Berlin cobweb. The late Heine: Jewish wisdom, Hegelianism

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CHAPTER V. JEWISH WISDOM

The defeat of the 48 revolutionaries throws a significant light on Heine’s pantheistic and sensualistic readings of Hegelianism. Degeneracy and distress pushed him to a careful reconsideration of the preceding decades back to his formative years in Berlin. The revolutionary failure made a mockery of Hegel’s sanguine view of history as the ‘autobiography of Spirit in time’. In this respect, the difference between the late Heine and Marx is significant. Though Marx had developed a more strictly secular criticism of civil society, in breaking with the theological way of thinking of the radicalizing Hegelians, still, after 1848, he stuck to a Hegelian optimism Heine could not share. According to Marx, revolutionarism was not exhausted, as there was still something to be fulfilled in working for a utopian goal:

Previous revolutions hinged on world historical reminiscences, so as to come to terms with their actual drift. The revolution of the nineteenth century must leave it to the dead to bury the dead, in order to grow to its full potential.1

Heine cannot do away with the dead so tersely. On the contrary, they urge him to reassess his fragile commitment to Hegelianism in the light of what he came to interpret as a series of revolutionary mischances invalidating the concept of civilized progress. Before his former potential allies among the cultured, Hegelianism is labelled as inert dialectics. The men in disrepute whom Heine blamed in the 1852 Preface to History were counted Hegel’s headstrong apprentices indeed. What they had discussed in the 1840s was the plausibility of Hegel’s views on the relationship between God and human history.2 Whereas conservatist Hegelians reaffirmed the links between God, monarch, and property owner, radicalizing Hegelians came gradually to embrace the full consequences of the dissolution of the Christian idea of personality.3 If man related to a transcendent God, the radicalizing camp argued, he must necessarily alienate himself from his own historical fate and that of the community he lived in; if man sought fulfilment in the temporal and corruptible world, the conservatists retorted, he committed the sin of reducing the hope for heavenly salvation to a worldly utopia.

In Heine’s later writings, gnawing doubts about teleological perspectives are revivified, and leading radicalizing Hegelians are now blamed for posing as self-made gods. At the same time, Heine is ready to criticize sharply those thinkers who neutralized their erstwhile Promethean associations of Hegel’s

1 Der achtzehnte Brumaire, MEW/8, 117.
2 Chapter III, 124-5.
3 Cf. Chapter IV, 158-9.
philosophy through accommodating swiftly to counter-revolutionary positions in the conservative camp.

In ‘Assumption’, the tenth poem from *Poems 1853 and 1854*, we follow the soul of a philosopher from Berlin on its way up to heaven, where it is devoutly knocking on St Peter’s gate. The heaven bears a striking resemblance to a royal court, with all the paraphernalia of absolutism. Whereas ‘tramps, gypsies, pollacks, scoundrels, pilferers, and Hottentots’ are denied access, this former university lecturer (‘married to a canoness’) may enter provided he would tell his ‘god’, the absolute monarch, that he came from Munich or Vienna instead of Berlin. Munich and Vienna, of course, are centres of ecclesiastical reaction. Here, whatever solidarity with the defeated (the ‘rogues’ vis-à-vis the Power of the Keys) is out of question. The sense of intellectual betrayal is heightened through St Peter’s disfavour with Berlin philosophy:

Die Philosophie ist ein schlechtes Metier.
Wahrhaftig, ich begreife nie,
Warum man treibt Philosophie.
Sie ist langweilig und bringt nichts ein,
Und gottlos ist sie obendrein;
Da lebt man nur in Hunger und Zweifel,
Und endlich wird man geholt vom Teufel.
(DHA III/1, 209)

These lines are written in an atmosphere which can be defined as ‘philosophical weariness’; they hint at overt hostility towards ‘affirmative, absolute thinking’ in the backwash of 1848, that is, as Rudolf Haym characterized the climate, towards philosophy’s political potential: revolutionary references were to be debunked. The defamation of critique led to penitential pilgrimages. ‘Assumption’ gives us a caustic comment on Catholic converts like Daumer, who distanced himself ostensibly from the radicalizing Hegelians under the conditions of restoration. As we will see, Heine searched his memory for a different distanciation.

In this chapter I concentrate on the recurrence of Jewish wisdom as the articulation of that difference. Heine now confronts his readership with a substitute for the philosophical vistas he was attracted to between the 1820s and the 1840s. This shift must not be mistaken for a religious asceticism in return for promises of gratification in a utopian future or an heavenly paradise beyond life, since it has nothing to do with connotations of the devout as Heine indicates in a letter to Julius Campe, his editor, dated 1 June 1850, in which he is plain-

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4 DHA III/2, 1197.
6 Daumer is discussed in Chapter IV, 159. Arnold Pistiak rightly stipulates that this poem is directed against the type of philosopher who invalidates Hegelian ‘dynamics’, but he misses the point of betrayal, “Ich will das rote Sechen küssen”. *Nachdenken über Heines letzten Gedichtenzyklus*, Stuttgart 1999, 183-89.
spoken: he projects the image of a perfectly frank Pilatus in order to prevent Campe from deleting pre-48 radicalizing texts from his Collected Works, in case he might ‘depart this life’ untimely:

Please do not take fright at the expression ‘depart’; it has nothing to do with pietism. I am not suggesting that I will exchange this world for heaven, for though I have come nearer to God, heaven stays as far away from me as ever. Do not give credence to the story that I have become a meek lambkin. The religious revolution which overtook me is a mere mental one, an intellectual act rather than spiritual mush. To my knowledge, my sickbed has hardly anything to do with it. Great, sub-lime, yea, shuddering thoughts came over me, yet thoughts they were, flashes of light, and especially not the phosphorous vapour of confessional piss. I want you to consider this point carefully, so as to avoid that you would expurgate passages from the Collected Works without my own consent; quod scripsi, scripsi. (HSA XXIII, 43)

The mood of this letter is clearly not one of pious affections which gently lead the poet on. Jewish wisdom is a fertile motif, not a fossil belief, and as such it is a radical alternative for ‘lambkin religion’, because it clarifies religion’s social function in terms of a fantastic imagery which represents examples of righteousness and injustice. What those examples have in common is their greatness. Obviously, there is a scriptural basis: the ‘Mosaic corpus’ serves as a paradigm of sublimity throughout Heine’s post-48 writings. Hence Heine’s insistence on the ‘sublime, yea, shuddering thoughts’ which came over him.

Before focussing on that topic, attention must be paid to Heine’s post-revolutionary dissociating from radicalizing Hegelianism. This entails an examination of how communism is depicted; its literary presentation is bound up with ‘Egyptian’ repression and ‘martyriology’. Heine’s exegesis is diametrically opposed to that of institutional religion. He reclaims the Scriptures from usurping practices, so as to succeed in restoring some sort of ‘aesthetics of the clandestine’, pertaining to a reservoir of contrary memories. Because they are intimately bound up with the articulation of grief, this chapter concludes with an analysis of Heine’s associating with the unassimilated Ahasverian force of the Wandering Jew.

1. Dogma vs. Philosophy

After 1848 Heine disposed of Hegelian absorptions and substituted his pantheistic self-godliness for the view of a real, personal God, which is outside of nature and the human mind, as he wrote in a letter to Heinrich Laube, dated 25 January 1850:

What people say about my present devoutness and sanctimoniousness is spiced with a lot of nonsense and a larger amount of malevolence at that. In my religious sentiments I have not undergone any great change, and
the only thing I can tell you about what happened inside me with determination and self-assurance is that my ideas about religion have been through a February Revolution, that is, instead of a former principle (which yet failed to fire me with enthusiasm) I formulated a new one (which still fails to enthuse me excessively, let alone be responsible for a sudden inward transformation). I have, namely, to elucidate the matter in a word, given up the Hegelian God or rather godlessness, and in its place have again pulled out the dogma of a true personal God beyond nature and not subject to the human mind. This dogma is as conclusive as our Hegelian synthesis. Its profundity had already been grasped by age-old magicians, witness to certain Neoplatonic fragments. Later on, the Mosaic corpus is documenting it with a zeal for truth and a talent for eloquence which is not to be found among our latest dialecticians. For me Hegel has very much declined, and old Moses is in floribus. (HSA XXIII, 23-4)

With respect to God, Heine begs to differ. There is a shift from attributing positive attributes to God in pantheistic-Hegelian terms (‘nature’ and ‘mind’) to expressing personal traits which have nothing in common with other characteristics. We are incapable of knowing what God is, since he does not exist in any of those philosophical senses. By formulating circumspectly his religious turn to a personal God, Heine invokes an alien element in culture. Before Laube, the ‘dogma’ is said to be ‘pulled out’; it is ‘taken from a store’ where it had been kept in the format of the ‘Mosaic corpus’.

Heinrich Laube (1806-64) had played a prominent part in the Young Germany movement in the two decades before 1848. One of the putative sources of Young Germany’s outlook had been Heine, whose then Saint-Simonian zeal came up to the redemptive concept of revolution writers like Laube sought to portray. Laube was effectively cured of his revolutionism by the abortive 1848 revolutions. In 1849, he repudiated vehemently his former colleagues in search for a forthright conservative position, rejecting what he characterized as the philosophical humbug and anarchic politics of the radicalizing Hegelians. Though Heine was distressed about Laube’s swing, he was well aware that this office-holder was a cultured reader par excellence and therefore a crucial addressee. His letter is an empathic commentary on the post-revolutionary policy Laube sought to set.

It is evident that Heine takes a tactical position towards conservatism; his articulation of the ‘dogma’ is biased towards post-48 circumstances. As it becomes a key to age-old learning, Heine is now able to ascertain that his religiosity by no means is novel. Before Laube he stresses that it is rooted in a magical tradition of wisdom. Again, we see that ‘Greekness’ is ‘expropriated’ and rendered ‘strange’. Those ‘Neoplatonic fragments’ belong to something

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7) We already pointed at these lines in Chapter III, 128.
8) More details below in this chapter.
9) Cf. the role of the ‘Low Greek’ in the Introduction, 18-20.
different, something mysterious which is isolated from the mainstream of philosophy. As such, they are emblematic of an underground tradition which has preserved its vitality in terms of a prestigious ‘dogma’. The cultured reader is drawn into a repository of Jewish wisdom in the guise of age-old ‘magic’.¹⁰ Hegel and his radicalizing followers (‘our latest dialecticians’) no longer offer firm ground for a revolutionary interpretation of the actual world.

