

HEINE AND THE REALISTS, THEODOR FONTANE AND WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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While Theodor Fontane reacts to Heine's writings sympathetically but not uncritically, the American William Dean Howells responds to the German poet with empathic enthusiasm. Both writers, however, acquire an insight into the contradictions in Heine's romanticism and share his conviction that no subject is unpoetic. This insight offers aesthetic strategies that manifest themselves in the Realistic novel.

Während Theodor Fontane die Dichtung Heines aufgeschlossen aber nicht unkritisch aufnimmt, begegnet der Amerikaner William Dean Howells dem deutschen Dichter mit empathischer Begeisterung. Doch gewinnen beide Autoren eine Einsicht in die Widersprüche in Heines Romanik und teilen seine Überzeugung, dass es kein unpoetisches Thema gebe. Diese Einsicht eröffnet ästhetische Strategien, die im realistischen Roman zum Ausdruck kommen.

The similarities between Heine, Howells and Fontane begin in their complex cultural legacies – in Heine's legacy as a German Jew, Fontane's as a Huguenot, a Calvinist among Lutherans as Eda Sagarra points out, and Howells's as an American with Welsh, Irish and German ancestry and a family allegiance to the teachings of Swedenborg.¹⁾ "Wer anders ist," as Sagarra says of Heine and Fontane in this connection, "beobachtet schärfer".²⁾ The capacity for sharpened observation makes each of them aware of the contradictions within their own surroundings, and between these and the worlds of their imagination. Howells sees his complex cultural identity as the source of "the imaginative temperament which has enabled me all the conscious years of my life to see reality more iridescent and beautiful, or more lurid and terrible than any make-believe about reality".³⁾ They also share a degree of heightened receptivity, which, together with their awareness of contrasts and contradictions, may explain why they seem unpredictable, capricious or ambiguous. This may throw light on their versatility as writers, on the urge to examine

¹⁾ EDA SAGARRA, *Geschichte als Prozess*, in: *Fontane Blätter* 76 (2003), p. 51.

²⁾ *Ibd.*

³⁾ WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *Years of My Youth and Three Essays*, Bloomington and London 1975, p. 4.

the contradictions between inner and outer worlds. Versatility sets them on similar tracks, if ultimately to different destinations: all began as poets, failed as dramatists, and succeeded in their own lifetimes in the hybrid forms of critical journalism and travel writing, but while Heine owes his present reputation mainly to lyric poetry, Fontane and Howells owe theirs chiefly to the realist novel. Yet Edwin Cady's argument that Heine offers "the future realist, Howells, useful lessons" also holds good for Fontane.⁴) In Heine's struggles with his own temperament and talent, both Fontane and Howells find not only an understanding of a romanticism that has become inauthentic but also aesthetic strategies for overcoming it.

Heine's impact on Fontane and on Howells reflects the differences between a sympathetic and an empathetic understanding. Fontane's undramatic, lifelong relationship with Heine's writings contrasts sharply with the extreme highs and lows that characterise that of Howells. For both of them, however, Heine's seductive accessibility gives way to moral-aesthetic reservations. Fontane responds to the balladesque Heine, to the poet of love and death, and to the historian. This is the protean Heine, whose mastery of popular forms combines with a struggle with his own poetic gift and a delight in being contradictory. Like Heine, Fontane responds to frustrations and trying circumstances by making unpredictability into a gesture of freedom. Critical accounts of Fontane's relationship to Heine describe his presence in Fontane's poetry, travel writing, theatre criticism, war books, biography and autobiography, stories and novels, diaries and letters, from his earliest poems in 1837 – the year of Howells's birth – to one of his last letters in 1898.⁵) Horch points out that Fontane included poems from ›Romanzero‹ in the second edition of his ›Deutsches Dichter-Album‹ in 1852, long before this collection became popular in the 1870s. Fontane's copy of ›Romanzero‹ shows his lapidary marginal comments of approval.⁶) But it is a discriminating, differentiated approval. While he finds much that is beautiful and politically apposite in Heine's ›Reisebilder‹, he regrets the absence of "das hohe, noble Fühlen, ohne das kein wahrer Dichter existirt" and feels a mixture of aesthetic and moral distaste for Heine's attack on Platen.⁷) A similar, if milder, form of this distaste is evident when, in 1889 and again in 1894, he lists his favourite books: Heine is at number twelve, with the comment "das Schlechte (mit alleiniger Ausnahme des Sentimentalen) mit demselben Vergnügen wie das Gute".⁸)

⁴) EDWIN H. CADY, *The Road to Realism. The early years of William Dean Howells*, Syracuse 1956, p. 52, suggests that Heine offered the future realist, Howells, useful lessons.

⁵) HANS OTTO HORCH, "Das Schlechte ... mit demselben Vergnügen wie das Gute". Über Theodor Fontanes Beziehungen zu Heine, in: *Heine-Jahrbuch* (1979), pp. 139–176.

⁶) Some pages showing Fontane's marginal comments in his copy of ›Romanzero‹ are reproduced in ROLAND BERBIG, "Der Dichter Fidusi – sehr gut". Zu Theodor Fontanes Lektüre des Romanzero von Heine. Begleitumstände mit einem detektivischem Exkurs, in: *Fontane Blätter* 65–66 (1998), pp. 10–53.

⁷) THEODOR FONTANE, *Tagebücher, 1852, 1855–1858*, Aufbau-Verlag n. d., p. 228, describes this attack as "das widerlichste was man lesen kann".

⁸) THEODOR FONTANE, *Sämtliche Werke*, Munich 1959–1975, vol. XXI/2, *Literarische Essays und Studien*, p. 497.

