

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Lecturing in Europe.

Mann, Klaus

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

LECTURING IN EUROPE

BY KLAUS MANN

"Is Mark Twain still alive? Has Sinclair Lewis published some of his works under the nom de plume of Upton Sinclair? Is it true that Dr. Kinsey has been paid five million dollars for the movie rights of his recent best-seller -- the one about the Human Male and his Behavior? Do all American authors employ ghost writers? Are there any starving poets in the United States? Why is there so much talk about liquor in Ernest Hemingway's stories? Is Dorothy Thompson still married to Theodore Dreiser? Do American readers understand the poems of Gertrude Stein? What are the major works of Elsa Maxwell? Why is she so famous?"

You'd better be prepared for such questions -- and even more disconcerting ones! -- if you want to lecture in Europe on the subject of ~~modern~~ American literature. It's a topic remarkably many people over there want to hear about, as I was to find out in the course of a long, strenuous tour through various European countries, on either side of the Iron Curtain. For almost a year, I kept on talking to audiences all over the Continent about literary life in the United States. I told them about the greatness of Walt Whitman and E. A. Poe (two favorites of the trans-Atlantic reading public) and about the genius of Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James (whose writings have remained practically unknown on the other side of the ocean). I tried to appraise and characterize the achievements of America's foremost novelists, playwrights, and poets in this century, from Sherwood Anderson and Willa Cather to James T. Farrell and Jean Stafford,

from Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost to the poetic vanguard of 1948, from the dark, massive tragedies of Eugene O'Neill to the airy, iridescent tragicomedies of Tennessee Williams. Whatever information I had to offer was eagerly received by crowds in Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Germany, and other parts of Europe. [They listened attentively; they wanted to get as many names and facts as possible. "Why didn't you mention Jack London? And you didn't say much about Erskine Caldwell, either! What about the recent work of Joseph Hergesheimer? Tell us more about the author of Gone with the Wind!" -- There were plenty of such complaints and inquiries at every question period following my address.]

Not that all my listeners were accomplished students of American letters! On the contrary, many Europeans, including members of the so-called "educated class," harbor the most peculiar ideas about the intellectual standards and conditions prevailing in this country. Nor can it be said that the European attitude towards America and American literature is always one of pure love and admiration. There was a sprinkling of more or less malicious hecklers in almost every group I had to face. Never shall I forget the stern-looking elderly lady in Zurich, Switzerland -- the perfect schoolmistress, with pince-nez and all -- who got up after my speech to embarrass me with the following query: "Do American adults actually enjoy those puerile comic strips which seem to be meant for children and illiterates only?" Her insidious primness struck me as even more intimidating than the open hostility of certain ill-tempered, sharp-tongued young men whose cracks had the familiar sound of an often-heard melody -- the shrill, persistent tune of the Party Line...

But no intellectually mature European, whether he likes the United States or not, can afford to ignore the main trends of American thought, these days. Everywhere from Lisbon to Helsingfors, from the Bosphorus to

made quite a few friends in that country. [It is true, many of them now are gone -- destroyed by the Nazi terror to which the Dutch people was subjected for five dark, dreadful years. But the more numerous and grievous the losses, the more moving and enjoyable the reunion with those who survived the calamity!]

With most of my old acquaintances belonging to the literary set of Amsterdam -- what would be the ^{usual} ~~general~~ subject of our luncheon chats and long, nocturnal ^{debates} ~~conversations~~? We would talk shop, of course -- discussing books, publishers, writers, the stylistic mannerisms, sexual habits and financial conditions of our colleagues in various parts of the world. But however juicy the highbrow gossip from Paris, London, Rome, and Budapest -- nothing seemed to fascinate my Dutch friends as much as what I had to tell them about the trans-Atlantic literary scene. Having pumped news and comments out of me in the course of many a long, alcoholic session, they decided, mercilessly, that I was to repeat all my stories for the benefit of a wider circle. A meeting was arranged under the auspices of a local writers' organization -- which marked the beginning of my career as a lecturer in Europe.

It was not a thorough, elaborate speech I had to offer -- just an informal, unassuming causerie à l'américaine, as I pointed out by way of apology in an opening passage. A lecturer, according to the Continental tradition, is a fellow grimly equipped with a bulky manuscript from which he reads with sadistic slowness and solemnness to his respectfully bored audience. "That kind of performance wouldn't do at all in the United States," I explained. "Over there, people don't like to be read at, but rather enjoy being talked to. So that's what I'm going to do -- just talk to you, without using any notes or sticking to a prepared outline. If I occasionally repeat myself or get a little mixed up -- never mind! Main thing you don't fall asleep."