Heine’s ‘dogma’ runs counter to ‘doctrine’. Instead of Hegelian revolutionism a different knowledge is to be reactualized. The essential difference consists in the fact that whereas in Jewish wisdom God is beyond man, the ‘godless self-gods’ raised man to the level of God. From the point of view of the latter group, the highest level is reached with the negation of the assumption that there is a division or distinction between man and God, with man confined to his own limits. The principal controversy between the late Heine and the radicalizing Hegelians is therefore centred on the notion of the disparity or identity between man and God. In stressing the disparity, Heine’s ‘religious sentiments’ are put forward in a post-revolutionary disputation over Hegel’s legacy; they are controversial and provocative, because it is Jewish wisdom which sets the tone, culminating in an exaltation of ‘old Moses’.

As was pointed out before, Heine had always been sensitive about the negation of the individual in the philosophy of Hegel and his radicalizing followers. In the case where someone’s ‘self’ is merely represented and ideally presented, there it is not actual; where it is by proxy, it is not at all. From his Berlin years on, it had remained doubtful whether any historicization of the Idea of Freedom was really a theme to be connected with the emancipation of the Jews within the bonds of legality. In Heine’s view, grief and sorrow were steadily growing resistant to progress. In Paris, consequently, the later Heine presents his readers with prophetic warnings about revolutionary miscalculation: this place shall no more serve as a forum for the historicization of the process of the Idea’s rational self-determination through man in terms of freedom, but as a slaughterhouse. The revolutionaries are fallen ‘by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will […] be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth’. And the city is broken ‘as one breaketh a potter’s vessel, that cannot be made whole again.’ These, of course, are not the wordings of Heine but of Jeremiah (Jer. 19:7-11). They are echoed in Heine’s lament about the ‘noble ideals of political morality, legality, public virtue, liberty, and egality, these rosy dreams of tomorrow from the eighteenth century, for which our fathers sacrificed themselves so bravely, to be dreamt on as valiantly by us – there they lie shattered at our feet, dashed to pieces like porcelain pottery, like tailors being shot.’ (HSA XXIII, 181)¹¹

The linkage between Heine and Jeremiah is explicitly articulated in Romancero (1851), in the picture of Heine’s alter ego, Jehuda ben Halevy, the

¹⁰ Cf. Tennemann’s discussion of Kabbala, Chapter IV, 151.
¹¹ The text has already been cited in Chapter I, 40.
Spanish-Jewish poet from the ‘Hebrew Melodies’, where we see Halevy as Jeremiah *redivivus* amidst ruins, weeping over Jerusalem:

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\begin{align*}
Ja, \text{ das ist das Zionslied,} \\
\text{Das Jehuda ben Halevy} \\
\text{Sterbend auf den heil'gen Trümmern} \\
\text{Von Jerusalem gesungen --} \\
\text{Baarfuß und im Büsserkittel} \\
\text{Saß er dorten auf dem Bruchstück} \\
\text{Einer umgestürzten Säule; --} \\
\text{Bis zur Brust herunter fiel} \\
\text{Wie ein greiser Wald sein Haupthaar,} \\
\text{Abentheuerlich beschattend} \\
\text{Das bekümmert bleiche Antlitz} \\
\text{Mit den geisterhaften Augen --} \\
\text{Also saß er und er sang,} \\
\text{Wie ein Seher aus der Vorzeit} \\
\text{Anzuschaun -- dem Grab entstiegen} \\
\text{Schien Jeremias, der Alte --} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(DHA III/1, 147-8)

Jeremiah’s grief epitomized that of a whole chorus of determinedly reservations about revolutionary prospects. The 1848 collapse was a confirmation of previous misgivings. Now the 1840s are viewed as a prelude to a test which has been postponed for good. Heine’s bodily conscience was disarranging his revolutionism, the heroicis of godless selfgodliness became redundant, and pantheism was debunked as a philosophical lever, as Heinz Pepperle underlined.\(^\text{12}\)

Writing became un- or even anti-heroic; the loss of what Heine had come to feel his Hegelian self-godliness parallels the disclaimer of progressivist vistas. This entails the very negation of philosophical guaranteeings that history would somehow lead to redemption, Heine suggests. Hegelianism is outwitted by the experience of sorrow, since the self-godliness Heine had sought among the radicalizing Hegelians had failed. Heine’s bodily conscience is expressive of the ‘unheroic subject’, who confronts his readership with pressing qualms about the reasonable sense of history. The ‘Berlin Cobweb’ had lost its beneficial potency; it left Heine with a residue of disillusionment. Hegel’s philosophy is no longer the herald of a new age; instead, Hegel is characterized as the ‘Serpent’s Mouthpiece’ in Heine’s 1852 Preface to *History*, namely, in the lines immediately following the call on the ‘godless selfgods’ we cited in the Intro-

\(^{12}\text{Heinz Pepperle, ‘Heine als Philosoph’, in Höhn, ed., \textit{Ästhetisch-politische Profile}, 169-73. Bodily conscience is discussed in Chapter II.}\)
Having recommended that they all should repent and dwell upon the scriptural example of Nebuchadnezzar, Heine continues:

Besides, there are more beautiful and strange stories in the Bible, which are also worthy of their notice. Right at the beginning we have for instance this story of the forbidden trees in the garden of Eden, plus the serpent, that little *professoressa*, who summed up the whole of Hegelian Philosophy already six thousand years before Hegel’s birth. This blue- stocking without feet gives a very shrewd assessment as to how the Absolute exists in the Identity of Being and Reason, and how man will be God through Knowledge, or, what pertains to the same, how God comes to Self-consciousness through man – This formula is not as clear as the original phrase ‘In the day that thou eatest of the tree of knowledge, ye shall be as gods!’ (DHA VIII/1, 498)

The ‘original phrase’ is a clever collage of God’s commandment, Gen. 2:16-17, and the serpent’s speech, Gen 3:5. As such, it is typical of Heine’s exegetis to be discussed below. What interests us now is his critical compression of Hegelian philosophy to what he thinks to be its pantheistic tenor, as it is expressed in the articulation of man’s self-godliness. Obviously, the existence of the Absolute in the Identity of Being and Reason points at a speculative, logical structure underlying history’s triadic manifestation. This logical structure can be seen as the core of Hegel’s philosophy. Here we are confronted with its demise: by questioning Hegel’s God, Heine points at a deidealized reality. Contrary to Hegel’s later views, absolute subjectivity (God) and finite subjectivity (man) are not seen as coinciding in a concept of freedom.

Heine regards the ‘Berlin Cobweb’ as indicative of a ‘dirty realism’ in which all traces of freedom are lost. Heine’s Jewish wisdom must be seen as a reaction to experiencing that loss: Heine has fallen back to a differing ‘self’, which amounts to a reconstruction of an ‘eccentric’ story which is yet anchored in present-day life through ‘indices of otherness’.

In the 1851 postscript to *Romancero*, that ‘otherness’ is presented as ‘ancient superstition’:

As for me, I cannot boast of any particular progress in politics; I persisted with the very democratic principles I came to honour in my earliest youth and for which I have been standing out ever more ardently since then. In theology, however, I must charge myself with retrogression, because I returned to ancient superstition, to a personal God, as

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13 Introduction, 1. Hegel contrasts the serpent’s promise of knowledge with the ‘idleness and indolence of the Jewish people’, *Religionsphilosophie*, 597.
14 Cf. Chapter IV, 133-4.
16 Lefebvre is wrong in concluding that Heine’s disillusionment with Hegel is part of a ‘Hegel-affect’, *Trommier*, 190ff. Contra Pistiak I hold that Heine does not spare the Berlin Hegel from the 1820s and the radicalizing Hegelians from the 1840s his criticisms, *Sefchen*, 186.
I already indicated above. There will be no polite suppression of these feelings such as my enlightened and well-meaning friends are advising. But I am quick to contradict emphatically that my retrograde brought me back to the threshold of a congregation or even in the fold of the mother church, as I am rumoured. No, my religious convictions are free from ecclesiastical prejudice; no bell seduced me, no candle blinded me. I kept aloof from symbolism, and I never completely gave up reason. (DHA III/1, 180)

Heine’s ostentatious ‘retrograde’ is necessitated: in post-48 Paris, there were signs in abundance that ‘mankind’s holy history’ would end in blood and tears. Latent doubts had grown into overt objection to the ‘justification’ of the bleeding Marx is proclaiming:

Only the defeat of June created all the conditions under which France can take the initiative in promoting the European revolution. Only after the tricolore was drenched with the blood of the insurgents of June, the red banner of the European revolution came into existence. And we proclaim: The revolution is dead! Long live the revolution!17

Heine has certainly had his share of the disaster; he cannot subscribe to exultant revolutionism any longer. At the same time, reality’s ‘dirtiness’ is repeatedly stressed in order to disturb the ‘domestic happiness’ of the victors, as we will see below, in discussing the provocative ‘memoranda’ about the eerie case of revengeful communists, destined for a sinister ‘non-place’ outside history.

Heine mourns for the loss of those previous expectations, over what he was never going to see any more, because the 1789 repertoire had turned to shambles. In many respects, he is a perspicacious melancholic who records his sadness over the status quo so sharply that in the process of mourning, a remainder stands up to the pressure of oblivion. Heine remains faithful to this rest even though life informs him that it is lost into stagnation and petrification. His mourning has the structure of a citation in which a quintessential ‘something’ is retained despite its disappearance from reality, while that ‘something’, as ‘something-to-be-mourned’ per se, is strongly resistant to any philosophical interference. Yet, melancholy succeeds in appropriating its own object only to the extent that it affirms its loss. Melancholy has a relationship to its ‘something’ which cannot be explained in terms of Hegelian dialectics. Although Heine’s mourning follows a loss which has really occurred, the loss can be documented in provocative ‘memoranda’ which are a distantiation or withdrawal from a revolutionary good whose echo has not yet been gone completely as long as the mourning lasts; in this respect, Heine’s melancholy renders its ‘something’ inaccessible to sober reasoning in a concerted attempt to adhere to ‘it’ at least in articulating its absence.

