

An American Grotesque

In the first 11 chapter, a length greater than that of Inquest, Kirkwood hasn't finished impaneling the jury.

It is the self-important, self-centered gossip old lady of a young man who dominates, not his hero or his villain. It is a New Orleans book by a non-New Orleanian, written in the manner of New Orleans social life, which may or may not have been Kirkwood's prior to his Great Days. It is overflowing with kindness to all his many benefactors, including the over-rich/bitch lady who subsidized him and many of her cronies, as well as Shaw's; to all of those with whom he ate and drank (not excluding what they ate where and how each held his drink); to his quarters-irrelevancies. I don't think I can remember another overlong book made more overlong by the most inconsequential trivia - a real limpwrister. Kirkwood's interests and attention are on the flutters of his eyes and to this point light-weight mind, not his story. To this point there is an enormous accumulation of breathlessly-detailed crap and remarkably little else except stage-setting.

He is not satisfied to display his own prejudice, his preconceived belief, nor to be instinctively anti-Garrison. Partly because I had heard he is homosexual, I guess, I had my preconception about his, furthered by his Esquire piece and the obsenity in it about Shaw the homosexual not raping Marilyn Tate. (In the book he goes to even greater length not to tell a non-secret, that Shaw stayed with her, yet he includes here in several pages of credits and thanks at the end.) So, I got the feeling that this was one homosexual springing to the defense of another in an esprit de corps motivation for which he lacked the masculinity and manhood.

Yet it is unintendedly revealing in a number of minor ways. I'd know the paranoia of the Garrison side. I did not know, as Kirkwood without so intending discloses, that the other side also was. Like his references to Garrison's "spies". They not only didn't exist, but there were none capable of it. Shaw had them all, including most of the press.

The departure from their touted postures by the press is one of his more interesting unintended disclosures. If to this point he says less than I heard and knew about some, he still says more than I think can leave them any comfort. Meanwhile, the case that could easily be made against Garrison isn't, and that case is reduced to the expression of K's preconceptions, likes and dislikes, not a persuasive one to the questioning mind.

He is to the selection of the 10th juror and has been raving about the defense lawyers without telling the key thing about those lawyers, that the one for whom he has only casual mention and for who he has but minor credit is the one who did all the really massive pre-trial work or why, which would have been more interesting than all his chitchat to this point and would have said more about Garrison than he has tried to.

Even the things he has tried to go into he doesn't understand and doesn't try to. From those with whom he associated he should have been able to learn what really happened in judge Halleck's court when the first hearing on the autopsy materials was held. He could have gotten a fair notion of what happened from newspaper clippings alone. But he missed what could have advanced his thesis more than anything in this vast verbosity. In short, he doesn't really understand what he is talking about and below the level of consciousness hides it in wasteful words.

Even the editing is punk, and he had plenty of them-hamed. There are some characters introduced over and over again with the same descriptions, the same parenthetical interjections, others not introduced at all.

Every restaurant in which he was is named, to no point. The one value I've found to this point is in his blabbing, about Sheridan (without mention of Townley), the Gurviches (no comment on the preswitch dick, no opinion on his morals or ethics) and the real press, of whom he was not one. The sheriff's prejudices also, as I had known.

I don't recall anything in which the bias is more pervasive. He even hated the judge before anything happened and ridicules him because he is neat in appearance and controlled his alcoholism before the trial began and for its length.

His attempt at reporting is bad and he eliminates all unfavorable to his side, like Sheridan getting caught in the courtroom wired with an FM transmitter and the activism of the pro-Shaw press corps before the trial began. In his pretended completeness, he fails to say ~~whether~~ whether the defense had any hired professional investigators. Awful drivvel.

American Grotesques- 2

Kirkwood interrupts the interminable jury selection for a chapter (13) on Ferrie and Dean Andrews, remarkably incompetent about both (he lists Andrews as a source but has nothin', not a single word, coming from Andrews) and no less dishonest. He here draws upon what he does not mention, Oswald in New Orleans, to include what was in it alone (alopecia) and to quote what had been quoted in it alone, the Escerpt from Andrews' testimony (others also quoted in part, but not this stuff). He gets around the use of the Secret Service Ferrie report by crediting Tom Bethell with giving him that, and he fails to draw upon a single Archives document or even to mention them, their existence, their suppression, etc.

He can't be this incompetent or uninformed, although he flaunts both, so I assume the dishonesty is deliberate.

Even his description of how the "probe" became known is not accurate, undoubtedly coming from Rosemary James, who was not first with it. Not even second.

This man lacks even normal curiosity. For one example, he says that Martin learned about Ferrie having been with LHO in the CAP on TV, yet, with the news director of that station that aired it as one of his cited sources, he fails to go to the original source, Veebel, or to mention him.

There are all kinds of retailed error, as there was no trace of a Clay Bertrans in the FBI investigation. Not only was there and I have the FBI reports, but there was that memorable gaffe by Ramsey Clark, that Shaw was Bertrand. (And I know Clark's source was the FBI.) What this chapter shows is that Kirkwood is really a propagandist. He could have been truthful about Martin and Ferrie without hurt to Shaw, but even this honesty he did not dare, although he felt it necessary to give a prejudiced and utterly incompetent account of the beginnings of the "probe". There can't be question about the dishonesty because he has cut out what his sources show that is uncongenial to his thesis. One example is the Ferrie protective-custody. Ferrie asked for that of Garrison. It was not the other way around. And it was so reported in the papers on which Kirkwood also drew.

