

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

In: The Washington Post. 23.10.1938, S. 8

Literatur in Exile.

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1938-10-23

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Literature In Exile

By Klaus Mann

IN MY FIRST report to The Washington Post, I made reference to the young German-Hungarian romanticist and dramatist, Oedoen von Horvath. I praised in particular the charm and significance of his novel "*Jugend ohne Gott*" (Youth without God), which meanwhile has been translated into many languages and its adaptation to the screen is being contemplated.

Oedoen von Horvath no longer lives. He was knocked down by a tree in the Champs Elysees of Paris. The news of his untimely death seemed to us, his friends, so horrible and fantastic, that we were loath to believe it. The writer went walking in the Champs Elysees in Paris on a stormy night; a heavy branch of a falling tree struck him in the neck and killed him.

Despite all the horror and all the sadness his going aroused in us, we all felt that this macabre ending was in some mysterious way fitting to Horvath's singular type. A tree becomes a murderer: This dreadful fancy might have been Horvath's own; his might have been the genius and the courage to form such an idea. In his books and in his plays, odd, grotesque and deadly catastrophes of this sort could often be found. For, ultimately, do writers themselves not actually experience what they, these playful Gods, have, in cruel capriciousness, conceived and decreed against the creatures of their imagination? Strict and mysterious laws govern the identity of a person and his work.

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BEFORE THE TREE felled him Horvath had just concluded his last work. The short novel, "*Ein Kind unserer Zeit*" (A Child of Our Times) (Verlag Allert de Lange, Amsterdam), presents the inner, not the outward, continuation of the story, "*Jugend ohne Gott*." This latter work shows us the children of the Totalitarian State, who have lost faith in God and have found as an only equivalent their belief in force.

The hero of this new novel is a part of the Totalitarian State itself, an active representative of that state's force—a soldier. The soldier does not think; he obeys. He believes and he does what his superiors tell him to and demand of him. Without deeper reflection he is convinced that the Nation is more important than the individual; that the conceptions: "Right, Freedom and Truth," have become obsolete and meaningless, that force alone matters. He permits the Totalitarian State to send him to war, without giving the matter much thought.

Millions feel and act as he; there are some who doubt, and from this doubt emanates the moral resistance. An officer, a captain (fundamentally, at least as far as character and spirit are concerned, little distinguished from a plain soldier), determines upon such resistance. In the course of the war, however—which, after all, is nothing more than an infamous looting expedition—the officer undergoes a spiritual metamorphosis. He realizes the injustice all about him; his emotional reaction is so violent that he no longer wishes to live; he must die.

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AND THUS for the plain soldier—who has admired this captain so greatly—inner upheavals begin, aided and abetted by outward complications, meetings, changes. The plain soldier muses thus: "I have lived wrongly; up to this time and even to this very day I have lived in error and sin. I was about to grow numb within myself. For the real characteristic of these, our times, of which I was so proud to be a product, is: coldness. We perish with cold, for we no longer have a soul to give us warmth."



KLAUS MANN

The plain soldier has not sufficient strength to glow solitarily, when all about him he feels so much icy coldness. But since the dreadful coldness all around him has only now penetrated into his inner consciousness, he is no longer able to endure it. He now actually freezes to death and turns into a snowman—thus becoming a mute protest against the cold times, of which he was both product and victim.

The book is beautifully prefaced by Franz Werfel. As an epilogue the book contains Carl Zuckmayer's funeral oration at Horvath's grave in Paris. The narrative closes with the death plaint to his hero, followed by a farewell message to the author: "Rest in Peace, Oedoen von Horvath—you, too, a child and victim of these times!"

Note: Earlier articles by Klaus Mann, son of Thomas Mann, dealing with the work of exiled German poets and novelists, were published in The Post May 22 and 29. A forthcoming book on the same subject by Mr. Mann and his sister, Erika Mann, will be published by the Houghton Mifflin Co. under the title, "Escape to Life."

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