

# **MODERNISM ON FILE**

**Writers, Artists, and the FBI,  
1920–1950**

Edited by

CLAIRE A. CULLETON AND  
KAREN LEICK



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## CHAPTER 11

# COMMUNISM, PERVERSION, AND OTHER CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE: THE FBI FILES OF KLAUS AND ERIKA MANN

ANDREA WEISS

Of course, I am not in a position to know the exact contents of the adverse information [collected by the FBI]. Yet I am eager to contribute whatever I can to the speedy clarification of my pending case. In doing so, I take it for granted that the suspicions against me are of a primarily political nature. [. . .] I am aware of certain rumors according to which my political views are extremely “left”—practically those of a so-called “fellow traveler” of the Communist Party. These rumors—spread against me by ignorant or malignant people (maybe by Nazi sympathizers or by jealous fellow-refugees)—are entirely untrue. (Klaus Mann, memorandum to the U.S. Attorney General Biddle, 1943. Erika and Klaus Mann Archive, Literaturarchiv. Monacensia, Munich)

ONLY A MAN AT THE END OF HIS ROPE WOULD WRITE TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT to defend himself without knowing what the charges were. In 1943 Klaus Mann wrote a seven-page, single spaced memorandum in which he gave Attorney General Francis Biddle ample information about both his political and sexual past—just in case it was the information the government already had. Eloquent and impassioned as his letter is, it would seem an exercise in

futility, though he could not have done otherwise. Mann was desperate to be sent overseas as a member of the United States Armed Forces, and had devoted the previous 10 years to railing against the Nazi regime when few were prepared to listen; now he longed to be part of the Allied fight against tyranny and fascism in his former homeland.

When Klaus wrote this memorandum, he was also desperate for personal reasons. His sister Erika, who was his closest friend and lifelong artistic collaborator, was stationed at the front as a war correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and he was desolate without her. His lover, Thomas Quinn Curtiss ("Tomski"), had joined the National Guard and was showing signs of losing interest in him. His antifascist literary journal, *Decision*, had folded the previous year. Moreover, his heroin addiction, which had been "under control" after a brief cure in a Budapest sanatorium a few years earlier, was slipping out of control again. He was acutely lonely and ached to be part of a group, to belong somewhere. The army seemed like the perfect solution to all of these problems. After a seemingly interminable wait, Klaus had been inducted into the army at the end of 1942, but he was now stuck in boot camp and with the rest of his unit already overseas, he was still waiting to be shipped out.

Klaus's problems were further compounded by external forces about which he knew very little. Though he correctly suspected that the FBI was investigating him, he could not be sure, and would never know the reasons behind the investigation. Nor did he link his personal difficulties to the FBI probe, or realize the extent of the bureau surveillance and interference in his life. Yet hundreds of FBI documents released through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal that his increasing paranoia was wholly legitimate. By considering these government documents in relation to Klaus's own private documents, it is possible to rewrite his personal history in a way that he himself, the author of three autobiographies and copious diaries, never was able to.

For example, the source of the following unsigned letter was someone who personally had known Erika and Klaus during the 1920s, when they were involved in avant-garde theater and participated in the wild gay nightlife of Weimar Berlin with virtually no interest in politics.

I would also draw your attention upon the activities in the United States of Klaus MANN and his sister Erika MANN. They are the son and daughter of the well-known writer Thomas Mann (Heinrich Mann, another internationally reputed writer and essayist, is their uncle). Klaus and Erika Mann are very active agents of the Comintern. They were very active in Berlin before Hitler seized power. Klaus Mann was an active agent of Stalin in Paris, for many years. We hear that he is now editing an English publication, "Decision," in the United States. (Anonymous letter in Klaus Mann's FBI file, undated. Cover

letter from the FBI states it was received from the American Embassy in London and “it is not possible to determine who the writer was.”)

The letter makes clear that the information contained in it was being offered in exchange for some visas from the State Department for several German friends residing in southern France. The letter writer’s claims were taken seriously: the FBI embarked on an investigation of Klaus and Erika and did not let up until he died in 1949 and she collapsed under the pressure and left the United States for good in 1951.

