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Werner Bergengruen und die "Innere Emigration".

Mann, Erika

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The Germans have coined a new term: "The Inner Emigration". It applies mainly to writers and embraces anyone who abstained from glorifying the Nazi Regime. In order to belong to this proud fraternity an author does not have to prove that he ever uttered an anti-Nazi sound; his books may have appeared all along and he need not have been driven from his house or robbed of his possessions. In fact, he may even have been a member of the "Reichsschrifttumskammer" (Reich's Literary Guild) and yet claim the honorable title of a spiritual exile. Nevertheless membership is hard to come by and easy to lose. Thus the club's very founder, the novelist FRANK THIESS, had recently to be expelled. An article of his, written early in the regime and praising ~~the~~ the "National Revolution" as a great, wonderful and epoch making event, was re-printed by a number of German dailies - a publication that ^{deprived} ~~reduced~~ the "Inner Emigration" of one of its most prominent members. Many such mishaps have been recorded. At some time or other the vast majority of all inner-German writers engaged in pro-Nazi activities which, when unearthed, belie their self-styled "exile".

The brightest star on the Reich's literary sky and the one who is recognized abroad as truly representative of that "other" Germany, is the poet WERNER BERG^ENGRUEN. This pride of the "Inner Emigration" was ^{VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN} ~~unknown~~ before Hitler and kept fairly quiet until the collapse. But today, 15 months after the surrender, his ~~se~~finder work enjoys a measure of fame which its purely literary quality would hardly seem to warrant. What makes Bergengruen's smoothly written ^{VERSE} ~~poems~~ so very attractive to his compatriots is their political content rather than their literary value. In analyzing his success much may be learned about the state of mind of his readers.

Werner Bergengruen has never been a Nazi. In his volume "DIES IRAE" he finds many a strong and moving word against the moral depravity and spiritual hollowness to which the nation fell victim. However, even at his most repentant the poet manages to picture Germany as the chosen country, selected as it ~~w~~^ere by fate for trials of unheard of bitterness. By transposing the flat and ugly truth of her deliberate relapse into barbarism on to a level where heavenly messengers arrive to test "this land so close to my (the Lord's) heart", he flatters the sinner even while accusing her.

"I've come" he lets ~~the~~^{his} deity cry, " in many disguises, yet never have I been recognized... I knocked at night, a pallid Hebrew, a fugitive with tattered shoes; But you called the beadle and by surrendering me you meant to do God a service.... I came as an old one, a woman, trembling and delirious, inaudibly screaming with fear; But you talked of future generations and only my ashes would you release... An orphaned boy on eastern steppes, I threw myself at your feet, begging for bread; Yet, shunning eventual ~~h~~g vengeance, you shrugged and gave me but death.... I came as a prisoner, a labourer, displaced and sold, mangled by the whip; You turned your eyes from the scrubby slave Now I come as your judge, do you know me now?"

~~Indirectly and in soothingly misty terms,~~ Bergengruen makes it appear as if the old and the infirm; the peoples of the East and the slave labourers of the West had been expressly dispatched and plunged into misery so as to provide Germany with a chance to be merciful. What or who caused that Hebrew to be so pallid; that old one to be turned into ashes; that orphan to be so hungry and that slave to be so mangled - the reader may know it but he is not told.

The poem, one of 18 contained in DIES IRAE and probably Bergengruen's best, is nevertheless an indictment. While it refrains from holding the German reader co-responsible for crimes the authors of which remain in the fog, it accuses him of having tolerated and abetted the outrage. If the rest of Bergengruen's work were equally "contrite", it would ^{scarcely} ~~have~~ have conquered so many German hearts. For no concept is less popular in today's Germany than that of the nation's "collective guilt".

