

A good read adds to intrigue

Title: "JFK: On the Trail of the Assassins"
 Author: Jim Garrison
 Read by: Edward Asner
 Time: Three hours, abridged
 Data: Audio Renaissance; \$15.95
 Our rating: ***



Written several years ago, this first-person account of former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy has been given a new lease on life by Oliver Stone's controversial film, "JFK," which uses it as one of its sources.

In this abbreviated form, the main points of Garrison's case against New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw and others seems impressive, mainly because of the one-sidedness of the account and the authority of Asner's gruff, underplayed good 'ol boy narration. (Asner appears in the film, as a conspiratorial private detective.) The other side of the coin is the reality of the situation: Shaw was vindicated by the trial.

Title: "Dan of Thieves"
 Author: James S. Stewart
 Read by: John Hockenberry
 Time: Three hours, abridged
 Data: Simon and Schuster
 Audioworks; \$16
 Our rating: ****

Wall Street Journal editor James S. Stewart's non-fiction best-seller shines a powerful reportorial light on the dark side of America's financial juggernaut of the '80s, revealing how "the greatest moneymaking boom in Wall Street's history" fueled "the greatest criminal conspiracy the financial world has ever known."

Stewart's account draws upon court transcripts and original interviews to construct a riveting narrative with the pace and tension of a fictional thriller. Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken are major players in the high-stakes action.

BOOKMARKS

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THURSDAY
 ■ Poets Norma Cole, Pasquale Verdichio and Paul Vangelisti will read from their recent works. Occidental College's Morrison Lounge, 1800 Campus Road, Los Angeles; 9 p.m. Free. (213) 259-2822.
 ■ Rock 'n' roll raconteur Richie Hass will read stories and poems. Common Grounds Coffee House, 9250 Reseda Blvd., Northridge; 8:30 to 11 p.m. No cover charge. (818) 894-0226.

SATURDAY
 ■ James Ragan, poet and director of the professional writing program at USC, will sign copies of "Womb Weary" at the California Writer's Club, San Fernando Valley Chapter, The Meeting Place, Fallbrook Mall, 6533 Fallbrook Ave., West Hills; 1:30 p.m. Guests: \$5. (818) 884-4905.
 ■ Author and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Faludi will be joined by State Controller Gray Davis and other panelists in a forum based on Faludi's book, "Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women." Directors Guild of America, 7220 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles; 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. \$10 (includes continental breakfast and parking). Pre-registration recommended. (310) 8846.

THE AUDIO FILE

TOM NOLAN and DICK LOCHTE

This abridgment seems to include the most salient sequences of a complicated scenario. Close initial concentration will make it easier to follow the rest of the story.

Hockenberry, a familiar voice to listeners of National Public Radio, narrates with appropriate dramatic authority.

Title: "Night Over Water"
 Author: Ken Follett
 Read by: (not billed)
 Time: 15 hours, unabridged
 Data: Bookcassette; \$25.95
 Our rating: **

Ken Follett's current hit thriller takes place in 1939, just after Britain has declared war on Germany. The setting is a Pan Am luxury airliner that sleeps 40 and crosses the Atlantic in a single day.

All on board this skyborne ship of fools are escaping various political and social entanglements. There's the prominent British fascist and his family; the young jewel thief on the lam; the brilliant Jewish physicist; the beautiful young married woman with a new American boyfriend. Also present: an FBI man and his gangster prisoner, and a flight engineer whose wife is being held captive by thugs.

All this makes for a rather bumpy takeoff, but once the multiple plots' engines are humming, Follett keeps a sure hand on the controls. The bookcassette's anonymous narrator does a serviceable job.

(Toll-free order: (800) 222-3325.)

Title: "A Year in Provence"
 Author: Peter Mayle
 Read by: Peter Mayle
 Time: Three hours, abridged
 Data: Audio Renaissance; \$15.95
 Our rating: ***

Title: "Toujours Provence"
 Author: Peter Mayle
 Read by: Patrick Macnee
 Time: three hours, abridged
 Data: Audio Renaissance; \$15.95

Our rating: ***

Peter Mayle, a British-accented veteran of Madison Avenue who bailed out of the advertising game to write books, began documenting his and his wife's life in the south of France with the 1989 best seller, "A Year in Provence."

The author himself reads this abridged version of his charming memoir, an account filled with colorful provincials, insensitive tourists and Gallic pleasures. Anecdotes revolve in low-key fashion around the Mayles' efforts to get their new Provencal home redone by Christmas, while a passel of workmen help and hinder them.

Recreations and celebrations include an impressively staged goat race and a number of feasts so lovingly described one can almost taste them. Major comic relief is provided by snobbish or boorish out-of-town visitors, all refreshingly English — not an ugly American in sight. Mayle is a first-class reader of his own work.

Patrick Macnee, star of the 1960s television show "The Avengers," brings an admirable zest and precision to the audio condensation of Mayle's second best-selling chronicle, 1991's "Toujours Provence."

But the authenticity of the author's own voice is necessarily missing. Also, the tales in this second volume (the writer's 50th birthday, an elaborate wine-tasting, a major truffle purchase, the hunt for buried coins) glow a shade less enticingly than those in the first.

