Image and Text:

The Creation of JFK as a Cultural Icon

By

Stephanie Melinda Yamniuk

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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MASTER OF ARTS

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

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INTRODUCTION

In *Picture Theory*, W.J.T. Mitchell addresses the question of what is a picture, and noting that such objects are not the same as visual images per se, he concludes that one cannot discuss the way that pictures function without extended reflection on texts, particularly on the ways in which texts act like pictures, or "incorporate" pictorial practices and vice versa. Although Mitchell's study takes the form of an investigation of interactions of visual and verbal representation in a variety of media, principally literature and the visual arts (4-5), his real purpose he explains is not only to look at these interactions, but to trace the linkages of image and text to "issues of power, value and human interest" (5). Accordingly, some of the issues he attempts to explain are: Who is in the position of creating the representation (whether image or text)? Who/What is being represented? How does this representation impact culture and politics? No matter what the medium, whether photograph, poem, painting, television clip, or musical ballad, art strives to represent something. Modern art may be a conscious turn away from representation, but, as Mitchell says, "We are surrounded by pictures; we have an abundance of theories about them, but it doesn't seem to do us any good. Knowing what pictures are doing, understanding them, doesn't seem necessarily to give us power over them" (5-6).

My purpose in this thesis is not only to argue that we can use theories about works of art to discuss a human icon but that doing so does perhaps give us some power over the icon. There are many disciplines of study – semiotics, studies in cinema and mass

media, comparative studies in the arts – which are all focussed on pictorial representation and visual culture. I want to take this approach a step further, and include the humanistic side of pictures. I want to take a human icon, substitute it for a picture, and apply theories about pictures, using image, text, and history. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* is not a theory about pictures: it is a way of looking at theories – how they are "pictured." My thesis in turn is concerned with the way that we picture a human icon and how it functions as a materialist work of art that represents something other than exactly what one sees.

Specifically, I propose to use aspects of Interarts Theory, normally concerned with visual and verbal art, and apply it practically to the human icon of John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK). JFK is an international, historical and political icon that incorporates all three of the issues mentioned by Mitchell: power, value and human interest.

It is also here that G.E. Lessing's classic study *Laocöon* becomes very important in setting a foundation for this thesis, insofar as he argued that "Truth and expression are art's first law" (19) and that the depiction "of a human hero, who is neither effeminate nor hard, but appears now the one and then the other, just as now nature, now duty and principles demand . . . . is the highest type that wisdom can produce and art reproduce" (30). JFK too was constructed as a human hero, a condition that explains why he was given so much exposure and attention in the political and cultural arenas. In becoming a public icon, his human qualities were subordinated to the demands of "art," and instead of being a man named John, through crafted images and text he grew to represent a hero, a savior, and at one point in his life, democracy itself. His photographer, Jacque Lowe, and his press agent, Arthur Schlesinger, both worked hard to transform JFK into an image of power, thereby giving rise to a series of questions: Was he naturally the JFK we knew

in the sixties? Or was he the JFK we knew in the seventies, when the Warren Report on his assassination was being questioned? Or is he the JFK we do not hear about much any more? Like a forgotten icon from the past, did he "exist" only as long as the fire was fueled by culture and his mythmakers?

Lessing's favoring of drama as the most effective and composite art form is also apropos insofar as JFK came to power at the time of the birth of television and film, when this type of visual medium was available and accessible to everyone, no matter what class, gender or race. In the late fifties and early sixties, JFK was seen on television, heard on the radio, and read and seen in newspapers and magazines. His image/text was everywhere, so that like icons of the past he came to represent something mystical.

Like those artists praised by Lessing, furthermore, JFK and his image-makers knew how to use the "pregnant moment," that is, a representation of temporal events by stopping the action at a climatic moment. Consider, for example, the photo of Kennedy in Berlin (see Fig. 1). He could be ready to say anything, but whatever it is will be profound: the pensive yet pained expression on his face anticipates sharing of deep thoughts. This, of course, is also the point at which the outcome is inconclusive and the meaning of the picture can stand for one thing or another, and like art critics of the past, Kennedy's press agents made sure that they decided what the public saw and the conclusions they came to. This was their artistic technique, and its success can be seen in the way that much of the American public fell in love with the icon that his "artists" created.

For Mitchell, comparativist studies of interarts relations are ultimately pointless, since both technology and cultural preferences must be taken into consideration. For him,

the starting point of interdisciplinary interarts studies needs to be taking the subject of the image/text as a "literal, material necessity dictated by the concrete forms of actual representational practices" (88-89). To understand how human icons function in this respect, Wendy Steiner also provides a helpful directive in her discussion of how identity is dependent upon repetition, at the same time that such stability militates against the kind of trust that Lessing felt that arts should promote. According to Steiner, in a post-modern world, "Reality, art and people become interchangeable tokens of each other, all flat and equally worthless in a world where mechanical repetition has replaced narrative becoming" (6). The danger of becoming an icon, in short, is that as much as one acquires artistic value, so much does one's humanity become blurred; or one might say that in the case of JFK, it becomes difficult to determine what was natural and what was crafted.

Pictures and human icons have several things in common: they are analyzed for meaning; they are looked at to provide answers to universal questions; and they are both compared to other pictures/icons. Like pictures, too, icons seem "to threaten and overwhelm any possibility of discursive mastery," and in doing so participate in what Mitchell has called the "pictorial turn" that characterizes modern thought:

> What makes for the sense of a pictorial turn, then, is not that we have some powerful account of visual representation that is dictating the terms of cultural theory, but that pictures form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry . . . . we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observations and on the world, how their history is to be understood and what is to be done with or about them. (13)

In the case of icons, their image/text configuration especially calls for this type of broad inquiry: they can and require to be understood in many contexts – cultural, political and historical. More than any other art form, furthermore, icons have an immediate impact on the world and how its history is understood, demanding that we speculate what is to be done about them and with them.

As Mitchell sees it, our current fascination with images is more complicated than it may at first appear.

> If we ask ourselves why a pictorial turn seems to be happening now, in what is often characterized as a postmodern era, the second half of the 20th century, we encounter a paradox. On the one hand, it seems overwhelmingly obvious that the era of video and cybernetic technology, the age of electronic reproduction, has developed new forms of visual simulation and illusionism with unprecedented powers. On the other hand, the fear of the image, the anxiety that the 'power of images' may finally destroy even their creators and manipulators, is as old as image-making itself. . . . what is specific to our moment is exactly this paradox. The fantasy of a pictorial turn, of a culture totally dominated by images, has now become a real technical possibility on a global scale. (15)

Such an emotional nexus is, of course, central to the icon and our response to it, and especially to the technological time when JFK's image was created.

As an investigation of JFK as an icon, therefore, this thesis consists of three chapters. The first provides a historical perspective and traces his evolution from a person to an icon, or a work of art. Focussing on the way his image was manipulated first by his

father, and then by his political agents as president, I will explore the connection between art and politics and the significance of power on representation.

In the second chapter I will focus on the power of the verbal arts in the creation of JFK, both his own rhetoric and his comments on literature. Equally I will discuss his relation to Robert Frost and the way he modeled his speeches on those of politicians like Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt. I will also examine the role played by the press in his career and what literary artists have written about him.

In the third chapter I will investigate the power of pictures and how it applies to JFK as an icon. Here I will attempt to "watch" the Kennedy/Nixon Debates in order to see the foundation on which JFK began his image-making, and the way he used the visual media to gain popularity and to command attention if not reverence. Similarly, I will "read" several videos about the life of JFK and analyze the way they reflect his iconic status, including here a brief discussion of Oliver Stone's controversial movie *JFK*.

Power, value and human interest all work together in the dynamics needed to create the icon of JFK, but to understand this process it is also necessary to consider the role played by artistic representation in the evolution of a person from a human being to an art object. This equally means not only attending to image/text relations but also looking critically at some visuals. Thus this thesis includes a pictorial appendix, and throughout my study I will attempt to make these pictures "speak" using text and history, as it were, to position them in time and to explain what came before and after the moment they record.

Chapter One

Show Me Kennedy: Creating the Kennedy Image

In the April, 1963 issue of *Show: The Magazine Of The Arts*, Alistair Cooke, chief American correspondent of *The Guardian* of England and a frequent traveler with the White House press corps, published an article entitled "Too Many Kennedys?" (see Fig. 2). According to Cooke, while Kennedy had deliberately cultivated a public image, it was now beyond his control and, instead of being discussed in political circles, it was now featured in tabloids and scandal sheets: "To put it mildly, the president has yielded to this image (White House as the ultimate movie set) and has manipulated it with the no doubt serious purpose of setting a contemporary 'style' of public life for the presidency" (qtd. in MacNeil 69).

The creation of the Kennedy image and rise to power began in 1937 when patriarch Joe Kennedy entered politics and was later named US Ambassador to Great Britain. He originally came with his family to America during the Great Potato Famine, and his father, who first worked as a saloonkeeper and a ward-level politician, eventually served in the Massachusetts legislature ("The Kennedys" MPI Home Video). Joe was educated at Boston's Latin School and at Harvard. He married Rose Fitzgerald, daughter of Boston mayor Honey Fitzgerald; it was a marriage of politics, two strong Irish families uniting against society's obstacles and criticism of their Irish-Catholic background (see Fig. 3). "Fitzgerald" – the middle name given to JFK – represented political and social

status in the Boston culture. Although Joe became the youngest bank president in the United States while still in his twenties, he never felt socially accepted because of his father's heritage, coupled with rumors that he was a bootlegger by night and banker by day. Joe believed in the American dream that wit, charm, brains and good luck could take you to the top, but often felt the sting of peer-envy and resentment. This personal angst contributed to the high standards he kept for himself and placed upon his family – that they must appear spotless and always be above reproach. He often took a militant stance on family upbringing and exercised harsh discipline, but he forgave easily and used other positive tactics, such as intellectual competition and discussions of daily events. He never took for granted the money he had saved and invested, and the status he worked so hard to maintain, and he expected his children to give the Kennedy family name that same respect and honor (see Fig. 4).

Joe Kennedy first met Franklin D. Roosevelt at the time Roosevelt was serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in WWI. This relationship became significant during the crash of the 20s. After serving in the Navy during WWI, Joe went to Wall Street to learn and to earn. Among other things, he produced films, where he met Gloria Swanson, a beautiful actress and soon a frequent companion. This started more rumors about his spare time, besides the bootlegging stories. He taught his sons that power over women was only more power over other men. He knew the power of image and incorporated this value into his family's values.

Financially, Joe had prepared himself for the crash by saving his money and then pulling his money out of the stock market at the right time; he was considered one of the twenty richest men in America, worth $400 million (Martin 21). Roosevelt welcomed

Joe's money for his campaign but politicians and government employees remained skeptical about giving him a government position in return. After waiting a year and a half to hear from newly elected President Roosevelt, Joe was named chairman of the newly formed Security & Exchange Commission in compensation for his financial contributions, and later become ambassador to the Court of St. James in Britain. There he taught his children respect for, not fear of, people in high positions and literally became image and text for them in terms of a standard of living.

During Hitler's reign in 1938, Roosevelt and Joe's relations became strained. Roosevelt thought Kennedy "talked too much" ("The Kennedys" MPI Home Video). When Chamberlain left his position as Prime Minister and Churchill came into office, Joe was interviewed in *The Boston Globe* and was quoted as saying: "Democracy is finished in England," going on to add, "It may be [finished] here" (qtd. in Martin 38). Joe was never forgiven for what this damaging report insinuated about the president's dictatorial mode of government and after resigning as ambassador, he was entirely isolated from a further career in politics. Joe, however, had long dreamed that a Kennedy should become president, and even though his own chances had been ruined, he did not give up. Thus, at an early age, his oldest son Joe Jr. was prepared for the presidency, and when he met his untimely death as a fighter pilot, the second oldest son, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, became the focus of his father's ambitions. A free spirit at heart, JFK preferred literature to politics, socializing to political networking, leisure to campaigning. This soon changed when his father convinced him to run for a seat in Congress . . . . and he won. The third oldest son, Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy, gave up his job in the Justice Department to work full-time on JFK's campaign for Senate.

The Kennedys were brought up to hide their weaknesses, as evidenced poignantly by the way that one of their daughters, Rosemary, who was mentally challenged, was kept "hidden" from the public. She did not fit into the "Kennedy Image" that Joe had worked so hard to create. When her father decided that she should have a lobotomy, the press was told that she was being sent to a convent. Nothing was going to blemish the Kennedy name, not even another Kennedy. Another example of hiding a family weakness was the way that just before the 1960 campaign, the Kennedy family sequestered JFK's medical records, believing that if the press found out about his back troubles and frequent sickness, it would give the impression that he was not sufficiently physically fit for the presidency. As a continuation of this protection of the "Kennedy Image," there is a story of how, when Edward Kennedy, the fourth Kennedy son, was caught cheating at Harvard, Joe did all he could to cover up the situation, including employing the boy who had taken the test for Teddy (Wills 129).

