Berlin cobweb. The late Heine: Jewish wisdom, Hegelianism

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CHAPTER II. THE CONSCIENCE OF THE BODY

Heine’s reaction to the 1848 revolution revealed the mental and physical circumstances in which he resumed writing. From 1849 onward, Heine acted against total resignation and speechlessness. Anti-Hegelianism was a fertile ground for post-revolutionary productivity: radicalizing Hegelians are blamed for posing as ‘godless self-gods’.\(^1\) In the present chapter I focus on what I called Heine’s bodily conscience, which is a clear sign of how strongly private distress and public malaise were interwoven in the articulations of a ‘physical self’. Political and physical paralysis eclipsed the lure of emancipation. Heine sets about interpreting the 48 aftermath in terms of ailing: in his dictum ‘The Word is made flesh, and the flesh is bleeding’, from the Article dated 6 May 1843 in Lutezia (DHA XIV/1, 68), we have a compact commentary on an era in distress.\(^2\) Heine’s bodily conscience reveals his criticism of supposedly ‘healthier’ conditions in society.

The explicit articulation of the ‘physical self’ must be analysed carefully. The disintegration of the body corresponds with Heine’s post-revolutionary experiences. The personal becomes a political event.\(^3\) The tone is set in Romancero (1851). Here, post-revolutionary history tallies with the poet’s agony. The body’s fading away is exemplar of the painful actuality of the factual world. Still, the explicit articulation of the physical self is an infringement of civil conventions. Its public exhibition is offensive to the spirit of the times. At the same moment, this rudeness runs counter to abstract rhetoric and empty philosophizing, but instead of letting himself be played down as a pitiable case, Heine insisted on the illness of the times. Consequently, history is seen as a series of revolutionary fiascos invalidating the concept of sound progress.

Writing, then, is art in crisis. The idyllic paradigm of inspiration has collapsed. Lyricism is redundant, as we will see, and Heine’s later poetry tends to become ‘bad verse’, poetry which the poet nevertheless cannot keep himself from writing. The display of the physical points to the awful and the grotesque. It is a response to the fruitless quest for ‘naturalness’. Since the incorporation of the Jewish poet in the ‘natural’ order of things had proved impossible, corporeal deterioration is now the public mark of his ultimate loneliness in society.\(^4\) Though it is already obvious that malady as such sets him already apart like a

\(^1\) As indicated in the Introduction, 1.


\(^3\) Cf. Stefan Bodo Würfel, Der produktive Widerspruch. Heinrich Heines negative Dialektik, Bern 1986.

\(^4\) In Heine’s earlier oeuvre, too, ‘ill health’ had been a sign of political uncertainties and Jewish miseries. Cf. Jürgen Voigt, Ritter, Harlekin und Henker. Der junge Heine als romantischer Patriot und als Jude, 156-171.
leper, Heine yet stresses the distance in using weary moulds of the legend, the parable, and the fable, all representing ‘strange’, dated forms which hover between impersonal and personal writing. We are left with abortive endeavours and grotesque travesties. In agony of suspense and fear, lyrical harmonizing is out of question. Heine’s later poetry poignantly stammers out the loss of ‘authorial aura’. Since poetry’s potency is restricted, many expressions are explicitly conjectural. I will indicate that the genre of the fable is particularly illustrative of Heine’s ‘strangeness’. Contrary to Realist standards, Heine’s allegorical fables are suggestive reminders of how unfamiliar things are, and their equivocal meaning enables the attentive reader to draw a moral from all this: the discrepancy between the objective fable and subjective uncertainties is a testimony to the unreliability of reality.

Distorted or even ugly images are therefore indicative of the conflict between poet and society. Heine’s ‘failures’ are summed up in the Yiddishism ‘schlemihl’, a configuration of a German-Jewish poet’s dilemmas, and the epitome of ‘non-heroism’. In Heine’s later writing the schlemihl figures prominently. The poet becomes ‘Jew’ again in terms of his dubious status as a Germanizer. Unsure of his language, he becomes more and more aware of the pitfalls within it. And yet the authority created within the realm of language is that of the poet, whose only freedom is within the realm he evocates, a domain which is as much based on the whim of the world as is the appearance of the Jew.

Heine kept aloof from the stir of normality; the poet distances himself from ‘conventional life’ in order to look at it ‘differently’. Through the ‘physical self’, Heine wished to show how the conscience of the body, for all its ‘uncleanliness’, might be transformed into texts which offer a challenge to conventional standards. The relishing of sorrow is no more possible for Heine than the unalloyed death wish the German Romantics had used as a stylistic device for escaping the bustle of life. To communicate the hopelessness of this situation, Heine makes use of figureae like Lazarus and Job. They are the eventual signs of endurance, urging even the reluctant post-48 reader to field the question of injustice once again. In concluding this chapter, I will argue that Heine’s final critique of Hegel is part of that question. Experiences of injustice and physical distress makes him challenging both left-wing and right-wing readings of Hegelian philosophy.

1. Physical Self

After 1848, the metaphor of illness gains relentless pungency in Heine’s work. For Heine, the remains of time are now misery and distress. His image of history’s eschatological message of salvation has turned into degeneracy. Civi-

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5 Prawer, Satirist, 229.
The Conscience of the Body

lization no longer tends to humanization; it is reduced to rubble, like in one of Heine’s last poems (1855-6), from the *Lyrical Bequest*:

Gebrochen auf dem Boden liegen rings
Portale, Giebeldächer mit Skulpturen,
Wo, Mensch und Thier vermischt, Centaur und Sphynx,
Satyr, Chimäre, Fabelzeitfiguren.

Auch manches Frauenbild von Stein liegt hier
Umkraut umwuchert in dem hohen Grase;
Die Zeit, die schlimmste Syphilis, hat ihr
Geraubt ein Stück der edlen Nymphennase.

(DHA III/1, 392)

In these lines, significantly, the prestige status of Renaissance sculpture is ruined. Pedestals, jardinières and marble nymphs are but the poor remnants of past glories. The classical shape has lost its romantic fairness: its truth is not beauty any more. These symbols of civilization are perverted into trash: *disjecta membra* of what once was a wholesome *corpus*, stripped of embellishment and educational concern. Syphilis is obviously omnipresent. Just as the integrity of the female body is broken in obscenity, the poem’s lyrical body is ruptured. But the whole dispute surrounding ‘culture’ is instantaneously displaced from the ‘syphilitic’, literal sense to a question of poetic technique, from anatomy to poetics; the reading of the text is altered by this displacement, which transforms a sexual prank into a poetic query about writing non-harmonized poetry.

Characteristically, these strophes work with inharmonious, ‘inartistic’ rhyme (rings/Sphynx, hier/ihir). The poetic text breaks with song, inasmuch song is marked by regular rhymes and melodic division, and lyricism – symbolized by the ‘soundless’ yet ‘eloquent’ and even ‘passionate conversation’ between poet and muse – is lost:

Lautloses Zwiegespräch! man glaubt es kaum,
Wie bey den stummen zärtlichen Geplauder,
So schnell die Zeit verstreicht im schönen Traum
Der Sommernacht, gewebt aus Lust und Schauder!

Was wir gesprochen? frag es niemals, ach!
Den Glühworm frag was er den Gräsern glimert?
Die Welle frag was sie rauscht im Bach?
Frage den Westwind was er weht und wimmert?

Frag was er strahlet, den Karfunkelstein?
Frag was sie düften, Nachtviol und Rosen?
Doch frage nie wovon im Mondenschein
Die Marterblüme und ihr Todter kosen!
Ich weiß es nicht wie lange ich genoß
In meiner schlummerkühlen Marmorthruhe
Den schönen Freudentraum – Ach, es zerfлоß
Die Wonne meiner ungestörten Ruhe!

O Tod! mit deiner Grabestille, du,
Nur du kannst uns die beste Wollust geben –
Den Krampf der Leidenschaft, Lust ohne Ruh
Gibt uns für Glück das albem blöde Leben!

