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Icebergs in the Caribbean Sea:
Cuba in Hans Magnus Enzensberger's

Der Untergang der Titanic

Stefan Höppner

Herr Enzensberger hat sich entschlossen, nach Cuba zu gehen und dort eine beträchtliche Zeit zu verbringen. Das dürften drei Jahre sein. [...] Er will dem cubanischen Volk von Nutzen sein. Er selbst, in eigener Person, will einem ganzen Volk von Nutzen sein. Die Verwandlung des Herrn Enzensberger in den Nutzen des kubanischen Volkes, dargestellt auf offener Bühne. Keine Tricks, keine doppelten Vorhänge, keine Schleier! [...] Da geht er hin und veröffentlicht sich in der New York Review of Books.

Uwe Johnson¹

Die Mode, sagten wir, sei unerbittlich, auch in der Kunst, ... und im übrigen begriffen wir nicht, was Cuba damit zu schaffen habe, Cuba sei eine idée fixe.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger
*Der Untergang der Titanic*²

It's all we're skilled in -
We will be shipbuilding,
With all the will in the world
Diving for dear life
When we could be diving for pearls.
Elvis Costello³

The year is 1968. At the peak of the Vietnam War and the student protests in Europe and the US, German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger renounces his fellowship at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. His main reason is the war the American government is fighting in Vietnam:

Ich halte die Klasse, welche in den vereinigten Staaten von Amerika an der Herrschaft ist, und die Regierung, welche die Geschäfte dieser Klasse führt,

für gemeingefährlich. Es bedroht jene Klasse...jeden einzelnen von uns. Sie liegt mit über einer Milliarde Menschen in einem unerklärten Krieg; sie führt diesen Krieg mit allen Mitteln; vom Ausrottungs-Bombardement bis zu den ausgefeiltesten Mitteln der Bewußtseins-Manipulation. Ihr Ziel ist die politische, ökonomische und militärische Gewaltherrschaft. Ihr Todfeind ist die Revolution. [...] Der Krieg in Vietnam ist...nur die größte, blutigste und sichtbarste Probe auf ein Exempel, das die herrschende Klasse auf fünf Kontinenten zu statuieren sucht. (qtd. in Peter 375)

Although Enzensberger's statement is not uncommon for protests in the US at that time, it moves along similar lines as the thoughts of many intellectuals in West Germany. Future *Rote Armee Fraktion* member Ulrike Meinhof, then writing for left-wing monthly *konkret*, states:

Das wird nun systematisch unter die Leute gebracht: In Vietnam verteidigt Amerika die westliche Freiheit. [...] Nichts von all dem ist wahr. Nachweisbar ist nur, daß die Bevölkerung, die derlei glauben gemacht wird, und die Presse, die derlei glauben macht, bis hin zu den Politikern ... in diesem Krieg eine Funktion haben. (71)

Both Enzensberger and Meinhof are exemplary for the attitude of many German intellectuals in the 1960s towards anti- and postcolonial struggles. For them, these past and present conflicts – in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and Palestine – are situated in the context of a larger global struggle, that of the revolutionary working class against capitalism (Lützel, "Blick" 11). Frederic Jameson even argues that the emancipation movements that emerged in the Western world in the 1960s cannot be conceived without the impulses they received from the decolonization of the developing countries (294-95). However, for all their revolutionary enthusiasm, few German writers make the effort to actually travel to those countries (Lützel,

"Blick" 11-12). Enzensberger, however, makes an unusual choice. In his letter to the president of Wesleyan University, he announces his intent to go to Cuba: "Ich habe den Eindruck, daß ich den Kubanern von größerem Nutzen sein kann als den Studenten der Wesleyan University, und daß ich mehr von ihnen zu lernen habe" (qtd. in Peter: 375). In the fall of 1968, Enzensberger indeed travels to Cuba and lives there for a few months. He mainly stays in Havana, but is also involved in helping with the annual sugar cane harvest (Müller 259). It is this stay that inspires *Das Verhör von Habana* (1972), a documentary play Enzensberger compiles from the protocols of court interrogations of some exiled Cubans involved in the misfired, US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. But Cuba also figures prominently in Enzensberger's poetry cycle *Der Untergang der Titanic* (1978).

Within the decade that lies between Enzensberger's stay in Cuba and the publication of the poetry cycle that deals with his stay, an important shift occurs in the way West German writers tend to write about what they term the 'Third World.' Enzensberger himself is often cited as the spearhead of a paradigm change from straightforward and uniform Marxist categories to a more differentiated stance of Western writers that allows for greater self-reflection on their part. In the 1960s, Enzensberger is one of the first German writers to deal with the relations between the industrial countries of the 'North' and the developing countries of the 'South.' He is the founder and editor of the periodical *Kursbuch*, which, from its beginnings in 1965, focuses on the 'liberation' of the 'Third World' from all forms of colonialism as well as from economic dependence on the industrial countries of the Northern Hemisphere (Weidauer 31-32). *Kursbuch 2* not only contains Enzensberger's programmatic essay on "Third World" issues, "Europäische Peripherie;" it also introduces West German readers to anti- and postcolonial writings by such prominent authors as Frantz Fanon and Carlos Fuentes, who were virtually unheard of in Germany at that time (Lau 218).

