

... in chronological order, and many, with minor variations, are repeated—creating both a sense of timelessness and an incan-

... has been bleaching herself of the past and the invisible black scars it left embedded in her flesh. Francine has pro-

Kathryn Marshall, a novelist, is the author of "My Sister Gone" and "Desert Places."

Kennedy-Hoffa 'novel' confusing

BLOOD FEUD

By Edward Hannibal and Robert Boris. Ballantine Books. 310 pp. \$10.

By Jack Flannery

Bobby Kennedy and Jimmy Hoffa fought for years, the former trying to put the latter in jail, the latter resisting the effort fanatically, successfully, but not finally. Hoffa went to prison, Kennedy to his death, Hoffa to a fate unclear.

Which, along with events before, during and after, could have made a quite compelling book of journalism. Instead, authors Hannibal and Boris chose to produce what they label, "a documentary novel." I think they made a mistake; for this reader at least, the book doesn't work.

Some readers turn off on stunt books on principle. Others will go along with them, but make an understandable demand: the stunt—in this case, creating dialogue, thoughts, situations for people we've seen in recent history—has got to come off every second.

That's hard, and I think the authors here finally fail to pull it off. I don't know whether it's that a reader's disbelief just



JIMMY HOFFA

... fate unclear

won't stay suspended over so long a haul, whether the material is just too copious, or whether, paradoxically, they simply fail to bring these recently living people "to life."

I'm prepared to believe, with an exception noted below, that Bobby did this and Jimmy did that, and maybe even that Jack Kennedy said one thing and Jack Ruby even said or did thus and so. But somehow or other, "facts" don't produce fiction here, don't create a "reality" that

is essential to a good novel.

If that sounds nuts—fact to fiction to reality—maybe that gets closer to what's wrong here; if "it" happened, why is it presented as fiction? If "it" didn't happen, why is Bobby saying those things, why is Jimmy doing those other things—and maybe the real problem here is that this reviewer isn't flexible enough to dart in and out of reality as frequently as necessary to get with the whole show.

The scene that most "came alive" for me is one I'll bet the price of the book never happened: Bobby and Jimmy, of an early morning, alone on a bench behind the Hatch Shell, no less, with Bobby offering a reduced jail term if Hoffa will quit union activities. Nice scene: characterization, credible dialogue, tells-a-lot-in-a-little. I didn't believe it for a minute, but I "believed" it.

That's the dilemma, perhaps: sorting "truth" from "fiction", having to think about that every step of the way in the book, being distracted throughout by the wondering of whether this or that happened or not. It gets to be too much work to be very much fun.

Jack Flannery is a freelance writer.

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