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Amerikanische Literatur (Radio, Berlin)

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Amerikanische Literatur (Radio, Berlin)

Während der letzten Jahre vor dem zweiten Weltkrieg gab es in Amerika eine Fülle neuer literarischen Tendenzen und neuer lit. Namen. Die prominenten geistigen Vertreter dieser Epoche -- eine Epoche, die politisch unter dem Zeichen F. D. Roosevelt's und seine "New Deal" stand -- zeichneten sich vor allem durch ihre Interesse an SOZIALEN Themen und Problemen aus: ja, man könnte sie geradezu als die "SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS"-Schule bezeichnen. *Durch diese bewussten Konzepte man Konzepte, die sich in der Literatur widerspiegeln und die sich in der Literatur widerspiegeln.*

Gegensatz zu vorhergehender Generation --: Thomas Wolfe, Faulkner, Hemingway, O'Neill, Scott-Fitzgerald; *anarchistisch-individualistisch.*

Hemingway bleibt wichtig -- hat grössten Erfolg mit FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS; aber ein Neuer -- JOHN STEINBECK -- wird mehr und mehr sein Rivale. Setzte sich langsam durch, aber wird nationale Figur und internationaler Repräsentant durch OF MICE AND MEN und THE GRAPES OF WRATH.

Neben Steinbeck vor allem:

James T. Farrell; (Irish)

Richard Wright (Neger-Problem; immer noch akut: "Native Son", "Black Boy.")

Daneben -- neo-romantische Richtung:

William Saroyan -- : Stücke, frühe Novellen -- bezaubernde Frische; jetzt manieriert...

Exotisch: Pearl Buck... ("entdeckt" China...: "Die Gute Erde");

Psychologisch: Katherine Anne Porter (Einfluss auf junge Autoren.)

Entwicklungen werden unterbrochen durch ZWEITEN KRIEG -- der, im Gegensatz zum ersten, geistig nicht anregend...

Reporter wichtiger als Erzähler... : *der eigentliche (Broschüre)*

Beispiel: Ernie Pyle...: Popularität beim einfachen Soldaten...

Romanciers werden Reporter:

*Donnerstag haben oft die Reiz der Dichter:
Romanen werden zu Romanen geschrieben:*

Hemingway in Frankreich; Steinbeck in Italien, neuerdings in Russland...

Charakteristisch: Hershey, begabter junger Autor, versucht sich als Reporter und Romancier. Sein Roman, "A Bell for Adorno" -- schwächer als Reportage, "Hiroshima" (Wirkung der Atombombe in Japan).

Aventgarde scheint ohne Richtung, ohne Programm...

Realistischer Roman geht weiter: Beispiele:

Alfred Hayes, "All Your Conquests" (befreites Italien: Beziehungen zwischen Zivilbevölkerung und GIs);

Calder Willingham, "Ende as a Man" (Militärschule im Süden: grausamer Realismus);

John Burns, "The Gallery" (Neapel...)

Typischer -- jedenfalls neuer --:

V e r i n n e r l i c h u n g : weg von aktuellen Themen, weg von der Reportage?; subtile Psychologie, Neigung zur Mystik... *E. H. S. Kafka i. S. d. S.*

Neue Namen, mit denen ich Sie nicht langweilen will; möchte aber doch nennen:

"Carson McCullers" ("The Heart is a Lonely Hunter"; charakteristischer Titel...)

Jean Stafford ("Boston Adventure"; Proust und Dostojewsky...)

Mystischer Stimmung noch deutlicher in der Sphäre der L y r i k :
die stärksten Einflüsse:

T. S. Eliot (Amerikaner in England);

W. H. Auden (Engländer in Amerika) --:

beide religiös... *Donnerstag*

(die große Bewegung)

Sogar auf dem Theater --: Tendenz WEG VOM AKUELLEN macht sich bemerkbar... Vor einigen Jahren: Clifford Odets, Lilian Helmann führend... (Zeitstücke: eher ^{gut} plump...); jetzt: Renaissance von O'NEILL... ("The Icemen Cometh": erstes Stück nach langem Schweigen)....: neuer Dramatiker, in O'Neill's Nachfolge stehend -- wenngleich lyrischer, weniger schwer --: Tennsy Williams --: "Glass Managery", "A Street Car named Desire"....

Fülle der Talente... Manche werden vielleicht versagen: es geschieht ja häufig in am. Literatur, dass Autoren ihre Bestes in der Jugend geben, um dann zu verflachen...: der korrumpierende Einfluss von HOLLYWOOD...