Doch wehe mir! Es schwand die Seligkeit,
Als draußen plötzlich sich ein Lärm erhoben;
Es war ein scheltend, stampfend wüster Streit –
Ach, meine Blum verscheuchte dieses Toben!
(DHA III/1, 394-5)

The nonconformity of Heine’s stance is heightened through voyeurism, as ageing, impotence and inactivity are coupled with grim remembrances of unbridled Eros, like in his 1852-5 ‘Citronia’, a late poem only posthumously to be published unabridged in 1913 for reasons of obscenity and indecency.7 ‘Citronia’ spurs a sexual lust frustrated by social injunctions. It rails against the restrictions placed on sexuality by society:

Manchmal, mit toller Fieberglut,
Faßt mich ein Wahnsinnübermuth –
O die verwünschte Scheidewand!
Es treibt mich dann mit kecker Hand
Die seidne Hülle abzustreifen,
Nach meinem nackten Glück zu greifen –
Jedoch aus allerley Rücksichten
Muß ich auf solche That verzichten; –
Auch ist dergleichen Dreistigkeit
Nicht mehr im Geiste unserer Zeit –
Es heiligt jetzt der Sitte Codex
Die Unantastbarkeit des Podex.
(DHA III/1, 406)

Here, at the end of the poem, the reader is faced with a triviality which validates the poet’s laments as a genuine grievance against an order in which the individual’s rights to happiness are disregarded. Sexuality and desire are indicative of anarchic lust; its focus is the place where the garment ‘gapes’. From the ‘text of bliss’ flows a certain current of disharmony which has an alarming effect.

7 Its provocative tenor is commented on by Alberto Destro, DHA III/2, 1748. For a more detailed analysis cf. Roger F. Cook, “‘Citronia’—‘Kennst du das Land...?’: A Riddle of Sexuality and Desire”, HJb 1996, 81-112.
Heine’s ‘ribaldry’ runs up against ‘decent’ civility. His libertarian pose is on bad terms with conjugal relationships civil society considers normal and usual.

Heine’s voyeurism is especially provocative when the ‘I’ remits the indiscretion of speaking the unspeakable fact that the fundamental exponent of masculine corporeality is that organ which is not mentioned by name in polite society, although it has obvious significance in life: the natural sensuality of man. The poet breaks a public secret, as he speaks of oeconomia dei:

Sein Oeconomieproblem
Ist daß wechselnd die Maschienen
Jeglichem Bedürfniß dienen,
Den prophanen wie den heiligen,
Den Pikanten wie langweilgen –
Alles wird simplifizirt,
Klug ist alles kombinirt:
Was dem Menschen dient zum Seichen
Damit schafft er seinesgleichen
Auf demselben Dudelsack
Spielt dasselbe Lumpenpak.
(DHA III/1, 403)

These are lines from Heine’s late ‘teleological’ poem ‘Two legs God gave us’ (posthumous); they can be seen as a poetical vindication of ‘vulgarity’. The libertarian pose sets the poet apart from ‘ordinary social intercourse’: he is the frail outsider who joins forces with instinctual impulses against political and social restraints, like the highly erotic can-can in the Pomare-cycle, a series of pre-48 poems inserted in Romancero as milestones on a literary route past joy, passion and lust. Heine had often posed as a passionate lover who voiced a desire for ‘the girl next door’ embodying the community with which he vainly sought to communicate on par.

After 48, these fantasies are repressed due to physical distress, a gesture made readable in Heine’s famous farewell to the Venus of Milo in the Louvre (whose torso is yet another ruptured body). In the Poems 1853 and 1854, characteristically, the former sensual raptures of the can-can are drowned by perverted cheers from slaves who are forced to dance on the deck of a Dutch slaver on her way to America:

8 Its philosophical background will be discussed in Chapter IV, 151-53.
Berlin Cobweb

Sie stampfen den Boden mit tobender Lust,
Und manche schwarze Schöne
Umschlingt wollüstig den nackten Genoß –
Dazwischen ächzende Töne.

Der Büttel ist *maître des plaisirs*,
Und hat mit Peitschenhieben
Die lässigen Tänzer stimulirt,
Zum Frohsinn angetrieben.

Und Dideldumdey und Schnedderedeng!
Der Lärm lockt aus den Tiefen
Die Ungethüme der Wasserwelt,
Die dort blödsinnig schliefen.

(DHA III/1, 194)

As Irene Guy notices, the picture of the dancing slaves is typical of the change from pre-48 poetry to the later poetry. The atmosphere is full of eerie feelings articulating the physical drive of the expropriated and fettered body. This is what occurs during the hallucinatory psychoses of desire, which present themselves as a reaction to a loss. As we will see in the following section, the loss has poetical consequences.

2. Lyricism Lost

The subtle, sensual rhythms of a creativity defended earlier with all the strength of the poet’s inventiveness are disturbed. These rhythms had been evocated elsewhere in ‘Forest Solitude’, the first poem of the ‘Lamentations’-cycle from the 1851 *Romancero*, where the motif of lost lyricism is running in a nostalgic, elegiac mood:

Ich hab’ in meinen Jugendtagen
Wohl auf dem Haupt einen Kranz getragen;
Die Blumen glänzten wunderbar,
Ein Zauber in dem Kranze war.

[...]

O, schöne Zeit! wo voller Geigen
Der Himmel hing, wo Elfenreigen
Und Nixentanz und Koboldscherz
Umgaukelt mein märchentrunkenes Herz!

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O, schöne Zeit! wo sich zu grünen
Triumphespforten zu wölben schienen
Die Bäume des Waldes – ich ging einher
Bekränzt, als ob ich der Sieger wär’!

[...]

Der Kranz ist mir vom Haupt genommen,
Ich weiß es nicht, wie es gekommen;
Doch seit der schöne Kranz mir fehlt,
Ist meine Seele wie entseelt.

Es glotzen mich an unheimlich blöde
Die Larven der Welt! Der Himmel ist öde,
Ein blauer Kirchhof, entgöttert und stumm.
Ich gehe gebückt im Wald herum.
(DHA III/1, 79-83)

These lines run contrary to the ‘pure Romanticism’ we can detect in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, were a picture is given of a boy living in total harmony with nature:

[...] And when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mock’d his skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv’d
Into the bosom of the steady Lake.  

The ‘gentle shock’ signals the residence of the divine in the human heart, a moment of unadulterated pleasure which heals the sorrows of mortality. To Heine, such Romanticism confuses life and poetry in aestheticism. It is just as foolish as Olympian classicism, which everywhere keeps life and poetry apart, destining humanity to transmit a patrimony which is lofty but which has become idle precisely in the issue that its loftiness should be of decisive value for mankind. Opposed to these two positions is the ‘impure’ experience of the poet, who affirms that if poetry and life remain infinitely divergent on the level of the biography and psychology of the individual, they nevertheless become indistinct at the point of their reciprocal debasement. They are united not

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immediately but in a medium. This medium, of course, is language. The poet is
he who, in the word, produces ‘foul life,’ withdrawn from lofty parameters. He
achieves in bathos; he makes a conscious effort to overreach ‘himself’ and
topples into absurdities and platitudes.

Heine no longer communes with the elemental spirits inhabiting nature.
The sky is silent and without divinity, as is shown in the poem ‘The Apollo-
God’, which recklessly invalidates yesterday’s poetic potentialities. This is
indeed one of the most disturbing poems in Romancero, figuring prominently in
the ‘Chronicles’, the collection’s first section. For here the mood is even more
unpleasant than that of an indifferently blue graveyard devoid of gods. A young
nun leaves her convent in search of a wandering musician whom she has heard
singing seductively in the guise of Phoebus Apollo, the god of poetry. From an
old Jew she learns that her supposed Apollo is all but a godhead. Through
Grecian pastiche and romantic slush, this Apollo is skilfully fetched down from
the Olympian realm to the gutter of Montparnasse, the kingdom of the Parisian
demi-monde:

Ich bin der Gott der Musika,
Verehrt in allen Landen;
Mein Tempel hat in Gräzia
Auf Mont-Parnass gestanden.

