

LITERARY HORIZONS

The Prizes Authors Seek

IN ITS Annual Summary Number *Publishers' Weekly* listed more than 200 prizes and awards bestowed on authors of books during 1966. There are some interesting items on the list. The Boys' Clubs of America gave five awards this year, with only the Dodd, Mead-*Calling All Girls* Prize on the female side. Residents of certain states are eligible for various prizes or citations, Indiana out in front with eight, Texas second with five. There are prizes for mysteries, Westerns, and science fiction. There are Catholic awards and Jewish awards. Almost everybody gets a crack at one prize or another.

What effect these awards have is anyone's guess. At least they bring money or recognition or both to a considerable number of writers, and these are commodities most writers are happy to acquire. The earliest prizes of the sort to be much talked about were the Pulitzer Prizes, established in 1917. There came to be a feeling that the Pulitzer judges were usually on the stodgy side, and that is one reason why various trade organizations set up the National Book Awards in 1950. The Pulitzers and the NBAs have been well publicized, and it seems clear that they help sales, sometimes spectacularly. If some of the many other awards save a few worthy books from oblivion, that is all to the good.

It seems to me that William Faulkner decided wisely when he created an award for the best first novel of each year. In spite of the efforts of some of us reviewers, many good first novels are overlooked, and almost any first novel needs all the help it can get. It was also smart of Faulkner to provide that the judges should be selected from college instructors and assistant professors under the age of forty. It was his theory that the best judges of writing are likely to be of the same generation as the authors. Whether this is true or not, at least he found a way of getting out of familiar literary circles.

As I look back over the record, it

seems to me that Faulkner's plan has worked rather well. During the seven years that it has been functioning the judges have chosen first novels of some quality, though not always those I would have picked as best; and I cannot see that they have overlooked any masterpieces.

When the award was first given, in 1961 for 1960, the winner was John Knowles's *A Separate Peace*, which has been widely read through the years, especially in schools and colleges. Another first novel of that year, one that was highly praised and also sold well, was Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. That was worth consideration, for it was skillfully written and almost avoided the sentimentality that its theme made a danger; but I preferred the Knowles book. That his second and third novels were disappointing is a backhanded compliment to his first.

In the following year I reviewed a group of fifteen first novels. One that I liked, but didn't put at the top of my list, was Lawrence Hall's *Stowaway*, which was given the Faulkner Award. My own choice would have been Jean Rikhoff's *Dear Ones All*. I wouldn't have selected, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, which stirred up more discussion than any other first novel of the decade.

In 1962 there were three strong contenders: Philip Roth's *Letting Go*, J. F. Powers's *Morte D'Urban*, and Reynolds Price's *A Long and Happy Life*. Roth had made a strong impression, on me as well as on many others, with his first collection of short stories, *Goodbye, Columbus*; but the novel seemed too muddled to be effective. I admired parts of *Morte D'Urban*, as I had been admiring Powers's stories for years, but the novel, I thought, fell apart. (It won the National Book Award just the same.) *A Long and Happy Life* would have been my choice, as it was that of the Faulkner Award judges, and Price's second novel and his book of short

- 22 Check List of the Week's New Books
- 35 Literary Horizons: Granville Hicks considers the Faulkner Award for First Novels
- 36 Letters to the Book Review Editor
- 37 "The Politics of Experience," by R. D. Laing
- 39 "Black Market Medicine," by Margaret Kreig
- 40 "The Plot Against the Patient," by Fred J. Cook
- 41 "Tomorrow's News: A Primer for Prophets," by R. L. Duffus
- 42 "The Third Book About Achim," by Uwe Johnson. "The Better Part," by Kit Reed
- 43 "Other People's Money," by Jerome Weidman. "Meyer Meyer," by Helen Hudson
- 44 Pick of the Paperbacks, by Rollene W. Saal
- 46 SR's Semiannual Reference Book Roundup, by David M. Glixon

stories have not lowered my conception of his abilities.

The choice for 1963—Thomas Pynchon's *V.*—was admirably bold. *V.* is wild, absurd, unconventional, not always intelligible, but full of vitality and in many portions brilliantly written. Perhaps the Faulkner Award helped it to acquire its small but fanatical following.

I wasn't altogether happy about Charles Simmons's *Powdered Eggs*, which won the award for 1964, but I can think of no likelier candidate. In 1965, on the other hand, there were four first novels, all of them offbeat, that made a reader sit up in his chair: Henry Van Dyke's *Ladies of the Rachmaninoff Eyes*, Donald Harington's *The Cherry Pit*, Earl Rovit's *The Player King*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper*. It was the McCarthy book that was given the Faulkner Award, and I have no quarrel with that.

Last year produced an unusual phenomenon, a first novel that went straight to the top of the best-seller list without benefit of cheap sensationalism—Robert Crichton's *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*. I might have been tempted to give it the award, if only to underline my belief that a good novel may be popular and vice versa. Probably, however, I would have picked Herbert Wilner's *All the*

Little Heroes. The novel that did win the award, Robert Coover's *The Origin of the Brunists*, I hadn't read until just the other day.

SR, I am happy to say, didn't overlook the book. It was reviewed by Emile Capouya (Oct. 15), and his comments made me want to read it; but there are always many books that I want to read, and I might never have read *The Origin of the Brunists* if it hadn't been brought back to my attention by an announcement of the Faulkner Award.