While fascism swept across Europe, the FBI expended considerable time and resources harassing two of the strongest and most dedicated advocates for liberal democracy, both of whom had great respect for the government of the United States. The FBI surveillance of German émigrés was hardly an outgrowth of an anti-Nazi stance; rather, it was an expression of American xenophobia toward all foreigners, and part of the well-documented campaign against liberalism and socialism. The FBI was not a renegade operation in this regard, out of step with the rest of government policy. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), for instance, was founded in 1934 to investigate both Nazis and Fascists but in 1938, incredibly, HUAC seemed to lose interest in fascists altogether and focused instead on the Left as the more dangerous threat.

Though the FBI was unable to link either Erika or Klaus to the Communist Party, because of the Mann siblings’ “premature” antifascism, as well as their candid admission of homosexuality, the FBI continued to treat them as dangerous suspects. In the FBI’s convoluted moral code, “premature antifascists”—people who opposed fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain before the onset of World War II officially established these countries to be the enemy—had less credibility than patriotic Nazis during the early and mid-1930, and homosexuals had no credibility at all—an ironic twist given what we now know about J. Edgar Hoover.

Soon after the FBI opened its files on Erika and Klaus, a statement regarding their “more than sibling” relationship appeared in an undated report originating from the bureau:

Confidential Informant [name blacked out] . . . stated that people are horribly shocked over the sexual perversions of a group of four: KLAUS MANN, his sister ERICA [*sic*] MANN, and the latter’s husband, the Englishman AUDAN [*sic*], and his collaborator, CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD. [Blacked out] stated that KLAUS and ERICA MANN were having affairs together; that there was reference to it in one of the books of their father, THOMAS MANN. [. . .] Informant further stated that KLAUS MANN is willingly and knowingly a tool of the [Communist] Party [. . .] (Klaus Mann FBI file, December 15, 1941, p. 3)

The FBI apparently was unbothered by the contradiction between the homosexuality of Erika and Klaus Mann and the charge that they had a sexual relationship; both were evidence of their perversion and immorality. To the bureau, Erika's depravity was polymorphically perverse: bisexual, yet married to W.H. Auden and in love with Klaus, she occasionally invited another man to spend the night, a doctor whose office, the FBI file tells us, was on the corner of Park Ave and 86th Street. The FBI's "Confidential Informant T5" informed his superiors on May 29, 1942 that, "[Name blacked out] stated that he thought KLAUS MANN was a psychopathic case and that to all who knew him, it is general knowledge that the subject is a sexual pervert (Klaus Mann FBI file, October 24, 1941, p.11)." Erika's marriage to W.H. Auden was also under suspicion; even evaluating Auden's poetry was not thought to be overstepping the FBI's mission: "Marriage of ERICA [*sic*] MANN to Englishman Auden was one of convenience and [ . . . ] neither KLAUS nor ERICA believe in marriage. [ . . . ] Informant advised that he did not think AUDEN was a Communist, but advised that he is an excellent poet, although very eccentric [ . . . ]" (Klaus Mann FBI file, October 24, 1941, p.13).

The political motivation behind Klaus's literary journal, *Decision*, was also of great concern to the FBI. Klaus established *Decision* in order to support "independent creative work and intellectual liberty," as he stated in its initial subscription drive; this English-language journal quickly became one of the most important, if short-lived, little magazines of the 1940s.

This periodical is presented as a neutral anti-Nazi publication and belongs to the specific camouflaged Communist propaganda-instruments known as the "Innocents' Clubs". The first thing these Soviet propagandists do, is to secure highly unsuspected international personalities, who sign their appeals and declarations [ . . . ] (From the undated, unsigned letter that led to opening Klaus Mann's FBI file)

Primarily a literary journal, *Decision* held no political line beyond a commitment to democracy and an abhorrence of fascism. On the editorial page of the first issue, Klaus revealed his own relentless idealism, his high hopes for the future, his love of America, and the inseparability of culture and politics that was behind all of his undertakings. This impassioned editorial was circulated among various FBI offices, with several words underlined and circled:

All of us feel and know that more is at stake in the present war than political systems or imperialist interests. . . . Ideas and values of supreme magnitude are involved—conceptions are threatened that form the very basis of our civilization. What we are witnessing is nothing more or less than a decisive struggle over the spiritual destiny of the planet.

. . . Another literary magazine? Just now, in the midst of a terrific ordeal—while the planet is convulsed in a paroxysm of agony?

Yes! A new forum for the creative spirit—*now*, at precisely this moment of fatal decisions; and precisely here.