Auf Mont-Parnass in Gräzia,
Da hab’ ich oft gesessen
Am holden Quell Kastalia,
Im Schatten der Cypressen.

Vokalisirend saßen da
Um mich herum die Töchter,
Das sang und klang la-la, la-la!
Geplauder und Gelächter.
(DHA I/1, 33)

The mock-Muses’ vocalizing is a blow to classical loftiness; theirs is an anti-
rhyme (da/la), evidently monotonous non-poetry calling for an all-out assault on
the lyric style of yore. The metrical structure they offer is accompanied by a
painful awareness of the deficiency of rhyme as compensation for thematic
meaning, so that the reader searches vainly for an analogy of sense in the very
place where he can find only disjointed words and nonsense. Through the
mock-Muses’ distortion of the congeniality between sound and sense the site of
meaningful poetry is undermined. They point at poetical friction. Apollo’s lyre
is finally nothing more than a hurdy-gurdy turned by an ex-cantor from the

Ashkenazi synagogue in Amsterdam. ‘High’ lyricism degenerates into ‘inferior’ tooting. The ‘Yiddishe’ hurdy-gurdy, significantly, invalidates poetic pretentiousness.

In Heine’s poem, Phoebus Apollo is identical to Rabbi Faibisch; his name ‘Apollo-God’ is but a pun, his record being as dubious as that of gamblers, street-players and souteneurs. In the last two stanzas the poem passes a point of no return, when the enticing aesthetics of bittersweet delight is annihilated in obscenity, as Faibisch is roaming the country with a gaggle of girls:

Aus dem Amsterdamer Spielhuis
Zog er jüngst etwelche Dirnen,
Und mit diesen Musen zieht er
Jetzt herum als ein Apollo.

Eine dicke ist darunter,
Die vorzüglich quikt und grünzelt;
Ob dem großen Lorbeerkopfputz
Nennt man sie die grüne Sau.
(DHA III/1, 36)

The enigmas of sensualism are lowered to a thriving trade in prostitution. The catastrophic impact is obvious: the poem itself is nothing less than the irreparable sabotage of lyrical dictation. This is why the poet appears as an ‘offender’ who cannot but deliver his ‘ladies,’ that is, lyricism, over to prostitution. The abandonment corresponds, in language, to poetical changes which do not simply represent stylistic or rhetorical intricacies, but also call into question the harsh borders of language. One can observe that in Heine’s later writing there is an abundance of unusual composed adjectives, agglutinative forms, and aggressive fricatives.

Tensions and extremism of this kind, however, are usually classified by Heine’s contemporary critics as ‘mannerisms,’ full of base and improper motives. What they clearly observed was that Heine’s style became ‘unsuited’. Terms of ‘artificiality’ and ‘mannerism’ are certainly apt, to the extent that they register the poem’s irreducibility to a procedure of stylistic standardization. In fact, Heine’s ‘mannerisms’ presuppose the standard of a style which he consciously seeks to avoid. The gesture of the writer dwells in the tension between these two poles: on the one hand habit which is also habitat, on the other extravagancy, which is also non-identity. In the oscillation between habitat and non-identity, Heine’s style is an insulting negligence, his manner an impertinent remembrance of oneself in the improper emphasis upon bodily conscience, as we will see presently.

14 Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 544-49.
15 As we will notice again in our Epilogue, 207.
16 For a discussion, see Guy, Sexualität im Gedicht, 79-169.
3. Stench

Heine’s emphasis upon physiology points to the persistence of irregularities in reality, and thus to an anti-aesthetics of the awful and the grotesque. A comparison with Karl Rosenkranz (1805-1879) may clarify the point. Being a convinced Hegelian, Rosenkranz is eager to express the nothingness of the awful. To him, it is only a transient phase between the beautiful and the comic.\textsuperscript{17} Yet he is registering his opinion about its unruliness and idiosyncrasies so persuasively, that after all, it seems, some substantive credibility could be lent to these features. Heine’s later poetry provides him with striking examples of the awful, showing the ascendancy of the physical over the ideal, e.g. in the poems ‘Disputatio’ and ‘Vitzliputzli’, were religious mysteries are pictured as loathsome ceremonies.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Romancero} significantly insists on details of disease, on the ignominious functions of the human body, on squalor and filth. Likewise, it accentuates the pitiful helplessness of naked, unaccomodated man. Its ending is one with a suggestion of stench, the smell of unwashed, sweating bodies. Insalubrities are materialized in ‘sick verse’ combining dreadful images of rotten reality with despair and nausea of the world, as in a posthumous poem dating from the Lazarus-cycle in the \textit{Lyric\!al Bequest}:

\begin{quote}
Ganz entsetzlich ungesund
Ist die Erde, und zu Grund,
Ja, zu Grund muß alles gehn,
Was hienieden groß und schön.

Sind es alten Wahns Phantasmen,
Die dem Boden als Miasmen
Stimm entsteigen und die Lüfte
Schwägern mit dem argen Gifte?
(DHA III/1, 354)
\end{quote}

Trapped in this wasteland inhabited by the sick, the drugged and their responsive keepers, Heine incessantly reminds his contemporaries about sorrow, apathy and phantasmagoria. He thus disturbs their idealizing post-revolutionary life: this is what occurs during hallucinatory psychoses of desire, which present themselves as a reaction to the loss of splendour, affirmed by reality.

The poet withdraws to a private realm of perceptions, and the phantasms ‘of old’, not removed, but perfectly conscious, can penetrate into the poem and come to be brought into the open. We moderns, it is suggested to the con-

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ästhetik des Hässlichen}, 269-72. To Rosenkranz, Heine’s poetry marks the deacaying of Romanticism; as such, it sounds ‘blâsé’ and ‘petulant’, as it is ‘coquetting’ with despair, cf. Karl Rosenkranz, \textit{Die Poesie und ihre Geschichte. Entwicklung der poetischen Ideale der Völker}, Königsberg 1855, 732.
temporary reader, have not ceased to be astounded by this restless crowd of ‘miasmas’, which animates our dreams and dominates our waking moments more than we are perhaps willing to admit. They are pictured in the third poem from the Lazarus-cycle in the Poems 1853 and 1854:

Wie langsam kriechet sie dahin,
Die Zeit, die schauderhafte Schnecke!
Ich aber, ganz bewegungslos
Blieb ich hier auf demselben Flecke.

In meine dunkle Zelle dringt
Kein Sonnenstral, kein Hoffnungsschimmer;
Ich weiß, nur mit der Kirchhofsgruft
Vertausch ich dies fatale Zimmer.

Vielleicht bin ich gestorben längst;
Es sind vielleicht nur Spukgestalten
Die Phantasien, die des Nachts
Im Hirn den bunten Umzug halten.

Es mögen wohl Gespenster seyn,
Altheidnisch göttlichen Gelichters;
Sie wählen gern zum Tummelplatz
Den Schädel eines toten Dichters.—

Die schaurig süßen Orgia,
Das nächtlich tolle Geisterreiben,
Sucht des Poeten Leichenhand
Manchmal am Morgen aufzuschreiben.

(DHA III/1, 199)

Here poetry is transformed into a ‘chamber’ or stanza in which an acute experience of desubjectivization goes hand in hand with the ceremonious invention of figures of delirium. What characterizes this ‘chamber’ is a singular coincidence of despairing and poetic practice, thanks to which writing poetry becomes the laboratory in which well-known types are undone and strange creatures ‘of old’ emerge, as in a sinister and frightening tale of Kleist or Hoffmann.

