

A sepia-toned portrait of Heinrich Heine, a young man with dark, wavy hair, looking slightly to the right. The portrait is the background of the book cover.

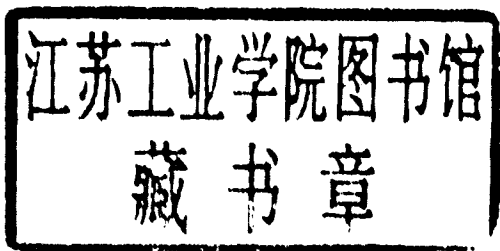
Reading Heinrich Heine

Anthony Phelan

CAMBRIDGE

READING HEINRICH HEINE

ANTHONY PHELAN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521863995

© Anthony Phelan 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-86399-5 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-86399-6 hardback

Acknowledgements

I started to read Heine under the guidance of Trevor Jones in Cambridge, and then found myself teaching him at the University of Warwick. Elisabeth Stopp encouraged some early thinking about his bear fable, *Atta Troll*; and I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service for a scholarship that first enabled me to get to know the texts of Heine's critical and creative reception in the twentieth century, and to make a start on some of the secondary literature; and to the University of Warwick, the University of Oxford, and Keble and Trinity Colleges for research leave.

Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own. I am particularly grateful to the Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, for permission to use the English version of *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine* by Hal Draper.

Chapter 10 on *Romanzero* and the later poetry appeared as a contribution to *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. Roger F. Cook (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002). The Epilogue was first presented in *Heine und die Weltliteratur*, ed. T. J. Reed and Alexander Stillmark (Oxford: legenda, 2000). In each case I am grateful to the original editors for their constructive criticism. Parts of the study were read by Helmut Schmitz and the late Gillian Rose at the University of Warwick, and by Tom Kuhn in Oxford; Martin Swales has always been a great source of encouragement over the years. The manuscript as a whole was read by Rowland Cotterill, Heidrun Frieze, and Michael Perraudin. I am very grateful to all of them, and to a relatively anonymous American reader, for their critical comments, which have corrected many errors and clarified much that was obscure. Some things I persist in – and that is no one's fault but my own.

What I owe to Liz Dowler for her patience and persistence, as we head for an anniversary of our own one year after this Heine year, is more than words can tell.

A. P.

Introduction

1997 saw the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Heinrich Heine, and the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his death falls in 2006. In the fifty years since the centenary of his death in 1956 his reputation, his canonical status, and perhaps even his popularity have been consolidated by enormous scholarly and critical activity. Towards the end of the last century, however, two commentators speaking from widely different positions challenged the prospects for Heine's continuing vitality, both within the academy and more generally in the future of literary culture.

Over a number of years Jeffrey Sammons, Heine's most important English biographer, has kept an acerbic eye on the mounting critical literature. He recently suggested that the intense preoccupation with Heine since the late 1960s has run its course and become exhausted. In response to this state of affairs, he has called for (and contributed to) a fuller understanding of the reception of Heine's work, and a return to careful readings of his style.¹ The playwright Heiner Müller, on the other hand, responded to the award of the Darmstadt academy's Büchner prize in 1985 with a speech claiming that 'Heine the Wound has begun to heal over, crooked; Woyzeck is the open wound.'² Müller's comment acknowledges the disturbance in German literary awareness caused by Heine, and evoked by Adorno's lecture 'Die Wunde Heine' ('Heine the Wound')³ in 1956, but suggests that it has been settled – though not set to rights. The remaining sore point is Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Heiner Müller's intuition was that Büchner more sharply addresses the North–South divide, and the residual claims made on our Western consciousness by democracy, which Müller understood as entailing the social and economic emancipation of working classes, and a solution to the problem of poverty that Büchner summarized as the 'bread question'. Faced with these doubts, the question of what continues in Heine, what lives on to provoke and disturb – what survives two historical-critical editions and a scholarly yearbook – is more important than ever to our understanding of the history of modernity and its current

shadow, the so-called postmodern. It is the purpose of this study to reassess Heine's relation to and articulation of modernity, both as writer and as critic, as 'talent' and 'character'.

