

## Remarks, Humanitas Prize, Writers Guild of America, West

*As I looked through the unfriendly "Entertainment" section of our newspaper the other day, it seemed to me a phenomenon was getting worse. I say "unfriendly" because the phenomenon is the subject matter of an incredible number of motion pictures. Movies today compete, to a large part, for the achievement of seeing which can most efficiently scare its audience to death. The studios and the independent producers seem to be shouting in their advertisements, "Motion pictures are your best entertainment and my monster is more monstrous than your monster!" Rats, bats, sharks, wild dogs, giant apes, man-eating pods, vampires...the inventive aspect of the art appears to be localized on the thing, human, semi-human or maybe-human, which will stimulate the most fearful and aggressive and least compassionate of our reactions. After reading the first section of the paper and learning about all the lovely events that are happening all over the world, we are urged to follow this up at night by going to a movie to find out how close it can bring us to cardiac arrest. On this scale, my remarks this afternoon will be "successful", I guess, if I accompany them by throwing a lighted firecracker directly into your midst.*

*In Television, however, in the last few years—though there's still oceans of junk—the trend, I feel—I hope—seems to be in the opposite direction. More and more, one can find programs with elevating rather than horrifying themes. Many screenwriters are turning to Television writing as an escape to reality, as a refuge where a story that tries to warm, rather than chill, us can be realized. And some recent ratings the networks love so dearly have shown this type of drama or comedy can also prove its merit in the marketplace. By encouraging writing which dignifies, probes, enlightens and enriches the human spirit—and for putting its money where its purpose is, the Humanitas Prize is surely one of the causes of what looks—I'm almost afraid to say it—like the beginnings of what may even be a turnaround in the concepts of network programming.*

*I think those who fund the Humanitas awards are also energizing, to some extent, another bulwark of what the Writers Guild believes: that the Television medium belongs to the public and ought to be used as much as reasonably possible for matters of value to the public. On that point, the influence of Television became staggering to me on July 4<sup>th</sup> when I read the lead item on the first page of the Los Angeles Times. It announced the abolition by the West German Parliament of a law which would have prevented legal proceedings against suspected Nazi murderers after the end of this year. And I quote from that news item: "Support among West Germans for abolition of the statute of limitations appeared to have risen earlier this year after the showing (in West Germany) of the U.S. Television series, "Holocaust...". I doubt the author of "Holocaust" literally sat down to help bring about an event of such enormous political and moral significance...and in a foreign country at that. But he must have been impelled to write on a theme which spoke mightily against evil—and therefore was a voice crying for good. And in that sense he was following the precepts of the Humanitas Prize.*

*All the finalists today and the other writers of the two hundred and thirty programs submitted obviously aimed their work at the highest levels of human decency. The Humanitas Prize is stimulating them and others of the Writers Guild who want the Television sets to light up with this sort of creative accomplishment. Like the ancient sage, they too are proclaiming: "If I am not for myself, who is for me? If I care only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?"*