This development is paralleled in Enzensberger's own work as a poet, playwright, and essayist between 1965 and 1975. During this period, his criticism of the status quo between 'North' and 'South' is prominently inspired by Marxism (Dietschreit 83).⁴ That is, he views the antagonism between the hemispheres as an expression of

a global class struggle between the 'poor' and the 'rich' (Lau 219). Moreover, Enzensberger criticizes liberal Western intellectuals for being too naïve towards the developments in Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam ("Peripherie" 169).

These changes in Enzensberger's point of view do not come about abruptly. Deeply disaffected by the opposition politics of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the ineffectiveness of the rather vague criticism of German politics voiced by his fellow writers, he tries to define a critical stance that lies outside, that is, to the left of the remainder of the *Gruppe 47* as well as to the left of the parties shaping West German politics at the time. By committing himself to specific political issues, such as the protest movement against the *Notstandsgesetze*, Enzensberger precedes fellow writers⁵ such as Martin Walser by a year or two (Lau 227-229).

After the political watershed of 1968, the 1970s witness the emergence of two new phenomena in literature. On a worldwide level, the anticolonial discourse of writers like Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi is replaced by postcolonial discourse. While most former colonial territories have now achieved formal independence, indirect forms of their political, cultural and economic dependence from the former colonial powers continue to exist. In contrast to the largely Marxist analysis of colonialism in 1968 Germany, postcolonial discourse exhibits a much broader range of literary forms and intellectual approaches and is connected to other contemporary emancipatory discourses, i.e. feminism, postmodernism, and multiculturalism (Lützel, "Blick" 7). According to Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, it not only strives to overcome political and economic dependence, but to undermine the imperialist subject altogether:

From a postcolonial perspective, Western values and traditions of thought and literature...are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism. Models of Western thought (derived, for example, from Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud)...have dominated world culture, marginalizing or excluding non-Western traditions and forms of cultural life and expression. (222)

From this perspective, the claims of Western Marxists, even well meaning Marxists, must then become a questionable operation, because they mostly speak *in the name of* the oppressed inhabitants of the former colonies, but hardly let them speak *for themselves*. Instead, they subject widely divergent societies and their needs to Marxism's one *grand récit* of liberation. In contrast, as Paul Michael Lützel remarks, the prime writers of postcolonial theory since the 1970s – Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to name a few – were themselves born and raised in former colonies of the West (Lützel, "Blick" 8).

While this shift constitutes a global development in the world of literary theory of the 1970s and 1980s, a simultaneous change occurs in the way West German authors deal with the "Third World." Since the 1970s, more and more authors have followed in Enzensberger's footsteps by traveling to 'Third World' countries themselves. The travelogues they bring back with them still contain elements of Marxist analysis, but are much more subjective in character than those of the 60s. As Lützel states further, they are rich in

Ideologieskepsis, Mißtrauen gegenüber Global-Utopien und großen Entwürfen bzw. universalen Meta-Erzählungen, durch Offenheit für persönlich-subjektive Erklärungsmuster, Erfahrungshunger... und Wiederentdeckung der Sinnlichkeit, durch Bestehen auf Konkretheit und die Rehabilitierung des Geschichtlichen. (Lützel, "Blick" 17)

Unlike Enzensberger (or Peter Weiss) in earlier days, these authors do not apply the same pre-existing, uniform Marxist model of history to each and every country, but rather strive to understand a society from within its own specific premises: "Sie haben sich auf das komplizierte Geschäft kulturellen Fremdverstehens eingelassen" (14). As Bodo Kirchoff points out, encountering a different culture teaches the authors something about themselves and their own limitations. According to him, encountering the 'Other' results in "Intellektualität; Möglichkeitsuche; ... Gedanken- und Gefühlsarbeit, die ich nicht nur leisten, sondern

der ich mich auch aussetzen kann; Brechenwollen, Brechenkönnen mit dem Selbstverständlichen; Ringenwollen, Ringenkönnen um das 'unheimlich andere'" (194). Kirchoff and his fellow authors – Peter Schneider and Hans Christoph Buch, among others – strive to lend a voice to those cultures that, in Western countries, are often perceived in a grossly distorted manner, or are hardly noticed at all. The shift towards postcolonial theories mainly practiced by intellectuals who come from 'Third World' countries themselves (Lützel, "Blick" 8), and the shift in the way German authors write about these countries, are not identical, but rather simultaneous, parallel phenomena. However, they share one important feature which Lützel calls "der postkoloniale Blick," or postcolonial gaze: "Der postkoloniale Blick ist ... gleichzeitig nüchtern und visionär: er will faktische koloniale Verhältnisse erkennen, um sie im Sinne der Dekolonisierung zu verändern" (Lützel, "Einleitung" 14). Because they share this goal, the travelogues of these writers can be regarded as postcolonial literature, although they are not from a colonized or formerly colonized society, and the colonial enterprises of their own country lie in a rather distant past.

