

OUR FIRST NBCC AWARDS— Pick of the Professionals

A transcript of the National Book Critics Circle First Annual Award Ceremony, Friday, January 16, 1976. Time-Life Auditorium, Rockefeller Center, New York, New York.

IVAN SANDROF: Good Evening. I am Ivan Sandrof. President of the National Book Critics Circle. In being here tonight, you honor not only our First Award but the book critics of the nation. For them and of them,—I thank you.

It so happens that we need each other desperately, a better union and understanding between the critics and the publishers. We need your books, obviously, and you certainly can function better with our peculiar and wonderful advice.

(LAUGHTER)

We need each other desperately in an age of declining standards, standards which we took for granted, standards that perhaps weathered the terrible Depression of the Thirties and that are now sloughing off in the ruins of peculiar influences.

Let us be kind to one another,—even before Judith Campbell Exner reveals her tale—

(LAUGHTER)

—and the next to the last library closes.

(CONTINUED LAUGHTER)

We are all involved, all a part of the scene. We can no longer afford to do nothing. We can no longer be indifferent to a fundamental chaos that robs us all. . .

And now to that moment that illuminates our function, the presentation of the first awards for the best books by The National Book Critics Circle, and this by our Awards Committee, John Barkham, Barbara Bannon.

BARBARA BANNON: There isn't any secret about these awards. There really is never any secret about very many awards, and I don't think that's an important fact. But we really did try very hard. We consulted, we worked, and above all we read—all of us, all year long, and I think that's a terribly important point to make.

Because I have been associated with some other occasions in which—where I did not read at all.

(LAUGHTER)

Having said that, I will now go further. John and I are doing this by turn. It is my pleasure to present: (LAUGHTER



E. L. Doctorow

HERE)—I don't have the award (LAUGHTER)—

VOICE: Which one do you want?

BARBARA BANNON: (laughing) I wanted Doctorow's—

Now this is our citation to Ed Doctorow. "In *Ragtime*, E.L. Doctorow becomes a Houdini of history, transforming our collective past into stimulus for our present imagination. In prose that is elegant for its clarity and syncopated beat, he gives us back an American saga at once suspenseful, tragic and in its innovative energy grandly comic, as it might have happened had the gods been on their toes."

Mr. Doctorow.

(APPLAUSE)

E.L. DOCTOROW: I am happy to have this award. Awards are probably not good for literature, but an impenetrable society is not good either. So while I would like not to approve of awards, I do. I approve especially of this one.

(LAUGHTER)

I think we should all consider the possibility that there is no more fiction or non-fiction, only narrative. Journalists know the power of simple denotation and have aesthetic requirements for their reports, which they call stories. Historians use metaphors. And psychologists entertain us with their case studies, which have villains and conflicts and climaxes.

But you may not want to agree with me too readily. Novelists after all have always tried to break down the wall between fiction, or what they do, and non-fiction, or what everybody else does. It's a means of establishing our credibility. The first English novelist, Daniel Defoe, pretended *Robinson Crusoe* was an autobiography and he only its editor. Of course there are facts. We live in an empirical world of precise measurements. Some facts, for instance the record of the Nazis in the thirties and forties, seem so indisputably monstrous as to stand alone. But literature like history makes constructions, and sometimes its constructions have the effect not of destroying the facts, but of perceiving them.

The poet, Kenneth Rexroth, speaks of a novel that pretends to be something other than what it is—*Robinson Crusoe* is an example—as a false document. I like that phrase. I would expand its meaning to include all fiction. All fiction is false document, in that compositions of words are not life, but only seem to be. And from the idea of the novelist as a creator of false documents, we begin to perceive the justification of his art as against that of the social scientist, the journalist, the historian. The novelist emulates the false documents we call our dreams. For that's what dreams are, the prototypical false documents—never real—never strictly factual, but controlling us, purging us, mediating our baser natures and prophesying our fate.

Examples of true documents by contrast are the report of the Warren Commission, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, and the Watergate tapes by Richard Nixon, who claimed only to be their editor.

(LAUGHTER)

I am grateful for your award, and I thank you for it.

(APPLAUSE FOR SPEAKER)

JOHN BARKHAM: The next award, Ladies and Gentlemen is for general non-fiction. The winning book is *Edith Wharton: a Biography* by R.W.B. Lewis, published by Harper & Row.