17 Marx, Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848-1850, 34.
To adhere to what is lost means to act against despair, as the wretched anticipation of unfulfilment and nullification. Heine’s adherence takes the form of literary ‘memoranda’ which open a ‘non-place’ for the existence of the defeated and mark out a scene in which the ‘I’ may enter into relation with the unreal and attempt a re-appropriation in terms of an underworld full of transgressive potential such as no ‘proper’ theory could rival. The poet claims to have an eye for the ‘radical hordes’ below, the eerie embodiment of ‘epistemic illegitimacy’, the epitome of the ‘unthought’ of any given point of knowledge and representation, in discussing the ‘monstrous’ imagination of communists looming up from the mud. Here it is appropriate to return to these ‘proletarian iconoclasts’ once again.

2. Communists

Heine’s provocative ‘memoranda’ of the unreal are moulded into vivid impressions of communist iconoclasm defying the great fanfares which announced the arrival of a new era. Their textual preservation can be interpreted as a form of literary mnemonics. The proletarians express Heine’s nightmarish longings for revenge at a moment when revolutionary prospects were remoter as ever. These spectres preserve the features of the ‘dirty realism’ which is Heine’s answer to those who fortify the status quo with slogans of glory and honour. Communist leaders are pointed at in the 1853-5 French version of Confessions:

Those mostly underground leaders of the German communists are clever logicians, and the brightest among them are well schooled in Hegelian tactics. They are indisputably the most capable and energetic heads in Germany. Along with their implacably committed disciples, these doctors of revolution are the only men to survive in Germany. The future is theirs. (DHA XV, 143)

The ominous addition ‘I am afraid’ to the last sentence in a printed version of this text is an extra insult to those who subscribe to the repressive and authoritarian forces of the restoration. There are no alternatives left, since all other parties are extinct; their Teutonic representatives are dead, as dead as mutton, and well buried under the dome of the St Paul’s at Frankfurt. I must stipulate that it is neither vow nor regret I am giving utterance to at the moment. I relate the bare facts and tell the naked truth. (DHA XV, 143)

18 For a lucid view on mourning and melancholy, see Giorgio Agamben, Stanzas. Word and Phantasm in Western Culture, Minneapolis and London 1993, 19-21.
20 In Revue des deux mondes, 15 september 1854, DHA XV, 670.
The St Paul’s at Frankfort is symbolic of the abortive 1848 heroism in Germany. The void left by the fading of revolutionism is filled with negatives which are dark in the places were the image is brightened, and luminous where the image is blackened.

Authoritarian vindications of post-48 conditions are sabotaged by visions of apocalyptic ‘terrorists’, discontented workmen, only too ready to look to ‘grossest atheism’ for support. In the German version of Confessions, Heine points to an implacable substratum:

German workmen form the core of an Infidel Army which may not be a walking exemplar of discipline but still is perfectly trained in doctrinal arguments. Virtually all these artisans profess grossest atheism. They are, so to speak, doomed to honour this desperate negation lest they should counteract their principles and lapse into sheer paralysis. These are destructive cohorts: they are saps opening an all-out assault on society’s strongholds with their battle-axes. They are by far and away outstripping the egalitarian radicals abroad in consistent but dire fundamentalism. For though their motive be madness, yet, to quote Polonius, there is method in it. (DHA XV, 33)

Heine is interested particularly in modulating the communists’ threat to an example of ancestral bondage. The destructiveness of Heine’s communists is unmistakable; they are making a virtue of necessity in revealing that settled culture shows all the signs of ‘Egyptian’ repression. Heine skilfully plays on bourgeois feelings of anxiety and fear about rioting hordes. The ‘methodological madness’ of the ‘Infidel Army’ points back to the dissembling techniques Heine is practising himself.21 The anger of the ‘cohorts’ is turned against a victorious civilization laden with booty of the oppressed. Heine points at an underworld cast in a topography of above and below which coincides with a discourse of hatred. Through hatred, necessity is emptied of its teleological aura; it is but the inevitable, and, as such, the perversion of progress.

By 1848 the projections of the 1830s and the 1840s had become obsolete. Heine had disposed of revolutionism and now renounced pantheistic claims for memorizing a difference which is indicative of an eccentricity where reasonable links with the world of Hegelian logics are non-existent. Heine counteracts the ‘Berlin Cobweb’ by raising sour memories of age-old Jewish homelessness in which scriptural paradigms of expulsion, slavery, and exile prefigure actual life. Communists are the secularized instance of that ‘otherness’. In Heine’s view, they are the embodiment of catastrophe, that is, the disastrous reversal of injustice. We may conjecture that the catastrophic disturbance somehow parallels the Messianic motif that runs through the expectancy in Heine’s Börne.22 Communists are ‘improper’ for being history’s riffraff, as

21 As we saw in discussing his association with the ‘marvelous Price of Denmark’, Chapter III, 108.
22 Chapter IV, 149-52.
Jewish Wisdom
disreputable as Lazarus. Precisely for that quality these ‘ferocious beasts’, these ‘hunted species’, prefigure an almost forgotten ‘reverse’.

Heine holds that the present generation has paid too dearly for revolutionary zeal. The legacy of revolutionism is nil. Deliverance is beyond the reach of the deprived and degraded; as revolutionism offers no solution, it must come ‘from elsewhere’. If its detection were done with prophetic artistry, then its message would be shut within small documentary clusters. It is yet to be camouflaged in literary brilliance in order to attract the intention of a readership not basically interested in disturbance: Heine’s attempt employs a literary strategy so as to bait the reader with the aim of forcing reflection about something which yet lies beyond the range of interest of many of his readers: the vista of communism had become an alien element in ‘proper’ discourse. Such citing flies in the face of common sense. Citations are provocative fragments; the insertion of these ‘unseasonable’ items enhances Heine’s ‘otherness’ in a slow and laborious process of recapitulating what has been established so far. It allows him to adopt an attitude towards history by dislodging its apparent consistency.

In Heine’s memorizing the defeated are prominently present: his later poetry is full of brutalized characters, which make it impossible for the poet not to raise his voice. They are representative of the ‘illness of the times’ Heine’s ‘bodily conscience’ is sensitive to. They point at the bare life of the marginals who figure ostentatiously in Heine’s later writings: the charcoal-burner’s children, slaves, tramps, the poor sisters, orphans, rebellious subjects, almsmen, strangers, and atheists. Together they mark the ‘Lazarus-people’, whose frustrated emancipation was identical to Heine’s. Against all odds, they are a privileged group of people whose ‘ghastly appearance’ in Heine’s poetry is antithetical to ‘social hygiene’ and ‘proper reasoning’.

An intriguing member of this varied band is Kaka, the Cuban Indian Heine presents in his posthumous and fragmentary poem ‘Bimini’ as a trickster. In the poem Kaka is the agent divulging (colonial) repression. She functions as a resistance to hegemonic power, represented by Spanish conquerors. Instead of being a decorative and exotic ornament to forces more powerful than her capacity to confront, she reclaims a sense of authority to raise her voice from a marginalized position, taking note of ruses of disguise and transformation as tactics of re-empowerment through subterfuge. Kaka’s ploy takes a sort of seemingly burlesque guises when Heine pictures her as a ‘supervisory attendant’ whose job is ‘to swat mosquitoes, to rock the hammock, and to pour the drinks’ as a worn Hebe for her oppressors:

23 As we saw in Chapter II.
Als Symbol des Amtes hält sie
In der Hand ein Goldpokal,
Trägt auch eine hochgeschürzte
Tunika wie eine Hebe

Kostbarliche brüßler Kanten,
Perlenschnüre, viele Dutzend,
Decken spöttisch die verwelkten
Braunen Reitze der Senora

Rococo-anthropophagisch
Karaibisch Pompadour
Hebet sich der Haarwulstkopfputz,
Der gespickt ist mit unzähligen

Vögel, die, groß wie Käfer,
Durch des prächtigen Gefieders
Farbenschmelz wie Blumen aussehen,
Die formirt aus Edelsteinen.

Diese närrische Frisur
Von Gevögel paßt vortrefflich
Zu der Kakawunderlichem
Papagoyenvogelantliz
(DHA III/1, 383)

But all these travesties of European civilization are undercover methods used
for the aim of revenging her people’s lot; thus she succeeds in luring the
Spaniards into a fatal expedition to Bimini where they will find Death instead of
Life. Poetry, characteristically, is her vehicle. Her masters are mesmerized by
her local ‘singsong’:

Kleiner Vogel Kolibri
Führe uns nach Bimini;
Fliege du voran wir folgen
In bewimplten Pirogen.

Kleines Fischchen Brididi,
Führe uns nach Bimini;
Schwimme du voran wir folgen
Rudernd mit bekränzten Stangen.
[...]

Alte Katze Mimili,

Whatever the grandees do in pursuit of their rite of passage to everlasting youth and vigour, the trickster is going to do something else, something unexpected, thereby putting the colonizers' 'Indian phantasm' (to use Bloch's term) into crisis.26 Her singsong is a charm, a spell or incantation, which consists of quasi mumbo jumbo to invoke the 'supernatural' powers of the humming-bird and her consort. In doing so, Kaka shows an apparent lack of morality according to acceptable codes of polite society. She is an incorrigible cheat, a carnivalesque teaser, a mistress of divination, a provocative trespasser, finding and taking advantage of 'anomalies'. Kaka's tricking is the lie which leads to truth, and it is hinted at in a game with excess ('Rokoko-anthropophagisch, / Karaibisch-Pompadour') bringing back into play elements excluded by standard habits. In Heine's picture of Kaka, then, we have a strong representative of the rebellious subjects mentioned above.

Within the present context, I cannot go into detail about Kaka's appearance; she is indeed of one of Heine's most puzzling female protagonists.27 I will return to another feature of 'Biminj' at the end of this chapter. Here the collective of the marginals Heine's later poetry is hinting at repeatedly must be scrutinized. In order to weigh its evidence, the poem 'Drop those holy parables' (1853/4) is to be viewed once again:28

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

Warum schlepp't sich blutend, elend,
Unter Kreuzlast der Gerechte,
Während glücklich als ein Sieger
Trabt auf hohem Roß der Schlechte?

Woran liegt die Schuld? Ist etwa
Unser Herr nicht ganz allmächtig?
Oder treibt er selbst den Unfug?
Ach, das wäre niederträchtig.

