

NEW BOOKS

FROM SOONERS
AND THE O.U. PRESS

Reviewer—Dick Smith

The Aztecs, People of the Sun, by Alfonso Caso, Translated by Lowell Dunham, University of Oklahoma Press.

IF FOR no other reason than for its physical makeup, this book should be snapped up as soon as it reaches the counters. The fact that a book of such a magnificent appearance can be designed and executed at the University's press should make every Oklahoman very proud.

Should-Should-Should-Should. It'll be a miracle if this one gets very far off the ground: the six-color illustrations and paper quality jacked the book's price up to the seven-dollar area; and rumor has it that Aztec gods aren't the mode.

But they should be. This beautiful book makes them Should Be.

RECOMMENDED: Caso does a nice job of calling off the unpronounceable names of the Aztec hierarchy; Doctor Dunham translates beautifully; Miguel Covarrubias illustrates magnificently; and the University Press outdoes them all.

The Bonepickers, by Al Dewlen, McGraw-Hill.

MR. DEWLEN bucks two of my basic prejudices with his 408-page book about an Amarillo rags-to-riches clan. Prejudice Number One—there's no 408-page book around that couldn't have been written better in 308 pages; and Prejudice Number Two—there's nothing in Texas that anybody could possibly write 408 pages about.

So, given fair warning on my anything-but-universal prejudices, you can take it or leave it that I was disappointed with *The Bonepickers*.

Mr. Dewlen is obviously a writer of high talent (*Night of the Tiger*, his first novel



An Aztec Knight

Courtesy University of Oklahoma Press

—and a best-seller—will soon be released as a movie), and he has an exceptional gift of giving life-in-art to everyday Southwestern Americana. Ultimately, however, it is this everyday stuff that wears you down after page 308 like a Panhandle drought. Realism is a fine goal; but Mr. Dewlen seems so intent upon rounding out his characters that they finally just roll away. In *The Bonepickers* there isn't one major character lopsided enough to stay put and let the reader either hate him or love him. All through this book you "understand" the bad guys and "suffer" the good guys. Maybe that's The Thing, but that ain't why I read books.

Mr. Dewlen's roll-around characters (with a few bounce-in-and-out exceptions) are all members of the Munger family, immediate or otherwise. The immediate Mungers consist of two idiot brothers (one of them committable, the other a

highly-successful, skinny, scrimping, stingy businessman), three kind-of-odd sisters (sexually, that is), and one now-and-then real womanly and now-and-then real mean sister. This bunch sticks up for each other like hill folks, and this makes them good folks; but the prairie they were born on is soppo with oil and they're stingy and this makes them bad folks.

The off-and-on sister is married to a Marine vet who is on-and-off his extraordinarily top-heavy secretary (here, I'll have to admit, is one major character who is lopsided). The vet's driven to it. He has no choice. His Munger wife has "mean" weeks. She seems more married to the Mungers than to him. And the Mungers don't seem to have any red-blooded meat on their bones. They won't encourage his bright-young-man planning with any moola. And they're all nuts. And he's an Outsider. And what's a fellow to do?

The Marine considers this problem for quite a few pages. Quite a few. But after an attempted rape, bean party, and virgin birth, the whole thing works out in the end. On page 408. And so the Marine vet didn't really have to think about things after all.

I'm being too light with Mr. Dewlen's heavy attempt to counterpoint the degenerate Mungers with sensationalism. But the majority of pocket books prove that sex and violence don't always create a sensation. A better bet is *Burning Ambition* versus *Insurmountable Odds*.

Nobody's really on fire in *The Bonepickers*. Which is a shame, because the Mungers are pretty insurmountable.

One last fling. And this to the book's

publisher: Get Mr. Dewlen an editor who has read enough to know that Faulkner's *tour de force* in *The Sound and the Fury* has put all grownup-idiots-tendered-by-loving-sisters in the has-been-done bracket. Not only does this exploited relationship start the book out, but repetition of repetitions! the idiot brother is connected with golf and Easter. Mr. Dewlen has a family to support and he can't sit around reading all day.

Neither can your reviewers, Mr. Dewlen. Next time do a shorter one. Three's a charm; and you've definitely got It—if you'll condense It.

