

Book Notes | Sarah Lyall

- Just how did all those Kennedy books do at the checkout counter? ■ A poet fights on in court
- Stamping out book piracy in southeast Asia.

Kennedy Book Update

Now that the 30th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination has come and gone, and with it the endless retrospectives, magazine and newspaper articles and television specials, it's worth asking: how did the several dozen J. F. K. books published to coincide with the occasion fare in the country's bookstores?

The answer is that some did better than others and many seemed to cancel each other out, as is often the case when so many similar books emerge at once. It will take months before final figures are in, of course. But so far, in a field that runs the gamut from coffee-table picture books to meticulously researched biographies to outré accounts of new conspiracy theories, the most successful has been Gerald Posner's "Case Closed" (Random House), which takes the radically unradical view that there was no conspiracy surrounding Kennedy's assassination.

The book, which came out several months earlier than the rest and was boosted by a steady stream of publicity orchestrated by the indefatigable Harold M. Evans, the publisher of the Random House adult trade group, has now gone through five printings, with a total of 135,000 copies in print. It spent five weeks on the New York Times best-seller list, reaching No. 8 before falling off.

Richard Reeves's "President Kennedy: Profile of Power" (Simon &

Schuster), a comprehensive study of the Kennedy Presidency, which was helped by good reviews and the almost universal impression that it was a serious book in a pack of lighter ones, is also selling well, with 85,000 copies in print. At Ingram, one of the country's largest independent book distributors, Susie Russenberger, the director of trade books, said that about 6,000 copies of the Reeves book had been sold, many of them in the last few weeks.

Some stores and some chains took the opportunity to devote special sections to the Kennedy crop, displaying them all at once. Among myriad others are Robert J. Groden's "Killing of a President" (Viking), a \$30 coffee-table book; Bill Sloan and Jean Hill's "J. F. K.: The Last Dissenting Witness" (Pelican Publishing); Gaeton Fonzi's "Last Investigation" (Thunder's Mouth); Harrison Edward Livingstone's "Killing the Truth" (Carroll & Graf); Oleg M. Nechiporenko's "Passport to Assassination" (Birch Lane/Carol Publishing); a compilation of letters to "Dear Abby" called "The Day J. F. K. Died" (Andrews & McMeel) and the Kennedy-satellite books, like Wendy Leigh's "Prince Charming" (Dutton), a book about John Kennedy Jr. Consumers can be forgiven for feeling awash in an overwhelming sea of books, particularly when so many old Kennedy books are still around.

"No, we haven't seen an upsurge in sales of these books at all," said

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Adam Brent, the manager of Stuart Brent books in Chicago, which has been carrying a handful of the new batch. "My feeling is that it was already covered with the Oliver Stone movie and so I think the enthusiasm for finding out as much as possible probably took place then. At some point, people just get saturated with this."