Also fragen wir beständig,
Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll

27 Pistiak, 'Bimini', 119.
Erde endlich stopft die Mäuler –
Aber ist das eine Antwort?
(DHA III/1, 198)

A crucial item is the programmatic personal pronoun Heine uses: a collective, viz. ‘we’ and ‘us’, carries the poem to its conclusion. Every interpretation of Heine’s usage of the ‘popular plural’ must include the fact that it constitutes both the constitutive political subject and the class which is excluded from politics. The personal pronoun in Heine’s poem is born out of compassion, and has become the equivalent for misfortune and unhappiness vis-à-vis the complex of citizens as a unitary political body. The excluded formulate a collective demand why the wicked is allowed to triumph, while the righteous suffers. It is obvious that these words are spoken by ‘they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’, the poor and the meek, the oppressed, the fragmentary multiplicity of needy and neglected bodies. The plural ‘we’ confronts the total state of integrated and sovereign citizens with its opposite: the underground world of the other, the preserve of the wretched. The collective is assertive and self-conscious, their demand is appealing, as Arnold Pistia stresses.29 The impersonal construction of the final stanza and its slant rhyme speak with unmistakeable contempt for religious bigotry and moral appeasement. You must solve the infernal question for us, and no evasions, if you please. This ‘we’ shares the poor man’s grave, their mouths are stuffed with a handful of clod. Their demand is obviously taken from Job 21: ‘Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?’ But Heine restates it with reference to Jer.12:1 (‘Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?’) and Ps. 73:3 (‘For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked’).

In the poem’s ‘we’, past and present amalgamate into a band of stigmatized. They are sharing their age-old experiences in a communal chorus, which has a link with the ‘we-lament’ from Lamentations 5, which is a striking example of ‘scriptural non-responsiveness’:

Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.
Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.
We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are widows. [...]
Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?
Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.
But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us. (Lam 5:1-20)

29 ‘Das Lazaruslied’, 42.
Like these ‘orphans and fatherless’, Heine’s ‘we’ is insisting on righteousness. Because of their ‘utterly rejection’, they are obviously not involved in the joining of contingency and liberty Hegel’s philosophy is working out in articulating the self-unfolding of the Absolute.

Within the context of the Lazarus-people, we must keep in mind that Hegel’s philosophy, too, represents an assertive collective for whom the Absolute is moving and becoming the intrinsic rhythm of life. This life must be viewed as the stage on which the passage from pre-revolutionary, divinely authorized sovereignty to post-revolutionary, national sovereignty was accomplished under the Banner of Freedom. The passage assured the transfer of ‘humaneness’ to the civil state which resulted from the collapse of the ancien régime. That in this process the ‘we’ is transformed into ‘citizenship’ marks the emergence of a complex of citizens as a unitary socio-political body. In the face of ‘rejection’, however, all pretence of organic, collective civility must be abandoned: Heine’s Jewishness makes him sensitive to those representatives whose ‘bareness’ was conditioned by post-revolutionary circumstances, but whose presence was tolerated as badly as the presence of the German-Jewish writer. Their ‘bareness’ is condensed in the poem’s infernal question, which is a question from this infernal bare life, the archetypical chthonic ‘non-place’, and the very negation of post-revolutionary ‘blessings’. The poem does not converse by the question-and-answer method; we can say that it violates an implicit agreement that every Lazarus-question requires a confession which is in accord with whatever injustice is done at the moment, a confession which ignores the trap the heavenly monarch and his earthly agents had laid. Instead, it works up to the traumatic fracture which was believed to have been overcome by rejecting the Lazarus-people (the ‘defeated’ who were its symbol).

The poem ‘Drop those holy parables’ offers a concise articulation of Heine’s post-48 discord: the Lazarus-people rebuffs demagogical devoutness without reconciling with atheism. Heine indicates that the ‘we’ of the poem have nothing in common with those buried in pomp and state. Their infernal question is answered by themselves in an untitled poem from Heine’s Lyrical Bequest:

Unbequemer neuer Glauben!
Wenn sie uns den Herrgott rauben,
Hat das Fluchen auch ein End’—
Himmel – Herrgott – Sakrament!

Wir entbehren leicht das Beten,
Doch das Fluchen ist von Nöthen
Wenn man gegen Feinde rennt—
Himmel-Herrgott-Sakrament!

Nicht zum Lieben, nein, zum Hassen

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Sollt ihr uns den Herrgott lassen,
Weil man sonst nicht fluchen könnt’ –
Himmel – Herrgott – Sakrament!
(DHA III/1, 399-400)

Here Heine’s ‘we’ is deliberately raising a voice to condemn ‘imperious religion’; their cursing is a case of knowing which ‘counter-religion’ the Lazarus-people must make their own so as to overcome injustice and repression.

Lazarus, ostensibly, is the epitome of a pariah, the beggar lying at the gate of the nouveaux-riches, ‘full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores’ (Luke 16:19). To Heine, he embodies a social crux: this world is particularly chagrined at its failure to eliminate the Lazarus-people it does not want to see. At the same moment it is obvious that this world offers no room for the Righteous. The Lazarus-people are an acute reminder that self-abnegation is out of question. The writing, which deals with these conditions is not involved in philosophical critique but in survival, and in such conflicts is, does not matter what the opponent’s ranks is, or whether he is noble or respectable.

The just cited two poems operate into two directions: the ‘we’ is put in terror of themselves in order to give them courage, and their opponents among Heine’s readers begin to sense, darkly, that something is going on outside their God-given reality. In this attitude of Heine a formidable obstinacy can be detected, a determination which is exemplified in a letter to Kolb, dated 19 October 1848, in which bodily conscience is expressly linked to the infernal question of righteousness:

Since four weeks I have been living again in Paris, after five months in Passy, in the countryside. Here I am as much confined to bed as there, for I am totally lamed and suffering from excruciating spasms which may last for 3 times 24 hours. I have been enduring this for five months now, and you can form a fairly clear idea of how gloomy I am at times. Wherefore must the Righteous on this earth suffer so badly? This is the question I am tossing and turning about on my martyr-bed. True, suffering is a purgative for the soul, but it seems to me that I could have done without this cure. (HSA XXII, 298-9)

These lines are indicative of a larger commemorative process in which Jewish wisdom is revivified. The late Heine adopts a literary, commemorative strategy which has nothing to do with resignation or pessimism, but points at an active understanding of the experienced, that is, the rare, critical reader who is prepared to reconsider post-revolutionary conditions in the light of Jewish wisdom. Within this context, ‘godless pantheism’ is indicative of alternatives

31 The persona of Lazurus is discussed in Chapter II, 84-8.
long past. There is no need of reactualizing it. Instead Jewish wisdom is called upon.

3. ‘Sublime, yea, shuddering thoughts’

Heine’s allegiance to Jewish wisdom is motivated by his reappraisal of the Bible, as it is shown in the citation from the eulogy of that wisdom in Jesus Sirach, Sir. 24:23-30, at the end of the 1852 Preface to *History*:

> All this is the covenant-book of God Most-High,  
> the law which Moses enacted to be the heritage of the assemblies of Jacob.  
> It sends out wisdom in full flood like the river Pishon  
> or like the Tigris at the time of firstfruits;  
> it overflows with understanding like the Euphrates  
> or like Jordan in the time of harvest.  
> It pours forth instruction like the Nile at the time of vintage  
> No man has ever fully known wisdom;  
> from first to last no one has fathomed her;  
> for her thoughts are vaster than the ocean  
> and her purpose deeper than the great abyss.  
> (DHA VIII/1, 499)\(^{32}\)

Heine’s Bible is cleared from Christian exegesis and taken back to a Jewish basis where the ‘Mosaic corpus’ (the ‘covenant-book’) may be read as a testimony to the sublimity of the Jews he pointed at in his letter to Julius Campe cited in the beginning of this chapter.\(^{33}\) Before entering on Heine’s image of Moses in more detail, that notion of sublimity must be studied first.

The ‘sublime, yea, shuddering thoughts’ which came over Heine obviously refer back to the philosophical climate of his Berlin years, when Hegel ascertained that Hebrew poetry was the classical locus of sublimity. In his 1820/21 lectures on Aesthetics he spoke about the Jews’ hymns in which they sang the praises of the Absolute-Universal, the One. Up to now, they are still magnificent and grand, although people begin to lose their acquaintance with them or fail to hold them in proper esteem. As I said, the main thing is that they are concerned with the Sublimity and Oneness of the Lord, from whom everything comes, and to whom all glorification is directed. Such everlasting grandeur is to be found in the Book of Psalms, for example in Psalm 104, which offers a pure, great, and in itself sublime conception. One of its leading motives is to ascertain that with the One, with Thought, the Finite is limited and apart, which is

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\(^{33}\) 171.
totally different from Indian confusion and jumble. Such tones, then, are to be heard in the psalms; they must resonate in our hearts for ever, for they are extolling the splendour of the Divine, for whom all nature is but a glorifying ornament. 34

To Hegel, the Hebrew distinction of the Absolute and the Finite prepared the way for the ‘free personality’, for people of flesh and blood who long, fear, love, and hate, personalities like Abraham, Isaac, and Moses. 35 Hence his conclusion that in its relation to the Absolute

the Hebrew nation displayed fuller consciousness than its neighbours, and that is way the Hebrews would burst with national pride – which was quite justified in those circumstances but was to degenerate into obstinacy. Be that as it may, the relationship with the Absolute plus the consciousness thereof do count as sublime. 36

For all its impressiveness, however, Hegel came to conclude that the ‘Jewishness’ of this relationship implied a contradiction between ‘nothingness’ and ‘substantiality’ which was to be overcome dialectically in the Spirit’s odyssey to completion. On that journey, sublimity is rid of its Jewish ‘burden’; and thus ‘Jewishness’ is no longer needed in explaining its impressiveness.