Recommended: To anyone who wants to get in on the ground floor of an author on his way up.

The Feature Writer's Handbook, by Stewart Harral, University of Oklahoma Press.

Recommended: Subtitled "2,000 tested ideas for newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, covering more than 500 topics," this one's an ideal book for idea men who don't have any ideas.

The Heritage of the Middle West, Edited by John J. Murray, University of Oklahoma Press.

Recommended: Look, Ma—We got heritage!

Wonderful Ted Owen died October 26. His brothers, Bennie and Bill Owen, were more well-known to the public as O.U.'s early-day football and baseball coaches, but Ted, as athletic trainer from 1926 to 1953, played just as important a role with O.U.'s long list of young athletes.

With Ted Owen in mind, this month's picture from the Roy E. Heffner collection was not chosen at random. The short man with the big grin on the opposite page is Ted Owen, and we've asked O.U.'s sports publicist, Harold Keith, to "identify" him.

ALTHOUGH the sports world knew what a skillful teacher Ted Owen was, few knew about his intelligence, his friendliness, his unfailing sense of humor and the bright, courageous way he bore the pain of his crippled foot.

Owen's sense of humor, expressed in the dry quips he uttered while he worked, was almost as big an asset as his widely-recognized skill as a trainer. With Owen joshing the athletes and making them forget their infirmities, the Sooner training room was a cheerful place indeed. The banter would probably go something like this:

A player would come in and mischievously ask, "How about a massage?"

"Quiet, you bum," Owen would bark.

A varsity end would limp in, carrying one cleated shoe and complaining that it rubbed blisters on his feet. Owen would slide his horned rims down on the end of his nose and peering over them at the player, blink his eyes fast a dozen times.

"I'll bet you took the innersole out because the shoe was too little. I'll bet everything I've got that I'm right. I've got seven cents. Heh! Heh!"

WONDERFUL TED

By Harold Keith, '29ba, '39ma

As he padded a guard's leg, Owen would probably tell him, "I otta be putting these pads on your rumble seat so that when you hit the ground today, you won't bounce so high."

"I take back all I said about you," Owen once apologized to a temperamental halfback who had once been a problem child but eventually outgrew it. "I wish I'd said more about you so I could take back more."

"One of us is crazy and I feel all right," he told an athlete who argued with him over how to treat a "strawberry."

In those days, there was no staff of student trainers. Owen handled the daily practices himself, taping the ankles of 50 to 60 men every afternoon before practice, besides ministering to the many who needed special treatment for their hurts.

Despite the pain from his foot, Owen tackled his tough job each day with the gay clowning the Sooners loved so well. His badinage was never rough. A quick thinker who made up his mind blam, he could tell off an athlete who obviously needed it with such lightness and gentleness that the lad usually led the laughter arising at his expense.

Once Owen was fitting a balm pack to the calf of a halfback who was criticizing an O. U. coach in plain hearing of other athletes.

"You ought to take a lesson from the Statue of Liberty," he told the boy, mildly.

"It's got a mouth three feet wide but it knows how to keep it closed."

His surprising statement ended the conversation. The boy realized instantly that he had been indiscreet. He accepted Owen's droll evaluation of him in a flash.

Ted lived with the players constantly and they all liked and respected him tremendously and listened to him more than to the coaches.

Unknown to the general public, Ted was the most personable man on the Sooner staff, the most delightful fellow at the departmental bridge parties, a fine, congenial companion on fishing trips. He was clean as a pin. He was also an extremely sensible and practical man, and I don't recall ever hearing anybody dispute him when he offered an opinion about something. He was ordinarily very quiet but when he did express himself, his angle was sound. He was a skillful carpenter. He loved plants and flowers, and his backyard was a lovely garden.

He worked and got along famously with hundreds of Sooner athletes and eight different O. U. head coaches—Bennie Owen, Adrian Lindsey, Lewie Hardage, Biff Jones, Tom Stidham, Snorter Luster, Jim Tatum, and Bud Wilkinson. His era here spanned three decades in O. U. athletics, 1926 to 1956. An era much flavored with the wonderful personality of Ted Owen.