

HERMANN SINSHEIMER: *GELEBT IM PARADIES*, NADINE ENGLHART (HRSG.)

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In 1938 the well-known Jewish theatre critic Hermann Sinsheimer fled Hitler's Germany for the safety of exile in London, where he remained until his death on 29 August 1950. His autobiography *Gelebt im Paradies*, work on which he had begun in 1948, was published posthumously in 1953 under the editorship of Gerhard Pallmann but in such wilfully distorted form that Nadine Englhart, the editor of this welcome new edition, feels able to dismiss it as no more

than "jene apolitische Anekdotensammlung, auf die sie Gerhard Pallmann offensichtlich gern reduziert hätte" (354). Englhart's laudable ambition is to replace Pallmann's volume with a complete and uncensored version of Sinsheimer's work. The various kinds of change to Pallmann's version to which this has led are made clear, albeit in somewhat unconventional fashion by the use of bold, italic or underlined script. Usefully, Englhart also corrects a number of minor factual errors made by Sinsheimer, although it must be noted that her own text is regrettably not entirely free of typographical blemishes.

The autobiography covers only the period up to 1938 and therefore, inevitably, contains relatively little on the period of exile in Britain. Sinsheimer planned to make his exile the focus of a second volume of memoirs but was unable to realise this ambition before his death in 1950. The paradise referred to in the title is the period between Sinsheimer's birth in 1883 and his move to Berlin in 1914 – in essence, his life in Mannheim before the outbreak of war (which, like many of his contemporaries, he regretted having welcomed with patriotic enthusiasm). It was in Mannheim that, as the young theatre critic of the *Neue Badische Zeitung*, he had spent "die schönste und sorgloseste Zeit meines Lebens" (128). After

serving as deputy director of the Volksbühne in Berlin, he briefly become artistic director of Münchner Kammerspiele in 1916 and tried his hand as a novelist (the hoped-for bestseller never materialised) before returning to his role as theatre critic, now for the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*. In 1924 he became editor of *Simplicissimus*, saving it from the threat of bankruptcy while attempting, in vain, to return it to its pre-war days of glory. His memoir includes a series of vividly sketched portraits of famous contemporaries he encountered in Munich, among them Erich Mühsam, Frank Wedekind, Max Halbe, Gustav Meyrink and Max Pallenberg. The blame for the bitter end to his friendship with Heinrich Mann is firmly ascribed to the latter, who in his book *Der Haß* had attacked Sinsheimer for his alleged collaboration with Goebbels. Although his name is missing in the index, Lion Feuchtwanger is also briefly mentioned as an occasional presence in the renowned Torgelstube usually associated with Wedekind and Halbe in particular. Sinsheimer is especially enlightening on Munich's theatrical tradition, notably on the importance of Karl Valentin and his partner Liesl Karstadt.

In 1929 Sinsheimer moved back to Berlin to work for the *Berliner Tageblatt*. After Hitler's accession to power he became an ardent Zionist and yet decided not to emigrate but to stay on in Germany – at least until his move to England where he became a British citizen and met his second wife, the English poet Christobel May Fowler. Unlike most German refugees he was not interned after the outbreak of war, mainly because of poor health. In 1942 he wrote, in English, his political pamphlet "Deutschland wie nie zuvor. Gedanken eines deutschen Flüchtlings" (privately published in 1943 and included here in German translation: 355-85) in which he reveals himself to be a passionate European with some ideas on the future of Germany which bear a remarkable resemblance to the shape taken by his native country after 1945. He managed to find modest employment as a checker for Cambridge University Press but gave this up at the end of 1945 before, three months later, undertaking lecture tours to Prisoner of War camps across England. This lasted until the winter of 1947/48 when he fell ill again. However strenuous, this period was according to Christobel without doubt the happiest of his life since 1933: "Denn plötzlich war für ihn ein Stück Deutschland da, mitten in dem Land, das ihm nie eine wirkliche zweite Heimat werden konnte, weil er zu deutsch war." (344) In the last two years of his life he found work as a translator, published in English his book *Shylock*, and began to write again for German newspapers. He fully realised, however, that, like most of his fellow refugees, he would never be able to return to and re-establish himself in the country on which he had been compelled to turn his back some twelve years earlier.

While Sinsheimer lays no claim to exceptional importance as a witness of his times ("Ich bin kein Kronzeuge der Epoche, die ich durchlebt habe" [215]) and even recognises his eminent rival Alfred Kerr,

with whom he had a difficult personal relationship which persisted even during their shared exile in London, as “der Bedeutendste von uns allen” (316) and, indeed, as Germany’s greatest theatre critic since Lessing, he is right to insist that the story he tells in *Gelebt im Paradies* is well worth the telling.

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