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Mary McCarthy reports from Vietnam: "I confess that when I went to Vietnam early in February I was looking for material damaging to the American interest and that I found it, though often by accident or in the process of being briefed by an official. Finding it is no . . ." *[Continued on Page 5]*



Elizabeth Hardwick on Manchester: "What was the purpose of this book? A close reading of the text—and a considerable chore that undertaking is—suggests that the work, as it went along its entirely undistinguished way, grew aimlessly fatter and fatter, feeding on any sort of snack that turned up. No doubt it was . . ." *[Continued on page 11]*

lets. ("A casualty of war," that general repeated solemnly. "A casualty of war") and whom he saw carried in one night to a drinking party in sick bay, her legs bandaged, a spotlight playing on her, while the Marines pressed candy and dollar bills into her hands and had their pictures taken with her; she had more dolls than Macy's, they told him—"that girl is real spoiled." To spoil a child war victim and send her back to her parents, with her dolls as souvenirs, is patently callous, just as it is callous to fill a child's stomach and send it home to be hungry again. The young doctor, being a doctor, was possibly conscious of the fakery—from a responsible medical point of view—of the "miracle" cures he was effecting; that was why he

frowned. Meanwhile, however, the Marine Corps brass could show the "Before" and "After" to a captive audience. In fact two. The studio audience of children, smiling and laughing and clapping, and the broader audience of their parents, who, when allowed to visit, could not fail to be impressed, if not awed, by the "other" side of American technology. And beyond that still a third audience—the journalists and their readers back home, who would recognize the Man in White and his corpsman, having brought them up, gone to school with them, seen them on TV, in soap opera. I felt this myself, a relieved recognition of the familiar face of America. These are the American boys we know at once, even in an Asian context, blub-

bling an Asian baby. We do not recognize them, helmeted, in a bomber aiming cans of napalm at a thatched village. We have a credibility gap.

Leaving the hospital, I jolted southward in a jeep, hanging on, swallowing dust; the roads, like practically everything in Vietnam, have been battered, gouged, scarred, torn up by the weight of US materiel. We passed Marines' laundry, yards and yards of it, hanging outside native huts—the dark green battle cloth spelled money. Down the road was a refugee camp, which did not form part of the itinerary. This, I realized, must be "home" to some of the children we had just seen; the government daily allowance for a camp family was ten piasters (six cents) a day—sometimes twenty if there were two

adults in the family. Somebody had put a streamer, in English, over the entrance: "REFUGEES FROM COMMUNISM."

This was a bit too much. The children's hospital had told the story the Americans were anxious to get over. Why put in the commercial? And who was the hard sell aimed at? Not the refugees, who could not read English and who, if they were like all the other refugees, had fled, some from the Viet Cong and some from the Americans and some because their houses had been bombed or shelled. Not the journalists, who knew better. Whoever carefully lettered that streamer, crafty Marine or civilian, had applied all his animal cunning to selling himself. □
(This is the first of a series of articles.)

Blow-Up

The Death of a President

by William Manchester.

Harper & Row, 710 pp., \$10.00

Elizabeth Hardwick

What was the purpose of this book? A close reading of the text—and a considerable chore that undertaking is—suggests that the work, as it went along its entirely undistinguished way, grew aimlessly fatter and fatter, feeding on any sort of snack that turned up. No doubt it was commissioned as a heroic memorial and certainly that is what Manchester wanted to write. But the nature of his mind is such that pointlessness outruns any other intention. In his earlier *Portrait of a President*, his inability to understand character and his instant attraction to the same pointlessness made President Kennedy seem small, banal, and commonplace. The first book was the preview and the present one is the full-length feature. It would be untrue to say that his choice by the Kennedy family is a puzzle: it is not in the least. Few people with power and money realize that the eulogist blackens more reputations than the liar. The only hope for public figures, if they would be remembered as a genuine presence, is to be observed, perhaps almost surreptitiously, by another genuine person who may one day write down his thoughts. The dullest of figures can come alive in the mind of an attractive writer, freely remembering and interpreting.

How can anyone concern himself with the damage a book like this may have done to any person or political group? In what way can you damage persons who are so busily damaging themselves, either by disastrous policy or inexplicable publicity. On the occasion of one of Mrs. Kennedy's recent interviews, I heard a reader on the bus fold the paper, and say, wistfully, "They must think we're awful dumb." President Johnson has gone from Bumbling-Comical on Air Force One to Bumbling-Tragic in the White House. A people who would withhold from Senator Kennedy, because of the legal tangles over this foolish book, a confidence they would otherwise have placed in him are truly lost.