The positive side of the Kennedy ambition, however, was that the children were raised in an intellectual atmosphere in the sense that they were encouraged to be critical and knowledgeable about society, culture and current events and to have answers ready when they were questioned. In part, this could have been the backlash of Joe's feeling that he lacked the image of a high-society gentleman, because of his immigrant status as a child. He did not want his children to feel that same shame, but rather to feel secure in the society in which they lived and worked. JFK's training as the son of Joe Kennedy, Sr. and as the younger brother of the eldest Kennedy, president-hopeful Joe Kennedy, Jr., brought him many opportunities for intellectual and cultural stimulation that his peers did not experience, such as living in England while his father was ambassador, traveling

throughout Europe, and meeting with people in high positions. In an interview, John Kenneth Galbriath, former US Ambassador to India, recalls: "[JFK] was an omnivorous reader. He was enormously interested in the ideas associated with government and politics. He loved it. If that makes an intellectual, I suppose he was" (qtd. in Strober 58). In his private life, books were never far from his reach. "I feel better when books are around," Kennedy told friend of the family Larry Newman: "That's really where my education comes from [from books]. Most things I learned, I read, good and bad. The rest I learned the hard way, campaigning" (qtd. in Martin 283). Being an "intellectual" in the Kennedy family meant being well-read on a variety of topics, and being able to discuss those topics with confidence.

The nature and degree of JFK's intellectualism, however, has been much debated. Some have argued that he was interested in ideas for their own sake and that this does not constitute an intellectual. According to Thomas Brown, for example, "Kennedy's 'intellectual' interests did not extend beyond ideas that could be directly converted into concrete proposals and programs" (10). In practice, Kennedy played the middle ground between intellectualism and mediocrity by clashing with intellectuals and condemning their "grubby" means necessary to translate ideas into action. Others have argued that Kennedy possessed such an intellectual's love of art, society and ideas, that he could enter the world of power and the world of ideas easily and build a bridge between the two, unconsciously and naturally. In his biography of Kennedy, Theodore Sorenson attempted to clarify the issue of JFK's celebrated intellectualism, by explaining: "He meditated, but on action, not philosophy. He was a directed intelligence, never spent on the purely theoretical, and always applied to the concrete. He sought truth in order to act

on it . . . . Typical intellectuals, in fact, were rarely among his closest friends. But he enjoyed the exchange of specific facts and ideas with almost anyone from whom he could learn" (386).

This kind of intellectualism can also be seen in JFK's interest in history, which he regarded as both art and craft, both speculation and practical. When people looked back at his presidency, he wanted them to see that *he* had made a difference in the way the government worked with its people. An expert on American culture in the sixties, Morris Dickstein, explains: "When Kennedy challenged the phlegmatic and restrained tendencies that underlay the saber-rattling of a Dulles, he called attention to American power and position in a new way. Kennedy demanded more flexible military posture, the ability to fight two and a half wars simultaneously" (284).

Among past presidents, JFK was particularly interested in Roosevelt and Lincoln, two politicians who were considered great because of their accomplishments and the ideals they brought to America and to the world. According to Robert McNamara, JFK's Defense Secretary, the fact was that he could manipulate the events of history to show his own greatness, whether he defended a great idea or condemned a bad one. "He clearly wanted to establish a place in history . . . . He kept asking Arthur Schlesinger's father why he felt this president was strong and that president was weak and what were the qualities that went with a great president. Of course he was thinking about his own place in history and wanted to make sure he was moving in the right way" (qtd. in Martin 276). Although Kennedy respected the power of history in the sense that it told a story that was inscribed for eternity, his eye was on the future, not the past. As Wills noted, "The

cultural revolution [Norman] Mailer anticipated was, in fact, accomplished [during his regime], according to President Kennedy's biographers" (145-46).

Bernard Boutin, campaign aide and a part of the General Services Administration, remembers how important it was to JFK to encourage people to create history – "not the event but the word of history – to write history, to research history. With his sponsorship, legislation was proposed and approved, providing grants to writers. It was a wonderful thing [the importance given to writers and artists as creating history]. You had the feeling of an appreciation for things of beauty, whether they were words, or buildings, or poetry" (qtd. in Strober 471). Implied in this observation and made clear by August Heckscher, advisor to the President on the arts, is the way Kennedy conceived history as an art: "He was interested in all the arts, more from the point of view of the discipline and the search for excellence which they embodied than he was in what might be called purely aesthetic forms" (qtd. in Strober 62). Heckscher began to work as part-time Special Consultant on the Arts in 1962. Early in December 1961 Kennedy invited Heckscher to conduct a survey to look at the resources, possibilities and limitations of national policy in relations to the arts. "Obviously government can at best play only a marginal role in our cultural affairs, but I would like to think that it is making its full contribution in this role" (qtd. in Schlesinger 734).

Kennedy's first attempt at writing history and his father's first effort at "selling" the idea that JFK was someone to be remembered and revered took place during his son's last year at Harvard when the authorship of his senior paper, "While England Slept," became controversial. JFK said that he had written the thesis because the subject of England's lack of preparedness for WWII had interested him while he was living in

England. Arthur Krock, *New York Times* columnist and a friend of the Kennedy family, took a look at the paper and suggested expanding it into a book. According to JFK, "Henry Luce [*Time-Life* publisher and family friend] took the book and agreed to write a forward for it. Several publishers turned it down, including *Harper's*. No one seemed to think it had a chance and it wouldn't have except for luck. It came out at the same time as the break-through in England. That's what made it" (qtd. in Martin 36-37). According to Harvey Klemmer, who wrote speeches for JFK's father when he was Ambassador, he had been assigned to rewrite John Kennedy's college thesis into a book: "It was terribly written and disorganized . . . I had to rewrite the whole thing including the final sum-up paragraph" (qtd. in Martin 37). Similarly, although the book was published as a best-seller, it also occasioned critical and negative reviews, the most damaging of which was written by the economist Harold Laski. Laski was a British political scientist, economist, educator, and author, born in Manchester, England, and educated at New College, University of Oxford. From 1914 to 1916 Laski was a lecturer in history at McGill University in Montréal. He then joined the faculty of Harvard University, remaining until 1920. After leaving Harvard, he returned to England, where he joined the faculty of the London School of Economics, becoming professor of political science.

It was alleged by JFK's father that JFK had studied with Laski at the London School of Economics, when in fact it was JFK's older brother Joe who had studied briefly with him. JFK had been enrolled in the London School of Economics but had never registered because of physical ailments. Somehow, magically almost, the "facts" that JFK had published a credible book and had studied with Laski went down in history. In

response to this, Laski wrote to Ambassador Joe Kennedy: "You're doing the boy no favor by having anything he does puffed up artificially" (qtd. in Martin 37).

According to Kennedy's biographer, Sorenson, the story of this same thesis has a different outcome: "At the age of twenty-three [JFK] expanded his highly regarded senior thesis – representing, he wrote his father, 'more *work* than I've ever done in my life' – into a distinguished book on *Why England Slept*, a well-reasoned and well-regarded analysis of that nation's lack of preparedness for the Second World War" (14). Sorenson, however, does not explain by whom the book was thought to be "well-reasoned and well-regarded."

Another book that brought fame to JFK was his *Profiles in Courage*, which he wrote as a Senator during his recovery from a back-injury (see Fig. 5). As a result of this book's publication in 1955, he was chosen to chair a special Senate committee for choosing the five outstanding Senators in America's history. This committee announced its choices just one day before Kennedy won the Pulitzer. Of the five Senators who were honored, three were included in Kennedy's eight "profiles" and the press introduced those Senators by referring to Kennedy's text. This public-relations opportunity significantly contributed to his political aspirations. As Gary Wills observes: "The book's appearance, his service on the committee, and winning the Pulitzer made up a kind of triple play for Kennedy in the spring of 1957, just as his presidential hopes were surfacing" (137). Wills, however, argues that though JFK authorized and directed the writing of *Profiles in Courage*, it was more Theodore Sorensen, along with Jules Davids and others, who wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning book (135).

With respect to his own role as a "hero," JFK's wartime activism on the small PT-109 was also much celebrated in the press and also controversial. Not only was the public reminded that he had saved the life of Patrick McMahon and had taken dangerous risks to look for his shipmates, but reportedly he exhibited great leadership when he said to his shipmates: "I know I'm the skipper of this PT crew and I can still give you orders, but most of you men are older than I am. I have nothing to lose, but some of you have wives and children and I'm not going to order you to try to swim to that shore. You'll have to make your own decision on that" (qtd. in Martin 40). According to Wills, however, JFK released to his biographers an inaccurate draft of the citation for his Navy and Marine Corps Medal. Whereas the citation says his boat was rammed "while attempting a torpedo attack on a Japanese destroyer" and that he "personally rescued three men," in fact, the attempted torpedo attack became in a later citation, a simple "collision" wherein he merely "contributed to the saving of several lives" (qtd. in Wills 131).

In the account of the PT-109 that JFK gave to *New Yorker* writer John Hersey, he repeatedly tried to establish the fact that he was on the attack when his boat was sunk, a point that is repeated on the jacket cover of *Profiles*. Later, when his father arranged for *The Reader's Digest* to print a piece from the *New Yorker* article, JFK took special care that the phrase "turn for an attack" was retained while other sections were cut (Wills 132). Although interviews with others on the boat make it clear that there was no attempted attack, for JFK it was important that he be seen on the defense, rather than on the offense, to justify his actions. As for whether Kennedy was negligent or whether there simply were pieces of the story that were unclear to some of the participants, JFK himself said to a friend, just after his rescue, "I actually don't know" [how a Japanese destroyer

could run down a PT-109] (qtd. in Wills 132). In 1944, when John Hersey tried to find out how a destroyer could run down a PT boat, he was blocked by the military and was not able to obtain the information he needed to confirm the feat.

Aside from his own abilities and the ambitions of his family, John F. Kennedy also had the advantage of coming into power during one of the most revolutionary decades in cultural history. In *The Sixties: The Art, Attitudes, Politics, and Media of Our Most Explosive Decade*, editor Gerald Howard describes this time as "spirited, articulate, inventive, incoherent, turbulent, with energy shooting off wildly in all directions. Above all, [there was a] sense of motion, of leadership and of hope" (55). At the time of Kennedy's presidency, vital issues were erupting in America and thus in the media: Civil Rights; National Security; the Missile Gap; the Bay of Pigs; the Space Program; the state of the American economy. In addition, JFK had a talent for making certain issues seem urgent. The more that issues were perceived by the public as needing immediate attention, Kennedy believed, the more power the President was given to make changes. He tended to exaggerate issues and make them seem out of control, so that he could in turn demonstrate his ability to take control. This was his craft as an artist of politics, and displayed to great affect in many memorable televised speeches he made in the early Sixties.

Also contributing to JFK's successes was the way that during this time, issues of conformity and materialism were being discussed in the intellectual circles critical of the United States as a "mass society." JFK's advocates praised his presidential "style" for its "aristocratic" standards of excellence and praise of individual accomplishments (Brown

10). JFK's vision for the future encouraged and revitalized an America that had survived World War II, an America that was dominated by young people who were serving in government and who still had enough hope to believe in a better and brighter tomorrow. Part of this hope had to do with the stability of the economy when JFK began his reign in the White House. As George Romney, chairman of the board and president of American Motors Corp., as well as governor of Michigan, said about JFK's economic luck: "A president is basically influenced in his first term by what his predecessor has done. JFK was very fortunate that Eisenhower had followed a very sound set of economical policies. Nixon tried to get Eisenhower to do that [stimulate the economy ahead of the election in 1960] but he didn't succeed. The result is that Kennedy took over the last really good economic situation that we had" (qtd. in Strober 243).

In a chapter of his book entitled "Education in Economics," *Time* White House Correspondent Hugh Sidey also noted the way that Kennedy's policies changed and evolved: "In two years, John Kennedy went through economic metamorphosis. In the embryonic state he was a budget balancer. With his wings fully developed, he proposed not only a budget with a $11.9 billion debt for the fiscal year 1964, but he coupled it with a tax cut, which was more than enough to make any old politician choke on his cigar" (335). One of Kennedy's campaign promises was to get "America moving" as he put it in one of the televised Kennedy/Nixon debates, including the country's economy. Although JFK's own formal education in the mystic science of economics was considered minimal, once in office, he carefully selected a Council of Economics Advisors: Walter Heller of the University of Minnesota: James Tobin of Yale University; and Kermis Gordon of Williams College. He increased the council's budget and strengthened the systems of

economic information gathering. To Kennedy, the national budget was not just something to be balanced; it was an instrument to be used in the pursuit of his administration's policy objectives.

In comparison with the Depression, furthermore, the Sixties was a time of great opulence. People began to value art at the same time that art begin to acquire greater monetary status. As Gerald Howard explains, the Sixties were fueled by an economic boom and a postwar demographic bulge of the under-thirty population – the major consumers and creators of cultural style: "The Sixties produced more and better ephemera than ever before" (14), ephemera in the sense that people collected temporary "stuff" more than ever before. According to Peter Sely, curator for the Museum of Modern Art, "The 1960's was the decade in which the arts became truly popular. More people had more time for art and they had more money" (qtd. in MacNeil 123).

In a time of such enthusiasm and craving for a new way of doing things, different from the past administration that seemed to be engrossed in tradition and mediocrity, JFK was just what the country wanted. The first president to be born in the twentieth century, JFK brought to the White House a vibrancy that had not been present since 1902 and the presidency of Theodore D. Roosevelt. His graceful wife, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, enhanced his captivating character with her subtle charm and innocence (see Fig. 6). Her fondness for European art and an elegant lifestyle mirrored JFK's "style" of politics, charisma and fine culture. "What really sold me on JFK was the reaction of people to the man," said Louis Martin, deputy director, Democratic National Convention; "He had tough old newspaper guys who don't like anybody admiring him, but they didn't know why they admired him. Nobody could ever explain to me how that guy could affect

people" (qtd. in Strober 56). A concrete example of how an individual changes from human to iconic status, JFK awed people by what he represented, not only by who he was as a person.

