

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Heinrich Heine in Geständnisse.

His views and positions on politics, philosophy,
literature and religion in 1854.

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

October 1979

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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I. Introduction.

a. Heine.

In the main, the famous "Streit um Heine" has been a quarrel over Heine's character and the attention bestowed on his work has to a large extent been dominated by a preoccupation with his person.¹ This aspect of Heine scholarship should not be uncritically passed over, but should be considered peculiar. For, whereas literary criticism more frequently than not has rejected psychological or biographical interpretations of art, it has rarely done so in its examination of Heine's work.² Perhaps it is true that subjectivity intrudes more blatantly into Heine's work than into the work of most other poets. Critics have been of this opinion, and various assessments of Heine's character, derived mainly from his work but also from reported conversations, anecdotes, etc., have greatly influenced assessments of his place in the history of German literature of the nineteenth century.

Heine's complexity, the seeming contradictions that fill his work, have been the chief cause of the long quarrel. Readers who want a simple, consistent and harmonious Heinebild have been unable to cope with these aspects of his work. Ludwig Börne early documented the frustration of the critic in search of an unambiguous Heine:

Niemals wird es selbst der Behendesten, verschnitztesten und katzenartigsten Kritik gelingen, Heine zu fangen, der immer noch mehr Maus als die Kritik Katze ist. Er hat sich in allen Winkeln der sittlichen, wissenschaftlichen, religiösen und gesellschaftlichen Welt Schlüpflöcher gesichert, und alle diese Löcher sind durch unterirdische Gänge miteinander in Verbindung gebracht. Du siehst Heine aus eine seiner kleinen Meinungen herausgehen, du verfolgst ihn, er kehrt wieder dahin zurück; du willst ihn nun fest darin halten; aber du selbst bist angeführt, denn er entwischt durch eine ganz entgegengesetzte Richtung . . . Du liesest diese oder jene Seite von Heine, wo sich eine falsche, abgeschmackte und lächerliche Behauptung findet; beeile dich ja nicht, sie zu widerlegen, schlage nur das Blatt um, denn Heine selbst ist schon umgeschlagen und widerlegt sich selbst³

Discussion of Heine in terms of his character is not limited to nineteenth century criticism, as is sometimes suggested. In fact, this feature of past Heine scholarship is prominent in some recent discussions of his work.⁴

Most critics concede Heine's talent, but many -- particularly bourgeois critics of the past -- perceive it as marred because the alleged character flaws of flippancy and inconsistency extend their influence into his work. It is essentially alleged inadequacies of character on the part of Heine which keep some critics from according him the status of a great writer, while others reject him entirely. Although the last ten years have seen a good deal of progress in Heine scholarship,⁵ this heritage still lingers on to some extent.

That this should be so is regrettable, as has lately been recognized even by proponents of the traditional demand for

"pure" art.⁷ The situation in which Heine scholarship so often found itself in the past, and which it still cannot entirely escape, reflects the nature of so-called "bourgeoise" criticism which has clung to traditional demands for an art that, among other things, is untarnished by discord; that in its truly great manifestations reflects a coherent, harmonious, well-integrated world-view; that is the art of Goethe--the "healthy" Goethe, as Heine would put it.

Thus Ernst Alker, in an article published in 1956, speaks of a loss in critical acclaim accorded Heine in the decade since 1946 and goes on to say:

Daß er nach Goethe der größte deutsche Lyriker gewesen sei, wird nun kaum mehr behauptet werden. . . . gewichtige Stimmen gibt es ferner die gegen Heine Eduard Mörike ausspielen, nicht aus irgendwelchen Ressentiment wider Heine, sondern vom Gesichtspunkt der ästhetischen Werthhaftigkeit her--jenen Mörike, den der marxistische Literaturwissenschaftler Lukacs . . . als einen "niedlichen Zwerg" bezeichnete.⁸

Eva Becker points out that such criticism comes about when Heine is regarded only as a lyric poet and when attention is accorded only such of his poetry as fits a particular and very narrow concept of the genre: ". . . man kann Heine nicht mit dem Maßstab für Mörike messen--sowenig wie umgekehrt".⁹