This point is illustrated in the work of Hegel’s follower Rosenkranz, the ‘great sage’ mentioned in our fourth chapter. 37 Though he analyzes Jewish religiosity from the retrospective position of Christianity, Rosenkranz does not neglect Judaism’s Messianism. In his 1848 Paedagogies he remarks that non-Jews (the ‘ethnic people’)

have only a lost paradise behind them; the Jews have also one before them. From this unshakable belief in the Messiah who is to come, from the certainty which they have of conquering with him, from the power of esteeming all present things of small importance in view of such a future springs the asbestos nature of the Jews. They ignore the fact that Christianity is the necessary result of their own history. 38

To Heine, the most important aspect of Rosenkranz’ view on Judaism is this Messianism; the belief in the Messiah who is still to come from outside history marks the indestructible importance (the ‘asbestos nature’) of the Jews. 39 In exploring the historical position of the Jews, Rosenkranz, in his Philosophical Encheiridion (1850), claims that, in virtue of their being ‘a nation of the future’, the Jews are a world-historical nation par excellence, a people which serves as

34 Vorlesung über Ästhetik, Berlin 1820/21, 140-1.
35 Ibidem, 142-44.
36 Ibidem, 144.
37 Chapter IV, 152-3.
38 Die Pädagogik als System, 194-5.
39 Rotenstreich, Jews and German Philosophy, 113-35.
invaluable example of wisdom. Theirs is a double history: one concentric and one peripheral, and therein again lies a bifurcation of their nationality, their own stable one and that assimilated to the outside world or the local region. The Jews have been preserved in the midst of other civilizations by the elastic power of the thought of God conceived of as independent from the control of nature. As the God of sublimity is superior to nature, Jews do not succumb to nature. As He is an abstract principle of thought, this concept of God lends itself to continuous interpretation and conceptual transformation. Thus, the Jews are prone to assimilate different cultures and to preserve their identity within and despite these assimilated components of other cultures.

Like Rosenkranz, Heine insists on the fact that Jewishness still exists and did not succumb to the fate of history. He finds a support in the world-historical position of the Jews: a striving for justice in the acknowledgement of the depth of the spirit. But Heine remains loyal to the Berlin Association; he sharply rebuffs Rosenkranz' Christian-Hegelian absorption of Jewishness in pointing at the Jews' historical fate, appreciating the inner cultivation they have managed to preserve in an unbroken tradition of two thousand years. His 'sublime, yea, shuddering thoughts' can be interpreted as the opposite of the philosophical propensity to silence this idiom of Jewishness.

The 'indestructible nature of the Jews' comes across in a letter to Joseph Lehmann, dated 5 October 1854, in which Heine discusses the French edition of his works by the publisher Michel Lévy:

I publish my work in French by Michel Lévy frères; the house was recommended to me. I had the choice between this publisher and another, an ex-bonnetier, that is to say, a manufacturer of cotton night-caps. I gave preference to the former, perhaps while he was descended from the tribe of Levy. I do not think that this does make Mr Lévy less reliable, and I would be the last to be guided by age-old prejudice against the Jews, even if I could find to my cost that I might have been terribly mistaken. I think that if you let them earn their money, they will be grateful at least, and they will cheat us not as grossly as their Christian colleagues. In general, the Jews are backward intellectually but not morally. A grand civilization of the heart is passed from one generation to the other for two thousand years. I think this explains why they can participate in European culture so quickly and smoothly, for re morals they have nothing to acquire, they only must master the intellectual skills involved. But you know all this better than me. I give you only a hint at the meaning of what I have said in my Confessions. But when I ask Campe to send it to you, you will not receive it till the day the Messiah appears, when he, by tradition, comes on an ass, instead of using the railway lines. (HSA XXIII, 378).

40 System der Wissenschaft. Ein Philosophisches Encheiridion, Königsberg 1850, 544, 549.
41 Die Pädagogik als System, 190.
Heine’s ‘Messianic attitude’ speaks volumes. Rooted in a scriptural tradition, biblical reading becomes anew a prerequisite condition for an understanding of Jewishness amidst Jew-hatred.

Heine’s Bible is primarily the Jews’ Bible. It is Tenakh, which has served them for a shelter from dispersal into nothingness. Their passion for it is almost proverbial; they preserved it so conscientiously, that others also could profit by their experience with it, as Heine pointed out in a text which Michel Espagne rightly terms a topical masterpiece. The text is written down in fair copy. Significantly, Heine argues that German philosophy originated in Jewish speculative exegesis of the Bible:

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Bible used to be the exclusive monopoly of the Jews, since its Latin version, the Vulgate, was concealed by the Church and even taboo for laymen. As regards its Greek version, the Septuagint, there was no need to conceal or ban it, for graeca sunt non leguntur, and the original readings of the Scriptures were simply non-existent among Christians because they had not the slightest notion of Hebrew. Only the ghetto preserved the living tradition of Biblical learning, and the lice in the beard of any one old Jewish haggler understood more Hebrew than all the doctores and magistri of Christendom. It was not until the mid-fifteenth century that some German scholars succeeded in assuaging the religious pride or the public prudence of the rabbis and gained entrance to the Biblia Hebraica: they learned Hebrew as well as the Chaldaean dialect in which the most ancient scriptural paraphrases, the Targumim, were recorded. The rabbis taught them further the Aramaic and Babylonian (all too Babylonian) glossaries and commentaries, the so-called lingua rabbinica; they introduced them to the textual criticism of the Masoretes, they even initiated them into the esoteric lore of the Cabbalists, that interpretation by Gematria in which the alphabet is associated with numbers. Here German diligence stood the test once again: the pupils soon equalled their teachers in Biblical scholarship, except that they never mastered the nasal chant in which the Chosen People recites the Hebrew texts – maybe the prerogative of Chosen Noses! The studious scholars con-trived to translate the Bible into German vernaculars, and thus they threw it open to the public. Now anybody could compare the Word of God with ecclesiastical ordinance. Raging ministers would take advantage of the situation. (DHA VII/1, 501-502)

This text is spiced with ‘Babylonian sentiment’, characteristic of captivity, martyrdom and exile, conditions referred to earlier. Its source is Biblical learning which, for reasons of oppression, is handed over in an esoteric tradition. The Jews were the supervisory board in the intellectual history of man, for they

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42 Cf. Chapter IV, section 6, ‘Messianic Expectancy’.
43 Espagne, Federstriche, 274.
Jewish Wisdom

passed down their Bible to Germany. The history of this exegetical tradition is connected with 'a well-known Augustinian monk' (Luther) and the Humanist literate Reuchlin, who, according to Heine, paved the way for German philosophy. Here Heine has returned to one of the most challenging ideas of the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies he participated in the early 1820s, namely, to the contributions Jews made and continue to make to contemporary culture. The power of tradition stems from the way it has been articulated: wisdom not qua 'round' system, but qua 'extendable' commentary, for it was always felt to be an indispensable annotation on the Scriptures, to be annotated ever and ever again in following commentaries. Here truth is not wholeness but piecemeal process. The just cited text itself forms part of that un-systematic process.

Heine's arguments may receive substantive support from Gershom Scholem. As a chain of commentaries is running from 'Babylon' down to 'Paris' and thus is contributing to a living tradition, Heine's writings can be read as yet another inscription into the margin of that tradition, which had to be preserved for the relentless beating of Hegelian world history. Paradoxically, its message is yet essential for the cause of humanity the 'Mosaic corpus' contains. To evaluate its meaning, the moral eminence of these teachings should be examined in some detail.

4. Moshe Rabenu

Heine's fascination with Moses, the lawgiver, 'the man of God, whom the Lord knew face to face' (Deut. 33:1 and 10), is elucidated the Confessions, where Moses is heralded as the 'inventor of the divine', because 'the skin of Moses' face shone' (Exod. 34:35) with the image of whom he had talked to. In the Confessions Heine focuses on Moses' formative power which created a monumental people out of a nomadic tribe:

He built pyramids of men, he chiselled obelisks from men, he took a poor shepherd tribe and created out of it a people which was also to defy the centuries, a great, eternal, and holy people, a people of God which was to serve all other peoples for a paragon, yea, all Man for a prototype: he created Israel! (DHA XV, 41)

The 'Mosaic corpus' acquires for the Jews an infinite significance in the sense that the followers of Moses stand by good fortune in an immediate relation to the transcendent God and to His will revealed in law. The Law is endowed with an aura of divinity which bestowed unstinting prestige on the Jews; it is a clear indication of their propensity to the sublime. This people is chosen be-

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44 DHA VIII/2, 1609-11.
cause of its responsibility for the preservation of a testament to the moral dynamics of the Law. Its Jewishness, one could say, resides in its becoming responsible for donating ‘sublimity’ to mankind, in spite of its miserable existence among the nations. It has to persevere with something extremely important to all, and simultaneously face up to innumerable miseries of its being distinctive and subject to the sores of ‘otherness’.

To Heine, then, the importance of ‘Mosaic corpus’ resides in its moral eminence. Its meaning comes out very clearly in Heine’s *Confessions*, in discussing the issue of private property:

Moses did not intend to abolish property; he rather meant to state that each person should have enough to prevent him from total enslavement through poverty. The concept of Freedom had always been the ultimate cause to this great Emancipator; it reverberates through the whole of his legislation on pauperism. Though he abhorred any form of slavery, he was not able to eradicate this callous inhumanity altogether, because it was deep-rooted in ancient life. Therefore he had to confine himself to a legal mitigation of this deprivation, by lowering the price for redemption of the slaves and shortening their servitude. But if a slave objected to being eventually released from his master’s house, while he was entitled to leave, Moses decreed that such hopelessly servile scallywag be nailed to the door post of the manor by his ear, and after this disgraceful spectacle he was condemned to slave for life. O Moses, our teacher, Mosche Rabenu, great fighter against serfdom, hand me hammer and nail, that I nail our placid slaves livered in black, red, and gold down to the Brandenburg Gate by their long ears! (DHA XV, 47)

Heine’s text offers a clear allusion to the second Book of Moses, Exodus:

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons and daughters: the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever. (Exod. 21:2-7)

The appeal to ‘Mosche Rabenu’ has far-reaching implications. By insisting on the sublimity of ‘outsider wisdom’, the late Heine calls up painful memories of his Berlin years; to him, the sublime should be seen in the light of all the totalizing forces ranged against his ‘self’. In this ultimate profession of difference I recognize traces of the Berlin Association amidst a mood of political disillusionment with radicalizing Hegelianism. The ‘Mosaic corpus’ includes
the fiction of a magnanimous legislator whose appearance is a revelation of the splendour of Jewishness in spite of their ‘servitude’. For all their ‘obsolescence’ and ‘dirtiness’ in modern Europe, the heirs of these Mosaic teachings will serve as a paradigm of humaneness. They are necessarily in conflict with the status quo because their tradition reminds them of emancipatory potency.

