

Gore Vidal:

The Art and Arts of E. Howard Hunt

From December 7, 1941, to August 15, 1973, the United States has been continuously at war except for a brief, too little celebrated interregnum. Between 1945 and 1950 the empire turned its attention to peaceful pursuits and enjoyed something of a golden or at least for us not too brazen an age. The arts in particular flourished. Each week new genius was revealed by the press; and old genius decently buried. Among the new novelists of that far-off time were Truman Capote (today a much loved television performer) and myself. Although we were coevals (a word that the late William Faulkner thought meant evil at the same time as), we were unlike: Capote looked upon the gorgeous Speed Lamkin as a true tiger in the Capotean garden where I saw mere lamtkin astray in my devouring jungle.

The one thing that Capote and I did have in common was a need for money. And so each of us applied to the Guggenheim Foundation for a grant; and each was turned down. Shocked, we compared notes. Studied the list of those who had received grants. "Will you just look," moaned Truman. "at those *ahh*-full *pee*-pull

they keep giving *muh*-nee to!" Except for the admirable Carson McCullers who got so many grants in her day that she was known as the conductress on the gravy train, the list of honored writers was not to our minds distinguished. Typical of the sort of novelist the Guggenheims preferred to Capote and me in 1946 was twenty-eight-year-old (practically middle-aged) Howard Hunt, author of *East of Farewell* (Random House, 1943); a novel described by the publishers as "probably the first novel about this war by an American who actually helped fight it." The blurb is unusually excited. Apparently, H. H. "grew up like any other American boy" (no tap-dancing on a river boat for him) "going to public schools and to college (Brown University, where he studied under I. J. Kapstein)."

A clue. I slip into reverie. Kapstein will prove to be my Rosebud. The key to the Hunt mystery. But does Kapstein still live? Will he talk? Or is he afraid? I daydream. "Hunt... E. Howard Hunt... ah, yes. Sit down, Mr. uh, Bozell? Forgive me... this last stroke seems to have... Where were we? Howie. Yes. I must tell you

something of the Kapstein creative writing method. I require the tyro pen-man to copy out in long hand some acknowledged world masterpiece. Howie copied out—if memory serves—*Of Human Bondage*."

But until the Kapstein Connection is made, I must search the public record for clues. The dust jacket of H. H.'s first novel tells us that he became a naval ensign in May, 1941. "There followed many months of active duty at sea on a destroyer, on the North Atlantic patrol, protecting the life-line to embattled England..." That's

island story has this our embattled yet still mightily sceptered realm owed to but one man..."

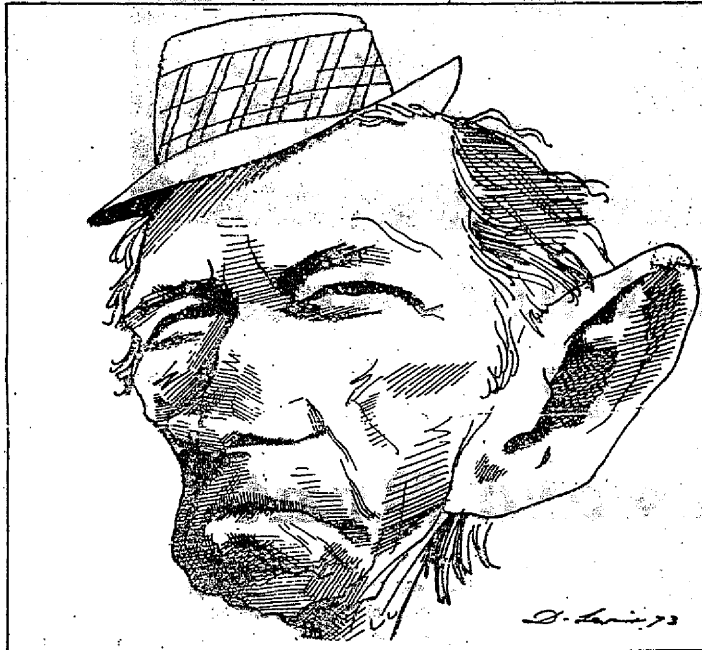
H. H. is a daydreamer and like all great dreamers (I think particularly of Edgar Rice Burroughs) he stirs one's own inner theater into productions of the most lurid sort, serials from which dull fact must be rigorously excluded—like the Random House blurb? "In February, 1942, Howard Hunt was detached from his ship and sent to Boston." Now if the dates given on the jacket are accurate, he served as an ensign for no more than nine months. So how many of those nine months

correspondent in the Pacific." *Who's Who* corroborates: "Movie script writer, editor March of Time (1942-43); war corr. Life mag. 1942." Yet one wonders what movies he wrote and what stories he filed, and from where.

Limit of Darkness (Random House, 1944) was written during this period. H. H.'s second novel is concerned with a naval air squadron on Guadalcanal in the Solomons. Was H. H. actually on Guadalcanal or did he use as source book Ira Wolfert's just published *Battle for the Solomons*? Possible clue: the character of war correspondent Francis X. O'Bannon... not at first glance a surrogate for H. H. who never casts himself in his books as anything but a Wasp. O'Bannon is everything H. H. detests—a low-class papist vulgarian who is also—what else?—"unhealthily fat and his jowls were pasty." The author contrasts him most unfavorably with the gallant Wasps to whom he dedicates the novel: "The Men Who Flew from Henderson."

They are incredibly fine, these young chaps. They ought to be with names like McRae, Cordell, Forsyth, Lambert, Lewis, Griffin, Sampson, Vaughan, Scott—not a nigger, faggot, kike, or wop in the outfit. Just real guys who say real true simple things like "a guy who's fighting just to get back to the States is only half fighting..." A love scene: "Oh, Ben, if it only would stop." She put her face into the hollow of his shoulder. "No," he said... "We haven't killed enough of them yet or burned their cities or bombed them to hell the way we must. When I put away my wings I want it to be for good—not just for a few years." A key motif in the H. H. oeuvre: the enemy must be defeated once and for all so that man can live at peace with himself in a world where United Fruit and ITT know what's best not only for their stockholders but for their customers as well.

An academic critic would doubtless make something of the fact that since the only bad guy in the book is a fat, pasty Catholic newspaperman, H. H. might well be reproaching himself for not having flown with the golden gallant guys who gave so much of themselves for freedom, to get the job done. In their numinous company, H. H. may very well have felt like an overweight Catholic—and all because of that mysterious accident in the naval



more like it. My eyes shut: the sea. A cold foggy day. Slender, virile H. H. arrives (by kayak?) at a secret rendezvous with a British battleship. On the bridge is Admiral Sir Leslie Charteris, K.C.B.: it's Walter Pidgeon, of course. "Thank God, you got through. I never thought it possible. There's someone particularly wants to thank you." Then out of the swirling fog steps a short burly figure; the face is truculent yet somehow indomitable (no, it's not Norman Mailer). In one powerful hand he holds a thick cigar. When he speaks, the voice is the very voice of human freedom and, yes, dignity. "Ensign Hunt, seldom in the annals of our

could he have spent protecting England's embattled life-line? H. H.'s naval career ends when he is "sent to Boston, to take treatment for an injury in a naval hospital." This is worthy of the Great Anti-Semanticist Nixon himself. Did H. H. slip a disk while taking a cholera shot down in the dispensary? *Who's Who* merely records: "Served with USNR, 1940-42."

I turn for information to Mr. Tad Szulc, H. H.'s principal biographer and an invaluable source of reference. According to Mr. Szulc, H. H. worked for the next two years "as a movie script writer and, briefly, as a war

hospital; in its way so like Henry James's often alluded to but never precisely by the Master named disability which turned out to have been—after years of patient literary detective work—chronic constipation. Academic critics are not always wrong.