History—how that word makes one wince nowadays. Written history: the

work of a special discovering intelligence; or those sweet little packets of modest recollection, observations left to us without undue calculation, honored by the dust of time. But every nursemaid, every employee is solicitous for the glory of the "historical record," as if it were some flag demanding an endless salute. The sacred record that tells us of men before our time is now just a business, and perhaps that is a fit monument to a business culture. It becomes clearer and clearer that few people have memories, and he who has "memoirs" is altogether rare.

THE INTENSE INANE—Poe's phrase—is the atmosphere in which William Manchester's book floats, like a big gas-filled balloon. His mind is entirely unutilized to the writing of history. To put it at its simplest: he has an astonishing aversion to the significant. But, one might protest, there is another kind of record, the exhaustively insignificant. Manchester is exhaustive, but he does not have any more flair for judging the small than the large; he can make the minute somehow ponderous and we are often in doubt that he is conscious of the paltriness of his little bits. Mrs. Kennedy's hair, her clothes, the weather, the new curtains, the sleeping arrangements for the funeral: there they are, offered up as if they were state papers. During the hours at the Parkland Hospital in Dallas, the "record" leaves us two extraordinary vignettes: one of a mad, dancing priest, waving putative bits of the True Cross; the other, a wonderful bureaucratic coroner, invested with some higher reaches of stubbornness in pursuit of his genuine business. These characters out of Gogol, coming as they did upon the scene at a time of great suffering, could not exactly be used for comic relief: but Manchester berates them and, of course, describes them with his usual bag of dusty details. What at last inhibits Manchester as a historian of the insignificant is his naiveté, his sentimentality, and his lack of self-esteem, which does not mean that he lacks complacency.

In his apologia in *Look* magazine, Manchester sees himself as he sees "history." He pities and praises himself for working so hard on his book, for holding back his tears, for slugging on through the Washington heat. And he scores on the Kennedys who, in his account, were indifferent to his labors and sufferings

and no more mindful of his gathering hopes and multiplying resentments than a judge would be of the tired fingers of a court stenographer. It would be nearly impossible to write well or seriously in Manchester's style. (Several celebrated New Frontiersmen, in some fresher, greener time, thought this a good book, until, well, they don't think so any longer. Arthur Schlesinger called it "the book of the Sixties" and placed it above his own. The adrenalin of Gilbert Highet, in his capacity as an editor of the Book-of-the-Month Club, rose and true to his classical training he summoned the Romans for comparison and spoke of the work as close to great oratory and poetry!)

Manchester has the prevailing American determination about first names and nicknames. Even Lady Bird does not go far enough for him; she must, thus, be "Bird" from time to time. "Beside it, in Bird's words, the young widow was standing 'quiet as a shadow,' her eyes 'great wells of sadness.'" And with Governor Connally's wife, "Bird" put her arms around Nellie and said, "He is going to get well." Remembering a recent death in the Connally family she added, "Too much bad has happened, he's got to get well." That is a fair sample from the style case of *The Death of a President*. Manchester has written, remembered, or tape-recorded some of the most ridiculous and empty dialogue ever to reach print. "If your back was turned toward a door, you could still tell when the President crossed the threshold . . . Dean Markham, confronting her, forgot that this was a formal occasion and blurted out, 'Hi, Jackie!'"

There is no need even to have an opinion about how people should be addressed—few things are less pressing. Still, as a matter of literary judgment, it appears very difficult to write a worthy history, and a tragic one at that, of Jacks, Jackies, and Birds. Perhaps some experimentation might have produced a manner sufficient to our own times and appropriate to events, but Manchester proceeds by simple, intimate humility toward his peculiar end. In a current of triviality he drowns friend and foe alike. Both person and position sink; what survives is the fame. It is the waves of mere fame we are to be soothed by.

THE ODDITIES of Manchester's mind

develop apace. He is fascinated by the Secret Service code for the Kennedy trip to Texas. This code is again one of those grand trifles that occupy his thoughts and he sees a kind of poetry in it. It is given at the very beginning of the book (Lyric is Caroline Kennedy; Vigilant is Walter Jenkins) and many of the large section titles come from the code. Lancer is President Kennedy; Charcoal, in this case Texas, is the temporary residence of Lancer; Castle is the White House. When one comes to the title "Go, Stranger," for the events on the returning plane, one is tempted to assume that "Stranger" is Lyndon Johnson; but no, it is Manchester himself who is to "Go, stranger, and in Lakédaimon tell. . . ." The Code, in its fullest sense, appears to be what Manchester wants to give us; that sense of the Inside, his being inside.

He has, also, an odd need to praise people for doing what all mankind must do. They are praised for bearing up when nothing else is possible, for standing when there is no place to sit, for appearing when there is no place to hide, for grieving over loss, for being loyal to the source of their power.