Fontane's sympathetic but not uncritical understanding of a precursor with whom he shares a common language and culture differs in kind and in intensity from Howells's sense of shock at being invaded by a sensibility that is simultaneously alien and kindred. Heine becomes, first, the means and the end of Howells's learning German, "I was impatient to read German, or rather to read one German poet who had seized my fancy from the first line of his I had seen. This poet was Heinrich Heine, who dominated me longer than any one author that I have known".⁹⁾ He recalls reading about Heine in the *Westminster Review*, "where several poems of his were given in English and German; and their singular beauty and grace at once possessed my soul".¹⁰⁾ In 1857 Howells is able to study German by reading Heine with Limbeck, a bookbinder, "one of those educated artisans whom the revolution sent to us in great numbers", who has "more sympathy for my love of our author's humor than for my love of his sentiment".¹¹⁾ As Howells reads, the imagery and rhythms of Heine's writing invade his consciousness:

[...] we [Howells and Limbeck P. H.] exchanged a joyous 'Gute Nacht,' and I kept on homeward through the dark and silent village street, which was really not that street, but some other, where Heine had been, some street out of the ›Reisebilder‹, of his knowledge or of his dream. When I reached home it was useless to go to bed. I shut myself into my little study, and went over what we had read, till my brain was so full of it that when I crept up to my room at last, it was to lie down to slumbers which were often a mere phantasmagory of those witching ›Pictures of Travel‹.¹²⁾

Howells realises that he could not have chosen a better master, for Heine's simple German is the perfect medium for learning the language:

The German of Heine, when once you are in the joke of his capricious genius, is very simple, and in his poetry it is simple from the first, so that he was, perhaps the best author I could have fallen in with if I wanted to go fast rather than far. I found this out later, when I attempted other German authors without the glitter of his wit or the lambent glow of his fancy to light me on my hard way.¹³⁾

Heine's accessibility is a channel to things of the spirit and to the freedom and confidence to find his own voice, to free himself from "literosity", the belief that writing involves:

⁹⁾ WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *My Literary Passions*, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers 1895, p. 167. The reference is often taken to be to George Eliot's essay ›German Wit: Heinrich Heine‹, which appeared in the *Westminster Review* in 1856 and is reprinted in: *The Works of George Eliot. Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, Edinburgh and London 1884, pp. 67–120. Writing about this early experience in retrospect, however, Howells seems to misremember or to conflate two sources because Eliot quotes poetry but translates only passages of prose.

¹⁰⁾ HOWELLS, *My Literary Passions*, p. 167.

¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 168f.

¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 169f.

¹³⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 170f.

a pose, with something of state or at least of formality in it; [...] that it must be like that sort of acting which you know is acting when you see it and never mistake for reality. [...] But Heine at once showed me that this ideal of literature was false; that the life of literature was from the springs of the best common speech, and that the nearer it could be made to conform, in voice, look and gait, to graceful, easy, picturesque and humorous or impassioned talk, the better it was.¹⁴⁾

Howells comes to recognise in Heine “certain tricks, which I was careful to imitate as soon as I began to write in this manner, that is to say, instantly”.¹⁵⁾ So successful was he that the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* checked all of Heine’s poetry to find out whether a poem Howells had submitted was his own or a plagiarised translation. Almost ten years later, when the same editor tells him to “sweat the Heine out of your bones as men do mercury”, Howells concedes that Heine’s

potent spirit became immediately so wholly my “control”, as the mediums say, that my poems might as well have been communications from him so far as any authority of my own was concerned. [...] But I do not think that either Heine or I had much lasting harm from it. [...] He undid my hands, which I had taken so much pains to tie behind my back, and he forever persuaded me that though it may be ingenious and surprising to dance in chains, it is neither pretty nor useful.¹⁶⁾

Howells first falls in love with Heine’s writings, then reacts against Heine’s influence as his own horizons broaden and “a more practical muse” persuades him “to do the various things which I have mostly been doing ever since”.¹⁷⁾ His passionate identification, his jealousy of people who had known Heine, as well as Heine’s “revengefulness, and malice, and cruelty, and treachery, and uncleanness” – a more vehement denunciation than Fontane’s aesthetic-moral distaste – contain the germ of his reaction against Heine.¹⁸⁾ An encounter with a woman who had known Heine alerts him to the delusions of his own image making:

When [...] she told me about Heine, and how he looked, and some few things he said, I suffered an indescribable disappointment; and if I could have been frank with myself I should have owned to a fear that it might have been something like that, if I had myself met the poet in the flesh, and tried to hold the intimate converse with him that I held in the spirit. But I shut my heart to all such misgivings and went on reading him much more than I read any other German author. I went on writing him too, just as I went on reading and writing Tennyson. Heine was always a personal interest to me, and every word of his made me long to have had him say it to me, and tell me why he said it. In a poet of alien race and language and religion I found a greater sympathy than I have experienced with any other.¹⁹⁾

Heine’s presence in the works of Fontane and Howells reflect the differences in their reception of his writings. Fontane has the stronger sense of the boundaries of

¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 171f.

¹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 173f.

¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 188f.

his own and other poetic worlds. His many references to Heine, extensively documented and analysed by a number of critics, shows how Fontane shares Heine's interest in social and political ills and in the prejudices and ideology of the nineteenth century, so that, as he grows more sceptical about his own society, and perhaps more radical, Heine's importance increases.²⁰⁾ From this critique of scattered occasions, evinced in allusions, quotations and thematic echoes, it is possible to discern Fontane's specific debt to Heine in the shared impulse to find authenticity of emotion and experience. Fontane sees Heine as a poet who sets a standard of authenticity, not easily or unreflectively, but by struggling with his own gift for romanticism. He takes Tennyson as a contemporary but contrasting reference point, arguing that, while Tennyson pursues Romanticism wilfully, Heine struggles to overcome a natural gift for it:

Heine [...] suchte durch Ironie die Romantik zu überwinden, die ihm Gott ins Herz gepflanzt hatte, und scheiterte damit: die Gottesgabe war stärker als der Dämon, der sie verspottete; Alfred Tennyson hingegen, einer Romantik nachjagend, die er nicht hat und die ihn nicht will, zerrt nur am Mantel jener Märchenprinzessin, der er so bereit ist, aber zu gleicher Zeit so unberufen ist, die Schleppe zu tragen.²¹⁾

Heine's irony allows the conflicting impulses to co-exist in the same space. For all his vacillating emotions and moral ambiguities, he becomes a helpful precursor rather than an inhibiting one because he has a distinct voice, with which Tennyson's "Tuttifrutti von Stoffen und Auffassungen" and "hunderterlei Formen" cannot compete. Again, Fontane echoes Heine's tone and his zeal for authenticity when criticising Arnim's spurious medievalism because it infantilises the reader and "die deutsche Nation ist keine Kinderstube, trotz Heine, der sie mal so nennt":

Was ist das Kriterium für wirkliche bürgerliche Freiheit, für jene Kulturblüte, die, wenn wir von alten Zeiten und Völkern lesen, uns allein interessieren und eine Sehnsucht wecken kann?! [...] Das Kennzeichen für solche echte Kultur ist das Einstehen für die idealen Güter der Menschheit.²²⁾

It is not far from this insistence on authenticity to Heine's lesson on how to incorporate history into narrative. In poetry and novels Fontane translates Heine's

²⁰⁾ In the absence of the essay on Heine that he may have written for Friedrich Eggers' ›Deutsches Kunstblatt‹: "Nach Aufzeichnungen Fontanes soll er vor dem 23. März 1855 einen Aufsatz über Heine für Friedrich Eggers' ›Deutsches Kunstblatt‹ geschrieben haben. Die Nachforschungen in dem genannten Zeitraum waren jedoch erfolglos" (FONTANE, Sämtliche Werke, vol. XXI/2, Literarische Essays und Studien, p. 519). Critics who have discussed Heine's presence in Fontane's writing include: LUISE BERG-EHLERS, Theodor Fontane und die Literaturkritik. Zur Rezeption eines Autors in der zeitgenössischen konservativen und liberalen Berliner Tagespresse, Bochum 1990; – CHRISTIAN GRAWÉ, Crampas' Lieblingsdichter Heine und einige damit verbundene Motive in Fontanes *Effi Briest*, in: Jahrbuch der Raabe-Gesellschaft 32 (1982), pp. 148–170; – JOST SCHNEIDER, „Plateau mit Pic“. Fontanes Kritik der Royaldemokratie in ›Frau Jenny Treibel. Ideengeschichtliche Voraussetzungen zur Figur des Leutnants Vogelsang, in: Fontane Blätter, 53 (1992), pp. 57–73.

²¹⁾ FONTANE, Sämtliche Werke (cit. fn. 8), vol. XXI/2, Literarische Essays und Studien, p. 429.

²²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 128f.

debates on social-historical change, on freedom, on the abiding presence of the past, into dialogue and characterisation. Philipp Frank suggests that Fontane's poem ›In der Koppel‹, largely a dialogue between a foal and a horse about the replacement of horse-drawn trams by electric ones, may be inspired by Heine's ›Pferd und Esel‹.²³⁾ Jost Schneider argues that Heine's discussion of constitutionalism in Artikel VI of ›Französische Zustände‹ may have prompted Fontane to read Mirabeau and so fed into the distorted version of Mirabeau's ideas embodied in Lieutenant Vogelsang in ›Frau Jenny Treibel‹. Mirabeau, the ambivalent, unpredictable "Zwitterwesen", with his advocacy of freedom and the 'wirksame Saillies' of his oratory, as Heine describes them, also features in ›Shach von Wuthenow‹.²⁴⁾ Here Fontane creates novelistic dialogue and characterisation out of a network of references to Mirabeau's view of Prussia and to the similar fates of Mirabeau and Victoire, both scarred by smallpox. Consoled and liberated from conventional thinking by Mirabeau's writings, she wants to call herself "Victoire Mirabelle von Carayon", a name that feeds into earlier discussions about beauty, morality, history and politics, from which the events of the novel flow. As in ›Frau Jenny Treibel‹ the dialectical quality of Heine's argument expands into counter-arguments expressed in a range of voices.

History and poetry come together in Horch's central tenet that Fontane draws on the elemental, pantheistic themes and figures of Heine's lyrics to portray the tyrannical 'Gesellschafts-Etwas' im Widerstreit mit der Sehnsucht nach dem Elementaren.²⁵⁾ He argues that Heine's elemental, unhoused Melusine figures in poems from ›Die Lorelei‹ to the ›Nordseelieder‹ return, without the pantheistic element, in his novels, especially when Fontane draws on Heine's ›Romanzero‹: in ›Effi Briest‹ in complex motifs and quotations from ›Vitzliputzli‹ and ›Spanische Atriden‹.²⁶⁾ In ›Unwiederbringlich‹, too, there is a reference to Belshazzar's feast that encodes sexuality and power, and in ›Der Stechlin‹, a reflection on the hazards of monogamous love.²⁷⁾ This last reference emerges from a discussion about the murder of the drone after it mates with the queen bee, which is described as "schlimmer als der Heinesche Asra. Der stirbt doch bloß. Aber hier haben wir Ermordung".²⁸⁾ The speaker's rigidly conventional friend sees this as the strictest

²³⁾ PHILIPP FRANK, *Fontane und die Technik*, Würzburg, 2005, p. 62; ›In der Koppel‹, written about 1895, is in: THEODOR FONTANE, *Werke, Schriften Briefe*. 2. Auflage, München 1978, Abteilung I, *Sämtliche Romane, Erzählungen, Gedichte, Nachgelassenes*, I/6, *Balladen, Lieder, Sprüche*, pp. 355f. ›Pferd und Esel‹, which originally had the title ›Soziale Bewegung‹, was written between 1852 and 1855, and is in HEINE, *Sämtliche Werke*, 3/1, *Gedichte 1853 und 1854*, pp. 336ff.

