

THE LYRICAL “I” AS INTERLOCUTOR IN HEINE’S *HEIMKEHR* AND *LAZARUS* POEMS

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Abstract

The thesis examines Heine's use of the poetic "I" first in the *Heimkehr* section of *Buch der Lieder*, in which the poetic persona is "ein deutscher Dichter, bekannt im deutschen Land," and then considers Heine's use of the poetic narrator "Lazarus" to govern his late poems written from the mattress grave. While the *Heimkehr* poems bring the poetic persona's disappointment in love together with the poet's own misery at his lack of a place in German literary and political society, Heine's later use of the figure of Lazarus permits a prophetic representation of a particularly modern homelessness: the dissolution of local community and the redefinition of dwelling, which Heidegger calls the basic human act, in terms of ever more technological, disembodied abstraction. In a final step, the later poems, marked by the poet's increased turn toward a second-person interlocutor and enriched by the figure of Lazarus and his literary burden of poverty, are shown to elucidate the most universal human condition of contingency and mortality. The thesis has recourse to literary criticism of other epic poets' use of personal poetic personae and provides close readings of the selected poems while drawing on several Heine scholars to explicate the significance of the poetic narrators of each sequence.

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1. Introduction

The question of a poetic persona or narrator has framed the study of poetry from its origins. The very concept of person started with the Greek *prosopon*, the mask through which the actor spoke to designate a role or “person” in the drama, and from this point onward the question of who speaks in a literary work has governed the communication among author, reader, and the text that brings them together.¹ A starting point for thinking about poetry is the mimetic act and how it grows from the interpolation of another persona between the author and the reader. What happens, however, when the poet and the persona share the same name and history, as in Heinrich Heine’s *Buch der Lieder*? Does this technique make a better or more authentic poem? The question may not admit any objective answer, but it opens up a path for asking more relevant questions about lyric poetry and whether its goals are the pleasure of reproducing reality in “minute fidelity,” as Aristotle says, or the destruction of society through the presentation of beautiful lies, as Plato thinks, or to show the limits of speech altogether as, for example, Paul Celan does.²

The other side of the question of poetic persona is the relation between objectivity and impersonality. The stylized conventions of lyric poetry of any age seem to halt the poet himself outside the gate. T.S. Eliot alludes to this “halting” when he calls the emotion of art “impersonal” and observes: “the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering

¹ See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1843), vol. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), available online through the Perseus Project of Tufts University, <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/Reference/LSJ.html>, s.v. πρόσωπον, “face, countenance”; III: “mask”; III.2: “dramatic part, character”; IV: “person.”

² Aristotle *Poetics* IV; English, *Poetics* (New York: Dover, 1997), 5-6. See Plato, *The Republic* X, 604b-606b; trans. Allan Bloom (New York: HarperCollins, 1968): “[T]he imitative poet produces a bad regime in the soul of each private man by making phantoms that are very far removed from the truth and by gratifying the soul’s foolish part, which doesn’t distinguish big from little, but believes the same things are at one time big and at another little” (289). Celan’s “Todesfuge” answers Adorno’s frequently cited though later retracted remark about the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz. See Adorno’s *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1963).

himself wholly to the work to be done.”³ If objectivity is better served through a wholly fictional narrator, why do many poets, including, as we will see, Dante and Seamus Heaney, choose to people their poems with themselves? The answer cannot be pure narcissism or emotivism; instead, it likely has something to do with the form of the lyric. Here one of the strengths of post-structuralism can be helpful, namely its attempt to identify or recreate ever-new realities based on the reader and his or her received traditions and systems of meaning. From this perspective, the goal of this emphasis in poetic interpretation can be understood as the attempt to defend against the imposition of an immediate authorial voice, as though such a voice would pronounce some univocal *fiat* that trampled the novelty-permitting fictional lyrical form that should instead open up space for the novelty of insight and excesses of intelligibility. This may be a reduction of what Eliot means by “objectivity,” however. The term may turn out to leave room for a re-created poet as well as a wholly fictional narrator.

This paper examines the question of Heine’s poetic persona from both sides and attempts to reconcile them at the end with an eye to the modern condition of “homelessness.” I will examine Heine’s lyrics in the *Heimkehr* sequence of his early *Buch der Lieder* (1827) and then consider the *Lazarus* poems of the *Matrazengruft* cycle written near the end of his life (1851, 1854), each of which offer a good opportunity to consider both sides of the poetic question, personal persona vs. fictional persona, in the figure of the same poet. Is it possible to read one against the other? Of course both personae are “fictional”: the “Heinrich Heine” of *Heimkehr* is no more the author Heine than “Dante the Pilgrim,” accompanied by Virgil and Beatrice through heaven and hell, is Dante the thirteenth-century Florentine. But at the same time, the metaphorical linking does in fact demand some degree of identification. What is gained in these cases when the poet recreates himself poetically? The assumption of a poetic narrator normally

³ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), III.

permits the poet more than a change in point of view, which a debate, monologue, or essay could present as well. The multiplication of persona in the sense of *prosopon* seems to permit a doubling of the poet's existence and so a re-creation of the world made intelligible through the being of another person. The most complicated case appears when the poet selects his own person to be his "personal persona," so that it is his own world and system of intelligibility that is recreated or "re-presented." It is true that one's self is part of "reality," the minute representation of which, according to Aristotle, is our "delight to contemplate." Heine presents a baffling character in much of his writing, whether in his journalism, novellas, mock epics, poetry cycles, or letters; he is the "elusive poet," in Jeffrey Sammons' useful term. The genre of the lyric, however, with its formal demands, makes a more manageable scope. As I will demonstrate, Heine, given his poetry in *Heimkehr* and in the *Lazarus* sequence, serves as a poetic prefiguration of and answer to the modern condition of homelessness and abstraction. The development of Heine's use of the personal and fictional persona accompanies a development in universality and profundity that is able to encompass also the situation of moderns living almost two hundred years after he wrote. Since the question has to do with enduring poetic personal personae, I will consider the contributions of Heine scholars as well as some critical essays illuminating the poetic narrator of Shakespeare's sonnets and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Part one of this paper begins then with the question of *Heimkehr*'s narrator, "Heinrich Heine," "ein deutscher Dichter, bekannt im deutschen Land,"⁴ in order to understand the poetic "I" and its contribution to the poems. Heine is the master of the killing or cutting line, but does the distance between him and his prey result from "surrendering himself wholly" to the work, in Eliot's terms, or rather from an imperfect, not to say self-absorbed "surrender" to his own

⁴ Heimkehr 13, "Wenn ich in deinem Haus," in *Heinrich Heine: Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr, vols. 1-16 (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1973-1997). Poems cited within this paper are taken from this edition, available online at the Heinrich-Heine-Portal, www.hhp.uni-trier.de/Projekte/HHP/.

concerns and misery? The subsequent section examines the “Matrazengruft” poems under the same light: how does the adoption of the impersonal character of “Lazarus” serve the same exigency as the earlier cycle: the expression of suffering and desire (for contingent life and the flesh, rather than for an unnamed beloved) and the poems’ recourse to that expression in an attempt to suggest something greater? These reflections lead to a consideration of Heine as a poetic prefiguration of the modern condition of social homelessness in the final section of this study. Heine’s historical situation (1797-1856) permits a simultaneous glance back at Romanticism, the categories of which were ceasing to be useful to the poet, and forward to the eruption of deconstructionism and phenomenology grounded in Heidegger, Derrida, and Heine’s own contemporary, Hegel. In the same vein, as I shall demonstrate, Heine’s own poetic, personal, and religious exile provides a window into a homelessness more universal than modern existential groundlessness and the lateral category of political exile are able to express.

II. Heine’s Poetic Persona in *Heimkehr*

1. The Difficulty of Heine’s Poetic Persona

Heine scholar Jeffrey Sammons says that misunderstood literary works have an ability to persevere through seasons of critical darkness: “they wait for us to try to understand them properly.”⁵ One such work, says Sammons, is Heine’s *Buch der Lieder*. Published in 1827, the book consists of five parts. Bernd Kortländer notes that Heine wrote only seven new poems for the book’s appearance, since each of the five sections had previously been published elsewhere, and that Heine’s main work for the book lay in editing, reordering, and shortening the material.⁶ Neither Heine nor his publisher expected great things from it, but the book brought Heine and his

⁵ Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: The Elusive Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 27.

⁶ Bernd Kortländer, *Heinrich Heine* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 92.

publisher fame during his lifetime and remains one of the most famous works of German poetry. Praver writes that it “was read and discussed at tea tables and evening parties; young ladies wept over it and businessmen sniggered over its jokes; empresses cherished it; statesmen . . . counted it among their favorite reading.”⁷ It is Heine’s most well-known work and Sammons notes that “[a]ccording to one estimate, poems from this collection have been set to music some 2,750 times,”⁸ a number certainly increased since this estimate was cited in 1969. The commentary and criticism on the work is vast. Sammons made his above-cited comment about misunderstood works that “wait for us” in reference to how the *Buch der Lieder* experiences periodic falling out of favor with various great literary figures and schools.

That a book can wait out such seasons is a remarkable comment on literature as both personal and impersonal, in other words, something that has its own existence, which is a substance given away, but at the same time something only experienced personally by every new reader. The reader does not create the reading experience out of nothingness; there is a text that has been given. Viewed from this impersonal side, the written text is something that the author sends out into the world in its own freedom. It is not the author himself but something separate from him. The reader’s encounter of the author’s work is thus disembodied, or at least stripped of the author’s immediate personality. The author, or the author’s work, does not personally enter the reader’s life but is rather distilled in a text that the reader can pick up or put down, skim or stare at, adopt or reject. This impersonality is what makes the work into a gift that the author must give away in order to put it at the disposal or service of the reader; this separation permits the author to get out of the way, so to speak, of his own vision. The impersonal mediation of text

⁷ S. S. Praver, *Heine: Buch der Lieder* (New York: Barron’s Educational Series, 1960), 9.

⁸ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: The Elusive Poet*, 26.

permits the reader to encounter in freedom the artistic creation being offered without the individual person of the author.

