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The Heine Cult in Hebrew Literature of the 1890s and its Russian Context

What is the reason for the fact that the enthusiastic interest of Hebrew literature in Heine began only at the end of the nineteenth century -- this, after fifty to sixty years of rather reserved reception?

This question was asked by Moshe Zweik in a discussion of the Hebrew translations of Heine. Zweik wrote: "It is surprising that Heine is absent from the group of German poets who were translated during the period of the Enlightenment."¹ The surprise is especially strong, he explained, since it would be expected that during the first half of the nineteenth century, when the Hebrew Enlightenment was encouraging translations of German literature into Hebrew, that Heine would also be translated. Heine was a famous poet in Germany and throughout Europe; nevertheless, only one of his poems was translated into Hebrew during his lifetime: "Frau Sorge" in 1853. During the next thirty-five years, only twenty more of his poems were translated. But, in the thirty years between 1888-1918, over two hundred poems by Heine were translated into Hebrew.²

Zweik argues that Heine's virtual absence cannot be accounted for by his conversion to Christianity, since the people of the Hebrew Enlightenment were tolerant of religious issues. In Zweik's opinion the reason was two-fold: first, the florid rhetoric of the Enlightenment was not suitable for dealing with Heine's language, which was seemingly simple, though actually sophisticated and stylized. Second, Heine's poetry, especially his love poetry, was foreign to the spirit of the Hebrew-German Enlightenment. The representatives of Enlightenment preferred literature which could serve their educational aims and express the moral values which they accepted.³

The language limitations can hardly explain the question of translation, since it would be wrong to say that Hebrew was a living language at the end of the nineteenth century. The difficulties in translating Heine's light and

¹ Moshe Zweik, "Heine Ba-Sifrut Ha'Ivrit" (Heine in Hebrew Literature), *Orlogin* 11 (1955), 179-195.

² Shmuel Lachover, "Heinrich Heine Be'Ivrit -- Me'ah Shana Le'Moto; 1856-1956. Bibliographia" (Heinrich Heine in Hebrew, 1856-1956. A Bibliography), *Yad Lakoreh* iv (1956-1957), 143-193.

³ Zweik, *ibid.*, 188.

elegant style into the language of Hebrew poetry exist until the present time. Arieh Leib Mintz, who in 1888 completed excellent translations of eleven of Heine's poems, decided in the 1920s to translate Heine, but this time, when he translated 136 of Heine's poems, he translated them into prose (published in 1929). Language limitations were not the reason for Heine's distance from the representatives of Hebrew-German Enlightenment, who were not deterred from translating Goethe and Schiller into Hebrew. Language limitations certainly cannot explain the outburst of public interest in Heine towards the end of the century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Heine had been an embarrassing historical fact, whose existence seemed to demand apologetic explanations, for example those given by Graetz.⁴ Sometimes, writers attributed their own opinions to Heine himself, as was done by Moses Hess.⁵ Elazar Schulman's 1876 monograph on Heine, *Mimkor Israel*, was written entirely in an apologetic tone as part of the tendency towards clearing Heine's name of the profanation of morality and religion.⁶ Contrastingly, representatives of the Hebrew-Russian Enlightenment -- for example, Yehuda Leib Gordon (Yalag) -- saw Heine as a lost treasure; if he had remained with the Jewish people, so Gordon claimed, he would have made useful contributions to the Renaissance of the national culture.⁷

The public interest in Heine began to increase greatly towards the end of the eighties and reached its peak in the nineties and in the first decade of this century.⁸ This was the time of the bitter debate over the "epidemic" fashion of imitating Heine's poems in Hebrew poetry.⁹ The Hebrew newspapers took

⁴ Zvi (Hirsh Heinrich) Graetz, *Divrei Yemei Hajehudim* (The History of the Jewish People), (A. Y. Trivosh, Trans.), (Vilna: 1908-1909), 264-292.

