valuable to those interested in Oregon politics, work as a labor arbitrator, and proponent of federal aid to education. Now that the Morse papers are finally open at the University of Oregon Library, we can look forward to future works that build upon this study.

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Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector. By James W. Hilty. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997. xiv, 642 pp. $34.95, ISBN 1-56639-566-6.)

Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade. By Jeff Shesol. (New York: Norton, 1997. xiv, 591 pp. $32.50, ISBN 0-393-04078-X.)

The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK. By John Hellmann. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. xviii, 206 pp. $29.50, ISBN 0-231-10798-6.)

No family in American history has undergone as much scrutiny as the Kennedys. The thirtieth anniversary of Robert F. Kennedy's assassination has invited further reexamination. For the past twenty years, Kennedy scholars have searched for balance between the hagiography published after John F. Kennedy's death and the revisionism of the early 1970s. Interpretations have broadened with examinations of other members of the Kennedy family and the meaning of JFK's "mystique." The three works reviewed here reflect these trends.

James W. Hilty, a history professor at Temple University, provides an insightful account of RFK's relationship with his brother John. *Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector* covers a period when "most of [RFK's] life was dictated by his place within the Kennedy family, his obeisance to its rules and rituals, and his resolute loyalty to John Kennedy." Through his young adulthood, Robert struggled to compete against his older, more charismatic brothers. Although he developed a sense of self-worth working tirelessly as a congressional lawyer in the 1950s, he sacrificed his own personal ambitions to ensure JFK's political advancement. In the process, he won the respect and admiration of his domineering father and John.

RFK's role evolved from a supportive player to protector of a career he had helped create. Working behind the scenes, he became "the indispensable man" to JFK's key political victories. He concealed from the public his brother's sexual indiscretions and medical problems. As a willing fall guy, he absorbed blame on matters related to Democratic politics and civil rights. Working as attorney general, RFK moved his brother to declare his moral commitment to Martin Luther King's cause. In the end, the Kennedy presidency became a partnership, one dependent upon a younger brother who was more mature and moral and less self-absorbed.

Characterizing RFK as "a complex man, a sheaf of incongruities," Hilty does not excuse his shortcomings. Robert and John were "reactors" and "splendid opportunists." They "were absorbed with pursuing, holding, and wielding political power." They relied on charisma often at the expense of organizational and political protocol. RFK's passivity toward J. Edgar Hoover allowed for violations of civil liberties. And on civil rights, Robert was initially more concerned about legalities and politics than morality.

Robert Kennedy is a splendid book. Hilty tells familiar stories with original interpretations, lacing his discussion with lucid tales of RFK's conflicts with Roy Cohn, Martin Luther King, Lyndon B. Johnson, and George Wallace. He challenges the myths and lore of the Kennedy past, from alleged voter fraud in Illinois to RFK's rumored affair with Marilyn Monroe. All the while, he weaves new primary evidence and interviews into the expertly synthesized secondary literature. The book will give pause to Kennedy admirers and detractors alike, for it is the most intelligently analyzed account of RFK to date.

Hilty's work shows that it is not enough to rewrite history. Readers need to understand it better. Jeff Shesol's *Mutual Contempt* falls short of this ideal. Shesol, a young Rhodes scholar, details the political and personal wars between RFK and Lyndon Johnson. He contends that the feud "became the defining relationship of their political lives" and that "the major events of the sixties bear the imprint of this personal rivalry." Shesol retraces familiar events: the Ken-

nedys' disorganized selection of Johnson as JFK's running mate; Johnson's troubled tenure as vice president; the reversal of fortune that came with JFK's assassination. Once RFK was elected to the Senate in 1964, tensions accelerated with each new challenge to the Johnson presidency. The rivalry took an emotional toll on the president and reaped a political harvest for RFK.

Mutual Contempt is well crafted but lacks clear insight. Shesol captures the tensions and personalities of the rivals with colorful quotations and fascinating stories. He makes good use of oral histories and LBJ's tape-recorded telephone conversations. Still, little new light is shed on the nature and meaning of this rivalry. He does not explicitly explore his own thesis but chooses instead to let the story speak for itself. The reader is left to wonder how this feud influenced events or affected the policies or performance of the players. Most of the memoranda quoted at length have long been published. Although the work is generally balanced, Johnson partisans may cringe at the working assumption that RFK ranks with LBJ as one of "the political titans of the decade." Some have argued that there is little comparison between the two men if measured in terms of real achievements and significance to the nation. Despite these shortcomings, even those readers familiar with the rivalry will enjoy the book.

Shesol is long on detail and short on analysis. No one, however, can accuse John Hellmann of underinterpretation. *The Kennedy Obsession* focuses on JFK's relationship to the public as "a fictional character." Hellmann, an English professor, examines how Kennedy's developing self-image and public persona came to symbolize the ideals of the American people. He applies an interesting literary approach to the issue of identity formation and public image. The origins of "Jack's second self, the popular hero" are found in JFK's early fascination with hero literature. Upon publication of *Why England Slept* (1940), JFK completed a "creative self-making." The PT-109 story inspired a heroic literary character that JFK fused with his public image. Writing *Profiles in Courage* (1956), JFK identified himself with such threatened virtues as masculinity and mettle. Through television, Kennedy projected likable images of matinee idols. As president, he became our "romantic lover, the object of our projected fantasies," who promised a return to "the primal scene of the nation's mythic / historic experience" of the frontier. In death, he was transformed into "an object of religious longing."

In its effort to be bold and original, *The Kennedy Obsession* is seriously burdened by strained interpretations, logical fallacies, and inadequate evidence. Those troubled by psychohistory will find here considerable ammunition with which to discredit the discipline. There are countless forays into JFK's mind ("perhaps he was thinking") compounded by conclusions based on mere speculation. In reading the romantic literature of King Arthur, "Kennedy was finding in his self-chosen heroes guidelines for the formation and sustenance of an ideal self." David Cecil's *The Young Melbourne* (1939) becomes "a mirror image of the deeper workings of Kennedy's conflicted psyche." *Why England Slept* is "a psychological study of England and capitalist democracy that mirrors Kennedy's own self-analysis." At one point, Hellmann argues that the film *Red River* (1948) was "a reflection of [JFK's] personal conflicts and wishes." To support this contention, he cites a friend of Kennedy's who had offhandedly recalled that it was once JFK's "favorite movie." Hellmann uses this lonely fact as a springboard for an imaginative but vastly overreaching analysis. After five pages of belabored psychological linkages between JFK and the film's characters, he then declares that Kennedy had a "fascination" with *Red River.* The "fascination" rests not with Kennedy but with Hellmann, who exaggerates whatever interest JFK may have had in the film to create something out of nothing.

These three works suggest that the Kennedy literature continues to shift from pure biography and episodic accounts to analyses of relationships. The assumption holds that how a person relates to other forces—be it a brother, a rival, or cultural conditions—reveals nuances that might not otherwise be appreciated. Hilty, and to a lesser extent, Shesol, have accomplished this task.

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