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BOOKS and REVIEWS

Verlaine: Fool of God
By Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson. 394 pp. New York: Random House. \$5.00.
Reviewed by PHIL THOMAS

Monsieur Janvier
By Elizabeth Linington. 288 pp. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$3.95.
Reviewed by FRED MALLENDER

Those Without Shadows
By Francoise Sagan. 125 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton. \$2.95.
Reviewed by ROBIN BAHR

"Verlaine: Fool of God" is the eighth volume in a series of jointly written biographies being turned out with production-line regularity by Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson in an effort, their publishers claim, to create studies of the artistic spirit which are perceptive in treatment and dramatic in effect.

This latest effort, like their earlier treatments of Van Gogh, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, is not very perceptive in treatment and can only be considered dramatically effective if the reader in some way believes this is achieved by over-dramatizing the more sensational and tragic elements of an artist's life.

PAUL VERLAINE (1844-1896) was an immediate forerunner of the symbolist school in French poetry.

He and other experimenting young poets of the same period, most notably Arthur Rimbaud, helped free French poetry from its traditional forms by writing French as it then was spoken and not as it was spoken in the past by the aristocratic class.

They also dropped the use of the old, end-of-the-line rhyme which enabled them to produce poetry famed for its grace, delicacy and musical suggestiveness.

Verlaine, the Hansons say, was "a poet of life, and to condemn his life and to praise his work is to ignore the reality that the one depends absolutely on the other; had Verlaine been . . . a less self-indulgent man . . . he could not have written the poems famed and loved throughout the world, for they spring from the same source."

THE THEORY that an artist's work is not to be judged separately is accepted by most critics.

Unfortunately, although the Hansons voice this critical method in their book, they do not follow it, preferring instead to give only the barest outline of Verlaine's work while laying undue emphasis on Verlaine's habits of mind and brooding.

Those interested in solid, critical estimates of Verlaine's work, intelligent appraisals of his influence on the course of poetry, and good, critical dissections of the best of his poems will find little of value in this book.

The Hansons are at their best as apologists for Verlaine the man.

ACCORDING TO THEM, the protective adoration of Verlaine's mother and foster sister never wavered even though the loved object began stumbling home drunk and hanging about brothels at the age of 16.

It was this adoration, they hint, which launched the poet on a life-long search for the maternal.

A search which led him into marriage with a 16-year-old girl who, instead of redeeming him with her love as intended, divorced him when he persisted in being her and leaving her to indulge in allegedly homosexual escapades with Rimbaud.

The search also led him with increasing frequency to the absinthe bottle and to the brothels.

NEAR THE END of his life (he died at 51), he limped along the streets of Paris, the limping apparently the result of venereal disease. Verlaine finally began realizing money from his writing.

Perhaps, if the money had come earlier, it might have changed the direction of the poet's life. But when it did come, it was too late for Verlaine to change his ways.

Verlaine died almost penniless. He was accused later that the poet had been using his funds to support three retired prostitutes with whom he had been taking turns living.

By Francoise Sagan. 125 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton. \$2.95.
Reviewed by ROBIN BAHR

"They could never be happy and they knew it. And at the same time they knew obscurely that it didn't matter. It simply didn't matter."

This is the state of affairs in "Those Without Shadows," Francoise Sagan's third novel following her first two best sellers, "Bonjour Tristesse" and "A Certain Smile."

Once again Miss Sagan is dealing with the changing relationships between a small group of people in the light of their amorous pursuits. Once again the story is dominated by this mood of futility.

In this case "they" refers to a small intellectual elite in Paris. The nine people involved congregate each Monday at the home of publisher Alain Malgrasse where both the characters and the reader discover the futile and confusing course of their individual loves.

FOR EXAMPLE, Fanny adores her husband Alain, but he is madly in love with an actress who is, at the time, obliging Alain's nephew Nicole loves her husband Bernard, but Bernard loves Joaze, who is living with a boorish medical student who couldn't care less.

And so it goes, putting to shame the old-fashioned triangle.

However, it is not the unrequited love that becomes depressing, but as the author says, the fact that nothing matters. Miss Sagan expresses this attitude with authority and conviction, and I believe sincerity, for she is of the generation which witnessed the horrors of World War II.

But while it rings true and may be representative, it limits her range as a writer. If she is ever going to do more than simply reflect the attitude of her own small world, she must be able to understand and explore the whole gamut of emotions—the positive as well as the negative, the do cares as well as the don't cares.

IT ALSO REMAINS to be seen whether the author can do justice to other facets of life beyond the bedroom. So far it has been the only setting in which she can find expression for her ideas.

What relieves this book is the author's light deft handling of words. Once again she renders vividly and accurately a given situation. The characters reactions to that situation seem real and momentarily give insight into the individual.

For instance, the dinner scene between Alain and Beatrice. The awkwardness and the sager stumbling attempts of Alain to attract Beatrice are pathetically real. You can actually feel Alain's frustrations and suffer his agonies.

BUT WHEN ALAIN becomes a drunkard over his lost love, it fails to carry conviction. There is no adequate penetration into his make-up to justify complete decline.

In spite of the author's preoccupation with the bedroom, her reluctance to go beneath the surface, and her adherence to a single mood, she is a good enough writer to make a rather meagre story into interesting reading with her mastery of language.

THE HERO of the novel is a Scot expatriate living in Paris whose family was wiped out as the result of the treachery of a neighbor. He adopts the alias of the title, moves to London to exact vengeance for this treachery and finally returns to Paris a wiser man.

On this simple framework Miss Linington has placed many real gems of characterization. The individuals who made up London society during the reign of George I and their pets of the moment are the major figures of the novel. A more diversified and fascinating group could hardly be imagined.

ANY PERSON who had money, or the appearance of same, was assured of a fawning coterie of admirers. Wealthy foreigners were welcomed with open arms and hostesses vied for their attentions.

Living on the fringe of this "society" were the gamblers, the expensive women, and the representatives of the arts. These openly struggled for money and fame with whatever means at their disposal.

Weaving all these characters together results in a novel of very delicate strength but rich in color.

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