. . . Where else is the creative spirit to continue its play and work, if not in this last haven of free thought and free expression? Where else is the seriousness of our plight to be recognized and discussed, if not in this country—the last bulwark of liberty, focus of our hopes? (Klaus Mann, “Editorial”)

*Decision* attracted both German émigré authors and well-known British and American writers, ranging from Aldous Huxley to Stephen Spender to Stephen Vincent Benét. Klaus could hardly believe its success; he was astonished when Sherwood Anderson came through with a story and was amazed that “Decision, Inc.” had managed to open a bank account, rent an office, and even hire a secretary who “looks exactly the way a real secretary should look . . . and apparently fails to notice that I don’t look like a boss” (Mann, *The Turning Point* 338, 139). So respectable did Klaus make the magazine, to attract public attention and financing, that he grew dissatisfied with it; he felt that the big names dominated to the exclusion of newcomers and more experimental approaches, and he intended to remedy the problem once the journal became more solvent.

It never did. Securing the financing was an unbearable struggle for Klaus. Wealthy patrons would not deliver on their promises—“How cruel and capricious are the rich!” he wrote in his diary—and with each issue the magazine went deeper and deeper in the hole (Klaus Mann, diary entry dated June 2, 1941, qtd. in *The Turning Point* 344, 139). These “failures” were duly noted in Mann’s bureau file:

Informant T4 . . . further advised that the account at X bank maintained by the *Decision* magazine has been closed because KLAUS MANN had made out a check on this account for \$4. payable to the informant and the check bounced because the account had been formerly closed. . . . (Klaus Mann FBI file, no date)

A secret informant was sent to report on a financial meeting for Decision, Inc. According to an FBI document, the meeting:

. . . turned out to be nothing more than a drinking party. Informant stated that at this meeting were VINCENT SHEEAN [*sic*] and his wife, MORRIS SAMUELS and his daughter, STRELSIN and ERIKA MANN [*sic*] and KLAUS MANN. Informant stated that VINCENT SHEEAN seems to be pre-occupied sexually and that there was little doubt in his mind but that ERIKA MANN and VINCENT SHEEAN had separated themselves from

the group that night to indulge in sexual pastimes. (Klaus Mann FBI file, October 26, 1941, pp. 13–14)

After such extensive investigation the only criminal act the FBI could find was that Klaus edited *Decision* in violation of the employment restrictions on his INS entry visa. The FBI turned its attention back to the “decadent culture behind the magazine which was obvious from its contents” (Klaus Mann FBI file, December 15, 1941, p. 12). Klaus’s lifestyle, more than the actual contents, served to confirm the magazine’s decadence.

The Mann file reports that Klaus was “frequently in arrears in his rent” and “many queer looking people” could be seen going into his Hotel Bedford room, which was carefully pinpointed in the file: hotel room 1403, which faces the front of the building, fifth window in from the east side. The doorman of the Hotel Bedford moonlighted as one of the main FBI informants in Klaus’s case (Erika suspected as much and tried, unsuccessfully, to have him fired from the hotel). He reported that a soldier spent several nights each week in Klaus’s room.

Informant T3 [ . . . ] further stated that unquestionably KLAUS MANN is a sexual pervert and that two or three times a week, a soldier by the name of [blacked out] from Governor’s Island spends the night with MANN in his room. [ . . . ] Informant further stated that the soldier, known as [blacked out], is a large 6 foot heavy set individual with fair complexion and dirty-blond hair. He advised that [ . . . ] the only suitable sleeping place in MANN’s room is a single bed. (Klaus Mann FBI file, December 15, 1941, p. 9)

The FBI followed with perverse fascination Klaus’s “decadent” lifestyle. Klaus admittedly was drawn rather indiscriminately to the “very gratifying young proletarian types . . . I fancy almost all of them, porters, waiters, liftboys, and so on, white or black. Almost all are agreeable to me. I could sleep with all of them,” he wrote in his diary (Mann, *Tagebücher 1938–1939* 139). His close friend, author Sybille Bedford, recalled that at this time “what attracted Klaus were the professional louts, I mean truck drivers and rough trade, as he would say, the ‘quick and dangerous.’ That was when he began to speak English in America. He used to come back beaten up by them and so on” (private interview recorded on July 31, 1999).

