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A special

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IN MEMORY OF JOHN F. KENNEDY

A special 14-page section

An American Family, November 1963

by Mary Augusta Rodgers

One friend of mine said that she was downtown, shopping in a large department store, when the first announcement that President Kennedy had been shot exploded over radio and television. Browsing in the record department near a display of television sets, she suddenly noticed a group of clerks standing together and staring in the same direction; their faces indicated that the view was frightening, and she thought, Oh, God, somebody's having a heart attack back there, or some awful kind of fit. She left-or, rather, fled. She went back to her car, threw her packages into the back seat and started home. On the expressway she noticed that here too something was wrong; it took a while before she realized the difference, which was that no cars were passing or changing lanes or even driving faster than 30 miles an hour. "It was eerie," she said. "Just like a funeral procession." And then she turned on the car radio and heard the news.

When something like this happens, something so shocking and sudden, with such reverberating consequences, it helps to put the event in a frame of some sort-to make a personal connection. All the stories that begin, "I'll never forget. I was on my way to the post office and it started to rain, so I ducked into a drugstore and . . ." serve the same purpose, whether the speaker is talking about the assassination of President Kennedy or Pearl Harbor or D day. The familiar details lessen the unbearable feeling of helplessness; they put us in the picture.

As it happened, I was doing the same thing when I heard about the assassination of President Kennedy that I had been doing when I heard about the death of President Roosevelt, and that was nothing much. It was early afternoon on both occasions and I was lying down-half reading, half asleep. My sister (she told me later) was better occupied; she was cleaning out a box of toys in the basement of her house in Winnetka and she found her husband's watch, which had been missing for weeks. Rushing to the phone, she called his office and, informed that he was out, started to leave a message. "Tell him there's very good news," she said, and the operator gave an asthmatic gasp and began to cry.

My sister was crying when I talked to her on the phone. We kept saying what everyone was saying, over and over—how terrible, how unbelievable, who could have done it, and what was going to happen now? Ann's voice steadied; there was a moment's pause, during which I imagine that she wiped her eyes, and then she said with sudden, furious intensity, "I'll tell you one thing. I'm never going to speak to Lew again."

Is it necessary to explain that Lewis is a cousin who'd been very much opposed to President Kennedy politically, and that he and my sister had argued on the subject many times?

But political persuasions didn't matter much that day. I talked to a woman who was an early and ardent worker in the Goldwater for President camp, and her first words were a surprise. "Oh, I never thought anything could happen to him," she said. "He always looked so *lucky*—" and her voice caught on the word and broke and she turned away, searching desperately for a handkerchief in her purse. And, of course, he did look lucky; it was one of the elements in his extraordinary appeal. He was handsome, vigorous, confident, at the peak of success and enjoying it, the man who truly had everything.

fternoon faded into evening, and the Presidential plane was somewhere in the sky between Dallas and Washington. Waiting, we felt and talked like people in an airport; there was the same restlessness, the same uncertainty, the milling around, the determination not to miss hearing the next announcement. Finally, on the television screen, we saw the plane land. For one last moment it was possible to believe that everything was as it had been that morning; that a crowd would murmur, "There he is!" and there he would be. But there was only the coffin; and then Mrs. Kennedy, the widow; and the waiting ambulance; and afterward President and Mrs. Johnson, facing a battery of microphones, and President Johnson speaking against the roar of motors in the background.

The evening was an interlude. What seemed strange was that everything was exactly the same. In the kitchen

not even a cup had crashed to the floor; the goldfish swam in their tank; the roast, taken from the freezer that morning, was still in its pan, defrosted and ready for the oven. Dinner was late, and the television set stayed on. Later some neighbors came over. There was a general impulse to gather together—like pioneer wagons forming a circle to ward off the attackers.

We talked, we listened to the radio, we wandered back into the room where the kids were, and the television set kept going. A new issue of a magazine lay on a table by the sofa; its cover was a color photograph of Jack Kennedy and his three-year-old son, very cheerful and sunny, one of the many family-album pictures that had made so many of us feel related to the Kennedys. "I haven't even had time to look at this yet," a visitor said in the familiar tone of stubborn protest. He picked up the magazine, rolled it and looked around the room-but there wasn't anybody he could hit.

Most of the news was about Lee Oswald. Oswald: an automatically comic name, like Egbert. (Or Adolph.) And a past that almost fitted the comic name; someone who according to reports seemed destined to spend his life pushing OUT on the IN door, shouting, "It's a free country, isn't it? A free country!"

riday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday
... the sequence of events is hard to recall, and it was confusing even then. The weather, I think, was fine, the sun shining and the autumn air turning brisk, but I'm not sure. Thanksgiving was only a few days away and the Christmas decorations were up in the business district of town, but all feeling of time and place was out of focus. Reality was the picture on the television screen and that turned into a kaleidoscope of faces and scenes and voices and blurred moments of violence.

We were taken to Washington, to Dallas, back to Washington again; there were news bulletins and reports and summaries and interviews and discussions and film clips and video tapes. There was the face of Lee Oswald—an anonymous face, we would have thought; a face impossible to remember until it became, in a few hours, a face impossible to forget. There was Oswald on film, airing his views on Cuba in a year-old interview from New Orleans; a rapid voice racing against the expected interruption, a guarded expression, the eyes bright

and avid for attention; "a born troublemaker," some of us might have guessed, fearing for the hubcaps on our parked cars. There was Oswald's mother, speaking in an immediately familiar voice and tone. (My son, he's a good boy, why should he get the blame every time something happens?) There was Oswald's young wife, silent, bewildered, a baby in her arms. There was one of Oswald's landladies, speaking in another familiar voice: "So I asked my husband to speak to him about the rent-I tried and, frankly, he was real snotty about the whole thing. . . ."

There was the flag-draped coffin on the caisson leaving the White House, moving slowly toward the Capitol, being carried up the steps. And there was Jacqueline Kennedy, pale and beautiful and controlled, moving in front of the others like a figurehead on a ship, the admiration of an entire country rising like waves around her.

"How can she do it?" I asked—we all asked—and alas for the rhetorical question. There are always those who have the answer for everything. Pills, they said. Undoubtedly her doctor was giving her pills. Another familiar voice—the easy, cynical voice of those who believe that anything can be made bearable with medication, that courage and fortitude can be contained in a prescription, available on request from your family doctor or your friendly neighborhood psychiatrist.

Churches were crowded that Sunday. In the entry of our church somebody had placed a blackboard on an easel; whatever exhortation it had held for one of the Sunday-school classes had been hastily erased, leaving a few stars in one corner, and the new message printed unevenly in soft chalk: In gratitude for the life of our beloved President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a communion service will be held at noon on Monday. . . .

The service began, and a woman sitting near me broke down during the first hymn. "Eternal Father, strong to save, Whose arm doth quell the restless wave . . ." I cried too, but this was nothing new. I admire stoicism but that's as far as I am able to go, being one of those unfortunates who cry at weddings and commencement exercises and sad movies and at the sight of children in a school band playing as they parade down a suburban street. During the rigors of this weekend I had been humming hymns under my breath and dwelling on all the obvious poetry quotations-"O Captain, My Captain," naturally, and "Goodnight, sweet Prince," and so forth. So I was not surprised, but the woman near me looked as though she was struggling with a feeling of aston-ishment as much as with her tears. "I never cry," she whispered apologetically, her eyes brimming.