Lützel's approach seems somewhat limited; his definition suggests that only the *author's* self is malleable and thus subject to change by the impact of an encounter with colonial or postcolonial society as an 'Other' with a rigid, monolithic identity. However, as Elizabeth Hallam and Brian Street point out, 'Self' and 'Other' are not fixed entities, but rather constitute each other in a continuous process (5-6). In this sense, the gaze of the author also *creates* the society he or she writes about. Moreover, any such creation will be situated in a certain political discourse in the author's society, and thus be used towards specific political ends. For our purpose, however, the impact of such concepts on the author's subjectivity is much more important. By making themselves permeable to impressions from other cultures, authors writing about these cultures question the "naturalness" of their own identity. Instead of applying previous knowledge to unfamiliar territory, they ideally learn how to question the familiar, to acknowledge the 'stranger' within themselves. Julia Kristeva even stresses the liberating potential of the 'stranger' within: "Wie frei sein, ohne irgendeine Utopie, ohne irgendeine Fremdheit? Seien wir also von nirgendwo, aber ohne zu vergessen, dass wir

irgendwo sind" (127).⁶ These aspects, of course, concern the 'First World' writers visiting the (post)colonial cultures more than they do the authors living in those cultures in the first place.

This study strives to examine Hans Magnus Enzensberger's text *Der Untergang der Titanic* in the context introduced here as the postcolonial gaze. Although this poetry cycle does not strictly belong to the genre of the travelogue, the most popular genre for postcolonial literature in Lützel's sense, it is nonetheless of interest in this context because it deals prominently with Enzensberger's stay in Cuba. I would like to examine where *Der Untergang der Titanic* could be located in the general development from the 1960s to the 1970s, from Marxism to postmodernism, from more or less monolithic anticolonialism/antiimperialism to the rather fluid and pluralistic concepts of postcolonialism.

To this end, I will first examine Enzensberger's position towards Cuba during his stay there in 1968-1969. For this purpose, I shall first discuss one text from the author's 'Marxist' period: *Ein Selbstbildnis der Konterrevolution*, which is the introduction to the documentary play *Das Verhör von Habana*. This text will help to exemplify the Marxist approach Enzensberger used in the 60s and early 70s to explain the problems of 'Third World' countries. Secondly, I would like to examine the way Cuba is portrayed in *Der Untergang der Titanic*, and to which extent this description can be located within postcolonial discourse. In short, I will explore whether Enzensberger stays behind in the 1960s or moves forward to follow the more recent paradigm that has been predominant since the 70s.

I intend to show that Enzensberger, despite his ongoing commitment to bringing the 'Third World' to the consciousness of the intellectual West German public, remains rooted in an analysis that disregards the specific features of Cuban culture but rather views Cuba as an example of global processes. The most significant change rather occurs in Enzensberger's general outlook which shifts from the revolutionary Marxist euphoria of the 1960s to a much more skeptical stance that culminates in a deeply rooted anthropological skepticism. It is this skepticism that lies at the heart of the apocalyptic visions of *Der Untergang der Titanic*. Cuba thus undergoes a metamorphosis from positive example for a worldwide

revolution to a depressing metaphor for the hopelessness of such endeavors, whose relevance, however, is conceived to be just as global.

Is it adequate to deal with Cuba in the context of postcolonial discourse at all? The island did become independent from Spain in 1898, long before the anti-colonialist movements in India, Africa, and the Middle East gained momentum. However, it is significant that Cuba's formal independence begins with an American occupation, that the US maintains special rights in the country until 1934 (Kinder 117; 187), and that Cuba's economy remains largely dependent on the US until the eve of the Cuban revolution. This continuity is a rather typical postcolonial situation, and therefore it seems valid to examine Enzensberger's writings about Cuba in a postcolonial context. Moreover, Cuba plays a highly symbolic role for the anti-colonial struggles of other countries throughout the 1960s (Jameson 296).

When Enzensberger renounces his fellowship in Connecticut, he positions the US and Cuba at opposing ends of the political spectrum. He is convinced that "APO, Studentenbewegung, Kuba, China und Vietnam Momente eines einzigen weltweiten Zusammenhangs bilden" (Peter 378). This becomes evident in *Ein Selbstbildnis der Konterrevolution*, his introduction to the documentary play *Das Verhör von Habana*. For him, the US-backed invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the subsequent hearings serve as examples of a much broader conflict:

Als Material zum Verständnis der kubanischen Geschichte lassen diese Dinge sich nicht archivieren. Die Struktur, die in ihnen zum Vorschein kommt, kehrt...in jeder Klassengesellschaft wieder [...] Die Gefangenen sind austauschbar. (21-22)

And they are indeed interchangeable. Enzensberger is not interested in these characters as individuals, but as representatives of the bourgeois class that ruled Cuba before 1959: "Das Selbstbildnis dieses Kollektivs zeigt nicht nur den äußeren Mikrokosmos der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft [...] es stellt vor allem den Innenbau

der herrschenden Klasse dar" (27). For Enzensberger, the events in Cuba are part of a global struggle of liberation from capitalism. He explicitly rejects seeing the invasion from a regional or personal point of view:

Die Forderung des Ideologie-Produzenten, man dürfe nicht verallgemeinern, läuft auf die Tabuisierung gesellschaftlicher Prozesse überhaupt hinaus [...] Auf diese Weise werden politische Fragen nicht nur personalisiert, sondern generell für unentscheidbar erklärt; Ihre Lösung liegt in der unzugänglichen Subjektivität des Individuums verborgen. (45)

Friedemann Weidauer thus regards *Das Verhör von Habana* as an example of a tendency in many of Enzensberger's writings, in which "er vorgibt, sich primär mit den konkreten historischen Bedingungen anderer Länder auseinanderzusetzen, um sie dann aber ... zur Darlegung einer abstrakten revolutionären Sichtweise zu benutzen" (32). Ultimately, Willi Winkler writes, the author's essays were aimed back at the situation in West Germany: "Die Bilder, die Enzensberger in den sechziger Jahren nach Haus brachte, sollten mehr sein als schöne Dias, eher Reizmittel für den Umsturz auch im eigenen Land" (13). For this reason, these images *ought to* describe Cuba in a global context. This global aim, ultimately rooted in a Marxist approach, becomes clear when he deals with the role of the CIA in the 1961 invasion:

Die Dummheit der CIA...ist eine lebensgefährliche Dummheit, deren Kalküle weiter reichen als bis in die Sümpfe von Zapata. Die erste militärische Niederlage des Imperialismus in Amerika war zugleich das Fiasko der borniertesten und reaktionärsten Fraktion des amerikanischen Monopolkapitals. [...] Es wird noch viele lebensgefährliche Krisen geben, und Tausende von Söldnern werden für die Konterrevolution ins Gras beißen, bis dieser Fraktion und ihrem Instrument,

der CIA, endgültig das Genick gebrochen ist.
(Verhör 21)

Although Enzensberger definitely takes a stand in favor of the overthrow of the Batista regime and Castro's revolution, his support is not as unequivocal and undifferentiated as *Das Verhör von Habana* may suggest. Amadou Booker Sadj insists that the play should be read in connection with Enzensberger's *Kursbuch* essay on the structure of history of the Cuban Communist Party (*Bildnis einer Partei* 259-260) in which the author criticizes Castro for his dogmatism and lack of a political agenda.⁷ Even so, his criticism comes from within a Marxist worldview.

While his attitude towards the Cuban revolution may be ambivalent, Enzensberger's agenda remains global. By analyzing a non-European country, he ultimately aims to criticize and change his own society (Booker Sadj 259; Weidauer 45). As Weidauer notes, the essential conflict for Enzensberger does not take place between former colonizers and colonized, but rather between the rich and the poor, even within West Germany (34). Enzensberger may both celebrate the Cuban revolution as an example of a global anti-capitalist struggle and criticize Castro from being too dogmatic in bringing about the necessary change – in both cases; however, Enzensberger applies a pre-existing Marxist model he ultimately leaves unquestioned.

Thus, *Das Verhör von Habana* resists the attempt to be labeled as a mere example of postcolonial literature as defined by Lützeler. It bears little trace of the subjectivity Lützeler sees as essential for postcolonial writing. There is little of the "Sich-Öffnenkönnen hin auf Ungewißheiten... bei der Erfahrung des Fremden" that Lützeler celebrates in "Der postkoloniale Blick" (17). Instead, Enzensberger aims to be objective, to describe things the way they are. There does not seem to be much space for a subjective narrator, because a subjective perspective would contaminate the objective 'truths' the text is said to contain. This distinguishes Enzensberger's essays from the radically subjective travelogues of authors like Peter Schneider, who take the limitations of their position much more into account. Not only does Schneider write *Die Botschaft des Pferdekopfs*, his account of a four-month journey through Latin America, in the first person

(Enzensberger writes his essays in the third person), he also reflects on the limitations of this perspective:

Das Ich, das sich in jedem zweiten Satz beschwor,
gab's das überhaupt? Dieses Ich, dem die Welt nur
noch der Anlaß für Lust- oder Unlustbezeugungen
war, was bewies es außer einem Verlust? War dieses
Ich-Gesage mehr als Selbstvergewisserung, die
ängstliche Behauptung von etwas, das nur durch
Anrufung existierte? (111)

Whereas Schneider uses the more 'subjective' genre of the travelogue ('the way I see things'), Enzensberger prefers the plain and more 'objective' genre of the political essay ('the way things are'). In other respects, Enzensberger is closer to the postcolonial writing of the 1970s. Lützeler's definition that postcolonial writing both seeks to analyze the situation in a 'Third World' country and search for solutions clearly applies to *Das Verhör von Habana*, in which the ultimate defeat of the CIA would be the ultimate and quite simplistic solution to all of Cuba's problems. *Das Verhör von Habana* is a postcolonial text only insofar as it seeks to analyze the status quo in order to change it, but it offers prefabricated answers from a 'First World' point of view rather than questioning the author's and the reader's European standpoint. The simple world view of this documentary play goes so far as to disregard even Enzensberger's own earlier conclusions that the lines between good and bad, 'North' and 'South' are not necessarily as clear cut as Marxism makes them out to be.⁸ In *Das Verhör von Habana*, all politics are thus reduced to a matter of the same old antagonistic struggle that is so familiar to European Marxists. "Die Geschichte aller bisherigen Gesellschaft ist eine Geschichte von Klassenkämpfen," wrote Marx and Engels (44); this drama leaves it at that. With this rather simple reduction of complex political conflicts to Marxist categories, the author even falls short of the more complex conclusions he reached in "Europäische Peripherie," his groundbreaking *Kursbuch* essay on the interrelations between the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