Klaus’s poor condition was also due at least in part to the distance he felt from Erika. It seems that what he wanted or needed from her was more than she could give, and he felt her pulling away. He wrote in his diary on February 18, 1940:

Sadness, without end. Deathwish as physical desire. The feeling of loneliness like frost. Everything dissolves and goes to pieces. [ . . . ] Erika distracted by

her successes, travels, activities, and her relationship with G [Dr. Martin Gumpert]. How long ago is *Anja and Esther* [their first play, from the 1920s]—how she has grown. Never totally estranged, but still, step by step, she is receding—Often I think I'm Pygmalion: what would she be without me—what am I without her? (Mann, *Tagebücher 1940–1943* 21–22).

That year, with Europe besieged by war, Erika received an invitation from Duff Cooper, British Minister for Information under Churchill, to become a correspondent for the BBC. Although the job was a dangerous one, Erika jumped at the offer. She simply could not stand by and watch one European country after another fall to the Nazis. England could well be next. In a 1963 radio interview, Erika recalled,

After the fall of France I felt compelled to leave behind my beautiful, cozy American lifestyle and go to England. I was convinced, in spite of all the evidence, that England would resist. And my reasons for this conviction were purely moral ones. ("Musik für einen Gast," host Roswitha Schmalenbach, 1963)

With "much envy and anxiety," Klaus wrote in a diary entry dated August 23, 1940 (*Tagebücher 1940–1943* 51), he witnessed Erika's departure for London. He could not make sense of the feelings that were tangled up in his heart: fear, envy, pride, sadness, and the feeling of being left behind.

Erika's job with the BBC took her to the war's battlegrounds, which is exactly where she wanted to be. It was a case of her strong sense of moral obligation synchronizing with her craving for adventure. In one of her BBC broadcasts, also published in *Liberty* magazine, a popular American weekly, offering national and international news commentary, she tells of how she managed to put herself right in the line of danger by boarding a rescue boat in the straits of Dover. The rescue boats were standing by, ready to fish out any airmen who had to make parachute landings in the rough, cold English channel. It was a typical morning in that part of the world: rainy and foggy. In one pocket Erika had her "nice neat Air Ministry permit" which entitled her to board a rescue boat, and in the other a small bottle of brandy to keep her warm at sea. However, the British naval officers resolutely refused to let her to board a rescue boat, and she was almost ready to cave in and accept their verdict—until she discovered the real reason for the resistance: "I realized that the whole thing was not a question of civilians, of reporters, not being admitted, but of women being refused. 'There's nothing for females out there—and we've never taken one.' That was what I couldn't possibly stand" (Mann, BBC broadcast, October 25, 1941, London). Erika, who had never been held back from anything on account of her gender, recoiled at such paternalism. She put up a huge fight and did not back down until she had won. She did not have much time to savor her victory, however. She took

off on a Naval boat with a 22-year-old college student at the command when suddenly, she told the BBC interviewer, “Out of the Calais air, the Messerschmitts [World War II fighter planes] leaped at us. There were two of them. Their crosses and swastikas could be easily distinguished.” The gunner on the rescue boat, a young man named George, sat behind his huge machine gun, held his breath, and took aim as the planes dived, climbed, and circled. He was just about to shoot when the 22-year-old captain shouted, she recounts:

“You are not to open fire.” The captain’s voice was hoarse. “Do you hear me? This is an order!” There—the devil knows where they came from—suddenly there they were: two more Messerschmitts at our back, at George’s back, rushing toward us, the air full of that buzzing crescendo which the screen has made so familiar to all of us. (BBC broadcast, October 25, 1941, London)

After the four fighter planes departed and everyone breathed a huge sigh of relief, the young captain explained that this was a “good old decoy performance.” Rescue boats were supposed to be off-limits as targets; they could not be attacked without provocation. The Nazis wanted the boat to shoot at the first two planes, so that the second two could justify opening fire. Then, the captain explained, the second set of Messerschmitts “‘would have finished us up from the rear like that.’ He snapped his fingers,” she told her radio listeners.