Professor Lewis is not with us today, but I have this cable from him sent from Florence. "Deeply honored by choice of *Edith Wharton* for your First General Non-Fiction Award. Wish I could attend Friday

reception, but will try to visualize it from my Tuscan terrace."

(LAUGHTER)

The citation for the award reads as follows:

"One of the best literary biographies of recent years, masterfully organized and admirably written, which combines original research with illuminating psychological insights."

"The book casts a fresh light on a novelist whose personality far from being aloof and patrician is shown to have been more erotic and plebeian than commonly supposed, thus making this biography not merely an interpretation but also a revelation."

I'd be glad to hand the award to the President of Harper & Row who I believe is among us—

(APPLAUSE)

WINTHROP KNOWLTON: It's a great pleasure and privilege to have published this book and a great pleasure and privilege to accept this award on behalf of Professor Lewis. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

BARBARA BANNON: Our poetry award goes to *Self-Portrait In A Convex Mirror* by John Ashbery, Viking, and this is the citation:

"In *Self-Portrait In A Convex Mirror*, John Ashbery is in perfect command of his art. The magic of his work lies in the union of a deep literary culture and a remarkably accurate sense of the commonplace, the popular and the current."

"His diction moves easily back and forth between romantic anxiety and a cool offhand wit. He has been called without exaggeration, 'the great original of his generation—'"

(APPLAUSE)

JOHN ASHBERY: I haven't won an award before. I've gotten some grants, and I consider—

(LAUGHTER)

—decided that I was a grants person, —grants, yes—awards, no.

(LAUGHTER)

And, therefore, it's particularly overwhelming for me to get an award that had so many judges involved. I've been told over the years by critics that my work is private and esoteric and destined to a mini-public, and the word coterie—I could usually hear it before I saw it—

(LAUGHTER)

—in an article,—the word was always very popular.

At any rate, for that reason it's, as I say, overwhelming for me to get this and it comes at the right time for me and renews my own faith in my work, for which good thanks.

JOHN BARKHAM: Our fourth and final award is a criticism award, which goes to *The Great War and Modern Memory* by Paul Fussell, published by Oxford University Press.

The citation reads:

"Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* is an exemplary work of

criticism which explores the historical era of World War I through the analysis of literature with elegance and insight. Fussell has expanded our understanding of the complex relationship between literature and society."

"As Lionel Trilling has said, it is—'An original and brilliant piece of cultural history and one of the most deeply moving books I have read in a long time.'"

I believe Mr. Fussell is present.

(APPLAUSE)

MR PAUL FUSSELL: Well, unlike John Ashbery, I have won one or two very tiny awards but never any where drinks were served.

(LAUGHTER)

So I'm very pleased to be here and—

(LAUGHTER)

And, of course, I'm very honored to have your award., I am pleased partly because as you've noticed, this is a book with footnotes.

(LAUGHTER)

And, books with footnotes, as you know, have a hard time in this world—

(CONTINUED LAUGHTER)

and, therefore, your approval of this book means a great deal to me, partly because I think this is a group which does justice to the best taste of the best general reader. And, I think your award to this book helps testify that footnotes are not death in the place where the general reader is addressed.

Those who have read the book realize that the book is full of people of all kinds, from fourteen-year-old adolescents, up to eighty-year-old ancients. While I was writing the book I was conscious many times that I was not writing anything for myself. I was writing as the spokesman for these people whom I admired so deeply.

And, I'd like to think that in accepting your award I'm doing it less for anything that I've done, but as a sign of your recognition of what they did. Not merely what they did, but a recognition of their generosity and even more important for our moment, their consummate literacy.

I'd like to think that your award helps recognize the charm of that kind of courageous literacy. In accepting the award, I'd like just to say that I'd like to accept it less on my own behalf, as on behalf of those people whose words I used. I think they would be very pleased by the tribute you've paid the book, and I think if they could they would all get together and send you a whole raft of field service post-cards—with everything crossed out except the words—Thank You.

(APPLAUSE FOR SPEAKER)

JOHN BARKHAM: Ladies and Gentlemen: This pretty much concludes the formal part of our proceedings. But I feel it incumbent that as a member of the Advisory Board, a few words should be said in a less than frivolous way about The National Book Critics Circle,—what it is, why it has come about and what it hopes to become.

The idea is the brainchild of Ivan San-

drof, rustivating in the bucolic serenity of Worcester, Massachusetts—

(APPLAUSE)

and let it be recorded on tablets of stone that this is where the organization was born.

As to myself, I read about my being a member of The National Book Critics Circle in *Publisher's Weekly* three months after the event.