⁵ Moses (Moritz) Hess, "Du-Siakh be'Olam ha'Emet bein Heine u'Berne" (A Dialogue between Heine and Börne in the Next World), *Ktavim Klali'im* (General Writings), (Yeshurun Keshet, Trans.), (Jerusalem: Hasifria ha'Tsionit, 1955), 230-236.

⁶ Elazar Schulman, *Mimkor Israel* (From Israel's Source), Part one: "Toldot Heinrich Heine" (The Biography of Heinrich Heine), (Vienna: 1876).

⁷ Yehuda Leib Gordon (Yalag), "Hasfikhim" (After-Growths), *Ha'Assif* 1 (Warsaw: 1884), 172-176.

⁸ Wolf Shor, "Heinrich Heine," *Hayom* (Petersburg: 1886), nos. 44, 52, 61, 68; Moshe Lilienblum, "Divrei Zemer" (Melodies), *Luakh Akhiassaf*, 5 (1898), 19-20; David Kabonovski, 'Heine', *Leket Prakhim* (A Collection of Flowers), (Gershon Bader, Ed.), (Warsaw: 1986), copybook two, 22-23; Kolmos, "Letoldot Heinrich Heine" (The Biography of Heinrich Heine), *Hamelitz* 131 (June 25, 1897), 2-3; Shimon Bernfeld, "Akh Rakhok" (A Distant Brother), *Hashiloakh* 3 (1898), 117-124, 216-223, 310-320; Reuven Brainin, "Heinrich Heine (Sirtutim Akhadim)," (Heinrich Heine [A Few Notes]), *Hatsofeh*, 22 (February 10, 1903), 181; David Frischman, "Heinrich Heine (On February 16, 1906)," *Kol Kitvei David Frischman* (Collected Works), (Warsaw: 1914), Vol. 3, 49-70.

⁹ David Frishman, *Mikhtavim al dvar Ha'Sifrut* (Letters on Literature), (Warsaw: Akhiassaf, 1895), 1-20; Lilienblum, *loc. cit.*; Yosef Klauzner, "Shirei Ahava" (Love Poems), *Ha'Eshkol* 1 (1898), 54-71; "Mlekhet Makhshevet, Tkhiat ha'Uma" (A Work of Art, National Revival), *Hador* 1 (1901), 14, 10-12.

a continual interest in the question of Heine's estate and reported in detail on the controversy in wake of the refusal of the town council of Düsseldorf to erect a memorial stone in Heine's honor.¹⁰ Heine was mentioned in journalistic notes written by Sokolov as a natural part of the Jewish European cultural heritage.¹¹ The question of including him in the canon of Jewish literature was a subject of debate between Ahad Ha-am and Bialik. Ahad Ha-am claimed that the national literature of a people is limited to what is written in the national language, by which he meant Hebrew for the Jewish people, whereas Bialik demanded inclusion of Heine's work in the Hebrew literary canon.¹²

An enthusiastic approach to Heine at the turn of the century was a salient feature of the new Hebrew generation in Russia. For the Hebrew Enlightenment in Russia, Heine was a famous Western European writer, whose Jewish origin was a source of pride and whose spiritual world was a point of identification. For example, in Gnessin's story, "Beterem" (Before, 1909), the young, enlightened hero quotes Heine's poetry, both as a natural part of his European education and as an expression of his world view.¹³

Yet, the question remains: what did the Hebrew literature of "Hatkhia" (Revival, Renaissance) find of importance in Heine? In an essay entitled "The Biography of Heinrich Heine," published in *Hamelitz* in 1897, Yalag was quoted as follows: "A poem is like the manna eaten by our forefathers in the desert [...] each reader tastes in it what he wants to taste." The writer

¹⁰ Moshe Khaikin, "Matsevet Zikaron Le'Heinrich Heine" (A Memorial Monument for Heinrich Heine), *Hatsfira* 116 (May 27, 1897), 475; *ibid.*, 118 (May 30, 1897), 484; Shimon Bernfeld, "Matsevet Zikaron Le'Heine" (A Memorial Monument for Heine), *Hatsfira* 157 (July 23, 1911).

