

Heine

A play in two acts

By Motti Lerner

Translated from the Hebrew by Anthony Berris

This play is based on the biography of the Jewish-German poet Heinrich Heine during his exile in France in 1831-1856. Although it deals with a historical figure, it is not a documentary play that strictly adheres to historical details, and most of what happens in it is a figment of the author's imagination.

Unless otherwise stated, Heine's poems are taken from The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version, translated by Hal Draper. Rights to use these translations must be obtained prior to production.

The Characters:

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| 1. Heinrich Heine (34) - | A German émigré poet |
| 2. Ludwig Beckerman (45) - | A German émigré journalist |
| 3. Mathilde (19) - | Heine's wife |
| 4. Marie (30) - | A Parisian princess and poetry enthusiast |
| 5. Alfred (40) - | Advisor to the King of France and Marie's husband |
| 6. Wolfgang Strauss (35) - | A German émigré translator |
| 7. Jeanette (40) - | Strauss's wife and Beckerman's lover |
| 8. Brauner (35) - | A German émigré poet |
| 9. Martha (26) - | A waitress at a café in Paris |
| 10. Friedrich Wilhelm (60) - | King of Prussia |
| 11. Julius Campe (50) - | Heine's publisher |
| 12. Hoffmann (40) - | The king's secretary |
| 13. Albert (50) - | A Parisian policeman |

Street musicians, policemen, officers, border guards, revolutionaries, etc.

The Plot:

The plot takes place in different parts of Paris and Germany. The stage is empty, except for necessary props, enabling quick scene changes.

Style:

The play is written as a performance by a group of actors, i.e., the theatrical components are visible to the audience. Many of the actors play several roles. The actors openly bring in and take out props and set parts. The musicians are visible onstage throughout the play. Several actors make up a chorus that sings Heine's lieder.

Act I

1. The German French border, 1831. A stormy night. Enter Heine and Campe in a “carriage”. Campe whips the “horses”.

- Campe: Had you listened to me I wouldn't be smuggling you over the border like a thief in the night.
- Heine: I am proud to flee, Julius.
- Campe: Only a fool like me would publish a book in which the King of Prussia and the bishops swallow each other's vomit to enslave Germany together.
- Heine: You'll be adding another floor to your home due to this book.
- Campe: This book is the reason the King has sent an army of agents after you, Heinrich.
- Heine: He wants to discover how I write and write like me.
- Campe: He sent them because you besmirched his honor! (**Angrily**) And why did you have to add that stupid joke about old Jehovah's ad in the papers that he has not authorized anyone on earth to speak in his name? You've outraged the entire church.
- Heine: You laughed when you read it.
- Campe: The King will kill you because of it.
- Heine: What are you angrier about, Julius? That you were forced to leave your warm fireside in the middle of the night, or that your goose has decided to lay its golden eggs in Paris?
- Campe: Do not flatter yourself, Heinrich. No other publisher will dare to publish your books.
- Heine: I'm certain that you bribed the Censor to ban this one. Whatever he bans always sells better.
- Campe: Not this time.

They stop at the border crossing. Campe swallows his anger and embraces Heine.

- Campe: I hope you're smart enough and modest enough to stay alive.

Campe exits. Heine hands his papers to the two guards

- Guard A: No crossing at night. Come back in the morning.
- Heine: (**Gives him a coin**) Here.
- Guard A: You want me to open the gate in the middle of the night for one thaler?

Heine takes out another coin. Guard B, who has inspected his papers, hurries to open the gate.

Guard B: Herr Heine? It is an honor. You can pass, sir.

Guard A: He'll pay first.

Guard B: Last year I met a beautiful woman, Herr Heine. I stood no chance of her choosing an ugly oaf like me. But I didn't give up. Every evening, I read her one of your poems and two months later we were married.

Heine puts the coin back into his pocket, crosses the border and exits.

2. Lights up on King Friedrich Wilhelm's office, where the King, Hoffmann and Campe are present.

Friedrich: Julius, my friend, I find it difficult to believe that an enlightened man like you, patriotic and law abiding, would smuggle Heine across the border.

Campe: I conveyed him in good faith, Your Highness. I didn't know he was escaping.

Friedrich: Have you not read his "Harz Journey", which you yourself published?

Campe: It never entered my head that Your Highness would pursue him for such a book.

Friedrich: I am willing to swallow the vomit of the bishops to enslave Germany?!

Campe: He added that line after the proofs, without my noticing.

Hoffman: Given that you conveyed him, Herr Campe, you must certainly know to where he is headed.

Campe: I told you. He's travelling to Paris. He wants to write there.

Friedrich: About what?

Campe: About the love lives of the Parisians, sir.

Friedrich: That actually sounds interesting. Be warned, Julius, if he writes about other subjects, you will be put on trial for lying to the king.

Campe: Your Highness, Heine is an unpredictable person. He might just as easily write about the civil liberties that the King of France has enacted recently.

Hoffman: **(To the King)** It's precisely what I told you, sir. **(To Campe)** Heine must learn what is permitted and what is

forbidden in poetry. We have no option but to confiscate all copies of that book.

Campe: I invested a fortune in them, sir.

Friedrich: You would do well to warn him, for his own sake. I am trying to build a thousand-year Reich here. Anyone who tried to obstruct me, already regrets it. If he thinks that my arm is too short to get hold of him in Paris, he is mistaken.
(Darkness)

3. Night. A café in Paris where German émigrés gather. In the corner a beggar is playing an accordion. Sitting at one of the tables are Beckerman, Brauner, Jeanette and Strauss.

Beckerman: This is not how the revolution in Germany will come about. When King Friedrich's spies tell him what is to appear in the next issue of "The German Revolution", he'll continue sleeping peacefully.

Brauner: I write my poetry from the heart, Ludwig.

Strauss: I am ready to translate another of Robespierre's articles.

Beckerman: And all because of the China teapot on your sideboard.

Brauner: The China teapot?

Beckerman: You fear that if something you write angers the King, you'll have to flee and the China teapot might get broken along the way.

Brauner: I bought it to make tea.

Beckerman: The peddler who sold it to you was one of the King's agents, who wanted to dishearten you.

Strauss: This is what Buddha meant when he said freedom is internal.

Jeanette: That's enough, Wolfgang.

Beckerman: If we want revolution, we must shatter all our chinaware.

Martha enters

Martha: We're closing.

Strauss: And what is to become of the revolution, Martha?

Martha: It's going to rain. It isn't the weather for a revolution.

Brauner: He who suckles at your breast, Martha, will be a slave forever.

Martha: My breasts, sir, will nurse the children of a real revolutionary.

Suddenly the sounds of a bugle and shouts of “Halt!” are heard. A man carrying a valise enters at a run, and before anyone recognizes him, he embraces Martha and buries his face in her bosom. Albert the policeman, who enters on his heels, does not recognize him as the fugitive.

Albert: Has anybody come in here? I’m walking down the street checking the locks, and suddenly someone runs past. “Halt!” I call. “Ein moment” he replies. I hadn’t put the manacles on him yet when five ruffians appear and try to abduct him. I blow a blast on my bugle, and they run away. But while I was returning the bugle to my belt, “Ein moment” also vanished.

Beckerman: We haven’t seen a soul, Monsieur Albert.

Albert: If you see him, you’ll call me, won’t you?

Beckerman: Of course, Monsieur Albert.

Albert exits. Martha frees herself from the unidentified man and adjusts her blouse.

Martha: The gentleman did not have to exploit my patriotism.

Everyone is astonished to see that the man is Heine.

Beckerman: Heinrich!

Strauss: Gott in Himmel!

Brauner: Welcome, Herr Heine.

Martha: Is that Heinrich Heine?!

Heine: In person. I was unaware that poets are accorded such great respect in Paris. An entire entourage of the king’s agents was awaiting me.

Martha: Heinrich Heine! I think I’m going to faint!

Beckerman: We read your “Harz Journey”, Heinrich, and we knew that the King would not hold back. We’ve been looking for you daily among the refugees.

Brauner: We heard that the police have confiscated all copies of the book.

Heine: When a German policeman sees a man with a pen in his hand, he immediately draws his sword.

Strauss: **(Shaking his hand)** Robespierre says in his book on the revolution, which I am translating, that every true poet is also a revolutionary.

Jeanette: That’s enough, Wolfgang.

Beckerman: Beer for everyone, Martha! Let us raise a glass to the German censors, thanks to whom we shall form here legions of freedom-loving writers.

Heine: Actually, I was hoping that those bastards would catch me. A flight from the gallows would have doubled the sales of my books. In fact, it would have been better had I been executed. The poems of dead martyrs always sell well.

They all laugh, clink their glasses and drink.

Beckerman: I have had an idea, Heinrich. A new column which we can launch in our next issue: "Heine and Beckerman – Conversations". Not simply conversations but arguments, debates, barbs, the plucking of feathers and cockscombs. Together we shall mock that ignorant king, the decadent aristocracy, the corrupt Church.

Jeanette: The impotent intelligentsia.

Brauner: **(To Heine)** Nobody will dare to censor you in France.

Beckerman: These issues will be sold throughout Germany. In bookshops. In apothecaries. At vegetable stalls. Under butchers' counters. Within a few months the King of Prussia will go out of his mind. He will be the first ruler in the world to be overthrown by two pens.

Strauss: Tomorrow you'll talk at Guillotine Square, where the king lost his head.

Brauner: And from there to the ruins of the Bastille, and you can talk at the place where the blood ran from the wounds of the rebels.

Heine: And after that you can all come to say Kaddish at my funeral.

Beckerman: What funeral?

Heine: Don't you see the rope around my neck?

Martha: Don't worry, Herr Heine. You can always take advantage of my patriotic feelings.

Beckerman: This is France, Heinrich. There was a revolution here a few years ago.

Heine: I am quite sure that both the King of France and the King of Prussia have heard about it, but I am also sure that for the sake of the friendship between them, they will not hesitate to tighten this rope until it is very difficult for me to breathe.

Beckerman: I am also followed by agents, Heinrich. I've already suggested to the King of Prussia that he save their wages and hire me to follow myself.

Heine: Were you to write like me, he would have had you killed long ago.

Silence. Beckerman is hurt. Knowing his sensitivity, his friends fear his reaction. Heine apologizes.

Heine: It is the fear, Ludwig. The fear that ambushes us in the Judenstrasse of Frankfurt, Dusseldorf, and Hamburg. What am I to do when somebody chases me with a drawn knife? Tell him a joke? When I am assailed by fear I secrete venom, so that anyone preying on me will die.

Beckerman: (**Forgiving**) If you are so afraid, Heinrich, I shall introduce you to a lady who can obtain the protection of the king of France for you.