Title: "Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life"
 Author: Robert Lacey
 Read by: Ron Silver
 Time: Three hours, abridged
 Data: Dove; \$15.95
 Our rating: **

Based on interviews with people who knew Meyer Lansky, Robert



Peter Mayle
 Charming memoir

Lacey's book attempts to debunk the various myths surrounding the "accountant for the mob," whose fondness for numbers rivaled Rain Man's.

We learn of Lansky's dysfunctional family: two sons, one physically impaired, the other emotionally scarred; and a daughter apparently as conscience-free as her father. We discover that, contrary to the stories of Lansky's great amassed wealth, for him crime actually did not pay enough. Finally, we follow his unsuccessful attempt in his declining years to find safe harbor in Israel.

Lansky's story is intriguing, if, in this adaptation, fleeting, but Ron Silver, terrific on stage and in films, narrates it in a rather uninspired manner.

(Toll-free order: (800) 345-9945.)

Title: "Scarlett"
 Author: Alexandra Ripley
 Read by: Dixie Carter
 Time: Six hours, abridged
 Data: Simon & Schuster Audioworks; \$25
 Our rating: 0

Yes, the book is selling like, well, Michael Jackson CDs. Yes, this very audio version has made Publishers Weekly magazine's weekly audio best-seller list.

Ignore the madness of crowds. With its dimensionless characters, ambling plot and cliché deep-South narration, this audio version would be awful at three hours. At six, it is unbearable. Oh, fiddle-dee-don't.

Tom Nolan is a contributing editor at Los Angeles Magazine. Dick Lochte's novel, "Blue Bayou," will be published in July by Simon & Schuster.

ON LANGUAGE

WILLIAM SAFIRE

Everything's coming up euphemisms



When George Bush, during his state visit to Japan, was afflicted with "stomach flu," as White

House aides called it, or "intestinal flu," as it was called more formally, or "gastroenteritis" as preferred by Lawrence K. Altman, M.D., medical correspondent of The New York Times, many radio and television news readers shied away from the distasteful verb to describe what the president did.

First reports were that he "was taken ill and collapsed" or "became sick to his stomach and fainted"; later, the broadcasters added that he had thrown up.

Print reporters were more inclined to come up with the hard word. When Marlin Fitzwater, the White House press secretary, announced that the president "was feeling weak and was helped to the floor by Secret Service agents," a reporter introduced the V-word: "Was the president nauseous when he slumped to the floor, or was there any vomiting?" Fitzwater, being helped to the floor by the journalists, said: "Yes, he was nauseous. He did vomit just before he slumped to the floor."

But he adopted the questioner's use of *nauseous*, which most dictionaries say means "causing nausea or disgust; sickening." (Pronounce it NAW-shus, not NAW-zee-us.) Nausea is rooted in "seasickness," from the same Greek root as *nautical*; for years, good usagiats have insisted that before vomiting, you feel *nauseated*, not *nauseous*.

As a card-carrying lexicographer and self-styled usagiast, I always say, "I am *nauseated*," before clapping a handkerchief over my mouth and racing to talk to Ralph on the big white phone, but I don't know any body else who says that.

They all say, "Gawd, I feel *nauseous*," or offer a telegraphic "Nauseous, gonna go whoops," and they actually take offense when I correct them with "No, you are *nauseated*"; in one instance, my lap then became the target of a power boot.

Probably the preferred slang verb to describe the evacuation of the stomach was used by Johnny Carson just after the episode involving the president: "If you had to eat raw fish while you looked at Lee Iacocca, you'd barf, too."

William Safire is a columnist for The New York Times.

■ Poets Shirley Graham, Terry Stevenson, Stellasue Lee and Willie Sims will read from their works. Sculpture Gardens Restaurant, Venice Plaza, 1031 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice; 3 to 5 p.m. Donation requested. (310) 399-6909.

IN THE FUTURE
 ■ Poets George Evans and Jimmy Santiago Baca will be presented by the Lannan Foundation's "readings and conversations" series. Center Green Theatre, Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood; 7:30 p.m. Feb. 11. Tickets: \$5 general admission; \$2.50 senior and students. Call Theatre (213) 486-1757. (A limited number of tickets will be sold at the door.)

BOOK SALES
SATURDAY
 ■ Used Book Sale, Sunland-Tujunga Branch Library, 7771 Foothill Blvd., Tujunga; 10 a.m. to noon. (818) 352-4481.

IN THE FUTURE
 ■ The 26th annual California International Antiquarian Book Fair offers rare books, manuscripts, fine graphics and prints and a special exhibition, "Forbidden Books and Manuscripts: Denying the Freedom to

Read," Los Angeles Airport Hilton, 5711 W. Century Blvd., Los Angeles; 4 to 9 p.m. Feb. 14; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Feb. 15; and noon to 6 p.m. Feb. 18. Admission: \$10 for first night (good for all three days) and \$5 on Saturday and Sunday. (818) 503-2233.

SEMINARS & CLASSES

MONDAY
 ■ Author Lillian Faderman ("Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th-Century America") will be the first writer in the UCLA Extension series "Gay and Lesbian Literary Salon: Seven Evenings with the Community's Premier Writers." Room 118, Haines Hall, UCLA campus, Westwood; 7 to 10 p.m. Fee: \$15. Single admission (\$25) available at door on space-available basis. (310) 825-9415.

Some events and seminars may require a fee or reservations. Submit items three weeks in advance of the event to Bookmarks, P.O. Box 4200, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91365-4200. Publication of notices does not imply an endorsement by the Daily News.