The actual writing of *Limit of Darkness* is not at all bad; it is not at all good either. H. H. demonstrates the way a whole generation of writers ordered words upon the page in imitation of what they took to be Hemingway's technique. At best Hemingway was an artful, careful writer who took a good deal of trouble to master scenes of action—the hardest kind of writing to do, while his dialogue looks most attractive on the page. Yet unwary imitators are apt to find themselves (as in *Limit of Darkness*) slipping into aimless redundancies. Wanting to Hemingwayize the actual cadences of Wasp speech as spoken by young fliers, H. H. so stylizes their voices that one character blends with another. Although Hemingway worked with pasteboard cutouts, too, he was cunning enough to set his dolls against most stylishly rendered landscapes; he also gave them vivid things to do: the duck that got shot was always a real duck that really got shot. Finally, the Hemingway trick of repeating key nouns and proper names is simply not possible for other writers—as ten thousand novels (including some of Hemingway's own) testify.

In H. H.'s early books, which won for him a coveted (by Capote and me) Guggenheim grant, there is a certain amount of solemnity if not seriousness. The early H. H. liked to quote from high-toned writers like Pliny and Louis MacNeice as well as from that *echt* American Wasp William Cullen Bryant—whose radical politics would have shocked H. H. had he but known. But then I suspect the quotations are not from H. H.'s wide reading of world literature but from brief random inspections of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*.

H. H.'s fliers are conservative lads who don't think much of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. They fight to get the job done. That's all. Old Glory. H. H. is plainly dotty about the Wasp aristocracy. One of the characters in *Limit of Darkness* is almost unhinged when he learns that a girl he has met went to Ethel Walker. Had H. H. not chosen a life of adventure I think he might have made a good second string to O'Hara's second string to Hemingway. H. H. has the O'Hara sense of irredeemable social inferiority which takes the place for so many Irish-American writers of original sin; he also shares O'Hara's pleasure in listing the better-brand names of this world. Even on Guadalcanal we are told of a pipe tobacco from "a rather good New Zealand leaf."

By 1943 H. H. was a promising author. According to *The New York Times*, *East of Farewell* was "a fine realistic novel without any doubt the best sea story of the war." Without any doubt it was probably the only sea story of the war at that point but the *Times* has a style to maintain. Now a

momentous change in the daydreamer's life. With *Limit of Darkness* in the works at Random House, H. H. (according to *Who's Who*) joined the USAF (1943-1946); and rose to the rank of first lieutenant. It would seem that despite "the injury in a naval hospital" our hero was again able to

fight for human dignity, this time in the skies.

But according to Mr. Szulc what H. H. really joined was not the Air Force but the Office of Strategic Services, a cloak-and-dagger outfit whose clandestine activities probably did not appreciably lengthen the war. "As a cover, he was given the rank of Air Corps Lieutenant." Mr. Szulc tells us that H. H. was sent to China to train guerrillas behind the Japanese lines. Curiously enough, I have not come across a Chinese setting in any of H. H.'s novels. Was he ever in China? One daydreams. "Lieutenant Hunt reporting for duty, General." The haggard face with the luminous strange eyes stared at him through the tangled vines. "Lieutenant Hunt?" Wingate's voice was shrill with awe. "Until today, no man has ever hacked his way through that living wall of slant-eyed Japanese flesh. . . ."

In 1946, H. H. returned to civilian life and wrote what is probably his most self-revealing novel, *Stranger in Town* (Random House, 1947). This must have been very nearly the first of the returned war veteran novels, a genre best exemplified by Merle Miller's *That Winter*; reading it, I confess to a certain nostalgia.

Handsome, virile young Major Fleming returns to New York City, a glittering Babylon in those days before the writing appeared on Mayor Lindsay's wall. Fleming has a sense of alienation (new word in 1947). He cannot bear the callous civilian world which he contrasts unfavorably with how it was for us back there in the Pacific in our cruddy foxholes with the fringing sound of mortars overhead and our buddies dying for what? How could any blackmarketing civilian spiv know what war was really like?

Actually, none of us knew what it was like either since, as far as my investigations have taken me, no novelist of the Second World War or returned-veteran-from-the-war novelist ever took part in any action. Most were clerks in headquarter companies or with *Yank* or *Stars and Stripes*; the manlier was a cook. H. H. may have observed some of the war as a correspondent and, perhaps, from behind the lines in China, but no foxhole ever held him, no wolf ever fed him, no vastation overwhelmed him in the Galleria at Naples. But the daydreamer of course is always there. And how!

The book is dedicated to two dead officers (Wasp), as well as to "The other gallant young men who did not return." Only a book reviewer whose dues were faithfully paid up to the Communist Party could keep a tear from his eye as he read that line. Then the story: it is early 1946. Major Fleming checks into the elegant Man-

hattan flat of his noncombatant brother who is out of town but has given him the flat and the services of a worthy black retainer who could have played *Dé Lawd* in *Green Pastures*. A quick resumé of Fleming's career follows.

Incidentally, each of H. H.'s narratives is periodically brought to a halt while he provides the reader with highly detailed capsule biographies written in *Who's Who* style. H. H. plainly enjoys composing plausible (and implausible) biographies for his characters—not to mention for himself. In *Contemporary Authors*, H. H. composed a bio. for his pseudonym Robert Dietrich, taking ten years off his age, putting himself in the infantry during Korea, awarding himself a Bronze Star and a degree from Georgetown. A quarter century later when the grandmother trampler and special councilor to the President Charles W. Colson wanted documents invented and history revised in the interest of Nixon's re-election, he turned with confidence to H. H. He knew his man—and fellow Brown alumnus.

As Fleming orders himself champagne and a luxurious meal ending with Baked Alaska (for one!), we get the bio. He has been everywhere in the war from "Jugland" (Yugoslavia?) to the Far East. He remembers good meals in Shanghai and Johnny Walker Black Label Steak. Yet his memories are bitter. He is bitter. He is also edgy. "I can't go around for the rest of my life like somebody out of the Ministry of Fear."

Fleming is an artist. A sculptor. H. H. conforms to that immutable rule of bad fiction which requires the sensitive hero to practice the one art his creator knows nothing about. We learn that Fleming's old girl friend has married someone else. This is a recurrent theme in the early novels. Was H. H. jilted? Recipient of a Dear John letter? Get cracking, thesis-writers.

The civilian world of New York, 1946, annoys Fleming ("maybe the Far East has spoiled me for America"). He is particularly enraged by demobilization. "Overseas, the nineteen-year-old milksons were bleeding for their mothers, and their mothers were bleeding for them, and the army was being demobilized, stripped of its powers. . . . He had had faith in the war until they partitioned Poland again. . . . Wherever Russia moved in, that part of the world was sealed off." Fleming has a suspicion that he is not going to like what he calls "the Atomic Age." But then, "They trained me to be a killer. . . . Now they'll have to undo it."

At a chic night club, Fleming meets the greasy Argentine husband of his old flame; he beats him up. It seems that Fleming has never been very keen about Latins. When he was a schoolboy at Choate (yes, Choate), he met an Italian girl in New York. She took him home and got his cherry. But "she smelled of garlic, and the sheets

were not very clean, and after it was all over when I was down on the street again, walking home, I thought that I never wanted to see her again." Ernest would have added rain to that sentence, if not to the scene.

The themes that are to run through H. H.'s work and life are all to be found in *Stranger in Town*. The sense that blacks and Latins are not quite human (Fleming is attracted to a "Negress" but fears syphilis). The interest in pre-war jazz: Esiderbecke and Goodman. A love of fancy food, drink, decor; yet whenever the author tries to strike the elegant worldly note, drapes not curtains: tend to obscure the view from his not so magic casements, looking out on tacky lands forlorn. Throughout his life's work there is a constant wistful and, finally, rather touching identification with the old American patriciate.

