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Exile in Paradise: A Literary History of Sanary-sur-Mer

Sanary-sur-Mer is a small seaside village located at the French Riviera between the cities of Toulon and Marseille. From a touristy point of view it looks like a typical village of the Mediterranean coast: the gently rushing turquoise water offers a contrast to the rough rock faces, sharp cliffs, and the beautiful beaches of the community. The picturesque and rather small place is renowned for its marina built on a harbor whose foundation dates back to the 16th century. Sanary has been discovered by tourism a century later than the rival cities of Cannes or Nice – that is at the end of the 19th century. More precisely, historians have dated the decisive step to its touristification back to the 1920s. Fitting in the marketing concept that is *la Côte d'Azur*, Sanary was declared „station de tourisme" in 1921 and „station de climat" in 1929, a year when its name was changed to Sanary-sur-Mer (Sanary on sea) in order to promote tourism. Needless to say that the Mediterranean coast had become during the 19th century one of the favorite travel destinations for upper class Europeans and Americans. In contrast, the large number of mostly poor immigrants – notably from Italy – had populated the neighborhoods of nearby Marseille, a city that has been used for centuries to gain access into France (see Flügge 1994, 12–63).

There is, the historians Manfred Flügge, Jeanpierre Guindon (1993) or Heike Wunderlich (2004, 13–73) remind us, another important tradition whose reference would be Sanary-sur-Mer: exile. Coincidentally the touristic discovery of Sanary falls during the main draw of political emigration to southern France in the first half of the 20th century. To explore the dimensions of this history that will bring about 400 German and Austrian political refugees to the district of *le*

Var until the beginning of the 1940s (see Flügge 1994, 14), we have to follow the ways of a few writers and artists that came to Sanary in the late 1920s, seeking initially to spend their holidays at the French Riviera. The first writer to actually settle in Sanary was, then, Aldous Huxley who purchased a property in 1930. In Sanary, Huxley wrote what would become his most famous novel, *Brave New World*, which he published in 1932. By then, the German scholar Julius Meier-Graefe, one of the leading art historians of the first half of the 20th century, lived in nearby Saint-Cyr. Other German artists like the writer Klaus Mann traveled through the region in the early 1930s and contributed to its rapidly increasing fame. With the rise of Nazism to power, number of writers and artists had to leave Germany. Sanary saw many of them arrive soon after February 1933. During the next years until the beginning of the war, when the French government started to take them into custody in the nearby concentration camp of *Les Milles*, a considerable number of those refugees settled here, clustering around such prominent literary personalities as Lion Feuchtwanger, Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann or Heinrich Mann. When the community of Sanary-sur-Mer, in 1987, inaugurated a memorial plaque in remembrance to its German speaking antifascist émigrés, their list was quite impressive. It includes, among others and in addition to those mentioned: Bertolt Brecht, Bruno Frank, Walter Hasenclever, Alfred Kantarowicz, Arthur Koestler, Joseph Roth and Franz Werfel. It is comprehensible that Sanary-sur-Mer has the reputation of having been "the capital of German literature" during the 1930s, as another of the *sanaryen* emigrés, Ludwig Marcuse, noted in his autobiography *Mein zwanzigstes Jahrhundert* (1975, 180–203). However, to complement my rough sketch on the material history of emigration to Sanary-sur-Mer, I would like to refer to another of Marcuse's strong statement on his years as a political refugee in Southern France – a statement which runs like a common strand through a lot of comments on Sanary in the 1930s: "Wir wohnten im Paradies – notgedrungen" (Marcuse 1975, 161).[1]

During the course of working on this project that is embedded in my postdoctoral thesis, I became aware how important it was to establish a historical knowledge on representations of exile in literary

[1] „We lived in paradise – unintentionally" (my translation, F.E.).

texts. Doubtlessly, the German-speaking exile literature between 1933 and 1945 provides a very useful entry to a critical understanding of modernity. But collecting material and sorting through it can only be the beginning, for me, of a long journey that necessitates demystification in order to analyze correctly its object, even though I am lagging behind the important studies that have been made in the past decades. This can only be achieved by shifting away from a critical discourse that is rampant in German 'Exilforschung' and that continually reanimates the representations of a negative whole that most of the writers in exile drew from their experiences. Reproducing the stereotypes related to Sanary-sur-Mer would result in regarding Sanary as a new Weimar. Like many others, Ludwig Marcuse used the moral authority provided by antifascist exile as an ideological weapon. He wanted to demonstrate how the 'other Germany' – as the German émigré intellectuals usually called the Nation they represented in exile as opposed to Nazi Germany – remained true to the humanist values of the country's past. In that sense, the exile community has been able to identify with Sanary without taking into consideration the more general questions raised by its hybrid status of being a place that also serves for the cultural production of modernity. I am focused, in contrast, on the counterrepresentational interest in a bridge that could close the theoretical gap between exile as forced emigration and exile as a powerful symbolic capital. Since various authors ranging from Dean MacCannell (1976) to James Clifford (1997), have suggested that critical examinations of tourism can open up the terms of mobility in modernity, I would like to suggest that exile can equally help us to get a more detailed understanding of the history and the scope of mobility in the modern world – especially since it is related to traveling and to tourism in cultural practice.