In 1960, the New Frontier became a symbol of Kennedy's administration, representing better ideals in education, health care, equality, economy and culture. The Kennedy concept of youth was rich with connotative associations: activism, optimism, originality, vigor, and the pursuit of excellence. But above all, it represented *idealism* (Brown 18). The New Frontier valued intellect along with youthful ideas and perspectives. Kennedy used his personal style to appeal to young people, who, as Thomas Brown explains, "could see mirrored in the president some of their own impatience with institutional routine" (17). Kennedy appealed to the anti-establishment bias of the young, using Eisenhower's presidential office of seven and a half years against him. In the case of the Bay of Pigs, for example, Kennedy loyalists have argued that the disaster taught him not to trust the advice of "experts" and to trust his own luck (31). He had trusted the "establishment" and had been burnt. Kennedy's image-makers used this disaster to show his strengths as a president rather than his weaknesses as a decision-maker, although the question that arises in turn is whether such an "artistic" strategy should be credited to JFK or to his advisors.

What is certain, as Sorenson explains in his biography *Kennedy*, is how carefully JFK crafted his symbols. For instance, his rocking chair represented not only the relaxation of a president who is in control of the situation, it also represented tradition, something the country fought against and yet clung to for familiarity (see Fig. 7). In fact, Kennedy used the rocking chair not only as a symbol of his "coming of age" as president

but to give his back pain some relief. This is a prime example of Kennedy's practicality and ability to turn a possibly negative image into a positive one.

In many ways, of course, the symbol with which JFK was most associated with was America itself. Brown argues that the Kennedy image was strengthened because of its connection to certain demographic trends in American society. JFK served as a positive symbol for numerous activist groups in the United States striving to find political expression: to urbanites, he was the ultimate cosmopolite; to the post-WWII generation, he represented a new generation of leadership; to newly assertive racial and ethnic groups, he was the promise of as yet unfulfilled opportunities; and to the college-educated, he epitomized the hope that intellect and vision could transform American politics from bureaucracy into a republic (43-44). Journalist Theodore White describes Kennedy as a liberator who symbolically broke the hold of rural WASP culture on American political life:

> Historically, he was a gatekeeper. He unlatched the door, and through the door marched not only Catholics, but blacks, and Jews, and ethnics, women, youth, academics, newspersons and an entirely new breed of young politicians who did not think of themselves as politicians – all demanding their share of the action and the power in what is now called participatory democracy. (qtd. in Brown 44)

A small but strategic aid in signaling this shift was JFK's avoidance of golf, which he purposefully did to distance himself from the Eisenhower image. Though Kennedy enjoyed playing, he did not use these times as photo opportunities, trying to distance himself from any association that would bring his predecessor to the nation's

memory. Similarly, Kennedy's style was expertly contrasted with the Eisenhower era of funny hats and Indian head-dresses, kissing babies and middle-class attitudes. His image took "ideas of fashion from Paris to New York, its entertainment values from Broadway and Hollywood, and its voguish 'new ideas' from the academic cocktail party circuit" (Brown 13-14). He easily changed from one mode to another but with each featuring the intellectual and cultured ideals of the New Frontier. As Jim Heath explains:

> Whereas Eisenhower preferred to surround himself socially with leaders from the business world, Kennedy made headlines with his invitations to a wide variety of people, including men and women of the arts, scientists, intellectuals, and sports figures. He and Mrs. Kennedy, with her broad interest in the arts, used social occasions to encourage a cultural and intellectual revival in America. It was not that businessmen were no longer welcome at the White House; they were, but with the change in administrations, there was a shift in emphasis. Kennedy prided himself on being an intellectual, and he enjoyed being with practical intellectuals. (8)

Moreover, as Wills explains, his "coolness" was itself a new frontier. It meant freedom from the stereotyped response of the past (143). As JFK became more established in politics, his image-makers, Arthur Schlesinger and Pierre Salinger, worked hard to preserve the Kennedy style through press releases, photographs, and arranged press conferences. Schlesinger describes JFK's dedication to his administration in Hollywood terms, maintaining the scholarly style of description in an effort to give credibility to vague compliments: "The combination of self-criticism, wit and ideas made up, I think, a large part of the spirit of the New Frontier. It informed the processes of government,

sparkled through evenings at the White House and around town, refreshed and enlivened the world of journalism, stimulated the universities, kindled the hopes of the young and presented the nation with a new conception of itself and its potentialities" (729).

JFK's verbal talent involved not only the content of words and speeches, but also the delivery, including his rapport with the press, his recourse to small jokes, and making fun of himself in several media appearances, to show people that he was just a regular all-American guy. At the same time, he constantly worked to improve his rhetoric and presentation, and by the time of his presidency, indeed, his skills had developed to the point that Lee Smith, a student at the University of Minnesota, was led to say:

> I was very inspired by JFK. When he gave his inaugural address and showed such skill at those televised news conferences, I thought he was the most wonderful thing I'd ever encountered in my whole life. . . . [After Eisenhower and John Dulles], then Kennedy came in and brought all these young intellectual people to the White House. He played touch football, and he knew all about art, literature, and music. It was something I hadn't seen in politics before. He was so eloquent. . . . (qtd. in MacNeil 65)

It was however, just after JFK's death that his wife Jackie gave a name to what the president symbolized, when in a tearful confession to friend and journalist Theodore White shortly after the assassination, she said:

> "At night, before we'd go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records; and the song he loved most came at the very end of this record. The line he loved to hear was: *Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.*"

> She wanted to make sure the point was clear: there will never be another Camelot in this lifetime. Don't let the idea of my husband fade away like other presidents. (qtd. in Brown 42)

Camelot, like any symbol, coordinates diverse ideas and emotions in a single image, and in doing so has kept the flames of the Kennedy legend burning. For some, Camelot reflects the difference between the revolutionary United States "Country" and the English "Court" (Brown 42). Camelot may be taken as a metaphor of how the New Frontiersmen saw themselves: a cultured, cosmopolitan elite group who would lead the United States away from its provincial past and prepare it for the tasks of the empire. For others, however, Camelot was merely a pop-culture myth. Thus according to Norman Podhoretz, editor of the *Commentary,* there was "a real glamour surrounding the Kennedys – the glamour of café society combined with great political power" (qtd. in Strober 470).

In any case, part of the presidential flavour was the artistic crowd. Artists were flattered to be invited to move in the literary and intellectual circles whose center was JFK. They had never been given any political power from the government before, and once they were within reach of it, they wanted to embrace power. Conversely, just as artists are concerned with the power they have over the art medium that they have mastered and the power they have over their audience, so Kennedy believed that the prize of presidency was power. In contrast to Johnson who believed that the presidency was a satisfying career choice, JFK knew that the importance of power was the way it was exercised and extended.

Like other aspects of the Kennedy administration, his interest in the arts invited controversy. Thus, while for some "the appearance of Pablo Casals in the White House became for them a signal that America had adopted art as a national purpose" (Wills 146), for insiders such as Richard Rovere, a writer for *The New Yorker*, Kennedy initiated this spotlight event more from a sense that "it was a good thing to do rather than from a genuine appreciation of artistic achievement" (qtd. in Brown15). This is not to say that Casals in the White House had any less of an effect on American society (see Fig. 8), especially since the media took careful notice of the guests that were invited to the soirée. Kennedy said with emphasis in introducing Casals: "We believe that an artist, in order to be true to himself and his work, must be a free man" (qtd. in Schlesinger 732).

Though Kennedy did support the arts and created artistic symbols of his administration, his friend and writer, "Red" Fay, remembers the president making a revealing faux pas when in answer to a question about two paintings in the White House, he said: "My God, if you have to ask a question like that, do it in a whisper or wait 'til we get outside. We're trying to give this administration a semblance of class. Renoir and Cézanne just happen to be about the two best-known French Impressionist painters" (qtd. in Brown 16). As it happens, while Renoir is indeed an Impressionist, Cézanne is in fact a post-impressionist, called the Father of Modern Art.

Support of the arts and artistic initiative became a national agenda item for the Kennedy administration in the fall of 1963. On Schlesinger's suggestion, JFK asked White House speechwriter Richard Goodwin to become his advisor to the special council on the arts, which he had assembled from a group of prominent people in theater, music, dance, motion pictures, art and architecture. Whatever the president's own interest,

Goodwin himself realized that this could be more than just another public relations scheme, and rather something that might concern "the entire problem of the aesthetics of our society: the way our cities looked, the beauty of our environment as well as the general encouragement of the arts" (225).

Recognition of JFK's relationship with the arts has been concretely evidenced in the evolution of John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts (see Fig. 9). Although it was back in 1958, several weeks after his second inauguration that President Eisenhower supported a proposal for the National Cultural Center, it was not until Kennedy's assassination that the Center was renamed to commemorate JFK's life and support of the arts. In an eloquent speech about what the Center could mean for the nation and our time, Architect Edward Durell Stone praised former President Eisenhower and his wife, and current President Kennedy and his wife for their "inspiration and leadership. This they did in full measure so that we are, in reality, in the beginning of a great Renaissance in the intellectual and artistic life of this country" (qtd. in Becker 67). In speaking to a meeting of the Center's Board of Trustees with the Advisory Committee at the White House in November, 1961, Kennedy himself had emphasized the larger significance of the Center:

> This is a most important national responsibility, and I can assure you that, if you will be willing to help, this administration will give it every possible support. We face many hazards, all of which you have been through before in your own communities, many difficulties in not only building but maintaining." (qtd. in Becker 40-41)

The following year, President Kennedy designated 26 November through 2 December as "National Cultural Center Week," which included a televised broadcast called "An American Pageant of the Arts," which the President and his wife attended. The new fund-raising goal for the Center was introduced as $31 million, a significant amount of money to contribute to the arts, but which the President justified when on 18 April 1962, after explaining that "Mrs. Eisenhower has agreed to serve as honorary co-chairman, with Mrs. Kennedy, of the National Cultural Center," he went on to conclude: "The NCC begun in the administration of Pres. Eisenhower, is the most significant cultural undertaking in the history of Washington and is of enormous importance to the cultural life of our Nation as a whole" (qtd. in Chase 231).

After JFK's death, for the purpose of sufficiently commemorating him, Bobby Kennedy and Bill Walton, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, thought of changing Pennsylvania Avenue to Kennedy Avenue. Instead, as a result of the suggestion by LeMoyne Billings, a lifelong friend and schoolmate of JFK, also a member of the Center's Board of Trustees, it was decided to rename the National Cultural Center after JFK. At the ground-breaking ceremony for the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, President Johnson explained the decision in words that firmly located Kennedy in American cultural history: "As the Center comes to reflect and advance the greatness of America, consider then that those glories were purchased by a valiant leader who never swerved from duty - John Kennedy. And in his name, I dedicate this site" (qtd. in Becker 81).

Today JFK's own words in support of the artist's creativity are carved into a plaque on the wall of the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts:

> There is a connection, hard to explain logically, but easy to feel, between achievement in public life and progress in the arts. The age of Pericles was also the age of Phidias. The age of Lorenzo de Medici was also the age of Leonardo da Vinci, the age of Elizabeth also the age of Shakespeare. And the frontier for which I am campaigning in public life can also be a new frontier for American art. . . . I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty. (qtd. in Becker 219)

The dual vision here reflected also perfectly summarizes the attitudes of Kennedy toward all aspects of his presidency: he continually looked back for ways of moving forward. But more importantly, perhaps, his sense of a connection between "achievement in public life and progress in the arts" encapsulated the secret of his own success – the merger of politics and aesthetics that went into the making of his image and which in turn made him into a cultural icon.

Chapter Two

Poetry and Power: Kennedy and the Verbal Arts

Eight months before John F. Kennedy's nomination for President of the United States, *Esquire* published an article entitled "The New Mood of Politics," in which Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. articulated the dissatisfaction and anticipation widely shared by activity-minded liberal intellectuals at the start of the decade: "The politics of the Fifties were . . . the politics of fatigue. . . . Perhaps [Eisenhower's] particular contribution to the art of politics was to make politics boring at a time when the people wanted any excuse to forget public affairs" (47-48). Calling for a reorganization of American values, Schlesinger emphasized the urgency for a new vision which would involve the following charges: revitalization of community life; reconstruction of the educational system; improvement of medical care for all ages; equal rights for minorities; freedom of speech, expression and conscience; development of natural resources; control of inflation; improvement of social security; provision of adequate foreign aid and pursuit of the weapons effort; and refinement of mass media and elevation of pop culture (52).

According to Schlesinger, the new mood in politics required a new way of doing government, and he argued that the result would also be "a change in the attitude towards government. . . . Young men will go into public service with devotion and hope as they did in the days of Teddy Roosevelt, Wilson and FDR. Government will gain strength and vitality from these fresh people and new ideas" (53-54). The messianic rhetoric, coupled with the youthful image that Kennedy projected, had the effect of making the presidential

candidate look like a "David" and subsequently, as president, made him into an icon to be worshipped.

The word *worship* is not used loosely in this context. Photographs of JFK were hung in homes around the world, next to the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ ("JFK: The Day the Nation Cried" V.I.E.W. Home Video). The famous words of his inaugural speech, repeated even in pop culture today – "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" (14) – became the mantra for many in the Sixties. Emphasizing the need for a fresh start, in a speech to the US Senate in June 1960, Kennedy proclaimed: "For all America – its President, and its people – the coming years will be a time of decision. We must decide whether we have reached our limit – whether our greatness is past – whether we can go no further – or whether, in the words of Thomas Wolfe, 'The true discovery of America is before us – the true fulfillment of our might and immortal land is yet to come'" (220).

