

### Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

From the generation following Johann Wolfgang von Goethe there is perhaps no writer more controversial than Heinrich Heine. Although best known now for his early lyrics--which have been set to music more often than those of any other poet--during most of his life he was renowned for his witty prose, his political journalism, and his caustic satires. These were the writings which earned him a controversial reputation among his contemporaries and after his death. Frequently censored for his liberal views and his attacks on religion, he was despised by narrow-minded German nationalists for his cosmopolitan feelings and discriminated against by a bigoted German society for his Jewish origins. While his writings became extremely popular among enlightened sectors of the European intelligentsia, in his native land he was often subjected to scorn or ridicule. This prejudice against Heine culminated in the period of National Socialism, when he was retroactively stripped of his German background; during the Third Reich the author of the "Loreley," Heine's most celebrated poem, was listed as "an unknown poet."

This blatant discrimination on the part of fanatical racists is somewhat balanced, however, by Heine's tremendous impact on the most innovative minds of the nineteenth century. He was a close friend of Karl Marx during his Parisian exile in 1843-1844, and it is quite likely that the radical socialist was influenced by both Heine's wit and his political views. Richard Wagner used motifs from two of Heine's works for his operas *Der fliegende Holländer* (The Flying Dutchman, 1841) and *Tannhäuser* (1843-1844). Friedrich Nietzsche admired him as one of the greatest poets of the century and considered him to be one of the superior German stylists of all times. And Sigmund Freud was obviously thoroughly acquainted with his writings; many of the illustrations he uses in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) are taken from Heine's works. With regard to his reputation, then, Heine has been a subject of considerable dispute. Hailed

as a genial poet and innovative prose writer by some, he has been vilified as a flighty poetaster and traitor to the fatherland by others.

In fact, controversy entered into Heine's life from--and around--the very moment of his birth. Although it is now presumed that he was born on 13 December 1797, this elementary biographical fact is by no means certain. No official record exists, and Heine himself, for unknown reasons, never confirmed this date. Indeed, he most often asserted that he was born two years later. Previous defamatory speculation that he lied in order to cover up his illegitimacy or to avoid service in the Prussian army has proven to be false. But no one has been able to ascertain why Heine consistently felt compelled to hide his actual age.

Heine's birth is not the only fact about his early life which is shrouded in mystery. Little information is available about his early years, and what there is is often of somewhat dubious validity. This much seems certain, however. Heine was one of four children--three sons and a daughter--born to Samson and Betty (van Geldern) Heine. He was named Harry by his parents, apparently to honor one of his father's associates. His childhood appears to have been rather uneventful. He attended a nursery school and a Hebrew school before entering the public school system in 1807. He was accepted into the lyceum in 1810 but never graduated, partially because of the turbulence surrounding the Napoleonic Wars, and partially because his family had planned for him to become a businessman. Accordingly he was enrolled in a business school in 1814. In 1816 he was apprenticed to a bank in Hamburg under the auspices of his uncle, Salomon Heine, one of the wealthiest financiers in Germany. Two years later his uncle set him up in his own business, but it was liquidated by early 1819, apparently because Salomon discovered that Samson was drawing money against his son's accounts.

After this brief and unsuccessful business career it was decided, probably by Uncle Salomon, that Heine should study law. In the autumn of 1819 he enrolled at the recently founded university in Bonn. Although he was several years older than the usual student, his behavior appears to have been quite typical for a young man of his times. He participated in a demonstration to commemorate the Battle of Leipzig shortly after his arrival in town, joined a nationalist student club in his first semester, and attended lectures on topics relating to German history and literature. After a year at Bonn, he transferred to the university in Göttingen, which had a fine reputation, particularly in the field of law. Here he was terribly unhappy, chiefly because both the faculty and the students lacked the nationalist enthusiasm he had experienced in Bonn. Heine joined a student club but was expelled, probably because of his Jewishness, which no doubt contributed to his dissatisfaction with the university. The misery of his first stay in Göttingen, however, lasted less than four months. Because he engaged in a duel with a fellow student, he was expelled from the university for a minimum of half a year.

