PROSE AND POETRY

HEINRICH HEINE

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POETRY

PROSE AND POETRY
BY HEINRICH HEINE · INTRODUCTION BY ERNEST RHYS

HEINRICH HEINE was born sometime between 1797 and 1801 at Düsseldorf. Studied law at Bonn and after his graduation visited London, Munich, and Italy. In 1831 made Paris his home. Contracted spinal disease in 1848 and was an invalid until his death in 1856.

INTRODUCTION

'*The wind of the Paris Revolution blew about the candles a little in the dark night of Germany, but the old watchmen are already bringing out the fire-engines and will keep the candles closer snuffed in future. Poor, fast-bound German people, lose not all heart in thy bonds!*' So Heine wrote near a century ago. What would he say if he could rise from his grave in his New Jerusalem at Montmartre and look upon Germany now, long after his death? For with all his despair of the new order he looked forward to the day of deliverance until the very end. He was born in 1797 at Düsseldorf when the echoes of the French Revolution were still reverberating. His father was a little Jewish tradesman—not exactly the fine figure he pictured, a bit of a dandy, an officer who arrived in the town with a train of horses, for in truth Samson Heine was looked on with suspicion at first by the Düsseldorf Jewish community. But he was extremely good-looking like the rest of the Heines, and he must have had a touch of his son's humour, for when the boy asked him about the family pedigree, he said: 'Your grandfather was a little Jew with a big beard!'

The grandfather's name was Chajjim Bückeburg, which had been adroitly cut down—from Chajjim to Heymann, Heymann to Heinemann, and from that to Heine. The name over the draper's shop at Düsseldorf in the Bolkerstrasse was plain Samson Heine. The shop did not prosper, for Samson in spite of his name was not the strong man of the family—that was his brother Salomon, who became a millionaire. But he was lucky in picking up a wife of better family than himself, Piera or Betty van Geldern, daughter of a Jewish physician. Heine was fond, very fond, of his mother, and made the most of her comeliness and even her culture; but in fact she spelt badly, and though said to be a reader of Goethe, she never cared much for her son Harry's poetry. Harry he was called after an English business friend of the family—a name he afterwards converted into the Heinrich by which he became famous.

Düsseldorf was in those days a little country town with the river Rhine running by and a pleasant countryside within easy reach, and Heine always spoke and thought of himself in his

German moments as a true Rhinelander. The family was not too well off for him to play with the little street-boys in the town, and he picked up from them, no doubt, the bits of folk-lore that helped afterwards to colour his verse. Poets' mothers often have much to do with the real nurture of their sons, but Betty Heine, though she wished her Harry to become famous, had no notion of his turning poet. She did not like to see him reading story-books, would not let him go to see folk-plays, and was angry if the maids told him ghost-tales.

It seems odd to think of his being trained for a business life in Düsseldorf—he even once set up shop, happily without success. His rich uncle Salomon, who was settled in Hamburg, and his pretty cousin Amalie, who inspired him with his first boyish passion, bring that city vividly into the record after the Düsseldorf days. He stayed three years at Hamburg, and then, his father having failed and being unable to keep him, he went with his uncle's help to the University of Bonn. There Schlegel, who was a professor, widened his ideas and gave impetus to his poetry; there he translated poems of Byron, began a tragedy, wrote ballads and *Lieder*, and projected a first book of poems. From Bonn he went on to Göttingen, but only stayed six months, because of a duel fought against the rules. Besides his uncle Salomon and the lovely cousin Amalie, there was another member of his family group on the mother's side, his uncle Simon von Geldern, who strangely affected his boyish imagination. A great traveller, von Geldern had been an Arab chief in Africa, and Heine was so impressed by his romantic story that he thought of himself as his uncle's *Doppelgänger*. He never travelled into the East, but he dreamt of it, and the wanderer's instinct was in his blood. The holiday described in his *Harzreise* falls within his early student days—a delightful vagabond book which deserves to be a hiker's classic.

His third University was Berlin, and at Berlin he met a remarkable woman, Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, a rich and cultured Jewess whose house became a poet's haven to him. There he found a brilliant intellectual circle, in which homage to Goethe was an article of faith. One summer he went to Weimar to visit the Olympian poet, to whom he had already sent his first volume of poems, though Goethe does not appear to have been much impressed. The account Heine gave of his Weimar visit is in his most Heinesque vein. On

getting there, he forgot all the fine things he had thought of saying. 'I was very near addressing Goethe in Greek,' he said, 'but when I found he understood German, all I was able to tell him was that the plums along the road between Jena and Weimar were very good.'