There is a rather less touching enthusiasm for war: "An atom bomb is just a bigger and better bomb," while "the only justification for killing in war is that evil must be destroyed." Although evil is never exactly defined, the killers for goodness ought to be left alone to kill in their own way because "if I hired a man to do a dirty job for me, I wouldn't be presumptuous enough to specify what weapons he was to use or at what hour..." Toward the end of the book, H. H. strikes a minatory anti-communist note. Fleming denounces pacifists and "a new organization called the Veterans Action Council" whose "ideals had been a paraphrase of the Communist manifesto." Apparently these veterans prefer to follow the party line which is to disarm the US while Russia arms. A few years later when Joe McCarthy got going, this was a standard line. But it was hot stuff in 1945, and had the book chat writers of the day like Orville Prescott and Charles Poore not hewed so closely to the commie line *Stranger in Town* would have been much read. As it was, the book failed. Too avant-garde. Too patriotic.

The gullible *Who's Who* now tells us that H. H. was a screen writer, 1947-48; attaché Am Embassy, Paris, France, 1948-49. But Mr. Szulc knows better. Apparently H. H. joined the CIA early in 1949, and after a short period in Washington headquarters, he was sent to Paris for nearly two years. Now for a cover, he called himself a State Department reserve officer. But the chronology seems a bit off.

According to the blurb of a John Baxter novel, the author (H. H.) "worked as a screen writer until Hollywood felt the impact of TV. When unemployed screen writer colleagues began hanging themselves aboard their yachts, Baxter joined the Foreign Service." I slip into reverie. I am with Leonard Spigelgass, the doyen of movie writers at MGM. "Lenny, do you remember E. Howard Hunt alias

John Baxter alias Robert Dietrich alias..." Lenny nods; a small smile plays across his handsome mouth. "Howie never got credit on a major picture. Used to try to peddle these foreign intrigue scripts. He was hipped on assassination, I recall, Poor Howie. Not even Universal would touch him." But I fear that like Pontius Pilate in the Anatole France story, Lenny would merely say, "E. Howard Hunt? I do not recall the name. But let me tell you about Harry Essex..." If H. H. was in Hollywood then he is, as a writer, unique. Not one of his books that I have read uses Hollywood for background. This is superhuman continence considering how desperate for settings a man who writes nearly fifty books must be.

Who's Who puts H. H. in Paris at the Embassy in 1948. Mr. Szulc puts him there (and in the CIA) early 1949. Actually H. H. was working for the Economic Cooperation Administration at Paris in 1948 where he may have been a "black operator" for the CIA. With H. H. the only facts we can rely on are those of publication. *Maelstrom* appeared in 1948 and *Bimini Run* in 1949. *The Herald Tribune* thought that *Maelstrom* was a standard thriller-romance while *Bimini Run* was dismissed as "cheap, tawdry." (It is actually pretty good.) That was the end. H. H. had ceased to be a contender in the big literary sweepstake which currently features several young lions of that day grown mangy with time's passage but no less noisy.

In 1949, at popular request, the novelist Howard Hunt hung up the jock until this year when he reappeared as E. Howard Hunt, author of *The Berlin Ending*. Simultaneous with the collapse of his career as a serious author, his attempts at movie writing came to nothing because of "the impact of TV." Too proud to become part of our Golden Age of television, H. H. joined the CIA in 1948 or 1949, a period in which his alias Robert Dietrich became an agent for the IRS in Washington.

In Paris, H. H. met Dorothy Wetzel, a pretty girl herself given to daydreaming: she claimed to be a full-blooded Cherokee Indian to the consternation of her family; she may or may not have been married to a Spanish Count before H. H. One reasonably hard fact (ritually denied) is that she was working as a secretary for the CIA in Paris when she met H. H. They were married in 1949 and had four children; their marriage appears to have been idyllically happy despite the fact that they were rather alike in temperament. A relative recalls that as a girl Dorothy always had her nose in a book—a bad sign, as we know. She also believed in the war against evil, in the dubiousness of the battle which at the end of her life last December seemed to be going against the good.

From Paris the two CIA employees moved on to Vienna where they lived a romantic life doing whatever it is that CIA agents do as they defend the free world, presumably by confounding the commies. According to *Who's Who*, H. H. was transferred to the American Embassy in Mexico City in 1950. Latin America was a natural field for H. H. (with the Guggenheim money he had gone for a year to Mexico to learn Spanish). Also, in Latin America the struggle between good and evil might yet be resolved in good's favor. Europe was old; perhaps lost. John Baxter's *A Foreign Affair* (1954) describes H. H.'s life in those days and his settling views. *A Foreign Affair* also marks the resumption of H. H.'s literary career and the beginning of what one must regard as the major phase of his art. Between 1953 and 1973, H. H. was to write under four pseudonyms over forty books.

Three years in Mexico City. Two years in Tokyo. Three years at Montevideo (as consul, according to *Who's Who*; actually he was CIA station chief). During this decade 1950-1960, H. H. created Gordon Davis who wrote *I Came to Kill* (Fawcett, 1954). In 1957 H. H. gave birth to Robert Dietrich who specialized in thrillers, featuring Steve Bentley, formerly of the CID and now a tax consultant. Steve Bentley first appears in *Be My Victim* (1957). It is interesting that the Bentley stories are set in Washington, DC, a city which as far as I can judge H. H. could not have known at all well at the time. According to Mr. Szulc, H. H. was briefly at CIA headquarters in 1949; otherwise he was abroad until the 1960s. Presumably the city whose symbol was one day to be Watergate always had a symbiotic attraction for him.

From the number of books that H. H. began to turn out, one might suspect that he was not giving his full attention to the work of the CIA. Nevertheless, in 1954, H. H. found time to assist in the overthrow of the liberal government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala.

H. H. has now published *Give Us This Day*, his version of what really happened at the Bay of Pigs. He also tells us something about the Guatemala adventure where he had worked under a Mr. Tracy Barnes, who was "suave and popular... a product of Groton, Yale, and Harvard Law. Through marriage he was connected to the Rockefeller clan... Incidentally, both the OSS and its successor the CIA of the early cold war were manned by fun-loving American nobles. Considering H. H.'s love of the patriciate, it is not impossible that his principal motive in getting into the cloak-and-dagger game was to keep the best company. The hick from western New York who had gone not to Harvard but to Brown, who had not fought in the Second War but worked behind the lines, who had failed as a serious novelist found for himself in the CIA a marvelous sort of club where he could rub shoulders with those nobles whose *savoir-faire*

enthralled him. After all, social climbing is one of the most exciting games our classless society has to offer.

But as Fitzgerald suspected, the nobles are not like those who would serve them on the heights. They are tough eggs who like a good time whether it is playing polo or murdering enemies of the state. They take nothing seriously except their pleasures and themselves. Their admirers never understand this. Commie-hunting which is simply fun for the gamblers became for their plebeian friend a holy mission. And so it is the true believer H. H. who is in the clink today while his masters are still at large, having good times. Of course they make awful messes, as Fitzgerald noted; luckily the Howies of this world are there to clean up after them.

In recruiting H. H. for the Bay of Pigs, Barnes expected to use him as "on that prior operation—Chief of Political Action... to assist Cuban exiles in overthrowing Castro." This means that H. H. had worked with Guatemalan right-wingers in order to remove Arbenz. "The nucleus of the project was already in being—a cadre of officers I had worked with against Arbenz. This time, however, all trace of US official involvement must be avoided, and so I was to be located not in the Miami area, but in Costa Rica." Later in the book we learn that "the scheduled arrival of Soviet arms in Guatemala had determined the date of our successful anti-Arbenz effort." Arms which the American government had refused to supply.