After a short visit with his family in Hamburg, Heine was sent to Berlin to continue his studies. Berlin, like Bonn, was a relatively new university (founded in 1810), but it had already acquired a fine reputation. Heine seems to have enjoyed seminars there more than in Göttingen, and he attended lectures by some of the most eminent intellectuals of his times. Chief among these was Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, perhaps the most influential philosopher on the Continent. But more important than his studies were the social connections he made in the Prussian capital. He gained entrance to the salon of Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, a Jewish woman married to a liberal Prussian former diplomat, and mingled there with the important literati of Berlin society. He was also successful in finding a publisher for his first book, *Gedichte* (Poems, 1822). But perhaps most significant for him was his association with the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden

(Society for Culture and Scholarship of the Jews). In association with other young Jewish intellectuals, Heine explored the role Jews had played in European culture and came to appreciate his own heritage. From his own researches Heine began a novel, "Der Rabbi von Bacherach" (The Rabbi from Bacherach, 1840), of which he completed less than three chapters.

Fortified by his sojourn in Berlin, Heine returned to Göttingen in 1824 to complete his degree in law. Aside from a two-month journey on foot through the Harz mountains in the fall of that year, he appears to have applied himself diligently to his studies. In May 1825 he passed his oral defense, and in July the title of doctor of law was conferred on him. Between these two dates another momentous change occurred in his life. In June he converted to Protestantism and was baptized Heinrich. For Jews who had any aspirations to hold governmental (including academic) positions, such a conversion was hardly unusual. Eduard Gans, who later became Hegel's successor in Berlin, and Heinrich Marx, Karl Marx's father, converted at about the same time. Heine himself insisted that it was his "Entreebillet zur europäischen Kultur" (entrance ticket to European culture). Still, considering his recent encounters with the Jewish tradition in Berlin and his reactions against others who converted, it is safe to assume that the decision was not made lightly.

By this time in his life Heine had already gained some notoriety as a writer. He had composed two dramas in the early 1820s, *Almansor* and *William Ratcliff*, first published in *Tragödien, nebst einem lyrischen Intermezzo* (Tragedies, with a Lyrical Intermezzo, 1823), but these were epigonic works which are largely forgotten today. His real talent lay in lyric poetry. Starting in 1817 he had begun to publish his verse in literary journals, and two small books appeared in 1822 and 1823. His literary reputation, however, rests largely on the collection of verse published in 1827 under the title *Buch der Lieder* (Book of Songs). It contained chiefly poems Heine had written during the late

1810s and early 1820s, revised and arranged in five sections or cycles: "Junge Leiden" (Young Sorrows), "Lyrisches Intermezzo" (Lyrical Intermezzo), "Die Heimkehr" (Homecoming), "Aus der Harzreise" (From the Harz Journey), and "Die Nordsee" (The North Sea). Although the second edition did not appear until a decade later, by the end of the nineteenth century it had become one of the best-selling books of poetry in the German language. Heine's most familiar poems, including those that so enchanted the composers of Romantic Lieder, are found in this volume.

Most of these early poems deal with the theme of unrequited love. Although they appear to be simply constructed from familiar romantic motifs, closer inspection reveals meticulous poetic craft and insight. Their outstanding feature is the turn or ironic twist which frequently concludes a poem. The reader is lulled into a false sense of security when he or she encounters the familiar imagery of lyrics from the Age of Goethe. But in the final lines Heine calls this imagery--and the ideology behind it--into question with a note of discord or ironic distancing. In this way the poem becomes a vehicle for self-reflection upon the role of the poet, the use of poetic motifs, and romantic poetry in general. To achieve their effect these poems therefore depend on subtle techniques of playing with and often disappointing the expectations of the reader. They are carefully designed to destroy the harmony they initially seem to posit, and thus they reaffirm in the form the thematic emphasis on unhappy love. Unfortunately, many of the most famous musical compositions for the poetry in *Buch der Lieder* fail to appreciate Heine's essentially ironic stance. These poems implicitly challenge the ideal of harmony and the idyllic world found in the literature of the preceding period. In accord with an era of turbulence and change in the social, political, and intellectual realm, they explore, on the level of emotions, dissonance and strife.

