

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Deutsche Schriftsteller im Exil. Ein Interview zwischen Edwin Seaven u. KM.

Mann, Klaus

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EDWIN SEAVER
"Readers & Writers"
WQXR
Tuesday, December 19, 1939

It might be said that from the cultural point of view, Europe's loss has been our gain. Since the advent of Hitlerism, scores, no, hundreds of distinguished European scholars, writers, composers, and other artists, have come to work and to live among us. ~~Inevitably this tendency must enrich our American culture.~~

At the same time, it would be foolish to let our good will and our optimism blind us to the struggles that so many creative individuals of foreign birth are enduring these days. So few among these transplanted ones are destined to succeed in striking new and healthy roots in our different soil. The tragic death of Ernst Toller was but one extreme example of what is going on among them. The creative spirits of Germany and Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland and Spain are in dispersion, and what is even worse, some of the lands in which they have found temporary haven now approach, in the forces of restriction and suppression, those from which they came.

We cannot, in the few moments at our disposal ~~this evening~~, consider the problem of exiled writers as a whole. Tonight, ~~therefore~~, I should like simply to discuss a few aspects of exile as they concern the German writers who have left their homeland. I have, therefore, asked Mr. Klaus Mann ^{1/2} if ~~he will~~ join me in the studio tonight for the purpose of such a discussion. Mr. Mann, as you probably know, is the son of the distinguished writer, Thomas Mann, and is himself the author of a number of books.

Incidentally, I should mention that the magazine "Direction," which Mrs. Margaret Harris publishes in Darien, Connecticut, has devoted its enlarged issue for December to the writings of German authors now in the United States, and I recommend this issue to those of you who want a closer acquaintance with

their writings.

MR. SEAVER: Now, Mr. Mann, how would you say the exiled German writers are faring in the country of their adoption?

MR. MANN: The position of those in France - ~~and there are ten thousands of them~~ - grows more and more unpleasant, almost intolerable. Most of them are imprisoned. In England, their situation still is comparatively good. Yet there is, among the German and Austrian refugees, a general, ever-increasing tendency towards the U.S.A. At the same time, it grows more and more difficult to obtain the necessary visas. Many of those who would like to come here, are obliged to wait for years in some European country, until finally it will be their turn. However, we may safely state that the U.S., at this moment, is the centre of all the exiles from Central Europe. As I know more about writers than I know about doctors or business men, I may add that many of my German colleagues - and several of the best ones among them - are living now in this country. Whenever I attend a meeting of the German American Writers Association, in New York City, I feel as if suddenly I am once more in Berlin or Munich, back in the old faraway days. There are so many familiar faces.

MR. SEAVER: In the book dealing with the characters and careers of various refugees, which you wrote with your sister, Erika, you gave an optimistic name to this exodus. You called it Escape To

MR. SEAYER:
(cont'd.)

Life. At least I assume this title is rather more optimistic than the entire picture warrants.

MR. MANN:

Well, it actually is a new life we escaped to, although a very complicated and involved sort of life. Every refugee ~~may~~ find it hard to adapt himself to customs and to a language unfamiliar to him. But for the creative mind, and especially for the authors, the language and all the details of daily life are more important than for the average man. The author who left his own country, lost much more than his home or his publisher or the public he used to write for, as he lost the very soil he was rooted in.

MR. SEAYER:

I should assume that it is even more difficult for a middle-aged or an elderly writer to adapt himself to foreign milieu than it is for young people.

MR. MANN:

Yes, but on the other hand, young writers, who were more or less unknown when they left their homeland, may find it very hard, if not impossible, to make a reputation for themselves, abroad. There are cases of young authors who actually have become famous in exile, such as the highly gifted Italian novelist, Ignazio Silone, who published his first successful book, Fontamara, in Zurich, or the German writer, Konrad Heiden, whose book on Hitler was an international best seller. But these are quite exceptional cases.

MR. SEAYER:

Are there
~~Who would you say are the~~ German authors who have succeeded in writing their work in English?

MR. MANN:

I know comparatively very few German authors who really succeeded in writing English. The distinguished playwright, Ferdinand Bruckner, was the translator, or the co-translator, of his own drama on Elizabeth, Queen of England, which was produced in New York. Besides, there are some scientists who prepare their lectures or essays in English; as for them, the style as such does not have the vital significance it possesses for us novelists or playwrights. I myself lived for three years in this country before I dared to write my first piece of English prose. During the last four or five months, however, I *have* almost entirely stopped writing in German ~~at all~~. I can assure you it is a thrilling experience to re-start a literary career by using a new instrument of expression.

