

fling off down the road in defeat. He leaves in the triumph of his own finer feelings—and no sooner is he out of sight than a new adventure begins for him, with a new and even more wistful heroine. Heroines aren't faring too well these days. The only one who could qualify as heroine in these three novels is downright malevolent. But all their heroes triumph even in the teeth of defeat. Mr. Leigh's trudges off to jail, Mr. Thomas' is drummed out of the quiet bliss of the army, and Mr. Davis' flees the undeserved vengeance of the popu-

lace. But they all win in their ways—and if that were all that distinguished Cool Humor from Black Humor it would be well worth it. Advice to Black Humorists: Cool it! It's all right to pulverize your hero as long as he doesn't give up. A pratfall can be funnier than a crutch.

After the Assassination

JOHN SPARROW

Chilmark Press, \$3.95

JOSIAH THOMPSON

Warden Sparrow's effort is not really a book. It is a 10,000 word review-article published originally by the *Times Literary Supplement* and now rushed into print as a 77-page mini-book, at a full book price.

Like other works before it, it seeks to defend the Warren Report by attacking the Report's critics. A characteristically British set of epithets are attached to those who have questioned the Commission's findings. Except for the "professors" whom the Warden of All Souls College, Oxford, treats with the deference due fellow union members, the critics turn out to be "demonologists" (pp. 5, 6, 15, 38, 64, 71), "a host of crack-pots and rabble-rousing publicists, of 'patriots' with a self-appointed mission and Baconians with an *idée fixe*" (p. 7), who are writing out of greed for fame or profit (pp. 4, 18), or political bias (pp. 13, 68-70, 72), or from a "passion [which] is apt to induce an intellectual myopia" (p. 13). This sort of argument by insult is a familiar part of the post-assassination scene. What distinguishes Sparrow's invective is that it combines the pomposity of an Oxbridge manner with an extraordinary fatuity. Two examples:

In a passage later highlighted with approval by *Time* magazine, Sparrow charges the critics with an "inability to form a picture of how things happen in real life" and proceeds to argue his point by offering the following instance: "If it is hard to believe that Oswald hit his target in two out of three quick shots, it is harder still to suppose that two men, more than 100 yards apart

and unable to see or communicate with each other . . . could have synchronized their fire so perfectly; and it is hardest of all to imagine that conspirators would have allowed the success of their plan to depend on such a feat of synchronization." Perhaps in the "real life" of the Coldstream Guards, where Sparrow served in World War II, an ambush was unknown. But in other armies ambushes are brought off with considerable regularity and no great difficulty: the various gunmen simply open fire when the target reaches an agreed-upon spot.

Earlier, Sparrow charges Mark Lane with "recklessness" or "negligence" for failing to mention certain FBI reports involving a witness, Julia Ann Mercer. But, as Lane has pointed out in reply, since the documents were not declassified until after the publication of *Rush to Judgment* it is difficult to know what Sparrow thinks he should have done: perhaps lead a charge on the National Archives? What is most revealing about Sparrow's discussion of this incident is that he is so unfamiliar with the geography of the assassination site as to mistakenly place the incident in Dealey Plaza when in reality it occurred some two blocks distant!

The list of fatuities could be extended at will. No critic ever claimed that an early November military rehearsal of a Presidential funeral had sinister significance. Nor did any critic, to my knowledge, ever misjudge the time needed to fire three shots from Oswald's rifle. These are straw horses which Sparrow sets up only to knock down.

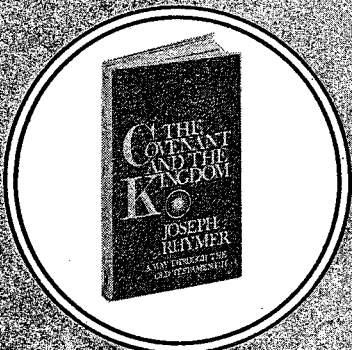
The real interest of this slender volume lies in its failure to deliver what its subtitle promises: "A Positive Appraisal of the Warren Report." *After the Assassination* never really addresses the Warren Report while offering a negative yet superficial appraisal of the Report's critics. In its refusal to confront the central difficulties of the Report, difficulties which have been raised over the last four years by a host of critics, is to be found its significance. Why was the President smashed backward and to the left under the impact of the fatal bullet while, according to

REVIEWERS

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the Commission, this bullet was fired directly from the rear? And why did impact debris from this shot fly to the *left rear* while, again according to the Commission, this shot blew out the *right side* of the President's head? Why does the Zapruder film validate unambiguously Governor Connally's claim that he was hit by a later shot than the one which struck the President, while the Commission's "single bullet" theory holds that they were hit simultaneously by the same shot? How did this "single bullet" manage to pierce two people, shattering two bones and causing seven

separate wounds, all the while keeping its nose in perfect shape and losing only an infinitesimal part of its substance? Finally, how did this same "single bullet," which purportedly wounded Governor Connally after striking the President, find its way onto a stretcher completely unconnected with the care of either man?

These are some of the difficulties which anyone seeking to offer a "positive appraisal of the Warren Report" must inevitably face. The failure of Warden Sparrow to face them points up an all important fact. It is now nearly three years since the principal difficulties with the *Report* first became known. They have not been surmounted. Both historian Jacob Cohen and Assistant Counsel Wesley Liebeler of the Warren Commission were rumored to be under contract for books which would defend the *Report*. It is revealing that neither of these books has been produced. What has been produced are shoddy works (like Sparrow's) which attempt to parade invective and insult for scholarship and argument. In that single fact is to be found the true significance of *After the Assassination*.

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JURGEN WEISSBACH

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