

MARY McGRORY

Poor Mrs. Gallagher Misunderstood Jackie

WASHINGTON — Mary Barelli Gallagher was for eight years the sorceress' apprentice, the personal secretary of Jacqueline Kennedy. She prided herself on getting everything Mrs. Kennedy told her the first time, but from this dreary tattle (a book called "My Life with Jacqueline Kennedy"—David McKay), it is evident that she never really got Jackie at all.

Here we have a communications breakdown perhaps unequalled since Marie Antoinette talked to a milkmaid at Versailles. Mrs. Gallagher was the 12th child of immigrant Italian parents; Mrs. Kennedy, out of the Social Register, New York and Newport, never bothered to explain herself to her fatally literal-minded amanuensis.

These perfidious inanities, undertaken, we are told selfrighteously, for the benefit of "future historians," tell us mostly that, had Mrs. Gallagher been Mrs. Kennedy, she would have done it all very differently—if anyone cares.

Again and again, Mrs. Kennedy failed to measure up to Mrs. Gallagher's standards—as wife, daughter, mother and First Lady.

Here is Mrs. Gallagher on the subject of early-morning separate tables in the Kennedy menage in Georgetown: "I used to wish that Jackie would eat breakfast downstairs with the senator, or at least come down to see him off at the door."

Or: "I looked at Jackie and thought how thrilled I would be if it were my husband who was running for the presidency."

Or: "At times I would find myself wishing that her daughter could be a bit more considerate of her mother."

When the children got on her nerves, Mrs. Kennedy would call the nanny, Miss Shaw (another servant-informer, by the way), and tell her to take them away. Mrs. Gallagher had two little boys whom she left in the care of her mother-in-law while she was busy at the White House disapproving of Jackie, but that was somehow different, apparently.

Mrs. Kennedy had the sheets of her bed changed every day for her nap. Mrs. Gallagher notes, with her usual retroactive solicitude, that she does not know if the President, who also napped, received the same luxury. Had she been in charge, we are given to understand, that would have been the case.

Mrs. Gallagher's Jackie is spoiled and imperious, extravagant and stingy, high-handed, self-absorbed. She robbed her husband of comfort of body by her incessant redecorating, and she stole his peace of mind by her wild spending on clothes. She flatly refused all ceremonial duties, had her stockings ironed and had to be dragged to Mrs. Roosevelt's funeral.

She was indifferent to politics, kept her husband waiting and ecstatically discovered trading stamps when her budget went off the boards. She hid her staff and displayed a taste for solitude and privacy on Cape Cod that her secretary finds unaccountable.

Mrs. Gallagher's view of her dazzling employer may have been conditioned by her long fight to get her salary raised. It took 15 months, even with presidential intervention. At the climax of the row, with a blazing-eyed Mrs. Kennedy protecting the family fortunes, Mrs. Gallagher says, with perfect predictability, "... It isn't the money alone that bothers me any more—it's the principle of the whole thing."

Most Americans forgave Mrs. Kennedy her frivolities because, when her husband was killed, her obsessions and the country's needs exactly coincided. She stylized the nation's grief, and made it bearable.