Heine’s Fatal Room hints at the architectural uncanny which flourished throughout the nineteenth century. By far the most popular topos was doomed domesticity. A pervasive leitmotiv of literary fantasy, it provided an especially favoured site for weird disturbances. Its apparent role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of imminent death. Private space metamorphosed into a crypt. It offered what seemed to be
the image of being buried alive in one’s own tomb.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, for Heine inertia and immobility had always been associated strongly with political connotations.\textsuperscript{20} After 1848, these terms were as ingenious as ever. While the proceeding of time at a snail’s pace is entirely devoid of any sense of historical progress, paralysis prevents the poet from restoring it to an alternative principle. His mind presents itself in an acute decay; in his seclusion the author is bound to passivity. As he lays awake in the night, he imagines that the wild thoughts rioting in his brain are ghosts, revelling the skull of a living dead. He is left with hotbeds of impressions, haunting him in carnival-like processions just like the revolutionaries had been showing up in 48, as we saw in our first chapter.

In Heine’s imagination, then, the creative store of autonomous artistry has got off its hinges as conclusively as life itself. His ‘locus poeticus’ is no freehold, as it is taken by grotesque distortions put about by reality. The apparitions clarify a fundamental incompatibility between history and identity. Yet Heine keeps on writing. Restyling his death-room into a stage, he takes up a theatrical image to communicate his illness. Heine’s theatricality intensifies the aforementioned voyeurism. Its form is not that of the serious play but of ‘cheap’ entertainment. Heine even does not get tired of depicting his own dying as a boring spectacle in his poem ‘Expiring’ from the Lazarus-cycle in \textit{Romancero’s} section ‘Lamentations’:

\begin{quote}
Der Vorhang fällt, das Stück ist aus,  
Und Herrn und Damen gehn nach Haus.  
Ob ihnen auch das Stück gefallen?  
Ich glaub’, ich hörte Beyfall schallen.  
Ein hochverehrtes Publikum  
Beklatschte dankbar seinen Dichter.  
Jetzt aber ist das Haus so stumm,  
Und sind verschwunden Lust und Lichter.  
(DHA III/1, 120)
\end{quote}

This theatre is full of darkest exhibitionism.\textsuperscript{21} The absence of the German audience, which had sauntered yawning in homeward throngs, symbolizes the lack of appreciation for the poet in his mattress-grave. Moreover, the image of a building void of all live content also represents a metaphor for the poet’s depleted subjectivity, now he has seen expiring in his breast every worldly vain desire. The ‘self’, the ‘I’ suggests, is as oblique as the ‘others’. There is no synthesis in agony of suspense and fear; again, lyrical harmonizing is out of question. In the 1855-6 poem from the \textit{Lyrical Bequest} we cited in the first section of this chapter, significantly, the last strophe ends in flagrant dis-


\textsuperscript{21} Heine’s literary exhibitionism is discussed in Dolf Oehler, \textit{Ein Höllensturz der alten Welt}, 239-266.
sonance: the querulous bray of a donkey drives the author almost to complete despair:

Mit diesem I-A! I-A! dem Gewiehr
Dem rülpsend ekelhaften Mißlaut brachte
Mich zur Verzweiflung fast das <dumme> Thier –
Ich selbst zuletzt schrie auf – und ich erwachte.
(DHA III/1, 396)

These lines evoke feelings of disenchantment. The poem is interrupted by an animal sound which remains outside grammatical language. The ‘I-A! I-A!’ of the last strophe is indicative of poetic emergency. Poetry opens onto a region which is uncertain and devoid of a round subject, flattened on the transcendental, and which can be defined only in terms of contamination.

Heine’s late writings, therefore, do not afford visible proof of the poet’s superiority. By separating Romancero from his Faust Heine renounces the allusion to Faustian pretences. Again, as he converted the promised Preface to Romancero into a Postscript, he abandoned the notion of a normative guidance from the literary expert. The forlornness of the dying can only be communicated by projecting his own anxieties and insecurities upon those who will live on. Decay, ugliness, and despair are put together in a single constellation, of which the querulous bray of the donkey is the utter confirmation. The donkey makes another appearance in the 1855 ‘Good Advice’ from the Lazarus-cycle in the Lyrical Bequest:

Guter Rath

Gieb ihren wahren Namen immer
In deiner Fabel ihren Helden.
Wagst du es nicht, ergehts dir schlimmer
Zu deinem Eselsbilde melden
Sich gleich ein Dutzend graue Thoren –
Das sind ja meine langen Ohren
Ruft jeder, dieses gräßlich grimme
Gebraye ist ja meine Stimme –
Der Esel bin ich! obgleich nicht genannt
Erkennt mich doch mein Vaterland,
Mein Vaterland Germania!
Der Esel bin ich! I-A! I-A!
Hast einen Dummkopf schonen wollen,
Und zwölfe sind es die dir grollen.
(DHA III/1, 358)

It is evident that these lines offer a commentary on the genre of the animal fable. They are grafted upon a tension between the objective sense of the 'clas-
4. Fables

Compared to Lessing, Heine’s fables are all but objective; what they do show is that in the 1850s the genre had become obsolete.\(^{22}\) In the animal fables of the late Heine, objective records are intertwined with a kaleidoscopic and ‘faulty’ mix of uncertainties.\(^{23}\) In a letter to Campe, dated 12 August 1852, Heine links up illness and sickness to ‘merciless drollery’, with reference to the making of his fables:

> My mental agitation is due to illness rather than to genius. For instance, I have lately versified a multitude of animal fables in order to soothe my pains. May be I will send one exemplar to young tsarevitch Campe, my future editor, to learn it by heart. In dreadful nights, my poor head is tossing and turning in anguish, and the bells of the old fool’s cap are tinkling with merciless drollery. (HSA XXIII, 225)

To Heine, the ‘merciless drollery’ is a means to restore the explosiveness of the genre as Alberto Destro rightly stipulates.\(^ {24}\) I would add that its ‘comic’ conception is an apparent inversion of the tragic rule that the just is guilty: comedy is a justification of what society holds guilty. But the ‘person,’ who is the site of this ‘expiation,’ is neither an allegory nor a moral subject, the ‘person’ is instead an old fool abandoned to the ordeal of the world. Whereas the classic fable presents a quasi-historical story, Heine’s fables are rather allegories in which the animal world represents a social order which cannot be deciphered unequivocally, as we saw above in Heine’s ‘Babylonian Worries’. These allegories make some moral, religious or political points which nevertheless remain obscure. Still, the obscurity of the allegory alludes to the disordered, fragmented and unhomely world of the 1850s.

Poetic fright pressurizes the ‘I’ away from the lyrical style into ugliness, a painful displacement we already noticed in ‘The Apollo-God’.\(^ {25}\) Eerie feelings are strengthened by the undue appearance of hungry rats from their loathsome habitat. Their space is assumed to hide, in its darkest recesses and half-forgotten margins, all the objects of fear and phobia which have returned with such insistency to haunt the imaginations of those who have tried to stake out rooms to protect their health and happiness. Space as threat, as harbinger of the un-

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\(^{24}\) Cf. Alberto Destro’s commentary, DHA III/2, 1371.

seen, operates as medical and physical metaphor for all the possible erosions of bourgeois bodily and social well being. The outside, even as the spaces of asylum, exile, confinement and quarantine, is continuously spilling over into the normal space of the city. Thus the clearly marked out limits of the post-48 social order is menaced by pathological spaces. Heine’s bodily conscience indicates how ‘clear space’ is invaded by the figure of ‘dark space’ on the level of the body in the form of epidemic and uncontrollable disease, and on the level of the city in the appearance of the lower species.