(LAUGHTER)

No one had approached me, but I have been very happy to serve on that body, in the year which is now drawing to a close. This is perhaps the highlight of our activities for 1975-76, and a new board will be elected about March or April.

I've been asked, as have other members of the Advisory Board,—what is the reason for our being? Why did we see fit to create a brand new organization of critics? And, why do we feel it necessary to add our award to those already being given by the National Book Awards people, by the Pulitzer Prizes and perhaps others?

I submit that there is a significant difference between our awards and all other awards. The Pulitzers, the NBA Awards, are selected by judges, ad hoc judges, appointed from established authors, academics, specialists in various fields of literature, with occasionally a smattering of book reviewers.

They meet for the occasion and make the awards. I call these people amateurs,—gifted amateurs, eminent amateurs, but amateurs, who've reviewed books only occasionally as and when some editor asks them to do so.

Between them and us yawns a great gulf. We are the pros. Whatever you may think of the reviews we write, we spend an entire year reading and writing about the new books. All of us can talk about the flood of new books that cross our desks year after year. We get a perspective of the new books published in any year far wider, infinitely broader than anybody else.

No publisher knows as much about the books that are published in any year as any full-time reviewer,—and we are all full-time reviewers who earn our living reading and writing about books.

So I submit to you on behalf of the Advisory Board, that we are in a different category to all the other awards being made. I will not go so far as to say,—it would be presumptuous of me if I did,—that it is a case of peers being recognized by peers, because we are reviewers,—we are not authors. But we do have a perspective which is uniquely ours.

Our first year started off slowly, and—but it seems to have ended on what seems almost a note of triumph. For the future we have plans. I do not myself expect to be in an executive capacity next year, simply through lack of time, but I do know that our membership is now 350 and growing, that it encompasses the entire country with a number of members from abroad.

Our associate members are extremely

valuable in the efforts that we have made. An attempt is now under foot,—machinery has been set in motion to declare a tax-exempt organization. We hope in this way to be able to add a monetary prize in future years to the scrolls we awarded today.

There have also been suggestions that we should add further categories to the ones,—to the four we already have. I trust that the Advisory Board next year when it takes that decision will consider very carefully before it does anything of the kind. Because—there is a law of diminishing returns,

(APPLAUSE)

—in the awarding of prizes. The more prizes, the less each prize means, and I give you the Nobel Prize where just one prize is awarded, and it means everything. . .

In conclusion, I've been asked to also say that there's an Oyster Bar down the corridor which remains open for drinks courtesy of Time-Life.

Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

IVAN SANDROF: And so, goodnight officially and thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

The Critical Scene

A lively, literate quarterly of the arts which carries an extensive book review section, *New Boston Review* may become a monthly. Founded about a year ago, it is edited by J.M. Alonso, with Jeffrey C. Hart and Anita Silvey (Address: 109 Museum St. Cambridge, Mass. 02138). Among its regular contributors are Herbert A. Kenny, Robert S. Taylor and H. Bibesco. . . . After one and a half years, another literary publication, *West Side Literary Review* is closing shop. Edited by Marvin Gelfand, it had a circulation of about 60,000 and published reviews by noted critics. . . . The new book review editor of *Harper's Magazine* is Helen Rogan, Scottish-born, Cambridge-educated and formerly with *Time*. . . . Barbara Lord has been assigned a weekly page of book news and reviews in the *Austin Citizen* which recently became a daily newspaper. . . . New book review editor of the *Charlotte Observer* is Danyne Romine. . . . Chuck Thegze is the new Book Editor of *Coast Magazine* in Los Angeles. Thegze is also an editor at Book-of-the-Month Club.

Reflections On Reviewing: A Tale of Two Cities

by Digby Diehl, NBCC Vice-President

If my tenure as Vice-President of this organization has, atypically, generated disappointingly little scandal, it has puffed out a rhetorical storm or two. Unlike vice-presidents in most hierarchies, I have tried to represent the Loyal Opposition—or, at least, the Actively Confused. Less generous assessments have assigned to me the role of West Coast Yenta.

