

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Reading in a tent.

Mann, Klaus

März/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

READING IN A TENT

By K l a u s M a n n

Dear Editors of AR&TUSA!

You want me to write an essay on contemporary American literature? But I can't! I am a soldier -- living in a tent, somewhere in Italy. Soldiers are not in the habit of traveling with elaborate libraries. Even the few volumes I carry obstinately with me add considerable weight to my military luggage. Yet I seem to be incapable of living without any books at all.

In the evening I have time to read. I don't care for the movies (or rather, I d o care for them, but the recent Hollywood output curiously failed to appeal to me); nor am I particularly attracted by U.S.O. shows or gambling. So reading remains my favourite pastime -- in the field as in civilian life.

The literary works which have given me the greatest pleasure, and in whose company I have spent the most stimulating and recreative hours, are indeed the classics. For one reason or another, the time-honored standard-works of world literature seem to be the favourite reading matter of men living in tents. I have noticed the same predilection in many of my comrades, whom I saw spending long evenings with Don quixote, The Arabian Nights, or Anna Karenina.

But you don't want to hear any eulogies about the old masters; what I am supposed to discuss is, on the contrary, American novelties -- recent publications in the U.S.A., which may be of particular interest for the Italian reading public but are not yet available in Italian translations.

588 MN

I am afraid that I'll have to begin with a confession and an apology: I ~~do not believe in~~ best-sellers. It may be a kind of intellectual am not very familiar with current

snobbery on my part; but that's the way I am, I can't help it. The more popular a book becomes -- and I am speaking about American books in particular! --, the more my interest in it decreases. Of course, there are exceptions -- books like John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath -- which are really significant and at the same time happen to have a strong appeal to the wider public. But in many cases even the best-sellers produced by literary celebrities are less interesting to me than ^{certain} ~~the~~ less successful works by the same authors/. ~~For example,~~ popular novel, Human Comedy, for instance, falls definitely short, in my opinion, of some of his truly delightful prose sketches and dramatic fantasies.

Just now there is a new novelistic "hit" which I am determined to skip: Forever Amber, by Kathleen Windsor. No doubt, it will be translated into Italian before long: so you may be able to judge if I have missed much by not reading it. Maybe it's a brilliant job; some of the literary, or semi-literary, reviewers seem to think so -- Mr. Paul Jordan Smith of the Los Angeles Times, for example, who announced the new literary, or semi-literary, sensation in the following terms:

"The million or so readers who have been begging for another Gone with the Wind now have their prayers generously answered. For in Forever Amber is a heroine who will remind them of Scarlett O'Hara and Catherine the Great rolled into one dainty package of dynamite and surrounded by a score of inflammable young Casanovas from the corrupt court of Charles II ... I make bold to reckon that ten million sleeping hours will be gladly sacrificed to its pages... and of course it is going to be a best-seller -- in capital letters."

So now you will understand why I am reluctant to venture on Miss Windsor's dainty and dynamic chronicle of romances and intrigues in Restoration England -- especially since I do not happen to belong to that "million or so readers" who devoured Gone with the Wind and keep dreaming of Scarlett O'Hara ever since.

The other day, when I was sick in a field hospital and had absolutely nothing to read, a sympathetic nurse presented me with a copy of another popular favourite -- The Robe, by Lloyd C. Douglas. It's the story of the garment which belonged to Jesus of Nazareth, and for the possession of which the Roman soldiers gambled in the holy and terrible hour of the crucifixion. The winner of the robe, a young ^{Roman} nobleman of remarkable intelligence and sensitivity, becomes subsequently a Christian -- under the magic influence of the sacred mantle. His gradual, painful conversion is the main theme of the novel -- skillfully and quite convincingly developed. The description of the historical background is lively and accurate; the psychological characterizations are of a certain sturdy simplicity; the narrative style is fluent, unassuming, at times pleasantly colorful, always readable. Yet there is something missing. It's all too smooth, too glib, too plausible. Although dealing with a highly mysterious and magic subject, the book is completely lacking in magic and mystery. Without being outright vulgar and superficial, it irritates through a kind of second-rate subtleness and ~~profundity~~ pseudo-profundity. It's a useful, edifying piece of work, all right -- apt to convey to the average American reader a vividly realistic picture of conditions in Rome, Greece, and Palestine, at the time of Christ; but it doesn't have much to do with literature in a stricter, more exacting, more exclusive sense.

