

seminar in Warsaw is called off because the instructor is unable to furnish his class with twenty copies of "The Leaves of Grass." Consequently Whitman's powerful—and, oh, so inexpensive—voice of American democracy remains silent in Poland.

I asked for a semi-official estimate

of the dollar funds needed for adequate purchases of American copyrights for one year. The modest answer was: "\$250,000 would suffice. And that would not have to be a charitable gift. We could offer the equivalent in Polish currency to be used by American interests in Poland."

powerful historical novel with an Asiatic background by Miloslav Fábbera, "Seven Mongolian Horses."

As a whole, the crop of new fiction, especially fiction with themes related to the recent past, is meager. "There's too much blood on our memories from the time of Nazi occupation," Mr. Rezác explained to me. "It's still raw flesh, too immediate to be shaped into fiction. That's the reason for the big stream of reports, chronicles, *documents humains*, and other non-fiction works."

In Slovakia, the situation is very similar to that in the Czech lands. There is a remarkable center of artistic, literary, and publishing activities at Turčiansky Sv. Martin; but Bratislava—where the country's best poet, Laco Novomesky, takes a leading part as secretary of education in the shaping of a very intensive governmental policy aimed at a general rise in cultural standards—occupies the first place in the literary life of the nation.

Two younger Slovak writers have lately come to the fore: Peter Karvas with a couple of experimental plays, and Margita Figuli with a historical novel, "Babylon," and a peasant tale of lusty primitive charm, "Three Chestnut Chargers."

Translations of American books are very much in demand. Steinbeck, Caldwell, Fast, Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis have a wide and enthusiastic audience. Popular hits have been scored by Kenneth Roberts and Louis Bromfield, while Waldo Frank and Carson McCullers have won much critical praise. America is still a magic word, and evokes a vivid popular sympathy from the Bohemian Forest all the way to the Tatra Mountains.

The change in government last February produced a number of changes in the organization of the publishing industry. All privately owned publishing houses have been taken over by the State, although cooperatively-owned enterprises continue to function as before. Mailing privileges have been denied a few foreign newspapers and magazines which, it was said, "consistently published false reports." Less than a score of members of the writers Association have been excluded "for active participation in plotting against popular democracy" or "unlawful activity." Among these were no writers of reputation, with the exception of Ivan Blatny, a promising young lyric poet who was barred following a trip to England in which he attacked Czechoslovakia. It is still too soon to say what effect these developments will have upon Czechoslovak letters.

### 3. Boom Before Doom?

F. C. WEISKOPF

LITERARY activity is booming these days in the Third Czechoslovak Republic. Although there are only about nine million Czechs—the three million Slovaks have their own literature and their own publishing houses—the average novel published in the Czech language sells about 3,000, while the average poetry book edition ranges from 1,000 to 2,500 copies. Prose works of favored authors often find up to 50,000 buyers, and verse collections between 10,000 and 15,000. There is hardly a small town—and that means one under 5,000 inhabitants—without at least one good bookstore, and there are several book clubs (almost all of them organized as cooperatives) with a nationwide membership.

Prague, the capital of the country, is also the capital of Czech literature. But Brno, Moravská Ostrava, and many smaller cities also have a very active literary life.

Moravská Ostrava, which in the past was a drowsy provincial town in northern Bohemia, has become a bustling industrial city and the scene of an extraordinary cultural renaissance. Its Association for the Advancement of Art is a veritable cultural powerhouse, supporting half a dozen enterprises, including a literary magazine, a lecture forum, an art gallery, a symphonic concert series, a program of special radio and theatre performances, and a publishing house. All of these activities are planned and directed by a group of people of differing backgrounds and ages but united by a youthful determination to make what they call "a concerted effort to make the new popular democracy a living thing in the field of culture."

Their magazine—*Mladé Archy* ("Young Sheets")—is printed in editions of 3,000 copies six times a year. It features mainly the work of young Czech authors (fiction, poetry, essays) and translations of modern foreign literature, with Paul Eluard,

Langston Hughes, Vladimir Mayakovsky, William Saroyan heading the list.