¹¹ Nahum Sokolov, "Mishut Be'Eiropa" (Visiting Europe), *Hatsfira* 239 (November 13, 1896).

¹² Ahad Ha-am, "Tkhiat Ha'Ruakh" (Spiritual Renaissance), *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha-Am* (Collected Works of Ahad Ha-Am), (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1947), 178; Haim Nakhman Bialik, "Hasefer Ha'Ivri" (The Hebrew Book), *Kol Kitvei H. N. Bialik* (Collected Works of H. N. Bialik), (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1941), 198-199. Bialik's "The Hebrew book" is a lecture, published in two versions; the first in *Hatsfira* 1913, nos. 185, 186, and 191; the second in *Hashiloah* 29 (1913). In the first version Bialik calls Heine "a loyal son of his nation" and demands that his poetry be translated into Hebrew as "a monument in memorial of our national geniuses." In the second version, however, he objects to the erection of a monument. He perceives Heine's ostracism as a symbol of the Jewish fate, but still recommends the translation of his poetry into Hebrew as a "wandering monument." See also Shmuel Verses, "Hasefer ha'Ivri - Shtei Girsat u'Misaviv Lahen" (The Hebrew Book -- Two Versions), *Bein Gilui le'Khisui* (The Explicit and the Implicit - Bialik in Story and Essay), (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz ha'Meuchad, 1984), 117-118.

¹³ Uri Nissam Gnessin, *Kol Ktavav* (Collected Works), (Dan Miron and Israel Zmora, Eds.), (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim and Ha'Kibutz ha'Meuchad, 1982), 290-292. See also Dan Miron's note on page 657.

continues and says that in Heine's poetry critics also tasted whatever their particular class or political and poetic school dictated to them.¹⁴

In fact, if we follow what was written about Heine in Hebrew by critics who lived in Russia during the seventies and eighties, the crucial years in which Enlightenment (Hebrew) literature gave way to the "Period of Revival," it is possible to see that the differences in their receptions of Heine were not only quantitative. Heine's personal and literary portraits were drawn according to different fashions, and thus reflected the changes in perspectives and tastes which were occurring during this period. For example, the above mentioned monograph written by Elazar Schulman in 1876 presents Heine as a warrior against tyranny and a fighter for truth and freedom. According to Schulman, "Heine never profaned pure love; he was unable to tread on the high ideals and lofty thoughts which are dear to everyone seeking justice and freedom."¹⁵ Moreover, in the foundations of his soul he was a loyal Jew. For example, in his criticism of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, he battled for his people. Schulman's Heine is a "radical liberal," who dedicated his life to the battle for Romantic and national ideals.

In an essay from 1884, Yalag expressed his appreciation of Jewish artists writing in German and Russian, among whom was Heine. Yalag commented: "All of my life I was saying sorrowfully: 'when will there stand among us a Hebrew poet like Heine, who would explain for his generation [...] [to the Russians] the toil of Israel and all its sufferings.'"¹⁶ Yalag saw Frug as Heine's Russian parallel. According to Yalag, Heine was a poet who explained the sufferings and troubles of the Jews to the German people, and that, according to his perspective, was the true role of a poet -- to reflect in his poetry the problems of society and to be, in this way, useful. Fourteen years later, in 1898, Lilienblum started at the same aesthetic position, namely, that literature must deal with general issues and be useful to society. From this point of departure, he attacked Heine's love poems and their imitations in Hebrew poetry of the 1890s. Lilienblum rejected the "Heine epidemic."¹⁷ He wrote: "Poems of love [...] are only the private interest of a single person and have no place within general literature [...]. What do the readers of newspaper supplements and collections care about the private groanings [of poets]?"¹⁸ Jews also have a love poem in their literature, he continued, "The Song of Songs, which was an ancient, but popular poem. Still, those who wish to belong to a developed culture, must also insist on usefulness and insist on some type of idea which can be useful for our

¹⁴ Kolmos, see note 8 above.

