



## BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

### Everything's Up to Date in Puerto Rico

**T**HE WINTER is over and San Juan may now return, at least for the summer season, to being a normally frantic Latin city. During the past few months it looked a good deal like Miami Beach in the Fifties. So many new hotels were opening that there was an indication that some tell-tale symptoms of the this-year's-hotel syndrome, which had infected Miami Beach during the years of its tremendous if almost unnatural growth, had cropped up here. When I told a friend that I was staying at the Puerto Rico Sheraton there was almost a hint of disappointment in the response. It looked new to me, but then I hadn't been in Puerto Rico when it opened in late 1963. Fortunately, I managed to make it this winter in time to view three new hotels.

Already the seaside resort strip is being called the Gold Coast. All season long the Gold Coast rocked with the five-star cabaret names—Chevalier, Durante, Eartha Kitt, Ella Fitzgerald, José Greco, Los Chevaes de España, Andy Russell, Xavier Cugat, Leslie Uggams, Tony Martin. Out of semiretirement came Milton Berle and down from Borschtland came Myron Cohen. A musical revue called *Hits of Broadway* disported at the Condado Beach nightly

and the Sheraton presented another called *Los Pretty Americanos*.

Despite the wholesale displacement of Broadway and Hollywood eastward from their winter lair in Florida to the shores of Puerto Rico, there was an effort in some quarters to recall the island's Latin roots. La Concha stayed Latin. The Caribe Hilton booked the Antonio Gades Spanish Ballet and Marco Antonio Muniz, advertised as the Mexican Frank Sinatra. The night I got to town the Sheraton's Salon Carnaval opened with the Brothers Castro, a Mexican combine sporting an unfortunate name and an enormous amount of talent. Done up in brown tails with black lapels, they played, sang falsetto, twanged an electric bass, and otherwise raised the rafters.

**U**P on the roof Sheraton has topped off its sky room with a modest palace called La Alhambra. Although the local version covers somewhat less than the thirty-five acres required by the original, and though there isn't a trace of the ghost of Washington Irving in the place, it's an opulent nest, all right, with an enormously sophisticated menu for the West Indies. Besides the capon with ham and brandied truffles and duckling with wild rice and the breasts of chicken

with prosciutto and cheese, there is a whole assortment called Caribbean cookery, a mixture of local and Spanish kitchens. It includes *paella*, *arroz con pollo*, and *carne empanada*—fried beef-steak with saffron rice, grilled pineapple, and baked bananas.

Of this year's hotels, two of the most impressive sit side by side just up the avenue, the Da Vinci and the Lee. Although they are utterly different (Da Vinci is Italian Renaissance and the Lee is new and kosher), they share the Da Vinci's pool and the Lee's beach. The Da Vinci sets its tone with its lobby, a small, quiet foyer with heavy, dark furniture, bright paper flowers, and a stone bas-relief on the wall. It has bright, tomato-hued corridors inside the masses of open arches outside that are rather reminiscent of the Foro Italico, built by Mussolini to mark the memory of his time. It has ninety-eight rooms in the main hotel and another fifty-six in its annex and is another element in the lengthening chain of San Juan hotels and restaurants that started when two enterprising Swiss opened the Swiss Chalet, once considered the *only* restaurant in the city.

The Lee, on the other hand, is not merely comfortable but also elegant. Every room has king-size beds, a Murphy bed in the wall, a television set, a radio, a refrigerator, and a view of the sea. The first kosher hotel to be built in San Juan, it must provide two dining rooms, one for meat and one for dairy. In the Lee's case they are separated by the entire height of the hotel. The Shalom Room on the roof serves dairy and the Terrace Room, hanging over the beach on the ground floor, serves meat. The night I walked into the Terrace Room, a pink and white salon with pink candles flickering on the tables, the waiters were frantically fetching trays of chopped liver while four violinists serenaded the seaside tables. I had only come to look, but the maître d'hotel, Irving Davidman, made me feel I would have insulted his soul had I left without trying something. A table in the corner was laid, as it normally is for guests, with a whole loaf of *chale* and a bottle of sacramental wine which Mr. Davidman poured himself. In Jewish orthodox law, wine loses its sacramental value if poured by a non-Jew and Mr. Davidman wanted us to have the best of everything. The menu was speckled with such items as *schmalz*, *gefulte* fish, stuffed *derma*, matzoh ball soup, boiled beef flanken, chicken in the pot, and brisket of beef with potato pancakes. Before long the waiters were fetching *me* the chopped liver and Mr. Davidman was on hand urging me to follow it with a little stuffed cabbage. I demurred at this point and took an elevator for the



The new San Juan—"like Miami Beach in the Fifties."

# The European Literary Scene

ATHENS.