²⁴⁾ HEINE, *Sämtliche Werke*, 12/1, *Französische Zustände, Artikel VI*, pp. 147f.

²⁵⁾ HORCH, "Das Schlechte ... mit demselben Vergnügen wie das Gute" (cit. fn. 5), p. 168.

²⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.165, argues that in ›Effi Briest‹ "Liebe und Tod, Historie und Politik bilden einen unauflösbaren Komplex – genau wie im Roman, auf dessen Ende ‚Carl I‘, ‚Vitzliputzli‘ und ‚Spanische Atriden‘ vorausdeuten".

²⁷⁾ FONTANE, *Sämtliche Werke* (cit. fn. 8), *Unwiederbringlich*, vol. V, p. 40.

²⁸⁾ FONTANE, *Sämtliche Werke* (cit. fn. 8), *Der Stechlin*, vol. VIII, p. 54.

proof of “das monogamische Prinzip, woran doch schließlich unsre ganze Kultur hängt”. While Horch considers it to be an “eher beiläufige Anspielung” – as it is in the context of the conversation –, it may also be argued that the emphasis on power identifies the common interest of Heine and Fontane in discourses of love, death, and politics.²⁹⁾ This is not so much in what Fontane calls “Liebesgeschichten mit ihrer schauerösen Ähnlichkeit” as in “der Gesellschaftszustand, das Sittenbildliche, das versteckt und gefährlich Politische, das diese Dinge haben [...]”.³⁰⁾

If Heine speaks *for* Fontane, he speaks *through* Howells. Heine liberates Howells from ‘literosity’ by alerting him to the parallels between fact and fiction. ›Andenken‹, the poem that Lowell had suspected was plagiarism in translation, takes a sight that is assumed to belong to Howells’s country childhood, namely that of a seasoned tree consumed by fire, and clothes it in rhythms, themes and images reminiscent of Heine. The final section includes themes and images like the child’s anticipation of adulthood, the adult’s rueful recollection, the dreams, the ghostly tree that stands apart from the wood that belong to poems like Heine’s ›Mein Kind, wir waren Kinder‹ and ›Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam‹, and its stanzaic patterns also echo these and similar poems.³¹⁾ The section begins with the memory of watching the tree glowing fiery red against the dark sky:

We children sat telling stories,
And boasting what we should be,
When we were men like our fathers,
And watched the blazing tree,

That showered its fiery blossoms,
Like a rain of stars we said,
Of crimson and azure and purple.
That night when I lay in bed,

I could not sleep for seeing,
With closed eyes tonight,
The tree in its dazzling splendor
Dropping its blossoms bright;

And the poem resolves into a flight from these memories that also recalls Heine’s moments of dejected melancholy:

²⁹⁾ HORCH, “Das Schlechte ... mit demselben Vergnügen wie das Gute”, (cit. fn. 5), p. 149.

³⁰⁾ Briefe THEODOR FONTANES. Zweite Sammlung, ed. by OTTO PNIOWER and PAUL SCHLENTHER, 2. Vols., 1910, 2, p. 322.

³¹⁾ See: EDWIN H. CADY, Young Howells and John Brown. Episodes in a Radical Education, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985, p. 66. See also: CADY, The Road to Realism (cit. fn. 4), pp. 51f.: “The part of Heine which hit young Howells hardest were the poems called ›Young Sorrows‹, which came first in Heine’s Buch der Lieder. Something out of the depths of Howells’ own troubles seemed to answer to the wry and often self-mocking or self-reproachful melancholia expressed in the poems of Heine’s obsession with his lost Amalie.”

And old, old dreams of childhood
 Come thronging my weary brain,
 Dear foolish beliefs and longings; –
 I doubt, are they real again?
 It is nothing, and nothing, and nothing,
 That I either think or see; –
 The phantom of dead illusions
 Tonight are haunting me.³²⁾

The more bizarre effects of Heine's influence are found in a poem inspired by a student dance. Re-discovering it in a tattered manuscript, Howells comments, "I think the poet could hardly have resented my masking in his wonted self-mocking, though I am afraid that he would have shrunk from the antic German which I put on to the beat of his music".³³⁾ The poem combines the uncanny and the banal:

'To-night there is dancing and fiddling
 In the high windowed hall
 Lighted with dim corpse-candles
 In bottles against the wall.
 'And the people talk of the weather,
 And say they think it will snow;
 And, without, the wind in the gables
 Moans wearily and low.
 'Sa! Sa!' – the dance of the Phantoms!
 The dim corpse-candles flare:
 On the whirl of the flying spectres
 The shuddering windows stare.

As a fiddler plays 'the silent Ghost-Waltz' the poem breaks into 'antic German' for one stanza, allowing Howells to invoke more obviously the spirit of his master while maintaining the rhythm and the ghostly atmosphere, but undercut by banality:

'Und immer und immer schneller,
 Und wild wie der Winterwind
 Die beide [sic] College Gespenster
 Sie walzen sinnengeschwind.
 'They waltz to the open doorway,
 They waltz up the winding stair:
 'Oh, gentle ghosts we are sneezing,
 We are taking cold in the air.'³⁴⁾

³²⁾ Quoted in: CADY, Young Howells and John Brown (cit. fn. 31), pp. 65f.

³³⁾ HOWELLS, Years of my Youth (cit. fn. 3), pp. 192f.

³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*.

