

## Women Performing the American “Other”

in Erika and Klaus Manns' *Rundherum* (1929)

By Kimberly Harpole with Waltraud Maierhofer<sup>1</sup>

Man überlegt sich angesichts eines solchen  
dunkelbraunen, plätschernden, jubelnden  
Altersgenossen, ob man der  
Höherentwickelte oder der Entartete sei. Er  
ist, als Körpermensch nämlich,  
unübertrefflich; wir, als vergeistigte  
Körpermenschen, durchaus nicht. (R 125)

(When face to face with such a person of  
one's own age, dark brunette, splashing and  
jubilating, you wonder whether you are the  
more cultivated or more degenerate one. He  
is, as a completely physical being,  
unsurpassable; we as cerebral rather than  
physical beings, are not that at all.)

**F**rom October 1927 to July of the following year, Erika Mann (1905 – 1969), the eldest daughter of prominent novelist Thomas Mann and Katia Mann, undertook a journey around the world. She was accompanied by her brother and closest confidant, Klaus (1906 – 1949). For Erika, the hastily planned trip was a convenient escape from her failing marriage with actor Gustaf Gründgens, whom she had married in the previous year; for Klaus, the journey provided a quick reprieve from bad reviews of his latest play. Additionally, the Mann siblings entertained—or pretended to entertain—hopes of breaking into the burgeoning American film industry since, at the time, Erika was a moderately successful stage actress and Klaus had previously written several very well-

received dramas and a somewhat controversial one as well (*Revue zu Vieren* [“Foursome Chorus Line”] which premiered and toured in Spring 1927).<sup>2</sup> At this time, Klaus Mann’s New York publisher, Horace Liveright, conveniently invited him to come to the United States to present “a few lectures,” as Klaus later put it in his autobiography, *The Turning Point* (1942) (129; Naumann 151). This allowed the two to finance part of their journey with a lecture series at American universities to promote Klaus’s most recent work, *Kindernovelle* (1926; English translation *The Fifth Child*, 1927), which had stirred considerable interest.<sup>3</sup> During the journey, the siblings, already known as highbrow and spoiled “Dichterkinder”<sup>4</sup> (“Children of Poets”), shamelessly promoted themselves as “The literary Mann-twins” (New York newspaper headline, quoted in R 26) and introduced themselves to every possible celebrity and contact of their famous father.

Since travel writing flourished in the decade after World War II, it was natural that the Mann siblings would similarly record their experiences in North America, Japan, and Russia for publication. They secured a contract and a considerable advance from the prestigious publisher Samuel Fischer in Berlin just before they left (Lühe 39).<sup>5</sup> During the journey Klaus regularly placed reports and columns about his observations, little adventures, and chats about celebrities in several papers in major German cities (Grunewald 34-37), and Erika did the same after their return (Lühe 40, 43). In book form their travel journal, *Rundherum. Das Abenteuer einer Weltreise* (“Round About: The Adventure of a Journey around the World”) included 35 photographs and was published shortly after their return in 1929. Although it was cleverly written and well received, the proceeds from the publication did not cover the debts accrued by the two during their nine-month journey. The following article investigates the Manns’ portrayal in *Rundherum* of the United States, especially in contrast to Europe. The overall impression, which they create, is that of a culturally immature nation, with a reactionary public, naïve ideals, corrupt personas, overzealous morals and unfounded prejudices. Focusing on descriptions of women performers in the US, we argue that they are singled out

in *Rundherum* as living representations of what the Mann siblings consider to be the actually genuine aspects of American culture and society.

### **Collaboration**

Since this article is appearing in a journal dedicated to women authors, it is necessary to first address the issue of collaborative writing and the discernibility of the female voice. We argue that it is not as important to show which of the siblings wrote what parts of the text; rather, it is necessary to accept the sense of equal co-authorship, which the Manns portray. *Rundherum* was the first of four journalistic-literary collaborations<sup>6</sup> between the siblings; it was also Erika Mann’s first book-length publication. From the following remark in the travelogue, it appears that in New York, at the initial stage of the journey, there was still a clear division of tasks with the sister in a traditional role of muse and assistant. Klaus did the bulk of the writing, while Erika provided ideas and visual materials, edited, and typed the final versions of the articles:

Akute Not war über uns noch nicht hereingebrochen, da die ‘Aufsatzfabrik’ sehr nett funktionierte. Wenn wir irgendeine freie halbe Stunde hatten, richteten wir es so ein, daß Klaus an seinem Schreibtisch mit Rampenbeleuchtung etwas Brauchbares abfaßte, während Erika an der Schreibmaschine lärmte oder in versendbaren Photographien kramte. (R 27)

(We were not yet in acute need because the ‘essay assembly line’ worked very nicely. When we had a free half hour, we arranged it such that Klaus wrote some acceptable report at his desk with the foot lighting, while Erika made noise at the typewriter or searched the photographs for publishable ones.)

The last sentence is characteristic for the narrative voice in the travelogue: If one of the siblings is singled out, it is by name and in the third person. If a later autobiographical note by Klaus is to be believed, Erika was hesitant to take on “the family curse” of authorship. It was only during this journey, with its constant financial needs, that she took his advice<sup>7</sup> and joined him in writing down their encounters. After their return, she placed several of her reports under her own name in the Berlin entertainment journal *Tempo* before they appeared in the book version, *Rundherum*.<sup>8</sup> She would later become a prolific author and one of the first professional women journalists.<sup>9</sup>

The narrative voice in *Rundherum* is nearly always “we,” which gives the impression that the Manns encounter everything together, see the same things and reflect in the same manner, reinforcing the image that they are inseparable and of one opinion and voice. From the individual newspaper articles, which appeared under only one of the siblings’ names,<sup>10</sup> it may be assumed that each of the siblings recorded different events and topics. Since these were all shared experiences, the two must have communicated during the encounters, which resulted in a mixture of perceptions in the reports, even if only one of the siblings composed them. This shared experience comes through even though they apparently compiled and edited the book without major revisions of each other’s sections. From the number of journal articles, it appears that Klaus Mann was the primary author of the majority of the text in *Rundherum*; he also included a much shorter version of the travelogue in his 1942 autobiography *The Turning Point* (Naumann 151). Yet on the original title page Erika and Klaus Mann are named as equals, giving the impression that they literally wrote the book together with steady input from each other. Consequently, Svoboda Dimitrova-Moeck, the author of the only substantial investigation of *Rundherum*, assumes “collaboration at every state of the book” (161) but does not provide any support for her claim and does not problematize the co-authorship for inclusion in her study on women’s travel writing.<sup>11</sup> In specific passages, however, she sees the attitude of “white men and white male sexuality” (195) expressed, as detailed below. In Karolina Fell’s recent research on travel

literature, *Rundherum* is also investigated solely in the context of women writers. On the other hand, in the more extensive scholarship on Klaus Mann, sections of the book have been cited as Klaus Mann’s individual views on issues such as mass communication and Hitler (Scholt 180) as well as on America and socio-political issues (Fulton 101f.). Lisbeth Exner briefly touches on the travelogue as a humorous prologue to the later exile of both authors in the US. The biographers Irmela von der Lühe and Andrea Weiss point out the long collaboration of the siblings, but do not analyze it.