On the other hand, as Sammons says, these works wait for *us* to try to understand them properly. The reception of a work requires the reader's personal engagement and judgment. Someone has to catch the ball the author throws, however long it might hover midway through or, as Sammons says, "wait." The impersonal text requires a personal reader.

Heine takes up this moment of impersonalization between author and reader and exploits it to great, often confusing effect in the creation of his poetic persona or narrator. It seems that the fictional void into which an author throws his work offers either too great or too little a distance for Heine the poet: he "peoples" the void with himself, adding a poetic fictional self to make an additional layer of distance from the reader, keeping the real Heine "elusive," again in Sammons' term. At the same time, while the narrator or the poetic persona is in fact fictional, Heine gives his own name and physiognomy to the voice of the work he then submits to the reader to "try to understand," as though he cannot manage to carry out the final act of "throwing" his creation into the world and apart from himself. Robert Holub writes that Heine's

first-person comments have a variety of different functions in his writings: some do indeed impart information relating to Heine and his life, but many others are included to create an effect. If we want to be less charitable to Heine, then we could simply state that Heine sometimes lies about himself, but we would want to note that his falsehoods are hardly ever without a purpose.⁹

Holub's comment makes clear that it is hard to tell where Heine ends and "Heine" begins. The same question has vexed studies of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Shakespeare's sonnet

⁹ Robert C. Holub, "Troubled Apostate: Heine's Conversion and Its Consequences," in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine*, ed. Roger F. Cook (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2002), 229-50; here, 229.

sequence.¹⁰ Should we see the poems of the poet-persona as children that the parent-Heine never manages to release to find their own way in the world? Is it a form of desire for power or control, not only over his reader, but over the work itself, which cannot be trusted to take on its own life across the void? Or is it rather the case that Heine's poet-persona permits an ever-greater intelligibility of the poetic vision, mediated as it is here by a hyper-"personalized" text rather than by a purely fictional creation? There is no easy answer.

The use of a fictionalized self is a common trope in literature. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is perhaps the most famous example, though there are many poets who use the device to write about poets writing poetry, whether as transparently as Dante or slightly more veiled. As a much earlier example, consider the opening lines of the *Iliad*: "Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,"¹¹ where both the poet and his audience know quite well that although the Goddess or Muse is credited for the song, Homer does all the work. There is also the common image for "writing" of farming or storing or digging in the earth, for example, as Seamus Heaney often takes it up, for instance, in his poem "Digging": "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it."¹² The poet writing about poetry can seem like infinite self-absorption. On the other hand, there is also the argument that the imaginative act of re-presenting reality is the fundamental human act, and that its most perfect distillation in lyric poetry is simply the ground toward which all other human activity tends.

¹⁰ For a helpful illumination of the question of a poetic persona, and of the similarly enigmatical narrator in Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, see Scott F. Crider, "Love's Book of Honor and Shame: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Lyric Flourishing," in *Souls With Longing*, ed. Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin A. Gish (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011), 293-302. Crider points to the ambiguity in separating the lyric "I" from the author: "The identity of the Speaker of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* is a famously vexed question, and I suspect we will never know whether he is the earnest autobiographical William Shakespeare himself, or the rhetorical ethos of William Shakespeare, or the fictional character 'Will'" (293).

¹¹ Homer, *The Iliad*, bk. 1, line 1; trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 77.

¹² Seamus Heaney, "Digging," in *Death of a Naturalist*, in *Poems 1965-1975* (New York: Noonday Press, 1988), 4.

Holub addresses the difficulty of grasping the rules governing the Heine-“Heine” system when he writes, “Heine is even more unreliable about himself when he is dealing with matters that were very close to him personally and about which he had conflicting emotions.”¹³ Although this comment is directed more specifically toward Heine’s prose writings touching on the theme of religious conversion, the point can be extended to determine the degree to which the poetic narrator of Heine’s poem cycles reflects his own concerns. The themes of *Buch der Lieder*, including love, loss, wandering, homesickness, and sorrow, which are particularly significant in the poem cycle *Heimkehr*, are cloaked in lyric forms and meter. It is productive to ask to what extent the poetic persona or personae serve as an additional cloak for the poet himself, given Heine’s own “conflicting notions” about the themes. As the notes in the Düsseldorf edition remark about the cycle, the first poem (“In mein gar zu dunkles Leben / strahlte einst ein süßes Bild”) announces “das erste Leitmotiv der Heimkehr: Rückkehr zum gewohnten Leid am Leben und an der Liebe.”¹⁴ The cycle treats, then, the question of sorrow and suffering in life and love. It is a broad topic and one that, as we will see, Heine takes up again in his last poems from the *Matrazengruft*.

2. *The Weltriß at the Heart of Heimkehr*

The poem cycle *Heimkehr* is the third part of *Buch der Lieder* and forms the structural center of the book. In approaching this cycle I am guided by Kortländer’s 2006 essay, “‘Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter’: Liebe und Unglück in Heine’s ‘Buch der Lieder,’”¹⁵ in which the author proposes a reading of the book as Heine’s attempt to bridge the chasm between the poetic world

¹³ Holub, “Troubled Apostate,” 229f.

¹⁴ *Heinrich Heine: Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, 876.

¹⁵ Bernd Kortländer, “Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter: Liebe und Unglück in Heine’s ‘Buch der Lieder,’” *Heine Jahrbuch* 45 (2006): 59-73. Subsequent references to this article are given parenthetically in the body of this paper.

and the real world by way of poetry (62). “Der große Weltriß” (63) that goes through Heine’s heart, writes Kortländer, is brought by the poet into the poems themselves. The “Weltriß,” writes Heine in another source, is actually a function of the “Zerissenheit” of the world, and it goes through the heart of the poet because the poet himself is the heart of the world.¹⁶ *Heimkehr*, in the middle of the book, portrays the loss of the “romantic myth” in the face of disillusionment and the impossibility of reconciling the poetic and real worlds (64). This opposition reflects the alienation of the individual in society, the disappearance of the connection between the individual and the world, and the dwindling function of art, which is no longer capable of recovering this connection. *Heimkehr*’s structural centrality is echoed thematically in what Kortländer sees as its “Ineinander von Sein und Schein” (65).

What is most striking about this essay is the author’s illumination of the poetic persona, who reveals himself in the famous words of *Heimkehr* 13:

Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter
Bekannt im deutschen Land
Nennt man die besten Namen
So wird auch der meine genannt.

The poetic persona (“Heine”), then, is not only the unhappy lover whose adventures are recounted (and mostly lamented) throughout the book, but also, like Heine, a German poet. The key to the poetic persona, according to this reading, is in the adjective “deutscher.” Although the themes of the poem cycle are almost entirely those of unrequited love, Heine himself warns against reading this common trope too naively, according to Kortländer (61). Kortländer reads the narrator—the “fremde, kranker Mann” (59), that is, the poet in his sickness over the

¹⁶ Heinrich Heine, *Die Bäder von Lucca*, in *Reisebilder*, ch. IV, DTV ed., Band II, 405-06. A gloss on the text explains further: “Schon in der ‘Nordsee. Dritte Abteilung’ spricht H. von sich und seinen Zeitgenossen im Gegensatz zu Goethe: ‘denn wir, die wir meist alle krank sind, stecken viel zu sehr in unseren kranken, zerrissenen, romantischen Gefühlen’ (S. 221, 7ff.) und S. 215, 31ff: ‘eben dieser Meinungszwiespalt in mir selbst gibt mir wieder ein Bild von der Zerrissenheit der Denkweise unserer Zeit’”(ibid., 868.).

“Weltriß”—as concerned primarily with Germany and the heartbreak he experiences at her hands. This may seem too facile a leap, since it simply collapses the narrator into the poet. Is it the narrator who is concerned with Germany, its politics and social problems, etc., or is the narrator bound to the realm of expressing the complex of unrequited love, while the poet turns this complex to the expression of his own more existential concerns? Kortländer tells us that Heine the poet “read his poems as expressions of the positive possibilities of Germany and the German culture; the poems themselves were to him the most striking expression of these possibilities” (70). The article’s conclusion is worth quoting in full:

[I]n diesem Gedicht [Heimkehr 13] treffen sich der Stolz auf die deutsche poetische Tradition (“Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter”) und die schlimmsten Schmerzen, die ein Leben in der Gesellschaft der Deutschen auslöst. Liebe und Unglück im “Buch der Lieder” meinen immer auch und zugleich die Liebe zu und das Unglück mit Deutschland. (71f)

What seems to me to be the most fruitful part of Kortländer’s reading is that it permits a distance to open up between the poet and the poet-persona, who are not easily distinguished, since both are “German poets” and concerned with “singing.” It is true that Kortländer seems to be saying the opposite, namely, that the two are united here.

However, a slightly different reading of the quote emphasizes that the two things “meet” (*treffen*). There can only be an encounter between two things if they are exactly that: two (separate) things. The fruitfulness comes from bringing them together, as in these poems. In joining the poet’s misery over Germany with the poetic persona’s misery over the failure of love under the common, universal theme of “Liebe und Unglück,” Kortländer manages to bridge part of the Weltriß that the poet Heine sets out to bridge with his poetry but gives up as a failure. In

fact, as Kortländer writes, Heine is attempting to ask whether romantic “Poesie” can achieve its claim of reconciling both sides, or whether it only opens up escape paths (62). The answer is grim. Heine says no, the modern world is not capable of doing this, or if yes, then it comes only at the price of truth (63). What emerges from this reading of the failure of the powers of poetry, however, is a view of the poet as able to bridge the chasm, if not with his lyric attempts, then with his own person. In this light, the troubling Heine-“Heine” question seems to permit access to a unity and resolution that a conventional, fictional poetic persona would not provide. The question may not be whether a too-close identification of poet and narrator is adequate for or hinders lyric poetry’s attempt to bridge the Weltriß between the poetic and the real Germany, but rather whether lyric poetry manages to bridge the Weltriß between the various agonized, “elusive” Heines.