Alker has no qualms about placing Heine after Goethe, Rilke, Mörike and Hölderlin. He is in complete sympathy, and this in 1956, with Rudolf Borchardt who thirty years earlier had edited an "aesthetically rigorous" anthology of

poetry entitled Ewiger Vorrat deutscher Poesie. Borchardt included fewer of Heine's poems than poems of the above mentioned poets, yet did not exclude Heine entirely although he was apparently ruthless in amputating unseemly, offensive, "non-art" parts of the poems as he saw fit (the labels are Borchardt's).¹⁰

In the development of German literary history since Heine there has never been a clearly established opinion that Heine is truly one of the important German poets and writers. In fact, as far as non-Marxist criticism is concerned, it is not even as if the low-point reached between 1933-1945 had given scholars a reason to start afresh with Heine. The current interest in Heine has not yet proven its durability, nor have its scholastic products established that they do justice to the poet.

Marxist criticism has felt pride regarding its achievements in Heine scholarship, and to a certain extent this pride is justifiable. In the period since World War II interest in Heine has been consistently demonstrated in the German Democratic Republic and Heine has been prominently included in the canon of great poets that make up the much vaunted "cultural heritage". But although Marxists rarely refer to Heine as a "torn" poet¹¹, although they do not dwell on his contradictions, dismissing him as a result of them, or, as is not more often the case, explaining them on the basis of

his background, the age in which he lived, the fashion of poets of his time, etc.,¹² Marxist criticism has not been as shining an example of scholarly rigour and integrity as it has claimed. Marxist criticism, too, is looking for an unambiguous Heine, a Heine not at odds with the historical developments of the day as seen from a Marxist perspective. Where discrepancies in Heine's life and work cannot be ignored, Marxist critics offer an answer: these discrepancies are to be regarded as a reflection of the growing, historically "objective" gap between romantic art and the prosaic capitalist everyday.¹³ Not "squarely" but "swayingly" (schwankend) Lukàcs places Heine between the petit-bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Heine had outgrown the former, but had not yet reached a level of historical and economic understanding that would allow him without qualms to close ranks with the "proletarian democrats".¹⁴ These explanations do not seem enlighteningly different from "bourgeois" explanations, but they are couched in Marxist terminology and are therefore acceptable to those who look at literature from a Marxist perspective.

Although prominent exceptions come to mind, one can say in general that Heine scholarship, especially in German countries, has been aesthetically and/or ideologically myopic to the extent that it has failed to do justice to Heine. Perhaps it is better to ignore or dismiss the entire work of

a poet than to distort it under the guise of serious discussion.

Heine's style has contributed in large measure to his being conceded talent but denied integrity of character. One factor is his apparently casual manner: his loose stringing of anecdotes and his random interspersions of even these in other discourse. While this may result in work that seems artless, formless and undisciplined, there is nonetheless method in Heine's madness. A case in point is the seemingly uncompleted Harzreise about which the claim has been made that its fragmentary appearance was necessary and was deliberately contrived.¹⁵

Geständnisse is no different in outward appearance than most of Heine's other prose work. At first glance it too could be seen as a random concoction, a pot-pourri of anecdotes. It is, in fact, very carefully organized. Heine's central theme, for example, his new religious perspective, is literally at the centre of the essay. The apparent ramblings can be divided into approximately five sections between which, in turn, there are logical links.

A second factor in Heine's style which contributes to a charge that he lacks character is its preeminently ironic nature. Critics from the nineteenth century to the present have resented this irony, have detected in it a flippancy, an unwillingness to commitment, and a cynicism. It is, of course, one of the dangers of ironic style that it may be a mere

disguise for self-centeredness and ultimately emptiness. As Vera Deblue¹⁶ points out:

In ihrer Konsequenz mündet die Ironie in einen Subjektivismus, der das Subjekt selber in Frage stellt, in eine Befreiung des Subjekts von sich selber: in die Selbstironie. "Die Auflösung der Objektivität in Subjektivität umfasst hier gleichsam das Subjekt selbst als Objekt ironischer Distanzierung". Dies bedeutet nun wieder Freiheit sich selbst gegenüber, wobei auch hier die Gefahr besteht, in dem Bewußtsein der durch Selbstironie gewonnenen Freiheit ethisch die Verantwortung dem eigenen Tun gegenüber subjektiv aufzuheben.¹⁶

