

portionately weaker. *A Dry White Season* suffers from the intrinsic fault of much of contemporary social realism—the author's art, like his hero, died for his cause.

—CAROLE COOK

### The Cruellest Night

by Christopher Dobson, Ronald Payne, and John Miller

Little, Brown, 223 pp., \$9.95

ON THE NIGHT of January 30, 1945, the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a German training ship crowded with civilian refugees and military personnel, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Baltic Sea. An estimated 7,000 passengers perished in the worst maritime disaster on record. *The Cruellest Night*, written by three British journalists, is a readable and mercifully concise narrative of the ship's destruction and the circumstances surrounding it.

The authors point to a symbolic German nemesis in the massive evacuation effort that led to the sinking. The frenzied exodus from Baltic ports in the face of increasingly murderous Soviet attacks offers an obvious parallel to England's earlier humiliation at Dunkirk. All of the vessel's passengers during its final voyage were fleeing marauding Russian soldiers, who as they drove westward inflicted a brutal revenge on the inhabitants of eastern Germany. A further irony may be seen in the *Wilhelm Gustloff's* varying fortunes. Initially designed as a single-class pleasure ship for vacationing German workers, it was used by Nazi propagandists to trumpet the early successes of National Socialism. Converted to a U-boat training ship during the war, this former adjunct of the Strength Through Joy movement finally recapitulated Germany's fate under Hitler.

Despite its readability and brevity, *The Cruellest Night* loses momentum in its concluding chapters. The postwar careers of Alexander Marinesko, the Soviet submarine commander, and Erich Koch, Hitler's Gauleiter for East Prussia, are interesting in themselves but relate only tenuously to the book's purpose. The authors have succeeded, however, in skillfully re-creating a previously neglected facet of a war that ravaged soldier and civilian impartially.

—DENNIS WILLIAMS

### O My America!

by Johanna Kaplan

Harper & Row, 286 pp., \$10.95

AS JOHANNA KAPLAN's incandescently wise and funny first novel opens, its protagonist, Ezra B. Slavin, writer, intellectual, iconoclastic social critic, and political activist, has just died, leaving behind a substantial public following, a young widow and infant son, several ex-wives,

sundry full-grown legitimate and illegitimate children and grandchildren, including his daughter Merry, the book's narrator. A Paul Goodmanesque figure devoted to the notion that America as a land of revolutionary possibility has consistently sold itself short, Slavin was the kind of radical Jewish intellectual to indulge in an irascible utopianism, and cloak himself in such sentiments as: "I have had a life-long affair with the idea of America. And when people find that difficult to believe, I remind them of the frontier vision which is bound to result when love is unrequited."

The author, by focusing on the private life of this culture hero and on his friends, acquaintances, and hodgepodge family, creates a novel of manners electric with devastating and often hilarious satire. While there is a genuine pathos to Slavin's life, and though the emo-

tional damage he often does to those close to him is bodied forth with poignancy, a spirit of pure comedy pervades the book. A genius at the telling nuances of personality and of speech, Johanna Kaplan brings us such classic contemporary types as Ffrenchy, Slavin's inimitable hippie of a daughter, who wishes he would consult her guru because it "could really help him. To get free. From his like, you know, mind attachment," and Sybil Roizman, an affluent, fashionably leftist Manhattan matron, who declares of some friends, "Well, they're not political at all... They don't even go to concerts!" Moving at high satiric speed, *O My America!* remains resonantly faithful to the complexities of actual experience, and precisely captures the spirit of things as they are in our advanced liberal age.

—JANE LARKIN CRAIN

THE GRENVILLE CLARK FUND AT DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, INC.

announces the

## THIRD GRENVILLE CLARK PRIZE

This Prize will be awarded in the autumn of 1981. Applications or nominations should be received by July 1, 1981, and sent in care of the Fund at 2501 Holmes Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64108.

The intent of the Prize is to commemorate and facilitate outstanding public service by private citizens in the areas of world peace, personal liberty, academic freedom, civil rights and good government. The Prize is \$15,000 and will be given every three years until the end of this century.

The first Prize was received by Monsieur Jean Monnet on November 15, 1975, in Paris, France.

The second Prize was awarded the following three individuals on October 20, 1978, in New York City: Mr. Jack Greenberg, Director-Counsel, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; The Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, President, University of Notre Dame; and Mr. Sydney Kentridge of Johannesburg, South Africa.

### Members of the Board of Directors

Mary Clark Dimond, President

J. Chrys Dougherty, Secretary

Robert H. Reno, Treasurer

F. William Andres

Norman Cousins

E. Grey Dimond

Leo Gottheb

Erwin N. Griswold

Anthony Lewis

H. Carl McCall

Jonathan Moore

Louisa Thoron Peterson

Elliot L. Richardson

John K. Schemmer

Samuel R. Spencer, Jr.