Although this poetry would later become an enormous success, Heine was unable to live by

writing verse. In fact, the *Buch der Lieder* brought him no money at all for at least a decade after its publication. Since poetry was not a promising way to earn a living, Heine was forced to pursue other avenues. During the period between the attainment of his law degree in 1825 and his immigration to Paris in 1831 he traveled about Europe--journeying to England in 1827 and to Italy in 1828--while contemplating various career options. At the beginning of 1828 he assumed the only regularly paying position he ever held, editor of the *Neue allgemeine politische Annalen*, but he resigned after six months. He then ingratiated himself with a Bavarian minister of the interior in hopes of securing a professorship in Munich. He apparently wanted to lecture on German history, but a competitor was chosen above him. Heine even thought about entering the political arena. Toward the end of 1830 he waged an unsuccessful and half-hearted campaign to be appointed to a high post in the Hamburg city government. Since he had no experience and scant qualifications, it is not surprising that nothing ever came of this attempt.

Much more important for Heine during these years was his writing; it was during this period that he established himself as a major author on the German literary scene. In 1826 he met Julius Campe, a progressive publisher in Hamburg who recognized his genius and did much to promote his works. Heine sold him the rights to "Die Harzreise" (The Harz Journey), a prose work that had appeared in a literary journal, and Campe saw the opportunity to publish more than just an isolated travel description. He conceived the idea of using it and other similar works in a series; each volume would thus serve as advertisement for subsequent volumes. Accordingly, he brought out *Reisebilder I* (Travel Pictures I) in 1826, followed by second, third, and fourth volumes in 1827, 1829, and 1831. Although the sales were unimpressive at first, by the time Heine left Germany in 1831 the *Reisebilder* had made him a relatively famous writer, especially in the circles of young, liberal intellectuals.

The success of this series can be attributed largely to its controversial content and innovative form. Heine takes up matters of current concern and comments upon them in a witty and critical fashion. Because of censorship he had to be extremely cautious. Rarely does one find a sustained or direct treatment of an issue or personality. Most often, Heine operates with an apparently free-floating technique of associating ideas. Something he witnesses or experiences will remind him of a politically more sensitive topic which he then discusses with humor, allusions, and innuendos. Heine had developed this technique earlier in the 1820s in a set of correspondence articles, "Briefe aus Berlin" (Letters from Berlin, 1822), and in a short travel description, "Über Polen" (On Poland; 1823), but by the end of the decade he had obviously perfected his art.

"Die Harzreise" is the first and probably the best-known work in the *Reisebilder*. The framework is the journey through the Harz mountains which Heine undertook as a break from his studies in late 1824. In this work his attitudes are more clearly tied to the German Romantic tradition. Some of the main targets for his ironic barbs are those individuals and institutions which maintain senseless cultural conventions. Heine's narrative persona is presented as a friend of nature, love, and authentic feeling, someone who disdains poetic prescriptions and aesthetic pretentiousness. In this work the philistine, a frequent object of ridicule for Romanticism, is the epitome of all that Heine detests. But Heine's criticism, unlike that of most Romantics, extends beyond the realm of art into societal relations. He is concerned with restrictions not only to artistic creativity, but to human potential as well. Thus he takes society to task wherever it confines individual liberty. For this reason Heine frequently mocks rigid class distinctions and orthodox religious attitudes. Both serve to maintain a conservative order inimical to his progressive, emancipatory desires.

Perhaps the most imaginative work in the *Reisebilder* is "Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand."

Consisting of twenty chapters of varying length, this work may be conveniently divided into four sections. In the first and last quarter of the work Heine assumes various personae: an Italian knight, an Indian count, a brokenhearted lover. In these parts the dominant themes are familiar from the Romantic canon: love, death, and suicide. At the close of the fifth chapter and throughout the next quarter of the book, the loosely structured narration shifts focus; the narrative persona, who is a somewhat distorted mirror of the author, begins to talk of his youth. The major event he discusses is the invasion of the French army into the German Rhineland at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Napoleon and the drum major Le Grand become symbols of emancipation for a backward, biased, and anesthetized Germany. In the third quarter of the work, after the demise of Napoleon and the death of Le Grand, the narrator reflects on a variety of themes including academic scholarship, the writing profession, and the political absurdities following the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The result is an amusing but critical collage of culture and society in an age of reactionary politics.

