

Books, etc.

—in which the author waxes irate

The current goings-on about William Manchester's *Death of a President* are the sorriest reflection on the book-publishing industry I have ever witnessed.

I haven't read any of the sneak previews of the book which have enabled *Look* magazine to sell some eight million copies per issue, nor do I intend to. I have heard quite enough about the book to convince me that its phenomenal popularity is due not to any intrinsic literary or factual merit, but rather to its deliberate tastelessness in the treatment of a very delicate subject.

When certain passages in the book proved offensive to Mrs. Kennedy, the author and publishers jumped at this opportunity to fabricate a marvelous sales gimmick. The only moral action for them would have been an immediate deletion of the offensive passages; but no, they forced Mrs. Kennedy to take legal action, thus putting the whole affair in the public eye and creating a "controversy".

And everyone knows that controversy, real or imagined, sells books. The scandal-hungry public jumped at the word, and now we hear reports of people learning German to read the uncut version in a West German tabloid. Apparently they missed the front-page synopses of the juicy parts in their local paper.

Tasteless, but profitable

I am tempted to believe that Mr. Manchester was perfectly aware of the tasteless nature of his work. He stands to make an estimated two million dollars from magazine and book royalties. His reputation isn't suffering; instead, the public cries "censorship!" and starts mumbling about the unjust influence of people in high places.

In short, it was entirely to Manchester's benefit to write a book that was an invasion of privacy, a dishonest capitalization on the gullibility of the reading public, and an insult to the persons connected with the late Mr. Kennedy.

Death of a President, now that it has been "censored", becomes just another in the interminable series of books on the Kennedy assassination. Most of these books have been guilty of putting the profit motive far ahead of their informational value. It is obvious that Manchester had the same motive in mind; he was just a little luckier in being able to stir up a controversy. My conscience won't allow me to read a book that has been promoted with vile tactics of this sort.

This whole affair reminds me of Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which I made a brief pass at last week. This is another book written for the purposes of profiteering on the excitability of the public. Mr. Nader has set himself up as America's Expert on Auto Safety, though he has somewhat minimal qualifications for the job.

Book taken seriously

His book is generally agreed to be a pile of crap from a technological point of view. He wrote it to make money, and he succeeded pretty well. The unfortunate thing is that the book was taken so seriously as to instigate government investigations, deal a crushing blow to the automobile industry, and instill enough panic in the consumers to necessitate production cuts and consequent loss of jobs, not to mention the terrible loss to the national economy. Thank you, Mr. Nader.

It is a sad thing that one man can become a millionaire by shaking the foundations of America's largest industry. It is even sadder when one can do so by capitalizing on the death of a leader of his country.

Some fascinating, and often frightening, insights into the mechanics of best-selling books are given in S. H. Steinberg's *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (in Penguin). He points out that in the United States a book becomes a best-seller automatically if it is chosen as a book club selection. In other words, the literary fare of the public is largely determined by a small group of executives.

A good example of this is Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, which was just another of the better-written crime documentaries until it was given top billing by the book clubs. Now it is one of the most popular books on the continent.

—Terry Donnelly



—Henry Kwok photo

ONE LITTLE, TWO LITTLE, THREE LITTLE
... Indians in Feux-Follets production

Canadiana colorfully conveyed by Feux-Follets dance group

Edmonton audiences packed Jubilee Auditorium Thursday and Friday to view a thoroughly enjoyable evening of Canadiana. The event was the presentation of The Canadian Mosaic, an evening of dance with Les Feux-Follets, a dance company from Montreal.

The company is directed by Michel Cartier, the man who created it in 1952. Since then Les Feux-Follets have won wide acclaim, and since turning professional two years ago have packed houses in Europe and the United States.

The Canadian Mosaic is the final product of a search that in 1961 took Michel Cartier on a cross-Canada search for material. After spending time living with Eskimos, West Coast Indians, and other ethnic minorities, Cartier created the Mosaic, ten suites in all. The theme which he wanted to capture was the Canadian Spirit as it could be traced from the past to the present in the form of dance. The spirit of the troupe and the choreography, most of it Cartier's, do in fact capture this spirit in a manner that astonishes.

Turtle Derby

Phi Delta Theta fraternity will hold their third annual Turtle Derby Jan. 27.

The derby will be held between periods of a hockey game between the Dinosaurs and Bears, starting at 7 p.m.

A dance will follow. All proceeds go to the Winnifred Stewart School for retarded children.

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The Canadian Mosaic does have faults, especially in the first suites. The Plains, the first suite presented, depicts an Indian Betrothal Ceremony, taking place before the arrival of the white man. Westerners who have really viewed an Indian ceremony will find the choreography rather unconvincing, although the wardrobe is very impressive.

The suite is only slightly unauthentic—one of the drum party is robed in a Hudson's Bay two-point blanket. The second suite, The West, smacks of Calgary Stampede.

From the third suite onward the choreography becomes more and more impressive; or perhaps the viewer becomes more receptive. Of particular note were suites six, eight, and ten,—The Pacific Coast, The North, and Kebec (Quebec) respectively.

The Pacific Coast suite depicts a Hamatsu ritual, traditionally performed during the salmon spawning season. This suite is undoubtedly the most colourful, in costumes and stage props, and one of the best in choreography.

Its popularity with the audience could be rivalled only by the Kebec, or Evening on the St. Lawrence, sequence. Interwoven into the musical traditions of the first French settlers are the traditions of the many travellers of the river. The resulting tapestry hints at British quadrilles, Irish jigs, and American ballads.

The performance received a well-deserved standing ovation as the curtain fell on the concluding scene of the traditional Broom-Dance, the habitant fiddler, and a set of clacking spoons.

—Joseph Zezulka

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