JFK began his presidency with radical predictions of a bright future. In his acceptance of the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention on 15 July 1960, he rallied support by appealing to what he felt the public desired: "I think the American people expect more from us than cries of indignation and attack. The times are too grave, the challenges too urgent, and the stakes too high to permit the customary passions of political debate. We are not here to curse the darkness, but to light the candle that can guide us through the darkness to a safe and sane future" (98).

Casting himself in the role of a Savior in a televised statement on the Berlin Crisis on 25 July 1961, he similarly exhorted :

> We are clear about what must be done – and we intend to do it. I want to talk frankly with you tonight about the first steps that we shall take. These actions will require sacrifice on the part of many of our citizens. More will be required in the future. They will require, from all of us, courage and perseverance in the years to come. But if we and our allies act out of strength and unity of purpose – with calm determination and steady nerves – using restraint in our words as well as our weapons – I am hopeful that both peace and freedom will be sustained . . . . Therefore I, as President and Commander-in-Chief, and all of us as Americans, are moving through serious days. I shall bear this responsibility under our Constitution for the next three and one-half years, but I am sure that we all, regardless of our occupations, will do our very best for our country, and for our cause. For all of us want to see our children grow up in a country of peace, and in a world where freedom endures . . . . (257-63).

The first president to make an art of the televised press conference, he expressed not only his private agenda of the day, but also transmitted a sense of mission to all listeners and viewers, as when in announcing the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty on 26 July 1963, he resorted to the royal plural: “History and our own conscience will judge us harsher if we do not now make every effort to test our hopes by action; and this is the place to begin” (297-98). In such a context, even Kennedy’s failures could be perceived as a sign of his “growth” as President, in keeping with “the archetypal myth of the hero who acquires spiritual insight through suffering and experience” (Brown 20), just as his untimely assassination meant that he could be eulogized as a leader who had not been

able to realize his full potential.

A president who could use words to mobilize and to paralyze, when Kennedy asked American poet Robert Frost (see Fig.10) to speak at his inauguration, he not only set a precedent but also signaled the role that the verbal arts would play in his administration. Frost replied: "If you can bear at your age the honor of being made President of the United States, I ought to be able at my age to bear the honor of taking some part in your inauguration. I may not be equal to it but I can accept it for my cause – the arts, poetry, now for the first time taken into the affairs of statesmen" (qtd. in Schlesinger 731).

In choosing Frost as his Poet Laureate, moreover, Kennedy was also aligning himself with the institution and prestige of a New England heritage, thereby doubly aligning himself with "culture" as his immigrant Irish ancestors had previously attempted to do.

Frost's poetry, of course, is based mainly upon the life and scenery of rural New England, but just as his seemingly colloquial verse is structured within traditional metrical and rhythmical schemes, so although he concentrates on ordinary subject matter, Frost's emotional range is wide and deep, and his poems often shift dramatically from a tone of humorous banter to the passionate expression of tragic experience. Further making Frost such an excellent choice for Kennedy's purpose was his underlying philosophy of individualism, and his strong sympathy for the values of early American society.

Prior to his inauguration, Kennedy had already enlisted Frost on his campaign trips of 1957-59, concluding numerous of his speeches by adapting the lines of Frost's

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

Iowa City is lovely, dark and deep

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep (qtd. in Sorenson's *Kennedy* 64)

By using Frost's poem as an ending to his speech, Kennedy was also drawing upon images of home and comfort, of an established America that at the same time was looking forward to the future for answers and for hope.

Although the poem that Frost recited at the inauguration was "The Gift Outright," this had not been his original intention. Instead for the occasion he had written a new poem "For John F. Kennedy: His Inauguration":

Summoning artists to participate

In the august occasions of the state

Seems something artists ought to celebrate.

Today is for my cause a day of days.

And his be poetry's old-fashioned praise

Who was the first to think of such a thing.

This verse that in acknowledgement I bring

Goes back to the beginning of the end

Of what had been for centuries the trend;

A turning point in modern history.

Colonial had been the thing to be

As long as the great issue was to see

What country'd be the one to dominate

By character, by tongue, by native trait,

The new world Christopher Columbus found.

The French, the Spanish, and the Dutch were downed

And counted out. Heroic deeds were done.

Elizabeth the First and England won.

Now came on a new order of the ages

That in the Latin of our founding sages

(Is it not written on the dollar bill

We carry in our purse and pocket still?)

God nodded his approval of as good.

So much those heroes knew and understood,

I mean the great four, Washington,

John Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, -

So much they knew as consecrated seers

They must have seen ahead what now appears,

They would bring empires down about our ears

And by the examples of our Declaration

Make everybody want to be a nation.

And this is no aristocratic joke

At the expense of negligible folk.

We see how seriously the races swarm

In their attempts at sovereignty and form.

They are our wards we think to some extent

For the time being and with their consent,

To teach them how Democracy is meant.

"New order of the ages" did we say?

If it looks none too orderly today,

'Tis a confusion it was ours to start

So in it have to take courageous part.

No one of honest feeling would approve

A ruler who pretended not to love

A turbulence he had the better of.

Everyone knows the glory of the twain

Who gave America the aeroplane

To ride the whirlwind and the hurricane.

Some poor fool has been saying in his heart

Glory is out of date in life and art.

Our venture in revolution and outlawry

Has justified itself in freedom's story

Right down to now in glory upon glory.

Come fresh from an election like the last,

The greatest vote a people ever cast,

So close yet sure to be abided by,

It is no miracle our mood is high.

Courage is in the air in bracing whiffs

Better than all the stalemate an's and ifs.

There was the book of profile tales declaring

For the emboldened politicians daring

To break with followers when in the wrong,

A healthy independence of the throng,

A democratic form of right divine

To rule first answerable to high design.

There is a call to life a little sterner,

And braver for the earner, learner, yearner.

Less criticism of the field and court

And more preoccupation with the sport.

It makes the prophet in us all presage

The glory of a next Augustan age

Of a power leading from its strength and pride,

Of young ambition eager to be tried,

Firm in our free beliefs without dismay,

In any game the nations want to play.

A golden age of poetry and power

Of which this noonday's the beginning hour. (qtd. in Glikes 7-9, emphasis mine)

The Augustan Age to which Frost likens the potential of the Kennedy administration was notable for its perfection of letters and learning and has come to refer to any epoch in which literary culture was high. What Frost, however, has also carefully done is to "Americanize" the poem by stressing the values of freedom, religious

tolerance, and above all youthfulness. Poetry is concretely being likened to power in the fact that freedom of speech ("firm in our free beliefs") is a right that is owed to each person living in this age of "poetry and power."

What prevented Frost from reading this poem that he had specifically written was ironically – or possibly appropriately – an accident of nature. That is, the glare of the snow blinded the 86-year-old poet, who instead recited "The Gift Outright" from memory.

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become. (qtd. in Glikes 10)

This poem addresses the potential of a young America, just as Kennedy represented the potential of a young, promising president. In a way, Frost was advising Kennedy to remember that he belonged to the people, just as "The land was ours before we were the land's." It was only with time that the land expanded westward and developed a reputation, and only after giving of itself – "The deed of gift was many deeds of war" – that the land began to fulfill her promise. Coming from a New England tradition, Frost was reminding Kennedy of his roots and his source of strength; the land.

As much as the messianic and religious rhetoric of "The Gift Outright" seemed to appeal to the President, so did the notion of empire in the "For John F. Kennedy – His Inauguration" poem, and in a speech delivered at the 1963 Amherst College graduation (see Fig. 11), less than four weeks before JFK's death, after describing Frost as "one of the granite figures of our time in America," Kennedy brought the two strains together:

> It is hardly an accident that Robert Frost coupled poetry and power, for he saw poetry as the means of saving power from itself. When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgement. (209)

For Kennedy, in short, poetry was important not merely as a sign of culture, but also as humanizing element and corrective to the abuse of power that might attend political concerns.

Among various poetic devices, none perhaps is more politically effective than the

recourse to metaphor, and especially the combination of a number of these. And here one might consider the mixed metaphors that Kennedy used at the National Cultural Center in November, 1962:

> As a great democratic society, we have a special responsibility to the arts. For art is the great democrat, calling forth creative genius from every sector of society, disregarding race or religion or wealth or color. What freedom alone can bring is the liberation of the human mind and a spirit which finds its greatest flowering in the free society. (207)

Such rhetoric sounds very much like that of Ralph Waldo Emerson, someone whom in 1959 Frost eulogized as one of the four greatest Americans – with Washington, Jefferson, and Linden. Indeed, Emerson had helped to create the "golden age of poetry and power" in 19th – century America, and Harvard-trained Kennedy frequently seems to have patterned his speeches after this great orator.

Like Emerson, who loved to pile phrase on phrase, so Kennedy frequently employed an incantatory style, as in a speech he gave in Frankfurt, Germany: "For we know now that freedom is more than the rejection of tyranny, that prosperity is more than an escape from want, that partnership is more than a sharing of power. These are all, above all, great human adventures" (qtd. in Ayres 92).

In many of his speeches, JFK echoed the same optimism and anti-traditionalism that Emerson displayed in "The American Scholar" and "Divinity School Address." Thus in a speech to the American Foreign Service Association in May of 1962, JFK speaks about the importance of change and revolution to the success of any country:

> If change were easy, everybody would change. But if you did not have

> change, you would have revolution. I think that change is what we need in a changing world, and therefore when we embark on new policies, we drag along all the anchors of old opinions and old views. You just have to put up with it. Those who cannot stand the heat should get out of the kitchen. Every member of Congress who subjects you to abuse is being subjected himself, every two years, to the possibility that his career also will come to an end. He doesn't live a charmed life. You have to remember that the hot breath is on him also, and it is on the Senate and it is on the President, and it is on everyone who deals with great matters. (67)

Similarly, one can hear distinct messianic echoes in the speech Kennedy made at a fund-raising dinner at the National Cultural Center, when he emphasized the universality of thought and feeling that art invokes and accentuated the natural part that art plays in creating understanding among humanity:

> Art is not for man alone, to the extent that artists' style is to express beauty in form and color and sound, to the extent that they write about man's struggle with nature or society or himself, to the extent that they strike a responsive chord in all humanity. Thus, art and the encouragement of art are political in the most profound sense, not as a weapon in the struggle, but as an instrument of understanding the futility of struggle between those who share man's faith [in humanity]. (206)

One wonders in turn just how much Kennedy might have learned from Emerson's admonishment in "Compensation" about styles of leadership: "The farmer imagines

power and place are fine things. But the President has paid dearly for his White House. It has commonly cost him all his peace, and the best of his manly attributes. To preserve for a short time so conspicuous an appearance before the world, he is content to eat dust before the real masters who stand erect behind the throne. Or do men desire the more substantial and permanent grandeur of genius?" (107)

Aside from a mutual ease in using language, Kennedy believed that idealistic politicians and poets have in common the strength of their convictions: their greatness depends upon the bravery with which they face the challenges that confront them. This is certainly the theme of *Profiles of Courage*, his 1957 Pulitzer Prize award-winning study of fourteen senators who showed courage in their political decisions and in their personal lives. One of these was Senator Daniel Webster, whom Kennedy included "not as a Massachusetts man but as an American," who gained support ironically by sticking to his own principles:

> His constituents and Massachusetts newspapers admonished him strongly not to waver in his consistent anti-slavery stand, and many urged him to employ still tougher tones against the South. But the Senator from Massachusetts had made up his mind, as he told his friends on March 6, 'to push my skiff from the shore alone.' He would act according to the creed with which he had challenged the Senate several years earlier [vote according to your conscience]. (69)

In praising Webster in this way, Kennedy of course was also identifying the qualities he wanted others to see in him. Or as John Hellman observes: "Kennedy found a means to engage the public world of politics through the private world of his innermost

inclinations" (83).

Another example of how Kennedy paralleled his own agenda with one of the Senators in his *Profiles*, is in the case of Mississippi Senator Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, elected to Congress in 1850 at the young age of twenty-six and later elected Senator in 1876. JFK describes him as "a public man" who refused to engage in petty issues or political trivia: "No partisan, personal or sectional considerations could outweigh his devotion to the national interest and to the truth" (155). Significantly, given Kennedy's own physical ailments, he also describes how similar medical problems had an effect on Lamar's military career, explaining how a disease like apoplexy "hung over him like death in moments of high excitement" (160). Another point of affinity stressed by Kennedy was Lamar's love for books, as evidence of which he quotes Lamar as saying: "Books! I was surrounded with books. The first book I remember having had put into my hand by my mother was Franklin's *Autobiography*" (qtd. in Sorenson 157). The second was Rollin's *History*, the same volume which nine-year-old John Quincy Adams – another of Kennedy's role models – himself had pondered over many years before. In this way, not only does Kennedy characterize himself as a voracious reader but also implicitly suggests the way that the life of an individual (autobiography) goes hand in hand with the life of a nation (history).

In the final chapters of the book, Kennedy brings these two dimensions together but now with a slightly different emphasis: "The stories of past courage can define that ingredient. They can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this each man must look into his own soul" (246). Again, in true American fashion, he seems to be applauding the models and heroes of the

past but also emphasizing that each generation and individual must be self-sufficient.

