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## "German Writers in Exile"

Franz Langhammer

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Franz Langhammer  
"German Writers in Exile"  
February 6, 1974  
Portland State University

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HOST: Punch the red button... All right. All-university events conference, 1974, number three. February 6, 1974, twelve noon, seventy-five Lincoln Hall. Okay, play it back. In the previous two, we've had an address by Dr. Saslow, which dealt with the psychological issues involved in resisting public evil, and yesterday President Wolfe opened his seminar on contemporary American policy and dealt with issues of morality at present. Today, we're going to move backwards to the era of the thirties and forties and to Europe. It's our privilege to have Professor Langhammer from the German department, who will talk to us about German writers in exile. I sense it may be true that "the pen is mightier than the sword." This is certainly a fruitful way to look at resistance to public evil, and I'm pleased to bring you now Professor Langhammer.

FRANZ LANGHAMMER: A little more than one hundred years ago, there lived—in exile, in Paris—a lyric poet by the name of Heinrich Heine. For political reasons, he was unable to live in his own country. Some six hundred years ago, there lived in Italy the greatest, possibly, Italian author by the name of Dante Alighieri; the author of the famous *Divine Comedy*. In his writings, Heinrich Heine once refers to Dante in saying, if I may quote, "When Dante Alighieri walked through the streets of Verona, the people pointed at him and whispered to each other, 'He was in hell.' How else could he have been able to describe all the suffering? He didn't invent them,

he lived them. He felt them, he saw them, he tasted them; he was really in hell. The city of the condemned. He was in exile."

Why should anyone choose to live in exile? To live in hell? Why should any writer—who, by the definition of the term, is so closely connected with his language—want to live in a foreign country? Is it the feeling of private responsibility versus public evil? Do they know that they could do more outside than within the political boundaries of their own country? In German literature, we refer frequently to two kinds of exile or immigration: the inner immigration and the outer immigration. The question remains whether those who remained in a so-called "inner immigration" were living more in hell than those who lived in outer immigration.

The theme of our conference is "In our name: public evil and private responsibility." I would have to change it slightly by saying "In the name of Germany: public evil and private responsibility." It all began in 1933, and maybe, for those who had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, some years earlier. On the 27th of February, 1933, a fire destroyed the Reichstag building in Berlin and gave the Führer the excuse for suppressing the Communist Party. In the elections held a week later, the Nazis still got only 44% of the vote, but combined with another 8% of the Nationalist Party, this Nazi-Nationalist coalition won the majority, and less than three weeks later, the so-called Enabling Act gave the government dictatorial power. With only voting the Socialists against it, the German parties signed their own death warrant. And this Enabling Act, as it was called, was used by the Nazis to remake Germany. So that the one party, the Nazi Party, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, became the only party, the one party, the legal party; destroying in this process the term "party," and misrepresenting it. The courts were overruled, concentration camps were created for all those who dared to oppose. Even the churches who, in the beginning, partly seemed to help Hitler, finally, Protestants as well as Catholics, began to quarrel with the Nazi government, began to oppose, although with only little effect.

Hitler started a tremendous program of public works and of rearmament. The trade unions were replaced by the Nazi labor front, and the state provided the workers with amusement, *Kraft durch Freude*, and vacations, and even big business followed the will of the leaders. There was the blood purge in 1934 when Hitler removed elements of potential opposition within his own party, and then when Hindenberg died, the Führer was indeed the Führer: the leader of the German Reich. The most repugnant aspect of this Reich was obviously the racial policy which began right away to be enforced in 1933. They boycotted Jewish businessmen and professionals, and then in 1935, the Nuremberg laws were defined, forbidding intermarriage between Jews and Germans as they were called, because for a Nazi a Jew could not be a

German. When the synagogues were destroyed and people began to suffer, then we knew something was rotten in the state of Germany.

Hitler's foreign policy was just as extreme as the policy he exercised within the limits of the boundaries of Germany. He opposed the Treaty of Versailles, and withdrew from the League of Nations already in 1933. He had the intention of swallowing Austria, and he did so; he denounced the armament conditions of the Treaty of Versailles; he reached an accord with Mussolini; he created a new word in the vocabulary: *Anschluss*, by swallowing Austria in 1938. He "liberated" three million Germans living in Czechoslovakia, and then there was the famous Munich Treaty in 1938. And so he went on and on until in 1939, he started with the war.

How did the people react and how did—this is what we're interested in—the writers react? The writer who is forced to flee his country is found very often in the history of literature. There is some kind of historical tradition. And Hermann Kesten, in his book *Deutsche Literatur im Exil*, claimed that every third German author of importance was persecuted by some kind of tyrant in the history of German literature. And we also have to note that some of the greatest master works in literature were written in exile; but the exodus of German writers from their homeland which began when Hitler assumed power is a phenomenon that is without parallel in the history, in the annals of Western European civilization.

