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BOOKS

Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*

by Stephen King

Everest House, 416 pp., \$13.95

STEPHEN KING is that rare phenomenon among authors of popular fiction: an entertainer who never stoops, but generally conquers. With a little help from the vampires, ghosts, and psychic deviants who inhabit the pages of such novels as *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, and *The Shining*, King has acquired a monstrous (so to speak) reading public while avoiding the explicit gore that has recently spilled out of the movie theaters and into horror fiction.

Stephen King's Danse Macabre is King's first book of nonfiction: an apologia for all the blood sucked and bodies devoured in the heroic effort to keep us happily scared witless. Unfortunately, what begins as an examination of horror novels and movies of the past three decades rapidly degenerates into an entertaining but essentially rudderless self-interview. While musing over such gems of the genre as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, King too often digresses into friendly, but more or less pointless, discussions of his own life, work, and views.

King comes across as intelligent and unpretentious, but even his most devoted fans should hesitate before paying the price of a book for nothing more than a magazine interview.

—ANDREW KLAVAN

Mary Chesnut's *Civil War*

edited by C. Vann Woodward

Yale University Press, 886 pp., \$29.95

OCCASIONALLY AN HISTORICAL document raises itself above the gray mass of source material to become an odd, elusive classic. Works like Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars* and Froissart's *Chronicles*, though artful, are not remembered for their art, and certainly not for their accuracy, but for their authors' ability to become Dantesque guides through visions of the world they knew. Mary Boykin Chesnut had that ability, and her journals of the Civil War are a painfully brilliant record of our old America at daggers drawn.

As the tough-minded but sickly wife

of a Confederate politician and plantation owner, Mrs. Chesnut was able to observe members from all strata of southern society, from president to slave. Her wit and shrewdness, her fierce abhorrence of slavery, her feminist ambitions, make those observations peculiarly modern. Today's reader is effortlessly drawn into her "gallant, gay, unfortunate" south, as its frenzied pre-war waltzes fade into the endless death march, and finally only into echoes in the ruins of a "world kissed to pieces."

C. Vann Woodward's editing of this latest, most complete edition of the Chesnut journals is exemplary: unobtrusive and instructive. He has reacquainted us with a remarkable woman; and she has reacquainted us with the living past.

—ANDREW KLAVAN

The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism

by Claire Sterling

Holt, Rinehart & Winston

334 pp., \$13.95

AT FIRST GLANCE, Claire Sterling's laconic, densely documented account of the terrorist phenomenon would seem an unbiased and straightforward piece of investigative journalism. Yet a careful reading reveals its central thesis—that the Soviet Union is the prime mover of global terrorism—to be a foregone conclusion shored up by a careful selection of facts.

The Terror Network reads like a complex thriller that spans continents and links together disparate characters and motivations. According to Sterling, since 1968 various "fronts" and "armies" have attempted to "destabilize" Western and pro-Western democracies. Under the avuncular tutelage of the Soviet KGB, a bewildering mix of nationalities has streamed through the guerrilla training camps in Cuba, Palestine, and elsewhere. To ply their trade, terrorist groups have crossed frontiers with astonishing ease, often carrying ill-concealed caches of guns and explosives—and an occasional Soviet-made guided missile.

Although Sterling makes a fair case

for KGB culpability in sponsoring terrorism, there are disturbing gaps in the presentation of her evidence: She barely gives rightist terrorism a nod, nor does she examine the clandestine activities of Western intelligence agencies. But her book does ring true in its scrutiny of the peregrinations and activities of stateless malcontents hell-bent on translating muddled ideology into violence.

—DAVID BELL

Mountbatten

by Richard Hough

Random House, 256 pp., \$15

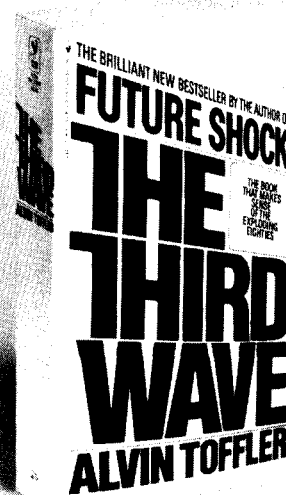
THE LIFE OF Lord Mountbatten, born Prince Louis of Battenberg in 1900, in many ways mirrored the sunset of the British Empire. At his christening he was held by his great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, and his childhood holidays were spent at royal castles in England and Germany and on the Russian Tsar's yacht. He married the richest heiress in England and learned to live with her infidelities.

Following his German-born father into the British navy, Mountbatten spent World War II helping defend the Empire as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia. But after the war he helped liquidate Britain's colonial holdings as Viceroy of India. Cousin to Queen Elizabeth II and uncle to her husband, Prince Philip, he succeeded in having the name Mountbatten-Windsor adopted for the Queen's heirs. In August 1979, while vacationing at his Irish estate, Mountbatten was killed when members of the Irish Republican Army blew up his fishing boat. He had already planned his own funeral, down to the guest list.

This is not an official biography but an informal portrait—admiring but candid, balanced but often critical—of a man who claimed that he never made a mistake in his life. Mountbatten was always controversial. Brilliant, hard-working, ambitious, vain, and arrogant, he seemed to his contemporaries somehow un-English, yet ended as a national hero. That he also emerges as likable and vulnerable is in part a tribute to Richard Hough's highly readable appraisal.

—RONALD NEVANS

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