Aber amerikanische Lit. als Ganzes gesund, von enormer Vitalität: ja, ich glaube, dass es heute nirgendwo sonst eine solche Fülle der Talente gibt.

Die Zukunft der am. Lit.? Wer wagte es heute, irgendetwas über die Zukunft vorauszusagen...

Dies aber steht fest:

Wenn unsere Zivilisation die gegenwärtige Krise überlebt -- wie wir es alle hoffen! -- so wird A. einen entscheidenden Einfluss auf das zukünftige Schicksal der Menschen ^{Welt} ausüben. Dieser Einfluss wird nicht nur politischer und wirtschaftlicher Natur sein, sondern auch intellektueller. Das am. Schrifttum, das heute schon aus dem Bild der Weltliteratur nicht mehr wegzudenken ist, wird mehr und mehr zu einem entscheidenden Faktor im geistigen Leben der Nationen werden.

AMERICAN LITERATURE
(lecture)

Apology
Warning: it's not to be an elaborate lecture --
just an informal speech, American style.

Americans don't like "to be read-at..." (even these few notes I'm using would be objectionable); but they love to be talked-to, in a casual, improvised fashion.

Americans --, most "lecture-conscious" people in the world. Old saying: If there were two signs -- one of them reading: TO HEAVEN; the other: TO LECTURE ON HEAVEN -- any good American would follow the second sign...

Everybody lectures in the U.S.: you can hear lectures on spiritualism and on how to breed chickens; on Japanese gardening and on cocktail recipes; ~~on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and~~ on the art of ice-skating and the Atomic Bomb... Lecturing as an important source of income for writers who don't find it always quite easy to make a decent living.

In fact, I have ^{been} ~~doing~~ quite a bit of lecturing myself. Made lecture tours "from coast to coast", addressing womenclubs in the Middle West, the "Elchs" in California, the Rotarians in Connecticut, etc. -- Funny life. Quite an experience.

universities
Clearly, the average American is more interested in listening and looking than he is in reading. Hence the popularity of lectures and radio (listening); of movies and funny papers. (Funny papers as one of the major mysteries of American life --: one of the things no European will ever quite understand or appreciate... Everybody seems to be crazy about them -- including the most "highbrow" people. "Superman", "Blondie" and so forth --: to me, quite enigmatic...)

"Targem"

"Comics"

Importance of women
in cultural life

Young and
old
the same in
the food
the highbrow
mind but
lowbrow

Compared to European nations, Americans are not literary-minded.

Are proud of their movie stars and their generals, of their inventors and their big-business men, their engineers and their athletes... Not quite proud enough of their writers...

Of course, it's a y o u n g literature. Started only in the early 19th Century -- still under European influence...

Yet, 19th Century produced some figures of impressive stature in America. Notably:

WALT WHITMAN... (The greatest... THE Voice of America... Mighty bard of Democracy... The beginning and at the same time the climax of American poetry...)

HERMAN MELVILLE... (Greatest novelist... "Moby Dick" -- immortal... Mysterious, romantic, viril, anticipates both Conrad and Kafka...)

E.A. POE... (the master of the weird, uncanny, macabre... Akin to European decadents: Baudelaire's predilection for him...)

Others...

[Mark Twain;
Frank Norris;
Henry James.]

late:

Mark London (1876 - 1916)

All those figures -- isolated...:
obvious in the tragic cases of POE, MELVILLE...
But even WHITMAN alone, for all his exuberant
sociability...

AM. LIT., as collective movement, begining shortly,
before, during, after First World War...

Leading critic of that period --

H.L. MENCKEN... (discovering, directing young
talents... The "American Mercury" and its func=
tion... When I came first to U.S., 1927, Mencken
still going strong... Now, cranky old man in Balti=
more... : reactionary... writing his memoirs...)

SINCLAIR LEWIS... (His "Babbit", "Main Street"
gave us an idea of American reality... First Am.
author I met in person...: Berlin; warned against
going to U.S.: "nothing to drink..."..... Now,
declining: "Kingsblood Royal" -- Negro problem...
: popular success but poor reviews...)

~~SINCLAIR~~ UPTON SINCLAIR... (The tireless crusa=
der... His first novels -- "T h e J u n g l e"
etc. -- revolutionary deeds: had the effect of
bomb shells... "Lanny Budd" series: of great
interest...)

THEODOR DREISER... (The third pioneer...:
"American Tragedy," "Sister Carrie," "The Titan":
remain classics... Sterile the last years before
his death...)

SHERWOOD ANDERSEN... (most likeable... more
subtle and lyric... Childhood, nature, sex...)

