1947

C. FESSIA – now Mrs. Andrew Wandruska (also a fellow in 47) now at U. of Colgn

I am afraid I shall not be able to give a fair appraisal of the academic program of the Seminar. My field is Literature and the very fact of having the opportunity of listening to Mr. Matthiessen's and Mr. Kazin's lectures and of taking part in their seminars, was in itself the very best thing I could wish for. Their courses have been so complete and so highly instructive that I cannot either criticize them or suggest any improvement for next year's Seminar in this respect.

Besides, if any one should ask me point blanc my opinion of the general organization of the Seminar, my only answer would be "perfect". I liked everything about it and if I was a little puzzled in the beginning, when I was looking for a topic to work on, and a quiet corner to work in, I only put the blame on myself, as I knew very well that if I want to work and I am interested in what I am doing, I can work just as well in the middle of a noisy room as in the privacy of my own room here at home. I mention this because I heard this kind of criticism being made sometimes at Leopoldskron, and this is the way I answered to it there too.

This ought to be the end of my report. But you want criticism and suggestions and I must try very hard to find some. Of course I am not very keen on any of the remarks that follow and I do not think they are important. One general remark was suggested to me by my attendance to the Alpach meeting of the Austrian Universities. I was there for a week and took part in Prof. J. Jell's seminar in XIX century European History, as it was the nearest one to my field of study available in Alpach. I noticed a considerable difference between the Alpach discussions and the particular Seminars at Leopoldskron. The subjects in Alpach were at all cases so general that all the national groups could contribute their own knowledge, researches and progresses achieved in their own countries on the theme discussed. One day f.i., the subject was the rising of nationalism and its relations to romanticism in the first half on the XIX century. You can imagine how the discussion lasted hours and it was very lively and it showed the results reached in each country by historical research, it also involved methods of research, and it was of the highest interest to everybody.

This did not happen, or, at least, it did not happen to this degree, at Leopoldskron. We could discuss the merits of a given American book, but all was bound to be done on our part in a sort of "dilettanti" manner. None of us was a specialist in American Literature. None of us had read everything that ought to be read on that given book; each one of us, including myself, was liable to substitute his own personal reaction to an objective appreciation of that book, and that on account of our scanty background in the field of

American Literature. Our remarks were mostly casual and could not be anything else. I had the impression I got more out of Matthiessen's book about Eliot than out of the actual seminar on Eliot in which so many extremely important questions were very lightly disposed of by ourselves. Which means that the seminar really consisted of Prof. Matthiessen on one side, and on the other side a group of non experts, who ventured to say something now and then, with the uncomfortable feeling that they were not acquainted with all the literature that existed on that problem, and certainly somebody had already said the things they, after so much thinking, had discovered.

Besides, although I had a few problems about American Literature myself and was deeply interested in listening to some discussions about them, I found that in the best of cases, the discussion was brought down to the basic principles of criticism, and once this stage was reached, it was bound to stop there. General principles, methods of research and such universal themes, which are developed in different ways in each country, and to the discussion of which each of us could contribute his own experience if he had any, were only mentioned sometimes, and no one ever had the opportunity of acknowledging his own methods as less advanced and inadequate in comparison with others f.i. illustrated by people who have a more advanced critical tradition. I myself feel that we are all more or less sick of the Croce critical tradition; the younger scholars in Italy are striving to find out something more correspondent to present day art and poetry, in the field of literary criticism too; and I would have welcomed anyone at Leopoldskron among so many students of Literature, who would have enlightened me on the stage reached in his own country in this field. These things cannot be found in books, as it is a very recent movement everywhere, and an interchange of ideas such as this, I think ought to be one of the principal aims of an international Seminar.

That was done I believe in other subjects, such as Economics, or Salvemini's Seminar, to which each student contributed the results reached in his own country on some general points that were essential problems in his own country too, and therefore a certain amount of thinking had been done about them, and the students had a more serious background on which to base their discussion.