After the service a group of us stood in the Sunday sunshine and talked about going to the communion service on Monday. A friend in a fur hat shook her head.

"I can't take any more," she announced. "This assassination has killed me."

So we went home, turned on the television set while we were having a late breakfast, and—passing a platter of bacon and eggs—we saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Oswald in the stomach.

Disaster and sudden death have been well documented in our century, and the pictures form a fearful montage: the car of the Archduke and Duchess of Austria, assassinated at Sarajevo, and the open limousine in Dallas with roses lying on the floor; the Chinese baby alone and screaming after the bombing of Nanking and the children's shoes lying in the rubble of the Negro church in Birmingham, Alabama; planes, bombs, tanks; concentration camps and refugees; a hat on a fence post and a body lying in the mud of a country road.

"History," people said as the shooting of Oswald was shown over and over and rerun in slow motion like the movements in some monstrous ballet. "This is history."

So it was, and so is every day that is past. The winds of chance blow, a President is shot and dies in half an hour, and a door bangs open in every house. We shiver, and as soon as possible we shut the door. For the present everything at home remains the same. The pot of ivy sits on the kitchen window sill, the goldfish swim in their tank, the milkman arrives—late, perhaps, on that weekend in November, but with the regular order.

In a way it was a relief when the funeral began on Monday. The turmoil and dreamlike horror of the weekend was over. Now grief was given an ordered and eloquent expression, and farewell said with prayers and full military honors. Think of one moment and you will remember them all-the slow march; the muffled drums; the riderless horse, prancing and jerking his head; the stab of pure astonishment at the sight of General de Gaulle and Haile Selassie walking together down a Washington street (it would have seemed no more fantastic if the announcer had mentioned the presence of Charlemagne and the Black Prince); the son saluting his father's coffin and his little-boy look of eager interest as the flags and horses and marching men went by; the final services at the grave, the lighting of the flame, taps and the folded flag—"eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord. . . ."

It was over. The limousines began arriving back at the White House. The eulogies continued, but in a different tone; they had been prepared more carefully and sometimes served other interests. "In this tragic hour ..."

e each are left with our own memories. I think of the evening of November 22nd, a late hour, and Mark, our third son, keeping the vigil before the television screen. (Fifteen years before, I myself had kept a very different kind of vigil in the maternity section of a hospital in Washington, D.C., where Mark was born. It was election night in 1948, when everyone was so sure Dewey would win, and the radios were on even there, although tuned to a discreet murmur. Around midnight I remember that a woman in one of the labor rooms suddenly began to shout, and an intern rushed to her side with soothing words about how much better this shot would make her feel. . . . "What are you talking about?" the sufferer cried. "Dewey is losing!")

Anyway, Mark was born that night, and on November 22, 1963, aged 15, he was just under six feet tall, and a nut about guitars and folk music. He had his guitar with him as he watched the television screen, and his fingers plucked out the same melody over and over; it was a song about pretty Polly-O.

The television program was a rerun of the 1960 Democratic convention in Los Angeles. (O Captain! my Captain! Rise up and hear the bells; rise upfor you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills—) Shouts, parading delegates, bobbing signs: WIN WITH KENNEDY and WE WANT JACK! It was the first political convention that Mark had ever found himself interested in; he had worn a campaign button, distributed leaflets, quarreled with his best friend, had a wonderful time.

A voice bawled, "And now . . . ladies and gentlemen . . . I give you . . . the next President of the United States!" and Jack Kennedy smiled and waved at the roaring crowd.

"I can't believe he's dead," Mark said. The music stopped; his head sank down on the guitar. It is the moment I remember as the memorial service in our family. Only one out of millions, I know.



Reflections a Year Later

by Diana Trilling

As I write, it is late summer, 1964; soon it will be a year since President Kennedy died. If we had thought that with the passage of these long months-and somehow they have been the longest months in memory-our pain at his loss would have notably diminished, we know now how mistaken we were. Our grief may be duller than it was, but it is deeper, more fixed in our permanent emotions; the likelihood sthat we'll take it with us to our own graves. We occupy ourselves with our customary concerns, we are no longer obsessed with his death as we were in those first days when it seemed as if all of life were defined by the awful calamity that had been visited upon usuntil suddenly there is a flash of recollection; we see the name or an old photograph or whatever it may be that releases us from the convention of "business as usual" into the freedom of admitted feeling, and then all over again we ask ourselves is it true, can it conceivably be true, that this man who spoke to us of so much hope and possibility no longer exists. To which our answer is no, it cannot be true: there are some deaths that are unimaginable.

Were we indulging ourselves in our extreme of mourning those first days after Kennedy died? Was there perhaps something undue, which came not from devotion to Kennedy himself but from the need to know the gratification of strong feeling, in our compulsion to engage each other like a nation of Ancient Mariners while again and again we rehearsed our emotions of devastation? Were we self-hypnotized at our television sets that November weekend when hour after hour we heard still another report, watched still another scene of the catastrophe, or in the weeks that followed when, with friends and strangers alike, we could talk of nothing except where we had been, what we had been doing, what we had gone on to do, when the news of the assassination had first reached us? Certainly the force of feeling generated by Kennedy's death even in people schooled in the restraint of their emotions was remarkable. I think of my own friends and acquaintances, for example. These are people who were in general favorable to the Kennedy Administration; and there had been signs enough that Kennedy's personality worked a kind of magic on them, quite apart from their judgment of his policies. But there was nothing to prepare one for the unembarrassed outpouring of grief at his death. And on the side of the opposition, the feeling of personal loss was almost as acute. I doubt that there has ever been a more bipartisan response to any event in American history.

uch a spontaneous and unprecedented sorrowing is not easy to explain; I have but a flickering perception of what may have accounted for it. But far from believing that it was disproportionate to the occasion, I think it accurately reflected what Kennedy represented to us-the only national leader we have known who, in addition to being a figure of political dominance and authority, was also the fulfillment of our dream of what a human being can be. Containing within himself certain marked impulses-the impulse to power, the impulse to practicality and earnestness -which we have come to regard as definitive of a man's character, or at least as exclusive of their opposites, he showed us that what may look like contradictions of character can live together in entire harmony. He demonstrated that it is possible to be concerned with power without capitulating to its brutalizing influences; to be intelligent without being disarmed for practical affairs; to be practical without being earthbound; to be earnest and yet at the same time humorous and high-spirited, dignified and yet relaxed, daring and yet cautious and responsible. By his own example, that is, he promised us our full complex humanity. We were therefore permitted a full, which is always an undue, human response to his death.