They didn't. In fact, those earnest Dutch bluestockings and men of

the Channel, people ^{would like to learn as much as possible} ~~are looking for sound, reliable information~~ about our way of life, our philosophy, our tastes, habits and institutions. Official U.S. agencies abroad have utterly failed, so far, in satisfying this widespread and intense curiosity. Skeptical, propaganda-wise Europeans are inclined to distrust anything that reaches them through government-controlled channels. If our Washington-appointed cultural experts and public-relations men were more skillful and imaginative than they actually are, they would use America's outstanding writers as good-will ambassadors all over the world, especially in literature-conscious Europe. [The international prestige of men like Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Thornton Wilder, and Richard Wright, constitutes an asset of ~~our country~~ ^{which} our authorities seem to be curiously unaware.] While other governments -- the French, the British and, in its own way, the Russian -- do everything to boost, on a global scale, whatever new, provocative ideas and talents their respective nations may produce, our State Department abides by its august indifference. The vital job of keeping the world informed about America's intellectual and artistic contribution is left to unofficial volunteers.

When leaving for Europe, last summer, I did not expect to do any lecturing over there, but was looking forward, unambitiously, to some restful weeks in Switzerland, France, and Holland. My sojourn in Amsterdam was to last somewhat longer than I had originally planned. It's an attractive, likable place -- grey old Amsterdam with its picturesque canals, narrow streets and proud seventeenth-century mansions, its buxom girls, agile bicyclists and vociferous music boxes; and it's almost like home to me. As a fugitive from the then newly established, powerful and aggressive Third Reich, I spent some time in the democratic, hospitable Netherlands and ~~came in contact with~~

made quite a few friends in that country. [It is true, many of them now are gone -- destroyed by the Nazi terror to which the Dutch people was subjected for five dark, dreadful years. But the more numerous and grievous the losses, the more moving and enjoyable the reunion with those who survived the calamity!]

With most of my old acquaintances belonging to the literary set of Amsterdam -- what would be the ^{usual} ~~general~~ subject of our luncheon chats and long, nocturnal ^{debates} ~~conversations~~? We would talk shop, of course -- discussing books, publishers, writers, the stylistic mannerisms, sexual habits and financial conditions of our colleagues in various parts of the world. But however juicy the highbrow gossip from Paris, London, Rome, and Budapest -- nothing seemed to fascinate my Dutch friends as much as what I had to tell them about the trans-Atlantic literary scene. Having pumped news and comments out of me in the course of many a long, alcoholic session, they decided, mercilessly, that I was to repeat all my stories for the benefit of a wider circle. A meeting was arranged under the auspices of a local writers' organization -- which marked the beginning of my career as a lecturer in Europe.

It was not a thorough, elaborate speech I had to offer -- just an informal, unassuming causerie à l'américaine, as I pointed out by way of apology in an opening passage. A lecturer, according to the Continental tradition, is a fellow grimly equipped with a bulky manuscript from which he reads with sadistic slowness and solemnness to his respectfully bored audience. "That kind of performance wouldn't do at all in the United States," I explained. "Over there, people don't like to be read at, but rather enjoy being talked to. So that's what I'm going to do -- just talk to you, without using any notes or sticking to a prepared outline. If I occasionally repeat myself or get a little mixed up -- never mind! Main thing you don't fall asleep."

They didn't. In fact, those earnest Dutch bluestockings and men of

letters proved rather a responsive audience. "There's a lot to be said for your American technique of lecturing," they assured me afterwards. "It may be a little too -- casual, by European standards; but it's ~~ver~~ certainly more fun than the kind of thing we're used to."

Some of those who heard me in Amsterdam must have sent fairly appetizing reports to friends in other Dutch communities. Presently invitations began to pour in from all over the country. Groups of students, club women, educators, business men, people from all walks of life seemed eager for a bit of first-hand information about "New Faces and Tendencies in American Literature." Instead of vacationing in Amsterdam or on one of the beautiful North Sea beaches, I had to rush about -- carrying the good word from town to town, ~~to~~⁸ to the most out-of-the-way places. In the city of Eindhoven, famed for the radio sets and other high-class gadgets produced there on a mammoth scale by the Philips factories, I talked to engineers and skilled workers -- most of them determined, as I was told confidentially, to emigrate to the United States as soon as possible ("There'll be another war, you know, and we don't want to be trapped here ~~again~~ again..."); in The Hague, my audience included foreign diplomats accredited to the court of sturdy old Queen Wilhelmina (now replaced by her equally robust and efficient daughter, Juliana); in Rotterdam -- half-destroyed by German high explosives -- I made a fool of myself by accepting an invitation extended to me by the so-called "Friends of America" -- an attractive name, to be sure! The organization, however, presenting itself under that nice label consists almost exclusively of Dutch Nazi sympathizers and notorious quislings -- which I found out a few hours before my lecture was to begin: just in time to cancel the embarrassing engagement.