With the exception of "Die Nordsee I" and "Die Nordsee II" (The North Sea), the first cycles of German poetry written about the sea, the rest of the works in the *Reisebilder* exhibited similar tendencies. In their form an apparently loose association of ideas, they deliver nonetheless a powerful and decisive liberal message. Because of the conservative political and cultural establishment these works were bound to be seen as a challenge to the status quo. But the most controversial of the works in the *Reisebilder* is known less for its political critique than for its personal character assault. In "Die Bäder von Lucca" (The Baths of Lucca) Heine's penchant for literary polemics led him to lash out fiercely at a fellow writer, August Graf von Platen-Hallermünde. The feud between them apparently began when Heine published some epigrams ridiculing Platen at the end of "Nordsee III." Although they were composed by Heine's friend Karl Immermann, a noted playwright and

novelist of the period, it appears that Platen was offended that Heine would dare to print them. He therefore countered with *Der romantische Oedipus* (The Romantic Oedipus, 1829), a satire of German literary life which included a few anti-Semitic swipes at Heine's Jewish background. Heine, who was especially sensitive about this matter anyway, suspected--wrongly, it turns out--that Platen was part of a Catholic-reactionary conspiracy which had prevented him from obtaining the professorship he had wanted in Munich. His assault was therefore especially harsh and all encompassing. Platen was taken to task for his metrical fastidiousness, his lack of originality, his aristocratic origins, and his bragging. But Heine also attacked him rather shamelessly for his homosexuality. In the prudish moral climate of the times such openness was unusual and attracted a great deal of attention. Heine was severely censured for this impropriety, even by some of his friends.

Although by 1830 Heine had acquired quite a reputation as a writer of both verse and prose, his future was nonetheless uncertain. Unable to live from his writings and unsuccessful at finding a secure position, hounded by the censors for his moral and political views and constantly fearing detention or incarceration, he decided to leave his native land for Paris. In May 1831 he arrived in the French capital, and outside of two visits to Germany in the 1840s and an occasional vacation, it remained his home until his death a quarter of a century later. Heine was exceedingly pleased with what he found there. Shortly after his arrival he remarked that if a fish in water were asked how it felt, it would reply, "Like Heine in Paris." It is not difficult to understand his enthusiasm. In Paris he found the stimulating political environment which was totally lacking in Germany. The French Revolution of 1830 had brought Louis Philippe, the bourgeois king, to the throne, but a spectrum of political parties from royalists to socialists thrived in a relatively open climate. Heine was also able to pursue his interests in Saint-Simonism, a philosophically based utopian doctrine which he had begun to study in

Germany. But another reason he felt at home in Paris was because he fit well into the cultural life of the city. Several good translations of his work facilitated his acceptance into the best salons and literary circles. By the mid 1830s he had become acquainted with some of the most celebrated musicians and writers of the era, and in time he himself became a cultural figure to whom visitors flocked.

One of Heine's principal activities in the Parisian capital was to mediate French cultural and political events to the German public. During the first decade and a half of what began as a self-imposed exile, he was an on-the-scene correspondent for some of the more popular German newspapers and journals. One of the first projects he undertook after arriving in Paris was a series of reports on an art exhibit in 1831. Although many of the paintings on display were conceived before the July Revolution, Heine seeks to uncover the spirit of the new era in these works. The articles, originally published in the *Morgenblatt* in 1831, were collected under the title "Französische Maler" (French Painters) in the first volume of *Der Salon* (1834-1840). In the second half of the 1830s Heine performed a similar task for French theater. In the form of letters to August Lewald, the editor of the *Allgemeine Theater-Revue*, Heine dealt with recent trends on the French stage. "Über die französische Bühne" (Concerning the French Stage; in volume 4 of *Der Salon*), like "Französische Maler," praises progressive trends in France, while questioning German backwardness. Heine's most successful writings about France were collections of correspondence articles he wrote during the 1830s and 1840s. *Französische Zustände* (Conditions in France, 1833) consists of reports published originally in early 1832 in the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*, while *Lutezia*, which appeared in book form in 1854 and is the longest work published by Heine, is an edition of articles composed in the early 1840s. In both works Heine shows himself to be an acute observer of the political and cultural scene. Using more intuition than investigative procedures, and writing in the witty, sometimes associative style

that was his trademark, Heine analyzes various aspects of cultural and political progress in the most revolutionary European city of the early nineteenth century.

