Palmier, Jean-Michel: *Weimar in exile. The antifascist emigration in Europe and America*, London [u.a.]: Verso 2006
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As an epigraph for his Exile Dialogues, Bertolt Brecht used a phrase taken from a comic description by P.G. Wodehouse of a character crawling around a dark room in search of a light switch: „He knew that he was still alive. More he could not say". Brecht's choice of these words was striking: a more concise evocation of the exile condition would be difficult to find. In his „Weimar in Exile", first published in French in 1987, now translated for the first time into English, the late Jean-Michel Palmier has attempted a detailed survey of German émigrés from Hitler, with the intention, as he puts it, to „grasp the fate of the culture" (p.15). The sentiment of Brecht's epigraph, a Beckettian hope against hope, lies at the heart of his book. His account shows the extraordinary diversity of experiences of those who fled Nazi Germany after the Reichstag fire and the book burnings of early 1933, and also attempts to place the phenomenon of exile in a historical context: it is only possible to understand the cultural efflorescence of the Weimar Republic, he suggests, by comprehending its tragic extinction after 1933.

Considering both the magnitude of the emigration, and the lack of coherence it presents to the historian, this is indeed an ambitious enterprise. One may seek in vain for common denominators of the Weimar exile. There were as many different reasons for leaving as political factions in Weimar Germany: some went willingly, some would much rather have stayed. It is certainly difficult to infer reactions to Nazism from previous political commitments: right wing aversion to Hitler was as likely as left-wing tolerance. Fritz P. Reck-Malleczewen's „Diary of a Man in Despair" [1], the diary of an aristocratic opponent to Hitler, is an example of the former that compensates amply for what Reck-Malleczewen describes as the lack of any soul or sense of humour in those who joined the party. The author was murdered in Dachau. Many of the left were inclined simply to laugh at Hitler, comparing him to Chaplin. Those visual artists who did not leave, despite earlier allegiances with left-wing groupings, found it easy to adopt an apolitical approach to style. Reasons for emigration could in any case be other than ideological; those assimilated Jews who were not opposed to Hitler, for example, or those artists who would otherwise have happily remained painting innocuous landscapes. If the most coherent exile group was the Communists, then even this became splintered and complicated in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet pact.

These complications inform one of the most prominent themes of Palmier's book, a pessimism with the political effectiveness of art both during the Weimar Republic and then during exile. Palmier describes the „myth" of left-wing political art during the twenties and early thirties, a time when Heartfield, Grosz, Piscator and Brecht were creating revolutionary artistic forms. The real expression of Weimar culture, he argues, can rather be found in the work of conservative writers such as Ernst Jünger, Ernst von Salomon, Carl Schmitt and Stefan George, whose work reflected far more directly the anti-democratic and anti-republican Germany of this time (p.53). The 'revolutionary'

aspect of their writings complicates the attempt to divide Weimar politics into opposing right-left camps, and Palmier is more inclined to speak of nationalist and Communist extremes connected by a variety of „ideological bridges“ (p.51). If conservative writers constituted the most prominent of these bridges, then their activism took place in the realm of myth rather than of street activism. The idealism of the literary left led not only to a marked optimism that Hitler would not last long, and a reluctance to leave the country, but also meant that left-wing artists and writers put up little opposition to Hitler. Those who did, such as Carl von Ossietzky, whose story Palmier recounts in moving detail, experienced an inevitable and in many eyes pointless martyrdom (pp.39-43).

Such complications do not make for a straight story. In the place of any master narrative of exile, what we rather have is a list of who went where, when, and what they did; documentation of which forms the most useful part of Palmier's book. Czechoslovakia was attractive for its liberal political tradition, but also due to a tradition of „Prager-deutsche Literatur“, German-language publications by authors based in Prague of which Kafka was the most prominent. Austria was conducive for the same reason, but also much more dangerous, and thus only a temporary harborage. Holland attracted the apolitical, and because the government did not consider literature as political, a propitious location for the exile press. Britain, markedly anti-communist and in poor economic shape, was not immediately welcoming, although it became important for exile archives, notably the Wiener Library and the Warburg Institute. Switzerland did not live up to the reputation it had earned during the First World War: there was to be no new Cabaret Voltaire. Russia was an obvious choice for communists, and was also an important centre of anti-fascist literature and theatre. The greatest names in Weimar culture went to Paris, but were soon dispersed throughout France, and famously gathered in Sanary near Toulouse. Shanghai, Turkey and Palestine must also be included in this itinerary. 70,000 German Jews emigrated to the latter between 1933 and 1939; many were however disillusioned with what they found. Palmier takes the case of the poet Else Lasker-Schüler, who died in poverty in a state of mental distress, and was buried at the foot of the Mount of Olives, as exemplary.

