

(Clarke reveals that Holly Golightly was called Connie Gustafson in an early draft); he was going to make a Taj Mahal. The American Proust was what he wanted to be, declaring the ambition repeatedly:

"A large novel, my magnum opus" was how he described it to Bennett Cerf. "A book about which I must be very silent, so as not to alarm my 'sitters,' and which I think will really arouse you when I outline it (only you must never mention it to a soul). The novel is called 'Answered Prayers'; and, if all goes well, I think it will answer mine."

All went nowhere. For one thing, far from being silent, he did almost nothing but talk about it; and, for another, he remained far more interested in the sitters themselves than any portrait he might produce. (This alone makes him something more like Proust's opposite than successor.) Finally, he forgot the very saying from which he derived the title ("more tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered prayers"). The little of the book that was published in *Esquire* in the mid-seventies can without much exaggeration be said to have killed him.

The swans recognized themselves dopedily dishing their marital secrets—secrets Capote had hardly refracted into anything like art—in the chapter called "La Côte Basque, 1965." Babe would no longer speak to him and Slim Keith ("Lady Ina Coolbirth") turned into an active enemy. It was, says Clarke, a disaster "complete and absolute," over which Capote cried without comprehension. His "boundless and insatiable" need to be loved now had to be filled by a B-team of swans, like Johnny Carson's second ex-wife.

He had nothing else to fall back on. One thing Clarke's book shows is that Capote's mind was engaged only by people, not such a bad thing for a novelist, but rather terrible for a person. Brilliant but shallow, he pursued no culture ("For him Venice was Harry's Bar," said Donald Windham), and he wound up with no intellectual resources for a rainy day. Of his contemporaries—Mailer, Vidal, and Baldwin, that bundle of talent all born around 1925—he has the least claim to the title man of letters. He wrote almost nothing that could be called criticism, because he was one of those people with tastes instead of beliefs.

He made one abortive revival. *Musical for Chameleons* (1980) is a disciplined collection of lean stories and sketches, an intriguing sort of notebook from an artist trying to fight his way back. But even it is flawed by "Handcarved Coffins," something that falsely claims to be "A Nonfiction Account of an American Crime," but is

more like a parody of *In Cold Blood*, just as Capote's 1970s (sleazing through Studio 54) were a bad-joke version of the real high life he lived in the sixties.

By 1970 his relationship with Dunphy was no longer sexual, and the two of them lived far from each other for months of the year. Capote did not fall into the manic promiscuity of his sometime friend Tennessee Williams; instead, he developed destroying obsessions for two completely unglamorous men: "Danny," an air conditioner repairman separated from his wife; and John O'Shea, a violent alcoholic, married "low-level bank vice president." Clarke is very good on the irony of these last romances. Danny, he says,

represented all those carefree, freckle-faced Alabama country boys Truman had wished he could have been, mocking him, even if they uttered not a word, with the nonchalant assurance of the absolutely average. In every way Danny stood for the common man: that was his allure. If he had been handsome, had boasted a fine physique, or had been out of the ordinary in any other way, Truman would not have given him a second glance.

He still showed up on talk shows, only drunk, not witty. He was a positive vacuum cleaner for cocaine, and his body, moving from binge to spa, ballooned and deflated like a rubber syringe. "An exact count of his [hospital] stays is hard to come by," Clarke says. During "the first few years of the eighties he was hospitalized in half a dozen states and Switzerland too. But the tally from Southampton Hospital, his favorite, gives an indication of the quickening pace of his decline: he registered there four times in 1981, seven times in 1982, and sixteen times in 1983." He died from either suicide or an accidental overdose—the question is pedantic—in 1984.