He did not like Berlin any more than he loved the Prussians, and thence he went back to Göttingen where he wrote, besides some of his loveliest lyrics, a remarkable prose book, the *Rabbi von Bacharach*, of which unluckily the greater part was destroyed in a fire. He took his degree of Doctor-of-Laws there, but instead of following up that career, his student days over, he entered upon a much more congenial period of *Wanderjahre* at home and abroad in which Uncle Salomon was still the chief, if at times a grumbling almoner. He went to the island of Norderney one autumn and made friends with the fisher-folk and the sailors—he always had a liking for the folk-life reflected in his poems. We find him later crossing the North Sea to the Thames, as an outcome of which he wrote his *Englische Fragmente*, a book by no means flattering to England or the English. 'Send a philosopher to London, but for heaven's sake, no poet,' he said in one of his proverbial asides. When in London he stayed in Craven Street, Strand, at No. 32. A tablet marks the house, which is little changed from his day, and on a moody dusky evening it is still possible to picture the narrow street of 1827 through which he came and went, not always in the best of humour.

All the while he was growing more disaffected towards his fatherland, where the anti-Jewish feeling and the stifling political atmosphere made the freedom he loved impossible, and he turned his eyes longingly to his New Jerusalem—Paris. But though he felt himself spiritually an outlaw in Germany, his fame was growing there. His book, *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, had won over the younger critics and gained him a place among the mastersingers, and a right to be ranked as Goethe's successor.

Before he had decided the plans for his Paris-exile, he made a journey to Italy, where he spent two prodigal years. Though he did not know Italian, he enjoyed at the Baths of Lucca what was for him, even allowing for some extravagance in the account, one of the halcyon times of his life. While there he shed the last mortifying shreds and rags of his Jewish gaberdine. The Latin and Hellenic sense of beauty drove out what he called the Spirit of the Nazarene—that sense for

which he afterwards found a formula in the Saint-Simonian creed of his New Gospel.

In 1831 he left Germany for Paris, in May, the month in the year when it is gayest. He revelled in the life of the boulevards and the theatres, the sense of being freed from the stigma of the Jew. He said that even the fishes in the sea, if they asked one another how they were feeling, would say, 'Like Heine in Paris!'

He wrote hard there, however, did much journalism, and though not the best his pen could do, he took endless pains over it. A friend, Hiller the composer, who saw some of his MSS., noticed there was hardly a line that had not been corrected and recorrected. He told Hiller: 'I worked like a goldsmith finishing a chain, link by link, one after another, one within another.'

He had begun in 1844 a series of volumes called the *Salon* —after the picture-gallery of that name—in which appeared some of his later poems and his comic masterpiece: the *Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski*, a delicious malicious extravanganza. In it the Jews came in for a deadly mixture of pity and satire, seasoned with impropriety; their Jehovah is the butt of the deadliest irony of all. Yet, immersed as he had become in the current of international politics, he confessed to being tired of it all — tired of politics, patriotism, public affairs, and journalism. He secretly longed to give himself up to his own art, write poems, and follow the bent of his genius. He was poetry's prodigal, who wished to return, but was tied to his land of exile by close strands, more binding than that Hegelian knot he had contrived to cut.

His campaign still went on against the reactionaries in France and Germany. But his attitude was bound to change in his Paris exile; even the tenets of his New Gospel gave way and grew more *convenable*. That did not mean any loss of his provocative powers, and now as if to rouse his critics, he turned Royalist, he, who had so often attacked the kings regnant—just as before he had renounced his Jewish birthright. That gave fresh zest to the deadly charge against him as a renegade and apostate; and he retaliated in kind. His old friend and fellow-exile, Börne, a Jew like himself, had led the attack, and as before in his quarrel with the poet Platen, Heine did not mind how he struck back. Unluckily in this case he waited till after Börne's death to take his revenge.

By the side of Börne, who was honest and loyal to his republican flag, Heine must have seemed turncoat, a moral coward to his old associates. But it was in his temperament to be mercurial and recalcitrant. Every formula he had used he was bound eventually to turn inside out. His most brilliant revoke is to be found in his lyric satire, *Atta Troll*, which he called 'the last free forest-song of Romanticism.' Atta Troll is a dancing bear, droll personifier of the Tendency-poets Heine was out to rout and destroy with his singing rapier. The poem is written in fluent quatrains, some of them as full of echoing consonances as a Welsh englyn:

> Andre Zeiten! andre Vögel!
> Andre Vögel, andre Lieder!
> Sie gefielen mir vielleicht,
> Wenn ich andre Ohren hätte.