Heine's influence fades, however, as Howells discovers Dante, Goldoni and others. As he writes in 1896 in his essay on George du Maurier, he comes to mistrust the mockery that is part of Heine's "confidential attitude", the illusion of intimacy that binds the reader by its grace and charm and places Heine in a line from Fielding to Sterne and, following Heine, to Thackeray. In Howells's view the "confidential attitude" ultimately "wants seriousness, it wants the last respect for the reader's intelligence, it wants critical justification".³⁵⁾ Yet Heine, again as Sterne's successor, foreshadows Howells's travel writings, in his own. Heine's subjective "travel notes", as Bakhtin calls them, reflect a journey towards an identity as a German, who sometimes wants to be a European, and so offer a model for Howells's concern with the nature of American identity – but of an American whose forebears and therefore much of his own thinking originate in Europe, and who, as American consul in Venice, is in Europe to represent his country.³⁶⁾ *Italian Journeys*, a series of sketches published in 1867 and based on excursions from Venice, incorporates both echoes of Heine and Heine's textual strategies for making an alien world familiar: miniaturisation, anthropomorphosis, the elision of temporal and spatial references. A solitary palm tree in Grosseto prompts a Heine-esque episode, in which the poetic and the prosaic clash:

This palm stands in a well-sheltered, dull little court, out of everything's way, and turns tenderly toward the wall that shields it on the north. It has no other company but a beautiful young girl, who leans out of a window high over its head, and I have no doubt talks with it. At the moment we discovered the friend, the maiden was looking pathetically to the northward, while the palm softly stirred and opened its plumes, as a bird does when his song is finished; and there is very little question but it had just been singing to her that song of which the palms are so fond, – 'Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam / Im Norden auf kahler Höh'.³⁷⁾

Howells counters this moment with a sardonic description of the town, projecting his personal fear of sentimentality on to the place, trivialising romance with his evocation of crowds and commerce:

Grosseto does her utmost to hide the secret of this tree's existence, as if a matter-of-fact place ought to be ashamed of a sentimentality of this kind. It pretended to be a very worldly town and tried to keep us in the neighbourhood of the cathedral, where the caffè and shops are, and where in the evening, four or five officers of the garrison clinked their sabres on the stones, and promenaded up and down, and as many ladies shopped for gloves; and as many citizens sat at the principal caffè and drank black coffee. This was lively enough; and we knew that the citizens were talking of the last week's news and the Roman question; that the ladies were really looking for loves not gloves, that such of the officers as had no local intrigue to keep their hearts at rest were terribly bored, and longed for Florence or Milan or Turin.³⁸⁾

³⁵⁾ EDWIN H. CADY (ed.), *W. D. Howells as Critic*, London and Boston 1973, "George du Maurier", p. 265.

³⁶⁾ WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *Italian Journeys*, Evanston, Illinois: The Marlboro Press/Northwestern University Press 1999; – M. M. BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, edited by MICHAEL HOLQUIST, Austin: University of Texas Press 1981, p. 245.

³⁷⁾ HOWELLS, *Italian Journeys* (cit. fn. 36), pp. 113f.

³⁸⁾ *Ibid.*

In the search for reassuring familiarity, travellers are inclined to suppress the passage of time, eliding the knowledge of places they have acquired from books or paintings with the sights that confront them. Nineteenth-century travellers often use the image of the palimpsest, which suppresses temporality by turning it into a spatial category, especially when writing about old civilisations. In Italy Heine sees history imprinted on the faces of peasants, while Howells calls these faces “palimpsests with centuries of experience etched on them”.³⁹⁾ In ›Reise von München nach Genua‹ Heine describes how Herculaneum und Pompeii:

jene Palimpsesten der Natur, wo jetzt wieder der alte Steintext hervorgegraben wird, zeigen dem Reisenden das römische Privatleben in kleinen Häuschen mit winzigen Stübchen, welche so auffallend kontrastieren gegen jene kolossalen Bauwerke, die das öffentliche Leben aussprechen.⁴⁰⁾

Howells’s description of Pompeii takes up Heine’s anthropomorphic view of natural phenomena, his habit of miniaturisation and domestication, and, most interestingly, of including himself in the pictured scene:

What is it comes to me at this distance of that which I saw in Pompeii? The narrow and curving, but not crooked streets, with the blazing sun of that Neapolitan November falling into them, or clouding their wheel-worn lava with the black, black shadows of the many-tinted walls; the houses and the gay columns of white, yellow and red; the delicate pavements of mosaic; the skeletons of dusty cisterns and dead fountains; inanimate garden spaces with pygmy statues suited to their littleness; suites of fairy bed-chambers, painted with exquisite frescoes; dining-halls with joyous scenes of hunt and banquet on the walls; the ruinous sites of temples; the melancholy emptiness of booths and shops and jolly drinking-houses; the lonesome tragic theatre, with a modern Pompeian drawing water from the well there; the baths with their roofs perfect yet, and the stucco-bas-reliefs all but unharmed; around the whole, the city wall crowned with slender poplars; outside the gates, the long avenue of tombs and the Appian way stretching out to Stabiae; and in the distance, Vesuvius, brown and bare, with his fiery breath scarce visible against the cloudless heaven; – these are the things that float before my fancy as I turn back to look at myself walking those enchanted streets [...].⁴¹⁾

Heine, too, remarks on the strangeness of being part of the painting one has just looked at. The inclusion of a kind of “Doppelgänger” contrasts with the proprietary gaze that more often announces the traveller as coloniser or adventurer, and it suggests ambivalence about the search for identity. In a banal way, the search is made harder for Howells as it was for Heine by the fact that “The people know but two varieties of foreigners – the Englishman and the German. If, therefore, you have not *rosbif* expressed in every lineament of your countenance, you must resign yourself to being a German”.⁴²⁾ Heine has to resign himself to being an Englishman because of his broken Italian, “Wegen meines gebrochenen Italienischsprechens

³⁹⁾ See: HEINE, *Sämtliche Werke*, 7/1, *Reise von München nach Genua*, p. 56; HOWELLS, *Italian Journeys* (cit. fn. 36), p. 131.