Even where Heine's ironic style has not met with critical resentment it has proven to be a frustration. Because this style makes Heine's position on various matters difficult to ascertain, critics have hesitated in "committing themselves" on Heine. Heine's words about Mathilde in Die Stadt Lucca describe critics' sentiments about Heine himself:

. . . es gibt Herzen, worin Scherz und Ernst,
Böses und Heiliges, Glut und Kälte sich so
abenteuerlich verbinden, daß es schwer wird,
darüber zu urteilen.¹⁷

In Geständnisse, this ironic tone has contributed to the distrust critics feel about Heine's self-proclaimed religious change. Gemüt has often been deemed more trustworthy than Verstand, especially in German letters.¹⁸ Certainly it is regarded as more suited to the poet. Religion, especially from the modern perspective, is often regarded as belonging to the realm of Gemüt, and therefore distrust is bred by Heine's strongly rational and entirely unsentimental approach to religion.

An ability to see the ironic aspects of the object was admired by Heine. Thus despite Heine's intense dislike for England and all things English, he retained a certain admiration for the British parliamentary system. He points to the capacity of British parliamentarians to satirize their country by the use of unflattering parables. In connection with England's dealings with Ireland and its Catholic minorities, satiric tales are told in both Houses of Parliament about the treatment of Greek minorities by the Islamic Turks. Heine observes, "Aber eben, je wichtiger ein Gegenstand ist, desto lustiger muß man ihn behandeln; . . ."¹⁹ Application of this principle can be found throughout Heine's work. The Geständnisse are no exception.

I consider most of Heine's discursive prose to be essayistic.^{19a} Perhaps this essayistic style also accounts in part for the long rejection of Heine--Heine's prose in this case--especially in German countries. Adorno speaks of the essay as a product of the Enlightenment, and says that in Germany it has been rejected as a Mischform because it is indicative of freedom of intellect. Adorno further observes:

Die Hartnäckigkeit, mit der dies Schema überlebt, wäre so rätselhaft wie seine affektive Besetztheit, speisten es nicht Motive, die stärker sind als die peinlich Erinnerung daran, was einer Kultur an Kultiviertheit mangelt, die historisch den homme de lettres kaum kennt.²⁰

Heinz Hengst makes the observation that essayistic style

allowed Heine to transcend both the limitations of the Kunstperiode and those of a "reine" Tendenz. The style in its use by Heine achieves a dialectic of the ethical and the aesthetic--a dialectic, albeit, that defies closer definition according to Hengst. Hengst quotes Max Bense:

Diese merkwürdige kalkulatorische Prosa atmet selbstverständlich den Geist starker ausdrückender Präzision, sie ist kryptorational. Sie versteckt ihre Vernunft. Warum?--Weil sie ja nicht reine Tendenz ist, sondern koinzidierte, sie ist ja noch Poesie, sie vollzieht sich um des Geschöpfes, nicht um der Tendenz willen.^{20a}

According to Hengst, an inability to understand Heine's very "modern" use of this dialectic underlay the accusations of his contemporaries, Ruge among them, that Heine was not steadfast in character and that he was subjective.

Heine's personality and style contribute to the strange image we have of him as being on the one hand an enthusiast, a man of his time, the German poet of his generation, and yet on the other hand as also remaining aloof from and at odds with his age. Clichés come readily to mind when one is expressing common sentiment: Heine is hard to pin down.²¹

b. Parteilichkeit.

A few years ago critics of German literature seemed once again to regard with interest social and political involvement with contemporary life on the part of authors and poets. The catchword of this new interest was Engagement.

Such a general interest was not a hindrance to the rebirth of interest in Heine which was then also in progress, and may in fact have stimulated the renewed interest.

The topic of this thesis was born in this spirit. It was a result of an attempt to establish what Parteilichkeit meant in Heine's life and work, especially in the Geständnisse. Parteilichkeit is a word which over the years has been denotationally inflated. One must come to terms with this word in its various meanings if clarity is to be achieved.

