

BOOK ENDS

By Richard R. Lingeman

5/1/77

Marina and Lee

THAT long-in-the-works biography of Marina and Lee Harvey Oswald by Priscilla McMillan has finally been completed. Mrs. McMillan, a Russian scholar and journalist who translated Svetlana Alliluyeva's first book, entered into an agreement with Marina Oswald for the exclusive rights to her story back in 1964 and has been working on the book off and on ever since. Part of the delay has been due to personal matters, but Mrs. McMillan writes in her foreword of the difficulties of tracking down aspects of Lee Harvey Oswald's life, in contrast to the easier task of obtaining facts from and about Marina Oswald.

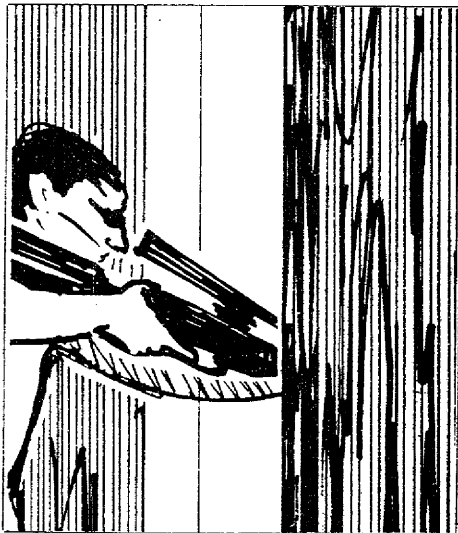
By sheer chance, Mrs. McMillan was involved with both Kennedy and Oswald before the 1963 assassination. After graduation from college in the 1950's, she worked for then Senator John F. Kennedy as a researcher and later became friendly with him. In 1959, when she was in Moscow working for a small translation service and as a stringer for the North American Newspaper Alliance, she interviewed Oswald, who had arrived in the country as a self-proclaimed defector. Her exclusive arrangement with Marina Oswald evolved out of her fluency in Russian but also because Mrs. Oswald was intrigued by Mrs. McMillan's prior acquaintance with both her husband and John F. Kennedy, whom she admired.

Mrs. McMillan and her husband, George, are anathema to believers in a conspiracy theory of the assassinations of both President Kennedy and Martin Luther King because of articles defending the Warren Commission's findings and Mr. McMillan's 1976 book, "The Making of an Assassin," a study of James Earl Ray that concluded he had acted alone in the murder of Dr. King. In "Code Name 'Zorro,'" a new book about the King assassination by Mark Lane and Dick Gregory, Mr. Lane charges that Mrs. McMillan was secretly in the employ of the State Department when she met Oswald in Moscow; Mrs. McMillan has denied this and says the State Department has repudiated the charge.

In her new book, which Harper & Row will publish in October under the title of "Marina and Lee," Mrs. McMillan gives "a thorough psychological portrait of Oswald as having many strange qualities and obsessions and perfectly capable of doing the deed alone without assistance," according to her editor, M. S. Wyeth Jr. Mr. Wyeth said the book offers "many new details," such as Marina's discovery of Oswald's attempted assassination of Gen. Edwin Walker.

Hemingway Prize

When the National Book Critics Circle voted last year on the best novel of 1976, Renata Adler's "Speedboat" lost out to John Gardner's "October Light" by one vote; her much-praised book was also passed over completely by the National Book Awards. Now it has won the Ernest Hemingway Foundation Award for "the best first published book of fiction by an American author." The prize, which includes a \$6,000 emolument, was established by Mary Hemingway three years ago and is administered by the P.E.N. Club, which chose this year's judges—E. L. Doctorow, Elizabeth



Drawing by Elliot Banfield.

Hardwick and Susan Sontag. Miss Adler learned of the award while in the midst of studying for final exams at Yale Law School, where she is a first-year student, after spending several years writing for *The New Yorker* and a stint as movie critic for *The Times*. She also worked for the House impeachment committee and her next book—non-fiction—will be on this experience.

Name Day

Naming a new publishing house is almost as difficult as naming the baby, only instead of rich uncles to be catered to there are legal considerations. The subject comes up because the Henry Regnery Company of Chicago has announced that as of this day it will henceforth be known as Contemporary Books. In this case the new name was prompted by Henry Regnery's decision to sell his stock in the firm he founded in 1947 and start another publishing house. His son-in-law, Sheldon Plotnick, who has been president for some years now, figured the firm needed a new image to reflect its new editorial direction—away from conservative, academic books and toward more popular fare.

As for Mr. Regnery, he can't legally use the Regnery name on his new company for a year. It was simpler back in the 19th century, when those patriarchal-sounding houses like Charles Scribner's Sons and G. P. Putnam's Sons were started and passed down the generations. Now a man's name may belong to someone else. Furthermore, if the precedent had been followed in the Regnery case, it would have been Henry Regnery's Son-in-law.

George Meredith

My apologies to George Meredith (1828-1909) for erroneously giving his surname as Moore in crediting the author of the lines quoted in the April 10 Book Ends. The lines, of course, were from Meredith's long poem "Modern Love," and an unusually large number of readers spotted the mistake, which can be regarded as a heartwarming commentary on the continuing interest in Meredith and poetry in general among our readers. Actually, "Modern Love" was a kind of 19th-century "Scenes From a Marriage" and its densely written sonnets have a contemporary ring. From his own contemporaries, Meredith received little recognition for his poetry and was much more famous as a novelist. He wrote in fulsome gratitude to a critic who had written sympathetically of the poems, saying that future generations might do better by them because "all my views of life are taken to be eccentric." Commenting on the obscurity of poets, as compared to the renown of the best-selling novelist, he wrote to another critic: "As to the Poems I don't think the age prosaic for not buying them. A man who hopes to be popular must think from the mass, and as the heart of the mass. If he follows out vagaries of his own brain, he cannot hope for general esteem; and he does smaller work. 'Modern Love' as a dissection of the sentimental passion of those days, could only be apprehended by the few who read it many times. I have not looked for it to succeed. Why did I write it? Who can account for pressure?" ■