

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

In: Free World. Volume II, No. 3. S. 274-276

Victim of Fascism: Stefan Zweig.

Mann, Klaus

April

Nutzungsbedingungen

Bei zahlreichen Dokumenten auf monacensia-digital.de sind die Urheberrechte bereits abgelaufen. Sie sind gemeinfrei und dürfen ohne weitere Rücksprache mit der Monacensia weiterverwendet werden.

Bei den Dokumenten, bei denen noch Urheberrechte bestehen, müssen für eine Weiterverwendung stets die Rechteinhaber*innen angefragt werden sowie eine Publikationsgenehmigung der Monacensia eingeholt werden. Das Zitatrecht bleibt hiervon unberührt.

Zur Erteilung einer Publikationserlaubnis wenden Sie sich bitte an:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus

Literaturarchiv

Adresse: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München

E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

Terms of use

The copyrights for numerous documents on monacensia-digital.de have already expired. They are in the public domain and may be reused without further consultation with Monacensia. In the case of documents for which copyrights still exist, the copyright holders must always be contacted for further use and publication permission must be obtained from the Monacensia. The right to quote under copyright law remains unaffected by this. To obtain permission for publication, please contact:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus:

Literaturarchiv

Address: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München

E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

VICTIMS OF FASCISM

Stefan Zweig

by

Klaus Mann

IN the death of Stefan Zweig, not only one of the representative figures of modern letters has passed away, but also an eminent connoisseur and patron, indeed, a great lover of literature.

This fine word, lover, seems particularly apt to describe his attitude towards life and letters. He was infinitely curious, always eager and prepared for new intellectual adventures. With fervor and diligence he kept exploring and extolling ever new aspects and domains of the literary cosmos. He rediscovered the classics and discovered the young. He translated foreign poetry into German and transmitted German values to five continents. He wrote prefaces, book reviews, extensive essays, and innumerable letters. His literary contacts reached from Paris to Rio de Janeiro, from San Francisco to Helsingfors. He travelled, lectured, adapted old comedies for the modern stage. His collection of manuscripts was unique, including the original works of Goethe, Balzac, Stendhal, Hölderlin, Johann Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. His own autograph went, by request, to his admirers in Leningrad and Leipzig, Milwaukee and Madrid. It also appeared on the checks which he presented to many a striving colleague. Whoever was in hard straits, and happened to be a writer, could depend on his help. His beautiful home in Salzburg, indeed every hotel room he occupied, whether for a few days or weeks, became a center of literary activities.

While Zweig possessed Flaubert's ardent preoccupation with the writ-

ten word, he was completely without the ascetic pathos and monkish gravity of the French master. Flaubert despised and virtually renounced life for the sake of a vampirish abstraction, art. As for Stefan Zweig, he was by no means inclined to sacrifice life at the altar of absolute art; on the contrary, he considered literature as the comprehensive ex-



Stefan Zweig

Courtesy Viking Press

pression of man's experiences and endeavors. There was nothing rigid and exclusive in his nature and attitude. In fact, he was as remote from the "Ivory Tower" as he was from the didactic brutality of Emile Zola. The classic type upon which he formed his character was neither the ill-tempered high-priest of beauty, nor the boisterous herald of progress. It was the scholarly humanist of the Renaissance epoch—aloof but sympathetic, tolerant but incorruptible.

In his treatise on Erasmus of Rotterdam, Zweig attempted to explain and defend certain features inherent in his own character. This solemn masquerade was evidently supposed to increase his authority and elucidate his objectives. Zweig asked his readers, almost openly: "You blame me on account of my elusiveness? Maybe you think me unduly soft or craven because I choose not to side with either party in the struggle of our time? But that is the way we are—we intellectuals, we humanists, we unselfish servants of the spirit. Hesitant, out of conscientiousness; seemingly aloof, but actually partaking in every human effort; profoundly versed in all abysmal secrets of the human soul and, therefore, *au dessus de la mêlée*. Thus we have always been, since the days of yore. Look at Erasmus, my illustrious brother!" But the hazardous parallel is only partly correct. There is something missing in this indirect self-portrait. It stresses and reveals but one aspect of a more complex and colorful reality. Zweig at once simplified and exaggerated his stature when he identified himself with the Sixteenth Century-scholar. The hesitance and indecision, in Erasmus's case, sprang from meticulous probity. Zweig, too, was loyal and high-minded. But, at the same time, there were other ingredients fused in the compound of his character: something bland and iridescent, seducible and seductive, a Casanova-like charm. Stefan Zweig came from Vienna—not from Rotterdam.

• How typically Austrian he was! All his penchants and animosities, his smiles and motions, the cadence of his voice were unmistakably Viennese. Only Vienna produced that peculiar style of behavior—French suavity with a touch of German pensiveness and a faint tinge of Oriental eccentricity. A mood of *laissez faire* and serene scepticism prevails in the baroque palaces and patrician mansions, the literary cafés and cheap tenements of Vienna. Racial or national intolerance seem

utterly out of keeping with the general spirit of civilized nonchalance. Barbaric aberrations like anti-Semitism appear incompatible with the innermost being of Vienna. They exist; but one would like to believe that they have been imported from provincial or foreign places. Not that Vienna was the ideal of a democratic community. The prejudices and limitations of the *ancien régime* had never been completely overcome. However, the various sectors of society were interrelated in a much more cordial and organic way than was the case in any part of the Reich. The Baron and the *fiaker* driver understood each other; they had the same vocabulary and mostly the same ideas. The idiom of the great Viennese writers has a strong popular savor, for all its sophistication. From the entralling verse of Hugo von Hofmannsthal emanate the sweetness and simplicity of folk-songs. And as for Arthur Schnitzler, he is not only one of the outstanding psychologists of modern literature, but also the authentic voice of his city, communicating its sadness and merriment, its desires, problems and joys.

