

REPORT OF FICTION JURORS

For the American novel 1960 was disappointing in the performance of established writers, gratifying in the achievements of younger ones. No American novel, for example, could match the historical sweep and depth of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's "The Leopard" or the psychological acuity of C.P. Snow's "The Affair." Where our more experienced novelists grappled with larger themes, their reach generally exceeded their grasp, as witness James Mitchener, John O'Hara and Jessamyn West. One exception was John Hersey, of whose novel, "The Child Buyer," more is said below.

Certain novelists, whose earlier work had aroused our hopes, published disappointing books during the year. William Styron's long-awaited "Set This House on Fire" and John Updike's "Run, Rabbit" both lavished major talents on minor themes. Each turned out to be distinguished in manner and thoroughly undistinguished in matter. Wright Morris' "Ceremony in Lone Tree" was notable for its poetic evocation of the Nebraskaplains, but its characters remained amorphous creations for all the accuracy of their vernacular. Harvey Swados in "False Coin" laudably sought to depict a hero in rebellion against the conventions of society, but his people emerged cerebral and his situations contrived. Herbert Gold's "Therefore Be Bold" was a warm and nostalgic remembrance of youth, but in scope and treatment it was too limited to justify our serious consideration.

Fortunately, however, the stream of new talent which constantly revitalizes American fiction produced at least two first novels of unusual distinction. The first and more ambitious of these was "To Kill a Mocking Bird," by Harper Lee. Set in her native Alabama, the book sums up in its seemingly artless tale the pride and shame that

are integral to Southern living. What starts out quietly as a picture of small town life is developed with authentic artistry into a climactic courtroom clash, in which not only a Negro prisoner is on trial but also the cherished, age-old mores of the South itself. Miss Lee has set it all down with affection, humor and understanding, eschewing sentiment yet achieving pathos. Her achievement, it seems to us, may be gauged by the fact that, although her story embraces virtually all the cliches of the Southern novel, they are nevertheless made to appear here as fresh and original. This is our choice for the Prize.

John Hersey's "The Child Buyer" is our recommendation for runner-up. Among better-known novelists, it seems to us, ^{only Hersey} ~~impressed~~ succeeded in striking fire with his savage satire on American education. His story, cast in the form of a legislative investigation, is no doubt guilty of overstating its case and caricaturing its cast, but its aim is high and its impact on the reader unmistakable. Few will question the validity or timeliness of its theme.

We wish to list two additional novels which appear to us worthy of praise. John Knowles' "A Separate Peace" is a short, succinct first novel of great promise. Set in a New England prep school, it enlarges its seemingly restricted theme to one of betrayal, tragedy and remorse on a level rarely encountered in novels of this kind. Mr. Knowles writes with a force and control which bode well for his future. Though "A Separate Peace" is too small-scaled a work for the Prize, we deem it worthy of honorable mention.

Mutatis mutandis, this may be said also of Henry Beetle Hough's "Lament for a City," which depicts the changes ^{which} time has wrought in a New England town. The author, himself a newspaper editor, laments--through the character of the town's liberal newspaper editor--the passing

of an old American order and the substitution of bland conformism for the traditional New England virtues of astringency and honesty. This is a viable and timely theme crying out for the novelist's pen, but Mr. Hough has not done full justice to it.

We should add that we were both impressed by the subtle artistry of Elizabeth Spencer's "The Light in the Piazza," but the fact that the setting and characters were largely Italian led us to remove it from consideration.

Our recommendations, on which we are agreed, are thus as follows:

PULITZER PRIZE.....TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD, by Harper Lee (Lippincott)

RUNNER-UP.....THE CHILD BUYER, by John Hersey (Knopf)

H_onorable Mention.....A SEPARATE PEACE, by John K_nowles (Macmillan)
LAMENT FOR A CITY, by Henry Beetle Hough (Atheneum)


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