Of course, it is not our place to judge whether Heine found wholeness through his poems. The answer could hardly matter less, or be more completely invisible to the modern reader in any case. The point here is in fact to *separate* the poetic “deutscher Dichter” from Heine the poet, precisely in order to lift out and point to the skill of Heine the poet. Allan Bloom explains that the greatness of Shakespeare, for example, lies in his work’s *non*-transparency to himself, commenting that interpreters tend to explain the differences among Shakespeare’s great works by way of “disappointments in love undergone by the Bard.” The genius of Shakespeare, he says, is rather that he “looks at the ancient heroes and love under different aspects in different plays and that each of the aspects is part of a total vision.”¹⁷ The poetic persona should then be at the service of the total vision, and not the other way around; in other words, the suffering, unhappy poet cannot be the poem’s last word. The “total vision” that Bloom ascribes to Shakespeare seems helpful for understanding what Kortländer calls the “Liebe und Unglück” of Heine and his

¹⁷ Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare on Love and Friendship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 79.

persona. The poet and persona can share properties and identities without confusion because the one, Heine the poet, possesses a wider vision and can place the Unglück or misery within a setting of its own. The Unglück can only form the content of a poem because a dispassionate and objective poet manages to see a structure where things can be related beyond or subject to the concept of misery.

Bloom also warns against referring to Shakespeare as a creator or mastermind of society. Instead, he points to the role of the author as that of recording with an “utter absence of didacticism.” Bloom says that rather than teaching or exhorting or attempting to improve his readers, Shakespeare’s “poetry gives us the eyes to see what is there.”¹⁸ If Heine’s poems can bear up under the comparison to Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence or Dante’s epic, it will be because they share in the ability to record problems, not solve them, and because they give his readers “eyes to see” what the poet points to with his works.¹⁹ We will see at the end how this comparison may be maintained in terms of interpreting Sammons’ remark that Heine is a “complex but not profound” writer.

3. Heimkehr’s Use of a Poetic Persona to Bridge the Gap

The question of a “return home,” as this section of *Buch der Lieder* is entitled, can benefit now from a return to the question of a fictionalized poetic persona. As is well known, Heine suffered from a lack of placement. As a Jew, he experienced exclusion from both the literary world of Germany, which was politically dominated by Christians, and also from the attempts to shore up a desired united Germany through a nationalism based on the idea of a Germanic race.

¹⁸Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁹ By way of illustrating the current of criticism that compares Shakespeare’s lyric with Heine’s, Gerhard Höhn draws on a complementary comparison between the two in his study of Heine’s “Kontrastästhetik.” Shakespeare’s role is as “Modell moderner Kontrastästhetik,” according to Heine’s contemporary Ludwig Tieck. See Gerhard Höhn, “‘Sauerkraut mit Ambrosia’: Heine’s Kontrastästhetik,” *Heine Jahrbuch* 48 (2009): 1-27; here, 3.

“Germania” specifically did not include the Jewish element of German culture. Heine criticizes this artificial construct of German nationalism, notably in *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen*, and would certainly not consider it a case of “suffering” to be excluded from what he saw as a craven act of public manipulation. It does, however, show another level of the author’s displacement. He was not a practicing Jew, his Protestant baptism was entirely cynical, he did not practice the law he had studied and, finally, he lived most of his adult life and finally died outside of Germany. In addition to the religious, social, and geographic exile these layers illustrate, he also experienced a linguistic exile by living and writing in France, a degree of displacement that exacerbates the physical exile for the writer or poet, who lives by words.

The first element of placement or grounding that the poem cycle offers Heine-“Heine” (and his readers) sets out from precisely this last level: the language itself. Heine’s use of the *Volkslied* form and Romantic themes and images placed him squarely in the tradition of German letters and all that had enriched, or been enriched by, the last century of German lyric. Michael Perraudin, in his study of *Buch der Lieder*, explains that the references of poems to other poems create a kind of shorthand, by which poets communicate among themselves and their readers.²⁰ Heine’s use of the Romantic apparatus has a double significance: first, not only is he personally familiar with and technically master of the tools and arts of the guild, but second, his age is arriving at a point of saturation and frustration with this particular apparatus and awaits a new direction. Perraud offers various readings of the signs of the times, including one that focuses on a dawning of “materialism”:

A highly restricted range of themes, connected above all with individual feeling, had dominated the preceding decades. Now, with the dawning of a more

²⁰ Michael Perraudin, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry in Context. A Study of Buch der Lieder* (New York: Berg/St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 2.

materialistic age, not only had the expression of these themes become impossible without prefigurations coming to mind, but the themes themselves had lost their persuasiveness; yet alternatives to them had not so far clearly presented themselves. . . . And our poetic borrowing, as the writers of the age as it were turned back on one another for poetic expression, may also be seen as an effect of this crisis.”²¹

Heine found himself here, at least, on solid ground because of his genius: whatever ambiguity his professional, social, and religious life displayed, his mastery of the lyric form and ability to turn it to new directions could provide a fixed point from which other areas of his life could be illuminated and oriented.

Dante and Seamus Heaney appeared earlier as examples of other poets whose poems feature personal poetic personae. Interestingly, they also share Heine’s background or “ground” of social rootlessness. Dante, of course, wrote the *Divine Comedy* in deep longing for the Florence from which he was exiled, a lovesickness that appears often in the text. Heaney was born and raised a Catholic in the strongly anti-Catholic Northern Ireland. His experience of not belonging in this milieu creeps regularly into his poems, as does the displacement he experienced as a schoolboy going off to academia and leaving the farming and cattle-dealing of his parents and heritage. Is there a link between “rootlessness” and the use of a poet persona? Heine writes at the beginning of what we call the modern period, a period that is often referred to as characterized by “homelessness.”²² This homelessness, beyond physical displacement or exile, is the subject of much work by American essayist and novelist Wendell Berry, and by the

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² See, for instance, Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 319-39, where the author discusses “the plight of dwelling” (339). I will discuss this text further below.

American philosopher David L. Schindler, who describes this notion of modern homelessness in dialogue with Berry's work:

[A] key to understanding contemporary American culture lies in its homelessness: homelessness, that is, understood first not as an affliction of a discrete group of people living in the streets but precisely as the modern condition of being or style of life (it is of course crucial to see that the two are intrinsically related [. . .]) Homelessness [. . .] consists in an abstract and mechanistic pattern of being, thinking, acting, and producing that makes human beings rootless . . .”²³

This “rootlessness” is what Heine’s poems shine a light upon, a hundred and fifty years before it will characterize the modern condition. Families attempt to provide young people a stable home from which to go out independently into the world, as though individual identity must first be with or from something, before it can be *for* something. It may be the case that the sensitive poetic soul experiencing rootlessness or homelessness in society perceives that its “first” creation was a fallen one, and so turns its mimetic powers to a second or re-creation of itself.

This question of the wound of homelessness opens up interesting paths for thinking about an author’s objectivity. Is a poetic process whose main goal is the healing of the author’s own Weltriß able to achieve the universality that good poetry is said to display, that is, the reproduction of a common human experience in meter and images? It would be easy to say no, that the reader is being more or less manipulated into serving as the audience for the poet’s personal therapy. But on the other hand, who does not suffer from a Weltriß of some kind, from a longing for a coherent home or welcoming ground of fundamental meaning? The difference

²³ David L. Schindler, “Homelessness and the Modern Condition: The Family, Community, and the Global Economy,” *Communio* 27 (Fall 2000): 411-30; here, 415.

between the exiled creators of poetic personae and the rest of modern homeless humanity is only one of degree.

There is another way to view the use of a poetic persona: as a confirmation of the goodness of finitude and individuality. In this regard, the use of the poetic persona is more a hymn in praise or affirmation of “myself,” or of the poetic beloved, than it is a literary device. The poem remains more closely on the side of the “giver” than to the reader-recipient. This is very clearly seen in the case of Dante and his Beatrice-“Beatrice”: the figure of Beatrice in the *Commedia* would remain pleasant, but not at all so powerful an image of a great love, if she were not actually a woman who lived. The poet is able to use her as an image for universal blessedness specifically because of her mortal particularity. In this case, the artist’s powers pick up the reality and “poetify” her into infinity. Her spiritual or poetic virtue depends in the first place on her literality. Charles Williams describes the failure of Dante readers who attempt to separate “Beatrice” from Beatrice by interpreting her only allegorically or spiritually:

The allegorists are those who, at the point of the *Commedia*, deny altogether the moral identity of Beatrice, and turn her wholly into Theology or Divine Grace or what not. Her smiles are, for them, always metaphorical; her anger is abstract and not feminine; her teasing—but for them she does not tease. She is unblooded and exalted, but at least she remains defined. In the spiritualizers, however, she becomes so dim that she is, in fact, nothing but a kind of vapour of the soul, a mist that goes up out of the ground of the heart.²⁴

What these readers miss, Williams seems to be saying, is the fact that Beatrice’s allegorical and spiritual powers depend on her finitude and mortality first. It is no use to try to read or love Beatrice “according to the spirit” if one has not read or loved her first according to the letter. The

²⁴ Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), 101.

very “definition” of the thing not only permits, but enables in the first place, the subsequent rounds of interpretations. The relevance of this question of Beatrice, and the comment from Williams, to the study of *Heimkehr* has to do with the question of Heine’s interlocutor. What is it that the poet is able to do for the two things he brings together in the fruitfulness discussed earlier, and which Kortländer argues that Heine unites under the themes of love and misery?

4. Approaching the Poems

In light of Kortländer’s identification of Heine’s poetic mission as both demonstrating the disappearance of love through alienation and overcoming that alienation in his own person, we turn now to the poems themselves, to see how the unity between the poet and the poetic persona illuminates or is itself illuminated by Heine’s lyric skill “im Wohllaut und vollendeter sprachlichen Perfektion.”²⁵ I have chosen several poems that exemplify the poetic persona’s encounter with the polis, with his disappointing beloved, and with the current state of poetry, the dust of which he is in the process of shaking from his sandals.

