



March 19, 1965

"Fulbright Advocates Bombing China." -- Sen. J. W. Fulbright, D. Ark, Sunday, March 14, 1965.

BOOK WEEK: NOVA EXPRESS by William S. Burroughs, Grove Press 1964, 187 pages.

Before condemning this novel as a bunch of utter tripe, I ought first to say that I'm not sure that it is utter tripe. Maybe it is a work of searing satirical brilliance, bitter revulsion against the vileness of contemporary society, and hilarious graveyard-humorous interludes.

Maybe, because I certainly do not claim total perception. Nor am I at all "in" on the current literary movement of which Burroughs is the darling.

I have not even read Junkie or Naked Lunch.

So okay, so Nova Express is utter tripe. Inasmuch as it has content in the conventional sense, it seems to be about a plot to sell out the planet Earth to some sort of extraterrestrial gangsters, with humanity eventually being wiped out and the world being turned over for the use of the aliens.

Meanwhile, a sort of interplanetary or interstellar police force is working to thwart the plot and bring the dastards to the bar of justice.

The narrative technique is a series of bewildering semi-coherent flashes rather than conventional action and dialog. There is an attempt to shock by sprinkling the text with such naughty words as...get ready to gasp... "shit." There is also a small section of homosexual porny at the end of the book; a prize, perhaps, for any reader faithful enough to stick it that long.

Maybe there is a whole lot here that I am simply missing, but my considered opinion of the book is still: utter tripe.

SPEECH WEEK: I watched and listened to Uncle Cornpone's speech the other night, when he took after Congress and exhorted the distinguished members to implement the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It seemed to me a bit late in coming, but of course the substance of the President's request was totally just.

The speech was the major topic of conversation in IBM's palatial 705 Building Cafeteria during our 42-minutes for lunch Tuesday. Just about everyone supported the idea of a voting rights law, but there was considerable disagreement over the speech as a speech. Your humble reporter must report that he was aligned against.

It seemed to me that the speech was much, much too long; it ran about three-quarters of an hour when fifteen minutes would have been not only adequate but far more effective. The speech was far too diffuse, offering something for everybody and wandering from the subject. And the final appeal, going to the old "God is on our side" pitch, was positively retch-worthy. But how can you quarrel with simple right?

One problem: will such a law do the trick? Will a Mississippi negro register and vote if he knows it will cost him his job, if not his life, to do so? Stay tuned and find out.

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