

has a well-intentioned but garrulous and fussy wife, Becky, and they have two sons, Ethan and John. Ethan, a good boy, works in his father's drygoods store. John, on the other hand, is a rebel and has left home to become a wanderer.

John, who has been informed of his father's illness, gets home at last, rejoicing Isaac's heart, but there are troubles to come. Ethan, good boy though he is, is in love with a gentile, and if his father can be philosophical about this, his mother cannot. The two boys have never got on well together, and there is a good deal of friction between them at this time, particularly when John seems to be paying attention to Ethan's girl. Finally, John announces that he is a conscientious objector—this is the time of the Korean War—and many of the townspeople turn against the Schumans.

MAMIS does well with all the characters. The mother, with her worries and her stratagems, might easily be a caricature, but she is not. Both boys are sharply drawn, and the reader sympathizes with them both. The real achievement is Isaac Schuman. He is a mild little man, who will go a long way to avoid trouble but will stand up to it when he has to. It is typical of him that he tries to maintain friendly relations between Jews and gentiles by writing letters to the local paper to explain Jewish customs. To John his father seems ridiculously timid, and to some extent, I suspect, the author agrees. But Mamis has written about the old man with sympathy as well as insight, and Isaac emerges as something of a hero and something of a saint. He wants to help everyone, not least his wife, and he is surprisingly successful.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

FRAZER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1104

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1104 will be found in the next issue.

YZYPT FVL RVM V PVELT NSPLY
SX REM DEXY QRYLNY NSFYM
XSHD QYVGRYP QREN R XSDD-
SQM REF.

PENRGYP

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1103

*Half of us are blind, few of us feel,
and we are all deaf.* —OSLER.

The European Literary Scene

Franz Kafka's posthumous fortunes prospered this year, with translations of his works into Russian and Eastern European languages, and with a fortieth anniversary observance of his death in Prague, attended by his discoverer-editor Max Brod. The year has not, however, cleared up the most tragic mystery of Kafka's personal life, the possible existence of a son. The first clues are the thirty letters that remain to us of his liaison with Margarete Bloch, best friend of his fiancée, Felicitä Bauer. Franz met these two twenty-year-old working girls in Berlin, and became informally engaged to Fräulein Bauer. In 1913 (when Franz began to dally with a Swiss girl at the Hartungen Sanatorium) Felicitä sent Margarete to Prague with the mandate of getting Franz to declare their engagement formally. The mission succeeded, but with the complication that Franz apparently left Margarete with child, a son who was to die in Munich at the age of seven in 1921, when Kafka was starting the *Castle*. Franz himself was to die only three years later.

Giorgio Zampa, writing in the *Stampa* of Turin, confirms the existence of photographs of this child, which Margarete revealed to certain intimates around 1940. It is presumed that she never informed her friends Franz and Felicitä, engaged until 1917, of the child's existence. Felicitä eventually married another and fled Hitlerism to Canada. Margarete, also Jewish, escaped to Italy, where the Wehrmacht caught up with and evidently killed her in 1944, in the Cioccaria town of San Donato di Val Comino. The thirty letters by Kafka to this unhappy heroine were not included in Brod's edition of the novelist's correspondence (1958). And now the mystery of Kafka's son is moving to our shores. More than 2,000 Kafka letters, mostly to Felicitä, have been bought by an American publisher. It is rumored that among these there are the letters of Margarete revealing her burdensome secret of a sire and a son, both dead.

What an irony if Kafka, whose story "Eleven Sons" represented in Brod's words "the symbol of Kafka's longing for paternity," had a son and never knew it. How cruel, when one remembers the forlorn entry in his *Journal*: "Without ancestors, marriage, or descendants, and with a violent desire for ancestors, marriage, and descendants!"

Habent sua fata libelli. Tempted to

mention in earlier newsletters *snobissimo*, the new social satire by Pierre Daninos, I held off, even though I personally considered it worthy of being shelved alongside Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*. Yet one cannot continue to overlook a book that has remained for months the No. 1 best-seller in France, topping Sartre, Troyat, and such heavyweights. Indeed, it may even outstrip Daninos's charming *Notebooks of Major Thompson*. It all started in Venice when young Pierre sought the gondolier who would most impress his current innamorata. Rejecting those of more simple garb, he selected a dandy dressed all in white, with scarlet sash and beribboned boater, one whose gondola moreover boasted blue-chevrons oars and a brilliant prow. The rejected oarsmen heckled him with "*snobissimo*," thus adding an Italian suffix to a venerable English word that originally meant cobbler, though it now applies to a non-U person with U pretensions. Daninos's history and anatomy of snobbism (why does English prefer snobbery?) has an affinity with recent best-sellers on gamesmanship, status-seeking, and the like. The cutting, ironical *mot* goes back to antiquity, when the non-U Diogenes asked the Emperor Alexander to step aside and not block the sunlight.

Daninos probes snobbism in daily life: when the snob asks for sausage and red wine as the butler is passing caviar and Clicquot rosé, when one exhibits Kierkegaard and Heidegger on one's coffee table even though one is halfway through *Caroline chérie* (Sinclair Lewis thought that in such circumstances one should exhibit the learned medieval quarterly *Speculum*). Daninos explains how snobbism exists "in every rank of mortal life," thus echoing Thackeray. He exposes the ruses of its practitioners in business, medicine, education, politics, sports, and so on. Even dogs are snobs, says Daninos, which would explain why French poodles are trimmed as they are. To Daninos, "the desire to appear is greater than the desire to be." Thus, the snob. The title *snobissimo* is written with a lower-case s, which would lead one to conclude that Daninos is, as he admits, himself a snob. I once lunched with him (name-dropping snobbism) and found no traces of this trait. Only a sadness bordering on melancholy, traditionally the mark of a great humorist.