Poem 17 (“Sei mir gegrüsst, du große, / Geheimnisvolle Stadt”) appears after an initial sequence of love poems set in nature. There are images of the moon, the sea, the woods, ships, fog, the wind, and always the woman. Now comes the city (“Sagt an, ihr Türme und Tore, Wo ist die Liebste mein?”) in opposition to these natural images and settings. The poem directly preceding this one shows the city in the distance, the place where the poetic persona lost his beloved. Here the voice addresses the city directly: greeting it as the mysterious place that had once contained his love. The romantic images were bound up immediately with the person of the beloved; she appeared among them as one of them. Here the city, the towers and the gate permit a barrier and an objective distance to appear between the poet-persona and the lost beloved. It is

²⁵ Kortländer, “Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter,” 65.

in some ways an introduction of his *affaire* into the affairs of the polis: they are no longer alone in the woods but in the squares and marketplace. The passion becomes public in the sense of being brought into the community. The importance of place and community comes sharply into view at this stage of the cycle.

Poem 32 (“Hat sie sich denn nie geäußert / Über dein verliebtes Wesen?”) is remarkable because it puts the poet-persona on the defensive, so to speak, and in the position of having to answer to a conversation rather than to muse alone or to apostrophize. The speaker asks the poet-persona whether the beloved had never expressed her feelings to him; whether he had never read love in return in her eyes; whether he had never managed to see into her soul. The speaker chides the poet-persona that he is not usually such a fool in these things. The reproach itself is full of interesting aspects, but more important is the structural turn. The poet-persona now has an interlocutor. He is no longer alone with his barren passion but must be subjected to a measuring rule that sizes him up and pronounces relentlessly. The homeless or wandering man is devoid of such an objective, measuring standard; without a community, he is left to his own devices to make sense of entirely self-referential passions and inclinations. The poet-persona can find relief here in being subject to a greater whole that can give intelligibility to his experience.

Before discussing the next poem (55), it is important to note that poem 44 forms the center of the sequence of 88 poems. This poem begins: “Nun ist es Zeit, dass ich mit Verstand, / Mich aller Torheit entledge; / Ich hab so lang als ein Komödiant / Mit dir gespielt die Komödie.” This seems to announce a change in the poet-persona’s approach to himself and to his poems. Subsequent poems reveal a changed stance toward the beloved. He grows impatient with his project. Since we have identified his “project” as in some way “himself,” perhaps it is time for the project to expand and be made truly universal or, as we said in the beginning, “free.”

In poem 55 (“Ich wollte bei dir weilen, / Und an deiner Seite ruhn”) we see the lover taking a step back from the beloved, who, busy with many things, hurries away from him (“Du mußttest von mir eilen”) and laughs at his assurance that his soul is wholly given over to her. The reaction of the beloved increases in levels of rejection: first she hastens away, then she laughs, but in the third stanza she definitively refuses (*verweigert*) to kiss him at the end of it all. The opening lines are particularly pertinent to our theme: the speaker wishes simply to dwell in her company, to be at peace in her presence. But even this is denied him. She runs away, but it is he who must now move along in search of a place to be at home. The bitterness of the fourth stanza is all the more expressive in light of the double love being rejected: the poet and his persona are both accustomed to rejection. The end can be read as a weary, final, denigration of the beloved—maybe he really did not love or need her so much after all—but it may also be read simply as acceptance of the ongoing grim reality of isolation without despair. This is the most significant opening the poem sequence displays toward where German poetry, not just this particular German poet, might be going. The Romantic tropes of “weilen” and “Seelen” and all that they carry, have come up empty. Where or to whom he turns next is not clear, but something has to change for the sake of the underlying coherence of the entire project. If someone or something is to be loved, this cannot be the extent of it. The poet opens up space for a greater novelty, space for him and for us to wait for it.

At this point we can now indicate a double generosity enabled or set forth by the original rootlessness. First, Heine-“Heine’s” separation from Germany permits the country to assume an elevated place in the poet’s and the poem cycle’s consciousness. If Heine were just another patriotic poet there would be no reason for this long, agonized conversation with and about the land that rejects him. In taking up the theme of Germany, particularly the “idealized” version of

it that Kortländer identifies as the poem's burden, Heine permits its finitude and its particularity to be taken with complete seriousness, both by him and by the reader. To put it in other terms, if Heine did not take so much trouble about the particular Germany he loved, it would have easily become a land of "vapor," as Williams said of Beatrice. The poet might just as well have loved anyplace, or no place. But he permits the blemished Germany to form his starting point and poetic vehicle. The second register of generosity is toward the reader, and here we return to the question of the poetic persona of "Heine." The love for, or perhaps longing for, the Germany (under the guise of the beloved), that should have been his home, seems to require no less a lover than a version of "Heine" himself: no purely fictional narrator or persona could have done justice both to the land and to the misery. Here Heine is generous to his readers by being generous with himself: as "elusive" and "conflicted" as the poet may be, it is nevertheless some version of himself that he chooses to throw across the void between himself and his reader and so fill with himself the gaping moment of impersonalization. In some way he wishes not to leave us alone, but rather to be personally with us as we take up his work that has been "waiting for us." It would be useful in this respect to study Heine under the light of modern exile studies. To what degree do authors in exile write in order to educate, propagandize, vent, or joke about the system that exiled them, and to what degree does an exile's work serve as the lonely author's craving for an interlocutor? The former can only pass away as secondary. The work as an expression of desire, however miserable, or, using the biblical term, "lamentation," for a beloved or a homeland, holds an educative gift out to the reader in the most liberal sense: the ever-new presentation of the *humanum* in its diverse and novel appearances. We will turn now to consider Heine's own cycle of "Lamentations" and what the level of impoverishment and misery in these poems have to offer for understanding our own particularly modern "homeless" situation.

III. Matrazengruft: A New Misery, a New Persona

1. "Lazarus" as the Poetic "I"

The previous section focused on the specific contribution that the use of a personal narrator, "Heinrich Heine," makes to the structure of *Heimkehr*. A fictionalized persona might serve to exorcize the poet's experience of displacement, to counteract his political exile, or to create a bridge between the idealized world of poetry and the real Germany that expelled him. More compellingly, the use of a poetic persona and his bitter interaction with Germany permits partaking of the actual reality of the subjects as a basis for the figures' subsequent poetic existence. It could seem a form of poetic laziness to latch onto the given reality of a character as the ground of poetic creation. Under another light, however, setting out from an already-existing figure might represent a closer approximation of poetics on the whole. One may or may not agree with Aristotle that a good lyric is the one that imitates reality or human experience most perfectly, but no author, however radical, starts out from nothingness; there is always a common experience, even if it is only the fact of being embodied in the world, with all the limits and contingencies this entails.

The question of the poetic persona makes a jumping-off point for judging the excellence of Heine's poems themselves. Is it possible to speak today of poems being objectively "better" than others, and does a fictionalized poetic persona make for a better poem? To answer this question, we turn now to the poem cycle Heine wrote at the end of his life, the "Lazarus" or "Matrazengruft" poems. Jocelyn Kolb's illumination of "Die Lorelei" and the structure of *Buch der Lieder* ("the last strophe illuminates the first"²⁶) offers a helpful analysis for understanding Heine's structural use of irony to increase degrees of intelligibility in his poetry, which, by

²⁶ Jocelyne Kolb, "Die Lorelei oder die Legende um Heine" in *Interpretationen. Gedichte von Heinrich Heine*, ed. Bernd Kortländer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), 51-71; here, 63.

extension, can justify turning to the later poems in order better to understand the earlier: What is true for the individual poem serves *a fortiori* to explicate the progression of the poetic persona through the two cycles.

The “Lazarus” poems appeared in two separate places. The first twenty poems were published in the cycle “Lamentationen” of *Romanzero* (1851), and the next eleven, “Zum Lazarus,” were published in Heine’s *Vermischte Schriften* (October 1854).²⁷ The “Lazarus” who frames the poems is the beggar of Luke 16, who sits at the gate of the rich man’s mansion and begs for scraps while dogs lick his sores in compassion. The character serves as a foil for “Dives,” the rich man who looks past the beggar and suffers eternal torments in hell while Lazarus is taken to Abraham’s bosom. Significant for the poems is the turn from the narrator of “Heinrich Heine,” the poet “bekannt im deutschen Land,” to the poor figure of Lazarus who lacks any goods or position at all. Elliot remarks that “the persona of Lazarus is a useful device (among others, like the matter-of-fact tone and the willful contemporaneity) to get rid of that taint of the merely egocentric which the first-person poet (let alone the life-long political satirist) had always avoided.”²⁸

To call the first-person poet “egocentric” argues against the interpretation suggested above, that to use one’s own self to form the bridge between two worlds, or to people the poetic void, could be understood as a form of generosity. It does not follow, however, that the two (egocentrism and generosity) are irreconcilable. If Kolbe is right that “the last strophe [here, of Heine’s work itself] illuminates the first,” then the poetic narrator of the earlier poems can be

²⁷ For a helpful overview of the history behind the Lazarus poems and their figures, see Alistair Elliot’s “Introduction” to his translation of the poems in Heinrich Heine, *The Lazarus Poems*, with English versions by Alistair Elliot (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1979), 1-4. Elliot argues for the structural coherence of the two segments: “[T]here is a technical point that would seem to show conclusively that these poems were not put together casually, but composed as a group: the twenty poems of ‘Lazarus,’ so many of them in quatrains, are actually in eighteen different metres or rhyme-schemes; and there are five still further different arrangements in the eleven ‘Zum Lazarus’ poems. Such variety implies careful planning” (3).

