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# A Writer's Diary

Prizewinning Novel  
Based Largely on  
Author's Own Life

By JOHN BARKHAM

This, I reflected, would be one interview in which I would be able to tell the author something about himself he didn't know.

It was a meeting both of us had anticipated — I because I had been one of the judges of the Harper Prize Novel Contest who had selected his book, "P.S. Wilkinson," as winner, and the author, C. D. B. Bryan, because



Barkham

he would be hearing, from one of the judges, why his book had been chosen. C.D.B. (for Courtlandt Dixon Barnes) Bryan looks every inch the stylish writer he is — a tall, slender, spectacled, good-looking man with delicate features and blondish hair brushed neatly back from his forehead.

I explained to him that the judges in the contest had not known the titles or authors of the manuscripts they considered, and that I read his book last but had unhesitatingly placed it first.

## Tested for CIA

The story had impressed me as being largely autobiographical. Was this, in fact, the case?

He nodded. "Yes, it was. It opens in Korea. I spent two years there after leaving Yale. It moves to Washington, where Wilkinson takes a lie detector test for the CIA. I took such a test."

He must have observed my look of puzzlement. "Yes, I know how it sounds, but when I got out of uniform I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be a writer, but I'd had no writing experience. I was 25 then, and I felt I ought to do something worthwhile — something of the kind President Kennedy inspired among young people at the time.

"So I went to the CIA in Washington and told them in effect: 'I don't really want to work for you, but I've had this training in Korea and, if it's any use to you, I'm available.' Their psychiatrists kept asking me why I was offering the CIA my services when I didn't really want to work for them, and finally flunked me out."

Here I interpolated that in my judge's report I had likened his dialog to that of John O'Hara, only to learn later, to

my surprise, that O'Hara was in fact his stepfather.

Bryan laughed. "Yes, he's been my stepfather for the past ten years and takes a great interest in my writing. He won't help me with it and he doesn't want to read any of it until it's published, but he did introduce me to his editor at the New Yorker and they bought three of my stories.

"It was the New Yorker editor, in fact, who urged me to try a novel."

## Cool and Elegant

Bryan's conversation is as cool and elegant as his dress and manner. His writing methods are of a piece. He lives in Tuxedo Park, N. Y., with his wife and two young children and, once a week comes into New York City to work at "Monocle," a satiric magazine.

At home he writes in a study recently done over on the proceeds of his jackpot. (The novel's first printing was 30,000.)

"I never write without a tie on — if you know what I mean," he remarked with a grin. "It's a psychological gimmick, of course, as though I were saying to myself 'If you look neat, you'll write neatly.'"