

# Allen's comedy shines despite drawings

Woody Allen, comic experimenter in comic forms, has a new book out, *Non-Being and Somethingness*. It is a selection of strips from his one and a half year old newspaper comic strip "Inside Woody Allen."

Though solid, the strip falls short of being all it could be.

The ideas, the jokes, are unadulterated Allen, and so are as jumpy and excellent as the rest of his work in other media. But the drawing of the strips, done by Stuart Hample, is at best meant to be ignored.

The figures are so lifeless and their expressions change so little that they sap energy from the punch lines they fail to support. One has to squint at small details of line to make sure the first drawing of a strip is not just duplicated for each subsequent frame.

Perhaps it is supposed to be the ultimate in deadpan delivery, leaving the face blank to put the words forward emphatically and on their own. If so, Allen should have stuck with prose pieces as the form for his written words. In the flesh he

does not have a straight, deadpan delivery.

It is more a satire of deadpan,

portunity to stop and savor anything that struck a chord. Allen's films are so stuffed with comedy,

humorous essays are topical, often stylistic, satires. But the comic strip, with its enforced brevity, often brings out the soul of his wit: the cosmic one-liner.

Vaguely Diane Keaton-looking character to Woody: "There's no way you can prove there isn't a God."

Woody: "Right. You just have to take it on faith."

Improbably, and with a measure of his own cosmic comedy, Buckminster Fuller has written the introduction for the book. Written and drawn; this is Fuller's comic

strip debut, too.

In the course of it Fuller has his characters weigh the world and find it heavy, call on the stars and galaxies to give Woody a big hand, and name him "the master of ceremonies in what may be the last act of humans on Planet Earth or the first act of Humans in Universe."

Now, how can such an introduction be anything but a big step forward in the Woody Allen Campaign to Take Comedy More Seriously and Take Seriousness More Comically?



By LANCE LODER

## Non-Being and Somethingness

bursts of nervous tension continually breaking through. So a drawing of him telling a joke should include a little of that nervousness, too. It wouldn't be difficult, and it would add so much. Meaningful nervousness is, after all, the major substratum of his comedy.

But all this would not be more than pointless quibbling if the idea were not so good. Woody Allen is a natural subject for a comic strip. The comic strip is a natural forum for his ideas.

The single most enjoyable advantage of this book was the op-

three viewings are often required just to hear all the jokes. His

Inside Woody Allen ©1978 by IWA Enterprises Inc. Hackenbush Productions Inc.



# Nixon cast as part-time narrator, full-time fool

*The Public Burning*  
by Robert Coover  
1977, Viking Press  
\$12.95, hardback (534 pages)

Before the Watergate follies and after, Richard Nixon has al-

tiresome tradition of harassing poor old Dick. With simpering candor, Nixon plays part-time narrator and full-time fool in this sprawling allegory of the American Dream turned nightmare.

Based upon the June 14, 1953

shrill sentiments and self-serving altruism, add a cruel, cartoon quality to the Rosenberg executions.

With real-life characters populating the plot, the novel reads like a history book. Eisenhower, J. Edgar Hoover, Bob Taft, Billy Graham, John Foster Dulles, Alger Hiss, Dean Acheson, William O. Douglas and many others represent the Sons of Light (the Free World) who do battle with The Phantom (Communism).

But Nixon is the most constant and interesting character. Other than masturbating at executions, he also is sodomized by Uncle Sam ("Sam Slick, star-spangled Superhero and knuckle-rapping Yankee Peddler"), a sadistic braggart who symbolizes America.

Perhaps the most scurrilous scene occurs when Nixon's prudishness redeems itself with a strong prurient interest. Before the execution, Nixon sneaks a visit to Ethel Rosenberg and attempts to make her confess. What ensues is

a pseudo-pornographic love scene between Nixon and Ethel. As the Vice-President describes it:

*We broke at last, gasping, groaning, sucking our battered lips, clutching each other desperately. She buried her head on my shoulder, nibbling frantically at my neck. "Oh, Richard!" she moaned. "You're so strong, so powerful!" She tangled her fingers in the matted hair on my chest...*

As they continue to fondle, Nixon adds: "That she had called me Richard and not Dick moved me deeply."

The Rosenbergs are electrocuted in Times Square while millions watch. Prior to this spectacle, comedians such as the Marx Brothers, Jack Benny, Milton Berle and Edgar Bergen warm up the throngs with sick jokes about the Rosenbergs' impending death. To compound this absurd slapstick, Coover even has the Supreme Court Justices sliding around in elephant dung.

This American Inquisition, with its burning of heretics, feeds upon a communal paranoia. The net result is that Coover exposes a parallel universe to our own which reflects the grotesque ironies and deceits inherent in our social order.

Coover's sense of allegory is excellent. But his writing, too often pretentious and highly-repetitive, butchers a good idea. The same story, with tighter organization, with less superfluous satire, with more rigorous editing, may have had more sting and vitality.

Like so much of Coover's writing (best exemplified by the short fiction in *Pricksongs and Descants*) he chokes the reader with a glut of overly-rich prose. His imagery is so intense, his style so swift and supple, that one has no time to digest the author's ideas.

But the most disturbing quality to *The Public Burning* is the creative license of a fiction writer that Coover wantonly misuses to scourge public figures. Actual history can be fitted to the fictional mold, but such freedom doesn't imply a need to take murderous shots at the facts. Nixon has committed enough imbecilities that new ones needn't be invented



By BRUCE CAMPBELL

## The Public Burning

ways been favorite fodder for ridicule and caricature.

Comedians, writers, political cartoonists have all derived vicious pleasure and steady incomes from kicking around Nixon. His critics, lusting for the blood of a moral cripple, have hounded him for almost 30 years. Naturally, Nixon has always worked hard to earn such hatred.

Robert Coover's latest novel, *The Public Burning*, continues the

execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg (who allegedly sold American A-bomb secrets to the Russians), *The Public Burning* mythologizes the disheartening horrors of the Korean War, the Berlin Wall, McCarthyism and hysterical anti-Communism which invested the 1950s with such sinister energy. Mixing nostalgia with sarcasm, Coover conceives this history in comic book terms: thick-witted patriots, stuffed with

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(Continued on Page 7B)

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