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IRS File on Hughes

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THE SECRET FILES of the late Howard Hughes strip him of the mystery he used to hide behind. Yet these fascinating files, now in the custody of the Internal Revenue Service, raise some startling new questions.

The improbable Hughes was deeply involved with the Central Intelligence Agency in some of its darkest operations, including the attempts on the life of Cuba's Fidel Castro. Hughes' man in Washington, Robert Bennett, also worked closely with the Watergate plotters.

Yet the files portray Hughes as a pathetic, if eccentric, old man who slowly wasted away — a dope addict, of uncertain sanity, who measured time by enemas.

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HE SPENT his last years confined in an asylum of his own creation, alternately making multimillion-dollar decisions and issuing elaborate instructions on the disposal of his penthouse waste.

In the end, he died of sheer neglect although he was surrounded by doctors and servants in a luxurious Acapulco hotel. The last doctor who examined Hughes reported to the Mexican authorities that "it wasn't a matter of a fatal illness but a patient who had been neglected." The local medics "could have saved him," attested the doctor.

Our curiosity was aroused by the billionaire's mysterious midnight departure from Las Vegas on Thanksgiving eve, 1970. We picked up whispers that there was something dreadfully wrong with Hughes. By Dec. 9, 1970, we were able to report that he was subject to

long lapses, albeit with "flashes of his old brilliance."

We also described him as "an emaciated invalid with white hair down to his shoulders, shaggy eyebrows, a straggly beard and grotesquely long fingernails and toenails."

This was a terrible secret which the Hughes empire labored mightily to dispel. Associates were produced to deny passionately that the world's richest man had degenerated into such a scraggly hermit.

Yet we continued to hear that the real Hughes had become the phantom of the penthouse, with a wild, unkempt look. Last April, we persuaded the Mexican authorities to assist with our investigation. They arrived at his Acapulco penthouse too late to save him from his death flight to Houston but in time to expropriate his files.

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LATER, we made arrangements with the Mexican authorities to turn the files over to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, which has been investigating the Hughes operation.

At least these files have now cleared up the mystery of the disparate Howard Hugheses. Both the disheveled Hughes and the other with the Van Dyke beard were the same man. For his rare visits with outsiders, according to the files, Hughes submitted to a cosmetic overhaul.

The Internal Revenue Service, meanwhile, is trying to determine whether Hughes was competent to manage his \$2 billion empire during his last years and whether his aides took advantage of his condition to enrich themselves.