

C.K.P.

Camelot Confidential

JACQUELINE BOUVIER An Intimate Memoir

By John H. Davis
Wiley. 208 pp. \$24.95

ALL TOO HUMAN The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy

By Edward Klein
Pocket Books. 406 pp. \$23

THE KENNEDYS IN HOLLYWOOD

By Lawrence J. Quirk
Taylor. 366 pp. \$24

By Stephen Birmingham

FOR READERS who still lust for more Kennedy lore—or backfence tittle-tattle—a good way to tackle these three new books would be to spread them open on the kitchen table and flip from one to another, skipping those parts that repeat the same—if not necessarily new—information. (E.g., what word best sums up John F. Kennedy? “Womanizer”—Quirk, p. 76; Davis, p. 172; Klein, p. 147. How did Jackie feel about her father? “Adored” him—Klein, p. 39; “worshiped” him—Davis, p. 120. Etc., etc.)

Then the reader might ponder certain factual anomalies that pop up from text to text. Did vixenish Janet Auchincloss conspire to get her ex-husband, Jack Bouvier, so drunk on Jackie’s wedding day that he couldn’t even make it to the church, much less perform the simplest of all wedding tasks: giving the bride away? Absolutely, says Davis. Not so, says Klein. Jack Bouvier was at the church “with tears in his eyes,” but sober. Who’s right? Does anyone really care? Think hard.

Two of these three volumes seem to have been assembled, rather than written. John H. Davis, the author of *Jacqueline Bouvier: An Intimate Memoir*, has made something of a profession out of being Jackie’s cousin (they shared a set of grandparents.) This is his sixth Bouvier/Kennedy book, and it recycles and retreads bits and pieces of his previous works on the subject(s). Davis’s “intimacy” with Jackie occurred mostly when they were both small children, and spent summers at houses in the Hamptons. When Jackie’s parents divorced, she

was about 11 and her mother afterwards saw to it that her daughters had as little to do with their Bouvier relatives as possible. Intimacy was thus reduced to the occasional encounter, usually in public places.

A similar assemblage is Lawrence J. Quirk’s *The Kennedys in Hollywood*. Quirk, a vintage Hollywood editor and reporter for such movie fan magazines as *Photoplay*, seems to have burrowed into his old files and put together a catalogue of departed or near-departed film stars whom Joe, Jack, Bobby, Teddy, John Jr., Peter Lawford, or Arnold Schwarzenegger knew and may (or may not) have bedded down. The lengthy list includes Mabel Normand, Marlene Dietrich, June Allyson, Joan Fontaine, Sonja Henie and, of course, Gloria Swanson and Marilyn Monroe. Quirk’s tone is leeringly salacious throughout.

Stephen Birmingham’s most recent novel is “*Carriage Trade*.”

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Jayne Mansfield? Heh-heh-heh.

More interesting, at least in its concept, is Edward Klein's *All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy*. But one trouble is, it wasn't much of a love story. Before marrying Kennedy, Jackie had rejected at least two serious suitors for not being rich enough. And Kennedy was pushed into the marriage by his father, who saw no chance of his son reaching the White House without a decorative wife at his side. Joe Kennedy had also fallen for a pair of the bride's family canards—as had Jackie herself: that the Bouviers were descended from ancient French nobility, and that Jackie's mother, the former Janet Lee, was one of the Lees of Virginia. Klein makes it clear that the early years of the Kennedys' marriage were spent in a state of barely contained hostility, and that the closest thing to "love" did not occur until just before Kennedy was gunned down, when the couple seemed to have begun to accept—and even enjoy, a little—the terms of the trade-off they had made at the altar.

And another problem with Klein's book is his irksome habit of projecting himself into Jackie's innermost thoughts, reading her mind at every turn: "Jackie thought that Charlie was becoming quite a bore;" "By midweek, Jackie was in a state of deep distress," etc. He also quotes verbatim conversations he couldn't possibly have overheard, including an anonymous telephone operator who supposedly asked Jackie, ungrammatically, "Whom should I say is call-

ing?" Klein may have felt that such novelistic techniques would add immediacy and drama to his narrative. Instead, they suggest that his book contains as much fiction as it does fact.

MEANWHILE, all three of these books manage to convey an air of having been cobbled together in a great hurry, hastily and sloppily edited, perhaps to be caught in the tail winds of the Sotheby's sale. In addition to factual contradictions, typographical errors, solecisms and misspellings of names abound. In Klein's book, Jessica Daves, the legendary Vogue editor, appears repeatedly as "Jessica Davis." Quirk has trouble with pronouns. Bobby Kennedy, he writes, feared that Marilyn Monroe might blab to the press "about she and the president."

Finally, none of these authors comes close to solving the fascinating riddle that was Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: how she managed to become the most celebrated public face of her era, while remaining one of its least known and most private people. The secret of how she conducted—with far more finesse than Garbo—this extraordinary balancing act rests with her in Arlington Cemetery. And if her spirit is aware that, even in death, she remains a publishing—not to mention auctioneering—cash cow, she surely must somewhere be flashing that radiant, enigmatic, almost feral smile. ■



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Jack and Jackie Kennedy