Heine’s fables often describe these lower species in monstrous wordings. They cause a dissonance of the beautiful and the true, of ideology and reality. As soon as the author finds himself in a lyrical wonderland, a noisy donkey brings him back to daily life. The abhorrences of the biological and corporeal sphere counteract the joyous image of the post-revolutionary world. This writing is in conflict with the sound and sane vividness the Realist writers were seeking in the post-48 decades.26

At first sight, Heine shares some of their objectives. Like the Realists, Heine takes refuge down the unembellished region of the physical. He too turns his attention to the concrete fabric of things, where the image of the divine had dissipated. But things look very different at closer examination. In the aftermath of 1848 Realism obviously developed into the mainstream literature in the German-speaking world. A leading protagonist of the movement was Julian Schmidt, together with Gustav Freytag the editor of The Frontier Guard. For reasons of morality, the late Heine became one of its most formidable enemies. Schmidt set out to establish a clear moral superiority which enabled the movement to formulate its literary criticism.27

Against the cultural revaluation of Realism, Heine reacted with a revealingly fine talent for mimicry. His ‘cynicism’ is especially centred on nationalistic pride and historical prejudice. His vision of the weird housekeeper in the aforementioned poem ‘James I’, from the Poems 1853 and 1854, turns a glorious past into actual rabble; Germany’s national heritage is hopelessly antiquated:

Da liegen die Kaiser-Insignia,
Da liegt die goldne Bulle,
Das Scepter, die Krone, der Apfel des Reichs
Und manche ähnliche Schrulle.


27 Julian Schmidt, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, second, revised and enlarged ed., vol. 3, Leipzig 1855, 12. Schmidt’s striving is for a ‘healthy democracy’ which would overcome revolutionary ‘infection’. A great deal of Realism has rightly been characterized in terms of a post-Hegelian idealism. Moreover, Realism is far from consistent; its definition depends largely on which historical framework is used. It will prove worthwhile to qualify Realism as a constellation of questions rather than as a clear set of topics.
Realism upgrades the status of the lyrical subject. Instead of concentrating on personal expressiveness, it suggests that the poet be able to adopt more objective gestures. But Heine does not opt for the objectivity Realism is demanding. To him, history rather reveals the individual’s ailing subjectivity. His detailed picture of the world, his preference for the peculiar and his fondness for the single are all contrary to objectivity and uniformity. Therefore, his fables are paradigmatic of the subject’s problematic refusal to accept the enforcement of Realism. This is precisely the point where Heine’s poetical vulnerability is resting: his refusal conflicts with demands for adaptation. The poet is left behind wounded. To Heine, therefore, he is a true schlemihl. Because this persona is the inextricable fusion of illness, Jewishness, and authorship, it must be analyzed in more detail.

5. Schlemihl

Poets, Heine’s poem ‘Jehuda ben Halevy’ from Romancero tells us, have as patron Apollo, the divine schlemihl, who pursued the nymph Daphne and found himself embracing a laurel-tree instead:

Dichterschicksal! böser Unstern,
Der die Söhne des Apollo
Tödtlich nergelt, und sogar
Ihren Vater nicht verschont hat,

Als er hinter Daphnen laufend
Statt des weißen Nymphenleibes
Nur den Lorbeerbaum erfafte,
Er, der göttliche Schlemihl!
(DHA III/1, 153)

In doing so, Heine selects a Yiddishism which had been absorbed into the world of the Christian German as a sign of the tragicomic acculturation of the Jew into society. Heine cites as his source for the word the German Romantic poet Adelbert von Chamisso, who had published his parody of the Faust legend under the title The Wonderful Story of Peter Schlemihl about the man who lost his shadow (1814). For Chamisso the schlemihl had very specific reference to a sexual relationship between parties where a ban has existed forbidding it. It is this mismatching to which Heine refers back when he discusses Chamisso’s source for the term, Julius Eduard Hitzig, originally Itzig, a convert among the conservative German Romantics.
Already in a letter to Moses Moser, dated 22 July 1825, Heine had associated himself with ‘Peter Schlemiehl’:

On the whole I am in good health. I will not stay here much longer. In a letter to my uncle I alluded to my wish for a trip to a seaside resort, and I have a strong hope that my wish will come true by his sagacity and clemency. Salomon Heine has been here; he sent for me at once, and he was most obliging, so that we spent enjoyable hours. But since there were some friends around, I was unable to talk to him about my private affairs, and when I was about to travel with him to Cassel, the coach was so loaded, that Peter Schlemiehl had to stay behind. (HSA XX, 207).

The uncle is characterized as an imperious lord; the meeting has all the traits of a begged-for audience. What seems at first sight a mild joking on the insecurity of a young writer, however, is really a sharp picture of a poet’s problematic relationship with a clan compelled by social pressures to seek assimilation. The remark that the company drove away without ‘Peter Schlemiehl’ may serve as a paradigm of a curriculum vitae in writing.

Poet and schlemihl meet up in the second of the ‘Hebrew Melodies’ from Romancero, devoted to the eponymous protagonist Jehudah ben Halevy. Heine identifies with Halevy in a paean to the Jewish poets of Moorish Spain, reflecting a complex act of artistic self-affirmation to accentuate the pessimism with which he regards the poet’s fate. In the Spanish Jew writing Hebrew poetry Heine creates his version of the exiled poet as his alter ego. The biography of Halevy can serve as an internalized self-portrait. It is important to note that hidden within the tale of the schlemihl is a moment in which the very domain of poetry becomes insecure, for Heine too refers to ‘our ancestor’, the biblical figure Schlemihl ben Zwi Schadday, killed accidentally by Pinhas. The spear Pinhas used has been preserved, and it is constantly whirling above the poets’ heads:

Jahre kommen und vergehen –
Drey Jahrtausende verflossen,
Seit gestorben unser Ahnherr,
Herr Schlemihl ben Zuri Schadday.

Längst ist auch der Pinhas todt –
Doch sein Speer hat sich erhalten,
Und wir hören ihn beständig

Obviously, the touch of anxiety experienced by the poet is tied to the perception of ‘his’ vocabulary in reality. As he can never quite be integrated into his own textual (i.e. Germanizing) framework, he lives in constant insecurity. For him, artificiality is an answer to insecurity.

This is conveyed when the stories of the *Haggadah*, which nourished Jehuda’s imagination during his Talmud study, are compared to the hanging gardens of Babylon: an extremely artificial paradise, suspended above the ground by technical skill:

Letztre aber, die Hagada,
Will ich einen Garten nennen,
Einen Garten, hochphantastisch
Und vergleichbar jenem andern,

Welcher ebenfalls dem Boden
Babylons entsprossen weiland –
Garten der Semiramis,
Achtes Wunderwerk der Welt.
(DHA III/1, 132)

It is significant that Heine begins this poem with an elegant German quotation evoking the lamentation of the Psalmist: ‘If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.’ The psalm is the 137th Psalm, which points at the necessity of keeping memory alive from generation to generation:

“Lechzend klebe mir die Zunge
An dem Gaumen, und es welke
Meine rechte Hand, vergäß’ ich
Jemals dein, Jerusalem —”
(DHA III/1, 130)

For those who hang on ‘Jerusalem’ the drive to remember sharply is strengthened by a solemn oath. This text has been of great intellectual value to Heine, that is, in his search for philosophical insight into the political and ideological scene which existed in post-Napoleonic Germany. Here it must be stressed that the transfer of memory counts as a liturgical obligation in the synagogue. Obviously, the ‘I’ is not one of the stem believers, as the subsequent lines indicate, in which synagogue tradition becomes fuzzy:

Wort und Weise, unaufhörlich
Schwirren sie mir heut’ im Kopfe,
The Conscience of the Body

Und mir ist als hört‘ ich Stimmen,
Psalmode, Männersstimmen –
(DAH III/1, 130)

The poem yet produces the recognizable character of Halevy amidst a host of bearded phantoms:

Manchmal kommen auch zum Vorschein
Bärte, schattig lange Bärte –
Traumgestalten, wer von euch
Ist Jehuda ben Halvey?

