

## 7. Events Leading up to the Banquet

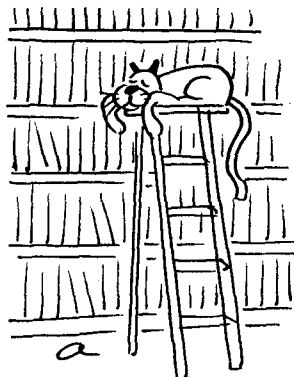
By DAVID DEMPSEY

ON FRIDAY, June 17, some 350 writers from more than forty foreign countries will sit down with about half that many American authors at the closing banquet of the Thirty-fourth International P.E.N. Congress. The banquet will culminate five days of working sessions at New York University.

Organizing the Congress is an achievement in logistics for the P.E.N. American Center as well as a vote of confidence from the numerous sources financing the Congress. Drafting a program, housing and planning the entertainment of the delegates—to say nothing of raising the necessary \$200,000 for these purposes—began last summer when the American Center president, Lewis Galantière, was given a budget, a small staff, and, thanks to the generosity of the Institute of International Education, expert and clerical assistance along with an office that fittingly overlooks United Nations Plaza. The week of almost uninterrupted activity will wind up with an “unforgettable” banquet at the Plaza Hotel for, altogether, 600 guests. The site of the Congress will be the magnificently equipped Loeb Student Center of New York University on Washington Square, and most foreign delegates will be housed in two NYU residence halls.

The American membership is picking up the \$12,000 tab for the banquet. More than fifty publishers, headed by Harcourt, Brace & World, *The Read-*

*er's Digest*, McGraw-Hill, E. P. Dutton, Book-of-the-Month Club, Time-Life Books, and Harper & Row, have contributed from \$2,000 down to \$25 each towards the general hospitality program. The Xerox Corp., with \$4,000, made the largest contribution received from industry. A score of family foundations and a good number of public-spirited citizens added their thousands to the kitty. The big money came from the Ford Foundation (\$75,000), Rockefeller Brothers Fund (\$25,000), the JDR 3rd Fund (\$20,000)—and, very satisfactorily, the National Council on the Arts (\$40,000). The Congress brochure and official



program were designed gratis by the Book-of-the-Month Club's Oscar Ogg, and the printing was a “contribution in kind” offered by the H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Co. The cup runneth over.

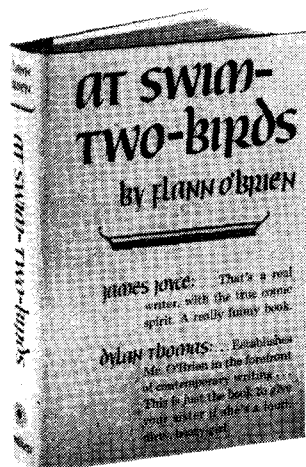
How did it come about that a writers' association with no resources beyond its annual dues—less than \$9,000 from up-

wards of 800 members—undertook so formidable a task? Out of plain embarrassment, the American P.E.N. directors say. In 1924 American P.E.N. was host at a modest “international writers' convention” with guests from fifteen foreign lands. For more than forty years thereafter the Americans were the guests at thirty congresses and thirty interim seminars in London, Paris, Vienna, Venice, Zurich, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Oslo, Dubrovnik, Stockholm, Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, Avignon. . . . It was scandalous, they thought, that this rich nation, this important center of letters and the arts, should always be on the receiving end. Taking courage in their hands, and without a penny in the till, they invited seventy-six Centers in fifty-six countries to send delegations to New York. That was in June 1964. Now, two years later, their gamble has paid off.

As the president of American P.E.N. remarked, “P.E.N. is unique. Every country has its authors' league, its writers' union, its society of men and women of letters. Those national organizations are, quite properly, a species of trade union, chiefly concerned with the protection of the writer as worker, with royalties, copyright, subsidiary rights, though of course with censorship, too, and with the promotion of public interest in reading and general cultivation of the mind. But they have no reciprocal relations. They are not banded together in a global organization able to speak for what Voltaire called the Republic of Letters. P.E.N. (incidentally, an affiliate of UNESCO) alone fills that role.