Atta Troll he wrote in 1841, during a summer visit to Cauterets in the Pyrénées, with his beloved Mathilde, whom he married on his return to Paris that August. He had come to know her years before when a girl of nineteen—a shop-girl in her aunt's shoe-shop—and fallen passionately in love with her. Mathilde was his name for her; her real name was more imposing—Crescentia. She was a pretty creature, simple, uneducated, who knew and could know nothing of his poetry. For some time, though they lived happily together, he did not think of marrying her, and only decided on it when, his health failing, he was afraid she might be left unprovided at his death; Mathilde, no more than he, knew how to be saving of money, and he had to drive his pen late and early to keep the house going.

When at last they were married, he only asked to the wedding those friends who were living in irregular unions like his own, and at the wedding breakfast he made a humorous speech inviting them all to get married like him. He took Mathilde once to Germany with him, where, not knowing the language, she was extremely bored and unhappy, poor girl; on another visit, when he went over for the last time to see his old mother at Hamburg and his uncle Salomon, he left Mathilde behind and was torn with anxiety and jealousy while they were apart. His mother, whom he had always loved with the profound affection the sons of his race have so often shown, he last saw in 1844—and that was his final good-bye to Germany. He went back to Paris with the seeds of his fatal and prolonged illness already menacing his health.

To turn again to his books, his *Neue Gedichte* appeared that same year, 1844, a volume in which his lyric powers were, if less impulsive, not a whit abated. Before it appeared, he had been writing the series of critical and political articles that make up the prose volume, *Lutetia*. In these he poured out again, all hot, his hatred for the soi-disant Nationalist Party in Germany: 'Howl, ye Nazis: the day will come when the giant's foot will grind you into dust.' The giant's foot was Communism. There again we read, as so often in Heine's pages, a signal anticipation of the later play and counterplay of liberty and reaction in Germany.

He entered on the writing of his *Memoirs* with undiminished wit and almost savage humour when his illness at last made him a prisoner. His eye had all but given out, he suffered from endless excruciating headaches; he was so weak, his body had so dwindled, that he had to be lifted out of bed by a nurse, a negress, his poor legs hung down like those of a doll—when he took to what he called his 'mattress-grave.' There he lay eight years, and during them went on writing with invincible spirit, turning out poem after poem, article after article, book after book. Sometimes he had even to raise up an eyelid with one hand while he wrote with the other; but his latest work was dictated to a secretary.

In the last year of all, he had one alleviation—the coming of Camille Selden, who had long been a reader and admirer of his poems;—*La Mouche* he called her, after the fly engraved on her signet ring. His passion for her was beyond control, and poor Mathilde could not understand his love for this frail *petite* creature who was such an utter contrast to herself. He would have liked to keep 'La Mouche' at his side always. A song of Mendelssohn's kept haunting his ear as he wrote his last *Lieder* to her, and from them we learn how, too late, he felt here was the one woman who could have given him the love and latent sympathy he had longed for all his life.

He died at four o'clock on Sunday morning, the 17th February 1856. His friend, Meissner, said he looked in death more beautiful than any one had seen him in life, and *La Mouche* that his face was like an antique mask, marble-pale, whose lines recalled a Greek statue. His last illness was due to a decay of the spinal marrow, which he himself thought to be an inherited malady: but there is a doubt about the exact nature of the disease. He was buried at Montmartre, and over his grave now is a monument of the Danish sculptor

Hasselriis. I remember going one hot June afternoon to Montmartre to look for it among those melancholy graves and immortelles, and reading the lines engraved on it!

> Wo wird einst des Wandermüden
> Letzte Ruhestätte sein?
> Unter Palmen in dem Süden?
> Unter Linden an dem Rhein? . . .

This volume of Heine gives the reader as near an idea of his work, verse and prose, as can be provided in selection and in English translation. His *Lieder*, his exquisite songs and lyrics, are admittedly all but untranslatable, as any one knows who has tried to put them into English. The mingled subtlety and simplicity of his verse, the deceptive mixed innocence and irony of his prose—how can one hope to capture them in any other tongue? Only the musicians who have set his songs, Schumann, Schubert, Wolf and others, have by their kindred art contrived to interpret, or even add to, his magic. Their settings have indeed tended to mislead the English public into thinking Heine only a *Lieder* writer, while much of his most characteristic work, even in poetry, lies outside the familiar lyrics and love-songs of his early books, and you must turn to the *Nordsee* cycle, to *Atta Troll*, and his later poems, to arrive at the full measure of his art, individual and inimitable. Not only that, you must not be content to read him only in English. This mixed anthology of his work would fail of its purpose if it did not send its readers to the original German. For no other writer so informed with charm and pliancy of style, with Gallic lightness and Hebrew imagination, his old mother-tongue. Long ago, Matthew Arnold, who was the first English critic to reveal Heine in his full power to the British public, ended his tribute with some telling words that may well be added to the record.