It is in this context and against this particular background that we should try to conceive the character and work of Stefan Zweig. The Austrian element was, of course, much more essential in the texture of his personality than was the Jewish component. That is to say, not only that the cultured Jewry of Vienna had completely assimilated their way of life to the Austrian pattern, but also that the Austrian style itself, or rather the style of Vienna, had become integrated with certain Jewish traditions. No German-Jewish writer could ever have attained so representative a position as Arthur Schnitzler, the Jew, occupied in Austrian literature.

It may be allowed to say that the Jews of Vienna were more Viennese than their non-Jewish compatriots; for they possessed, in a still higher degree, those qualities we consider specifically Austrian, the keen wit, the civilized courtesy, and the love of music.

The greatest explorer of the human psyche in this century, Sigmund Freud, was a Viennese Jew. Stefan Zweig, who analysed and praised the inventor of psychoanalysis in an acute treatise, was in many respects his pupil. It is to *him*, the bold discoverer of the unconscious, that Zweig owes most of his insights and intuitions. It was Freud's authoritative example which taught and encouraged him to

untangle the confusions of the heart, to scrutinize the inspiration of masterbuilders and demons, to delve into the subterranean sphere of repressed desires and forgotten fears.

Indeed, Zweig's approach to the human drama is akin to the attitude and tactic of the "mental healer." It may be that this comparison will prove more helpful than any other to elucidate a character whose potentialities range from Erasmus to Fouché, from Don Juan to Isaiah. What his methods and aspirations have in common with those of the psychiatrist, is the odd blend of detachment and sympathy. Zweig does not hope nor pretend to change the world by his writing; his sole ambition is to mitigate the bitterness of human suffering by amplifying our awareness of its roots and causes. The angle from which he tackles reality is neither idealistic nor materialistic, in the Marxian sense. In fact, there is no "angle" at all—no principle according to which human beings could be labeled and evaluated. The only principle Zweig accepts is that of civilization, which exists for the sake of man.

But if man, in devastating frenzy, turns against the very civilization which was conceived and built to protect and improve his life, what will be the reaction of the lover and analyst, in such sinister case? Will he continue to "understand"? Will he abide by his detachment and sympathy? Does he not realize that sympathy has long become dangerous, indeed, *suicidal*, considering the murderous impetus of the assault? How can he fail to see that those ferocious hordes threaten our civilization? Civilization implies and guarantees liberty which—as Zweig has put it in his last, tragic letter—remains "the greatest wealth in the world." Why, then, does he not lift his hand to defend what is so dear, indeed, indispensable to him? Why does he not protest? Why does he not resist? He used to be so glib and agile, jaunty and alert. What is it that paralyzes him now?

"Beware of Pity!" The title of the only novel he wrote, indicates that he knew his danger. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. . . . But how could you understand and how forgive the crime and *not* feel sorry for the criminal? He is your enemy, he will kill you—and yet you understand, forgive, and pity him.

How can you fight, paralyzed by knowledge and sympathy?

"I don't want to fight," says the humanist. "All I want is to understand."

'But how can you strive for truth when the glaring lie triumphs? How can you maintain your detachment and dignity, under the heel of the tyrant?'

Says the humanist: "No tyrant will ever touch me. I am free."

He is free to die. Nothing else remains to be done when the last courteous letter is couched and everything put in order. The hour has arrived: the philosophical lover of life, letters, and liberty invites his wife to join him in the last macabre escapade.

Those who stay are saddened and bewildered. Some of them discreetly scold the late Master because of his lack of courage. Some others think, on the contrary, he acted courageously: that is what they admire him for.

How trite and arrogant are our judgments, considering the overpowering reality which is death—the unspeakable drama which is suicide. Was he "right" to throw away his life? Was he a defeatist? Does his voluntary death affect the validity of his works? And if so, how? The last one of these questions is the only one that makes sense. To Stefan Zweig as a person our measures and evaluations are not applicable any more. Our moral concepts necessarily proceed from the presupposition that life as such is valuable and worth while. He who renounces life automatically overcomes a morality that loses its relevance in the vacuum of eternity.

But the work remains here; it is ours. No doubt the tragic end of the author is apt to influence our views as regards these brilliant biographies, masterly essays, skillful novelettes. Zweig's desperate action in Petropolis, Brazil, seems to have added a new note of gravity to the fluent elegance of his prose. The lights as well as the shadows become more distinct in the rich and colorful texture. With wistful admiration we watch the display of his craftsmanship. We relish his daintiness, but not without apprehension. His own death reminds us of the enemy, who wants to destroy all this. What can we do in order to protect such vulnerable splendor?

Only this: to accept and cherish those elements of his message that *could* have resisted: if only the other element, the fragile and weary one, had followed his own admonition: *Beware of Pity!*