It is necessary to examine the importance of the concept of Parteilichkeit in Marxist-Leninist literary theory. Parteilichkeit is a word that, among other things, connotes constancy, steadfastness of purpose. Bourgeois criticism has generally not recognized such qualities in Heine; the word would be found appropriate for Börne, but it is doubtful that the designation could be considered complimentary, given the bourgeois point of view. To call Börne parteilich in the bourgeois context would reflect a view of him as a somewhat dogmatic and closed-minded individual. Parteilichkeit is further linked in the bourgeois mind to narrowly political art, as the criticism of Benno von Wiese reveals.²² Such political art has, until recently,²³ been generally unfavourably regarded.

In Marxist literary theory, on the other hand, the concept of Parteilichkeit is central. It is demanded of all art that

it be parteilich, it is in fact impossible for art not to be so. On a different level, Parteilichkeit is an extremely influential factor in determining the worth of a poet and his work. If a poet is to be claimed for the socialist cultural heritage he must be seen to be parteilich in the Marxist sense insofar as this was appropriate and possible in the times in which he lived. Claims of non-partisanship are mere pretenses of objectivity on the part of those who favour the status quo. For the only possible objectivity is historical and it can only be attained by one who is parteilich in the socialist sense.

Heine died a full half century before the appearance of Lenin's essay Parteiorganisation und Parteiliteratur. This essay has become the basis for the development of a Marxist theory of art. A key passage of the essay, with the famous "nut and bolt" metaphor, was quoted again and again by those who were in the vanguard of the development of socialist literary theory:

Worin besteht nun dieses Prinzip der Parteiliteratur? Nicht nur darin, daß für das sozialistische Proletariat die literarische Tätigkeit keine Quelle des Gewinns von Einzelpersonen oder Gruppen sein darf, sie darf überhaupt keine individuelle Angelegenheit sein, die von der allgemeinen proletarischen Sache unabhängig ist. Nieder mit den literarischen Übermenschen! Die literarische Tätigkeit muß zu einem "Rädchen und Schraubchen" des einen einheitlichen großen sozial-demokratischen Mechanismus werden, der von dem ganzen politisch bewußten Vortrupp der ganzen Arbeiterklasse in Bewegung gesetzt wird.²⁴

In Lenin's mind, non-partisan literature is non-partisan in name only and clearly belongs to reactionary and capitalist forces. The theory of the innate Parteilichkeit of all literature was first enunciated in this essay. Parteilichkeit as Lenin uses the term, assumes the integrity of literature (art) in relation to the dialectical historical process. Given their presuppositions about historical and societal human development, this makes it possible for him and other Marxists to assert that there exists but one true Parteilichkeit and that "true" literature and such Parteilichkeit will automatically occur together.²⁵

Problems exist with the use of the word Parteilichkeit in view of the more recent history of literary criticism. For better or worse, German literary criticism has come to be divided into two camps: the bourgeoisie and the Marxist. While it is undeniable that the possibility of division along other lines and from other perspectives exists, as between German and non-German criticism²⁶ or, in Marxist criticism, between Soviet criticism, East German criticism, and that of West German Marxists,²⁷ it must be conceded that for the last decade at the very least, the quarrel between Marxists and non-Marxists has been the chief determinant of the course taken by Germanistik. The preoccupation of West German criticism, the so-called "Krise der Germanistik",

has to do with a search for justification of bourgeois scholarship. Socialist critics brought on initially and primarily a questioning of the concepts of bourgeois art theory, such as the concept of reine Kunst.

The word Parteilichkeit, claimed as it is by Marxists, and so integral a part of their literary theory, has necessarily become a part of this quarrel. Its use in literary criticism has been polemical, suggesting that a pro-Marxist, anti-bourgeois position will be taken or vice versa. In the case of this thesis, given the text chosen--that is, one that is likely to be an embarrassment to Marxist Heine scholarship--the assumption might be made that the essay will attack the Marxist position, will defend, at least tacitly, the bourgeois one. That is not the intention. It is not desirable to impose twentieth century quarrels on a concept, the meaning of which is difficult enough to establish on its own terms and for the mid nineteenth century. Heine clearly predates the beginnings of the Leninist theory of Parteilichkeit, as he also predates the political party in its modern more rigorous and structured sense.²⁸

The Geständnisse were originally intended to be a part of the second edition of De l'Allemagne, which Heine himself named a Parteischrift. Heine wrote to Campe on August 3, 1854 that he wished through this piece to make clear the unity and continuity of his life and work.²⁹

It must be established what was meant by Parteilichkeit in 1854 and what Heine meant by it in Geständnisse.

