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DB - 26
The gilded style;
Carnival, III

Plockstrasse 8
Giessen, Germany
March 10, 1958

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Besides the "Importance of being Foolish", there are several other characteristics essential to Cologne's Karneval. One of them is what a German commentator calls "the voluntary subservience" of the people who swear fealty to His Craziiness, Prinz Karneval. It is a democratization of court etiquette. Yet elements of dignified ritual and majestic form remain.

When one recalls the intense German interest in royalty - the affairs of the British queen, Iran's Soraya, and so on - it's not surprising to encounter the half-serious courtliness of Karneval.

To find out more about this and other aspects of Fastnacht, I looked up Albrecht Bodde, a liquor wholesaler and a renowned Karneval big-shot. At 67, Bodde is a hale and hefty gent. He reminded me of a vigorous Frenchman whose recipe for health was to drink two quarts of champagne a day. Bodde is honorary president of the Festival Committee of the Cologne Karneval. He is also president of the Great Kölner Karneval Society - one of the biggest and best. This is his fiftieth year of Fastnacht activity. Here are some of his comments on the festival:

The Prince---"He is really the symbol of the whole Karneval. Each year there are several candidates for the roll. They are examined by a special citizen's committee and the Lord Mayor. One is picked. The same goes for the 'Virgin' and the 'Cologne Peasant'. After the nominations, the prince must pay \$3,000 to the Festival Committee. The Virgin and Peasant pay \$1,200. However, that's only part of their costs. They must buy their own costumes - the elegant ones cost up to \$1,000. In addition they must pay for banquets, and the tons of caramels which are thrown from the prince's float to his 'subjects.' Some princes shell out \$12,000.

"It's a great honor to be prince. But it's also strenuous. He must visit every single Sitzung, no matter how small. He must make hundreds of public appearances - visit the archbishop, orphans homes, hospitals - sometimes 23 in a single day."

Karneval Societies---"They are organized something like corporations. There is a board of directors, called the 'senate', and the management called the Elferrat. Most of them lose money on their Sitzungen, but we make it back on our masked balls - sometimes \$5,000 profit on a ball. Profits go towards the making of a better Rosenmontag parade. For the rest of our costs we rely on contributions.

"The societies are traditionalized. Some have had three or four generations from single Cologne families. Each has its own uniform, fool's caps, medals, coat of arms.

"Actually, all clubs in Cologne are 'carnivalized', the business and professional clubs, the refugee clubs, the sport clubs. They all join Karneval, when the season comes around."



Bodde, body and soul

Albrecht Bodde takes part in Karneval body and soul. He writes songs. He presides over the exhausting Sitzungen. He attends the masked balls (dressed as a maharaja), the parades, and the fish dinner on Ash Wednesday. His apartment is filled with Karneval souvenirs; a thousand medals, silver Karneval flails, fool's caps. "Our way," he says, "is to be light, blithe, and lively. I always die a little when I go away from Cologne."

Bodde is an idealist; he is also a practical man. "Karneval is one of the largest things in Cologne's economy," he says, "especially for the food, drink, and textile industries." Bodde's wholesale house sells a lot of booze during Fastnacht. And it is no secret that the main promoters of Karneval are Cologne's burgher-businessmen. But it would be unfair to claim that they support the festival out of pure self-interest. They put much more into it than they gain in business returns. Karneval is a going concern; but when you count up the marks and pfennigs. it is the city that profits more than the individuals.

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It was Saturday evening and time for another spectacle. At 6 p.m. the New Market was jammed with people waiting for the arrival of the "Ghost Parade", headed by the prince and his court. One wondered whether these were the same persons who attended the other ceremonies on previous days. Certain only was the fact that there were thousands upon thousands who wanted to see their "prince".

Prinz Walter rolled up in his royal coach, followed by three large companies of marchers from the various societies - each with their prancing, kiss-blowing "Mariechen". A cyclone of cheers burst from the onlookers. Prince, Peasant, and Virgin mounted the platform, pasted on smiles, and waved to the admirers. Their gorgeous velvet and ermine doublets and cloaks shone in torchlight.



"Gorgeous" - Virgin, Prince,
and Peasant

was thrown by one of the most genteel Karneval societies - the Prinzengarde. It featured a debutante-style band with lots of saxophones, clean tableclothes, and no dark corners.

Accordingly, the manners and mien of the guests differed. At the Barn, they squatted on the dance floor when there was no more room at the tables; at the Gürzenich they sat daintily on the staircase outside. Costumes differed too: at the Barn incredibly grotesque masks, sputnik rigs, people dressed as fish or hideous monsters. At the Gürzenich the idea was plainly to cut a figure, to be splendid - pashas, admirals, goddesses. We drank beer at the Barn, champagne at the Gürzenich. We wobbled in the Barn; danced in the Gürzenich. The one reeked of sweat; the other was fragrant with perfume.