With Erika’s new position at the BBC, she found she had little time for Klaus back in New York. Her cables to him were infrequent and brief—one read only “safe so far” (qtd. in Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point* 334)—which did little to quell either his loneliness or his anxiety about her wellbeing. Klaus wrote in his diary on August 10, 1941:

I suppose this is the most lonely summer I’ve ever experienced. The city seems to be deserted by everybody I know. Erika is in England. . . . The only person I see is Muriel Rukeyser, who recently joined the staff of the magazine. She is a great help in these trying days. . . . But even she, the only comrade in this arid solitude, escapes to the country from Saturday until Monday: while I have to stay—paralyzed, as it were, by the demon of this fierce and relentless summer. At times I actually fear suffocation in the stifling hole that’s my room. The only comfort on those painful Sundays are the calls from Savannah [Georgia, where “Tomski” was stationed in the National Guard]. (*The Turning Point* 346)

Despite his despondency, Klaus fought for the journal’s survival “like two mother lions,” Erika wrote on May 1, 1942 (unpublished letter to Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Erika and Klaus Mann Archive, Literaturarchiv Monacensia, Munich); but she believed that the sooner it

folded, the better for all concerned, especially Klaus. Her patience with his depressed state of mind was wearing thin just when he needed her most. She did not realize that Klaus at one point was near suicide. In the autumn of 1942, Klaus wrote in his diary:

Tomski called and asked how things were going. I told him, miserably, that I had nothing to eat and no money for a haircut and just absolutely nothing. He replied it was awful, and why didn't we eat together? He had arranged to have a few drinks at 6 o'clock with someone from Camp Stewart, but . . . promised to call me at seven. So I said okay, and postponed the suicide. (*Tagebücher, 1940–1943* 116, Diary entry dated October 24, 1942)

As a British citizen (through her marriage to W.H. Auden), Erika did not require American citizenship for her assignments and therefore was in a very different position from Klaus, who had, after four years of total statelessness, only a temporary visitor's visa in a Czech passport (granted by the Czech government as a gift to Thomas Mann). He longed to enlist in the United States Army, driven by his genuine desire to fight the Nazis in every way possible but also by his desperate need to be part of something. "I *want* to go into the Army. I *want* to wear the same uniform as the others. I don't want to be an outsider or an exception any longer. Finally, for once, I'll feel in solidarity with the majority," he wrote in his diary (*Der Wendepunkt* 461).

It is possible that Klaus could have been admitted as a regular soldier without American citizenship. But he knew he was not cut out for combat, and was hoping for a post in counterintelligence or propaganda, where his German background and his polyglot talents could be best utilized. For such a sensitive job, American citizenship was required. He applied for it, but it was just one more thing on which he seemed to be waiting. Finally, when he could bear it no longer, he asked to be allowed to enlist without citizenship. Reflecting on his lifelong dread of isolation, Klaus wrote in his diary,

The obsession that haunted me when I was a child—the paralyzing fear of moral and physical isolation—never ceased to perturb me [. . .] To be an outsider is the one unbearable humiliation [. . .] And so I conclude my reply to the Selective Service Board with these words: I want to notify you of my willingness, indeed, my eagerness to join the U.S. forces, even before my naturalization has actually taken place. (*The Turning Point* 362–63)

The U.S. Army and the FBI both had their doubts about Klaus. The FBI stepped up its surveillance when an SAC received a letter from Hoover himself. Hoover called the New York and Philadelphia FBI offices "delinquent" in the case of Klaus Mann, and demanded "this matter be given prompt attention." The New York office started to tail Klaus around the

clock, and recorded such mundane activities as his eating pastry and buying stationery.

KLAUS MANN entered [blacked out] Street at 12:32 P.M. at which time he was wearing a gray suit, no hat, horn-rimmed glasses and brown shoes. He left the doctor's office at 12:47 and took a Lexington Avenue subway to 86th Street. At this point, he left the subway and walked over to Geiger's Restaurant at 206 East 86th Street and made a purchase of some pastry. It was 1:06 P.M. at this time. He thereafter returned to the Lexington Avenue subway and took an express train to Grand Central Station. Leaving Grand Central Station, he stopped and made a purchase at "Filing Equipment and Office Supplies," on the south side of 42nd Street off Lexington Avenue. He thereafter returned directly to the Hotel Bedford at 1:30 P.M. (Klaus Mann FBI file, June 18, 1942, p. 5-6)

Klaus's first physical exam revealed (according to this FBI report) a "syphilitic condition" and "13 arsenical and 39 heavy metal injections," likely injections of heavy metal chelators used to treat heavy metal poisoning to which he could not possibly have been exposed to. Klaus's diary indicates that he received 48 injections from Dr. Gumpert, 36 of bismuth (a metal once used to treat stomach ulcers, before it was deemed too dangerous) and 12 of salvasan (for syphilis). Gumpert was known to give Klaus a variety of prescription drugs that he took without knowing what they were. Results from his first physical led Klaus to be classified by the U.S. Army as 4-F. The FBI informant's report stated,

