

construct a gibbet and a rack and wheel in their front garden. Each does his share as matter-of-factly as if they were fixing up a basement playroom. "We began the construction work on a Sunday afternoon after the raviolis," but on Monday some are obliged to go to their jobs because "after all, you have to live somehow." Eventually, to the satisfaction of the family, neighbors stand at the fence by the hundreds to protest, threaten, and mutter, and the police are called in to have a look (they "commented favorably on how well the gallows looked"). And when the work was done the delightful crew, who never intended to *do* anything with their macabre construction, happily go off to sleep.

Equally whimsical is the account of what happens when a large part of the family are given jobs in a post office by a distant relative. For three days everything is topsy-turvy: a shot of vodka accompanies each money order, and balloons are handed out free with stamps. When the police invade the premises the mother showers them with multi-colored paper airplanes made of telegrams and money orders.

The book's third section has less unity; it pokes fun at a wide variety of subjects, from pedants to secretaries, and from the nature of language to the strange recurrence of the first name Felix.

The last and longest section contains "Stories of Cronopios and Famas." Neither Cortázar nor the American publisher bothers to explain these strange names invented by the author. In fact, there is no need to explain, because we quickly come to understand that they are elements of Cortázar's particular cosmography. Cronopios are the spontaneous, temperamental, artistic people who are congenitally disorganized and impractical, but who enjoy life and live it fully. Famas are plodders—prudent, scientific, intelligent, but unimaginative. Lastly come esperanzas, the slugs who do not think at all, who see no further than the ends of their noses, but who are nevertheless not entirely unappealing (Cortázar cannot really dislike *any* segment of people), because, like the "nebechs," they are born losers.

Now it happens that turtles are great speed enthusiasts, which is natural.

The esperanzas know that and don't bother about it.

The famas know it, and make fun of it.

The cronopios know it, and each time they meet a turtle, they haul out the box of colored chalks, and on the rounded blackboard of the turtle's shell they draw a swallow.

When traveling, famas investigate hotel accommodations, prices, and locations very carefully. Cronopios miss trains and find all rooms taken, but manage to find a bed finally and are thrilled because the city is beautiful. Esperanzas don't take the trouble to travel at all. In a post office the fama meticulously sticks his stamps on an envelope and then presses them to make doubly sure, while the cronopio becomes enraged that the portraits on the stamps are too ugly for him to use on a love letter to his wife.

Cortázar is masterfully incisive. Each page sparkles with vivid satire that goes to the heart of human character and, in his best pieces, to the essence of the human condition; in its entirety *Cronopios and Famas* comprises a veritable human comedy. One



is tempted to mention possible literary influences on Cortázar: Borges, Kafka, Jarry, the surrealists, Thurber, to name a few. But in reality this Argentinian writer who has lived in France for more than a decade and a half is very much his own man; if he naturally does not write in a vacuum, his work does clearly bear his own stamp, and his whimsical imagination is wholly original. Paul Blackburn's outstanding translation preserves the crispness of Cortázar's style, the wealth of his images, and the gaiety of his humor.

Tom Bishop

Tom Bishop is professor of French and Comparative Literatures at New York University.

A LOVING WIFE

by Violet Weingarten

Knopf, 241 pp., \$5.95

IF ONE COMMENTS about Violet Weingarten's second novel, *A Loving Wife*, that the author shows remarkable insight into the educated, urban, fortyish matron, it sounds not only like a put-down, but seems to suggest dull fiction. Yet such is not the case. *A Loving Wife* is something more than entertaining for both the dialogue and the characters are believable. Most readers will be engrossed, and many women will find themselves surprised into the "shock of recognition."

Like *Mrs. Beneker*, the perceptive and witty first novel by Mrs. Weingarten published last year, the story is told from the point of view of the central character, in this case Molly Gilbert, the loving wife. An ironical title? At first one would think so, for after years of what seems to have been a happy marriage, Molly becomes involved in a passionate love affair. It can't go anywhere, since her lover cannot—or will not, which amounts to the same thing—divorce his wife. But for Molly, as her son remarks in another context, everything is supposed to lead to something else, and if love affairs are a kind of shopping around, then the one that suits is supposed to lead to marriage. It is Molly's maneuvering and questioning, her rattling of the box she is in, her scrutiny of the cards she has chosen, that make up the novel.

Her husband, Mike, is a familiar and exasperating type—uncommunicative, often kindly, wrapped up in his work. "No one says anything and everything

Your Literary I.Q.

Conducted by David M. Glixon

P A T E D E M A M E R E L ' O I E

With no help from the youngest generation, how fast could you associate these nursery-rhyme characters with their customary foods? Such is the stern challenge flung by Sister Mary Jeremy Finnegan of River Forest, Ill. The menu is straightened out on page 31.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Curly-Locks () | A. mince and quince | 7. Little Tom | G. tarts |
| 2. Taffy () | B. cold potato | Tucker () | |
| 3. A queen and a knave () | C. bread and honey | 8. The lion and the unicorn () | H. pumpkin |
| 4. Good King Arthur () | D. pease porridge | 9. The queen in the parlor () | I. strawberries, sugar, and cream |
| 5. The man in the moon () | E. a piece of beef | 10. Peter () | J. cherry pie |
| 6. Billy Boy () | F. white and brown bread and plum-cake | 11. The owl and the pussy-cat () | K. white bread and butter |
| | | 12. Mister South () | L. bag-pudding |