It proved to be worth reading, all right. Although Capouya took exception to the novel on several grounds, he called Coover "gifted as well as ambitious," and he was right on both counts. One of the judges wrote of the book: "It catches much of the American spirit whole and live, and in its story of the rise of the Brunists after a mining disaster it explores not only the peculiarly American religious impulse, but the texture of American life as a whole." Another says: "This, then, is solid, masculine, bountiful art, a novel tough-minded in its vision and robust in its manner, a triumph of intelligence and a courageous heart, of a youthful spirit and a seasoned insight." These are large claims, but the book, despite some obvious faults, does invite enthusiasm. For as young a man as he appears to be, Coover knows a lot and has thought a lot and has learned a lot about writing. This is a meaty book, and it may be, as the judges believe, the beginning of an important career. At any rate it is the kind of novel that needs and deserves to have attention called to it, and it adds to my esteem for the Faulkner Awards.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT No. 1241**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1241 will be found in the next issue.

M DZXS TX FTUO M POJOLMF:

TS SMUOX M VTXDMK SZ LO-

ROMF DTX POJTIX.

—DZLMNO

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1240

A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table than when his wife talks Greek.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON.

LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



Gems

ASHLEY MONTAGU'S RECENT DELIGHTFUL *The American Way of Life* is a collection of light and entertaining essays, all of not too much importance, but each one in essence a finished gem in which Mr. Montagu sets forth his impressions—doing so in a most charming and insouciant manner. It saddened me to read a review of it [SR, Apr. 8] by a critic apparently lacking some of the humor that is so common among Americans.

WILLIAM J. SHORE.

New York, N.Y.

Crisis in the Classroom

GRANVILLE HICKS'S article "The Media Crisis in the Classroom" [SR, Apr. 15] is an excellent discussion on a subject too long neglected except by "involved" teachers and students.

As a teacher I offer my sincerest congratulations to Granville Hicks and to *Saturday Review*.

ROBERT W. AZEVEDO.

San Francisco, Calif.

HOW HEARTILY I BEGAN to read Mr. Hicks's article, hoping for a good-sized blow struck at the kind of education-oriented teacher-training institutions which can take what very often are vibrantly alive human beings and change them, through their "how to teach" battery of dull, repetitive courses, into anything but "teachers" in any real sense. . . . Blame the system, Mr. Hicks, and think of the damage done to thousands of high school boys and girls every year by teachers who know, because of a surfeit of educational gobbledygook encountered in college, *how* to teach, but, put damn simply, not at all *what* to teach.

JOHN HUSSEY.

Fort Collins, Colo.

I HAVE RECEIVED A NUMBER of letters regarding the piece that I wrote on the teaching of English literature in high schools. Because I have been out of the country, I have been unable to answer all of them. In any case, many of the letters offer suggestions that are worth passing on, and others raise questions that seem to me to be of general interest. I propose, therefore, to return to the topic sometime in the future. In the meantime I want to express my gratitude for the letters.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Grafton, N.Y.

Guts?

I HAD A GOOD LAUGH out of the letters in SR May 6 lauding the "guts" presumably manifested by Robert Sherrill in his "courageous" exposé of President Johnson in *The Accidental President* [SR, Apr. 8]. Now, really! It should, by now, be glaringly obvi-

ous to anyone with an average amount of perception that, of all possible exposés which could be undertaken by a crusading journalist, one raking LBJ over the coals is quite the safest, and that pelting our President with filth is the quickest way to earn oneself a cheap and easy reputation for "great daring."

JOHN KINTNER.

Kokomo, Ind.

IS THE PRESIDENT REALLY "without a deep inner well of compassion"? Compare the recent pictures of him with those taken several years ago and you will recognize that the sorrows connected with the Presidency have deeply affected him!

WILLIAM SIEGEL.

New York, N.Y.

Gratuitous

ARTHUR KNIGHT'S REVIEW of *King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn* [SR, Mar. 18] leaves much wanting—as does the book. I will be willing to bet that he never met the late boss and co-founder of Columbia Pictures. But what, to me, was most offensive in his peroration was this gratuitous and irrelevant statement: "Significantly, [Louis B.] Mayer was a junk dealer, Cohn a song plugger before destiny brought them to the movies."

Mayer was a theater operator before he came to Hollywood and if in his early days he was a junk man, and Cohn a street car conductor, so what? All of which is really beside the point. What is to the point is Knight's pointed reference to a "junk dealer," the significance of which demands an explanation.

LOU GREENSPAN.

Beverly Hills, Calif.

Fourth Ellul

SAUL PADOVER STATES THAT Jacques Ellul's *The Political Illusion* [SR, Apr. 29] is his third book to appear in the United States. He omits a fourth, Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Westminster Press, 1951). This book also deals with political and technological problems of our time, such as ends and means, communication, etc., and stresses the Christian responsibility to be "present" (aware, involved), inventing one's obedience.

L. FRAZIER CLARK.

Monroe, La.

Marred

IT IS A SHAME that J. H. Plumb's otherwise beautiful review of Bertrand Russell's autobiography [SR, Apr. 22] was marred by two glaring, unforgivable errors: surely he meant A. N. Whitehead and J. J. Thomson (no 'p').

PRISCILLA R. FEIGEN.

Palo Alto, Calif.