Others of that generation:

WILLA CATHER... ("Death Comes to the Archbishop")

HERGESHEIMER... (still alive, but finished...)

ERSKINE CALDWELL... ("Tobacco Road": climax:
nothing new to say...)

Postwar generation --: or "the lost generation" as they called themselves --: *Barbois* disillusioned, cynical, "debunking" idealistic slogans employed indiscriminately during the war... Most important among them:

expatriates
Ernest Hemingway
Hemingway (some of his early stories... "A Farewell to Arms"... "The Sun also rises" A new tone... :staccato dialogues... Powerful influence, not only in U.S.: not without danger... Too easy to imitate)

John Dos Passos (especially "Manhattan Transfer," a bold experiment...; "Three Soldiers" -- disgust with war, military life...)

William Faulkner (a great writer... truly nightmarish visions -- most uncanny and most compelling in "Sanctuary." Combines a certain American down-to-earth realism with the profundity of a Franz Kafka... Brutal gangster story seems to assume deeper significance...)

mystic
F. Scott Fitzgerald ("Tender is the Night", and other novels; short stories; typical of his period. Later swallowed by movies...) "*The Great Gatsby*" *has been made into a movie*

Dorothy Parker (similar case: her poems and short stories -- the early ones -- remain authentic documents of the so-called "Roaring Twenties." Hasn't done anything of major interest for years... Hollywood.)

Thomas Wolfe (purer, more inspired than all those just mentioned -- including even Faulkner... "Look Homeward, Angel" -- greatest American novel since "Moby Dick." It is true, the later novels -- "Of Time and the River", "The Web and the Rock", "You Can't Go Home Again" -- somewhat anticlimactic, repetitious. In his *case* -- not on account of Hollywood but brain tumor...)

Henry Miller
Thornton Wilder (doesn't seem to belong to that group. Certainly a fine writer -- especially "The Bridge of St. Louis Rey" --; but there is something artificial, slightly anemic about his *art* style...)
More liked in Europe than U.S.

Gertrude STEIN (her personal influence... *Don't* talked about *than* read; *it* "Picasso" -- marks a *character*.)

After disillusionment -- "social consciousness":
the thirties: time of New Deal, the
Civil War in Spain...

Most prominent representative of that ~~school~~
school:

John S t e i n b e c k (already known as
author of "Tortilla Flat" and "In Dubious
Battle"; now reached the peak of his career
with "The Grapes of Wrath".)

Love for Scandinavia; "The Moon is down..."
Others: M: Last Gold; Edith Wharton

James T. Farrell (realistic novelist...
of Irish stock...)

Richard Wright (Negro writer: "Native
Son" -- sensation, also as stage adaption;
"Black Boy" -- autobiography --: which I
regard as even more admirable...)

H e m i n g w a y influence continues:

"For Whom the Bell Tolls" -- most popular
book. Yet, from a purely artistic point of view,
a decline. Less personal, less moving than
his early things...

At the same time -- neo-romantic trends...:

Frederick P r o k o s c h -- ("The Asiatics",
"The Skies of Europe": remarkable sensitiv-
ity... rich, musical prose...)

More popular:

William S a r y o a n (his early short stories
-- quite delightful. "Human Comedy" --
Armenian pleasant enough, a little sentimental...)

Nothing of interest recently. Too busy being
"a character", an "enfant terrible" shocking
the public with crazy statements...

→ Katherine - Anne Pontw (subtle
psychology...)

→ Pearl Buck (Far East:
"The Good Earth")
— Nobel Prize —

new plan: the back of the 6.1.

Second World War -- failed to produce great literary movement, in America as elsewhere. ... Reporters (Ernie Pyle, and others) tell the story -- while novelists keep silent or choose to write on other subjects... Characteristically, Hemingway, Steinbeck content themselves with writing newspaper- and magazine articles -- not fiction... "Hiroshima"

New classic, John Hershey's famous piece on the effects of the Atomic Bomb in Japan -- much more fascinating than his somewhat sentimental "A Bell for Adorno."

Literary vanguard seems to be somewhat lacking in purpose and direction, at the present moment. Looking for something -- a new philosophy, a new style... hardboiled

General trend: away from crude realism... Speak of "Old Man Hemingway" -- "That national monument Hemingway" --: not to mention Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, etc. All this is "la barbe".

Yet, realism in general, and Hemingway in particular, still strong. Samples:

Calder Willingham (only 24; his first novel, "End as a Man" -- describes life in a military school in the American south, with remarkable bitterness and boldness... About the dirtiest language I've ever seen in print. Yet, candid and serious; an interesting young writer.)

