

whose list of deeds makes him a rival of Jack the Ripper. Yet the old man murmurs, "For what you have spent your life doing, you are a sensitive man."

All Western attitudes are failing her. She, and the reader along with her, will have to enter the Russian way of feeling and thinking, with its mixture of pity and terror. Before long Laura will even find herself planning to act as an accomplice in an assassination plot.

Fortunately, the intensity of the drama is mercifully balanced with rich humor and paradox. Laura's appeals to her English father for help avail little,

and when he does come she is already more Russian than English. She can but recommend his trying the dessert: "Have some *plyoomkek*. They call it that because they think they're copying our plum-cake, but it's much nicer."

So is this book, compared to others in the field. Not sparing any of the hair-raising elements, Dame Rebecca has created characters who delight us; the portrait of the double agent is a triumph. The novel is dedicated to friends "... whom I love and honor." The author has certainly honored her readers with a civilized, engrossing entertainment.

## Bonsoir Tristesse

**La Chamade**, by Françoise Sagan, translated from the French by Robert Westhoff (Dutton, 156 pp. \$3.95), concerns a triangle involving an intelligent, sensual woman, her sad, wealthy, fifty-year-old lover, and a sad, poor, younger man. Dorrie Pagones is a free-lance writer and critic.

By DORRIE PAGONES

**M**ENTION that Françoise Sagan has written a new novel, and it's like saying that Brigitte Bardot has made a new movie. People begin to look titillated and ask, "Is it—you know—like her other ones?"

*La Chamade* is like Sagan's other ones, but she is far from being the BB of the literary world. Jane Austen would be nearer the mark. Certainly no Sagan heroine would feel, as an Austen one did, that refusal to dance with one gentleman "put it out of her power" to dance with anyone else. She might not even feel that accepting one gentleman as a lover put it out of her power to accept another the next night. But Miss Sagan, like Miss Austen, is incapable of describing her characters inelegantly.

The title is untranslatable. At the end of the novel an erudite guest at a society party tells the others that "According to Littré, it's a roll on the drums to announce defeat."

The plot concerns itself, as no one will be surprised to hear, with an amorous triangle. Those involved are Lucile, an intelligent and agreeable sensualist verging on thirty, Charles, who is sad, wealthy, and fifty, and Antoine, who is sad, poor, and thirty. Although Lucile has been Charles's mistress for two years, the stage is rapidly set for her to become Antoine's. "As her only form of morality was the avoidance of self-deceit," she stays with Antoine until, after several

passionate but monotonous months in his small, ugly apartment, she comes to realize "she no longer loved loving him."

The heroine's world is inhabited by a vapid group of aging society types, most beautifully portrayed by Miss Sagan. There is Claire, a little past fifty and a little too tightly belted into her Cardin dress: "... she was a clever woman and never spoke ill of anyone, unless it was absolutely necessary in order not to appear stupid." Then there is Johnny, who "had been a homosexual until the age of forty-five, but now, after a day's work and a dinner, felt incapable of meeting a handsome young man at midnight." Last there is Diane, who has ruled society for twenty years but breaks its basic rule of indifference and becomes its victim.

Lucile finds these people alternately amusing and touching. To her they look frightened, "frightened of growing old, of losing what they have, of not being able to get what they want, of being bored. . . ."

Lucile herself is never frightened, except when she is prevented from doing whatever makes her immediately happy. She might be Dominique of *A Certain Smile*, or even Cécile of *Bonjour Tristesse*, a dozen years older and tempered, though not altered by experience. Underneath she is as adolescent as they.

*Bonjour Tristesse* was the novel that any eighteen-year-old girl worth her salt would have loved to shock the grown-up world with. Now the heroines are growing older, and their lovers older still. Ten years from now I suppose the heroine of the latest novel, fortyish but still almost ravishing, will be obliged to consummate her desires with a boy of eighteen. Then, indeed, *bonjour tristesse*. However unhappy or bored her languid ladies get, I hope Miss Sagan will be putting her fine mind to work on short, elegant novels for at least half a century more.

