

# On Receiving the Heinrich Heine Award Dusseldorf, September 2009

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I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Hartung, President of ECTRIMS and Chairman of Neurology at Heinrich Heine University, to the University, to the state and to ECTRIMS, for selecting me as the first recipient of the Heinrich Heine Award for contribution in the field of multiple sclerosis research and neuroimmunology.

Heinrich Heine was born in 1797 in Düsseldorf to a Jewish family. The Hebrew name given him by his parents was Chaim, which means life. As an adult, Heine was a modern secular Jew, which at that time was considered by his community to be revolutionary. Heine lived and died before the concept of Zionism emerged. But he was a proto-Zionist in one important sense, as emphasized by the renowned Israeli writer Amos Oz in his address on receiving the Heinrich Heine Prize in 2008. Heine regarded Judaism neither as a religion (as Jews did) nor as a race (as anti-Semites did), but as a culture and a people. He always considered himself a member of that culture, a son of that people. He belonged to an era that witnessed a flowering of Jewish genius in European history along with distinguished figures like Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Marx, Freud, Kafka, Einstein and Buber.

Educated in Germany, Heinrich Heine was a gifted writer and one of the giants of German culture in the nineteenth century, along with luminaries such as Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Rilke and many others.

Heine's Jewish origin interplayed with his German identity and with his 'Francophilia' and 'Europhilia'. He admired the Jewish legacy on justice, morality and vision, but he shunned Jewish orthodoxy. He admired German culture with its divine music, sublime poetry and enlightening philosophy, but he despised German fanaticism, nationalism, extreme patriotism, and despotism.

After moving to Paris in 1831 he met Karl Marx. Heine's circle also included influential writers like Balzac, Gautier, Lassalle, Dumas and George Sand. He became increasingly more radical and international. In his ironic style, he expressed the belief, as stated by Amos Oz, that modern humans will never be fully at home in one culture and one place. This would explain how, with equanimity, he converted to Christianity in order to obtain a civil academic post in

Germany. He was to be disappointed, for the doors remained closed. He expressed the longing of many Jews for a super-national Europe. He regarded himself first and foremost as European. Amos Oz calls it a deeply Jewish predicament. We know it well from our parents and grandparents. They loved Europe, Europe did not love them.

Following the influence and spirit of Heine, Europe's Jews entered into mainstream European life in spite of the discrimination. They succeeded in integrating into the fabric of the German way of life in many fields: industry, the economy, culture, literature, medicine, science. This is reflected in the fact that during the first four decades of the twentieth century, forty-six German scientists received the Nobel Prize, of whom seventeen were of Jewish origin, almost 40 percent. To mention some: Adolf Bayer, Otto Wallach, Richard Willstätter, Fritz Haber, Albert Einstein, Isidor Rabi, Paul Erlich, Otto Meyerhof, Otto Warburg, Otto Loewy, Fritz Lipmann, Hans Krebs.

However, while Heine exemplified the involvement of Jews in German life, he also foresaw the end of this road. One hundred years before the eruption of Nazism, he predicted a massive, brutal national revolution in Germany. He also predicted that "where they burn books, they will also burn people." And indeed, on 10 May 1933, the Nazis set fire to thousands of books at the Operaplatz in Berlin, including those written by Heinrich Heine. This was one of numerous similar events that presaged World War II and the Holocaust.

Several years after the end of the war and the establishment of the State of Israel, German scientists from the Max Planck Institute together with Israeli scientists who emigrated from Germany to Palestine before the war found ways to establish scientific collaboration on an individual level. Later, bilateral cultural and scientific agreements were signed between Germany and Israel. As a result of the personal relationships that grew out of this cooperation, Israelis were exposed to a new and different generation of Germans. These ties have enabled our German partners from the new generation to voice their feelings about the past. They facilitated the creation of personal friendships with numerous Israeli colleagues, including myself – direct descendants of families eradicated in the Holocaust in Europe.

On the personal level, I am fortunate to have here in the neurology community some very dear friends, like Peter

ECTRIMS = European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis

Hartung, Hartmut Wekerle, Klaus Toyka, Reinhardt Hohlfeld, Tomas Brand, and others. I thank all of you and appreciate your friendship. We represent different parts of a common modern European civil society. It is a joint legacy of Heinrich Heine and of all of us present here today.

I would like to conclude with a few sentences regarding Heine's illness. Since the age of thirty-five he suffered from a neurological disease until he died twenty-four years later in 1856. In 1832 he developed paralysis in the fingers of his left hand. In 1837 he described visual failure in one eye that lasted for several weeks. During the next few years, he described almost twenty neurological events, with partial or complete recovery, of unilateral blindness, diplopia, dysarthria, facial palsy, ptosis, hemihypesthesia, monoparesis, and urinary problems. In 1845 he became paraparetic and in 1848 permanently paraplegic. Dr. Putnam from New York, Dr. Jelhinek from Edinburgh, and Dr. Gadot from Tel Aviv independently reached the conclusion that what he was suffering from was multiple sclerosis. This was based on evidence of dissemination in time and space, clinical relapses and remissions, lack of cognitive impairment, and the absence of signs of any other chronic disease. The first report, by a patient, of an

MS-like disease was made in 1822 by Augustus D'este, a son of the Duke of Sussex. Heine's self-description was the second. In 1868, twelve years after the death of Heine, Charcot published his article on the clinical and histological features of "La Sclerose en plaques."

In closing, Professor Hartung, I would like to express once again my deep gratitude to you all for honoring me with an award named for Heinrich Heine, a fine Jewish-German-European man. For me, an Israeli Jew, receiving this award on German soil, where he was born, and during an international meeting on MS, a disease that Heine most likely suffered from, is immensely meaningful.

Finally, I would like to thank my many teachers, colleagues, residents and students, who have accompanied me during the years. Without the support and collaboration of such friends – like Shaul Feldman, Michael Sela, Ruth Arnon, Talma Brenner, Stanly Prusiner, Don Silberberg, Robert Lisak, Haim Ovadia, Hanna Rosenman, Dimitri Karussis and many others – I would not be standing here today.

Many thanks, Vielen Dank, Toda Raba