In the United States it is more appropriate and more necessary than anywhere else, perhaps, to discriminate clearly and severely between "real" literature, on the one hand, and popular "would-be" literature, on the other.

For in no other country are the commercial substitutes of culture so ~~danger~~ dangerously developed as in the United States. Film, radio, the popular magazines, and the comic-strip~~es~~ or "funnies," are terrific powers. The American creative writer has to beware of these pseudo-cultural devices which mean a formidable competition and at the same time a constant temptation to his own labile, powerless guild. Hence the remarkable irritability certain "highbrow" intellectuals show towards all forms of commercial entertainment. Edmond Wilson, for instance, -- one of the most influential younger literary critics; now the successor of Clifton Fadiman, as the book reviewer of The New Yorker -- addressed recently an impressive warning to young American writers, to be on their guard against the evil spell of Hollywood and such cheap periodicals as the popular Saturday Evening Post, which is famous for publishing the ^(tritest) ~~worst~~ short-stories and paying the highest fees. Another critic, writing in the venerable Sunday Book Section of the New York Times, discovered and deplored certain traces of "Hollywood's ever-increasing influence on our novelists" even in John Steinbeck's new best-selling novel, Cannery Row, which -- in the opinion of the Times expert -- is a weaker repetition of things Steinbeck has said before, plus a problematical new touch partly borrowed from the movies and their simplified psychology, partly from that favourite enfant terrible of the American reading public, William Saroyan, whose sentimental and whimsical clichés (always according to the Times reviewer) seem to have seized Mr. Steinbeck's imagination. What the severe critic forgot to mention was that Saroyan himself, for all the authenticity and the original charm of his talent, has already been affected by the Hollywood poison.

His successful novel, Human Comedy, could remain almost completely unchanged when it was turned into a fairly pleasant, but by no means extraordinary, film. There are indeed reasons to suspect that the author may have conceived his story originally as a screen script and had only later the idea to use the same material for a novelette...

Other observers again are concerned about the corrupting influence of certain types of vulgar American advertising, ~~and radio programs~~. It is particularly the mawkish cult of the American mother, called "Mom," which gets on the nerves of a talented young author, Philip Wylie, who in his book, Generation of Vipers, vitriolically and amusingly attacks radio programs for women. The radio, he says, is "Mom's final tool; for it stamps everybody who listens with the matriarchal brand... Just as Goebbels has revealed what can be done with such a mass-stamping of the public psyche in his nation, so our land is a living representation of the same fact worked out in matriarchal sentimentality, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death."

Harsh, violent words, these! -- not quite without sound foundation, perhaps, but grossly exaggerated. National death, indeed! It does not look like death in any domain of public American life -- including the sphere of creative writing. The American literary scene is always colorful -- always rich in new promises and new experiments.

Upton Sinclair, that indestructible old crusader and story-teller, has just presented, and is still engaged in, a new experiment of most impressive dimensions and of a quite unique character -- a bold combination of fiction and journalism; a kind of contemporary European history in ~~some~~ form of a adventurous novel, or rather a series of

novels, including, so far, five volumes, namely: World's End, Between Two Worlds, Dragon's Teeth (which won the important Pulitzer Prize, in 1943), and -- recently published -- Presidential Agent, which has kept me thrilled and amused during many an evening in my cold, lonesome tent.

The leading character of the whole epic cycle is a young man called Lanny Budd -- something like an ideal hero: wealthy, brilliant, dynamic, idealistic. The son of an American industrialist and a French femme du monde, he ~~lance~~ spends most of his time travelling all over Europe, studying social conditions in the various countries of the continent and making friends with all the important personalities. By telling us about Lanny's adventures, the author gives us a comprehensive and lively picture of political events in Europe during the decade preceding the outbreak of World War Two.

