

Heinrich Heine als politischer Dichter [Heinrich Heine as Political Poet]. Walter Grab. Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1982, 202 pages, \$12.00

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Most historians have ignored the rich and politically useful work of the German Jacobins and radical democrats. H. Treitschke made only one reference to this tradition in his monumental *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*. K. Lamprecht was more generous. He devoted twelve lines to this topic in his *Deutsche Geschichte*. In 1960, H. Grundmann's *Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte* referred to these individuals on only one occasion. German Jacobins were portrayed as either traitors or madmen. This was not accidental. Germany's radical democrats posed a threat to both the conservative authorities and their liberal critics. Conservative and liberal historians opted to tell the story of the past not "wie es eigentlich gewesen" but as the authorities hoped it would remain.

Since 1966, Walter Grab has made himself the leading figure in the work to regain a sense of Germany's suppressed revolutionary tradition. In the last eighteen years Grab has published eight books, lectured widely in Europe, the U.S., and Australia, and founded the Institute for German History at the University of Tel-Aviv. Grab's most recent work is a political biography of the German poet and philosopher Heinrich Heine. Professor Grab has again succeeded in deepening our understanding of the development of revolutionary thought in nineteenth century Germany.

Heinrich Heine occupies a problematic place in the history of German letters. Controversy surrounded Heine during his life. His critics considered his work subversive. His supporters tried to save Heine from this charge by representing him as primarily a poet. In the twentieth century, the Nazis solved the Heine problem by trying to make it appear that Heine never existed. Today, literary critics in the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic differ in their interpretations of Heine's work. In the east, scholars have used marxism to uncover the political implications of Heine's thought. West German literary critics have played down Heine's political thought while concentrating on the psychological and aesthetic character of Heine's work.

Walter Grab offers a new perspective on Heine in his *Heinrich Heine als politischer Dichter*. Grab refuses to separate the political and the poetical. Instead, he seeks to uncover the relationship between Heine's poetical and social conceptions in Heine's political experiences. Professor Grab has written a book which deepens our appreciation of Heine's genius while simultaneously teaching his readers a great deal about the development of revolutionary thought during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Heine came into his political majority in the years following the Congress of Vienna. The post-Napoleonic age was dominated by two major economic and political currents. Politically, the conservative victors set about restoring the old order. If the clock

could not be turned back to 1789, the conservative powers intended to slow its advance. The desire to avoid change found a wide body of supporters in the intellectuals. Romantic poets and philosophers praised the medieval period. Reactionary politicians and conservative intellectuals joined in their opposition to liberalization.

There were, however, other forces working for change. The spread of capitalism and the advance of the industrial revolution could be slowed but it could not be stopped. The European powers sought a variety of solutions for the problem of restoring political order while promoting economic advance. Britain forged the most progressive solution, while the Hapsburgs and the Romanovs sought to restrict capitalism. Germany was the land in the middle. Some of the southwestern states pursued policies favorable to capitalism. Other states put obstacles in the way of the spread of industry. All remained opposed to political reform.

Heine formed his political outlook in the decade following Napoleon's defeat. He opposed the conservative effort to turn back the clock. He rejected the sentimentalism of his romantic contemporaries. Simultaneously, Heine feared the advance of capitalism. He based his political philosophy on three pillars: St. Simon, Hegel, and Napoleon. From St. Simon Heine drew the idea of different historical ages. Hegel supplied the idea that there was a pattern or idea working its way through history. Napoleon provided an example of a leader whose actions had transformed the course of history.

The central problem in Heine's political development concerns the question of revolution. Some have maintained that Heine abandoned his belief in the necessity of revolution. No one disputes that Heine had advocated revolution in 1830. In 1848, however, Heine expressed doubts. This is where Walter Grab makes an important contribution to understanding Heine's life and work. Grab finds an explanation for Heine's behavior in a conversation with Ferdinand Meyer in the late 1840's when the men met on the island of Helgoland. Heine explained to Meyer that he held to his early political opinions. Europe desperately needed a revolution. The revolution of 1848 had misfired because of the weakness of its leaders. The liberals did not understand in 1848 that it was impossible to compromise with the traditional powers in Germany. Heine, though, remained convinced that there must be a revolution.

Heinrich Heine was a complex man. Unfortunately, most scholars have dismissed his political thought. Walter Grab has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of Heine's life and work. Professor Grab has demonstrated two things. First, he has shown the consistency in Heine's political thought. Second, he has demonstrated how Heine was affected by the political currents of his time.

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