



## Amateur Night

William Hogan

I CONFESS to some prejudice when considering the money-making tactics of former holders of great political power who, with contempt for the gentle art of fiction, see themselves as instant novelists. Specifically I refer to John D. Ehrlichman, onetime chief of domestic affairs to ex-President Nixon, and the discredited former vice president, Spiro T. Agnew.

I have looked in and around Ehrlichman's "The Company" (it refers to the CIA) and Agnew's "The Canfield Affair" (Canfield is a vice president of the United States) and frankly put each down in short order with a sense of weariness and resentment.

★ ★ ★

EACH OF these people received unusually large cash advances for first novels that are thinly disguised "memoirs," and in Agnew's case a vulgar slapping back at the media, which discovered early on that Agnew, as vice president, was hardly the new John C. Calhoun.

These successful non-writers are getting more attention on national television and the print media than the celebrated literary self-advertisers Truman Capote and Norman Mailer. Would Al Capone, in the old days, have shaken off his tax problems by writing his own version of "The Godfather?"

Agnew was asked in New York the other day why he, who had never

written a word of fiction, turned to the novel after leaving the vice presidency under a storm cloud. "I had to make a living," Agnew answered with some candor. "Besides, it's therapeutic. When you've had a hard fall, creative activity restores you."

There seems little reason for a reader to contribute \$8.95 (the price of the book) toward the massaging of Agnew's psyche, especially when the amateur writer admits: "The difficult part was the mechanics of moving the characters around from place to place, the linking elements came hard."

★ ★ ★

THE LINKING ELEMENTS always come hard, Agnew may be interested to learn, but the talented practitioners learn enough to bring it off, to link. And the professionals, whether their names be Irving Wallace or Feodor M. Dostoyevsky link very well.

An amateur novelist, like an amateur brain surgeon, tightrope-walker or an amateur vice president, is not to be taken seriously, it seems to me, and anyone who is enticed into buying and reading such nonsense has only himself to blame.

Incidentally, if a choice must be made between these books, Ehrlichman's "The Company" is by far the more sophisticated and informative. Ehrlichman is a much brighter man than Agnew, if hardly our new Dreiser.