

KUNKEL FINE ART

Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts

Thomas Theodor Heine

1867 Leipzig - 1948 Stockholm

As a pupil at the *Thomasschule* in Leipzig, Heine showed precocious skill as a caricaturist. His fellow pupils were not the sole butt of his scorn. He also targeted his teachers and this led to his expulsion shortly before he was due to sit his Abitur. He took up his studies at the Düsseldorf Academy in 1885 but there too, his notoriously antagonistic behaviour resulted in a period of suspension from classes. He spent the two semesters studying in Bavaria, based mainly in Munich where he moved after completing his training in Düsseldorf.

Heine attempted to eke out a living as a freelance painter but was forced to supplement his income producing caricatures for the weekly satirical magazine *Fliegende Blätter*. His drawings attracted the attention of Albert Langen, a publisher who was on the point of launching a new satirical magazine. He quickly engaged Heine in the project, which proved to be groundbreaking both in literary and in artistic terms. The first issue of *Simplicissimus* was published in 1896. Over decades the magazine would deliver a week-by-week exposure of social and political injustice in Germany and made a courageous stand against abuse and extremism. Heine designed a striking symbol that soon became the emblem of the magazine: an aggressive red bulldog with a bitten-through chain glaring with bared fangs at the viewer to demonstrate the combative stance of the magazine.

From the start, Heine stood out as the moral and political conscience of *Simplicissimus*. From the magazine's inception and up to 1933 he was to publish over 2,500 drawings in the magazine. A characteristic feature of his caricatures is their extremely wide-ranging expressive spectrum. His draughtsmanship was highly versatile. Depending on the content and the intended message it ranged from tensely hatched, nervous linearity to broad, planar treatment of form. He would select his palette to chime with and heighten the desired effect, using sugary tones to suggest an idyllic mood, while tonal discord conveyed a feeling of unease. Such stylistic devices are especially marked in the series *Bilder aus dem Familienleben* [Images of Family Life], published between 1896 and 1898, where the double standards of Wilhelminian society are exposed. The success of the series prompted Heine



Nicola Perscheid, *Thomas Theodor Heine*, 1915

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to produce a considerably more acerbic series titled *Durchs dunkelste Deutschland* [Across Darkest Germany]. Published between 1899 and 1910, the series provides a particularly harsh image of the social evils of the German Empire.

Unlike his colleagues Ferdinand von Reznicek, Eduard Thöny and Rudolf Wilke, Heine was not afraid to use his images and captions as vehicles to express exceptionally biting critique. This may explain why it was his contributions that were generally chosen for the cover pages of *Simplicissimus*. By provoking controversy, he helped to increase circulation but at the same time increased his own vulnerability to state scrutiny. Inevitably it was he, rather than his colleagues, who was singled out as a target. The scandal that erupted in 1898 around the *Palestine* edition of the magazine, when Heine and the writer Frank Wedekind parodied Kaiser Wilhelm's visit to the Promised Land, showed that their scorn had clearly overstepped the tolerance mark of the authorities. The *Palestine* issue was suppressed and both Wedekind and Heine were given prison sentences of several months on charges of lèse-majesté. But Heine was undeterred by setbacks like these and they only served to promote the magazine. Wit, intellect and high artistic merit were not the only contributing factors in its success. It also thrived on spectacular scandals in its rapid advance to be Germany's leading satirical magazine.

Although Heine had already reached the peak of his artistic career by the outbreak of World War I he remained a leading contributor to *Simplicissimus* until the end of the Weimar Republic. It was all the more difficult for him to see his colleagues withdraw their support for him when the Nazis seized power in 1933. Because of his Jewish background he was forced to flee Germany to escape persecution. Yet not even this blow of fate could dampen his caustic humour. In exile he resumed his activity as a caricaturist and in 1942 wrote a semi-autobiographical novel full of wit and irony, a review of his own life titled *Ich warte auf Wunder* [I am Waiting for Miracles].