Crowding Daninos on the best-seller list is Robert Escarpit, professor at the

University of Bordeaux and biographer of Hemingway, whose nonfiction hit, the *Littératron*, is also social satire. This picaresque tale, as the author calls it, spoofs promoters and "operators" at loose in the cultural and political circles of Paris, even while it envisions the terrible potentialities of cybernetics and electronic computers. One Mériadec Le Guern invents and promotes a machine that can compose the appropriate level of prose desired from the vocabulary stored in its memory disc: best-sellers according to the current formula, electoral harangues, television speeches, and the like. In a world accustomed to hidden persuaders, subliminal conditioning, semantic wizardry, and translating machines, the *Littératron* is a crowning if inevitable achievement. The French, including Escarpit, enjoys speculating about the brave new world of technology, even though deeply convinced that Cartesian logic and common sense will accomplish anything that a machine can. Yet at the end of this parody, Escarpit confesses a weakness for "merchants of illusions, dabblers in wind, and climbers of clouds."

One of the ironies of Eugene Ionesco's belated acceptance by his native Rumania is that he is, after all, the author of two great anti-Hitlerian dramas, the *Killer* and the *Rhinoceros*. By rights, his anti-Nazi hero Bérenger ("Je ne capitule pas!") should have stirred East as well as West. Perhaps out of fear that the unlabeled political allegory might be thought to refer to the wrong ideology, the *Rhinoceros* was long withheld from the Rumanians. It has now been unveiled before Bucharest audiences, to great enthusiasm. Reviewers and radio commentators have made it clear which



Eugene Ionesco—*Rhinoceros* assimilated.

ideology is the target. All part of the thaw and the "assimilation of Western literature," as Radio Budapest put it. The chairman of the Rumanian Writers Union, Mihai Beniuc, said this year, "We want to establish contacts with men of good will who believe in peaceful co-existence, and are convinced that a clash of opinion and dialogue between men of different opinions can only help."

Recently Ionesco issued a curious, indirect warning that play directors, like critics, should not read into dramas political meanings which do not exist. On hearing of the drowning of Robert Postec, Ionesco eulogized this director of his plays for his objectivity. "Although very clearly oriented politically, Rostec would never let one read into an author or a work things which he or it did not intend." Indeed, continues Ionesco, many a demagogic director wins easy fame by betraying the pages he is animating with rhythm, breath, and personality. The warning reminds us of Nabokov's parody of a state theater troupe rehearsing *Hamlet* and making it ideologically correct.

One of the current literary debates in France is whether one should undertake a film of Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu*. This in fact was the theme of the September gathering of Les Amis de Combray et de Marcel Proust at Illiers, the village 113 kilometers from Paris (below Chartres) immortalized by Proust as Combray. Literary scholars, film critics, and cineasts debated the matter in a wing of the house where Proust spent his vacations as a child, the house of *Suann's Way*. Henry Agel, editor of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, was the principal speaker. Laurent LeSage, author of *The Literary Friendships of Marcel Proust*, writes me that the liveliness of the sessions was rivaled by the charm of the old church town, the sixteenth-century basilica with its eleventh-century chapel, the rustic houses dating from the Middle Ages and the Directory.

How could one successfully translate Proust's *roman fleuve* or part of it to the screen? Flaubert, Tolstoy, James, Dostoevsky, and others have been so transmuted, with varying success. Yves Robert has just finished making a film of Jules Romains's riotous *Les Copains* (the Cronies), including the scene of the nude living statue of Vercingetorix, a real *difficulté vaincue*. Yet the subtleties and alembics of Proust risk mightily being lost in the transfer. Poetry, as has been said, is what is lost in translation. This especially applies to translation to the screen.

Not only do scholars fear for the outcome; the film critics are also apprehensive. Writes Jean-Louis Bory in a recent number of *Art* (Paris), "I tremble



Pierre Daninos—dandy for an innamorata.

when I hear talk of a film made on the novel of Proust—even if this film, in all humility, is admittedly the most faithful possible, even if the work of Proust is reduced to the limits of *Un amour de Swann*. In the present state of things, a novel finds itself mortally stifled in a film. There exists a sort of unkeying between cinema and literature, an out-of-gear situation scarcely compensated by substitution of image for word, and a resulting divergence in speed of perception." Bory's well-taken point is that if a short story requires a feature-length film to do it justice, even one volume of Proust's *Remembrance* would require many hours on the screen.

World-wide plans are already well advanced for the 700th anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri, to be centered next April in Florence, which exiled him, and the splendid Byzantine town of Ravenna, which took him in. Perhaps no poet has ever been the object of more study, or earned for candidates more doctorates given out for theses on him (Dante unhappily never obtained one). What lasting values does this medieval thinker have for a generation aiming to colonize the moon, that "eternal pearl," as he called it? (Dante in the thirteenth century projected his man onto the moon: Cain carrying a bundle of thorns—*Inferno*, xx, 126.) The Dante Society of America is working out ambitious plans to make this country aware of the anniversary; there will be a Dante postage stamp, for example. If you wish to lend support to the project or engage a lecturer for your community, write to the national chairman, Dr. Vincent Cioffari, The Dante Society of America, Boylston Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Next April I'll send you an on-the-spot report from Florence.

—ROBERT J. CLEMENTS.