

Professor Irwin Corey Accepts the National Book Award for Thomas Pynchon*

Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York
Thursday, April 18, 1974

Ralph Ellison: The jury has determined to divide the prize between two writers. To Thomas Pynchon, for *Gravity's Rainbow*, which bridges the gap between two cultures and puts the world of manipulation and paranoia within the perspectives of history. To Isaac Bashevis Singer, for *A Crown of Feathers* and a lifetime of distinguished work revealing a skeptical, philosophical and mischievous obsession with human and demonic character. I present this, not to Mr. Singer, but to Mr. Pynchon.

Professor Irwin Corey: However . . . I accept this financial stipulation—ah—stipend in behalf of Richard Python for the great contribution which, to quote from some of the missiles which he has contributed . . . Today we must all be aware that protocol takes precedence over procedure. However, you say—WHAT THE—what does this mean . . . in relation to the tabulation whereby we must once again realize that the great fiction story is now being rehearsed before our very eyes, in the Nixon administration . . . indicating that only an American writer can receive . . . the award for fiction, unlike Solzinitzki, whose fiction does not hold water. Comrades—friends, we are gathered here not only to accept in behalf of one recluse—one who has found that the world in itself, which seems to be a time not of the toad—to quote Studs TurKAL. And many people ask “Who are Studs TurKAL?” It’s not “Who are Studs TurKAL?” it’s “Who AM Studs TurKAL?” This in itself as an edifice of the great glory that has gone beyond, and to intuitive feeling of the American people, based on the assumption that the intelligence not only as Mencken once said, “He who underestimates the American public—public—will not go broke.” This is merely a small indication of this

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vast throng gathered here to once again behold and to perceive that which has gone behind and to that which might go forward into the future . . . we've got to hurdle these obstacles. This is the MAIN deterrent upon which we have gathered our strength, and all the others who say, "What the hell did that get?"—WE DON'T KNOW. We've got to perforce with all the loving boy . . . And as Miller once said in one of his great novels—what did the . . . that language is only necessary when communication is endangered. And you sit there bewildered, and Pinter, who went further, said "It is not the lack of communication but fear of communication." THAT'S WHAT THE GODDAMN THING IS that we fear—communication. Oh—fortunately the prize has only been given to authors—unlike the Academy Award, which is given to a female and a male, indicating the derision of the human specie—God damn it! But we have no paranoia, and Mr. Pynchon has attained, and has created for himself serenity, and it is only the insanity that has kept him alive in his paranoia. We speak of the organ . . . of the orgasm . . . WHO THE HELL WROTE THIS? And the jury has determined to divide the prize between two writers—to Thomas Pynchon for his *Gravity's Rainbow*. Now *Gravity's Rainbow* is a token of this man's genius . . . he told me so himself . . . that he could . . . in other words, have been more specific, but rather than to allude the mundane, he has come to the conclusion that brevity is the importance of our shallow existence. God damn. Ladies and Gentlemen. To the distinguished panel on the dais and to the other winners, for poetry and religion and science. The time will come when religion will outlive its usefulness. Marx, Groucho Marx, once said that religion is the opiate of the people. I say that when religion outlives its usefulness, then opium . . . will be human . . . All right . . . However, I want to thank Mr. Guinzburg, Tom Guinzburg of the Viking Press, who has made it possible for you people to be here this evening to enjoy the Friction Citation—the Fiction Citation. *Gravity's Rainbow*—a small contribution to a certain degree, since there are over three and a half billion people in the world today. 218 million of them live in the United States, which is a very very small amount compared to those that are dying elsewhere . . . Well, I say that you will be on the road to new horizons, for we who live in a society where sex is a commodity and a politician can become a TV personality, it's not easy to conform if you have any morality . . . I said that myself many years ago . . . But I do want to thank the bureau . . . I mean the committee, the organization for the \$10,000 they've given out . . . tonight they made over \$400,000, and I think that I have another appointment. I would like to stay

here, but for the sake of brevity I must leave. I do want to thank you, I want to thank Studs TurKAL. I want to thank Mr. Knopf, who just ran through the auditorium, and I want to thank Brezhnev, Kissinger—acting president of the Unites States—and also want to thank Truman Capote and thank you.