That experience -- seemingly inconsequential -- meant quite a blow to my morale. Being by nature rather confident, not to say credulous, I hate to distrust people. But you have to be wary, these days -- particularly

in Europe -- lest you become the stooge of elements you want no dealings with. Certain characters over there now posing as our friends -- and accepted as such by certain Americans! -- were only yesterday our most vicious foes and may be ready to turn against us tomorrow, if there is an opportunity...

After the incident with those phony "Friends," the European scene palled on me, ^{at} at least temporarily. I had a good mind, at that point, to discontinue my tour and return to the States without any further delay. But the messages I received from Denmark and Sweden were couched in terms of such warmth and urgency that I could not resist. Prodded by the "English Debating Club" in Copenhagen and similar groups in Stockholm, I decided not to go home as yet but to venture on a quick excursion up north.

My Dutch friends did not even try to conceal their envy when told about my forthcoming trip. ~~to Scandinavia~~ To them, travelling has become all but impossible, due to stringent currency regulations. Not that living conditions at home, in the Netherlands, are unbearably poor! But what with the costly "police action" in Indonesia -- a full-fledged colonial war the outbreak of which was announced the very day ^{I happened to} ~~of my arrival~~ ^{arrive} in Holland -- and what with the vast expenses of national reconstruction, the once prosperous Dutch can't afford any luxuries. No opulent meals in the grand old Flemish style any more! The diet in most Dutch homes is remarkably austere nowadays.

"But up there, in Copenhagen, you'll get everything!" my hungry-eyed ~~friends~~ friends sighed as they bade me farewell, at the Amsterdam railroad station. "Too bad we can't go with you," they said wistfully. "It would be like a trip to paradise."

How little the various peoples of Europe know about each other, in spite of radio, airplanes and other modern means of communication! While the newspapers are full of talk about European unity in general and, in

particular, the necessity of a firmly united western bloc, there seems to be, at this crucial moment, less contact among the nations than ever before in modern history. Characteristically, my poor Dutch friends were altogether mistaken when referring to Denmark as "paradise." It is true, milk, butter, eggs, bread and meat (although rationed) are comparatively plentiful in that small, agricultural country. As for certain other vital and pleasant things, however -- wine, chocolate, tobacco, matches, paper, gasoline, articles of clothing -- they are as scarce and as expensive in Denmark as anywhere else in Europe.

But if Copenhagen is no "paradise," it's certainly one of the Continent's most delightful cities -- truly "the Paris of the North," as Scandinavians are wont to call it. My visit there was as enjoyable as could be, thanks to the hospitality of the "English Debating Club" -- an organization which has done for years, and is still doing, a remarkable job in promoting Anglo-American culture throughout Scandinavia.

"Yes, we're pretty active," the Club's jovial Secretary General observed, not without justified pride. "And, I daresay, we might do even better, if only you Americans were a little more cooperative!" -- At this point, his round, gentle face assumed a somewhat hurt, reproachful



expression. "Now, take the English -- they're different. The British Council, here in Copenhagen, sees to it that we get as many speakers as we can possibly use -- and first-rate speakers, at that! But American lecturers seem about as scarce and precious as American dollars. That's why we're so pleased to have you with us tonight..."

The gala meeting arranged by the "Debating Club" turned out to be an unusually pleasant affair. No sooner had I entered the platform than I noticed, right in the center of the front row, two familiar faces: the Danish writer, Karin Michaelis, and the Danish actress, Asta Nielsen, one of Europe's most celebrated movie stars in the days of the silent film. Two superb artists, two friends of old standing -- what a thrill to find them here among my listeners!

After the lecture, there was an informal gathering with heaps of sandwiches and a lot of cheerful talk. Karin asked me questions about mutual acquaintances in New York from where she had only just returned, after a stay of several years in the United States. "It was exile, all right," she observed. "But it could have been worse. In fact, I rather enjoyed myself over there." -- "In any case, you were lucky to get out of Denmark before the Nazis could catch you," another member of the "Debating" circle said, in a more serious tone. "Why, they would have tortured you to death -- those devils..."