But Heine also endeavored to mediate German culture to the French. His two most important essays of the early 1830s, *Die romantische Schule* (The Romantic School) and "Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland" (Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany; published in volume 2 of *Der Salon*) attempt to correct the view of German intellectual life found in Mme de Staël's influential book *De l'Allemagne* (1813). It was especially important for Heine to combat de Staël's favorable portrayal of German Romanticism, and Heine's first essay contains a sustained discussion of and attack upon this current in German letters. *Die romantische Schule*, however, is more encompassing than its title suggests. For it includes observations on most of the major figures in German literature during the Age of Goethe. Indeed, the title under which this work was first published, *Zur Geschichte der neueren schönen Literatur in Deutschland* (Concerning the History of Recent Belles Lettres in Germany), is much more appropriate. What emerges from this literary history--which was one of the first of its kind to be written in German--is a view of two antagonistic tendencies in German culture. The first is identified with the Enlightenment, sensualism, Protestantism, and progressive politics; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Friedrich von Schiller, Johann Heinrich Voß, and the Young Germans are placed in this tradition. Opposing it is a mystical, spiritualist, Catholic, and politically regressive turn to the Middle Ages that Heine associates with the Romantic movement. Towering above both of these, although definitely allied with the Enlightenment heritage, is Goethe. By introducing this typology to deal with German literary history, Heine is attempting to discourage French intellectuals from their admiration of the German Romantics, while simultaneously showing them that

Germany, too, possesses a critical and forward-looking literature.

The identical set of dichotomies structures Heine's essay on German religious and philosophical thought. Heine sets up an historical narrative according to which the spiritualism of the Catholic Middle Ages is gradually eroded by advances in the domain of German intellectual life. The major stages in this erosion process, which is also the path of political emancipation, are the focal points of the three sections. In the first Heine treats Martin Luther's clash with the Roman Catholic church as a pivotal point in breaking the hegemony of spiritualism. By opposing this foreign, intellectual oppression, Luther managed to assist in the creation of a positive and liberating national identity. Benedict de Spinoza appears as the hero of the second section because of his doctrine of pantheism, "the clandestine religion of Germany." Here Heine traces the materialist roots of pantheistic teachings and points to their potentially revolutionary implications. Although the final book deals with German idealist philosophy in general, there is little doubt that Immanuel Kant is the central figure. His *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason, 1781) is likened to the French Revolution; it destroyed the last remnants of deism in German philosophy and made theology in any traditional sense a dead issue. Heine's reading of intellectual life in this work thus posits a basically emancipatory trajectory, and his exegetical practice elucidates the hidden stations on the enlightened road as well as the intellectual detours.

Heine's views were inherently oppositional, especially when one considers the repressive atmosphere in Germany at that time. But he appears to have limited his opposition to acts of the pen. He seems never to have been a member of any organized political group. It must have come as a surprise to him, therefore, when in 1835 the German Diet marked him as one of the leaders of the Young Germans and banned the sales of all his past and future works. The others mentioned

in this official decree (Karl Gutzkow, Heinrich Laube, Theodor Mundt, and Ludolf Wienbarg) were also liberal writers; the conspiracy against the state which the Diet perceived was clearly non-existent, the result of either mistaken identity or extreme paranoia. Heine--and most of the others--protested vehemently against this prohibition, and although total censorship was soon lifted, the ban definitely had a deleterious effect on the intellectual climate for the rest of the decade. Certainly this is part of the reason that the following five years were the least productive in Heine's literary career. Aside from a polemic against Wolfgang Menzel, a rabid nationalist who was one of the most vituperative critics of the Young Germans, and an attack on a group of Swabian poets, Heine published only a novel fragment, "Florentinische Nächte" (Florentine Nights), an essay on folklore entitled "Elementargeister" (Elementary Spirits)--both in volume 3 of *Der Salon*--and a preface to an edition of illustrations from Shakespeare, *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen* (Shakespeare's Maidens and Ladies, 1838). When he collected a few miscellaneous works for a volume which appeared in 1837, he suggested "das stille Buch" (the quiet book) or "Mährchen" (fairy tales) as the title; either would have been appropriate.