In any event, I have incessantly voiced the opinion that our organization's original charter was to break away from the limitations of the New York nexus and to share ideas and opinions amongst book editors and reviewers throughout the country in the manner of a truly national organization. This has been a particularly tough assignment on those days when I sit in New York elbow-to-elbow with my colleagues on the Advisory Board, swilling down exotic nectars compliments of Andy Anspach in a hospitality suite of the Algonquin Hotel. In fact, on those days when I am mere blocks away from Henry Grunwald, Clay Felker, Al Goldstein and other great opinion-makers, I begin to wonder why all those little people in remote regions like Miami, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco feel so alienated from the Red Hot Literary Center. In those warm wood-paneled rooms at the Algonquin, I feel certain that we gathered sages are making decisions and pronouncements—enlightened by our proximity to actual publishers' offices—which could only reflect well on those yokels in the hinterlands.

Now, far from the wit of the Algonquin,

I again have anxiety about what the "decision-making" crowd out there is doing. As I have urged before, we must devise a new, democratic means of communication amongst, not just the Advisory Board, but the entire organization. Would it be possible to communicate, at least amongst the Advisory Board, through photocopied letters? Or, could we enlarge the scope and frequency of our NBCC Journal to allow regular correspondence and debate on various issues to circulate throughout the entire membership?

Having abused the privilege of this essay with those inflammatory remarks, I will end by assuring you that the life of letters here in Tinseltown is just fine. The separate Book Review section of the *Los Angeles Times* celebrated its first birthday on April 20. Reader response, as well as expanding book sales, indicates that this western *Avis* of the book world continues to try—although sometimes softer. Not surprisingly, people in Los Angeles are reading the same books as large urban audiences are reading everywhere in America. Robert Kirsch continues the astounding feat of writing a daily book review (as he has for the past 25 years). And an encouraging number of local publications run regular—sometimes feisty and insightful—book sections.

Last week I had lunch with Elizabeth Taylor—and a thousand other intimate friends—at the Publicists' Guild Awards. For "party favors" (as we called them in the days of my youth) the Zanuck-Brown producing team gave everyone hardback copies of *The Ninth Man*. Who says Hollywood isn't hungry for literature?

Making Book On The Streets of San Francisco

by William Hogan, San Francisco Chronicle

Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin, the Broadway producing team (*Guys & Dolls*, etc.) which recently took over as managing directors of the Los Angeles-San Francisco Civic Light Opera, observed the other day that Los Angeles is a sophisticated theater town where even 15 years ago it was "dreadfully provincial."

That may have made the Southern California citizenry preen a bit. But then, Feuer and Martin on San Francisco: Well, with Boston it was the only place where they didn't have to alert audiences that the touring company of *The Boy Friend* was not the real thing but only the mock.

Among other rivalries, the cultural rivalry between San Francisco and Los

Angeles is historic. San Francisco, the Boston of the West, is old California, urban and uppity if often chilly as a July morning fog. L.A. (up here it's "L.A."), the Miami Beach of the West, is firecracker hot, the America of tomorrow, which looks upon its graying northern sister as an aging grande dame at best, certainly California's second city—fewer Mercedes registered, for example, fewer Dennys and Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, fewer, well, book stores.

The result of the Republic, of course, couldn't care less about this rivalry. In New York, and New York publishing, both are important markets out there all right—a couple of dots on the map about half way

to Japan.

Feuer and Martin have observed that Los Angeles is a sophisticated book town where even 15 years ago it was "dreadfully provincial." This, it would seem to me as an old competitor, is the result of what Digby Diehl and company have been doing on the Los Angeles Times, a larger and certainly richer journalistic operation than The San Francisco Chronicle. But in this area, I think, there is less a metropolitan rivalry than in that, say, between the Dodgers and the Giants.

The book editors of the two most important California newspapers are not in competition. Certainly they are not cultural or even literary arbiters in their respective regions, but do try to cover a beat, and a large one at that (writing, producing, publishing and selling of books), for markets—there is that word again—that are ever increasing, if only because of the weight of population and education.

We don't necessarily count book-selling outlets statistically, like the seating capacity at the Coliseum vs. that at Candlestick Park.

Yet between, say, Fresno, Reno, Nev., and the Oregon line there are quite a few of these in northern California, and some exotic ones. In the City, for example (here we have always called it "The City," not "S.F.") there is Gosha-Do, in Japan Town, that features Japanese books and records, and China Books and Periodicals, a source of books from the People's Republic, and Cinema Shop, which stocks books new and used on everything cinematic, and John Howell, a bit of London on Post Street that features old and rare books and prints, and Ferlinghetti's City Lights, a kind of minicathedral from the Beatnik Fifties, Tro Harper and Tillman Place, Philoblibion and the wonderful art book outlets at the San Francisco Museum of Art and the Palace of the Legion of Honor.