²⁸ Elliot, “Introduction,” 2.

taken up and elucidated in light of Lazarus, who communicates his particular and ontological poverty retroactively over both voices. If “Heine” suffered from romantic love, expanded by Kortländer to an interpretation of misery over Germany and poetic exile, then what greater “Liebe und Unglück” can the poverty and misery of Lazarus be held up to mirror? It seems that the third-person intervention between poet and poem permits a greater degree of perspective for the content of the poem to emerge, whether it is to be universally pleasing or only personally cathartic. The question is complicated by the fact that the speaker of the “Lazarus” poems often reveals himself as a version of “Heine” himself as well. Or, at any rate, the narrator emerges as a sick poet pushing up against limits and barriers. In this case, it is interesting to ask whether it is the physical sickness that the poor beggar Lazarus is best able to image and “re-present,” or whether it is more basically the poverty of the poetic vision and voice that Lazarus serves to illustrate. The sickness may be entirely incidental; all poets may be Lazarus outside the gate of intelligibility and vision, and in the end we all might be the poor beggar waiting at the pleasure of both life and death. As Sammons observes, “In [Romanzero] Heine’s own experience of defeat and suffering radiates into a vision of life and history. . . . Yet in the ingenuity, color, and pungency of the poetry itself there is resistance; in voicing the lament and defiance of the flayed creature, the poet speaks out for humanity.”²⁹ If, as we suggested in the first section, the poetic act is a fundamentally human act of representing reality, the stance of the beggar is even more fundamentally the human condition and a door opening up to a more profound vision of human experience than that opened by the image of the exiled poet. The progression from “Heinrich Heine” to “Lazarus” illumines a progression from a poetic explication of “doing” to one of “being.”

²⁹ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography*, 311.

2. *The Mattress Grave: The Poet Divested of Autonomy*

We saw in the earlier sequence that the poetic narrator is on the hunt throughout for a home, whether simply to be in accord with the beloved, in her presence in society, or in a fortified community after wandering in nature. In the “Lazarus” poems, too, the narrator seeks something. Let us look at some of the poems to trace the trajectory of this desire.

The first poem, “Weltlauf,” contains a veiled reference to another Gospel text: “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him” (Mt 25:29) and its parallel, “For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him” (Mk 4:25). The first stanza of “Weltlauf” concludes: “Wer nur wenig hat, dem wird / Auch das wenige genommen.” The biblical text is mysterious; it is difficult to reconcile a generous God with the simultaneous enriching and divesting that the texts portray. The text from Mark is preceded by the admonition, “By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more will be given you besides,” which offers a clue into its meaning: the “divestment” is not arbitrary but linked in some way to the subject’s own initiative. The problem faced by the narrator of the Lazarus poems is not one of timidity in grasping, but rather that the vital forces of his own body are failing. Here at the beginning of the cycle the reader does not yet know what the “wenig” is that the speaker lacks, but it turns out to be the simple physical motion and control that permits independent action. Without this “wenig,” the speaker indicates, it is better not to be: “Wenn du aber gar nichts hast, / Ach, so lasse dich begraben.”

The second poem, “Rückschau,” immediately takes up the theme of physical delight and enjoyment of the world. The present sorrow is understood through recalling (the poem’s title is literally, “Looking back,”) what the speaker can no longer manage: “Ich habe gerochen alle

Gerüche / In dieser holden Erdenküche; / Was man genießen kann in der Welt, / Das hab ich genossen wie je ein Held!” The speaker’s removal from the delightful experiences is expressed through their ironical, measured, often hilarious description: “Es ward mir so selig zu Sinne dabei, / So dämmerüchtig, so sterbefaul— / Mir flogen gebratne Tauben ins Maul, / Und Englein kamen, und aus den Taschen / Sie zogen hervor Champagnerflaschen—.” The difference between the days of languor and pleasure and the poetic “now” is expressed precisely through the lack of mobility. Where before it was bliss for him to laze about with roasted pigs hastening to him through the air, he is now laid, or “propped,” on the ground: “Jetzt lieg ich auf feuchtem Rasen, / Die Glieder sind mir rheumatisch gelähmt, / Und meine Seele ist tief beschämt. . . . Jetzt bin ich müd vom Rennen und Laufen, / Jetzt will ich mich im Grabe verschnaufen.” Having lost the “wenig” of bodily independence, the speaker would rather give up the whole. His wishes in this second poem express a direct correlation to the description of the way of things in the first: from those who have little, the rest will be taken. The second poem is a kind of amen to this decree. The immobility of desire in this sequence offers a sharp contrast to the peripatetic narrator of *Heimkehr*. We will see that these last poems, too, are governed by a “Heimkehr”: a return to being at home in the flesh, now dying, and a new love for the world, which is now passing away.

The third poem, however, “Auferstehung,” takes up the theme of transfigured mobility at the end of the world, when the trumpet blares and “Die toten steigen aus der Gruft, / Und schütteln und rütteln die Glieder. // Was Beine hat, das trollt sich fort, / Nach Josaphat, dem Sammelort.” Here the mobility is returned, but the bodies do not follow their own direction. Instead another mind and will moves them on to where they will be judged: “Das Böcklein zur Linken, zur Rechten das Schaf, / Geschieden sind sie schnelle; / Der Himmel dem Schäfchen

fromm und brav, / Dem geilen Bock die Hölle!” The cascading dactyls and their subsequent quick iambs give a sing-song, whimsical sense to the talk of judgment and damnation, undercutting its weight and returning the focus to the speaker’s present state of misery—quietly, thereby underscoring that his power remains to poeticize and re-shape reality as it pleases him.³⁰

This remaining, overmastering power of the speaker, clearly set aside as “Lazarus,” to dominate the physical reality of suffering and regurgitate it in ironic meter and irreverent rhyme, appears, strangely, to reveal the genius of the poet Heine more clearly than the earlier poems of *Buch der Lieder*, which were set forth under his own shadow through the poetic narrator of “Heinrich Heine.” The reason may be that Heine had found a more fitting medium in suffering, death, and unsettling deflation of the Romantic idea, than the earlier form of unrequited love permitted. Gerhard Kaiser’s recent article on “Lazarus als Lyriker” provides a helpful insight into understanding the poems as a triumph over Romanticism by way of what he calls, in conversation with Adorno, the “wound” of Heine:

Das ist die Wunde Heine, von der Adorno spricht: die zu glatte Beherrschung der Standards lyrischer Sprache. Heine erlaubt sich nicht, was zumindest seit der Zeit Goethes in Deutschland zum Bild des Dichters, vor allem des Lyrikers, gehört: eine Sprache des Ausdrucks, die das geläufige Wort und die geläufige Erfahrung zwar aufnimmt, aber sie durchstösst und nach dem völlig Eigentümlichen tastet.³¹

The particular “Eigentümliche” of Heine’s persona in these poems is suffering and divestment of all power and self-sufficiency. Such an experience was not to be romanticized or sublimated, but

³⁰ Heine criticism shows a tendency to overlook the poet’s actual skill with the language, in favor of addressing various aspects of exile or reception theory. Some scholars call for a renewed appreciation of Heine’s lyrical style. See Gerhard Höhn, “Sauerkraut mit Ambrosia,” 1 and Bernd Kortländer, “Vorbemerkung” to *Interpretationen: Gedichte von Heinrich Heine* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), 8-9.

³¹ Gerhard Kaiser, “Lazarus als Lyriker: Über das lyrische Werk Heinrich Heines,” *Heine Jahrbuch* 43 (2004): 62-98; 63.

rather shown to be the “banal reality” that it was, by way of a constant decrescendo and unexpected reversal or deflation:

Der romantische Geist dementiert also seine Aussagen aus Kraftgefühl. Bei Heine richtet sich das Dementi gegen die Poetisierung, weil die Welt ganz anders ist. Die romantische Ironie lässt ins Unendliche fallen; die Heinesche Ironie arrangiert den Sturz aus dem Sublimen auf den Boden der banalen Realität. Sie stösst auf die Banalität der Gegebenheiten, die übermächtig sind, einfach weil sie der Fall sind. Solche Selbstdestruktion ist der Kern des Gedichts. Es führt seine Selbstzerstörung vor, aber man kann auch umgekehrt sagen: Diese Selbstzerstörung ist der Höhepunkt und die Vollendung des ganzen, so wie ein Feuerwerk zugleich aufleuchtet und verlischt.³²

The triumph of the poems of death, then, is the birth into new life of the poems beyond Romanticism.

The fourth poem, “Sterbende,” calls up the image of homesickness for Germany, along with what is perhaps a reference to the Prodigal Son, only, in this case, a Prodigal Son who does not make it home: “Mancher leider wurde lahm / Und nicht mehr nach Hause kam — / Streckt verlangend aus die Arme, / Daß der Herr sich sein erbarme!” The fifth poem, “Lumpentum,” reflects on the rich person’s desire for flattery: “Die reichen Leute, die gewinnt / Man nur durch platte Schmeicheleien,” and takes the reader back to the image of Lazarus before the gates of Dives. A reference in the final line to the poet’s easy way to get rich, that is, to praise a rich patron’s dog, “Besinge gar / Mäcenas’ Hund, und friß dich satt!” calls to mind the dogs who licked Lazarus’s sores and makes another link between poverty and the poetic task. The poem provides an internal gloss by way of contrast on how Lazarus saw the rich man: he does not flatter him, but rather waits on God to cure his poverty.

³² Ibid., 66.

The poem that follows “Lumpentum” recalls the *Heimkehr* sequence, in that it looks back at something lost and presents a desire for stability. The subject of the poem, “Erinnerung,” is a sad one: the drowning death of a small boy, “Wilhelm Wisetzki,” who had been a school friend of the poet. The third line of each of the six tercets is the same: “Doch die Katze, die Katz’ ist gerettet,” which painfully deflates the elegiac seriousness by equating the life of “Wilhelm” with that of the cat. The reference to a home falls in the fourth stanza, where the speaker tells the dead boy that he was wise to flee the storms of life and find a place to shelter: “Bist klug gewesen, du bist entronnen / Den Stürmen, hast früh ein Obdach gewonnen — / Doch die Katze, die Katz’ ist gerettet.” Here, by contrast to the concern in *Heimkehr*, the reference to a home or a place of surety has to do with something beyond a country. It refers rather to a desired alternative to the contingency and uncertainty of life itself, which the poet presents as a reason to “envy” the boy who has escaped it: “Seit langen Jahren, wie oft, O Kleiner, / Mit Neid und Wehmut gedenk ich deiner.” Here the figure of the completely “homeless” Lazarus points to a profounder homelessness that characterizes every living person.