The most striking difference between *Das Verhör von Habana* and *Der*

Untergang der Titanic may be a formal one. In spite of the fact that *Das Verhör* is compiled and edited from actual protocols of the 1961 hearings in order to bring out the message more clearly (Berghahn 288), and thus employs elements of fiction, Enzensberger insists on the authenticity of his text: "Jedes Wort und jeder Satz des Dialogs ist in Habana gefallen" (*Verhör* 54).

On the other hand, *Der Untergang der Titanic* remains a purely and explicitly fictional text, a poetry cycle consisting of 33 Cantos, a number chosen to honor Dante's *Divine Comedy*, plus 16 extra poems, so-called "Glossen und Randbemerkungen." The text is set at three different points in time and space: the sinking of the famous ship in the waters of the Northern Atlantic (1912), the writing of the first version of the cycle in Cuba (1969), and the reconstruction of the lost manuscript in Berlin (1977). According to Hans Egon Holthusen, there is no single center in this text, and it deals with a multiplicity of issues, centered on the image of the iceberg hitting the Titanic, which stands for the idea of progress and Western civilization in general, and for the ideas of 1968 in particular (49). While the three settings and spaces are intertwined and often inseparable, Cuba certainly occupies a privileged position within this rhizomatic network. It is the "Ort der Reflexion und Imagination" (Born 236). What Enzensberger describes here, in Canto 3, is entirely different from *Das Verhör*:

Damals in Habana blätterte der Putz ab
von den Häusern, am Hafen stand unbeweglich
ein fauler Geruch, üppig verblühte das Alte,
der Mangel nagte Tag und Nacht
sehnsüchtig am Zehnjahresplan, und ich
schrieb am *Untergang der Titanic*.

[...]

damals dachte kaum einer an den Untergang,

[...]

Es schwankte
die Insel Cuba nicht unter unseren Füßen.

[...]

Wir wußten nicht, daß das Fest längst zu Ende,
und alles Übrige eine Sache war

für die Abteilungsleiter der Weltbank
und die Genossen von der Staatssicherheit,
genau wie bei uns und überall sonst auch. (14-15)

The narrator's description is a disillusioned one, but it seems to be disillusioned in retrospect. There is no trace of this melancholy in *Das Verhör von Habana*, which was published a full three years after Enzensberger's stay in Cuba. The sense of disillusionment rather seems to have emerged during the time elapsed between 1970 and 1977. And yet there are definite traces of earlier skepticism towards the Cuban revolution (Born 238) that become manifest in the narrator's apocalyptic vision at the end of Canto 3:

da sah ich ihn, sehr viel größer
und weißer als alles Weiße, weit draußen,
ich allein sah ihn und niemand sonst,
in der dunklen Bucht, die Nacht war wolkenlos
und das Meer schwarz und glatt wie Spiegelglas,
da sah ich den Eisberg, unerhört hoch
und kalt, wie eine Fata Morgana
trieb er langsam, unwiderrufflich,
weiß, auf mich zu. (17)

This iceberg, of course, recalls the iceberg that hits the Titanic in Canto 1. Thus, the failure of the ideas of modernity and progress, embodied by the sinking ship, is linked to the failure of the Cuban revolution, whose ideals seem as illusionary as those of John Jacob Astor, the ship's owner, and as out of place as any iceberg in tropical waters. Thus, Cuba becomes "auch eine Titanic" (Born 236-38; Müller 271).

It is this universal idea of failure, even of apocalypse, that forms the not-so-secret center of the cycle (Seeba 284-285). Different points in time and space thus float into one another. In Canto 9 of the cycle, the narrator describes a scene at the Hotel Nacional in Havana, 1969, in which Trotskyites from Paris play with the expensive food (36). Their decadence is hardly distinguishable from that of the rich passengers on the upper decks of the *Titanic* (10). This interpretation is further strengthened by another parallel:

the evening menu aboard the ship (30) is mirrored by the menu at the Hotel Nacional (36). In an outdoor movie theater in Havana, an old film version of the sinking of the *Titanic* is playing. At the end of Canto 9, Cuba and the ship have finally become one: the narrator identifies the silence of his Cuban hotel room with the silence aboard the *Titanic* at the moment the ultimate disaster sets in: "Nie wieder wird es so trocken und still sein wie jetzt" (38). This quote mirrors the second stanza of Canto 1: "Nie wieder, sagt er, / wird es so ruhig sein, / so trocken und warm wie jetzt" (7).