> No account of Heine is complete which does not notice the Jewish element in him. His race he treated with the same freedom with which he treated everything else, but he derived a great force from it, and no one knew this better than he himself. . . . He himself had in him both the spirit of Greece and the spirit of Judea; both these spirits reach the infinite, which is the true goal of all poetry and all art—the Greek spirit by beauty, the Hebrew spirit by sublimity. By his perfection of literary form, by his love of clearness, by his love of beauty, Heine is Greek; by his intensity, by his untamableness, by his 'longing which cannot be uttered,' he is Hebrew. Yet what Hebrew ever treated the things of the Hebrews like this?—

'There lives at Hamburg, in a one-roomed lodging in the Bakers' Broad Walk, a man whose name is Moses Lump; all the week he goes about in wind and rain, with his pack on his back, to earn his few shillings; but when on Friday evening he comes home, he finds the candlestick with seven candles lighted, and the table covered with a fair white cloth, and he puts away from him his pack and his cares, and he sits down to table with his squinting wife and yet more squinting daughter, and eats fish with them, fish which has been dressed in beautiful white garlic sauce, sings therewith the grandest psalms of King David, and rejoices with his whole heart over the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt. . . . I can tell you, the man is happy, he sits contented in his green bed-gown, contemplates with satisfaction his candles, which he on no account will snuff for himself; and I can tell you, if the candles burn a little dim, and the snuffers-woman, whose business it is to snuff them, is not at hand, and Rothschild the Great were at that moment to come in with all his brokers, bill discounters, agents, and chief clerks, with whom he conquers the world, and Rothschild were to say: "Moses Lump, ask of me what favour you will, and it shall be granted you"; —Doctor, I am convinced, Moses Lump would quietly answer: "Snuff me those candles!" and Rothschild the Great would exclaim with admiration: "If I were not Rothschild, I would be Moses Lump."'

There Heine shows us his own people by its comic side.

He shows us the serious side in his beautiful poem on Jehuda ben Halevy, a poet belonging to 'the great golden age of the Arabian, Old-Spanish, Jewish school of poets,' a contemporary of the troubadours . . . who makes his pilgrimage to Jerusalem; and there, amid the ruins, sings a song of Sion which had become famous among his people:

'That lay of pearled tears is the wide-famed Lament, which is sung in all the scattered tents of Jacob throughout the world,

'On the ninth day of the month which is called Ab, on the anniversary of Jerusalem's destruction by Titus Vespasianus.

'Yes, that is the song of Sion, which Jehuda ben Halevy sang with his dying breath amid the holy ruins of Jerusalem.

'Barefoot, and in penitential weeds, he sate there upon the fragment of a fallen column; down to his breast fell,

'Like a gray forest, his hair; and cast a weird shadow on the face which looked out through it—his troubled pale face, with the spiritual eyes.

'So he sate and sang, like unto a seer out of the foretime to look upon; Jeremiah, the Ancient, seemed to have risen out of his grave.

'But the bold Saracen came riding that way, aloft on his barb, lolling in his saddle, and brandishing a naked javelin;

'Into the breast of the poor singer he plunged his deadly shaft, and shot away like a winged shadow.

'Quietly flowed the Rabbi's life-blood, quietly he sang his song to an end; and his last dying sigh was Jerusalem!'

Nor must Heine's sweetest note be unheard—his plaintive note, his note of melancholy. Here is a strain which came from him as he lay, in the winter night, on his 'mattress-grave' at Paris, and let

his thoughts wander home to Germany, 'the great child, entertaining herself with her Christmas-tree.' 'Thou tookest,' he cries to the German exile:

'Thou tookest thy flight towards sunshine and happiness; naked and poor returnest thou back. German truth, German shirts—one gets them worn to tatters in foreign parts.

'Deadly pale are thy looks, but take comfort, thou art at home! one lies warm in German earth, warm as by the old pleasant fireside.

'Many a one, alas, became crippled, and could get home no more! longingly he stretches out his arms; God have mercy upon him!'