. . . now that "Decision" had folded up he had staked everything, "including his self-respect" on joining the American Army. [Klaus believed] that the Army had rejected him "because the F.B.I. had told them that I was a homo-sexual." KLAUS MANN alleged that he admitted to the Army people that he was a homo-sexual "because that is nothing to be ashamed of." (FBI internal memo, NY field office to Washington DC headquarters, August 16, 1932)

Though utterly unashamed of his homosexuality, Klaus *was* ashamed of the 4-F classification he earned because he complained it put him in the same grouping as criminals and insane men. But when the Army interviewed him at length after the physical exam, Klaus backtracked on his avowal of his homosexuality. He insisted that syphilis test result was "a dubious plus-minus reaction," not a clear positive. And even if it were positive, he would have contracted it "from a prostitute in New York" rather than from "any form of perversion." Clearly he had no indication that his admissions to the U.S. Army doctors would be passed on to the FBI.

When Klaus was called back for another Army examination on June 4, his syphilis had been cured but the military doctor was again dissatisfied with

him: “Provisional Rejection” was the verdict. Klaus proposed yet another exam and retreated to his room in the Bedford where he lived increasingly like a hermit. He wrote in his diary on July 1, 1943, “But if my application were straightaway *rejected*, SUICIDE actually would be the only logical response, would be almost inevitable.” On September 7, after standing naked all day in a line with other recruits, he was rejected once more. His disappointment was immeasurable, and he spent the next few months in a deep depression. Daily he wrote in his diary that he wished to die, nothing else. In these dark times, many had experienced far worse than Klaus, and he knew it—his own brother Golo, for example, had been held in an internment camp in Nîmes. But the awareness of his relatively privileged condition could do little to release Klaus from the clutches of his death wish, something rarely amenable to rational thought. In September 1942, his autobiography *The Turning Point* was published to overwhelmingly favorable reviews in the *Sunday Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, and elsewhere; but his depression did not lift until December 14 when he took a boat to Governor’s Island once more for his physical exam.

This time, several friends had given him “lessons” on how to appear heterosexual—not that he really needed them. The American Army was so eager by then for additional able-bodied men that the military doctor was willing to overlook his homosexuality, as well as the huge scar which remained from his six childhood appendicitis operations. The Army psychiatrist merely asked him if he had a girlfriend (he answered he had several), and pointed to a woman out the window, commenting, “She must have a nice bosom!” According to Curt Riess, one of Klaus’s friends who gave him the lessons in “normality,” “Klaus, who never in his whole life was interested in any woman’s breasts, nodded enthusiastically: ‘Yes! Nice bosom!’ And with that he passed the test and was in the American Army.” (Reiss, *Meine Berühmte Freunde* [Freiburg, 1987] 92)

Klaus was instructed to report for active duty at Fort Dix, New Jersey two weeks later, more than a year after he had first tried to enlist. The following day, the FBI was notified, and his case was supposedly closed.

On December 29, 1942 [blacked out] Clerk, Local Board 15, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York City, advised that the subject had been inducted into the United States Army on December 28, 1942. [ . . . ] In view of the subject’s induction into the United States Army as noted above the investigation in this matter is being discontinued and this case is being closed.

CLOSED (Klaus Mann FBI file, February 9, 1943 for the period ending December 29, 1941)

From Fort Dix, Klaus was shipped off for eight weeks of basic training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas, and then transferred to Camp Ritchie in

Maryland. At the age of 36, he was for the first time financially independent of his parents, he was a soldier in the United States Army, and his father finally had reason to be proud of him.

Despite Klaus's deepest wish to belong, he remained an outsider in the Army—certainly it was not the job he was born for. His fellow soldiers in basic training had little in common with him. He was a good 15 years older than they were, obviously homosexual, physically weak from over a decade of drug abuse, exceptionally poor at sports and other physical activity (as he had been since childhood), and to make matters worse, probably spoke better English than they did, but with a thick German accent at a time when Germany was the enemy.

