Die Alchemie des Exils: Exil als schöpferischer Impuls by Helga Schreckenberger (Review)

William H. Carter
Iowa State University, wcarter@iastate.edu

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Die Alchemie des Exils: Exil als schöpferischer Impuls by Helga Schreckenberger (Review)

Abstract
Alchemie des Exils: Exil als schöpferischer Impuls offers a number of diverse perspectives on exile, approaches that might, at first glance, seem incompatible. Beginning with essays titled "Pestalozzi in Dewey’s Realm: Bauhaus Master Josef Albers at Black Mountain College (1933-1949)" (Karl-H. F?ssl) and "Hannah Arendt’s Elaboration of an Existential Republicanism" (Wolfgang Heuer), the volume also includes a piece by David Ketder on "Weimar and Labor' as Legacy: Ernst Fraenkel, Otto Kahn-Freund, and Franz L. Neumann" and one by Laureen Nussbaum addressing "Robert(o) Schopflocher’s Adaptive Response: Via the Argentine Soil Back to His German Roots." These distinct contributions, however, combine with careful readings of literary, philosophical, and cultural texts to generate a thought-provoking engagement with the questions of how, when, where, and to what extent the impetus of exile meets the boundlessness of creativity.

Disciplines
German Language and Literature

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his Hegelian *tour d’histoire*, Richter zeroes in on Adorno’s provocative statement, “die Dummheit Hitlers war eine List der Vernunft” (138), and although he problematizes Adorno’s ironic take on Hegel’s *Weltgeist*, one wishes he would have challenged this cynical “ruse of reason” much further and focused it unequivocally through the prisms of Auschwitz. David Bathrick’s article explores the cinematic remasking of Hitler from Riefenstahl to Chaplin and thus maps the treacherous territory of an evolving cultural commodity in which historical tragedy begins to twist with a twinkle into situational comedy and ultimately into comics. Klaus Berghahn’s analysis of George Tabori’s play *Mein Kampf* takes its cue from Mel Brooks’ late acknowledgements—“I want to thank Hitler for being such a funny guy on the stage”—and interprets Tabori’s play and its Jewish (gallows) humor as an Adornian “lightheartedness of despair” (209). Dani Levy’s latest German-Jewish film comedy, *Mein Führer*, will be more grist to our chills-and-thrills producing entertainment mills, which by now can turn even the most hideous into the utmost hilarious, thereby transforming Germany’s Holocaust *Betroffenheit* increasingly into a comically relieved “Wiedergutmachungsspaß” (Günter Anders 211). Helen Fehervary’s essay follows Heiner Müller’s growing preoccupation with Hitler in his theater production, zooming in on “The Bunker” as the central stage of fascism’s apocalyptic finale. Concluding the tragicomic trajectory of the Third Reich and its aftermath, Müller’s grim “circus burlesques” (227) morph into the Hitler comic strips of Walter Moers and Achim Greser, whose pop-iconic success have, according to Thomas Jung’s essay, become part of our “new culture of laughter” (256), in which anything goes.

This vertiginous culture is the psychological *Schauplatz* for the return of the suppressed, the uncanny homecoming of Weimar’s most prodigal *Schmierenkomödiant*, who is having a great masking ball. As undead *Führer*, he is leading us from remorse to redemption, from resented guilt to guilty pleasure, from the inability to mourn to the ability to laugh, in short, from silent rage to outrageous fun. Germany’s laborious *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, its growing scholarly discourse formations, its artworks, rituals of commemoration, not to mention its masochistic instrumentalization (Walser & Co.) and—ultima ratio—its ironic inversion into a multi-media entertainment industry represent a singular case history for the “ruse of reason,” into whose riddle *Unmasking Hitler* provides many fascinating and forbidding insights.

FREDERICK A. LUBICH, Old Dominion University


*Die Alchemie des Exils: Exil als schöpferischer Impuls* offers a number of diverse perspectives on exile, approaches that might, at first glance, seem incompatible. Beginning with essays titled “Pestalozzi in Dewey’s Realm: Bauhaus Master Josef Albers at Black
Mountain College (1933–1949)” (Karl-H. Füssl) and “Hannah Arendt’s Elaboration of an Existential Republicanism” (Wolfgang Heufer), the volume also includes a piece by David Kettler on “Weimar and Labor’ as Legacy: Ernst Fraenkel, Otto Kahn-Freund, and Franz L. Neumann” and one by Laureen Nussbaum addressing “Robert(o) Schopflocher’s Adaptive Response: Via the Argentine Soil Back to His German Roots.” These distinct contributions, however, combine with careful readings of literary, philosophical, and cultural texts to generate a thought-provoking engagement with the questions of how, when, where, and to what extent the impetus of exile meets the boundlessness of creativity.

Rather than limiting its scope to a particular field of study or genre, the collection follows exile where it leads. “Im Mittelpunkt aller Beiträge,” Helga Schreckenberger writes in her introduction, “stehen produktive, schöpferische Aspekte des Exils wie auch die Offenheit der Künstler gegenüber neuen Erfahrungen und ihre Fähigkeit, diese Erfahrungen künstlerisch und intellektuell fruchtbar zu machen” (10). From Klaus Mann’s shift to English as his literary language (Susanne Utsch) to Ernst Lothar’s 1945 novel Heldenplatz (Jörg Thunecke), Die Alchemie des Exils: Exil als schöpferischer Impuls considers the impossible demands that exile imposes and analyzes how artists, writers, and philosophers responded creatively and criticized constructively. Wulf Koepke revisits negative impressions of Hollywood and its environs, while Valerie Popp analyzes unflattering depictions of New York City and, by extension, America in exile literature. Erhard Bahr, Klaus Weissenberger, and Terry Reisch each reconsider the reception of Werfel’s work in exile, and Dieter W. Adolfs addresses the relationship between Adorno and Thomas Mann in light of the former’s contribution to Doctor Faustus. The volume concludes with Martin Vialon’s masterfully crafted, persuasively argued essay on Erich Auerbach’s unpublished “Philologie als kritische Kunst” (1948). In this fine piece of scholarship, Vialon reads the manuscript as a key to central concepts that Auerbach employs in his literary criticism and underscores the significance of exile for Auerbach’s understanding of philology, philosophy, and culture.

Throughout this collection, the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity manifests itself repeatedly and in countless forms. In her careful analysis, “Exil als kulturelle Symbiose: Die Hörspiele der Franziska Ascher-Nash,” Helga Schreckenberger presents Ascher-Nash’s “Idee einer geistigen Heimat” as one “die sich geographisch nicht festlegen lässt und daher transferierbar ist” (53). She then asks whether “diese Einstellung, das Bewusstsein einer sicheren, unerschütterlichen Verankerung in einer geistigen Heimat” can counter the “Trauma der Vertreibung und dem damit verbundenen Identitätsverlust” in order to discover “die Möglichkeiten des Exils als persönlichen und künstlerischen Neuanfangs” (53). In the case of Franziska Ascher-Nash and the others, to whom this welcome addition to exile scholarship is dedicated, the answer is a resounding “yes.”

WILLIAM H. CARTER, Iowa State University