Quite logically, the very term "guilt" is not much in demand where its application would embarrass so many. Instead, "fate" - always a German favorite - has become all-important. The Nazi tyranny, its concomitant phenomena and its disastrous results, they all are part of the German "tragedy of fate" wherein "guilt" plays a very minor, if any, part. Even those few who concern themselves with the problem of guilt ~~point the finger~~ tend to accuse the whole of humanity rather than any who once raised his voice in defense of Niemöller and is of its components. Thus the poet ERNST WIECHERT, the only genuine martyr boasted by the "Inner Emigration", condemns the atrocities committed in German concentration camps as follows:

"What a disgrace it is for the human species to believe that ideas may be taken revenge for, or driven out by physical torture. And how crushing a blow is this notion to the culture of many a people of the present. Yet only 150 years have past since Mozart in his 'Magic Flute' wrote the air of pure humanity."

The paragraph appears in Wiechert's autobiographical novel "The Forest of the Dead" and deals with what happened at Buchenwald in 1938 - long before the war had ^{done away} ~~with~~ ^{some of} the civilized inhibitions cherished by the rest of the world. But according to Wiechert it is first of all the human species - not the Germans - who ought to be ~~ashamed~~ ashamed in the face of "Buchenwald", even if "many a people of the present"

~~hshsh~~ has to ^{especially} consider itself disgraced. Only when it comes to remind us of a great human achievement, that "air of pure humanity", created by a German - Mozart - does Wiechert descend from the clouds and becomes specific. His martyrdom, incidentally, consisted of six months spent at Buchenwald after which ^{UNDERSTANDABLY} ~~period~~ he signed a voucher, promising to be good from now on, a promise that he faithfully kept. Admittedly he enjoyed preferential treatment at the camp and, after his release, was ^{allowed} ~~hshshshsh~~ to return to his home, an enchanting place in the Isar valley which had been taken away from the Jewish writer and historian Erich von Kahler (now an American citizen)

The generally prevalent tendency to dissolve whatever German guilt may concededly exist in the ocean of human sinfulness is very clearly demonstrated by Bergengruen in the most famous of his poems which forms the crowning finale of "DIES IRAE". The poem is entitled "An die Voelker der Erde" (To the Peoples of the Earth).

"Peoples", calls Bergengruen, "We ^{HAVE} ~~we~~ suffered also for you and your transgressions, suffered on Europe's ancient stage of fate, repenting in your place and for all of you.... Peoples of the Earth, the treachery was yours as well.... Curiously you smelled the fire's exciting breath; yet, what was burning here was the occident's heartshield; Seduced by the lethargy of your hearts each of you thought ^{IFATE} ~~that~~ will not touch me'... But fattened by our blood the demon broke out and into the world..... Peoples of the Earth who are sitting in judgment today, do not forget that we all are wanted before the bars of justice and listen with us to the Divine Metanoete! (Repent!) "

Here ,a theme which is only touched upon in the song of the heavenly messengers returns in full and heavy orchestration, ^{THE THEME OF} Chosen Germany, ^{But not ~~the~~ see then} carrying the cross, suffering for the world's transgressions and repenting for man's sins. Even the concluding assertion that "we

all are wanted" (Germany included) hardly mitigates the self-righteous contention that what really caused all this trouble was some unidentified demon who chanced to move into Germany and whom, "in the lethargy of their hearts", - not the Germans - but the peoples of the earth failed to displace.

The poem, highly celebrated at home and sadly characteristic of the "best" German attitude, prompted some criticism in Switzerland where both Wiechert and Bergengruen are widely read. In an essay "Voices of another Germany?" the well known Swiss writer and dramatist Max Frisch comments as follows:

"A criminal... accuses the human ~~hhhh~~ tribunal - first - of its failure to imprison him from birth so as to prevent his running amock; secondly, because all humans are guilty before God - those who burned at Oradour no less than those who burnt them."

Frisch continues:

"Even if - to our mind - much of what is said in this precarious poem happens to be true, there remains the decisive question as to who ^{says} ~~hhhh~~ these things.... As for any generally human guilt (he) had better leave it to the poets of other peoples to admit and accept their share."

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Bergengraben