

**Murder From Within**

by Fred T. Newcomb and Perry Adams. Copyrighted pre-publication draft, prepared for use of Congress and other interested bodies: 424 pages (typed and multilithed, paperback), not for sale. For additional information write Prose, Box 13390, University of California, S.B., Santa Barbara, California 93107.

**The Literary Impact Of THE GOLDEN BOUGH**

by John B. Vickery. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey; 435 pages, \$16.50.

Here are two disparate documents, curiously suited to some kind of joint notice. Fred T. Newcomb and Perry Adams' *Murder From Within* is an arresting new study of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (certainly *somebody* should be arrested), while in *The Literary Impact Of THE GOLDEN BOUGH* by John Vickery, Professor of English at the University of California at Riverside, offers first a kind of précis of Sir James George Frazer's tendentious twelve-volume encyclopedia of ancient myths, cults, rites, and anthropological oddities; then a broad survey of the belteristic sequelae of waves propagated by Frazer's laboring Leviathan; and, finally, a detailed analysis of *Golden Bough*-ism in the writings of William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce.

The highest common factor of these two not quite incommensurable works is the carefulness of their respective authors. Newcomb and Adams supply us in 424 pages with more than twelve-hundred docu-

mentary notes, besides an abundance of photographs, charts, and appendices. As for Professor Vickery, his academic caution may be calibrated by the care he takes in his preface to explain why he uses "Impact" instead of "Influence" in the title of his book. "The intent," he says, "was to convey a concern with literary forms, figures, and motifs that is both broader and rather less precise than that traditionally exhibited in older studies of literary influence." The point is well taken, and illustrates how Professor Vickery, though cautious, is not pedantic. He is concerned not with minutiae (though he can handle them) but with what we conspiratorialists call the big picture. As much can assuredly be said for Newcomb and Adams.

Or almost as much. For though they are concerned with but one example of Frazer's double leitmotif of the Sacred King and the Dying God, yet the sacrificial slaying in Dallas — at once ritualistic, practical, and mythopoetic — was a piece of dramatic, not to say thaumaturgic, surely not matched in modern history, not even by the executions of Charles I of England, Louis XVI of France, or Nicholas II of Russia. \* None of the three European kings parallels the Frazerian "Sacred King," so closely as does the American President. Nor in any of those three cases was the vacated office filled, since in every case a system was overthrown and the office discontinued. (Later reinstated in France and England. About Russia, who knows?) In the United States, on the other hand, succession to the supreme position occurred promptly in due form.

Frazer begins *The Golden Bough* with an account of the "strange rite of the priesthood or sacred kingship" in the grove of Diana at Lake Nemini near Aricia, in Italy. Vickery quotes Sir James as follows:

*In the sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prow! In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and to hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the role of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he returned office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.*

Vickery adds, "The King of the Wood, as Diana's guardian is called, is, then, a priest-king . . . This joining of secular royalty and the priesthood in one individual is, according to Frazer . . . a common feature of societies at all stages from barbarism to civilization."

Well, in the U.S.A. we have separation of church and state, right? Yes. Many feel, however, that the separation means in practice that while the church has lost secular power, the state has retained, or even increased, its own aura of sacredness. \* What preacher commands so much reverence nowadays as does a federal judge? (Believe me, I speak not for myself.) As for the Presidency, even Johnson, even Nixon, even Gerald Ford, have not indelibly profaned the office, however they may have disgraced it. To speak of an "Imperial Presidency" is probably less appropriate in the secular realm of worldly power than in the mystical realm of almost superstitious awe. Only the Praetorian Guard, instituted to protect the divine emperor, was close enough to him for its leaders to know his vulnerability, his fragile human-

ity. So they came to kill him for their sport, and hopefully for their advancement, though the sport was more certain. This was a far cry from the earlier King of the Wood in his lonely vigil near Lake Nemini, and also from the American Presidency yet to come. But the tension, the occult terror, in all three, though a variable quantity, is of one quality.

You see where I am going with all of this. According to Newcomb and Adams, "the office of Vice-President is a natural hatchery for a plot to take over the Presidency." To which it might be responded that for 174 years no such plot was ever suspected. Prior to November 22, 1963, seven Vice Presidents had succeeded to the office of President because their predecessors had died between elections. These were John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, Andrew Johnson, Chester A. Arthur, Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, and Harry Truman. None of these was ever suspected of plotting the death of his predecessor.

With the accession of Lyndon Johnson, however, the case was different. William Manchester has recorded in *The Death Of A President* that John Kennedy's brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, on hearing the dreadful news, "realized that Asia, Africa, and South America would assume that whoever had killed President Kennedy would now be Presi-

\* If we consider Massachusetts (a very appropriate place to consider), where church and state were united until 1833 (the U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment, protected establishment of a church by a state, if the people of the state so wished), it becomes obvious that as the doctrine of separation of church and state has overrun its original bounds the visible power of the church has greatly declined while that of the state — particularly of the federal government (so largely guided from Cambridge) has enormously increased.

