

HEINRICH HEINE

LAST POEMS

CAMBRIDGE
PLAIN TEXTS

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German

Selected by

WILLIAM ROSE



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Cambridge Plain Texts

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PREFACE

The last phase of Heine's life began in 1848 when he took to his bed and never walked again. There had been many premonitory warnings of the coming physical collapse, but though for eight years he lay with shrunken body and much of the time in intense pain, his mind was never clouded, and, after long years when his poetic gifts had lain fallow, he again wrote abundantly in verse, much of which bears the stamp of physical and mental suffering.

In 1851 he published *Romanzero*, the bulk of which, unlike the *Buch der Lieder* and *Neue Gedichte*, had been composed within the comparatively short space of three years. A small number of poems originally intended for inclusion in this volume were printed in the section *Zur Ollea* which was added to the third edition of *Neue Gedichte* in 1852. In 1854 there appeared a further cycle of poems, *Gedichte / 1853 und 1854* (in the first volume of *Vermischte Schriften*), and among his manuscripts were found after his death poems which had been written in pencil, or thought out during nights of pain and dictated to his secretary next morning, when they were subjected to careful revision. Many of the latter were published in *Letzte Gedichte und Gedanken*, edited by Adolf Strodtmann in 1869.

In a letter to his publisher, Julius Campe, on 28 September 1850, Heine referred to his new collection of poems as 'die dritte Säule meines lyrischen Ruhmes'. Between the *Buch der Lieder* and *Romanzero* lay a world of personal experience, of enjoyment and suffering, and during the culminating years of almost unendurable discomfort and bodily torment there rose up from the depths of the poet's soul verses which have no parallel in literature except perhaps in the lamentations of Jeremiah and Job. During these bedridden days and nights he thought much on religion, and in the *Nachwort* which he appended to *Romanzero* he made a confession of conversion to religious faith that has stirred great argument. Lying in his 'Matratzengruft zu Paris', he declared, 'Gedichte, die nur halbweg Anzüglichkeiten gegen den lieben Gott selbst enthielten, habe ich mit ängstlichem Eifer den Flammen überliefert'. It was better, he said, that the verses should burn than the versifier. Heine had not lost his sense of humour, though the humour had become a trifle grim. He had made his peace with the Creator, though his 'Heimkehr zu Gott' had drawn reproaches from his enlightened friends and delivered him up to the anathema of the atheists. 'Ja, ich bin zurückgekehrt zu Gott, wie der verlorene Sohn, nachdem ich lange Zeit bei den Hegelianern die Schweine gehütet.' He felt the need for a personal God, a God with a will of His own,

unlike the impotent God, imprisoned in the material world, of the Pantheists. He wanted a God who could help, a God with the attributes of 'Allgüte', 'Allweisheit' and 'Allgerechtigkeit'. The immortality of the soul could then be accepted as a kind of bonus. Heine stressed that he had returned to a personal God, but denied that this involved belief in any church dogma or enticement by romantic ecclesiastical trappings. 'Ich habe mit keiner Symbolik gespielt und meiner Vernunft nicht ganz entsagt.'

Sixteen months before composing this *Nachwort*, on 1 June 1850, Heine had written to Campe, '...glauben Sie nicht den umlaufenden Gerüchten, als sei ich ein frommes Lämmlein geworden. Die religiöse Umwälzung, die in mir sich ereignete, ist eine bloß geistige, mehr ein Akt meines Denkens als des seligen Empfindens, und das Krankenbett hat durchaus wenig Anteil daran.' Be that as it may, the God with whom Heine communed in his sleepless nights bore the stern lineaments of the Old Testament Jehovah, and as his past life unrolled before him the religious tradition to which he had been born was a force that he could not eliminate from his inmost feeling. When he reflected that no masses would be sung for him, there also passed through his mind the thought that neither would the Jewish prayer for the dead be recited:

‘Keine Messe wird man singen,
Keinen Kadosch wird man sagen,
Nichts gesagt und nichts gesungen
Wird an meinen Sterbetagen.’

In *Romanzero*, the *Historien* are mainly narrative poems or romances, long drawn out, even at times prolix, and only occasionally, as in *Schelm von Bergen*, *Karl I.*, *Der Asra*, or *Pfalzgräfin Jutta*, does Heine recapture the terse, masterly style of his earlier ballads. But these romances are suffused with poetic feeling, and the flashes of humour reveal how unconquerable was this element in his attitude to life and the world, how indelibly it coloured his whole temperament.

The *Lamentationen*, though they contain a poem like *Spanische Atriden* which might well have found a place in the previous section, and a few topical satires, are mainly lyrical utterances of the pessimistic mood that underlies the narrative poems. Feeling is voiced directly. Yet even in the poignant *Lazarus* cycle the poet laughs at times to conceal his anguish. Facing the prospect of imminent death, the longing for what life has to offer has not been stilled.

