



Bruce Jay Friedman — "a wild poet of the secret life."

as the pepper and salt of conversation. Meg *speaks* sarcasm; it is her native language. (Hyperbole is her second.) And at the flick of her tongue she arouses your horror, sympathy, laughter, or dismay. The last is Joseph's usual response to her uninhibited words and actions. For instance, in the hotel where he and Meg are staying (she refuses to leave until he is safely settled at college, a time that never seems to come) he finds her talking to the chambermaid. "My lover," says Meg. "How do you like who your mother picked to have a little discussion with? Her democracy . . . sometimes you can get more wisdom from a thing like this than you can from a real person." When promising Joseph aid and comfort in getting into college, she chants: "Will you please learn to put your last buck down on this baby?"

Getting Joseph settled at school and Meg on her way home is the outrageously funny burden of most of the book. Joseph is an agonized, nervous boy full of frustrated sexual longings and elaborate adolescent fears. When Meg introduces him to a divorced lady, he finds her legs appealing and is certain "that she knew how to do dark and divorced things with them." Meg is always increasing his sexual anxiety by lounging around in her girdle or yanking up her dress to compare underwear detailing with a friend. She aggravates his social anxiety by accompanying him to a fraternity and pressing ice cream on the membership to lubricate Joseph's acceptance. At his first college class she arrives bearing a sweater and has it passed to the anguished boy. ("He'll kill me for this. But what can I do. I'm one of those crazy mothers.") She tips a rabbi while Joseph squirms: ". . . for a little extra prayer . . . for my son's col-

lege because he's got some tough haul in front of him."

Finally, Meg leaves. Joseph shouts to the departing train: "You're not great at all . . . I never enjoyed one second with you." It is an affecting moment, if only because the boy only half means it. One knows the odd involvement has done its work.

The book is suffused with a disturbed sexuality, as was *Stern*. But it serves

here more appropriately because Joseph is an adolescent, groping his way toward sex as toward everything else. The author's real victory is one of style. The style *is* the subject, because the characters' lives and their language are identical.

Friedman is a wild poet of the secret life, one of the funniest of writers, but with a dark echo to the laughter that gets painfully close to the bone.

Gods and Beetles in the Grass

Scented Gardens for the Blind, by Janet Frame (Braziller. 252 pp. \$4.50), uses loss of speech and insanity to suggest the lack of communication among humans in general. Dorrie Pagones studied comparative literature in Europe under a Fulbright grant.

By DORRIE PAGONES

JANET FRAME would be a fascinating writer on any subject she chose. What she does choose, again and again, is the theme of insanity.

In her new book, *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, the asylum has become indistinguishable from the world; we all probably belong in it. Even Dr. Clapper, the overworked psychiatrist, is troubled by strange dreams, and finds himself studying, with ridiculous concentration, a blackbeetle on his window-sill.

As for the elderly spinster inmate who has been without speech for thirty years, is she a vegetable who, even if she were able to talk, would have nothing to say worth hearing, or is she an oracle who, if she would, could announce the new language of humanity?

The story unfolds through the secret thoughts of three people, members of a disunited family. There is Edward Glace, genealogist, lovingly tracing the banal past of the extraordinarily ordinary Strang family: "Humanity tempted him, in spite of its revoltingly persistent attempts to play at being pigs instead of people."

His daughter, Erlene, who should be making a place for herself in the world, cannot speak (except to beetles), although she used to recite poetry, and could articulate as well as anyone in school, "We are standing on the grass watching the large cars pass; the large cars cannot harm us while we are standing on the grass."

Her mother, Vera, is afraid of speech

but even more of silence: "Oh, I must urge the furniture to speak . . . all objects must speak; it is a panic; anything to drown the final silence of the human race."

Erlene, sitting silently by her window, hears the tragic story of Albert Dungbeetle, who allowed his wife and children to starve to death while he watched the sky with fanatic patience, waiting for a god to drop down to him the Treasure of All Time—the most magnificent piece of dung in the world.

Sitting there in the grass all day, watching and waiting, . . . [he] had time to consider the question of gods and distance, and because at the same time he also considered the fact of dung being dropped from the sky, he united the two questions in his mind and gave himself one answer. . . .

Janet Frame doesn't give any answers, not even for beetles and still less for people; but she has a wonderful way of putting questions.



Janet Frame — "a wonderful way of putting questions."