This time, in Presidential Agent, Lanny's fascinating ^{odyssey} ~~adventure~~ through the crisis-ridden continent has a twofold purpose; first, to find and, if possible, to rescue his wife, Trudi, a German anti-Nazi refugee and former underground hero whom he has secretly married and who was subsequently kidnapped by the Gestapo in Paris; second, to gather special information about European affairs for President Roosevelt, to whom he was presented by a mutual friend and who has appointed him his secret agent. He fails to rescue Trudi, but manages to pick up quite a few juicy inside stories for the Big Boss back in Washington.

The Europe Lanny explores is a continent driving towards disaster: the Europe of the Spanish Civil War, the Europe of Appeasement, the Europe of Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and -- Munich. Brilliant Mr. Budd, the secret emissary of the White House and fervent liberal disguised as a suave playboy and gentleman art dealer, observes everything, meets everybody, is everywhere where things happen. Thanks to Lanny's extra-

ordinary social contacts, ~~and ability~~, we are introduced to a whole galaxy of international "headliners" -- from Roosevelt and Hitler (the two most elaborate and most striking portraits in the great panorama) over Goebbels, Göring, Hess, Franz von Papen, Ambassador Bullit, Dr. Schuschnigg, and Baron Schneider, of Schneider-Creusot, down to such comparatively second-rate celebrities as Jules Romain -- who is presented as a spokesman and apologist of the Daladier-Bonnet Government -- and the Austro-Fascist, Prince von Starhemberg, with his pretty actress wife, Nora Gregor. We make the personal acquaintance of Spanish Communists and French Cagoullards, American snobs and English conservatives, radical intellectuals and cynical financiers, statesmen and bohemians, sadists, criminals, social climbers, political intriguers, and the upright fighters of freedom. It's definitely an original kind of narrative -- a journalistic epos, so to speak --; colourful, well-composed, and amazingly well-documented.

It's a grimly realistic picture, too -- analysing with remarkable lucidity and insight the social conditions which have caused our present calamity --; yet it is not without an element of spirited optimism. Clearly, Upton Sinclair -- the experienced, often-disappointed veteran of many liberal Causes and Crusades -- agrees with his youthful hero that it is worthwhile, indeed, ^{necessary} to act, to struggle, to believe in the possibility of progress and of a better future, in spite of all difficulties and dangers, set-backs and confusions.

Of course, Upton Sinclair's social criticism and political ideas are essentially based on Marxian principles. Yet the kind of Marxism he preaches and represents is modified, first, by his ardent American liberalism, and, second, by a mystic element which -- surprisingly, almost paradoxically -- seems to become increasingly important in

Sinclair's mental set-up. Spiritualism was already one of the themes in the earlier Lanny Budd novels; in Presidential Agent, however, it plays an even more predominant role. The interest in ghosts is one thing Lanny has in common with Hitler, Hess, Sir Basil Zaharoff, and some others of this prominent friends. A Polish medium -- a clairvoyant old lady with whose help Lanny hopes to obtain information about his missing wife's whereabouts, and whom he finally introduces to Hitler, at Berchtesgaden -- is one of the more central characters in the complex, multifigured plot.

Clearly, Upton Sinclair rather sympathizes with his hero's penchant for the occult. He writes:

a "Lanny had read enough to know that it was truly a mysterious universe, and the clues to its secrets had been found in odd and unexpected places.... And what about our mind, most familiar of our possessions, yet the least investigated? Lanny was coming to the conclusion that his mind was one with all the other minds existing -- and this, not because his mystical stepfather had dreamed it, but because of facts which he was observing and for which he could find no other explanation. He saw himself as a bright and lovely bubble, floating on the surface of vast dark ocean; he was keenly aware of his own existence and somewhat less keenly aware of other bubbles, dancing in the sunshine all around him; but of the infinite ocean from which he had come and to which he was destined to return, he knew next to nothing, and was considered an oddity because he kept trying to find out."