Of course, the fact that Kennedy was murdered made for some of the intensity of our response; there was the element of shock as well as of grief. While the modern experience may inure us to mass slaughter, the violent taking of an individual life is something we assign to the world of ugly fictions; we still hold to the illusion that anyone with a familiar face and place has a natural immunity to sudden extinction. And when it comes to the assassination of a president, it is as difficult for us to credit such a pos-

sibility as to suppose that we, our precious selves, are susceptible to the grimmer diseases that attack others.

Ever since the shooting, a great deal of nonsense has been spoken, publicly as well as privately, about our national violence. An act that, so far as we knew at the time or have been able to learn since, was the work of a single madman has been put forward as proof that American society is lawless, vicious, poisoned by hatred. Well, this may be. Perhaps we are a hateridden people, insolent before law. Certainly the shooting of Oswald in the very jail where he had been held, before the eyes of his jailers and of millions of television viewers, was anarchic to the point where it necessarily shook our faith in the agencies of social order. But murderous madmen have existed in all periods and countries. The phenomenon of Oswald or even of Ruby adds no substantive evidence to a diagnosis of our national health. To charge ourselves, as a people, with the motives of Kennedy's assassin constitutes, I think, a perverse use of the event. It reduces tragedy to the level of morbidity.

The actual terror lay, of course, in the entire gratuitousness of the killing and in what this implies of our lack of control-finally-over human circumstance: a man, a great public figure, the President of the United States, rode through the streets of his country as he had innumerable times before and a lunatic killed him. Was security at fault? We like to suppose so, but in our hearts we know that there is no security that is impenetrable, at least not in a democracy. Was anything gained by the killing? Literally nothing except the gratification of a mad phantasy-and thus can a madman move through any innocent street of our lives and wreak his havoc; or thus can any other awful eruption in nature, or simply chance, do away with any of us, with nothing gained or to blame. A lunatic is not ordinarily responsible for his insane deed, and where there is no moral responsibility there is no moral meaning; we are left to a world of accident, in which the bizarre and the unpredictable win out over reasonableness. Because there is no one on whom we can decently vent our rage at Kennedy's death, our fury stays with us as fear and we turn it into an attack upon the society of which Oswald was such an uneasy tenant. Some of us even translate the mysteriousness of fate into the "unsolved mystery" of who killed our President. The displacement is understandable but it is not intelligent.

That Kennedy was shot down from ambush with no opportunity to put up

the fight of which we know he would have been so capable had he met an adversary in open battle or even had he had to combat a perilous sickness; that his death was as robbed of meaning as of grandeur; that he died still young, with much unexplored life ahead of him-it was this that made the peculiar horror of his killing. This, together with the fact that he happened to be the person he was-a unique instance, among American public figures, of someone who embodied a myriad of qualities we think of as American but who also transcended them, or at least combined them in such a way as to create for us a new image of our national possibility.

Much is talked and written about the Kennedy "style"-ever since his death the word has been wearied in our effort to capture the special flavor of this man's personality, what it was in his manner of being that so captivated not only his own people but the world. Every president puts his individual stamp on the office and also, subtly but pervasively, on his epoch. And this is in addition to the place he marks out for himself in history by the events in which he participates and the public decisions he takes. From his very face and voice; the way in which he holds his body, greets people, smiles or doesn't smile; from his wife and children and the way in which he lives in the White House; from his choice of friends and advisers; from the relation between the personal tone and the public performance, we can construct the dominant tendency of an era and make a fairly accurate determination of why it was that in this period of the national life the culture as a whole took the particular direction it did. The word "style" to encompass this presidential tone and influence had never, to my knowledge, been used before it was used of Kennedy-not of our early presidents, not of Lincoln or our recent presidents, not even of Roosevelt, for it was not until the Kennedy years that a personal no less than a political ideal so commandingly established itself in the White House. The energy, freedom, boldness, imaginativeness that we associate with the endowment of the artist, Kennedy brought with him to the office of President. Describing him, we therefore use a term previously reserved for the discussion of works of

The artist is always young in the degree that he brings his own freshness of vision to our perception of life. The youthfulness of Kennedy was a significant aspect of his creative energy and had little to do with his cal-

endar years. Even today, when our life span has been considerably increased, a man in his middle 40s has seen the end of youth and the beginning of his middle age. It was impossible, however, to think of Kennedy as a middleaged man, his vitality had been so unabated by his experience of life-indeed, one felt, so far from fully tested by life. This was not a matter simply of physical well-being—the one time I was in a room with him, his back was giving him obvious trouble; when he noticed that one of the gloves I was carrying had dropped to the floor, he apologetically explained that he was unable to bend to pick it up for me; yet there was no sign of any retraction of spirit such as customarily accompanies a bodily impairment. ascendancy over age, in Kennedy, described his refusal of the personal limitations most of us unconsciously invite. He was dramatically, and in defiance of biology, young as the artist is imaginatively young or, more precisely, as the romantic hero is young, because he still, in his mid-40s, conceived of himself as having been put in life in order to enlarge its range, in order to overcome it.

In maturity heroism takes the form of nobility, dignity, wisdom-the quiet virtues by which we undertake to measure up to the demands life makes of us. But the young hero challenges life to meet his demands of it. His romance lies in his belief that he can make the world bend to his imagination of himself. Kennedy was all romance in this sense, all romantic heroism. Despite his calendar age, by whatever alchemy the mind works on the flesh, he even looked the young St. George eager for new dragons to subdue. The venturousness we expect only in those who have not been long enough in the world to learn its lessons of humiliation and defeat he had retained well beyond the stage in life when most of us have long since conceded the bitter victory of reality over our dreams.

mericans, literature tells us, are less ready than other people to renounce their dreams. Europeans are apparently born older than we are and more submissive to the governance of reality, and this is supposed to account for the rawness of which other countries (and we ourselves) accuse us: we are unripened by a knowledge of actuality, especially the actuality of our own past. In his reluctance to part company with himself as a young

man, Kennedy would thus seem to have been a peculiarly American character.

But there is also a sizable difference between holding on to one's dream of personal transcendence, as Kennedy did, and evading the external realities, as we so regularly do as a nation but as Kennedy so rarely did. The dramatic exception for Kennedy, the situation in which he was surely (and in the familiar way of his country) more wishful, or even self-deluded, than realistic was, of course, the Bay of Pigs invasion, a foolhardy adventure if ever there was one, and one which we came out of perhaps better than we deserved. The lack of a proper objective appraisal of the dangers involved in a Cuban invasion and of the chances for its success was the grossest of errors; so far as Kennedy was concerned, it was redeemed, if at all, only by the dignity with which the President conducted himself after the fiasco. That the same man who engineered, or failed to engineer; the invasion of Cuba was later able to handle the Cuban crisis of October 1962 with so much realism testifies, no doubt, to the amount Kennedy had learned in the intervening period about the danger of making decisions on the advice of subordinates. By the time of our second round with Cuba, the President was in control; it was his crisis and his decision, and far from indulging the old moth of America's imperviousness to foreign attack, Kennedy made the sternest possible assessment of the gravity of the threat and of our ability to meet it, achieving a victory that presented a wholly new picture of America to the world. Now it was a case, not of Kennedy following the American precedent as we know it from recent history, but of America finding its courageous model in Kennedy. If, as has often been said, President Roosevelt represented for the American people a much-honored father figure, with the Cuban crisis Kennedy became our much-loved symbol of the heroic son.

