

EDUCATION AND BOOKS

Sunday, July 23, 1972

7-H

Fiction as Strange As Truth in Dallas, In November 1963

IN THIS RAUNCHIEST of apocalyptic novels, the rough beast that slouches towards Dallas to be born takes many grotesque forms: A slobbering, loose-boweled lion in the back of a hearse with seven Scotch drinkers; Lyndon, a large white turkey with a rhinestone collar; the Baby Giant, a yard-high marijuana plant flourishing in a plastic wastebasket under an infrared lamp; a stuffed tiger copulating with an orange-haired dancer at Jack Ruby's nightclub. For it's the fall of 1963 and the cages have been opened, the lids pried off by dope and drink, sex and money, political madness and social chaos: "Our truth was lunacy and our destination oblivion, and I had it in the Bolex." The Bolex belongs to John Lee Wallace, who has played Tarzan in the movies and a gun-slinger on a popular television Western series and who has returned to Dallas to make his own film about "the real Texas."

Keeping himself mobile with the aid of pot and Dexed-

BOOK OF THE WEEK: FICTION



By Edwin Shrake

STRANGE PEACHES

Harper's Magazine Press.
\$7.95.

rine spansules, John Lee bears stoned witness to the most garish collection of freaks since Mailer's "Why Are We in Vietnam?" With both his fly and his lens always open, he records scene after memorable scene, some touched with manic humor, all hurtling towards the fateful explosion: a bitter visit with his father to the decaying family farm; a dazed documentary of the Parkland Hospital emergency room; a pheasant-slaughter at a Dallas hunt club; a mad luncheon with Big Earl, a 93-year-old billionaire who looks like God; a later encounter with Big Earl in a supermarket where, against a backdrop of frozen spinach, the baby-faced pioneer sings 27 verses of a self-composed ballad that Dylan might envy; Adlai Stevenson being mob-handled at the Municipal Auditorium.

Then the film screams to stop-frame in Dealey Plaza when John Lee sees through his viewfinder the pieces of skull and red spray flying out of John Kennedy's head. "Murder was loosed, and lunacy was unburied, and there was no other way." No other way except a gun-running, dope-smuggling expedition into Mexico, ending in a final horrifying discovery of Tarzan as dedicated outlaw, the self as animal, the ego as all-out Armageddon.

Edwin Shrake never once lets up the pressure. Though the Acapulco sequence (until the big shoot-out with Mexican hoods) is inevitably a let-down, there is not a dull page, not even a dull paragraph, in this book. You almost wish there were. Jack Ruby is, of course, as unbelievable as the other minor and major characters — and as completely convincing. Oswald, his wife, and his mother carry through their small speaking-parts as if they were perfectly type-cast. History here is a nightmare from which nobody is even trying to awake; the other side of the dream is true nothingness.

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Oswald & Ruby: characters in a novel