

## PAPERBACKS <sup>9.21.71</sup> By Joseph McLellan

### FICTION

**Laughable Loves**, by Milan Kundera; introduction by Philip Roth (Penguin, \$3.50). **The Guinea Pigs**, by Ludvik Vaculik; introduction by Neal Ascherson (Penguin, \$3.50). Penguin launches its "Writers from the Other Europe" series, devoted to literature from Eastern Europe, with the fiction of two Czech authors who have not been allowed to publish in their own country since the counterrevolution of 1968 although they are the country's leading prose writers. Neither book is political except obliquely; a social allegory may be seen in Vaculik's harrowing novel about a clerk in a Prague bank (where money keeps disappearing mysteriously) who passes his spare time experimenting in the effects of terror, torture and disorientation on guinea pigs. Kundera's stories of eroticism and the tricks it plays on its practitioners deal largely in frustration and deception (including self-deception) but their subject is basic human relation, with political realities merely an occasional element in the background. Both writers perform at a level of excellence that sets a high standard for the new series.

**A Case of Conscience**, by James Blish (Ballantine, \$1.50). In this science-fiction classic, a Jesuit biologist on an interplanetary exploration encounters a new species of intelligent reptiles whose existence and way of life pose an intricate set of challenges to earthbound faith and morals. Well written and intelligent.

**Winter Kills**, by Richard Condon (Dell, \$1.75). The author of *The Manchurian Candidate* is back with another fiction that derives a special interest from its parasitic relation-

ship to fact. This time it's a novel about the murder of a young American president with an Irish name and the discovery, 14 years later, that it was not the work of a lone assassin but the result of a conspiracy. Intricate, appalling and readable.

### NONFICTION

**The President**, by John Hersey (Knopf, \$2.95; hardcover, \$6.95). In the week of March 10, 1975, the author was with President Ford through virtually all of his working hours (excepting discussions of foreign policy), and this hour-by-hour diary records what he saw happening. The profile that emerges is more complex than might be expected, but much of what happened was predictable. During the whole week, Hersey saw the President receiving advice from only one person less conservative than himself (Kissinger was out of town at the time), and he concluded that one advisor's casual statement might serve as a motto for the administration: "This is not an era for change."

**The Plumber's Kitchen: The Secret Story of American Spy Weapons**, by Donald B. McLean (Normount Technical Publications, Wickenburg, Arizona 85358, \$12.95). A fascinating and disturbing survey of special weapons designed for use by the OSS (predecessor of the CIA) during World War II. These include spring-powered guns which could kill without gunpowder noise or flash, radio transmitters, grenades, incendiary devices, poisons and a variety of wildly offbeat stratagems (injecting female hormones into Hitler's vegetable patch) and devices (a tool to embed razor blades in tree trunks so that snipers could not climb them) that show ingenuity amok.