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attack on China's vital interests as the recall of the Soviet specialists."

The depths of the dogma-drenched naïveté that lies behind these assertions is surprising in a man as worldly and knowledgeable as Deutscher.

In the same vein, and in a paragraph in which he ridicules Western Point Four programs, he blandly asserts that "the Soviet worker has begun to 'finance' in all earnestness the industrialization of the underdeveloped communist countries; and he 'finances' it out of the resources which might otherwise have been used to raise his own standard of living." One is tempted to comment about his embarrassed use of quotation marks, but a more important issue is why he suddenly seems to believe that the heroic workers have—in this single area—set the Soviet government's policy. They haven't, of course; it is still Deutscher's hated "bureaucracy," so we're back to wondering how the Soviet worker really feels about this charity (meager as it is). Otto Passman could probably make a more reliable estimate about

this than could a Marxist ideologue.

Isaac Deutscher keeps the faith. While mentioning Trotsky's "nostalgia for the heroic period of the revolution," he avers that now (1959) "a new Soviet generation is looking back to that era almost as much as he did. . . ." Thus, Trotsky was "the great precursor of another [era], which is only beginning." "History" is not mocked; the simple purities and Truths of the October Revolution are reemerging; the millenium does approach.

Meanwhile, Deutscher lives in London. This consideration, plus his own frequent use of analogies between political and ecclesiastical affairs and his unswerving faith, suggests the following allegory:

Once upon a time, there was a

believer-heretic-saint, who, in order to avoid the stake, chose to live among the heathen and who made his living by making insightful and delightful commentaries on how the Church hierarchy was defiling the True Faith. And all the while he continued to believe not only that the Church's doctrine—correctly understood, of course—was sound, but that the Institution that professed it was bound to be purified and to square its performance with its teachings. At the same time, there were those who believed that there was something to be said for the oddly dynamic and alluring practices of the heathen. But the believer-heretic-saint knew better because he had glimpsed Truth.

His life was full of irony.

Last Flight from Dallas

by Joseph Featherstone

You may have heard by now that William Manchester's sensation contains a staggering amount of information and there are patches of good reporting throughout the 647 pages. Barring new revelations, his step-by-step reconstruction of Lee Oswald's movements in the hours leading up to President Kennedy's assassination is about as close as we are likely to get

The Death of a President
by William Manchester
(Harper & Row; \$10)


to that event. Similarly, the account of Jack Ruby's entry into the Dallas police station is a piece of careful documentation that establishes once and for all the stupid complacency of the Dallas police. I was impressed, too, by the portrait of President Johnson. I didn't read the *Look* series, but had listened to talk about it, and I was surprised at the generous treatment of Mr. Johnson, at least in those rare moments when he is visible through the steam of Manchester's adulation for John Kennedy. By this account, Mr. Johnson was an awkward man who tried to behave admirably in an impossible situation; and succeeded.

For the rest, *The Death of a President*

is an ugly and pointless book, written in a garish style that parodies the New Frontier's own rhetoric. Manchester explains, among other things, his method of fashioning History:

"... I approached every person who might shed light upon this complex of events. I retraced President Kennedy's last journey from Andrews Field to San Antonio, Kelly Field, Houston. . . . Every scene described in the book was visited: the rooms in the executive mansion, Hickory Hill, Brooks Medical Center . . . the pavements of Washington, the pews of St. Matthew's . . . back and forth through the compartments of the Presidential aircraft. . . . I darted over the last lap of Oswald's flight to the Texas Theater. . . . I studied each pertinent office, embassy, and home—over a hundred of them—right down to the attic mentioned on the last page of the epilogue of this volume. . . . I even had the damaged Dallas-to-Bethesda coffin uncrated for inspection. . . ."

What is striking is the intensely-felt quality, the chanted repetition of the first person pronoun emphasizing Manchester's gloating obsession with all he



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had collected. He has the true collector's mania. Here he tells History about the presidential traveling party:

"There were S teams, D teams, W teams, secretarial pools, political advisers, medical men, the military, the luggage crew. . . . Each group had a standard trip drill and a bible. The luggage bible, for example, began with a pretrip trip to a closet beside the carpenter's shop in the White House basement. There, on the night before each take-off, an Army master sergeant extricated two portable three-inch plywood bedboards and a five-inch horsehair mattress and sent them via truck to the MATS (Military Air Transport Service) terminal at Andrews Field for loading. . . . Every member of the party was issued a 3x5 card telling him his own position in the caravan and everyone had been issued an identification pin. The background color for these changed from trip to trip, but the patterns were constant. Those for staff members were elliptical, with

a dot in the middle. . . ."

If this were more lighthearted, you might mistake it for Tom Wolfe's campy parajournalism, which often consists of long meaningless catalogues of miniskirt fabrics or lipstick shades or whatever. But Manchester is dead serious—I'm certain he never thought of smiling when he wrote the phrase "pretrip trip." It is this collector's passion that makes reading *The Death of a President* such an eerie experience. Certain writers—Dickens, for example—are able to communicate such an intensity of interest to the reader that common objects in their stories come to life and play out a surreal drama of their own. Elements of this exist in Manchester. All these scraps, these feelings for people's feelings, are gathered up the same greedy way as room furnishings and colors of automobiles—are so important to him that the reader comes to half-believe in their importance, the way a crowd will gather around a man staring fixedly into empty air. It is hard to stop reading even the most

fatuous passages. Thus dreamwalking, you pass through a description of how Dave Powers and somebody else picked out a coffin, and you scarcely notice when the collector, mindful of his obligations to History, has broken in again with his obsessive voice: "Tampering with their moving account is a pity, but the Irish, as John Kennedy once noted wryly, are not noted for their accuracy, and the casket in which he was to be buried is obviously a matter of some historical interest. Undoubtedly. . . ." Obviously, undoubtedly—the adverbs trail off down the winding mazes of Manchester's mind.