Culture must be an international achievement. We see every day that in the fields in which this internationalization is possible, the results are more advanced, as one country can learn from another, and besides the joint work of the two nations can reach developments that each one separately cannot achieve.

In the field of Literature the common ground can only be the method of research, and - to a certain extent - a number of themes and writers that have become the literary legacy of all nations and are the subject matter of literary works everywhere. This is the character of University courses in Italy, which ought to be a less advanced stage than an international Seminar. Our professors of

Literature do not give any systematic course in Literature, but they speak of one author or a literary movement for the whole year, teaching methods and ways of literary work, and giving their treatment of that particular point as a practical example. If Europe could find at Leopoldskron every summer an illustration of what has been done in America during the year in the different fields of humanistic culture; and if Europe could bring to Leopoldskron whatever scanty work Europe has done in the same fields (and some work is actually being done despite the present day situation that sometimes may be very unfit for systematic work); I believe that it would be a very great advantage both for America and Europe, and the results of such a cultural meeting would be far more concrete and effective than any results up till now achieved by any international conference.

Then there is the other side of the Seminar, which may be equally important, but is only secondary in my opinion, I mean lectures and the library. I think it is less important because it is not necessary for it the actual presence of the people in the same place. Lectures may be printed and mailed to people along with books. As I said in the beginning, this was the part I enjoyed most. I really can say that I learned much and am extremely thankful for the opportunity of getting acquainted with a number of books I did not know and especially for the opportunity of taking so many books with me to Italy, so that I am re-reading all of them now and going over my appreciation of them more leisurely. I am particularly thankful to Prof. Matthiessen for giving me his American Renaissance, (which has been lent today to a girl of Venice Univ. who is going to write her doctor thesis in American Literature and told me she considers it as a heaven sent and unhoped for help) and his book on Eliot, which was in fact for me the thing I had been missing for the last two years and the best introduction to the understanding of Eliot I could ever hope for.

May I add a suggestion on the library too. Would it not be better to have all the works of a certain number of authors, instead of several copies of the same book. In this way each student could do a complete and sound work on a particular author and get a general knowledge of the American Literature from the lectures and from books of general information. A six weeks steady work on one writer may be the basis for a useful research to be done later at home. When I say so, I am afraid I am being personal again, because I am thinking of all the people that have gone back from Salzburg to some small places f.i. in Finnland, or like myself to Venice, where there is no special American library, so that I must make the most of the reading I have actually done at Salzburg. My main difficulty was to change every week from one author to another with the feeling that I was being so very superficial and casual and frivolous about a number of interesting and most important questions, although I tried very hard to do all I could in the time allowed, and although for all the authors treated in the seminar I had done the strictly necessary reading at home in the past.

All these rambling remarks of course take me back to the basic question, which is what kind of people you want to invite to attend the seminar. From what was said in the last meetings, I think it was

eventually decided that the Seminar is going to be mostly a meeting of undergraduates with a few professors. If it is going to be so, then its present organization is the best one can imagine, as the lectures supply the information, while the seminars compel the students to make an effort and try to find solutions in their own minds, that have a pedagogic value in themselves, no matter if critics and philosophers have said the same things centuries ago, and no one would dream of discussing them again. It is a sound educational principle to take up everything "ab eve" and start e.g. with getting from the students themselves in a most Socratic fashion, the definition of "drama" before coming to the actual discussion of American drama; although, when one then stops at Aristoteles' definition of drama and adopts it as a criterium today, one implicitely denies everything all the other thinkers have done in that field, from Plato down to the present day.

I am afraid this report is really too confused to have a conclusion. I have tried very hard to find faults and be objective, but the only possible conclusion must be a very subjective and personal one. The Salzburg Seminar has been for me such a perfectly pleasant experience, that if I had still to go through it I would not have it changed. I only hope that the future students will understand its meaning and enjoy it as deeply as I did, and that the Seminar will remain in their minds as a living strength, to inspire their work in the years to come.