Also,

~~Not for~~ Hayes ("All They Conquests" -- novel on occupation of Rome: giving rather a gloomy picture of relations between GIs and natives.)

water James than Howie...

More characteristic -- symbolistic, psychological trend... influence of K a f k a ; renewed interest in Henry J a m e s ... Sartre (Existentialism) / Samples:

Carson M c C u l l e r s ("The Heart is a Lonely Hunter"; "Reflexions in a Golden Eye"; "The Member of the Wedding.")

Jean S t a f f o r d ("Boston Adventure"; "The Mountain Lion": remarkable proofs of talent; school of Proust, Dostoevski. At times obscure, overly subtle; but evoking childhood moods with great power....)

Eudora Welty (fine short stories; follower of Katherine Anne Porter....)

Mysticism --: English writers working in U.S.:

Aldous H u x l e y

Gerald H e a r d

Chr. I s h e r w o o d...

Even Somerset M a u g h a m --: "The Razor's Edge"

Anden
This mystic trand -- even more obvious in poetry. The two strongest influences in American poetry, at the present moment: greatest since Rilke, Valéry

T. S. E l i o t (Am. poet, living in England)

W. H. A u d e n (Engl. poet living in America)

--;
both religious; both formalists; both truly inspired; great craftsmen...

American poetry -- not well known enough abroad. (Translation difficulties.) Rich; represents important aspect of American intellectual life.

Of course, WHITMAN has no successor. Those who imitate him do not always sound convincing --:

Archibald M a c L e i s h --;

Carl S a n d b u r g (also Lincoln biographer)

But others -- from Emily D i c k e n s o n to Marianne M o o r e and Muriel R a k e y s e r ;

X Robert F r o s t and Edna St. Vincent M i l l a y to Ezra P O U N D (later Fascist) and E.E.

C u m m i n g s (dadaist...) -- W. Carlos Williams
Many young talents now.

Karl Shapiro (war poems)

Robert Lowell (consciousness objects)

Robinson Ellis ("Medea" "Emotions")

Both
Partisan
Prig
"Librarian"
of Compt's

as the great literature
as have, in the field of fiction, "Come with
-18- the Wind" or "For now Amber"

This commercial aspect of American literature
even more obvious and more disturbing in the
case of the THEATRE.

Young talents...

BROADWAY, like Hollywood -- big business.

Every production costs \$ 100,000.

"Life with Father", "Oklahoma" have as little to do

NO LITERARY THEATRE -- notwithstanding such
attempts as Theatre Guild, Eva Le Gallienne,
and, more recently, Experimental Theatre.

European plays -- flop. (Cocteau, "L'Aigle à
têtes"; Anouilh, "Antigone.") ~~Weakness, Spindly~~

Americans have hardly any literary playwrights.
Naturally not: Where there is no lit. theatre,
there will be no literary dramatists -- just
like countries without opera don't have any
operatic composers...

Exceptions: Elmer Rice; Thornton Wilder
Maxwell Anderson (his recent Jeanne
D'Arc play, a success -- thanks to Ingrid
Bergman...)

Robert Sherwood ("Petrified Forest";
"Reunion in Vienna"; "There Shall be No
Night" -- etc) - Sarayan

and, of course, towering above all the others:

→ EUGENE O'NEILL ←
: not only by far the greatest American playwright
but one of the most ~~literary~~ powerful writers
altogether... maybe in the whole world...

After long silence -- last year:

"The Iceman Cometh."

Mixed reception... One critic: "The Iceman
Stinketh"... Unfair. ... True, a long-winded
affair -- extremely gloomy... His present
renaissance may be typical, symptomatic:

He was silent throughout the (optimistic)
period of the New Deal; makes his come-back
at a moment of depression and confusion...

His nihilistic philosophy fits well in keeping
with prevailing mood...

→ Tennessee Williams: "A Street
car named Desire"
"Glass Menagerie" Desire

Decline

-9

WASTE

Many young talents -- in every field ...
... many promises...

Will they develop? Will they live up to their own potentialities?

Many disappointments...

In many cases, American writers were at their best in their early books, while their later output is curiously lacking in vigor and originality...

twaggy

~~"Babbitt" and "Main Street" by S.L. are certainly more significant than his most recent novel, "Kingsblood Royal" (a best-seller on account of subject: Negro problem).~~

"The Wayward Bus"

Even

Steinbeck's recent works fall definitely short of "The Grapes of Wrath;"

Hemingway has long lost the ~~a~~ striking directness and freshness he commanded in "A Farewell to Arms" and his early short stories...

Faulkner, Dos Passos, even Saroyan --: it's always the same decline... petering out ...