¹⁵ See note 6 above, p. 15.

¹⁶ Gordon (Yalag), see note 7 above.

¹⁷ Lilienblum, see note 8 above.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

people."¹⁹ According to Lilienblum, Heine was not a liberal freedom fighter, nor was he singing the plight of the Jewish people; rather, he was a poet who wrote lyric poetry, which was neither useful nor moral.

Heine's portrait, as it was drawn in the Hebrew literature of the nineties, was being transfigured. Despite those who justified Heine the apostate and claimed that he had remained a Jew in his roots and soul (as Frischman tried to prove, when he published Heine's letters to Moser, and as Bialik tended to see him in his article "The Hebrew Book"), for the first time voices were heard that were prepared to receive Heine as a poet who had totally alienated himself from his Jewish roots.

Bernfeld's extensive essay, which was published in *Hashiloach* (1898) in honor of Heine's one hundredth birthday, is a clear example of the new style of Heine's readers developing at the end of the century. Bernfeld's Heine was a decadent, as this term was understood in Russia at the time. He was introduced to the reader as an epicurean aristocrat, as a heretic "as long as it remained customary in the upper-class [...] but when other people began to believe similarly, the poet returned to his belief in God with all his heart."²⁰ This formulation is reminiscent of des Esseintes, Huysmans' hero in *À Rebours*, which was considered the bible of French decadence. Bernfeld did not find in Heine any morality or national idealism. He wrote: "Heine lacked throughout his entire life the power to overcome his impulses, since he never would agree to losing his soul for some moral purpose."²¹ Bernfeld also wrote that Heine knew all of the various impulses and desires, but none of the moral and national emotions. Unlike Börne, Heine was not a publicist who wrote about contemporary issues from the depth of his heart and with enthusiasm when needed.²² He respected his people only for his own pleasure, and he hated the democrats with all his heart. He had a brilliant and cunning mind, but lacked warm emotions. Heine was a born pessimist and turned in his old age into a poet of "ennui." His perspective was always subjective. "He continually placed himself at the center of all the world's phenomena, and from his flesh he deduced predictions on the entire human race."²³ In Heine's words, it is possible to find egoism and self-glorification. Yet all of this -- and even Heine's alienation from the traditions of Hebrew literature -- did not diminish his greatness in Bernfeld's view. The opposite is true. These features allowed him to find in Heine an expression of the *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere that was the "dernier cri" in Russia at the beginning of the Age of Silver. Also Brainin, in an article published in 1903, called Heine

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ Bernfeld, see note 8 above. p. 314.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

²² *Ibid.*, 313.

²³ *Ibid.*, 318.

"the modern of moderns" and emphasized that Heine's writings were esoteric and not meant to meet the needs of the people, nor were they so received by the German literary establishment.²⁴

The change which took place towards the turn of the century in the reception of Heine is also reflected in the choice of poems which were translated. Until the end of the eighties, the only poems which were translated were meditative, with conceptual propositions which were rationalistic, as well as those poems which dealt with the rehabilitation of the Jewish cultural tradition. The excellent translations of Arie Leib Mintz from 1888 are actually revolutionary. There are seven poems of love and desire, and these contain descriptions of sexual fantasies or of lovers lacking emotions. In the translation of "Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus" ("Die Heimkehr, XIV"), Mintz does not flinch from using bold erotic expressions, unusual in Hebrew poetry of the time. Also included here is a translation of the poem "Auf ihrem Grab" ("Tragödie, 3"), in which Heine expresses identification with "the flower of sinful soul," which blooms where suicide victims are buried. Also, poems like "Die schlanke Wasserlilie" ("Neuer Frühling, 15"), and "Laß die heil'gen Parabolten" ("Zum Lazarus, 1") express direct denial of the moral world and the existence of God.²⁵

Lilienblum's protest against the "Heine epidemic" would probably not have erupted with such fury, had the translations and the Heine-like poems only contained love poetry in the Romantic sense. It was not love, but rather the denial of love as a spiritual and sacred emotion that shocked the enlightened Jews in Russia. No less shocking was Heine's denial of the trustworthiness of collective moral and national values, as well as Heine's "decadent" traits, which Bernfeld and others specified.