This is not surprising, because until recently, collaborative authorship has rarely been considered by scholars. Holly Laird, for example, has shown that such partnerships provide a paradigm of literary creativity that complicates traditional views of both author and text. According to Laird, it is not important to find out who contributed what, but rather to establish the way in which the relationship is reflected in the literary outcome (Laird). Erika and Klaus Mann were known to be unconventional in many ways, and the journey in America was the time when they were closest and most dedicated to each other. Was the co-authorship a manifestation of this closeness, a statement about modern writing, or simply the logical extension of their American publicity hoax as the “literary twins?” Biographer Nicole Schaezler claims that their appearance as equal authors on the title page constituted an attempt to fictionalize their relationship, a “Literarisierung” (80). The following discussion will take the collaborative authorship seriously even though it happens that Klaus Mann penned at least two of the reports examined. The reports convey a shared experience and possibly reflect immediate sentiments and conversations. In particular, the male-female “we” modifies the male gaze on women performers and makes a claim that goes beyond a gender-specific perception.

### **The Manns and American Performers**

Before we examine particular sections about the American experience, we need to locate the Manns and their undertaking within the wide contemporary

spectrum of travel and writing as well as of views of America. While crossing the continent by train, the siblings assert:

“Reisen, ins Weite ziehen, auf und davon, in die Ferne. [...] [E]in wahrhaft wundervolles und mysteriöses Abenteuer.”

(“Traveling, moving through vast expanses, up and away, to the far distance. [...] [A]n adventure, truly wonderful and mysterious,” R 32).

The original subtitle of *Rundherum* was “ein heiteres Reisebuch” (“A light-hearted travelogue;” Grunewald no. 121) which captures the style of the book. *Rundherum* is a prime example of a travelogue that does not even pretend to offer profound analysis of the countries visited, but is rather openly about the travelers themselves and their “young” way of seeing.<sup>12</sup> The Manns were only in their early twenties and were naturally more interested in their own amusement and self-promotion than in social or political analysis. They allow themselves to be overwhelmed by impressions of America and to convey their sense of adventure. The result is a text conceived not of extensive research or study, but rather of personal impressions and perceptions and a mixture of youthful vibrancy and curiosity with the skepticism of the intellectual elite.<sup>13</sup> It is their direct encounters with the American citizenry which allow a closer look at Erika and Klaus Mann’s descriptions of American society and culture.<sup>14</sup>

Since they were a playwright and an actress, the Manns took every opportunity to encounter the American stage and entertainment industry. Although they spent much of their time on this journey socializing with relocated acquaintances and famous German emigrants who were living in the United States, such as the actor Emil Jannings in Hollywood, they were also eager to participate in what they considered to be the genuine or authentic aspects of American culture. Three particular encounters with women performers provide the focal point of this

study: first, the evangelical preacher Aimeé McPherson; secondly, the blues singer Nora Holt; and finally, the luau dancer Mrs. Wolters. Erika, who was 22 years old at the time, was an experienced actress with high aspirations; therefore, one could assume that the episodes about female performers were mostly initiated and authored by her. However, the article on sects in California, which included the Baptist preacher McPherson, as well as the one on Nora Holt’s club in Chicago, both appeared first under the name of Klaus Mann, and therefore likely originated from his pen.<sup>15</sup> We argue that as a self-declared cultural critic, his perspective—particularly through Erika’s influence—reflects far less of the male gaze. Instead, it documents the observations of the European who is searching for differences in American performance.

The three women noted above were not conventional actresses in theaters, but they still put on a show for their audiences as a preacher, a singer, and a restaurateur/dancer/singer. Since the three individuals include a black woman (Nora Holt) and a native Hawaiian (Mrs. Wolters), they also represent the ethnic diversity the Manns were seeking out in the American culture. It is remarkable that the travelogue only acknowledges “true” art in America in the cases of Holt and Wolters, locating it specifically in the non-white body of the performer.<sup>16</sup> While each woman is initially encountered as a form of entertainment for Erika and Klaus Mann, she later resurfaces in the text as a means to further characterize the perceived foibles attributed to America as a whole. These women have put themselves on display and far exceed what the young actress and the critic from Berlin are used to in performance: they have willingly opened themselves to the gaze of those who choose to sit in their audiences, they exploit the wish for spectacle, and have arisen from humble or even disadvantaged beginnings to become celebrities.

In the reports, McPherson, Holt, and Wolters are never what they appear to be at first glance. Each woman is introduced under the auspices of her created persona and then, through the act of performance, she undergoes her own individual transformation. Therefore, each woman is unmasked, revealing her natural, perhaps

original, state of being. The preacher and media celebrity McPherson is stripped of her holy persona and revealed to be nothing more than an actress and a money hungry capitalist. In contrast, the African American blues singer Holt is transformed through the act of singing into a genuine priestess of spirituality, completely absorbed in the rhythm of her music. Lastly, the Hawaiian islander Mrs. Wolters is transfigured from a mature business-woman into an emotionally stirring reminder of pre-colonial times when she performs a traditional hula. In the way they describe each encounter, the Manns reveal thematic strands of capitalistic greed, troubled race relations and American hegemony, themes that resonate with relevancy even today.