He is sentimental, but not charitable. In his comparison of those gifts of nature and circumstance that fell upon President Kennedy with the abject meanness of all that fell to the lot of Oswald there is not a trace of pity for a miserable youth.

The President was ten times a millionaire. But that was only one of a thousand differences between them. One man had almost everything and the other almost nothing. Kennedy, for example, was spectacularly handsome. Although Oswald's voice hadn't yet lost its adolescent tone, he was already balding, and he had the physique of a ferret. The President had been a brave officer . . . had written a book which won the Pulitzer Prize. Oswald's record in the peacetime service had been disgraceful, and he was barely literate.

It is typical of Manchester that he shows little interest in research about Oswald and contents himself with reading his mind (he was going mad in the early evening of November 21, 1963) and blaming his condition, at least immediately, on his sexual humiliation by

his wife, Marina. This is not new and we can only accept that somehow Oswald did not lend himself to the passionate insignificant, having by the actions Manchester believed he took. That is, by assassinating President Kennedy, passed too thoroughly into the Significant to warrant much attention by the author.

Dallas and the violent feelings of Texas do not find their best expression in the complicated history of Oswald, but they made a remarkable impression on the world through Oswald's death in the basement. Jack Ruby and his strippers, his trial, the police, the courts, the witnesses. The historian would naturally be led to wonder and speculation about such a place and Manchester has a try at it.

The origins of Dallas' implacable hostility to the New Frontier lay in a profound longing for the values, real and imagined, of the old frontier. No one could successfully depict John Kennedy as a plainman. . . Chaps didn't look right on him, tooled boots wouldn't fit, and a five-gallon hat was preposterous. His legs weren't bowed. He never loped or spat. His accent evoked no memories of the golden West—it was almost another language—and his *Welansicht* was entirely

lacking in yippee.

The real question of Dallas and of Texas is how the resentful poor and the resentful rich came to share the same violent, hysterical notions of the possibilities of America. A very interesting anecdote is told by the photographer, Zapruder, who took the film of the assassination. He was standing by a man who said of Kennedy, "God made big people," and of himself "God made little people." And then he added, "But Colt made the .45 to even things up." Manchester is content to be horrified by this.

WHAT IS THE MEANING of all the intensity about who stood where, who told Johnson to take or not to take the oath, on the returning plane? There is a sense in the writing of this of a great drama but we are not given the terms of the conflict. It appears that the principals are very eager to have their actions known, to settle who was where. Certainly Mrs. Kennedy and all of those who had made the trip were naturally anxious to leave Dallas and return to Washington, but there was more than time involved. It is clear from the book that the grief was twofold, grief for the dead President and grief that Lyndon Johnson was the new

President. That this was their own doing did not make it easier. Perhaps one of the ways in which this curious book aroused some sympathy for Johnson was its picture of the Kennedy staff's surprising anger that Johnson was anxious to take the oath and the office. Johnson had wanted to be President as intensely as any man who ever lived, and even had he had an unimaginable reluctance, there was nothing he could do except to take the oath and the duties and privileges of the office. For this clear reason, the whole chapter about the flight back is a puzzle without a key. Here, inadvertently, the book makes a contribution to our understanding. We feel Power in the plane, Power waning and Power rising. The office is indeed all. We are not surprised to discover it.

Back in the White House, with the funeral ahead of him, Manchester reaches a sort of climax in his eccentric task. He is back at that work he loves the best: memorializing the dust-bin of history.

The Smiths, the Spaldings, Lem Billings, and Peter Lawford and his agent were on the third floor, and the widowed First Lady would be sharing the second floor with her sister, her mother-in-law, two brothers-in-law, a sister-in-law, a niece and her children. . . . Shriver took

up at a station by the white princess telephone. . . .

The white princess telephone.

President Kennedy is becoming much less real to us than, say, Roosevelt. An over-stimulated public is fickle. But the story of his assassination is a genuine one and perhaps Manchester's book will not pre-empt it forever. No doubt, it would have been better to leave the writing of it alone, to trust to time; but if that could not be, at least the interviews might have been given to someone who was capable of asking the interesting questions, of giving some sort of meaning and stature to all those who pass through these pages. And yet something about this book is revealing, if not about those in politics, about those who choose them. It may not be possible to conduct serious politics in America any longer. Calculation, manipulation are the skin and bone, but how mischievous and unmanageable they are. There is no shrewdness large enough to track the restlessness of that needle of preference. Manchester has written a sentimental book, often mean about Johnson—and lo, the light shone on the wrong side somehow and Johnson had reason to chuckle at his ill-treatment and the Kennedys to wonder at the perils of adoration. □

