

whatever hatchet there was between the two of them and to somehow recapture "Winds of the Old Days." Acknowledging that her own "years of self-righteousness will not budge," and momentarily patronizing Dylan ("our blue-eyed son"), she refers to herself rather movingly as "Johanna," just as Dylan did in one of his best songs. And in the title cut, about her decade-old lost love affair with an unnamed but evident "unwashed phenomenon," she sings of herself as "the madonna . . . the girl on the half-shell," recalling her lover's disdain for her work ("my poetry was lousy, you said") even as she attempts to carry on with it. Far more touching than the song's railing against the past, or the singer's hopeless entanglement in her memories, is the imperfection of the effort: lyrics are clumsy and stilted, barely fitting the melody, coming out in a breathless, almost angry jumble. Baez's voice is humanized considerably by such flaws; the high point of her lovely "I Dream of Jeannie/Danny Boy" medley comes at the end, as her voice cracks and she strains for air.

Three other songs on the album—Stevie Wonder's "I Never Dreamed You'd Leave in Summer," Janis Ian's "Jesse," Jackson Browne's "Fountain of Sorrow" (Collins expressed some regret that she hadn't gotten to

this one first)—are also about recollections of lost romance. And on one verse of the obligatory Dylan song ("Simple Twist of Fate"), Baez finally records the uncanny Dylan imitation she's been doing in concert for years. But on her terribly shrill "Children and All That Jazz," Baez proves herself to indeed be ten years away from her subject, and now a frazzled mother. The song sounds like a deliberate, if unsuccessful, attempt to hold both the singer's and the listener's nostalgia in check. But it's too late: once memories of the old Baez and the circle in which she traveled have been conjured up, they can hardly be dispelled by her current cover versions or electric guitar parts. *Diamonds and Rust* is effective only through acknowledging that its import is, at best, subsidiary.

My neighbors' daughter turned 9 the other day, and somebody gave her a guitar. I heard her strumming chords out on the lawn one afternoon, with her sister and a girlfriend singing along in high, sweet, little inflectionless voices. Their harmonies were so ephemeral but plain, their faces so earnest but dispassionate, that it took me a while to recognize the song they were working on so diligently as "Proud Mary." Something about *Judith* and *Diamonds and Rust* reminds me of those little girls.

**\*\*\*Soap Opera, *The Kinks* (RCA).**

There's nothing about this love-hate ode to bourgeois normalcy that can't be found in at least six other Kinks opuses. But the theatrical form in which their old themes are reiterated shows star performer and impresario Ray Davies to be as eccentrically gifted an actor as he is a singer. A honing-down of their *Preservation* methods, and a soundtrack for their recent stage show, this features the usual nice ironies and some extraordinary vocals.

**\*\*\*Jan Hunter (Columbia).** Former lead singer with Mott the Hoople teams with Mick Ronson, former guitarist with David Bowie, to make a tough, sexy, alternately arrogant and reflective solo debut. "Boy," one of the best songs here, is a piece of advice to the British pop hermaphrodite whose name sounds like its title.

**\*Playing Possum, *Carly Simon* (Elektra).**

What's lacking here, even more than genuine eroticism once you get past the very soft-core cover, is a sense of humor; after the relative hiatus of *Hotcakes*, Simon is suddenly self-important all over again. A couple of strong melodies here, but hardly a whole album's worth.

# BOOKS

## Spooks

By Geoffrey Wolff

*The Tears of Autumn* by Charles McCarry. Saturday Review Press/Dutton (276 pp., \$7.95).

This is a novel of international intrigue and detection, a hybrid of fancy and history in the school of Forsyth, Deighton and Le Carré that is by now dollar-proved. Such fictions please by solving real riddles, in this instance the riddle of President Kennedy's assassination. Here's what happened: During the early autumn of 1963 Diem and Nhu realized that their regime would soon be overthrown by some among their many rivals, with the collusion of Kennedy and his CIA. They had a horoscope cast, and it assured them that they

would also be murdered, and they had no doubt that "the broker for these murders would be the President of the United States." Believing themselves already as good as dead, they arranged to take revenge from beyond the grave, not for personal reasons but because they regarded their overthrow and murder as an insult to the Vietnamese nation and to their family. The family, wide-flung and powerful, included members of the government of North Vietnam. One of these, placing family above politics, requested that a high Cuban official—as a favor—find an assassin to kill Kennedy. The Cuban agreed, never believing that his diplomatic favor would actually come to pass in Kennedy's death. (The Vietnamese needed a "white" cutout from a third country for obvious reasons.) The Cuban recruited Oswald in Mexico City, having heard of his erratic

efforts in New Orleans on behalf of Castro. Oswald, astonishingly, did precisely what he was instructed to do. The Soviets were frightened that Oswald would somehow connect them, falsely, with the assassination. They gave a hit order to a gangster who worked for them without knowing who they were, and he in turn recruited Ruby to kill Oswald.

In McCarry's version a CIA agent, Paul Christopher, solves the tangled crime in very short order. But people close to President Johnson elect to destroy his evidence, and never to disclose it, because they don't wish to alienate the American people from the Vietnamese, because they don't wish to disturb the public tranquility and because they don't wish to diminish John F. Kennedy in the world's esteem by showing that rather than dying a martyr, killed by a psychopath, he died in the

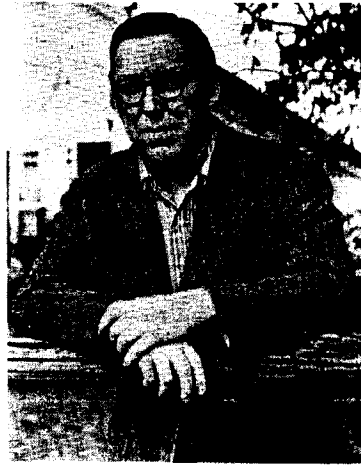
equivalent of a gangland feud: "I won't have any son of a bitch saying that what happened to Jack in Dallas was a *punishment*," in the words of one member of the Irish mafia who had loved him, and remained in power after his death.