More than two hundred men of letters who had already firmly established a reputation not only in their own country but in the world, except Gert Hofmann and Ricarda Huch, both of whom were already more than seventy years old when the Nazis took over, all these people—more than two hundred—left Germany. They were forced to flee for their personal security, for their very lives. And some of them were lost for German literature forever. I refer, for example, to Arthur Koestler, who was a Hungarian author who lived in Germany until 1933, and who wrote in German. He's famous for his books like *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar*. But when he left Germany, he ceased writing in German altogether. And could we ever forget the fact that Thomas Mann was forced to leave Germany, the most highly-respected representative and the speaker for the exiled authors ever since. He wrote political essays: *Von zukünftigen Sieg der Demokratie*, *The Coming Victory of Democracy*. Or "This Peace," or "This War," or "What is German?" and he broadcast these to the German people during the war and asked them to uphold those ideas upon which the good name of Germany rested. Who could forget authors like Alfred Döblin, or Franz Werfel, or Lion Feuchtwanger, to name just a few. Or Theodor Adorno, Georg Kaiser, Theodor Plievier, Arnold Zweig [...], Yvan Goll. Or perhaps Leonhard Frank or Max Brod, or Stefan Zweig, Friedrich Bolger, Anna Seghers, or Erich Maria Remarque, Robert Musil... a list that seems to be without end.

Does this mean that all German writers of importance were in exile? In inner immigration or outer immigration? And no Nazi writer of importance emerged in the twelve years of the Third Reich? Yes, that's correct. All German writers of importance were in exile: inner immigration or outer immigration. And no Nazi writer of importance emerged during the twelve years of the Third Reich.

The United Nations publishes the so-called *Index Translationum*. This index tells us that among the German authors who were translated into foreign languages and whose works were published in large numbers between 1933 and 1938, eleven were in exile and four remained in Germany. And of these four, one was not permitted to write; he was a case similar to Solzhenitsyn. The other one was later put into a concentration camp, and the other two wrote in a style that was not understood by the Nazis. And at that time, Thomas Mann wrote in the [...] about the inner immigration, and I quote, "We should ask whether one or the other of the authors in Germany would not also prefer to be outside. I don't want to turn the attention of the Gestapo toward those, but often some technical reason might play a role." And he added, "The dividing line between exile and non-exile literature is not necessarily the political boundary of the Third Reich." And the authors protected actively, and with this we touch again upon the subject of our discussions against the public evil, because they feared private responsibility.

And something else happened, symbolically, in 1933. More than forty years ago, on the 10th of May, 1933, flames leaped up from the countless piles of books that were being burned all over the country. And this was the beginning of a long chain of violent actions which represented, to international public opinion, by the new leaders of Germany, the so-called spontaneous expression of the will of the people—of the sound will of the people, as it was called, although these actions had in fact been organized by the party, by the National Socialist party down to the last detail. And Heinrich Heine again, we quoted him in the beginning, commented on such acts more than a century ago by saying, "A country which will burn books will burn people, too." A country which will burn books will burn people too. We all know to what extent the horror of this prophetic statement became reality during the years of the Nazis, which were to last one thousand years.

One of the well-known immigrants was Bertolt Brecht. And he said, in 1937, "I never could agree with the name that was given to us. *Emigrés* are people who immigrate, but we did not leave the country of our own free will to go to the country of our choice, nor did we immigrate to stay in that country, perhaps forever. No, we had to flee. We were driven out and banished. And the country that received us is no home, but a place of exile. We sit, waiting for the day of return, waiting ill-at-ease as near the borders as we can. Watching the slightest change on the

other side of those borders. Eagerly questioning each new arrival, forgetting nothing, and giving up nothing, nor forgiving anything that happened; forgiving nothing at all. The silence of sin does not deceive us. We hear the screams." We hear the screams in 1937, and more screams were heard in the years to come.