Generally the *Modern* implies two historical definitions: within the general period since the Renaissance, the specific development of the industrialized and urban culture of the nineteenth century which extends to our own time. In Germany, the experience of modernity was typically dominated by quite sudden demographic and economic changes. In the latter part of the nineteenth century there was a shift in the German population from the country and an essentially agrarian economy to the metropolitan centres of Berlin and Munich and the growth of manufacturing industry. In the tradition of German sociology these changes are associated with a rationalization of social action and a corresponding curtailment of affect (described by Georg Simmel's fundamental study 'The Metropolis and Mental Life')⁴ and with increasing alienation, secularization, and disenchantment. Heine's experience is, on the whole, of an earlier phase of this development, but in a number of respects he recognizes structures which become dominant in later social formations: the capital-led changes in the intensification of industrial production, and the consequent importance of capital mobility; the social and political significance of the emerging proletarian response; and the collapse of traditional forms of religious belief. Heine's relationship with his uncle Salomon, and his reflections on the significance of Baron James Rothschild testify to his sense of the mechanisms and effects of capital investment; his awareness of the growing importance of the communist movement and its cultural consequences bears witness to his understanding of the democratic claims of the working class beyond the scope of bourgeois liberalism; and the repeated images of old gods in exile clearly address the question of the secular – whatever we make of Heine's personal return to religious belief towards the end of his life.

Heine's importance two hundred years after his birth is closely tied to his self-understanding, his understanding of the process of modernity, and to twentieth-century readings of the forms in which these understandings were articulated. In the first instance, however, Heine defines his position as a modern in relation to Romantic poetry: 'with me the old German lyrical school was closed, while at the same time the new school, the modern German lyric was inaugurated by me' (B 6/I, 447).⁵ He happily accepts this assessment by the literary historians of his own day; and his *Geständnisse* (*Confessions*) go on to identify his recovery of religious belief (the so called 'theological revision') by reference to Judaism as well as the Christian

tradition, and of course in relation to the 'communist' atheism which he has come to abjure.

In this sense, it is also possible to see Heine's modernity as defined also by his relationship to tradition – or rather to distinct traditions. In his memoir of Ludwig Börne, Heine structures his recollections by reference to three contexts: the July Revolution and the political future of Europe, the traditions of Judaism (in the Frankfurt ghetto) and of German nationalism (in the Hambach Festival). There is little doubt that he sees himself as engaging more adequately with problems of politics and aesthetics than his critical contemporary and sparring partner. The figure of Börne is presented as simply old-fashioned, but not, Heine claims, because there is any fundamental ideological disagreement between them. No doubt there were disagreements, but Heine understands his own position as defined by his written *style*.

In turn, this commitment to a modern writing has its own tradition. At the end of the first book of *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (*On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*), Heine identifies the true origin of the modern style in Luther; again and again, in other work, Luther is associated with Lessing, the great literary and critical figure of the late Enlightenment, and, surprisingly, with the classicist translator and poet Johann Heinrich Voß, in a trinity of polemical and democratic *stylists*. Such modern writing has three essential characteristics in Heine's view. First, it addresses the material interests of the present in a way which is combative and adversarial; Romantic writing in the previous generation, on the other hand, which is *not* modern, attempts to combine the national and the religious. Modern writing, secondly, returns to classical models of decorum and genre, while its Romantic predecessor is extravagant. Finally, it is rational, individualist and sceptical. These are the qualities which have encouraged recent critics to identify Heine as a precursor and ally of modern intellectual critique. Peter Sloterdijk, in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*,⁶ endorses his modernity by aligning the modern tradition Heine defined with the representatives of his own 'Higher Kynicism'. Sloterdijk's allusion attempts to harness Heine to the argument of his 'postmodernism of resistance';⁷ and in another quarter Jürgen Habermas has claimed him for the genealogy of the post-war German intellectual. Habermas sees him, perhaps more importantly, as presenting the form in which critical distance and political commitment to questions of German identity can be established.

