

Jokey look at our elections

GERALD GARDNER, author of "The Mocking of the President," (Wayne State University Press, \$17.95) was in town last week to talk about the necessary ingredient in any presidential campaign — humor.

Gardner knows whereof he speaks. In his lifetime, the television producer/writer ("The Monkees," "The Smothers Brothers," "That Was the Week That Was") has also written 25 books, including "All The President's Wits," "The Quotable Mr. Kennedy," "Robert Kennedy in New York," and the perennial favorite, "Who's in Charge Here?" the photo-caption book Bantam brings out during the year preceding the presidential election.

His latest book, subtitled, "A History of Campaign Humor from Ike to Ronnie," covers the funny stuff originated by comedians, humorists, journalists, cartoonists and sometimes the candidates themselves — though with the advent of White House gag writers (yes, all too true), the prospect of a president creating his own comedians becomes more and more rare.

STILL, GARDNER believes that "Thanks to the humorists who brighten our election campaigns . . . we can maintain our sanity, even when those who seek our votes seem most crazed with the quest for power. We can keep our senses of humor when the candidates' frailties, follies, and frauds seem most intolerable."

Humor is a most essential element in a democracy, Gardner says. "The one ingredient that totalitarian societies seem to have in common is a lack of humor. In a dictatorship the practice of satire is a jeopardous pastime indeed."

John Kennedy had an ironic outlook on life and could make the connection that creates wit ("Mothers still want their sons to become presidents in the process"). Kennedy was the last original wit in the White House, Gardner says, though Ronald Reagan's wit seems original because his timing is on target.

Jimmy Carter's humor could be sardonic to an unusually enthusiastic crowd: "It's a pleasure to see people waving at me with all five fingers"; Gerald Ford's humor could be self-deprecating: "Arnold Palmer has asked me not to wear his slacks, except under an assumed name"; while Richard Nixon's sense of humor was, according to Gardner, non-existent and often hilariously unintentional. At DeGaulle's funeral: "This is a great day for France! Astride the Great Wall of China: 'This is a great wall.'"

BUT "THE MOCKING OF THE PRESIDENT" dwells mainly on how the media draws on the humor of the presidential campaigns and presidencies. Gardner moves from the "soft" mono-

book break Mona Grigg

logues of Johnny Carson and Bob Hope to the harbar cartoons and strips of Garry Trudeau, Jules Feiffer, Pat Oliphant, Jeff MacNelly and others.

He gives wickedly funny examples of how television serves to routinely skewer and deflate the pomposity of the presidency. Our memories are refreshed with replays of skits from "That Was the Week That Was" and "Saturday Night Live." In addition, Gardner lets us on how the presidential "victims" themselves received them. (Gerald Ford cringed at Chevy Chase's imitative pratfalls on SNL — while Ford's own children hooted with laughter.)

Gardner spent this summer hot on the trails of Michael Dukakis and George Bush, collecting campaign humor for inclusion in yet another book. He'd better watch it — this could become a habit.

"The Mocking of the President" is the first in Wayne State Press' "Humor in Life and Letters" series, edited by Sarah Blacher Cohen.

THE FRIENDS OF THE Baldwin Public Library hold their annual book sale this weekend. Saturday hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Proceeds from the sale go toward more books, equipment and library programs.

Congratulations to the West Bloomfield Township Library, celebrating its 50th year. And how are they doing it? With "Murder and Mayhem in Michigan." Mystery writer Loren Estleman ("Downriver" began the speaking series Wednesday. (Sorry we didn't get the info sooner). William Keizler ("The Rosary Murders") will be at the Main Library (4600 Walnut Lake Road) Wednesday, Nov. 9, at 8 p.m. Elmore Leonard ("Freaky Deaky") will be at the Westvaco Branch (7321 Commerce Road) Thursday, Nov. 17 at 8 p.m. The programs are free, but advance registration is advised. Call 682-2120 (main) or 353-1024 (Westvaco).

On Friday, Nov. 11, at 8 p.m., poets Margo LaFattuta, Lawrence Pike, Gay Rubin, M.L. Liebler, Faruq Z. Bey and others will read at a benefit for H.E.A.R.D. (Holistic Education Alternatives Research and Development), a non-profit alternative creative teaching organization. The Program Center is at 29 West Lawrence, Pontiac. Call 334-6716 or 577-7713. Donation is \$3 and an open reading follows.

Art is lecture's theme

As part of its ongoing campaign that uses "Let There Be Art" as its slogan, the Livonia Arts Commission will present a lecture on the importance of art in the community. The lecture will be held at the Livonia Civic Center, 3277 Five Mile Road, Livonia, on Wednesday, Nov. 16.

The lecture, which is open to the public, begins at 7:30 p.m. There is no admission charge.

Palmer has her bachelor of fine arts and her master's as well as a doctorate in art history from the University of Michigan.

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