Last year the list of the publishing house comprised six books of verse and short stories by young Czech writers and two volumes of translated French prose and poetry (by Elsa Triolet and Jules Supervielle) in editions from 2,200 to 5,000 copies. Both the magazine and the publishing house are self-sustaining, thanks to a good deal of voluntary work put in by the leading people.

Czech writers are becoming very active once more after the hiatus caused by the war. A life of Cortez by Ivan Olbracht, first among the older novelists and at present chief of the radio department of the Ministry of Information, appeared late last year. A new volume of verse by Frantisek Halas, an outstanding poet who heads the state department of book publishing, was enthusiastically greeted by his many faithful readers.

POETRY has always been the pride of Czech letters. "Our literary language," Mrs. Halas told me when we were discussing the state of Czech poetry, "is so developed and refined that it creates poems almost by itself. We have a very high standard of average good poetry. Our publishers bring out many collections of good verse, but genuine poems, great poems are very few. Yet we have a number of really promising young poets—Blatny, Krainar, Kolar, Bednar, Fleischmann, Fikar, Kundera, Mikulasek—whose first books make us ask for more.

Among the widely acclaimed and read works of fiction are Egon Hostovsky's story about Czech-American life, "A Stranger Looking for an Apartment"; Vaclav Rezac's novel "The Dividing Line," with an interesting double plot intertwining the histories of a great actor and of his "creator"; Marie Pujmanová's gentle tale of a brother and sister in childhood-anguish, "Foreboding," and a

# the Phoenix Nest

## THE UNTIDY END OF ADJECTIVE JONES

(After *Too Many Western Thrillers*)

**B**UCKY DURANT calmly rolled a cigarette as he sat atop the pitching bronc. After tense minutes of agonized snorting and lurching the panting palamino crept to the side of the corral. Bucky, a pleased grin splitting open his suntanned features, leapt lightly from the saddle. After giving the critter a friendly pat, he tossed the hand-tooled saddle lightly over his shoulder and strolled toward the corral gate. His steps were the measured pace of a gun toter, as his muscles rippled quietly like tanned wheat in the autumn sun. "Now fer the Brahmas," he said through tightly-compressed lips.

As he looked through the seasoned slats of the corral gate his eyes narrowed to hard slits and the jaw muscles under his steel-blue growth of beard flickered back and forth like a baby magpie bird at feeding time. His footsteps sounded slow and regular in the desert vastness, like Navajo war drums.

Across the ranch yard Cobra Raggles, the ranch foreman, came swaggering. He was a swarthy-skinned hombre, greasy and unkempt. As usual, his oily moustache was covered with tobacco stains. Bucky flipped his silver-decorated saddle to the ground. Quietly he loosened his two pearl-handled shootin' irons in their holsters. Then he leaned back against the fence. Waiting.

Raggles sneered as he neared. "Whut the hell's the trouble, Durant, you only broke six head of hosses this mawnin'!" he snapped. Bucky's steely eyes dug into the pouchy face for a moment. Then he pulled a bag of Durham from his breast pocket and quietly rolled one. His answer was cool and measured when it finally came. "Yup," he said.

Raggles pulled out a tailor-made and stuffed it in the corner of his thick-lipped mouth. "Gettin' old?" he taunted. Cobra did not see the instinctive tightening of Bucky's back muscles, ready instantaneously to drop into a shooting crouch. But, instead of gun play, the latter gazed out into the desert. A hombre who had seen plenty of vastness on both sides of the Rio Grande, Bucky never tired of the ever-changing moods of the mesas.

"Listen, you mangy coyote," Bucky said quietly, "Ah's not hankerin' fer

trouble—but Ah aims fer you to know thet if yer lookin' for it you came to the right party." Raggles flushed under his whiskey-blotched skin.

Suddenly, as the two men stood calculating one another, Janie the ranch-owner's daughter, turned the corner. Blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, she was dressed in a buckskin jacket and flowing riding dress. She held a turquoise-studded riding-crop in her small white hand. Tripping lightly toward the two stolid men, her blonde curls tossed like convolvulus in the desert breeze. Bucky quickly snuffed out his makin's and doffed his sun-bleached Stetson. Raggles stood unkempt with his hat on, the tailor-made still sticking ungently from the side of his leer-mouth.