“P.E.N.'s centers,” Mr. Galantière noted, “have no official character; their delegates do not represent their countries, but rather their literary communities. For instance, there are two in Belgium, one of ‘French expression’ the other of ‘Flemish expression,’ each with its P.E.N. Center. There are four Centers in multilingual Yugoslavia and Switzerland. There is one universal center, the Yiddish Center; another international center, composed of East-Central Europeans, is the Writers-in-Exile Center. This purely literary, nonpolitical and non-ideological character explains the presence of centers in eight Communist states, seven in Europe and the eighth in Cuba.”

Like their counterparts from Western Europe, writers from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Rumania are not coming over solely to talk about literary matters. A good many will make the trip because (a) they have never been to New York, (b) they will have a chance to visit their American publishers, (c) a charter flight from Paris and London is an extraordinary bargain, (d) writers are just as gregarious as other people, and (e) in some cases the Justice Department has decided to let them in, as pro-



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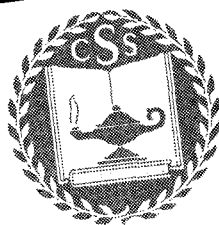
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posed in a singularly unnoticed statement by President Johnson last February.

The over-all theme of the New York Congress was chosen by a committee that included Edward Albee, Leon Edel, Ralph Ellison, Elmer Rice, and Glenway Wescott, all of whom will be on hand. The Congress gets a warm-up on Sunday, June 12, at a meeting of the International Executive Committee, guided by David Carver, international secretary, with Arthur Miller in the chair. The whole Congress will that evening embark on a three-hour tour around Manhattan by boat. To lend an international cachet to the outing, it is being called "pique-nique sur l'eau." On Monday morning the inaugural session will be held: there will be speeches of welcome by the chancellor of New York University, governmental dignitaries, and the head of the American Center, as well as Arthur Miller's presidential address. Saul Bellow will speak on the over-all theme.

From Monday until Friday, the delegates will *not* be discussing "the role of dialogue in fiction," "opening paragraphs," or "prosody—East and West," as the *London Times Literary Supplement* cavalierly suggested they should a year ago at the Bled Congress, but rather the four weighty themes listed on page 16, one for each day, interspersed with coffee breaks, receptions at afternoon's end, and an evening performance, on June 16, of *Annie Get Your Gun*. Only twenty-four hours to go until the banquet. We have taken a lighthearted attitude toward the proceedings because we think it is quite impossible to sit through five days of round-table discussions, especially when one of them is being masterminded by Marshall McLuhan, without looking forward to a solid meal. Banquets symbolize a certain ritual denominator in conferences of this kind, something you earn your way into by surviving the qualifying heats.

Ordinarily, too, they signal the end of the revels, but in this case two post-prandial affairs have tentatively been scheduled—an evening of "Poetry Aloud," on Sunday, June 19, following a day on Long Island, at which the overseas delegates will swim, play tennis, and picnic (in English) as guests of the faculty at the State University at Stony Brook. This may turn out to be one of the most interesting parts of the show. Would a character in a novel by Günter Grass, Graham Greene, Muriel Spark or Alberto Moravia—among those invited—unburden himself more intimately at a round table, or in a bathing suit? Even an independent spirit is entitled to a good time, and the Congress may be remembered as warmly for its planned *Gemütlichkeit* as for its formal dialogues, its resolutions in favor of free expression, and the intellectual décor of its stellar performers.



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years ago there were preposterous German members of P.E.N. to protest that Hauptmann should not shake the hand of the Belgian, Maeterlinck. Twenty-five years ago there were hotheaded Americans who declared that they would never, never sit at the same table with Germans. In 1948, when the P.E.N. Charter was being given its final form, there were still other American members who would have qualified P.E.N.'s championship of freedom of expression by the weasling clause, "so far as consistent with public order"—as if this were the way to meet the challenge of Communism. In that same year, the year of the climactic Communist coup at Prague, heartsick East European exiles were condemning virtually all their fellow-writers who had, for whatever cause, chosen to stay at home under Communist rule.