In order to understand why the "decadent" Heine was so popular in Hebrew Renaissance literature we should turn to the Russian literature from which Hebrew literature of the second half of the nineteenth century developed. The first Russian translations of Heine appeared in 1844; the translators were Apolon Grigoriev and Mikhail Mikhailov.²⁶ Grigoriev translated six poems, meticulously matching Heine's rhythm, and so contributed greatly towards the penetration of a prosaic style which later became a favorite of the Russian Symbolists and was called "pausnik" or "dol'nik."²⁷ In 1858, a collection of Heine's poems appeared, translated by Mikhailov. Mikhailov, a friend of Tchernikhovski, chose the poems and

²⁴ Brainin, see note 8 above.

²⁵ Arie Leib Mintz, "Mishirei Heine" (From Heine's Poetry), *Knesset Israel* 3 (1888), 392-396.

²⁶ Hermann Ritz, *150 Jahre russische Übersetzung* (Bern, Frankfurt/M: 1981).

²⁷ Viktor Zhirmunskii, *Nemetskii Romantizm i Sovremennaya Mistika* (German Romanticism and Contemporary Mysticism), (Leningrad: 1913), 180.

adapted them, so that they received the social and humanistic purpose which is missing in the original. In the fifties and sixties a myth was created in Russia of Heine being a lover of his people, whose life was sacrificed for his love of truth and uncompromising justice. In these years Heine was often translated, and a fashion of imitations, which were translated adaptations, spread. The translations of Maikov, Mai, Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy, and especially Veinberg contributed to the portrait of Heine as a liberal. The Jewish writer, Veinberg, who assumed the pen-name "Heine of Tambov," published a volume of translations of Heine in 1860, and, in 1866 he began to publish Heine's collected works in 12 volumes.

Heine was also translated by Fet and Tiutchev. Their own work, which was influenced by German Romanticism, did not suit the "civic" poetics which ruled Russia at this time, but received the renewed admiration of Symbolists, like Afanasy Fet, a poet influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer and who translated *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* into Russian. Feodor Tiutchev, who had close personal contacts with Heine during the twenties and thirties, when he stayed in Germany, was influenced by Heine's poetry and translated large portions of it.

Tynianov, in his article "Tiutchev and Heine" (1922)²⁸ shows that despite the closeness between the two poets, Tiutchev, the Romantic, remained blind to the non-romantic elements of Heine's poetry. Tiutchev's first translations, which he completed in 1830, are partially translated adaptations and are considerably different from the originals. Although Tiutchev kept the artistic form of Heine's poems, the translations show the basic poetic distance which existed between them. For example, Tiutchev softens Heine's incisive endings, the sharpness of which is often caused by a sudden lowering of the diction of the language or a deviation from the accepted meter. He would sometimes exchange "I" for "We" and so achieve in the poem more of the characteristics of a lofty dramatic chorus and less of those of a light lyrical poem. Tynianov wrote that Tiutchev was unfamiliar with Heine's special irony, his special "Witz," which was close to the "esprit" of French eighteenth-century poetry. He explained Tiutchev's deviations from the originals on the basis of national tradition and the spirit of Russian literature.

A considerable part of Tynianov's article is dedicated to his reservations about the popular belief that Tiutchev was an imitator of Heine. According to Tynianov, Tiutchev was closer to German Romanticism than Heine. Although Heine saw himself as a Romantic, and even used Romantic motifs in his poetry, he actually alienated himself from the Romantic experience and emptied it of its emotional and conceptual contents. Without explicitly saying so, Tynianov found in Heine's poetry the characteristics of European deca-

²⁸ Ju. N. Tynianov, "Tiutchev i Geine" (Tiutchev and Heine), *Teoria Literatury; Kino* (Theory of Literature, Cinema), (Moskow: Nauka, 1976), 350-395.

