

FRANZ KAFKA. By *Franz Baumer*. Translated by *Abraham Farbstein*. Modern Literature Monographs. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1971. 122 pp. \$5.00, cloth. \$1.45, paper.

CONVERSATIONS WITH KAFKA. By *Gustav Janouch*. Translated by *Goronwy Rees*. 2nd revised and enlarged edition. London: André Deutsch, 1971. 219 pp. £2.00. New York: New Directions. \$8.50, cloth. \$3.25, paper.

FRANZ KAFKA: HIS PLACE IN WORLD LITERATURE. Edited by *Wolodymyr T. Zyla*. Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium, vol. 4, January 28 and 29, 1971. Lubbock: Interdepartmental Committee on Comparative Literature, Texas Tech University, 1971. vi, 174 pp. Paper.

Reviewers are given strange bundles sometimes. This one reminds me of Christ between the two thieves.

Let us begin with the central figure. When Camus remarked, apropos of his "hero" Meursault, that every age gets the Christs it deserves, was he also thinking of Kafka? It is certainly tenable that this man suffered for many sins of the modern world, if not that he takes them away. Janouch's delightful book, which began when his father invited Kafka to look at Gustav's poems, reveals a person with the humor, dignity, warmth, and patience of a saint, thus finely counterbalancing the impression—obtainable from some of Kafka's writings—that he must have been a constantly anguished neurotic. Admirers of Goethe will be heartened by the evidence given here that Kafka not only respected but liked that thoroughly un-Christlike writer; and in general we gain a picture of a mind and a personality that were intensely capable of enjoying life, from all the Kierkegaardian standpoints: aesthetic, ethical, religious. It is good that Kafka found an Eckermann.

The translator of the first edition, which amounted to about half of what Janouch had recorded, does equally well by its completed form. A postscript by the author, and six pages of useful notes, round out this invaluable work.

The side figures may be treated more rapidly. Franz Baumer has thrown together a cold sketch of our author's life and work, which is presumably intended as a manual for beginners. They should avoid it. The other thief looks better fed: there are photographs of a bust, of a (presumably) imaginary portrait, and even of two husky dancers "interpreting" a story. There is also a tediously detailed account of a researcher's chats with some of Kafka's relatives and acquaintances, and of her impressions of Prague. The body of the work comprises seven essays, steeply varying in quality, which compare their incomparable subject with writers from Apuleius to James Purdy. The best contribution is a short opener by the widow of Johannes Urzidil, who wrote *There Goes Kafka*. With memorable simplicity and directness, and (we are told) partly in her husband's words, Mrs. Urzidil stresses Kafka's unique and elusive purity.

And so youth wins the day. A true disciple, otherwise unknown, who claims that he cannot bring himself to read his hero's posthumously published works, rewards us with essentials, while influential scholars grunt and groan over placings and assessments. But who shall blame them for being unwilling or unable to become as little children?

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