We miss the fine old Newbegin's on Union Square (it was swallowed up by the new Qantas Building) and Paul Elder's Bookstore (swallowed by a Hyatt House), two of the elegant old-timers. But like Hydra, the many-headed water serpent, Doubleday, Waldenbooks, B. Dalton and Brentano replace them, and the personal bookstores from Santa Cruz to Sacramento have bloomed like wildflowers in the desert during the past 15 years.

The bookstores are part of our beat, too, or should be, as Western publishing is and should be. After two decades on this beat I find it exciting still, out here half way between the Hudson and Tokyo Bay. No, San Francisco and Los Angeles are not in competition in this department. We both, I think, Digby Diehl and me, look with some dismay at the fat New York Times Book Review and all that business concentrated at the Red Hot Center, and wish publishing would take a stroll around Berkeley and Westwood, the City and Beverly Hills. This is where the action is, and will be in America Tomorrow.

We Make The Scene

by Nona Balakian, NBCC Secretary

It was a year of heady surprises and substantial gains. Barely out of our shell, we faced—and survived—varieties of dissension, some internal (leading to one resignation), some publicly expressed. We acknowledged the mistakes stemming from inexperience, and hope that we learned from them. If the "growing pains" are not over yet, the growth, at least, is real: the membership has increased to 400 (with more than two-thirds Regular members) and prospects for NBCC's future look bright.

The year's highlight was, of course, the NBCC Book Awards "inaugural" on January 16, 1976 at the Time-Life Building Auditorium which drew a capacity audience of about 250 persons and elicited the highest enthusiastic response of the publishing community. A few notes on the stages leading to the day may be of interest.

Late last October, the Regular membership was reminded to submit its recommendations of 1975 titles in Fiction, General Non-Fiction, Poetry and Criticism to the 18-member Executive Board which would be the jury for four awards in these categories. The recommended titles were tabulated and mailed to the Board before it met on December 3rd for an initial survey of the field. After considerable deliberation, the Board chose 20 contenders (five in each category) and these were announced in the press the following day. These 20 books were then closely studied by all Board members before the final balloting on January 7th (Board members who could not attend the meeting sent their choices by mail.)

In the period between the announcement of the contending books and January 16th, the NBCC had extensive public exposure. We owe special thanks to Lisl Cade for her important part in introducing us to radio and TV. On WQXR Casper Citron interviewed Eliot Fremont-Smith, Barbara Bannon and Nona Balakian; John Barkham and Richard Locke talked about book reviewing on Channel 9's "Straight Talk" and John Leonard, Mr. Fremont-Smith and Miss Bannon talked to Marcia Rose on Channel 4 on the special value of the new Awards. In a full hour's program on WBAL, Ivan Sandrof, Digby Diehl and Miss Balakian expatiated on the current literary scene and the NBCC story, and on Arlene Francis's WOR daytime program, Elizabeth Hardwick, Herbert Kenny, Mr. Sandrof and Mr. Locke reviewed the winning books.

In two successive issues of The Village Voice (January 12 and 19) Mr. Fremont-Smith wrote two long lead articles on the NBCC which were widely read and discussed. And John Leonard's vivid, in-

dividual account of the Awards ceremony in The New York Times of January 24 conferred "existential" reality to the Circle. These were not the only articles and programs, but the ones that made most noise.

The second NBCC Journal (Fall 1976) edited by Larry Swindell was well received from all quarters. The self-criticism conveyed through many of the articles was viewed as a healthy sign of self-awareness. One remembers especially John Aldridge's plea that editors seek out "reviewers of strong and independent judgment" who write "with grace and precision of language."

On the continuing legal scene, we failed to get tax exempt status. Thus, on December 3rd, the Board met to consider the founding of an additional organization which would allow a non-profit professional group such as ours to obtain grants and donations. On the advice of our attorney, a new organization, designated the National Book Critics Literary Fund Inc. was founded and incorporated in the State of New York last February. The temporary staff includes: Susan Heath, President, Eliot Fremont-Smith, Vice-President, John Barkham, Secretary and Barbara Bannon, Assistant Secretary.

In view of an ever growing membership, the possibility of setting up regional centers looms large. And there are more immediate plans which a new advisory board will undoubtedly pursue. In New York, a new series of lectures and symposiums is being planned. The first of these was a Symposium on Criticism, "Critics Confronted" (in which authors, critics and editors cross-examined each other in exploring the reviewing scene). A joint presentation with Columbia University's School of the Arts took place on April 20 at Columbia's Low Library.

