



## A SEASON OF DISCONTENT

By HALLOWELL BOWSER

**W**HAT has come over the world of belles-lettres? In the half-year just past, no fewer than four of our major literary prizes—the National Book Awards, the Pulitzer Prizes, the American Academy of Arts and Letters grants, and the YM-YWHA Poetry Center awards—have occasioned unwonted displays of spleen and temperament.

A certain amount of pique and bruised feelings is, of course, a feature of the award-giving process. But the flareups that punctuated the 1962 awards season reflect a basic disgruntlement that may well turn the early months of 1963 into another season of literary discontent.

The first and gaudiest of the 1962 controversies began with the National Book Awards banquet, on the evening of March 13. When Walker Percy's novel "The Moviegoer" was named winner in the fiction category, embarrassment hung heavy in the hall, since most of the several hundred book critics present had neither read nor reviewed the prize-winner.

By the next morning embarrassment was turning into suspicion. How could an unheralded first novel have won the nation's top fiction award? Was there more here than met the eye?

There certainly was, according to a

newspaper story that was soon being circulated widely in different versions. The report was based on remarks made by writer A. J. Liebling, husband of NBA judge Jean Stafford, at a Columbia School of Journalism seminar held the day after the NBA awards dinner. Mr. Liebling, the story ran, had boasted of influencing his wife and the other NBA judges in favor of "The Moviegoer," largely because the novel's setting is Louisiana—a state Mr. Liebling has been particularly fond of ever since he wrote a biography of its eccentric former Governor, the late Earl Long. As *Show* magazine told the story, "It seems that the journalist husband of a lady judge found the book attractive principally because it was set in New Orleans, one of his favorite places. He conveyed his preference to his consort. She dutifully convinced her fellow jurists that her husband's wish was their command."

Wounded, Mr. Liebling denied that he practiced literary criticism on a states' rights basis. The story going the rounds was, he protested, based on a misinterpretation by a "kid from the *New York Times*" of remarks he, Mr. Liebling, had made at the Columbia University seminar. "I said at Columbia that I was attracted to 'The Moviegoer' by a favorable review . . . and by its New Orleans setting," he explained in a letter to the editors of *Show*. "I did not say, 'I found it attractive principal-

ly because' it was so set, as you have it. I thought it a fine book."

He had later recommended the novel to his wife, Mr. Liebling averred, and after reading and liking it she had mentioned it to her fellow judges, Herbert Gold and Lewis Gannett; but Miss Stafford was no Trilby to his Svengali ("She seldom respects my preferences."). Miss Stafford's thoughts on the award appear elsewhere in these pages.

As for his playing Gray Eminence to NBA judges Gannett and Gold, the suggestion was, said Mr. Liebling, "pure fantasy and inexcusably insulting to . . . two independent souls . . . who made up their minds about the book separately, a continent apart."

More hard feelings had been stirred up, meanwhile, by Mr. Liebling's assertion in the Columbia talk that Mr. Percy's publishing house, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., had been less than vigorous in its promotion of "The Moviegoer." "When I had read the book," Mr. Liebling recalled in his letter to *Show*, "I called it to Miss Stafford's attention. Knopf, Percy's publisher, hadn't . . . although they had sent around a bushel or so of their more favored offspring . . . 'The Moviegoer' without this chance encounter might have missed the judges' eyes altogether. . . . When Percy, a grand fellow, showed up to receive the award, his publisher treated him like an erring daughter with child at breast."

No such thing, cried a spokesman for Knopf: "This is a gratuitous slap at a house that has gone out of its way to publish first novels. . . . As for pushing this book, we did exactly what we do for every first novel."

Finally, an NBA spokesman was moved to chide Mr. Liebling for his apparent misunderstanding of the Awards procedure: ". . . it is not fair to criticize any publisher for failing to send copies of books to NBA judges. The judges themselves, with the help of the lists furnished to them by the Awards Advisory Committee, are responsible for making their own individual requests for books; these requests are then passed on to the publishers."