4. The salon of Princess Marie. Enter Marie, a strikingly beautiful woman of about 30.

Marie: Bon jour, Monsieur Beckerman.

Beckerman: Bon jour, Princess Marie.

Heine: (**Bows**) Heinrich Heine, mademoiselle.

Marie: So you are the poet who frightens the King of Prussia? You seem far too gentle. And you are not all that ugly, as one might expect of one who always writes about unrequited love.

Heine: I hope, mademoiselle, that here I shall be writing of loves that are requited.

Beckerman: It is not Heine's love poems that are angering the King of Prussia, mademoiselle, but his poems that expose the king's tyranny.

Marie: (**To Heine**) By the way, Monsieur Heine, do you think that your poems exposing the king's tyranny are good?

Heine: If they expose the reasons for his tyranny. If they reveal why the Germans submit to it.

Beckerman: They are good because they are written by a poet who does not write about his tortured heart, but about the torment of the common people, to prepare them for revolution.

Marie: Poets who write for the common people are usually common poets.

Heine: Only if they flatter the common people.

Beckerman: I hope that that the princess is not belittling the importance of the revolution.

Marie: I do not belittle the importance of the revolution. I fear for the fate of poetry.

Beckerman: The fate of poetry depends upon poets, mademoiselle. Heine needs protection to continue writing. We beg that you exert your influence on your friends in the government to protect him.

Marie: He will merit that protection if his poetry is worthy of it.

Heine: If they were unworthy, the King of Prussia would not have tried to kill me.

Beckerman: The princess has great influence with the king's counsellor in the Palais Royal.

Marie: More than a veteran revolutionary like yourself?

Beckerman: Mademoiselle's beauty accords greater weight to her words.

Marie: Are you asking me to offer my body to the king's counsellor?

Beckerman: Not at all, my lady.

Marie: If I must offer him my body, then your arguments in favor of Heine are probably not sufficiently persuasive. And if they are not sufficiently persuasive, I have no desire to hear them. Thank you very much.

Beckerman glances at Heine, sees that he is not joining him, turns and exits.

Heine: You think my poetry is unworthy, mademoiselle?

Marie: If you are as fanatical about the revolution as that man, then it possibly is.

Heine: I am a lover, mademoiselle. Lovers are more fanatical about women than revolutions.

Marie: Permit me to doubt your talents as a lover as well.

Heine: Mademoiselle has not yet tried my talents.

Marie: They are written on your face.

Heine: They are written on my heart.

Marie laughs. Heine kisses her hand. Enter Alfred.

Marie: This is Alfred, my faithful suitor and the king's counsellor.

Heine: Heinrich Heine, sir.

Marie: He heard I was meeting with you and hastened to see whether he has grounds for concern.

Alfred: Does mademoiselle think I have grounds for concern?

Marie: Poets are ordinary mortals, Alfred. Perhaps a little more arrogant, selfish and petty.

- Heine: Mademoiselle thinks me arrogant because I dare to write, that I am selfish because on occasion I write about myself, and that I am petty because I fear for my life.
- Alfred: Do you have good reason to fear for your life, monsieur?
- Heine: The King of Prussia does not favor my poems.
- Marie: Which is why he requires the protection of the King of France.
- Alfred: Poetry in Germany is an internal matter, in which we shall not intervene.
- Heine: But the revolution there is not an internal matter, sir. If Germany is ruled by tyrants, she will destroy Europe in a vast conflagration.
- Alfred: And if you write poetry, those tyrants will relinquish their rule?
- Heine: If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't write.
- Alfred: **(To Marie)** I see that he is as arrogant as you said.
- Marie: If he receives protection and writes, poetry will force humility upon him.
- Heine: Monsieur can assure His Majesty the King of France that I shall not exploit this protection against him.
- Alfred: Unfortunately, monsieur, if we offer you our protection, we will be compelled to offer it to others.
- Marie: My dear Alfred, I hope the day won't come when I find out that Monsieur Heine was denied the protection of the king simply because you sought to keep me from the pleasure of his company.
- Alfred: **(Laughs)** Monsieur Heine will have the protection he seeks, if only to prove that your suspicions are groundless.

5. An actor sings the fifth stanza from the poem "Angelica" by Heine.

When in the heaven of your kisses	I beg you, Leave Germany out of your
Enraptured in your arms I lie,	chatter!
Then never mention Germany to	Don't plague me with questions – you
me –	must forswear it.
I cannot bear it – there's a reason	Don't ask me about my home and
why.	kindred –
	There's a reason why – I cannot bear it.

Lights up on King Friedrich Wilhelm's bureau. The king, Hoffman and Campe are present.

- Friedrich: Julius, my friend, I shan't reveal to you how I came to be in possession of this article by Heine, which I received yesterday, but I was wondering about your opinion of it. Here, for instance, he accuses me of betrayal. He maintains that I have broken my promise to give Prussia a constitution.
- Campe: I don't agree with him, your majesty, but that is his opinion. Heine is a well-known poet. Even your majesty reads his poems on occasion.
- Friedrich: Then let him write poems, not articles.
- Campe: His articles increase the distribution of the paper, sir.
- Friedrich: I will give Prussia a constitution when Prussia is ready for a constitution. When those who call themselves revolutionaries, do not exploit it to undermine me.
- Campe: Your majesty, I am willing to publish articles written by your ministers explaining the delay in the formulation of the constitution.
- Friedrich: If my ministers were capable of writing like him, I would have a far better government. I'm not a tyrant, Julius, and I won't close down your newspaper. But I will do everything to ensure the future of Prussia. Without a strong monarchy, she will drown in anarchy. Blood will flow like water. Why? So Heine can profit from his contemplations?
- Campe: In my opinion, your majesty, the article will arouse a debate, at the end of which the public will be persuaded that Heine is mistaken.
- Hoffman: This is the version of Heine's article which the king approves for publication. **(Gives him a sheet of paper)** You are required to publish it as written, Herr Campe. His majesty, of course, doesn't want the public to know that he demanded changes.

Darkness on the bureau. The angry Heine addresses Campe, who is in his office.

- Heine: The fact that you publish the paper does not give you the right to censor me.
- Campe: I censored a few sentences so I could publish the others.
- Heine: Whoever reads this article will believe that the king wrote it! I request that you publish it exactly as I wrote it.
- Campe: Are you determined to cut off the branch on which you are sitting?

- Heine: Don't your readers have the right to understand the world in which they live? One day they will realize that the king is indeed a bully, that his brain is too small in relation to his body, that his most notable talents are riding his horse and brandishing his sword. And on that day you will despise yourself for not publishing these things when I wrote them.
- Campe: On that day I will be proud that my readers understood it without my publishing it explicitly.
- Heine: What do I have but my truth, Julius? The world detests me for writing it, but at least I respect myself. I did not have to flee Germany to write what you have published. I could have written the same words in the king's service and earned twice as much.
- Cotta: You want to write everything, Heinrich. But not everything is possible. And on the day you learn to write the possible, you will be a better writer.
- Heine: Thank you for your advice, Julius, but if you do not publish what I wrote, I shall not write for you anymore.
- Cotta: You are resigning?
- Heine: Yes!!

6. The café. A beggar is playing his accordion. Martha is serving beer to Brauner. Heine enters, sits down at a table and scans the menu.

- Brauner: Herr Heine, it is indeed an honor.
- Heine: I hope that this honor will gain me a discount. **(To Martha)** May I have the veal, Martha?
- Martha: Here you will receive whatever you require, sir.
- Brauner: Now that you have resigned from Campe's paper, perhaps we'll be privileged to have you write for us. With us you can protest against the Church, against the censor, against the arrest of the writers, against the ban on demonstrations in Berlin.
- Heine: The world is tired of protests, my friend. The louder you cry out, the less they listen.
- Brauner: And if you are so fearful of the king's agents, we can publish your articles anonymously.
- Heine: Thanks for your kind offer, Herr Brauner, but unfortunately my name is all I have.

Enter Beckerman, Strauss and Jeanette.

Beckerman: I am delighted to see you, Heinrich.

Beckerman sits down next to Heine. Jeanette and Strauss sit next to him. Martha serves them beer.

Beckerman: I was sorry to hear that you had to resign, Heinrich. Our paper is at your service, of course.

Heine: I would write for it if it had readers.

Beckerman: If you write for it, it will. **(Heine is silent)** When we read the article in Campe's newspaper, we felt as betrayed as you.

Heine: Then you are in good company. The king also felt that I had betrayed him, and I feel that I have betrayed myself too.

Beckerman: I assure you that we shall not censor a comma.

Heine: Ludwig, I cannot remain hungry all my life.

Brauner: Hunger is a source of inspiration for many poets.

Heine: Herr Brauner is prepared to starve a poet to death in order to read a good poem after lunch.

Jeanette: I was most surprised to discover that Herr Heine has written mostly art and literature critiques recently, and a few sea poems here and there, too.

Strauss: Really, Heinrich, what is there in the sea that you write about so much? I, too, go to the sea on occasion. All it is, really, is water.

Beckerman: We shall pay you the same rate as Campe.

Jeanette: If he is thinking of sending us "literary criticism", he should save himself the trouble.

Beckerman: On the contrary, Jeanette. Revolutionary literary criticism could bring Berlin's lovers of literature closer to us.

Jeanette: Love of literature is the excuse of cowards to avoid fighting for freedom.

Heine: I'm avoiding the fight?!

Beckerman: You're not avoiding anything, Heinrich. Jeanette is just suggesting that even in your literary criticism you should try to emphasize the importance of the fight for freedom. You could have written pure literary criticism in Germany, too.

Brauner: But it is more convenient for him to write pure literary criticism. What kind of war can be waged by writers and poets whose hands are manacled? Writing criticism of the king is slightly more dangerous. The king might belch, and Heinrich's head will part company from his body.

Beckerman: Please, Brauner.

Brauner: Who is he that we have to beg him to write for us?

- Heine: I promise to write. What else do you want? A donation?
(Empties his pockets) This is all I have. The address of a whore, a concert ticket, a note I meant to send to an opera singer, a handkerchief with which I have blown my nose. And now the real treasure: two francs. Take them. Irrefutable proof that I am a poet.
- Jeanette: This man is unashamed of his debauchery.
- Beckerman: **(Forcefully)** He has promised to write!
- Brauner: We don't need his charity. His hypocrisy proves he still has all the attributes of his merchant ancestors. They sold rags, and he sells words. He sprinkled a few drops of water on his head so he would be considered a German, and now he pretends to be a revolutionary. It is because of him that everyone thinks we are all Jews.
- Beckerman: Brauner!
- Heine: When my 'merchant' ancestors wrote the Song of Songs, yours were running around the forests in bearskins, worshipping idols of wood and stone.
- Beckerman: Heinrich...
- Heine: Unfortunately, your poems aren't good enough for anyone to consider you Jewish.