The following poem, “Unvollkommenheit,” picks up this theme of dissatisfaction with existence itself and starts out baldly, “Nichts ist vollkommen hier auf dieser Welt.” The seven stanzas give a row of banal examples of imperfection: flowers, art, boring women, clichéd concepts of “Stern,” “Äpfelwein,” and “schwarze Flecken” “in der Sonne” that prepare the ground for the final contrast of serious failure in the last line, where the speaker tells the “verehrte Frau” what she lacks: “Ein Busen, und im Busen eine Seele.” The soul, an organizing principle of intelligibility, seems to be exactly what the querulous speaker seeks without finding in the world, but in a surprising contrast the absence of this soul is revealed precisely through physical suffering. The revelation of a dissatisfying or lacking underlying order paradoxically

gives meaning and coherence to the seemingly senseless dissolution of the flesh and attrition of powers. Why should the world be expected to bring forth exempla of perfection, when it is clearly a mass of disorder and injustice in itself? And yet the speaker intuits that things *should* be otherwise. The form of woman, or intelligibility, makes itself known by its absence.

“Fromme Warnung” sets up a further deflating contrast between the soul and the disappointing physical realities. Picking up again the last word of the preceding “Unvollkommenheit,” it begins “Unsterbliche Seele, nimm dich in acht” and ends with an amusing contrasting reference to “weiche Pantoffeln” as a sign of paradise. The following poem, “Der Abgekühlte,” proceeds to warm up the “coldness” of death by infusing it with images of life and waiting. The title, “cooled off,” seems at first to refer to the coldness of death: “Und ist man tot, so muß man lang / Im Grabe liegen; ich bin bang, / Ja, ich bin bang, das Auferstehen / Wird nicht so schnell vonstatten gehen.” As the poem proceeds, however, it becomes clear that the “cooling off” or “gone cold” refers to the speaker’s amorous desires. He wishes for one last love affair “eh’ mein Lebenslicht / Erlöschet, eh’ mein Herz bricht,” but he wishes to love quietly, without the “Tumult der Leidenschaft” or the “wechselseit’ges Seelenfoltern” that young people pursue. The final lines express his modified desire: “Möcht ich noch einmal lieben, schwärmen / Und glücklich sein — doch ohne Lärmen.” The text permits a reading of disappointed or lukewarm love, but the reverse is also true: the passions may be “cooled down,” but death itself may also be seen as somehow compatible with life. If lying in the grave is just a form of “cooling off” while waiting for the next event, then death ceases to be the abyss of nothingness and functions as a modification, not the annihilation, of life. Contingent life with all its disappointments is able to save death from being the final word. Instead, the final word of the poem and perhaps the speaker continues to be “waiting.” Sammons links the waiting of the

speaker with Heine's own patience in his sickness: "In these incredible agonies with such hopeless prospects, suicide would have been unsurprising and even reasonable. But the thought did not really occur; Heine waited out his suffering, a tormented but curious observer of its amazing dimensions."³³

"Solomon" continues the meditation on sleep. The king appears protected from evil dreams by angels: "Sie schützen den König vor träumendem Leide / Und zieht er finster die Brauen zusammen, / Da fahren sogleich die stählernen Flammen, / Zwölftausend Schwerter, hervor aus der Scheide." The sleeping king grants that he is externally powerful, "die Länder sind mir untertänig," but having been returned to the primal state of sleep he is still on the hunt for love and relationship. We can read a veiled reference to or perhaps dependence on the creation narrative of Genesis 2 here, where God, finding no companion fit for Adam among the animals, casts Adam into a deep sleep and removes from him the rib from which he then forms Eve. The vulnerability of the sleeping king, portrayed in the angels who ring him around, reveals itself to be a more fundamental neediness: "O Sulamith! das Reich ist mein Erbe . . . Doch liebst du mich nicht, so welk ich und sterbe." The impoverished, homeless narrator Lazarus and the mighty sleeping king speaker of this poem are linked in their experiences of poverty and restlessness.

The next poem, "Verlorene Wünsche," continues this theme of desire for another and combines it with the earlier theme of the specific desire to be at home with that other. The poem describes the speaker's attempts to do everything to please his beloved: "Alles, was dir wohlgefiele, / Alles tät ich dir zuliebe." But the end of his desire is cast twice in terms of presence or being at home: "O wie sehnlich wünscht ich immer, / Daß ich bei dir bleiben könnte," and "Ja, ich wollte zu dir kommen, / Nicht mehr in der Fremde schwärmen — / An dem Herde deines Glückes / Wollt ich meine Kniee wärmen." How is this desire distinguished from

³³ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography*, 296.

the similar desire to be at home with the beloved in “Heimkehr”? The perspective of the speaker has changed: he is no longer simply exiled in a foreign land; he is exiled from his own power and autonomy: “Goldne Wünsche! Seifenblasen! / Sie zerrinnen wie mein Leben — / Ach, ich liege jetzt am Boden, / Kann mich nimmermehr erheben.”

The next several poems have the effect of deflating memories of current and past loves, relegating them either to the ridiculous (when Matilde finally might come to visit his grave, he regrets he will not be able to offer her a seat; the sweet, fat child should take a taxi home, in “Gedächtnisfeier”) or the decayed and disappointing, “Die zärtlichen Gluten, die großen Flammen, / Sie waren erloschen unterdessen . . . Doch ich und die Toten, wir ritten schnelle,” in “Widersehen”). The sense of popping or deflating comes to concrete expression in “Frau Sorge,” where the old companion “Worry” sits by his bed: “Als Wärterin die Sorge wacht. . . Mir träumt machmal, gekommen sei / Zurück das Glück und der junge Mai / Und die Freundschaft und der Mückenschwarm — da knarrt die Dose — daß Gott erbarm, / Es platzt die Seifenblase — Die Alte schneuzt die Nase.” The soap-bubble dreams pop and the speaker returns to the reality of sickness and isolation.

3. The Final Poems: Victory Over Poetic Narcissism

The poem “Im Oktober 1849” returns to the question of the identity of the narrator. Again, as in *Buch der Lieder*, the speaker is a German poet reflecting on the state of Germany (“Es klirrt mir wider im Gemüt / Die Heldensage, längst verklungen, / Das eiserne wilde Kämpfenlied — / Das Lied vom Untergang der Nibelungen”), but by the end of this longer text the form of suffering Lazarus arrives to join the speaker and to bring a new dimension to the poet speaking of being a poet. The experience of the poverty of physical suffering affects the poetic

task: “Das heult und bellt und grunzt — ich kann / Ertragen kaum den Duft der Sieger. / Doch still, Poet, das greift dich an — / Du bist so krank, und schweigen wäre kluger.” A limit has been reached and poetry, however skillful, can no longer serve to gather up the speaker’s forces and launch him into the world. (Although, of course, this failure of poetry occurs within the arms of this to some extent at least immortal poem.) His suffering (“Du bist so krank”) demands the different response of silence and again, waiting on something other than his own initiative and greater than his previously wholehearted political engagement and participation. Of course, the poet himself is far from silent. Numerous commenters have remarked on Heine’s ability to produce and compose while in such pain: “Even confined to the nursing home and cut off from firsthand contact with events outside, he managed to write three articles on the February revolution for the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, which he submitted along with a rather desperate postscript to its editor: ‘Dearest Kolb, I can’t see anymore, and I cannot walk two steps. Your poor friend H. Heine.’”³⁴ Robert Lowell (1917-1977), who translated a number of the Lazarus poems into English, expresses something of the same admiration with an additional remark on the depths underlying the work: “I enclose a translation of Heine, almost an original poem from three of his. How marvelous to have had a life that could be so written about even in terrible pain.”³⁵ According to Kaufmann, even Nietzsche found inspiration in Heine’s deathbed poems: “It was Heine’s irony—and not the essentially different, pointedly equivocal and inconclusive, irony of the German romantics—which served Nietzsche as a model.”³⁶

³⁴ Ernst Pawel, *The Poet Dying: Heinrich Heine’s Last Years in Paris* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 35.

³⁵ Robert Lowell, “Letter 212” to Elizabeth Bishop, in *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008), 324.

³⁶ “It was from Heine that he learned much about the nuances of ‘divine’ sarcasm and about the handling of the German language; and perhaps Nietzsche’s prose owes more to him than to any other German writer. And the agonizing poet who celebrated the beauty of life in overflowing verses from what he called his *Matrazengruft* apparently seemed a paragon of power to Nietzsche, and not a romantic” (Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 324).

The “terrible pain” links the poetic “I” again with Heine himself in the subsequent poem, “Böses Geträume,” whose dismaying end to dreams of Ottilie is “Denn ich erwachte jählings – und ich war / Wieder ein Kranker, der im Krankenzimmer / Trostlos daniederliegt seit manchem Jahr.” The sadness of this dismaying end is lightened by the previous comic moment provided by the rhyme of “Lilie” with “Ottilie,” and the reader is left with the poetically pleasing image of a man whose delight in his beloved puts him entirely at her mercy: “Doch wunderbar ihr Wesen mich erweicht, Und heimlich bebend küß ich ihre Hand” — why does her nature weaken his? This effect of her nature on his provides an expression of being taken away from one’s own self and being moved by another, which prefigures and contrasts with the present form of dependence: “Trostlos daniederliegt.” In one sense, the speaker sees an end to all his powers. But in another sense, this end has been prepared and prefigured since the beginning. He was never at his own disposal to begin with, so his (and our) experience of being divested of autonomy at the end of life does not appear as an unexpected, violent attack on a previously impregnable fortress: in truth the fortress was always under the sway of another.

