great task of the present:

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Not simply the emancipation of the Irish, the Greeks, the Frankfort Jews, the blacks from the West Indies, and all such oppressed peoples, but the emancipation of the whole world, and especially of Europe, which has matured into autonomy, ready to throw off the shackles of privileged aristocracy. (DHA VII/1, 69)

The bitter disappointment Heine felt about the denouement of 1848 was prompted by the failure of this set of secularized eschatology, which had attracted him to Paris in the 1830s. When we look back on this middle period, it is evident that, emigrating from Germany to France in 1831, Heine had compared the Rhine to the River Jordan, beyond which the Land of Promise stretched far and wide into the future, where a New Jerusalem beckoned (DHA VII/1, 269).

In the 1830s and 1840s Paris was the antithesis of the German miseries Heine had experienced in cities like Hamburg, Berlin, or Munich. These miseries rooted in nineteenth-century German-Jewish disparity, the real origin of the ‘Jewish Question’ we came on to above. That ‘question’ was an obviously public reaction to the fact that Jews were typical latecomers to modern civilization. For the history of the exodus of Jews into Germany in the nineteenth century was a case study in culture shock. Age-old Christian anti-Judaism metamorphosed into ‘German misery’. The hoped for correspondence between what Jews expected from emancipation and what modern life had promised became a major problem. Lured by the vouchsafe of civil rights, the latecomers were disillusioned to find themselves not in the legitimacy of a political society but in the trial of civility. The growing disenchantment with the impact of this ‘German misery’ on his own career forced Heine to take evasive action. Hence his preference for Paris, where he expected vainly to experience the fulfilment of revolutionary dreams, as we will see next.

7. Germanic Anxieties

For its liberal grandeur Paris had seemed a viable alternative to the poor conditions in Germany during the 1820s. Here Heine expected the German-Jewish antinomy we discussed in the Introduction to be mastered by the universal claims of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Revolutionary liberalism now developed into fidelity to supra-national emancipation from feudalism and absolutism: the tension between Germaneness and Jewishness was bound to dissolve, as we saw above. Moreover, from the 1830s on, Heine had claimed that a ‘social Hellenism’ must be favoured, so as to end the spirituality of Jewry and Christianity alike. To Heine, in this middle period, spirituality is one of history’s basic principles; it is contrasted by the principle of sensuality. Whereas otherworldly spirituality is hostile to sensual enjoyment, worldly Hellenism represents a sensualistic, revolutionary counter-force which was to invalidate arguments for asceticism.

In the 1830s as well as in the 1840s, Heine had long nursed a desire to propagate the cause of sensualism. Paris fostered a sensualistic life-style, which became a wonderful antidote to the miseries Heine's 1843 poem 'Nocturnal Thoughts' sings of:

Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht,  
Dann bin ich um den Schlaf gebracht,  
Ich kann nicht mehr die Augen schließen,  
Und meine heißen Thränen fließen.

[...]  
Seit ich das Land verlassen hab',  
So viele sanken dort in's Grab,  
Die ich geliebt – wenn ich sie zähle,  
So will verbluten meine Seele.

Und zählen muß ich – Mit der Zahl  
Schwöllt immer höher meine Qual,  
Mir ist als wälzten sich die Leichen  
Auf meine Brust – Gottlob! sie weichen!

Gottlob! durch meine Fenster bricht  
Französisch heit'res Tageslicht;  
Es kommt mein Weib, schön wie der Morgen,  
Und lächelt fort die deutschen Sorgen.  
(DHA II, 129-30)

The 'deceased' from these lines point back to a letter Heine wrote to Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, in which he sheds 'bitter tears' over his Jewish friend Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, née Levin.51 Here it is appropriate to cite 'Anno 1839', the complementary poem to 'Nocturnal Thoughts'. For here 'German miseries' are savagely caricatured in exaggerated chauvinism:

O, Deutschland, meine ferne Liebe,  
Gedenk' ich deiner, wein' ich fast!  
Das muntre Frankreich scheint mir trübe,  
Das leichte Volk wird mir zur Last.

Nur der Verstand, so kalt und trocken,  
Herrscht in dem witzigen Paris –  
O, Narrenheitsglöcklein, Glaubensglocken,  
Wie klingelt Ihr daheim so süß!

51 I will view its importance in Chapter III, 108-10, in discussing the 'pathography' Heine and Rahel are sharing.
Höfliche Männer! Doch verdrossen
Geb’ ich den art’ gen Gruß zurück. –
Die Grobheit, die ich einst genossen
Im Vaterland, das war mein Glück!

Lächelnde Weiber! Plappern immer,
Wie Mühlenräder stets bewegt!
Da lob’ ich Deutschlands Frauenzimmer,
Das schweigend sich zu Bette legt.

Und alles dreht sich hier im Kreise,
Mit Ungestüm, wie’ n toller Traum!
Bei uns bleibt alles hübsch im Gleise,
Wie angenagelt, rührt sich kaum.

Mir ist, als hört’ ich fern erklingen
Nachtwächterhörner, sanft und traut;
Nachtwächterlieder hör’ ich singen,
Dazwischen Nachtigallenlaut.

Dem Dichter war so wohl daheime,
In Schildas teurem Eichenhain!
Dort wob ich meine zarten Reime
Aus Veilchenduft und Mondenschein.

