

[Cafe Royal]

[?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER E. Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Avenue, NYC

DATE December 29, 1938

SUBJECT CAFE ROYAL

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant Social-Ethnic: Jewish group studies. Personal observations by the staff-worker.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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NAME OF WORKER E. Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Avenue, NYC

DATE December 29, 1938

SUBJECT CAFE ROYAL

For the last twentyfive years the "Royal" has been a gathering place for Jewish writers and actors. Every evening and on many an afternoon they sit at their Stammtish (favored table) for hours engaged in lively, often violent discussions about literature and art. The younger artist feels honored if he can sit at the table of a more recognized man. He listens with respect to his older colleague and wants everybody to see that he is a friend of the great man. Sometimes a table becomes so crowded, when a famous writer like Sholem Ash appears, or the famous and beloved short story writer and poet Abraham Reisen, or a publisher of a Jewish daily newspaper, that traffic between tables becomes impossible and waiters have to make great detours to bring an order to a table.

A poet can get criticisms of his latest creations there from fellow poets. Of course he knows better than to take them at their words; he listens to the tone of their words, the look on their faces which may betray their real thoughts. An actor tries out before a colleague the song he is going to sing at his next play... Sometimes a violent discussion arises at one table which goes on for hours, to which people from nearby tables listen with great attention. Once in a while it comes to a real fight. A story is told of a poet throwing a sugar

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bowl at a colleague for an adverse opinion of his talent, or a woman story-writer slapping with her glove the face of a critic for a bad criticism of her book. There have been many scandals in the "Royal" which have become history, like the one of a famous actress becoming jealous and upbraiding in the highest and shrillest voice she could muster her famous actor husband for his advances to a younger actress and reminding him that he has false teeth and that twenty years ago she supported him when he was penniless and starving.

It's curious that the writers and actors do not mix freely. The actors sit at the right side of the "Royal" and the writers at the left side. While the actors are mostly well groomed, sometimes even dressed loudly and conspicuously, and there are usually as many women as men among them, the writers' side of the cafe is made up mostly of men poorly or carelessly dressed. There are very few Jewish women writers and they are not such good "kibitzers" as the men are - and the wives of the writers usually sit at home.

Of course the "Royal" attracts many visitors. Some just drop in to look the place over and some come ever so often to have a good dinner on the European style (Wiener Shnitzel and Rheinisch Sauer-Braten are quite famous). One can find here a famous stomach specialist and a known labor leader and the latest celebrity, who has arrived from 3 Europe. Ever so often Broadway celebrities show up. Paul Muni, who was a Jewish actor before he became a Hollywood celebrity, comes here everytime he is in New York, and a table is pointed out where Trotzky sat when he was a poor emigrant trying to make a living from writing.

The waiters in the "Royal" are dignified and elderly. They know most of the guests by name and know their eating habits and diets. When a guest orders something which is not on his diet list, the waiter refuses to bring it and tells the man not to be a pig.

Herman, the "water-boy," a man of about sixty, stooped, with a Charlie Chaplin walk, watches every departing customer, in order not to be cheated of his nickel tip. Once a

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guest asked him: "What if you get a nickel less? Haven't you already more than you can use?" To this Herman answered: "The B.M.T. has more nickels and yet you don't get a free ride." A joke was played once on the same Herman, whose job is also to answer the telephone. "Who do you want to speak?" Herman asked when the telephone rang. "William Shakespeare," came the answer. Herman shouted all over the place: "A call for William Shakespeare. A call for William Shakespeare. Is he here?"