Oct 4, 1975

SpVice -  
This will probably  
Backen my idea  
never known but  
would find the J.B.S.  
the next of kin  
can't go away to  
Wood here to  
hear from Frank  
what you think of  
the press in Chicago  
when you get a chance  
He reviewed a non-book!

dent.' Such assumptions were not confined to the Third World, though to be sure they were appropriate enough there since the Third World is *Golden Bough* country par excellence. In Western Europe and the United States there were numerous transparent implications and a few outright assertions that L.B.J. had caught the nearest way to the White House.

I myself wrote, in *AMERICAN Opinion* for September 1967, that "whoever killed John F. Kennedy . . . evidently wanted Lyndon Johnson to become President," but I did not conclude that whoever that was was Lyndon Johnson himself. I avowed ignorance, and I still do. Clearly, Lyndon did not pull the trigger, and it is not clear how he could have made arrangements for whoever did pull it. (Or *them*; we must allow the possibility that more than one trigger was involved.) I also admitted to certain speculations regarding action — not just failure to act, which is of record — by the Secret Service. But I thought the Secret Service was not big enough to pull off such a *coup d'état* by itself. The strategy, as distinct from the tactics, would have to come from elsewhere, from higher up. Newcomb and Adams suggest that it came from the Vice President, while he still is Vice President, has little or no actual power. How would he go about inspiring the White House Praetorian Guard (a symbolic term not necessarily, though quite possibly, meaning the Secret Service) to betray and murder the President for his benefit?

There are in our government more powerful men than the Vice President. Particularly, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Treasury (who controls the Secret Service), and the Attorney General (who controls the F.B.I.) have, while the President lives, far

more power than the Vice President. And there are men who do not hold any office, to whom these Cabinet officers, and indeed the President himself, may be firmly indebted. It is tricky business indeed to try to pin probable responsibility for the killing of President Kennedy on any one group or person, including Lee Harvey Oswald. Of only one thing can we be reasonably sure: that if Oswald alone was not guilty (and few now believe that he was solely guilty), then the Warren Commission was guilty of a coverup worse than Watergate.

But Newcomb and Adams have researched this whole matter far more extensively than I have, and they have come to far more specific conclusions. What they write is shocking — more shocking than some of the earlier, more frenetically expressed charges and insinuations — almost stunning because they are not insinuations at all but flat statements as if of known fact, known inferentially, to be sure, but inescapably. Then, as indicated above, they adduce a wealth, not to say a plethora, of documentation. Their imputations against the Secret Service are in general no more extreme than many which have long passed current against the Central Intelligence Agency, but there is a difference in that the C.I.A. is so vast and impersonal an organization as to cloak with anonymity any individuals who may have taken specific criminal action. (That is, of course, one of the liberally contrived features of the C.I.A.) The Secret Service, in contrast, is a comparatively intimate group and, despite its name, comparatively open. (Or is that an illusion?) To hear District Attorney Jim Garrison blast the C.I.A. and blast the late President Johnson (whose acquired office at once exposed him to, and protected him from, the most

serious accusations) is one thing; the following, I suggest, is something else: *Just before a freeway sign, the driver began to slow down the Presidential limousine.*

*Suddenly, a shot came from the top of Elm St., now a half-block in back of the President. A Secret Service agent in the Vice-President's follow-up car had raised his left hand out of the partly-open window. A revolver was fired skyward.*

*The crowd's attention was distracted from the Presidential limousine by the sudden explosion.*

*As if in response to this shot in front of the depot, a Secret Service agent in the front of the Presidential limousine fired his revolver directly at the President, striking him in the throat . . .*

Does that say that either Roy Kellerman or William Greer shot John Kennedy? They were the only two Secret Service agents in the Presidential limousine. Kellerman was the ranking agent in Dallas that day. Greer was the driver of the limousine. But perhaps "in the front of the Presidential limousine" should read, "in front of the Presidential limousine." Perhaps there was a rogue agent on the famous grassy knoll.

Question may be raised whether such things should be said, much less printed. I have talked to Newcomb on long distance, and he says he and Adams have not yet found a publisher. On the other hand, no one has challenged the propriety, or the logic, of what the two have done. I look at it this way: If a man sees, or thinks he sees, a crime being committed, or thinks he has located the perpetrator of a previously unsolved or wrongly solved crime — *and does not report it* — he is guilty of nonfeasance of civic duty. False alarms are bad and false

witness is a deadly sin, but only if the falsity is deliberate. Better honest error than the sin of silence, which may, in such a case as we are here concerned with, amount to complicity in crime.

