

Mein Mallorca: A German-Spanish love affair

Petra M Bagley

This paper will explore how Mallorca has become much more than an island of refuge for exiled German writers, much more than a popular holiday destination for German tourists; instead it provides a setting for what could be termed a new form of ‘immigrant’ fiction, namely, tales of relocation, of second-home ownership. The descriptive terminology for exile proves to be inadequate for this body of contemporary writing, as this is voluntary relocation. Worthy of discussion is the way in which the experience of living between two languages, between two cultures, has inspired such narratives, which are difficult to categorise in literary terms, since they could also be considered a sub-genre of travel writing. At the same time, they could be associated with ‘immigrant literature’ in terms of theme, since a common feature of such texts is the way in which these authors convey the struggle to create a home community and a sense of belonging, in this case, a Mallorcan Heimat. Moreover, in their detailed study of the concept of Heimat, Boa and Palfreyman argue that over time the word ‘Heimat’ has distanced itself from the attachment to a fixed place and has instead become “a frame of mind: the commitment of citizens to the process of making a liveable social space”.¹ This is a new field of research, which is still in search of definitions that can guide the process of inquiry, because some would argue that these narratives of relocation have their ‘home’ in travel literature, whilst it is also possible to borrow elements of the descriptors of ‘axial’, ‘postnational’, ‘postcolonial’, ‘exophonic’, ‘grey zone’, ‘settlement’ literature, due to the fact that the

narrators/authors have relocated to another country and draw attention to the differences between their own and their host culture. They also continue to write in their mother tongue. The extent to which this creation of a new homeland has happened and is happening suggests that Mallorca has undergone a form of German colonisation, both factual and fictional; whether it continues to be the focus of relocation is another story.

The Germans long 'love-affair' with the Mediterranean island of Mallorca is undeniable, but not unequivocal. Their first 'date' can be traced back to around 425 AD, when the Vandals, a Germanic tribe, invaded the Balearics and, having defeated the Romans, remained for seventy years, until they themselves were conquered by the Byzantines.² This tumultuous and aggressive start to their relationship eventually blossomed into a romance, so that by the start of the 20th century a number of Germans, in particular the wealthy elite and artists seeking sanctuary, had already settled in Mallorca and had made a home for themselves alongside the islanders. In 1903 the island's first hotel was opened by the Austrian archduke, Ludwig Salvator; in the same year the tourist board was established "as an instrument for stimulating cultural and intellectual activity."³ The relationship became more earnest in the 1930s, as the island provided refuge for exiled German writers, such as Erich Arendt, Harry Graf Kessler (1868-1937) and Karl Otten (1889-1963).⁴ German, as well as English and American hotels and pensions, started to appear; *Majorca Sun*, was a foreign-language newspaper, which was also published in German and French; there was even a German lending library. With the arrival of the first charter plane in 1952, the nature and simplicity of this peaceful paradise was about to shift to hedonism and

sensual adventures. The once refined relationship was replaced by fun-filled, passionate, one-night stands, when from the late sixties onwards Mallorca became the number one holiday destination for sun, sea, sand and sex. The Germans, like the British, came in their droves, with cheap package holidays resulting in mass-tourism. By the beginning of the 1980s, due to the mass-tourism and corresponding reports in the media, the image of Mallorca had turned into that of an island of cleaning ladies (Putzfraueninsel) because even they could afford two weeks in the Mallorcan sun.⁵ The boom hit an all-time high in 1998 when more than 4.5 million German tourists 'invaded' the island, overwhelming the 610,000 local inhabitants to such an extent that they believed the 'Vandals' had returned.⁶ The Germans were no longer just visiting; they wanted commitment in the relationship and showed this first by buying holiday homes: twenty percent of the island's property was now in German hands, and then by choosing to live permanently on the island. By the end of the nineties approximately 100, 000 Germans had relocated and opened up businesses, thus investing both emotionally and financially in their dream of paradise.⁷ For the Mallorcans, however, the relationship had already turned sour. Whilst it was true that tourists had transformed the island from a rural backwater into the richest province in Spain, there was talk of the island being 'sold out' to Germany. In 1994 an MP from the CSU, Diony Jobst, had indeed made the incredible suggestion of either purchasing Mallorca or leasing it for 99 years, thus making the island Germany's 17th federal state.⁸