The intricacies and transitions of McCarry's plot are craftsmanlike and, within the bounds of a work of imagination, elegantly persuasive. But *The Tears of Autumn* is being promoted within wider bounds, as a plausible account of what actually happened in Dallas, and why: "It explains too much to be ignored," as the publisher archly promises. The license to lie in a work of fiction has attached to it no restrictive covenants. But the license to lie in a work of fiction that pretends to the authority of history is held by an author in a binding contract of good faith, and right reason. It is clear by now that the report of the Warren Commission has been judged by serious critics and by the majority of America's citizens to be a fiction both unreasonable and committed in bad faith. Because the riddle of Kennedy's assassination has not been solved, and is not likely to be solved, new fictions have displaced the government's: a preposterous movie tricked up to resemble a documentary—*Executive Action*—and another more artful but even less plausible—*The Parallax View*. A novel by Joseph DiMona, *The Last Man at Arlington*, assigns the blame for Kennedy's death to the CIA.

A laboriously detailed report in this magazine (April 18, 1975) by Robert Sam Anson critically examines an inventory of possible solutions: the Mafia did it (in Anson's judgment the most likely conclusion), Castro did it to avenge assassination attempts against him and prevent more of them (in Anson's judgment not very likely), the survivors of Diem and Nhu did it (least likely, because they died only three weeks before Kennedy died, and after Oswald visited Mexico City).

McCarry's version stands or falls by prognostication: Diem and Nhu must be believed to have known in advance that they would die, and to have arranged in advance of their death their revenge. This given, for me, begs too much of my credulity. In short, what Paul Christopher sells I refuse to buy. But I'll surely bid on parts of his solution. For one example, I have never understood why Robert and Edward Kennedy seemed to accept the conclusions of the Warren Commission. Indeed, their evident satisfaction with the Commission for a long time (until the recent

publication of such articles as Anson's and Robert Blair Kaiser's in the April 24, 1975 *Rolling Stone*, led me to conclude that while obviously flawed in many of its particulars, the report satisfied one crucial test of truth: Robert Kennedy seemed to buy it whole. I assumed that these brothers, not notable for their quickness to forgive and forget, would otherwise shake the world with their doubts. I did not reckon on the possibility McCarry so plausibly develops, that any logical explanation for Kennedy's assassination—any explanation that provided a motive—would probably reflect discredit on the late



McCarry: fiction, not a solution.

President's actions before his death, and would assuredly stain him in the world's memory.

In short, had the crime been solved as quickly as Paul Christopher solved it, I now believe it is possible that its solution could have been suppressed, in what is called *the national interest*, or in the Kennedys' own interest, and from sympathy for them. The Pentagon Papers established for certain that President Kennedy knew and approved of plans for the coup that overthrew Diem and Nhu. The circumstances of their deaths are still not known, but a personal footnote may demonstrate that their murder—whether or not it touches upon President Kennedy's—absorbed the interest of our government.

In the spring of 1965 I was a cultural affairs reporter for the *Washington Post*, very recently liberated from night duty on the police desk. I was in the newspaper's hierarchy and esteem lower than a snake's ass, a cub. I was eager to show off with a book review, and having pestered the book editor for many weeks for an assignment I was finally given Morris West's novel, *The*

*Ambassador*, for review. That afternoon I read the book, and found it pretty thin stuff, a bad-guys vs. good-guys account of the overthrow of Diem and Nhu, and their murder, by the arrangement of an evil character serving as the CIA's station chief in Saigon. Within a few hours after I had finished the novel I received a telephone call at home from the father of a friend. The caller had recently retired from the CIA, which he had served in a very senior position, and he wished to see me at his house first thing in the morning, before breakfast. I agreed to the meeting, half expecting to be asked to leave at once for the Balkans on a mission crucial to the survival of Western Civilization. Instead I was told, with anger and dismay, that the book I was reviewing was a masterpiece of falsehood and subversion, that it posed a threat to relations between the United States and many other countries, and that it *must* be denounced. I was also given a couple of quibbles to shoot West's way: he had got some diddly detail wrong about the CIA's functions at embassies abroad. (West is Australian, and did pretty well with the details, after all.)

I left that encounter shaken and amazed that so much risk, such potential for embarrassment, had been staked on such an inconsequential matter as the review of a novel by a kid, moreover of a novel without much merit as a work of fiction. (I ignored the hype, and said the simple truth, that the novel was ill-written.) I tell the story only to suggest that no yarn is so farfetched as to be judged impossible by our own functionaries. The deeper into Kennedy's grave people dig, the more spooks come ghosting out, ours, "theirs," God only knows whose. The real value of McCarry's novel is that it shows—better than any book I have read—what spooks are like. The appeal of the Agency is that for men with a certain bend to them it offers "a lifetime of inviolable privacy." Once in, they have no politics: "They had no morals, except among themselves. They lied to everyone except their government... yet they cared about nothing but the truth. They would corrupt men, suborn women, steal, remove governments to obtain the truth..." And once they found it, they were—as Sam Adams has shown in a stunning exposé in the current *Harper's*, showing a CIA conspiracy against its own intelligence in Vietnam—perfectly capable of burying the truth deeper than any grave-robber could dig.

HATA! A SHOW LEARNER.