Newcomb and Adams have not circulated their grave accusations surreptitiously; on the contrary, they have sent copies (each copy given a serial number) to some fifty Members of Congress, and evidently to at least some thirty others, since my copy is Number Eighty. My conversation with Newcomb by phone (some of you know how seldom I write letters) was in mid-August, at which time he had received some twenty replies from Congressmen, who were for the most part, as you will scarcely be surprised to learn, noncommittal. *Murder From Within* is no more part of a smear campaign than was Zola's *J'Accuse*, which detonated the Dreyfus affair. (Let it be noted that my own political predilections are quite different not only from Zola's but also from those of Newcomb and Adams, who are polite "Liberals." I have been charged with being neither.)

I don't know whether the Secret Service killed the man it is hired to protect or not, just as I don't know whether Huey Long was shot by his own bodyguard, as many believe in Louisiana. I'm not a detective, but just a fellow who sits and reads books. I also read newspapers and magazines. Sometimes I can't help thinking about what I read. As I read Newcomb and Adams I could not confirm or automatically accept what they were saying. But neither, as I examined their documentation, could I charge them with recklessness or arguing from prejudice or malice. Whether they have seen correctly what they have looked at, I think they have called the shots (if you will pardon the gruesome pun) as they have seen them.

But serious as the deed that day in Dallas was, it was not so serious as the moral climate in which it was done, for the latter comprises the former and much else besides. Oddly enough, here I am at one in general principle with many "Liberals." Only, they blamed the dead on Dallas, on "McCarthyism," on Rightwing Extremism; I blame it on those who have created the dominant decadence of the day. I refer to the moral climate of a nation which has lost its Christian faith and rejected righteousness, turning instead, when it is not totally enervated with despairing doubt, to hedonism and heathenism — turning, in fact, to such preoccupation with the kind of pagan rites as, largely through Sir James George Frazer's *Golden Bough*, the intelligentsia increasingly have come to observe, first in the sense of scientific study, then in the sense of religious celebration. The result is cultural regression in which the sophisticated emulate the primitive. In thought, word, and deed. The thought is murky, the words are incantational gibberish, and the whole mumbo-jumbo concludes with a catastrophe of blood.

The effects of this cultural regression are felt on all levels, though obviously it is most stubbornly resisted on the reactionary middle level. (Is it bad to react against regress?) Even the middle level feels it, however, as witness the feature story in the August seventeenth issue of *Parade*, a national Sunday supplement for families concerning — *promoting* rather — the degenerate Mick Jagger phenomenon.

At a higher level, on the inside, one reads *The Golden Bough*. Why? To escape the obligations of Christianity — individual and collective. If one can learn, as Frazer ambiguously teaches that the primitive death

burial, and resurrection of Christ constitute simply one more instance of the perdurable and widespread myth of the Dying God, then it may follow, may it not, that Christianity is no better than another pagan religion, or putting it another way that the pagan religions are just as good as Christianity? And then one would be as free as a happy pagan. Right? Just about as free, yes. Which is to say one would be enslaved to passion and superstition. And just about as happy. Which is to say, driven to kill one's own fair god. Happiness is the new Sacred King of the Wood who has just murdered his predecessor in the grove of Diana.

Professor Vickers opines, "Frazer stands with Marx and Freud, just behind Darwin as an influence on the thinking of the modern world." What do the four have in common? (By the way, Frazer and Darwin are as fine specimens of Nordic-cum-Celtic *Urbemensch* as you will find in the Valhalla of intellectuals.) They were all four out to do in Christianity. Our immediate concern, however, is with Frazer, "whose comparative method," writes Vickers, "with its genetic emphasis tends to make earlier religious practices preferable to the modern absurdity of man's bowing down to Christian superstitions."

How much more rational, instead of kissing a crucifix, to kill one's own king, in Camelot or wherever? Maybe we can raise him again from the dead, with incantational passages from William Butler Yeats or D.H. Lawrence, or *The Golden Bough* itself.

I have previously (I don't know how long ago) cited the passage from William Manchester's *The Death Of A President* reading in part as follows:

*In early April of 1960, during the fall that followed the assassination...*

... *Senator John F. Kennedy read Mary Renault's The King Must Die in his Georgetown home. Although fictive, this novel is based on a custom which Sir James Frazer [sic] found in every early society: the ritualistic murder of the folk hero. In Britain he was Arthur [etc.] ... These epics were more than fables. In the twentieth century that legend is vestigial. Yet no one familiar with world religions can doubt its viability, and the nature of its atavistic power must be understood if one is to grasp what happened to the memory of John Kennedy after his burial. . . .*

Yes, Well, quite possibly the nature of that atavistic power must be understood, too, if one is to grasp what happened to John Kennedy himself that brought about his burial. The Kennedy's inhabited a legendary, a mythopoetic ambience. The musical *Camelot* ran in New York from December 1960 to January 1963, not quite contemporaneously with the Kennedy Administration, and in some minds at least the White House became King Arthur's court. Which may account for Manchester's listing Arthur first in the roll of folk heroes from Frazer's *Golden Bough*, where as a matter of fact Arthur is not extensively treated, since he did not conform to the stereotype of the murdered demigod, but received a grievous wound in battle, from which he may or may not have died. Kennedy as Kennedy is more Frazerian than Kennedy as Arthur, but the Camelot charade does furnish a prologue to the final enactment in Dallas of the ritual of Diana's priest-king at Arica.