When the chronicle of our times is written, the successful confrontation of Russia on Cuba will undoubtedly stand as Kennedy's major accomplishment in foreign affairs, just as his civil rights program will remain his major contribution in the domestic sphere. Certainly the Cuban victory was a fresh and fortifying experience; we have not often, on our latter-day record, known its kind. America is used to being on the winning side in war and has developed a considerable arrogance about its invincibility-which may be why it has not bothered to study the high and difficult arts of

statesmanship. But cold war is a new invention of civilized nations, and it demands a different approach than we have been accustomed to in international conflict. Even if they have not been entirely conscious of it, I think, the American people have for some years now suffered the fear that our superior industrial skill and the dependability of our young men in war are not a sufficient resource with which to meet our present dangers. In cold war there is required in the everyday conduct of foreign affairs the same courage and strategy we need in battle, and for what might be called spiritual as well as practical ends, to save us from a senseless blunder with its aftermath of national chagrin, and to preserve our resilience as a culture. Kennedy's conduct of the Cuban crisis was no less cautious than it was stalwart; it was unmarked by bravado. It made us a much-needed gift of national pride and confidence, which is something else again than arrogance. There is every probability that the response to his death in the Iron Curtain countries-and a month after the assassination an American visitor to the Soviet Union could report that he was personally commiserated with wherever he went-was the response of the vanguished challenger to an adversary who had demonstrated his right to victory.

ne of the side effects of America's triumph in the Cuban affair was to deprive the intellectual community of an old ground for protest against the retrograde authority of government. Already Kennedy had not only confirmed the domestic program of Franklin Roosevelt but also, on the issue of civil rights, carried it a large step forward beyond anything Roosevelt had dared. In addition, the quality of his personality considerably closed the gap that had previously seemed to separate the life of action from the life of speculative intelligence. It required only Kennedy's calculated boldness in the Cuban affair to prove what intellectuals have always believed, that there is a root connection between personal style and politics; that is, between personal style and the proper uses of power. As of October 1962, romance, mind, power were all of them united in the single figure of the President as they had perhaps never been since the early years of the Republic. At long last distinction had been restored to our national style, and the intellectual minority was well on its way to being transformed from a voice of antagonism to the voice of

a loyal opposition.

But the interesting fact is that Kennedy, who was able to satisfy the intellectuals' desire for a government consonant with their imaginative vision, no more conformed to the pattern of present-day intellectual rebelliousness than to the familiar image of the politician. In terms of the sensitive balance he maintained between the speculative and the practical intelligence, he was not even a certifiable intellectual. I am told that he once invited a well-known New York literary critic to lunch at the White House to discuss the difference between his own perception of the problems of the country and that of the professional student of contemporary culture. After listening gravely to the critic's statements, Kennedy terminated the interview with the question "But what has all of this to do with the papers waiting for me on my desk at this very moment?" This story made the rounds of the intellectual and literary community without-and here is the wonder-provoking any of the expectable irony. For this was the point about Kennedy: He had neither dismissed nor belittled the message of culture; he had wholly understood it but was simply introducing into the discussion his frank puzzlement as to how one goes about reconciling the premises of speculative thought with the concrete demands of government. Insofar as any bridge can be made between ideal and practical politics, he made it -and in the process gave new stature to diplomacy.

ennedy acknowledged his indebtedness to Churchill as a model of political power, and certainly he was closer to the Churchillian than the Rooseveltian image in his personal style as well as in his diplomatic stance, though his rhetoric as successfully avoided Churchill's orotundity as it did Roosevelt's paternalism. What the language of Kennedy did share with Churchill's was the common touch that always brought a flight of Churchillian prose back to earth; the homely dimension was something Roosevelt inevitably missed no matter how hard he strove for it-the fireside tone, one had felt, was merely a contrivance of simplicity, not the real thing. Where Roosevelt was the patrician sincerely speaking for the common good, Kennedy was always, despite his wealth and Harvard, the self-made man addressing a nation of his own kind. The cadence of local American speech took the sting of privilege out of his ready fluency. His wittiness, implemented as it was by a grin that was nothing if not pure pleasure at his having been able to bring it off, protected his literacy from all taint of ostentation. And if there were times when his humor was touched with wryness or perhaps even sharpness, this too was appropriate. Kennedy's mockery was sharp chiefly as it was turned against himself. What, it asked, am I doing up here among the exalted, leader of the strongest nation in the world? It was a question which communicated no self-doubt, only a healthy instinct to self-deflation, taking the measure of everyman's ulti-

mate insufficiency.

But when in the history of this orany country has a head of government dared regard himself as he would any other man, and with no loss of dignity? We have had humble presidents and modest presidents, and surely we have had undignified presidents, but only in Kennedy a president whose pridefulness and humility were symbiotic, each best understood in reference to the other. There comes to mind the occasion of the Nobel Prize dinner, when Linus Pauling, in protest against nuclear armaments in the democracies, picketed the White House on the afternoon of the festivities and then, changing into a dinner jacket, appeared as one of the Kennedys' honored guests. Welcoming him warmly, Kennedy made only a single comment on Dr. Pauling's earlier manifestation. With a smile, he reported that Caroline had wanted to know what her father had done wrong for people to be carrying signs outside his house. It was the gracefulness not only of a sophisticated but of a truly serious man who saw the Presidency as but a single term in the complex democratic process.

And yet he was a very defended man-despite the relaxation and geniality, the personal armor was there and obvious to a glance, as how could he not be and endure the career he had chosen for himself?-just as he was a man of whom it was possible to guess that he could be ruthless. And one had heard that even within his family he insisted upon a formality in manners and address which might seem to dispute the casualness which was so much his public posture. Certainly there can be no question of his taste for ceremony. Only under the Kennedy sponsorship could the Nobel Prize dinner have combined so much natural and yet ceremonial flavor. It was natural for the Kennedys to be hosts to gifted people and it was natural for

their guests to feel so much at ease in the Kennedys' White House that spontaneously, after the dinner, they began to dance to the music of the Marine Band. It was natural that when a guest commented to Mrs. Kennedy that it was a wonderful party, she replied that in the days when her husband had been Senator they both had suffered so much stuffiness at official functions that they had promised themselves, on coming to the White House, that their visitors should have a genuine good time. It had been natural and ceremonial that the Presidential entrance into the East Room, where the Nobel Prize winners and the other guests were assembled, should have been heralded by the standard bearers of the four branches of the military and by the playing of "Hail to the Chief." One need not have worried that the fanfare would put a chill on the quick conviviality of the gathering: the expression on the faces of the President and his wife as they moved into the room was quite sufficient assurance that one was being received by friends. It was both natural and ceremonial that Kennedy, in his short speech of welcome to his guests at dinner, opened with the since-famous remark that never before in the . history of the White House had so much talent been gathered in this one room since Thomas Jefferson had dined alone; this was more than witty, it was a charming compliment which, at the same time, included the characteristic self-depreciation. Obviously Kennedy never needed to be solemn about his respect for the past, any more than he needed to be pedantic in order to invoke tradition.