In trying to establish meanings of Parteilichkeit apart from modern literary and political quarrels, the search for an equivalent English term is a worthwhile enterprise. It focuses attention on the difficulty of thinking in a relatively neutral fashion about such a word. A translation that might be considered is "allegiance". The commitment and loyalty implied by "allegiance" are certainly also implied by Parteilichkeit. However, possibly because of the centrality of the word and the concept in medieval feudal society, it carries with it intrinsic connotations of a deep bond of personal loyalty, as between two men, or between a man and a personalized institution or abstraction. In the grand old tradition one owed allegiance to God, King and Country. The word is inappropriate for the nineteenth century when loyalties were shifting and the great concerns were the more impersonal matters: larger political institutions, abstract political aims--although it must be admitted that in instances where strong identification with a "cause" occurs, one speaks even today of "allegiance".

The Schöffler-Weis Compact German and English Dictionary offers two other possible translations: "partiality" and "factionalism". "Partiality" is far too mild, and too limited to the personal realm to be a useful term. One can be partial

to a person or to food but it is ludicrous to describe Börne-- to offer a clear example of Parteinahme--as having been partial to republicanism. "Factionalism" stresses differences, dividiveness and strife. All of this is connoted in a secondary sense by Parteilichkeit, but the latter word primarily stresses adherence, commitment and loyalty.

Although it too is not entirely satisfactory, "partisanship" is a better translation. Here one encounters difficulties that are the exact opposite, in terms of time, of those mentioned in conjunction with "allegiance" as a possible translation. Since the 1930's the highly political and revolutionist-militarist implications of the term have grown. Thus the Oxford English Dictionary offers as one meaning of "partisan":

Member of light irregular troops employed in special enterprises(hist.); (in recent use) a guerilla (applied originally to Russians resisting in part of their country occupied by the enemy). Hence partisanship. . .

But this is not partisanship of the Heinesque mould. Another definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary is, however, more appropriate and reads as follows: "Adherent of a party, cause, etc., esp. unreasoning one (often attrib., as in a -- spirit)." There are analogies here to nineteenth century connotations of Parteilichkeit. According to what can be deduced from Grimm's Wörterbuch, Parteilichkeit was not, in Heine's time, particularly favourably regarded. It

appears to have been frequently used in a deprecatory sense to refer to one who put his "party" before (moral) principles. Contemporary usages, some of them from Heine himself, bear this out.³⁰

It remains our problem, of course, to discover what Heine meant by the Parteilichkeit he claimed for himself in Geständnisse. References in this thesis will be to Heine's position or stance on the various matters he discusses in Geständnisse.

c. Geständnisse.

The text and problems related to it.

In his Textgeschichte of Geständnisse, Eberhard Galley points out that there is more material available in manuscript form for the Geständnisse than for any of Heine's other work.³¹ Heine corrected and rewrote parts of the text three to four times.³² Seventy-five percent or 284 pages of the original German text are extant and of these, 212 are in Heine's own handwriting. The entire French manuscript is also available.³³

Critics have felt that the time-span (winter 1853 - spring 1854, which Elster indicates for the genesis of the essay) is too short. On the other hand, 1850, when it is claimed Heine mentioned his Bekenntnisse for the first time, seems too early a date for Heine to have commenced with

writing the text in its final version.³⁴ On the basis of references to Napoleon III, Galley concludes that the major portion and the final version of Geständnisse must have been written 1853/1854. In any case, as the Geständnisse manuscripts indicate a complex development for the work from as early as 1844 up until 1854, there emerges the necessity of deciding where to set one's parameter when considering Geständnisse. Galley's brief Textgeschichte points out three areas where this decision must be made: the first involving Briefe über Deutschland, the second, the different versions of the text, particularly the differences in the German and French texts, and the third, the question of the "Waterloo-Fragment".