When his unit was shipped off to Europe in the spring of 1943, Klaus was left behind—his citizenship, which finally was to be granted the very day before departure, was held up at the last minute. Klaus did not know the reason, but suspected it had to do with either his left-wing political views or his homosexuality. Though stamped “CLOSED” in December 1942, Klaus's FBI file shows further FBI activity in the file after that date. Stuck in boot camp, he wrote his desperate memorandum to the attorney general, answering the unspecified charges against him. After denying his affiliation with the Communist Party he moved on to defend himself against the other probable cause, his sexuality:

It may be, however, that the adverse “special information” in question includes also rumours or denouncements of a very different kind . . . Since I do not know what has been said against me, I take the liberty to state . . . nobody has yet dared to doubt or to deny into my face: that my character and “sex moral” are “excellent.” (Klaus Mann, Memorandum to U.S. Attorney General Biddle, 1943. Erika and Klaus Mann Archive)

Klaus stagnated in Camp Crowder, Missouri, where he had been assigned to the 825th Signal Repair Service Company, “clearly a mistake, as I am not a technician and can not be of any use in a repair service unit.” To do something constructive and keep himself busy, he took over editing the army camp newsletter, *The Camp Crowder Message*. Finally he humbled himself to appeal to his father. Thomas Mann, disturbed by Klaus's anxious mental condition, intervened on his son's behalf and wrote a letter to the U.S. government vouching for Klaus's integrity.

On June 4, 1943, the FBI showed up to interview Thomas Mann at his home in Pacific Palisades regarding his views on his son. The father insisted that he had few if any disagreements with his son, about politics or anything else. Both were moderate and pro-democratic in their political views. Klaus's mother, Katia (called Mrs. Catherine Mann in bureau files) was interviewed

two days later, and she confirmed that Klaus was “quite like his father” (qtd. in Stephan, *Communazis* 95).

It is not clear whether the testimony from his parents was the deciding factor that turned his case around, but on August 30, 1943, Klaus faced one final interrogation, this time by a Special Agent for Military Intelligence, and his report was most favorable: “Subject is highly intelligent and possesses a wonderful command of the English language [ . . . ] This Agent is of the opinion that Subject would be very useful in combat propaganda and [ . . . ] citizenship should be allowed Subject” (qtd. in Stephan 547). In September 1943, nine months after he was admitted into the Army, Klaus was finally approved for citizenship. His naturalization took place immediately.

Klaus shipped out on an overcrowded transport carrying 8,000 men. Eventually it reached Casablanca, and after stops in Algiers and Tunis he crossed the Mediterranean to meet his former comrades from Camp Ritchie in Naples, where he became part of the Psychological Warfare Branch of the United States Army. Within two days of his arrival, the very street he was traveling down was bombarded, not far from his jeep. It was not the only time he would come under enemy fire. Yet Erika commented that when Klaus finally joined up with his unit overseas, it was the only time in his life, since their childhood, that he was “almost happy” (Bayerische Rundfunk radio interview).

Klaus described his elation in a broadcast over Swedish radio in 1947: “We German refugees, the first victims and most inexorable enemies of Nazism, were eager to contribute our bit to the fight against the Brown Plague. I was happy and proud therefore, to join the army of my new country, the United States of America, and to be sent overseas—first to North Africa, then to Italy, where I served with General Clark’s Fifth Army” (*Turning Point* 368).

Despite his uniform and the military ideology behind it, Klaus remained an intellectual pacifist. He justified his participation in the war by saying that his goal was to end it as quickly as possible. His high-security-clearance job was to produce propaganda leaflets to be dropped over the Nazi-occupied territories for the purpose of demoralizing German soldiers and convincing them to go AWOL. When Germany finally did surrender, however, Klaus and Erika both were left in a kind of limbo. They had devoted all their energies during the past 12 years to fighting fascism, and now that they had reached their goal, they found themselves suddenly without one.

#### EPILOGUE

Fulfilling a deep life-long yearning, Klaus committed suicide by way of a sleeping pill overdose in 1949. Erika lived a full 20 years without him, but she was never the same again: her spirit was broken. She became embittered and

her health deteriorated. She was physically and emotionally depleted, first by the loss of her brother, and then by the animosity she faced in McCarthy's America.