The NBA excitement had not yet subsided when, early in May, the Pulitzer Prize announcements kicked

May 24, 1962.

I WANT to make a brief statement on this [AAAL] award. John Williams declined the Arts and Letters award because he was refused the Academy in Rome Fellowship after having been the unanimous choice of the jury of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. This was done in an atmosphere of great bureaucratic confusion. I was the runner-up in the competition and therefore won it. Mr. Williams and I agree—more or less—to the following statement on the basis of a conversation between us:

(1) The jury of the American Academy of Arts and Letters: If they had been firmer in their dealings with the American Academy in Rome, this painful situation would not have happened.

(2) There is a bug in the relations between the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy in Rome that allows this confusion to happen. The American Academy of Arts and Letters should define its relations with the American Academy in Rome. The question is, should an administrator have veto power over judges who award prizes to artists on the basis of merit?

(3) My personal position is: I will take the money from the academies during their confusion, and I will go to Rome in the hope that they will behave better in their future awards. Thank you.

—ALAN DUGAN.

up a new fuss. For the first time in forty-six years the trustees of Columbia, who administer the prizes, turned down a biography recommended by distinguished Pulitzer advisory board, and said they would give no award in the biography category.

The work passed over so pointedly was "Citizen Hearst," Walter Swanberg's life of press lord William Randolph Hearst, Sr. The trustees did not explain why the book had been found unacceptable. Unofficially, however, one trustee confided that a book about such a controversial personality as Mr. Hearst could hardly measure up to Pulitzer specifications for a biography "teaching patriotic and unselfish services to the people, illustrated by an eminent example."

This explanation brought snorts from many critics, who pointed to various prize-winning works that did not begin to live up to the toplofty citations for their categories. Actually, the book makes no bones about the awful gap between Mr. Hearst's journalistic practices and the sky-high standards cited by the trustees. In one passage Mr. Swanberg says that though Mr. Hearst "spoke piously of ideals in journalism, he left no gutter unexplored." This viewpoint found no favor with Mr. Hearst's son and successor, publisher William Randolph Hearst, Jr., who wrote, "I couldn't care less whether the book won . . . or not . . . Swanberg . . . describes a side of my father which . . . did not exist."

Relishing the commotion and the attendant brisk sales of "Citizen Hearst," Mr. Swanberg dubbed his un-winning of the non-award "How to Succeed by Failing." He suspects the trustees' action was less a matter of moral revulsion than it was "a latter-day replay of the Hearst-Pulitzer journalistic war."

While Columbia's board of trustees and the Pulitzer board were disagreeing with each other, another battle of the boards was shaping up. On January 30 novelist John Williams received from the American Academy of Arts and Letters a note saying, "... the Academy . . . has chosen you as the recipient of a Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome for the year October 1962-October 1963 subject to the approval of the American Academy in Rome. The letter went on to mention the award's value—\$3,500—and the date of its presentation (May 24).

Elated, Mr. Williams applied for a leave from his job, had a fifteen-minute interview with Richard A. Kimball, director of the American Academy in Rome, and began to make plans for his year abroad. But late in February the novelist learned the Academy in

Rome had broken an eleven-year precedent by passing him over, without explanation, in favor of the AAAL's second choice, poet Alan Dugan. The blow was later softened somewhat when Mr. Williams received a letter from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (parent body of the AAAL). The letter assured him that the Rome academy would soon let him know why his name had not been approved. The same letter offered him another award—this one for \$2,000—which he agreed to accept at the AAAL's May 24 ceremonies.

But on May 7, oppressed by his failure to receive the promised explanation of his rejection by the Rome group, Mr. Williams wrote to the AAAL and the Institute, "The events leading up to the granting of the [\$2,000] award are of such an ambiguous nature that I cannot in good conscience accept the grant. . . . I feel now were I to accept the award, it would be tacit agreement that no explanation was due me." Tempers at the AAAL were not improved by the fact Mr. Williams's declination came only after the academy had printed up announcements and an awards program listing his name.