Cuba is also the place where the author composes his first version of *Der Untergang der Titanic*. The manuscript, however, is lost on the way to Paris. Although the narrator states "Untergegangen ist damals / nichts weiter als mein Gedicht / über den Untergang der *Titanic*" (21), it is obvious that much more has been lost – namely the narrator's (and the author's) faith in the Cuban revolution as a model for other revolutions to come that would eventually do away with capitalism as we know it. And as Byung-Hee Rim points out, without such progress towards a more livable, socially just world, history for Enzensberger will inevitably result in apocalypse (111).

In an unexpected turn, Enzensberger's disillusion with Cuba might partly be attributable to a phenomenon he deals with in the much earlier essay "Eine Theorie des Tourismus." Describing the writers of the Romantic era, he states:

[Sie] haben die Freiheit, die unter der Wirklichkeit der beginnenden Arbeitswelt und an der politischen Restauration zu ersticken drohte, im Bilde festgehalten. Ihre Einbildungskraft hat die Revolution gleichzeitig verraten und aufbewahrt. Sie verklärte die Freiheit ... bis sie ... zeitlich zum Bilde der vergangenen Geschichte, zu Denkmal und Folklore gerann. (190)

With the notable exception that Enzensberger's *Verhör* rather glorifies the future history of world revolution (because this revolution is yet to come) instead of a distant past, the author seems guilty of a similar attitude, i.e. of setting out for Cuba with a Romantic, even utopian attitude in search of a place that is different from discredited

forms of history, from West German and US capitalism as well as from the Stalinist forms of Socialism, which the essay on the PCC describes as equally discredited (154). According to Götz Müller, Cuba served as a quasi-mythical island for the imagination of the West German Left throughout the 1960s because it seemed to hold the promise of a 'different' type of revolution that was not bound to get tangled up in Soviet-type bureaucracy, a goal that eventually proved to be unattainable. Thus, Cuba became "der rettende Hafen und auch schon die enttäuschte Sehnsucht" for Enzensberger (Born 238):

Wir suchten etwas, hatten etwas verloren
auf dieser tropischen Insel. Das Gras wuchs
über die abgewrackten Cadillacs. Wo war der Rum,
wo die Bananen geblieben? Etwas anderes
hatten wir dort zu suchen – schwer zu sagen,
was es eigentlich war -,
doch wir fanden es nicht
in jener winzigen Neuen Welt. (15)⁹

In the above quote from Canto 3, Enzensberger's narrator once again does not look closely at the specific conditions of Cuba. Such passages lack the careful analysis the author exhibits in his earlier essays. His real life encounter with a decolonized Cuba has certainly reshaped his views, though in a rather unexpected way. In fact, Enzensberger is deeply disappointed. It is his work as a volunteer during the annual sugar harvest that transforms Enzensberger's views of Cuba entirely. While he initially sets out enthusiastically, the extent of corruption, opportunism and disenchantment with the revolution that the author encounters in the farm workers comes as a total surprise and shock (Lau 256-58). In this light, his 1969 essay on the PCC documents Enzensberger's disappointment, rather than a "kritische Solidarität" with the values of the Cuban government (261). The at times harsh criticism of this essay is followed by a six-year silence on Cuba, which many left-wing readers and writers interpret as evidence that the author silently agreed with these values. Jörg Lau states, however, that Enzensberger's silence is rather due to his deep disappointment with the Cuban revolution (258).

Despite this thorough revision of Enzensberger's general political outlook, the narrator in *Der Untergang der Titanic* seems to exhibit little of Schneider's voluntary and Kirchoff's involuntary openness towards the other culture. *Der Untergang der Titanic* eventually reaches the conclusion that the living conditions in Cuba are "genau wie bei uns und sonst überall auch" (15). He does not see the other as much as he sees the same. He merely revises his position insofar as his initial euphoria turns into disappointment. Cuba ceases to be a utopia for Enzensberger and is, in essence, simply inverted to signify his absolute dystopia (Grimm 151). Both images seem equally monolithic. The same goes for most Cubans portrayed in the text. Instead of bourgeois counterrevolutionaries, there are now nameless "Mulatinnen / mit der Maschinenpistole im Arm" (15). Their individual features, however, remain as vague as those of the exiles/inlanders in *Das Verhör*. Throughout the text, the only Cuban mentioned by name is the dissident Heberto Pedilla (16); in reality, Heberto is lost and locked up in a Cuban prison by 1977. It is thus equally problematic to label *Der Untergang der Titanic* as postcolonial literature as defined by Lützel as it is to file *Das Verhör von Habana* in that same category.

When the iceberg drifts towards the Cuban shore in Canto 3, the collision comes as unexpectedly and as *unwiderruflich* as the fact that the ship is hit in Canto 1. The Cuban revolution is ultimately doomed. Enzensberger's narrator may have come to this conclusion through an analysis of the situation, but the analysis itself is suspiciously absent from the text. Cuba, the Titanic, and the darkness of Berlin become interchangeable chiffrés for the same global crisis as well as for each other. Here, Enzensberger is not the highly original thinker who has opened numerous intellectual discussions in Germany over almost half a century; he rather recycles an image that many others have used before him. In 1970s Germany, the sinking of the *Titanic* is a common image for the ultimate failure of the ideals of 1968 (Seeba 286). Moreover, the *Titanic* metaphor fits in very well with the intellectual climate in West Germany around 1980. At that time, it has become an effective metaphor for the impending death of mankind, or at the very least that of Western civilization, through either nuclear annihilation or environmental destruction (Delisle 179).