A terrific waste of talent.

WHY? Why does American Literature has so many young talents but so few masters or "grand old men"? [Rayb. Sinclair Lewis]

Maybe it has to do with a certain lack of intellectual substance and ambition... Young American writers tell their story -- tell it beautifully, sincerely --; and then there is nothing left for them to say any more. (The case of Thomas Wolfe.)

Even more decisive: certain features and tendencies inherent in the very structure and tradition of American culture...

✓ Lack of tradition, continuity, no classical masters ...

✓ His slow progress ...
✓ Min Search to death of go to law

In no other country, writers are confronted ^{with} ~~by~~ the so many temptations, so many corrupting influences...

It's so easy for a writer in America to make a lot of money -- if he wants to lower himself to certain depths...

The most dangerous single factor: HOLLYWOOD. Writers hate and despise it; yet, being human, they are attracted by fabulous wealth... Most novelists write with an eye on Hollywood -- which is bad... Serious critics deplore influence -- : Edmund Wilson of the "New Yorker"; others.

Others factors:

RADIO...

POPULAR MAGAZINES... (literary reviews don't pay. Differences: "Reader's Digest" = \$ 1000; "The Nation" = \$ 25; "Partisan Review" = 0.)

→ DECISION "POETRY" (20,000) ...

BOOK OF THE MONTH Club: monopoly...

Books have either vast circulation or just sell 2-or 3000 copies: which is already considered pretty good... Advertising

Older books -- not to be had. Americans dis-
trust older books as they distrust old people... Only a few classics survive -- often in abridged versions... ("The Portable Viking" series, and so forth...)

Power of advertising;
inordinate costs of
ads -- which are indispensable...

High level, yet popular:
"The New Yorker"

It's not always easy for European intellectuals to adapt themselves to American climate...

Certain European intellectuals in U.S. develop a curious mixture of inferiority complex and arrogance... : they feel like the last representatives of an ancient, tired but precious civilization in the midst of a vast, powerful, but somewhat primitive country --: their position in America resembles that of the decadent, sophisticated G r e e k s (= Graeculi) in Rome...

Many European writers went to U.S. during the war and before; some stayed, became citizens. Not too many of them were successful.

Among the French:

Jules R o m a i n s André M a u r o i s ...

Among the German-writing authors:

W e r f e l ... F e u c h t w a n g e r ... Th.M.
(Others, like Hesse, Döblin -- completely ignored...)

LANGUAGE difficulty...

Most of them still writing in their own language. Depend on translations -- often inadequate.

To change one's language -- quite a risky and painful venture, as I know only too well...

My attempts to write in English... (Books, articles, Army helped: STARS & STRIPES -- good school...)

Now, problem of translating my English-written books into German...: a precarious and tedious job...

of course, knowledge of language is NOT SUFFICIENT
... You will not become an American writer, unless
you develop a certain sense for the particular
rhythm and color of American life -- that vast,
dynamic whirlpool with all its glaring vulgarity
and secret drama, its paradoxes and mysteries,
its follies, its excesses, its genius, its infinite
promises...

No doubt, in a country of such enormous spiritual
resources -- a country so pregnant with future,
literature has a ~~great~~ ^{vital} pedagogic function, a
great social responsibility...

European-born writers, now living in the U.S. as
American citizens, may contribute their bit to
the development of American letters -- by acting
as go-betweens and mediators between the mellow,
somewhat weary and problematical culture of the
OLD CONTINENT, on the one hand, and, on the other,
the young, striving civilization of the NEW WORLD...

IS THE CENTER OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE SHIFTING FROM
EUROPE TO AMERICA?

Who knows...

There's no saying what the future may have in
store for us...

But if one believes -- as I do -- that human
civilization has become an indivisible entity;
if one is convinced -- as I am -- that we are
living in ONE WORLD:
then one will visualize the prospects and prob-
lems of American life and American literature
as m e r e a s p e c t s of a universal situa-
tion.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN; though:

If our indivisible civilization is to survive its
present ordeal; -- as we all hope it will! --,
the UNITED STATES is destined to play a decisive
role in the future drama of mankind; and American
literature -- being an integral, vital part of
American life --

ONE THING IS CERTAIN beyond any question:

IF this indivisible civilization of ours is to survive the present crisis -- as we all hope it will! -- , the UNITED STATES is destined to play a decisive role in shaping the future of mankind; and American literature -- being an integral part of American life and a genuine expression of the American genius -- will prove one of the vital factors in the ~~great~~ process of educating and humanizing the human race.

- not only economically but
also in the literary i

THE END