This is a well-researched book. There are patches of flat writing and overwriting (the two are really the same thing), but Clarke's prose is generally solid and in a few places memorable: "It was a strange household he entered in Monroeville, unique to the South, peculiar to the time: three quarrelsome sisters in late middle age, their reclusive older brother, and an atmosphere heavy with small secrets and ancient resentments." There are some nice set pieces on 1940s New York and the fashion magazines that gave Capote's fiction its start. I wish Clarke wouldn't first-name everyone (Cerf is "Bennett" and Vidal is "Gore"), but I suppose this is meant to give the reader some sense of how "Truman" operated in the world. For many years that operation was calamitous, and Capote is lucky to have found someone—rather in the way Oscar Wilde eventually found Richard Ellmann—who has been able to make far more sense of his life than he himself did. □

SENATORIAL PRIVILEGE:
THE CHAPPAQUIDDICK COVER-UP
Leo Damore/Regnery Gateway/\$19.95

Franz M. Oppenheimer

What? Another book about Chappaquiddick and Teddy Kennedy? Who wants to hear any more about that? I was asked that question repeatedly when seen with this book, 40,000 copies of which were sold before publication. The answer is that we all ought to hear more about it. Senator Edward Kennedy remains a leading member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and on June 11 he was formally endorsed by the Massachusetts State Democratic Convention as the Democratic party's candidate for yet another term as senator. True, what we already know should alone make that endorsement a scandal. But thanks to the luck and patient detecting of Leo Damore we now know more, and enough to remove the lingering mysteries of that sordid episode.

From Robert Sherrill's masterly *The Last Kennedy*, we knew by 1976 that sometime between 11:30 p.m. and 12:45 a.m. during the night of Friday, July 18, 1969, Senator Kennedy drove his car off a narrow bridge in Chappaquiddick, and that his car, and in it Mary Jo Kopechne, were discovered submerged in Poncha Pond about 8 a.m. the following morning by two fishermen, who reported their discovery by telephone to the police at 8:20 a.m. Senator Kennedy reported the accident to the police about two hours after the fishermen had reported it. He had complained to the night manager at his motel at 2:25 a.m. about noises from a neighboring party; and at about 7:30 a.m. he chatted with some yachting friends on the motel's porch. He was immaculately dressed in "yachting clothes," freshly shaven, nonchalant, and "normal in every way."

Senator Kennedy gave three different and inconsistent accounts of his role in the tragedy: a written account drafted with the help of his friend and lawyer Paul Markham at the police station after reporting the accident, an account that omitted, among many other facts, any mention of the party with Mary Jo Kopechne and five other former members of Robert Kennedy's staff; a television address, given a week later on the same day he pleaded guilty (and there-

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by avoided cross-examination) to the charge of leaving the scene of an accident without reporting it "after knowingly causing injury to Mary Jo Kopechne"; and secret testimony at an inquest held the following January. The TV speech was the product of a conclave of Kennedy celebrities who were barricaded with their leader incommunicado inside the Kennedy compound at Hyannis Port for a full week after the accident. The chief draftsman was Theodore Sorensen; among the other handmaidens were Richard Goodwin, Arthur Schlesinger, Burke Marshall, and Robert McNamara. The public reaction to the evasions, irrelevancies, and probable falsehoods of the speech was, in Sherrill's words, "a disaster." The *New York Times* commented: "Senator Kennedy was really asking for an outpouring of support on the basis of a partially irrelevant and totally unsatisfactory *ex parte* account." As for Kennedy's third and last story, given at an inquest belatedly held on January 5-8, 1970, the judge found it "probable" that "Kennedy and Kopechne did not intend to return to Edgartown at that time; that Kennedy did not intend to drive to the ferry slip and his turn onto Dyke Road was intentional." The judge also found "inconsistencies and contradictions" of testimony too numerous for him to list and "probable cause to believe that Edward M. Kennedy operated his motor vehicle negligently . . . and that such operation appears to have contributed to the death of Mary Jo Kopechne."

Apart from obvious internal contradictions, the untruths of Kennedy's accounts were most convincingly established by a man of unblemished reputation, Christopher Look, a deputy sheriff of Dukes County who testified at the inquest. Look had spotted Kennedy's car at 12:45 a.m. stopped on the road; he left his car and went toward Kennedy's to see whether help was needed, only to see it speed away on the dirt road toward the fatal bridge. Since Kennedy and all other Kennedy witnesses had testified at the inquest that Kennedy and Miss Kopechne had left the party together at about 11:15 p.m., and Kennedy maintained that he had done so in order to drive Miss Kopechne to the ferry, which was only two

and a half miles away, the discrepancy of time alone knocked every one of Kennedy's inconsistent tales into a cocked hat.