Briefe über Deutschland, which Heine had begun to write after his visit to Hamburg in 1843,³⁵ and Geständnisse belong together. The Briefe, arbitrarily and misleadingly so named by Strodtmann,³⁶ represent Heine's first attempt to provide both the necessary continuation to Die Romantische Schule and an epilogue to De l'Allemagne.³⁷ Large portions of the text of the Briefe are missing; however, a part of the manuscript which is available is among the Geständnisse manuscripts.³⁸ It is the beginning of the letter rebutting the Countess d'Agoult's (whose pen-name was Daniel Stern) praise of Mme. de Staël at the expense of Bettina Arnim.³⁹

As Galley points out, much had changed in the years

between the composition of Briefe (begun c. 1844) and the composition of Geständnisse (1853/54). Outwardly there had been major alterations in the political situation in Europe, in Heine's financial state and health, and even more significantly in Heine's changed attitude towards many important questions.⁴⁰ Probably for this reason Heine did not wish to include the Briefe nor the main body of their content in Geständnisse, but rather used them much as he used his Zettelkasten,⁴¹ taking over many thoughts and expressions.⁴² A comparison of the passages in the two texts dealing with Mme. de Staël will show this to be true.

That the Briefe were a preliminary step towards Geständnisse for Heine is undeniable;⁴³ they should be judged as such and considered together with the Geständnisse. But they are not an early version of Geständnisse.⁴⁴ Galley suggests that Elster implies this by including Briefe in his Variantenapparat. No section in Elster is so labeled; Galley must be referring to the Lesarten section, where there is no evidence of what Galley suggests. Elster's introductory note reveals that he regards the Briefe much as does Galley: ". . . Heine scheint aber nur das folgende Bruchstück niedergeschrieben zu haben, welches zum Teil für die Darstellung der 'geständnisse', . . . benutzt wurde . . .".⁴⁵ Although an analysis of the Briefe and an accounting of what exactly Heine used and what he did not use from them in

Geständnisse might be useful in tracing his development in the years from 1843-1854, my concern is primarily with Heine as he thought and wrote in 1854. It is for this reason that the Briefe will be excluded from consideration here.

A second, more difficult, problem is posed by the variance of texts of Geständnisse that came into being c. 1854 in French and German. Galley points out a number of differences; for instance, the comparison between the two tailors Wilhelm Weitling and Johann von Leyden is omitted in the German version.⁴⁶ More significantly, the German version presents Heine's prediction of the impending victory of communism in more general terms and in a more warning tone. On the other hand, a final passage in the French text about communism and its ultimate victory in Germany is not contained in the German version. Parallels for discrepancies of this kind between the French and the German versions of one and the same text can be found in other works of Heine. Heine's famous so-called "political testament" appears only in the foreword to the second French edition of Lutecé (1855). The German Lutezia is preceeded by a dedicatory letter to Fürst Pückler-Muskau (dated 1854) and is comparatively uninteresting politically.

As Galley points out, it cannot have been fear of German censorship that caused Heine to delete passages about the coming victory of communism in Germany from German texts.

The censor would in all likelihood have perceived such passages as being anti-communist. Rather, as Galley also points out, differences of specifically this kind can be attributed to Heine's hatred of nationalists, an enemy he had in common with the communists. More generally speaking, differences in the two texts are due to Heine's journalistic capability to consider different audiences.⁴⁸

While Galley demonstrates how instructive comparisons between the French and the German texts of Geständnisse can be, the German text alone will be used in this paper. The interest here is in Heine as a German poet. In the absence of a final critical text yet to be established, the German text as edited by Ernst Elster has been used here.

Finally, there is the problem of the "Waterloo-Fragment". It is unclear whether Heine originally wrote the Waterloo fragment as a part of the Geständnisse, or as a separate piece which he included in the Geständnisse later, and then decided to omit again.⁴⁹ Elster implies that the latter was the case⁵⁰ and Heine's letters lend support to Elster's view, for in them he does not seem to regard the Waterloo fragment as an integral part of the Geständnisse. His letters to Campe, his publisher, indicate a rather haphazard manner of putting extra prose manuscripts into the Vermischte Schriften where they would fit in terms of length.⁵¹ Campe wrote to him (17.4.1854) that he feared the Geständnisse and the