Insulted, Brauner exits.

- Beckerman: Heaven blessed you with a sharp tongue, Heinrich, but you'd better use it to defend justice and not to satisfy your desires.
- Heine: If I did not have to satisfy my desires, I would not be a poet.
- Beckerman: It is indeed possible that the era of poetry is coming to an end. People across the border are fighting for their freedom. You, too, should be part of their struggle.
- Heine: Which people? The ones drinking beer in the taverns? Those who lick the boots of a few crude barons and wait to have their behinds kicked? When their flesh has rotted in the ground, they will still stick out their bony arms so that the king can fetter them.
- Jeanette: **(Gets up)** This man is no patriot, Ludwig. He hates Germany more than its enemies. Someone needs to rip out his tongue.
- Strauss: What was it he said?
- Beckerman: I would be most happy if you would write for us what you just said.
- Heine: I am tired of writing it, Ludwig.
- Beckerman: Why? Because the king still sits on his throne?

Heine: Because I am tired of striking a sheet of tin with my fist when all I want is to pluck a harp with my fingers.

Beckerman: Your readers need simple, clear and practical words.

Heine: I seek to discover the mysterious, the profound and the nebulous, and you want me to write simply, clearly and practically?

Silence.

Beckerman: Why have you come to Paris, Heinrich?

Heine: To discover the heartbeat of the heavens and the earth.

Beckerman: Mortals cannot discover the heartbeat of the heavens and the earth, even if they are great poets. You would do much better to devote yourself to more modest ambitions. Like revolution in Germany, for instance.

Beckerman gets up and exits. Enter Martha carrying a tray.

Martha: Herr Heine, the cook is refusing to cook your veal. He maintains that you're driving away all our customers. I've heated up some chicken from yesterday. **(She puts down the tray in front of him)**

Heine: Chicken from yesterday?

The angry Heine rises and snatches the tray, as if to throw it on the floor. Enter Crescence Eugénie Mirat (known later as "Mathilde"), carrying two pairs of shoes. Heine stands facing her, the tray in his hands. Crescence looks at him and bursts into laughter.

Heine: If mademoiselle is laughing at me, it is best she says why.

Crescence: Why should I? Who is he that I should tell him anything?

Heine: **(Angrily)** Why is mademoiselle laughing?

Crescence: Monsieur is a very odd waiter.

Heine: A waiter? **(Throws the tray to the floor)** I am an exiled poet who wants to write. I try to explain to God the world he has created, and he does not understand. I tell the world of his suffering and the world laughs.

Crescence: A poet?

She laughs even louder. To silence her, Heine kisses her on the mouth. She slaps him.

Crescence: Son of a whore! Attacking a decent maid like me? On the Day of Judgment demons will rise from Hell and skewer your bum. Oh, Jesus. If you dare touch me again, I'll rip your balls off – if you've got any – and I haven't seen any sign that you have.

Heine: I apologize for succumbing to your charm. Mademoiselle...

Crescence: Crescence Eugénie Mirat. I sell shoes in the second shop on the left. **(Exits)**

Martha: Herr Heine, I'd be happy to prepare for you whatever you like.

But Heine exits.

7. The salon of Princess Marie. Enter Heine. Alfred comes out of Marie's room, his jacket in his hand.

Alfred: Monsieur Heine. How are you?

Heine: Like a fish in water, sir. Or more precisely, should you inquire of a fish in water how he is, he will reply: as well as Heine in Paris.

Alfred: **(Laughs)** I hope that the King of Prussia's agents have stopped troubling you.

Heine: They certainly have, monsieur.

Alfred: And you, of course, will not trouble her highness.

Heine: Of course not, monsieur.

Alfred puts on his jacket. Marie appears in the doorway.

Alfred: By the way, Heine, King Louis-Philippe did not like your new book. Some lines even angered him. He aspires to be a dictator? He chops down the trees of liberty to strengthen his unstable rule with them?

Heine: Heaven forbid! The French translator of the book distorted what I wrote. I actually lauded the king for granting freedom to France that in Germany is not even dreamt of.

Alfred: The king's protection is not given gratis, Monsieur Heine.

Heine: Most certainly, monsieur. I know that very well, monsieur.

Alfred bows to Marie and exits.

- Heine: I have never met such a unique man, mademoiselle. Should a surgeon open up his chest he will find that he does not have a heart. Quite a phenomenon in mammals.
- Marie: He is soon to become my husband, Heinrich.
- Heine: My congratulations, mademoiselle. No doubt an astute and fascinating man. I was delighted to see him, for it made me think of the goose I shall eat on the Champs-Élysées tomorrow with the fee for the poem I'll write about him.
- Marie: **(Smiling)** I am happy that you have come, Heinrich.
(Extends her hand to be kissed)
- Heine: **(Kissing her hand)** I sent my book to you, too.
- Marie: I have read it.
- Heine: And?
- Marie: You know that I seek aesthetic perfection in poetry.
- Heine: And your highness has my admiration for it. **(Again kisses her hand)**
- Marie: And yet you claim that poetry is not a circus in which the writer presents the wonders of his art, and that it should not divert the readers' attention from their suffering.
- Heine: Your highness must admit that poetry has reached a new era. Poets are not high-minded visionaries who delude their readers with the magic of their words, but wizards who turn the water flowing in the veins of their readers into blood.
- Marie: Those poets will never write good poetry.
- Heine: And that is why you did not reply to my letter?
- Marie: You have no genuine interest in my opinion of your book.
- Heine: I swear, mademoiselle.
- Marie: Do not swear vain oaths. You come here because you've had enough of your émigré friends who are trying to force you to write empty rhymes for their revolution, and you have discovered that the street ladies you meet at night bore you during the day.
- Heine: Mademoiselle is a woman with an immense soul. I come to her for inspiration.
- Marie: You do not want inspiration, Heinrich. You want me.
- Heine: **(Embarrassed)** Mademoiselle is the most beautiful woman in Paris...
- Marie: And you hope that your wit will undo the laces of my corset.
- Heine: God forbid!
- Marie: If that is what you came for, you can leave.
- Heine: **(Hurt)** My dear lady, you tell me to leave because you fear that at any moment you might fall into my arms. But now I am no longer certain that I want you in my arms. Had you

read my poems, you would have known that I have never desired a woman who desired me.

Heine turns to leave. Marie grasps him. He stops. They kiss prolongedly.

Heine: Mademoiselle truly intends to marry the king's counsellor?
 Marie: Yes.
 Heine: When?
 Marie: Tomorrow.
 Heine: And when shall we continue our discussion on the aesthetic perfection of poetry?
 Marie: The day after tomorrow.

They kiss again.

8. The humble apartment of Crescence Eugénie Mirat. She enters, basket in hand and sits exhaustedly on the single chair in the room. Knocking on the door. Heine enters, with a bouquet of flowers in his hand. Crescence is amazed.

Crescence: You!
 Heine: The very same. **(Hands her the flowers)** From the depths of my heart.
 Crescence: What... What are you doing here?
 Heine: I have searched the whole of Paris for you.
 Crescence: For what?
 Heine: To hear you laugh.
 Crescence: Laugh?! You, monsieur, will leave immediately. My aunt will be back at any moment.
 Heine: I am happy to hear that mademoiselle is alone.
 Crescence: I asked the gentleman to leave. **(She lifts the chair)**
 Heine: Another moment and your anger will cause these flowers to wither.

Crescence hesitates for a moment, puts down the chair and takes the flowers.

Crescence: You look like a sensible fellow, monsieur. Tell me the truth. What else do you want, other than hearing me laugh?
 Heine: That is all, mademoiselle. I swear. There is not a woman who laughs like you in the whole of Paris. When I see you

- walk, I know that the ground trembles when you dance.
When I see you roar, I imagine to myself how you moan.
- Crescence: So you came for that? To hear me moan?
- Heine: I came because I seek simplicity, innocence, youthful beauty, love.
- Crescence: Sit.
- Heine: Perhaps I can kiss her before her aunt returns?
- Crescence: **(Laughs)** I don't have any aunt. I ran away from my mother in the village. They deal only with pigs and geese there. They know nothing about love. I heard that in Paris they know.
- Heine: I, too, heard. Which is why I came here.
- Crescence: For love? Swear it.
- Heine: I swear. **(Gets down on his knees before her)** Your beauty is God's revelation in the world. I felt his heavenly lips in your kiss. If you ask me where paradise is, I will say it's between your arms.
- Crescence: You exaggerate. It's clear that you're a good man. But I'm not certain you're very bright. You do know how to read, don't you? I recently began learning and I understood all the pretty words you spoke. I also understood that you believe in the Lord.
- Heine: In you I believe a little more, mademoiselle ...
- Crescence: Crescence Eugénie Mirat!
- Heine: What a name! How noble it is. How many dentists could make a living from repairing my teeth until I learn to pronounce it.
- Julie: Monsieur... **(She does not know his name)**
- Heine: Heinrich Heine. It would be better if I called you by another name. Mathilde, perhaps.
- Crescence: My name is Crescence.
- Heine: Mathilde is such a simple name, filled with so much youthfulness. It has the wildness of a tavern girl and the softness of a loving mother.
- Crescence: My name is Crescence Eugénie Mirat.
- Heine: Mathilde. **(Kisses her on the lips)**
- Crescence: **(She detaches herself from him after a moment)** Don't think I'm naive, Henri Eine. Nor am I as stupid as I look. I let you kiss me because I get the impression you understand love. That is why I spent the week searching for you. But I didn't know your name. Every day I passed the tavern of the Germans and hoped ...
- Heine: Maybe it's finally time to feel the ground tremble?

Crescence, who has become Mathilde, kisses him. Heine carries her in his arms to the bedroom.

9. Actors sing four stanzas of Heine's "Song of Songs"¹.

Fair woman's body is a song	Yes, woman's body is, amongst songs,
Inscribed by our great Maker	The song most sweet and tender,
In Nature's mighty album,	And wondrous strophes are her limbs,
When moved to life to wake her.	So snowy-white and slender.

Before the splendor of your song	Yes, day and night I'll study it,
I'll bow in adoration,	No loss of time admitting;
And to its study day and night	So shall I soon with overwork
Pay closest application.	Be thinner than befitting.

Lighting up on the bureau of King Friedrich Wilhelm. Hoffmann, his counsellor, has a book in his hand.

Friedrich: I am a king, Hoffmann. I do not have time to read books.
What seems to be the problem?