I began this night as gentleman and finished it as a fool. That is, at 9 p.m. I was sober and elegant in my Mississippi gambler's costume. I even found myself rather dashing. Six hours and a dozen glasses later, a woman with green hair and long false eyelashes hove into my diminished view. "I wanna go home," she said, digging her fingers into my deltoids. "Let's go," I replied

Home turned out to be about 40 miles from "The Barn. Forty rainy, muddy miles. The green woman passed out into a Sleeping Ugly slumber. So I delivered the cargo and drove back to the ball. It was just finishing - at 5:30 a.m.

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Sunday afternoon was sunny and cool. Feet swollen, knees weak, and eyes red, I ventured out to see the Veedelszög (district parade) on the Gereonstrasse. This is a preliminary to the great Mad Monday parade. It is strictly amateur, and utterly delightful.

The prince told the crowd to be grateful that "our old Adenauer has sent us such beautiful sunny weather from his vacation spot on the Riviera. That's friendship at a distance." Then he smiled some more, waved goodbye, climbed into his coach, and rattled off.

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Saturday night was the time for masked balls - 18 of them. I went to two; one in a suburban den called "The Barn," and the other in the downtown Gürzenich. The difference was considerable. The ball at the Barn was pitched for Cologne's arty set - wild decorations, a sizzling Dixieland band, and lots of dark corners. The Gürzenich ball

The performers are mostly school children who rig up imaginative floats and costumes. Connoisseurs prefer the Veedelzög to the Monday pageant; and truly, the enthusiasm and genius which the youngsters showed in their masks and parading seemed closer to the Karneval spirit than much of the adult doings.

The Veedelzög was also evidence of the intense pride in their city districts cultivated by Cologners. "Here comes the Vringesveedel" (Severin District) one big sign announced. And another: "We're the kids from Eigelsteinpooz!"

The streets were filled with masked children and grown-ups after the parade. Automobiles had to creep at a pedestrian pace, since no one wanted to use the sidewalks. The streets belonged to the mummers.

I went down to the Gürzenich to watch Albrecht Bodde preside over the final Sitzung of the "Great Kölner" society. He was in fine form: introducing the performers, welcoming honored guests (one was "the darling Miko Maschina from Ceylon" over whose name Bodde lingered lovingly), passing out bouquets and medals, leading the audience in "sisboomahs" for the entertainers, kissing the Mariechen roundly, and shouting "Alaaf!" The prince appeared, limping, eyes inflamed, and hoarse-voiced. He was heavily made-up . . . and smiling.

The entertainers produced by the Great Kölner were far superior to those who had played for the Thursday night Sitzung of the Alt-Kölln Society. Among the best were the composers of the top Karneval hit songs, Jupp Schmitz, Jupp Schlösser, and Tony Steingass.

As one Kölner observed, "The text is not so important. The rhythm (march or waltz-time mostly) is what counts." Steingass' hit was political, but the mob was interested only in the refrain. Similarly, the refrains of the Schlösser and Schmitz songs were idiotically simple - but somehow catchy. The authors cashed in an estimated \$10,000 apiece on these numbers:

(Steingass' song:
one verse & refrain)

"Wouldn't it be nice if today at a fest,
Politicians from east and west,
Could shake hands, gaze at each other,
then sing this song sincerely:

When I examine you
From up real close
I secretly conclude
I'm completely nuts about you."

(Schlosser's song, refrain:)

"Every week just once there's chamber theatre at Schmitz.
Always on a Friday, chamber theater at Schmitz.
And at this performance, I have the best of seats.
Cause I live 'cross the street from the chamber theater of Schmitz."



(Schmitz's song, refrain:)

"In winter it snows, then,
In winter it is cold,
Always cold, always cold, always cold.
Thus in winter we don't go out,
In the woods at all,
In the woods, in the woods, in the woods,
But in May, then it is green again.
Then budding trees,
They are so beautiful."



Sophisticated Americans might turn up their noses at such Karneval songs. However, more than one Cologne hit has conquered Tin Pan Alley ("The Loyal Husar" and "You Can't Be True Dear" to name two). Cologne has produced no great composers, but it is a musical city.

That evening I was fortunate enough to get admission to Cologne's perennially popular puppet theatre, the Hännesse. A singular performance was presented in this 150-year-old playhouse - a Karneval Sitzung by puppets. It can be fairly said that it was the best "session" of the whole festival.