No doubt, there is a new vogue of ^{literary} mysticism noticeable in the United States -- which may be not surprising, or almost inevitable, in a time of moral and intellectual crisis ^(such as ours.) Liberal critics are alarmed by what they call the "symptoms of a dangerous disease in many of the most distinguished -- or popular -- writers of the present era. The disease is infectious, and it seems to be a grave matter for the welfare of the whole intellectual community. The illness I should call religiosity, and I use that term to distinguish it from religion (which is arguably not a malady at all)."

The article from which I quote appeared in the influential Saturday Review of Literature and was dealing with a recent volume of essays by Franz Werfel, Between Heaven and Earth. Werfel's mysticism -- which proved most appealing to the American public when ~~expressed~~ presented in a narrative form, as in his highly successful novel, The Song of Bernadette, -- gets on the nerves of liberal American critics when expressed in a philosophic-didactic manner. The reviewer of the Saturday Review complaining most bitterly about Werfel's "dismissal of the hope of progress, of the human use of sciences," his "contempt for the secular world," his "insistence that there is no meaning in life, or order discoverable in existence, save in mystical or in supranatural terms." These symptoms of the religious-mystical disease -- the critic, Irwin Edman, continues -- are nearly always the same, and may be observed in such different writers and different forms as Aldous Huxley and even in ^{so} ~~type~~ clear a mind as Somerset Maugham's.

The mystically "infected" book by Maugham to which Mr. Edman refers, is a new novel, The Razor's Edge, which I am not in a position to appraise as no copy of this much-discussed bestseller has found its way to my rustic abode as yet. I am looking forward to reading it, however; for I happen to like Maugham -- a superb craftsman of considerable imagination and sensitivity whom many of us "highbrows" are inclined to underrate, just as we are inclined to underrate Colette... As for Aldous Huxley, however, I wouldn't miss any of his books, ~~even~~ ~~the~~ -- tent or not, "mystical infection" or not. To me, he is one of the very few living authors whose ideas and experiments are always interesting and stimulating -- no matter how controversial and capricious they may sometimes appear.

Huxley's new novel, Time Must Have a Stop, is certainly controversial and capricious enough, but it's also one of the most brilliantly written books I've had the pleasure ^{of} ~~in~~ reading for a long time. The very contradictions inherent in Huxley's present style and philosophy seem to add a certain piquant, paradoxical charm to his extremely clever, highly sophisticated prose.

Time Must Have a Stop seems to be actually written by two different authors: ^{by} one who is skeptical, malicious, cool, ~~and~~ observant, witty, and extraordinarily intelligent -- and by a mystic earnestly striving for ultimate truth. From a purely literary point of view, the "skeptical," more frivolous parts of the book are by far the more successful ones; they contain indeed some of the freshest, most amusing things Huxley has produced since Point Counter-Point.

This time, the background of the story (after a few introductory chapters which take place in London) is Florence -- a pre-War Florence, the prosperous, leisurly Florence of the twenties, where wealthy Englishmen lived in picturesque villas and indulged in costly hobbies, such as the collecting of artistic masterpieces and the hiring of mediums for spiritistic experiments. The two leading characters are Eustace Barnack, the sophisticated sybarite and skeptic, and his nephew, Sebastian, who spends his vacations in his uncle's villa and there comes in contact with ~~all sorts of~~ all sorts of intriguing and instructive people and problems. It's a kind of double Entwicklungsroman -- presenting, first, the story of Sebastian's development from a callow and muddle-headed, if highly talented and sensitive, youth to a mature character and ethical-religious thinker; and, second, the moral and psychological crisis through which Uncle Eustace, the voluptuary, passes after his death -- in another world to which we are allowed to accompany

his disembodied soul.

But, curiously, the experiences and vagaries of the living Eustace Barnack turn out to be much more interesting than his posthumous adventures -- just as Sebastian is more attractive and original in his capacity as a brilliant, romantic youngster than he is in his later state of mellow wisdom and spiritual transfiguration. It is true that there are some unforgettable, truly inspired pages describing Eustace's first sensation of death; but the following story of his metaphysical conflicts and tribulations somehow fails to become moving and convincing.