I was surprised to find a representation of exile such as the photograph that has been taken in Sanary-sur-Mer in 1933 – at a time, when most of the people shown on it still believed in the imminent fall of Hitler and still hoped for an early return to Germany (see Betz 1986). There is a certain sense of self-mockery that underlies the gently looking faces of a group of émigrés (including Thomas Mann and Julius Meier-Graefe) 'ready for take-off' in a fake airplane (see Wunderlich 2004). In the particular context of 1933 and the beginning of their exile, the photograph can be understood as an act of defiance

to Gottfried Benn, the famous expressionist poet. Benn had stayed in Germany and had come to terms with Hitler. In response to a letter from Klaus Mann written in Sanary, that challenged him to distance himself from National Socialism, Benn had publicly disavowed the exile community seemingly composed of traitors to the fatherland who enjoyed their life, as he puts it, in the 'Palace-Hotels of the Riviera' (Marcuse 1975, 179; „Palast-Hotels der Riviera"). The photograph may well ironically refer to that declaration. It seems to designate it as narrow-minded nationalism and seeks to compare it implicitly to the humanistic and internationalist cosmopolitanism of the exile community. However plausible this contextual interpretation may appear, the picture suggests a structural identity between exile and travel, which draws attention to the underlying issues: to values like disaffection from home transformed into a discourse of heroic adventure, to displacement and loss being a source of creativity, to the crossing of boundaries adding to the modern artist's condition, to melancholic seeking that betrays a concern for current space instead of tradition. As positively referred to by the photograph, these issues not only enact symbolic resistance against backward oriented Nazi Germany but call for a modern subject position. In that sense the persons shown on the photograph act out modern sensibility. And by doing so, they privately celebrate what Gottfried Benn had blamed them to be: rootless cosmopolitans. The ironic value of the picture consists in identifying the reality of exile with pure cliché, and in deliberately confusing the culturally valued figure of the émigré as traveler with a less valued form of touristic mobility such as a group tour to Saigon.

Marta Feuchtwanger, the wife of the writer Lion Feuchtwanger, mediates the same poles of exile and tourism, when she describes her life in Sanary-sur-Mer in 1934. She compares herself with the guest in a health spa and distinguishes her social status in Sanary from that of a simple emigrant: „Hier ist man eben noch Kurgast und nicht Emigrant." (Feuchtwanger/Zweig 1986, I, 41). In a similar way, the autobiography of an influential journalist among the German émigré community in Sanary, Balder Olden, describes its author being "a writer of novels and a cosmopolitan" (Olden 1977, 59; „Romanschriftsteller und Weltreisender") referring to the 1930's. In this narrative, Olden undertakes the task of reaffirming modernism's

discursive authority through the experience of exile that lead him from various European capitols to Sanary and finally to Argentina and Uruguay. On the one hand, both Marta Feuchtwanger and Balder Olden reassert a modernist exile discourse that secretly or openly participates in culturally privileged forms of mobility. On the other hand, Olden's statement calls attention to the continuities and discontinuities between related terms of mobility. He positions the experience of exile within the confining matrix of a modern aesthetics of travel. In a broad historical perspective, such an emphatic link between the discourses of travel and exile can be traced back to European Romanticism. If we take a closer look at the situation in the 1930s, it points to the mobility of a lot of émigré writers such as Ludwig Marcuse and Lion Feuchtwanger that left Sanary in 1937 for a few weeks to visit the Soviet Union. By doing so, both 'exiled travelers' fit easily in the ranks of those left wing intellectuals who came to Moscow to testify social progress. Leon Trotzky used to ironically call them 'radical tourists' (see Leggewie 1992). And in fact, Feuchtwanger's account of the journey provides an instructive portrait of the exiled antifascist intellectual as a tourist (Feuchtwanger 1993).

In that sense, exile and tourism do not necessarily occupy opposite poles in the modern experience of mobility even though authors like Ernst Bloch come do a different conclusion. Bloch remarks in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, a philosophical inquiry written during his exile in the United States between 1938 and 1947: „Jede Reise muß freiwillig sein, um zu vergnügen. […] Ist Reisen erzwungen oder Beruf, also nicht abbrechend-glücklich, so ist es keines […]. Geschäftsreisende, Matrosen, Emigranten sind nicht auf Reise, letztere trotz der möglichen Befreiung nicht" (Bloch ^{3}1990, I, 430).[2] Bloch contests a concept that would link emigration to literary modernism. He cannot accept the idea of forced exile transcending the state of oppression the emigrant lives in. For him exile represents an obstruction to true mobility, unlike travel. As a faux mobility after all, emigration can only be identified with the journey of a businessman or a sailor: this is

[2] „One must travel voluntarily to be able to enjoy the journey. […] If the journey is enforced or part of a job, and can therefore neither be discontinued nor happy, it is none. […] Businessmen, sailors, emigrants are not traveling, the latter even though he could be liberated" (my translation, F.E.).

to say it lacks any cultural currency in the circulation of modernism. As one might say, this assertion demonstrates a remarkable form of cultural myopia. And curiously enough, despite his strategy to demystify exile, Bloch remains locked into the conventional modernist construction of 19th century 'travel for the travel's sake' excluding from travel any forms of commodification, force or necessity. Just as he constructs the nostalgic figure of the traveler as 'antiemigrant', he is not able to resolve the discursive ambivalence and ideological uncertainty presented by 20th century political emigration.

Most obviously, the *sanaryen* experience Bloch himself participated in still needs to be examined with sharper analytical instruments and on a broader iconographical and textual basis. I could only outline its general character and link it to the production of literary modernism. Regarding Sanary-sur-Mer – as a tourist rendez-vous and a vacation village with a history of exile and persecution, and a vicinity to migration – incited me to describe phenomena of transfer, issues of 'crossover' between exile and other modern forms of displacement (like tourism, like migration) that have carefully been suppressed in traditional exile studies. As Caren Kaplan remarks, "the differences between the discourses of tourism and exile are so strenuously asserted that any overlap and confusion is worthy of note" (Kaplan 1996, 47).

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