While Enzensberger's description of Cuba is as subjective as any travelogue, it seems even more radically so. By declaring itself a *Komödie*, a drama, a fictional text, *Der Untergang der Titanic* renounces any claim for authenticity, any pretense to accurately report "what really happened." When the narrator states: "Seinerzeit glaubte ich jedes Wort, / das ich schrieb" (20), he implies that he feels differently now in 1977 – not coincidentally, this is the same year Punk voices a younger generation's disenchantment with the Hippie ideals of the 60s. The assumption that literary texts are now seen as unfit to document reality is supported by "Weitere Gründe dafür, daß die Dichter lügen," one of the poems that Enzensberger inserts between the 33 cantos. According to this poem, language and the objects it describes must always remain incongruent: "Weil der Verdurstende seinen Durst / nicht über die Lippen bringt. / Weil im Munde der Arbeiterklasse / das Wort *Arbeiterklasse* nicht vorkommt" (61). Thus, any attempt to give an accurate description of political and social phenomena, and to contribute to political and social change, must inevitably fail.

Such a conclusion marks a radical turn from Enzensberger's poetological program at the time he wrote *Das Verhör von Habana*. In his *Kursbuch* essay "Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend," Enzensberger still propagates "die politische Alphabetisierung Deutschlands" (197). To this end, he advocates the use of 'objective' documentary art, which he himself practices in his *Verhör* and other texts, like his 1972 novel *Der kurze Sommer der Anarchie* (Müller 254-55).

Der Untergang der Titanic, however, is written much later. The 1975 poetry collection *Mausoleum* marks a new phase in Enzensberger's work. In this cycle it becomes clear that the idea of a revolutionary change and 'objective' art are connected for Enzensberger as he retreats from them simultaneously. The rehabilitation of subjectivity and a growing skepticism of a left-wing revolution are intimately connected (Dietschreit and Heinze-Dietschreit 100; 115). Five years earlier, at the time of *Das Verhör*, it would have been highly unlikely for Enzensberger to write an elegiac poem about Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara like the one that concludes *Mausoleum*. (126-28) In this respect, *Der Untergang der Titanic* seems even more radical. Subjectivity rules supreme and makes the objective status of

reality melt away; the sinking of the ship is reduced to a vision in the head of the poet. In the words of Götz Müller:

Sicher war Enzensberger auf Cuba, sicher hat er bei der großen Zuckerrohrernte mitgeholfen; selbst die Entstehungsdaten belegen es. Doch die Person, die da 1977 in Berlin schreibt, erkennt sich nicht wieder; die utopischen Hoffnungen des kubanischen Experiments sind zerstoßen, der aufgeregte Mann auf der fernen Insel erscheint unwirklich. Das vergangene Ich hat denselben Realitätsstatus wie Gordon Pym. Die objektive Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit ist eine Fälschung. (262-63)

The radical subjectivity here differs greatly from that of Peter Schneider or Bodo Kirchoff. There seems to be no dialectical process at work between the narrator and the Cuban scenery he describes that would result in a productive revision of his own premises. Instead, the narrator lets other characters question his own status as a subject. In Canto 31, after the narrator's fictional death, one of his characters argues: "Gestatten Sie... / ich möchte klarstellen, ein für allemal, / daß er nie in Habana gewesen ist, / dieser Simulant, und außerdem, / daß es dort keine Eisberge gibt" (110). As Müller notes, the line between reality and fiction is blurred, the text becomes so radically subjective that the action merely takes place inside the author's or the reader's head (260-61). The resulting disorientation of the reader is clearly an intended one, as Manon Delisle points out, since it results in a questioning of "übliche Denkmuster" (181). In this respect, Enzensberger's choice of narrator would rather heighten the self-questioning of the reader and the author that Lützel highlights in his definition of the postcolonial gaze (Lützel, "Blick" 15).

However, if the line between reality and fiction disappears as it does in *Der Untergang der Titanic*, Cuba ceases to be a 'real' place where one might travel and learn lessons, and merely becomes a theatrical backdrop for something entirely different, a symbol, a metaphor, an imaginary Cuba. As Nicolas Born puts it: "Die Kraft der Imagination erzeugt eine Gleichzeitigkeit aller Ereignisse, von

denen im Buch die Rede ist" (236). It is this power that makes it possible to fuse the sinking ship, the iceberg, Cuba, and Berlin, in the design of a giant apocalyptic scenario, but this move at the same time fictionalizes them and makes them unreal. This Cuba could be anywhere. In fact, it is everywhere.

Enzensberger continues to discuss the 'Third World' after 1978. However, he circumvents the genres that are most common to postcolonial literature, namely the letter, the journal, and the travelogue, whose status lies, according to Lützel, between literary and non-literary texts (Lützel, "Blick" 15). Enzensberger either uses the non-literary essay or the strictly literary forms of the poem and the play. This is a further point that distinguishes him from Lützel's definition.