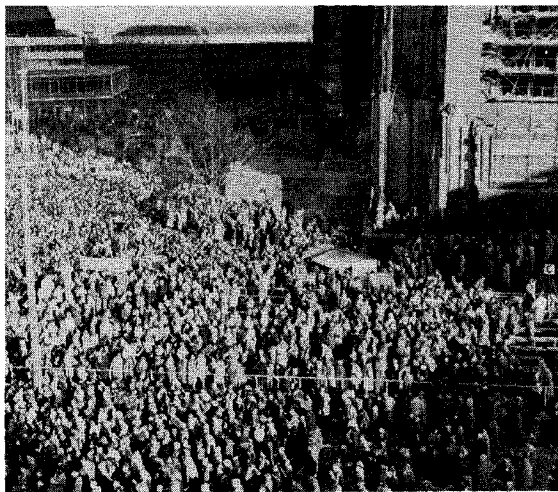
Only one limb can be controlled on these puppets - the right arm. The other arm and the legs swing free. But due to the skill and verve of the ensemble, the Poppe give the illusion of being alive as no others I have seen. Largely because of the efforts of its devoted director, Karl Funck, the Hännesse is Cologne's only self-supporting theatre.

The Hännesse "Fastelovend" was marvelous. There was "Albrecht Bodde" presiding over the "Elferrat". There were the "Kölsche Red-white Sparklers" with their puppet Mariechen. They performed their amusing "drill" which includes Stippeföttche, (rubbing bottoms together). There were the traditional Cologne figures, Tünnes and Schäl (roughly like Pat and Mike), the Speimanes (a character who spits when he speaks), and a dozen other priceless creatures. As in the real Sitzungen, the audience joined in on the original songs. The text of the whole 3-hour show was in the Kolsch dialect. It was a rich parody of the live Karneval.

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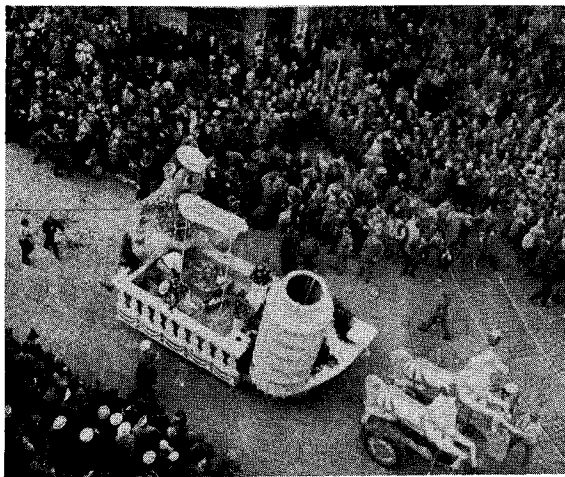
On Monday morning I went to visit Heinrich Böll, a Kölner, and one of Germany's best novelists. Was he going to the Rosenmontag parade? "No, I haven't enjoyed Karneval since the war," he said. "It's too macabre for me. They danced on the corpses of their fellow-citizens after the war. They celebrated in the air raid shelters during the bombings. It seemed too grotesque, too morbid...."

Meanwhile, the city was filling up for the great parade. By noon, a million and a half persons lined the procession route, some sitting in rented stands, some on boxes, most of them standing. Again, they sang and "Schunkeled".



A sea of people

cried "Kamelle" as the floats came by, and lackeys dutifully shovelled out tons of caramels to the scrabbling onlookers. Across the square I could see the police aid-station filling up with drunks.



"Am I Schäl or am I arunk?"
says the figure.

after the parade. We had all been nipping on bottles during the afternoon, and by the time night fell we were ancient friends. The secretary lolling on my lap said, "I like you," and puked affectionately on my shoulder. "And this too is Karneval," said a neighbor.

Back in town I strengthened myself with a smelly potato pancake. The night was young so I decided to tour some of the masked balls. At the third one, I had some difficulty. It was at the Stadtwald Restaurant. I showed my press pass to the door-man. "So," he said, "are you a journalist?" I nodded. He punched me in the stomach. In the struggle that followed, he bit me on the hand. "Why did you bite me," I asked retreating a pace. "I hate journalists," he said. "Last night I knocked out one from India."

I joined a group of journalists at the city traffic bureau opposite the Cathedral. Before us a sea of people engulfed the square.

The pageant arrived with its thousand marchers and riders, its 60 bands, and its 30 floats. The theme of this year's parade was Mer jöcke öm de Welt (We fly around the world). Several of the floats had Sputnik themes. There were others - great papier mache affairs - with burlesque figures of Adenauer, bosomy movie queens, and Cologne figures like Schäl, the squint-eyed bachelor. The crowds

Upstairs, the foreign correspondents were getting pie-eyed too. One suddenly emerged from the men's room stark nude and giggling. An unsuccessful chase ensued; the man was lightning-fast.