Janie's wide, blue eyes slipped from the hard, tanned face with the steel-blue jaw to the pouchy face of the foreman. "Ah've been pickin' wild flowers," she smiled, white teeth glistening behind her red lips. Bucky's steel-grey eyes fell to the hem of her petite skirt. He replied, politely: "Yes, Ma'am." Raggles's blood-shot eyes fastened on Janie's bosom. Janie withdrew under the lewd gaze.

Quick-thinking Bucky stepped between Janie and the foreman, but Raggles, leaning sideways to see more of Janie's contours, only sneered. The Old Man, Janie's father, was in his wheelchair, up at the ranch house.

Raggles paused a moment, eyeing Bucky. Then he turned, and started toward the corral. His chance would come—and soon! Why not wait until he and the boys could handle this loco puncher in their own way?

Bucky was hesitant before he spoke again, as he and Janie stood alone. "Miss Janie, Raggles there is head of a mangy bunch of coyotes that have been takin' cattle off yer Daddy's south drift fence since six months ago." Janie's eyes filled with tears. She clutched her swan-like throat. "You mean—you mean while Pa's been in the wheelchair?" she asked, bewildered. Bucky nodded quietly.

A sickening wail of pain split the air. Bucky spun around, his hands on his shooting irons. In the corral, Cobra Raggles was standing with a heavy raw-hide whip in one hand, a bottle of drinking whiskey in the other. He was mercilessly flailing the tired palamino Bucky had just broken!

As Bucky hurdled over the fence, his two six guns were blazing. Raggles

dropped his bottle. Janie could not see through the dust. For a few moments all was clamor. The horse whinnied wildly, as seven shots ripped through the air. Then silence. When the dust cleared, Cobra was clutching his untidy belly and slipping slowly, slowly to the ground. Bucky leaned over the inert figure. Blowing the blue smoke from his trusty Pals, he turned to Janie. "Don't look, Ma'am," he said quietly.

"You hadn't oughta, Bucky!" moaned Janie, horror-struck at the scene before her. Bucky withered under the reproachful words of the girl. Then his jaw muscles tightened. He replaced his sun-bleached Stetson and lifted his turquoise-studded saddle to his wide shoulder. "Reckon Ah'll get on to the Brahmas," he said.

But as he turned to go, his gaze lifted for a moment to Janie's soft face. He straightened his back and spoke: "Ma'am, Ah reckon Ah can tell you now. This varmint was due to swing. He ain't Cobra Raggles—he was really Adjective Jones!" Janie backed away.

"You mean Adjective Jones, the rustler?" she whispered. "Yes, Ma'am," replied quiet Bucky.

Janie's soft eyes fell to the inert figure before her in disgust. Her soft hands slipped quietly at last from her swan-like throat: "Be you sure?" she asked, a loving light appearing in her eyes. Bucky pulled back his vest. On the front of his shirt, glistening in the desert sun, was the star of the Texas Rangers!

"Ah've been trailin' him," said Bucky simply.

Janie spoke with great sadness: "Now that your job is done you'll be ridin' on?"

Bucky gazed for a moment into the desert grandeur. A soft breeze tossed the sun-bleached hairs of the brows above his steely eyes. Janie spoke again: "Pa'll be needin' a foreman."

Slowly Bucky's hands slipped to the beloved bone-handled Pals at his side. He pulled them from their holsters with his strong, brown hands, studied them a moment, then, silently and reverently, kicked a small hole in the dust beneath his feet. They dropped into their desert grave. He kicked back the dust and quietly bowed his head.

Janie knew how sacred the moment was. Finally she ventured to speak: "Reckon' you'd be interested in ridin' into the sunset of life together?"

Bucky's grim face broke into a radiant smile. He lifted his ornate saddle, with the Upache bead trim, to his shoulder. He hesitated carefully before speaking. Then he said: "Yes, Ma'am."

R. MATHISON.

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WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.