This perspective is yet eclipsed by world history, as is indicated in Heine’s poem ‘Vitzliputzli’ from Romancero, where Moses is compared with Columbus:

Einer nur, ein einz’ger Held,
Gab uns mehr und gab uns Bessres
Als Kolumbus, das ist jener,
Der uns einen Gott gegeben.

Sein Vater, der hiefß Amram,
Seine Mutter hiefß Jochebeth,
Und er selber, Moses heißt er,
Und er ist mein bester Heros.

(DHA III/1, 60)

In these lines, Columbus and Moses are reminiscent of America and the Promised Land. Their affiliation is a reprise of earlier themes: already in June 1824, in a letter to Moser, Heine had indicated that he was concentrating on ‘historia judaica’ as an elaborate preparation for his Bacherach-project, which led him to the statement that America, the land of religious freedom, was discovered the same year the Jews were expelled from Spain (HSA XX, 168). In Vitzliputzli, however, the New World proves to be a distorted mirror image of the Old World. In Heine’s image of America, post-revolutionary European affairs are disguised as a travesty of power, as the Barbarossa colours on the bottoms of American monkeys corrode the very vista of newness. America had never been ‘a divine true sketch’ of the ‘freshest and freest of men’. Significantly, the European conquerors of Mexico were headed by the ‘robber-chief’ Cortés, the poem indicates (DHA III/1, 59). Cortés is the obvious opposite of Columbus, and therefore also the wrecker of Mosaic splendour.

‘Moshe Rabenu’ shows that the importance of Heine’s reappraisal of the Bible resides in a reading of it as a set of texts intervening in religious discourse. Vis-à-vis Christianity, Jewish wisdom takes the specific form of counter-religion: Heine’s reading aims at impairing efforts to ease social tensions by meaning of devotion, as we saw already above, in citing his poem ‘Groans’. His exegesis is based on the principle that a German-Jewish writer has the right to interpret the scriptures on his own terms. Despotic or fundamentalist claims are sharply rebuffed. Imperious orders are disobeyed and the

47 Walt Whitman, the 1856 Preface to Leaves of Grass, in Francis Murphy, ed., The Complete Poems, Harmondsworth 1975, 769.
challenge to ecclesiastical and political authority is accompanied by articulations of hatred, anger, and blasphemy, all witnessing to Heine’s clear understanding of man’s submissive and subservient willingness to hold on tenaciously to old beliefs in Divine Guidance.

To his cultured contemporaries, Heine contends, scriptural texts are obviously alien, in spite of all efforts to clear it of their ‘inconveniences’. Against spiritualization, attention is focussed on the concrete reminders of ‘scriptural militancy’. For Heine, the fury of the prophets, the lament of Job, and the scepticism of Ecclesiastes are all about survival. These voices cannot be silenced by Hegelian verdicts. As we have seen in citing Psalm 137, Heine sticks to the dynamics of memorizing.48 His point of reference is the Babylonian Captivity, when every possible effort was made to secure the people’s oral heritage from the threat of oblivion. A team of scribes wrote down the great stories of creation and exodus, the Promised Land, prophets and kings, songs of praise, hope, and revenge, elegies, laments, rites, and institutions, and tales of rebellion. ‘By the rivers of Babylon’, those ‘pious Temple Registrars’ (as Heine had called them in his 1844 Eulogy on Ludwig Markus, DHA XIV/1, 274) succeeded in redacting a chain of stories which cannot be subsumed under philosophical headings. Heine’s Jewish wisdom is expressive of his adherence to the work of those scribes in exile; against feelings of failure and despair, they offer him narrations which are not ‘anaesthetized’ by the religious pomposity of the victors. As regards their ‘royalistic imagineering’ of a spiritual super-being, the late Heine is definitely atheist, but in his Jewish wisdom a different notion of the divine is retained.49 That notion, I hold, is captured in those ‘sublime, yea shuddering thoughts’. As we saw throughout this study, Heine’s writing is a reactualization of these reminders.

It must however be stipulated that his writing is not necessarily an unconditional affirmation of what the tradition has said previously. Dissension, too, forms part of the chain. The late Heine recurs deliberately to the ‘fantastic’ potentialities of tradition. His preference is notably rooted in Haggadic themes.50 In the aftermath of 1848, the poet’s distinctiveness rests on his ability to rework the unsuitable in the laborious process of reproductive memory which must be studied more closely.

5. Reproductive Memory

Heine’s preference for ‘fantastic’ potentialities is fully operative in the character of Jehuda ben Halevy, the Spanish-Jewish poet from the ‘Hebrew Melodies’ in Romancero.51 This poem offers us a clue as to how Heine’s commemorative

48 Chapter III, 113.
49 Contra Pistiak, Sefchen, 194.
50 Introduction, 20.
strategy can be interpreted. We may infer that active memorizing is an act of selective protection. Since our cultural storage is finite, there is an urge to retain only most valuable things, as Heine elucidates by telling the story of a box, which itself serves as a treasured container of Jewish wisdom.

We have already noticed that in the third section of the poem Heine interrupts the portraying of Halevy in order to switch our attention to a precious casket: the jewellery box Alexander the Great had taken away from Darius.\textsuperscript{52} In seventeen stanzas Heine informs us how Alexander eventually exchanged its contents for a scroll with the epics of Homer. The jewels are generously given away, and they begin with an eventful journey through Western cultural history. Significantly, these events are meticulously pictured in terms of a Diaspora, running from the ancient Near East, Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, up to Heine's contemporary, the baroness of Rothschild in Paris. The diasporic perception is lodged in a story which is conceivable only through reproductive memorizing, Heine implies.

Poetical recall is transmuted into vexing questions about its own possibility of being told in present-day circumstances. At the same time, tradition is pared down to a ‘fantastic potential’ which allows the poet to exploit his technical skill so as to speak from a ‘different past’ which is actually present in a gentile society which constructs itself as a dominant discourse, sealed by European modernity. I am not suggesting that Heine fails to signal the imminent demise of certain forms of remembrance which supposed age-old traditions of inherited experience, seamlessly transmitted from one generation to the next. It is obvious that he cannot deny that the notion of tradition has been fundamentally. But we have also seen that the later Heine defies the flattering image of a stable, coherent, continuous, and wholly controllable society. The diasporic writer tenaciously lives in a time warp. Never able to surpass the astonishment of rupture and homelessness, nor able to transcend the biting salt of longing, desire, and despair which eats through the very fabric of individual artistic enterprise, he still writes what he imagines to be the essentials of a homeland, intensifying such memories with tinges of Haggadah: gardens burn ever incandescent with lush flowers and foliage which swing slowly, the sun of righteousness will arise, and the wicked will be punished. Yet hardly does the diasporan subject return to inherit this kingdom; upon seeing Jerusalem, Halevy is killed. One could say that for this persona, return is ever deferral.

In this problematical context, Jewish wisdom can be summed up as a search for a narrative which seeks some kind of actual significance in terms of referrals back to a living past. Thanks to his skill, the narrator makes a secondary world. For to conceive of a diasporic tradition is to enter into correspondence with a literary, scriptural community adorned with all manners of emblematic gestures (fantastical, ostentatious) and significations which speak to the desire for preservation as well as reactualization. The journey of the jewels could be articulated as the quintessential process of regrouping, recreations, and reiterations: through the poem, Heine initiates a literary route into

\textsuperscript{52} Chapter II, 79.
the heart of the cultural capital of the nineteenth century in order to link up with the rest of the wandering people screened from the consciousness of the unwelcoming. Despite the risk of non-understanding, there is a need to tell a story to 'the rest', so as to make 'them' recognize the narrator as a subject capable of literary acting and committing himself to 'others'. It is this 'authorial capacity' which is at stake in Heine's 'Halevy'. The author perdures through writing down a story told by an 'I' about his alter ego; and what he considers communicable and memorable is meant to be also valuable as an invitation to responsiveness of contemporary readers.

As indicated above, Heine's poem is concerned with the gathering in of certain poetic goods to a casket. Casket and contents obviously refer to memory. They refer as well to an allegiance to tradition. Heine is not inclined to fill the box with classical texts, but plays on the idea of putting Halevy's poetry in it, if there were no need for cash:

Still davon – es ist die Rede
Von dem Kästchen des Darius,
Und ich dacht' in meinem Sinne:
Käm' ich in Besitz des Kästchens,

Und mich zwänge nicht Finanznoth,
Gleich dasselbe zu versilbern,
So verschlösse ich darin
Die Gedichte unsres Rabbi –

Des Jehuda ben Halevy
Festgesänge, Klagelieder,
Die Ghaselen, Reisebilder
Seiner Wallfahrt – alles ließ ich

Von dem besten Zophar schreiben
Auf der einsten Pergamenthaut,
Und ich legte diese Handschrift
In das kleine goldne Kästchen.
(DHA III/1, 145)

The exhortation to break off ('No more of that!') refers back to the tarnished pride viewed in the Introduction to this study, when it appeared that, for the late Heine, the poet's 'destiny' is no longer going to pull him towards Glory, as if he were sitting in a chariot driven by supernatural powers, like the triumphal car pictured in the preceding stanzas, where the poet has sunk into the brutish state of Nebuchadnezzar.53

Facing 'poetical crisis', Heine takes pains to reconsider the plausibility of poetry, which confronts him with yet another fundamental difficulty, for the

53 Introduction, 24.
Je wish Wisdom
desire to gather in poetic items in order to save them from neglect is at odds
with the commonsensical pragmatism of the times. The subjunctive mood in the
just cited lines is used to express doubts about poetry’s plausibility. Poetical
language is hardly amenable to monetary adaptation. Commodification de­
stroyed not only the old notion of individual artistic genius and completed, self­
contained and august oeuvre. Heine’s suggestion of containing a living texture
of tradition in a box, too, is in conflict with a representative system which is, in
the Parisian context of the poem, basically a system of cultural representation in
terms of merchandizing, where literature is regarded as a product to be
consumed by a passive and anonymous audience. As it seems evident that all
the visible universe is nothing but a shop of images and signs, what does it
mean to save words instead of money? Commodity is antithetical to ana­
chronistic systems of preservation, as it is shown by Heine’s fictional ‘wife’
(‘Mathilde’), who disapproves of Halevy’s non-profitability:

Meine Frau ist nicht zufrieden
Mit dem vorigen Capitel,
Ganz besonders in bezug
Auf das Kästchen des Darius.

