

JFK IS ALIVE: A MODERN LEGEND

That folklore (if we can speak of it in rather superorganic terms) responds with sensitive immediacy to current events and current human hopes and aspirations seems clearly manifest in the recent spate of "Kennedy is alive" legends. This legend cycle first came to the attention of the FORUM staff some three or four months ago. A version of it was heard by Mrs. Marion Lang, an Indiana University graduate student in Speech and Theater who also teaches junior high school in Mitchell, a small town in southern Indiana. In summary this version incorporated the following elements:

Jeanne Dixon saw in a vision that John Kennedy had not been killed by the assassins* bullets which struck him in Dallas; the shots had rendered him a virtual vegetable, however, and he was transported to a hospital in Athens, Greece where he was assigned a whole floor. Jim Garrison was close to discovering this, however, and Mrs. Kennedy "faked" a marriage with Aristotle Onassis so that the president could be moved to Onassis' private island and so that Jackie could have an excuse for being in Greece.

The narrative came up in connection with a discussion of Jeanne Dixon in Mrs. Lang's class at Borris School and was contributed by Margi Stroud, a 17 year old "cadet" teacher from the town's senior high school. Mrs. Lang reports that none of the younger students had heard the tale before and that they listened to it with virtually unprecedented attention. Miss Stroud heard it from a friend, Jim Robinson, who attributed it to "a professor at Northwood."

The legend, of course, incorporates the older motif that a certain hero, recently "dead", is in fact alive, although rendered to a sub-human state (and hence hidden away); this was told of both Franklin Roosevelt and James Dean, both of whom were said to be in sanitariums in the South. But this new narrative ("narrative" in a rather loose sense) is remarkable in the way in which it incorporates several other elements of intense current interest: the Kennedy assassination and the controversy surrounding it, the Garrison investigation, the Kennedy-Onassis marriage and Jeanne Dixon (who apparently has a very wide following).

Mrs. Lang later had Miss Stroud write out a synopsis of the story. Two points have been added since the first telling: Robert Kennedy was going to reveal the truth about Jack after he was elected president, but he too was shot down; the truth has been written in a book that will be published in the year 2000. The first version was collected before the Clay Shaw trial, the second synopsis was collected after it. Significantly, all mention of Jim Garrison has been dropped from the later version.

We also have several texts (none of them taped or verbatim) from I.U. undergraduates. None of these are as elaborately developed as the Lang version, however. To generalize about these: Kennedy is still alive in

* There has been considerable editorial disagreement over the correct placement of the apostrophe in this word. We have therefore excluded it altogether.

Parkland Hospital in Dallas or was only moved recently to Greece. Neither Garrison nor Dixon are mentioned; it is the "press" that has caught on to the fact that Jackie has consistently visited Parkland Hospital and rarely visited the grave site in Arlington. One text does not allude at all to the Onassis marriage and it seems possible that the "Kennedy is alive" motif may have existed first by itself, with a "faked wedding" motif a secondary stage. This text is apparently the earliest; the informant, Gretchen R. Smith, thinks she heard it in October, 1968. The second earliest report, however, makes mention of the marriage. The informant for this version, Joni Willets, claims to have heard the story around November 15, 1968. She cited WLS, a Chicago radio station as the ultimate source of the story, although she did not hear it herself from this source.

Miss Smith states that she heard the story from F. Lee Bailey, the noted criminal attorney, when he spoke at the Lycea dinner at I.U. The legend has also been attributed to Truman Capote, who of course knew the Kennedy family and in fact lived in the same apartment complex as Senator Robert Kennedy. The "Capote" version received considerable notoreity in March, 1969 when it was picked up and broadcast by right-wing Chicago radio personality Howard Miller /see the Chicago Sun-Times, March 8, 1969, pp. 1,327. One of Miller's listeners had sent him a copy of a mimeographed letter apparently then being circulated and attributed to Capote's authorship which Miller subsequently read over the air. The broadcast caused much excitement and was soon denounced by Albert E. Jenner Jr., who had been senior counsel for the Warren Commission. Capote's editor at Random House issued a disclaimer when questioned. At around the same time a similar story about Kennedy and Jackie-Onassis was being run by the National Informer, a garish tabloid published out of Chicago.

In November of 1968 the FORUM noted (FF I:46) the prevalence of a cycle of obscene jokes about Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis which perhaps reflected an initial hostile reaction by a portion of the American public to the marriage, and the shattering of their image of Jackie as a noble, suffering and faithful widow, a magnificent living monument to the memory of the late president. (Careful interviewing of the bearer's of this tradition would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis.) The above legend seems to reflect a different attitude toward the situation. Besides expressing the belief that John Kennedy is alive, it denies the feature of Jackie's behavior which seems to have offened the American public, her union with an old Greek billionaire.

The editors of the FORUM would be interested in hearing from anyone who has encountered this legend either in oral tradition or in the mass media. Please record the legend as completely as possible with a notation of the date and place it was first heard. Enclose any newspaper clippings you might have or their complete bibliographic reference; also the name, network and date of any radio or television show on which it may have been mentioned.

Upon request, the editors would be more than happy to share the information they receive with their readers.

F. deC.

E. L. O.