

ROMANTIC AFTERLIVES: HEINRICH HEINE'S "DEUTSCHLAND. EIN WINTERMÄRCHEN" IN YIDDISH TRANSLATIONS

Magdalena Sitarz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2765-2538>

(Jagiellonian University)

e-mail: magdalena.sitarz@uj.edu.pl

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Abstract: This paper presents the reception of Heinrich Heine's "Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen" in Yiddish translation. For many of his younger colleagues he was "der grester liriker fun 19tn jorhundert, der sharfster humorist und biterster satiriker in der daytsher literatur" [the greatest poet of the 19th century, the sharpest humorist and bitterest satirist in the German literature]. My aim is to show on the example of *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* [*Germany. A Winter's Tale*] (1844) how Heine's subversive drawing on Romantic ideas and language is rendered into Yiddish in the first half of the 20th century by Moyshe-Leyb Halpern and Moyshe Khashtshevatsky.

Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), a German-Jewish writer and poet of the Romantic Period, was born in Düsseldorf. He studied law in Bonn, Göttingen, and Berlin while devoting himself to poetry, literature and history. After taking a degree in law, Heine converted to Protestantism in an effort to be eligible for a civil service career in Germany – a decision his Jewish compatriots understood but never stopped resenting. Although he was rooted in the German Romantic movement, his works are often perceived as a beginning of the post-Romantic crisis. Among Heine's famous poetic works one should mention *Buch der Lieder* [*The Book of Songs*] (1827), *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* [*Germany. A Winter's Tale*] (1844), *Romanzero* (1851) and *Gedichte 1853 und 1854* [*Poems 1853 and 1854*] (1854). Heine died in exile in France and is buried at the Montmartre cemetery in Paris.

Both Heine himself and his poetic work are viewed by many as liminal, positioned on the threshold of modernity: "Heine's importance two hundred years after his birth is closely tied to his self-understanding, his understanding of the process of modernity [...]. In the first instance, however, Heine defines his position as a modern in relation to Romantic poetry."¹ Even though the history of Heine's reception is very complex, he was perceived as a genius already by some of his contemporaries:² "Still, for his con-

¹ Phelan 2009: x; Cook 2002: 1.

² For more on Heine's reception see four volumes of *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* and four volumes of *Die französische Heine Kritik* from the Springer Publishers book series *Heine Studien* (<https://www.springer.com/series/15263>).

temporaries, for us, for the Europe of the present century, he is [...] significant because he was, if not pre-eminently, a brave, yet a brilliant, a most effective soldier in the war of liberation of humanity.”³

Although Heine was definitely rooted in German Romanticism – he established his reputation as “one of the best young Romantic poets”⁴ as early as 1821, and after Romantic composers started to put his lyrics to music, he rose to the status of a “major Romantic poet,”⁵ – from the very beginning he started deconstructing Romantic language and Romantic ideas. According to Anthony Phelan,⁶ one could define Heine’s modernity, among others, through his relationship to tradition, especially the July Revolution of 1830, Judaism, and German nationalism. In my preliminary analysis of *Germany. A Winter’s Tale*, I would like to show how some elements of German nationalism were undermined by Heine. My main aim is to examine how Heine’s subtle mixture of romantic ideas and language with clear marks of subversion was rendered into Yiddish in the first half of the 20th century by two Yiddish poets: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (*Daytshland. A vinter-maysele*, New York 1918) and Moyshe Khashtshevatsky (*Daytshland. A vinter-mayse*, Moscow 1936).⁷

Romantic longing for the infinite shows itself, among others, in a fascination with the past, especially in the glorification of the Middle Ages, in turning to the national myths and legends, which in Germany had its tragic consequences:

Romanticism [...] prepared the rise of German nationalism after 1800. [...] German romanticism was and wished to be more than poetry. It was an interpretation of life, nature and history [...]. It never developed a program for a modern German nation-state, but with its emphasis on the peculiarity of the German mind it helped the growth of a consciousness of German uniqueness.⁸

In Heine’s *Winter’s Tale* one can find many passages where he mocks the nationalistic dreams of Germans, their usurpation of “Vater Rhein,” their pride in winning the battle of the Teutoburg Forest; he also mentions characters from Grimms’ *Fairy Tales*, as well as the Emperor Charlemagne, and Hammonia, the goddess watching over Hamburg. We also find the most elaborate critique of German hegemonic dreams in chapters XIV–XVII, where he depicts the Emperor Barbarossa: legend has it that he lives in the Kyffhäuser Mountains, along with thousands of soldiers, and for centuries he has been preparing to liberate Germany. In Heine’s ironic rendering, Emperor Barbarossa has

³ Arnold 1863: 4.