Modernity in turn made its own historic claims on Heinrich Heine. They are the very conditions of his life and work which bring him

be deceptive. In the present study I attempt to follow the logic and implications of his writing as closely as possible, and to assess it in the light of strong readings in the twentieth century. The first part of the discussion traces the critical debate about Heine in a polemical tradition which Kraus initiated. His enormous anxiety in relation to Heine's style has constantly embarrassed later Heine critics. My purpose, however, is not simply to document this aspect of a difficult reception. Rather, by tracing the development of Kraus's case, its influence on Adorno's centenary talk in 1956, and the counterclaims made for Heine by Helmut Heißenbüttel, it is possible to identify a recurring biographical impulse. Kraus and Adorno need to fix the disturbances of Heine's writing in a corresponding *personality* with whom ultimate moral responsibility lies. Heißenbüttel responds by insisting on *textual* effects, and a formal and constructivist aesthetics which he associates with the documentary and the end of lyric metaphor. This argument provides a framework in which the poetry of *Das Buch der Lieder* (*The Book of Songs*) can be reconsidered as a text directly addressing the possibility of lyric subjectivity. Heine himself plays a kind of hide-and-seek with the expectations of autobiographical reference to make his collection a compendium of forms for supposed self-expression. In a close parallel to this game with self-revelation, the *Reisebilder* or pictures of travel, which first made Heine's name, explore the material and ideological constraints imposed on literary subjectivity.

Heine finds many ways of dismantling the poetic language of selfhood. In a further investigation of the forms in which he refracts modernity for the twentieth century, I examine the serious problems his ironies and cynicism presented for the German poets who established a durable symbolist aesthetic from the turn of the century. Here, anthologies compiled by Stefan George and Rudolf Borchardt show how strongly Heine's poems simultaneously lend themselves to and resist atmospheric vagueness. Within the framework of this symbolist aesthetic, Heine's writing in *Atta Troll. Ein Sommernachtstraum* (*Atta Troll. A Summer Night's Dream*) can be seen to deploy the lyrical discourse of personality and *character* with a calculated political edge. His celebration of 'l'art pour l'art' in poetry written *for its own sake* negotiates the relationship between poetry and politics on the terrain of style and form, and so defends his own art from the encroachments of mere ideology.

The work which most fully theorizes and practises the suspension of the personal in order to maintain the political freedom of the aesthetic is the memoir of Ludwig Börne – a work which on the face of it appears to flaunt personality and private resentments more than any other. In the history

of Heine's reception it has been, strikingly, writers who have recognized the achievements of this notorious polemic. Heine's whole strategy in the memoir quizzically and smilingly upsets every possible assumption about public authorship and personal commitment, so that *style itself* becomes the instrument of the most rigorous and scathing political analysis.

In the third part of the book, Heine's encounter with the urban political life of Paris is examined. The political journalism of *Lutetia* exploits the destabilization of metaphor, begun in *Buch der Lieder*, in order to set in play a stylish political emblematics. To borrow a phrase from Jacques Derrida, Heine the famously 'elusive poet' derives the strength of his encounter with Paris and Parisian politics from 'knowing how not to be there'. Heine's other great encounter with Paris is conducted in verse, in the poems of *Romanzero* and his later poems of 1853 and 1854, and in posthumous collections. In examining this mature work, I first return to Adorno's claim that Heine did not achieve 'archetypes of modernity' of the kind created by his younger contemporary Charles Baudelaire; and then, following a hint in one of Adorno's letters to Walter Benjamin, I consider the ways in which Heine's late poetry very precisely articulates his relationship to modernity understood as the disruption of tradition.

Tradition disrupted continues to define the experience of modernity for the older generation of German poets writing at the moment. Here an epilogue considers the vitality of Heine's legacy in the verse of Peter Rühmkorf, Günter Kunert and Wolf Biermann. Heine emerges as a poet confronting modernity because he engages so profoundly with history, and does so at the point where he is most vulnerable and most exposed – in the secular defeat of poetry itself.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
PART I THE BIOGRAPHICAL IMPERATIVE	
1 The biographical imperative: Karl Kraus	3
2 The biographical imperative: Theodor Adorno	20
3 The biographical imperative: Helmut Heißenbüttel – <i>pro domo</i>	33
4 From the private life of Everyman: self-presentation and authenticity in <i>Buch der Lieder</i>	46
5 In the diplomatic sense: reading <i>Reisebilder</i>	91
PART II THE REAL HEINE	
6 How to become a symbolist: Heine and the anthologies of Stefan George and Rudolf Borchardt	113
7 The real Heine: <i>Atta Troll</i> and allegory	129
8 Ventriloquism in <i>Ludwig Börne. Eine Denkschrift</i>	151
PART III PARISIAN WRITING	
9 Scheherazade's snapshots: <i>Lutetia</i>	181
10 Mathilde's interruption: archetypes of modernity in Heine's later poetry	209