### **Aimeé McPherson**

The performance by evangelist preacher Aimeé McPherson is the last of several mass entertainment events that the Manns attended in Los Angeles and Hollywood, after a film premiere, a football game, and a boxing match. The reader is prepared by an introductory remark to understand that the report is as much about the audience as about the performer: “Toller als die Exzesse, die Amerikaner sich im Sportlich-Sadistisch-Rekordhaften leisten, sind die, zu welchen sie kommen, wenn sie sich auf religiöses Gebiet begeben.” (“Even wilder than the excesses that the Americans achieve in matters of sports/sadism/records are those in the area of religion,” R 61). For the Manns, McPherson and her audience provide the means for a twofold representation: that of the unchecked capitalist charlatan, juxtaposed with the gullible public that perpetuates her existence.

The evangelist Aimeé Semple McPherson (1890 – 1944) ascended to fame through her theatrical sermons, which combined the era’s love of stage entertainment with her purported natural acting abilities and her own “kinder and gentler” interpretation of Pentecostal evangelism.<sup>17</sup> Her massive stage shows played almost daily to capacity crowds. At any given performance, the audience included not only earnest devotees who had come to hear her preach, but also

various entertainment industry notables and tourists who were simply there to watch her well-publicized show.

The Manns’ four-page report begins with a general description of the artist, then reports on the “Nummern” (acts) in the performance, including those by assistant performers; after hinting at McPherson’s “romantic” past, it concludes with a brief analysis and personal evaluation. The initial description may also serve as a sample of the authors’ matter-of-fact writing style and astute observations:

Die Dame präsentiert sich als ungefähre Mischung aus der Mistinguette<sup>18</sup> und einem evangelischen Pfarrer. Sie hat eine ondulierte blonde Frisur und eine ausgeschriene Stimme. Als Schauspielerin ist sie erster Klasse und von vollkommener Sicherheit. – Über ihren Geschäftssinn braucht man kein Wort zu verlieren, der ziemlich stattliche Angelus-Tempel samt allen Christusbildern ist ihr privates Besitztum, ihre Bücher tragen phantastische Auflageziffern [sic], und sie hat ihre eigene Zeitung.  
(R 62)

(The lady presents herself as a mix between [the French comedienne] Mistinguett and an evangelical priest. Her hair is blonde and undulated into waves, and her voice is raw from shouting. As an actress she is first-class and perfectly confident. – There is no need to mention her sense of business: The rather grand Angelus Temple, with all its pictures of Christ, is her private possession, her books reach fantastic runs, and she publishes her own newspaper.)

From the outset, the Manns make clear that they are attending a show, a “religiöse Revue” (“religious revue,” R 62), rather than a genuine, traditional Christian service. The description of the religious cabaret details its progression

from lively, jazzy church songs performed by a choir to musical numbers by various singers and other performers including a small girl and black singers. The scorn which colors the Manns’ view of McPherson’s materialistic tendencies becomes clear as they list her personal assets. According to their summary, the sermon includes the promotion of her magazines and books, as well as personal anecdotes and stories about the devil; the last attraction is staged in the form of a public baptism of some fifty followers, and concludes with a final speech. McPherson’s showmanship is skeptically dissected by the Manns to reveal such details as her ability to hurry about the stage and yet skillfully wield the microphone, her film-star hairstyle and make-up, and her well-planned ordering and arrangement of the musical numbers and sermon within the religious revue. It is telling that the spectacle reaches its climax with the carefully choreographed and artistically lighted baptism, which the Manns astutely record. The performance is complete with a projected scrolling sing-along text and an elaborate springtime backdrop, against which McPherson appears dressed in a white coat, flanked by an assistant, in a perfectly, artistically staged washing away of sins as they briefly submerge the white-clothed candidates in a swimming pool (64).

Only the cold observer finds this show grotesque. The reaction of both the baptized group and the audience is much as the travelers expect: “Hände krampfen sich in Ekstase, Köpfe sinken schief und beseligt ins heilige Naß; Hysterie läuft wie ein Feuerbrand durch den Saal.” (“Hands cramp up in ecstasy, heads tilt and sink into the holy water in a beatified attitude; hysteria spreads through the room like a wildfire,” R 64). The report quotes a few sentences from the performer’s/preacher’s concluding triumphant speech about the importance of praying in public, and reflects the audience’s cheerful response; it also remarks that the subsequent collection plate brought “große Einnahmen” (“substantial proceeds,” R 64) for McPherson. The preacher reaches even beyond the large audience in her temple via radio to “die Hunderttausend in Stadt und Land” (“the hundred thousand in the city and beyond,” R 63). In passing, the report touches on the new mass medium of radio broadcasting and its potential. The Manns’ word choice towards the end of

the report compares such successful manipulation of a mostly invisible mass audience with magic and hypnosis. They ponder the fact that in order to create this effect, the preacher must be deeply convinced of her mission (R 65).

Travel writing allows the authors to camouflage criticism of issues close to home. It is therefore not a stretch to read this description of a skilled performer who, with a mix of real ecstasy and trickery, causes mass hysteria in an assembly, as an early inquiry into mass psychology. It can also be seen as an analogy to the effect of Hitler’s speeches, about which Klaus Mann later hinted in his 1942 autobiography.<sup>19</sup>

Though they themselves remain unmoved by the apparent religious fervor, the Mann siblings carry away a significant insight. They conclude: “Ihrem grauenhaften Pseudogottesdienst beigewohnt zu haben, ist eine gar nicht unbedeutende Erfahrung. Es bereitet Brechreiz, aber es belehrt über die Kehrseite des Materialismus” (“It is not an insignificant experience to have attended her horrific pseudo-church service. It is nauseating, but instructive about the flipside of materialism,” R 65). When, in 1928, Klaus Mann first published the report, which presented a strong critique of American culture and its religious fervor, he chose the title “Die Kehrseite des Materialismus,” (The flipside of materialism), drawn from the last words of this section. Clearly, the siblings’ disdain for McPherson is not based solely upon her apparently scripted religious services; rather it derives from the combination of her inauthentic religious fervor with her capitalistic ambitions. Equal parts actress, businesswoman, and preacher, Aimeé McPherson incorporates roles that are not easily reconciled and which, to the Mann siblings, represent the worst of American capitalist attitudes.