During a meeting with President Idigoras of Guatemala (who was giving aid, comfort, and a military base to the anti-Castro forces) H. H. "thought back to the period before the overthrow of Colonel Arbenz when CIA was treating with three exiled leaders: Colonel Castillo Armas, Dr. Juan Cordova Cerna, and Colonel Miguel Idigoras Fuentes. As a distinguished and respected jurist, Cordova Cerna had my personal vote as provisional president..." But H. H. was not to be a kingmaker this time. Castillo Armas was chosen by the golden gamblers, only to be "assassinated by a member of the presidential bodyguard in whose pocket was found a card from Radio Moscow..." They always carry cards—thank God! Otherwise how can you tell the bad from the good guys?

One studies the books for clues to H. H.'s character and career; daydreams are always more revelatory than night dreams. As I have noted, H. H. chose Washington, DC, as setting for the Robert Dietrich thrillers starring Steve Bentley. Although he could not have known the city well in the Fifties, he writes knowledgeably of the broken-down bars, the seedy downtown area, the life along the wharves—but of course low life scenes are the same everywhere and I can see that I really recognize my native city in his hard-boiled pages.

Here is Georgetown. "In early Colo-

nial times it was a center of periwigged fashion and Federalist snobbery that lasted a hundred years. For another eighty the close-built dwellings settled and tottered apart until only Negroes would live there, eight to a room. Then for the last twenty-five years, the process reversed. The New Deal's flood of bureaucrats claimed Georgetown as its own... On the fringes huddle morose colonies of dikes and nances, the shops and restaurants have names that are ever so quaint, and sometimes it seemed a shame that the slaves had ever left." The narrator, Steve Bentley, is a tough guy who takes pride in the fact that Washington has "per capita, more rape, more crimes of violence, more perversion, more politicians, more liquor, more good food, more bad food... than any other city in the world. A fine place if you have enterprise, durability, money, and powerful friends." It also helps to have a good lawyer.

The adventures of Steve Bentley are predictable: beautiful girl in trouble; a murder or two. There is a great deal of heavy drinking in H. H.'s novels; in fact, one can observe over the years a shift in the author's attitude from a devil-may-care-let's-get-drunk-and-have-a-good-time preppishness to an obsessive need for the juice to counteract the melancholy of middle age; the hangovers, as described, get a lot worse, too. Mr. Szulc tells us that in real life H. H. had been known to tittle and on at least one occasion showed a delighted Washington party his CIA credentials. H. H.'s taste in food moves from steak in the early books (a precious item in wartime so reminiscent of today's peacetime arrangements) to French wine and lobster. As a student of H. H., I was pleased to learn that H. H. and his fellow burglars dined on lobster the night of the Watergate break-in. I think I know who did the ordering.

It is a curious fact that despite American right-wingers' oft-declared passion for the American Constitution they seem always to dislike the people's elected representatives. One would think that an enthusiasm for the original republic would put them squarely on the side of a legislature which represents not the dreaded people but those special and usually conservative interests who pay for elections. But there is something about a congressman—any congressman—that irritates the American right-winger and H. H. is no exception.

Angel Eyes (Dell, 1961) is typical. Beautiful blonde calls on Steve Bentley. Again we get his philosophy about Washington. "A great city... All you need is money, endurance, and powerful friends." The blonde has a powerful friend. She is the doxie of "Senator Tom Quinby. Sixty-four if he was a day, from a backwoods, hillbilly state that featured razorback hogs, turkey-neck sharecroppers, and contempt for Civil Rights... A prohibitionist and a flag-waving moralizer." One suspects a bit of deceit in the course of the Steve

Bentley thrillers. They are not as heavily right-wing and commie-baiting as the Howard Hunt or John Baxter or Gordon Davis works, while some of the coloreds are actually OK guys in Steve Bentley's book. All the more reason, however, to find odd the contempt for a tribune of the people whose political views (except on prohibition) must be close to H. H.'s own.

I suspect that the root of the problem is, simply, a basic loathing of democracy, even of the superficial American sort. The boobs will only send boobs to Congress unless a clever smooth operator like Representative Lansdale in *End of a Stripper* manages to buy an election in order to drive the country, wittingly or unwittingly, further along the road to collectivism. It would be much simpler in the world of Steve Bentley not to have elections of any kind.

Steve doesn't much cotton to lady publishers either. "Mrs. Jay Redpath, otherwise known as Alma Ward" (or Mrs. Philip Graham, otherwise known as Kay Meyer) makes an appearance in *Angel Eyes*, and hard as nails she is. But Steve masters the pinko spitfire. He masters everything, in fact, but Washington itself with its "muggers and heroin pushers and the white-slavers and the faggoty... This town needs a purifying rain!" Amen to that, Howie.

In 1960 H. H. published three Dietrich thrillers. In 1961 H. H. published two Dietrich thrillers. In 1962 there was no Dietrich thriller. But as John Baxter H. H. published *Gift for Gomala* (Lippincott, 1962). The dates are significant. In 1961 H. H. was involved in the Bay of Pigs and so, presumably, too busy to write books. After the Bay of Pigs, he dropped Robert Dietrich and revived John Baxter, a straight if rather light novelist who deals with the not-so-high comedy of Kennedy Washington.

H. H. begins his apologia for his part in the Bay of Pigs with the statement that "No event since the communization of China in 1949 has had such a profound effect on the United States and its allies as the defeat of the US-trained Cuban invasion brigade at the Bay of Pigs in April, 1961. Out of that humiliation grew the Berlin Wall, the missile crisis, guerrilla warfare throughout Latin America and Africa, and our Dominican Republic intervention. Castro's beachhead triumph opened a bottomless Pandora's box of difficulties..." This is the classic reactionary's view of the world, uncompromised by mere fact. How does one lose China if one did not possess China in the first place? And what on earth did Johnson's loony intervention in the Dominican Republic really have to do with our unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Castro?

H. H. deplors the shortness of the national memory for America's disgrace twelve years ago. He denounces

the media's effort to make JFK seem a hero for having pulled back from the brink of World War III. Oddly, he remarks that "The death of Jack Ruby and worldwide controversy over Wil-

liam Manchester's book for a time focused public attention on events surrounding the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Once again it became fashionable to hold the city of Dallas collectively responsible for his murder. Still, and let this not be forgotten, Lee Harvey Oswald was a partisan of Fidel Castro, and an admitted Marxist who made desperate efforts to join the Red Revolution in Havana. In the end he was an activist for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee." Well, this is what H. H. and a good many like-minded people want us to believe. But is it true? Or special pleading? Or a cover story? A pattern emerges.

H. H.'s memoir is chatty. He tells how in 1926 his father traced an absconding partner to Havana and with an Army Colt .45 got back his money. "Father's intervention was direct, illegal, and effective." Years later his son's Cuban work proved to be indirect and ineffective; but at least it was every bit as illegal as Dad's. Again one comes up against the paradox of the right-wing American who swears by law and order yet never hesitates to break the law for his own benefit. Either law and order is simply a code phrase meaning get the commie-weirdo-fag-nigger-lovers or H. H.'s Nixonian concept of law and order is not due process but vigilante.

As H. H. tells us how he is brought into the Cuban adventure, the narrative reads just like one of his thrillers with the same capsule biographies, the same tight-lipped asides. "I'm a career officer. I take orders and carry them out." It appears that ex-President Figueres offered to provide the anti-Castro Cubans with a base in Costa Rica (the same Figueres sheltered Mr. Vesco). But the Costa Rican government decided not to be host to the patriots so H. H. set up his Cuban government-in-exile in Mexico City, resigning from the Foreign Service (his cover). He told everyone he had come into some money and planned to live in Mexico. Privately, he tells us, he was dedicated to getting rid of the "blood-soaked gang" in Havana by shedding more blood.