⁴ Cook 2002: 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Phelan 2009: xi.

⁷ Since Yiddish is a Jewish language written in Hebrew script which originated from medieval German dialects, German is its basic component in terms of vocabulary as well as morphology and syntax; consequently, translation from one language to another is relatively straightforward, but it is nevertheless interesting to examine both its form and content, since especially the analysis of the latter can bring insights concerning some crucial culture-bound fragments of Heine’s poem. In this paper I use the YIVO Romanized transcription.

⁸ Kohn 1950: 443.

many soldiers and weapons, but he is lacking horses, so he has to be patient before going into battle to avenge Germany. Since Barbarossa admits his lack of historical knowledge, the narrator brings him up to date and explains, among others, how the guillotine works. When Barbarossa accuses the narrator of impudence and high treason, he calls him a figure of the past belonging to a mythical kingdom who would be a laughingstock of the republicans and should stay at home with his red, black and golden flag. The episode ends with the traveller's ironic expression of longing for the Emperor who would restore the old Holy Roman Empire and liberate Germany both from the romantic transfiguration of the past and from its oppressive political and social system.

Heine's reception among the writers and poets of Jewish origin was ambivalent. Karl Kraus's⁹ ingenious – and very critical – study *Heine und die Folgen* accuses the German-Jewish poet of lacking originality.¹⁰ At the same time, for many of Heine's younger colleagues and readers he was “der grester liriker fun 19tn yorhundert, der sharfster humorist un biterster satiriker in der daytsher literatur” [the greatest poet of the 19th century, the sharpest humourist and bitterest satirist in German literature]¹¹ and they stated that “obvol a getoyfter yid, farnemt dokh a groysn ort in der oybn-on fun undzer folk” [although a baptised Jew, he takes an important place at the very top of our nation].¹²

Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886–1932), the translator of the New York edition, was born in Zlotshev (now in Ukraine), and in 1898 he went to Vienna to study and started writing modernist poetry in German. After returning to Zlotshev in 1907, he began to write in Yiddish. Soon afterwards, in 1908, he emigrated to New York; on his way there, he took part in the famous Czernowitz Conference, which proclaimed Yiddish to be one of the Jewish national languages. In America, his first book of Yiddish poems was published in 1919. He wrote for Yiddish satirical magazines and the communist periodical “Frayhayt,” as well as other Yiddish newspapers. He also worked as an editor and translated from German. He died prematurely of a heart attack.¹³

The translator of the Moscow edition, Moyshe Khashtshevatsky (1897–1943), was born in the Ukrainian Buki, published his first poems in 1918 and, after settling in Kiev in 1921, established himself as one of the builders of Soviet-Yiddish literature. He published his own poetry in Soviet-Yiddish periodicals in Kiev, Kharkiv, Minsk and Moscow and translated from Russian, Ukrainian and other languages. From 1923, he collaborated intensively with *Emes* publishers in Moscow and took an active part in Soviet public life. In 1941, he volunteered for the Red Army and perished at the front line in 1943.¹⁴

⁹ Karl Kraus (1874–1936) was a Jewish-Austrian writer, literary critic, editor and journalist, known for his satirical texts directed at, among others, German culture and German and Austrian politics. His career was similar to that of Heine in another respect as well: he studied law but devoted his life to literature.

¹⁰ Kraus 1910.

¹¹ Rozenfeld 1906: 5. All translations from non-English sources – MS.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kharlash 1960: 31–38.

¹⁴ Tshubinsky 1961: 389–390.

It is sometimes mentioned that the title of Heine's poem was influenced by Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.¹⁵ However, the German equivalent *Wintermärchen* does not really suggest an "old women's story."¹⁶ Still, Halpern's diminutive *maysese*, as opposed to the standard *mayse* [tale], highlights Heine's ironic suggestion that the story of Germany, home to a powerful European nation, is a "just-so story."