Situated about 90km to the east of the Spanish mainland, Mallorca is by far the largest of the Balearics, an archipelago, which also comprises

Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera, and forms one of the autonomous regions of Spain. In German parlance 'Malle' is still affectionately referred to as Germany's southernmost state, while the Castilian-Catalan spelling of 'Mallorca' in English is 'Majorca' and has given rise to a long-standing Spanish joke of there being a fifth Balearic island. As in the case of Germany, Majorca is Britain's favourite holiday destination, though each nationality frequents different areas: the British tourists tend to stay in Magaluf and Palma Nova in the west, the Germans are in the east in Arenal. This geographical segregation is broken down even further into regional segregation, such as 'Hamburg hill' or 'Düsseldorf hole'.

As noted earlier, the island has for many centuries lured visitors on account of its favourable climate, extensive coastline, attractive, white sandy beaches and endless blue skies. Its beautiful seas and scenery, as well as the tranquillity, gave rise to Mallorca's dominant image as 'la isla de la calma'. The British artist Francis Caron lived there in the 1930s and drew attention to the common perception that time almost stood still:

The air here is hot, and quite still. It smells of leaves and all sorts of spices, and they say that strangers when they first come to the island are drugged by it. The nights are slower and more spacious than they are at home – and that is because the sky is larger too.⁹

Sixty years later the drug is sangria and binge drinking among many pleasure-seeking tourists. Their summer holiday is a hothouse of nationalistic fervour, of pub-crawls and discos: 3000 people can fit into the German disco *Bierkönig*

in Arenal. The last thing they want is peace and quiet. To accommodate the hoardes, the coastal landscape in the south has been transformed by high-rise apartment blocks. Each week some 400 aircraft from Germany land in Mallorca. The German language can be heard everywhere; German beer gardens, restaurants, supermarkets dominate the main streets; most German TV networks are available via satellite; there are three German newspapers of which the German tabloid *Bild* has an island edition *Mallorca Zeitung*; a proliferation of German signs and menus is evident.¹⁰ Beach section six has been renamed *Ballermann 6* and is synonymous with non-stop alcohol consumption. It has become the epicentre for the plague of new German 'vandals': a sub-culture, which presents the worst possible picture of young Germans. Is it any wonder then that the Mallorquins fear a Germanisation of their island and perceive a threat to their identity?

But it is not just the young who come en mass, elderly Germans are taking advantage of the healthy climate, the cheaper cost of living and they want something more exotic than butter trips on the Baltic. In winter 2003/04 the German travel firm TUI Club Elan opened three hotels on the island to cater specifically for this market. The over-50s have access to German doctors and chemists; they have their own website and club newspaper. Many choose to retire to the island and live in planned settlements with their own restaurants and shops. The infrastructure is custom-built to meet the needs of retirees. To live comfortably on the island there is also no need for them to speak the language, since translators abound and local German-language newspapers advertise numerous types of services provided by German-speaking entrepreneurs. For these 'residential tourists' creating a

Heimat abroad does not involve integration into the host country's lifestyle and culture. As Huber and O'Reilly conclude in their study of Swiss and British elderly migrants in Spain, what counts in the construction of a new Heimat in a new environment "is a functioning network of good friends and neighbours (regardless of nationality and background), and solid links with the home of origin."¹¹

