

Book world 1/28/68

He doan wrassle good

THE CITY OF ANGER. By William Manchester. Little, Brown. 500 pp. \$6.95.

By Mark Strage

The year 1953 was fairly typical for novels. Of the 1,495 that were published, all but a few hobbled unsung into obscurity, including one called *The City of Anger*. But then that is the lot of most novels, unless their authors can do something later that gets them into the papers, or make a killing in some other line of work. William Manchester, the author of *The City of Anger*, can lay a claim to having done both. So his book is back for a second chance, reissued by the publishers as "a political novel by the author of *The Death of a President*."

The dialogue is by Amos out of Andy. Says the woman who comes closest to being the heroine: "I jest doan know why you can't do lahk other men, save and hep me and yore little boys. It's jest pitiful."

It shoah is.

Description? "That was what Sam was. He was a very large child with the tempered muscles of a brute and a restless savagery in his heart and an old, childhood hatred burning deep with-

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in him."

The plot involves a desperate power struggle within a large Eastern seaboard city (Boston? Baltimore?). Jarvis Cameron, scion of a wealthy family, is an aging triple-letterman from Princeton who "arches his brow in feigned disappointment," possibly because he has suffered a series of financial setbacks. He is, literally, down to his last race track, and furthermore is rapidly losing business to a flourishing numbers racket run by Ben Erik, who is also undisputed boss of the Seventh District (Democratic), which consists mainly of 250,000 slum-dwelling Negroes, who in turn account for much of the book's hogjaw and chitlins lilt.

Jarvis' cousin, Wallace Gillette, is an upstate legislator whose gubernatorial ambitions are blocked by Ben Erik. To serve their common ends, Jarvis and Wallace decide to ruin Erik by rigging his numbers racket. The daily winning number is based on the results of a major race track. By bribery, they manage to make a certain prearranged number come up, the same number they have touted to thousands of players.

Jarvis Cameron does make one slip. He forgets he has a daughter who ran away from home 10 years earlier and is now a drunk on skid row. Erik doesn't forget



William Manchester

and manages to photograph her in a compromising situation.)

About this point, the plot vanishes and all hands seem to come out losers, which is perhaps what the writer of the book-jacket blurb meant when he called the contents "bitterly relevant and meaningful."

Elsewhere in the 500 pages, there are platoons of cops, mostly crooked, politicians, mostly crooked, judges, mostly crooked, landlords, universally crooked. There are also the pubescent nubbins of sex. Says a young Negro girl who is a janitor in a school, "Down where I wuhk. they's a white man, a teacher, an we wrassle sometime.' She laughed coarsely. 'I doan wrassle good.'"

As a novelist, Manchester's credentials are not yet validated. He does however have a vigorous style and a flair for the decisive moment. Perhaps next time he should try his hand at historical reportage.