Meanwhile, to Mr. Williams's dismay, all sorts of whispers and surmises were being heard about his rejection: Had his nomination been vetoed because he is a Negro? Or did he have some unspeakable character defect, like many of the people in his well-received novel "Night Song"? Published by

Farrar, Straus & Cudahy in 1961, "Night Song" depicts "a world of cool, of arrogant musicians and worrying night-club owners, a world filled with admirers, detractors, tourists, hipsters, squares, policemen, and weirdies." Mr. Williams's own surmise was that he had been turned down not because he is a Negro, as such, but because he is a Negro who wears a cap and a beard—and who so violates the foursquare "public image" which, he says, the Rome Academy representative set great store by during their brief talk.

Finally, on May 17, Michael Rapano, president of the Academy in Rome, wrote to Mr. Williams, "... it was felt that [Alan Dugan] would profit more from a year in Rome than would you. . . . As to the question of race prejudice [the Academy] has had Fellows who were Negroes. . . ."

In reply Mr. Williams, writhing under the poisonous rumors, wrote, "You do not explain why it was felt that I would profit less than someone else from a year in Rome. . . . You assure me that I was not rejected because I am a Negro. It would perhaps be better for my personal reputation if you told me that that was the reason for my rejection."

At the awards ceremony of May 24 Alan Dugan, in accepting the Rome prize, startled the audience by saying the AAAL jury should have been firmer in their dealings with the American Academy in Rome. He added, "I will go to Rome in the hope that they will

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# The Critics Go to the Poll

A GENTLE naturalist turned crusader heads the list by a wide margin in *SR*'s fall survey of outstanding books. Twenty-five of the forty-four newspaper critics replying to the poll agreed that Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" is the season's most significant work, and its repercussions will undoubtedly be heard for a long time to come. Second place, with ten ballots, went to James Jones's latest examination of men at war, "The Thin Red Line," followed closely by Allen Drury's "A Shade of Difference," chosen by nine reviewers. Runners-up include "More Lives Than One," Joseph Wood Krutch's sensitive autobiography (five votes); Mark Twain's fanciful "Letters from the Earth" (also five votes) and the sometimes all-too-real "Letters of Oscar Wilde," which tied with Glenway Wescott's examination of literary "Images of Truth" (four votes; see p. 41).

These, and other titles receiving from one to three votes, are listed below.

## TWENTY-FIVE VOTES

**SILENT SPRING.** By Rachel Carson. Houghton Mifflin. \$5. A devastating and heavily documented indictment of the irresponsible loosing of dangerous chemicals on our countryside. (J. Alexander, Barkham, Bingham, Bond, Bradley, Brunk, Cady, Cromie, de Morinni, Flowers, Grunewald, Hogan, Kenney, Klein, Kilpatrick, Lawrence, McSherry, Menn, Nordell, Peckham, Powers, Rogers, J. Sherman, T. Sherman, Stanley.)

## TEN VOTES

**THE THIN RED LINE.** By James Jones. Scribners. \$5.95. This many-leveled chronicle of the last days of the Guadalcanal campaign forms a companion piece to the much-heralded "From Here to Eternity." (Bradley, Douglas, Grunewald, Hogan, Kenney, Kirsch, Klein, Sandrof, Willard, Yeiser.)

## NINE VOTES

**A SHADE OF DIFFERENCE.** By Allen



Drury. Doubleday. \$6.95. Senatorial figures from "Advise and Consent" reappear in this long novel in which racial discrimination becomes the U.N. issue that unites Soviet and African blocs against the United States. (H. Alexander, J. Alexander, Bond, Brunk, Cromie, Flowers, Kilpatrick, McSherry, Peckham.)

## FIVE VOTES

**MORE LIVES THAN ONE.** By Joseph Wood Krutch. Morrow. \$5. Naturalist, philosopher, and critic, Mr. Krutch records with modesty and simplicity of style his search for life's meaning. (Douglas, Flowers, Kenney, Nordell, T. Sherman.)