Attitude and tone of the writer is the very opposite of what is expressed: the poem is a specimen of rhetorical irony. The object of this wicked catalogue was to reinforce the ‘rudeness’ the German-Jewish poet had experienced ‘at home’, by elaborating scenes of stagnation and backwardness. Paris, in contrast, is said to be ‘witty’, ‘fomenting’, and ‘frantic’, which are all indications of revolutionary and emancipatory potentialities. But whatever the allure of France had been in the 1830s and 1840s, the 1848 misfortunes put a grim complexion on things. Neither his French wife’s smiling face nor the morning sun over Paris could dispel Heine’s Germanic anxieties any more. On the contrary, what had been a solace to him is now itself the source of the Babylonian worries cited above. His political and philosophical perspectives being ruthlessly distorted, Heine has to abandon his optimistic feelings about the alternative to German miseries. As indicated before, emblematic of this rejection is Heine’s bestiary. Significant is his drive to point at the revolutionary people, which is doomed to lead a ‘bestial existence’ after the failure of 48.

Heine now sees history as a parade of malice. It is the same old story: July 1830, and February, June, and December 1848. The fields have been left fallow, as men are going away to slaughter. The people of Paris get the boot. Hundreds of thousands are being uselessly killed in the volley fires of the National Guard commanded by bourgeois-minded officers. Yet again, Heine hastens to remark publicly: Be quiet, my heart; otherwise you will reveal too much. For after all, his compassion still is for the beaten dog in the bestiary, the legendary Medor, underground symbol of the fighting people in the streets of Paris Heine had already hinted at in the Second Book of his 1840 Ludwig Börne:

He carried his master’s rifle and cartridges. When his master felt and his remains were interred next to his heroic fellows in the Louvre courtyard, he would sit day and night at the grave, motionless, like a statue of fidelity. He ate hardly anything from the food offered to him, burying most of it under the ground – maybe viands for his master below! (DHA XI, 51)

When Heine wanted to take a post-48 look at the dog in the Louvre courtyard, however, it was not the legendary Medor he noticed but an ordinary poodle arrogating to himself another's merits, as he wrote in his 1855 German draft of an introduction to a French edition of the Second Book from Börne:

No sooner had I arrived in Paris than I was desirous of getting to know Medor as well. But the creature did not come up to my expectations at all. What I saw was a mean cur, whose eyes showed not a trace of zeal. Nay, he squinted a bit falsely with slyly selfish glances. There was something industrial about him. A young student told me that this was not the real Medor but a scheming poodle, un chien de lendemain, keen on feedings and petting, and that he lived on the real Medor’s exploits, whilst the latter, shortly after his master had died, had sneaked off discreetly, like the people who made the revolution. (DHA XI, 213-4)

Under Napoleon III, the fate of the revolutionary people’s history coincides with that of the author; they are strays. Heine and Medor share the crucial feature in common to be duped into a canine existence in squalor and displacement.

The post-revolutionary, ‘inhuman’ features of the people are typical of Heine’s re-interpretive, ‘backward’ writing. His re-examination of ‘the people’ fits in a wider literary context: Heine interprets older texts in order to make his audience wonder anxiously what had caused the 1848 turnabout. Hence the ghostly rumbling noises of underground ‘communists’ threatening the status quo. Heine is eager to give reactualized versions of older forecasts; the destructive, nihilistic force of the inferior bestiary still exhibits signs of unrest. But as the writer is no longer one of the leading authorities in revolutionism, basic themes like the poet’s avant-garde status and his claim to Godhood are
Heine's later writings are coloured by commemorative revisions of older topics. As he endeavoured to elaborate his contributions to the *Augsburg General Gazette* for his *Lutezia*, he could not resist the temptation to add in bits of information which must elucidate his actual position by stipulating its pre-48 traces, so as to lend them a prophetic quality afterwards.

The 'hideous' features of the people in Heine's later writings hint at a physical, bodily obstinacy which is the very negation of the restoration of law and order. Literature gets expressive of bodily conscience; the body, this ensemble of unfulfilled desires and repressed libido, is felt to be symptomatic of the anti-revolutionary order. Heine turns to the fray with renewed literary vigour. His later texts organize the body's contradictory potential: its 'inhuman' presentation acts as a catalyst to set off an aesthetic which incriminates the social order for its refusal to deal justly with the sacrifices it requires from the flesh. Poetry, as a consequence, manifests itself as a source of disruption of social communications. In the next chapter I will argue that Heine's bodily conscience sets a litmus test of his commitment to post-revolutionary authorship.

53 In general, Heine's elitism fits in with a way of striving after the realization of a neo-humanistic idea of cultivation in an intellectual caste of 'spiritual aristocrats', as fostered by early nineteenth authors like Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schlegel, and Fichte. For an analysis of 'cultivation' see Arnold Labrie, *'Bildung' en politiek, 1770-1830. De 'Bildungsphilosophie' van Wilhelm von Humboldt bezien in haar politieke en sociale context* (Cultivation and Politics, 1770-1830. Wilhelm von Humboldt's 'Philosophy of Cultural Formation' Viewed in its Political and Social Context), diss. Amsterdam University, Amsterdam 1986; As Dolf Sternberger has noted, Heine's literary views of the 1830s and 1840s had some trenchant elitist aspects which are rooted in Saint-Simonism; in the late work the self-assured pretensions to a poet's inherently divine status are dropped cf. Dolf Sternberger, *Heinrich Heine und die Abschaffung der Sünde*, Hamburg and Düsseldorf 1972. I return to Heine's elitism in Chapter IV, 163-5.