

CENTREPIECE

A New Kennedy Theory

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I long ago got left behind by the stupendous outpouring of words about the murder of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, and have no intention of ever trying to catch up. The conundrums presented by the seemingly conflicting evidence, and by the confused, if not deliberately misleading, handling of the case, are unlikely ever to be wholly resolved. After all, books still come out about Lincoln's in some respects oddly similar murder by the actor, Booth. A century hence they will assuredly likewise be coming out about Kennedy's murder, arguing ingeniously that Lyndon Johnson was responsible, or General de Gaulle, or Mao Tse-tung. The only two writers on the subject who give me a feeling of complete confidence are Dwight MacDonald and Edward Jay Epstein. From the former I accept the conclusion that Oswald was indubitably the assassin; from the latter's book, *Inquest*, that the Warren Commission Report was carelessly produced, and leaves gaps and ambiguities in its reconstruction of the crime — for instance, as to whether or not Oswald might have had an accomplice.

Curiously enough, despite this very desultory and indeterminate acquaintance with a large and complex subject, I have all along had an inner certainty about how Oswald came to do what he did; almost as though I had seen it all happen in one of those vivid dreams which stay with one longer and more clearly than actual waking happenings.

Thus, for instance, when on the day following Kennedy's murder I was telephoned to for comment by some obscure news agency man (he must, poor fellow, have tried pretty well everyone, imaginable and unimaginable), I heard myself saying in a matter-of-fact voice: 'Oswald's bound to be killed, like Booth' — a prognostication which was fulfilled almost as I was speaking. In the same sort of way, I feel absolutely certain that Oswald was a double agent, entrusted first with a vague mission by Soviet Intelligence, then turned round by the FBI, and finally reduced to a condition of bemusedness and lost identity which led him, in a trance-like state, to murder the President, as van der Lubbe, in a similarly trance-like state, set fire to the Reichstag.

Lest this should seem far-fetched, let me recall that at one point the old Tsarist Political Police, the Okhrana, found themselves, without being aware of it, through their system of spies, *agents provocateurs* and double agents, actually engaged in plotting the assassination of the Tsar. They were

able to pull themselves up just in time, but it might easily have happened.

Anyone who knew the USSR in the early Thirties, as I did, will be familiar with the sort of foreign artisan or proletarian who, in relatively large numbers, came to Moscow with a view to taking Soviet nationality and settling in the country. Inclined to be self-assertive and to address one as though one were an outdoor meeting, they had a touching expectation that in a Workers' State they would be important and privileged by comparison with their status in their capitalist homelands. For the most part, they were soon disillusioned, finding that they were

not important or privileged, besides being treated with a certain amount of hostility, suspicion and derision by their Soviet fellow-workers. Some of them got sent to labour camps and died in the purges; some managed to make their way back home, battered and fiercely anti-communist; and some, I daresay, settled down with relative contentment to being Soviet citizens.

Oswald seems to have been a typical case, except that after three years he was permitted to return to America with his Russian wife — a rare privilege often denied to perfectly respectable diplomatic personnel, let alone a disgruntled proletarian like Oswald who had actually taken Soviet nationality. His treatment, it seems to me, points clearly to a mission. That Oswald was, evidently, quite unsuitable for anything of the sort is neither here nor there. As the Gouzenko, Petrov and other such cases indicate, the Soviet Intelligence has all the imbecile attitudes and fatuous practices of MI6, the FBI and the Deuxième Bureau, and is just as prone as they are to launch unsuitable agents on unprofitable enterprises. Everyone's Man in Havana is like everyone else's.

Back in America, Oswald's instructions must have been to live quietly and modestly until a Contact gets in touch with him and tells him what to do. Inevitably, the FBI pick him up; a target not even they can miss. One sees the poor fellow subjected to relays of grey-faced men with gleaming spectacles; indistinguishable from the ones who in Moscow briefed him and sent him on his way. From the FBI's point of view, Oswald is a great catch; if they manipulate him properly, and watch him closely enough, sooner or later the Contact will emerge from the shadows, and a great new Intelligence saga open up before them.

Now the question of Oswald's Cover arises. (Ah, Cover, what things are done in thy name!) One imagines the interminable conferences, the fat Most Secret reports considering the relative merits of Oswald's being a porno bookseller in Brooklyn, a waiter in Third Avenue, or an ageing college student at Columbia. Finally it is decided that he had best be a casual employee in Texas, where he is to establish progressive credentials. Thus we find him acquiring, and in a desultory way distributing, Hands Off Cuba leaflets; joining a pro-Castro organisation doubtless set up, financed and largely recruited by the FBI. He even — a master-stroke, that — makes some sort of application for a return visa to the USSR, going into Mexico without let or hindrance for the purpose.

Finally, there is the attempt on General Walker, a phantasmagoric figure from the extreme Right. This whole episode is so wildly unconvincing and altogether bizarre that it can only have been set up for purposes of Cover. Oswald, a competent marksman, capable subsequently of hitting a distant moving target with remarkable precision, puts his gun through the window of General Walker's study when the general is seated at his desk, and misses him. Only, surely, a high-grade Intelligence organisation would be capable of putting Oswald in

so preposterous a situation, and then, to make matters worse, ensuring that no convincing police investigation takes place afterwards.

Now try to imagine the state of mind of Oswald. What is really expected of him, he asks himself. Whose side is he on, if any? For that matter, who is he, if anyone? If it was so easy to point a gun at General Walker and pull the trigger, why not at someone more important? And hitting instead of missing. What about the President, for instance? So Oswald stations himself at the window, munches his cold chicken while he waits, then points his gun and this time scores a hit. On whose behalf? No one's, anyone's. I know - he kills Kennedy for Intelligence's own sake; the perfect I-murder. Perhaps in recognition of this, the Soviet authorities did an unprecedented thing; they handed over their dossier on Oswald to the FBI. For once the two services had a common interest - the maintenance of a common fantasy. In the context of the cold war, it was like those occasions in the 1914-18 war when at Christmas time the two sides suspended hostilities and fraternised, sharing their Christmas pudding and sausages and brandy-butter.

Of course Oswald had to die in case he should come to and become a person again. Ruby was standing by to kill him. No need to prod him on or persuade him. He was there, on the spot, with his gun in his pocket, and ready to do the deed - on television, before millions of spectators, 'for Jackie'.

A conspiracy theory would be much more attractive; that some malign force - segregationists, White backlashes, oil millionaires, Red Marxists, what you will - conspired to destroy a benign President. Or, alternatively, that by some unhappy chance a nut intruded into history. I see it differently - as a Kennedy and an Oswald, alike projections of the underlying conflict, the collective schizophrenia of our time, mutually destroying one another; two Bond readers colliding like atoms to create a mighty and far-reaching explosion.