Noting that in writing these "biographies," Kennedy was also writing his own "autobiography," Hellman observes: "The 'Kennedy' narrating the book is in the end Kennedy's calculated self-representation" (76), and as an example he quotes what Kennedy said about the politician's love for themselves, as opposed to their love for the public:

> Because each one's need to maintain his own respect for himself was more important to him than his popularity with others – because his desire to win or maintain a reputation for integrity and courage was stronger than his desire to maintain his office – because his conscience, his personal standard of ethics, his integrity or morality, call it what you will – was stronger then the pressures of public disapproval – because his faith that *his* course was the best one, and would ultimately be vindicated, outweighed his fear of public reprisal. (80)

At the same time, however, in the majority of his speeches, Kennedy was very careful to create a sense of "us" between the government and the people, not the "you" and "them" relationship that appears in a monarchy and dictatorship. The Declaration of Independence clearly states that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain non-inalienable rights, "among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." Kennedy was a man of action and wanted to make these rights come alive during his presidency. He hoped that by being a politician for the people, not against the people, other leaders would follow in his footsteps. He knew the significance of his position as US President and trendsetter and he wanted to serve as a role model, not only

in America, but also in the world. Advocating the importance of art and culture as a benefit to his public, he also used the popular media to emphasize the art of "the people." Brown argues that "the Kennedy's reliance on the mass media of communication simply reflects a realistic assessment of how a modern politician can reach and influence the mass public" (64).

At the 1963 Commencement speech at Amherst College he said, as a proud American: "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist" (210). In this speech, a tribute to Amherst College alumnus Robert Frost, JFK was able to verbalize a state official's respect for and pride of the artist community. "I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment. . . ." JFK was always pointing to a bright future that had been created by the American people in cooperation with the world. Upon signing the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty in October 1963, he said: "If this treaty fails, it will not be our doing, and even if it fails, we shall not regret that we have made this clear and honorable national commitment to the cause of man's survival. For under this treaty we can and must still keep our vigil in defense of freedom" (298).

JFK was never satisfied with perpetuating the current state of affairs; not for his country, not for himself, and not for the American artist. Although he was aware that honoring great artists would not solve the problem of increasing respect for artists by the public, nor the economic preservation of the arts, during his Administration the public did see the national government initiating projects which highlighted their contributions, from stamps to erecting public buildings; "and these things, the President felt, ought to serve as an example to the rest of the country" (Schlesinger 734).

Emphasizing how such attitudes were part of a new regime, the Democratic National Convention, in his acceptance of the presidential nomination, he compared his platform with that of his Republican opponent, Richard Nixon: "Their pledge is a pledge to the status quo – and today, there can be no status quo" (100). It was rhetoric like this that gave his political speeches their distinctly American flavor, which frequently evidences a curious mixture of self-confidence and self-consciousness. Thus a bit later he continues: "All mankind waits upon our decision. A whole world looks to see what we will do. We cannot fail their trust, we cannot fail to try" (102). If one here detects a possible echo of John McCrae's famous WWI poem "In Flanders Fields" – "To you from failing hands we throw/ The Torch" – one should also note the way that Kennedy, himself a WWII veteran, here makes "failure" something that Americans must avoid at all cost.

JFK's speech-making ability was something that developed over the years. Ralph Dungan, one of his special assistants, recalls: "He was awful; awkward and gawky. But the interesting thing is that he improved every day. He absorbed a lot of information, but he also observed other people. Of course he turned out to be a magnificent speaker, but in those days – that was 1957 – he was not a very prepossessing person" (qtd. in Strober 56). Insofar as delivery is central to effective oratory, a contributing factor here was the University of Boston voice teacher that JFK's father hired to help him with his breathing and timing. From this tutor he learned how to make his voice less nasal and harsh and more cadent, as well as how to slow his pace and lower his register to add more drama (Martin 192).

Effective delivery was also something Kennedy learned from listening carefully

to speakers he admired, such as Winston Churchill. A friend of Kennedy recalls a day in 1960, when JFK was listening to Winston Churchill's speeches on records, and "kept us waiting about fifteen minutes until he heard what he wanted to hear. I guess he was listening for the cadence and the style as well as the language" (Martin 191). Aligning himself even further with the British Prime Minister, in his acceptance of the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention on 15 July 1960, JFK quoted the words that Churchill himself had used when he came into office 20 years before: "If we open a quarrel between the present and the past, we shall be in danger of losing the future" (98). Indeed, Kennedy so much admired Churchill that on 9 April 1963 he signed a proclamation conferring honorary citizenship on him, with a rhetorical flourish which clearly indicated his emulation: "Whenever and wherever tyranny threatened, he has always championed liberty. Facing firmly toward the future, he has never forgotten the past . . . . He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle. The incandescent quality of his words illuminated the courage of his countrymen" (319).

Another great speaker whom Kennedy admired was the 50th President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, as can easily be seen from parallel passages in Roosevelt's 1937 inaugural speech and Kennedy's in 1961:

> Roosevelt: I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day. I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago. I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children. I see millions lacking the means to buy the products

of farm and factory and by their poverty denying work and productiveness to many other millions. I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. (Roosevelt, Online)

Kennedy: Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us. Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms—and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations. Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce. Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah—to "undo the heavy burdens ... and to let the oppressed go free." (13-14)

In both cases, both the enormity of the presidential task and the expansiveness of America's people and resources are highlighted, not merely by the use of numerical words but also by the cumulative repetition of the key numerical phrases at the beginning of each sentence. And in both cases the evocation of statistics gives the rhetoric the sound of factual economics. There are, however, three important ways that the "message" differs: first, whereas Roosevelt uses "I" and thus presents himself as a single leader, Kennedy used the plural "us" presenting himself as the coordinator of a collective; second, whereas Roosevelt focuses on the injustices and gloom of the current time, Kennedy looks forward to the promise of future horizons; third, whereas Roosevelt's

view is an essentially secular one, Kennedy's tone is evangelical – complete with a biblical invocation.

Similarly, although both presidents go on to speak about their agenda, there are subtle differences in their ways of rallying support:

> Roosevelt: Our progress out of the depression is obvious. But that is not all that you and I mean by the new order of things. Our pledge was not merely to do a patchwork job with secondhand materials. By using the new materials of social justice we have undertaken to erect on the old foundations a more enduring structure for the better use of future generations.

> Kennedy: Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. (12)

Whereas Roosevelt uses the domestic and architectural metaphor of "building," Kennedy's imagery is militant and muscular, and whereas Roosevelt's focus is local and immediate, Kennedy's spans past and future, and includes not merely America but the entire globe. In short, while Kennedy's inaugural speech was clearly designed to align himself with the "New Order" that had endeared Roosevelt to the American people, he

was equally aware that good rhetorical strategy required repetition and personalized inflection.

Significantly, as Kennedy's confidence in his speaking abilities developed, he also become more adept at this kind of adaptation with respect to his own speeches, enabling him to begin a prepared script and change the text enough to sound differently from the last time he had used the same speech, but still generating the same feeling of accomplishment and excellence (Martin 138-39).

Similarly, although JFK was most comfortable using classical references and literary quotations – Jackie once counted some of her husband's scholarly references in a single speech: Byron, Tennyson, Shakespeare, De Gaulle, and Macaulay in a single speech – he also learned to tone up or down his rhetoric to suit the occasion. One such incident, in which nature conspired, occurred when JFK was campaigning eloquently in the midst of pouring rain at the National Plowing Contest in South Dakota: "The years ahead for all of us will be as difficult as any in our history. There are new frontiers for America to conquer in education, in science, in national purpose – not frontiers on a map, but frontiers of the mind, the will, the spirit of man . . ." (Martin 190). Miraculously, the sun came out just then and the normally quiet farmers broke out in wild applause.

If Kennedy's own literary and rhetorical flair were essential to his success as a speaker, however, in the making of the presidential icon, an equally important role was played by the press and its unique kind of popular/political verbal art. Indeed, as John Hellman has described: "The initial image had been produced from a merger of journalism with literature, creating a 'Kennedy' who was in fact a literary representation through whom the reader underwent a narrative experience" (88). This media creation of

Kennedy began in 1944 when writer John Hersey wrote an account of his PT 109 experience in the South Pacific that was published in *The New Yorker* as "Survival," and shortly after appeared in a condensed version in *The Reader's Digest* (Hellman 37). Taking advantage of this political publicity, when JFK decided to run for Congress in 1946, Joe Kennedy, Sr. ordered 100,000 offprints of the story for distribution in his congressional district (58).

Kennedy's own skill at courting the press corps grew steadily stronger during the 1960 presidential campaign (see Fig. 12), and continued throughout his career. Even when his daily schedule was quite hectic and often lasted more than ten or twelve hours, he would always try to make himself available to reporters, answering their questions, giving his views on specific issues. More than that, and knowing that in order to maintain his image he must flatter those who made him newsworthy, he frequently complimented a reporter on a story he or she had written (Paper 322). The real key to understanding Kennedy's relations with the press is his belief that the media commanded a great deal of political power. It was the media after all, which interpreted events and judged leaders for the American people. Although he genuinely liked and trusted some of them, Kennedy was anxious to gain or retain the respect of the press people, to bring them on the administration team, and to encourage stories that reflected that team sprit. And he wanted them to stimulate public interest in matters that he thought important (Paper 321, 323). This was effectively done by a compliment to reporters and news editors who were telling the stories that JFK wanted the public to see and hear. He had the power to control the media – and as evidenced in 1972 by the case of Nixon's Watergate scandal – was perhaps the last to enjoy this authority, since by the mid-sixties, the public demanded

their leaders to account for what they did. It could be argued that even in 1963 leaders were held accountable for their actions, but one could also argue that the because of the newness of the media's access to public leaders, the public was not as aware of their leader's actions as they would become in the near future.

In a press conference in December of 1962, a reporter specifically asked Kennedy about his relation to the media: "You once said that you were reading more and enjoying less. Are you still as avid a newspaper reader? I remember those of us who traveled with you on the campaign, a magazine wasn't safe around you." JFK replied, "Oh yes. No, no, I think it is invaluable, even though it may cause you – it is never pleasant to be reading [stories] that are not agreeable news, but I would say that it is an invaluable arm of the Presidency, as a check really, on what is going on in the administration, and more things come to my attention that cause me concern or give me information. . . ." (qtd. in Chase 351). The majority of the newsmagazine reporters liked Kennedy because he seemed to be like one of them. He was honest and hardworking and knew that everything he did was political. Although he knew that he was in control, he also knew the importance of admitting the value of their attention.

More "literary" journalists, however, were somewhat dubious about Kennedy's relationship with the press and his movie star image, as in the case of Norman Mailer, who addressed the issue in a 1960 *Esquire* article entitled "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" (see Fig. 13), which was later included in his book *The Presidential Papers*. An American writer whose books frequently explore the unconscious impulses that drive human behavior, Mailer rather sarcastically speculated on the timing of Kennedy's entry into the presidential arena:

> It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time, a man whose personality might suggest contradictions and mysteries which could reach into the alienated circuits of the underground, because only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people, and so be good for the vitality of his nation. (41-42)

Mailer's relationship with JFK was a rocky one, but even if grudgingly, he had to admit JFK's strength of personality, and admire his power over the public: "It was Kennedy's potentiality to excite such activity which interested me most; that he was young, that he was physically handsome, and that his wife was attractive were not trifling accidental details but, rather, new major political facts. I knew if he were to become President, it would be an existential event; he would touch depths in American life which were uncharted" (26-27).

In a postscript to "The Third Presidential Paper," Mailer writes about his feelings with reference to the repercussions from this article:

> This piece had more effect than any other single work of mine, and I think this is due as much to its meretriciousness as to its merits. I was forcing a reality, I was bending reality like a field of space to curve the time I wished to create. I was not writing with the hope that perchance I could find reality by being sufficiently honest to perceive it, but on the contrary was distorting reality in the hope that thereby I could affect it. I was engaging in an act of propaganda. (60)

Also somewhat skeptical about the entire Kennedy mystique was Gore Vidal, who in a 1997 *New Yorker* article reviewed his feelings in a debate with Louis Auchincloss.

As it happens, and as indicated by the article's title - "Just Between Cousins,"- Vidal and Auchincloss were distant relatives and both with a connection to the Kennedys. Vidal's mother's second husband was Hugh D. Auchincloss, one of Louis's cousins. Hugh Auchincloss's third wife was Janet Bouvier, the mother of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. Including previous correspondence between Vidal and Auchincloss, the *New Yorker* article provides numerous insights into the origins of Kennedy's reputation, as well as family tensions lying beneath some of the glamour.

After Kennedy's assassination, we learn that Auchincloss had sent his condolences to Vidal:

> I have thought of you many times this terrible weekend. Isn't it curious how much one cares? By one I don't mean you, who knew the President, but those of us who didn't. Is it caring, really, or are we TV-made creatures who have lost a "big brother"? Any way, I feel I shall miss all the Kennedys, even Bobby. For Bobby will fizzle out, too, don't you think?

Responding from Rome in a letter dated 10 January 1964, Vidal explained that he tried to fly back for JFK's funeral but that he was unable to attend because of the "confusion" over the tickets:

> I suspect Bobby's hand, even at the edge of the grave. . . . Jackie's mood, apparently, was one of rage more than grief: how dare they do this to us! . . . . He [JFK] was adorable and one enjoyed his wit and pleasure in himself and the comedy which turned so unexpectedly black. If ever one doubted the wisdom of Greek tragedy, doubt no longer: nothing vast ever

> entered human life without a curse, as Sophocles more or less wrote . . . .

The Kennedy family was very protective of one another, and Vidal felt that he was being kept out of the family loop by Bobby and also by the fact that he was not a member of the Church.

In another letter to his cousin, Vidal refers to a book he had been working on since at least 1955. Subsequently published and titled *Washington, D.C.*, the book deals with "those changes in time which affect us all humanly while affecting, quite as dramatically, the Republic which became reluctant empire" ("Just Between Cousins," 81). Interpreting everything in a political context, emphasizing how what a person does today will effect the amount of power he/she has tomorrow, Vidal explains that he is having difficulties with the whole moral aspect of people's lives, privately and publicly, and asks: "What is a right action? What means may be used safely to achieve what ends, no matter how temporary?"