Troubadour

The Novels of Flaubert:
A Study of Themes and Techniques
by Victor Brombert.
Princeton, 301 pp., \$7.50

Intimate Notebook 1840-1841
by Gustave Flaubert,
translated by Francis Steegmuller.
Doubleday, 50 pp., \$4.00

The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas
by Gustave Flaubert,
translated by Jacques Barzun.
New Directions, 86 pp., \$1.45 (paper)

November
by Gustave Flaubert,
translated by Frank Jellinek,
edited by Francis Steegmuller.
Serendipity Press, 192 pp., \$3.95

V. S. Pritchett

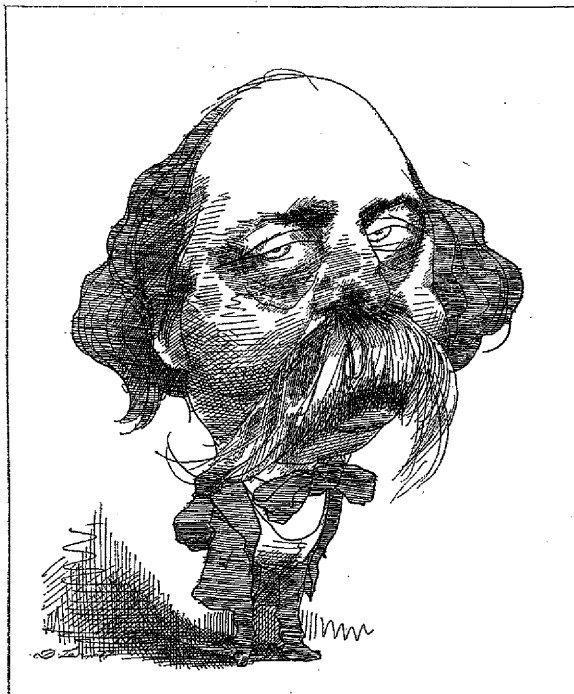
Although marred by tiresome affectations of style, Professor Brombert's book is a full and very suggestive scrutiny of Flaubert's love-hate of realism, as it is woven into the texture of his narratives. Flaubert's own ambiguities on the subject are clear. "I abhor what has been called realism, although they make me out to be one of its high priests," he wrote to George Sand. He hated reality. (Or rather it disgusted him; that is also an attraction.) Art held priority over life. If so much of his work is minutely drawn from everyday life, he forced himself to depict it (in Professor Brombert's words):

partly out of self-imposed therapy to cure himself of his chronic idealism, partly also out of a strange and almost morbid fascination. . . . Art for him was quite literally an escape. . . . For hatred of reality . . . was intimately bound up with an inherent pessimism—and pessimism

in turn was one of the prime conditions of his ceaseless quest for ideal forms.

In resilient moments he called himself an old "*romantique enragé*"; even, a *troubadour*.

deal owing to Marxist and Christian criticism, the quite gratuitous notion has got about that Flaubert was not what he ought to have been. He ought not to have been "an alienated bourgeois"; yet, surely, a vast number of



All this is well known; we know an enormous amount about Flaubert and Professor Brombert brings all the important critics into his net. But, a good

great artists are alienated from their dispensation and especially in the nineteenth century. Alienation is a cant term for a necessary condition. The

"hatreds" of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Flaubert, or Proust are the characteristic engines of a century bemused by its own chaotic energies. The force of criticism from an outside position of Marxist, Christian, or psychoanalytical neo-conformity is now fading and one is at least heartened to see Professor Brombert applying himself to "the unique temperament and vision that determine and characterize a novelist's work as we find them in the text."

There can be two weaknesses in this kind of criticism: first it puritanically denies side glances at biography, social influences, etc., but rather hypocritically assumes that we have had these necessities privately at the back door. Professor Brombert is not too strict here: how could one leave out the effect of atheistic medical observation and the morgue on Flaubert's mind? Even Flaubert's obsession with style seems to have something of medical specialization in it. Secondly, the critic may find too much in the text and build comically top-heavy theories on images and symbols, as one finds, for example, when this kind of criticism deals with Dickens: all that talk of baptismal water! (I have only one doubt about Professor Brombert's attention to key words: this is when he catalogues the symbols of liquefaction.)

In Flaubert's case the danger is usually small for he was the most conscious of artists; a most ardent collector of echoes and symbols. His documentary interest in things is also a concern with what they tell of the imagination. Things are corrupted or corrupting. He is tortured by the fact that the century has turned mind into matter, the ideal converted into ludicrous or detestable paraphernalia. But if anyone makes too much of his images it

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