Boxley's revenge? In two chapters Kirkwood talks about the leaked lists of witnesses, in the first (220) quoting Aynesworth as saying he got it from someone he knew in Dallas and in the second (esp ~~246~~ 246-7) telling his version of the Bethell story. Even with this they almost missed Speisel. Phelan finally nudged the lawyers into a last-minute investigation. I wonder if Boxley was the first source? The lists are not identical, so they appear not to come from the same copy.

There is a pattern in this book: all for Shaw are fine, even Bethell, who is really a repulsive, slothful man, is described glowingly; those against always in some way bad. There are generally significant details omitted when they make the defense look less good or the prosecution less bad. With all this verbiage, omission is not for reasons of space. I have noted a few in the book. Even when they are minor as Sandra McMaines (Moffitt) asking for decent clothes with which to go to N.O. and a place to stay, agreement to her terms is called bribery. It is only right that with her K depart from his practise of including all the irrelevancies. He does not say she bore Perry Russo's child, as she did. And with all sorts of detail about Russo, he omits Perry's having been to an Oswald picketing and still having one of the handbills. Nor is it surprising, given the mishandling by the prosecution, which appears to have done no checking at all, that K omits mention of the fact that the House on Esplanada to which Speisel took the circus had been owned by Shaw. K says the layout was not identically as Speisel had drawn it but he does not say there had been no alterations after Shaw sold it.

2/19 Having finished with it, I feel it is even worse in every way than I felt earlier, and by this I intend to include as a defense of Shaw. It is so excessively pro-Shaw that he destroys his own credibility. When it is so completely boring, verbose and intimately concerned with the trivia, the combination becomes a burden to Shaw, who is as unheroic a hero as man can fabricate. He never does or says anything wrong, is emotionless and tolerant, never displaying deep or human feelings. And everybody loves Shaw, except bad people, who don't and to whom there is never-ending, pointless reference. Real uck, done in a very amateurish way, which in itself prompts wonder. Simon and Schuster have published before. The editing here would be poor for the vanity press.

The unhidden dishonesty, even about the Warren Commission, which, ostensibly, neither he nor Shaw's lawyers are defending (while never stopping), is astounding. With Finck, for example, all the military orders to corrupt the autopsy are suppressed in this version of his testimony, his admission of significant errors is excluded, and his embarrassment at being caught in lies, apparent from the transcript, is disguised and explained as his lack of experience being cross-examined!

It seems impossible that Kirkwood understands as little about what was going on as his book says of him. I don't think he can be that detached from the realities of the court or of life or of New Orleans. So, I have to assume that he is just that dishonest. In a book of more than 650 pages, exclusions can't be attributed to space limitations, particularly when he wastes most of his great space with junk and childishness and self-promotions.

I think I detect an unintended self-disclosure in this wretched garbage. Kirkwood goes into great and continuous detail about the closeness of his relationship with all on Shaw's side, from Shaw to his lawyers and including many cronies and local celebrities. Yet in 650 pages there is not a single thing of any consequence, even minor consequence, that he attributes to any one of them. Nor are there minor disclosures to him. An example of what he could well have used, to give a little humanity to his characters is how Panzeca stayed in the case when he didn't want to. From this book you'd never know that Panzeca did all the hard work. You get the impression that he just happens to be there-sometimes. If Sal didn't trust Kirkwood enough to tell him that, or how much more he had on Perry Russo than he used, Sal had to be without trust of the only man writing a book on Shaw's side. The same goes for the other lawyers and for Shaw. For all the boozing Kirkwood did with the reporters, they also told him precious little. He uses much less than I would expect to drop in normal, friendly association.

Why this lack of trust shines from the many pages I don't know. Feeling they had to keep everything secret might explain it, but then the feeling would require some reasonable explanation. There would seem to have been no reason for such security with a trusted friend (ask him, he'll tell you he was, as he does without prompting). After the Esquire piece it can't be because his loyalty was in doubt. After Mrs. Stern took him on, it can't be because of poor auspices. I'm inclined to believe it is because Shaw and his lawyers had secrets to keep so they kept everything secret.

The few items of minor value are included for reasons other than their value in research or as good reporting. One of the few illuminations is the personal attitudes and beliefs of the judge, who seems to be on a sound legal basis in his opinions. But Kirkwood is out to get the judge, too, so he fails to tell the real story of the party which undid Haggerty. This is unfortunately typical of his treatment of those he regards as Shaw's enemies. They all become his enemies and his book is his axe for each, without any exception that comes to mind. A mean, vindictive thing.

Because he is so inept, so lacking in minimal understanding of more than appeared in the papers, it is possible that some of his taped interviews may hold value. I've asked if I can see that with Russo. He'd never tumble to what they might blab and turn them off, and nobody with any sense would worry about saying almost anything to him-and might have. Just a dropped name could mean something to one familiar with the names.

At no point in the book does he acknowledge that Shaw is a homosexual, until at the very end he has Haggerty commenting on it and uses this in a way to make it seem that the prosecution didn't use it because it would have backfired. That wasn't the case at all. Garrison just would not use it, and it could have been used very effectively, including to at least infer a proclivity to violence, whether or not true. Especially was this needed because of the role of Clay Bertrand. However, it was against Garrison's principles to use it. There was no other reason for the immediate decision never to use it. Jim did not even release the return on the search warrant.

With Ferrie a central character in the trial, there is less in all of the book than appeared in some single news stories about Ferrie. Is it just that Kirkwood is that kind of writer? No more-no worse?