The difficulties experienced by those in exile were compounded by the easing of Germany's political isolation in the mid-1930s, in the wake of economic success, the concordat with the Vatican, and the Olympic Games. Sympathy for their plight fell off, although return would have meant certain arrest and incarceration. The Saar plebisicite, in early 1935, when 85% of Saarlanders chose attachment to Germany rather than a continuation of the League of Nations administration of the region, came as a terrible wake-up call to those émigrés who still saw Nazism as unsustainable. This made resistance even more difficult. Antifascist activities by émigrés, such as the „International Congress for the Defence of Culture“, organised in Paris in 1935, although a poignant symbol of the „popular front“ coalition of workers' parties, were abstract rather than real gestures. Only very rarely were the dispossessed able to strike back: in addition to the genuine unity of the German émigrés who fought for the international brigades in Spain, Palmier refers frequently to Willi Münzenberg's documentary publication, the „Braunbuch“, part of a successful campaign to establish the innocence of those accused by the Nazis of burning down the Reichstag (pp.205, 299, 305, 319-321). Before the defendents were tried in Leipzig, Münzenberg organised a counter-trial with an international panel of legal experts in London, which concluded that the Nazis had most probably burned down the building themselves. The trial was a masterpiece of political irony, and, together with the brilliant satirical defence of the principal accused, Giorgio Dimitrov, led to the acquittal of three of the five defendants. It was however an isolated success: all other attempts to

save political prisoners such as Erich Mühsam and Ernst Thälmann failed.

The second part of „Weimar in Exile“ deals with the period after 1939 and the experiences of those who were forced to flee to the United States. For Exiles whose life had become a nightmare of transit visas and detention camps, the passage across the Atlantic was doubtlessly a liberation, but new difficulties of assimilation and disenfranchisement awaited them. Palmier's problems as a historian do not here disappear either. If persecution and diaspora in Europe during the 1930s are difficult to categorise, then the experience of émigrés in America is impossible to describe in one breath. Experiences of assimilation varied depending on personality: Fritz Lang and Kurt Weill adapted well to the new conditions, Heinrich Mann and Alfred Döblin didn't. Brecht involuntarily looked „at each hill or lemon tree for a price tag“ (p.494). George Grosz was able to feel at home, but his work lost its edge. In the case of German academic émigrés the story acquires a little more coherence. The three chief gathering points were the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton, where, amongst others, Erwin Panofsky was active; the New School for Social Research, whose director Alvin Johnson played a key role in aiding refugees; and the Institut für Sozialforschung, which moved in the mid-1930s and was reborn as The Frankfurt School in New York. Palmier's brief mention of Panofsky (p.484) is typically tantalizing, but also demonstrates his relative lack of interest in artists and art historians.

Communists and committed anti-fascists were largely debarred from entering the United States, and soon realised that the only option left to them was Latin America. The influx of refugees into all South American countries was considerable, although Argentina and Mexico were the centres. Mexico was particularly welcoming for left-wing opponents of Hitler: it was the only country apart from the USSR to support the Spanish Republic, and in 1936 had legalised the Communist Party. The „Club Enrique Heine“ was the centre of anti-Nazi cultural resistance, and „El Libro Libre“, a publishing house established by émigré writers including Anna Seghers, Bodo Uhse and the famous journalist Egon Erwin Kisch, published many important exile novels for the first time. Curiously enough the only other centre for Communism was Hollywood, which harboured an unparalled spirit of anti-fascist solidarity, generated largely by the intellectual core of the film studios, the Screenwriters. The Motion Pictures Artists' Committee to Aid Republican Spain (MPAC) was one of a number of organisations raising money and awareness using all the resources available in Hollywood. In 1939 the MPAC arranged a showing of Picasso's „Guernica“ to this end. John Howard Lawson's 1938 film „Blockade“ funded eighteen ambulances to be sent to Spain. The Hollywood Popular Front was largely unstitched, however, in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Throughout his account of the pre and post-1939 history of exile, Palmier is preoccupied with the experience of writers. This is not suprising: writers formed the group most persecuted by Nazism and censorship, were crucial for émigré resistance, and were for obvious reasons the most vocal. Their struggle, however enfeebled, was to reestablish a voice and an audience away from the cultural silence of the ever-expanding Reich. Palmier dwells at length on the question of categorising the writings of those who left. Although it is clear that exile literature was not a genre, and was rather circumstantially defined, it is also true that the emotionally compelling facts of emigration, the tragedy of it all, cannot be forgotten in the reading of books such as Anne Seghers „The Seventh Cross“, a realistic depiction of the broken, dispersed and ultimately hopeless nature of anti-fascist resistance within Germany, or Klaus Mann's more picaresque account in „The Volcano“. In many cases the fact that books were written at all is extraordinary. As Palmier paraphrases Lion