How can we define the relationship between exile, literature, and political struggle? This literary immigration had been a political one right from the beginning because it was determined by political events, and because it displayed open objection to the political cause in Germany at that time. Public evil and private responsibility. And in an open letter to a Swiss critic, in which Thomas Mann classified his attitude toward immigration, he decides to choose the lines from a German poet, August von Platen, 1796 to 1835. And he quotes him by saying, "The men who hate to see evil should prosper, will find himself obliged to flee the country. If he would else be a slave in his native land, and better far to wonder as a stranger than wear the yoke of hate and fear and malice, and bow beneath the whiplash of a tyrant's hand." In quoting an author who said this around the year 1800, Thomas Mann tried to explain the feelings of the people in exile, and he found himself again and again in the position of having to state his views on political matters. He expressed his fears and hate and disgust in essays and manifestos and letters and radio talks which were broadcast to Germany by the British Broadcasting Corporation during the war. He truly used his words as his weapon, and as a youngster, as a child, I heard those broadcasts in Germany, although, believe it or not, there was a law in Germany stating anyone listening to foreign broadcasts would be punished. To be sure, in some cases, the death penalty was applied. Nevertheless, many Germans listened, and heard the voice of Thomas Mann, and spread the good word.

Heinrich Mann, his brother, wrote his memoirs during the war while he was here in California as an *émigré*, and he completed the book after the war. It's a strange collection of remembrances under the title *Reviewing an Era*, and in it there is one chapter called "The Companions." And Heinrich Mann writes the following about his famous brother, Thomas: "When my brother had moved to the United States, he declared, quite simply, 'Where I am is Germany.'" These words were spoken by Thomas Mann in 1939, the beginning of World War II, when Germany was obviously in the grip of a very stable Nazi regime. If anyone else would have made this statement, we would have smiled, but when Thomas Mann makes this remark, we stop smiling and take him seriously. Because not only the American reading and listening public, but anyone in the world who valued humanity and spiritual integrity was aware of the fact that German literature was not represented by the slogans of the Nazi party or by the puppets of the Führer, but by writers like Thomas Mann, who were then moving into exile from one country to another. Thomas Mann was taken seriously, and every serious person agreed with him.

And Heinrich Mann questioned the reason which might have led the American people to call Thomas Mann "the world's greatest author." Heinrich Mann himself was one of the well-known German authors of our time, and he recalls in his memoirs as follows: "In order to attain this unquestioned degree of respect, a man must represent more than just himself. He must stand for his country and her traditions. Or perhaps even for a whole decent way of life; a kind of awareness which is international. Up to now, the one bore the name of Europe just as much as the other; it was Europe itself." This is a rather remarkable idea. Thomas Mann is of course acclaimed all over the world as a great author, but the dialectics of history have led to the man who could be considered as typically German in his writings. Thomas Mann experienced very early in his career the strange reaction of the national or even regional origins of his work and its international effects. And his great, useful epic which earned him the Nobel Prize, *Die Buddenbrooks*, was a literary world success. Although at first glance it seemed to be a story that is limited to a small town somewhere in Northern Germany, we know now that it is much more than that. And as far as the people in that small town—Thomas Mann's birthplace Lübeck—are concerned, it took them a long time to be reconciled with the author.

Obviously, not all German exiles were writers. One could just as well speak about German scientists in exile; it would be quite an impressive list too. German music in exile: another impressive list. But acceptance or rejection, hope, fear, protest; it is the writer who expresses his ideas and is using his word as a weapon. An engineer can carry out his work everywhere, under any government, even under tyranny, relatively comfortably, because public matters concern him only to a limited degree. His trade doesn't force him to exchange ideas, but the writer—whether he wants it or not—becomes involved with politics, particularly when the politics are contrary to his conscience. When the public evil is against his private responsibility.

We all know that among the exiles were many Jewish writers, but it would be quite incorrect to assume that they left the country because they were Jewish. They left the country, first of all, because they were writers. Jewish writers though, who left the country during the months of Hitler's coming to power, not because they were Jewish but because they were writers. And most of the members of the Jewish population who were in other professions stayed home and stayed there unfortunately too long, because they would not and could not believe what was coming to them. Just as all of Europe found it impossible to believe what was waiting for them.

We might be tempted to praise the German literature in exile to the heavens, and claim it was the greatest. Of course, quite a few minor works were written, as could be expected. But even many of you who are not acquainted with German literature will be impressed by the literary collection, which contains Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brethren* and his *Dr. Faustus*. Or

Hermann Broch's *The Days of Virtue*, or Heinrich Mann's *The Youth of Henry IV*, or Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, or, last but not least, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*; let alone the great poetry by Franz Werfel, or the profound political moral analysis by Hermann Rauschning, or Walter Benjamin's essays, and so on. Such a collection of works is truly outstanding. And those who wrote these works belong to the *real* Germany, not to the fake one of the thousand years of Hitler. We can flatly say that the writers in exile had nothing in common with the German state of the time; they rejected it. They didn't want it. And on the other hand, all those authors not necessarily had many things in common, except this feeling of rejection toward the Nazi state.

