

Mrs. Oswald--Behind Every Man, a Woman

LAT- (approx.) 3/15/66
BY MARGARET MARBLE

A MOTHER IN HISTORY by Jean Stafford (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: \$3.95).

• The picture of Marguerite Oswald which adorns the dust jacket of this remarkable book was obviously taken from some height, so that the figure is foreshortened, and the woman appears distorted and grotesque. The picture drawn by Jean Stafford in the hundred-odd pages inside is head on, however, full-face and mercilessly clear. If the self-styled "mother in history" still appears distorted and grotesque, one must assume that she is.

To illuminate the reasons for the unreasonable acts of Lee Harvey Oswald that day in Dallas when President Kennedy died, Miss Stafford recorded three conversations with the assassin's mother, one from notes, two with the aid of a tape recorder. They are completely fascinating.

Exhibitionistic and egocentric, Mrs. Oswald threaded her way through a maze of rationalizations and ingenious hypotheses to justify her son's crime. Along one of the tortuous paths she took it became a "mercy killing," performed in the service of his country.

Anyone who has talked at length with mental patients will recognize the eerie rhythm of the paranoid confidence, allusive and portentous, in Mrs. Oswald's revelations. Certain key phrases are repeated endlessly, fantasies abound, and "They" are everywhere.

Miss Stafford frames her picture sparingly with a few perceptive observations of her own, but she is primarily a camera, and the three sittings have produced a brilliant portrait, invaluable to anyone who would hope to understand Lee Harvey Oswald.