Feuchtwanger, „not everyone has the gift of writing a novel in a hotel room when they don't know how to pay the next day's bill“ (p.388).

Alongside this compelling story of writers, Palmier's coverage of visual artists must be read with circumspection. Factual errors abound. For example: protests by officers against the inclusion the Franz Marc's work in the 1937 „Entartete Kunst“ exhibition were not in vain, they led to the removal of the painting „Turm der Blauen Pferde“ (p.669); Kandinsky was not the President of the Societé Anonyme, but the honorary vice-president (p.536); the exhibition in Dresden in 1946 was not of art „banned in the Hitler period“, but a general survey which included many recent paintings, and so on. Many names are mistaken or misspelt: „Wolf“ for Wols (p.215), „Herbersheimer“ and „Hilbersheimer“ for Hilberseimer (p.535), „Albert“ for Albers (p.535) to indicate but a few. Quick research shows that not only have the editors preserved all the original errors of this type, but added to them. Much important English-language research on the fate of émigré artists has appeared since the original publication in France of „Weimar in Exile“, not least in the catalogue to the landmark exhibition „Exiles + Émigrés“ (Los Angeles, Montreal, Berlin, 1997-98), Keith Holz's account of émigré groupings in Paris, Prague and London, and scholarly publications such as the account of German artists in Britain from 1933-1945, published by the London-based Research Centre for German and Austrian exile studies. [2] Despite failings as a documentary account of the visual arts in exile, however, Palmier's book retains value through his often starkly expressed approach to the subject, opposed to the pathos of a sentimental victim culture. His observation concerning the political feebleness of left-wing opposition to Hitler both during the Weimar period and in exile, in particular the weak collective response, may be read alongside Holz's account of the resistance mounted by exile groups.

Although other aspects of Weimar in Exile may initially appear disagreeable - the frequent repetition of facts and stories, for instance - these are not necessarily drawbacks, representing rather through a sort of reflected failure the twisted paths and circuits of exile itself. It is in this sense that Palmier's book is an organic monument to the Weimar exile, a book not weighed down but hollowed out, given interior dimensions, by the traumas of persecution and expulsion. The Weimar exile was the destruction of one of the richest cultural milieus of the twentieth century in a matter of weeks. One wishes for some kind of happy ending, but there is none. After 1945 it became clear to many that the Third Reich had not been an interruption, but a definitive end. For those caught up in the hysteria of McCarthyism, the prospect of returning to a broken country with no guarantee of any kind of welcome was bleak. As Oskar Maria Graf wrote, the years after 1945 saw the true beginnings of emigration.

[1] Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen. Diary of a man in despair, New York: Macmillan 1970 [first published in German as „Tagebuch eines Verzweifelten“, Lorch/Württb., Stuttgart: Bürger-Verlag 1947].

[2] Stephanie Barron. Exiles and Émigres: the flight of European artists from Hitler. Exh.cat., Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, 1997; Keith Holz. German art for thirties Paris, Prague and London: resistance and acquiescence in a democratic public sphere. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004; Shulamith Behr and Marian Malet. Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945. Politics and Cultural Identity. The Yearbook of the Research Centre for Germ an and Austrian Exile Studies. Amsterdam, New York: Rodolphi, 2004. See also, amongst others: Kunst im Exil in Großbritannien, 1933-1945. Exh.cat., Berlin, Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1986; Ulrike Wendland: Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil. Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler, 2 Vol.,

München: Saur 1999; Karen Michels: Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft. Deutschsprachige Kunstgeschichte im amerikanischen Exil, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999 (Studien aus dem Warburg-Haus; 2); Jutta Vinzent. Identity and Image: Refugee Artist from Nazi Germany, 1933-1945. Weimar: VDG, 2006.

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