This was the spring and summer of 1960 and Kennedy and Nixon were running for president. Since Kennedy's denunciations of the commie regime ninety miles off the coast of Florida were more bellicose than Nixon's, the exiled Cubans tended to be pro-Kennedy in the election. But not H. H. He must have known even then that JFK was a communist at heart because his chief support came from the pinko elements in the land. H. H. also had a certain insight into the new President's character because "JFK and I were college contemporaries" (what he means is that when Jack was at Harvard Howie was at Brown) "and I had met him at a Boston debut" (of what?) "where he was pointed out to

me... I freely confess not having discerned in his relaxed lineaments the future naval hero, Pulitzer laureate, Senator, and President."

Meanwhile H. H. is stuck with his provisional government in Mexico and he was "disappointed. For Latin American males their caliber was about average; they displayed most Latin faults and few Latin virtues." In other words, shiftless but not musical. What can an associate member of the Wasp patriciate and would-be killer of commies do but grin and bear it and try to make a silk-purse of two of his Latin pigs' ears?

In 1960 Allen Dulles received the top team for a briefing on the proposed liberation of Cuba. H. H. was there and tells us of the plan to drop paratroopers at "Santa Clara, located almost in Cuba's geographic center" while "reinforcing troops would land by plane at Santa Clara and Trinidad... on the southern coast." Assuming that Castro's troops would be in the Havana area, the Brigade would "march east and west, picking up strength as they went." There would also be, simultaneously, a fifth column to "blow up bridges and cut communications." But "let me underscore that neither during this nor other meetings was it asserted that the underground or the populace was to play a decisive role in the campaign." H. H. goes on to explain that the CIA operation was to be essentially military and he admits, tacitly, that there would probably be no great uprising against Castro. This is candid but then H. H. wants no part of *any* revolution. At one point he explains to us that the American revolution was not a class revolution but a successful separation of a colony from an empire. "Class warfare, therefore, is of foreign origin."

The Kennedy administration did not inspire H. H. with confidence. Richard Goodwin, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Chester Bowles "all had a common background in Americans for Democratic Action—the ADA." In H. H.'s world to belong to ADA is tantamount to membership in the Communist party. True to form, the White House lefties started saying that the Castro revolution had been a good thing until betrayed by Castro. This Trotskyite variation was also played by Manolo Ray, a liberal Cuban leader H. H. found as eminently shallow and opportunistic as the White House found noble. H. H. had his hands full with the Consejo or government-to-be of Cuba.

Meanwhile, troops were being trained in Guatemala. H. H. made a visit to their secret camp and took a number of photographs of the Brigade. Proud of his snaps, he thought they should be published in order to "stimulate recruiting"; also, to show the world that members of the Consejo were getting on well with the Brigade, which they were not.

At this point in time (as opposed to fictional points out of time), aristocratic Tracy Barnes suggested that H. H. meet Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. at the White House where Camelot's historian was currently "pounding out" the White Paper on Cuba for Arthur the King. Arthur the historian "was seated at his desk typing furiously, a cigarette clinging to his half-open mouth, looking as disorderly as when we had first met in Paris a decade before." Although H. H.'s style is not elegant he seldom comes up with an entirely wrong word: it is particularly nice that in the monster-ridden cellar of his brain the word "disorderly" should have surfaced instead of "disheveled" for are not all ADA's enemies of law'n'order and so *disorderly*?

During this meeting, H. H. learns that Dean Rusk has vetoed the seizure from the air of Trinidad because the world would then know that the US was deeply implicated in the invasion. (The word incursion had not yet been

minted by the empire's hard-working euphemists.) Then the supreme master of disorder appeared in the historian's office. Said Adlai Stevenson to aristocratic Tracy Barnes, "Everything going well, Tracy?" and Barnes gave a positive response. This exchange is important for it was later alleged that Stevenson had been kept in the dark about invasion preparations."

Later, waiting in the press secretary's office, "I sat on Pamela Turnure's desk until the getaway signal came and we could leave the White House unobserved, much like President Harding's mistress." Bull's eye, Howie! Worthy of Saint-Simon, of Harold Robbins!

D-Day. "I was not on the beachhead, but I have talked with many Cubans who were." Shades of the war novelists of a quarter century before! "Rather than attempt to write what has been written before; it is enough to say that there were no cowards on the beach, aboard the assault ships or in the air." But the Bay of Pigs was a disaster for the free world and H. H. uses the word "betrayal." As the sun set on the beachhead which he never saw, "only vultures moved." Although safe in Washington, "I was sick of lying and deception, heartsick over political compromise and military defeat." Fortunately, H. H.'s sickness with lying and deception was only temporary. Ten years later Camelot would be replaced by Watergate and H. H. would at last be able to hit the beach in freedom's name.

At least two other Watergate burglars were involved with the Bay of Pigs caper. "Co-pilot [of a plane that dropped leaflets over Havana] was an ex-Marine named Frank Florini," who is identified in a footnote: "Later, as Frank Sturgis, a Watergate defendant."

The New York Review

December 13, 1973

That is H. H.'s only reference to Sturgis/Fiorini. On the other hand, he tells us a good deal about Bernard "Bernie" L. Barker, "Cuban-born US citizen. First man in Cuba to volunteer after Pearl Harbor. Served as USAF Captain /Bombardier. Shot down and spent eighteen months in a German prison camp." H. H. tells us how Bernie was used by the CIA to infiltrate the Havana police so "that the CIA could have an inside view of Cuban antiauthoritarian operations." Whatever that means. Bernie was H. H.'s assistant in Miami during the pre-invasion period. He was "eager, efficient, and completely dedicated." It was Bernie who brought Dr. José Miró Cardona into H. H.'s life. Miró is a right-wing "former president of the Cuban bar" and later head of the Cuban revolutionary council. He had also been, briefly, Castro's prime minister.

Bernie later became a real estate agent in Miami. Later still, he was to recruit two of his employees, Felipe de Diego and Eugenio P. Martinez, for duty as White House burglars. According to Barker, de Diego had conducted "a successful raid to capture Castro government documents," while Martinez made over "300 infiltrations into Castro Cuba." At the time of Watergate Martinez was still on the CIA payroll.

Give Us This Day is dedicated "To the Men of Brigade 2506." The hero of the book is a very handsome young Cuban leader named Artime. H. H. offers us a photograph of this glamorous youth with one arm circling the haunted-eyed author-conspirator. It is a touching picture. No arm, however, figuratively speaking, ever encircles the equally handsome Augustus of the West. H. H. is particularly exercised by what he believes to have been Kennedy's tactic "to whitewash the New Frontier by heaping guilt on the CIA." H. H. is bitter at the way the media played along with this "unparalleled campaign of vilification and obloquy that must have made the Kremlin mad with joy." To H. H., the real enemy is anyone who affects "to see communism springing from poverty" rather than from the machinations of the men in the Kremlin.

"On December 29, 1962, President Kennedy reviewed the survivors of the Brigade in Miami's Orange Bowl. Watching the televised ceremony, I saw Pepe San Román give JFK the Brigade's flag" (Footnote: "Artime told me the flag was a replica, and that the Brigade feeling against Kennedy was so great that the presentation nearly did not take place") "for temporary safe-keeping. In response the President said, 'I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this Brigade in a free Havana.'" H. H. adds sourly, "One wonders what time period he had in mind."

Who's Who tells us that H. H. was a consultant with the Defense Department 1960-1965. Mr. Szulc finds this period of H. H.'s saga entirely murky. Apparently H. H. became personal assistant to Allen Dulles after the Bay of Pigs. Mr. Szulc also tells us that in 1963 the American ambassador to Spain refused to accept H. H. as deputy chief of the local CIA station because of H. H.'s peculiar activities as station chief for Uruguay in 1959. After persuading President Nardone to ask Eisenhower to keep him *en poste* in Uruguay, H. H. then tried to overthrow the same President Nardone without telling the American ambassador. It was this tactless treatment of the ambassador that cost H. H. the Spanish post.