Back in the winter of 1838 friends and neighbours were very few and far between according to George Sand's account of her three month stay on the island together with her lover, Frederic Chopin and her two children. For health reasons they too had sought the warmer climate of the Mediterranean island: the composer was ill with bronchitis and Sand's son, Maurice, was suffering from rheumatism. However, after a month of hot weather, the rains started and turned that particular winter into an unusually severe one: as a consequence Chopin's bronchitis worsened, and he became feverish. The family moved from Palma to Valdemossa, where they stayed in the cells of the Carthusian Monastery. The local inhabitants believed Chopin had TB and stayed away from the family. They also frowned upon the fact that the couple were living in sin and that Sand never went to mass, that she smoked cigarettes and dressed herself and her daughter in masculine clothes. Two months later the visitors returned to France, and within two years Sand published *Un Hiver à Majorque* (1841), a book in which she praised the natural beauty of the island but condemned the Mallorcans as barbarians, cheats and thieves, who lied, abused and plundered. In her words the islanders "found the idea of selfless service to a stranger as incomprehensible as that of behaving honestly or even obligingly to a foreigner...We nicknamed

Majorca 'Monkey Island' because when surrounded by these crafty, thieving and yet innocent creatures, we grew accustomed to defending ourselves against them...".¹² It might be surprising to learn, therefore, that this book is still printed and sold in Mallorca in English, German and Spanish, without comment on its errors and slanders. Moreover, it has been described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as one of the great travel books of literature. Certainly, Sand does describe in great detail aspects of 19th century life on the island but her observations are blurred by personal experience. From the perspective of the Mallorcans it may be that by continuing to make the book readily available, they are playing a joke on the author, for the book illustrates the extent to which the island has developed, since she wrote such a scathing account. Prejudices, however, remain. In her recent account of her year working on the island, journalist Marie Roth notes "Vorurteilen begegnet man auf der Insel zwischen den Kontinenten wie Sand am Meer. Die Deutschen meinen, die Mallorquiner seien provinziell, verschlossen und geizig. Die Mallorquiner meinen, dass die Kultur der Deutschen aus Bratwurst, Bier und sentimentalen Schunkelliedern bestehe. Und dass die Deutschen glauben, alles kaufen zu können und *caps quadrads* seien."¹³

Criticism should of course be part and parcel of any good travel guide or travel narrative. Michael Böckler adds a new twist not only to the genre of travel writing, but also to Sand's description of Mallorquin villains. Published in 2002 *Sturm über Mallorca* (Storm over Mallorca) serves two purposes: firstly it is a typical of a crime story.¹⁴ For two years the German police had been searching for a German stockbroker, who had embezzled millions on the stock exchange and then vanished. Felix Reiter has assumed a new identity

and is living on a yacht in one of Mallorca's many bays. The story begins with the yacht crashing about in the waves of a sudden storm; the young German girl on board finds herself alone, unable to steer the yacht. Her companion whom she had met just two weeks before has seemingly fallen over board and disappeared. The reader then learns in retrospective flashbacks about how they met as well as how the press, a private detective and the Spanish mafia are all hunting for this man. What makes the style of this crime story so different from others, is that Böckler also provides information about the island within the story and in an appendix, so that the reader knows about the best restaurants, the places to visit and even learns about the history of the island, including the visit of Chopin and Sand. The subtitle of *Ein Roman als Reiseführer* which is not on the book's cover, but on the title page, makes it clear that this is a novel as well as a travel guide. In my opinion it is a very odd combination of fact and fiction, and unsuccessfully tries to combine the twofold purpose of a gripping crime story and an informative guidebook for tourists, who are already on the island. As a reader of crime stories, you do want to progress with the story, instead of being interrupted with what are sometimes pages of historical detail and not at all relevant to the plot. Whilst its appeal and target market must therefore be limited, it does add another dimension to forms of travel writing, as well as crime writing.