Toward the end of the decade, however, Heine once again turned to bolder themes. Perhaps the most controversial of these dealt with the writer Ludwig Börne. On the surface Börne and Heine had much in common. Both were liberal Jews residing in France, and both wielded particularly sharp pens. During the early part of the decade they seem to have recognized these affinities and admired one another's work, but a process of estrangement obviously occurred. By the time Börne died in 1837 he and Heine were no longer on friendly terms. Some unfavorable remarks which Börne made in reviews of Heine's work and in private had increased the acrimony between the two men, and Heine soon seized the opportunity to distinguish his views from Börne's. The result was a book which was supposed to be titled "Ludwig Börne: Eine Denkschrift" (Ludwig

Börne: A Memorial). To fuel the fires of controversy, however, Heine's publisher Campe gave it the unauthorized title *Heinrich Heine über Ludwig Börne* (1840)--a pun, since the German word *über* means both "about" and "over." In the *Denkschrift* Heine sets up two different types of radical positions. The Nazarene, associated with Börne, is narrowly political, antiartistic, petty, and Catholic. The Hellene, on the other hand, appreciates aesthetic excellence and understands that a true revolution must encompass more than political upheaval. Although it is never explicitly stated, Heine identifies himself with this preferred position.

Because of Börne's sterling reputation, even among adversaries, Heine's strategy backfired. He was almost universally condemned for what was perceived as an unjustified assault on a man of unimpeachable integrity. What made matters worse was that Heine had also cast aspersions on Jeanette Wohl; for a time Börne had lived with her and her husband, Salomon Strauss. Heine's innuendos concerning this ménage à trois occasioned a public scandal which led to a duel between Heine and Strauss; Heine escaped with a mere wounded hip. The more lasting outcome of this escapade was Heine's marriage to Crescence Eugénie Mirat. Mathilde, as Heine renamed her, was a poor salesgirl whom he had met in 1834 and with whom he had been living since 1836. Recognizing that he could be killed in his confrontation with Strauss, he decided to provide some measure of security for her, and they were wed a week before the duel in August 1841.

Despite the reception of the Börne book and its disastrous consequences, its appearance marks a positive turning point in Heine's literary career. Although in this book he consciously separated himself from the Republican oppositional party with which Börne was associated, his writing once again became more radical and more political during the early 1840s. This turn is partially due to the altered political atmosphere in Germany during the period known as the Vormärz (pre-March), which refers to the eight years directly

preceding the March Revolution in 1848. With the death of Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia in 1840 and the ascension to the throne of his successor, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, progressive forces hoped for a fundamental change in German political life. These hopes were kindled during the initial years of his reign by reforms in censorship and an apparent willingness to tolerate oppositional views. But perhaps more important for the intellectual climate was the appearance of a strong contingent of left or young Hegelians, who attacked conservative bastions with journalistic enterprises and philosophically informed arguments. Heine was acquainted with the writings of many members of this diverse group, and he befriended for a time the most celebrated young Hegelian, Karl Marx, while he was in his Parisian exile during 1843-1844. Some of Heine's most rousing political verse was written for the radical newspaper *Vorwärts*, to which Marx was also a frequent contributor.

The culmination of Heine's political poetry occurred in 1844 with the mock epic *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (Germany: A Winter's Tale). In twenty-seven brief chapters containing clever rhymes and witty barbs the poem describes a fictitious coach trip from the French border to Hamburg. Heine had traveled to Hamburg in late 1843 to visit his mother, and the stations on his return home correspond, in reverse order, to the central episodes in the poem. Heine's biting satire has three major objects. First, he attacks the German government, especially Prussian bureaucracy and the limitations placed on individual freedom. Second, he criticizes a rabid nationalism which advocated political revolution without a liberation from religious and ethical bondage. And finally Heine takes to task the German people themselves for their Romantic quietism and political acquiescence to authority. To some extent all three are assailed in the central chapters (14-17), where in a dream the poet confronts the former kaiser of the Holy Roman Empire, Friedrich Barbarossa. According to legend Barbarossa and his army are asleep in the Kyffhäuser Mountain waiting for the proper

moment to rise up and save Germany. Heine mocks this nationalist myth and the people who would place false hopes on revolutionary leadership coming from royalty. After arousing Barbarossa's anger by mentioning the French Revolution, he concludes that the German people do not need a kaiser at all.