The poem is preceded by a prose preface and consists of twenty-seven chapters – *capita*. Heine chose a verse form which can be found in many folk songs of the Romantic period – the *Vagantenstrophe*: Germanic doggerel originating in the Middle Ages which allowed the poet to combine a popular tone with satirical intent. The New York Yiddish edition mostly preserves this form with its rhythm (lines 1 and 3 take four stresses, while lines 2 and 4 take three). There are two general differences, however: first, Halpern chooses not to use the borrowing from Latin *caput* and decides on using the more conventional *kapitl*; second, due to characteristics of the Yiddish language, where there is an elision of the "e" in the final syllable,¹⁷ there are almost no feminine rhymes, whereas in Heine's poem the rhymes are alternately masculine and feminine. As for the Moscow edition, it additionally contains a translation of Heine's short poem "Abschied von Paris" which describes the poet's motives behind his trip to Germany and could have been intended as a poetic introduction to *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*.¹⁸ Khashtshevatsky was probably working with an edition in which this poem was included, but we cannot know this for sure since neither translation names the original German edition.¹⁹ Yet another characteristic of the Soviet edition is the orthography used,²⁰ but this has no impact on the translation itself.

When we take a closer look at the Barbarossa chapters of Heine's work, more differences become evident, especially concerning some ironically used words or expressions which sometimes pose problems in translation. In chapter XIV in a stanza about bearded soldiers sleeping in the second chamber of an underground retreat, the German version reads: "Sie sind gerüstet von Kopf bis Fuß, / Doch alle diese Braven, / Sie rühren sich nicht, bewegen sich nicht, / Sie liegen fest und schlafen" [They are armed from head to toe, / but all these brave ones, / They don't stir, don't move, / They lay firmly and sleep] (HH 102). When Heine calls German soldiers "die Braven," this definitely has an ironical undertone which is lost in both Yiddish translations, as they omit the word "brave" (MKh 124, MLH 52); Halpern, however, ironically compares Barbarossa's soldiers to the dead: "un shlofn vi toyte in eynem" [and all sleep like the dead] (MLH 52). In the fourth chamber the Emperor dwells alone; both translations faithfully reproduce the somewhat comical situation of a sleeping hero who behaves in sleep like anyone else: he stirs,

¹⁵ Eversberg 1996: 9–10.

¹⁶ The word "Winter" is rather seen here as a metaphor for the rigid political and social conditions in Heine's homeland (*Ibid.*: 10).

¹⁷ For example German *geklungen* (stress on the penultimate syllable) becomes in Yiddish *geklungn* (stress on the last syllable), German *guten* is in Yiddish *gutn*, etc.

¹⁸ Eversberg 1996: 11.

¹⁹ As for the New York translation, we can surmise that *Heines Werke in fünfzehn Teilen* (Berlin: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong, 1908) served as the source, since Erwin Kalischer's biography of Heine is to be found in this German edition (see: footnote 11).

²⁰ In the Soviet Union the etymological orthography for words of Semitic origin was abolished and replaced by the phonemic orthography in 1920, while some years later the separate final forms of five consonants (f, kh, m, n, ts) also disappeared – both changes to be seen in the Moscow translation.

blinks an eye and raises his brows (HH 104, Mkh 125 and MLH 52). There are two other clearly ironic examples in this chapter: one when the Emperor wakes up and "seizes the worthy flag" ("ergreift die gute Fahne," HH 104), and another when it is stated that Barbarossa's soldiers fight well because they "are well-rested after sleep" ("Sie haben ausgeschlafen," HH 104). Halpern omits here the crucial word "worthy" – "*gut*": "Ervakhn vet er un a khop ton di fon" [He will wake up and seize the flag] (MLH 53); however, he retains the second expression "Zey hobn zikh gut oysgeshlofn" [They were well-rested] (MLH 53). Khashtshevatsky follows Heine's irony in both cases (MKh 125–126).

