

Mike Royko

# Burglar Hunt:

## a flashback

Mike Royko - 8/17/73

Nelson Algren was relaxing at a table in one of Chicago's few outdoor cafes. I suggested we go inside because somebody recently discovered that outdoor cafes are illegal in Chicago, so we could not be sure a paddy wagon wouldn't show up to haul away the cafe and everybody in it.

There seemed to be some kind of logical relationship between the fact that in Chicago outdoor cafes are illegal, and in Chicago, Algren, maybe the greatest writer the city ever had, is not as well known or as highly respected as the TV weathermen.

But before I could figure out what it all meant, Algren cheerfully said he was mad about something. I asked him what it was.

"IN 1946, I APPLIED FOR A GUGGENHEIM fellowship. I wanted to do research for a novel on the drug scene in Chicago. In my application, I had recommendations from Carl Sandburg and Ernest Hemingway. Do you know what they did? They turned me down."

Well, I could see how Algren could have felt in 1946. He was a poor, unknown, but tremendously talented writer. Those are the kind of artists the Guggenheim Foundation says it wants to help with a little money.

But wasn't 27 years a long time to brood about it? After all, the book he planned — "The Man with the Golden Arm" — was written anyway, without the Guggenheim help. And it established him as a major literary figure.

"Oh, I wasn't mad about it then," Algren said. "I was used to being turned down. They had already turned me down every year for 10 years. And they turned me down five more years after that. So I wasn't mad."

Then why was he mad now?

"Because I read that in 1946 the Guggenheim Foundation gave a fellowship to E. Howard Hunt."

THE HUNT OF VAN DYKE LAMOT?

I ASKED ALGREN IF HE HAD EVER READ ANY OF Hunt's literary efforts. Although he is now widely acclaimed as one of Mr. Nixon's best burglars, he did write many books while a CIA agent. Most of them were cheap thrillers, written under pen names.

"I've never seen one," Algren said. "Maybe I should. Then I might finally understand what kind of talent the Guggenheim people were looking for."

Later in the day, while I was rifling through some very old news clippings on Algren, preparing to write about the Guggenheim business, I came across a book review Algren had written in 1942.

I immediately phoned him, and said: "You said you had never read one of Hunt's books."

"That's right," Algren said.

"What about the one you reviewed in 1942?"

"I reviewed?" He was genuinely astonished.

And he had. That's when he was even poorer than in 1946. He sometimes reviewed books for newspapers, which then paid about \$2 a review. This one appeared in the Chicago Sun.

THE BOOK WAS CALLED "EAST OF FAREWELL," and it was apparently one of the few books Hunt signed his own name to.

"What did I say about it?" Algren asked.

I read him a few paragraphs. They are more interesting today than they were in 1942.

"This is probably the first novel about this war by an American who actually helped fight it. The author is a destroyer man with the North Atlantic patrol. . . . Although it had a few good points, Algren went on to say, it wasn't a very good novel. The review ended with these words: 'Mr. Hunt feels that the responsibility for a democratic peace lies with the Negro.' There is a glaring hole through the book which makes me wonder whether the author is willing to go all the way with this conviction. 'Not even the conditions under which the book was written lessened this reader's irritation at the author's attitude toward the Negro.' 'Its persistence throughout the text lends an incongruous note to the voice of a man actively absorbed in a war for democracy and peace for a democratic peace.' End of review. ALGREN THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT, then said: 'Guess I was a prophet.' 'I'm sure Daniel Ellsberg and his psychiatrist would agree with that.' LE assumed I know paper. Forget