dent poetry. He wrote, for example, that the Romantic ideals -- infinity, God, love, nature -- lose their value in Heine's poetry and become empty thematic schemes to be filled with "stylistic content." A dream in Heine's poetry is not an idealization of the phenomenal world, but rather a subjective revelation of consciousness. Heine relates ironically to the tendency of human consciousness to redesign the picture of reality according to its needs, illusions, and whims. Beneath the vital landscape in Heine's poems lies an inanimate landscape, barren and illusory, a lifeless scene, whose components build oxymoronic constructions. The landscape in Heine's poems does not reflect the poet's emotions. But, he does include macabre elements, as he sometimes describes the city as a place of shadows and graves. Love is occasionally a desire for a ghost or a statue. Heine's style testifies to an aestheticism alienated from emotion. Heine has the tendency to use an epithet, which creates a contradiction with the noun, or a series of epithets which do not connect with each other. His epithet does not present a coherent picture, but instead is the means of creating a formal musical game. Heine's use of motifs and forms from popular poetry is a stylization; its purpose is strictly formal. His poetry is full of parodic games and self parody. Heine prefers the aesthetic form over emotion. He occasionally exaggerates emotional expression as a means of destroying the emotional illusion. Similarly, his use of prosody is not expressive, but rather a manipulation of pure form for ornamental purposes.

Tynianov's article, which was written during the period when Russian literature was rejecting Decadence and Symbolism, on one hand exposes the characteristics which caused Heine's popularity among the symbolists; on the other hand, it emphasizes his estrangement from the traditions of Russian literature and the spirit of the Russian people. Similarly, he compared Heine and Blok in his article "Blok and Heine" (1921).²⁹ There he wrote that although Blok translated Heine's poems and was greatly influenced by their rhythm, his translations contain fewer ironic closures and more emotional imagery. Both Heine and Blok lived during a revolutionary period and contributed to the struggle against the old order, but Heine's revolt was only literary and stylistic, and not experiential. Blok built his art from emotions, while Heine from the word as pure form. It is not the subject matter which is important for Heine, but rather its formal design. Heine destroyed the subject in order to destroy emotion. Form is his way of reaching the freedom of spiritual self-knowledge, while Blok's art is not emancipation, but rather work and sacrifice. Even though Blok, like Heine, used Romantic imagery and subjects only as a means of creating emotional effects, Blok's pictures are realistic, whereas Heine does not evoke clear images, but instead uses words

²⁹ Ju. N. Tynianov, *Blok i Geine* (Blok and Heine), (Moskow: 1921).

as the material for creating ornamental arabesques. He draws pictures of incongruent elements, which sometimes create comic effects. Tynianov's description shows that Blok continued the Romantic tradition, while Heine used the integrated Romantic tradition to destroy its emotional quality. In the conclusion to his article, Tynianov wrote that Blok's basic genre was Romance, a genre which developed in Christian Europe during the Middle Ages, whereas Heine's basic genre was the Eastern arabesque. That is the reason why there was so much debate over Heine, both in his lifetime and after his death, while Blok rose above all debate.³⁰

Tynianov's effort to clear Blok of any suspicion of similarity to Heine's poetics is contradicted by the impression which Blok himself gave two years before his death in his three lectures on Heine in 1919: "Heine in Russia," "Heine and Herzen," and "On Heine's Judaism."³¹ All three are written in tones of admiration of, and identification with, Heine. In his first lecture, Blok attacked the liberal image which Heine enjoyed in Russian literature during the fifties and sixties. He spoke loathsomely of "the myth of a liberal Heine, a lover of his people,"³² and claimed that Mikhailov's translations were not really Heine, since they contained too much Romanticism, while lacking Heine's mercilessness. The humanistic tradition of the nineteenth century totally destroyed the language and true experience of Heine. Only now had the time come to begin to listen to the original and true Heine. Blok wrote:

Heine in his element is *anti-humanist* [original emphasis], and therefore was continually persecuted, continually misunderstood, and continually adapting himself to reality. Now, the time has come to listen to Heine, when throughout the world the bells of anti-humanism are ringing and the world has removed its humanist costume. Now it is clear that man is a cruel animal or a vegetable without humanity. Now we can comprehend and Heine can be read in the context of Wagner, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Dostoevski -- writers, who throughout the nineteenth century prepared us for the downfall of humanism. The man, whom these writers see as the aim of humanity is neither moral, humane, nor political, but rather a Man-Artist ["chelovek-artist"].³³

Blok's conclusions were that Heine, who was first and foremost an artist, must be understood and translated as such, and not, as was the custom, to seek in him liberal, Romantic ideas. Blok strengthened this claim in his second lecture by quoting Herzen. According to Herzen, Heine did not know

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

³¹ Alexander Blok, *Sobranie Sochinenii* (Collected Works), (Moskow-Leningrad: 1962), T. 6, 116-125, 141-143, 144-150, respectively.

³² *Ibid.*, 118.

³³ *Ibid.*, 125.

the people, nor did the people know him. Blok quotes Herzen, saying that: "On the cold heights where he [Heine] sat, emotions could not reach, neither pain nor joy."³⁴ Furthermore, "Heine wrote out of limitless, stricken self-love."³⁵ He mocked "the movement of human foolishness, partly Jewish-Russian foolishness, that never stopped gushing over the brightest of the brilliant among the Jews."³⁶

In his lecture "On Heine's Judaism," Blok claimed that Heine was against Judaism. He explained that betrayal is in itself not a vulgar deed, but rather an act of religious significance. Heine belonged to the school of "cursed poets" (meaning, of course, the French *poètes maudits*). All great men of the humanities were traitors, suggested Blok, not out of humbleness, but in order to fulfill their greatness.

It is easy to see that Blok identified with the perspectives which he assigned to Heine, and which he himself called "anti-humanist." He also found in Heine's works self-love, emotional alienation towards his people and mankind, and the dissolution of morality. This did not hinder him from seeing the greatness of Heine as an artist and as a religious man. In the portrait of Heine drawn by Blok, Nietzsche's influence is clearly recognizable. Nietzsche was at the center of Russian Symbolism and seminal in Blok's own work. Blok's positive attitude towards Heine's "immorality," his criticism of humanism, liberalism, and Russian nationalism, and his respectful attitude towards anti-humanistic writers, mainly the French symbolist poets are signs of the special spiritual climate of the Age of Silver in Russia at the turn of the century. Also characteristic is the attempt by Blok, who was the foremost representative of Russian Symbolism, to treat Heine's "immorality" as a kind of sacred religion, while at the same time negating his Jewish roots.

Yet, it was the apostate Jewish writers in Russia who began, even before Blok, to draw the portrait of the new man, the decadent, the cosmopolitan, the self-aware egoist, aspiring to obtain an artistic, mystical experience and not an altruistic social stance. Minski's book *Pri Svete Sovesti* (By the Light Conscience, 1890) was the first Russian public manifestation of the new movement. Volynski, in his activities as an editor and publicist, helped to establish it. Volynski, who was Merezhkovski's partner in designing the mystical character of Russian symbolism, tried to present Heine as the outcome of his beliefs and personal destiny. In a lecture on Heine, he claimed that Heine's work expressed the common spiritual-rational denominator found in both Protestant Christianity, German Idealism, and ancient Judaism.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Lev Shestov, the decadent-existentialist philosopher, wrote about Heine in 1907, two years before Blok began to translate Heine's "Die Heimkehr." Shestov considered Heine a declared skeptic and a moral relativist. According to him, Heine understood that passion and impulse, and not reason, rule man, and that philosophical "truths" are the result of a psychological situation. Heine's greatness was a result of his impudence, which testified to his pride, his self-conscious greatness, and his knowledge of his rights. Heine knew that his soul's redemption resulted from its victory over the spirit and its acceptance of a heavy yoke, "but he loathed such redemption and ridiculed philosophy, morality, and different religions."³⁷ The increased interest in Heine was, then, one of the phenomena which characterized Russian literature at the turn of the century, and it is directly related to the "decadent" roots from which the philosophy and aesthetics of the Russian Age of Silver grew, and which had special attraction for intellectual Jews at the time.