^{As for} ~~the~~ Sebastian's mature philosophy, ^{it} ~~which~~ is presented, rather abruptly and surprisingly, in the form of an epilogue. His spiritual awakening and maturing takes place behind the reader's back, so to speak -- between the end of the actual story, in 1929, and the beginning of the epilogue, in 1944. In the meantime ~~Sebat~~ Sebastian has written a successful play, lost one arm in the war, and turned religious -- mostly under the influence of his friend and ^(intellectual) ~~spiritual~~ mentor, Bruno Rontini, a Florentine book dealer, mystic and anti-Fascist. ^(that) (It has to be stated Rontini, as a literary creation, falls definitely short of the more maliciously depicted characters in the book -- Eustace Barnack, his grotesque, wealthy old mother-in-law, attractive, ambitious, bitchy Mrs. Thwale, and so forth.)

Of course, the enlightened, purified Sebastian of the epilogue has, and expresses, some fine, truly profound ideas -- how could it be otherwise, since it is his privilege to share the thoughts of one of the most intelligent writers of our epoch? --; yet there remains something unsatisfactory, indeed, disturbing about his new moral credo. While trying to find the ultimate Truth behind and beyond the transient phenomena of this world, Aldous Huxley, and with him Sebastian Barnack, arrive at

contempting or belittling the realities and requirements of the temporal sphere altogether. In Sebastian's case, this contempt is particularly accentuated by his antagonism to his father -- a scientist, free-thinker, and liberal politician of the good old Nineteenth-Century tradition.

In the concluding scene of the novel, we see father and son confronting one another -- Barnack Sr., frustrated, weary, embittered, haunted by the unmanageable problems of political life; Barnack Jr., serene and confident -- a trifle complacent, perhaps --, musing on the sublime enigmas of the cosmic order. As the old man listens to the news, and naturally worries, Sebastian reminds him of the fact that human beings should not identify themselves "with money-making, say, or drink, or politics, or literature. None of which has anything to do with the cosmic order. So naturally they find that nothing makes sense."

"And what's to be done about it?"

Sebastian smiled and, standing up, ran a fingernail across the grille of the loud speaker.

"One can either go on listening to the news -- and of course the news is always bad, even when it sounds good. Or ~~a~~ alternatively one can make up one's mind to listen to something else."

One cannot help wondering whether this is really the alternative. Is the interest in the cosmic order indeed incompatible with the natural concern in the social and political conditions of man's life here on earth? Do the two spheres of thought and of endeavour actually exclude each other? I for one, refuse to believe it. Even after having read Huxley's thought-provoking novel, and after having given all due consideration to Sebastian's advice, I shall continue to listen to the news -- which should not prevent me from hearing also that other mysterious message described by Barnack-Huxley, with a typical British understatement, ^{simply} as "something else."

There can be no doubt that an important part of the American literary vanguard, after the vogue of "social consciousness" and political radicalism characteristic of the thirties, is now rather inclined to go to the other extreme and to question or to deny all vital connections between the problems of creative writing, on the one hand, and those of a political and social nature, on the other. Especially in the field of serious poetry this metaphysical, anti-political tendency definitely prevails. Of course, there are young American poets -- like, for instance, the highly gifted Muriel Rukeyser -- who try to integrate the great issues of contemporary life and the images of pure poetry. But the more fashionable, more predominant direction seems to be away from topical, "journalistic" themes -- towards more abstract, more philosophically detached forms of poetic expression.

The two most prominent and most brilliant representatives of this school are an American poet living in England and an English poet living in America -- T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden.

Auden's influence in American ^{literary} ~~intellectual~~ life increased considerably since he has settled down in the United States. Whatever ~~he~~ he has to say, not only as a poet but also as a critic, is being listened to attentively and taken very seriously by the intellectual élite. Much in contrast to his former iconoclastic attitude, his judgments and advices are now mostly on the conservative side. The problems ^{with} which his mind seems preoccupied are of a primarily moral, indeed, almost theological religious nature. In every article he writes, and be it the most casual book review, at least one of the ~~basic~~ fundamental ethic issues is earnestly and astutely discussed.