Hoffmann: Heine.

Friedrich: What has he written now?

Hoffmann: A big book, your majesty. "The Romantic School".

Friedrich: How on earth could he harm us in a book on "The Romantic School"?

Hoffman: He writes that "the revolution in Germany will be cruel and merciless. It will release all our satanic powers."

Officer: And what else?

Hoffman: "The German lust for blood will be revealed in all its savagery. Our nationalists will destroy all the cathedrals in Europe with hammers." In my opinion, he is trying to cause friction between us and the Church.

Friedrich: This is very bad.

Hoffman: He is also encouraging the French to attack us.

Friedrich: That is even worse. Maybe the time has now come to get rid of him.

Hoffmann: It seems to me, your majesty, that if Heine is eliminated, his books will sell in even greater numbers.

Friedrich: So what is to be done?

¹ Translated by E. A. Bowring.

Hoffmann: We must ban all his books from the bookshops. Poetry, prose, articles, Everything.

Friedrich: That is not sufficient, Hoffman. We shall prohibit publication of everything he has already written and everything he will ever write.

Hoffman hands him pen and paper, The King signs.

Hoffmann: What of Ludwig Beckerman, your majesty?

Friedrich: What about him?

Hoffmann: He, too, writes against your majesty.

Friedrich: Hardly anyone reads him. If we ban his books, too, we will create the impression that I am a dictator.

10. Heine's apartment. Beckerman is showing Heine a German newspaper.

Beckerman: Look at the last line, Heinrich. He also prohibits any new book you will write. For the first time in history, books are banned before they are written.

Heine: Impossible!

Beckerman: He has declared war on us all. Tomorrow my books will also be banned.

Heine: But why? What did I do?

Beckerman: He accuses you of subverting his rule, of harming morals and religion.

Heine: I am a loyal German, Ludwig. How could I subvert his rule?

Beckerman: But this time his tyranny will be the trap he falls into. We shall publish a special issue of "The German Revolution". Writers from all over the world will protest. The free governments will come out in condemnation. All over Germany young people will take to the streets. You shall write the editorial.

Heine: Have you lost your mind? No, I shall apologize to him. I shall recant everything I have written. No tyrant has ever resisted a poet's flattery.

Beckerman: You cannot recant everything you have written.

Heine: I am even willing to kiss the silken fringes of his underwear.

Beckerman: And the republic? What will become of the republic?

Heine: Poetry is more important.

Beckerman: We cannot renounce our principles the moment we face an obstacle.

Heine: I will not fight the king for the sake of some stupid principles. I have only one principle: Poetry will reform Man, and Man will reform the world.

Beckerman: There is no shame in upholding a few more.

Heine: If I must humiliate myself to write poetry, then I shall do so with pride.

Beckerman: And you will not write our editorial against his tyranny?

Heine: No.

Beckerman: (**Angrily**) What a fool the King of Prussia is! He declares war on a corrupt sycophant like you, who has scribbled a few biting remarks against him. And I, who have fought him all my life, written, spoken at assemblies, organized demonstrations, drawn up petitions – me he leaves to continue writing. (**Turns to leave**)

Heine: I'll write for you when he lifts the ban against me.

Beckerman: I will not publish a word you write.

Exit Beckerman. Mathilde, who has been watching them from the corridor, approaches Heine.

Mathilde: What's happened, Henri?

Heine: Nothing.

Mathilde: My mother's in the country. If we need to run away, then...

Heine: There is no need to run away either.

Mathilde: If I have to die, I'd like to know why.

She moves to embrace him.

Heine: You don't have to die. (**Avoids the embrace**) The king of Prussia has ordered the banning of my books, Mathilde. From today, nobody will buy them, and nobody will read them.

Mathilde: So what if nobody reads them? They're just words.

Heine: Just words?

Mathilde: Yes. Words of love that you write to other women. Father Jean Paul says that if I knew how to read German, I wouldn't let you write at all.

Heine: With those words I tell the world what I think of it. People buy those words to understand their lives. For that reason they pay for them. If I am unable to sell books, we shall be penniless within a few weeks. Even your small brain should be able to comprehend the catastrophe.

Mathilde: What catastrophe? If you can't sell books, we'll sell shoes.

Heine: I am a poet, Mathilde.
 Mathilde: But you have to work as well.
 Heine: What else am I able to do except sit on chickens' eggs?
 Mathilde: A king's a king, Henri. You can't fight him. But God is greater than him. If you pray to him, he'll answer and fight for you. I prayed and I got you. **(Heine is silent)** Perhaps God is angry with us because we're living together without a wedding? **(Heine is silent)** Father Jean-Paul will be happy to marry us. And then perhaps God will no longer be angry, and he'll save us from this disaster. **(Heine is silent)** Would you like me to hug you? You're always happy when we're hugging.

11. King Friedrich Wilhelm's bureau in Berlin. The king is sitting at his desk. Heine addresses him from Paris.

Heine: Your majesty! Law and justice are the foundations of your glorious kingdom. Every thief, rapist or murderer is entitled to defend himself in court. Why has my verdict been sealed without my being heard? Even if my writing was negligent and some of my sentences were inaccurate, as soon as I clarify them it will be obvious that I pose no danger to Germany. I have never been a republican. If the republicans ever come to power, my head will be the first to roll. **(Despairingly)** There is no greater patriot than I, sir. In each of my books I have written about Germany. Every page and every line. If Germany was not dear to me, I wouldn't have written about her to such an extent. Your majesty, I am willing to publish a public apology. I am prepared to acknowledge to my readers that everything I have written before today is nonsense and folly. The caprice of a young man who erred because of his arrogance and blindness. I beg your majesty's forgiveness...

Hoffman enters. Heine gives way.

Hoffman: All the books have been confiscated, sir.
 Friedrich: Very well. Including his first book of poetry?
 Hoffman: Yes, sir.
 Friedrich: Pity. I wanted a copy of that book. My old one is falling to pieces.

- Hoffmann: That book should not be rolling around the palace, your majesty. Even Heine's love poems are subversive. They encourage licentiousness and adultery.
- Friedrich: Actually, it would be good for a few copies to be rolling around the palace. If my ministers were to deal with licentiousness and adultery a little more, they wouldn't have time to undermine me.
- Hoffman: Yes, your highness. I think I left myself at least one copy.

12. Night. Paris. The home of Alfred and Marie.

- Heine: If the king does not grant me an allowance, I will die of hunger, monsieur.
- Alfred: The king is aware of that.
- Heine: Monsieur must emphasize the benefits that my poetry brings him.
- Alfred: His majesty needs to be persuaded that the benefits are worth five thousand francs a year.
- Heine: Tell him that a man who reads my poems will have a better understanding of himself and his world.
- Alfred: I am not certain his majesty is interested in that.
- Heine: I would think, monsieur, that my articles contribute to the public debate about the rights of the citizen.
- Alfred: His majesty prefers that your contribution in that sphere be as modest as possible.
- Heine: I make a very important contribution to the national security of France.
- Alfred: The national security of France?
- Heine: Who other than I can describe the German spirit for him? Who other than I can interpret the German nature that is awaiting the moment to destroy the world? It is I who inscribes the writing on the wall. If the King of France were to invest five thousand francs a year in me, he would be ready to face the German danger.
- Marie: I fail to understand your thinking, Alfred. Why are you forcing him to voice worthless reasoning in which he himself does not believe? He is in need of an allowance to write his marvelous poetry.
- Heine: Pay her no heed, monsieur. I believe in every word I say. I am willing to place myself at his majesty's disposal. He knows that a tongue can be sharper than a sword.

Marie: He cannot place himself at the disposal of a king, Alfred. A poet's loyalty is only to his poetry.

Heine: His majesty can place his trust in me, monsieur.

Marie: Don't plead with him, Heinrich.

Heine: I am not pleading. I am demanding a reward for my contribution. **(To Alfred)** The world will be a better place if I continue writing about it.

Marie: Until this moment, I thought you were an enlightened man, Alfred.

Alfred is hurt. Silence. Heine construes his silence as tacit agreement.

Heine: Thank you, Monsieur. I will be grateful to his majesty to my dying day.

Alfred: For your own good, Heine, it would be better that no one hear of this.

13. Night. Heine's apartment. Enter Heine.

Heine: Mathilde? Mathilde?

Mathilde: **(Entering)** Henri! **(Embraces him)** Where were you the whole night? I was afraid I'd never see you again.

Heine: I was in church. I confessed, I fasted and I was saved. **(Kisses her)**

Mathilde: I was certain you'd run away.

Heine: Do you imagine I would leave a woman like you?

Mathilde: And the German king? Has he pardoned you?

Heine: I have never asked for his pardon.

The kiss is prolonged. She suddenly breaks away from him.

Mathilde: You're not touching me again until we're married.

Heine: Married? What for?

Mathilde: I've already given you what a decent girl can give to her husband. I don't want to be afraid that you'll leave me.

Heine: I have sworn to live with you for eternity.

Mathilde: You swore and disappeared. You're not going anywhere until the wedding. And I want a Catholic wedding. So don't even think about divorce. And why isn't anything happening in your trousers all of a sudden?

Heine: I'm waiting for the ground to begin trembling.

Mathilde: Come on.

They turn towards the bedroom. The policeman Albert enters.

Albert: Halt, monsieur! Are you the German-Jewish poet named Heine?
 Heine: Yes, monsieur.
 Mathilde: We're going to bed, Albert.
 Albert: Please come with me, monsieur.
 Heine: Of what does monsieur accuse me?
 Sergeant: I'm not accusing you, monsieur. I'm arresting you.
 Mathilde: He won't write any more poems. He promised me.
 Heine: One moment, monsieur. There surely has been some mistake.
 Mathilde: We're getting married in the morning. Come back after the honeymoon.
 Heine: Has someone informed on me? Who? What did he say?
 Sergeant: Ask at the station. (**Takes Heine by the arm**)
 Heine: Go to bed. I'll return in the morning.
 Mathilde: Someone needs to tell you what to say there.

She exits with them.

14. Actors sing "Dedication to The Rabbi of Bacharach".

Burst out in loud lamenting,	It pierces through ears and vision,
O somber martyr-song	And so into heart and brain;
That's lain so unrelenting	I've conjured up with precision
On burning hearts so long!	The thousand years of pain.

They weep, little men and big	And all of the tears are flowing
powers,	South, quiet and unified,
Even lords with frigid eyes,	They're flowing together, and
The women weep, and the flowers,	going
The stars weep up in the skies.	To pour into Jordan's tide.

A room in the police station. Albert sits beside Heine, whose hands are manacled.

