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# He Chose a Countess

By Winzola McLendon

AUTHOR Hans Habe, who as a dashing young man lived in Washington during part of World War II, was in town last week with his chic, former actress wife, Licci. But, his favorite topic of conversation is another woman—Countess Maria Nikolayevna Tarnovska.

Maria, the daughter of a noble Irish family in the service of the Czar in turn-of-the-century Russia, is the heroine of Habe's latest novel, "The Countess," which has been translated from the German and released in the United States, last week, by Harcourt, Brace and World.

Habe became fascinated with the Countess when he saw a picture of her when he was 17. "She was fabulously beautiful," he recalled while discussing his book in the Habes' Jefferson Hotel suite.

"She was pictured being led into court to stand trial for having her fiance murdered by two of her lovers. . . . The trial was the Dolce Vita of 1910 . . . and it was the first time psychiatrists had been used in a trial. It became a regular battle between the psychiatrists and the lawyers."

LIKE OTHER BOOKS written by Habe, "The Countess" will be made into a movie. Habe is going to

## Beautiful Russian Is Author Habe's Favorite Topic

Hollywood from Washington (via Alabama, Florida and Texas) to work as an advisor on the filming.

Habe is an American citizen, born in Hungary, raised in Austria and now living in Switzerland. "I live in Europe because I am a European writer and I'm living in my language. It is difficult enough to write without writing about something you do not know.

"I have written two books about America or Americans. One, "Walking Darkness," which has been dramatized and is now playing off Broadway, is about an American Negro soldier in Germany. The other was "Aftermath" and is about Washington society in pre-war days. I lived in that society and knew it."

(The author was married to the former Eleanor Close, daughter of Mrs. Herbert A. May, and during World War II they had a home on Kalorama rd.)

The son of a Budapest newspaperman, Hans Habe covered many of the important events in Europe before the war as a foreign correspondent for a leading Czechoslovakian newspaper.

When the war broke out, he joined the French army, was captured by the Germans, escaped and came to America.

HIS EXPERIENCES with the French army were told in his best selling book, "A Thousand Shall Fall," which was made into a movie. After lecturing for the War Department, Habe enlisted in the American Army, rose to the rank of major.

Habe's real name is Jean de Bekessy; Hans Habe is his pen name.

He met Licci Balla in Munich and they were married ten years ago. She, too, is a Hungarian-born, American citizen.

The Habes live at Ascona on Lago Maggiore (the second largest lake in Switzerland). They live a calm country life in a big house with a big garden. Both of them like boating and cruise the Lago often on their cabin cruiser.

They also entertain often ("somebody is always passing by; we are on the route to Italy") and that pleases Habe very much.

"The German Who's Who," he said, "lists my hobby as 'guests.'"



By Charles Del Vecchio, Staff Photographer

LICCI AND HANS HABE

