

Criminals At Large

By NEWGATE CALLENDAR

There are those who will never believe the Warren Report's conclusions about the assassination of President Kennedy, and it is true that there remain certain unexplained ambiguities. Which makes it fair game for novelists. Only a short time ago, in Norman Lewis's "The Sicilian Specialist," the assassination was explained in terms of a Mafia contract. Now comes **THE TEARS OF AUTUMN** by Charles McCarry (Saturday Review Press, \$7.95) with a completely different hypothesis.

In this novel, it was the killing of Ngo Dinh Diem and

Ngo Dinh Nhu in Saigon that precipitated the tragedy. The assassination was a blood killing: life for life. Revenge, pure and simple. It is a clever idea, and McCarry makes the most of it. He builds his story around an American intelligence agent, a specialist in Vietnamese affairs who almost immediately realizes what has happened. A White House official, one of the Kennedy group working for the new President, takes him off the case. Naturally he goes off on his own, surreptitiously aided by his superior.

"The Tears of Autumn" is a closely plotted book, full of constant movement (the hero seems to be everywhere in the world at once), pulling in various governments hostile to the United States, not even sparing our own Government. It is an even better book than McCarry's generally admired "The Miernik Dossier" of 1973. Nobody is going to take its thesis

very seriously, but that will not interfere with the originality of the idea and the convincing way McCarry develops it. Put this one high on your list.

If you are a sucker for traditional British mysteries, they do not come any more traditional than the books of Elizabeth Lemarchand. Take her new **DEATH ON DOOMSDAY** (Walker, \$5.95). It starts with a map and a list of characters—shades of Dorothy Sayers. It has characters with such names as Lady Arminel Tittle. Within the text timetables are carefully worked out. There is even a villain who, on being revealed for the criminal he is, says (gloriously): "You vile devil, you've tricked me."

The plotting is scrupulously fair, and there are some pleasantly barbed observations on British nobility. The book is about a titled family that opens its house to the public. Presently a body turns up on the

premises—hidden in a priest's hole, naturally; every Elizabethan British house must have a priest's hole, and bodies must be hidden in it. Scotland Yard is called in, and Superintendent Pollard solves the case in classic style. Naturally. The body is not all that it appears to be. Naturally.

Still another book about the life and times of a Mafia big shot: **LOSERS, WEEPERS** by Edwin Silberstang (Doubleday, \$6.95). Nothing much new here. By now, the progress of a determined Italian boy to the inner circles of the Family is a story that is becoming boring. Mario Puzo took care of it once and for all. One little twist here, however: the Mafia man ends up against a tough Jew who has come up much the same way as the Italian boy. Sparks are expected to fly, and they do.

Desmond Cory is one of the more intelligent authors of

crime novels, but even he cannot overcome the artificial device of having the story in **THE CIRCLE COMPLEX** (Doubleday, \$6.95) told from the viewpoints of several different characters. But, that handicap accepted, "The Circle Complex" turns out to be an interesting puzzle, and it does have one of the most ingeniously worked-out frame-ups of contemporary crime fiction. The ending is curious but believable.

For most of its length, Graham Lord's **THE SPIDER AND THE FLY** (Viking, \$7.95) is a regulation novel about a Member of Parliament and the troubles of his love life. There is, however, some espionage at the beginning and some real excitement toward the end. Thus it can qualify as a novel of political intrigue—but just barely. In any case, it is written with sophistication and understanding. ■