MR. SEAYER:

Are most of the books by exiled German authors translated for American publication?

MR. MANN:

Most of those among us who enjoy a certain international reputation, have at least some books that were published in this country. There are very few of us, however, whose literary production is translated in its entirety. There are perhaps only five or six German-writing authors, whose

MR. MANN:
(cont'd.)

complete work is really popular in America. We may assume that such authors as Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel, Lion Feuchtwanger, Erich Maria Remarque, Emil Ludwig and Thomas Mann are almost as well known in this country as they used to be in their homeland. In other cases just one special book by an author has been fairly successful in America, while his other works remain actually unknown. Ernst Toller, for instance, was famous here for some of his early plays, but some of his later dramas never were produced in New York. Heinrich Mann made a strong impression with his historical novel on the French King Henry IV; yet the very novels that made him famous in Europe, apparently did not attract very much the American public. One of his most brilliant and most significant epics, The Subject, was published here, soon after the war, but did not sell much more than a few hundred copies. As a rule it is easier for a foreign author in this country to find a publisher and a public for a non-fiction book than it is to raise interest for a novel. Even younger writers, who are not really known yet to the American public, have been fairly successful with biographical or political books.

MR. SEAVER:

Would you name a few of these?

MR. MANN:

Just recently an author by the name of Heinrich Eduard Jacob received most flattering reviews on a very well-written and instructive biography of the Viennese composer Johann Strauss. The German political leader and essayist, Hermann Rauschning,

MR. MANN:
(cont'd.)

has become famous here, almost literally "over night," through his brilliant analysis of National Socialism, The Revolution of Nihilism. Sometimes - although rarely - it even happens that the American version of a book is successful, without the original German version ever having been published. The impressive study on Leonardo Da Vinci, by Antonina Vallentin, for example, was originally written in German, but published only in English and French.

MR. SEAVER:

I understand some of the exiled German writers are working in Hollywood now. Who are they and what have they written for the motion pictures?

MR. MANN:

Yes, there are several German writers active in Hollywood, beside the various German directors and actors who have made an American movie career. As to the writers, we must carefully distinguish between the genuine professional screen writers, and those literary authors who only occasionally work for the film, either because they are eager to earn certain portions of the fabulous Hollywood gold, or else because of their interest in the movies, or for both of these reasons combined. The playwrights Ferdinand Bruckner and Ernst Toller, both of whom I have mentioned before, worked for the Hollywood studios for a while. Toller made a script on the dancer Lola Montez, historical lady friend of a Bavarian king, but the picture never was produced. Another

MR. MANN:
(cont'd.)

distinguished German novelist and playwright, who still is active in Hollywood at this moment, is Bruno Frank, author of the fine novels Cervantes and Lost Heritage. An original story he wrote for "Universal" - a romantic plot with the background of the French Revolution - ~~is~~ ^{will soon} just ~~going~~ into production. Among the professional screen writers, some of the more successful ones are Hans Rameau, who is under contract with MGM and just finished his adaption of Phyllis Bottome's exciting anti-Nazi novel, The Mortal Storm; Billy Wilder, who is the co-author of several Lubitsch productions, such as Bluebeard's Eighth Wife and Ninotchka; ^{Felix} Jackson, who is responsible for the charming comedy Hundred Men and a Girl and for Miss Marlene Dietrich's less charming new wild west thriller; and finally, Wolfgang Reinhardt, son of the great director Max Reinhardt, who is the co-author, with the young American John Huston, of Dieterle's Juarez and Maximilian picture.

MR. SEAVER:

What would you say is the consensus of opinion among the German exiles about ever seeing their own land and being able to work there again?

