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Will participate in a conference on the defense of free culture under the auspices of

The American Committee
for Cultural Freedom

on

Saturday March 29, 1952

on the

Starlight Roof

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel

Park Avenue at 50th Street
New York City

Starting at 10:00 a.m. the conference will last all day, including a luncheon session.

The featured speaker at lunch will be

H. Howland Sargeant

Assistant Secretary of State
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seems to misplace their companions, to be uncertain about their size, and sometimes to forget where they are standing or sitting. A director could in a day correct these errors which, though small, are disconcerting.

I have other qualifications and objections. The evening would, I think, gain if one number or even two numbers were dropped from it. It would also benefit by cutting that obvious speech about a painter's work outlasting a performer's, which at present mars Miss Skinner's otherwise highly distinguished impersonation of Yvette Guilbert. One other thing—I began to tire of having so many of the women

in Miss Skinner's Paris concerned only with what Percy Hammond used to call "the obstinate urge."

It seems fair to repeat that these are the reservations of a person allergic to monodrama. Certainly they were not shared by most of the people in a large and enthusiastic first-night audience. No less certainly Miss Skinner is one of the remarkable women of our time, dazzlingly endowed, strong in courage no less than looks and charm, and at the peak of her powers in "Paris '90," which is the most full-scaled, one-woman show ever to have been done.

—JOHN MASON BROWN.

Broadway Postscript

FLIGHT INTO NEW HAVEN

MOST playwrights, no matter how many plays they have written, find a pre-Broadway tryout as nightmarish as waiting for a visa with deportation staring them in the back. The fear of failure, the avalanche of well-meant but unusable suggestions, and the awful realization that it is too late to go back and do it a better way, are grounds for anything from frayed nerves to a genuine psychosis. George Tabori, author of "Flight Into Egypt," is therefore something of a phenomenon if only for the superb detachment he has brought to the tryout proceedings of his first play.

Interviewed in New Haven shortly after the play had opened there, the thirty-eight-year-old novelist-turned-dramatist appeared wearing a Tyrolean hat with an old mountain-climbing jacket and looking very much like a carefree tourist. Bothering him not a hella's worth was the fact that the last scene of the play (so ambiguous that *Variety* had reported the wrong resolution) was lying in his hotel room waiting for rewrite.

"I like work," he said, sipping an aperitif with Continental relaxedness, "and I enjoy experimenting with the play. This ending we're using now is just a test. I think we'll eventually go back to the way it ended originally."

Mr. Tabori explained that "Flight Into Egypt" concerns itself with the efforts of a family to get into the United States from Austria via Egypt. When first written the script had them finally get to America through the will power of the father, who must commit suicide to make it possible.

"Although I firmly believe that it is

wrong for them to go to America," said the tall and slender writer who is an expatriate himself, "it is probably right for the play to have them go. You see, the point of it all is that the consequences of flight are rage, humiliation, and usually disaster. I hope it comes across as this, and not as an essay about the respective merits of Austria and America."

Mr. Tabori, whose long wolfhoundish nose and thin, tired mustache brand him as Mittel-European, was actually born and educated in Budapest. He learned English by translating into Hungarian not only the novels of Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair but Western and gangster tales by lesser American literary lights. At the age of eighteen he decided that, like Joseph Conrad, he would henceforward write in English. From then on he became an uprooted traveler, and during the past twenty years he has actually resided in thirteen different countries. He is now a British citizen, having been a member of the British equivalent of our OSS in the Middle East during the war. However, he feels that while he is eternally an outsider, he is also in an exceptionally good position to see things with more freshness and objectivity than the deep-rooted artist.

He sees, for instance, that members of the old European middle class, who still believe in free-enterprise buying and selling as a way of life and who are unwilling to adjust to the necessities of existence in postwar Europe, clutch at the illusion that they can re-establish their old way of life in America. This group is represented by "Flight Into Egypt's" Engels family. Mr. Tabori observes that the Engels,

if they can contribute nothing to Austria, where anyone who can contribute is needed to stay and rebuild, can also contribute nothing to America. For this reason, he has made Franz Engels, the father, paralyzed with multiple sclerosis in order to symbolize his unwillingness to give up his old way of life and accept a function in the new reality. Franz's wife, Lili, stands for the traditional European woman formerly relegated to housewifery and motherhood, but now beginning to transcend these functions.