Doch sie huschen rasch vorüber;
Die Gespenster scheuen furchtsam
Der Lebend’gen plumpen Zuspruch –
Aber ihn hab’ ich erkannt –
(DHA III/1, 130)

The recognition accounts for the first section of the poem. In the following section Heine goes on exploring Halevy’s traits, till he interrupts his ponderings in the third section, where he switches to the legendary story of Alexander the Great and the jewel box from the tent of Darius.29

It is worth considering the fact that the second section again starts with a quotation from Psalm 137; here its well-known entry is cited:

Bey den Wassern Babels saßen
Wir und weinten, unsre Harfen
Lehnten wir an den Trauerweiden –
Kennst du noch das alte Lied?
(DHA III/1, 135)

The evocations of the ‘old psalm’s text’ hint at Hebrew as the language of true poetry. In a striking gesture, Hebrew is the unknown mother tongue of ‘otherness’. As such, it is a language whose existence lies in non-evident evidence ‘elsewhere’: Halevy’s flights of fancy turn him into the poet of an other world, worshipping ‘Lady Jerusalem’. As the wandering minstrels went off in search for an inspiring Lady, so Halevy wandered to the Holy Land where, in conformity to the fortune of the schlemihl, a Saracen kills him. And his dying words are the Sabbath Hymn Lecho Daudi Likras Kalle, ‘Come my Friend, Meet the Bride,’ wrongly yet for obvious reasons ascribed to Halevy, being one of the very few figures of the golden age of Spanish Jewry whom even a lesser knowledgeable reader would have recognized. If Heine had mentioned the actual author of the hymn, the sixteenth-century Galilean poet Solomon Alkabets, hardly anybody would have associated this name with any

29 That story will be discussed in Chapter V, 195-7.
specific context. Now Halevy’s Hebrew words are the pivotal point of Heine’s poem. True poetry, then, brings with it an awareness of bilingualism: at the point where Halevy is inscribed in Heine’s poem, a language is recollected which stands apart from pragmatic discourse thanks to the skilful poet, and which becomes a dimension not beyond language but in between daily communication. In doing so, Halevy’s dream is in fact dreamt again every time the text is read, and in the restoring of the bilingualism and discord implicit in Heine’s text an ‘oriental’ language is evoked which, though absent in instrumental language, makes such ‘strange’ texts ‘in an unknown tongue’ somehow possible. Heine wants the reader to believe in this different world, which he had begun to conjure in ‘Princess Sabbath’, the first of the ‘Hebrew Melodies’ from Romancer, Because this poem informs us about the hostility the poet’s ‘oriental tongue’ is met with in society, it deserves closer attention.

6. Cleanliness

‘Princess Sabbath’ tells of a prince named Israel who has been transformed into a dog and lives in squalor during the week but is temporarily restored to human shape on the Sabbath:

Hund mit hündischen Gedanken,
Köttert er die ganze Woche
Durch des Lebens Koth und Kehricht,
Gassenbuben zum Gespötte.

Aber jeden Freytag Abend,
In der Dämmerungstunde, plötzlich
Weicht der Zauber, und der Hund
Wird aufs Neu’ ein menschlich Wesen.

Mensch mit menschlichen Gefühlen,
Mit erhobnem Haupt und Herzen,
Festlich, reinlich schier gekleidet,
Tritt er in des Vaters Halle.

(DHA III/1, 125)

This poem is the recreation of the milieu of the marginal Jew into a gorgeously coloured fairy-tale from Thousand and One Nights:

In Arabiens Märchenbuche
Sehen wir verwünschte Prinzen,
Die zuzeiten ihre schöne
Urgestalt zurückgewinnen:

Das behaarte Ungeheuer
Ist ein Königsohn geworden;
Schmuckreich glänzend angekleidet,
Auch verliebt die Flöte blasend.
(DHA III/1, 125)

The magical transformation is heralded by the singing of the Sabbath Hymn
*Lecho Daudi Likras Kalle*. ‘Princess Sabbath’ represents the kalle:

In dem Liede wird gefeiert
Die Vermählung Israels
Mit der Frau Prinzessin Sabbath,
Die man nennt die stille Fürstin.
(DHA III/1, 127)

The Prince partakes of *scha/et*, which sets off a train of a train of scriptural vistas:

Speist der Prinz von solcher Speise,
Glänzt sein Auge wie verkläret,
Und er knöpft auf die Weste,
Und er spricht mit sel’gem Läch'en:

“Hör’ ich nicht den Jordan rauschen?
Sind das nicht die Brü/3elbrunnen
In dem Palmenthal von Beth-El,
Wo gelagert die Kamehle?

Hör’ ich nicht die Heerdenglöckchen?
Sind das nicht die fetten Hämmel,
Die vom Gileath-Gebirg
Abendlich der Hirt herabtreibt?”
(DHA III/1, 128-9)

The poem closes with the *havdalah* and the shaking of the *bessamin*, the ritual spice container, containing the aroma of the Orient, with which the Sabbath ends.

In my opinion, this poem is the imaginative counterpart of the anecdote of Moses Lümpchen from Hamburg, discussed in the Introduction. Again, we come to hear of an apparently uncivilized outsider becoming free from the ordeal of civility on Friday evening, when he enjoys ‘a wonderful meal’ and ‘rejoices greatly’ at scriptural items. Lümpchen from Hamburg is complementary to the *schlemihl* from the Orient. In this context, however, it must stressed that even in the magical world of Sabbath the Prince is not wholly free from squalor, as he is said only to be dressed *almost* cleanly. What ever remains to overcome is the canine likeness Israel bears to Medor, the people’s dog pointed at in the previous chapter. The resemblance is significant of Heine’s bodily con-
science. By this hint that also on Sabbath the poem’s protagonist cannot be completely human, Heine reveals his ambivalence towards Germanization. Therefore, it is not, as S.S. Prawer said, just a portrait from the outside, ‘an unassimilated Jew partially seen by a Europeanized observer.’

It is inside information about a culture which signifies a linguistic standard which is not generous but compelling, because standard language has become a hallmark of civility. It is a straitjacket in which communication tends to be restricted to socialization. Significantly, Heine chooses to represent that splendid Sabbath-world either by exquisite German translation from the Hebrew or, indeed, by the original Hebrew itself. But one ‘uncleanliness’ does remain, precisely the one revealing that Jewish poets, because of their Germanizing, are always bound to be seen as Jews in that conflicted world of culture in which Heine found himself, and in which he was clearly not made welcome.

Heine’s writing presents a challenge to cultural standardization, as it refers to the unassimilated naturalness of his father’s diction evoked in the 1853-4 Memoirs:

> Manly and sonorous as his voice was, it had an air of childlike innocence which I would somehow associate with a robin’s warbling in the forest. His speech entered the heart so swiftly, that it seemed to avoid passing via the ears. (DHA XV, 81)

Heine’s writing is in search for such naturalness. But his is not a world which admits the poet who writes (in) his own language; for this world, poetry exists in its own ghetto and in a language far removed from daily routine. The Germanizing poet is forced to recreate a new language from ordinary language, an artificial language which evokes poetic self-sufficiency. And yet this self-same language must reflect and perhaps even strive to enter the world from which it has been banned.

Heine’s search for naturalness has a problematic relationship with Romanticism, which will be discussed more fully later on, in the next chapter. What Heine may have in mind, by way of anticipation, is this ideal of poetry as its own vindicating force. The ‘robin’s warbling in the forest’ had died away, nature is mute. Poets are left with nothing but their longing for the faintest echo of a paradisiacal purity. And yet the persona created within the world of corrupted language is that of the poet, whose only status is within the world the poet creates, a world as ephemeral as is the status of the Germanizing Jew. Heine’s double bind is articulated within the language he has created and is both its source and its goal. What he is striving after is this dispensation from the instrumental, the tongue (representing both a poet’s personal gift of utterance

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30 Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 555.
32 A concise survey of the Romantic thirst for an unspoiled tongue ‘eastward in Eden’ in Walter Benjamin, Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache der Menschen, Gesammelte Schriften II/1, 140-57.
and the common resources of language itself) is granted the right to govern. The tongue, governed for so long in the social sphere by considerations of tact and fidelity, by nice obeisances to one’s origin within the minority, this tongue would suddenly perform freely. It would gain access to a condition which is unconstrained and, while not being practically effective, is not necessarily totally inefficacious. The poetic art would thus be credited with an authority of its own.