In *Washington D.C.*, the character most associated with JFK is a man named Clay who comes from a middleclass background, and is a rising politician:

> The more he saw of the world, the more convinced he was that without money, a very great deal of money, he could never obtain any of those glittering prizes the Republic bestows so generously upon the rich, so haphazardly upon the poor. But as long as Blaise [his politically influential father-in-law] was irreconcilable, Clay's career was at a halt. (81)

In the book, Clay has affairs with the wives/fiancées/girlfriends of powerful men, one of whom is Miss Dolly Perrine, fiancée to Mr. Munson, an employee at the Mint. It is, however, not a matter of love – "There's nothing in it. Nothing but fun" (39), he told her

– but rather the notion of conquest: "He could not have enough victories over women and, indirectly, over the men who did love them. Each time he took Dolly, he conquered Munson too" (40).

Near the end of the book, when Clay has started on the road to the presidency, the emphasis upon his constructed and calculated image as a people-loving politician seems undoubtedly designed to suggest parallels with JFK:

> He saw no reason why a politician, even such a traditionally dull figure as the President, could not be presented in the same way as a movie star to the public. "But," she [his companion Elizabeth] had observed, "how many politicians look like you! And are young! And a hero!" Clay had laughed. "You put things in their proper order anyway." He had not told her that this same order was the very one exploited by Blaise and the public relations firm which had been engaged to maintain Clay's celebrity in the shadowy precincts of the House of Representatives. Youth was explained (promise of future greatness) as well as war record (a film of his wartime adventures was now being made) and physical appearance (whenever he appeared in public, girls would clamor at the photographers' prompting). Yes, as Clay knew, that which begins falsely becomes with constant repetition true. (233)

For Auchincloss, however, if Clay was supposed to resemble JFK, then Vidal had doubly failed, and in a letter of April 1967 he protested:

> Clay in the second half is ruined by the contrast of JFK. Clay is charmless, and what would JFK have been without charm? The question can't be

> answered because he wouldn't have existed without charm, at least as a successful politician. . . . or is it Bobby? Is that the message?" [referring to Bobby's hunger for power but lack of charm] (82)

In reply, Vidal vehemently denied that this was his intent:

> Clay is not JFK, not remotely. The similarity to Jack is, simply, the way money is used to promote illusions and win elections. We disagree on Jack's PT-109 feat. I call it admirable but would expect no less of any officer. . . . The only deliberate likeness to Jack is the sexual promiscuity and I think I have got the point to each – sex as a means to power not over the woman so much as over the other men involved with her. . . . As for Jack, my memory of him is most pleasant and though I feel one ought to prevent the heirs from making a god of him I don't in the least mind him being a man. (82)

In the correspondence between Auchincloss and Vidal, we see opposing perspectives on the nature and ethics of image-making, and in the process the same issues of power that were debated by both supporters and critics of the Kennedy Administration. Moreover, we can also see a further connection between art and politics in the sense that just as a novelist creates characters and in so doing manipulates reader response, so a politician creates a self-image and in so doing sells his agenda to the public.

Mailer, Vidal and Auchincloss were, of course, not the only writers who felt a need to articulate their response to JFK, and perhaps even more of an indicator of his impact on the American public is the collection of works published in the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination: *Of Poetry and Power: Poems Occasioned by the Presidency*

and by the Death of John F. Kennedy (see Fig. 14). In this collection are 79 poems, written by both writers of national and international reputation, and poets who were known only to other poets. Some of these poems were published in *The New York Times*, the *Saturday Review*, and even the *London Times Literary Supplement*, while others were written in response to a letter from the editors, Erwin Glikes and Paul Schauber, who in their Introduction explain their tactics: "In our letters, we promised to publish a book only if the response indicated that our assumption was correct – that a large body of fine poetry on this subject [the assassination of JFK] did, in fact, exist. We wanted the poems to be available to the generation that had lived with John F. Kennedy and must now live with the fact of his death" (1).

Among the poems in the collection, one that is especially evocative of the life and death of the Kennedy regime, is entitled "That Dying," written by a former staff writer for *The New Yorker*, Alaister Reid.

As often as not, on fair days, there is time
for words to flex their muscles, to strut like peacocks,
discovering what to say in the act of saying –
the music of meaning emerging from the sound
of the words playing.

Every now and again, however, the glass breaks,
the alarm shrills, the women hide their faces.
It is then that words jump to their feet and rush,

like white-faced stretcher-bearers,

tight-lipped, tense, to the unspeakable scene.

They grab air, water, syllables, anything handy.

There is blood. No nonsense. No adjectives. No time.

O that these words might have been

a tourniquet of a kind, to keep

that incredible life from spattering away,

instead of as now, a dirge, a bell

tolling, a stutter, a sigh, silence.

There is nothing now for these words to do

but walk away aimlessly, mute, like mourners. (132)

In the first stanza, perfectly captured through a composite of imagery and sound, is "that one brief shining moment known as Camelot," as the song so beloved by Kennedy puts it, becoming in turn the name for the mythical aura that the President and his wife brought to the White House. Within this context, what is also evoked is the conjoined "peacock" fame of the couple and the seemingly spontaneous eloquence of JFK's speech.

Then in stark contrast, in the second stanza, sounds and images are used to portray the confusion and chaos at the time of the assassination, and the personified words of the

first stanza become clinical medics, just as syntax becomes stripped of everything except necessities.

In the third stanza, in turn, the ineffectual power of words parallel their dwindling to silence, leading to the final transformation of them into vacuous grievers. For Reid, in short, elegance and eloquence were the hallmark of the President, and thus the muting of words becomes the perfect analogy to register both his death and the void that attends it.

Another poem in the collection, written by Robert Hollander, poet and literary critic, first signals the stark message through its purely factual title – "November 22, 1963" – as if the date itself was an obituary.

You and the hoary poet
In the wind in Washington
Talking *of power and poetry*
Didn't know a fool had been taught
That he could shoot and read,
Sending fathers falling on top of their sons
Seeing your ruined familiar head. (62, emphasis mine)

Taking the form of apostrophe – itself a paradoxical device for evidencing the power of words to make the absent present at the same time that it underscores that very absence – the poem begins by evoking Kennedy's inauguration and the mantra phrase used by Robert Frost in the tribute he wrote for the occasion. Then, evoking the assassination by a sniper's bullet from the tower of the Dallas book depository, the

speaker both endorses and questions the value of words in the face of violent ignorance, turning the aged head of Frost into the shattered skull of Kennedy.

While words may not be more powerful than the sword, in short, in conjunction poetry and power constitute an unbeatable force, and the role of the Kennedy Administration in fostering the art of speech did indeed fulfill Frost's prophecy of "a next Augustan Age . . . . A golden age of poetry and power."

"Kennedy made the presidency elegant and vocal and powerful," summed up Robert Donovan, Washington editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, who noted that "JFK's knowledge and talent in music and painting never matched his skills as writer and orator; but in his encouragement of the arts, he set a standard of excellence to which all who follow might aspire" (qtd. in Martin 285, 205). Pragmatically, Kennedy believed that a politician's job was to ask the questions, and intellectually, he felt that people should be given the tools they need to find and implement the answers. Poetry operates in much the same way. It asks questions that enable its readers to look for answers, including questions such as: What is it about poetry that politicians should know? What is it about politicians that poetry should know? How could both use politics to make the world a "better place"?

Chapter Three

Pictures and Politics: Kennedy and the Visual Arts

Visual art was clearly important in the Kennedy Administration – and it was equally political. To pay national tribute to artists who had excelled in some way, in 1961 President and Mrs. Kennedy instituted an annual award called the Presidential Medal of Freedom, designed to recognize and "honor those whose talent enlarges the public vision of the dignity with which life can be graced and the fullness with which it can be lived" (qtd. in *A Thousand Days* 733). Although an interdepartmental committee was responsible for making the recommendations, Kennedy took a keen interest in the candidates. Although JFK favored the artist Ben Shahn, a Russian-born American artist whose work is known for its strong, flat colors and clear, incisive lines, and who often painted immigrants, the poor, sweatshops, and unflattering portraits of politicians, the final decision was to give the Medal to Andrew Wyeth, whose style ranges from the realistic to the impressionistic.

Commenting on the selection process and its outcome, Kennedy playfully but also pointedly resolved: "Next year, we will have to go abstract" (qtd. in Ayres 214). It was important that a person from each "area" of expertise be honored in turn, so that politically no one felt left out or neglected. Similarly, if the medal was designed to promote and honor American art, so much was it also designed to promote an image of the president as someone knowledgeable about artistic culture.

It was, however, at a much lower – or at least popular – level that the visual arts

played a role in the Kennedy regime. Indeed, this role was noted by no less than Marshall McLuhan who in an article entitled "Television: The Timid Giant," he describes the effects of this media on the culture in which Kennedy presided. "Just where to examine the transformation of American attitudes since TV is a most arbitrary affair" (401), he observes, going on to address the question of how TV has affected political life by asking a question about the 1960 Presidential Debate between Kennedy and Nixon, the first debates ever to be televised. What would have been the outcome be if the public had not been able to see their candidates speak and react to each other's statements? Many historians have said that this televised debate was a key element of Kennedy's campaign victory. More than 70 million Americans viewed the Kennedy-Nixon exchange on television; millions more listened to the debates on the radio. Those that watched felt that Kennedy had won, whereas those who listened to the debates on the radio thought Nixon was the winner.

As McLuhan explains, the press itself felt that although Nixon had done poorly in the first of the four debates, he had gained in the last two, but that this did not offset his poor performance as an actor. Nixon, McLuhan felt, expressed his views and principles with "too much flourish for the TV medium. Mr. Kennedy's rather sharp responses have been a mistake, but he still presents an image closer to the TV hero, something like the shy young Sheriff – while Mr. Nixon with his very dark eyes that tend to stare, with his slicker circumlocution has resembled more the railway lawyer who signs leases that are not in the interests of the folks in the little town" (405) (see Fig. 15).

Listening to Kennedy's comments, one can detect several verbal slips, as in the case of the first of his 8-minute opening speeches where he made two blunders:

> I want people in Latin America, in Africa and Asia, to start to look to America, to see how *we're* doing things, to wonder what the president of the United States is doing and not to look at Khrushchev, or look at the Chinese Communists. That is the obligation upon our generation. In 1933 Franklin Roosevelt said in his inaugural that this generation of American (*sic*) (pause) has a rendezvous with destiny. I think *our* generation of Americans has the same rendezvous. The question now is, can freedom be maintained (pause) under that most severe attack attack (*sic*) it has ever known. I think it can be. And I think in the final analysis it depends (pause) on what we do here. I think it's time America started moving again. (qtd. from ABC News Video, my transcription)

Kennedy's visual presence and confidence spoke louder than words. For many who watched, Kennedy's charm and his hope for the future (see Fig. 16) stood out like a bright light in the darkness of Nixon's monotonous and dull promises. Most agreed that the debate helped to dispel the argument that Kennedy was too young and too inexperienced to be president. "Looking back now on all four of them," Nixon himself wrote in 1962, "there can be no question but that Kennedy had gained more from the debates than I . . . . I recognized the basic mistake I had made. I had concentrated too much on substance and not enough on appearance" (qtd. in Paper 30).

In television, as McLuhan explains, a character who is less occupationally defined or established is more likable than a person who is identifiable and who thus prevents the public from seeing whom they want to see. JFK had a visually less well-defined image and appeared more nonchalant than Nixon. Nixon had a disadvantage visually, because

he looked the part of the manipulative politician, with his shifty eyes and greased back hair, whereas Kennedy could be anyone (see Fig. 17). Furthermore, whereas Kennedy was politically an unknown quantity, Nixon had the collective memory of the public to manage. As vice-president, he had maintained the status quo on the one hand, but also did not have a strong political image on the other.

Politically, Kennedy rose to power in the era of Hollywood's adolescence, in a time when film was becoming a recognized and dominant medium in popular culture, and at a time when it began to have a real effect on society; economically, socially, politically, aesthetically and morally (Spatz 9). He became president at a time when the visual arts of film, television, graphic arts and fashion were given an elevated status in society, and he contributed to their raised status in a significant way, both philosophically and economically. Both JFK and Hollywood in a sense became *icons*; both possessed huge amounts of money that promoted *image* in the sense of perception and power; and both knew that the *picture* they gave to the public was integral to the power they held in popular culture.

There is, however, another side to this coin, as Walter Benjamin perceived in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics" (226). The same could be argued in the case of JFK. Pictures of him were reproduced in photos and on

television each time he made a speech or introduced a new piece of legislation; his representation was duplicated in the visual media and the "authentic" JFK was lost. By producing the artistic image of JFK, he had become a part of a political production line, which at one and the same time enhanced and diminished his iconic status.

Closely related to this question of authenticity is the matter of posturing, and if we look carefully at television clips, etc. of Kennedy, we can detect a sense of looking through a mask. While this self-consciousness is most evident when he speaks his rehearsed speeches to the camera, as opposed to the times he was photographed "candidly," even such shots too were simulated. He was obviously very aware of how his visual image would effect his public image, and rarely let his guard down by allowing photographers to take the picture they wanted. For Benjamin, this artificiality has much to do with technology:

> The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is the transported? Before the public. Never for a moment does the screen actor cease to be conscious of this fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory. This may contribute to that oppression that new anxiety which, according to Pirandello, grips the actor before the camera.

> The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity. (232)

JFK as an icon changed from a person to a piece of merchandise used by the public, something that could be sold for votes and could raise money for the Democrats.

