

## Oscars, Edgars, and Tonys

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**M**ORE THAN TWENTY YEARS ago when prizes given to outstanding performances in the movie industry became known as OSCARS, a new group of names was inaugurated. The custom of designating an "award of merit" or a "first prize" by a personal name is gradually gaining ground but is by no means universal yet. Oscar's English counterpart is prosaically called "Picturegoer Award," the best Western film earns the "Silver Spur Award," and it will doubtless take many years until the Pulitzer prizes will be designated as "Josephs." In the meantime OSCAR and his family are moving ahead.

The awards of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at a gala program in Hollywood for the best actor, actress, and motion picture of the year, has been given annually since 1931. The recognition had been made by the Academy the four years preceding, but the gold-plated bronze statuette had as yet no distinguishing designation. How it came to be named quite by accident and thereby started a new class of names for awards is told by Terry Ramsaye in the current issue of the *Motion Picture and Television Almanac*, page 756. Mrs. Margaret Herrick, executive secretary of the Academy, exclaimed when she saw the statuette on the first day of her employment in 1931, "He reminds me of my Uncle Oscar." Her remark was overheard by a reporter seated nearby and he used the nickname in his newspaper report the next morning. M. M. Mathews, in *A Dictionary of American English* (1951), accepts a similar account as the best explanation for the whimsical name. But strangely the name does not appear in the two-page listing of the annual Academy Awards supplied by the organization itself to *The World Almanac*; the dignified appellation "Academy statuette" is still used in the 1954 *Almanac*. The

presentation of awards by the Academy has grown from three in 1928 to twenty in 1953, to include set and costume design, story writing, technical production, and an honorary foreign language film award. The goldplated statuettes cost from \$60 to \$100 a copy. The award may mean an added million dollars of gross income to a film and a fortune to an actor.

The first imitation OSCARS made their appearance during the late war when FUZZY WUZZY or GI OSCARS, figures of Fiji Islanders mounted on a fragment of metal from a shot-down Japanese airplane, were awarded to Humphrey Bogart and Greer Garson, and when Margaret O'Brien received an OSCARETTE.

In the twenty-seven years since the OSCAR was designed by George Stanley, a Los Angeles sculptor, the name has become a generic term applied to recognition not only in the arts but to industry and public service also. *Time*, April 12, 1948, used it as a verb—"recently Oscared by Hollywood." *Newsweek*, August 30, 1954, spoke of the "Oscar-studded cast" of the Paramount film, *Sabrina*. It has had many imitators, as I shall show. But the number of satirical awards, the past few years, patterned on the OSCAR, indicate that it may have lost something of its magical quality.

*Newsweek*, March 19, 1951, printed the following item:

Swamped by the current plethora of award giving, a group of Hollywood correspondents last week announced that they would present their own accolades in self-defense. The first annual "Mickey's," Martini glasses set on pedestals, will be handed out, under the familiar klieg lights, at Barney's Beanery on March 21. Among the categories: the usher who led the public to the greatest heights; the theater manager putting the most butter on popcorn; the star getting the most phone calls at the Brown Derby.

The ROSCOE was a back-handed trophy awarded by the Harvard *Lampoon* in February 1951. This annual award was for the actor or actress who in the previous year "has most shown those qualities of perseverance, leadership, and personal integrity which have helped Hollywood become what it is today." The first recipient was Elizabeth Taylor, for "so gallantly persisting in her career despite a total inability to act." The next month the Pooners gave her the "Fabian Fall Award" as the actress who had "shown the most improvement as a result of a previous receipt of the "Roscoe."

The RACSO—*Oscar* spelled backwards—was proposed by Serge

Fliegers for a film based on a book by Mickey Spillane. He wrote in *The Freeman*, October 5, 1953:

If an award of an Oscar denotes excellence in performance, we should like to award a "Racso" (Oscar spelled backwards) to Mr. Elliot and to Harry Essex, the writer and director of *I, the Jury*. Considering the low quality of Spillane's book, it is difficult to believe that the film could be any worse. It is, however.

Returning to genuine honors, the EDGARS, awarded annually since 1946 by the Mystery Writers of America, Inc., go to "people who have contributed outstandingly to the field of crime entertainment." *Publishers' Weekly*, March 8, 1947, told of the MWA awards in that year:

"The Killers," based on the Hemingway story, is the leading contender for the Edgar in the film field. . . . Edgars are the Mystery Writers version of Hollywood's Oscars. . . . Since Edgar Allan Poe is patron saint of the MWA, the transmogrification from Oscar to Edgar is self-explanatory.

EDGAR is the first of the nicknames to appear in the *World Almanac* lists; he has been included both in the text and index since 1950.

ERNIE is a recent addition to the OSCAR family. *Publishers' Weekly*, July 4, 1953, had the following announcement:

In recognition of the best Western novel of the year, the newly-formed Western Writers of America will present an award in February in memory of the late Ernest Haycox "who did so much to raise the level and prestige of the Western." The award, to be known as an "Ernie," is similar to the "Edgars" awarded in memory of Edgar Allan Poe by the Mystery Writers of America for the best mystery stories.

The U. S. Steel's dramatic program, "The Theatre Guild on the Air," won the MICHAEL, the award of the Academy of Radio and Television Arts and Sciences for meritorious achievement in radio, in 1949 and in the two years following. MICHAEL may have been derived from *microphone*. Although the nickname is not in the index, it appears in the text of the *World Almanac* for 1953, along with "Mr. Mike,"—Arthur Godfrey, the durable broadcaster.

