

Lida Fiserova

Praha, 6th October 1947

Dear Mr. Campbell:

First of all many sincere greetings from my country and thanks for your letter. When I have to write about the Seminar, I do it with a great pleasure; it reminds me of the wonderful time there and I would like to help you with some suggestions to prepare a still nicer seminar for the next summer.

As to the academic program, I write about the library lectures. Both Professor Matthiessen and Mr. Kazin showed me the right way which I was seeking, how to understand an American writer from various points of view, how to analyse a book, how to read not to miss anything. I was anxious to hear it from American people who know best the conditions and the life which the author comes from and writes about. I have never been in the States, I had various imaginations about the life and people there; in the Seminar I could know nearer the mentality of both young and older Americans, which, without any doubt, brought much light into my understanding American literature. From the other lectures on literature I liked Mr. Levenson's Mark Twain. Now, Mr. Campbell, allow me to be quite frank. The fault was that we had very scarce instructions before leaving for the seminar as to the program there, which caused that we had very much to read to be able to follow both lectures and seminars of literature. It took much time, so that we had to miss the lectures from the other scientific branches which we were interested in. One way how to prevent this would be, I think, to let the people who are going to be invited know, let us say about Christmas or in January, in detail about the program, so that one can prepare his special subject and questions from all branches. Now, as to the literary seminar, I would suggest the following way: the Council could send at the same time with the invitation, the list of authors and books which are going to be discussed. Each member choose something, works on it, has to read a report on it in the seminar, and let you know what he has chosen. Maybe some people choose the same subject but it does not matter, because each finds some other problem in it and the discussion could be much more vivid. Then the member has more time to attend the other lectures, has more time for the friends from other countries and this point, I think, is of great importance. During the six weeks I lived with nearly the whole young world in fact. Authentic news made me, rather often, change my imaginations about the country, its life and people. My questions were answered, some problems were solved, many polemics and explanations taught me another way in both thinking and acting.

The next suggestion: it would be of great interest for all members if one member from each country prepares a short report about his own country as to its contemporary cultural, political and social problems. Each member would be asked to prepare it when he gets the invitation.

But the body must be trained too, otherwise people miss it very badly. I think tennis and volley-ball could suit the place there. The playground for badminton could be used for tennis playgrounds and not far from it, one or two playgrounds for volley-ball could be built near the water to be able to water the playgrounds.

If some members who took part in the last seminar will be invited again, they could form a committee, so to say, they having so much experience, could help the American friends, who had such a pretty hard work the last summer. The committee could help in administration, in informing the new members about the place, about the environs, where to go for the weekends so as not to miss any nice places, and there are many there, they could arrange some special discussions, they could be on duty in the library to avoid the painful thing with loosing so many books. Each who wants to borrow a book would be registered, he can take the book from the library, and he is crossed away from the list when he brings back the book.

I would not agree with common excursions, because when a little group goes the people learn to know each other much more when en masse, and each weekend a new group is formed.

If it is possible, do not arrange the lectures in the library, so that it could be a quiet place for studying all day. The rooms behind the library could be reading rooms, where the journals, which each member brings from his country, could be placed. If the number of the members is not high, the Venetian room and the small dining room could be used as lecture rooms.

The concerts both in the castle and in the town were nice, but a variety of the program would be wanted, I think.

As to the community life. It was very good. It was a very pleasant feeling to go abroad for the first time after six years' isolation and to find such a friendly treating at the office in the Seminar, with the members and with the professors, who were never tired to help, the democratic way in expressing one's opinion. I liked the sportsmanlike life in the dormitories, but the discipline was rather small. Too much noise at night, coming late home and taking a bath after midnight, which awoke people sleeping in the adjoining room. Some house order would be useful.

Now what the Seminar meant for me personally. Something I have written about this point above, but much more is left; the Seminar taught me to understand better the American literature, which is my subject. It opened for me the way to many friends and foreign countries, the people and problems of which interest me very deeply, I learned to know a wonderful region, I got a quite new and strange, and for me, a very important experience, how to teach a foreigner Russian, I saw how to lecture on American literature, I improved my English and was inspired to continue my work I have started.

Mr. Campbell, I tried my best to let you know my impressions and ideas as to the Seminar. Allow me thank you once again for all you have done for me and for our Czech group. We shall discuss it all with Mr. Matthiessen in Praha. If I can help you with anything, write, please, I would be glad to be able to do so.

I enclose one clipping from a paper from the time I was in Salzburg.

With best wishes,

Lida Fiserova