"Don't you get excited," Karin said reassuringly. The old liberal and untiring champion of progressive ideas had a pensive, somewhat ambiguous smile as she added, "It's all over now -- or isn't it?"

"Is it really?" The apprehensive question came from an earnest-looking, shy young man -- a former leader of the Danish Resistance movement, as I was later told. "I'm not so sure." He shrugged his shoulders; there was an expression of fear, indeed, of horror in his eyes. "There seems to be more trouble in the making..."

The specter of new bloodshed and destruction -- there it was, evoked by the young man's casual remark. For a few minutes, the general conversation turned around such ticklish and ominous subjects as the "Russian danger," the "American war psychosis," the problem of Palestine, and so forth. It was Asta Nielsen who saved the situation by inquiring, rather abruptly but with disarming briskness, about some recent Hollywood films. "To a poor country like Denmark, American pictures are quite out of reach," she said, without any bitterness, just as if to explain her ignorance. "Too expensive, you know."

"That's too bad," I said. "But, frankly, it isn't much you're missing. Most of the stuff they're producing, these days, seems rather on the dull side. To think how wonderful the movies used to be -- and what a bore they are now! Why, in years I haven't seen anything ~~that~~ to be compared with one of the silent classics, like Die freudlose Gasse (The Joyless Street)."

Those among the "Debaters" ^{who} who were old enough to remember that cinematographic masterpiece -- produced about 1925 -- ~~presented~~ presently started praising its merits. It was the only film ever to present Asta Nielsen and Greta Garbo together -- "the two greatest tragediennes of our time," as some one in the room stated pointedly. ~~I could not but agree.~~ "Yes, I said, ~~they are the two greatest ones -- our friend here, and her Swedish rival.~~" Whereupon a shrill female voice could be heard from a distant corner: "Of course, it's a well-known fact that Garbo is of partly Danish stock. How could she have any chic, if she were purely Swedish?"

The Danes, as I noticed on various occasions, rather tend to be catty about the Swedes who, on their part, seem to be full of respect and admiration for their south-western neighbours. "You're coming from Copenhagen?" people would ask me in Stockholm. "What a city! There's nothing quite like it, anywhere in the world."

What the Swedes like about the Danes, without envy or jealousy, is their suaveness, their sophistication and cosmopolitan savoir vivre. -- "Most of us northerners -- Finns, Swedes, Norwegians -- have a somewhat provincial touch," my Swedish friends admitted, with a humbleness and objectivity quite unusual in these days of nationalistic arrogance. "But not the Danes! They're men of the world -- all of them. A little flippant, at times; rather glib and malicious. But how clever they are! How amusing! And at the same time, how brave! They behaved quite admirably, you know, when their country was occupied by the Germans."

This somewhat overemphasized appreciativeness on the part of the Swedes may in some measure be due to a certain psychological factor manifest in all those European countries which managed to keep out of the war. Former neutrals, while enjoying the material advantages of their position, are apt to develop a slight inferiority complex. The wealthy Swiss seem to suffer from the same curious malaise that bothers the prosperous Swedes. In both countries, Sweden and Switzerland, people rather resent any tactless allusions to their past neutrality. The very word is taboo. After listening for some time to your friends in Stockholm and Zurich, you will get the impression that those two nations, far from being neutral, were indeed taking actively part in the war -- on the victorious side, almost needless to say.

[Were there, in either country, any pro-Axis, anti-Allied tendencies, at the time of Hitler's military triumphs? God forbid! Everybody, except a few wicked quislings, was wholeheartedly for us -- or that's what people will tell you. If our former allies -- not only in eastern Europe but also in western parts -- are sometimes rather outspoken in their criticism of American tactics, such ex-neutrals as Sweden and Switzerland stress today their unreserved loyalty to our cause.]

Stockholm, where German influence used to be predominant, appears ^{today} more thoroughly "Americanized" than any other European capital. ^{whatever} ~~anything imported~~ from the United States seems to appeal to the fastidious Swedish public -- not only American shoes, cigarettes, automobiles and other commodities, but also American books, magazines, films and plays. ^{in Stockholm} The most glamorous, most important social and cultural event to take place at the time of my visit was the première of O'Neill's drama, The Iceman Cometh, ~~at one of Stockholm's leading theaters~~. The production, modeled conscientiously after the pattern of the original New York mise-en-scène, proved very effective indeed, although Mr. O'Neill's strangely suggestive slang cannot be translated into another language without losing some of its ~~unique charm and~~ flavour.