Ceremony and tradition-the two are of course inseparable, and it was in Kennedy's instinct for the traditional that we perhaps discover the chief though paradoxical explanation of the peculiar hold he had on the modern world and, more paradoxical still, of his extraordinary appeal to the young. The acute, the quite phenomenal, grief which the young of all countries felt at Kennedy's death has been accounted for-too glibly, I think-by his own youthfulness. To be sure, a president who is youthful, handsome, athletic, is bound to invite the identification of young persons. But I believe that the poignant emotion excited among the young by Kennedy's death had less to do with this identification than with the living connection Kennedy made between past and present, and with the promise this contained of a continuing life in civilization, a future. This was not a political comfort Kennedy offered the young; it wasn't a matter of brave words and optimistic forecasts. It was a matter of Kennedy's own assumption, subtly communicated wherever in the world his personality made itself felt.

he kind of sophistication which Kennedy had in such abundance tends in our time to be allied-not as it once was, with a rich and wise experience of life-but only with a conspicuous familiarity with the current and fashionable. Rarely indeed does it have its source, as it did in Kennedy, in an appreciation of the past or in an educated awareness of traditional values. Kennedy's ability to respect tradition without being captive to its modes of thought and feeling was a superb gift, perhaps his supreme distinction as a contemporary man. And it was nothing he needed to talk about except in passing reference; it was the quality in his personality. In the way he handled his body, in his idiom, in the catholicity of his friendships, in his relations with his family, in every facet of his deportment as it was reported or photographed, we recognized a person for whose benefit contemporaneity and traditionalism worked in perfect accord.

To this inner harmoniousness there could be no more striking clue than his relation with his family, and in particular his relation with his father. There is no reason to mince words: to have as your father someone as well defined in the public mind as Joseph P. Kennedy and to decide to run for elective office on a progressive platform is no small undertaking, and there were many of us who wondered, back in 1960, how Kennedy would manage it. How would he be able to reconcile the advantage that accrued to him because of his father's wealth with the palpable misfortune of being associated in the public mind with his father's pursuit of money and his retrograde politics? But Kennedy did manage it, with what looked, at least on the outside, like entire ease, by refusing to entertain within himself even the possibility of guilt by association -either the guilt of being rich or the guilt of being the son of a man discredited with the liberal public. He was his own man, and if this included the possession of a fortune, then this was the kind of man he was, a man with a fortune; and if it included a father with an unhappy reputation, this was also the kind of man he was, a man whose father had an unhappy reputation. He never flaunted either fortune or father; indeed, during the campaign Joseph Kennedy was sensibly kept out of the spotlight. But neither did Kennedy disclaim or apologize for his wealth or the father who had accumulated it. No more than he restricted his wife's expenditure for clothes out of fear that this might alienate less-privileged sections of the population-and it turned out, of course, that rich and poor alike took pleasure in Jacqueline Kennedy-did he ever suggest any diminution of proper filial feeling; as President he continued summer residence in the family compound at Hyannis Port, and the genuineness of his family attachments seems obvious enough. The idea which is so strong today wherever sophistication or progressivism show themselves, that in order to be a person in one's own right one must be wholly rid of family ties and loyalty, seems never to have occurred to Kennedy. His behavior, in fact, proposed the quite contrary hypothesis, that a man is truly free only when he is not captive to the idea of an unconditioned selfhood.

In the contemporary view of the personal life, this is virtually a revolutionary proposition, it runs so counter to our present-day notion that independence can best be won by the wiping away of all our antecedents. And if we are to understand why Kennedy meant what he did to young people, I think the traditionalism of his attitude toward his family-and this includes his brothers and sisters no less than his father-is of central significance. His family feeling was but a single, highly charged statement of the respect he gave to everything which had gone into the making of the person he was. A counterpart of the same sentiment was his high regard for history, for American society and its institutions. Dry and wry as he might be about himself as President of the United States, he was never funny about the office or his country. Disinclined as he might be to sanctify himself as the leader of his nation, he felt no need to disavow his national heritage in order to authenticate himself as a liberal spirit. His awareness of the past, both his personal and his national past, instead of being a restriction upon his sense of contemporaneity, was its greatest strength. From it he derived his knowledge of cultural continuity and his disdain for mere fashion.

A man, and a president at that, who believes in history, in continuity, in a future, and who yet, even in the judgment of the most intransigent youth, cannot be written off as a "square"; a president whose personal aura is one of heroism, romance, charm, gaiety,

even a certain rakishness, and who yet has the stern substantiality of mind and character to lead his country in international crisis and to clear new paths of domestic enlightenment; a modern who is yet a traditionalist; a traditionalist who is yet the most contemporary of personalities-what more could the young people of the world ask for in the way of reassurance that life is solid under their feet in spite of their own uncertainties? The great burden of modernity-and I think this is especially so in America-is its strange assumption that the new has to be self-generated, without a parentage or precedent. Like no national leader one can name, Kennedy represented the new, yet his firm roots in the past were always known; andwhich was his cultural triumph-his acceptance of the past increased rather than dimmed the glow of modernity in which he moved and lived. Small wonder his younger contemporaries felt that he offered them the secret of life, and that with his loss they were themselves again lost.

I spoke of Kennedy as being comparable to the artist in the enlargement he gave to life. He was also like the artist in the way he used the old to create the new. This is what we wait for always, but today our need is peculiarly sharp and deep-reaching -the painter, the poet, the novelist, who will make the bridge between history and the future and thus dispel our isolation in the present. That, in our time, it was not an artist but a political figure who performed this act of grace is more than a surprise; it is a miracle. And it indeed makes his death an enduring occasion for mourning: it is ourselves we grieve for.





County Wexford, Ireland

by Ihan Robbins

In early December of 1963, ten days after the tragic assassination of President Kennedy, I visited County Wexford, in Ireland, the birthplace of the President's great-grandfather Patrick Kennedy. I was there to fulfill a promise I had made lightly ten years earlier when I interviewed the late President-then a junior United States senator from Massachusetts.

Our conversation had included a long discussion of Ireland, and John Kennedy had strongly advised me to "see Erin." I promised I would do so. When I found myself routed from London to Shannon Airport a few days after the President's funeral, I decided on the spur of the moment to carry out that long-delayed intention.

At Shannon Airport the green, white and gold flag of Eire was hanging at half-staff. Many of the employees in the terminal were wearing black arm bands. A porter who overheard the clerk at the car-rental agency telling me how to get to County Wexford sighed heavily and said, "'Tis where himself was born!"

I didn't correct him, for in a way he was right. In the next five days I learned that John Kennedy was and will always be an honorary birthright Irishman, even though nearly everyone knows he was born near Boston and it was his great-grandfather Patrick who emigrated.

Through the Irish Tourist Office I was assigned a rather unusual guide

for my visit. He was Andrew Minihan, the chairman of the New Ross Urban Council, who had represented the county at the funeral. We met the following afternoon at the Royal Hotel in New Ross, a charming, medieval-looking town built on the heights of the River Barrow.