One of H. H.'s friends told Mr. Szulc, "This is when Howard really began losing touch with reality."¹ In *Give Us This Day* H. H. tells how he tried to sell Tracy Barnes on having Castro murdered. Although H. H. gives the impression that he failed to persuade the CIA to have a go at killing the Antichrist, columnist Jack Anderson has a different story to tell about the CIA. In a column for January 25, 1971, he tells us that an attempt was made to kill Castro in March, 1961, a month before the invasion. Castro was

The New York Times, Sunday Magazine, June 3, 1973, p. 11

to be poisoned with a capsule in his food. Capsule to be supplied by one John Roselli—a Las Vegas mobster who was eager to overthrow Castro and re-open the mob's casinos. Also involved in the project was a former FBI agent Robert Makeu, later to be Howard Hughes's viceroys at Las Vegas.

It is known that Castro did become ill in March. In February-March, 1963, the CIA again tried to kill Castro. Anderson wonders, not illogically, if Castro might have been sufficiently piqued by these attempts on his life to want to knock off Kennedy. This was Lyndon Johnson's theory. He thought the Castroites had hired Oswald. The Scourge of Asia was also distressed to learn upon taking office that "We had been operating a damned Murder, Inc., in the Caribbean." Since it is now clear to everyone except perhaps Earl Warren that Oswald was part of a conspiracy, who were his fellow conspirators? Considering Oswald's strenuous attempts to identify himself with Castro, it is logical to assume that his associates had Cuban interests. But which Cubans? Pro-Castro or anti-Castro?

I think back on the evidence Sylvia Odio gave the FBI and the Warren Commission's investigators.² Mrs. Odio was an anti-Castro, pro-Manolo Ray Cuban exile who two months before the assassination of President Kennedy was visited in her Dallas

apartment by three men. Two were Latins (Mexican, she thought, they weren't the right color for Cubans). The third, she maintained, was Oswald. They said they were members of her friend Manolo Ray's organization and one of them said that their companion Oswald thought Kennedy should have been shot after the Bay of Pigs. If Mrs. Odio is telling the truth, then whoever was about to murder Kennedy may have wanted the left-wing anti-Castro group of Manolo Ray to get the credit.³

During this period Oswald's behavior was odd but not, necessarily, as official chroniclers maintain, mad. Oswald was

² Warren Commission *Hearings*, Vols. XI: 369-381 and XXVI: 834-838; see also National Archives: Commission Document No. 1553.

³ The Warren Commission and the FBI never satisfactorily identified Mrs. Odio's visitors. Just before the Report was finished the FBI reported to the Warren Commission that one Loran Eugene Hall, "a participant in numerous anti-Castro activities," had recalled visiting her with two other men, one of them, William Seymour, resembling Oswald. But after the Report appeared the FBI sent the Commission a report that Hall had retracted his story and that Mrs. Odio could not identify Hall or Seymour as the men she had seen. (See Richard H. Popkin, *The Second Oswald* [Avon, 1967], pp. 75-80.)

Hall had already been brought to the Commission's attention in June, 1964, under the names of "Lorenzo Hall, alias Lorenzo Pascilio." The FBI heard in Los Angeles that Hall and a man called Jerry Patrick Hemming had pawned a 30.06 rifle, which Hall redeemed shortly before the assassination with a check drawn on the account of the "Committee to Free Cuba." Hemming was identified in 1962 as one of the leaders of Frank Sturgis's anti-Castro brigade. (See Warren Commission Document 1179: 296-298 and Hans Tahnner, *Counter-Revolutionary Brigade* [London, 1962], p. 127.)

doing his best to become identified publicly with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee as well as setting himself up privately as a sort of Soviet spy by writing a mysterious "fact"-filled letter to the Soviet Embassy. That the Russians were genuinely mystified by his letter was proved when they turned it over to the American government after the assassination. Also, most intriguingly, Oswald visited Mexico City in September, 1963, when, according to Mr. Szulc, H. H. was acting chief of the CIA station there. Finally, Oswald's widow tells us that he took a pot-shot at the reactionary General Walker, the sort of thing a deranged commie would do. Was he then simply a deranged commie? The right-wing Cubans and their American admirers certainly want us to think so.

After the murder of the President, one of those heard from was Frank Fiorini/Sturgis, who was quoted in the

Pompano Beach, Florida, *Sun-Sentinel* to the effect that Oswald had been in touch with Cuban Intelligence the previous year, as well as with pro-Castroites in Miami, Mexico City, New Orleans. A Mrs. Marjorie Brazil reported that she had heard that Oswald had been in Miami demonstrating in front of the office of the Cuban Revolutionary Council headed by our old friend Dr. Miró Cardona. A sister of one Miguel Suarez told nurse Marjorie Heimbecker who told the FBI that JFK would be killed by Castroites. The FBI seems eventually to have decided that they were dealing with a lot of wishful thinkers.

Finally, Fiorini/Sturgis denied the story in the *Sun-Sentinel*; he said that he had merely speculated with the writer on some of the gossip that was making the rounds in Miami's anti-Castro Cuban community. The gossip, however, tended to be the same: Oswald had killed Kennedy, on orders from Castro or from those of his admirers who thought that the murder of an American president might in some way save the life of a Cuban president.

Yet the only Cuban group that would be entirely satisfied by Kennedy's death would be the right-wing enemies of Castro who held Kennedy responsible for their humiliation at the Bay of Pigs. To kill him would avenge their honor. Best of all, setting up Oswald as a "pro-Castro, pro-Moscow agent, they might be able to precipitate some desperate international crisis that would serve their cause. Certainly Castro at this date had no motive for killing Kennedy, who had ordered a crack-down on clandestine Cuban raids from the United States—of the sort that Eugenio Martinez is alleged so often to have made.

I suspect that whoever planned the murder must have been astonished at the reaction of the American establishment. The most vengeful of all the Kennedys made no move to discover who really killed his brother. In this, Bobby was a true American: close ranks, pretend there was no conspiracy, do not rock the boat—particularly when both Moscow and Havana seemed close to nervous breakdowns at the thought that they might be implicated in the death of the Great Prince. The Warren Report then assured the nation that the lone killer who hurls the American psyche had struck again. The fact that Bobby Kennedy accepted the Warren Report was proof to most people (myself among them) that Oswald acted alone. It was not until several years later that I learned from a member of the family that although Bobby was head of the Department of Justice at the time, he refused to look at any of the FBI reports or even speculate on what might have happened at Dallas. Too shaken up, I was told.

Fortunately, others have tried to unravel the tangle. Most intriguing is Richard H. Popkin's theory that there were two Oswalds.⁴ One was a bad shot; did not drive a car; wanted the world to know that he was pro-Castro. This Oswald was caught by the Dallas police and murdered on television. The other Oswald was seen driving a car, firing at a rifle range, perhaps talking to Mrs. Odio; he was hired by...? I suspect we may find out one of these days.

In 1962 H. H. published *A Gift for Gomala* as John Baxter. This was an attempt to satirize the age of Camelot. Lippincott suggests that it is "must reading for followers of Reston, Alsop and Lippmann who are looking for comic relief." One would think that anyone who tried to follow all three of those magi would be beyond comic relief. The tale is clumsy: a black opportunist dresses up as a representative from a new African nation and tries to get a loan from Congress; on the verge of success, Gomala ceases to exist. Like Evelyn Waugh, H. H. thinks African republics are pretty joky affairs but he gives us no jokes.