### **Nora Holt**

In direct contrast to McPherson stands Nora Holt (née Lena Douglas, 1885 or 1890–1974),<sup>20</sup> a blues singer and nightclub owner in Chicago, where she was known as a wild socialite during the 1920s and was seen as “one of the most fascinating personalities of the Harlem Renaissance” (Thaggert 574). In 1918, Holt

had been the first African American to earn a Master of Music degree in the United States, at the Chicago Musical College. She was a music critic for several black publications during the Harlem Renaissance, and she gained further fame as the model for a major character in Carl Van Vechten's controversial novel, *Nigger Heaven* (1926; West 154). Later, she became a prolific composer. In 1921, after inheriting a large fortune at the death of her fourth husband, Chicago hotel owner George Holt, Holt obtained the Apex Club, a small locale on Chicago's notorious south side. Like McPherson, Holt was both a woman of means and a performer.

Again, the Manns frame the performance as light entertainment and distraction, which they actively sought after encountering the depressing slaughter machine of the Chicago Stockyards. In a style, which is seemingly simple and spontaneous, they begin their report with a swift, if jumpy, description which can best be grasped in full:

Berichten wir, um etwas abzulenken, vom Chikagoer Nachtleben, von den Negerlokalen, dem Apex-Club und der Madame Holt.

Nora trägt sich mit dem Anstand einer Herzogin. Macht man sie mit einem Kavalier bekannt, senkt sie die Lider mit jener fast pikierten Würde, welche die Dame charakterisiert. Später erst wird sie aufgeräumter.

Sie ist Chansonette von exquisitestem Ruhm. Keine von der populären Sorte, Revuekönigin – Josephine Baker –: unsere macht Sensation in ausgewählten Zirkeln, Freundin der international-intellektuellen Kreise. Eine richtige Negerin ist sie nicht. Neuerdings hat sie sich sogar das Haar glatt machen lassen, blond gefärbt trägt sie es schon lange. Dieser Trick, widerspenstiges Haar zu entkräuseln, ist speziell für arrivierte Damen ihrer Rasse ausgedacht worden. Man braucht dazu sehr komplizierte Apparate, es soll kostspielig und schmerzhaft sein. Die blonde Jungfrisur

sieht aufreizend aus zu breiter Nase, blanken Augen und zum grellen, dicklippigen Mund.

Die ihr Silberkleid heute mit eleganter Nonchalance trägt, sich so kostspielig herrichtet wie nur irgendeine auf der Fünften Avenue, kommt aus der finstersten Gegend New Yorks. Der Anfang heißt: Harlem, das schwarze Viertel. (R 101-102)

(As a distraction from these serious topics, we'll report on the Chicago nightlife, on the black bars, the Apex Club, and Madame Holt.

Nora comports herself with the manners of a Duchess. When she is introduced to a gentleman, she lowers her eyelids with the almost piqued dignity that characterizes a true lady. Only later does she become more jovial.

She is a singer of most exquisite reputation. Not one of the popular type, the revue queen—such as Josephine Baker—: She is the sensation of selected circles, a friend of international intellectual circles. She is not a true Negro. Recently, she even has had her hair straightened, for a long time it has been dyed blonde. The procedure to straighten unmanageable hair has been invented especially for successful ladies of her race. It requires complex machines and is said to be expensive and painful. Her blonde boyish hairdo looks provocative with her broad nose, shining eyes, and flamboyant thick-lipped mouth.

The lady who today wears her silver dress with elegant nonchalance, who makes herself up in as costly a way as any lady on Fifth Avenue, hails from New York's darkest area. The beginning is called Harlem, the black Quarter).

The American-born Josephine Baker, who is mentioned here for contrast with Holt, had become an instant success in 1925 for her erotic dancing in Paris. She had toured Europe in subsequent years, and represented for Weimar culture “ultra-up-to-dateness” (Nenno 146). The physical descriptions of McPherson and Holt in *Rundherum* do not greatly differ—for example, both wear their hair in the short, blonde style favored by actresses of the day. However, there is one striking difference: as an African American woman, Holt represents the counter-culture movements underway in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A study in contradictions, Holt appears at once exotic, audacious, demure and stylish. She carries herself like any wealthy white lady in New York’s shopping headquarters, though she hails from the poor African-American quarter; the report neglects her quasi-rural origin in overwhelmingly white Kansas. Thus, Erika and Klaus Mann touch on “the desire of black women to change the racial appearance of their bodies and to look more ‘white,’ complicating the notion of racial identities being fixed along biological lines” (Dimitrova-Moeck 196). The report continues with short references to the early stages of Holt’s career, when she was discovered in Paris, had an influential mentor, and quickly rose to stardom. The remarks of the Mann siblings suggest that “subjugation of the black woman to the requirements and aesthetic values of white men” (Dimitrova-Moeck 196) enables success more than talent, hard work, and expertise. Before the travelogue describes the specific performance, it briefly touches on issues of race, calling the erotic triumphs (“erotischen Triumphe,” R 102) of black women performers a form of revenge for the humiliation of their “brothers.”<sup>21</sup> To be sure, the authors do not take this opportunity to expand on the politics or theories of race, but their remarks show their keen observation and sensibility, even though they closely link the black performer’s success to her sexuality and attractiveness and do not mention her academic and intellectual accomplishments.

The Manns also note the exotic décor of the club, the solemn half-darkness, the mostly white audience, and the thrill of the upper class as they enjoy dancing incognito with African-Americans (R 104). However, the remarks made by the

Manns about the musicians, singers, and dancers in the general program are unenthusiastic; they even find them indecent, exaggerated, and appalling. They point out that their white companions at the club are “keine Abenteurer, sondern angesehene und gesetzte Herren” (“not adventurers but respected and mature gentlemen,” R 103) who are proud of their acquaintance with the singer. The Manns also openly flaunt their association with Holt, both here and on several other occasions in the travelogue, showing their rejection of both American and European social norms.<sup>22</sup>

Nora Holt’s performance, as she gives in to the foreign sojourners’ request, is clearly the highlight of the evening for everyone in the club. The report spends almost as much space on the preparations for it, underlining the sensation and the audience’s growing expectations, as it does on the following description of the song:

Sie beginnt, ihre Stimme kommt noch tiefer, als man es erwartet hatte. Sie tönt feierlich wie ein Gong, ein wenig rauh, aber manchmal aufglänzend mit einem Ton, der wie ein dumpfes, mutwilliges Jauchzen klingt. Ihre Haltung ist hochdramatisch, in der Wendung ihres Kopfes liegt Pathos. Vergessen ist die elegante Dame von vorher; diese *singt* nur, existiert nur im Rhythmus, nun ist sie eine Art Priesterin, so ernst waltet sie ihres Amtes. Sie begleitet, ohne hinzusehen, ihre Finger finden die richtigen Tasten. Sie zeigt uns, während sie singt, ihr todernstes Gesicht – uns scheint es todernst, sogar wenn es sich lachend verzerrt.