In this way, poetry would become an achievement intimating a possible order beyond itself, although that further order remains as promissory and remote as ‘Bimini’ or ‘Jerusalem’: an ever-receding destination. Here we have a motivation for the peculiarity of Heine’s search for poetry’s ‘impossible’ obstinacy.33 For the acceptance of sheer conventionality would lead into surrender to the ignorance that naturalness has been relegated to oblivion. If we must suffer, he suggests, it is better to recreate the world in which we suffer. Faced with the brutality of historical onslaught, fiddling with words and rhythms is practically useless. Yet poetry verifies a poet’s singularity, it strikes and stakes out the ore of the ‘I’, which lies at the base of this individuated life. In one sense, the efficacy of poetry is nil indeed. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like provocative writing in the sand in the face of which the accusing crowd is left speechless.

Heine’s audience, however, does not submit to the jurisdiction of such poetry. Accordingly, if universal acclaim, at least from the German reading public, is Heine’s goal, still it could never be achieved within the limits of a Germanizing which turned out to be unconventional per se. Rather, Heine would remain the outsider, cast into the everlasting role of a non-acceptable subject.34 Its literary scope is displayed in the second and third Book of Romancero, the ‘Lamentations’ and the ‘Hebrew Melodies’, respectively, and includes personae like Job and Jeremiah from the Old Testament, the two New Testament characters of Lazarus, medieval Jewish poets from Spain, culminating in the legendary appearance of the Wandering Jew.35 Here I concentrate on Job and Lazarus. Lazarus is the character whose name is the title of a coherent series of later poetry: first, the twenty poems constituting a cycle entitled ‘Lazarus’ within the ‘Lamentations’ in the 1851 Romancero, then a collection of eleven poems entitled ‘On Lazarus’ within the Poems 1853 an 1854, and finally fourteen posthumous poems. For Heine, the name ‘Lazarus’ is a compact martyriology, allowing him to register his commitment to Jewish-ness. As we will see presently, it is typical of the post-48 interlinking of personal and public dismay which conditioned Heine’s writing.

33 Introduction, 22-25.
35 The role of the Wandering Jew will be discussed in Chapter V, 201-5.
7. Lazarus’ Rattle

In the 1854 *Miscellaneous Writings*, Heine’s last major publication, the last lines of the *Confessions* conjure up an image of a monk, a famous medieval poet who ended in misery, while all Germany was whistling and singing his songs. The situation resembles that of Heine:

> At times, in dreary nocturnal visions, I fancy I can discern the figure of the poor cleric from the Limburg chronicle, my brother in Apollo, his sickly eyes staring gloomily out of his cowl. But at the same moment he whisks off, and I find myself listening to the dream-like echo of the fading Lazarus-rattle. (DHA XV, 57)

Heine’s *Poems 1853 and 1854* are accompanied by striking presentations of the Lazarus-rattle. Hardly had the echo died away when the *Poems 1853 and 1854* are to be read.\(^\text{36}\) The first poem, ‘Thirst for Stillness’, continues:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Laß} & \text{ bluten deine Wunden, laß} \\
\text{Die} & \text{ Tränen fließen unaufhaltsam –} \\
\text{Geheime Wollust} & \text{ schwelgt im Schmerz,} \\
\text{Und Weinen} & \text{ ist ein süßer Balsam.}
\end{align*}
\]

(DHA III/1, 185)

The evocation of a voluptuous pleasure to be found in pain and sorrow is delusive. Romantic appetites for suffering are spoiled by hyperbole in the second strophe:

> Verwundet dich nicht fremder Hand,  
> So mußt du selber dich verletzen;  
> Auch danke hübsch dem lieben Gott,  
> Wenn Zähren deine Wangen netzen.

(DHA III/1, 185)

Conditions of squalor and privation prevail as transcendent perspectives are ruled out. The Epilogue of the *Poems 1853 and 1854* is valuing just the bare minimum of life for the lack of otherworldly alternatives:

> Unser Grab erwärmt der Ruhm.  
> Thorenworte! Narrenthum!  
> Eine fehere Wärme giebt  
> Eine Kuhmagd, die verliebt  
> Uns mit dicken Lippen küßt

\(^{36}\) This textual cohesiveness is lost in modern editorial practices of divorcing the prose and poetry of the later Heine from their context, cf. Schumacher, *Stillstand*, 62, and Prawer, *Satirist*, 227.
The last poem of the cycle ‘On Lazarus’ hints at the reason why life still prevails:

Mich locken nicht die Himmelsauen
Im Paradies, im sel’gen Land;
Dort find ich keine schöhere Frauen,
Al's ich bereits auf Erden fand.

Kein Engel mit den feinsten Schwingen
Könnt' mir ersetzen dort mein Weib;
Auf Wolken sitzend Psalmen singen,
Wär auch nicht just mein Zeitvertreib.

O Herr! Ich glaub’ es wär das beste,
Du ließest mich in dieser Welt;
Heil’ nur zuvor mein Leibgebreste
Und sorge auch für etwas Geld.

(DHA III/1, 204)

The vagueness of religious promises is no substitute for illness and destitution. The poem postulates the brutal nature of life by dispelling the romantic notions of agony and death through a trenchant, acid wit, of which the bathetic ‘only’ is a characteristic feature. The persona of Lazarus counters transcendent perspectives. Though he may be seen as a martyr of history, despairing at the thought of lost chances, the absence of responsive frameworks is omnipresent, as shown in the opening poem of the ‘On Lazarus’ series, the counterpart of the lines just cited:

Laß die heil’gen Parabolen,
Laß die frommen Hypothesen –
Suche die verdamten Fragen
Ohne Umschweif uns zu lösen.

Warum schleppt sich blutend, elend,
Unter Kreuzlast der Gerechte,
Während glücklich als ein Sieger
Traht auf hohem Roß der Schlechte?

Woran liegt die Schuld? Ist etwa
Unser Herr nicht ganz allmächtig?
Oder treibt er selbst den Unfug?

37 For Heine’s bathos, this chapter, 88.
Ach, das wäre niederträchtig.

Also fragen wir beständig,
Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll
Erde endlich stopft die Mäuler –
Aber ist das eine Antwort?
(DHA III/1, 198)

These are the questions put in the Book of Job, which Heine says elsewhere in the *Miscellaneous Writings*, in the 1854 Postscript to his 1844 *Eulogy on Ludwig Markus*, must have been inserted in the Bible as a homeopathic cure for man’s propensity to doubt God’s goodness.²⁸ In this poignant addendum Heine emphatically points to the feelings of failure and despair Job’s ‘Canticles of Scepticism’ express:

But why must the righteous suffer so much here on earth? Why must virtue and honesty perish, while that swaggering buffoon who has exposed his eyes to no Arabic manuscript whatsoever is lolling about on Fortune’s pillow, almost rank with selfishness? The Book of Job does not answer this awkward question. On the contrary, this Book contains the Canticles of Scepticism, wherein heinous serpents are hissing and whistling their eternal: Why? How is it that on the return from Babylon those pious Temple Registrars under the chairmanship of Ezra did enter that Book into the canon of the Holy Scriptures? I often wondered this myself. I suppose that those God-fearing men were not lacking in judiciousness; on the contrary, in their saintly sagacity they knew that since doubt is essential for human nature it cannot be done away with clumsily but must be carefully healed. They preferred all-homeopathic remedies, similar acting on similar, though the dose they administered was far from homeopathically small but rather rose to enormous quantities. The Book of Job amounts to such an overdose of doubt; yet, this venom was an essential ingredient in the Bible, that huge family medicine cabinet to mankind. Yea, just as men must weep their fill when they suffer, so they must doubt their fill when they feel wretchedly hurt at their vain demands for a blissful life. As from ex-cessively bitter weeping, from intensely strong doubting (Germans rightly call ‘despair’), too, results a traumatic experience of moral healing. But happy he who is in good health and needs no medicine! (DHAL XIV/1, 274-5).