⁴⁰⁾ HEINE, *Reise von München nach Genua* (ct. fn. 39), p. 58.

⁴¹⁾ HOWELLS, *Italian Journeys* (cit. fn. 36), pp. 62f.

⁴²⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

hielt sie mich im Anfang für einen Engländer, aber ich gestand ihr, daß ich nur ein Deutscher sey".⁴³⁾ But while Heine relentlessly projects images of home on to his new surroundings, Howells is more diffident, more alert to the traveller's predatory habits and conscious that visiting a place affects and is affected by its designation as a place to visit. While both are sensitive to social conditions and the dependence of the visited upon the visitor, Heine defends himself against the miseries around him by accommodating his sense of social injustice to a grander philosophical design; it is Howells who dwells on present poverty in faded splendour, and worries about the Genoans' empty stomachs and the chilblained hands in their kid gloves.

Cady suggests that the realist Howells is educated to his task by "Heine's sense of incongruity, of antithesis and bathos, his power to belittle romantic pretense and find sources of literary power in common, nearby objects".⁴⁴⁾ In Howells's 'international' novels, that is, those set in Europe, there are still 'Heine moments', usually involving love, dreams and rude awakenings. More interestingly, in the autobiographical novel, ›Their Silver Wedding Journey‹ (1895), Heine's comic-poignant descriptive fancies are used to record an excursion in search of Heine himself.⁴⁵⁾ Basil March, Howells's autobiographical hero, and his wife visit Hamburg. Howells appears to distance himself from his own youthful enthusiasm for Heine and from his hero's by having Mrs. March tell a local inhabitant that her husband "has always had a great passion for Heine and wants to look him up everywhere", upon which the narrator comments, "March had forgotten that Heine ever lived in Hamburg, and the young man had apparently never known it".⁴⁶⁾ In search of Heine, they instruct their driver to find a house with a bust in front of it, and when he does:

They dismounted in order to revere it more at their ease, but the bust proved, by an irony bitterer than the sick, heart-breaking, brilliant Jew could have imagined in his cruellest moment, to be that of the German Milton, the respectable poet Klopstock, whom Heine abhorred and mocked so pitilessly.

[...]

The pilgrims to the fraudulent shrine got back into their carriage, and drove sadly away, instructing their driver with the rigidity which their limited German favored, not to let any house with a bust in front of it escape them. He promised, and took his course out through Königstrasse, and suddenly they found themselves in a world of such eld and quaintness that they forgot Heine as completely as any of his countrymen had done.⁴⁷⁾

This quaint world resembles Heine's lost Vineta or the ancient towns of ›Reise von München nach Genua‹:

They were in steep and narrow streets that crooked and turned with no apparent purpose of leading anywhere, among houses that looked down upon them with an astonished stare from

⁴³⁾ HEINE, *Reise von München nach Genua* (ct. fn. 39), p. 44.

⁴⁴⁾ CADY, *Road to Realism* (ct. fn. 4), pp. 51f.

⁴⁵⁾ WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *Their Silver Wedding Journey*, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers 1895, ch. XXI, pp. 134ff..

⁴⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 135f.

the leaden-sashed windows of their timber-laced gables. The façades with their lattices stretching in bands quite across them, and with their steep roofs climbing high in successions of blinking dormers, were more richly mediaeval than anything the travellers had ever dreamt of before, and they feasted themselves upon the unimagined picturesqueness with a leisurely minuteness which brought responsive gazers everywhere to the windows; windows were set ajar; shop doors were darkened by curious figures from within, and the traffic of the tortuous alleys was interrupted by their progress. They could not have said which delighted them more – the houses in the immediate foreground, or the sharp, high gables in the perspectives and the background; but all were like the painted scenes of the stage, and they had a pleasant difficulty in realizing that they were not persons in some romantic drama.⁴⁸⁾

Writing ›Of originality and imitation‹, 1907, an essay that anticipates questions raised by Harold Bloom's ›Anxiety of Influence‹, Howells suggests, with Heine-esque playfulness, that a writer should acknowledge in a confession to be revealed after his death 'that up to a certain moment he had tried as hard as he could to write like this master or that; and that all along in his career he was in the habit of snatching a phrase here, a turn there, that seemed fortunate, and weaving it into the web of his work long after the material and texture had become effectively his own.'⁴⁹⁾ Perhaps ironically in Howells's last echo of Heine, from ›Florentinische Nächte‹, he describes himself in a letter to Henry James, as a "comparatively dead cult with my statues cut down and the grass growing over them in the pale moonlight".⁵⁰⁾

Beyond the individual writer's debt to Heine, he offers the would-be realist more general ways of liberating himself from the sentimental vestiges of romanticism and from the aesthetic constraints of the later nineteenth century. Both Howells and Fontane respect the integrity of Romanticism, its poetry, its sense of the historical and its authenticity, and see it as compatible with realism. At the same time they realise that authenticity emerges from a dialogue with one's own age, reflecting and defining its mood, conditions and needs. Romanticism, says Howells, "was a development of civilization [...] it lifted and widened the minds of people; it afforded them a refuge in an ideal world from the failure and defeat of this [...] and we cannot have its spirit back because this is an age of hopeful striving".⁵¹⁾ It has exhausted itself in seeking "as realism seeks now, to widen the bounds of sympathy, to level every barrier against aesthetic freedom, to escape from the paralysis of tradition". The world of Fontane and Howells is afflicted by its distorted and disingenuous leavings, by sentimentality, superstition, commodification – all signs of the inauthenticity that Howells refers to as "romanticistic" and Fontane as "falsche Romantik". Fontane describes the prolonged exploitation of the themes, figures and

⁴⁸⁾ HOWELLS, *Their Silver Wedding Journey* (cit. fn. 45), p. 137.