Minihan, a bearded, boomingvoiced giant of a man, with the accent of an Oxford graduate but an Irishman's sweetness, told me about the crowd of thousands who had gathered on the moldering quay by the riverside to welcome Kennedy in June of 1963.

"New Ross was once a greater seaport than Dublin. The population was thirty thousand. More than fifty vessels a day came and went," he said. "But that's a century past, and everything now seems to be crumbling into the water. I had boats standing by to rescue all who fell in. I half expected the embankment to slide into the stream. There were ten thousand people jumping up and down, hallooing and waving and singing.

"I'd seen President Kennedy the day before on television as he stood at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. He looked grim and tired. Now in Ireland, his true homeland, he was smiling, joking, enjoying himself.

"As he was preparing to speak we discovered the electric power had been cut off from the microphone. I was desperately embarrassed. I began checking the wires and the plugs and signaling for help. President Kennedy said to me, 'Don't worry, Andy. It's a poor Irishman that can't shout!'

"Fortunately, he didn't have to. We got it fixed in time. I discovered that security agents had become suspicious of the wild tangle of wires and transmitters. Fearing a bomb, they had yanked out all the electrical connections."

he next morning Andy Minihan and I went to Dunganstown, a small crossroads of half a dozen whitewashed houses four miles away.

"There used to be fifty families living here," Minihan said. during the famine of 1848 the landlords evicted families who couldn't pay rent by tearing down many of the houses and burning the furniture. The people were left to walk the roads."

The home pointed out to visitors as the birthplace of Patrick Kennedy is a small, single-story stone building. "At least we think this is the house," Minihan said. "No one can say for sure. Perhaps it's just an outbuilding and the original house was pulled down."

On the exterior wall near the front door is a sign reading, "The Kennedy Homestead." The word "homestead" is misleading. The Kennedys of Dunganstown rented this farm. They owned not even \$50 worth of personal property. Now the house, and the larger one adjoining it, are owned by Mary Kennedy Ryan. She is a 63year-old third cousin of the late President, the granddaughter of Patrick's brother James. She married her second cousin, James Ryan, a grandson of Patrick's brother John. Mrs. Ryan is a stout, friendly woman with keen blue eyes, and gray hair knotted in a bun at the top of her head.

"The times were so bad then," she told-me, "there is not even a public record when Patrick Kennedy left Ireland. But we are sure that it was about 1848. Even the family records are so muddled, a body can't tell. More than a million people left at the time of the potato famine. A blight came upon the leaves of the vine and crumbled the roots and there was nothing at all for a body to eat."

I learned that many starvation victims were shoveled into multiple graves. "And never marked nor a mass said over them," Andy Minihan said. "The priests themselves were dead or dying."

ew Americans are aware that County Wexford played a leading role in the Irish rebellion against the English that took place just 23 years after our own Revolution. The revolt was crushed, but it was County Wexford that launched one of the few successful uprisings. There they still sing a wistful tune called "Johnny, I Hardly Knew Ye." The tune is familiar to Americans as the Civil War song "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." The Irish words express the anguish of a young girl who watches her sweetheart go marching off to fight the English.

"After more than a century there is still some bitterness here," Minihan told me. "Only the men of Wexford had the power and courage to make a real stand against the English. They were led by Father Murphy, a heroic priest. He was hung and his parishioners' heads were stuck on spikes throughout the town. But the noble men from Wexford—we call them the 'men of the west'—have always been ready to battle for the right."

In 1848, when John F. Kennedy's great-grandfather Patrick decided to emigrate, Ireland was a charnel house strewn with frozen, starved bodies. If Patrick Kennedy resembled other emigrants at that time, he wore ragged clothing and had no shoes—only a few strips of cloth bound around his feet. He made the trip in the steerage hold of one of the "coffin ships," so called because so many of the passengers were fatally infected with typhus.

atrick landed on Noddles Island, in the mouth of Boston Harbor, was kept there in quarantine and then joined friends in Boston, who got him a job as a barrelmaker.

"The first news he heard from Ireland," according to Andy Minihan, "was that his family had been evicted. He knew this meant they were living in bog holes or covered ditches, eating rotten potatoes or even the bark of the beech trees.

"And yet he passed down to his children his love of Ireland, and they have it to this very day. He must somehow have kept his sense of humor too, for your President had it in great abundance. He was not above making a local joke. Speaking of the emigration and its consequences, he said, 'By all rights I should be here in New Ross, working for the Albatross Company.' At the idea, the crowd broke into peals of laughter. As they paused President Kennedy glanced teasingly at Protocol Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke and said, 'See, Angie, what fun it is to be Irish?' Oh, I can tell you, he swept our hearts away!"

Mrs. Ryan invited us into her home. She and her 25-year-old daughter Josephine live in a slightly larger house in front of the Kennedy homestead. Her younger daughter Mary Anne, she said, was a nurse at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin and came home only on holidays.

The building has a modern galvanized tin roof painted green. Heating is supplied by a large, open hearth. The house as we entered was filled with the odor of baking bread. Mrs. Ryan broke open a loaf too fresh to cut and slathered sweet butter on the steaming lumps of bread.

"You Americans are all too thin," she said. "Cousin Jack and his sisters were too thin. 'You worry too much and race about,' I told them."

Mrs. Ryan served black tea strong as lye. I turned to sit down on a fire-

side stool, but she said sharply, "Himself sat there!" I sprang back and found another seat.

"Cousin Jack came here like an ordinary member of the family," she continued. "He crouched at the fire and blew the bellows. He asked everything about the family and the farm, God rest him."

She began to cry quietly, then continued, "He'd read the New Ross Standard before he came here and he knew there was going to be a cattle auction on the weekend. He said, "The fire feels wonderful.' Oh, he cared—he really gave you the feeling he cared. We had a tea for him and his darlin' sisters Eunice and Jean, and for his sister-in-law the Mrs. Princess Radziwill.

"Cousins came from miles around. He shook hand, with each of them and he said, 'I'm glad some of the Kennedys missed the boat and didn't all go to Washington.' We had everything on white linen cloths. We had tea from a silver pot and cold boiled salmon.

"The sisters were lovely too," she continued. "Not a bit of false pride in them, for all their money. They sprang up and down to help with the servin'. You know, if you take my Josie's mouth and chin and put my Mary Anne's eyes on top, you've got the same face as his sister Eunice.

"The government men with him kept telling him he had to go—that he must be on schedule. As he was leaving we gave him the presents. There was a large white wool blanket made from sheep right here. A bit of china for his wife. A blackthorn walking stick for himself. A handkerchief for Caroline. A hand-carved wooden boat for the little boy. Bless him, and his father taken away so early!

"His last words were, 'Cousin Mary, the next time I come I'll bring Jackie and the children.'

nearly fainted dead away," Mrs. Ryan said, "when I heard the evil news. Father William Mernagh—all the way from Ballykelly Church a mile off—came rushing over to comfort us, but he was so upset I had to get up and fix him some tea.