to anyone else. You want to say everything that comes into your head, go see a psychiatrist." Her lover is seen more dimly. He fills the hotel rooms at which they rendezvous with flowers—different ones every time—but he is the sort of domesticated philanderer who takes his wife and children skiing at Christmas and probably spends August with them at the shore. Her son, although he still comes home from college on vacations with his laundry and his girl, is basically where he wants to be—out of it. Her mother, never a friend nor a model, coldly and devastatingly sketches life as she sees it for the widow or divorcée. Molly's job, which she loves, offers a refuge of sorts, for "each day, when she walked into the office, she hung up her conflict like a coat." The world of Molly's work is skillfully and knowledgeably woven into the texture of the novel, yet the job may also be one of the strains that has worn down her marriage.

Mrs. Weingarten has pre-empted for her fiction a small bit of ground and cultivated it admirably. Whereas Doris Lessing, an author of greater stature, writes ambitious novels in which she studies women of more scope in considerable depth, Mrs. Weingarten, less complex, has taken the territory of the well-to-do city or suburban matron whose children are almost independent and whose marriage has grown a bit stale. The stuff of *McCall's* or the *Ladies' Home Journal*, perhaps, but Mrs. Weingarten's characters are intelligent, and she neither gushes nor pants over their escapades. Her reach is exactly in keeping with her grasp, with the result that her honest novels achieve exactly the right note.

Cecile Shapiro

Cecile Shapiro, a former college English teacher, is now doing free-lance editing and writing.

LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

by **David W. Elliott**

Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 279 pp., \$5.95

LIKE MANY NOVELS about mental institutions, *Listen to the Silence* is filled with emotional land mines, booby traps, and pitfalls. It is also the longest 279-page book I have read in many a month. Let the reader proceed at his own risk.

Timmy, a teen-age orphan committed to a mental institution by one of the many foster families he has lived with, seems to be an autobiographical figure (a brief note about the author states that he spent his first thirteen years with fifteen different families). The boy's sojourn in the asylum, is



David Elliott—"weird incidents."

punctuated by a series of weird, unlovely incidents and passages of dialogue that do not make any progress or do much in the way of defining character. The cumulative impression is of a wretched, hopeless life, both in the world of the institution and inside the heads of its inmates.

That life is, of course, a vastly different one from what would be described by an attendant or a doctor. How important is this? Highly important, I would say, because it is not the result of the difference between two human minds or characters, but of that between rationality and non-rationality.

The publisher has the caution to hedge in designating the book as a novel, yet it is clear that the author intends it as a work of fiction. But what are the ground rules for such a work? It is hard to say—whatever, I suppose, the author believes he might find in the heads of his unfortunate characters; and who is to say he is wrong in what he dredges up? Perhaps the whole area of mental illness ought to be treated only in nonfiction.

Whatever the answer to that question may be, *Listen to the Silence* suffers from shapelessness. After a certain number of pages the reader realizes that he has no idea where the book is going. The last two pages could come equally well at the end of any chapter in the second half of the book. There seems to be no special reason why they are placed where they are except, perhaps, that this is how it happened in the author's life.

Paul K. Cuneo

Paul K. Cuneo is a magazine editor and free-lance writer.

USSR

AN IDEOLOGY IN POWER: Reflections on the Russian Revolution

by **Bertram D. Wolfe**

Stein & Day, 406 pp., \$10

BERTRAM WOLFE has been a prolific commentator on the Soviet scene for thirty years. His *Three Who Made a Revolution* (1948) is a classic in a field where few books achieve longevity. He wields the facile pen of a seasoned and skillful polemicist, readily produces colorful similes and memorable quotes, and elegantly launches poison arrows at antagonists as he mercilessly exposes wishful thinking or naïve *non sequiturs*.

Thus another in the impressive list of his books is bound to merit careful inspection. This one brings together twenty-five essays and articles—twenty-three of them previously published—that illustrate the range of topics Mr. Wolfe, now senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University, has dealt with over the past generation. Here are pieces on the Russian Revolution and Marx, on the First World War and the Leninist heritage, on "Backwardness and Industrialization in Russian History and Thought," but, above all, on the Soviet régime as it took shape in the Stalin era. Wolfe is at his best when exposing and debunking, and his chapters on Stalinist historiography, forced labor, and party control over arts and sciences are telling indictments well worth reading and pondering.

But the most provocative chapters are those that summarize his general outlook on Communism and the Soviet régime. The title of this volume,—*An Ideology in Power*,—and of one of Wolfe's best-known essays, reprinted here—"The Durability of Despotism in the Soviet System"—are indicative of his approach. Bertram Wolfe is a leading exponent of the thesis that the Soviet system has not changed and cannot be expected to change in any fundamental sense. He has reason to be proud of his own consistency in the face of others who have time and again forecast either the collapse of the Soviet régime or its regeneration. His insistence that the leaders in Moscow are animated by Communist beliefs is a healthy antidote to the proclivity for dismissing "ideology" as *post facto* rationalization and mere propaganda.

Yet the reader will wish to approach these rather indifferently edited essays with a critical eye. Wolfe assumes that the "ideology in power" remains unalterably operative in shaping Soviet