In chapters XV and XVI, about a dream in which the narrator encounters Barbarossa, Heine's text subverts the folk tale and ridicules German beliefs. Barbarossa is presented as a chatty old man, a kind of an antiquarian, not at all majestic. Where Heine writes: "sah er nicht so ehrwürdig aus" [he didn't look so noble] (HH 106), Khashtshevatsky translates almost word for word: "un hot nit oysgezen virdik azoy" (MKh 129), while Halpern changes the optics, stressing the individual perspective of the narrator: "oykh ze ikh em mer nit vi frier azoy / a shtoltsn aza" [also, I don't see him as before / so proud a person] (MLH 55). Where the narrator states that he dislikes the flag and mentions that it is "black-red-golden" (HH 116), Khashtshevatsky follows the original (MKh 140), while Halpern makes it four colours, adding yellow: "dayn shvarts-royte-gold-gele fon" [your black-red-golden-yellow flag] (MLH 62). This was not done to preserve the rhythm because Halpern, an excellent poet, did not normally have such basic problems, so the addition was probably meant to ridicule the German colours even more.

There are also many other, less direct, ways in which Barbarossa is ridiculed. For example, when Heine writes that the Emperor "waddles" through the halls: "Er watschelte durch die Säle herum" (HH 106), portraying him as old and decrepit, Khashtshevatsky preserves the tone: "Er hot zikh mit mir iber zaln geshlept" [He dragged himself with me through the halls] (MKh 129), but Halpern changes the meaning: "Er geyt nebn mir vi a khaver bam zayt" [He walks like a friend by my side] (MLH 55), which puts all of following text in a different light, suggesting not only familiarity, which Heine uses to ridicule the Emperor, but also friendly feelings between the narrator and Barbarossa, which is clearly not Heine's intention.

When the Emperor counts his horses and finds out there are not enough to go into the battle for Germany, so the fight has to wait – yet another place where Heine's irony is at his best – the narrator shouts: "Schlag los du alter Geselle" [Get on it, you old fellow] (HH 110); Khashtshevatsky says likewise in Yiddish: "alter gikher! / tret gikher aroys" [Old chap quicker! / move quicker] (MKh 133), while Halpern states in a much more polite way: "hob ikh fun kayzer farlangt, / az shoyn zol er kumen un shtraytn" [I asked the Emperor / to finally go to battle] (MLH 58). In chapter XVII, the narrator wakes up and realizes that the German reality is even worse than that of his dream, so he asks the Emperor to come back: "Komme du bald, o Kaiser!" [Come back soon, oh Emperor!] (HH 120). Khashtshevatsky is closer to the original, as he translates: "O gikher kayzer, bavayz zikh!" [Oh faster, Emperor, show yourself!] (MKh 144), while Halpern writes: "O kum shoyn, kum gikher mayn kayzer." [Oh, come on, come faster my Emperor] (MLH 66), which again suggests warmer feelings of the narrator towards the Emperor, but here, and perhaps also in similar cases mentioned above, we could also regard this as an additional highlighting of Heine's obvious irony.

Heine's critics have accused him of "being too French," of loving France more than his homeland, which is also reflected in the language he uses: in the text stylized on a folk song there are many borrowings from French which could have been replaced by readily understandable words of German origin. This French element is removed in both translations. For example, in the opening stanza of chapter XIV Heine writes: "Die Chaise wackelt im Schlamme" [The chaise wobbles in the mud] (HH 98). Halpern translates: "Es shlept zikh der vagn in zump" [The wagon is dragging itself in the swamp] (MLH 49), while Khashtshevatsky writes: "S'geyt di drozhke in blote same" [The horse carriage moves in the mud only] (MKh 119). Here we can additionally observe that Halpern uses a more German Yiddish (often called *daytshmerish* [German-ish]), albeit not characteristic of the whole translation, whereas Khashtshevatsky prefers words of Slavic origin: *blote* (rather than *zump*) for *Schlamm*. And later at the beginning of chapter XV Heine uses the German word of French origin *Postillon* (HH 106); Halpern follows him (MLH 55), while Khashtshevatsky uses *furman* [coachman] (MKh 129), which once again detracts from the French flair of the original text.

