



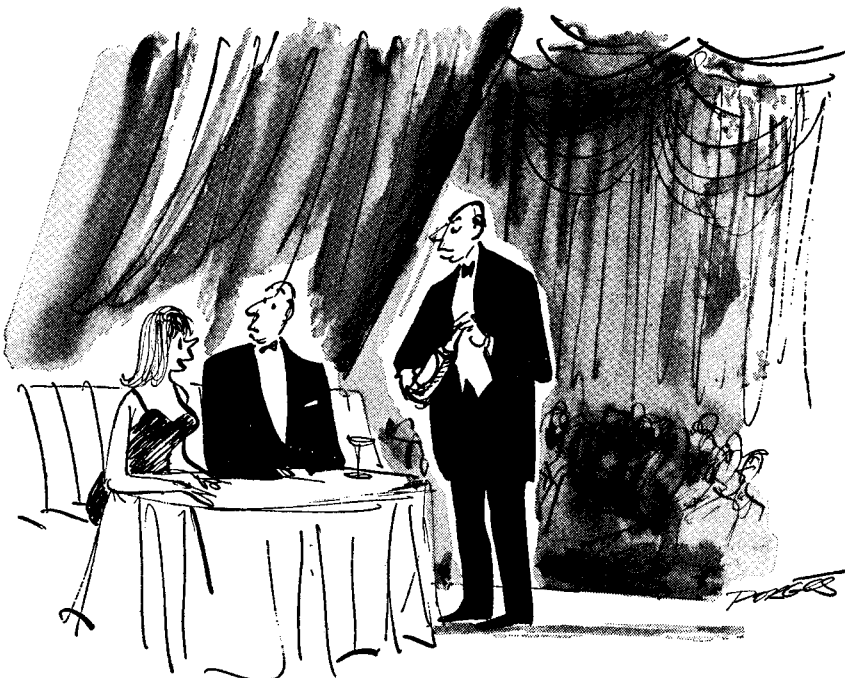
## My Favorite Blonde

IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA this past summer I came across an endearingly unpretentious, touchingly funny, and wholly masterful little movie called *The Loves of a Blonde*. It was directed by a young man named Milos Forman, whose earlier *Black Peter* had been shown approvingly at the New York Film Festival in 1965, then promptly disappeared. Was the same unhappy fate in store for his *Blonde*?

Fine pictures curiously resemble fine wines: Not all of them travel well. Many a film has been showered with prizes at the European festivals only to be greeted with critical indifference and public apathy when it reached these shores. Nor is it necessarily the fault of the picture (or, for that matter, of American critics and audiences, either). Most movies are of a certain place and time. Remove them too far from their own *milieu* and they are apt to suffer for want of the basic rapport that made them so exciting to their audiences at home.

I am, therefore, particularly delighted to be able to report that *The Loves of a Blonde* has survived its trans-Atlantic passage not only with its original virtues intact, but with the extra added attractions of freshness and originality in a movie season that has been notably deficient in both these qualities. What Forman has done, with a virtuosity that is

all the more remarkable because everything in it seems so spontaneous and simple, is to lead us gently and ever so discreetly into the intimate details of the life of a little Czech factory worker. Andula, the blonde of the title, is a snub-nosed teen-ager, neither very bright nor spectacularly pretty. There are probably millions like her in Czechoslovakia—which, I suspect, is at least part of Forman's point. At a dance arranged for the factory hands, Andula jilts a trio of middle-aged military Lutharios for a fling with the youthful pianist in the dance band. And so ingenuous is she that she interprets his jaunty farewell as an invitation to stay with him in Prague. Not only is this ro-



"That wine is as old as I am."

mance, but an escape route from her drab, provincial factory town. A week later, when she turns up on his doorstep, suitcase in hand, the boy has already forgotten her.

What saves this from being a dreary sermon on what every young girl should know is Forman's wry but sympathetic understanding of the problems of youth (with a notable assist from his script writer, Ivan Passer). At the dance in a town where the girls so outnumber the men that the factory supervisor arranges there for morale purposes, Andula is properly pleased when three of them send a bottle of wine to her table—and properly displeased when she realizes that they take it for granted their small gesture of gallantry entails a far greater gesture on her part.

Typical of the film's humor is the frantic effort of one of the soldiers to remove his wedding band as Andula and her friends approach his table, only to have it roll clear across the dance floor and rest at the feet of a girl he had earlier insulted. Best of all, however, is Forman's handling of the tensions between Andula and the boy's parents when she turns up unexpectedly at his shabby Prague apartment. The gulf between the generations is insuperable, but Forman understands and enjoys them both. And so, through this film, do audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

*Loves of a Blonde* succeeds by being genuine. One cannot doubt for a moment the existence of Andula and her friends because their responses to every moment are natural, instinctive, spontaneous. *Georgy Girl*, an English import starring James Mason, Alan Bates, and Lynn Redgrave, is almost the antithesis of this—and, to my mind, fails accordingly. Based on a novel by Margaret Forster, it presents the pudding-faced Miss Redgrave as a free-thinking, free-wheeling nonconformist who is the daughter of a "gentleman's gentleman." When Mason, a gentleman, makes the gentlemanly proposal that she become his mistress since he is saddled with an ailing and vindictive wife, Georgy rather haughtily turns him down. She would much prefer an occasional romp with Alan Bates, the Cockney lover of her fox-faced chum, Charlotte Rampling. But Mason is moodily, even masochistically persistent, and eventually, after the wife conveniently dies, the wedding bells ring out.