In short, by 1976 at the latest, anyone interested knew that Kennedy was a liar. Thanks to the media and Robert Sherrill's book, anyone interested also knew that Kennedy's lies and conduct remained unpunished in the teeth of Massachusetts law, because of the diabolical efficiency with which the Kennedy apparatus thwarted any normal investigation and prosecution.

There remained, however, many mysteries that have now been solved by Leo Damore. The first was why Kennedy waited ten hours before reporting the accident, a question on which until now we could only speculate. The answer was finally given to Damore by Edward Kennedy's cousin, Joseph Gargan. It was to Gargan that Kennedy first reported the accident when he returned to the party to seek help, having escaped from the submerged car in Poncha Pond. After attempting to rescue Mary Jo, Gargan finally drove Kennedy to the ferry landing, from which Kennedy swam the channel to return to his motel. Gargan, at long last, told Damore that Kennedy had urged Gargan to report the accident, in order not only to avoid that painful chore but to develop another option:

Kennedy was having alternative ideas about the situation: Why couldn't Mary Jo have been driving the car? Why couldn't she have let him off, and driven to the ferry herself and made a wrong turn?

Kennedy asked to be brought back to the cottage to establish the story. After a while he could leave. Kennedy suggested that when he was back at the Shiretown Inn, Gargan could "discover" the accident and report to police that Mary Jo had been alone in the car. How this was going to be worked out insofar as "details" were concerned, the Senator didn't say.

It is now clear that although "Gargan rejected the idea out of hand," Kennedy did not. Indeed, on the next morning, when Gargan and Markham came to see Kennedy at his motel, fully expecting him to have reported the accident, they found that Kennedy had continued to expect Gargan to make the report. Kennedy said: "I'm going to say that Mary Jo was driving."

This is why, in violation of his promise to Gargan, Kennedy did not report the accident after returning to his motel sometime before 2:25 a.m., why he sought to establish his presence at the motel by complaining about the noise from a party, and why he chatted so nonchalantly with his friends on the porch the next morning.

Another of Damore's major revelations explains how Kennedy could drive off a bridge he knew so well. There had been previous speculation that he had been drunk, but Kennedy testified at the inquest that after drinking "about a third of a beer" with friends before the party, and after a rum and coke at 8 p.m. and one at 9 p.m., he drank nothing at all and drove off the bridge "absolutely sober." By contrast Damore reports that Kennedy, at a regatta victory party on a friend's boat before the Chappaquiddick party, had drunk "three rum and cokes in about twenty minutes." Add those drinks to the later two and sobriety becomes questionable. Mary Jo Kopechne's blood analysis showed an alcohol content of .09 percent (about six drinks), and all witnesses described her as the most abstemious drinker of the group. No one has ever described Ted Kennedy as abstemious. The evidence is virtually conclusive that he was drunk when he drove off the bridge, which under Massachusetts law made him guilty of manslaughter.

In this light, the deputy sheriff's testimony that Kennedy sped away when he saw the sheriff approaching becomes quite plausible: Kennedy did not want to have his presidential aspirations blighted by yet another reckless driving charge. (Besides, Kennedy had no driver's license on him; nor could his license, which had expired months earlier, be found.) Between 11:15 p.m., when he left the party, and 12:45 p.m., when he drove off the bridge, there was plenty of time for more drinking and carrying on.