Like the exile writers of the thirties, Böckler's protagonist seeks refuge in Mallorca, and like the holidaymakers, he too is fleeing reality. For Ulrich Stefan's first-person narrator, it is employment, which brings him to the island. Written in 2004, *Hüte dich vor den Bergen und dem Wind und den Deutschen, die im Ausland sind! Eine deutsch-mallorquinische Episode* (Beware of the

mountains and the wind and the Germans, who are abroad. A German – Majorcan episode) focuses on how German entrepreneurs make a living in Mallorca.¹⁵ Stefan does not portray life on the island through rose tinted spectacles; like Sand and Böckler he too includes Mallorcan history in his account, but he relates the events to the current situation of his narrator and at the same time he expresses his criticism, not of the Mallorcans, but of the German tourists and residents, who have created enclaves called the *Düsseldorfer Loch* (Düsseldorf Hole) around Port Andratx and *Hamburger Hügel* (Hamburg Hill) between Felanitx and Santany. He points out that within these communities, the people who can fit a light bulb describe themselves as electricians, whilst a trained hairdresser runs a health spa. Many soon find themselves facing financial crises, their dream of living the good life turns into a nightmare. This narrator's observations are supported by sociological studies of expatriates abroad as well as statistics: over 29,000 resident Germans experienced more money problems than any other group of islanders in 2007.¹⁶ A number are choosing to return home to Germany, as has been documented in a German weekly TV programme called *Die Rückwanderer*, (The returnees) which features people giving up on their dream of living in the sun. In the case of the many retirees, old friends have also moved back home, usually due to severe health problems, or they have passed away. Loneliness and isolation are not uncommon. One of the greatest taboos is that of alcohol consumption among the residential tourists. With time on their hands 1 in 2 Germans are reported to have turned to alcohol to deal with depression.¹⁷ After five years Stefan's protagonist leaves Mallorca because his skills are no longer required; the work has dried up in

the building trade. According to him, the new German Eldorado will be the islands of Cape Verde, where another paradise awaits the intrepid entrepreneur and tourism is in its infancy. A peripatetic migrant, he will recreate his home, wherever there are moneymaking opportunities.¹⁸

Today at least half of the foreigners, who live permanently or semi-permanently on Mallorca are Germans, another forty percent are Britons and the remainder Scandinavians. Germans own about sixty percent of the island's holiday homes. The author, Elke Menzel, is one of these owners, a German-Mallorcan residential tourist. In *Eine Finca auf Mallorca oder: Geckos im Gästebett* (2006) (A finca on Majorca or geckos in the guest bed), an autobiographical novel, she describes with much humour the renovation of her finca, her holiday home, as well as her contact with the local inhabitants and other Germans.¹⁹ We hear about the festivities celebrated on the island; the survival of the Mallorquin language; the harvesting of almonds; the problems of infestations of ants, flies and even rats. Her account aligns itself with narratives of relocation/settlement, since the reader is privy to all the ups and downs of her experiences of creating a new home in a new environment. Humour is also a characteristic of more recent German stories about Mallorca. Peter Knorr's *Mallorca: Insel der Inseln* and Stefan Keller's *Papa ante Palma: Mallorca für Fortgeschrittene* both appeared in 2011, both are semi-autobiographical. The satirist and journalist, Peter Knorr, has been migrating between his homes in Frankfurt and Mallorca for more than 20 years, whilst musician and writer, Stefan Keller, moved with his Spanish wife and young twin daughters, from Cologne to Palma in 2007 and then moved to the countryside.

As previously noted, these authors have followed in the footsteps of many other Germans, and if the media and budget airlines have their way, others will follow them and will make the island their home, their Heimat, by joining an established community, which includes German private health clinics, a German radio station and even German bakeries. Television programmes, such as *Goodbye Deutschland. Die Auswanderer* (the emigrants), *Mein neues Leben* (my new life) and *Lebe deinen Traum. Jetzt wird alles anders*, (Live your dream, now everything is going to change) document how ordinary people have followed their dream of starting a new life, after selling up and moving abroad.²⁰ On the one hand, these series are tempting audiences with images of warmth, beauty, tranquillity and cheap property; on the other hand, they show how dissatisfied these people are with life in Germany. Soap operas, including *Hotel Paradies*, set in Deia, and *Mallorca – Auf der Suche nach dem Paradies* (in search of paradise) further fulfil the fantasies of the German viewer. The figures suggest that never before in the history of the Federal Republic have so many people opted to leave the country, totalling 155,000 in 2006, an increase of 7% compared to the previous year.²¹ Whilst Switzerland is the most popular destination for German emigrants, Spain is ranked sixth out of a list of twenty countries.²² Many are seeking the sun, a relaxed way of life, almost always in the countryside, improved employment prospects, culminating in a better standard of living, and above all happiness in a foreign land, where they retain their own culture and can construct transnational communities that transcend place.

