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The Position of Foreign Writers.

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The Position of Foreign Writers

~~The masses are not interested in serious literature.~~

These ^{is a} are tough time for writers. Serious literature was not exactly the focus of public interest - neither here nor elsewhere - even before Pearl Harbor or before the German invasion of Poland. But, ^{no doubt} ~~undeniably~~, the prospects ^{of} of this particular trade have alarmingly deteriorated since. People are preoccupied ^{with} with their own urgent worries and the vast, dramatic implications of a world-wide struggle. For the purpose of relaxation and divertissement the average citizen evidently prefers a movie or a cheap magazine to any grave and pretentious stuff. All publishers confirm that the situation of the book market ^{is in a deplorable state} is indeed disastrous. The bulk of new publications - no matter if fiction or non-fiction: imported or domestic - just doesn't sell at all. Even the few spectacular successes of the past few months have been paid for with such exorbitant sums spent for publicity that the actual returns are still depressing enough. (The exceptions, like Werfel's *The Song of Bernadette* and Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*, ^{which} are almost too scarce rare to be mentioned in a general survey.)

There are optimists who predict that things are going to pick up as far as books are concerned. According to this reassuring theory, literary life ^{is usually} is always paralyzed during the ~~initial~~ first few months of a war, but ~~as a rule~~ recovers from this initial shock as the war continues. That is what happened during the first World War, and what took place in Britain, ~~about 1940.~~ ^{The Times}

I don't mean to be unduly pessimistic; but it seems to me that analogies of this kind - especially those ^{designed} supposed to prove something pleasant - never are quite convincing. The fact that the Germans became book-minded in 1917, or the English in 1940, ^{does hardly not equate} does not irrefutably prove that the Americans ^{have to} will follow their example, in ^{the fall of 1942.} the fall of 1942.

It is only fair, or even necessary, to stress this general calamity by

which all writers in this country are equally affected, before indulging in ~~any~~ ^{neglecting} wails or prophecies as to ~~the~~ ^{the} particular position of foreign literati ~~now~~ in the United States. It would be distasteful and fatuous make any fuss about ~~their~~ ^{the} difficulties, when ~~American men~~ ^{emphatically} without admitting right in the beginning, that American men of letters have their own worries ~~to~~ and problems to cope with. The precarious plight of ~~all~~ ^{most} literary reviews in this country is but a symptom of the situation at large. Comparatively well-established "high-brow" periodicals like the Keynon or the Partisan Reviews ~~admit~~ - to mention just two at random - frankly admit that they are struggling against ^(the same sort of) difficulties, which recently compelled the meritorious Southern Review to suspend publication. I am only too familiar with the trying conditions ^(which are not) those ~~side~~ editors ^{have} to meet. My own attempt to run a monthly of high cultural standards was baffled for want of a few thousand dollars., after fourteen months of frantic efforts ~~and~~. DECISION appeared from January, 1914, until February, 1942. It was not meant to be a "mouthpiece" for European refugees, as I pointed out in my introductory editorial; it was designed "to become instrumental in intensifying the relations between the Am. & Eur. spirit - in proving and improving a solidarity between progressive minds that transcends all national boundaries."

Among the literary sponsors of my magazine were such ~~representative~~ Americans as Stephen Vincent Benét, Robert Sherwood, Sherwood Anderson, Horace Gregory, Frank Kingdon, ^{Vincent Shuster} and Freda Kirchwey. ^{Sewall} Most of these writers contributed to the opening number of the magazine. Yet Decision was ^{labeled} ~~labeled~~ - not to say, ~~snubbed~~ ^{denounced} - as a "refugee review," ~~as it~~. Why? Because its editor is not American-born and, moreover, because it carried more material by non-American writers than most magazines do. I do not assert that ^{this arbitrary lack of D. is due,} ~~this arbitrary classification~~ ^{has} exclusively or mainly caused the collapse of responsible for Decision's melancholy ^{to} this arbitrary classification.

There can be no doubt, however, that this particular label, "refugee review," was a ~~hindrance and~~ handicap, rather than an asset, to the career of the magazine.

~~I do not suggest~~ That is not to say that the American reading public is in general prejudiced against refugee writers. ~~If it were, the sweet-~~
~~In exceptional cases~~ It still occurs - if only exceptionally - that a work by a refugee author ~~attains~~ is a sweeping success. A ~~fact like~~ Just now a novel by an Austrian fugitive - Franz Werfel's The Song of Bernadette - leads the bestseller lists, together with The Moon is Down by John Steinbeck. One instance of this kind, ^{seems to} ~~prove~~ that ~~there is no boycott~~
~~against the products of foreign-born,~~ ^{the} foreign-born writer - no matter if of German or Chinese extraction - has as much of a chance ~~as a native~~ to hit the mark ~~and to~~ as has any native author. The big prizes in the lottery are necessarily scarce.

Literature and War

Reaction to first World War: pacifism - moral and artistic stimulus. Beginning during the war ("Le Feu"), rich aftermath - Remarque, Aldington, Dos Passos, etc.

This time, basic difference.... Literature on "totalitarian" side, negligible; (not the pre-Nazi literature, like Ernst Jünger, or the pre-Fascist lit., like D'Annunzio-Marineti, but the actual war literature....).... Everybody who "counts", silenced or in exile.

Japanese lit., doesn't have much of a message. Nor seems the Russian lit. in a very inspired state...

China, South America, India - fields in themselves...

.... May concentrate on France and the English-speaking world - including the exiles...

No literary boom in business sense - certainly not here; a little more in England.

Spanish Civil War was more of a stimulus to the writers, particularly to the French. But also, "For Whom the Bell Tolls" - compared with "The Moon is Down".

Both necessity and pivotal significance of this war in general accepted. Yet it fails to inspire.

Various reactions:

1.) The Irresponsibles. (Cocteau)

2.) Integrity and Detachment (Gide; Sherwood Anderson; Stefan Zweig; Auden- Rilke. *4 T.S. Eliot*)

3.) Activists; the "official" type: Giraudoux, Romain; Priestley, Noel Coward; Sherwood; McLeish;

look like a fragment of a complete
essay, narrow down
the content.

263/42