PART IV EPILOGUE

II The tribe of Harry: Heine and contemporary poetry	245
<i>Notes</i>	265
<i>Bibliography</i>	291
<i>Index</i>	303

PART I

The biographical imperative

CHAPTER I

The biographical imperative: Karl Kraus

Heine saw himself as the founder of a radically modern school of German poetry. Such claims have been treated to a mixed reception, however; and Karl Kraus provided one of the most intelligent and influential readings. His virulent attack on Heine's innovative effect as a writer set the agenda for many subsequent critics in the twentieth century.¹ The essay remains an embarrassment;² but equally Kraus identifies problems in Heine that are still difficult to resolve. Chief among these is a failure of authenticity, which Kraus believes Heine bequeaths to contemporary journalists, and his strategy is to insist on Heine's *personal* responsibility for this effect of modernization. Like many hostile critics before him, Kraus is forced to submit to a biographical imperative which will also guide Adorno's attempt at rehabilitation in 1956. Kraus's critique, cast in the terms of his own transcendental understanding of literature, may be allergic, but his response to the peculiar stylistic expression of Heine's modernity is extremely acute.

HEINE THE PROBLEM

'Heine und die Folgen' ('Heine and the Consequences', 1910) is central to a critical attack extending from 'Um Heine' ('Around Heine'), written for the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death in 1906, to Kraus's major essay on rhyme of 1927.³ The continued use and abuse of Heine over this period is striking. Kraus's essay powerfully associates Heine with central issues in modernity, while simultaneously attempting to block his reception. His status within the canon in 1910 is not a matter of great interest to Kraus, though he is well aware of recent new editions. Rather, Kraus takes his stand as an expert on writing ('Schriftsachverständiger') to identify a cultural crisis. He believes that intellectual 'anti-culture' has now taken two forms, each moving away from an unnamed centre. The spatial metaphor soon shifts towards a geographical one in which Germany and France stand at opposite

poles. This confrontation plays a significant part in Heine's critical essays on German literature and thought and on French politics, but for Kraus it is also part of the common currency of his own time. The source of the contrast that identifies France with form and Germany with content is almost certainly Nietzsche's essay 'On the Use and Abuse of History', the second of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (*Untimely Meditations*). Nietzsche attacks the German habit of mind that confuses inwardness ('Innerlichkeit') with content ('Inhalt'), eschewing all outward, formal expression.⁴ Kraus, taking up the German preoccupation with substance, glosses the tendencies as two varieties of an identical weakness – a vulnerability either to matter or to form.

The relation of 'Form' to 'Stoff' is traditionally that of form to content, but Kraus uses 'Stoff' to include the substance of the world or even 'experience' itself. The Germanic 'defencelessness before the material', in Kraus's terms, concentrates on the content of a work of art. The Romance tendency, on the other hand, finds aesthetic qualities in the substance of experience *already*, prior to the work of form. In May 1917 Kraus added a 'final word' to his polemic in which he asserts his own unqualified allegiance to human values. Taking up a theme already touched on in 1910, he identifies in contrast to such values the corrosive force of the commodity. Whatever else his Franco-German terms may intend, they have little to do with differing national allegiances.

The 'German' dominance of content over form is welcome to Kraus because it frees the imagination and poses afresh the question of beauty. In the Romance preference, 'good taste' and 'culture' have penetrated everyday phenomena so completely that 'any Parisian newspaper-seller has more grace than a Prussian publisher'.⁵ The ultimate effect of this, in Kraus's view, is that the well-spring of art in the interior life is obliterated by a universal superficiality. Echoing Richard III's remark about every Jack becoming a gentleman, Kraus observes that when every fool is possessed of individuality, then the real autonomous 'individualities' are bound to be vulgarized.

When Kraus claims that the 'German' mentality makes of art a mere *instrument* for its content, while its 'Romance' counterpart transforms life exclusively into *ornament*, he uses terminology borrowed from the architect Adolf Loos. The instrumentalization of art is the lesser of two evils, Kraus suggests, because it leaves intact the substantial objectivity and priority (both logical and chronological) of 'content'. However functionally it may be conceived, the autonomy of art is preserved, since the relation between