Benjamin has also argued that "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (243), and it is in this context that we might consider Oliver Stone's controversial film *JFK*, which Mitchell has described as "a propaganda film that uses representation as a weapon in the war for the hearts and minds of the American public" (*Picture Theory* 409). In *JFK*, the audience is presented with a myriad of images and sounds, a million and one possible scenarios outlining the what-ifs of the Kennedy Assassination, but the film also attempts to manipulate visual response and tries to "prove its point" by using the narrative provided alongside the visual. In this sense, then, while the film seems to argue that JFK was a hero and a victim, cut-down in his political and personal prime, and while it seems to be an attempt to shape politics into an aesthetically pleasing work of art, it also has the affect of presenting a war between image and text. Television clips from the Vietnam War are "dropped" as names are dropped at a political convention, and throughout the viewer is made to ask: what is more real, the pictures one sees or what the film's character is saying? Which tells the truth? Who killed Kennedy? Who created Kennedy into an icon and a hero? What kind of war was being waged? Was it a war of images? Was it a matter of politics against the people, or was it a class and

thus a power issue – the rich and powerful against the rest of us? I think it was a war of representation: who has the right to be represented to the public, and who has the power to do the representing? What visual images were used to create JFK as a cultural icon?

Instead of trying to answer such questions directly, it may be more profitable to consider how Kennedy, in conjunction with Hollywood and his publicists, created the New Frontier by creating the idea of a hero and leader for the public to follow. Hollywood's social, economic, political, artistic and moral atmosphere is closely related to American culture, so closely that Hollywood is often seen as a commentary on national progress. In *Hollywood in Fiction*, Jonas Spatz identifies three components of the American dream. The first features "growth, youth, innocence, opportunity and eternal life"; the second stresses individualism and freedom; the third focuses on "the frontier hero and invokes the principle of equality as expressed in the Declaration of Independence" (12).

Underlying all of these components is optimism, and here one also finds the link between Hollywood and JFK. As Spatz notes: "The ambitious scale and contained success of Hollywood productions sustain the air of enthusiasm and hopefulness associated with the utopian symbol" (23); the same could be said of Kennedy. Both had the talent to make the ordinary person look glamorous and the glamorous person look ordinary. They knew the power of the image as *perception*, what people think they see, and how to manipulate *representation*. Both Hollywood and JFK gave hope of a better future to the average person and they both capitalized on the power of images.

On the one hand, this may be what Joe Kennedy had in mind when he argued that his son was in more demand by the public than popular movie idols: "Jack is the greatest

attraction in the country today. I'll tell you how to sell more copies of a book. Put his picture on the cover. You advertise the fact that he [JFK] will be at a dinner and you will break all records for attendance. He can draw more people to a fundraising dinner than Cary Grant or Jimmy Stewart. Why is that? He has more universal appeal" (qtd. in Hellman 93). On the other hand, however, Jimmy Stewart typically played the role of an emotional hero, a man of many faces, and Cary Grant played the role of a smooth talker who could manipulate women and men in power to change their opinions to his. Joe Sr. may have been implying that his son perfectly combined their different ways of exercising power over the public. A concrete example of this is JFK's own photo on the cover of *Profiles in Courage*: he looked clean cut, young and energetic, and represented the success of the younger generation. The text in itself may have been boring, but people would buy the book solely because of the author's celebrated success and his smile.

Also comparing Kennedy to a Hollywood actor was Norman Mailer, who in "Superman Comes to the Market," was one of the first critics to describe JFK as a hero: "it was the scene [the opening of the 1960 Democratic Convention] where the hero, the matinee idol, the movie star comes to the palace to claim the princess, or what is the same, and more to our soil, the football hero, the campus king, arrives at the dean's home surrounded by a court of open-singing students to plead with the dean for his daughter's kiss and permission to put on the big musical that night" (38). For Mailer, Kennedy was the man with a dozen faces: "Although they were not at all similar people, the quality was reminiscent of someone like Brando, whose expression rarely changes but whose appearance seems to shift from one person into another as the minutes go by" (47). In Kennedy's case, this chameleon quality pertained to the need and his ability to adapt his

image to a situation as needed. For the older generation, he must prove his maturity; for the younger generation, he must prove his youth and new way of thinking; for the rich, he must prove his loyalty to their positions of power; and for the poor, he must prove his dedication to improving their economic status.

Although Mailer's likening of Kennedy to Brando, who was known for his temper and personal problems, may have been a bit snide, undoubtedly he was also thinking along the lines of Benjamin who had sensed how technology changed what "acting" once entailed:

> The artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera, with the twofold consequence. The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole. Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changed it position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film." (230)

Enabling the editing of JFK's performance as needed, the camera showed the public what JFK and his press agents wanted them to see – which in the face of crisis was a president who was calm, thoughtful, assertive, and in control. It was necessary to "create" the image of a president that would give the world confidence of his success. As evidenced by the public's admiration for him, his performance was in this sense truly "spectacular."

As much as JFK controlled his image, however, he knew that he could fall out of favor any moment. Like art objects, politicians exist in a precarious position. Public

opinion and public funds will make or break a public image that is in the public sphere, whether that image is a person or a painting. In an age of technological reportage, the lines become marred between private and public knowledge, and the once-ordinary citizen is now a moviestar/superhero – and vice versa – because of what the public thinks they know about him/her. As JFK grew from person to icon, he and his family realized more and more how precious his privacy was, so that Jackie Kennedy allowed the presidential photographer Jacque Lowe to take only specific pictures of her family. One way that she could stay in control of the Kennedy family "image" was by visually limiting what the public saw of them. This meant no pictures of the family fighting, or doing anything that would shed a negative light onto the Kennedy image.

Before Hollywood began to normalize the exposure and confession of people's private lives, politicians remained safe from personal scrutiny, and were thought to be beyond human emotions. As Hollywood became more "mainstream" and everyone went to the movies at least occasionally, people began to feel more intimate with people in powerful positions, who were revealed to have the same feelings, and vulnerabilities as the ordinary citizen. This openness to the private life of people in the public eye allowed the public to feel more powerful and demand that they have some access to what lay behind the "image" of the politician and the Hollywood actor. What the country saw was a political product, no longer a natural one.

JFK was not always glitter and glamour. One face that JFK tried to hide from the public was the lonely one he had in private. To his associates, he sometimes seemed remote, as if he had traveled to a lonely world and found himself isolated from the masses. His personal photographer, Jacques Lowe, took one of the most moving pictures

of an isolated Kennedy, in the fall of 1959, at Coos Bay, Oregon (see Fig. 18). JFK is standing on the edge of a boat, looking deep into the dark water for answers that do not exist. As Lowe explains, the photo was taken during a presidential campaign trip and JFK had just returned from an unsuccessful meeting with a group of longshoremen in their union hall (16). Photographs of JFK, such as this one, opened up his personal life to the public. This created a mixed reaction by the public because he went from being an iconic, artistically created image to a human person with problems and imperfections, and some began to dig deeper into his personal life as a result of their curiosity.

Another problematic aspect of JFK's Hollywood marketing was that the institution itself was somewhat of a political machine. At times Hollywood appears to be a national voice of conservative political opinion: "Because of the myths that it perpetuates, the liberals have branded Hollywood a reactionary stronghold" (Spatz 27). Evidence of this was seen in the California gubernatorial election of 1934, when the movie film studios forced their employees to contribute one day's salary to help defeat Upton Sinclair. For the first time in history, the film industry itself was used as an instrument of propaganda to preserve conservative governments. The lies perpetuated in this situation led directly to Sinclair's defeat and permanently embittered the liberals against Hollywood capitalists.

Spatz informs us that the intellectuals, of which politicians make up a large component, were not "seriously concerned" with Hollywood until the 1930s. It was seen as a passing fancy, something to talk about at dinner amongst acquaintances, but not something to take seriously. Once it began to affect the economy, it became a convenient institution to blame for the evils of civilization. The liberals believed that after the

Depression, Hollywood became a "microcosm of certain selfish and destructive tendencies in modern society" (Spatz 26) and brought on economic disaster by seducing people with dreams of success. The leftists believed that Hollywood represented materialism and out-of-date capitalism. Moreover, to the extent that "Hollywood's personalities are culture heroes, symbols of the perfection that the settlers of the New World believed in" (Spatz10), and to the extent that it created characters with whom people could identify it exercised a great deal of control over the masses, the fear was that Hollywood's image-making would someday grow so powerful that it would be impossible to control.

Kennedy, who had been groomed to perform since before the day that his oldest brother Joe died, effectively and invisibly combined the authority of the news and the popularity of Hollywood to the always-watching world. He had a sense of what was necessary, and as Hellman explains: "Like the networks and photo magazines – like J. Hershey in his presentation of JFK in the *New Yorker* article "Survival" – Kennedy built the facts into a story" (91). Significantly, in a *TV Guide* interview in November of 1959, Kennedy himself acknowledged the artifice of television images by emphasizing the importance of a contemporary politician's being able to create "a television image people like and (most difficult of all) remember" (92). He even took this opportunity to proclaim that youth was a great advantage in constructing such a successful image. In itself, of course, this was a strategic way of down play: by openly admitting his recognition of the importance of an artful representation of the presidential image, he directly addressed the public's fear of images and showed them that he was aware of the problem, not a contributor to the problem of images. By not hiding the extent to which he was using the

power of the visual image, and by sharing this with the public, he generated a sense of his own honesty and was able to dispel fears about image-making.

Kennedy's first photo opportunity was, however, something of a fortunate accident. His "opening night" was a televised response to a verbal attack from Harry Truman, the titular head of his party, on the eve of the National Democratic Convention (NDC), 4 July 1960. Truman, who had resigned as a delegate to the NDC, also made a statement that he would not attend the convention to give a promised speech of support for Senator Symington. Instead, he gave a press conference, using the visual media to let the public see him in the role of a father who was angry and disappointed with young John Kennedy. As a visual statement, his presence on television provided a doubly damning attack that ironically set the perfect stage for Kennedy's entrance into the spotlight:

> I have resigned as a delegate at the NDC. I did this because I have no desire whatsoever to be a part of proceedings that are taking on the aspects of a prearranged affair. A convention, which is controlled in advance by one group and its candidate, leaves [the party] no opportunity for a Democratic choice and reduces the convention to a mockery. The Democratic Party must never be allowed to be a party of privilege: for men of modest means or no means at all.
>
> Senator: [speaking directly to an unseen Kennedy] are you certain that you are quite ready for the country, or the country is ready for you in the role

> of president in January, 1961? I have no doubt as to the political heights to which are you destined to rise but I am deeply concerned and troubled about the situation we are up against in the world now, and in the immediate future. That's why I hope that someone with the greatest possible maturity and experience would be available at this time. May I urge you to be patient." ("*The Collected Speeches of JFK*", translation mine)

Seen on national television, Truman's attack on JFK's honesty, his ethics, his youthfulness and his lack of experience, was much more dramatic and dynamic than if the public had merely heard his words on television. For his part, Kennedy prepared for his own speech by the way he looked, appearing cool, calm and confident against Truman, who accordingly began to look like a bully. As Kennedy spoke later in a televised news conference, the television camera captured the excitement of his many supporters, all huddled around him, as he rebutted Truman.

> Last Saturday one of our most dedicated and courageous Presidents gave the nation his views on the forthcoming Democratic convention. Inasmuch as Mr. Truman's remarks were directed at me, I am taking this opportunity to respond to his statement. First, Mr. Truman suggested that I step aside as a candidate in 1960. In response, let me say I do not intend to step aside at anyone's request. I was the only candidate to risk my chances in all the primaries; the only one to visit every state. I have encountered and survived every kind of hazard and opposition, and I do not intend to withdraw my name now on the eve of the convention. (91)

He finished his speech by calling for new leaders, younger leaders with vision:

> The balance of power is shifting. There are new and more terrible weapons, new and uncertain nations, new pressures of population and automation that were never considered before. And in many of these new countries I have noticed, in both Africa and Asia, they are electing young men to leadership – men who are not bound by the traditions of the past, men who are not blinded by the old fears and rivalries, men who can cast off the old slogans and illusions and suspicions. It is time for a new generation of leadership to cope with new problems and new opportunities. For there is a new world to be won, a world of peace and goodwill, a world of hope and abundance, and I want America to lead the way to that new world. (94)

After this powerful rhetorical performance, during the convention people paid particular attention to JFK's image, in the ideological sense. Who was this young Kennedy, who acted like an actor, and who looked like an actor? These visual traits did not go unnoticed, as in the case of Norman Mailer who described the afternoon that JFK arrived at the 1960 Democratic Convention and he first saw him in person: "Deep orange-brown suntan of a ski instructor, and when he smiled at the crowds his teeth were amazingly white. . . . . It was as if a beloved actor had come to greet his fans. The band was playing, the people were cheering and reaching out to touch JFK as if he possessed some miracle cure for poverty, sickness and despair. Just like in a movie" (38). The public wanted a Savior, and JFK embodied the traits of one, someone who had the cure to the public's problems. These traits were perpetuated by the media and by his publicists using the

effective medium of television, and in conjunction with the millions of images of Kennedy that appeared in magazines and newspapers, they served to establish and later perpetuate the Camelot tradition of "high hopes" – Kennedy's campaign song which was sung by Frank Sinatra, himself an icon in the music world.