However, despite his growing political skepticism, Enzensberger still sees 'North' and 'South' as linked in a global system. In his 1993 essay *Aussichten auf den Bürgerkrieg*, for instance, he argues that there is no fundamental difference between the 'Third World' and the *Metropolen* of the North. In his scenario, the molecular civil war has already arrived everywhere (18-19). Enzensberger takes leave from universalism, insofar as he now encourages the inhabitants of the Northern cities to focus their power on processes in their immediate environment, but holds on to it insofar as he insists that the phenomena his analysis deals with are elements of a global paradigm: "Bevor wir den verfeindeten Bosniern in den Arm fallen, müssen wir den Bürgerkrieg im eigenen Land austrocknen. [...] Nicht Somalia ist unsere Priorität, sondern Hoyerswerda und Rostock, Mölln und Solingen" (90). Once again, this radical eurocentrism and limitation of the reader's perspectives and options for immediate action resemble the subjective positions of Schneider and Kirchoff, and yet they are more geared towards making readers *act* – not in the 'Third World,' but in their immediate surroundings. By radically historicizing his own position, Weidauer states, Enzensberger may actually display a deeper awareness of the actual historical constellations than those who deem to speak *in the name of* the 'Third World' (45). And yet, when the author now refutes the notion of a global class struggle and argues that the conflicts in 'Third World' countries are not necessarily caused by their exploitation through

the north (*Aussichten* 40-41), his pessimism still mirrors some of the melancholy over the failure of the Cuban revolution he described prominently in *Untergang der Titanic* and, just as impressively, in his eulogy for Che Guevara, the last poem in *Mausoleum*:

Es ist nicht lange her, und vergessen. Nur die
Historiker nisten sich ein wie die Motten ins Tuch
seiner Uniform. [...] Der Text bricht ab, und
ruhig rotten die Antworten fort. (128)

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Notes

¹ Johnson 802-803.

² Enzensberger 53.

³ Costello 160.

⁴ Enzensberger's biographer Jörg Lau, however, comes to a different conclusion. According to him, the author remains "noch als Revolutionär lange ein Vertreter der 'skeptischen Generation.' [...] Seine Texte, auch die radikalsten, verfügen über versteckte Hintertüren, durch die das Ich, das eben noch zur Straße hinaus heftige Parolen in die Menge gerufen hat, im Nu verschwinden konnte, falls jemand sich einfallen ließe, es heimzusuchen und zur Rede zu stellen" (Lau 35).

⁵ In his Kursbuch essay "Gemeinplätze, die neueste Literatur betreffend," Enzensberger voices some of his harshest criticism of his contemporaries: "Der Aufstieg [der Autoren] war erkauf mit theorieblindem Optimismus, naiver Überheblichkeit und zunehmender Unvereinbarkeit von politischem Anspruch und politischer Praxis" (Enzensberger, "Gemeinplätze").

⁶ Ultimately, such fluid concepts of "self" and "other," the familiar and the stranger, may wear down the opposition between those terms entirely and thus result in an aporia where there are no defined boundaries between the two, but the stranger / the other becomes a mere redoubling of the self. For details on this discussion, see Schütze, "Global Stranger."

⁷ In this essay, which even precedes *Das Verhör von Habana*, Enzensberger's criticism of the PCC is rather harsh: "Dem desolaten organisatorischen Zustand der Partei entspricht ihre ideologische Verfassung. [...] Ein Programm der PCC gibt es nicht. [...] Die Verwechslung von Dogma und Theorie gehört zum ständigen Repertoire Fidels. Es ist freilich nicht recht einzusehen, was an den Schulungstexten der PCC undogmatisch

sein soll, und worin sie ihren sowjetischen Vorbildern und Gegenstücken überlegen wären: jedenfalls können sie sich mit ihnen an Engstirnigkeit und Phrasendrescherei durchaus messen" ("Bildnis einer Partei" 209-213).

⁸ As Enzensberger states in his essay "Europäische Peripherie," "Die weltpolitische Gruppierung, die sich dabei [im Nord-Süd-Konflikt, my addition] abzeichnet, und die 'uns' von 'denen' scheidet, setzt sich offenbar gegen alle ideologischen Differenzen durch: Kommunismus und Antikommunismus, Faschismus und Antifaschismus halten ihr ebenso wenig stand wie die alten sozialen Wasserscheiden zwischen Kapitalisten und Arbeitern, der Bourgeoisie und dem Proletariat. [...] [Die Demarkationslinie] ist schwer zu bestimmen...An vielen Stellen ist sie durchlässig oder verworren, kompliziert durch Enklaven oder Exklaven, durch 'graue Zonen,' Puffergebiete, Waffenstillstände und Neutralitätsabmachungen" (157).

⁹ This pessimism about Third World revolutions is reminiscent of a phenomenon Edward Said notes in an essay on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "After years of support for anti-colonial struggles in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Palestine, and Iran, which came to represent for many Western intellectuals their deepest engagement in the politics and philosophy of anti-imperialist decolonization, a moment of exhaustion and disappointment was reached. One began to hear and read how futile it was to support revolutions, how barbaric were the new regimes that came to power" (Said 355).

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