They Ate, Drank, and Were Merry

European Commuter, by Willi Frischauer (Macmillan. 311 pp. \$5.95), provides in the racy personal memoirs of a Viennese journalist a behind-the-scenes look at the Europe of the past thirty years. Henry C. Wolfe wrote "The German Octopus."

By HENRY C. WOLFE

WHEN Willi Frischauer, author of this uninhibited memoir, was a newspaperman in his native Vienna, he learned from Chancellor Dollfuss that the name of Hitler's father was Schicklgruber. "If the Germans," commented Frischauer's paper, "were compelled to shout 'Heil Schicklgruber!' rather than 'Heil Hitler!' the Nazi movement would sink in a sea of ridicule. . . ." The Fuehrer had not yet come to power, and the newspaper comment was intended to stop his rise. The anti-Nazis, however, were not yet taking Hitler seriously. When they finally did, it was too late.

Although the book is touted on its jacket as "The Scandalous Years of Willi Frischauer"—and racily lives up to it—the memoir also illuminates from the inside some interesting aspects of twentieth-century European history. Frischauer knew the *Wiener Gemütlichkeit* of the final Habsburg years. World War I, the fall of Austria-Hungary, the tragic, inflation-ridden aftermath, the increasing Right-Left conflict in Austria, Hitler's triumph, World War II (which Frischauer spent as an alien in Britain), and postwar visits to Germany, France, Austria, Egypt, and Israel were intimate facets of his experience.

Son of a Catholic father and a Jewish mother, Frischauer enjoyed the good life of the upper bourgeoisie. Those were the days of "breakfast, second breakfast, lunch, *jause*—the Vienna afternoon coffee-and-cake meal—and dinner." In the Frischauer milieu everybody ate, drank, waltzed, and quoted poetry: ". . . my generation all but swooned when listening to Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Vienna Opera." The author cannot see "any difference between feasting one's eye on a Braque or a Monet and indulging one's palate." Needless to say, indulgence in *Backendl* and *Salzburger Nockerl* did little to restrict the expansion of the Frischauer waistline.

Sadly enough, Vienna's epicureanism,

her high culture, and her "infectiously gay baroque beauty" were the setting for the catastrophic quarreling between Right and Left that prepared the way for Austria's doom. Frischauer was a staunch anti-Nazi. From his vantage point on a Vienna newspaper during the early Thirties, he observed the political trends and the moral collapse that he has recorded in a previous book, *Twilight in Vienna*.

After the Nazis' brutal assassination of Dollfuss, Frischauer decided to leave home and go to London. There he found English society to be much like Vienna's, a fairly decadent crowd. He was shocked to find the British apathetic "to the implications of the rapidly spreading Nazi menace." Even the Nazi drive against Czechoslovakia, another of Hitler's "last territorial demands," failed to disturb Britain's mood of appeasement. Her interests seemed not to be threatened—not just yet. A year later, Britain was drawn into war with Germany.

Frischauer, a Jeremiah who had vainly tried to wake up the British, was thrown into an Aliens' Internment Camp, where he spent three unhappy months. He was finally released on medical grounds. Later on, his name appeared on Himmler's wartime list of "2,300 marked men"

to be liquidated when the Nazis conquered Britain. His parents, meantime, had perished at Nazi hands.

After the Nazi surrender, Frischauer traveled widely as a British war correspondent. Although his travels took him to the Continent, the Middle East, and America, he paid special attention to Germany. He had high regard for Schumacher, Heuss, Brandt, and a few other German leaders, but he found much to arouse his misgivings. He was appalled to find men like Schacht thriving and to note Globke serving in an influential post under Adenauer. "My moral indignation fed on the memory of conditions in Austria thirty years before, a memory on which I had been happy to turn my back."

European Commuter teems with names of our century's famous and infamous, and with offbeat anecdotes involving them—sometimes hilariously—in the memoirist's personal history. Frischauer seems to have had his finger in a few international pies. In one cloak-and-dagger episode, he apparently helped spy on Lord Halifax. Halifax, Hannen Swaffer, Hedy Lamarr, Elisabeth Bergner, Marlene Dietrich—they would all be listed in the index if this provocative and colorful history had one.

As for the titillating description on the book jacket, Frischauer does not disappoint. From his early teens, it would seem, this amiable Viennese piled up amorous adventures. Even so, his romantic chronicle is of a piece with the cynical sophistication of the whole book. It helps define the spirit of place and the temper of the times.