To Heine, the phrase about ‘Job’s patience’ could not be further from the mark. ‘Job’s defiance’ would have been a far more apposite figure of speech, for it

²⁸ I will return to these lines in Chapter V, 181-2.
was Job who had all the passion, and all the grasp of the real paradoxes implicit in the idea of theodicy.³⁹

Through ‘Job’s defiance’, Heine aims for a literary stamina to bear bodily dismal, so as to articulate his aversion to anaesthetizing the deepest experiences of death by means of aesthetics, as is shown in his posthumous poem ‘Morphine’, written in blank verse which makes a free usage of the iambic pentameter in combination with the choriambus:

Gross ist die Aenlichkeit der beiden schönen Junglingsgestalten, ob der eine gleich
Vielmettässer als der andre, auch viel strenger, Fast möchte ich sagen viel vornehmer aussieht
Als jene Andre, welcher mich vertraulich
In seine Arme schloß – Wie lieblich sanft
War dann sein Lächeln und wie sein Blick wie selig!
Dann mochte es wohl gesehn, daß seines Hauptes
Mohnblumenkranz auch meine Stirn berührte
Und seltsam duftend allen Schmerz verscheuchte
Aus meiner Seele’ – Doch solche Linderung.
Sie dauert kurze Zeit; genesen gänzlich
Kann ich nur dann, wenn seine Fackel senkt
Der andre Bruder, der so ernst und blei und.
–
Gut ist der Schlaf, der Tod ist besser – freilich
Das beste wäre, nie geboren seyn.
(DHA III/1, 277)

In his analysis of the poem, Paul Peters speaks of a ‘paean to Death’, expressed in a petrified bone-structure of poetry.⁴⁰ At first sight, the poem ‘stands’ indeed like funerary sculpture. But after a formidable caesura (‘besser’ – ‘freylich’), Christian-Classical ‘Death-aesthetics’ is overridden by Heine’s adaptation of Job’s lamentation in the last line of the poem:

Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. [...] Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? [...] For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest [...] as a hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. (Job 3:3-17)

³⁹ Contrary to Hegel’s ‘servile Job’ in Religionsphilosophie, 289.
Job and Lazarus, then, embody Heine’s obstinate efforts not to give way to his sufferings but to assume a literary position of acting publicly against despair. The suffering is the source of what Heine called his ‘religious blasphemy’. ‘Do you know’, Heine wrote to Laube on 7 February 1850,

that ghastly, awkward feeling I would label as ‘the body’s despair’? It is that very experience I am labouring with now. Thank God that I have a God again, so that in excessive pain I may indulge in some blasphemous curses. The atheist is denied such comfort. (HSA XXIII, 26-7)

Heine’s final view on God is obviously polemical. Lazarus and Job bear witness to a challenging attitude towards a God whom Heine had been regarding as a mischief maker in the face of the French and German revolutions, as is shown set in a letter to Campe, dated 9 July 1848:

Nothing about the actual course of events. Universal anarchy, the world in a muddle, God’s madness become manifest! The Old Man must be locked up, if things go on like that. It is all the atheists’ fault of driving Him crazy. (HSA XXII, 287)

The argument censures both left-wing and right-wing readings of Hegelian philosophy. The ‘atheists’, firstly, are to be associated with those radicalizing Hegelian ‘godless self-gods’ representing the coincidence of God and revolutionism. Against the different critiques of Hegel’s religious presuppositions they had presented from 1840 onward, Heine now beseeches a philosophically unsophisticated God (the ‘Old Man’). The ‘anarchy’, secondly, is to be associated with the Right-Hegelian notion of Divine Guidance of a Moral State which favoured the fortunates as ever. Instead, this godhead is summoned before the mattress-grave to be boldly addressed as a failure. God’s providentia is now reclaimed unashamedly for private benefits in the Confessions:

I returned to the humble tribe of all creatural and paid anew homage to God Almighty who presides over the world’s fortunes, and who will henceforth also lead me in the paths of my personal affairs, which had sunk to precarious confusion the days I was my own providence. I was glad of a chance to transfer them to a celestial intendant, so to speak, who, in his omnipotence, will act as a more reliable trustee to my belongings than I myself can do. (DHA XV, 37)

Ultimately, the conscience of the body makes ‘blasphemy’ sound more sincerely than left-wing and right-wing readings of Hegelian philosophy. The complexity of this shift is evident. Poetry like ‘The Migrant Rats’, or prose passages revealing Heine’s ingenious ‘abhorrence’ of proletarian iconoclasts, indeed assails the biased Guarantor of the Moral State. Against the great horde of the atheists, however, Heine continues to insist on a God after all.
8. Against Hegel

While it was Progress which had made Heine act a godless self-god, Heine raises the fundamental question as to whether or not God should be at issue in dissociating himself from Hegel. By replying in the affirmative Heine finds himself in vehement opposition to the radicalizing spokesmen of Progress. Heine had always subscribed to the idea that philosophy should reflect over the divine. But as the philosopher’s God fails, he must be sought beyond philosophy.

In the 1850s Heine, then, pursues a retrospective polemic against Hegel. The anti-Hegel attitude now is a recurrent motif. Hegel is seen as the author of the self-godliness Heine comes to disqualify as godless, despite its former attractiveness. It makes him wonder about his acquaintance with what he suggests to be the central issue of Hegel’s philosophy, the ‘major question of God’, as he puts it in the 1852 Preface to History.41

In order to restate his view on Hegel, Heine draws upon pre-48 themes. Unfavourable impressions are consolidated, favourite tones are countered. The lines on Hegel thus reflect a commemorative reconstruction which is typical of Heine’s later work. However, no analytic critique of Hegel was ever developed at length by Heine. His critical attitude took the literary form of a fictional manuscript in which he would have projected his final judgement on Hegel. The anecdote culminates in one of the most exposed passages in Heine’s Confessions, where the dissent is sharpened by his avowing that once he had been giving himself ardently up to Hegelian philosophy. He now contrasts his God especially to the philosopher’s God Hegel had reflected over:

I had the intention of writing a comprehensive survey of Hegel’s philosophy, which I would have inserted on completion of a new edition of my de l’Allemagne. I was concerned with this project for two years; by supreme effort, I finally succeeded in mastering the abstract matter, and I sought to reword it as lucidly and commonly as possible. Having finished the work, however, I shuddered at its appearance, it seemed to me that the manuscript was scrutinizing me with uncanny, ironic, yea, malicious eyes. I was caught out by strange feelings of embarrassment: author and writing no longer matched. For in those days my heart, as mentioned before, was already filled with deep aversion to atheism, and while I had to admit that Hegelian philosophy had pandered tremendously to all that wickedness, it put me in a fatal uneasiness. Besides, I had never experienced much enthusiasm for that philosophy, still less, it did not suit my persuasions by any means. I never happened to be an abstract thinker, and thus I embraced the synthesis of Hegelian doctrine uncritically, for I felt flattered by its conclusions. I was young and proud, and my haughtiness stiffened even further, as I learnt from Hegel that my grandmother wrongly believed the good Lord to be residing in

41 To which I return in Chapter IV.
heaven, playing God myself here on earth. However foolish this pride, it did not deprave me, but instead elevated my disposition high to heroism. (DHA XV, 35)

As the manuscript is said to have been burnt eventually, it is pointless to speculate about what the tract was likely to be. Yet, a general tendency can be inferred to criticize Hegel more and more severely. Heine stipulates plainly what he now holds his former atheistically orientated reading of Hegel. The story about the manuscript is told to underpin Hegel’s wickedness. The impossibility of achieving an elaborated text culminates in the statement that the Hegelian self-godliness has faded away. It must be stressed that the tone here is indescribable satirical, provocative. Heine’s newfound modesty is a sham, a polemic directed at the quiescent reader.

In contrast to post-revolutionary complacency, the loss of Heine’s self-godliness points back down to a substratum of reality beyond philosophical redemption. Hegelianism is outwitted by the bodily experience of sorrow. To analyse the origin of the self-godliness, attention must be focused on Heine’s receptivity to Hegel’s Berlin lectures.