⁴⁹⁾ EDWIN H. CADY (ed.), *W. D. Howells as Critic*, London and Boston 1973, ›Of originality and imitation‹, p. 405.

⁵⁰⁾ MILDRED HOWELLS (ed.), *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc. 1928, 2. Vols., vol. 2, p. 350.

⁵¹⁾ CADY (ed.), *W. D. Howells as Critic* (ct. fn. 49), p. 158: "Neo-romanticism"; the 'romanticistic'".

motifs of Romanticism as a “romantischen Quincailleriesmarkt”.⁵²⁾ Howells rejects its pretentious ugliness: statues in Berlin seem to him to be “the modern Prussian avatar of the old German romantic spirit, and bear the same relation to it that modern romanticism in literature bears to romance”.⁵³⁾ It remains “for realism to assert that fidelity to experience and probability of motive are essential conditions of a great imaginative literature”.⁵⁴⁾

In Heine’s writings they recognise the contradictions of romanticism, its energising capacity to liberate and the debilitating seductions of its sentimentality. Heine, however, also offers a bridge over romanticistic writing because his own breaks and transitions open up alternatives. His mockery of romantic pretention, his implicit assumption that there are no unpoetical themes, and his eye for the commonplace but telling detail are useful lessons for the would-be realist.⁵⁵⁾ For example, a single image, the trailing hand of a woman suggesting suffering and possibly sin, provides a moment of reflection in Heine’s ›Reise von München nach Genua‹, becomes an interpretive focus in Storm’s ›Immensee‹ and in his poem “Frauenhand”, – Fontane illustrates the similarities between Heine’s and Storm’s delight in the erotic by quoting this poem – , and a structural element in Howells’s ›Indian Summer.‹⁵⁶⁾ In ›Indian Summer‹ and in Fontane’s ›Effi Briest‹ Heine’s writings provide an intertextual resource that enables both novelists to convey the sentimentality they despise and to encode references to sexuality about which they are famously reticent.⁵⁷⁾ But Heine is such an effective teacher because his eye for the poetical in the commonplace is matched by a strong personal voice; as T. J. Reed suggests, he is an almost bodily presence in his own poetry, with a distinctive “Gestik und Stimme, Sehweise und Gangart”.⁵⁸⁾ Vision and voice combine in writing that, for all its intense subjectivity, conveys both “Zeitbild und Selbstbild”, and so unites the singular and the typical for which the realist strives.⁵⁹⁾ His subjectivity, irony and impatience for historical change, counteract the later nineteenth century’s expectation that the writer will speak for moral, social and political orthodoxy, for the *status quo* and for the alliance of these with the aesthetic. Heine – bolder, more reckless and more challenging than either Howells or Fontane – tells them that things are more complex than this, that the present contains but also re-examines the past.

⁵²⁾ FONTANE, *Sämtliche Werke* (cit. fn. 8), vol. XXI/2, *Literarische Essays und Studien*, p. 639.

⁵³⁾ HOWELLS, *Their Silver Wedding Journey*, p. 480.

⁵⁴⁾ CADY (ed.), *W. D. Howells as Critic* (cit. fn. 49), p. 83: “Negative realism”.

⁵⁵⁾ See: CADY, *The Road to Realism* (cit. fn. 4), pp. 51f.; – E. M. BUTLER, *Heinrich Heine. A Biography*, London 1956, p. 33, describes Heine as “the first German poet [...] to deny implicitly the existence of ‘unpoetical’ themes; the first lyrical realist”.

⁵⁶⁾ FONTANE, *Sämtliche Werke* (cit. fn. 8), vol. XXI/1, *Literarische Essays und Studien*, p. 31.

⁵⁷⁾ See: PATRICIA HOWE, *William Dean Howells’s ›Indian Summer: (1886) and Fontane’s ›Effi Briest‹ (1894). Forms and Phases of the Realist Novel*, in: *The Modern Language Review* 102, 1 (2007), pp. 125–138.

⁵⁸⁾ T. J. REED, *Heines Körperteile. Zur Anatomie des Dichters*, in: T. J. REED and ALEXANDER STILLMARK (eds.), *Heine und die Weltliteratur*, Oxford 2000, pp. 184–201.

⁵⁹⁾ JÜRGEN BRUMMACK, (ed.) *Heinrich Heine. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*, München 1980, p. 119.

Perhaps more radically, Heine's capacity for cutting loose, for making a virtue of dislocation by using it to articulate his passion for freedom, is an even more important lesson, for it provides not just an idea but also the aesthetic strategies to realise it. In his travel writing dislocation is a structural principle, leading "zu anderen Möglichkeiten, die erlauben, das Bestehende zu relativieren, zu ergänzen und zu kritisieren und eine Alternative zu denken".⁶⁰) But, because he projects images of home on to alien surroundings, it is also clear that journey's end is a realignment of self and world. Fontane shows journeys as escape, respite, estrangement, but, ultimately, as the impetus for re-assessment. Howells, too, relates dislocation to the values of home; his Americans in search of identity counter any lapse from or threat to these values by re-assessing the situation and moving on.