For about a year during this period (1965-1966) H. H. was living in Spain. Whether or not he was working for the CIA is moot. We do know that he was creating a new literary persona: David St. John, whose speciality is thrusting a CIA man named Peter Ward into

⁴The Second Oswald.

exotic backgrounds with a bit of diabolism thrown in.

As Gordon Davis, H. H. also wrote *Where Murder Waits*, a book similar in spirit to *Limit of Darkness*. In the early work H. H. daydreams about the brave lads who flew out of Henderson, often to death against the foe. In *Where Murder Waits* H. H.'s dream self hits the beach at the Bay of Pigs, that beach where, finally, only vultures stirred. Captured, the hero spends nine months in the prisons of the archfiend Castro. Once again: Expiation for H. H. in dreams begins self-love.

It is curious that as H. H. moves out of the shadows and into the glare of Watergate his books are more and more open about his political obsessions. *The Coven*, by David St. John, is copyrighted 1972. In July of 1971, on the recommendation of Charles W. ("If you have them by the balls their hearts and minds will follow") Colson, H. H. was hired by the White House and became a part-time criminal at \$100 a day. Zeal for his new masters informs every page of *The Coven*. The villain is the hustling handsome rich young Senator Vane with "a big appeal to the young and disadvantaged" (i.e., comics)—just like Jack-Bobby-Teddy. The description of Mrs. Vane makes one think irresistibly (and intentionally) of Madame Quassia—not to mention

Harold Robbins, Jacqueline Susann, and the horde of other writers who take such people and put them in books thinly revealed rather than disguised.

"The Vanes are legally married to each other and that's about all. Their private lives are separate. He's a terror among the chicks, and she gets her jollies from the artists, writers and beach boy types Vane gets public grants for." She also seduces her narrator. "I had seen a hundred magazine and newspaper photographs of her cutting ribbons, first-nighting, fox-hunting at Warrenton, and empathizing with palsied kids..." But, as H. H. reminds us, "only a fool thinks there's any resemblance between a public figure's public image and reality." Fortunately the narrator is able to drive the Vane family out of public life (they are prone to taking off their clothes at orgies where the devil is invoked). H. H. believes quite rightly that the presidency must never go to devil-worshippers who appeal to the young and disadvantaged.

The chronology of H. H.'s life is a tangle until 1968 when he buys Witches Island, a house at Potomac, Maryland (his wife went in for horses).

On April 30, 1970, the new squire retired from the CIA under a cloud—he had failed too often. But H. H. had a pension; he also had a lively new pseudonym David St. John; his wife Dorothy had a job at the Spanish Embassy. But H. H. has always needed money so he went to work for Robert R. Mullen and Company, a PR firm with links to the Republican party and offices not only a block from the White House but across the street from the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Mullen represented Howard Hughes in Washington. H. H. knew his way around the Hughes operation—after all, Hughes's man in Las Vegas was Robert Maheu, whose contribution to Cuban affairs, according to Jack Anderson,⁵ was to "set up the Castro assassination" plot in 1961, and whose contribution to Nixon was to funnel \$100,000 to Bebe Rebozo in 1970. But Hughes sacked Maheu late in 1970. In 1971 H. H. found a second home at the White House, assigned with G. Gordon Liddy to "the Room 16 project" where the Administration prepared its crimes.

Room 16 marks the high point of H. H.'s career; his art and arts were now perfected. Masterfully, he forged; he burgled; he conspired. The Shakespeare of the CIA had found, as it were, his Globe Theatre. Nothing was beyond him—including tragedy. According to *Newsweek*, John Dean told Senate investigators that H. H. "had a contract" from "low-level White House officials" to murder the President of Panama for not obeying with sufficient zeal the American Bureau of Narcotics directives. "Hunt, according to Dean, had his team in Mexico before the mission was aborted."⁶

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December 13, 1973

As the world now knows, on the evening of June 16, 1972, H. H. gave a splendid lobster dinner to the Watergate burglars and then sent Bernie Barker and his Cubans into battle to bug the offices of the Democratic party because H. H. had been told by G. Gordon Liddy "that Castro funds were going to the Democrats in hopes that a rapprochement with Cuba would be effected by a successful Democratic presidential candidate." H. H. has also said (*Time*, August 27, 1973) that his own break-in of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist was an attempt to find out whether Ellsberg "might be a controlled agent for the Sovs."

One daydreams: "Doctor Fielding, I have these terrible headaches. They started just after I met my control Ivan and he said, 'Well, boychick, it's been five years now since you signed on as a controlled agent. Now I guess you know that if there's one thing we Sovs hate it's a non-producer so...' Doctor Fielding, I hope you're writing all this down and not just staring out the window like last time."

Now for the shooting of George Wallace. It is not unnatural to suspect the White House burglars of having a hand in the shooting. But suspicion is not evidence and there is no evidence that H. H. was involved. Besides, a good CIA man would no doubt have preferred the poison capsule to a gunshot—slipping ole George the sort of slow but lethal dose that Castro's powerful gut rejected. In an AP

⁵ *Japan Times*, January 23, 1971.

⁶ *Newsweek*, June 18, 1973, p. 22.

story this summer,⁷ former CIA official Miles Copeland is reported to have said that "senior agency officials are convinced Senator Edward Muskie's damaging breakdown during the presidential campaign last year was caused by convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt or his henchman spiking his drink with a sophisticated form of LSD."

When Wallace ran for president in 1968, he got 13 percent of the vote; and Nixon nearly lost to Humphrey. In May, 1972, 17 percent favored Wallace for president in the Harris Poll. Wallace had walked off with the Michigan Democratic primary. Were he to continue his campaign for president as an independent or as a Democrat in states where he was not filed under his own party, he could have swung the elec-

⁷ *AP Dispatch*, London, August 17, 1973.

tion to the Democrats, or at least denied Nixon a majority and sent the election to the House.

"This entire strategy of ours," Robert Finch said in March, 1972, "depends on whether George Wallace makes a run on his own." For four years Nixon had done everything possible to keep Wallace from running; and failed. "With Wallace apparently stronger in the primaries in 1972 than he had been before," Theodore White observed, "with the needle sticking at 43 percent of the vote for Nixon, the President was still vulnerable—until, of course, May 15 and the shooting. Then it was all over."⁸

Wallace was shot by the now familiar lone assassin—a demented (as usual) busboy named Arthur Bremer. Then on June 21, 1973, the headline in the

⁸ *The Making of the President, 1972* (Atheneum, 1973), p. 238.

New York Post was "Hunt Tells of Orders to Raid Bremer's Flat."

According to the story by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, H. H. told the Senate investigators that an hour after Wallace was shot, Colson ordered him to fly to Milwaukee and burglarize the flat of Arthur H. Bremer, the would-be assassin—in order to connect Bremer somehow with the commies? Characteristically, the television senators let that one slip by them. As one might expect, Colson denied ordering H. H. to Milwaukee for any purpose. Colson did say that he had talked to H. H. about the shooting. Colson also said that he had been having dinner with the President that evening. Woodward's and Bernstein's "White House source" said, "The President became deeply upset and voiced concern that the attempt on Wallace's life might have been made by someone with ties to the Republican Party or

the Nixon campaign." This, Nixon intuited, might cost him the election.⁹

May 15, 1972, Arthur H. Bremer shot George Wallace, governor of Alabama, at Laurel, Maryland, and was easily identified as the gunman and taken into custody. Nearby in a rented car, the police found Bremer's diary (odd that in the post-Gutenberg age Oswald, Sirhan, and Bremer should have all committed to paper their *pensées*).

According to the diary, Bremer had tried to kill Nixon in Canada but failed to get close enough. He then decided to kill George Wallace. The absence of any logical motive is now familiar to most Americans, who are quite at home with the batty killer who acts alone in order to be on television, to be forever entwined with the golden legend of the hero he has gunned down. In a nation that worships psychopaths, the Oswald-Bremer-Sirhan-Ray figure is to the general illness what Robin Hood was to a greener, saner world.