This didactic, moralizing element is very strong in Auden's poetry, too; in fact, some of his recent verse bear a slightly disquieting resem-

blance to rhymed sermons. His new volume, For the Time Being, -- consisting of two long poems; a Christmas oratorio and a lyric "commentary" on Shakespeare's "The Tempest" -- is in parts somewhat dry and abstruse, notwithstanding the author's extraordinary formal virtuosity and the impressive range of his intellectual vision.

In the case of T. S. Eliot, -- to me, the greatest poet writing in English today -- the marriage of abstract and poetic elements, of the didactic and the emotional, seems to be more organic. His recent book of verse, Four quartets, is one of the treasured items in my little field library.

It is a slim volume, containing four long poems, with each of the poems consisting of five "movements." The four pieces, varying with truly musical conscientiousness and ingenuity one central theme, form together a spiritual and ^{artistic} ~~logical~~ entity. As for the basic theme, it is indeed difficult to define. Of course, Eliot's message is essentially mystical, yet his Catholic faith hardly becomes apparent. His ambition seems, to express something which in itself transcends expressibility -- "Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt -- Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure." He strives for the precise articulation of a mystical experience in which the fleeting moment assumes the character of Eternity, the transient sensation has the validity of absolute Truth. At times he evokes simple images -- running water, waves, rocks, the rose, the fire, the voice of the hidden waterfall, the laughter of children in the apple-tree --; at other times he operates with highly technical terms and erudite allusions. But what he tries to do is always the same; namely, to catch and to describe the indescribable sensation and revelation which is the essence of all poetry (and perhaps of all

religious feeling); the timeless moment --

Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always --
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)

... Four quartets is not the kind of work that could be properly analyzed and evaluated in the context of a literary causerie; it has to be read, nay, heard -- heard repeatedly like certain sublimely intricate pieces of chamber music (the late Beethoven quartets, for example).

An Italian poet of great skill and sensitivity will be needed to translate Eliot's lyric-philosophic composition into the language of Dante and Leopardi (both of whom the author of Four quartets ardently admires). But the effort will be worthwhile.

The lines I am writing here will have had a significant and gratifying function if they stimulate the editors of Aretusa to introduce Four quartets in an adequate translation to the Italian friends of poetry.

The predilection for moral and metaphysical themes which we have noticed in some of the most talented representatives of modern English and American poetry, has a parallel in the sphere of serious artistic fiction. Not that many young American writers would expressly subscribe to the anti-political philosophy put forward by Aldous Huxley and other out-and-out mystics; but there is a curious kind of aloofness as regards current events and political questions among many of the more ambitious and more exclusive younger novelists. Characteristically, no major American novel about this war -- not even a short story of any particular interest -- has been produced as yet. The only work of fiction dealing with the war that has had any wider resonance in the United States, is John Hersey's A Bell for Adano -- successful also in a dramatic version,

now being produced on Broadway --, the story of an idealistic American AMG officer stationed in a little Sicilian town for which he tries to obtain a church bell. It's pleasant reading -- unassuming and engagingly humane --, and it has ~~some~~ value and significance as a document dealing with certain aspects of the American administration in southern Italy during the early stages of the Italian campaign. But from a literary point of view the book is without any major interest.

Most of the serious and ambitious creative writers seem to keep away from the war.

By far the most exciting work of fiction by a young American writer I have read for the past year or so, is Boston Adventure -- the first novel of a remarkably gifted young woman, Jean Stafford. It has absolutely nothing to do with the war.

Couched in the first person singular (although obviously not altogether autobiographical), the story is very much in the Marcel Proust vein -- a delicate, searchingly precise evocation of sombre childhood memories and the subsequent emotional entanglements. Miss Stafford's heroine is a sensitive and intelligent, somewhat colorless, girl, Sonia Marburg, the daughter of a romantic, frustrated German shoemaker living in the United States and a beautiful, rather terrifying Russian woman. Sonia's mother -- a character of uncanny, truly Dostojevskian intensity -- first tortures her husband (who leaves her after a few unforgettably nightmarish scenes), then murders (indirectly) her little son whom she loathes, and finally becomes insane. The drama of this weird and yet attractive neurotic is the most extraordinary part of the book -- a truly amazing tour de force, especially if one considers that its author is a literary beginner.