These thematic expressions of dislocation are extensions of an aesthetic strategy, namely code-switching, the ability to keep two or more codes alive at the same time. This is Heine's signature, evident in his unpredictable antitheses, his irony, and other reflexive qualities of his writing, above all in the "Stimmungsbrechung", which reverses a romantic or sentimental mood with a banal or sardonic comment. In 'The Structure of the Artistic Text' Jurii Lotman describes this technique as disrupting:

the unity of the point of view between micro-text and macro-text, which in Romantic narratives are combined in a single unmoving center of narration – the author's personality. The unity of the point of view becomes a synonym for Romantic subjectivism.⁶¹)

Lotman shows that code-switching involves juxtaposing conflicting statements or statements on different levels within a single structure so that they are compatible on one level but not on another. Both the single structure and the jarring elements are essential to the effect, because the ultimate purpose is revisionary:

Juxtaposed units that are incompatible in one system force the reader to construct an additional structure in which the incompatibility is eliminated. The text is correlated with both, and this leads to an increase in the number of semantic possibilities [...] against the background of 'incorrectness' (which must be preserved for the structure to work) another ordering takes shape.⁶²)

The result is a re-coding that creates a possible world in which apparent contradictions – the aspects that Cady calls Heine's 'sense of incongruity, of antithesis' – co-exist as fictional entities, shedding the ontology of their origins.⁶³) The reader's conception of the world in the text shifts to incorporate its new elements and in doing so transfigures them. For both Howells and Fontane transfiguration or 'Verklärung' is a key aesthetic concept that modifies the emphasis on the mimetic, suggesting instead that the text does not replicate the 'real' world but models a possible world. Lotman's account illuminates not only Heine's *Stimmungsbrechung* but

⁶⁰) Ibid., p.119.

⁶¹) JURII LOTMAN, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, University of Michigan 1977, p. 269.

⁶²) Ibid., p. 283.

⁶³) CADY, *The Road to Realism* (cit. fn. 4), p. 52.

also such different forms as nonsense poetry and the dialogic discourse of the novel. Lotman explains the last of these as it develops from the subjectivity of Romanticism and its poetry to the multiple points of view inherent in prose:

The text's enslavement to one point of view is conceived of as the predominance of 'expression' over 'content' as 'poetry'. Opposing it is 'prose', the dominion of 'content', free of authorial subjectivity. But significantly, after the 'poetry' of Romanticism laid bare the problem of 'point of view' as the stylistic and philosophical center of the text, the movement towards 'simplicity' was maintained, not by rejecting this accomplishment, but by complicating the issue, by affirming the possibility of many 'points of view' operating simultaneously.⁶⁴)

In other words, the transfiguration involved in this process can produce the dialogic or polyphonic novel, because it "is about accommodating rival discourses, optimistic and pessimistic, within a unified narrative structure".⁶⁵) The "Stimmungsbruchung" comes alive in the discontinuities that contribute to the development of a narrative sequence and of character.

Heine's famous leaps and transitions make the process of re-coding visible. They are not a means of privileging the final word, but of modelling a world in which different points of view co-exist. It may not be too fanciful to see them as a secular form of the contrasts found in mystical poetry where opposites embrace all the possibilities that lie between them. Although the jarring element may be understood to signal deconstruction, they belong referentially and aesthetically to the ideals and processes of liberation; for they are intended to instruct and enrich, as Heine tells readers of the French translation of his ›Reisebilder‹, where 'les transitions, les brusques saillies, les étrangetés d'expression' produce a German book in the French language:

C'est de cette manière que nous avons, nous autres Allemands, traduit les écrivains étrangers, et cela nous a profité: nous y avons gagné des points de vue, des formes de mots et des tours de langage nouveaux.⁶⁶)

And Heine cannot resist telling his French readers that it would not hurt them to do the same. Other "Stimmungsbrüche" contextualise subjective experience, so that it becomes both individual and typical, often in an uncomfortable way; for example, on one level the "Stimmungsbruchung" that appears to disrupt poems about love breaks a mood, but on another level it signals the discomfiting truth that all experiences of love are banal, except one's own. Fontane recognises this when he speaks of "Liebesgeschichten mit ihrer schauderösen Ähnlichkeit"; Howells demonstrates it in the episode in Grossetto. Disjunction and re-coding offer them strategies for exploring aspects of romantic individualism in the context of communities

⁶⁴) LOTMAN, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (cit. fn. 61), p. 269.

⁶⁵) PETER JAMES BOWMAN, *Fontane and the Programmatic Realists. Contrasting Theories of the Novel*, in: *The Modern Language Review* 103, 1 (2008), p. 142.

⁶⁶) HEINRICH HEINE, *Reisebilder, Œuvres complètes de Henri Heine, Nouvelle Édition*, Paris 1834, p. 2.

faced with discontinuities, unease, choices between the viable and the moribund, the subjects that Fontane and Howells debate in their novels. The process of recoding illustrates the peculiar paradox of realism, as Renate Böschstein describes it, namely its capacity to affirm the contemporary reader's empirical understanding of the real, while pointing through its discursive strategies and metaphorical language to a poetic exploration of that reality that leads to those elements that are unrecognised, unpenetrated, perhaps resisted.⁶⁷⁾ Heine shows that fissures and fractures point beyond their immediate cause and manifestation to other possible worlds, and this in a philosophical, historical and aesthetic sense. In dream images, in personification and characterisation, in links between historical debate and personal experience, in forms of dislocation, Heine shows how the past is extended and transformed in writing. Elements like these foster a talent for hybrid forms, until it produces the polyphonic novel, in which many individual voices and discourses moderate the insistent, omniscient voice of authority and are, as Bowman says, affirmed and accommodated in a unified structure. Heine contributes to this process both a view of the world and a means of translating it into the forms of realism that he and Howells and Fontane believe are what contemporary society needs.

⁶⁷⁾ RENATE BÖSCHSTEIN, *Zur Struktur des realistischen Schreibens. Am Beispiel der Darstellung des psychischen Lebens einfacher Landbewohner* (1994), in: *Idylle, Todesraum und Aggression, Beiträge zur Droste-Forschung*, Bielefeld 2007, edited by ORTRUN NIETHAMMER, *Veröffentlichungen der Literaturkommission für Westfalen*, Bd. 24, pp. 97–126.