"Father Mernagh says he was taken because God needed him very much somewhere else. The next morning I had my Josie write a letter to Jacqueline Kennedy with that message. Do you know that angel woman wrote back and thanked me for being so kind to her Jack?"

As I left, Mrs. Ryan showed me the juniper tree President Kennedy had planted next to her house on his visit. "It's said to live fifty years and grow twenty-five feet high," she said. "That means I can look at it every day for the rest of my life and remember him!"

A short distance down the road I called on Mary Ryan's brother, Jim Kennedy. His stone house was similar to hers and there was a small bog fire burning in the kitchen. A spare, wrinkled dairy farmer, he introduced me to his wife Kathleen and his 22-year-old son Patrick, who bears a startling resemblance to Edward Kennedy.

Jim Kennedy remembered the President's first visit to his farm. "It was in 1947," he said. "This Yank came drivin' up in a shiny station wagon. He gave me his card that said, 'John F. Kennedy, United States Congressman.' Ah, it was easier for him in those days. He didn't have all those bloomin' press men following him about.

"Do you know"—and Jim Kennedy became indignant—"one of the news photographers that came along with him the last time brought along a pig under his jacket so he could photograph poor old Patrick's house with a pig in it. Bedad and I took out after him with a hayfork. Lucky for him a priest stopped me.

"But who can say, if Patrick hadn't left Dunganstown, Jack might be alive today! And perhaps he'd ha' been happier here on the farm."

y next visit was with the Reverend Mother Clement, Mother Superior of the Loreto Convent, an orphans' home a few miles from New Ross. Mother Clement, a sturdy woman in her early 60s, is a Fitzgerald, related to President Kennedy's mother.

She smiled at me. "I'm the forgotten relative. But your President came to call on me. He stopped his motorcade up the road a bit and came in on foot with only one man with him. There he was, the President of the whole United States, an Irishman and a Catholic, God bless him, and my very own cousin.

"Right away he began talking about the Fitzgeralds, the convent and our family home in Skibbereen, in County Cork. He greeted the other nuns and the children. He lifted a lame little girl up and marched her about the garden in his arms.

"I learned about his death when one of the women who lives nearby came running to tell me. In shock I was for five minutes. Then I called all the children together and we said the Rosary for the repose of his soul."

hen I left the convent I walked back through the streets of New Ross, past foundations of an abbey built in the sixth century. Most of the storefront windows had pictures of Kennedy draped in black and flanked by Irish and American flags. I no sooner stepped through a door than people who recognized me as an American by my clothes gathered around to express sympathy.

In a plumber's shop the assistant turned to me and said, "It was past supper, going on about eight o'clock, and I was looking at Telefis Eireann. The program was an American thriller that starred Mr. Peter Lawford, the President's own brother-in-law. A sudden rainstorm came up and me sister Peggy flew to shut the windows. Amid the bangin' and smashin' of the window sashes I suddenly heard the announcer cut in to say that President Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas. Peggy let out a lofty shriek. Me mother and da came running into the room. We all just clung together and sobbed. I tried to comfort them by telling them we all have to meet our fate sometime."

An old man who was sitting quietly on a stool in the front window, sunning himself, added, "I lost my wife by pneumonia, my three sons through army service, high livin' and drownin', and now him. Seems like I've nothing left to live for—except that I had the outstanding privilege of shakin' that darlin' man's hand." Then he called after me, "By the ways, they were known as the O'Kennedys in me father's time!"

In a tobacco shop several doors away an attractive, vigorous, red-haired woman showed me tiny models of the Kennedy homestead.

"Some say it's disrespectful to sell these," she said defensively, "but I think those who come here will appreciate souvenirs—particularly if they are historically sound. D'you notice it's got a hand-done thatch roof? And they're only four shillings."

A butcher's helper at a shop on Henry Street remembered: "Shaving I was, with my brother's electric razor. He has more money than the Bank of Ireland. The radio was on, but I wasn't much listening. But then the

announcer said it again. I stood like a fool, shaving myself on the chin over and over until my mother came and turned the razor off. The killing just had to be part of a horrible plot. How sorry I am for all you poor people in America!" Then he added, "You have no idea what Kennedy's election meant right here in Ireland. Me, I even decided to go back to school. I wanted to do him proud. That he shouldn't be ashamed of any Irishman."

A middle-aged housewife who had just ordered two pounds of calves' brains remarked, "I didn't know anything about it until I saw my fatherin-law standing by his rocking chair on the stoop. It was raining dreadful, and he is an old man and should have had more sense, but he was standing by his rocking chair, pushing it back and forth, getting wetter and wetter. He kept saying, 'Kennedy is dead.' I thought he meant one of the Kennedys down the road. I made him go inside and take the chair with him. Only then did he make himself clear. I like to died myself!"

And at a performance of Anne Frank at the New Ross movie theater that night, the lights had suddenly flashed on. The manager, weeping unashamedly, said, "President Kennedy has just been murdered. In honor of our Jack, this theater is closing."

Everyone filed out silently. New Ross was suddenly shut tight. A recital by the Confraternity Brass Band was canceled. So were a dance, a temperance meeting and a bingo game.

he following morning, I was told, hundreds of townspeople turned out to see Andy Minihan off to Washington to attend the funeral.

"A finer funeral a man never had," he told me. "At the graveside there was a platoon of twenty-seven Irish cadets. They were lads to be proud of —smartly turned out and in perfect precision. They volleyed him into his grave. Mrs. Kennedy herself had requested their presence because she knew what Ireland had meant to her husband.

"Each of the cadets stood erect in perfect military manner, but I could see tears on their cheeks. I know they were not only tears of sorrow—but also of gratitude and of promise. They were grateful, like all of us, that an Irishman had been given the chance to contribute so much—and they were pledging that we shall give more."

In Memoriam: Seven Poems

Great historical events—disaster, victory, revolution—have always been memorialized by the poets of their age. Shortly after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, it occurred to two young university professors, Paul Schwaber and Erwin Glikes, that American poets were undoubtedly responding to this event as an earlier generation had responded to the assassination of President Lincoln. In the hope of assembling a memorial volume they wrote to more than 300 poets of recognized

accomplishment in England and America. "We wanted the poems," they said later, "to be available to the generation that had lived with John F. Kennedy and that must now live with the fact of his death. The response was overwhelming." Seventy-six of the poems they received have been assembled in a collection, "Of Poetry and Power," which is being issued this month by Basic Books. Seven poems from the collection, together with an introduction by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., follow.

There is a sad felicity in the fact that the murder of John Fitzgerald Kennedy should have provoked this memorial volume. This is in part because poetry had a prominent place in President Kennedy's own vision of America. He saw his country not just as a political establishment or an economic system or a web of legal relationships. All these were for him aspects of a larger conception: America as a civilized society. He believed that the arts were the source and sign of a serious civilization; and one of his constant concerns while in the White House was to accord artists a nation's belated recognition of their vital role. And he considered the arts essential not only for their own sake but for the health of the state: for, among other things, art could provide a necessary check on and criticism of authority. His sense of the relationship between poetry and power was not casual or whimsical. It was organic and profound.