Vor unserem halbtrunkenen Blick verwandelt sie sich zum Sonderbaren. [...] Sie wird, die Singende, eine Negergottheit sein, die ihren rhythmischen Gottesdienst hält. Bunt behangen, mit breitem Mund und über der dunklen Stirne das unerlaubt blonde Haar, hat sie keinen Gedanken mehr, nur noch Takt – – (R 104-105).

(She begins, her voice enters even deeper than expected. She sounds festive like a gong, a little harsh, but sometimes brilliant with a note that sounds like muffled, willful jubilation. Her posture is highly dramatic, the turning of her head conveys pathos. Forgotten is the elegant lady from before; this woman only *sings*, exists in rhythm, now she is a kind of priestess, she performs her duty with such earnestness. She accompanies herself without looking down, her fingers find the proper piano keys. While she is singing, she shows us her deadly serious face---it appears earnest to us even when contorted in laughter.

Before our half-drunk gaze she transforms herself into something strange. [...] The singer will be a Negro goddess conducting her rhythmic religious service. Colorfully adorned, with her broad smile, and the illicit blonde hair above her dark forehead, she has no more thoughts, only the rhythmic beat— —).

It is surprising that the detailed description of Holt’s voice and posture is not followed by information about her songs and their themes. Her singing appears void of content, and is reduced to sound, rhythm, expression, something almost animalistic. Her musical expertise becomes intuition, even a religious offering to an unnamed god. The description of Holt’s performance provided by the Mann siblings concludes with impressions of her exotic appearance and ends with two dashes, which supports the earlier remark about her extraordinary effect in creating a sensation of drunkenness among the listeners. For the Manns, this performance of black music is an important experience; it is part of Chicago with its many faces, of which they say in the next section, “Wer Amerika kennen will muß sich *hier* umgesehen haben” (“Whoever wants to know America has to have had a look around *here*,” R 105).

While McPherson is criticized for her flawless delivery and showmanship, Holt is praised for her raw and seemingly unrehearsed presentation. Though Holt is undoubtedly performing for the patrons in her club, the Manns read her physical movements, her facial expression, and her vocal quality as the products of a genuine state of ecstasy. Although she began the performance as a blues singer, she has transformed before their eyes to a priestess of music. The rapt atmosphere is no longer that of a club, but rather of a temple, where they now find themselves involved in a sort of rhythmic service, led by this exotic deity.

### **Mrs. Wolters**

Like Holt’s performance, the last example, that of Mrs. Wolters, also shows the Manns’ search for cultural authenticity. Among the palm trees, tropical flowers and bungalows in Honolulu, the Mann siblings discover what they believe to be the very personification of imperialist America and its ever growing sphere of influence in the Hawaiian Islands. While earlier native Hawaiians may have spent their days tending chickens or pigs, the Hawaiians encountered by the Manns have found a less strenuous way to earn their living—namely, sitting on the beaches and entertaining the throngs of tourists (Lua 136). Though the Manns believed that in Hawaii they found authentic locals, they in fact only came across those who chose to present themselves to the tourists.

It quickly becomes clear to the Mann siblings that not even the vast Pacific Ocean is capable of stemming the tide of capitalist influence on what they view as a sort of Garden of Eden. Here more than anywhere else, they engage themselves in an active search for the “authentic.”<sup>23</sup> They find that Hawaii seems to be divided into two social spheres, which coexist separately from one another. The “inauthentic” sphere consists of the hotels and gift shops, with their calculated attempts at “authentic” culture which, however, are aimed solely at exploiting the tourists—in particular the “Americans,” the other face of their conquerors—and approximating their misguided conceptions of what is Hawaiian.

In a separate realm from what the Mann siblings consider to be the modern plague that has infested Hawaii, is all that they perceive to be authentic—in this case, the brown-skinned people whom the Manns view as native Hawaiians. Everyone and everything outside of this sphere is considered to be inauthentic. As they comb the beaches and local areas away from the tourist-ridden hotels, the Manns describe the children, the swimmers, and the elderly people who personify their ideal of “authentic” Hawaii. Above all, the local people are portrayed as idyllic, simple and more connected with nature than the Mann siblings or their American tourist counterparts. The Hawaiian children laugh and play on the beach in a way that the Manns believe European children no longer can (R 124). The adolescent males, whom the siblings describe as preternaturally athletic and born into the world to be swimmers, dive for coins tossed into the harbor by arriving tourists. The elderly women radiate an inner happiness, sitting like “Indianerhäuptlinge” (“Native American chieftains”) and amusing themselves with stories of the former Royal family (R 126).

Before the description of the Luau, the narrators muse about the pretense of authenticity, which rules this territory, and the combination of hospitality and economic interest, which the descendants of the indigenous people display towards the tourists from the US:

Wir haben aber auch ein “echt hawaiianisches” Gastmahl mitgemacht, etwa fünfundzwanzig Amerikaner waren dabei, und der Eintritt kostete fünf Dollar [...]. – Das psychologische Kuriosum bei einem solchen “Gastmahl” ist die innere und äußere Haltung der Wirte. Echte Gastfreundschaft und naive Gewinnsucht gehen eine wunderliche Hochzeit miteinander ein. Einerseits ist man sich durchaus darüber klar: hier gibt es dumme Amerikaner zu neppen, andererseits bewahrt man sich die schöne und natürliche Geste des großartig Einladenden, feierlich Bewirtenden. Diese Leute *vergessen* tatsächlich, daß sie für beinahe nichts fünf Dollar verlangt

haben, und bitten die frech Ausgenutzten mit so herzbezwingender Fröhlichkeit zum geschmückten Tisch, als veranstalteten sie, nach alter Sitte, wirklich für die Fremden ein Empfangs- und Ehrenfest. (R 126-7)

(We also participated in an ‘authentic Hawaiian’ banquet, about twenty-five Americans were there, and the fee was five dollars [...]. — The psychological oddity at such a “banquet” is the inner and outer manner of the hosts. Real hospitality and naïve profit-seeking become very strange bedfellows. On the one hand, it is quite obvious: this is about ripping off stupid Americans, on the other hand the beautiful and natural gestures of splendid invitation and festive hosting have been preserved. These people really *forget* that they charged five dollars for nearly nothing, and they invite the guests they are impudently taking advantage of, to their ornate table with such heart-conquering gaiety that it seems as if they really had arranged a reception and banquet of honor for the strangers, according to ancient custom.)

