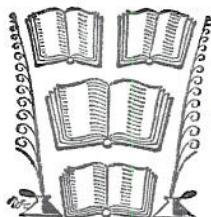


World of Books



The Kennedys as The Possessed

— John Barkham

A NOTHER book about the Kennedys? Yes, but "The Kennedy Neurosis," by Nancy G. Clinch, is different. Before us is a "psychobiography" of the whole Kennedy clan, in which its history is explored, its motivations analyzed, and its achievements assayed — all against the larger background of the Kennedy relationship to the American people.

This is an ambitious undertaking for even an experienced psychoanalyst or psychologist, let alone a political analyst-military historian with no professional qualification in medicine. But Nancy Clinch is intelligent, sensitive, well read and, most important, has her own distinctive approach to the Kennedy family. Briefly, it is her thesis that the Kennedys personify the American drive to succeed, that they pursued it to the point where it became a neurosis, and that the results have been disappointing for the American people and disastrous for the family.

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NONE OF THIS is precisely new. Other writers have dissected the Kennedy compulsion to succeed and the "Kennedy curse" which supposedly surrounds the family. But Ms. Clinch (she is an ardent feminist) documents her theory in detail and with sharper candor. The fact the Kennedys are a strongly male-oriented family has not exactly endeared them to her. She prefers to call their "masculine mystique" plain "male chauvinism." In her words: "All the Kennedy men were sexually promiscuous and tended to regard

their wives as little more than attractive possessions."

Ms. Clinch opens her book by retelling the Kennedy story of the handsome brothers as a fairy tale. Her own very different view of the family then follows. Scrutinizing each member in turn, she attempts to show that the founding father, having failed to win social acceptance in Brahmin Boston, raised his sons to be instruments of power who would gain the recognition denied him. This led to the "Kennedy neurosis" — a drive to power that became a "drive to dominance."

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SHE REJECTS Camelot as a symbol for the Kennedys, substituting instead Kafka's "Castle." In her words: "The Kennedy Camelot was more an illusion of power than a reality, a dreamworld doomed to betrayal from within." The dream survives in the person of Edward (Teddy) Kennedy. Ms. Clinch is at her most scathing in characterizing his career, culminating in his behavior at Chapquiddick.

This book deserves to be widely read if only because of the frankness with which it discusses a family prematurely raised into legend. It is written in a style commendably free of psychiatric jargon — though one finds it hard to forgive a monstrosity like "characterology." If it does nothing else the book removes the Kennedys from their collective pedestal and treats them as humans. (Grosset & Dunlap; \$10).

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