What is the point in this kind of speculation? Simply that if we are ever to identify the executioners of John Kennedy, we must look beyond simple gunmen working for the

Treasury Department's Secret Service (and whoever thought in 1963 that Governor John Connally would in 1972 be Secretary of the Treasury?); we must look even beyond ambitious politicians, no matter how unscrupulous; we must look for a di-  
thyrambic element. The perpetrator of the death in Dealey Plaza was a pagan poet, for whom the gunmen and the visible political heirs were puppets.

But I'm sorry; I was about to overstate or oversimplify the case. I do not mean one personal poet, I mean a school of poets. I mean a choir of hell. I do not believe that those who misrule the world are dry-as-dust accountants; I believe that they are, rather, persons of fevered imagination, persons who yearn, like Omar Khayyám, to "conspire/To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire," and "shatter it to bits." And some such persons have found each other, and formed their conspiracy. It was in some weird and wicked way a compliment to John Kennedy that they decorated his death with anthropological analogies, with golden boughs. They do not always do so. When Lyndon's turn came, there was no poetry, just the firm, enforceable command, Get out!

We live in an age of assassination, which means an age of alternating tyranny and chaos, of permanent terror. (But permanent does not mean eternal.) I understand well enough that we shall not successfully triangulate the assassination center simply by speculating on the psychological character of those who give commands either from or to that center. Yet I think we shall not invest and destroy the citadel of evil unless we comprehend the nature of the evil dreams of those within it, and especially of those who seem to be remote from it, but who control it nevertheless.

less. Lear said, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport." And men at the center who would be gods may feel impelled to demonstrate their power and (thus) pursue their pleasure by killing kings and Presidents. And to try to show that their lethal game is not brutal but intellectual, they might well provide a garnish of recondite mythology. — MEDFORD EVANS

**Samuel Johnson: A Biography**  
by John Wain. The Viking Press, New York; 388 pages, \$10.00.

Now that the failure of "Liberalism" is everywhere self-evident — as plaintive leaders of "Liberalism" would be among the first to admit, without, however, blaming themselves or the romantic mystagogues from whom their doctrines derive — it would seem to be time to look back to find, if possible, where we took the wrong turn. (Who are "we"? In this context we are humanity as represented by the English-speaking world, which has not been without influence on and from the rest of the world.) Our essential mistake may well be represented by our having chosen, some two hundred-odd years ago, to follow the lead of Jean Jacques Rousseau instead of that of Samuel Johnson. James Boswell, who knew both men so well, venerated and loved Johnson the more, but lived rather more thoughtfully according to the principles (or lack thereof) of Rousseau. John Wain writes:

*Boswell was thirty years younger than Johnson . . . . If Johnson had been born in 1680 and Boswell in 1710, the difference between them would merely have been the difference between youth and middle age; but since Johnson's birth date*

*was 1709 and Boswell's 1740 they are separated by one of those seismic cracks in the historical surface. Boswell is a new man in Johnson's world; he belongs to the epoch of Rousseau . . . .*

But Rousseau, having been born in 1712, was only three years younger than Johnson, and he died in 1778, six years before Johnson's death in 1784. How is it, then, that we speak of "the epoch of Rousseau" as something later than the Age of Johnson? Certainly not because of chronology itself, but because of human choices. So many eminent and talented scoundrels have chosen to take the self-regarding road of indulgence with Jean Jacques that the two centuries which have elapsed since the death of both authors have seen the counsel of the Englishman rejected and his reputation half distorted, half neglected, while the perfervid genius of Geneva has been fervidly followed by millions who lack the half-redemptive value of his genius.

John Wain is certainly right in saying, as he does, that Samuel Johnson has not yet "come into his rightful reputation," in part because "certain stereotyped misconceptions about him still persist." But it would be naïve to think that if the dominant intellectuals of our time knew more about Doctor Johnson they would regard him more highly. Sam Johnson was first of all a patently sincere Christian, second a prodigious scholar, third a loyal subject of the British crown, fourth a resolute and fearless individual who commanded as much respect as he gave — all characteristics to occasion "Liberal" hostility.

No man lived more basically by the Golden Rule than Johnson, as is shown by his varied and sometimes almost clandestine charities, which

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