

Mailer on Oswald

Norman Mailer's next book has the working title of "Oswald in Minsk," although Random House publisher Harold M. Evans says he wanted to call the book "Oswald's Ghost."

Either way, it promises to expand mightily on what we know of Lee Harvey Oswald, the presumed assassin of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Mailer's "portrait of deviation" (Evans' words) draws on the author's fruitful visit to Minsk, where the local office of the KGB obligingly laid out the files on Oswald that it amassed when the American defector was living in the city with his Russian wife, Marina. The trove included tapes of bugged conversations between the couple and helped swell Mailer's book by a third, to an expected 800 pages.

"The KGB's contribution to literature is to give us the way Oswald talked in Minsk and the way Marina talked in Minsk," Evans said. The bugs tuned in on marital spats, for example. "It's amazing stuff. You don't hear Oswald saying, 'I'm going to kill the president.' You hear a man, coming home, who's an American, who's got his own hangups, talking to his Russian wife. It's amazing. It's Dostoyvsky."

Publication is scheduled for June.

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