As if Klaus's death were not enough, Erika was forced the following year to withdraw her application for U.S. citizenship, which had seemed within her grasp. The Treasury Department and the War Department had awarded her citations, commending her for her "patriotic services during the War," and she felt her actions entitled her to citizenship. She wrote to the Director of Immigration and Naturalization:

Immeasurable are the times I endangered my life while . . . covering the war as a correspondent accredited to the U.S. Forces . . . Had I been an American citizen [during the War] I could not possibly have tried harder to be helpful. In fact, I felt like an American, lived like an American, and to all practical purposes was an American . . . I lived and worked in the United States, and since I wished to go on doing so I deemed it only fair to add myself legally to the good people of this country. (Mann to Edward J. Shaughnessy; December 11, 1950. Mann Archive)

But as soon as the war was over, the FBI renewed its investigation of Erika like a dog finding its favorite bone. Erika was in their files dating back from spring 1940, when she, somewhat naïvely it turns out, had actually offered information to the FBI. An internal FBI memo indicated that Erika approached the FBI office in New York and "indicated a desire to be of assistance." Her motivation: to prevent Nazis from slipping into the United States. One German refugee, she reported to the FBI, was traveling on a passport with a "J" on his German passport although he was definitely not Jewish (usually it was Nazis who had access to these passports, stolen from Jews, alive or dead). Erika assumed that the FBI was interested in tracking Nazis, when in actuality they were far more preoccupied with tracking suspected Communists, Erika included. Because she was so strategically placed in the German exile community, the FBI was eager to make use of her. By way of thanks she became a subject for surveillance.

To the INS, Erika described the damaging effects the investigation by the FBI had on her life, especially after the War:

Ever since then an investigation has been going on that could not help casting doubts upon my character, gradually ruining my career, robbing me of my livelihood and, in short, changing me from a happy, busy and fairly useful member of society into a humiliated suspect. Friends of mine have been questioned for two and three hours at a stretch until they all but collapsed. When it became obvious that I was neither a Communist, nor a "fellow traveler" . . . the authorities took to digging into my personal life in a way most

shocking to those questioned . . . Small wonder, prospective employers felt ardently disinclined to engage my services . . . (Erika Mann to Mr. Edward J. Shaughnessey, Director of Immigration and Naturalization, New York District office, December 11, 1950. Erika and Klaus Mann Archive)

And this, according to declassified FBI files, is how Erika herself came under such intense scrutiny, although she never had any inkling of it herself. The FBI discovered that she had socialized with the wrong person, Englishman Guy Burgess, someone with whom she was barely acquainted, and the investigation spread like an invisible deadly virus from him to her. The upper class Englishman Burgess was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, who worked for the BBC. He had developed pro-Communist sympathies during his college days, became a Soviet spy after the War, and eventually defected to the Soviet Union in May 1951. Erika met the man through W.H. Auden, during a wild homosexual party in England during the War, and he was too drunk to carry on a conversation. She saw him again on one or two occasions, always as part of a group. Asked directly about Guy Burgess by the two surly FBI agents who dropped in on her in October 1951, she could hardly remember him and, when pressed, recalled only that she did not like the man, and had not bothered to learn his last name. She never discovered that this remote acquaintance was the key to her current misery.

To the INS director she went on to report her bafflement at her current predicament, “ruined—through no fault of my own”:

Personally, I am at a complete loss as to what may have prompted the investigation to take on such disastrous proportions. I have never been granted a hearing . . . Yet I—and only I—could have supplied whatever information was required . . .

I [have] had to witness the gradual destruction of all I had built up in more than a decade. This spectacle was all the more painful since it involved the third existence I had made for myself. Nazism drove me from my native Germany where I had been quite a success; Hitler’s growing influence in Europe caused me to leave the continent which I had been touring with my own show for more than a thousand performances; and now I find myself ruined—through no fault of my own—in a country I love and whose citizen I had hoped to become. (Erika Mann to Edward Shaughnessey)

Despite such moving rhetoric, in 1950, the INS asked the FBI for assistance in building a case to deport Erika from the United States. According to FBI documents, “INS has . . . expressed an interest in the subject and has not as yet obtained sufficient evidence upon which to base the issuance of a warrant of arrest in deportation proceeding.” The FBI tried to comply with the request for evidence, and although they were unable to uncover any, they harassed Erika to the point that she felt forced into exile yet again.

Erika was still in her 40s when she unpacked her belongings in her final home in Switzerland, but between Klaus's death and the FBI ordeal, she had aged visibly in just a few years. The move did not signal an attempt to start over: she insisted she was not strong enough, nor did she have the will, to undergo the tremendous efforts of building a new life in a new place all over again.

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