Evidently, for this as well as for other projects, funds will be needed. At this stage, too, we would like a cubicle we can call "office" and part-time paid help. We have begun making applications for such non-profit funding, and we are hopeful. In the meantime, we continue to be dependent on the good will and generosity of friends who freely offer us their time, knowledge and support. Our special thanks to our attorney, Robert A. Kline, to Andrew Anspach of the Algonquin Hotel, to our publicity experts, Donna Schrader and Jane Pasanen, to Lisl Cade, Catherine Donoghue Hartman and Nicholas Benton (who was also our generous host), to Frank MacShane; and last but not least to John Baker, dean of literary chroniclers at Publisher's Weekly. Without them we might never have made the scene.

Rocky Mountain Book Fever

by Stan Peckham, Denver Post

Book reviewing for newspapers around the country is not the same as it may be for the New York Times or the Washington Post, or even perhaps the L.A. Times or the Chicago Tribune. It is chiefly a matter of conserving space and using it—such space as you can get—to the best advantage.

Why waste space on reviews your readership is going to skip? For that matter, why waste space on books in which your readership is not likely to be interested? Why waste space on books of so little merit that all your reviewer can do is take up that space to show what a devilish clever fellow he is, how devastatingly witty he can be in telling the public why they needn't bother to read the book he scorns? (Usually he is far less clever than he thinks he is, anyhow.)

If your reviewer is actually erudite, why waste space letting him go on and on exhibiting his erudition for many a paragraph before he even condescends to mention the book he is reviewing or letting its author get his words in? Waiting to find out what the book is about, what the author has to say, may be all right for readers of the New Yorker, but will only arouse the impatience of most newspaper readers. Why waste space on the college professor whose main point is going to be, since he knows the subject so well, "This is not the book I would have written!"?

In 1958, when I took over editing book reviews for The Denver Post, I found that most people bought their books in the department stores, for Denver had precious few bookstores. Bennett Cerf brought that point home to me a year later when I pointed out to him how many more books we were covering in The Post than the San Francisco papers did. "Yes," he admitted. "But see how many more bookstores there are in San Francisco!" That was why we couldn't get enough book advertising to make the book section look like a book section. We needed more bookstores.

I never did care enough about advertising even to find out what our rates are, but I did care about the appearance of the book pages, and I also knew that my chances of getting more space for books depended on the paper's attracting more book advertising. On this score, Alfred Knopf once told a luncheon group of book review editors at the NBA, "The New York Times is your common enemy. They monopolize everybody's advertising budgets."

You can't have a respectable book section in a newspaper unless you have a healthy book business in that newspaper's home city. You start out by getting more newspaper readers interested in reading books, but you can't do that through the pages of your newspaper alone.

So you work closely with booksellers, and perhaps keep an eye on the local library, too.

In 1959 the Colorado Booksellers Assn. finally instituted an annual fall book-and-author dinner. It was a great success, but the booksellers were too busy to do it in successive years, so we got the American Association of University's Denver Branch to take over its sponsorship, and they have continued it ever since. These were popular enough that next the Denver Woman's Press club got into the act with annual book-and-author luncheons in the Spring. Then other groups got the idea, so book-and-author dinners and luncheons now crop up in Denver throughout the year.

Television was such a threat and competitor to reading that first I got rid of my own TV set, then accepted an invitation from the local educational television station to conduct a book-and-author television show. My chief motives were to persuade other commercial stations that there actually was a public interest in such shows, if they would do them themselves, and also to persuade the local educational station regularly to run Bob Cromie's Book Beat, which they got but seldom aired.

It worked, at least until the networks woke up and took over most of the author-interviewing racket, and the local stations grew less interested in doing their own jobs. Anyhow, Book Beat, last I heard, still appears regularly.

When the big paperback explosion occurred, Pike Johnson of Doubleday and Ross Claiborne of Dell persuaded me it would be a great idea to devote special supplements occasionally to paperback books. This we did, once with great success. Then other newspapers around the country followed suit—until the advertising all went you-know-where, and our second attempt was less remunerative, so we said the hell with it. But both paperback supplements left their marks on the public.

Then Wes Lawrence of the Cleveland Plain Dealer (or was it the Press?) invented the Book Festival, patterned on the ABA convention exhibits, with author-speakers, but open to the public. Sales managers and sales reps alike, who had left vacations in Colorado most reluctantly to attend the Cleveland show started calling me from there even before it was over to tell me what a great idea it was and why didn't The Post try it?

