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978-0-521-11062-4 - Frankenstein's Island: England and the English in the Writings
of Heinrich Heine

S. S. Praver

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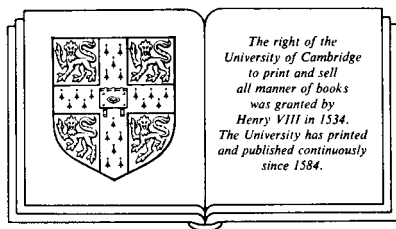
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for
The Provost and Fellows of The Queen's College, Oxford
amicus amicis

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I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling
beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous
phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the
working of some powerful engine, show signs of life.

Mary Shelley

The story goes that an English mechanic, who had
already constructed the most ingenious machines, con-
ceived, in the end, the idea of manufacturing a human
being. In this, we are told, he finally succeeded. His
handiwork could bear itself and behave just like a
human being.

Heine

I returned from London, crushed, despairing, over-
whelmed in mind and body; for the first time in my life I
experienced a blind and furious repugnance to modern
civilization.

Karel Čapek

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PREFACE

The story I am setting out to tell in this book has not been told before. It narrates the life-long involvement of a sensitive, intelligent, witty and politically conscious foreign observer with England and the English – an involvement that began on the very day of his birth in Düsseldorf on the Rhine, and ended in 1856, when he died in a Parisian apartment house. What he observed and experienced was first and foremost English men and women, institutions and policies, books and journals, of his own day; but he extended this experience backwards, into English history and English literature of the past, which he constantly related to his present. The resulting picture is shaped by traditional preconceptions, by political considerations, by social philosophies of various kinds, and by aesthetic experiences; it is based on personal encounters with British people in England, France and Italy as well as on printed records ranging from Shakespeare to the London *Morning Chronicle*; and its form is partly determined by the observer's special flair for verbal caricature.

Heine is not just a verbal cartoonist, however. He is a poet, who finds in English writers a source of inspiration and an occasional irritant, provoking creation along different lines. He is a student of history schooled by Hegel, who seeks characteristic turning-points and characteristic expressions of a 'World Spirit' in the development of peoples, nations and states. He is a social observer who views with concern what is happening to a world increasingly subject to rapid industrial, commercial and social changes, in which new values are being propagated and new organizations tried out. He sees himself, during many crucial years, as a political propagandist consciously seeking to advance a cause that went counter to British interests. He is a German of Jewish extraction, who visited England at a particular moment in its history, and who received, in the course of that relatively brief visit, vivid impressions which remained with him for the rest of a life spent mostly in France;

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impressions confirmed and in some cases modified by later study and observation.

Many of the texts in which Heine deals with England and the English-speaking world have not, until now, appeared in English translation; others have appeared in versions that are misleading in important respects. I have therefore used my own translations throughout. Since the German originals may be found in many different editions, I have not specified volume and page numbers; I have, instead, made clear in every case from which of Heine's (usually short) works my quotations derive, and I have given the dates of all letters and recorded conversations which I cite. The select bibliography lists the editions used as well as the critical writings that have helped me tell the story of Heine's encounters with the English and the way in which these are reflected, shaped, integrated into changing contexts, and humorously distorted, in his writings.

The Oxford University Press and the London University Institute of Germanic Studies have kindly permitted me to use material from two published lectures: *Heine's Shakespeare. A Study in Contexts* (Oxford 1970) and *Coalsmoke and Englishmen. A Study of Verbal Caricature in the Writings of Heinrich Heine* (London 1984). My greatest debt is to the librarians of the Taylor Institute, Oxford, and to Professor Manfred Windfuhr and his devoted team of editors and sub-editors in Düsseldorf.