The Luau affords the Manns a closer look at Hawaii’s colonial conquest and capitalist exploitation. An aging relic of the court life of Hawaii’s former monarchy, Mrs. Wolters first appears in the narration as an ugly reminder of colonial history and the hegemony of the foreign in paradise. This perception is based upon the Manns’ mistaken idea of what constitutes “authentic” Hawaiian, and is rooted in their readily apparent anti-American sentiment. Though they are themselves visitors to the islands, the Manns continue to reject the Hawaiian Luau until the moment when the hostess transforms their perceptions through her unique performance of a traditional Hawaiian dance. The Manns’ initial rejection of the Luau and all the performers in it is founded on their first impressions of the apparent invasion of the Hawaiian islands by foreign, mainland US forces. The Manns

initially categorize the Luau hostess, dancers, and singers in this sphere, based on their business relationship with the hotels and the general tourist industry. To them, the hostess is merely a capitalist who serves the masses of tourist invaders, and is thus almost indistinguishable from the owners of plantations and factories, or the inhabitants of the military bases.

As presented in the narration, a woman simply named “Mrs. Wolters”<sup>24</sup> serves as the hostess of the luau, which the Manns attend. The travelogue records the first impression of her as fascinating and likable, and describes her elegant, if matronly outfit for the festive occasion:

Unsere “hostess” heißt Mrs. Wolters, sie ist ziemlich stattlich, ziemlich bejahrt und, bei Licht besehen, ein faszinierender Anblick. Zum feierlichen Anlaß trägt sie Gelb und Schwarz [...]: schwarzes Seidenkleid mit Schleppe, anmutig matronenhaft kombiniert, dazu schwarzgelben Sammethut und gelbe Handschuhe. Mrs. Wolters mit Brille und tiefer Stimme gehört dem Damentyp an, der einem wohlgefallen muß: herzerquickend und vertrauenerweckend. (R 127)

(Our hostess is called Mrs. Wolters, she is quite stately, quite elderly, and when seen in the light of day, a fascinating sight. She wears yellow and black for the festive occasion [...]: a black silk gown with a train, a combination of the graceful and the matronly, along with a black and yellow velvet hat and yellow gloves. Mrs. Wolters, with her glasses and deep voice, belongs to a type of woman who can't help but please: refreshing the heart and inspiring trust.)

In contrast, the siblings find her husband to be “heuchlerisch” (“duplicitous” R 127), and he makes a less favorable impression on them.

Most of the description of the event ensues without reference to the likable Hawaiian woman with the American name—a circumstance the travelogue does not find noteworthy, but which expresses the woman’s adaptation to the world of business with Americans. The narrative describes a round of special Schnaps, the preparation of the pig, which is buried in the ground and roasted whole, and then its ritual uncovering, all with a tone of irony in relation to the “ancient Hawaiian” presentation, including the fact that the meal is eaten with the fingers. The feast is followed by a performance of Hawaiian dance and song. The Manns observe a distinct difference from European dancing; in the Hawaiian dance, there is a form of monotonous recitative, and the women dancers “illustrate” these extensive epic ballads, heroic deeds and national adventures through their motions. The Manns are especially fascinated by the elderly singer. As with Nora Holt, they spend the most time on the description of the singer’s voice, while we learn nothing more about the contents of the ballads. However, after this traditional entertainment, the next acts are more modern, sexy dances to which the audience reacts mostly with amusement (R 127-30). The song and dance performance ends with a Hawaiian dance by Mrs. Wolters; here the description moves from her background to an evaluation of her technique, from short impressions to compliments by the audience and then ends with a surprisingly positive comment:

Als letzter Clou tanzt Mrs. Wolters selbst. Sie ist ein Liebling am Hofe der letzten Regentin gewesen, wie verkündigt wird. Sie versteht, wenngleich sie nur schwerfällig trippelt, immer noch ihre Sache, man merkt es, daß sie eine bessere und durchdachtere Technik hat als die Jungen. Wie sie hinter Brillengläsern kokettiert, die matronenhafte Schleppe hebt, hat sie etwas Schauerliches. Aber es ergötzt sie, wie eine alte Hofdame das Menuett. Und da man ihr nachher Komplimente über ihre Grazie macht, lächelt sie so selig wie ein Kind. Die wir ein paar Minuten

vorher für eine gierige und groteske Alte angesehen, ist mit einem Male ein rührender Mensch. (R 130)

(As the final highlight, Mrs. Wolters herself dances. According to the announcement, she was a favorite at the court of the last monarch. She still knows what she is doing, even though she can only mince along in a labored way. It is obvious that she has a better and more sophisticated technique than the younger dancers. There is something unearthly about the way she flirts behind her glasses and lifts her matronly train. But it delights her, as a minuet delights an old lady-in-waiting. When afterwards she is complimented about her gracefulness, she smiles as blissfully as a child. The woman, whom we viewed a few moments earlier, as a greedy and grotesque old lady, has suddenly become a touching human being).

Once again, the report of this encounter ends with an abrupt statement. Through her performance of the native Hawaiian dance, in the perception of the Mann siblings, Mrs. Wolters is lifted from the sphere of the exotic but inauthentic, to be linked with Nora Holt in the realm of the expression of something higher. The Manns are surprised by the transformation of Mrs. Wolters from a personage of greed and grotesque masquerade to someone who conveys a moving sense of humanity. This transformation is at once revealing and complete. Suddenly Mrs. Wolters no longer appears as an intruder pandering to the hordes of unsophisticated tourists, “stupid Americans,” who gladly purchase the inauthentic kitsch, which fills the hotels and gift shops. Rather, she radiates authenticity, as a worthy example and reminder of native Hawaiian culture. The Manns concede that her art distances her from other “tourist trappers” and therefore renders her worthy of admiration.

