



North American Heine Society

January 27, 2025

Dear Members,

This time around it is not easy to write this newsletter. For Heine, the personal was the political and the political the personal. So what can we say at this moment when the nemesis of Heine reception Karl Kraus, otherwise never at loss for words, noted at a sadly all too similar historical moment: “*Mir fällt zu [...] nichts ein*” – “With regard to [...] nothing comes to mind.” This was three months after Hitler came to power.

As one of our members, Alex Soros, said in an interview a few days ago: “I hope Marx was right that first comes the tragedy and then comes the farce. I worry it’ll be the other way around, that we’ll look back at Trump’s first term as farcical and this is going to be very bad and tragic for a lot of people.” (*Financial Times*, January 22, 2025)

The quip, lifted from Heine’s *On the History of the Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, points to an earlier inspiration for Marx’ *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Heine’s *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand*, where we find the caustically accurate depiction of the changing of the guards that became the model for

Marx’s discussion: “nach dem Abgang der Helden kommen die Clowns und Graziosos mit ihren Narrenkolben und Pritschen.”

Farces usually end with cheers but the carnage that concluded Trump’s first term leaves us with a more somber aftertaste. Wished away by lies, silence and one of the first executive orders pardoning the violent January 6 insurrectionists, the farce of the first term does not bode well for what appears more likely to be a catastrophe than a tragedy. The cathartic effect that tragedy once promised is now replaced by the sacrifice of the public while the unrelentingly flawed anti-hero goes scot-free.

Another scene of Heine’s lucidly sharp characterization starkly captures the current moment. As they enter the Frankfurt ghetto in the *Rabbi of Bacharach*, we find the eponymous protagonist wearily observing to his wife: “wie schlecht geschützt ist Israel! Falsche Freunde hüten seine Tore von außen, und drinnen sind seine Hüter Narrheit und Furcht!” Yet, while in the middle ages the Jews were involuntarily confined to ghettos, the United States is about to eagerly commit

itself to building the walls of its self-imprisonment.

While the fear of dark hours lies ahead of us, and in a world where humanities and literature seem no longer welcome, returning to Heine offers the kind of respite we all depend on to avoid becoming prisoners of the moment. Heine like other resourceful artists gives voice to a stubborn resistance as his writing offers both critique and intellectual shelter. If Adorno remarked that “thinking itself poses resistance,” the same is true for those who open themselves to such thinking. Such resistance pulsates through every line of Heine’s prose and poetry, and I wish for us all that in the dark moments ahead of us that we and others will find in Heine’s work assurance, support and strength.

For me, returning to Heine, his writing and his irreverently liberating voice, helps me to find the much-needed fortitude to look at what’s unfolding through the medium of literature. It is my wish and hope that Heine as well as other similar intellectual resources continue to be available to us to recharge from, and help us resist, the drain we experience.

To help doing this, the Society continues its work. Here are the activities from the past year and some other announcements.

GSA panel Atlanta 2024

At the GSA in September 2024 the NAHS featured the panel “New Work on Heinrich Heine.” Thanks to Michael Swellander for organizing. Here is the program. Like many other participants, two of the panelists were unable to attend.

Julia Kitzman had to cancel. Because of the hurricane, Madeline Zimring was unable to attend. Jeff Grossmann read her paper:

Madeline Zimring (Berkeley), *The Stakes of the Razor: Irony and Mimesis in the Political Writings of Heinrich Heine*

Raymond Blankenhorn (New York University), *The Jewish Aristophanes: Comedy in Heinrich Heine's *Der Rabbi von Bacharach**

Moderator: Jeffrey Grossman (University of Virginia)

The papers were followed by a lively conversation around the subject of Heine and classical antiquity, which was addressed in Raymond and Madeline's papers.

MLA Panel New Orleans 2025

At the MLA in January 2025 the topic of the Society’s panel was “Heinrich Heine and Literary Identity.” Thanks to Alicia E. Ellis’ initiative, who organized the panel, it was included by the president of the MLA, Dana Williams, in this year’s presidential theme. The theme was invisibility. This turned out to be productive theme to explore various aspects of Heine’s significance for the question of what Toni Morrison described as “invisible ink,” a quote that Dana Williams gave programmatic meaning in formulating visibility as theme of this year’s convention. With Alicia being unable to attend, I presided the session. The program was:

Willi Goetschel (Toronto), *Heine’s Literary Identity*

Mark H. Gelber (Ben Gurion University), *Heinrich Heine in Jewish Literary History: The Role of Gustav Karpeles (1848-1909)*

Adi Nester (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill), *Poetry and Deintegration: The temporality of Jewish Difference in Heinrich Heine and Max Czollek*

The panel was well attended given the attrition of the presence of German Studies at the MLA. The papers were followed by an engaging discussion where to locate Heine among the various claims to identity he seems to solicit or reject.

Upcoming GSA and MLA

Deadlines for submitting Call for Papers for both the GSA and the MLA are coming up and I ask you to please contact me in the next two weeks or so with suggestions for organizing or contributing to a panel. The GSA will take place in Arlington, Virginia, MLA will be in Toronto.

Jeffrey L. Sammons Prize

The deadline for nominations and self-nominations is February 15, 2025. Please send suggestions for nominations or self-nominations as soon as possible. Here is the information which is also posted on our website. Here is the link: <https://heine.research.uconn.edu/>

“The prize is awarded biannually for the best essay published or accepted for publication by a graduate student or emerging scholar (pre-tenure) in North America that contributes to advancing research in any of the aspects of the life, work, and times of Heinrich Heine.”

Free Graduate Student Membership

This is a reminder that we continue to offer free membership to graduate students. I would like to encourage all members to direct students interested in becoming members to the Secretary-Treasurer for registration: wogenstein@uconn.edu

Dissertation Mentoring Program

Please direct any students writing their dissertation on Heine or a Heine-related subject and interested in mentoring support to me so we can match them with an experienced colleague for support and mentoring.

Research opportunities at the Heinrich-Heine-Institut

The Heinrich-Heine-Institut offers a fellowship for students conducting research for their dissertations. This is a great opportunity to receive not just a nice stipend but also benefit from the generous expertise of the knowledgeable scholars working at the institute. Candidates should contact me for further information.

NAHS Website

If you have recently published a book, article, or another contribution on, or relevant to, Heine, please send the information to Sebastian Wogenstein for posting on the NAHS website.

Finally

We exist only thanks to your contributions: intellectually as well as monetarily. This is the annual appeal to please pay the annual membership fees. Most importantly, however, I would like to invite you to support our activities by contributing with your work. While this comes now with the promise of the Jeffrey L. Sammons Prize for younger colleagues, we all appreciate your work and support as participants and organizers of panels, and suggestions for other initiatives.

With best regards and wishes,

Willi Goetschel