MR. MANN:

There really isn't any "consensus of opinion" among the exiled German writers about the problem of returning to their homeland. To begin with, it all depends on what Germany will look like, after Hitler's fall. All of us are convinced that the Hitler government is doomed and will not

MR. MANN:
(cont'd.)

survive the present war. However, there are many different opinions among intellectual exiles as to what probably will and what should follow the Nazi dictatorship. I presume the majority of my colleagues are not very much inclined to rush back to Germany if and when another dictatorship, either reactionary or communist, would succeed the present tyranny. Most of us are keenly hoping for a new German Democracy to come, and would be joyfully prepared to collaborate if such a state ever will be established. On the other hand, those of us who live in this country for a certain while, begin to feel very much at home here. My family, for instance, and myself are not willing at all to give up our cordial contacts with America and its public, whatever may happen in Europe. All of us - my father, my sister Erika and myself - certainly would consider this country as our home, even if a perfect democracy would flourish in the Reich. This does not mean, however, that we are not interested in the political and social future of our former homeland. As a matter of fact, we are very keenly concerned with its future state - not only because of our German blood, language and education, but, above all, because we realize that the German problem involves the problem of Europe and of our entire civilization. There won't be any lasting peace in Europe as long as the German people does not find its way back to Western civilization - and there won't be peace in the world as long as peace will not be soundly and solidly organized and established on the European continent. Not merely as a German or as an European

MR. MANN:
(cont'd.)

or as a new American, but as a Citizen of the World I hope
and pray for the final awakening of that Better Germany which
I know and love, and which the liberal German authors in
America try to represent.

Answer 1.)

This 'emigration' has taken on the character of a migration of peoples. It would be erroneous to assume that in the year 1933 a certain group of people left Germany and found a permanent haven in other countries. It is more true to fact to say that since 1933 this movement, this tendency of 'Away from Nazi-barbarism!' has increased. The number of those who no longer can or want to remain in the Reich has become steadily larger. Consider also that the sphere of influence of the Hitler dictatorship reached ever greater proportions. Day before yesterday new emigrants came from Austria, yesterday they came from Czechoslovakia, to-day the victims of Nazi aggression reach here from the Polish cities. Whom may we expect tomorrow? Possibly before long we may hear from the refugees from Amsterdam, Helsingfors or Stockholm... Moreover, the position of those who were settled in France - and there are tenths of thousands of them - grows more and more unpleasant, almost intolerable. Most of them are imprisoned. In England their situation still is comparatively good. Yet there is, among the German and Austrian refugees, a general, ever increasing tendency towards the U.S.A. At the same time, it grows more and more difficult to obtain the necessary visas. Many of those who would like to come here, are obliged to wait for years in some European country, until finally it will be their turn..... However, we may safely state that the U.S., at this moment, is the centre of all the exiles from Central Europe. Especially as I know more about writers than I know about doctors or businessmen I may add that many of my German colleagues - and several of the best ones among them - are living now in this country. Whenever I attend a meeting of the German American Writers Association, in New York City, I feel as if I suddenly would be, ^{once more,} ~~back~~ in Berlin or Munich, ^{back} in the old faraway days. There are so many familiar faces...

1)

Answer 2.)

In a book dealing with the characters and careers of varied refugees which my sister Erika have written, we gave an optimistic name to this mass exodus. We called it Escape to Life. For it actually is a new life we escaped to, although a very complicated and involved sort of life. Every refugee may find it hard to adapt himself to customs and to a language unfamiliar to him. But for the creative mind, and especially for the authors, the language and all the details of daily life are more important than for the average man. The author who left his own country, lost much more than his home or his publisher or the public he used to write for, as he lost the very soil he was rooted in.

...One may assume that it is still more difficult for a middle-aged or an elderly man to adapt himself to a foreign sphere of culture than it is for young people. On the other hand, young writers, who were more or less unknown when they left their homeland, may find it very hard, if not impossible, to make a reputation for themselves, abroad.

There are cases of young authors who actually have become famous in exile, such as the highly gifted Italian novelist Ignazio Silone,

Or the German writer Konrad HEIDEN, whose book on Hitler was an international bestseller, but this is a quite exceptional case.

I know comparatively very few German authors who really succeed in writing English. The distinguished playwright Ferdinand Bruckner was the translator, or the co-translator, of his own drama on Elisabeth, Queen of England, which was produced in New York. Besides, there are some scientist who prepare their lectures or essays in English, as for them the language style as such does not have the vital significance it possesses for us, novelists or playwrights. I myself lived for three years in this country, before I dared to write my first piece of English prose. During the last four or five months, however, I almost ^{entirely} stopped writing in German at all. I can confirm you, it is a thrilling kind of an experience to re-start a literary career by using a new instrument of expression. 2)

Additional Question:

"Are most of the books by exiled German authors translated for American publication?"