Somehow the parade, with all its noise, and color, was a disappointment. It seemed too formal, too organized. Maybe it was the weather, which was turning colder and cloudier all during the procession after five unseasonably warm and sunny days. Snow fell as the last float passed by. Perhaps it was a presentiment of Lent.

I fell in with a group of young public relations people

So I sneaked in the back way and danced until 3 a.m.

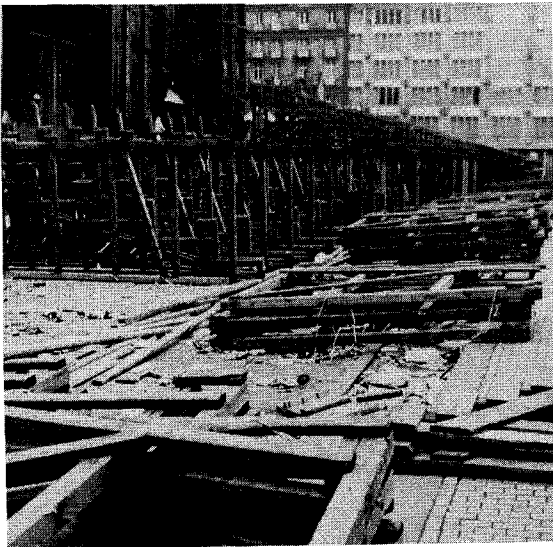
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There were more parades on Tuesday, and four more huge masked balls that night. But I didn't make any of them.

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Ash Wednesday dawned cold and bleak. Cologne's many churches, the ancient, the modern, the war-damaged, were filled with pale-complected and footsore celebrators. A sudden hush had fallen over the city. I saw Cardinal Frings say the Lenten mass in the chilly Cathedral, and later in the old St. Gereon Church. The latter service was for Cologne's artists.

There were many of the persons who had shouted and quaffed so riotously on Saturday night at the Barn. Now they were devoutly silent. The odor of incense filled the chapel. Candles flickered. A priest sprinkled holy water on the salver of ashes. The cardinal moved slowly down the rows of penitents, dipping his thumb in the ashes, marking the foreheads. He murmured the words from Genesis repeatedly: "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust shalt thou return." Lent had begun.



"Unto dust..."

Outside the Cathedral, the reviewing stands from Rosenmontag were being torn down. Beneath was the litter of confetti, streamers, bottles and dust.

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That evening the Karneval societies held their final festival exercises - the traditional fish dinner. I stopped by the one given by the Great Kölner. It seemed an anti-climax. Albrecht Bodde was there, singing the Karneval hits for his table. A trio played foxtrots for a group of dancers (the latter was almost shocking as an aftermath to the church service). Champagne was served. But Karneval was dead.

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Cologne newspapers reported that crowds had been much smaller at this year's Karneval parades and sessions. Businessmen bewailed the fall in profits: less liquor sold, less hotel guests, less costumes ordered. One writer cited television as the chief competitor for Karneval, noting that West Germany has over a million receivers now. But a radio commentator seemed to have a better diagnosis. He said people's tastes in entertainment were changing.

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Looking back on Karneval, I am perplexed. It is a tremendous festival: gay, swanky, polychromatic, foolish. Yet Heinrich Böll was right. And so was the man who said: "Karneval lies close to death."

A whole city puts itself in hock in order to celebrate. Dionysus and Saturn meet. The buffoon chaffs the lord. Romance and intoxication mix. Pomp attends circumstance. Gilding covers the dirt, and dirt the gilding.

One is reminded of Huizinga's "Waning of the Middle Ages" where he describes the extravagant and garrish festivals of the 15th century - the "tableaux vivants" and the "entremets". Huizinga writes:

"The 15th century, profoundly pessimistic, a prey to continual depression, could not forgo the emphatic affirmation of the beauty of life, afforded by these splendid and solemn collective rejoicings. ...Festivals...require other things than mere gaiety. Neither the elementary pleasures of gaming, drinking, and love, nor luxury and pomp as such, are able to give them a framework. The festival requires style."

He continues, noting that the highly stylized religious and courtly festivals of the latter Middle Ages gradually gave way to civil festivals which had little or no style.

There is something medieval about Cologne's Karneval, just as there is something medieval about much of twentieth century culture. The difference is, and it is a profound one, that Karneval has style; despite the inroads of commercialism and artificially cultivated traditions.

David Binder

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