Bremer's diary is a fascinating work—of art? From what we know of the twenty-two-year-old author he did not have a literary turn of mind (among his effects were comic books, some porno). He was a television baby, and a dull one. Politics had no interest for him. Yet suddenly—for reasons he never gives us—he decides to kill the President and starts to keep a diary on April 4, 1972.

According to Mr. Szulc, in March, 1972, H. H. visited Dita ("call me Mother") Beard in Denver. Wearing a red wig and a voice modulator, H. H. persuaded Dita to denounce as a forgery the memo she had written linking ITT's pay-off to the Republican party with the government's subsequent dropping of the best part of its antitrust suit against the conglomerate. In May, H. H. was installing the first set of bugs at the Democratic headquarters. His movements between April 4 and May 15 might be usefully examined—not to mention those of G. Gordon Liddy, et al.

For someone who is supposed to be nearly illiterate there are startling literary references and flourishes in the Bremer diary. The second entry contains "You heard of 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich'? Yesterday was my day." The misspelling of Denisovich is not bad at all. Considering the fact that the name is a hard one for English-speaking people to get straight, it is something of a miracle that Bremer could sound the four syllables of the name correctly in his head. Perhaps he had the book in front of him but if he had, he would not have got the one letter wrong.

The same entry produces more mysteries. "Wallace got his big votes from Republicans who didn't have any choice of candidates on their own ballot. Had only about \$1055 when I left." This is the first and only mention of politics until page 45 when he describes his square clothes and haircut as "just a disguise to get close to Nixon."

One reference to Wallace at the beginning; then another one to Nixon a dozen pages later. Also, where did the \$1,055 come from? Finally, a minor psychological point—Bremer re-

⁹ *New York Post*, June 21, 1973, reprinting a *Washington Post* story.

fers to some weeds as "taller than me 5'6." I doubt if a neurotic twenty-two-year-old would want to remind himself on the page that he is only 5'6" tall. When people talk to themselves they seldom say anything so obvious. On the other hand, authors like this sort of detail.

Popular paperback fiction requires a fuck scene no later than a dozen pages into the narrative. The author of the diary gives us a good one. Bremer goes to a massage parlor in New York (he has told the diary that he is a

virgin would he? Perhaps) where he is given an unsatisfying hand-job. The scene is nicely done and the author writes correctly and lucidly until, suddenly, a block occurs and he can't spell anything right—as if the author suddenly remembers that he is meant to be illiterate.

One of these blocks occurs toward the end of the massage scene when the girl tells Bremer that she likes to go to “wo-gees.” This is too cute to be believed. Every red-blooded American boy, virgin or not, knows the word “orgy.” Furthermore, Bremer has been wandering around porno bookstores on 42nd Street and the word “orgy” occurs almost as often in his favored texts as “turgid.” More to the point, when an illiterate is forced to guess at the spelling of a word he will render it phonetically. I cannot imagine that the girl said anything that sounded like “wo-gee.” It is as if the author had suddenly recalled the eponymous hard-hat hero of the film *Joe* (1970) where all the hippies got shot so satisfyingly and the “g” in orgy was pronounced hard. On this page, as though to emphasize Bremer’s illiteracy, we get “spair” for “spare,” “emphasis” for “emphasis,” and “remember.” Yet on the same page the diarist has no trouble spelling “anticipation,” “response,” “advances.”

The author of the diary gives us a good many random little facts—seat numbers of airplanes, prices of meals. He does not like “hairy hippies.” A dislike he shares with H. H. He also strikes oddly jarring literary notes. On his arrival in New York, he tells us that he forgot his guns which the captain then turned over to him, causing the diarist to remark, “Irony abounds.” A phrase one doubts that the actual Arthur Bremer would have used. As word and quality, irony is not part of America’s demotic speech or style. Later, crossing the Great Lakes, he declares “Call me Ismat.” Had he read *Moby Dick*? Unlikely. Had he seen the movie on the Late Show? Possibly. But I doubt that the phrase on the sound track would have stayed in his head.

The diary tells us how Bremer tried to kill Nixon. The spelling gets worse and worse as Bremer becomes “thruorly pissed off.” Yet suddenly he writes, “This will be one of the most closely read pages since the Scrolls in those caves.” A late April entry records, “Had bad pain in my left temple & just in front & about it.” He is now going mad as all the lone killers do, and refers to “writting a *War & Peace*.”

More sinister: “saw ‘Clockwork Orange’ and thought about getting Wallace all thru the picture—fantasing my self as the Alek on the screen. . . .” This is a low blow at highbrow sex’n violence books and flicks. It is also—again—avant-garde. Only recently has a debate begun in England whether or not the film *Clockwork Orange* may have caused unbalanced youths to commit

crimes (clever youths now tell the Court with tears in their eyes that it was the movie that made them bash the nice old man and the Court is thrilled). The author anticipated that ploy all right and no matter who wrote the diary we are dealing with a true author. One who writes, “Like a novelist who knows not how his book will end—I have written this journal what a shocking surprise that my inner character shall steal the climax and destroy the author and save the anti-hero from assassination!” Only one misspelling in that purple patch. But “as I said befor, I Am A Hamlet.” It is not irony that abounds so much in these pages as literature.

May 8, Bremer is reading *R.F.K. Must Die!* by Robert Blair Kaiser. Like his predecessor he wants to be noticed and then die because “suicide is a birth right.” But Wallace did not die and Bremer did not die. He is now at a prison in Baltimore, awaiting a second trial. If he lives to be re-examined, one wonders if he will tell us what company he kept during the spring of 1972, and whether or not a nice man helped him to write his diary, as a document for the ages like the scrolls in those caves. (Although H. H. is a self-admitted forger of state papers I do not think that he actually had a hand in writing Bremer’s diary on the ground that the journal is a brilliant if flawed job of work, and beyond H. H.’s known literary competence.)

Lack of originality has marked the current Administration’s general style (as opposed to the vivid originality of its substance; witness, the first magistrate’s relentless attempts to subvert the Constitution). Whatever PR has worked in the past is tried again. Goo? Then take the blame yourself—just like JFK after the Bay of Pigs. Caught with your hand in the till? Checker’s time on the tube and the pulling of heart strings.

Want to assassinate a rival? Then how about the Dallas scenario? One slips into reverie. Why not set up Bremer as a crazy who wants to shoot Nixon (that will avert suspicion)? But have him fail to kill Nixon just as Oswald was said to have failed to kill his first target General Walker. In midstream have Bremer—like Oswald—shift to a different quarry. To the real quarry. Make Bremer, unlike Oswald, apolitical. Too heavy an identification with the Democrats might backfire. Then—oh, genius!—let’s help him to write a diary to get the story across.

(Incidentally, the creation of phony documents and memoirs is a major industry of our secret police forces. When the one-man terror of the Southeast Asian seas Lieutenant Commander Marcus Aurelius Arnheiter was believed of his command, the Pentagon put him to work writing the “memoirs” of a

fictitious Soviet submarine commander who had defected to the Free World.¹⁰

The White House’s reaction to the Watergate burglary was the first clue

¹⁰ See *The Arnheiter Affair* by Neal Sheehan (Random House, 1971).

that something terrible has gone wrong with us. The elaborate and disastrous cover-up was out of all proportion to what was, in effect, a small crime the Administration could have lived with. I suspect that our rulers’ state of panic came from the fear that other horrors would come to light—as indeed they

have. But have the horrors ceased? Is there something that our rulers know that we don’t? Is it possible that during the dark night of our empire’s defeat in Cuba and Asia the American story shifted from cheerful familiar farce to Jacobean tragedy—to murder, chaos? □

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