

BOOKS

sis when all the files grow arms and legs and it isn't funny any more." Le Carré can still raise Circus shoptalk to the level of art. The intricate procedures of his baby sitters (bodyguards), lamplighters (watchers, safe-house men), and pavement artists (shadows) rarely palls. As Smiley pursues the mole, lives, careers and ancient loyalties are put in jeopardy along his secret path.

For all its arms and legs, the book remains something of a paper chase. Why? In part, one suspects, because the struggle occurs mostly in Little England, a political shire now shorn of power and purpose, where there may simply be too much central heating for the spy who comes in from the cold. (One of the reasons the mole becomes a mole, in fact, seems to be the 1956 Suez disaster. He joins Moscow in part to be where the historic action is.) Le Carré heightens suspense by lowering the number of suspect moles to two. The remorseless world of international espionage is thus transformed into something very like a traditional English detective story with the suspects figuratively locked in the English country house as the sleuth (Smiley) pokes around and the tantalized spectators wonder if he will dare pin it on the butler.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy is one of the best tales of the year so far. But by le Carré's highest standards it is, as Evelyn Waugh remarked in another connection, simply "creamy English charm playing tigers." ■ Timothy Foote

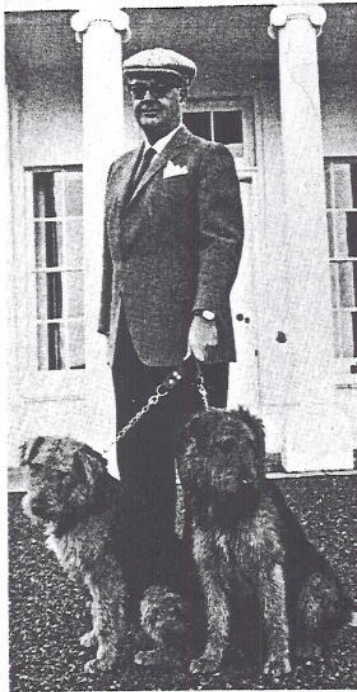
Obscurity Now

WINTER KILLS
by RICHARD CONDON
Fitzhenry & Whiteside. \$9.15.

If high accomplishment were, like child molesting, a forgivable crime—if Nobel-prizewinning scientists, wives of former Presidents, old poets and athletes and desiccated jazz musicians were allowed to sink into honorable obscurity five years or so after their last attestable attack of greatness—there would be no Richard Condon problem.

A humane society would let Condon off the hook. His early books, *The Oldest Confession*, *The Manchurian Candidate* and *A Talent for Loving*, are among the maddest funny novels of the last couple of decades. They seemed to have been written by Mephistopheles, raucous with glee at the insane excesses of the human creature. But Condon's last several books have been querulous and scolding.

It should be enough to say that *Winter Kills* is a gothic farce about the assassination in the early 1960s of U.S. President Tim Keegan. Condon unaccountably gives Keegan a younger half brother named Nick Thirfield who uncovers the plot afterward, and although the shooting occurs in Philadelphia, not Dallas, President Keegan travels to Berlin during the blockade and tells cheer-



RICHARD CONDON & FRIENDS
Taking suspicion for a stroll.

ing crowds, "Ich bin ein Berliner." Of course, this is in grossly bad taste, although cynicism prompts the additional observation that taste might not matter if the book were funny. It is not. It is paranoid. Condon clearly wrote the novel to take his suspicions for a stroll, and what he suspects is that the very rich are in conspiratorial control of the country. It turns out that Keegan's billionaire father, in the Old Joe Kennedy slot, arranged with fellow oligarchs to kill his son because President Tim was showing signs of believing his own guff about helping the blacks and the poor.

Condon has unraveled. The world's villainy simply does not work so simply. To pretend that it does is mindless mischief. ■ John Skow

**A SICK SOLUTION!
Chinks in the Armor**

QUIN'S SHANGHAI CIRCUS
by EDWARD WHITEMORE
291 pages. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
\$9.25.

"What's yellow and smooth and dangerous?" yips the clever infant, zapping his father with another riddle. "Quin's Shanghai Circus," answers the weary book reviewer. "Stop being silly," the child admonishes. "What's yellow and smooth and dangerous?" "Ah, dangerous," says his distracted parent, "I thought you said meaningless."

Yes, indeed. But if the reader resigns himself to the remarkable fact that this elephantine farce will move through five decades of Asian parashistory without at any point touching ground or making the slightest sense,

there is a lot of dizzy fun in the book. Edward Whittemore is more an engaging long-distance liar than a novelist, and his scheme for persuading literature to lurch forward is simply to introduce another freakish impossibility whenever reason's vague outline is sighted through the fog.

The story's people, all outlandish, pop from the author's head fully jigsawed. There is old Geraty, a buffalo-like giant addicted to Japanese horseradish, who once ran a Chinese pornographic movie parlor. There is the former Baron Kikuchi, a Japanese who converted to Judaism and became a rabbi. Quin appears as a shadowy cuckold who ran a circus in Shanghai at the war's outset and orchestrated the murder of its entire company during a performance. Maeve Quin, his glad-glanded wife, is an aerialist who made her final somersault into the lights with no hands to catch her.

Some of it works and some of it does not. "To what end?" is a question that is three-quarters silly when queried about a knockabout entertainment, which uses the rape of Nanking as a casual scene shifter. The only answer is, "To the end of the book!" Still, the author does have a point of view: the human race is obsessively and sometimes grandly daft. Whittemore is a first novelist, age 41, an ex-Marine who learned Japanese as a Foreign Service officer in the Far East. He also served Mayor Lindsay in New York's anti-drug addiction agency. What he caricatures with much admiration is the stupefying energy with which men pursue their baffling manias. ■ J.S.

Best Sellers (u.s.)

FICTION

- 1—*Waterhip Down, Adams* (1 last week)
- 2—*Jaws, Benchley* (2)
- 3—*The Fan Club, Wallace* (3)
- 4—*The Snare of the Hunter, MacInnes* (4)
- 5—*Cashelmarra, Hawatch* (5)
- 6—*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy, le Carré*
- 7—*Burr, Vidal* (6)
- 8—*The Other Side of Midnight, Sheldon* (7)
- 9—*You and Me, Babe, Barris* (8)
- 10—*The Partners, Auchincloss* (9)

NONFICTION

- 1—*Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors, Read* (3)
- 2—*Times to Remember, Kennedy* (1)
- 3—*You Can Profit from a Monetary Crisis, Browne* (2)
- 4—*All the President's Men, Bernstein & Woodward* (4)
- 5—*Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman, Miller* (5)
- 6—*Management, Drucker* (7)
- 7—*Go East, Young Man, Douglas* (9)
- 8—*Working, Terkel* (6)
- 9—*Thomas Jefferson, An Intimate History, Brodie* (8)
- 10—*The Wall Street Gang, Ney*