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New Writers Never Had It So Good, Says

By Miles South

NEW YORK (AP)—In Arnold Gingrich's opinion these are "the best of times and the worst of times" for writers and writing. Why the best of times?

"Because never before has it been easier to get published," the veteran editor said in an interview. "Never before has it been so easy for a young writer to get a grant in aid, or to get a job as a writer in residence, or in teaching."

"And publishers are engaged in a fantastic competition to uncover new talent. The days of Joseph Hergesheimer writing 14 years without getting a line in print are gone forever."

Why the worst of times?

"With all this competition among publishers, you'd think we would be in a golden age of writing, but we're not."

"Never has there been less editing of manuscripts. Never has there been more half-baked stuff published than there is today. There is an utter lack of discipline in writing now."

"Writers today reach too much success too soon. I feel that qualitatively we have no progress to point to."

GINGRICH, 64, publisher and founding editor in 1933 of Esquire Magazine, and is this year's recipient of the Henry Johnson Fisher Award of the Magazine Publishers' Association, for individual achievement in magazine publishing. His editing career goes back to the days of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

Asked about the current tendency toward themes of sex and eroticism, Gingrich said a reaction is developing.

"In this race for what we

used to think of as indecent exposure, the movies are practically keeping pace with the books—and so is the theater," he said.

"I don't believe in imposed censorship. No one in tune with this century believes in it. But a natural censorship is bound to assert itself. It is the censorship of boredom. Inevitably it is going to do its own policing job."

"When you have an age of such extreme relaxation of all standards, inevitably you will have a surfeit," he continued.

"We see that now in our youth. Our young are so fed up with love-ins and sex that it is politics they are turning to now."

Gingrich said that "already we have seen a reaction in France, their revulsion from sex. And now in France they have the novel of objects rather than of people—almost

the abstract novel, if you want to call it that. It may be establishing a trend. Or at least it is a reaction to the surfeit of sex."

ONE DEVELOPMENT in writing, said Gingrich, has been "the blurring of a line between fiction and the article, and that involves the rise of the so-called nonfiction novel."

He spoke of Truman Capote in that connection, and while he credited him with "writing like an angel" and being "as good a writer as we've got," he asserted Capote did not invent this technique.

"Lillian Ross did that sort of

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thing way back in the '50s, in her demolition job on Hemingway," he said. "She pinned him like a butterfly, by using the fiction writer's stock in trade, a good ear for dialogue. She destroyed him by quoting his exact words."

Humor is extremely scarce these days, said Gingrich.

"It is the universal complaint of editors today that they can't find the stuff. Or if they do find it they can't hang on to it. Suppose they find a young college kid who has written something exceptionally funny. The next thing they know, he has gone into advertising or is writing television scripts."

"But then, there are reasons back of this. For one thing, the world isn't as funny as it used to be years ago."

"For another," he continued, "there are fewer things you dare be funny about. People are more sensitive to what is said about them. Today, dialect humor is out. Try to be funny about any nationality and someone will be on your neck."

"I know, it is easy to scoff at what has been called the culture boom, and easy to say that many of these people are amateurs."

"But what's wrong with having a dedicated band of amateurs?"