Answer:

Most of ~~us~~^{those} among us who enjoy a certain international reputation, have at least some books that were published in this country. There are very few of us, however, ~~whose~~ however, whose literary production is translated in its entirety. There are perhaps only five or six German-writing authors, whose complete work is really popular in America. We may assume that authors such as Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel, Lion Feuchtwanger, Erich Maria Remarque, Emil Ludwig and Thomas Mann are almost as well known in this country as they used to be in their homeland. In other cases just one special book by an author has been fairly successful in America, while his other works remain actually unknown. Ernst Toller, for instance, was famous here for some of his early plays, but some of his later dramas never were produced in New York. Heinrich Mann made a ~~very~~^{strong} impression with his historical novel on the French king Henri IV; yet the very novels that made him famous in Europe, apparently did not attract very much the American public. One of his most brilliant and most significant epics, "The Subject", was published here, soon after the war, but did not sell much more than a few hundred copies.....As a rule it is easier for a foreign author in this country to find a publisher and a public for a non-fiction book than it is to raise interest for a novel. Even younger writers, who are not really known yet to the American public, have been fairly successful with biographical or political books. Just recently an author by the name of Heinrich Eduard Jacob received most flattering reviews on a very well-written and instructive biography of the Viennese composer Johann Strauss. The German political leader and essayist Hermann Rauschning has become famous here, almost literally

'over night', through his brilliant analysis of National Socialism, The Revolution of Nihilism. Sometimes - although rarely - it even happens that the American version of a book is successful, without the original German version ever having been published. The impressive study on Lionardo da Vinci by ~~Ma~~ Antonina Valentin, par exemple, was originally written in German, but published only in English and French...

Answer 3.)

Yes, there are several German writers active in Hollywood, beside the varied German directors and actors who have made an American movie career, ~~such as the directors Dieterle, Lubitsch, Fritz Lang and Paster-~~
~~naek.~~ As to the writers, we must carefully distinguish between the genuine professional screen writers, and those literary authors who only occasionally work for the film, either because they are eager to ~~earn some cash~~ ^{certain portions of the fabulous Hollywood gold}, or else ~~but~~ because of their interest in the movies, or for both of these reasons combined. The playwrights Ferdinand Bruckner and Ernest Toller, both of whom I have mentioned before, worked for the Hollywood studios, for a certain while. Toller ^{made} ~~produced~~ a script on the dancer Lola Montez, ^{historical} lady friend of a Bavarian king; ~~a century ago~~, but ^{the picture} ~~it~~ was never produced... Another ^{distinguished} German novelist and playwright, who still is active in Hollywood at this moment, is Bruno Frank, author of the fine novels "Cervantes" and "Lost Heritage". An original story ^{he} wrote for Universal - a romantic plot with the background of the French Revolution - is just going into production. - Among the professional screen writers some of the more successful ones are Hans Rameau, who is under contract with MGM and just finished his adaption of Phyllis Bottom's exciting anti-Nazi novel The Mortal Storm; Billy Wilder, who is the co-author of several Lubitsch productions, such as ~~the~~ Blue Beard's Eighth Wife and Ninotschka; Jackson,

who is responsible for the charming comedy "Hundred Men and a Girl" and for Miss Marlene Dietrich's less charming new wild west thriller; and, finally, Wolfgang Reinhardt, son of the great director Max Reinhardt, who is the co-author, with the young American John Huston, of ^{his} Dieterle's "Juarez and Maximilian" picture.

Questin 4 (covered by Answer 2.)

Answer 5.)

There is not any "consensus of opinion" among the exiled German writers about the problem of returning to their homeland. To begin with, it all depends on what will Germany will look like, after Hitler's fall... All of us are convinced that the Hitler government is doomed and will not survive the present war. However, there are many different opinions among intellectual exiles as to what probably will and what should follow the Nazi dictatorship. I presume the majority of my colleagues is not very much inclined to rush back to Germany / if and when another ^{at} dictorship, either reactionary or communist, would succeed the present tyranny. -- ~~while~~ Most of us are keenly hpping for a new German Democracy to come, and would be joyfully prepared to collaborate if such a state ever will be established. On the other hand, those of us who live in this country for a certain while, begin to feel very much at home here. My family, for instance, and myself are not willing at all to give up our cordial contacts with America and its public, whatever may happen in Europe. All of us - my father, my sister Erika and myself - certainly would consider this country as our home, even if a perfect democracy would flourish in the Reich. This does not presume, however, that we ^{were} ~~are~~ not interested in the political and social future of our former homeland. As a matter of fact, we are very keenly concerned with its future state - not only because of our

5)

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