Heine: I have loved France all my life, monsieur. I have many French friends. Alexander Dumas, for example, or Victor Hugo who, by the way, is almost as tactless as our own Johann von Goethe. And Balzac, who is the only man in the

world who never bores me. I have always been grateful to the government of France for taking exiled artists and thinkers into her bosom. Like Chopin, or Wagner, or Karl Marx. The French are Europe's pioneers of progress. Monsieur may rest assured that I would not cause them even the slightest discomfort.

Albert: The officer will be here shortly, Monsieur.

Heine: And if you have arrested me because of a complaint by the King of Prussia, monsieur, it is surely a mistake. Every word I have written proves that I am a true German patriot. Germanism is the essence of my life. I need Germanism the way a stove needs coal. My heart is German in precisely the same way as my poetry is German. I have not written a single word in French, and I have not robbed your own great writers of a single reader.

Albert: Yes, monsieur.

Heine: If monsieur is thinking that I humiliate myself because I fear questioning, then monsieur is surely mistaken. Poets are courageous men. A man needs great courage to tell the world the truth. By the way, monsieur would be well advised to write down what I say. It is quite possible that one day you will be able to sell my words to The Louvre for a bag of gold. My landlady, for instance, waived rent so that in another few years she'll be able to sell tickets to tourists who will flock to see my chamber pot.

Albert: Yes, certainly. Certainly, monsieur

Heine: If you have arrested me because I am a Jew, then you must release me immediately. I was indeed born a Jew, and the God of the Jews put a long nose on my face so he could recognize me should I attempt to evade him. But I have been baptized. My baptism certificate is always in my pocket. My entrance ticket into European culture. You should know that a Jew becomes a German with the greatest of ease. The closeness of these two peoples is truly astounding. Both are dedicated to abstract ideas with a pathological meticulousness, both are zealots of a strict and cruel morality...

Albert: **(Mimicking a chicken)** Cluck-cluck, cluck-cluck, cluck-cluck.

Heine: **(Despairingly)** Perhaps you would be so good as to tell me what you want of me. Why are my hands manacled? Since when have poets been arrested because of their poems? Tomorrow you will be arresting tailors for sewing

underwear. Who can I harm? The artist is a child whose tears are pearls. And the cruel world beats him harder to make him cry more. It is not I that should be under arrest, but the King of Prussia who ordered the burning of my books. And wherever they burn books, they will also burn people. Let me go, Monsieur. You have seen my Mathilde. If I am not in church in the morning, she will marry another.

Enter the Officer, together with Marie and Alfred.

Officer: **(To Heine)** I apologize for the misunderstanding, Monsieur. Had we known of your friendship with the lady and the gentleman, we would not have arrested you. **(Gestures to Albert to release him)**

Marie: I hope you have not been subjected to torture, Heinrich.

Heine: Had you come but an hour later, I would have been on my way to the guillotine.

Marie: You must speak to the king, Alfred. Otherwise, he'll be rearrested.

Alfred: He will not be rearrested. **(To Heine)** The German émigré who informed on you wrote that you are a spy of the King of Prussia, but the investigation came up with nothing.

Heine: **(Stunned)** A German émigré informed on me?

Officer: According to his handwriting and grammatical errors. We are still trying to find out who he is.

Heine: I know who he is.

15. Night. The entrance to Beckerman's home. Heine is knocking on the door. Beckerman goes out in his nightdress.

Heine: I see you are not pleased to see me, Ludwig.

Beckerman: It is two o'clock in the morning.

Heine: Do you think I am an agent of the king of Prussia?

Beckerman: You know better than me.

Heine: Who informed on me to the police?

Beckerman: Someone who discovered that the King of Prussia banned your books in order to dispel any suspicion that you are his agent.

Heine: Don't equivocate. You informed. Yes, or no?

Beckerman: If only I was courageous enough.

Heine: Why? I am a soldier in the service of the revolution, Ludwig. You despise me only because I wrote a few witty words that do not echo like hailstones on the roof.

Beckerman: You are no soldier, Heinrich. You are a boy who went off to war, and when he came to the battlefield, he chased butterflies.

Heine: You envy me because I gained the favors of a few women?

Beckerman: You sold big ideas for the favors of those women. (**Turns back into his home**)

Heine: I have not sold any idea. I am faithful to the revolution, but I require a little freedom to write about its flaws.

Beckerman: Again I hear the voice of a Jew. There is no freedom in loyalty to the revolution.

Heine: You are more of a Jew than I. Only a Jew could be so fanatical.

Beckerman: Judaism is a disease of which I was cured long ago.

Jeanette enters, also in a nightdress. On seeing Heine, she stops and turns to go back, but Heine sees her.

Heine: (**To Beckerman**) I see that you, too, try to gallop like a foal in the pasture. Perhaps I did sell an idea or two for the favors of a woman. But what a woman! What did you see in her, Ludwig? Her face is all pocked, like the Passover matzos.

Beckerman: Shut your mouth, Heinrich.

Heine: (**Suddenly understands**) It was she who informed on me! The grammatical errors are hers.

Beckerman: She did not inform on you!

Heine: You sent her, and she informed. (**Towards the neighboring apartment**) Herr Strauss! If you are looking for your old slippers, they are here.

Jeanette: Tell him to stay quiet, Ludwig.

Heine: She informed on me, and I'll inform on her. Herr Strauss, your old slippers are taking the air outside.

Beckerman: Heinrich!

Strauss appears and is astounded to find his wife in the entrance to the Beckerman apartment.

Heine: The great revolutionary is nothing but an adulterer with bad taste. The least he could have done is find a lover worthy of his status. But it seems that his status is equal to his lover's

looks. The face of the earth after your revolution, Ludwig, will be more pockmarked than hers. **(Exits)**

Strauss: **(To Jeanette)** You order me to translate Robespierre's books, and meanwhile...

Jeanette: I heard him in the street and came to see what he was plotting.

Beckerman: That man has slandered your wife, Wolfgang.

Strauss: I have already forgiven him.

Beckerman: You must challenge him to a duel.

Strauss: A duel? God forbid...

Beckerman: You are a revolutionary, Wolfgang. At a time of revolution there is no choice. It is kill or be killed.

Strauss: Indeed. That is what Robespierre said in his book on...

Jeanette: That's enough, Wolfgang.

Strauss: Come home. **(Darkness)**

16. The Bois de Boulogne. Enter Heine dressed like a bridegroom, with a revolver in one hand. He is followed by Mathilde in a bridal dress, stumbling, her shoes in her hand.

Mathilde: Why do you insist on dying? Since when has a liar like you had honor that must be defended? Have you lived enough? Have you done enough? Why do I have to go directly from wedding to funeral?

Heine: I promise I will not die.

Mathilde: Can I believe your promises? Have you ever even held a pistol? Have you ever shot anybody?

Heine: He does not know how to shoot either.

Mathilde: I'm scared, Henri.

Heine: Have no fear. You are my lawful wife now and you shall inherit the royalties on my books without having to suffer me your entire life.

Mathilde: Don't talk like that. You're angering God.

Heine: What's He going to do? Strike me down with lightning?

Mathilde: Jesus! **(Crosses herself)** Quickly, cross yourself. And ask forgiveness. At least I want to have your child.

Heine: He could resemble me, Mathilde.

Mathilde: I pray that he does.

He embraces her. Enter from the other side Strauss, Jeanette, Beckerman, Brauner and Martha.

Brauner: Heinrich, are you ready?

Heine: Ready.

Straus raises his pistol. Mathilde bursts into tears. Heine hears her.

Heine: I am still alive.

Strauss fires. Heine flinches but remains standing. Mathilde enthuses.

Mathilde: Blow his head off, Henri. Put it between his eyes. Smash his face so that even God won't recognize him.

Heine slowly takes aim at Strauss.

Strauss: No, Heinrich. My honor is satisfied, and so is my wife's. After all, Jews have always been merciful. I bear a grudge against no man. Buddha said that... **(To Beckerman)** Tell him to stop, Ludwig. **(Mumbles)** Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu. Tell him to stop, Ludwig. It was your idea.

In tears, Strauss kneels. Heine aims his pistol at Beckerman.

Beckerman: Even though you are a knave, Heinrich, you cannot shoot an unarmed man. Or perhaps I am mistaken, and you think that anything is permissible. To despise the revolution and the king. Germany and France. Christianity and Judaism. God and Man. You have made deceit an art and art a deceit. Don't hesitate. Pull the trigger. I am willing to die to show the world who you are.

Heine raises his pistol, fires nobly into the air, and collapses. Mathilde rushes to him, embraces him and finds that he is bleeding from his thigh.

Mathilde: He hit him! The bastard hit him! Henri! Henri! **(Darkness)**

Act II

17. 1848. Heine and Mathilde are riding in a “carriage”. The coachman whips up the “horses”. In the background, sounds of the revolution: shots, shouts of “Viva la Republica” and “Long live the King”.

Mathilde: **(To the coachman)** Drive this way. Now down here. What’s the matter with your horses? Are they tired?

Heine: This way would be better, Mathilde.

Mathilde: There’ll be no barricades down here.

Heine: How do you know? Did you plan the revolution? **(To the coachman)** Drive down here.

Mathilde: That’s the street of the brothels. They’re against this stupid revolution. **(To the horse)** Giddy up. Giddy up. Move your stinking bum already.

Heine: I think that this horse actually supports the revolution, Mathilde. The other one is the royalist.

Two revolutionaries block their way. One has a pistol, the other a stave.

Revol. A: Get down.

Mathilde: We’re on our way home.

Revol. A: Get down.

Heine: Why, sir?

Revol. A: We need your carriage for a barricade.

Mathilde: My husband’s ill. We’ve been to the doctor.

Revol. A: He’ll recover after the revolution.

Revol. B: Do you want us to overturn the carriage with you inside?

Heine and Mathilde quickly get down from the carriage. Suddenly a young man, a sack over his shoulder, hurries past them. Revolutionary A aims his pistol at him.

Revol. A: Halt! What’s in the sack?

Thief: Food. From Baron de Bourbon’s palace. They fled and left it all on the table.

Revol. A: There’ll be no looting in our revolution. **(Shoots him)**

Heine: **(Shocked)** Why, monsieur? Perhaps he was hungry? Perhaps he has hungry children? Even the earth doesn’t swallow someone who picks a flower.

Revol. A: Who are you to be so insolent?

Heine: I am a poet.

Revol. A: A poet? You probably made your living from glorifying the king. (**Aims his pistol at him**)

Mathilde: He's no poet. He hardly speaks French. (**To Heine**) Come on home before I tear your tongue out.

She drags Heine away. It is now evident that he limps.

Revol. A: Put the thief on the barricade. We'll say he was shot by the king's soldiers.