'life' and 'art' can still be understood in terms of reflection or mimesis. The 'Romance' mentality, on the other hand, already experiences the aesthetic in the material from which art might otherwise be made. This is where the complexity of Kraus's argument begins to emerge. If the German mentality recognizes in art only the sphere of its reference – what it is *about* – it must nevertheless concede a kind of epistemological power to the aesthetic as the form in which that field of reference is 'truly' revealed, in the mimetic process. The French preference, the ornamentalization of life, however, dissolves these relations: the relocation of the aesthetic in the sphere of the material itself simply abolishes the mimetic relation. Every Jack becomes a gentleman, and both life and art are equalized in relations of homogeneity. There can no longer be a platform for art because life itself has ceased to exercise any privilege as content. Art ceases to be art because the mimetic distance which makes possible the criteria of adequacy in relations of form and content is closed. 'Every man his own poet' is Kraus's summary, and mimesis has been replaced by mere repetition.

Heine is presented as the symptom and origin of this condition. Yet his dubious achievement is also recognized as the response to a need in the 'German' mentality. Kraus calls it 'a longing that has to rhyme somewhere or other', and the metaphor of rhyme will be cashed in when Kraus discusses Heine's verse technique.⁶ To illustrate his case, Kraus describes the German desire for a direct, if subterranean, route from the realm of secular practicality in the accounts office ('Kontor') to the kitsch 'blue grotto' of a decayed Romantic imagination. The separation of the two is familiar from Thomas Mann's contrast between the bourgeois and the artist, in *Tonio Kröger*, for example, or *Buddenbrooks*. Kraus is much more exercised by the immediacy of the connection between them.

Heine not only brings the 'French' message to Germany, he also supposedly seeks to combine the two opposed impulses. Kraus objects to a levelling out of strict distinctions: form and content, in such writing, are merely contiguous and perspicuous – but where there is no conflict, art cannot create true unity either. Just this *confusion* of forces has been inherited by its worst contemporary expression in journalism, the true object of Kraus's polemic. But within the terms of his critique, Heine's crime is to have rejected the fundamental oppositions on which art depends, to have displaced the boundary by taking on the role of a dangerous *mediator* between art and life, and hence, in a further very striking metaphor, becoming parasitic on each. Another way in which Kraus's point can be understood is to see the autobiographical theme which insinuates itself into

Heine's writing as an occupation of the boundary dividing art from life. Writing for Heine, Kraus's essay suggests, dissolves these distinctions and demarcations.

Kraus's polemic recognizably works with two main metaphors, one sexual and the other economic. The 'feuilleton' of Kraus's slogan 'No feuilleton without Heine' is of course a French word, and Kraus suggests that the impressionistic journalism of his day has taken its lead from a certain ease of writing originally imported by Heine from France. Stylistic facility is evidence of the absence of conflict between content and form. Kraus does not believe that the relationship between the two, in language, is obvious or given. Rather the bond between word and essence ('Wesen') must be pursued in a constant process of critical doubt. If the writer should once 'stop calling the connexion into question . . . the association between linguistic form and conceptual meaning becomes attenuated'.⁷

In French writing, then, and in French culture generally, this sense of necessary difficulty is absent. French is simply lazy in matters of thought. Subsequently the French and German languages will be personified as women or Muses, via an image that comes from Kraus's description of the feuilleton as 'the French disease' Heine brought from Paris, where 'you easily get infected'. In fact Heine is implied in each of these images. The French disease Kraus means is syphilis, and Heine's paralysis during his last years in Paris was widely thought to have been syphilitic in character. From this biographical detail Kraus extends the sexual force of his polemic to a systematic comparison of the French and German languages. If French is intellectually idle, she is also 'easy': she gives herself to any rogue, effortlessly, 'with that perfect deficiency of restraint and inhibition which is perfection in a woman but a deficiency in a language'.⁸ Contact with French weakens the moral fibre of German *Sprachgefühl* so that the most level-headed writer will start to have bright ideas.⁹ German, on the other hand, is a 'companion who only creates and thinks for the man who can give her children'. Here a new element has appeared in the sexual metaphor, perhaps derived from the earlier image of the parasite. It is now clear that the French linguistic and cultural principle is ultimately unproductive. It can produce only phantom pregnancies.

Since Heine, Kraus tells us, German-language journalism, at least in Vienna, can dispense with creativity. Hack-work will achieve the necessary ends: 'German journalists can fetch themselves some talent in Paris as a matter of pure diligence'.¹⁰ The reference to talent alludes to a central theme of Heine's disagreement with his contemporary and friend Ludwig Börne,