It has recently become a commonplace in France to say that while Albert Camus has lost his appeal for older readers, he now has an enthusiastic following among the young. Logically enough, since this same generation, according to the sumptuous new volume dedicated to Camus in Hachette's collection of *Génies et Réalités*, is busily engaged in writing an astronomical number of theses on France's 1957 Nobel Prizewinner. Gallimard has now issued the second volume of Camus's *Notebooks*, covering his jottings from January 1942 to March 1951. This was the period of the *Etranger* (1942), *Sisyphus* (1942), and the bulk of the plays. (Notes on his trips to North and South America in 1946 and 1949 will appear in a separate volume.) When all of his *carnets* are in print, many a degree candidate will seek analogies between these *obiter scripta* and Camus's formal works. Obviously, the gloomy note of a world war is reflected in this second volume, which comes to the almost inevitable conclusion that men live increasingly "like dogs." Camus felt a strong desire, as he put it, to set down *pêle-mêle* everything that passed through his head. Never a philosopher, always a *moraliste*, Camus's random thoughts make interesting reading, as the following sampler attests:

- Why am I an artist and not a philosopher? It is because I think according to words and not ideas.
- The aim is to live lucidity in a world where dispersion is the rule.
- The great problem to be solved "practically": can one be happy and alone?
- All life directed toward money is a death. The rebirth is in disinterestedness.
- The secret of my universe: just imagine God without man's immortality.
- I am not made for politics because I am incapable of wishing for or accepting the death of my adversary.
- He who despairs over an event is a coward, but he who holds hopes for the human condition is a fool.
- Every fulfillment is slavery. It drives us to a higher fulfillment.

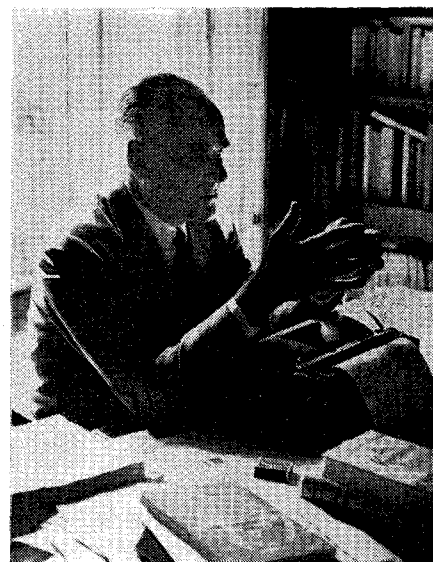
- Write a story about a contemporary cured of his anguishes by the mere lengthy contemplation of a landscape.

As Maurice Chapelan observes of this last entry, "Whatever religious there was about Camus was Taoist."

Following Italy's notorious leftward break-through (*apertura*) in politics and the weakening influence of the Demochristian party, the doctrine of committed art and literature logically should become more widespread in that peninsula. However, many of the liberal or leftist critics of the influential *Espresso* group find the doctrine unacceptable if not repugnant, even while remaining tolerant of Communism as a social experiment. They are still able to remember the "literature of the black era," which Mussolini sought to make into a vehicle of his movement, descending to such *obstats* as the depiction of suicide in plays and novels, self-destruction being an idea offensive to his dynamic state.

Alberto Moravia is a good case in point. Leftists are impressed by his distinction of having his *opera omnia* placed on the Church's Index of Forbidden Books (both under his pen name of Moravia and his family name of Pincherle, just to be safe). His writings sell abundantly in the USSR itself, and his travel notes to Russia are his only such diaries to exist in print. He once told me of his satisfaction at his popularity in Russia, but that in view of Moscow's lack of consumer goods and luxuries, he had never troubled himself to collect and spend his royalties there.

Moravia's thoughts on art and communism are expressed in his essays *L'uomo come fine* ("Man as an End"), published by Bompiani in Italy and to be issued here by Farrar, Straus & Giroux (see SR, page 23). It must come as an unhappy surprise to the Russians to be told by Moravia that their unshakable attitude about *engagé* literature is a dubious one at best, that the greatest genius matures most fully in a cultured and aristocratic state, that their esthetic amounts to little more than a "suspension of art," and that even if their idea of directed literature were valid, their own literary production is mighty poor armament in the battle between East and West. Moravia's points, expressed with a syllogistic clarity that comes as a relief after Sartre's ambiguities on this



Alberto Moravia—points made with a syllogistic clarity.

subject, add up to one of the most important recent statements on literature and politics.

In view of Moravia's arraignment of controlled literature in Russia, it is significant that the Central Committee on Ideological Matters (Moscow), recently deploring that too little control was being exercised by the Ministry of Culture, established a state committee usurping the powers of that ministry and curbing Russian publishing and printing. The committee's new head is Pavel Romanov, former head of Soviet censorship. So much we learn from the *Sunday Telegraph* of London. The pendulum of forces controlling art and literature is enough to mesmerize an observer. For example, among the new members elected to the board of the Moscow Writers' Union are three recently scolded by Khrushchev and by *Pravda*. These are the poets Yevtushenko and Voznesenski and the novelist Sergei Mikhalkov, who replaced as secretary a stalwart of the old guard, Georgi Markov. Yevtushenko has been under a cloud ever since his indictment of anti-Semitism in Russia in "Babi Yar."

In the latest issue of *Soviet Literature* Alla Marchenko's article "New Features in Contemporary Literature" finds Russian literature of the past ten years better than alleged by Sig. Moravia.

Almost a decade has passed since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The literature of this decade is characterized by an active incursion into life and intense topicality. In overcoming the habit of illustrative and descriptive representation, it continued and deepened the traditions of genuine Socialist realism which had persisted despite unfavorable conditions in the best works of

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