The last three poems of the “Lazarus” poems form an escalating comment on the end of all things for the speaker, as the titles suggest: “Sie erlischt,” “Vermächtnis,” and “*Enfant perdu*.” This final text, “Little Lost Boy,” sums up devastatingly the themes of the preceding nineteen: homelessness, exile, poetry, suffering, vulnerability, death. The saddest line is “Ich kämpfe ohne Hoffnung, daß ich siege, / Ich wußte, nie komm ich gesund nach Haus.” The next lines describe the speaker’s toils and sufferings, using martial imagery for the poetic arts of war. They are worth citing at greater length:

In jenen Nächten hat Langweil’ ergriffen
 Mich oft, auch Furcht — (nur Narren fürchten nichts) —
 Sie zu verscheuchen, hab ich dann gepiffen
 Die frechen Reime eines Spottgedichts.

Ja, wachsam stand ich, das Gewehr im Arme,
Und nahte irgendein verdächt'ger Gauch,
So schoß ich gut und jagt ihm eine warme,
Brühwarme Kugel in den schnöden Bauch.

The final line shows the speaker's final victory over poetic narcissism. The "Waffen" of the poet remain; his success was to master them and wield them toward his own ends. His own person fails him, but not his skills. He can keep faith in the poetic weapons because they do not depend on him. They remain beyond his grasp:

Doch fall ich unbesiegt, und meine Waffen
Sind nicht gebrochen — nur mein Herze brach.

These twenty poems come to a satisfying, crashing end with the "Little Lost Boy" breaking his heart. Typically, Heine did not rest content here but rather started up again and continued with the "Zum Lazarus" poems of 1854. Rather than continuing with the sequence in depth, a look at a few specific lines will serve to show how the image of Lazarus and his poverty continues to guide and develop Heine's meditation on suffering and death.

4. The Second Lazarus Sequence: Return to the Question of Persona and the Turn Toward an Interlocutor

The first poem takes up the topic of death and asks frankly whether death is supposed to be an answer to the questions of suffering and why the upright suffer while the evil flourish: "Also fragen wir beständig, / Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll / Erde endlich stopft die Mäuler — / Aber ist das eine Antwort?" The third text describes the poetic task as the transformation of death into human (poetic) terms: the poet, "ganz bewegungslos," is trapped in a dark cell that he knows he will only change for his grave. He asks whether he is perhaps already dead, since the

old gods “wählen gern zum Tummelplatz / Den Schädel eines toten Dichters.” The conclusion is a grim description of the suffering poet’s daily task:

Die schaurig süßen Orgia,
Das nächtlich tolle Geisstertreiben,
Such des Poeten Leichenhand
Manchmal am Morgen aufzuschreiben.

The remainder of the eleven poems “Zum Lazarus” turn to old loves and the desire for the old desires. The theme, again, is the impossibility of arranging reality as one wishes and the rebellion of the flesh against its task of conforming itself instead to reality: “Ohnmächtige Flüche! Dein schlimmster Fluch / Wird keine Fliege töten. / Ertrage die Schickung, und versuch, / Gelinde zu flennen, zu beten” (2); and “Auch du erbarm dich mein und spende / Die Ruhe mir, o Gott, und ende / Die schreckliche Tragödie” (8); and (to the Fates): “O spute dich und zerschneide / Den Faden, den bösen, / Und laß mich genesen / Von diesem schrecklichen Lebensleide!” One remarkable quality of these poems is their increasing turn toward an interlocutor. Poems one and two are directed to the speaker himself, asking the rhetorical question about death as an answer, and then advising himself to bear cruel fate and “versuch, / Gelinde zu flennen, zu beten.” Poems five, six, and seven address old loves in the second person, while eight speaks first to an old love (“Ein Wetterstrahl . . . war mir dein Brief”) but ends with the plea to God to end the terrible tragedy. Poem ten asks the Fates to hurry and cut his lifeline so he can begin to recover from this dreadful suffering. The figure of death as a desideratum for the sake of recovering from life’s sorrows is a fine example of what Höhn praises as Heine’s hallmark of oxymoron and “semantic collision”: “dann ist das Oxymoron die Stilfigur Heines schlechthin, weil sie echte semantische Kollisionen heraufbeschwört. . . .”³⁷ Continuing the poet’s increasing reference to an interlocutor, poem eleven addresses itself to God. Once again

³⁷ Höhn, “‘Sauerkraut mit Ambrosia’: Heine’s Kontrastästhetik,” 17.

the advice to let the last strophe illuminate the first turns out to be helpful, as the final poem in this sequence ends with a quatrain that contains love for the flesh, for life, for the enjoyment of fine things, along with the plea to the unknown one who has power to do something the poet cannot. Despite the stance of the supplicant that marks the entire poem (“Leave me here a bit longer”), the crashing, hilarious ending rhyme of “froh” with “*statu quo*” indicates the ultimate victory of the poet over his breaking body:

Gesundheit nur und Geldzulage
Verlang ich, Herr! O laß mich froh
Hinleben noch viel schöne Tage
Bei meiner Frau im *statu quo*!

With this increased turn toward an interlocutor we are returned to the idea of “poetic persona” or the Greek mask, “*prosopon*,” which began our investigation. The earliest cases of dramatic dialog are the Greek plays, which enabled the resultant prosopographic exegesis of the Psalms. Heine’s poetic language continues both the biblical language of questioning and addressing God, and the entire poetic tradition of creating roles for the sake of illuminating questions. When Heine writes that he is proud to be a German poet, he mentions that Germany excels in two areas, namely, philosophy and lyric: “Man ist viel, wenn man ein Dichter ist, und gar wenn man ein großer lyrischer Dichter ist in Deutschland, unter dem Volke, das in zwei Dingen, in der Philosophie und im Liede, alle andern Nationen überflügelt hat.”³⁸ His increasing turn toward an interlocutor crystallizes the best of both traditions.

³⁸ Heinrich Heine, *Geständnisse*, DHA 15,55, cited in Kortländer, “Vorbemerkung,” 7.

IV: Modern Homelessness: Can Heine Help?

1. Why Read Heine Today?

One question underlying the present paper is the relevance of Heine's poetry for a modern reader. It is easy to say that good poetry is not bound to any particular age and that we will always read the classics, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer, Jane Austen, and their peers. Whether that is true for our century remains to be seen, particularly in light of academic trends away from traditional Great Books surveys and text analysis and toward the study of interdisciplinary currents and the possibilities of digitalization for research, within a context of ever greater emphasis on technological skills. If Heine and his poetry have an enduring role in the formation of a literary imagination, it might be helpful to lift out some elements of his specific application to our times. Certainly, expressions of lovesickness will never go out of style. Our times, however, seem particularly apt for listening to Heine's insights into what it means to be exiled, homeless, and rootless. His poetry grew out of a clear experience of his twenty-five years of physical exile and the banning of his books in Germany,³⁹ but it is a commonplace today to refer to homelessness as simply the modern condition, as man is increasingly alienated from his history, culture, and finally his own body; as the human body appears in the visual arts in ever more touched-up and idealized human forms for advertising and entertainment; and as beginning and end of life issues are managed in more clinical environments than in the home. Social networks and the internet, offering on the one hand invaluable opportunities for community life, in another sense recreate the idea of community itself into something entirely disembodied and physically isolated. In studying the poetic narrator of Shakespeare's sonnets, one scholar claims that the love depicted in that sonnet sequence "is neither pagan, nor Christian love, for neither the Platonic nor the Pauline conceptions of proper love 'cure' human desire of its honor and

³⁹ For a thorough discussion of Heine's social homelessness, see Pawel, *The Poet Dying*, 8-9.

shame. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, love's book of honor and shame, enacts a modern love."⁴⁰ In the same light, is it possible to consider Heine's "Lazarus" poems as enacting, and overcoming, a modern experience of homelessness as the human condition, rather than homelessness as a particular kind of exile from a physical location? This possibility brings us back to the question of the generosity of the poet and poetic narrator examined in the first section. Now we can see Heine's work of taking his own suffering and attempting "manchmal am Morgen aufzuschreiben" what was given to him in the night to undergo, as a gift particularly well-suited for the modern reader, at home neither in his own body nor in his polis.

2. *Modern Homelessness*

To consider what modern "homelessness" entails, it is useful to start with Martin Heidegger's reflections on how "dwelling" defines the human condition and what it means to dwell. In his 1951 essay "Bauen-Wohnen-Denken," Heidegger explains dwelling as the way humans exist in the world:

Bauen originally means to dwell. Where the word *bauen* still speaks in its original sense it also says *how far* the essence of dwelling reaches. That is, *bauen*, *buan*, *bhu*, *beo* are our word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin*, I am, *du bist*, you are, the imperative form *bis*, be. What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin*, *du bist* mean I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Crider, "Love's Book of Honor and Shame," 300.

⁴¹ Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 349.

In this essay Heidegger goes on to show in what ways the tasks of building, and thinking itself, are forms of dwelling as mortals within a restricted space, and that the “*proper plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses.” The plight of dwelling, he says, is that mortals “*must ever learn to dwell*. What if man’s homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling.”⁴²

The description of “giving thought” as able to transform a reality from misery to fertile ground for flourishing lends itself easily in this context to characterizing what Heine did with his suffering. Of course, this does not mean to cast his years of pain and paralysis in the light of a radiant martyrdom. Quite the contrary, the poet’s querulous and often bitter “lamentations” against his lot make the poems what they are: the familiar, apt, “pleasing,” as Aristotle would say, representations of reality for the reader, who has suffered his own losses and is also one day going to die. One scholar recently fleshed out what Heidegger means about dwelling in terms of provisionality and the fact that reality is always underway:

The time and the space that we in every moment are, are finite. Therefore we are ultimately in a radical sense homeless, always merely visitors, never truly at home, and the decisive question that repeatedly confronts us is how we deal with this homelessness and this suffering, with the fact that our self-knowledge is always bound up with the insight into the loss of our homeland, the homeland we once glimpsed in our childhood.⁴³

⁴² Ibid., 363.

⁴³ Holger Zaborowski, “Toward a Phenomenology of Dwelling,” *Communio* 32 (2005): 515.

This first side of “homelessness,” the ongoing flux and wandering, is the easier to understand and apply to the various situations of modern man who is always on the move and at home everywhere and nowhere.

