

Literature Pattern May Be Changing

IT LOOKS like Democrats and environmentalists were not the only ones voted out of office last November. Casualties of the 1980 election might also include the New York-centered literary elite who have presumed to tell the country what books we ought to read.

Millions of citizens pay absolutely no attention to this source of advice, but the elite has considerable influence upon what is available to read. "Inside" reviewers promote the "in" books.

For two decades these bookish circles have largely favored political "quickies," scandals about famous people, exposes to disgrace American heroes, and explicit, vulgar sex fiction.

This pattern may be changing. Jeff R. Laird Sr. has passed along a copy of Harper's magazine (Aug. 1981) containing a satirical article that says so. The lengthy piece by Bryan F. Griffin is titled "Panic Among the Philistines, the collapse of the literary establishment."

Griffin describes in considerable detail how the literary circle had

devoted itself to supplanting good taste and worthiness with books devoted to perversion, lust and immorality.

As establishments may be expected to do, he began by looking into the cash register. "Post-romantic inverse snobbery attached to sales figures," muttered one of the (Washington) Post's book reviewers, and we all shuddered, as we always do, when the sales figures are in danger," Griffin wrote.

What he means is that the obscene, crass books that have been dominating book stores aren't selling so well lately. Near the end of this article the author suggested an explanation. He said:

"It had been years since the blue-bagging literary party-goers had actually bothered to read one another's dreary publications, just as it had been years since any of them had actually acted upon a real idea (let alone ordered their lives upon one). Books were not for reading, and ideas were not a basis for life; books were for talking and shouting about, and an idea was something

you passed around with the pistachios and the burnt peanuts, until you grew tired of sniffing at it (after which it became something you had been through)."

The large nebulous group of writers that Griffin talks about must write something that will sell. Where will they turn? Book publishers are much more interested in sales than they are in content.

Will the conservative, patriotic and religious book market offer them opportunity? Reports indicate a strong upswing in sales of these types of books.

Pornography is not on its way out yet. Probably it will be as persistent as cockroaches and crabgrass, but oversexed literature may be losing ground among the literary elite.

It would be a strange phenomenon if authors who have gained prominence by writing prurient descriptions of ugliness in private lives should switch to literature patterned to uplift and motivate readers to higher achievements.

They might, if folks have had enough of the vulgar kind.