Science is more or less international; so are commerce and trade in general, but literature, by definition is, first of all, closely related to one language, and to the numberless experiences and references attached to this language. That's why I claim that every translation is by definition already an interpretation. Now, the number of potential readers was automatically reduced if a German author was forced to leave his country. And the language barrier: how many authors speak Russian, French, English? The language barrier was bound to isolate the writer even more in a country where he was probably an unwelcome guest. For he only had his language as his tool, and his language as his weapon; his *own* language. That was his only means of expressing himself, and the language cannot be separated from the message.

Yes, he was indeed in these countries, in many cases, an unwelcome guest. The European countries were not very rich in these days, and Hitler's regime was not very popular in these days, and the Germans who left Hitler to come to another country were looked upon with suspicion. Even if you protest to a tyranny, you are somehow related to the tyrant. And so, very often they had a hard time getting established in a foreign country, and this was exasperating and demoralizing to endure all this. To be someone in your own country and to be nothing in another country.

I have read that in 1968, the government of the Netherlands made an offer to Greece to accept their political prisoners and offered them asylum in Holland. I also know that many soldiers, United States soldiers, found asylum in Sweden. Times have changed. Times have changed indeed. On the other hand, we should not forget the great help and friendship extended to those writers in exile. This, to name only one example, the Dutch publisher Querido; a brave man who printed the books of the men in exile, and in doing so could give them financial assistance. Or another publisher in Zürich. Incidentally, Emanuel Querido, who so graciously offered his help to the exiles, was himself later taken prisoner by the Nazis and brutally murdered.



Let me quote Golo Mann, the son of Thomas Mann, who once said, being an exiled author himself, I quote, "The difficulties with the authorities and those of an economic nature were not the only ones. The worst problem was to have to live in foreign, cold, and indifferent surroundings to preserve one's spiritual and artistic identity in the face of the threat from the mocking, ever growing, and triumphant arch-enemy; to remain creative under these conditions, to find material for expression and the means of expressing it. The artist must try to preserve his soul, for what has a hopelessly isolated, despairing writer have to offer the public but the rags and tatters of his very being?"

Thomas Mann, in his piece *Europe Beware* which appeared during World War II, already said, "Europe and the rest of the world are ready for radical reform and the conception of the distribution of property and the ideas of possession with a socializing of raw material which could of course only be attempted in the spirit; it was in the framework of general understanding and reasonable settling of the conflicts. In short, in the spirit of peace, industry, and general welfare." Thomas Mann did become an American citizen under Franklin Roosevelt. But in the Truman era, he took some more distance from this brave new world, and he was irritated by a figure like McCarthy.

When the war came to an end, he gave up his home in California and settled again in Switzerland near Lake Zürich, as he had done during the early years of the Third Reich. When he was 75 years old, I had the great privilege of listening to a lecture delivered by Thomas Mann in which he said, "But when one has spent 75 years below, one knows a little about the merciful effect of the passing of time, and how patiently it is fulfilled. One has also conceived a certain attachment of this green earth, and when one is all too soon to descend into it forever, one would wish for the people of the earth who are still living in the light of day that their lot may not be misery and the shame of bestiality, but that they may live in peace and joy." This was written and spoken many, many years ago. 24 years, to be exact. And Thomas Mann ended the speech, which he had entitled "My Time." He was indeed 75 years old, and had only very few years left in his life.

We sense in this lecture a skeptical confidence, and he is cautiously probing, and he is avoiding high-sounding statements by saying like..."one knows a little," or "a certain attachment." He would rather be guilty of understatement than of vain proclamations. These were the words of a native of Lübeck, Northern Germany, and the last two words, "peace and joy," are complementary; not only because of the similar sound in German, "*Friede und Freude*," but also in human terms. He talks about peace on earth and the joy of living. And with these words, an old man closed the speech. A man who, in exile, had done so very much to keep the German name clean.

We should not forget the writers in exile. We should not forget the writers in exile who wrote in the past, and we should not forget those in exile who are writing now. One of my students just finished writing his master's thesis in German on the topic of German writers in exile. He is doing his little share of keeping their names alive. Let's remember men like Solzhenitsyn, who are in exile in their own country. Karl Otten, who published a book of expressionistic writers who all were in exile, and in the dedication to this book he said, "Dedicated to the memory of the German poets who are buried wherever they died all over the world, and who wait to return with their words in our language to the people whose name they kept clean, even in their most desperate hour." And let us recall the words of Thomas Mann; if he were here today to participate in our discussions, he might very well have said, "One would wish for the people of the earth who are still living in the light of day, that their lot may not be misery and the shame of bestiality, but that they may live in *Friede und Freude*." In peace and joy. Thank you. [applause]

In the spirit of these meetings, if anyone cares to ask any questions or would like to discuss any problem of exile writers, I should be more than happy to participate.