It is all very mod, all somewhat angry in its pitting of the Establishment against the disestablished. But whereas in *Loves of a Blonde* one feels that its makers have looked squarely at contemporary Czechoslovakia, in *Georgy Girl* one feels that its makers have looked at rather too many English movies.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



# Books

SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR

## LITERARY HORIZONS

### A Problem of Definition

ON SEPTEMBER 20 the Rowland Company, a public relations firm with a Madison Avenue address, held a press conference and cocktail party at the Overseas Press Club to announce the publication on October 24 of *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, priced at \$25. Bennett Cerf, who is, among so many other things, chairman of the board of Random House, was on hand, as was his successor as president of the company, Robert L. Bernstein. Mr. Bernstein introduced Jess Stein, editor-in-chief of the dictionary, and Leonard Urdang, its managing editor. I was not able to attend the conference, but SR was represented by Ruth Brown of the Book Review Department, and I have her notes as well as a stack of press releases.

From the releases I learn that the dictionary weighs nine and a quarter pounds, has 2,091 pages, and contains 260,000 entries. (Its only rival as an unabridged dictionary, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, hereafter called W3, published in 1961, contains 2,718 pages and 450,000 entries, and sells for about \$50.) "The RHD," I learn from one release, "demanded seven years of editorial research and about \$3,000,000 to produce." In spite of the use of computers—which in these days is like speaking about the aid of heavenly angels—the services of a large staff were required, and the advice of hundreds of experts was obtained. The purpose of the publishers was to create a dictionary that would be completely up-to-date, would "suit 99 per cent of the people 99 per cent of the time," and would be cheap enough to reach a large audience. President Bernstein said at the conference: "Just as Samuel Johnson produced the dictionary of the eighteenth century and Noah Webster the dictionary of the nineteenth century, we hope ours will be the dictionary of the twentieth century." (According to a release, Mr. Bernstein "has signed President Johnson, Vice President Humphrey, Anthony Lewis, Doug-

lass Cater, Fred W. Friendly, Richard Condon and many others to Random House contracts." This sounds like wholesale forgery, but I don't think that's what the release meant.)

In 1934, when *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition* (hereafter called W2) was published, its eminent editor-in-chief, William Allan Neilson, spoke with dismay of the large numbers of words that had come into the language in recent years and pointed out that many older words had been omitted. Since 1934, of course, the expansion of the language has been more and more rapid, chiefly because of the development of both the physical and the social sciences but also because the mass media wear out words, especially slang and jargon, at a tremendous rate. There are at least 50,000 words in RHD that have come into existence since 1934. Yet W2 had 600,000 entries as against RHD's 260,000, which seems to mean that approximately 400,000 words to be found in W2 are not in RHD.

Before I go into the question of what has been included and what has been omitted, I must point out that RHD tries to be a one-volume encyclopedia as well as a dictionary. Names of persons and places are included in the main dictionary, which is sound practice. The main body also contains names of characters in literature, which is an innovation so far as I know and a useful one, although anything like a comprehensive listing was obviously impossible. There are a sixty-page atlas and a thirty-five-page gazetteer. There is a lot of miscellaneous information: a directory of colleges and universities in the United States, some historical documents, a manual of writing style, explanations of signs and symbols, a list of reference works, dates in world history, and so on. Most extraordinary of all, the editors have included concise French, Spanish, Italian, and German dictionaries, running to nearly 200 pages. These are so concise that they are never really useful and often

- 20 SR's Check List of the Week's New Books
- 49 Literary Horizons: Granville Hicks reviews "The Random House Dictionary of the English Language"
- 52 Letters to the Book Review Editor
- 53 "You Do It Because You Love Somebody"—Lillian Smith: 1897-1966, by George P. Brockway
- 54 "Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power," by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak; "The Johnson Eclipse: A President's Vice Presidency," by Leonard Baker
- 56 "Pursuit," by Berry Morgan
- 57 "A Matter of Time," by Jessamyn West. "King of Spades," by Frederick Manfred
- 58 "Rudyard Kipling," by J. I. M. Stewart
- 59 "Ludendorff: Genius of World War I," by D. J. Goodspeed
- 59 "Rare Books and Royal Collectors," by Maurice L. Ettinghausen; "A Primer of Book Collecting," by John T. Winterich and David A. Randall
- 60 Books for Young People, by Zena Sutherland

misleading. In particular the English-French, English-German, English-Italian, and English-Spanish sections seem to me to be usable only by persons who already know the languages. All these features, as the editors call them, are good selling points, but I would settle for more dictionary and less encyclopedia.

As for up-to-dateness, the editors boast that the user can find *à go go*, *camp*, *frug*, *jet set*, *kooky*, and *ratfink*, as well as such concoctions as *Franglais* and *Guesstimate*. Definitions of such terms may be useful this year, but they probably won't be next, for you can't keep up with this kind of language unless you issue daily bulletins. The dictionary has *cool* as an adjective in the modern slangy sense but not *cool* as a noun. Yet Arthur Schlesinger recently suggested in the *New York Times Magazine* that we should "recover our cool" with regard to Vietnam. That wretched invention *debrief* is included; but the even worse *de-escalate* isn't—not, of course, because it is a monstrosity, but because it has been coined since the RHD went to press. At any rate, RHD