TONY also was included in the Special Awards section of the *Almanac* in 1953, but not in the index. The Antoinette Perry Awards, TONYS, for notable contribution to the theater, have been given annually since 1946 by the American Theatre Wing. The Donaldson awards for excellence in stage presentations have been given since 1943.

The Television Academy, with four hundred members, awarded its EMMY to Bishop Fulton J. Sheen as the outstanding personality on TV in 1952. This award was first made in 1949. Miss Emerson has not claimed the honor but it seems likely that this award may have been named for her.

Pocket Books has held a Million-Copy Club party annually since 1944. Silver GERTRUDES (replicas of the kangaroo trademark) are presented to those authors or publishers whose Pocket editions have sold more than a million copies; gold GERTRUDES are awarded for sales of more than two million copies or for sales of more than five million combined titles.

CHRISTOPHER awards have been made since 1949, when Father James Keller, a Roman Catholic priest, founded an organization to encourage men and women to combine the spreading of Christian values with their daily jobs. Five prizes of \$5,000 each were given in 1951 for books and movie scripts that were "at the same time entertaining, artistic, and inspirational." For serving the common good in the field of communication Charles A. Lindbergh was recognized for his book, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and the Ding Dong School television program for children has also received the honor.

The HORATIO ALGER has been presented since 1947 by the American Schools and Colleges Association, "to dramatize the ideal of individual self-reliance." Among the winners in 1953 were Herbert Hoover, former President, and Thomas J. Watson, president of International Business Machines Corporation. The nickname is an appropriate one, for the series of juvenile novels popular a half century ago which bore this title and which had the theme of self-reliance are considered typically American.

BRENDA, an award created by the Atlanta, Georgia, alumnae chapter of Theta Sigma Phi (national professional fraternity for women in journalism) was announced in *The Matrix*, July 1953. First made in that year, the award will go each year to men and women for distinction in journalism. In 1954 it was awarded to Dr. Malcolm H. Dewey, professor emeritus of fine arts at Emory University.

The GOLDEN MIKE has been given by *McCall's Magazine* since

1951, for outstanding public service. *The Matrix*, September 1954, had a picture of the current recipient, and said of her:

Judith Cory Waller has been in radio work 30 years and in television since its inception. . . . Her award came as recognition of her service "primarily to youth" in originating two years ago the "Ding Dong School," nursery school television program.

In 1952, Pogo won the Billy DeBeck award for his creator. These awards are known as BARNEYS and have been given since 1947 to cartoonists of merit. They consist of a silver cigaret box, engraved with sketches of Barney Google and Snuffy Smith.

ANNAS are awarded to amateur painters in oil and water color by ARTnews in a national competition. The gold, silver, and bronze medals of honor were designed in 1952 by the American sculptor David Smith.

*Printers' Ink*, July 4, 1952, told of the JOSHUAS, named for Joshua Pusey, Philadelphia patent attorney who invented match books.

Joshua, a three-dimensional bronze plaque shaped like a match book, is the newest award for outstanding advertising. The award will be presented to advertisers in each of 41 classifications of industry by the Match Industry Information Bureau. The competition marks the 60th anniversary of the use of book matches as an advertising medium.

"As avidly as Hollywood awaits its 'Oscars'," said *Life*, September 28, 1953, "the U.S. fashion industry looks forward each fall to the presentation of the Coty American Fashion Critics' Award, a bronze statuette called 'Winnie.'" The public was let in to the show for the first time in 1951—to raise money for the children's cancer fund—although the award has been made since 1942.

APPAREL ANNIE is another fashion award, decided by the vote of the members of the Manufacturers and Wholesalers Association of San Francisco.

Motion picture animal actors are awarded PATSYS, by the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the American Humane Association. In 1951 the nominations were Bongo the chimpanzee; Herman the camel; Francis the "talking" mule; Billy, a 12-foot alligator; Leo Carillo's horse Diablo; and Roy Roger's horse Trigger.

TEE PEE WILLIES were awarded to thirty-one "Men of the Year" in 1953 by J. R. Coulter, president of the Toledo, Peoria and

Western Railroad. The recipients were community leaders in twenty-six cities along the route of the T.P.&W. The nickname derives from the name of the railroad, following the familiar pattern of coining a personal name.

The COMMUNITY FUND OSCAR, a statuette, was presented to C. A. Doepel, president of the Mattoon, Illinois, Employees Service Club in 1949 for services of the members to that charity. They were employees of the Illinois Central Railway.

*American Business*, July 1953, told of ELMER, a trophy presented to the "top suggester" of each month in the Manufacturing Services Division of the Ford Motor Company.

In view of the tremendous influence which American customs and American names exercise all over the world, it is not surprising that the custom of designating awards by names of people has spread to Europe. The French "Victories" for the best foreign actor may not belong into the OSCAR class, but the German KILROY, awarded in 1948 by German listeners to the "Suspense" program of the Columbia Broadcasting system, doubtless commemorates the ubiquitous Kilroy whose name was inscribed by American service men in every corner of the world.



Last winter after Senator Karl Mundt had travelled through his State, South Dakota, he made a report to his constituents. In one paragraph he gave, perhaps deliberately selected, a list of typical western place names: "West of the River we made many new friends when we appeared at places such as Olerichs, Timber Lake and at Wounded Knee. We spoke to fine groups at places like Bison, Cottonwood and Colome; met other folks at Bullhead, Swett, Cactus Flat and Igloo . . ."



Papers in the Netherlands criticize cattle breeders for giving their prize bulls such strange names as Eisenhower, Farouk, and Molotov.



"The name of the English Greyhound comes from 'grey,' because it is of the first grade of dogs and of the best breed. 'Grey' in English—'gradus'. The Latin equivalent is *Leporarius*."

Letter of Caius to Gesner, 1570.