Questions concerning The Iceman were remarkably frequent at the "open forum" following my speech. ~~on American literature~~. It was the extreme gloominess of the play, the inexorable pessimism, not to say nihilism, of Mr. O'Neill's philosophy, what struck the Swedes as puzzling and intriguing. To most foreigners, the typical American is a fellow whose supreme credo and categorical imperative can be summed up in two words -- Keep Smiling! My audience seemed rather taken aback when I tried to explain that O'Neill's somber vision was, in its own way, as specifically "American" as the sturdy optimism and common sense usually accepted as our foremost national characteristics. There is indeed (as I pointed out to my unbelieving Swedes) a distinct vein of bitterness and despair running through the whole of creative writing in America, from Melville and Poe to Faulkner and O'Neill -- a morbid penchant for dark moods and subjects, to be understood, perhaps, as a logical, inevitable reaction against the somewhat vulgar cheerfulness of that popular and powerful American type known under the name of Babbit...

If the low- and middle-brow Swedes were obviously shocked by the discovery that life has its tragic aspects even in the world's richest

country, the highbrows seemed rather pleased with O'Neill's uncompromising hopelessness. The lady, for instance, whom I took to the Iceman opening, was positively delighted. "It's superb!" she cried enthusiastically, as soon as the lights went on, after the end of the oversized first act. "I enjoyed every minute of it. There's something so familiar about all those wretched characters. Why, they could be taken from one of my father's plays -- the whole doleful lot of them!"

I told my friend that her father, the great Swedish writer August Strindberg, was admittedly one of O'Neill's masters and heroes. "That's nice," Kerstin Strindberg smiled, and added, not without suspicion: "I take it, then, that father's work enjoys a certain popularity in your country?" -- Popularity? I felt a little embarrassed. "Well, of course, he's very highly thought-of by all men of letters," I said warily. "But as for the reading masses, I'm afraid they don't know much about him." -- "Is that so?" She sounded rather hurt. "Seems kind of funny -- doesn't it? Here in Sweden, American books -- both translations and originals -- have a wider circulation than our homemade stuff; and you people over there, in the States, don't even bother about August Strindberg -- one of our more important authors, after all..."

What European writers do have any following to speak of in the United States? This question was put to me innumerable times, in public as well as in private conversation. The more impoverished and powerless the Europeans become, the more they pride themselves on their cultural glories. Nothing can be more offensive to them than the indifference the non-European world often shows towards those spiritual values.

In Switzerland -- my next stop after Sweden -- I found this Continental touchiness particularly marked. Wherever I went -- and my lecture tour took me not only to big cities like Geneva, Zurich, Bern and Bale, but also to small towns in various parts of the country -- people were remarkably conversant with our literature and only too ready to stress

their pro-American feelings; at the same time, however, they seemed rather inclined to doubt the intellectual maturity of the American reading public. -- "Is it true that our two outstanding authors -- the French-writing C. F. Ramuz and the German-writing Hermann Hesse -- are practically unknown in the United States? How do you explain such lack of appreciation?" Thus they kept badgering me. A spectacled female (not the same who made the unpleasant remark about "those puerile comic strips," but rather a similar type) inquired whether Emil Ludwig and Erich Maria Remarque were indeed the two only Europeans enjoying literary fame "over there" --: "which would be really too bad," as she added. "For neither deserves to be taken seriously from our more exacting point of view."

I was glad to assure her that some other representatives of European letters -- worthier, or at any rate more exclusive, than those two best-seller-producing gentlemen -- were greatly en vogue, right now, with the American intellectual elite, if not with the wider public. "Take your own great philosopher and psychologist, F. C. Jung," I said -- slyly picking a native of Switzerland to ^{begin with.} ~~open my enumeration.~~ "His influence in the States has been steadily increasing during the past few years. Or, to mention another illustrious citizen of your country -- Rainer Maria Rilke!" (It is true, Rilke was not born in Switzerland, but he resided there for some time.) "Why, our young American poets are just crazy about him!" I asserted heatedly, and went on throwing celebrated European names at them -- Franz Werfel, André Gide, Sigmund Freud, Ignazio Silone, Jean-Paul Sartre: all of them enormously admired by American critics and connoisseurs, as I insisted, much to the satisfaction of my audience.

And Kafka! Eager as I was to save the honor of the American intelligentsia, I found truly rhapsodic words in describing the ~~almost~~ ^(unique position occupied, at the present moment, by that strange visionary)

current Kafkamania of our literary vanguard. "It's a veritable cult," I insisted, ~~not without pride~~. "You can hardly open any highbrow review in the United States, these days, without finding at least one profound essay⁹ on that curious visionary and prose-poet, ~~Ernest Kafka of Prague~~. And not only articles are being devoted to him in great number, but whole books -- bulky volumes, mind you, dwelling on all the different aspects, all the most subtle and most abstruse implications of his work."