3. *The Transformation of Immobility Into Dwelling*

We saw how the poems of “returning home” in the early *Buch der Lieder* point to a fracture in the poetic narrator that results from belonging to a country and society in which he was permitted neither to live nor to flourish. The later sequence of “Lazarus poems” points to the inevitable human condition of exile even from one’s own body, and during the period before death: dying itself is an exile, but it only repeats the form of human life of being at home, only provisionally, in the body. Wendell Berry, who writes often of the modern loss of a sense of place, points to the link between exile and helplessness:

When people accept mobility as a condition of work, it means that they have accepted a kind of homelessness. It used to be a part of good manners to ask a person you had just met, “Where are you from?” That question has now become a social embarrassment, for it is too likely to be answered, “I’m not from anywhere.” But to be not from anywhere is part of the definition of helplessness. Mobility is a condition in which you can do little or nothing to help yourself, and in which you live apart from family and old neighbors who would be the people most likely to help you.⁴⁴

This description of “mobility” as a condition of helplessness offers a counter-image to Heine/Lazarus’s experience of “immobility” on the mattress grave as a condition of helplessness. To reconcile the two, we can return to Heidegger’s expression of the human condition as one of

⁴⁴ Wendell Berry, “The Cost of Displacement,” *The Progressive* (December/January 2010), <http://progressive.org/berrydj0910.html>, accessed June 14, 2012.

“dwelling”: being rooted, but only provisionally, in the sense that the world and time we have at our disposal is always finite, as we saw above, but also keeping in mind the fact that the dwelling subject faces the task of setting up a home precisely within the provisional. The comment cited above in explanation of Heidegger continues in this vein:

But in order to remain human, we must also become domestic [*heimisch*]. We have to recognize that it is ultimately inhuman to make everything in our life ultimately provisional. To put everything under conditions is to make life ultimately impossible. We would no longer be able to make decisions anymore, and we would continually sit among packed-up moving boxes, without knowing where we in fact are and where we after all want to or ought to go.⁴⁵

A modern way of dealing with the problem of the inadequate provisional is simply to avoid thinking about what might be non-provisional, to avoid thinking about the question of meaning entirely since it seems to be a region beyond consensus or civility. The modern busy life of the internet age permits ever greater ways to multi-task and to be at home everywhere and so nowhere.

Heine’s “Lazarus” poems offer a meditation on the way to living within the two extremes: not dwelling forever as he is, but also not ready to move again at any moment. In the choice between the two, he comes down clearly on the side of the world, the flesh, the “domestic,” the love for this particular wife and “status quo.” But as we saw in the final poem “Zum Lazarus,” it is precisely the desire to live with his wife a while longer that drives the second-person address to God, who could extend the provisional a little longer. To grasp the provisional definitively requires something beyond the provisional. In order to address this final point, we can look at the question of the tradition linking Heine with Heidegger.

⁴⁵ Zaborowski, “Towards a Phenomenology of Dwelling,” 515.

Heidegger (d. 1976) occupies a clearly modern place, and Heine falls in a much earlier area of nineteenth-century pre-modernity. Why should we read Heidegger in light of Heine, or vice-versa? There is in fact an interesting direct line from Heine to Heidegger in the person of Hegel, whose philosophy influenced Heine for many years, though it is uncertain whether he read closely many of the philosophical texts or picked up the broader lines through conversation and political acquaintances.⁴⁶ Even a cursory approach at the relationship between Hegel and his onetime student Heidegger is beyond this paper, but Holub gives an illuminating overview in his article “Troubled Apostate” of the role that the intermediary figure of Hegel, whose worldview Heine later rejected, occupies in Heine’s own writings and in the criticism: “Heine depicts his religious transformation in the ‘Matrazengruft’ as a rejection of Hegel and a renewal of former beliefs. The insistence on a renewal has led some commentators to believe Heine embraced something akin to Judaism, although Heine insists that his God is a personal one.”⁴⁷ The rejection of Hegel’s cosmology in favor of what may be, as Holub says, a personal God in some way formed by Judaism, finds a much more succinct explanation in a line from Heine himself: “‘Never mind the gods,’ he said [to Fanny Lewald]. ‘No pagan gods would have done to a poet what was done to me. Only our old Jehovah would do a thing like that. Even my lips are paralyzed. I can’t talk, and I can’t kiss.’”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For an illuminating discussion of Heine’s familiarity with Hegel, see a recent review by Jeffrey Sammons, who notes that there is “room for doubt about the depth and precision of Heine’s reception [of Hegel]. . . . Heine’s allusions to Hegel are all quite brief and many of them dismissive. . . . For him as perhaps for other Young Hegelians it was not the complex details of Hegel’s philosophy that were important, but the implication that history contained an indwelling dynamic that would enable it to move again, that the torpor and stasis imposed as a policy by the Metternichian regime would not be permanent” (Jeffrey L. Sammons, Review of Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. Terry Pinkard, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2008.03.27).

⁴⁷ Holub, “Troubled Apostate,” 246. Holub continues: “The association of Hegel with Heine’s late renewal of faith makes sense—at least psychic sense—if we view it again in terms of displacement” (ibid.).

⁴⁸ Cited in Pawel, *Heinrich Heine’s Last Years in Paris*, 45.

The link between “our old Jehovah” and Heine’s twin desires to “talk” and “kiss” recalls Sammons’ remark that Heine is complex but not profound:

Heine’s texts owe their resonance and brilliance to detail; sentence by sentence they hook into circumstances, issues, clichés, and tabus of his own present with an adroitness that demands attention to every nuance, allusion, juxtaposition, and transition. He was a complex but not really a profound writer; his density is of the surface, making his texts all the more difficult to abstract and paraphrase, and their activist and committed character causes them to require vastly more commentary to be read intelligibly than those of any other nineteenth-century German creative writer of any importance.⁴⁹

In the end, we do not need Heine to be profound as long as he focuses on the complexity of what he, and we, have before us to discuss and to learn to love definitively in its provisionality. The profundity will take care of itself, as long as the complexity is given its due. As Kortländer says in his essay on “Liebe und Unglück” in *Buch der Lieder*, Heine’s poems reflect “[d]as gebrochene Verhältnis zu seinem Deutschtum” (60), which grew out of Heine’s exile from his country. The poems from the mattress grave, then, growing out of Heine’s exile from his own flesh, reveal to us a more universal “gebrochene Verhältnis”: that between the infinite human desires and the mortal human condition. Heine’s contribution to his modern reader is to point us, in the midst of our technological abstraction and reduction, back to the flesh in its contingency and vulnerability.

4. *A Final Moment of Exile*

Finally, to Heine’s experiences of exile from his country and, ultimately, from his body, a third moment of exile enters into the final poems: his own self-imposed exile from the role of

⁴⁹ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography*, ix.

poetic persona. By permitting the figure of “Lazarus” to govern the final poems, rather than the “deutscher Dichter, bekannt im deutschen Land,” Heine removes himself and makes room for another, thus permitting an interplay between his own character and Lazarus. This interplay between the personae and the traditions they bring to bear on the underlying themes of poverty and desire provide a satisfying reproduction of the human experience of “crawling between earth and heaven,”⁵⁰ mentioned in the first section of this paper as one element of what makes a good lyric. In this sense, Scott Crider’s remarks on Shakespeare’s work apply again to Heine’s poems about homelessness and death: “Neither the family nor the polity will satisfy all of the soul’s longings.”⁵¹ We could add, neither will bodily integrity, though Heine’s expressions of desire precisely for this integrity, for his wife, and for a place and home in Germany, serve the function of showing what the “soul’s longings” actually are, since, although they may be more, they will not be less or other than these “complex” provisional starting points and interlocutors that permit the profound to set up its dwelling place and be at home in the human.

V. Conclusion

To return to the starting point of *Heimkehr* and *Buch der Lieder*, the question of the woman offers a helpful point of both comparison and departure. The editor of the Düsseldorf edition notes that Heine’s early poems use the countenance of the beloved woman as a “Symbol des Göttlichen,” in order to bring out the opposition “zwischen dem dunklen bzw. wilden Leben und dem strahlenden Idealbild eines verehrten Frauengesichts.”⁵² The woman in these poems has little individuality, playing the part as she does as a symbol for the divine, the romantic ideal, the ethos of Germany (as in the *Loreley*), or the source of pain and rejection. She appears as the

⁵⁰ *Hamlet*, III.1.

⁵¹ Crider, “Love’s Book of Honor and Shame,” 293.

⁵² *Heinrich Heine: Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, 876.

unblooded “vapor,” as Williams describes the spiritualized Beatrice. By contrast, the woman (or women) of the *Lazarus* poems stand on the side of the world that Heine and his narrator Lazarus love and wish to cling to “im statu quo.”

The poet, in handing his last poems over to the narration of the persona of Lazarus, whose literary burden and role explicates the experience of poverty and death better than he is able to himself, overcomes the Weltriß between the poetic or idealized world and the real world of suffering. The earlier section on *Heimkehr* suggested that the poems benefitted from the poet’s love for the particular country of Germany and that his treatment of the society from which he was exiled was an act of generosity toward it. In these later poems, in an ironic turn, the departure of Heine to leave room for Lazarus permits an even greater glimpse at the poet’s human suffering, as though his final act of generosity in removing himself earns the reward of greater glory for the world and wife the poet wishes to praise. The final poems seem at first to point to the triumph of the painful, real world over the ideal. The fact, however, that the narrator himself longs only for the real world in the end, permits the idealized world to take its place within a larger view that includes both, offering space for growth for the real world rather than opposition between the two. The final cycle of poems from the mattress grave offers the modern reader, not a pious instruction in following ideals or philosophical systems, but rather an example of how the specific poetic gift of attention to and representation of suffering can refocus our abstracted, rootless attentions back to the flesh and the desire to be at home with another. Heine’s use of the poetic persona shows that at least poetically, the desire and intent to be at home with another can turn the experience of exile into a creative act of renunciation that makes room for the other and so permits the possibility of new life and conversation.

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