### The “Other” America

The above-cited passages from *Rundherum* make up only a small part of the entire text. As the Mann siblings wander the vastness of the country in search of the “real” America, they uncover a great deal of evidence indicating the decadent, greedy, and prejudiced nature of the American population. While in love with the youthfulness of America and its potential, the Manns distance themselves from most people and places they encounter. In the process, they reaffirm what they believe to be the superiority of European society and culture. When they leave the continent after six months, in their snobbish reliance on the European tradition, which values idealism or *Geist* higher than materialism, they ponder their “*Haß auf Amerika*” (“hatred for America,” emphasis original, R 120).<sup>25</sup> It is important to take into account here that the German word *Geist* can be translated either as mind/intellect, or spirit, when the Manns explain:

“Das üppig gedeihende, aufreizend wohlhabende Amerika mit ganzem Herzen zu verabscheuen – und zwar aus Liebe für das zerrüttete alte Europa, wo man aber immer noch den Geist vermutet –, könnte eine anständige und positive Regung des Herzens sein.”

(“It may be a decent and positive impulse of the heart to loathe the lavishly thriving and tantalizingly well-to-do America with all one’s heart—to be sure out of love for shattered old Europe where, however, the existence of *Geist* can still be presumed” R 120).

The Manns conveniently neglect the fact that it was the gifts of American capitalists that had made their extended journey possible. In his 1927 essay, “Zur Situation des jungen Geistigen Europas” (“On the Situation of Europe’s Young Intellectuals”), which probably formed the basis for his US lectures, Klaus Mann complained that there were very few young Europeans left who stood up for *Geist*,

and that intellectualism was under attack from all sides, including among artists (R 133). However, the standpoint expressed here is not unique or original. In upholding the opposition between *Geld* (money, materialism) and *Geist*, the Manns follow their father and his Romantic critique of Capitalist modernity<sup>26</sup>—and ignore the fact that the Weimar Republic had also embraced the possibilities of democracy and capitalism. Self-consciousness among intellectuals about a perceived attack on *Geist* by money was an “essential aspect of German culture during the inflation period” following World War I (Widdig 170). Clinging to the notion of the supremacy of *Geist* over the physical body and material goods, the Manns despise the American entertainment industry as “ungeistige Kunst” (“art lacking spirit/intellect” R 100). However, their encounters with the three women highlighted above present a closer look at performance at its heart. Where the performers break through the materialistic frame and effect-conscious arrangement of their presentation, the travelers find genuine art that speaks not to their *Geist* but to their hearts.

In the two cases where they acknowledge great American performers, the Manns do not portray them as driven by intellect; instead, they suggest that their art is purely physical. It seems to be no coincidence that both enthralling performers belong to the “other,” to racial minorities—even if they have adopted “white” attire and names. Great American artistic performance appears for the “literary twins” in the tradition of the noble savage: The singer’s and dancer’s performing body of the “other” race is not subordinated to the intellect. Innocently, the Mann siblings use the term “entartet” or “degenerate” when asking who is more developed: the “Körpermensch” (“physically dominated human being”), or the intellectually/spiritually dominated individual like themselves. In their description of young dark-skinned native Hawaiians playing in the water, swimming, and cheering (as quoted in full at the beginning of this article), we note how the Manns wonder “ob man der Höherentwickelte oder der Entartete sei” (“whether one is the more cultivated or more degenerate person”). They conclude that the young Hawaiians, since they are completely physical, are unsurpassable or

“unübertrefflich” while the siblings themselves, as intellectuals who view the body as a relic and clumsy burden, are not at all exceptional (R 125). They had no way of knowing at the time, that the many innovative, oppositional and experimental cultural practices for which Weimar is justly famous and of which the Manns were proudly a part, would soon be officially labeled as degenerate (“entartet”) and that they would seek exile in America, the country they had so ironically criticized and condescendingly admired during their early adventure in traveling the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This article grew out of Kim Harpole’s M. A. thesis; it was originally submitted for the collection, *Sophie Discovers America*, edited by Rob McFarland and Michelle Stott James, and we thank the editors for their valuable feedback. As Kim Harpole was unavailable for revisions, I (WM) stepped in; we are grateful to the editors of the *Sophie Journal* to allow and encourage this form of collaboration, quite appropriate for its topic. English translations of quotes are by WM except where published translations are noted.

<sup>2</sup> See Schaenzler 76-82.

<sup>3</sup> For details on the biographical background see Lühe, Dohrmann, and Weiss.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the self-ironical term “‘Dichter-Kinder’-Betrieb” (“‘poets’ children’ operation,” R 39). Especially Klaus Mann used the attribute in a more negative sense, as in his autobiographical article “Dichterkinder ... früh vergiftet” (“Poets’ Children ... Poisoned Early,” 1929; listed in Grunewald no. 123).

<sup>5</sup> Weiss states that the idea for the book came rather late when they were stuck in Japan, unable to pay their hotel bill, and Samuel Fisher rescued them with a considerable advance (59); however, she does not cite evidence for this claim. The fact that the book starts at the outset of the journey and maintains throughout the flavor of impressions “ganz nebenbei” (“entirely on the side,” Lühe 39), rather than analytical reflection after the fact, speaks against Weiss’s theory.

<sup>6</sup> The other three are another travelogue, *Das Buch von der Riviera. Was nicht im Baedeker steht* (“The Book about the [French] Riviera. What is not in Baedeker,” 1931); *Escape to Life*, a “Who is Who” of exiles from Nazi Germany (first published in English, translated by Mary Hottinger-Mackie, 1939, illustrated English

edition Boston 1938; German edition *Escape to Life: Deutsche Kultur im Exil* not until 1991); and *The Other Germany* (trans. Heinz Norden 1940), their defense of German culture and the German people against Hitlerism and Nazism and their “appeal to America to save them from their monstrous tyrants” (anonymous review in *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 13 [1949]: 572). Klaus and Erika Mann collaborated on other works such as the play *Plagiat, eine Komödie in fünf Bildern* (“Plagiarism. A Comedy in Five Scenes,” written in 1931, unpublished).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Klaus Mann 143. He does not go into detail about the collaboration or who wrote what. Neither Klaus’s published diaries, his childhood memoirs, *Kind dieser Zeit* (“A Child of This Time”), nor Erika’s published letters provide detailed material from this time period. Upon their return Erika wrote a play and appeared as the sole author of children’s books (such as *Stoffel fliegt übers Meer* [“Stoffel Flies across the Ocean,” 1932]).