Today, something more like the Founders' "new order of the ages" reigns in P.E.N. There is no active Madrid Center, but there is a Catalán Center at Barcelona. There are Centers in eight European Communist states and in Cuba. The Soviet Writers Union initiated negotiations more than a year ago for the founding of a center in the USSR. The West and East German Centers meet twice yearly to review common problems. Except the Balts, whose three states were forcibly absorbed into the Soviet Union, writers in exile and their compatriots of the homeland have found in P.E.N. a politically neutral and spiritually nourishing terrain. The Yugoslavs have twice been the hosts of P.E.N. Congresses (Dubrovnik 1937 and Bled 1965); the Hungarians were hosts at a seminar preceded by a meeting of the P.E.N. International Executive (Budapest 1964). Congresses have been held outside Europe at Tokyo (1957) and Rio de Janeiro (1958); the Ivory Coast will play host in 1967 and, probably, India in 1968 and Israel in 1969.

The earliest P.E.N. congresses were less concerned with exploring professional subjects than with deepening and animating a sense of world fraternity among writers. As already remarked, P.E.N. was from the first day a nonpolitical body. But as an age of violence grew out of the War of 1914-18; as civil strife and the clash of ideologies spread; as the cry for national tradition, order, and property swelled in one quarter while in the contrary quarter the cry for human rights, social justice, and revolution arose; and, more particularly, as both quarters (since extremes meet) claimed that each alone possessed the truth, P.E.N. found itself entering the arena, precisely in pursuit of the goal of fraternity and entente among writers.

A characteristic of every period of violence is the persecution of writers. There is, in the true writer, an inde-

(Continued on page 69)

## The Writer as Independent Spirit

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following guest editorial is by Lewis Galantière, the president of the P.E.N. American Center.*

IN 1921, when International P.E.N. was founded in London, the hope that the First World War had been "the war to end war" was fast receding. For the Russians and the Poles, the war was in fact not yet over. Germany was filled with civil strife. And in East-Central Europe one result of President Wilson's noble "self-determination of peoples" had been to rouse fresh tribal hatreds and create border problems that were to prove a primary cause of the Second World War. The half-score treaties signed in the suburbs of Paris and at Geneva were written along nineteenth-century lines of power calculations and in response to popular emotions; they laid no viable foundations. At the newly established League of Nations the old-style diplomacy continued to bar the way to what our Founding Fathers in their day had called—see your dollar bill—a *novus ordo seclorum*.

Yet there were everywhere, in government and out, men and women concerned to work for an end to war and for world understanding. One of these was an English novelist, Katharine Dawson Scott, whose death P.E.N. mourned last year. She brought to John Galsworthy the idea of a world association of writers to be called "The P.E.N. Club," P.E.N. standing for poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, and novelists. Galsworthy responded warmly and energetically. He recruited H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, and E. M. Forster, among others. Ana-

tole France agreed to become the first president of the French P.E.N. Center. Gerhard Hauptmann in Germany, Maurice Maeterlinck in Belgium, Benedetto Croce in Italy were won over. An American Center was formed in 1922 by a committee of which the eminent publisher John Farrar is the surviving member. Its first president was Booth Tarkington; and one of his early successors was the first editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Henry Seidel Canby. Today there are seventy-six Centers in fifty-six countries. No question of "conflict of interest" arising, the President of the Republic of India, Sir S. Radhakrishnan, is still president of All-India P.E.N.

The launching of International P.E.N. was in fact not so easy nor its growth so unclouded as these words suggest. P.E.N. was and remains a nonpolitical body, not concerned with power or material interests; but even as an association of literary communities it unites beings possessed of their fair endowment of human frailties. When Descartes said that no man claimed to be without his full share of common sense he did not say that all men did in fact share that quality in equal measure. (We see recent evidence of this in the U.S. Supreme Court's sentencing of a publisher to five years' imprisonment for the misdemeanor—surely not crime—of prurient advertising of books acknowledged by the Court itself not to be obscene.)

Even so, Mrs. Dawson Scott, and those she influenced, builded better than they knew. The world does move, even in this half-century of violence. Forty