This is history in the sense that the souvenir hunters who put in bids for Lee Oswald's rifle are historians. There is only this ransacking of the past for its artifacts, as though if we picked up enough souvenirs, we could recreate the events and reach the men and women who lived them. With enormous labor, Manchester has constructed a kind of mad waxworks, bizarre, even repulsive, for strewn among the cameras, cars, weapons, notebooks, letters,

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1945-1966

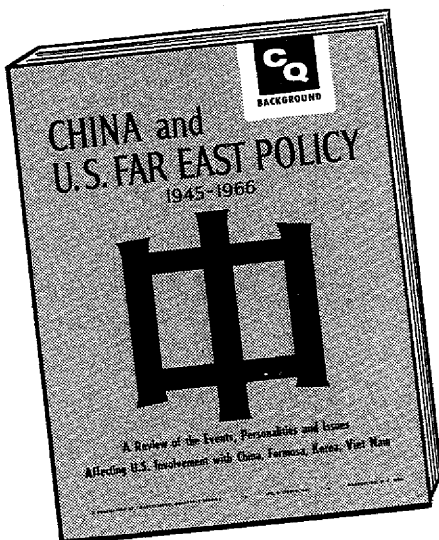
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and airplanes are bits of feeling and real human voices, fondled and then embalmed in purple prose, so that they, too, can be open to the public twenty-four hours a day.

Large tracts of the book present the appearance of a narrative. But then the chronology breaks, and the collector is forced to assign some sort of meaning to his specimens. His incoherence on these occasions, the wildly over-killed — if that is the proper phrase — metaphors, reveal how deeply and inappropriately implicated he is in his material. You get a taste of this in the foreword where instead of simply stating that he will not use footnotes, he feels obliged to put the matter in this odd way: "The moment I began to write I went to the mat with the issue of annotation. I arose with a painful verdict: no page-by-page footnotes. . . ." This distraught rhetoric pervades the chronicle. Right after the gruesome descriptions of the doctors' vain attempts to save President Kennedy's life, a new paragraph begins: "This was the hour of David Brinkley's pri-

vate ordeal." The "ordeal" turns out to be a fashion show that was occupying airspace that should have been reserved for the news from Dallas. We become numb to this warping of perspective, or else we begin to skip the crazed interpretive passages. For example, on Lee Oswald:

"Still there he is. He will not go away any more than John Wilkes Booth and Vidkun Quisling will go. They stain the pages of our texts, and so will he. Crucified and the crucifiers, Balder and Loki, Eichmann and the Jews are united in time's unscrupulous memory, and righteousness cannot divorce them. Yet inspecting opposite sides of a coin is difficult, especially when they must be examined at the same time, and in this crime coeval observation is necessary. The events of November 22, 1963 were synchronic. It was as though the Axis powers had surrendered, and Adolf Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt had died in the hours between noon and mid-afternoon in Washington of a single day in 1945."

The most vulgar sections of *The Death of a President* deal with Mrs. Kennedy, the state funeral, and the countless and pointless reminiscences of private grief. But the conventions we have for dealing with death are so inadequate that we even find ourselves

touched by this mortuary poetry. We like to imagine that we are no longer quite as moved as our grandparents were by locks of hair, scrapbooks of funereal verse, paintings of tombs, weeping willows, and noble bereaved lovers. But is Manchester's waxworks so different, after all, from the lugubrious stupidities Mark Twain made fun of in *Huckleberry Finn*?

"Despised love struck not with woe
That head of curly knots,
Nor stomach troubles laid him low,
Young Stephen Dowling Bots.

O no. Then list with tearful eye,
Whilst I his fate do tell,
His soul did from this cold world fly,
By falling down a well."

It is such a relief to come across other voices besides Manchester's sentimental, cracked keening. I remember two with particular gratitude. The first was Charles de Gaulle's: "As I grow older I think we are too casual about death. Why is it that only in your country and mine do we have this fringe of violent men?" The second was Daniel Patrick Moynihan's, saying, "We all of us know down here that politics is a tough game. And I don't think there's any point in being Irish if you don't know that the world is going to break your heart eventually. I guess we thought we had a little more time. So did he."

The Virtues of Verbosity

by Lawrence Graver

In the late 1740's, when *Clarissa* was reaching preposterous lengths, Samuel Richardson happily accepted the reassurance of a friend, who told him: "You have formed a style . . . where

The Soldier's Art
by Anthony Powell
(Little, Brown; \$4.95)

verbosity becomes a virtue . . . redundancy but conveys resemblance and to contract the strokes would be to spoil the likeness." With proper allowance for the differences between genius

and talent, something of the same argument can be made for Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, now (with its eighth volume) two-thirds done. The effect of the series is cumulative; all that happens in *The Soldier's Art* depends for force and meaning on the preceding seventeen hundred pages, and on the thousand pages yet to be published. Just as the abridgement of *Clarissa* distorts a book whose length is part of its power, so if Powell were to contract the strokes of his *roman fleuve*, he would spoil the likeness, and the fun.

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