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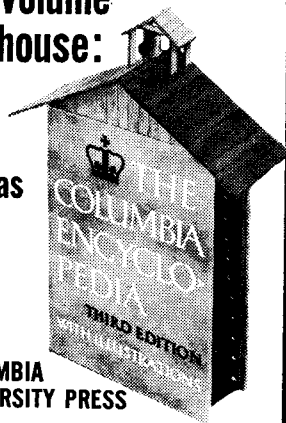
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# An Old-Fashioned Kind of Love

*The Notebooks of Captain Georges*, by Jean Renoir, translated from the French by Norman Denny (Little, Brown, 316 pp. \$5.95), carries echoes of Dumas and Prévost in its story of the love of a well-born French officer for a prostitute. "The French New Criticism," by Laurent LeSage, a companion volume to his "French New Novel," is scheduled for publication this winter.

By LAURENT LESAGE

**A**MONG recent French novels this one by the famous cinematographer stands out as an anachronism. Neither sociological, metaphysical, nor phenomenological, it is simply a love story, the story of an old-fashioned kind of love related in an old-fashioned way. It belongs to a tradition that, although generally abandoned today, is nevertheless a long and glorious one in French fiction, having produced such works as *Manon Lescaut*, by Prévost, *Dominique*, by Fromentin, *Sylvie*, by Nerval, and *Le Grand Meaulnes*, by Alain-Fournier.

I don't wish to place Renoir's story of fatal passion between a young man of family and a prostitute on the same level qualitatively as these classics. A realistic emphasis on the details of sex too often punctures the illusion of transcendent love and threatens to turn the novel into a pack of naughty postcards. Prévost knew better than to show Manon and Des Grieux in the postures that Captain Georges assumes with Agnes, his wench from the brothel of Sables d'Olonne. Moreover, if Renoir's complacency in describing bedroom scenes or scenes usually reserved for bedrooms obscures his portrait of a great love, so does the obviously "period" frame he chooses to put around it. The setting is too reminiscent of Feydeau or Dumas *filis*—the demimonde of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where gay young blades sowed their wild oats and fashionable *cocottes* showed them how. Georges, caught without his pants in the closet, resembles the hero in countless farces of the period. And frequent reminders of *La Dame aux Camélias* (even to the heroine's fatal malady) give the novel the cast of a time-marked parody. But Jean Renoir doubtless wished neither to parody nor to emulate, but rather to evoke the good old days when

real romance was possible. Rather than a caricature or stock figure, Georges must represent for him a nostalgic ideal—a dashing figure in his hussar's uniform, with his eye for bosoms and his way with horses. And Agnes, the artless little peasant turned whore, seems to wring Renoir's heart.

Those not profoundly moved by the story of these "star-crossed" lovers may still find it quite readable, and genuinely relish some incidental material—if not the orgies or the escapades, perhaps the period vignettes or the scenes of cavalry combat in World War I. The pompous and proper couple who run the bawdy house, the Parisian courtesan who has black silk sheets, the colonel's daughter are all well-drawn secondary figures. Horses and horsemanship are extremely well described too, both in maneuvers and in battle. I myself confess an extraordinary interest in Mr. Hartley of the prologue and epilogue, who raises dogs and published Captain Georges's notebooks in order to board and lodge an unmarried girl and her baby.

## Homely Recipe

*Ess, Ess, Mein Kindt*, by Harry Golden (Putnam, 320 pp. \$5.95), offers another helping of the Golden wit, wisdom, frankness, and maybe a little chicken soup. Joseph Haas is an editor and writer for *Panorama Magazine* of the *Chicago Daily News*.

By JOSEPH HAAS

**H**ARRY GOLDEN is everyone's favorite Jewish uncle, whose warmth and humor replace the reputed severity of the Dutch uncle. Papa preaches, mama teaches; but if you want the straight facts you go to Uncle Harry, who offers the truth in such a palatable way that you aren't aware he's doing both.

Another collection of Goldenisms isn't a book, however. Books are meals, and good ones are feasts. Golden's latest collections of paragraphs and short articles from his popular newspaper column are, rather, an appetizing *nosherei*. You don't sit down to it to dine. You try a little of this, a little of that, and maybe you return to the table a few times before you're  
(Continued on page 71)