That went over in a big way, as I had expected. Clearly, the Swiss enjoyed hearing about the present Kafka craze in this country. Nobody can be more essentially, more profoundly European than the author of such terrifying and enchanting parables as The Trial and The Castle. By admiring the genius of that tragic Bohemian Jew, Americans pay homage to the very genius of Europe. Hence the hearty approval, the flattered nods and smiles with which European-minded audiences in Zurich, Bern, Geneva and other picturesque old towns acknowledged my remarks about Kafka's American fame.

If the best Continental minds recognize Kafka's message as valid and representative, there is one European capital where I found critics inclined to dispute his greatness. In his own birthplace, Prague, the general Kafka fashion is rather frowned upon.

My trip to Czechoslovakia had been discussed back in November, several months before the Communist coup was to take place in that country. I still was in Holland, at the time; and it was there, in Amsterdam, that I met a young Czech writer¹ some of whose books I had read in English and French translations. A goodlooking chap of cosmopolitan culture, he had served in England as a pilot during the war and was married to an English woman. We had a most pleasant chat. I always enjoy meeting Czechs; in fact, for several years I was a Czech citizen myself, thanks to the generosity of President Edward Benes. As long as I lived in Europe -- that is, up to 1938 -- I made a point of visiting Prague ~~at~~^{at} regular intervals.

My last trip there was short and took place under dramatic circumstances, in May 1945, a few days after the Liberation. Now I told my new friend that I should like to see the beautiful city again. "That's easy to arrange," he smiled. "I'll get you an invitation." -- And, sure enough, some weeks later I received a cordial letter from the Anti-Fascist Society in Prague, asking me to make a speech on contemporary American letters.

When the political crisis in Czechoslovakia reached its climax, last February, the Swiss newspapers -- usually not given to sensationalism -- got as excited as the rest of the western press. Irritated by the panicky headlines, I sent a wire to Prague inquiring whether the Anti-Fascists still wanted me to come and talk about U.S. writers. Their prompt answer confirmed the original invitation in even more urgent terms. ⁷ Although my Swiss friends warned me against such a foolhardy venture, I decided to go, after all.

Prague, described by imaginative correspondents as the scene of hair-raising atrocities, appeared outwardly calm and normal. The day of my arrival, March 7, the capital was celebrating the 97th birthday of the late President-Liberator, Thomas G. Masaryk. While I could not discover any of the Russian troops I had read about in the papers, there were throngs of cheerful people crowding the festively decorated streets and squares.

Three days later, however, the aspect and atmosphere of the city were to change with terrifying abruptness: The news of Jan Masaryk's suicide had the stunning effect of a thunderbolt. For "the great son of a great father" had been more than just the pet of a social clique or the hero of a political party; he had enjoyed true popularity, had been loved by the people. His sudden death would have meant a national calamity, even if it had occurred under less tragic, less perplexing circumstances. The suicide story, as told and interpreted by ^{government} ~~various~~ agencies, could not

but cause a flood of fantastic rumors. Had the Minister of Foreign Affairs -- "our Honza," as the people were wont to call him -- actually flung himself from a window of his palatial residence? Sober, realistic observers saw no reason to doubt the voluntariness of Jan Masaryk's death; but the bewildered masses suspected some sinister secret behind the official version of the tragedy.

My lecture in Prague was scheduled to take place on Saturday, March 10 -- the day of Masaryk's funeral. All theaters and other entertainments were closed as a demonstration of public mourning, but the Anti-Fascist Society assembled nevertheless. The atmosphere in the lecture hall -- almost needless to say -- was rather tense and gloomy, all the more so as the audience included some of the late statesman's closest personal friends. There was, for instance, Czechoslovakia's most popular comedian, Werich, partner of the famous "Voskovich and Werich" team. During the period of war and occupation the two brilliant actors lived in the United States, from where their grimly satirical anti-Nazi messages were broadcast across the Atlantic. Shortly after the Liberation the two partners returned to Prague, where they are now running one of the city's major theaters. Their latest hit, a Czech adaptation of the American musical comedy Finian's Rainbow, had just opened a day or two before my arrival -- enthusiastically received by the public, but rather harshly treated by some of the more orthodox Marxist critics.