Fast mit Bitterkeit bemerkt sie:
Daß ein Ehemann, der wahrhaft
Religiöse sey, das Kästchen
Gleich zu Gelde machen würde,

Um damit für seine arme
Legitime Ehegattin
Einen Kaschemir zu kaufen,
Dessen sie so sehr bedürfte.

Der Jehuda ben Halevy,
Meinte sie, der sey hinlänglich
Ehrenvoll bewahrt in einem
Schönen Futteral von Pappe

Mit chinesisch eleganten
Arabesken, wie die hübschen
Bonbonnièren von Marquis
Im Passage Panorama.
(DHA III/1, 149-50)

The poet counters the criticism by remarking that the poetry of the Jews is drowned by today’s more trivial and accessible media like the theatre and music.

The language of the poet is both difficult and complex, like that of a foreign tongue in the consumers’ world of the nineteenth-century metropolis, where ‘strangeness’ is reduced to the attractiveness of exquisite merchandise. Goods are displayed as exotic luxuries in metropolitan dreamworld of the Parisian Panorama Arcade. Heine’s ‘Mathilde’ halts before the marvels of modern life; ‘she’ is ‘the greedy public’ which wishes to contemplate an enchanted scene and not similar products, uniformly grouped. The commodity is transfigured into enchanted object, signifying that exchange-value is eclipsing the use-value of the commodity. Heine notices that commodification impresses new features on the object. Speaking of the exotic product (cashmere) as a sample of universal beauty in the eyes of ‘Mathilde’, the fetishization becomes evident: exchange value no less than use value had lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore. Everything desirable could be transformed into commodity, and in this enchanted object could simultaneously be vested the kind of authority traditionally reserved for the work of art. In these mercantile circumstances, the late Heine reconstructs a format in which past and present are welded, so as to make of ‘Mathilde’s’ ‘devaluation’ a possibility of preservation. Now the ‘devaluation’ is invalidated by Heine’s insisting on the value of poetry in terms of survival.

6. Survival

Against commodity, Heine invokes tradition’s documentary side by citing the poetic laudatio Rabbi Salomo Al-Charisi bestowed on Jehuda Halevy’s writings:

In citing Al-Charisi’s *laudatio*, Heine implicitly invites the reader to draw a comparison between these lines and his own ‘Halevy’. They have one obvious point in common. Al-Charisi suggests that Halevy’s writings are a precious receptacle in which ‘all poetry’ is stored.

As we saw above, Heine’s poem, too, points to a desire to retain a priceless literary treasure, by rewriting the story of a box which itself serves as a invaluable container of writing. The inevitable corollary of this urge to save will be viewed below in this section. There are yet two other features to be mentioned. First of all, it is clear that Heine’s poem plays on Germanizing Al-Charisi’s traditional reverence for Halevy. In aureate wordings Halevy is put on par with literary genius:

Rein und wahrhaft, sonder Makel
War sein Lied, wie seine Seele –
Als der Schöpfer sie erschaffen,
Diese Seele, selbstzufrieden

Küßte er die schöne Seele,
Und des Kusses holder Nachklang
Bebt in jedem Lied des Dichters,
Das geweiht durch diese Gnade.

Wie im Leben, so im Dichten
Ist das höchste Gut die Gnade –
Wer sie hat, der kann nicht sünd’gen,
Nicht in Versen, noch in Prosa.

Solchen Dichter von der Gnade
Gottes nennen wir Genie:
Unverantwortlicher König
Des Gedankenreiches ist er.

Nur dem Gotte steht er Rede,
Nicht dem Volke – [...]}

And yet, in spite of his status, Halevy is exemplar of a vulnerable existence:

[...] In der Kunst,
Wie im Leben kann das Volk
Tödten uns, doch niemals richten. –
(DHA III/1, 135)

I think that genius and vulnerability are indicative of an equivocal articulation of literary selfhood in a basically alien environment. Via Halevy, Heine informs us about his own aspirations and insecurities: the 'we-talk' in the just cited lines can be interpreted as a concise recapitulation of a lifelong experience: however brilliantly Halevy/Heine Germanized, his Jewishness was not fit for unconditional acceptance as an author, i.e. as member of a cultivated, intellectual elite.

It was already stipulated that Heine's Germanizing was typical for the literary bravura of the newcomer who sought to establish his 'literariness' relative to the authority of the poet laureate from Weimar. Halevy's Germanizing, too, is effected in direct rivalry to 'healthy' Goethean standards; Heine refers to a catalogue of Romantic elements so characteristic of the mystique and daemonic agency surrounding poetic genius in the second half of the eighteenth century. There is the gracious touch of the Daimon as a token of the poet's extraordinary distinction, the supernatural power which 'drives' him, there is the reference to hermetic knowledge, and there are allusions to absolute prestige. This proud and gifted poet stands alone in his learning: he is poeta doctus, a fair and sweet sage. He rises to royal state in the realm of fantasy; he sits at the loom of thought. He claims that his charisma manages to enchant the audience, that people applaud his colour, his detailed embroiderings full of elliptical comparisons and ingenious arabesques, richly equipped with orientalia. This poet is able to rearrange his motifs so that things do not come in factual order but where they will make unexpected impact in juxtaposition.

What thus is revealed, Heine claims, is an expertise which need not be calculated and taught in the name of philosophy or theology. In an important letter to Weerth, dated 5 November 1851, answering Weerth's compliments on the Preface to Romancero, Heine proudly declares that the poet is obliged to neither of these intellectual frameworks:

I am glad my Preface has pleased you. Much to my regret, however, and quite apart from lacking time, I was in no mood to formulate there what I actually intended to set forth, namely, that I die a poet who can do without religion and philosophy. Whereas the poet is well versed in the symbolic idiom of religion and in the abstract argot of philosophy, neither the masters of religion nor the lords of philosophy will ever comprehend the poet; his tongue is all Greek to them, as incomprehensible as Latin to Massman. As a result of their linguistic ignorance these gentlemen could fancy that I had become a bigot. (HSA XXII 1, 147-8)

Greek and Latin hint at a strange tongue which is familiar to true poets only. Their minds cannot be fathomed. Heine alludes to a fundamental scission of the word, which is construed to mean that poetry knows something beyond philosophemnes and theologoumena. Writing should have the right of self-government and the writer should not be beholden to anyone. From this it followed that the poet, too, was someone special, apart from others. The German-Jewish author

56 Chapter III, 106.
expresses the idea that even he belonged to an elite. The provocative proudness of this stance is highlighted in Heine's *Confessions*:

It is a great thing to be a poet, especially when you are one of Germany's leading lyricists, that is, among a people who has outstripped all nations in two fields: philosophy and lyrics. (DHA XV, 55)

There is no reason to ascribe these sentences to 'a real Heine', as Arnold Pestiak is doing. To my opinion, Heine is rather giving yet another impetus to the 'I' pointed at in the Introduction to this study, when mention was made of a self-stylized, self-dramatized instance which is constructed out of biography and poetic licence. Only thanks to literary skill, the 'I' continues to exist 'in art', artificially that is, in spite of being nearly destroyed or made extinct in the representative system of actual life. For here we come upon the vulnerability of the German-Jewish poet Halevy/Heine. Romanticism is 'contaminated': Germanizing does not make the poet out-and-out German. On the contrary, hardly he has attained his ambition of becoming a genius when the spell is broken by the reality of the *schlemihl* who might be killed at random by 'the people' around him.

From this perspective, one can grasp the significance of an imagery in which Heine's writing becomes, itself, a set of exceptions to conventional rule. Here the literary self-styling is exploited to the full in giving the impression of the poet who oscillates between habitat and non-identity. This poet is someone who traffics in literary survival. If it is done properly, we should not underestimate the power of his writing as an actual mechanism of disturbance, a kind of momentous blockage in the representative system which is, in his case, basically a system of cultural representation in terms of Germaneness.

In this particular context, the significance of poetry is based resistance to *damnatio memoriae*, as 'art' is to be said resistant to perpetual persecution. This 'alien element' will always abstain from exercising the social virtue of being easy to be with:

[...] in der Kunst,
Wie im Leben kann das Volk.
Tödten uns, doch niemals richten.

Faced with the impossibility of a radical return to the past, poetry is a ciphered indication of a relation to things which goes beyond use-value and exchange value. It is a gift to be cherished. Now we can conclude that the 'Hebrew Melodies' themselves might serve Heine for a secret casket or ark, in which Halevy's poetry could be rescued. Whereas the casket is emblematic of mem-

57 Sefchen, 191.
58 Introduction, 5.
ory’s potential, its contents are hinting at the invaluable preservation of Jewish wisdom. 59

As the casket is obviously a sine qua non of memorizing, it has a ‘salvaging’ function. In this beneficial respect, it has significant parallels in scriptural caskets, ranging from the ark Noah made according to all that God commanded him (Gen. 6) and the ark of bulrushes in which Moses was saved by the river’s side, to the ark Bezaleel made of shittim wood for the children of Israel in the desert (Exod. 37). Especially illustrative of the casket’s beneficial potential are the tephillin and mesusa, the miniature boxes containing formulaic texts on parchment which are a remedy to the catastrophe of forgetting. By exhibiting the physical constitution of the work (a piece of parchment which is subject to erasure), attention is drawn to its fragility; it makes the reader ponder upon the qualities which yet account for its vitality. Heine’s acknowledgement of poetry’s permanence is based on the presumption that it is capable of being ‘handed down’ to a modern readership without losing its intrinsic signatures. The urge to retain, consequently, makes for a literary document which lives on in a mental archive where its ‘strangeness’ is on par with its most fragile presence, and the least one could to is to keep it as explicitly as possible.

These literary contents thus qualify as cultural text, that is, an emphatic record from a strange past which yet has wrought a profound reorientation towards an unhomely present. 60 Its culturality resides in its Jewishness. The aforementioned citation of Al-Charisi offers a clue as to how this record can be read. In a letter to Campe, dated 26 September 1851, Heine identifies the laudatio as a fragment from a makame by Al-Charisi (HSA XXIII. 129). Traditionally, a makame or makama (plural: makamat) is a sort of rhymed prose in Arabic which was practised in the courts of oriental rulers, presented in the form of a tournament. The custom resulted in a variety of literature. Al-Charisi (about 1220) introduced it into Hebrew literature, taking the famous vagabond rnakarnat from Hariri as his reference. 61 I think that Heine, in turn, introduces his ‘Halevy’ as a kind of famous vagabond makamat into German literature. What he may have had in mind is a brief description of the genre by Samuel Kaempf (1845). According to Kaempf, the unheroic protagonist of the makama is the wandering poet who recognises at last his quixotic identity; his adventures are strung together in a colourful series which forms a ‘well-connected whole’. 62 If we replace ‘Quixote’ by ‘schlemihl’, then the parallel between Heine’s record and the makama is striking.