The *Hebräische Melodien* (a title taken from Byron) are really narrative poems, strongly tinged with satire, which reflect the renewed interest taken by Heine in Jewish history and religion during these last years. In *Prinzessin Sabbath* he expresses the vital significance for

the Jews of this holy day and its power of magic consolation during the centuries of oppression. In *Jehuda ben Halevy* (of which only the first two Cantos are here included), the medieval Jewish poet of Spain, travelling nostalgically to Jerusalem towards the end of his life, becomes a symbolic figure in whom Heine saw something of his own experience.

The *Gedichte / 1853 und 1854* and the post-humous poems continue, on the whole, the mood of *Romanzero*, with the cry of despair rising at times to a sharper pitch or the note of mockery growing more bitter. Of the five poems addressed to 'Mouche', only the last one, 'Es träumte mir von einer Sommernacht', bears the title *Für die Mouche* in the manuscript.

There can be no doubt that the composition of these poems helped to render Heine's suffering endurable, in circumstances when a poet of less stubborn will would have been submerged and silenced.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Full commentaries will be found in the relevant volumes of the two major editions of Heine's collected works:

OSKAR WALZEL (ed.): *Heines Sämtliche Werke* (Insel-Verlag, Leipzig, 1911-15).

ERNST ELSTER (ed.): *Heines Werke* (2nd revised ed. Bibliographisches Institut, Leipzig, 1925-). Only the first four volumes of this edition were published.

The text used in the present selection (from which poems of political satire or merely topical interest have been omitted), is that of the Insel-Verlag edition, in which the spelling has with certain reservations been modernized. It is particularly regretted that exigencies of space have prevented the inclusion of *Bimini*.

The most scholarly biographies in English are:

H. G. ATKINS: *Heine* (Routledge, 1929).

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URS BELART: *Gehalt und Aufbau von Heinrich Heines Gedichtsammlungen* (Haupt, Bern, 1925).

Heine's Letters 1845-56 are collected in:

F. HIRTH (ed.): *Heinrich Heine. Briefe* (Kupferberg, Mainz, 1950-). Three volumes of letters and three volumes of commentary. Letters 1845-56 appear in vol. III. Only the first volume of commentary has so far been published.

For 'Mouche' see:

CAMILLE SELDEN: *Les Derniers Jours de Henri Heine* (Calmann Lévy, Paris, 1884). English translation, *The Last Days of Heinrich Heine* (Remington, 1884).

WILLIAM ROSE

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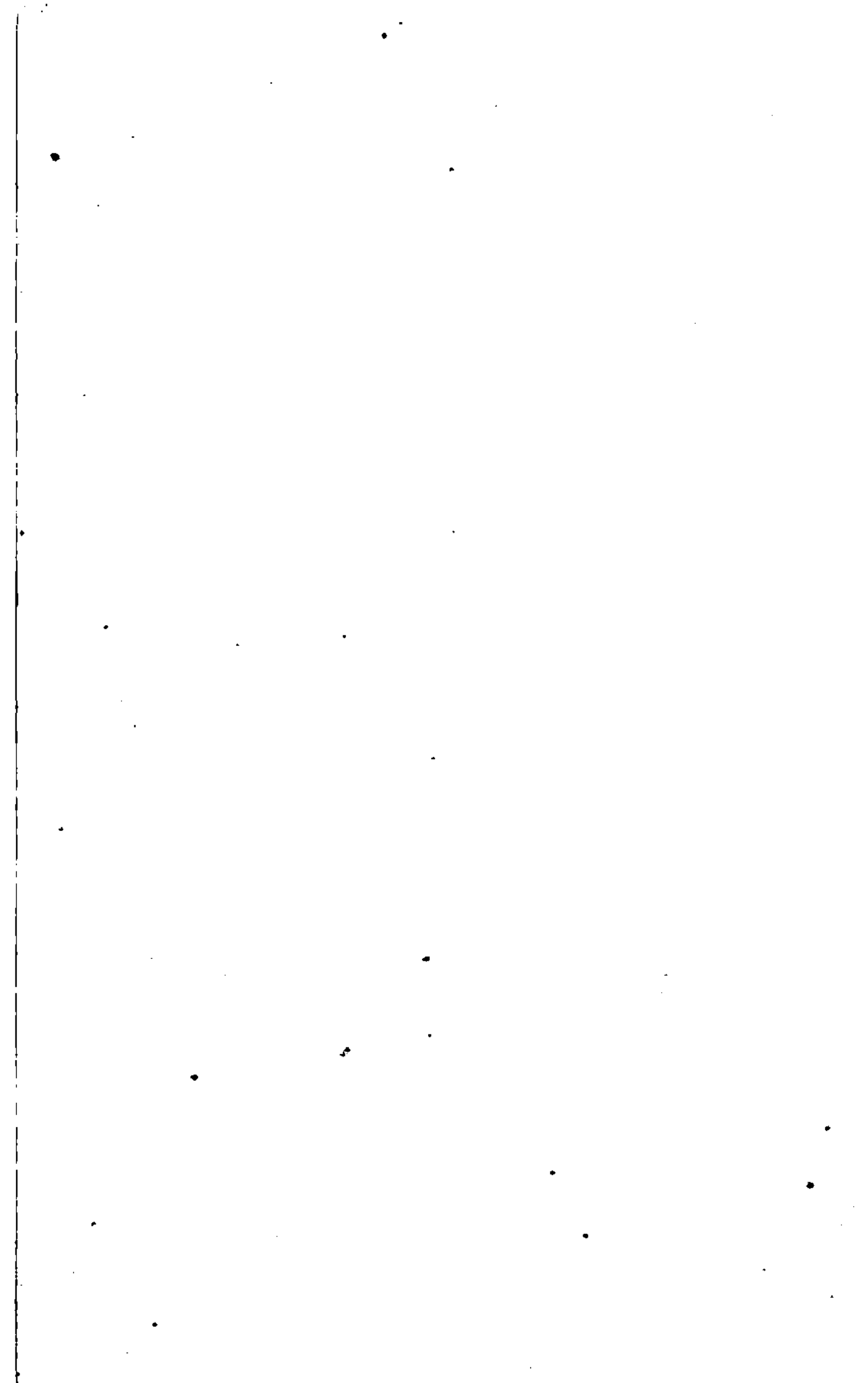
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ROMANZERO