God have mercy upon him; for what remain of the days of the years of his life are few and evil. 'Can it be that I still actually exist? My body is so shrunk that there is hardly anything of me left but my voice, and my bed makes me think of the melodious grave of the enchanter Merlin, which is in the forest of Broceliand in Brittany, under high oaks whose tops shine like green flames to heaven. Ah, I envy thee those trees, brother Merlin, and their fresh waving! for over my mattress-grave here in Paris no green leaves rustle; and early and late I hear nothing but the rattle of carriages, hammering, scolding, and the jingle of the piano. A grave without rest, death without the privileges of the departed, who have no longer any need to spend money, or to write letters, or to compose books. What a melancholy situation!'

He died, and has left a blemished name; with his crying faults—his intemperate susceptibility, his unscrupulousness in passion, his inconceivable attacks on his enemies, his still more inconceivable attacks on his friends, his want of generosity, his sensuality, his incessant mocking — how could it be otherwise? . . . But on the negative side of one's criticism of a man of great genius I, for my part, have no pleasure in dwelling. I prefer to say of Heine something positive. He is not an adequate interpreter of the modern world. He is only a brilliant soldier in the war of liberation of humanity. But, such as he is, he is (and posterity too, I am quite sure, will say this), in the European literature of that quarter of a century which follows the death of Goethe, incomparably the most important figure.[1]

E. R.

The following is a list of Heine's chief works:

Gedichte, 1822; Tragödien (Almansor, William Ratcliff) nebst einem lyrischen Intermezzo, 1823; Reisebilder, 1826–31; Buch der Lieder, 1827; Epistel an Deutschland, 1832; Zur Geschichte der neueren schönen Literatur in Deutschland (later reprinted as Die Romantische Schule), 1833; Französische Zustände, 1833; Der Salon, 1834–40; Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland, 1835; Heine über Ludwig Börne, 1840; Neue Gedichte, 1844; Atta Troll, 1847; Der Doktor Faust, 1851; Romanzero, 1851; Briefe, edited by Steinmann, 1861; Briefe von Heine an seinen Freund M. Moser, 1862; Aus dem Nachlass Varnhagens von Ense, 1865; Letzte Gedichte und Gedanken, 1869; Memoiren und neugesammelte Gedichte, Prosa und Briefe, 1884.

[1] *Critical Essays* by Matthew Arnold: Everyman's Library.

Collected editions of his works are: Sämmtliche Werke, 6 vols., 1856–7; Sämmtliche Werke, 21 vols., edited by Adolf Strodtmann; Gesammelte Werke, 9 vols., edited by G. Karpeles, 1887; Sämmtliche Werke, 7 vols., edited by Ernst Elster, 1887–90; Werke, 10 vols., edited by Oskar Walzel, 1910–15.

In English the most comprehensive—and effectively the best—edition is that issued by Heinemann in 12 vols., 1892–1905. It contains the prose and poetry and was translated by C. G. Leland, T. Brooksbank, and Margaret Armour. Translations of the verse include a complete edition translated by John Payne in 3 vols., 1911; Book of Songs, translated by John Todhunter, 1907; Poems selected from Heine, by Kathe Freiligrath-Kroeker and others, 1887; Translations from Heine and Goethe, 1912, and More Translations from Heine, 1920, by Philip G. L. Webb; Translations from Heine, by Monica Peveril Turnbull (first included in A Short Day's Work, 1902). Prose translations include The Prose Writings of Heinrich Heine, translated by Havelock Ellis, 1887; Italian Travel Sketches, translated by E. A. Sharp, 1892; Heine in Art and Letters, translated by E. A. Sharp, 1895; Travel Pictures and The Romantic School, translated by Francis Storr, 1887.

Lives and studies of Heine in English include William Sharp's Life of Heinrich Heine, 1888; Heine, by H. G. Atkins, 1929; Heinrich Heine, by H. Walter, 1930; Poet in Exile, by Antonina Vallentin (Eng. trans., 1934). References to German biographical works will be found in any of these three works. Matthew Arnold's well-known essay on Heine in his 'Essays in Criticism,' 1865, has already been referred to in the Introduction.

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A final word is due to the editorial and critical services of Miss M. M. Bozman, in collating and revising the text, both verse and prose.

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PART I—THE POEMS

(*The translators' names are in italics*)

BOOK OF SONGS

THE JOURNEY HOME (1823–4)

FROM 'THE HARZ JOURNEY'

THE NORTH SEA (1825–6)

(*John Todhunter*)