The story leads from the Marburgs' miserable home in a village near Boston to a middle-class summer resort hotel where little Sonia substitutes for her mother as chambermaid, and where she meets Miss Pride, a patrician lady of ancient New England lineage. Sonia adores Miss Pride, just as Proust's autobiographical hero adores the Duchess of Guermantes. Sonia, the child of a vagabond and a mad woman, dreams that life could hold nothing better for her than the imagined splendor of

Miss Fride's house on Beacon Hill, the fashionable district of Boston.

The second part of the novel describes the realization of Sonia's dream -- portraying with minute and malicious accuracy the curious antics and intrigues, the follies and prejudices of America's proudest, most conservative social elite, the social elite of Boston.

The book is rich in psychological insights and poetic images. It is unusually well written and contains quite a few bits of very amusing, if somewhat superficial, social criticism. But there is no reference whatever to current events or to the great political problems of our time. I don't state this in a derogatory sense -- just as an interesting, characteristic fact. Boston Adventure, as far as the conflicts and conditions it describes are concerned, might have been written in 1920 or even in 1910.

The American bards of the present struggle are not the novelists but the U.S. war correspondents, some of whom are doing a superb job. But the correspondents just describe, soberly and exactly, the day-by-day scenes of the great tragedy; it is not their function, and in most cases not their ambition, to analyze the deeper origins and implications of the crisis we are passing through.

There are, however, American historians and philosophers who strive earnestly and with talent for a clarification of the vast and complex issues confronting modern civilization. ~~There are~~ Many names that would deserve to be mentioned in this context -- the former Vice President and present Secretary of Commerce of the United States, Henry A. Wallace, is one of them. But I will just speak of one book, if only because it happens to be the one that reached me in my tent, and also because I consider it one of the more important contributions to the great discussion -- Common Cause, the new work by G. A. Borgese.

The author of Goliath: The March of Fascism -- now a professor of Romance Languages at Chicago University -- gives this time a thorough and passionate account

of the background of the global war, its real causes and its possible consequences.

There are only three choices -- Borgese tells us -- confronting the indivisible entity which is our modern world: World Empire; World Anarchy; World Republic.

In the first case, the ~~world~~ universe would be ruled by one tyrannic world government -- the kind of planetary dictatorship which the Germans tried to establish. (Borgese evokes this sinister Teutonic dream in a compelling chapter called "Sermons from the Depths.")

The second danger we have to face, and to overcome, is universal anarchy resulting in another war and in the complete, irreparable disintegration of our civilization. This may be our future, in spite of Allied victory, if the victors do not succeed in planning and establishing the right kind of peace. Borgese is bitter and remarkably outspoken in analyzing the confusions and indecisions in our camp -- the camp of democracy. In some instances he seems to go too far: at times his arguments and opinions appear exaggerated and therefore distorted. I believe, by example, that he underrates the vitality and future importance of the British Commonwealth. (The opening chapter of his book is entitled, "Why the British Empire failed.") Also, I cannot help feeling that he overrates both the wickedness and the actual power of the Roman Catholic Church. (His very thorough and extremely interesting analysis of the papal policy is presented in a long chapter called "Demofascism.") But even where one disagrees with this passionate and provocative spirit, one will be ~~amused~~ stimulated by its vigorous originality, moved by its candid fervor.

This pure, high-minded fervor manifests itself most beautifully and most impressively when Borgese deals with the third alternative -- which is of course the only constructive, only lasting solution --: namely, the establishment of true, universal democracy. He speaks in the best Italian and at the same time in the best American tradition -- as an heir of both Mazzini and Woodrow Wilson. At once inspired and realistic, his appeal -- far from being vague and only

emotional -- has the twofold persuasion of cogent logic and idealistic enthusiasm.

To me, Borgese's book with good, comforting company, during those lonely winter evenings, somewhere in the Apennine mountains. It's one of the more recent American publications which, in my opinion, would deserve to be translated into Italian. In this particular case it would not be difficult to find an adequate translator: The author himself would undoubtedly do the best job...

Italy, March/April, 1945