ERSTES BUCH: HISTORIEN

ZWEITES BUCH:
LAMENTATIONEN

DRITTES BUCH:
HEBRÄISCHE MELODIEN



ERSTES BUCH

HISTORIEN

SCHELM VON BERGEN

Im Schloß zu Düsseldorf am Rhein
Wird Mummenschanz gehalten;
Da flimmern die Kerzen, da rauscht die Musik,
Da tanzen die bunten Gestalten.

Da tanzt die schöne Herzogin,
Sie lacht laut auf beständig;
Ihr Tänzer ist ein schlanker Fant,
Gar höfisch und behendig.

Er trägt eine Maske von schwarzem Samt,
Daraus gar freudig blicket
Ein Auge, wie ein blanker Dolch,
Halb aus der Scheide gezücket.

Es jubelt die Fastnachtsgeckenschar,
Wenn Jene vorüberwalzen.
Der Drickes und die Marizzebill
Grüßen mit Schnarren und Schnalzen.

Und die Trompeten schmetternd drein,
Der närrische Brummbaß brummet,
Bis endlich der Tanz ein Ende nimmt
Und die Musik verstümmet.

“Durchlauchtigste Frau, gebt Urlaub mir,
Ich muß nach Hause gehen —”
Die Herzogin lacht: Ich laß dich nicht fort,
Bevor ich dein Antlitz gesehen.

“Durchlauchtigste Frau, gebt Urlaub mir,
Mein Anblick bringt Schrecken und Grauen —”
Die Herzogin lacht: Ich fürchte mich nicht,
Ich will dein Antlitz schauen.

“Durchlauchtigste Frau, gebt Urlaub mir,
Der Nacht und dem Tode gehör ich —”
Die Herzogin lacht: Ich lasse dich nicht,
Dein Antlitz zu schauen begehrt ich.

Wohl sträubt sich der Mann mit finstern
Wort,
Das Weib nicht zähmen kunnt er;
Sie riß zuletzt ihm mit Gewalt
Die Maske vom Antlitz herunter.

Das ist der Scharfrichter von Bergen! so schreit
Entsetzt die Menge im Saale
Und weicht scheusam — die Herzogin
Stürzt fort zu ihrem Gemahle.

Der Herzog ist klug, er tilgte die Schmach
Der Gattin auf der Stelle.
Er zog sein blankes Schwert und sprach:
Knie vor mir nieder, Geselle!

Mit diesem Schwertschlag mach ich dich
Jetzt ehrlich und ritterzünftig,
Und weil du ein Schelm, so nenne dich
Herr Schelm von Bergen künftig.

So ward der Henker ein Edelmann
Und Ahnherr der Schelme von Bergen.
Ein stolzes Geschlecht! es blühte am Rhein.
Jetzt schläft es in steinernen Särgen.

* * *

SCHLACHTFELD BEI HASTINGS

DER Abt von Waltham seufzte tief,
Als er die Kunde vernommen,
Daß König Harold elendiglich
Bei Hastings umgekommen.

Zwei Mönche, Asgod und Ailrik genannt,
Die schickt' er aus als Boten,
Sie sollten suchen die Leiche Harolds
Bei Hastings unter den Toten.

Die Mönche gingen traurig fort
Und kehrten traurig zurücke:
"Hochwürdiger Vater, die Welt ist uns gram,
Wir sind verlassen vom Glücke.

"Gefallen ist der beste Mann,
Es siegte der Bankert, der schlechte,
Gewappnete Diebe verteilen das Land
Und machen den Freiling zum Knechte.

"Der lausigste Lump aus der Normandie
Wird Lord auf der Insel der Britten;
Ich sah einen Schneider aus Bayeux, er kam
Mit goldnen Sporen geritten.