In *Sunset Lives* King, Warnes and Williams employ the term 'residential tourists' "to describe retired (and other) people who have settled permanently or semi-permanently in the same areas as those visited by large numbers of tourists" and also discuss how the problem of differentiating migrants from visitors is illustrated by the number of possible labels, which alternate according to the extent of long-term commitment to and contacts with the country of origin: permanently-settled emigrants, dual residents, seasonal migrants, second-home owners, long-stay tourists.²³ They point out that the influx of such groups into Southern Europe has resulted in the "creation of cultural enclaves with familiar, northern European types of services, where languages such as English and German are widely understood, and the deterioration of the quality of life in these enclaves" due to the congestion caused by the increased numbers.²⁴ Mallorca is clearly a prime example. The danger exists that "the impact on the socio-cultural environment could lead to the disappearance of the very atmosphere and lifestyle that the tourists come to find."²⁵

In conjunction with this phenomenon, there has been an incredible increase in autobiographical novels as well as fictional tales of relocation and migration to sunnier climes, both in English and German, so much so that it could be argued that this type of narrative has become a genre in its own right, and therefore warrants some form of labelling other than 'travel books'. These narratives of relocation have their 'home' in travel literature but their authors are not on a 'Grand Tour' nor are they imparting factual knowledge/advice for its own sake. Whilst they or their protagonists have indeed migrated to another country and draw attention to the differences

between their own and their host culture, it could be regarded as marginalising to employ a concept such as 'literature of migration', which is very broad and might suggest a negative outlook/ attitude/ experience. Recently, Tita Beaven has used the term 'settler narratives', to describe the auto-biographical texts of English writers, who now live in Spain, and who explore their new socio-cultural identity as well as offer the reader the possibility of imagining a life abroad through their writing, whilst Tom Cheeseman refers to 'literature of settlement' and 'hyphenated writers' to explain the writings of third-generation Turkish immigrants, living in Germany.

²⁶ In my opinion, using the words 'settler' or 'settlement' is problematic due to the historical links to the writings of American, Australian and South African pioneers of the 19th century.

The German literary works featured in this paper illustrate how the once casual attitude of a visitor to a place such as Mallorca, for instance, the brief sojourn of a holidaymaker, or of someone on the run from their problems back home, becomes something much more meaningful, no longer a protracted love-affair, but a serious relationship in terms of new job prospects, new friendships, a new lifestyle. Both the fictional and factual literature about the Germans in Mallorca does suggest that the island has undergone a form of colonisation, since so many young and elderly Germans choose to live as one community, and create a Mallorcan Heimat, however negatively this might be regarded. At the same time they blur the distinction between migration and tourism, because they oscillate in physical and psychological terms between their home and host country. Their migration may ultimately

be seen as a migration to the concept of freedom, escape and new beginnings.

¹ See E. Boa and R.Palfreyman , *Heimat. A German Dream* (Oxford, 2000), 195.

² H. Bott et al. "Rückkehr der Vandalen", *Der Spiegel*, 2.8.99.

³ P. Bull, "Mass tourism in the Balearic Islands. An example of concentrated dependance" in D.G.Lockhert and D.Drakakis-Smith (eds) *Island Tourism*, (London, 1997), 137-151:141.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of German exile writers on Mallorca, see Reinhard Andress, "Deutschsprachige Schriftsteller auf Mallorca (1931-36) – ein ungeschriebenes Kapitel in der deutschen Exilforschung", *German Studies Review*, Vol.24:1, 2001, 115-143.