Heine, then, is faithful to Halevy’s martyriology with all the poetical force he could muster. Against the triumphant rise of a materialistic society his

59 Markus Hallensleben suggests that the ‘Hebrew Melodies’ can be read as fragmentary selichot, but I miss the similarity to such penitential a prayers, “Heines “Romanzero” als Zeittriptychon”, 89.


creative memory shows up what poetry may be and how it can work at survival. At the same time, Halevy and Heine are sharing the stigma of the *schlemihl*, the unlucky poet who risks falling victim to whoever he finds on his way towards the achievement of his literariness. A story of Jewishness and artistry is therefore interwoven into a pattern of grief, as we will see presently, in concluding this chapter, by focussing our attention to the Wandering Jew, the embodiment of the perpetual outsider.

7. Wandering

In his ‘Halevy’, Heine’s ‘I’ associates with Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew. The unassimilated Ahasverian force runs counter to the Hegelian conception that history up to now is a majestic plan for all. His presence is a nuisance for those who demand reality to be idealized. He is pictured as the embodiment of perpetual displacement:

Lange schon, jahntausendlange
Kocht’s in mir. Ein dunkles Wehe!
Und die Zeit leckt meine Wunde,
Wie der Hund die Schwären Hiobs.

Dank dir, Hund, für deinen Speichel —
Doch das kann nur kühlend lindern —
Heilen kann mich nur der Tod,
Aber, ach, ich bin unsterblich!
(DHA III/1, 136)

There is the conspicuous detail of Ahasverus’ blackening beard, reappearing in the same poem as the mark of Jewish eternal vitality:

Silberweiß hinabfloß, während
Sich das Barthaar an der Spitze
Wieder schwärzte und es aussah,
Als ob sich der Bart verjüngte —

Ein gar wunderlicher Pilger
Möcht’ er seyn, die Augen lugten
Wie aus tausendjähr’gen Trübsinn
Und er seufzt: “Jerusalem!
(DHA III/1, 139)

The beard is not a petty literary detail, but rather a complex indication of Jewishness. It is firstly a symbol of that permanent quality of Jewishness which cannot be shaved or washed away by the individual. At the same time, the blackening beard is a symbol of the eternal race of the Jews, an eternal youthful and vigorous race, always renewing itself. Such pride in a perpetually re-
generating Jewish race was in conflict with bias against the Jews as a lifeless historical fossil race. The Ahasverian beards of the Jews betoken their providential mission for humanity. At first sight, Heine thus seems to transform the Wandering Jew from an instance of contempt to one of perseverance conform to the significance of the ‘Mosaic corpus’ discussed above.

Here a careful distinction must be drawn between a symbolic tradition, consisting of institutions and commandments which create a sense of genealogical affiliation, and its reverse, residing in otherness, depravity, and obscurity which point at eerie and phantom presences of something ‘behind’, an ‘inferior and inconspicuous something’ on which yet the very articulation of that tradition depends, while its ‘inferiority’ prevents it from being recognized as something formative. The spectral shape of the Wandering Jew, too, belongs to this backstage; Heine shows himself fully aware of this persistent ‘anomaly’. To him, the Wandering Jew’s wandering represents the rhythmic pulse of a trauma which cannot be inscribed in marked genealogy, for Ahasverus apparently manages to linger on as persona non grata, confronting the descendants with never ending neglect. In the persona of the Wandering Jew, Jewishness is not articulated in terms of acceptable symbols of sublimity, but in terms of a ‘living dead’ visiting his modernizing offspring with painful secrets nestling in the blank between the lines and in the interstices and cracks of the culture. Heine’s insistence on this otherness allows him to operate his particular practice of memorizing in which teleology is ‘re-recorded’ through martyriology; he stuck to the Jews’ woes, ranging from exile and ghetto to the outsider and outcast.

In his spectral appearance, the Wandering Jew is the outcast per se; to the late Heine, he represents those who were recklessly excluded from post-48 ‘normalcies’, culminating in the violent gestures of restoration. His restlessness marks him as a wrongdoer banned from society. Who has been banned is delivered over to his own separateness and, at once, consigned to those who abandon him; he is at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured. Those condemned to disgrace are the representatives of an ‘illegal’ cause which can no longer be comprehended as an infrahistorical historical factor. The eternity of the Wandering Jew is not only paradigmatic for this existence ‘beyond history’, but also an indication that, to him, historical time is basically a continuum of repression. Heine’s post-48 conditions mark a reversion from Hegelian teleology to Ahasverian actuality.

Through Jewish wisdom, Heine learns the lesson the hard way: the consistency and continuity of dominant culture hang on expulsion and exclusion of otherness. The Wandering Jew is a liminal being; calling into question the fundamental categories of a reality in which bare life is separated and excepted as the frightening reverse image of ‘decent society’. At the same moment, the bare life is articulated in terms of a non-belonging which is characteristic not of an individual’s life but of a shared experience of rejection, as we saw above, when we pointed at the ‘bareness’ of the Lazarus-people. The idiosyncrasy of this suffering is rendered into Heine’s contaminated Romanticism. It is expressed as a personal drive to turn what is particular into compulsion, that is,
into someone who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his bodily conscience on ‘them’. In sum therefore it is the negation firstly of a conception of totality and secondly of a construal of that totality as interconnected with particulars plus that connection determining their identity, which further blocks the possibility of moving between universal and personal, marking the absence of totality.

In Heine’s late poem ‘Bimini’ we have an impressive résumé of contaminated Romanticism, bodily conscience, and wandering. Contaminated Romanticism is condensed into the legendary beauty of the Caribbean. Here it moulded in a troubled vista of an exotic, wondrous world overseas, which is pictured in terms of a fictitious yet forceful topography. Bodily conscience is referred to in terms of ailing, decline, and withering. Restlessness gives the poem its impetus:

Bimini – mich selbst erfaßt
Tolles Sehnen und ich schüttle
Mich so stürmisch, daß die Nähte
Meiner Narrenjacke platzen.
(DHA III/1, 366)

As a recap of older themes, literary constellations, or even individual words, phrases, and rhyme constructions, ‘Bimini’ is exemplary of that larger complex of ‘reproductive memory’ viewed above.63

Here it is important to notice that Heine’s ‘I’ is presented as a sickly, startled jester jumping up as woeful dreams from his youth are being revived by the very mention of Bimini. In other words, his setting-out differs from the yearning of Ponce de Leon’s, the poem’s tarnished subject, who is motivated by a ruthless determination to rejuvenate his colonial power, as he avows in a clearly shabby prayer to Madonna (who is in fact completely non-responsive in comparison to the ‘heathen’ agency of Kaka’s we viewed earlier in this chapter):

Du, o Jungfrau, bist ein Weib,
Und obgleich unwandelbar
Deine unbeschränkte Schönheit,
Weiblich klugen Sinnes fühlst du

Was er leidet, der vergänglich
Arme Mensch wenn seines Leibes
Edle Kraft und Herrlichkeit
Dorrt und hinwelkt bis zum Zerrbild!
(DHA III/1, 374)

63 192-6.
Whereas Heine’s ‘I’ associates with Ahasverus, the restless wanderer and refugee, the Spaniard conqueror is the frustrated westerner running after the dynamics of everlasting potency. I do not see why Heine would somehow sympathize with Ponce de Leon. The Spaniard’s odyssey is a calculated risk:

Juan Ponce de Leon wahrlich
War kein Thor, kein Fasenlante
Als er unternahm die Irrfahrt
Nach der Insel Bimini.

Ob der Existenz der Insel
Hegt’ er niemals einen Zweifel –
Seiner alten Kaka Singsang
War ihm Bürgschaft und Gewähr.
(DHA III/1, 384)

Real mariners, on the contrary, are led by far more mysterious motives:

Mehr als andre Menschenkinder
Wundergläubig ist der Seemann;
Hat er doch vor Augen stets
Flammendgroll die Himmelswunder

Während ihn umrauscht beständig
Die geheimnissvolle Meerflut,
Deren Schooß entstiegen weiland
Dona Venus Aphrodite
(DHA III/1, 384)

Obviously, the poet himself is the seaman par excellence:

Wer will mit nach Bimini?
Steiget ein, Ihr Herrn und Damen
Wind und Wetter dienend, bringet
Euch mein Schiff nach Bimini.
(DHA III/1, 367)

His sense of superiority makes him deride ‘poor’ Ponce de Leon’s enterprise:

Ach anstatt von altem Siechtum
Zu genesen, ward der Aermste
Heimgesucht von vielen neuen
Leibesübeln und Gebresten –

64 As suggested by Pistiak, ‘Bimini’, 115.
By virtue of being an eternal wanderer, the poet is able to put in perspective Bimini’s effectiveness as a placatory cure and palliative for the suffering of memory, which is, to Heine, identical with the memory of suffering. He therefore shifts from the descriptive ‘he’ (who is Ponce de Leon) to the allocutionary ‘you’ (the narratee who may be a fellow wanderer):

Während er die Jugend suchte
Ward er täglich noch viel älter
Und verrunzelt, abgemergelt
Kam er endlich in das Land

In das stille Land wo schaurig
Unter schattigen Zypressen
Fließt eind Flüßlein dessen Wasser
Gleichfalls wunderthätig heilsam –

Lethe heißt das gute Wasser!
Trink daraus, und du vergisßt
All dein Leiden – ja, vergessen
Wirst du was du je gelitten –

Gutes Wasser! Gutes Land!
Wer dort angelangt, verläßt es
Nimmermehr – denn dieses Land
Ist das wahre Bimini.
(DHA III/1, 385)

These lines do not offer a religious stopgap, as Michel Espagne rightly states. Nor do they allow the reader to draw upon Heine’s ‘spiritual grappling’ with his imminent death. What they do welcome is the ending of martyriology.

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