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Literature In Exile

By Klaus Mann

A GREAT GERMAN WRITER, who has not been sufficiently acclaimed in foreign countries, is Alfred Doeblin. His novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, sort of a highly unusual variation on Dos Passos' theme, *Manhattan Transfer*, has been an international success.

His other works are not well enough known beyond the confines of the German language. He belongs, however, to the most original, vigorous figures of our literature. He is at all times obstinate, often treading unbeaten paths. His imagination is enormous, spreading wildly, too voluptuous, perhaps. He associates, invents, heaps up pictures, thoughts, fates, in a wild profusion. He is a quaint painter, who would like to incorporate everything into one colossal canvas: angels and human beings, heaven and hades, with the earth in the center; caricatures, forests, mountains, seas and giants.

All the charms and dangers of this imposing talent are impressively summed up in Doeblin's newest novel, *Der Blaue Tiger* ("The Blue Tiger") (Querido-Verlag, Amsterdam). The book constitutes the second conclusive part of a great and daringly epic composition, which began with the first novel, *Die Fahrt ins Land ohne Tod* ("The Journey Into the Land Without Death"). Its gigantic background is South America, whose magic people are discovered by the seafaring Europeans, subdued and civilized by them, who brought great misery to this people also. Among the white there may be found those also who truly, in all seriousness, consistently and with all courage and will to sacrifice, desire to be "deliverers," saviours.

These are the fighting hosts of the newly founded order of Ignatius of Loyola the Jesuits. By their mighty efforts, jointly with the dark men, they created the flourishing republic of Paraguay—a peaceful enclosure in the midst of general devastation.

HOWEVER, this truly Christian state, wrested from the primeval forest, could not maintain itself. The new era, the commercial epoch, in which money and mechanism govern, has new and merciless laws. This time does not tolerate the moral principle of love of one's neighbor; this time is the primeval forest itself—which it so boldly undertook to extirpate. This becomes stirringly clear in the last chapters of the book,



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that are laid in the present day. They are titled: *Der Neue Urwald* (The New Primeval Forest).

"They grew up and entered into the primeval forests," it is said of the humans of our times. "For this was Europe." The last modern paragraphs of the great work seem to me the strongest; at any event they are the ones, which concern us most vitally. Out of the limitless abundance of present-day fates some are singled out: two young Germans, a few women; an adventurous young Pole; several French prisoners, who flee from the Bagno in Cayenne and at last are literally devoured by the primeval forest.

At the end there again is the primeval forest, as at the beginning. This primeval forest is the real hero, the mysterious pivot of the book. Civilization passes; all its achievements and all its sins are forgotten. The primeval forest remains. The victims of civilization—the criminals, the adventurers sink back into it.

THERE CAN BE no doubt that Doeblin must be classed in the category of German present-day narrators with the most powerful command of language. When at some future time the history of literature is written, his name pos-

sibly will be mentioned simultaneously with that of James Joyce.

Despite this it is not difficult to understand that his strong, wild and desperate language finds no echo; that he is lonely. Possibly there is within him too much of the spirit of the primeval forest; too many anarchical elements. There is much that is dark and chaotic in his work. There is a lack of lucidity, clarity, grace.

This German-Jewish writer (whose works are, of course, forbidden in Germany) is far too German. Not quite unjustly a wise critic has recently compared him with Jean Paul, the romanticist. He has the German tendency toward immensity. His despair is boundless, infinite also his wild, somewhat barbaric joy in all things of creation. He is intoxicated with pictures and ideas. He is incapable of discrimination. He wants to encompass all. His works are so variegated that they become monotonous.

His genius has the character of something monstrous—like the genius of James Joyce. He fascinates, but he brings no solace. He charms, but it is a dangerous charm, a black magic.

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