⁵ See H. Wachowiak, "Trip patterns of German tourists", *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure*, Vol 5, 2009, 185-203.

⁶ Andreas Heilmann, "Das 17. deutsche Bundesland", 29.6.05, *Spiegel Online*, www.spiegel.de/reise/europa/0,1518,362532,00.html (last accessed 2.9.10).

⁷ The latest figures show that approximately 10 million tourists visited Mallorca in 2007, of which 3.9 million were Germans. Officially 29,094 Germans live on the island, unofficially the figure is one hundred thousand. See Stella Bettermann's article on Germans living on Mallorca, their good and bad experiences: "Mallorca für immer?" *Focus*, 14.7.08.

⁸ Andreas Heilmann, "Das 17. deutsche Bundesland", 29.6.05, *Spiegel Online*, www.spiegel.de/reise/europa/0,1518,362532,00.html (last accessed 2.9.10).

⁹ F.Caron, *Majorca: the Diary of a Painter* (London, 1939), 1.

¹⁰ According to Roger Munns, the German tabloid sells 65,000 copies a day, illustrating how strong the German network is on the island. R. Munns, 'Majorca residents fed up with Germans', www.abcarticledirectory.com (last accessed 10.6.2012)

¹¹ A. Huber and K. O'Reilly, "The construction of Heimat under conditions of individualised modernity: Swiss and British elderly migrants in Spain", *Ageing and Society*, 24, 2004, 327-351:348.

-
- ¹² G.Sand, *Winter in Majorca* (London, 1956), 144-146.
- ¹³ Marie Roth, *Ein Jahr auf Mallorca. Reise in den Alltag* (Freiburg, 2009)
- ¹⁴ Michael Böckler, *Sturm über Mallorca* (Munich, 2002).
- ¹⁵ Ulrich Stefan, *Hüte dich vor den Bergen und dem Wind und den Deutschen, die im Ausland sind! Eine deutsch-mallorquinische Episode* (Aachen, 2004).
- ¹⁶ anon. "Mallorca, die Insel der Schuldner", *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 15.8.07.
- ¹⁷ H. Bott et al. "Rückkehr der Vandalen", *Der Spiegel*, 2.8.99.
- ¹⁸ Stefan's protagonist is typical of the 'flexible people' (coined by Richard Sennett in 1998) the global economy promotes. They repeatedly take on new tasks and are always ready to change their job, profession and residence. The promise of immediate satisfaction, such as lower living costs, becomes more important than religion, language, even family.
- ¹⁹ Elke Menzel, *Eine Finca auf Mallorca oder: Geckos im Gästebett* (Westerstede, 2006)
- ²⁰ Within the past decade there has been a boom in relocation programmes on British TV, amongst the many *A Place in the Sun*, *Living in the Sun*, *Living the Dream*, *No Going Back*, *Get a New Life*, *Home from Home*, *Dream Holiday Home*, and *There's No Place Like Home?* in which expatriates reconsider returning to Britain.
- ²¹ Further figures are available from the Federal Office of Statistics' press release of 30.5.07 at www.destatis.de (last accessed 10.6.12). Germany in 2009 was considered a country of emigration with more exits than new entries registered.
- ²² anon, 'Besser leben im Heidi-Land', *Focus*, 17.2.07.
- ²³ R. King, T. Warnes, A. Williams, *Sunset Lives: British Retirement Migration to the Mediterranean* (Oxford, New York, 2000), xi.
- ²⁴ *ibid*, 49
- ²⁵ Boust, 2007, 16.
- ²⁶ I am indebted to Tita Beaven for sending me a copy of her paper "A Life in the Sun: Accounts of New Lives Abroad as Intercultural Narratives", which has since been published in *Language and Intercultural Communication*, Vol. 7:3, 2007, 188-202. Tom Cheeseman's *Novels of Turkish-German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* was published by Camden in 2007.