At that time the Friends of the Denver Public Library were talking about having a Book Fair (to sell books in competition with the local booksellers), but The Post decided that if we could get the Friends, the other newspaper, and the booksellers themselves all to join in as co-sponsors, then The Post would go along on the prac-

tically community-wide project and guarantee it against too great a commercial loss. Not only that, but we got all the local radio and TV stations involved.

The 1968 Rocky Mountain Book Festival was a stunning success. There were nearly 100 publishers exhibiting, author-speakers galore (I did a one hour TV show on educational TV with 12 authors, including Arthur Hailey, Mrs. Medgar Evers, Malcolm Boyd, Edward Abbey, Lerone Bennett Jr., and I don't know who all, plugging the book festival). We arranged to bring in high school students by bus, they came back later bringing their parents, and the attendance count went over 50,000 in these days.

The point is that many of the people coming to the book festival had never been in a bookstore in their lives. Another point is that at least two bookstores I know of were actually born at that book festival, and they have prospered ever since. The people who started them suddenly got that interested in books!

But what do you do for an encore after a hit show like that? We had another book festival in 1975, with more exhibitors (over 100), and more authors. Both were happy enough with the results, but I wasn't. Somebody was unable to get the buses for the schoolkids this time, and the attendance fell horribly to less than half those attending the 1968 show. It should have gone up, but it went down.

Nevertheless, we now have four or five times as many bookstores in the Denver area as we had here in 1958, plus three excellent big book jobbers: Gordon's Books for hardbacks; Ray Sarguine of Boulder for quality paperbacks; Morton News Co. for mass market paperbacks. Gordon's Books is new since 1970, and flourishing.

To steal space throughout the newspaper, I dole out art books to the art editor, sports books to the sports dept., music books to our music critic, drama books to the drama editor, cookbooks to the food editor, movie books and TV books to the entertainment department, etc. They all have columns, and columnists always are getting stuck for something to write about, so they write about the books.—And do we run a lot of cookbook reviews! Likewise, these are the people I can usually interest in doing author interviews.

The net advertising results are hardly sensational, but I no longer get squawks from the advertising department that we are not getting our share. One irony is noticeable, however. With reviews planted all around the paper, now some book advertisers have got the idea that their advertising is sometimes more effective if kept out of my book section! So be it.

Booksellers, as well as my 50 or more local reviewers, are sometimes startled at which books we play up, which we play down. Local interest here is intense in Western History (which definitely excludes history of Texas, California, and perhaps the Pacific Northwest.) Personally, it bores

me, but I have plenty of good reviewers to cover it. When Bill Hosokawa came out with "Thunder in the Rockies" which is a history of The Denver Post, it was reviewed by Bob Perkin, former book editor of the Rocky Mountain News, who had published the history of his own newspaper, we gave it a big splash, of course, and it has been a local bestseller ever since.

Personally, I prefer to read fiction, which is fortunate, for most of my reviewers want non-fiction. But I play up

fiction as big as I can, partly due to my own prejudice but also because I want the not-too-often reading public to enjoy the experience of reading. They will then enjoy non-fiction more, and read more.

The Denver Post reviewers are a good cross-section of local citizenry. We use very few out-of-town reviewers, and none from outside our immediate area. Newspaper readers want the view from their home town, not from Beacon Hill, Murray Hill, or Capitol Hill in Washington. Nor are many newspaper readers in-

terested in literature for its own sake, so it doesn't pay to be a literary snob.

In fact, the only bestseller lists we run are monthly reports on mass market paperback best sellers, and customers have been spotted comparing that list with the stands in supermarkets. That just may be a big readership we have overlooked.

Right now I'm chiefly concerned with how to do more for the shoppers who pick up those paperbacks along with the milk and eggs. Who has a good idea that hasn't already been over done?

April Membership Meeting and Board Election

by Barbara Bannon, Vice-President

The annual membership meeting of the National Book Critics Circle took place in New York City on April 19, 1976. The President (Ivan Sandrof), Secretary (Nona Balakian) and Chairman of the Awards Committee (John Barkham) read reports summarizing the events of the past year including the publication of another edition of the Journal edited by Larry Swindell of the Philadelphia Inquirer. The major event was the first National Book Critics Circle awards, voted upon by members of the board, and presented in January at a ceremony in the auditorium of Time-Life, which donated the space and the accompanying food and drink. The Treasurer (Susan Heath) announced that there was \$1600 in the treasury. Membership is: 278 regular members, 113 associate.

