Review of Erhard Bahr's "Weimar on the Pacific"

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Bahr writes that his book is unique among studies of German-speaking exiles in LA because "the crisis of modernism...found a specific German answer in Los Angeles" (9). He cites Raymond Williams on modernism as a response to new media and border crossings (9). He uses Russell Berman's book *The Rise of the Modern German Novel* to think in passing about "fascist modernism, leftist modernism, and a modernism of social individuality" (11-12). In the book's first chapter he catalogues some of the arguments in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and mentions Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* to talk about modernist defamiliarization (39-40). He writes about Brecht's California poetry as "a prime example of modernist poetry in exile" (104), but, oddly, does so in Bettina Englmann's postmodern context in which Brecht's "demand of realist literature was a demand for deconstruction" (104). He cites Ruth Kliger to the effect that modernism involves "...in theme, a sense of dooms and isolation, in form, a highly complex structure and a style that is not easily penetrable..." (190). And repeatedly he seems to sum up modernity simply as a movement in whose art closure is denied (21).

Each of the works Bahr describes in some detail—and the number of novels and plays and buildings and musical compositions produced by these artists in exile is impressive indeed—is briefly measured against this hodgepodge standard of modernism and/or against ideas from Adorno and Horkheimer. For instance, Werfel's work, "in contrast to Adorno's concept of literature and art...is devoid of any dialectic...and is a 'regress to mythology'" (186). "Döblin's novel is a 'regress to mythology'" (222). And Schoenberg's California work made him a "true modernist" (265) whose art "made no compromises yet was still able to reach society. This was the goal of modernist art in exile" (272).

If the brief analyses of the various works in terms of theory are frustrating, not so the historical narratives Bahr constructs. He has worked on these German exiles for decades and knows their California haunts and habits like few others. He is especially intent on chronicling the positive responses of various exiles to their temporary asylum. Marcuse, for instance, described his sense that he was again "in the middle of the Weimar Republic" (21). Brecht, despite his poem comparing California with Hell, produced "perhaps more positive poems than negative ones in the Los Angeles cycle" (98). And Schoenberg said that his exile meant he had been "driven into paradise" (268). Some exiles, of course, did better than others. Thomas Mann lived without concern for money (while supporting his older brother Heinrich, who was destitute), but Schoenberg's $29,600 monthly retirement payments from UCLA and failed Guggenheim grant application led him to think briefly about scoring the film of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*. Döblin was supported by the European Film Fund. And Werfel's *Song of Bernadette* was a "huge commercial success" (180) as a book and as a movie.

The chapters about Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and Schoenberg's exile works tell two tightly interwoven and detailed stories. Bahr skillfully describes Mann's work on *Doktor Faustus* in the context of his successes and lost opportunities in opposing fascism. The fascinating meeting of Brecht, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Feuchtwanger, Bruno Frank, Marcuse, and others at the home of screenwriter Salka Viertel resulted in a joint statement supporting The Council for a Democratic Germany. Thomas Mann read the statement to the assembled exiles. And then, as Brecht reported in his diary, Mann soon withdrew his signa-
ture. Bahr writes interestingly about Mann’s use of Goethe’s Faust as a representative of Germany’s soul, of the evil and the good German—ideas also expressed in his lecture at the Library of Congress in May 1945 titled “Germany and the Germans.”

It is well known that Schoenberg’s music is the basis for the music composed by Adrian Leverkühn in Mann’s novel and that Adorno consulted with Mann as he wrote the novel. Bahr does a good job pointing out just how that happened and which of Adorno’s ideas inform which parts of Doktor Faustus. And he lays out Schoenberg’s response to the novel and Mann’s attempts to clarify his use of Schoenberg’s ideas, including his dedication of Schoenberg’s copy of the novel to “dem Eigentlichen” (288).

The chapters on Brecht’s poetry, on his play Galileo, and on his film, with Fritz Lang, Hangmen Also Die, similarly include good biographical and historical information. And the two-dozen photographs of artists and their California homes provide a visual sense of this important era during which Weimar found a brief home on the Pacific.

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