The revolutionaries exit.

18. Lighting up on the bureau of the king of Prussia, with the king, Hoffman and Campe present.

Friedrich: Julius, my friend, was there not an agreement between us that Heine would no longer write for your paper?

Campe: Heine has not written for me for many years, your majesty. But a revolution is taking place in France. The people have barricaded the streets, the king has fled, a government has been formed. I thought that Heine could explain the events there. After all, when Paris sneezes, all of Europe catches cold.

Friedrich: But why Heine?

Campe: Heine is a man of penetrating vision, your majesty. From him we can learn about what might take place here in Germany. By the way, most of his articles do not support the revolution.

Hoffman: But they do not oppose it either.

Friedrich: Heine's articles will not be published!

Campe: Yes, your majesty.

Friedrich: And if you want to know what will happen in Germany, listen to me. As long as I am the king of Prussia, there shall be no revolution here.

The Chorus sings Heine's "1849".

In woods the quiet rillets run, Soft moonlight bathes the garden plot, But sometimes bang – Was that a gun? – Perhaps it is a friend who has been shot.	Perhaps they caught him, arms in hand, That firebrand who would not obey – (Not everyone can understand Like Horace when it's brave to run away.)
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19. Heine's home. Leaning on a cane, Heine seeks to go out. Mathilde blocks his path.

Mathilde: What's so interesting in those barricades that you've got to see them?

Heine: I told you. I'm writing a book about the revolution.

Mathilde: But your king forbade you from writing about it.

Heine: Until it's finished, he'll be overthrown, or go out of his mind, or die.

Mathilde: Why provoke him? There's already been a revolution here, and many books have been written about it. Maybe write about the pyramids in Egypt? Haven't you heard that there's a country called Egypt with pyramids in it?

Heine: No. I haven't heard.

Mathilde: So sit here and I'll tell you. Someone's likely to kill you outside.

Heine: The Lord saves me because he wants me to explain to people what is happening in his world.

Mathilde: Father Jean-Paul explains it better than you do. Yesterday he told me that if you confess the Lord will pardon you and you will heal.

Heine: God is the one who should confess for striking me with this illness.

Mathilde: **(Forcefully)** You can hardly walk.

She hugs him. Beckerman enters.

Mathilde: Oh, Monsieur Beckerman.

Beckerman: Good evening, madame.

Heine: Welcome, Ludwig!

Mathilde: I had just started to undress, monsieur.

Beckerman: I shall wait until you dress, madame.

- Heine: I have been waiting for you for seventeen years. Perhaps you will dine with us? I have taught Mathilde how to make cholent.
- Beckerman: (**Surprised**) Cholent?
- Heine: The passing years have made me yearn for home.
- Mathilde: Maybe I'll get undressed anyway, Henri? (**Unbuttons her dress**)
- Heine: Mathilde! (**She exits**) Have you ever seen a woman as vulgar as my wife, Ludwig? I am sometimes so angry with her that instead of kissing her a thousand times, I kiss her only nine hundred and ninety-nine times.
- Beckerman: How are you, Heinrich?
- Heine: Better than the world.
- Beckerman: The world is changing for the better. The revolution is spreading. Here. In Italy. Hungary. Austria. And now in Germany, too. The parliament is convening in Frankfurt next week.
- Heine: And how are you, Ludwig?
- Beckerman: When I hear of barricades in Berlin, my youth returns to me. (**Laughs too loudly**) We must overcome our past disagreements, Heinrich. The people need us. Our ideas. Our words. When Germany awakens, we cannot sit yawning in Paris.

Enter Mathilde with two glasses of wine.

- Heine: To the Revolution. (**To Mathilde**) Perhaps we can offer our guest some cholent too?
- Mathilde: I hope he chokes on it. (**Exits**)
- Heine: You cannot imagine how low I have fallen. She moos love to me, and I bray back in French.
- Beckerman: A sign that the time is ripe. (**Discreetly**) Tomorrow we embark on the journey. A thousand Germans who were exiled from their country and have waited to return to it. In five days' time we cross the border and join the struggle.
- Heine: A thousand?
- Beckerman: Armed. You shall sit beside me in the first carriage. When we reach the parliament in Frankfurt, you shall ascend the stage and speak.
- Heine: The moment I cross the border I shall be arrested, Ludwig.
- Beckerman: A thousand men will guard you.
- Heine: Even they will not cool the King's ardor to hang my head among those of the bears he hunted.

- Beckerman: I assure you that the parliament will guarantee your protection. And you will be able to write completely uncensored.
- Heine: I want to live in Germany more than anything else in the world. But each time I make up my mind to go back, the desire to remain here arises in me. Exile, it appears, is a more natural condition for us.
- Beckerman: We are no longer Jews, Heinrich. Exile is not our natural condition.
- Heine: And what about my wife? You know I have been unwell.
- Beckerman: Martha will be very happy to take care of you.
- Heine: The moment I leave Mathilde, all the cocks of Paris will be strutting around her.
- Beckerman: You are worthy of better than her, Heinrich.
- Heine: With whom can I fight there with such enjoyment? When God is bored, he peeps in here and amuses himself with our quarrels.
- Beckerman: (**Forcefully**) Heinrich, if we do not return home, we shall go mad.

Enter Mathilde with a tray and dishes, which she arranges on the table.

- Mathilde: What's he whispering to you, Henri? I want to hear. When good is intended, one isn't ashamed to speak aloud.
- Heine: He came to eat cholent, Mathilde.
- Beckerman: I'm waiting for an answer, Heinrich.
- Mathilde: (**To Beckerman**) Do you think I've forgotten how much you wanted Henri dead? It was because of you that that idiot shot him in the leg. Here. Just imagine if he'd hit him a little more towards the middle, I'd have had a husband with no balls.
- Heine: Not now, Mathilde.
- Mathilde: I'll never give up on Henri's balls, Monsieur Beckerman. Not even for Germany. (**Exits**)
- Beckerman: Are you deserting the struggle for a republic because of that vulgar woman?
- Heine: No, not because of her, Ludwig. The tyranny of the masses can be even more terrible than that of kings. With my own eyes I have seen revolutionaries shoot a beggar who stole some bread.
- Beckerman: Heads roll in every revolution. When a body is sick, the gangrenous limbs must be amputated. That lewd woman

with her stupid prattling won't even squash a louse in her own hair.

Heine: Mathilde is a poem that I'll never be able to write.

Beckerman: You seek poems while the people are crying out for human rights?

Heine: I am not fighting for human rights for the masses, Ludwig, but for God's rights to Man. What is the point of a struggle if we all end up eating bean soup? There are some men worthy of the fruits of Paradise. I do not wish to live in a republic that doesn't distinguish between peaches and horse dung. Which destroys marble statues for paving roads. Which uproots roses to plant potatoes.

Beckerman: And what of those with bellies swollen by hunger who long for the summer in order to eat those potatoes?

Heine: In order to feed them we do not have to dress fairies in uniforms, or to fry a nightingale for lunch.

Beckerman: And all this because that woman is in love with your balls?

Heine: (**Angrily**) Do you want to know what Germany will look like after your revolution? Take a peek into your chamber pot tomorrow morning.

Beckerman: (**Angrily**) Just take your pen, cross the border with me and write whatever will make it a free, enlightened and just republic.

He grabs Heine and drags him toward the door. Enter Mathilde who hurries to them.

Mathilde: Leave him be. (**Beckerman hesitates**) Leave him be. (**She picks up a knife from the table and threatens him with it**) Before I slash your face.

Beckerman frees Heine.

Beckerman: The new prime minister is as fanatical about the revolution as I. When I quote you to him, he will have you expelled from France.

He exits. Mathilde rushes to Heine who has collapsed onto the floor.

Mathilde: Heinrich! (**She assists him to a chair**)

Heine: May I have a glass of water!

Mathilde: I'll get it for you.

Exit Mathilde. Heine picks up his cane and limps out from the house.

20. Princess Marie's house. Heine enters and addresses Alfred and Marie.

- Heine: Beckerman visited him and told him that I oppose the revolution. The prime minister has almost certainly signed my deportation order already.
- Alfred: Your opposition to the revolution has been known to the prime minister for a long time, Heinrich. I am not sure that I can help you.
- Heine: I do not oppose revolution. I have always supported human freedom anywhere in the world.
- Alfred: That is not what you wrote.
- Heine: I wrote that I am not prepared to support the replacement of one tyranny with another one that is even worse.
- Alfred: The prime minister is not pleased to hear that you think him a tyrant.
- Heine: I did not say he is a tyrant. The opposite. He is an enlightened prime minister. I am prepared to write that again. My only concern is that in his naivety he is liable to be dragged into tyranny.
- Alfred: So you think him naïve?
- Marie: You cannot expel from France every person who disagrees with the prime minister.
- Alfred: If you want to stay here, you will need to keep your pen in your pocket.
- Heine: I cannot keep my pen in my pocket when I see a prime minister who was borne into office on the shoulders of the revolution, and who consolidates his regime with the help of the army. On the day the masses beg for bread, he will order the army to fire on them.
- Alfred: How do you know?
- Heine: Any man who rules with the help of guns will one day be tempted to use them.
- Marie: The prime minister should be grateful to him for that warning.
- Alfred: My friendship with you has become dangerous, Heinrich. I was the king's counsellor. The new prime minister is not entirely certain of my loyalty and is liable to have me thrown into prison as well. It is not only your ankles that are too delicate for iron shackles.

- Marie: (To Alfred) If you are not willing to take a risk for Heinrich's freedom to write, then the freedom to write is not sufficiently important to you.
- Heine: Perhaps you have not discerned it, monsieur, but my health is deteriorating. I have to obtain medical help. Deportation means death for me.
- Alfred: I am sure that there are good doctors in Germany, too.

Heine takes his cane and turns to leave.

- Marie: If you are deported, Heinrich, I shall come with you.
- Alfred: (Astounded) If I am not mistaken, Marie, you are my wife.
- Marie: I cannot be the wife of one who abandons a poet to die because of his poetry.
- Alfred: (Angrily) I promised that I would do my best. (Heine halts) I will speak to the Prime Minister. Perhaps you will be reprimanded but not deported.

Heine limps out. Actors sing two stanzas of "Germany, A Winter's Tale".