Both translators omit some culture-bound expressions, either because they did not understand them, or, more likely, because their readers would not have known what they meant. So, when Heine writes in the fourth stanza of chapter XIV about the Fehmic court (a medieval vigilante court): "Das haben die Rächer der Feme getan" [That's what the avengers of the Fehmic court did] (HH 98), Halpern writes: "Dos hobn nekome-farshverer geton" [It was done by those who promised vengeance] (MLH 49), while in Khashtshevatsky's rendering there is a similar phrase: "Dos hobn di nekome-nemer geton" [It was done by the avengers] (MKh 120). In the next stanza, Heine recollects Otilie, a character from a German ballad: "Otilie hatte sterbend geschrien" [Otilie had screamed dying] (HH 100), clearly, a Romantic element; Halpern misunderstands this part and writes "Zi hot a minut farn toyt nokh gekrekhtst" [She screamed only a minute before her death] (MLH 49), where *zi* [she] refers to the narrator's wet nurse mentioned in the previous verse.²¹ Here Khashtshevatsky translates faithfully: "Geshrien Otilie hot farn toyt" [Otilie screamed before her death] (MKh 120). Heine then uses reminiscences of the old wet nurse to introduce the topic of legends and fairy tales; the reader will recognize a reference to the Grimms' fairy tale *The Goosemaid*. Yiddish readers should also have been familiar with the characters from the Grimms' collection, because their fairy tales had been translated into Yiddish.²²

On the other hand, "some foreign" cultural aspects are added by the translators, and other culture-bound problems occur. For instance, after a summary of the Barbarossa legend as told by the wet nurse, Halpern, who tries to maintain the atmosphere of a folk tale, brings in some elements of Jewish culture. The German text reads: "Die Ampeln erhellen so geisterhaft / Die hochgewölbten Säle" [The lights illuminate so ghostly / the high vaulted halls] (HH 102), which Khashtshevatsky translates truthfully as: "Dort brenen di eyl-lompn geheymnisful / in di zaln di hoykhgevelbte" [There, the oil lamps burn ghostly / in the high vaulted halls] (MKh 123). Halpern, however, writes: "Es shaynen di lempelkh un shimern dort / vi yor-tsayt likht kalt un fartroyert" [The lights

²¹ Halpern continues this mistranslation in the next stanza, where he mentions wet nurse's (rather than Otilie's) "cold extinguished eyes" – "Di oygn farloshene, kalte" (MLH 50).

²² Grimms' *Oysgeklibene mayselekh* [Selected fairy tales] were published in two volumes in Berlin in 1922, but there are also some earlier translations of single tales.

are shining and shimmering there / like anniversary candles cold and familiar] (MLH 51). When in chapter XVI the narrator tells Barbarossa about the guillotine, he is taken aback, shouting "For God's sake!": "Um Gotteswillen" (HH 114); Khashtshevatsky retains this German expression and uses a calque, "um Gotes viln" (MKh 137), whereas Halpern writes "o Got" (MLH 60), which is a better choice because it sounds much better in Yiddish. Nevertheless, a little bit further he uses the Yiddish "kholile" [God forbid] (MLH 61) which is of Hebrew origin and sounds at least strange coming from the mouth of a German emperor; Heine writes here "Gott bewahr" (HH 116) and Khashtshevatsky again uses an unfortunate calque: "Got bavor" (MKh 138).

The last aspect to be mentioned is that both translations were rendered at different times for different readers, which is best seen in the introductions. The first volume of the New York edition has a long introduction (or rather two of them, one by Nachman Syrkin and the other by Erwin Kalischer²³) and in the Moscow translation there is a foreword by F. Shiler. The introductions help to understand Heine and his world, even if both Syrkin and Shiler are clearly biased. Thus, Syrkin states in his foreword to the New York edition: "Hayne iz in dem shoresh fun zayn neshome yidish, oysshlishikh yidish" [Heine is in the roots of his soul Jewish, exclusively Jewish],²⁴ and explains that although his family was assimilated, all the Jewish traditions lived as family memories "familyen-zikhroynes" (*ibid.*: 9). Further on he states that some of Heine's words sound almost Zionist (*ibid.*: 17), and even that everything he wrote is imbued with his Jewish wit, sadness and hope (*ibid.*: 23).²⁵ Shiler's Soviet introduction,²⁶ on the other hand, focuses on the political and social aspects of Heine's oeuvre, stressing his connections to Marx and Engels, while his Jewishness and his involvement in the Romantic discourse of the time are mentioned only marginally, if at all. Shiler states that *Germany. A Winter's Tale* is "di hekhste dergreykhung fun Haynes revolutsyoneler poezye" [the highest achievement of Heine's revolutionary poetry] (Shiler 1936: 4). He also notices that the poet "iz shoyn in zayne friike verk aroysgetrotn – hagam er hot dos oft fardekt mit a romantishn shleyer – far di revolutsyonere grund-foderungen fun der birgerlekher demokratsye" [already in his earlier works stood for – though he often obscured this with a romantic veil – the basic revolutionary demands of bourgeois democracy] (*ibid.*: 70). Towards the end of his

