

Agnew Novel Critiqued

By Lloyd Timberlake

Book World

NEW YORK—The Ladies' Home Journal today published an excerpt from Spiro Agnew's novel-in-progress, a move which will probably lay to rest all suspicion that the former vice president has the help of a ghost-writer.

In fact, there are passages which make it doubtful that Agnew has the help of an editor, such as the scene in which a cabinet meeting ends and "chairs scraped the deep carpet as everyone rose . . ." Scraped the deep carpet? Try to imagine it.

Agnew's narrative style contains the strange combination of didacticism and naivete that many heard in his vice-presidential speeches. For instance, handsome, wealthy ivy league Vice President Porter Newton Canfield tells his wife over the phone: "Damn it, Amy, you

Elsewhere, the perfume of beautiful, amber-eyed Meredith Lord, 34, Secretary of

Health, Education and Welfare, hits Canfield and "pleasantly stirred his senses."

"Why, he wondered, did his wife wear that wierd stuff that left a lingering impression of wet dog—at 50 dollars an ounce." A sophisticated society dame wearing eau de wet dog?

The journal excerpt kicks off the romance between Miss Lord and Canfield, a curioux mix of love and politics, both of which, under Agnew's handling, become inadvertently funny. He describes Miss Lord:

"To the men, she was a graceful swirl of femininity; to the women, a beautifully turned-out competitor. To Porter Canfield . . . she was a forbidden chocolate candy—one he found more and more difficult to resist." (Miss Lord is presumably caucasian, as her "cafe-au-laid suntan" is elsewhere described.)

Canfield takes her to her apartment, eases himself down on the couch beside her and she tells him about

a program she wants approved:

"The only way I kept this question alive long enough to get it assigned to you was by recruiting powerful congressional leaders of both parties to pressure the president."

This incredible speech, in which a cabinet member describes U.S. politics to a U.S. vice-president, would be enough in itself to puncture the growing intimacy of the scene, but Agnew is taking no chances. As the tete-a-tete reaches its will-they-or-won't-they climax, Canfield asks:

"In situations like this, when there's just the two of us, couldn't we forget the formal title and just make it Newt—the way it was that last night in Minneapolis?"

Somehow the juxtaposition of the nickname "Newt" with a romantic allusion to Minneapolis has had the effect of reducing a few early readers to helpless laughter.

It's just as well, for a Miss Lord says shortly after: "In

a way it was a relief for us both. Caught in the euphoria of an unforgettable moment, we might have forgotten very important things—things like you're a married man." They don't.

Few had expected Agnew's prose style to be crisp. Most had touted the work for its "insider" possibilities—a former vice-president reveals the passionate behind-the-scene guts of Washington.

But the excerpt contains little of this.

Agnew has his characters wandering familiarly in the red, blue and black rooms of the White House, but he doesn't describe the scenery.

In describing people, he opts for the general over the specific.

"At the doorway of the yellow Oval Room, the President greeted them courteously." How? Handshake? Backslap? Smile?

Agnew's political leanings crop up elsewhere, as when he refers to futuristic Salt VI and VII agreements "the agreements that left the U.S. on the fork in the road that led to eventual mediocrity."