AUDIENCE 1: During the early 1940s in Germany [...] [off-microphone, inaudible]

LANGHAMMER: The German film production had a tremendous tradition in the 1920s; I believe I'm correct in saying that German films were probably leading in our world, and the greatest producers of films were found in those days in Germany; but after 1933, nearly all of them left Germany and made movies in Hollywood. And not only the film makers, but also the actors; they left Germany and... German accent or not, they went to Hollywood and produced films. And to your first part of your question, I mentioned Gerard Hofmann as an example, an old man who continued to write. If you go through our file, you will find Gerard Hofmann shaking hands with Adolf Hitler. But this old man, he was 70 years old when Hitler gained power; I would not necessarily hold it against him. He wrote his great works much earlier. There were other writers who lived in Germany and wrote, but there is no great work I can think of—nor even medium work—that could be considered valuable material to be read by anyone during the twelve years of the Nazi period. There were many Nazi authors who wrote poetry for Hitler, praising Hitler as the savior, the Lord, the one who brings the blessing to the German people and so on, but they are badly written poems. How can you write great poetry with such a subject?

There is one book published in Germany right now under the title... well, summarized, it's something like "The Nazi Literature, 1933 to 1945." I have a volume at home; I went through it. After a few pages you just can't read it anymore. In there you find the following, which I might

mention in this connection: Thomas Mann had received the honorary doctorate degree from the University of Bonn. And when he left Germany, he received a letter from the Dean of the university: "To Thomas Mann, writer. Dear Sir, this is to inform you that you no longer have the right to the doctor's degree we gave you, because you left Germany. Sincerely yours," some signature, the Dean. And on New Year's Eve in 1935, Thomas Mann sat down to answer that letter. And this letter is a famous essay now in German literature in which he said, in other words, "How dare you? How dare you speak in the name of Germany? Look what you have done in the first four years of Hitler, and I predict"—this was in 1935—"I predict that you will start a horrible war and that you will be horribly defeated." Nobody heeded his words in those days. But when we read it today, we know how true it was, that Thomas was indeed a seer. He saw what was coming, but unfortunately not very many listened.

It must be extremely difficult for an American living in a free country to understand what went on in Germany during those horrible years. I mentioned in passing that there was a law that you could not listen to radio broadcasts from non-German stations, by penalty of death. It is a law written in black on white in the law books of Germany. If you can go that far that you can strangle any attempt of freedom, then you truly can be a dictator and govern a country and do as you damn please. That's exactly what he did. The most horrible thing, of course, is that at the end of the war, before Hitler committed suicide, he said, "The German people don't deserve me. I was too good for them, they were not good enough for me; let them go all down the drain. *Götterdämmerung*." And if it weren't for the writers in exile, there would be many years of silence in the annals of German literature. Somebody said, "It can't happen here."

Yes ma'am.

AUDIENCE 2: Did some of the writers return... [inaudible]

LANGHAMMER: Most of the writers did return. Thomas Mann, as I mentioned, went to Switzerland, but they had a choice of going to East Germany and West Germany. Bertolt Brecht and others decided to go to East Germany, settle down, and continue, and Seghers, and and so on, while the others went to West Germany. And of course, it depends on their background and their political persuasion. You might have the impression that most authors did come to the United States, which is true, but a very high percentage did go to Russia and lived in Moscow. They, in fact, published a literary journal in Moscow in German language under the title *Das Wort*, which was the subject of a thesis a student of mine was working on. But they did return. Some to Switzerland, very many to West Germany, a few to East Germany.

AUDIENCE 3: How did the German writers of this Nazi period deal with the German myth [...] Did they feel the German writings were superior [...] What was happening [...]

LANGHAMMER: I understand you're talking about the Nazi writers?

AUDIENCE 3: No, I'm talking about the [...] [inaudible]

LANGHAMMER: Well, Thomas Mann wrote during the First World War a book under the title *Thoughts of a Nonpolitical Man*, in which he was much closer to the thinking of the German Reich than in later years. He had to mature, he had to go through a period of development. So the early Thomas Mann had certain leanings toward the concept of the *zweiten Reich*, of the Reich created by Bismarck; but he went through a maturing process, as I like to call it, and became in the true sense of the word, a democrat; a man who was thinking in democratic terms. It is very difficult for the Germans to be democrats, but I think in West Germany they succeeded. It's a free country now, thank goodness.

Well, some of you have to go to class; thank you very much for your attention.

[applause; program ends]