*Atta Troll* (1847), the other mock epic Heine wrote during the 1840s, has a somewhat different target. The title figure is a dancing bear who escapes from captivity only to be tracked down and killed by a team of odd hunters whose symbolic significance remains obscure. *Atta Troll* represents everything Heine objected to most in the German opposition. Prone to long-winded, empty speeches about freedom and equality, this "Tendenzbär" (tendentious bear) personifies the politically limited, religiously tainted, and ethically backward personality Heine had ridiculed in his caricature of Börne. And indeed, this work performs a function similar to that of the book on Börne. While in the earlier work he sought to distinguish his views from those of an apparent political ally, in *Atta Troll* he endeavors to separate his notions of political poetry from the crudities of the poetasters during the Vormärz. In defending fantasy and the imagination as imperative for successful verse, Heine criticizes the trend during the 1840s to create poems consisting of revolutionary platitudes in rhyme.

Heine's radical phase came to an end toward the close of the decade, and three factors were generally responsible for this change. First was his growing preoccupation with what has been called the Erbschaftstreit (inheritance controversy). Salomon Heine had helped to support his nephew with a modest annual allowance, but when he died in 1844, his son Carl balked at continuing these payments. A huge struggle ensued, and the battle of the cousins was carried out on Heine's part with all the public pressure and private leverage he could muster. Heine eventually secured the money he wanted on the condition that he not print anything injurious to the reputation of his family. Far more important was

Heine's rapidly deteriorating health, a condition which may have been exacerbated by the stress of the inheritance controversy. Although the precise identity of Heine's ailment is uncertain--most commentators feel that it was some variety of syphilis--its effects were all too evident. He had suffered from severe headaches even as a young man, but during the mid 1840s he began to experience more serious symptoms. Among these were paralysis in various parts of his body, including his eyelids, severe spinal cramps, and tormenting pain. During the last eight years of his life he was completely bedridden, and this period has therefore come to be known as the *Matratzengruft* (mattress grave). Finally, the failure of the 1848 revolutions to achieve any of the political goals he so cherished probably dampened his spirits even further.

In this state of physical decay and spiritual depression, Heine underwent a conversion of sorts. Although he had been one of the harshest critics of religion all his life, during his final years he expresses a strong belief in a supreme being. Perhaps more significant for his writing was the abandonment of the sensualist position which had characterized his thought from the early 1820s. While his two ballet scenarios, *Der Doktor Faust* (1851) and *Die Göttin Diana* (published in volume 1 of *Vermischte Schriften*, 1854), the first of which was commissioned in 1846 for Her Majesty's Theatre in London, still advocate a pagan materialism, his later works tend to reject both sensualism and spiritualism as philosophical doctrines. Thus the tenor and content of his poetry from the *Matratzengruft*, the two collections *Romanzero* (1851) and "Gedichte 1853 und 1854" (in volume 1 of *Vermischte Schriften*), stand in marked contrast to both his early love poetry and his activist verse from the 1840s. While there is no decline in poetic craft or composition, thematically his verse now most often deals with the futility of existence and the ultimate victory of evil over good. That each collection contains a Lazarus cycle says much about the mood and content. Despite this pessimism in his later years, Heine did not completely relinquish his

progressive political stance; his later lyrics still evidence a sense of moral outrage at social injustice, and quite a few treat contemporary topics with the satirical wit for which he had become so famous. But a sense of melancholy pervades even these poems, and like the soldier in the war for liberation in "Enfant Perdu," Heine knows that he must count on others who are younger and stronger to fight future battles.

The sufferings of Heine's final years were mitigated somewhat by a woman acquaintance, Elise Krinitz, who is better known by her pen name, Camille Selden, and whom Heine called La Mouche. He met her in 1855, and although Heine's physical state made a passionate affair impossible, the six poems he wrote to her demonstrate his genuine feelings. By the time she had appeared in his life, however, his condition had much deteriorated. Severe cramps and hemorrhaging became frequent occurrences; his pain was regularly relieved by rubbing morphine in an open wound. An end to his torment finally came on 17 February 1856. Three days later he was buried in Montmartre Cemetery on the outskirts of Paris.

**Papers:** The Heine Archive is at the Landes- und Stadtbibliothek, Düsseldorf.

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## WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

### Books

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