Finian's Rainbow, incidentally, was by no means the only American play to be presented in Prague, at the time of my visit. There were several other shows of U.S. origin, and the bookstores -- more numerous and more handsome in Czechoslovakia than anywhere else in Europe -- displayed a copious choice of translations from our language. It is true, American newspapers and magazines already began to disappear from the newsstands; but as for literature in the more exclusive sense of the term, it had been

exempted, so far, from the anti-American boycott. The fact that a representative group of Czech intellectuals wanted to hear my speech is in itself indicative of that still existent, still tolerated curiosity -- a curiosity beyond, and independent from, all political disagreements.

Of course, the discussion following my address was not free of ominous undertones. Some stouthearted Marxists made a point of heckling me with a vengeance. Were American authors -- they asked -- really free to write as they pleased? Was our much-vaunted freedom of the press not a mere illusion, a hypocritical trick? (On that occasion, one of the hecklers quoted the expression "freedom of misinformation" coined by Dr. Adolf Hoffmeister, Czech delegate to the recent UNESCO congress at Mexico City.) And what did I have to say about that objectionable vogue of mysticism dominating the American literary scene at the present moment? [Didn't many American writers try to dodge or minimize the most pressing social issues?] Wasn't there, among our creative minds, a dangerous tendency to indulge in escapism, to withdraw to the sterile and immoral seclusion of the Ivory Tower?

It was in this half-literary, half-political context that the Kafka problem came up. His inordinate success in the United States was interpreted by one of the speakers as an unwhol^esome symptom, an alarming sign of the prevalent escapist trend. "Kafka was a pathological case," the angry young man insisted. "A manic-depressive suffering from a virulent persecution complex. Only muddle-headed dillettantes and aesthetic snobs^{utterly} devoid of sound judgment and social consciousness can idolize such a neurotic."

As I was walking back to my hotel, some hours later, the silent bleakness of the scenery made me think of Franz Kafka again. Yes, it was here, in the midst of all this melancholy grandeur and stifling narrowness, that he conceived his sublime and terrible vision. The atmosphere of

Prague, the unmistakable climate of that ancient and tragic city, is omnipresent, almost tangibly, throughout the complex structure of his entire work.

I left Prague after a two-week stay rich in experiences and impressions. Many of those I came in contact with were worried, frightened, almost desperate, while others seemed full of hope and enthusiasm. Some people told me how much they enjoyed living in a "people's democracy;" but more often I had to listen to the whispered confessions of those who hated the new regime and were anxious to get out of the country -- to some faraway place, no matter where, but if possible in the United States of America...

For me too it was high time to get out of Europe at last. My original intention had been to be home by September; now it was April, and I was in Vienna! Another audience interested in news about Steinbeck, Wilder, O'Neill, Hemingway -- why should I not oblige them with my time-honored causerie? I could have delivered it asleep by now... But if my own lecture was gradually getting stale on me, there were enough new and exciting things, wherever I went, to keep my mind alert and occupied.

Besides I had to prepare a new speech -- not on Americans, for a change, but on a great European: André Gide. The German version of a book I wrote about Gide's work and character had just been published in Switzerland -- which may have come to the attention of the literary-minded French Military Government at Baden-Baden. The head of the Centre de l'Education Française approached me with the request to talk about the celebrated French author and Nobel Prize winner to various groups of Germans throughout the French-occupied Zone.

In Vienna, I had found living conditions surprisingly improved since 1946, the time of my last visit there. In Germany, everything looked unchanged to me -- just as shabby and nasty as two years before. It still

was all there -- the same mess and the same misery, the same ruins and the same people doggedly repeating the same old story in the same old tone: "... never been a Nazi... never knew there were concentration camps ... What about a nice little Care-Paket?" -- But what I had to offer them, instead of American cigarettes and precious coffee, was only words -- abstract, innutritious talk about a foreign writer. Would they care to listen?

Curiously enough, they did. I made my speech in Baden-Baden (practically untouched by the war), Freiburg, Mainz, Tuebingen and other centers of the French-controlled area. As most of my lectures took place under the auspices of universities and similar institutions, I had ample opportunity to come in touch with German academic youth, for the first time since 1933. Much to my surprise, I found the teen-agers easier to get along with than any other age-group in postwar Germany. The older people who helped Hitler to power and faithfully supported his regime have a bad conscience, which makes them resentful and apologetic. The young, on the other hand, harbour no such feelings of guilt. They have been taught certain doctrines -- racial, social and political -- which turned out to be unworkable and fallacious. The more intelligent, more open-minded ones among them would like to learn something new -- uncompromised ideas, valid principles, a fresh, constructive Weltanschauung to help them find their way out of the moral and intellectual vacuum.