²³ Kalischer's biography of Heine might be called "a modern one": the author offers a solid documentation of the poet's life as well as a fine analysis of his works, in which he considers not only their content but also their form. Erwin Kalischer (later known as Erwin Kalser, 1883–1958) was a philosopher and literary historian, who studied in Berlin where he got his PhD in 1907 for his work *Conrad Ferdinand Meyer in seinem Verhältnis zur italienischen Renaissance*. He also became a well-known actor: in 1957 he played the main character in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (Beck 2005: 958–959).

²⁴ Syrkin 1918: 8.

²⁵ Nevertheless, Syrkin writes also about Heine's radicalism and even states that "er iz der erster revolutsyoner af daytsher erd" [he is the first revolutionary on German soil] (Syrkin 1918: 23), and a little bit further we read: "Hayne iz geven an oysgeshpokhener sotsyalistisher mentsh mit a shtarker revolutsyoneler leydenshaft" [Heine was a decidedly socialist man with a revolutionary passion] (*ibid.*: 31–32).

²⁶ Khashtshevatsky's translation is preceded by an introduction by a F. Shiler (not to be mistaken with Friedrich Schiller, a German poet, who died in 1805 and thus could not have written a foreword to Heine's work published in 1844), who already at the beginning stresses Heine's connection to communism and his acquaintance with Karl Marx (Shiler 1936: 3–4). This attitude towards Heine in the Soviet state is not surprising, especially that only a few decades later another communist land, the German Democratic Republic, appropriated the poet for the same purpose as the "first German republic in the sense of Heinrich Heine" (Nabrotzky 1977: 535).

introduction Shiler stresses once again that *Germany. A Winter's Tale* belongs to the best works Heine wrote under Marx's influence (*ibid.*: 30). This political bias is not, however, evident in Khashtshevatsky's translation, except perhaps for the last line of chapter XVI where the narrator states: "brauchen wir gar keinen Kaiser" [we don't need an emperor at all] (HH 118) and Halpern follows him in Yiddish: "badarfn mir gornisht ka kayzer" (MLH 63). Khashtshevatsky, who translated for Soviet readers, obviously felt compelled to highlight Heine's message and make a stronger political statement: "badarfn mir nit ka kayzorum" [we don't need any emperors] (MKh 140).

To sum up, as discussed above, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern translates rather freely, so he sometimes changes the original meaning. He also introduces some specific Yiddish expressions, which sound strange in a text rooted in the German culture. Moyshe Khashtshevatsky, as shown in the paper, follows the original more faithfully, so he avoids some of Halpern's mistakes, but falls into the opposite trap, using "German" words and expressions which do not sound good in Yiddish or are perceived as loanwords.²⁷ In general, however, one could surely assert that both poets succeeded in presenting Heine's work to their Yiddish readers while not losing much of its characteristic form and irony.

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²⁷ There is also another feature of Heine's poem which should be taken into account: Heine sometimes uses awkward rhyming words, which some of his critics duly pointed out, but the reason for this was to strengthen the irony of the whole work. This specific form always makes a witty allusion to its content (Eversberg 1996: 10). Here, however, there are not many differences between the German and the Yiddish versions of the poem, since both Halpern and Khashtshevatsky often do likewise.

²⁸ Whenever known, the real names of the translators using pseudonyms are added in brackets.

²⁹ There is more than one text in this volume, although the pagination of each poem and introduction always starts from number 1; I give in brackets the pages counted from the beginning of the volume.

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