He sees also that Lili, as every refugee, is a slave to accident. She can only operate with reason as long as she has a market for her skill. Wipe out this market, as happens in the play, and all she has left to sell is herself. "At home," as Mr. Tabori has one of his characters say, "if you call for help at least you don't have to translate."

These themes and others present in "Flight Into Egypt" will be familiar to readers of Mr. Tabori's novels ("Beneath the Stone," *SR*, Aug. 10, 1945; "Companions of the Left Hand," *SR* July 27, 1946; "Original Sin," 1947, not reviewed in *SR*, and "The Caravan Passes," *SR* Mar. 17, 1951). Running through most of his work is his preoccupation with "achieving freedom through exploring the utmost lim-

its of one's unfreedom not academically but by practical activity." His characters tend to be on the colorful side and he likes the atmosphere of thick weather, be it dust storm or throbbing heat. He can turn out such Odetsian lines as "Never," that's a word only the best people can afford," but on the other hand is sometimes tempted to stretch his metaphors in an attempt to be poetic. A speech in the play as seen in New Haven was: "You burst the seams of our little life with these two weak hands that touch the stars." However, Mr Tabori promises this will be fixed before the play reaches New York.

HE has turned to playwriting because of what he calls the impasse in the novel, which he feels is tending to become too private and too deep. He believes that the drama is a more collective means of communication, where the emphasis falls on the emotional and the violent rather than on the reflective and the detailed. "I can't bother with little anxieties when larger issues like gas chambers and Hiroshima are around," he says.

"A play," he added, "is harder to write because you have to think out all your moves ahead, like chess. And then you run into problems of authenticity. In this play, for instance, the

Engels face being turned down for a visa because Franz is too sick. Legally this is not correct, but in actuality it often turns out that way. I'm hoping that audiences will accept the truth as opposed to the letter of the truth."

On the other hand, Mr. Tabori is very happy not only at the opportunity to try things out on audiences which a novelist doesn't have, but at the idea of having other people collaborate in the final output. He is particularly impressed with the work of the director, Elia Kazan.

"Gadge is wonderful at speaking to the actor in his own language. He always gives them something concrete to work with. In the scene where Lili comes back from her assignation, he told Gusti Huber that as she walked she should think about the shame and humiliation, gradually letting it turn into resentment against her husband."

"Another device he's trying," continued the author, "is with Zero Mostel, who plays the hotel-keeper. Gadge feels Zero needs to objectify himself more than he usually does, so he's asked him to play it with a British accent. Right now Zero sounds terrible, but that's not the point. After Zero has objectified himself enough he can drop the accent if he wants to."

Mr. Tabori looked at his watch and said: "Well, I guess I'd better get at that last scene. Maybe I just won't say whether they go to America or Austria. After all, people are pretty much the same anywhere you go."

Mr. Tabori spoke with the easy assurance of a man who was just as happy in New Haven as he would have been in Cairo or New York.

—HENRY HEWES.



Elia Kazan and George Tabori—"emphasis on the emotional and violent."

Domestic Chronicle

A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN THEATRE 1700-1950. By Glenn Hughes. French. \$5. In attempting to compose a short history that would be both readable and definitive, Dr. Hughes has not really succeeded in doing either. The book, though not annotated, smacks of long hours in the library, and for the most part is a dreary chronology of theatrical productions. Not until the end of this book does Dr. Hughes allow himself to take an editorial point of view. Then he demonstrates that when he has something of his own to say about the ills of our contemporary theatre he can say it incisively. Unfortunately, it comes too late, since by this time the reader is a weary marathoner and the countryside he's passed a memory blurred by exhaustion.

—H. H.