Fellow wolves, you never	I am a wolf, and I'll howl with the
doubted me	wolves
Nor believed the rascals around	As long as I can yelp. You
you	Can count on me, and help
Who told you I'd gone over to	yourselves –
The side of the dogs that hound	Then even God will help you!
you,	

21. Heine's apartment. He is sitting at his writing desk. Enter Mathilde, festively dressed and carrying a parasol.

- Mathilde: Are you coming? (Heine is silent) You said that you've already finished the book. Let us go to the post office together to send it. What's the matter? Do you fear going out? If you haven't written anything against the new government, there's no cause for worry. (Heine is silent) It's spring outside. I bought a new parasol. We can walk arm-in-arm. Every now and then, we'll rest on a bench. (He struggles to stand up) Actually, there's no point in going out. It's going to rain. It would be a pity for you to muddy your shoes. I'll send the book to Campe myself.

Heine gives her an envelope. She exits. Lighting up on Campe's office in Germany. He is reading the manuscript of Heine's latest poem, "Germany, A Winter's Tale" and braying with laughter.

Heine: So, what do you think, Julius?

Campe: This is by far your best work, Heinrich. The nobles in Berlin choose for king the first one to shoot a bird. **(Laughs)** And the king claims that all German citizens enjoy complete freedom of expression, except for a few fools who insist on writing. **(Laughs)** A scandal is assured.

Heine: I am pleased to have succeeded in amusing you.

Campe: I am hurrying to the printers. The winds of freedom will not continue to blow here for much longer...

Heine: Wait a moment,

Campe: I shall pay you as usual.

Heine: In usual times you can pay as usual. But the present times are somewhat unusual.

Campe: Do you think that because censorship has been removed, I will sell more books? On the contrary. When the censor bans a book, it sells far better.

Heine: I am ill, Julius. I am not sure that I will live much longer. And I have a wife. I would like a new contract.

Campe: No other poet has the contract you have.

Heine: No poet has been banned and ostracized as I have. A death sentence awaits me in Germany. Even in France, I'm living on borrowed time. In a miserable apartment that even a junior government clerk would be embarrassed to live in. I demand a permanent annual contract.

Campe: And should you suddenly stop writing?

Heine: Then publish new editions of my old books.

Campe: How much?

Heine: Five thousand a year.

Campe: Are you out of your mind?

Heine: My wife no longer works in order to nurse me.

Campe: Two thousand.

Heine: Very well. You swallow your two thousand and choke on them, and I shall go to another publisher.

Campe: One moment. Three thousand.

Heine: And after my death, my wife continues to receive the money every year.

Campe: Out of the question. She's young. If she lives for another forty years, I'll go bankrupt.

Heine: Three thousand a year until her dying day and you can go to the printing house.
 Campe: And you will continue writing until **your** dying day.
 Heine: That is something you don't need to ask.

Campe turns to leave. Hoffmann enters his office.

Hoffman: The party is over, Herr Campe.
 Campe: Which party is that?
 Hoffman: Censorship is being restored.
 Campe: The king abolished it only two weeks ago.
 Hoffmann: And this morning he renewed it. You will submit to me every book you intend publishing for my review. That includes Heine's new book.
 Campe: Which new book?
 Hoffman: The one in this envelope.

22. Lights up on a café in Paris. The exiles who have escaped defeated from Germany, have returned to the café. Beckerman is supported by Jeanette and Strauss. After them strides Brauner. They sit in silence. In the corner a beggar plays his accordion.

Martha: Well, well, so you've finally returned. Alive, I'm happy to see you. Welcome.
 Jeanette: Ludwig needs a glass of water, Martha.
 Martha: Certainly. **(Pours it for him)** I waited for you. I was concerned. I asked whoever I could.
 Brauner: Everything was in vain, Martha. The poems, the articles, the critiques. A waste of paper and ink. Risking our lives during the fighting on the barricades, that, too, was in vain.
 Strauss: We are lucky to still have our heads on our shoulders.
 Brauner: And the snow in Berlin has thawed. The trees are blooming, and the king still rules.
 Martha: When you talk, I see that you have lost two teeth.
 Brauner: Those teeth fell in battle. Tomorrow I shall hang a placard on my chest.
 Strauss: But Ludwig's speech to parliament was remarkable. Like that of an ancient prophet whose God was revealed to him from within a storm. **(To Beckerman)** Buddha would have said of you...
 Jeanette: He is unwell, Wolfgang.

Brauner: He'll be back to himself by next spring, when the smell of revolution is again in the air.

Enter Heine, limping and leaning heavily on his cane. He sits at a table close to Beckerman.

Heine: Good evening, Ludwig. I heard you had returned. I also heard of your heroic battle against the Prussian army. And the brutality of the soldiers. And of your brilliant speech to parliament.

Martha: The beer is on the house today.

Brauner: I shall write a poem in your honor, Martha.

Heine: **(To Martha)** I'll be very happy to have one. **(To Beckerman)** I wasn't surprised to hear that they'd opened fire on you. The king of Prussia has yet to discover that human beings are no longer cannibals. He wants to feed his soldiers on the hearts of revolutionaries. **(To Martha)** I asked for beer, Martha.

Martha: **(Coldly)** You can try the café opposite.

Heine: I'll write you an even better poem.

Brauner: **(Angrily)** Have you come here to provoke us?

Heine: Heaven forbid! I have come to re-forge the alliance between us. I have always been a soldier in the fight for freedom. If you relaunch the revolutionary newspaper, I'll be happy to write for it.

Strauss: It's forbidden to say 'freedom' here these days, Heinrich.

Heine: I said it quietly.

Beckerman addresses Heine angrily.

Beckerman: You, a soldier in the fight for freedom? You are a despicable lackey of the dictatorship! You are the king's faithful servant.

Heine: The king's? Which king?

Beckerman: **(Takes out a document)** The King of France. You wrote in his service until he fled. Now you write in the service of his supporters. The French treasury still pays you an annual allowance. This is the treasury record.

Heine: **(Aghast)** What record?

Beckerman: Five thousand francs every year. Now it's clear why you betrayed our revolution. Now it's clear why you vilified it. Now it is clear why it failed.

Jeanette: Ludwig, control yourself.

Heine: Do you believe that I wrote anything at all in return for that money?

Beckerman: **(Gets up)** You were given that money not only for what you wrote, but mainly for what you did not write.

Jeanette: Sit down!

Beckerman: You betrayed Germany. You hired out your pen to anyone who would pay for it. Had the Devil himself been willing to pay, you would have hired it out to him, too. History will remember you in eternal shame as a man who turned morality into a bad joke. I am writing a thick book about you. Not a newspaper article that will be wrapped around fish tomorrow. It is because of Jews like you that there is anti-Semitism in the world.

Beckerman collapses into Jeanette's arms. Heine exits with a pronounced limp.

23. The bureau of King Friedrich Wilhelm. Hoffman shows the king the record of payments Heine received from the King of France.

Friedrich: Excellent. Finally we can accuse him of treason and execute him.

Hoffman: Undoubtedly, your highness, Heine is a dead man. But I propose that we first destroy his reputation.

Friedrich: Destroy his reputation?

Hoffman: No German patriot who knows that he received an allowance from the king of France will ever read his books again.

Friedrich: That's all? I want to see his head chopped off. He mocked me, humiliated me, disrespected me with every word he wrote. I am a horse with a bit in my mouth, and I neigh through my ass?

Hoffman: God forbid, my lord! Execution is certainly too good for him. Heine owes his entire career to the love of his readers. The worst punishment for him would be their hatred. If we publish a large notice about his betrayal ...

Friedrich: Brilliant idea, Hoffman. Publish a full-page notice in all the newspapers. In very large letters.

Hoffman: He will be cursed forever. Germany will hound him and his books for generations to come.

24. Heine's home. Mathilde enters wearing a colorful dress.

- Heine: Where are you going?
- Mathilde: To get your medications.
- Heine: In that dress? How did you have the gall to buy it? Even if I wrote a book that sold as well as the Bible, I still wouldn't be able to pay for it.
- Mathilde: Why are you so angry? Did the wind blow your hat off on the boulevard? You want a kiss? Here, I'll give you one.
- Heine: And the corset? Were you unable to find one big enough to hold your breasts? I hope you reveal them to a lover I will be proud of, when my poems are forgotten.
- Mathilde: I wore this dress to make you happy.
- Heine: If you think it's possible to make me happy, you clearly don't understand the size of the disaster. Because of the notice that the King of Prussia published, no-one will ever read a book of mine again.
- Mathilde: You always say that, and there are always those that read.
- Heine: Now the whole world thinks that I wrote what I wrote for money.
- Mathilde: You always think that the world's against you. When a dog barks in the street, you think it's chasing you. When a leaf falls from a tree, you think that the tree doesn't want to offer you its shade.
- Heine: I think that everyone is against me because I no longer know who is for me. Any one of my friends who knew of the allowance from the King of France could have told Ludwig. Even you.
- Mathilde: Me? You're my husband. I love you. Why would I inform on you? If you don't beg for forgiveness immediately, I will not share my bed with you the entire week.
- Heine: You won't last for even one night.
- Mathilde: Oh yes, I will. You'll be trying to go to other women.
- Heine: If only I could.
- Mathilde: Every week you go to that rich woman who likes your poems. The day will come when you discover that it was her husband who informed on you. You are so stupid you don't understand that every cuckolded husband has his limit.
- Heine: Good God, Mathilde. Your brain is larger than I credited. You're right. It's her bastard husband.

Heine picks up his cane and limps out.

25. Alfred and Marie's home. Heine enters and addresses Alfred.

- Heine: You gave the records of my allowance to Beckerman. Despite knowing that my hands were clean. I have never written a single word in return for it.
- Alfred: You know full well why I gave them.
- Heine: My friendship with your wife was pure, monsieur. She has not besmirched your good name at all. Ask her.
- Alfred: I know what she will say.
- Heine: You do not believe her?
- Alfred: I gave the records to Beckerman because you treated her too freely.
- Heine: And so you decided to ruin my life? Now, every word I have written about reforming the world is seen as a word in the service of the king. Who will want to read a book of mine?
- Alfred: It was your misfortune to choose a woman married to the wrong husband.
- Heine: At least ask the prime minister to continue my allowance.
- Alfred: (**Angrily**) Go beg for alms in the synagogue from your bearded brothers, who sniff around in their ancient books and fill the world with the stench of pickled herring and garlic. Perhaps they will find a few centimes they earned from selling secondhand breeches in the market.
- Heine: Thank you, monsieur.
- Alfred: (**Increasingly angry**) Could you not have chosen a Jewess? Even God chose a Jewess to bear his Son.
- Marie: Leave this house, Alfred! Leave and never return! (**Alfred exits**) That man deceived me from the day I met him. Behind his enlightened face lurks a dark soul. Every flower he looks at wilts under his cold gaze.
- Heine: He actually gave me a good reason for hope. I am persecuted for what I have written. Nobody will read what I write anymore. I am impoverished. Ill. A vengeful wife awaits me at home. Wherever I may go must be better than that.
- Marie: Alfred will not hesitate to use his power to have you deported.
- Heine: Where shall I go?
- Marie: Here. Here you can write about the revolution without fear of any man.
- Heine: My wife will not give up on me, Marie.
- Marie: And I neither. You have spent twenty years teaching me to love you. This love cannot be spurned now.