The French are more keenly aware of this situation than any of the other occupying powers. A remarkable effort is being made, in the French Zone, to stimulate cultural life in general and, in particular, education. "Our main handicap is the scarcity of qualified, trustworthy teachers," I was told by a high official in charge of the Educational Branch -- an unusually attractive and capable woman by the name of Madame Giron. "Don't you want to stay here for some time? There would be plenty to do

for you. This is one place where lecturers are really wanted!"

But I had to reject her friendly proposition. There was that lecture engagement in Paris I had light-mindedly accepted, to say nothing of the one in Brussels -- yes, and there was Berlin. Berlin was a "must"-affair; for that particular invitation had been extended to me by U.S. authorities -- an honor I appreciated all the more as it came unexpected. Of course, I knew, or could guess, to whom I owed this flattering surprise. A friend of mine, now connected with Information Control Division, had probably had the idea of summoning me to Berlin. Yet there remained something astounding, indeed, almost incredible about military orders stating in dry words that "Mr. K. M. (American National, Consultant) Temporary Employee, OMGUS, is invited to proceed from Amsterdam, The Netherlands, o/a 3 May 48 to Berlin, Germany, and thence to Frankfurt, Germany, for a period of approximately ten (10) days to give lectures on literature and consult with writers. Upon compl. ret. to proper sta."

What a strange and at the same time fitting finale for my European tour! The mangled cadaver of a capital, the most cruelly beaten city, the scene of unspeakable misery and vast political intrigues, the decisive battlefield of the Cold War, the place where East and West were facing each other in ominous proximity -- this, then, was to be the last station of my Continental pilgrimage. Instead of flying from Amsterdam, The Netherlands, to New York, U.S.A., as I had expected to, I took a train to Frankfurt, Germany, whence I proceeded, obedient to OMGUS orders, by military aircraft to Berlin. Carrying out my instructions with soldierly conscientiousness, I gave lectures on literature (one, on American letters, at the official U.S. cultural center, the so-called Amerika-Haus; another, on André Gide, at a special Sunday-morning matiné in one of Berlin's leading theaters) and, dutifully, I consulted with writers. There were the usual

questions to answer ("Is Mark Twain still alive? What are the major works of Elsa Maxwell?"), the usual social functions to attend. But even while engaged in such routine activities, I often felt as though dreaming. Was it the nightmarish panorama of the ruined metropolis what caused that curious sensation? An uncanny sight, no doubt -- suggestive enough to evoke all kinds of forebodings and memories: forebodings of a time when all the now powerful and prosperous cities of the world will look like this shockingly guilty, shockingly maltreated capital; memories of the days when Berlin still was its old self, still intact and alive, still breathing, throbbing, struggling, playing, glittering -- not a bad place on the whole, a place where I used to be almost happy...

How could I help thinking of the past? There were so many things to remind me. If the shattered streets appeared changed beyond recognition, the faces of my old friends had maintained something like familiarity -- the evasive, intriguing quasi-familiarity of faces we meet in dreams.

Of course, there had been old acquaintances wherever I went in Europe; half-forgotten pals and sweethearts, collaborators and competitors had presented themselves, surprisingly, in Amsterdam and Stockholm, in Vienna, Zurich, Prague, and Copenhagen. But in Berlin there were more of them than anywhere else: their number assumed disquieting proportions. They beleaguered the platform before and after my lecture, they bombarded me with telephone calls, telegrams and letters, they invaded my hotel room -- a ghost parade, a procession of shadows, an intrusive band of materialized, if somewhat undernourished, memories. Like the hero in the last volume of Proust's psychological saga, À la Recherche du Temps Perdu, I had to face my own "Past Recaptured": there it was -- smiling at me, beckoning me, luring and frightening me with ambiguous grimaces.

"Why don't you stay with us?" I heard them whisper -- yesterday's playmates, the companions of my early troubles and adventures. "Why don't

you rejoin the old gang? Let's have fun together! The situation here may seem a little dreary, at the present moment; but why shouldn't it pick up, eventually? And besides, nobody knows what's going to happen to the other countries, the so-called victors. Our present plight may be in store for all of them... So why don't you stay with us? We'd love to hear you talk about the literary scene in America -- especially if you give us some American spam and powdered eggs to boot..."

Their voices sounded strange, for all the intriguing, dream-like familiarity of their features. I knew that I would not feel at home in their midst anymore. Besides there was that plane reservation, Amsterdam-New York -- repeatedly postponed, but never canceled. My orders read: Upon completion, return to proper station.

+