But his recognition of the place of the artist is, I think, the lesser reason for the appropriateness of this volume. The greater reason lies in the fact that President Kennedy himself shared so much of the vision of life which has animated the greatest poetry. He once described himself as an "idealist without illusions." He understood both the potentialities of humanity and the precariousness of the human condition. He admired Robert Frost, for example, not as a good gray rustic philosopher but as an artist who confronted the somber cruelties of experience without fuss or sentimentality. From without, Kennedy's life sometimes seemed easy and privileged; but this was so in only a limited sense. His brother has told us, "At least one half of the days that he spent on this earth were days of intense physical pain." He brushed extremely close to death several times before the terrible day in Dallas. He lived, moreover, in an age which had been an ordeal of historical disillusion, leaving so few things on which mature man could rely-family, friendship, physical courage, intellectual discipline, wit, reason, power. With such a life and in such a world, he chose to distance himself from displays of emotion.

In consequence some thought him detached or indifferent, But only the unwary could really conclude that his "coolness" was because he felt too little. It was because he felt too much and had to compose himself for an existence filled with disorder and suffering. At a press conference he once remarked about the demobilization of the reserves after the Berlin crisis, "There is always an inequity in life. Some men are killed in a war and some men are wounded, and some men never leave the country....Life is unfair." He said this, not with bitterness, but with the delicate knowledge of one who lives in a bitter timea knowledge which stamped him as a son of that time. Some poems in this collection evoke his charm and grace, occasionally almost with envy. But the Kennedy style was not an uncovenanted gift. It was the triumph, hard bought and well earned, of a gallant and collected human being over the anguish of life.

A number of poems describe in various ways the fragility of our civilization, the monsters of violence lurking underneath the façades of order. Kennedy himself was desperately aware of this. He knew he always must keep his country and his world moving fast enough to prevent violence from rending the membrane of civility. Supremely a man of reason, he understood the depths of unreason in human nature and sought within the time he had to strengthen the decencies of life against the demons of destruction.

These things, much more than his royal role as patron of the arts, account, I think, for these poems. So many of the writers identify themselves with him, and they do so because they perceived in him not just another American president but mon semblable, mon frère, who, as much as the poets themselves, felt the terror of the age, and in striving to master both terror and himself, challenged the self-pitying notion so cherished in our nuclear epoch of the abjectness of the individual in the face of history. The editors of this volume have noted that for some he closed the gap between public and private experience. This surely was so, and it was surely because he held out hope that the humane purposes of private man might still influence the unfolding of public events, that mankind was not necessarily impotent before the awful forces man himself had set in motion, that man could be not only victim but hero. "If we filled the day with bravery," said Emerson of the Poet, "we should not shrink from celebrating it."

-Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

NOVEMBER 25, 1963*

Drums, drums, I too am dead.
I breathe no breath, but only dread.
I have no soul, but lay my head
Upon his soul, and on that bed
I stop.

Drums in heartbeat cadence drill His life away. My life is still. My heart drums down my wit, my will, And with his cadence, mounts the hill And stops.

He stops. I stop. He ends. I end. He will not heal. I will not mend. He goes alone. I take no friend. His God is mine. He kneels. I bend. All stops.

And that is all of me tonight.
I do not want tomorrow's light.
I do not want the sound or sight
Of time. No more. These words I write,
And stop.

-William Butler

A NIGHT PICTURE OF POWNAL FOR JFK

Thanks to the moon,
Branches of our trees are coral
Fans, cast on the lanky snow
Which, crusted though,

Takes impressions
As Matthew Brady's eye received
The desperation of Civil War;
He was its retina

And watched history
Rise and set. Above its kilt
Of steel-blue air the moon turns,
A circle leans

To stare down fissures
Of space to that black forest set
Like match-ticks on the white hillside;
All sound has died.

Our apple tree Prints its own photograph, its strong Branches espaliered on the snow Fading, will not go

From our minds, the clean
Etching of dark on white, each detail
Tuned to the whole; in its precision
Enduring as bone.

What we have seen
Has become history; tragedy
Marks its design upon the brain—
We are stained by its stain.

-Barbara Howes

TRACTION

His brother said that pain was what he knew. Pain's wit is irony. It took two Bullets to bring that straight back down. They said One bullet had exploded in his head.

The unforeseen becomes inevitable.
Who would have thought, on that bloody day,
That back that had survived the terrible
Would take the head down with it all the way?

We saw another back. It killed the killer, Who had killed twice. Three murders done, The one before our eyes like a cheap thriller Run and rerun. That weekend of the gun,

Twenty-one salutes, his epitaph,
Back-fired on a billion screens at noon.
We loved his luck until it broke in half.
The end comes back. It always comes too soon.

---Howard Moss

BULLETIN

THE PERSON NAMED IN

Is dead. Is dead. How all The radios sound the same. That static is our seed. Is dead. We heard. Again.

We peck at the words like bran Strung on a string of air. Is dead. Again. Is dead. Too rhythmic for despair.

Our faces are all the same, Learning to taste the word. Lockjawed with awkwardness. Is dead. We know. We heard.

ON NOT WRITING AN ELEGY

My friend told me about kids in a coffee house who laughed and celebrated the killing. Another friend didn't care, sick at his own divorce, drinking Martinis with a delicate hand, saying he couldn't care when I said I cried like everybody. Still, I am the vain one, a bullet in my shoulder, six seconds to go before another burns in my head. Trying to write about the thing, I always end by feeling I have been shot. My brain, my spine gone, and with time winding foolishly, I am raced, tabled, cleaned out, boxed, flown, carried and lowered in. I have had this done on a shiny day with my wife and bodyguards and everyone there to cry out, and I have cried without trying and without a clear thought. This death has had me where I cannot write or hate or love, numb as a coined face fallen where all flames have only to burn down. Lost where I must only lose my place. I mourn the glories of our blood and state.

-Richard Frost

FOUR DAYS IN NOVEMBER

In late autumn sun This coldness without season. Strangers asking how.

A long rain today,
Cold against the face, has quenched
Final disbelief.

No movement of hours Disturbs this room or betrays The sly leap of pain.

Once restless as wind, His quickness borne in slow march. Nothing in its time.

---Marjorie Mir

CORTEGE

The drums have entered my heart; The creak of caisson over unprepared Terrain; the tight clop of the slowed hooves; The swaying. We have at last met, Sealed from harm's reach, having ridden earlier Different ways. It is late, and I ask Whether riding with you now Will make a difference. Is it enough to live that beat One mile or three, to climb the hill That watches Lincoln, to wait, Wait for love to catch up? We are stretched together; I do not See the avenue, the avenue is only where my blood Points, the rumble is within, the procession Is breath, breath, breath, breath. I feel a river below, the hooves are hollow; We pass, suspended: the dead breath, The breathing dead. Now the grave. Darkness is a book, a friend. I wait your signal. When is the earth, still loosely packed, Ready for me to rise? The way back is dense, but clear. You have returned with me.

--- Jerome G. Rothenberg