- Heine: You love the person I was, Marie. (**Takes his cane and turns to leave**)
- Marie: Wait. (**She blocks his way**) At least stay the night. I threw out my husband for you. If, in the morning, you wish to leave, I will not stand in your way. I am too proud to beg. I also know that you'll be back tomorrow evening. Without my love, you would feel worthy of a shoe saleswoman's love only.
- Heine: If only I was still worthy of her love. (**Exits**)

26. Actors sings Heine's "By the Rivers of Babylon".

By the Babylonian waters	That old tune – do you still
There we sat and wept – our harps	know it? –
were	How it starts with elegiac
Hung upon the weeping willow.	Whining, humming like a kettle
That old song – do you still know it?	That is seething on the hearth?
Long has it been seething in me –	Dog, I thank you for your
For a thousand years. Black sorrow!	spittle,
And my wounds are licked by time	But its coolness merely soothes
Just as Job's dog licked his boils.	me –
	Only death can really heal me,
	But, alas, I am immortal!

Lights up on Heine's room, where he is lying on two mattresses. His body is paralyzed, other than his right arm and head. He is looking at Campe, who is reading his new poems.

- Campe: This is the acme of your work, Heinrich. No mortal has dared rage against God as you have. We shall call it "Romancero". Readers will think it contains love poems and will hurry to buy it. I should rush to the printers right away. I hope the first edition sells out before the king bans it.
- Heine: One moment, Julius... Maybe you won't see me again.
- Campe: Don't worry. When death sees you writing a poem, he waits until you finish it.
- Heine: And what will be the fate of these new poems? Mathilde won't know what to do with them.
- Campe: I'll publish them after the Romancero.
- Heine: Give me your word.

- Campe: **(Hesitates)** I'll do the best that I can, Heinrich. The new poems may be a little too daring...
- Heine: These poems will ensure the victory of man over God, Julius. They will cast doubt not only on his existence, but on the very necessity for God. They will show that the power that humans gave to God corrupted him. That he lost his sense of humor.
- Campe: I would give you my word, Heinrich. But you know the church will declare war on me.
- Heine: I thought we were allies.
- Campe: Heinrich, you dare to write poems like this because it's no longer possible to execute you. Me it's still possible. **(Turns to leave)**
- Heine: **(After him)** I write them because the bastard up above forces me.

Exit Campe. Despite his pain, Heine takes up pen and paper and tries to write. Mathilde enters with a glass of water. She helps him drink

- Mathilde: If you continue writing, Henri, it will hurt even more.
- Heine: The contrary. Each line I write eases the pain.
- Mathilde: Maybe I should bring a priest, just in case? Confess, pray and you will live.
- Heine: God already has millions of fools praying to him.
- Mathilde: Our God is full of mercy.
- Heine: Really? Have you met him recently?
- Mathilde: Stop it! **(Restrained)** I want you to recover, Henri. To stand on your feet. To be angry with me and to mock me. I want to walk down the street with you and see you sniffing at the perfumed women waiting at their doors. I'm willing to pray for you, to confess and fast. And you are not willing to do anything. Why? If you say that you believe in God, he'll heal you. Jesus raised people from the dead.
- Heine: If your God is capable of healing me and yet he still abandons me to this suffering, then he's a real bastard.
- Mathilde: God only works miracles for those who believe in him. I'm prepared to call a Jewish priest for you. I'm even prepared to bring you a skullcap.
- Heine: I wear my skullcap over my heart.
- Mathilde: If the God of the Jews is punishing you for betraying him, I'm willing for you to go back to being a Jew.
- Heine: I cannot go back to being a Jew.
- Mathilde: Why not?

- Heine: Because I have never stopped being one. **(He laughs)**
- Mathilde: Then perhaps your illness is my punishment? Perhaps it's me who has sinned? **(He is silent)** If you're not prepared to pray for yourself, then ask mercy for me. I'm suffering too. **(He hesitates)** Lots of people have fallen ill and returned to him, even though they never believed.
- Heine: I don't want to believe just because I am ill.
- Mathilde: If you don't believe in Him, he'll send you to hell.
- Heine: Hell was invented to frighten foolish people, Mathilde.
- Mathilde: I'm foolish, and I'm frightened.
- Heine: And I am wise, and I am frightened. Because I do not know for what I am being punished. Because I do not know why I am dying when I so much want to live. Why does he fill my mouth with a handful of earth to silence me? Is that his answer to my poems? A handful of earth?
- Mathilde: Enough, Henri. Stop! **(Silence)** I'm going to get the priest.

To her astonishment, a priest enters, his face obscured by his hat. He is carrying a candle. The priest says a blessing.

- Priest: Deo gratias. In hoc signo vinces. Durus est hic sermo, et quis potest eum audire.
- Mathilde: **(To the priest)** Who called you, father?
- Priest: The Holy Spirit.
- Mathilde: Jesus! He is not about to die, is he?
- Priest: Apparently not.
- Mathilde: Thank you, father.
- Priest: I wish to be alone with the sufferer during the confession, my child.
- Mathilde: God bless you, father.
- Priest: You, too, my child.

Mathilde bows and leaves

- Heine: You can go back to your church. I do not intend to confess. **(The priest takes off his hood, revealing Beckerman)** Ludwig?!
- Beckerman: I read the Romancero, Heinrich. Your failures grow from book to book.
- Heine: Since when are you a priest?
- Beckerman: Since I discovered that men are not able to redeem themselves by themselves and need the grace of the Lord to be redeemed.

Heine: And you've abandoned the revolution?

Beckerman: If we have no hope on earth, we need to search for it in the heavens.

Heine: You preached against that lie your entire life.

Beckerman: And now I've discovered the truth. You're the one who has lied throughout your life. And the time has come to be judged.

Heine: For what?

Beckerman: For having preached to men that they were created in God's shadow and were therefore able to redeem themselves.

Heine: If you have come to convert me, I'll be happy to write to whoever sent you that you did your utmost.

Beckerman: You won't be writing anything anymore, Heinrich. Whoever reads you will be persuaded that there's no point in praying to God and will thus sentence himself to hell.

Heine: He who reads me will ask himself if there really is a God.

Beckerman: You are a pathetic creature. Who are you to doubt his existence?

Heine: Man may be a pathetic creature, enslaved to his god. But he can also believe in himself and reign over his life. **(Indicates himself)**

Beckerman: You are crippled and dying, but in your heart you're a king? Your apostasy is the arrogance of a braggart and fool.

Heine: What else can I brag about?

Beckerman: About your refusal to ask for mercy. I'm warning you Heinrich. Repudiate everything you have written, confess and ask mercy. God will answer you and reduce your suffering.

Heine: And if not?

Beckerman: A decent Catholic priest knows how to persuade everyone to confess. **(He moves the candle closer to Heine's face)**

Heine: **(In fear)** Mathilde, Mathilde...

Marie enters. Beckerman hastens to douse the candle and cover his face.

Beckerman: The Lord himself will persuade you. Even you will not find the words to save yourself from his punishment. And if you pray for Death to save you from your suffering, know that he will not save you from my vengeance. I will spend the rest of my life denouncing your accursed poems, which desecrated the holy of holies, and I will prove that they are banal and hollow jests.

Beckerman exits. Marie squats beside Heine and embraces him.

Marie: Dearest Heinrich, your suffering is worse than what I had heard. I'm taking you back to my home. You will not rot on filthy mattresses in a moldy room like this.

Heine: Thanks, Marie. But Mathilde won't agree.

Marie: Shall I take you to hospital? She can be by your side there.

Heine: She won't agree to that either.

Marie: Maybe she'll agree that I come here and help her? I can't abandon you to such suffering.

Heine: It's somewhat late, Marie.

Marie: Why? You're still writing. I can see that the ink is barely dry on the page.

Heine: Can you not see that I am dying?

Marie: I see a king of stature bestride the earth, while we scuttle around him picking up crumbs of his reflections.

Heine: I've already lost my kingdom, Marie.

Marie: Your poetry is a kingdom.

Heine: It's a momentary kingdom. Its crown is as light as a feather in a dream. If I could, I would grab hold of a beam of rotten wood. Just when I'm certain that there is no God, he hits me with such a fatal blow. **(Revives a little)** Hold me, Marie. If he sees me in your arms, maybe he'll disappear among the clouds in shame.

Heine hugs Marie. The actors sing the poem "Miserere"

How much I envy him his lot!	O God, cut short my agony,
For seven years I lie	Hasten the muffled drum!
Tossing in pain upon the	You know I have no talent for
ground,	The act of martyrdom.
I writhe and cannot die.	

Mathilde enters

Heine: This is Marie.

Mathilde: I know.

Marie: I came to help you.

Mathilde: There's no need.

Marie: He needs me. I give him the strength to live.

Mathilde: I do, too.

Marie: He's very happy that I'm here. Ask him.

Heine: Maybe she can dine with us?
 Mathilde: There's no place at the table.
 Marie: I'm asking for his sake. Be generous to him.
 Mathilde: Go already!
 Marie: Thank you, madame. **(To Heine)** I'll come again tomorrow.
 Heine: Wait, Marie. Kiss me.

Marie hesitates, but approaches Heine and takes his hand

Heine: I love you until my soul leaves me, apparently tomorrow or the day after.
 Marie: When you die, Heinrich, my soul will die with you.

She kisses his hand and exits

Heine: **(After her)** Marie! **(To Mathilde)** Call her.
 Mathilde: She won't enter this house again.
 Heine: Call a carriage. I'll go after her. I want to feel a few more heartbeats.
 Mathilde: You live in a world created by God, and he forbids us from wanting so much.
 Heine: That God no longer forbids nor allows me anything. See how afraid he is of me. How he waits for Death to put his hand on me and hopes that I'll bend my knees and plead for his mercy. See how he longs to hear me bless him and die. But I won't bless and die. I'll curse and live. Damn you for grinding me with the heel of your boot. Damn you for crushing me like a worm on the ground. And despite all that, I still live. You see? I live and I write...
 Mathilde: **(Embracing him)** You can't live more than what God permits, Henri. You can't love more than he permits. You can't betray, cheat, mock, envy. Nor can you write more than he permits.
 Heine: I've never asked for his permission, Mathilde...

Mathilde continues holding Heine until he stops breathing. Darkness.

End