2 Abrupt History Studies

A MOTHER IN HISTORY. By Jean Stafford. 121 pp. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. [illegible]

ADLAI STEVENSON. By Lillian Ross. 59 pp. Lippincott. [illegible]

DAILY BOOK REVIEW

By Alan Pryce-Jones

THE ladies who have written these short books are both ladies of formidable wit and [illegible] [illegible] by the [illegible] public of her [illegible]. The other, having [illegible] time preparing a profile of Adlai Stevenson for The New Yorker, turned, we learn, "the day after he died," her notes into a tribute for that magazine's pages. Thus given an obituary resonance, her Stevenson becomes another kind of legendary figure; perhaps Andrew Lang's Prince Ricardo after he has slain the Yellow Dwarf.

In other words, both studies suffer from too abrupt an immediacy. Mr. Stevenson, presented so soon after the moment of death, emerges embalmed. Mrs. Oswald, the "mother in history," being still very much alive, cannot but elude what Miss Stafford calls her "Paul Pry eye." After all, the essential fact about Mrs. Oswald is simply that she exists. Her connection with public events is entirely peripheral; there cannot, in the nature of things, be anything either to praise or to blame in the [illegible] fact that she is the mother of her son.

Miss Stafford's study therefore stands or falls on its stereoscopic brilliance. Can she, or can she not, take us with her into the small house in [illegible] [illegible] She can, [illegible] so vividly that she almost overwhelms a feeling for fair play which could easily make the reader uncomfortable [illegible] [illegible] her job?"

Exploring the labyrinths of Mrs. Oswald's own mental processes must be infectious, for Miss Stafford would not, I think, find it strange for the vice-president of a bank to travel "almost an hour" to his work.

Lillian Ross has chosen 23 photographs in order to make a book out of what is no more than a short essay, much of [illegible] has [illegible] no perspective, [illegible] herself to the last four or five years of his life in the role of a charmer going from one public platform to another. It is sad that so perceptive a writer should present no more than a reverential cut-out agreeably illustrated, even though she includes some excellent *obiter dicta*, such as Mr. Stevenson's remark:

"It's a curious thing. The more [illegible] you are in [illegible] seeing an [illegible] side, the more they say you're indecisive."