Damore also sheds new light on the perversion of the investigation that shielded Kennedy. We learn for the first time that, however belatedly, there was a supposedly secret police investigation of the accident before the inquest, and that, in violation of his official duty, State Police Detective Lieutenant Bernie Flynn volunteered to Kennedy's brother-in-law, Stephen Smith, to prepare Kennedy for interrogation at the inquest by briefing him on the results of that investigation. The offer was accepted, and Flynn met secretly once with Kennedy's counsel Herbert J. Miller, formerly assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division of the Department of Justice in the Kennedy Administration, and another time with Miller and Stephen Smith. At the end of the second briefing a grateful Stephen Smith asked Flynn: "What can I do for you?"

There are many other revelations in this book, for each of which the sources are given meticulously. Yet for all its merit, *Senatorial Privilege* is difficult to read and understand. It is a splendid source book for students, but its presentation is likely to put a strain

on the common reader. Still, if the book does no more than stir the conscience of Democrats and Republicans who by action and omission permit an

emotional and moral imbecile to serve on the Senate Judiciary Committee (to say nothing of the Senate), it will have rendered a patriotic service. □

FINAL WARNING: THE LEGACY OF CHERNOBYL
Robert Peter Gale and Thomas Hauser/Warner Books/\$18.95

Jonathan Cohen

In the spring of 1986, Dr. Robert Peter Gale, a specialist in bone marrow transplants at the UCLA Medical Center, joined a team of Western physicians and scientists asked by the Soviets to assist in the treatment of radiation victims from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. *Final Warning*, told in the first person by Dr. Gale and written with attorney and journalist Thomas Hauser, reads more like two books than one. The first book, comprising the first and last chapters of the larger volume, is a sketchy and misleading sermon on the dangers of nuclear energy that is likely to confuse lay readers looking for lessons from Chernobyl. The second book is Dr. Gale's rather self-impressed account of his role in the mercy mission and fling as a celebrity in the Soviet Union.

The final product here might be consigned to the same shelf with diet books, hospital soap operas, and other unsuccessful stabs at immortality by hambone surgeons and ear, nose, and throat specialists. The seriousness of the subject matter, however, and the emergence in the media of Dr. Gale and other non-authorities as prominent spokesmen on matters of nuclear policy, make bad books like this one important. In press interviews, television panels, and other public discussions of nuclear energy, individuals with genuine credentials and experience are increasingly overlooked in favor of charismatic self-promoters and politically motivated alarmists. Correspondingly, the kinds of misrepresentations and confusions that characterize *Final Warning* have steadily gained currency in the United States and Western Europe over the past two decades, providing impetus for an irrational political movement that lumps all things nuclear into a single object of superstition and dread.

From the start, Gale and Hauser demonstrate that they don't understand what happened at Chernobyl and how it relates to the nuclear technology we

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use to generate electricity in the United States. In keeping with the book's title, the authors begin by arguing that the Chernobyl accident (from which thirty-one people died) provides a final warning of "how deadly nuclear power can be and how helpless the world is when radiation rages wild." The tone of alarm continues as the reader is told that a nuclear power plant meltdown in the United States would kill 27,000 people and seriously injure another 73,000. The fact that these figures represent a highly dubious, worst-imaginable case that could be expected once in every 100,000 meltdowns (every million years or so) is left unsaid. Similarly, the reader is warned that a single atom of plutonium from the Chernobyl accident could find its way into an American citizen's lungs and eventually cause cancer. Unmentioned is that said atom has about one-quadrillionth of a chance of harming anyone, leaving the citizen much more at risk from asteroid collisions or polar bears escaped from the local zoo.

While frightening people about nuclear power plants in general, the authors seem oblivious to the fact that Soviet RBMK reactors of the kind that exploded at Chernobyl are unstable and uncontained systems, designed to produce plutonium for bombs, and therefore unacceptably dangerous by the standards applied to commercial power plants in America and Western Europe. Because the authors make an illogical leap from their reports on Chernobyl to pronouncements on the dangers of nuclear weapons and calls for the U. S. government to participate in "meaningful arms reduction," one might think they would pay attention to the fact that power and weapons production are part of a single industry in the USSR, but kept separate in the United States. However, they show no awareness of this information and choose not to dwell on the fact that the Chernobyl accident could not happen in a U.S. power plant. Nor do they care