<sup>8</sup> See Lühe 43 and the list on 327; from these we know that Erika Mann authored at least the corresponding sections in *Rundherum* on “Das kleine Mädchen von Honolulu” (“The Little Girl from Honolulu”), “Hollywood bei Nacht” (“Hollywood at Night”), “Literatur in Amerika” (Literature in America), “Student-girls und Student-boys,” “Generalprobe” (“Dress Rehearsal”), “Charles Lindbergh,” “Silvesterbrand in Hollywood” (“New Year’s Eve in Hollywood”), and “Die Bohème ist tot” (“The Bohemian is Dead”) all of which appeared before the book between October 1928 and January 1929 in the paper, *Tempo*.

<sup>9</sup> See the chapter, “The Emergence of Travel Journalism as Women’s Profession,” in Dimitrova-Moeck.

<sup>10</sup> For Erika, see the bibliography section in Lühe (327); for Klaus, Grunewald 34-37 with the following about the US: “Jahrmarkt der Eitelkeiten” (“Vanity Fair”) about actors in Hollywood, “Besuch bei Upton Sinclair” (“A Visit with Upton Sinclair”), “Der Fall Marion Kramer” (“The Case of Marion Kramer”), “Bei Pola Negri” (“Visiting Pola Negri”), “Klaus Mann schreibt uns aus Hollywood” (“Klaus Mann Writing from Hollywood”), “Kehrseite des Materialismus” (“The Other Side of Materialism”), “Amerikanische Lektüre” (“American Readings”), “Form in der amerikanischen Zivilisation” (“Form in American Civilization”); all published in the first quarter of 1928. Klaus Mann also published 13 reports in the Essen illustrated paper *Die Wochenschau* (Naumann 148). Possible overlap between these reports and the book version will need further investigation. Oberloskamp, considering mainly the paper articles’ sections on Russia, states that they are “weitgehend mit dem Buch identisch” (“largely identical with the book version,” 100). Both Weiss and Lühe in their biographies document the lifelong collaboration of the siblings but do not analyze it.

<sup>11</sup> Dimitrova-Moeck should be challenged when she states: “Erika Mann and Klaus Mann collectively

produced their travel accounts, working together to capture every detail from each stage of their trip and

together drafting the book from the first to the final pages.” (161) It would be impossible to record every detail of a journey covering nine months in just over 200 pages. The narrative is highly selective and for the most part avoids giving details and analysis in favor of quick impressions and glimpses into their fast-paced encounters. Even at the sentence level, the text presents quite the opposite of the detail, complexity, and polished style that was so famously executed in their father’s novels, and which they did not want to be seen as imitating. See the longer quotes below.

<sup>12</sup> For “the interplay between observer and observed” as essential for travel writing, see Blanton 5.

<sup>13</sup> Naumann (151) arrives at a similar assessment.

<sup>14</sup> Within the scope of this article, it is not possible to examine this further. Dimitrova-Moeck goes more into detail on cities and landscapes, races and racism, and the legacy of Western Civilization in the travelogue overall; however, she discusses only one of the performances investigated here.

<sup>15</sup> Klaus Mann, “Kehrseite des Materialismus.” *Neue Leipziger Zeitung* (28 April 1928), noted in Grunewald no. 102; “Der Apex-Club.”

<sup>16</sup> In Berlin, the Manns had encountered and shared “Weimar Germany’s supposed fascination with black culture and black bodies, ranging from jazz to Josephine Baker” (Graml 161). In America, they were fascinated by a general love for the body; they were looking for black art and the black body in its original context.

<sup>17</sup> Not only were McPherson’s sermons and writings published as early as 1919 (*This is that: Personal Experiences, Sermons and Writings*), but as one of the most influential evangelists of the twentieth century, McPherson herself has been the subject of several book-length studies and biographies; see Epstein.

<sup>18</sup> Original name Jeanne-Marie Bourgeois (1875 – 1956), a popular French comedienne; this is an example of the frequent name-dropping of celebrities used by the Manns.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Scholdt 180. The ban on public speaking for Hitler was gradually lifted around the same time as the Manns’ journey, in the course of 1927 and 1928, and the Manns attentively watched his rise and his effect on the masses in the following years.

<sup>20</sup> The year of her birth is not known but it is believed to be either of these years (Thaggert). For scholarship on Holt as entertainer and composer, see Reed 2010, 70-80; Walker-Hill 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> This broader issue goes beyond the scope of this article; the short paragraph has also been analyzed by Dimitrova-Moeck who interprets the Manns’ view—or, more specifically Klaus Mann’s view—as “another form of neo-colonization, in this case, white men and white male sexuality colonizing the bodies and psyches

of black women” (196). Dimitrova-Moeck linked the short report with the discovery of what Homi Bhabha later labeled cultural “mimicry” or what is also known as “racial passing” (196). The way the Manns report the performance conveys their vague familiarity with theoretical concepts of racism circulating in Berlin and an attempt to provoke attention, if not protest. Klaus Mann followed up on the male fascination with the black female body in the relationship of his protagonist Höfgen with the dancer Juliette Martens in his 1936 novel *Mephisto*; cf. more in Fulton (102) who like Dimitrova-Moeck in this context attributes the section on Nora Holt solely to Klaus Mann.

<sup>22</sup> This rejection is touted at several other points in the narrative, when the siblings board a train to California and wistfully observe the African American attendant, and again in Hawaii when they befriend a troupe of native Hawaiian performers and parade them through the dining room of a lavish hotel, much to the abhorrence of the other white guests.

<sup>23</sup> The search for authenticity and “questioning the legacy of Western civilization” in *Rundherum* is also investigated by Dimitrova-Moeck (200-207), who includes the report on Hawaii but not the performance by Mrs. Wolters in particular.

<sup>24</sup> No further biographical information could be found.

<sup>25</sup> Klaus Mann considered himself an authority on and speaker for the young generation in general, which was also the topic of his lectures in the United States (Lühe 39). He tended to utter sweeping criticisms of cultural tendencies in his works of these years (such as the essay *Heute und Morgen. Zur Situation des jungen geistigen Europas* [Today and Tomorrow. On the Situation of the Young Intellectual Europe]), especially towards the perceived hostility of the modern mass society against intellect or *Geist*. For a deeper analysis, see Schanzler 87-90 and Bogdal 92.

<sup>26</sup> More on this issue can be found in Bullivant.