The main event of the membership meeting was the election of a new Board of Directors for the NBCC:

NONA BALAKIAN, Editorial staff, *The New York Times Book Review*; Secretary NBCC—1974-76.
 BARBARA A. BANNON, Senior Editor, *Publishers Weekly*; Advisory Board NBCC—1974-76.
 WALTER CLEMONS, General Editor/*Book Reviewer*, *Newsweek*.
 DIGBY DIEHL, Book Editor, *Los Angeles Times*; Vice-President NBCC—1974-76.
 MAURICE DOLBIER, Book Review Editor, *The Providence Journal*.
 TIMOTHY FOOTE, Senior Editor and Book Reviewer, *Time*.
 ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH, Senior Editor, *The Village Voice*; Advisory Board NBCC—1974-76.
 ELIZABETH HARDWICK, Advisory Editor/*Critic*, *The New York Review of Books*; Advisory Board NBCC—1974-76.
 SUSAN HEATH, Book Review Editor, *Saturday Review*; Treasurer NBCC—1975-76.
 KATHLEEN MALONEY, Book Review Editor, *Chicago Tribune*.
 HERMAN KOGAN, Editor, *Show & Book Week*, *Chicago Sun-Times*.
 JOHN LEONARD, Chief Cultural Correspondent of *The New York Times*; Advisory Board NBCC—1974-76.

RICHARD LOCKE, Deputy Editor, *The New York Times Book Review*.
 MARGARET MANNING, Book Review Editor, *Boston Globe*.
 WILLIAM McPHERSON, Book Review Editor, *Washington Post/Book World*; Advisory Board NBCC—1975-76.
 CLARENCE E. OLSON, Book Review Editor, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.
 IVAN SANDROF, Book Review Editor, *Worcester Telegram-Gazette*; President NBCC—1974-76.
 LARRY SWINDELL, Book Review Editor, *Philadelphia Inquirer*; Advisory Board NBCC—1974-76.

One of the major concerns of the NBCC at the moment is funding. In order to qualify for tax exempt status not just as a professional organization, a status the group has at present, but as a legitimate tax deduction for organizations or individuals contributing to it, at the advice of our lawyer, Robert Klein, a new subsidiary organization, The National Book Critics Circle, Inc., was voted into existence by the membership at this meeting. This now authorizes the group to go outside and seek funding help under Section 805 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law. Susan Heath is president of this subsidiary group and Nona Balakian vice president.

Members speaking from the floor emphasized their desire to have more of a chance to participate directly and showed a keen interest in the idea of regional seminars or discussion groups, similar to the one held the following day at Columbia University, sponsored by the NBCC with the assistance of Columbia University.

The following day the new board members (all of them) attended a board meeting at which, after some discussion, the following officers were elected: President, Eliot Fremont-Smith, *The Village Voice*; Vice President and Secretary, Richard Locke, *N.Y. Times Book Review*; Vice Presidents: Digby Diehl, *Los Angeles*

Times; Barbara A. Bannon, *Publishers Weekly*; Treasurer, Larry Swindell, *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Robert R. Harris of the book review section of *Library Journal* has been appointed Recording Secretary. This is not an office, but will entitle him to be present at board meetings.

A Note Of Tribute

Since this is the last issue of the NBCC Journal to be produced under his presidency, it is perhaps appropriate that we pay tribute to the Founding Father of the Critics Circle, Ivan Sandrof. From the moment when Ivan first dragged a small group of us away from elegant parties into a dingy restaurant on Broadway and 44th (was it the now-defunct Blue Ribbon?) for a first, informal meeting, to his speeches at the recent meetings in April, Ivan has been a forceful, colorful leader. Swimming against the initial tide of apathy and cynicism, he patiently molded a squabbling, opinionated gang of individualists into a functioning organization. Over-ruling timid voices of caution, he implemented his plans for the first NBCC Awards—and met with overwhelming success.

As this Bicentennial celebration reminds us, no new enterprise is born without strong, steadfast leadership. In his inimitable style, Ivan has set an example of determination and hard work (shared admirably by Nona Balakian) for all members to follow. As a gesture of affection and appreciation, heretofore it will be the informal tradition of our organization that Ivan drinks free at any table graced by the fellowship of the Critics Circle. D.D.

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