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**LLCU 205 Assignment #3**

To understand Heine’s critiques of Germany more thoroughly, we must keep in mind certain aspects of Heine’s character. Heine himself was a contradictory figure, both as a person and a poet; for example, he was a patriot, but also ruthlessly critical of some of Germany's faults of his time; his poetry was lyrical and romantic, but they were often filled with acerbic and ironical language. Part of his complexity may come from the fact that he was raised in a German-Jewish background, growing up in Dusseldorf, but while it was under French occupation. The “enlightening” French philosophies and political movements brought about by the French influenced Heine strongly. He became a poet with outright liberal thinking, and his distaste for traditional Germanic conventions fueled his scathing remarks towards the overall conservative German culture at the time. His critiques are none more eloquently summarized in his epic poem A Winter’s Tale. The poem depicts an imaginary journey of an unnamed narrator (namely, Heine) from Paris to Hamburg, encountering many allegorical and mythical figures and events, which parodies many traditional traits and ideas of Germanic culture. A significant portion of the poem centers around Heine’s blatant lampooning of the oppressive natures of the prevalent authoritarianism, provincialism, Romanticism, and divisiveness in Germany at the time with a great deal of those satirizing allegories and imagery. This paper will analyze the most prominent of the poem’s critiques and discuss their relevance to contemporary Germany.

While the poem criticizes many aspects of German culture, Heine ultimately directed his critiques towards the harm authoritarianism does to the people. This begins with his mockery of religious sentiments in Caput I, when he encounters “a little harp girl singing” of “the Beyond where souls are glad” when he reunites with his fatherland in a touching moment (Heine, pp. 483-484). He states bluntly that religion is a device intended to numb the people’s wits (“The lullaby heaven simpers/To lull the people back to sleep/When that lummox whines and whimpers (Heine, p. 484)”). In Caput II he begins to attack writing censorship, especially from Prussia, as he believed that restricting the freedom of speaking and writing created a false sense of Germanic unity (“The Censorship gives us unity/Of spirit, the ideal-- (Heine, p. 486)”). He further extenuates his distaste for religion in Caput IV, especially Catholicism, when the narrator travels to the unfinished Cologne Cathedral and praises its abandoned state, comparing it to a “mind’s Bastille” built by “crafty Papists” (Heine, p. 489). Heine made it evident at this point that he believed religion and censorship are methods used by rulers to assert their authority over Germany by creating a false sense of “spiritual unity” at the cost of the imprisonment of the German mind. He ridicules the “spiritual unity” and Germanic nostalgia asserted by kings such as Wilheim of Prussia as it made people subdued and easier to rule (“Of the printless age of faith when yet/No daily press was appearing (Heine, p. 488)”). Heine also mocks German mythical and Romantic symbols. On the other hand, he praised the symbols of France. For instance, whatever Heine thought of France’s revolutions, he paints the French colours as a symbol of liberty and mourns their stigmatization (“And Freedom will come with dancing and sport/With its flag--the white, red, blue one (Heine, p. 499)”) whereas he saw the German colours as pointless and trivial (Heine, p. 482). He mourns Napoleon as well (“The Emperor’s risen up since then/And back in the tomb they laid him (Heine, p. 499)”). In contrast, Heine depicts the “Kaiser” Barbarossa with glorified imagery but denounces it all as nothing more than a myth (“Old nurse’s tales--how dear they sound/What sweet dreams they inspire (Heine p. 509)”). A part of this derives from Heine’s favouritism of French thinking, and another subtler aspect is perhaps to emphasize Germany’s lack of revolutions, especially France. Indeed, the title “Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen” itself alludes to Germany’s isolation from the modern world in an effort to preserve the past rather than move forward with the times. Heine criticizes the “dreamlike” aspect of German culture of making it lose touch with the real world (“But in the airy realm of dreams/Our sway is uncontested...Other nations of the earth/Developed on terra firma (Heine, p. 496)”). He also criticizes the apparent “spiritual unity”, as he pointed out the dangers of Prussian control many times throughout the poem. His resolution is to shift Germany’s focus on making “The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth now” (Heine p. 484) and gives a poetical warning to the kings that Germany will ascend to its rightful place one day and they should be prepared for it (Heine p. 536).

Heine’s criticisms are arguably less relevant in the contemporary age. Much of his salient critiques center around oppression, divisiveness and powerlessness, themes that can scarcely be connected with Germany in the 21st century. There are subtler shades of the issues Heine speaks of, however, that still has some relevance to contemporary today. For example, Heine criticized that Germanic people are always powerless in the real world, and have no sense in politics. While this description is far-fetched for Germany today, contemporary Germany does still have a decided lack of pro-activism and international leadership for a country of its standing. It is overall quite conservative and tends to withdraw from political challenges of the times. Moreover, issues of divisiveness occasionally resurface often in the form of occasional clashing between old political, cultural ideals and newer ones. This shows that Germany is still not “completely” unified in the way its neighbours have, as it continues to struggle to find a distinct set of core Germanic values (The Economist). However, Heine’s brash, pessimistic critiques are mostly obsolete at this point. Germany stands strong as an autonomous nation today, with no threat of Prussia dominion, imprisonment of the intellect with censorship, unhealthy nostalgia, or fear of unification (The Economist). Like he “prophesied” in the poem, “A new generation is growing up/Without any shamming and sinning/It’s free in thought and free in joy/I’ll proclaim a new beginning (Heine, p. 535)”. The philosophical dreams of liberty he so often heard and believed in had come to near-realization today.

**Works Cited**

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