The Heine cult in Hebrew Renaissance literature is part of a basic change which occurred in the 1890s, which was related to similar developments simultaneously occurring in Russian literature. Hebrew literature written at the turn of the century, commonly called "Hatkhia," is usually characterized by its Romantic features. Nevertheless, this literature was also influenced by Russian Decadence and Symbolism, which directly opposed the basic ideas of the Hebrew Renaissance movement, whose official slogan carried the signature of Romantic nationalism. The declared ideology of the Hebrew Renaissance literature, whose major representatives were Berdychevski, Bialik, Tchernikhovski, Gnessin, and Brenner, was an optimistic national ideology, which stood for the possibility of a Renaissance of the culture and moral spirit of the Jewish people. But, the Renaissance movement was active in Eastern Europe during a period in which the Romantic, liberal humanistic culture of the nineteenth century was collapsing. The major forces which were vying for influence were scientific materialism in its Marxist version on one hand, while, on the other hand, there were a variety of idealisms, whose origins could be found in the works of German philosophers, like Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, and Nietzsche. Russian literature of the period was influenced by French Symbolism and European Decadence, and the reception of these influences in Russia, taking into account the strong tradition of poetry with moral and social commitment, aroused agitation and stormy controversy, mainly because of the immoral and anti-humanistic character of these influences. Hebrew literature, throughout the second half of the nine-

³⁷ Lev Shestov, "Tkhilat Dvarim Aharonim" (The Beginning of Last Words), (U. N. Gnessin, Trans. [190]); see note 12 above, Vol. 2, 259. Originally: "Predposlednia Slova," *Hachala i Kontsy* (St. Petersburg: Shipovnik, 1908), 124-197.

teenth century, grew under the clear influence of "cuvuc" and "narodnik" poetics and could not remain untouched by these new influences. Generally, it is possible to say that this is literature enveloped in a continual conflict between the optimistic belief in the national Renaissance idea, a basically Romantic ideal, and, between the pessimistic aestheticism of European decadence. Certainly, the responses were not uniform. They were mostly dependent on the background and education of the artist. Writers such as Frishman and Berdychevski, who received Western educations, and Gnessin, who achieved by himself the equivalent of a Western education, tended towards the decadent direction, whereas writers such as Brenner and Bialik, whose greatest source of external influence was Russian literature, gathered forces around an openly declared anti-decadent position, even though their work did not remain entirely free of the decadent experience. The basic claim of the opponents of the new European movement was that it was essentially foreign and contradicted the Jewish moral spirit, an idea which was formulated and established in articles by Ahad Ha-am and Klauzner.

The interest which Hebrew literature took in Heine at the end of the century, that is, at a time during which he was considered in Russia to be a decadent poet, arose partially because of the great interest afforded Nietzsche, Ibsen, Schopenhauer, Baudelaire, and anything then considered modern. Furthermore, Heine aroused identification in those Hebrew poets in Eastern Europe, who, despite their writing in Hebrew, saw themselves as belonging to Western European culture and wanted to compete with world-class writers. Heine's conversion did, in fact, bother the enlightened Jews of Russia, for, despite their religious tolerance, they still attributed sacred values to ideological and moral principles.

During the Renaissance period there were writers, Gnessin for example, who thought that ideological, moral, and religious declarations were an insignificant, exterior part of the unchanging psychological nature of man. These were ideas that penetrated Hebrew literature through Russian literature at the turn of the century.

Consequently, Heine's reception in Hebrew literature of this period was the result of the cultural *fin-de-siècle* climate in Europe at the end of the century, which penetrated Hebrew literature through contacts with foreign literatures, and more importantly, through the processes which both thought and literature were going through during the Silver Age in Russia.