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Bruno Frank Achieves Major Stature in Fine New Novel

Reviewed by
Klaus Mann

ONE FAIR DAUGHTER. By Bruno Frank. Translated by Claire Trask. Viking. 261 pp. \$2.75.

AMONG the many German refugee-writers living now in this country, Bruno Frank is an outstanding and engaging figure. Some of his books—especially his fine Cervantes novel and a cycle of short stories around Frederick of Prussia, "Days of the King"—have greatly appealed to the American reading public by virtue of their elegant craftsmanship and the moving authenticity of their emotional impact.

The same qualities of artistic skill and true ethical fervor are manifest in his new novel, while in other respects "One Fair Daughter"—a topical story, intensely relevant to the problems of our time—undoubtedly surpasses the historical narratives.

The intrinsic theme of Bruno Frank's entire work—presented and dramatized in various forms and from many different angles—is the moral concept of justice and, interrelated with it, the pathos of sympathy and compassion. His two masters and guides are Voltaire and Schopenhauer. Like the latter, he conceives pity as the only ethical and effective approach to the bitter mysteries of our transient life; while—in the former's spirit—he believes in, and ardently recommends, moral activism, an uncompromising fight against evil. *Ecrasez l'Infame!* Voltaire's battle cry is the leitmotiv of Bruno Frank's writings.

Elisabeth—a remarkably attractive, high-minded girl of half Polish-Jewish, half Austrian-aristocratic stock—refuses with gallant obstinacy to acquiesce to the power of evil. She knows what intolerance is: its abysmal stupidity and cruel viciousness destroyed the life of her mother. Recha Doctor, a Jewish music-hall star, was in love only once—with Elisabeth's father, Count Franz von Pattay. The novel opens with her short, nostalgic romance—a miniature masterpiece.

Recha's lover is killed in World War I—not by an enemy bullet but cravenly, by a compatriot and fellow-officer—one of those puny villains who will flock in

masses, 20 years afterward, to the high priest of villainy, Schickelgruber of Brunau.

The spirit of hatred and intolerance can assume many different forms, but its withering, deadly impact is invariably the same. Elisabeth—brought up in a small Polish town which formerly belonged to the Hapsburg monarchy—is boycotted by her schoolmates because of her Austrian-Jewish parentage. As for the Jews, they, too, distrust and despise her. Has not her mother, Recha, betrayed her race and creed by marrying a gentile? The proud and sensitive child has no friends, except two melancholy, aging women—her mournful, enchanting mother and Aunt Chana, a Jewish matron of truly Biblical grandeur and stamina. Their circle will soon be joined by Piotr, one of the most original, most lovable characters of the story—a Ukrainian peasant boy who used to be Count Pattay's military servant and later becomes Elisabeth's most faithful friend and companion.

The drama of Elisabeth—that fair daughter of two ancient races—is intimately, insolubly connected with the European drama in general, indeed, with the very drama of modern civilization. She was born at the historic moment of the Austrian empire's collapse and disintegration. She lives to witness, first, the national rebirth, then the tragedy, of the Polish people and the martyrdom of the Jews.

Those whom she loves are doomed. The Nazi Huns invade Poland, ransack and almost destroy her home town. Aunt Chana dies. Recha and Piotr perish. Elisabeth survives. There is a man who could not bear to lose her—John Herkimer, an American correspondent, robust and upright, reliable, taciturn. He rescues her from the inferno.

But she survives also, thanks to certain energies inherent in her complex and delicate being. She survives because she wants to live; because she has faith in life and in human nature—despite and beyond all tragic insights and experiences. For the author, in his generous tenderness, has endowed her with the very forces and impulses that enabled him to write this beautiful, noble book.

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