**LETTERS FROM THE EARTH.** By Mark Twain. Edited by Bernard DeVoto. Harper & Row. \$5.95. This series of imaginary epistles from Satan to his fellow archangels after his banishment from Heaven, first prepared for publication in 1939 but withheld due to family objections, emphasizes the power of the sexual urge. (Brady, Perkin, Reid, J. Sherman, Willard.)

## FOUR VOTES

**THE LETTERS OF OSCAR WILDE.** Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. Harcourt, Brace & World. \$15. From school in Dublin and Oxford to Reading Gaol and final exile on the Continent, one of the most incredible of literary lives is here vividly recreated. (Barkham, Bradley, Cross, de Morinni.)

**IMAGES OF TRUTH: Remembrances and Criticism.** By Glenway Wescott. Harper & Row. \$6. In a belief that "there is a more precise, potent truth in story than in philosophy," the author searches for the meanings to be found in six contemporary writers of fiction. (Derleth, Douglas, Nordell, Peckham.)

## OTHER SELECTIONS

**AGAINST THE AMERICAN GRAIN.** By Dwight Macdonald. Random House. \$5.95.

**ALL MY PRETTY ONES.** By Anne Sexton. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.

**AMERICA AND THE WORLD REVOLUTION.** By Arnold J. Toynbee. Oxford. \$4.75

**THE AMERICAN HERITAGE HISTORY OF FLIGHT.** Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. American Heritage. \$15.

## The Newspaper Reviewers

HOLMES ALEXANDER, *Tampa Tribune*  
JAMES E. ALEXANDER, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

JOHN BARKHAM, *Saturday Review Syndicate*

MARY BINGHAM, *Louisville [Ky.] Times*  
ALICE DIXON BOND, *Boston Herald*  
VAN ALLEN BRADLEY, *Chicago Daily News*  
CHARLES A. BRADY, *Buffalo Evening News*  
CHARLOTTE BRUNK, *Des Moines Sunday Register*

ERNEST CADY, *Columbus [O.] Dispatch*  
ROBERT A. CROMIE, *Chicago Tribune*  
LESLIE CROSS, *Milwaukee Journal*  
PEGGY DE MORINNI, *Buffalo Courier-Express*

AUGUST DERLETH, *The Capital Times* [Madison, Wis.]

MARY STAHLMAN DOUGLAS, *Nashville [Tenn.] Banner*

PAUL FLOWERS, *Commercial Appeal* [Memphis, Tenn.]

GEORGE FREEDLEY, *New York Morning Telegraph*

HUDSON GRUNEWALD, *Washington Star*  
VICTOR P. HASS, *Omaha World-Herald*

WILLIAM HOGAN, *San Francisco Chronicle*  
HERBERT P. KENNEY, JR., *Indianapolis News*

JAMES J. KILPATRICK, *Richmond [Va.] News Leader*

ROBERT KIRSCH, *Los Angeles Times*

FRANCIS A. KLEIN, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE, *Newark News*  
RICHARD McLAUGHLIN, *Springfield [Mass.] Republican*

ELIZABETH A. McSHERRY, *Hartford Courant*

THORPE MENN, *Kansas City [Mo.] Star*  
RODERICK NORDELL, *Christian Science Monitor*

HOKE NORRIS, *Chicago Sun-Times*  
STANTON PECKHAM, *Denver Post*  
ROBERT PERKIN, *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver, Colo.]

DENNIS POWERS, *Oakland Tribune*  
MARGARET WALRAVEN REID, *Wichita Falls [Tex.] Times*

SAM RAGAN, *Raleigh [N. C.] News and Observer*

W. G. ROGERS, *Saturday Review Syndicate*  
IVAN SANDROF, *Worcester [Mass.] Sunday Telegram*

JOHN K. SHERMAN, *Minneapolis Star & Tribune*

THOMAS B. SHERMAN, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

ROBERT I. SNAJDR, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*  
DONALD STANLEY, *San Francisco Examiner*

LON TINKLE, *Dallas Morning News*  
GEORGE TROY, *Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin*

LAWRENCE F. WILLARD, *New Haven Register*

FREDERICK YEISER, *Cincinnati Enquirer*