

**BOOKS**

**Prototype Terrorist  
As Prickly Loner**

**Oswald's Game** By Jean Davison,  
with a foreword by Norman Mailer  
Norton, 343 pages, \$17.95

*Reviewed by Larry Tool*

**S**ing a lament for conspiracy theorists. For 20 years the Kennedy assassination has provided them with steady work, but the bonanza is about panned out.

As Norman Mailer complains in his petulant introduction to this new book, Jean Davison now seems to have spoiled all the fun. How has she done it? Not by uncovering some rich new vein of evidence but by attempting the obvious — a portrait of the accused assassin based on known facts.

Her description of the character and career of Lee Harvey Oswald makes fully credible the conclusion of the Warren Commission: That Oswald acted alone. He emerges not as a patsy of Mafia dons or CIA putschists but as a prickly loner, trying to be a hero according to his bizarre political vision.



**Lee Harvey Oswald**

Davison is a professional writer and an amateur sleuth. She became intrigued with Oswald when she discovered the surprising amount of information the Warren Commission had amassed. She approached this information with no ax to grind but with a novelist's eye for character and plot.

She concludes: "The assassination was a natural outgrowth of Oswald's character and background — and of American-backed plots to kill Castro." She doesn't pretend to have all the answers, arguing only that other theories involve wild departures from what is known about the killer.

"Oswald's Game" is also an essay on investigative method. Davison is eloquent on the need to suspend judgment and allow truth to emerge from the welter of facts.

Conspiracy theories, she notes, are a natural response of the human mind to the unknown. We all live by faith and preconception; we all rush to judgment. Our first impressions of people and events become patterns, she says, which interpret and select subsequent information. The best investigator is the one who can hold out longest against his own will to believe.

When political passions are involved, such mental

discipline is particularly difficult, Davison says. The Warren Commissioners were acutely aware of this and chose to err on the side of inconclusiveness. Dreading a wrong conclusion, they left much evidence undigested.

Davison suspects an additional handicap. Oswald was influenced by his knowledge of U.S.-sponsored plots against Castro and by Castro's threat that U.S. officials "would not be safe" either. The Johnson administration was not eager to expose Oswald's Cuban connection for fear it would create an unwelcome international incident and expose dubious CIA activities.

An unexpected dividend of Davison's approach is to bring to life an Oswald who commands our attention, although not our sympathy. The product of an ideological age, he illustrates the pitfalls of translating deep-seated personal problems into "political" creeds and crusades.

**H**istory, as one witness noted, served Oswald in place of God or conscience. The daily paper was his prayerbook, notoriety his salvation. In service of a home-brew Marxism (composed of 10 percent social concern and 90 percent romantic vanity) Oswald spent his short life searching for a utopia where he would be "appreciated."

Ignored first by Soviet and later by Cuban bureaucrats, Oswald turned to acts of violence to establish his "revolutionary credentials" before an indifferent world. Oswald bore John Kennedy no personal grudge, Davison says; he shot the president because he thought it would look good on his resume.

Oswald, in short, was a prototype terrorist. Davison's portrait of this pathetic and appalling man reminds us that we have more to fear from anarchy than from conspiracy. A free society can tolerate Oswald's wacky opinions; no society can afford to tolerate those who would imitate or justify his methods.

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