In discussing image/text relations in his *Laocöön*, Lessing had used the political analogy of rivalry and collaboration between various nations, and it is also in this context that one might discuss Kennedy's diplomacy and desire to establish good relations between America and other countries by celebrating their art and culture. As Lawrence Fleischman, President of the Detroit Arts Commission said:

> The Kennedy's wanted to bring American art into the White House, and I was appointed to the White House Committee that was focusing on that. One of the points that came up in our committee discussion was how much more effectively France used its culture as a diplomatic instrument. Here we had foreign dignitaries coming to the White House all the time, and this was a place to advertise our culture and dramatic art. But the effect extended beyond the White House. People saw Jacqueline Kennedy interested in art, and it became more socially acceptable to own American art. (qtd. in MacNeil 25).

Art was used here as a political tool, a means of persuasion and a "wooing" of international partners.

At the opening of the Mona Lisa Exhibit at the Smithsonian, for example, Kennedy praised the French government for lending the da Vinci painting to the United States. He called it "the work of one of the greatest figures on the great Western age of

Creativity" and deemed the act to be one of friendship between the two countries: "It will also come as a reminder of the universal nature of art. . . ." (qtd. in Chase 341).

It was, however, not merely art per se that the Kennedy regime imported from other countries but also a sense of style. Indeed, it could be said that via Jackie Kennedy, fashion became a central component of the visual arts and a major diplomatic tool, enabling the President to say, "I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris, and I have enjoyed it" (*Let the Word Go Forth*, 310). (see Fig. 19). She transformed his fashion style after he was married to Jackie and ran for President. When JFK was still a Senator, and before he married Jackie, he was often seen in rumpled clothes and ties, in keeping with the image of a typical American intellectual. After meeting Jackie, his shirts were cleaned and pressed, and above all, stylish. As a politician, he set the standard for presidential costume as dressing with power and confidence, and it was no accident that Jackie so frequently accompanied him on diplomatic missions.

Given the role played by style in his career, it is not surprising that JFK's biographers include many anecdotal stories about his attire. One of these included Ted Sorensen, speechwriter and advisor to JFK from 1952 until his death, who supposedly needed a necktie one evening, prompting Dave Powers, a close family friend and advisor, to borrow one from the Senator's closet that he was sure JFK never wore. The Senator's first words as he stepped into the room were "Is that my tie you're wearing?" (Ayres 31)

In another anecdote perpetuating the JFK "look," a bold journalist is reported to have asked the President how many times he had changed his shirt that day. "Four," he answered. Pressed for details, the President explained he had started off with a clean

shirt, put on another after his swim before his lunch honoring the Bolivian president, donned a third shirt after the lunch because it had been so hot during the lunch, and his fourth clean shirt after a bath before dinner (Ayres 174). Although perfectly in keeping with the image he wanted to promote, close acquaintances knew that much of this had to do with his personal health habits. Because of his health problems, he naturally perspired a considerable amount and needed to change his clothes often to compensate. Yet even if "stylish" stories like these tend to mask the truth, in doing so they equally serve to evidence the way that the Kennedy tradition involved playing the part, regardless of the harsh realities of physical problems.

The role of style in Kennedy's nomination and presidency did not go unnoticed by intellectuals who responded with mixed emotions. Mailer, for example, again in his "Superman Comes to the Market" article, observed: "He would be not only the youngest president ever to be chosen by vote, he would be the most conventionally attractive young man ever to sit in the White House, and his wife – some would claim it – might be the most beautiful first lady in our history" going on to add somewhat sarcastically, "America's politics would now be also America's favorite movie, America's first soap opera, America's best-seller" (44) (see Fig. 20).

As America's soap opera continued, people wanted to see more of the Kennedy lifestyle and equally more of the leading lady. Thus in a televised tour of the White House on 14 February 1962, (see Fig. 21) CBS correspondent Charles Collingwood asked Jacqueline Kennedy many questions about the life of a president's wife, including one pertaining particularly to the arts: "Mrs. Kennedy, this administration has shown a particular affinity towards artists, musicians,

writers and poets. Is this just because you and your husband feel this way, or do you think there is a relationship between the government and the arts?" Mrs. Kennedy's reply was: "That's so complicated, I don't know. I just think everything in the White House should be the best, the entertainment that's given here, and if it's a drama company you can help [sic]. I like to do that and if it's not. . . just as long as it's the best" (transcription mine). Actually, however, the public cared little about what Jackie thought; for them she was mainly another art object and the important thing was how she looked. Similarly, implied in her stumbling reply is the way she had been told early on by Patriarch Joe Kennedy to just "sit there and smile pretty; never speak unless asked a direct question" (CBS Home Video). The less a woman says, Joe had advised, the more she is assumed to know.

For the Kennedy tradition and the American people it was enough that Jackie showed her quintessential style by the visual images she portrayed on television and in magazines. Moreover, it seemed that when she did speak, her words were not consistent with her image. She showed the public the image that they wanted and she wanted them to see – the caring mother, the graceful equestrian, the Queen of Camelot – whereas to her close and small group of friends, Jackie was known to be a gossip on the one hand, and a straightforward person who was not afraid to speak her mind, on the other. Neither presented a fitting image for the wife of the president of the United States of America, so she and the Kennedy publicists limited what she would show the public, about herself and her family.

Thus in this CBS televised tour of the White House, the focus ultimately shifts to JFK, who comes home from the proverbial "hard day at the office," ready to answer a few questions about the relationship between arts and the government. Although his words themselves are only a bit clearer than his wife's, what captures the viewer's attention is how he looks and speaks, not what he is saying. He uses facial expressions to emphasize a point, and hand gestures to involve the viewer in his answer.

Furthermore, what he says pertains mainly to the value of the visual media. Explaining that his father and Grandfather Fitzgerald were teachers of "the fine art of politics," he goes on to say that he learned most by experience and observation. For him, what a political leader requires is a clear vision of the future and the ability to communicate what he wants the country to do. Communication accordingly includes both showing and telling, and politics, like visual art, is performance and representation.

After Kennedy's death, he became the subject of a number of documentaries – an art form specially based on the principle that seeing is believing. One of these, a video entitled "JFK: The Day the Nation Cried," and hosted by James Earl Jones, presents a number of people talking about Kennedy and their relationship to him. In this way, we are given a number of "views" of Kennedy – as friend, brother, lover and employer – but again it is the very fact of "seeing" these people talk that convinces the viewer of how much JFK was loved and respected.

Where the visual dimension is most called upon to speak louder than words, however, is in the film footage of the transportation of Kennedy's deceased body after the assassination: first, the arrival in Washington, DC, then the trip to the Bethesda Naval Hospital on Friday, then to the White House for a family ceremony on Saturday, and

finally to the capital rotunda for public viewing on Sunday. For many the news of the assassination was too shocking to accept, but this footage in conjunction with scenes of the funeral, the death march by ambassadors and politically powerful people, and his wife weeping made the fact of his death seem all too real.

Another documentary entitled, "JFK – the End of Camelot," begins by presenting a visual collage of scenes from the assassination and effectively contrasts these with scenes of JFK and his family in their leisure time. In this case, however, the purpose is less to bring home the reality of the tragedy than to raise questions about why it happened and who was responsible. Thus while this documentary also includes interviews with key people in Kennedy's life, they present a different range of contacts and authority: Walter Cronkite, news correspondent who broke the story of JFK's assassination; the late Gov. John Connally and his wife Nellie; journalists Ben Bradlee, Hugh Sidey and Tom Wicker; Charles Brehn, key witness to the assassination; George Ball, undersecretary of state during Kennedy's administration; James Leavelle, the Dallas police officer who interrogated Oswald; JFK's brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver; Dick Goodwin, special assistant to the president; Mac Kilduff, press secretary to JFK; Jack Valenti, PR consultant who accompanied LBJ on Air Force One as he was named President.

Among these interviewees was also Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's personal assistant, who recalls Johnson's paranoia, and who in doing so visually makes it seem more real. She explains that as soon as he heard that JFK was dead, Johnson started running up and down the hospital corridors yelling, "There's a conspiracy, get me out to Air Force One." Another interviewee was James Swindal, pilot of Air Force One, who traveled to Dulles with Kennedy and back to DC with Johnson. Recalling how Johnson

closed all the blinds right after they had entered the plane, Swindal was very quick to identify the recently transpired events as a conspiracy, a piece of evidence ignored by news reporters. Johnson was worried about his own image at this point, about what his future would hold, both politically and personally.

Aside from using surreal music as a voice for those who have been kept silent by people who do not want the public to know the truth about JFK's death, the documentary also uses commonplace objects to illustrate the bizarre and to shock us into looking at simple objects in a different way. As Benjamin explained the technique: "By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on the hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action" (238). In the documentary, for example, the opening images in the Parkland Hospital surgery room are digitally covered with the translucent colors of red, white and blue. These images are contrasted with digitally constructed red/white rose petals strewn on the hospital floor and the sound of a clock ticking away as Kennedy's life fades (see Fig. 22). Significantly, the digitally enhanced images of the hospital show a truth that may or may not have existed, in the same way that Kennedy's image-makers and enemies showed images of JFK to tell a story that may be truth, or may be a lie.

One stark image of this documentary is of dead leaves in rainwater on the Saturday after Kennedy was assassinated (see Fig. 23). In the film, three of the four shots of these were changed by computer to illustrate the point of mechanical reproduction and authenticity. Which was the original picture? Turn this question around and we can ask,

Who was the original, authentic JFK? In the film the leaves were altered by technology: from a normal view to a more blurry one, then to one that is intensely surreal, and finally, to a view of them as cracked in a mosaic fashion, each little piece contributing to the whole picture of the leaves. In the same way, each visual piece of Kennedy's life and dreams, as presented by his publicists, worked together to construct the icon of JFK.

Benjamin reminds us that "in principle, a work of art has always been reproducible. Men could always imitate man-made artifacts. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain" (220). The image of JFK's assassination in this video is used to gain sympathy from the public, and to turn the attention away from why he was assassinated and by whom he was assassinated by. The master here is the group of people who disseminate the visual images in the video. Their works, the visual images of JFK that are shown, diffuse the questions asked by the public, and arrange a conspiracy of their own.

Another artwork about the assassination that employs repetition is Andy Warhol's "16 Jackies" (see Fig. 24) in which four identical prints of her face are laid out: The four identical prints are laid out in four rows, each row a different print. In the top print we see Jackie smiling, wearing her infamous pink pillbox hat. The second row is a side view of Jackie, obviously after JFK's assassination. She looks as if she is still in shock, the black veil revealing a wife in mourning. The third picture is during the funeral; a stark picture of a guard in the background, Jackie looking as if she has lost the only thing worth living for. The fourth row moves dramatically away from the assassination, and is of a happier Jackie, still wearing the pink pillbox hat. The story is a sad one of repetition; joy then

death then more death and joy. It works to numb its viewers so that they look at the print as a work of art, disassociated from the painful memory of a dead president.

Commenting on the technique that Warhol employs, Wendy Steiner has observed: "In the multiple images of a traffic accident or Jacqueline Kennedy's face, the repetition initially deprives the image of any impact, since the whole appears to be an intricate, beautiful design. A close examination of the work, however, reveals the content of the image, and the shock of this transformation of catastrophe into design still works today, no matter how many times we have seen through it. This play at the boundary between narrative and design inevitably poses the issue of value" (177). Turning then to the reasons for using a publicity image, she goes on: "By turning numbing repetition back upon itself, pop combined simple-mindedness and intellectual complexity and in the process put the perceiver in a classic double bind. . . . . the slick 'cool' of pop simply sheds political and emotional intensity. At the same time it is dealing with issues of great importance, including the issue of it own superficiality" (178).

Equally concerned with pop art and politics, in *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*, Art Simon discusses the way that "16 Jackies," along with Warhol's other 13 silk-screens remembering the assassination, "contributed to a shift in aesthetic values within the art world by incorporating imagery from a political debate (the assassination) which was itself assaulting dominant structures in the sphere of discourse" (102). Critical readings of these silkscreens – such as Simon's – tend to stress the effects of such formal features as repetition and image reversal to the point of omitting entirely their emotionally saturated content. What such critics focus on is the artistic aspect of the images, not the content. Here, Warhol has used visual art to remove emotion from an

extremely emotional situation, and changed it to a political situation about an emotion. The prints are an artistic reading of the political assassination of JFK and the effects of repetition on the viewer is mind-numbing.

By observing Warhol's assassination silkscreens, one can follow the mass production of the guilt and the pain the media provided; the Warren Commission's lies; the repetitiveness of the statements about the assassination; and the deadened face the president's wife had to hide from the media. Artifice and duplicity were Warhol's fascination, and the president's family had the art of "image duplicity" perfected. Simon points out that the "epistemological struggle" between image and text broke the trust the public had in what they saw in the media's view of the assassination, and "forms the essential backdrop for any subsequent readings of the art forms created around the death of JFK" (33). Reminding us that the issue of power is almost unavoidable in any discussion about JFK, Simon quotes Michel Foucault's ideas about the often-invisible politics of looking: "Power has its principles not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes" (2). His understanding of power in terms of the visible aptly characterizes the political contests found in the assassination debates. A major component of these debates become a struggle between "camera vision and historical authorship and how the images and issues stemming from the case have been inscribed in art and film" (2) Whether the issue is about the authority of explanations about the JFK assassination, or about the power of those who produce them, it is clear that the visual arts continue to play a critical role.

In the final chapter of *Picture Theory*, Mitchell considers the nature of public art and how art functions in the "public sphere," which he argues is usually thought of as "a

kind of utopian counterpart to the pictures of power. . . . It imagines a place outside of the realm of power and special interests, a place of freedom from power" (364). Going on then to argue that all forms of representation are political he asks: "What is the role of art and image-making in a public sphere that is mainly constituted by forms of mass spectacle and the mediatization of experience?" By way of addressing this issue he turns to the question of responsibility and asks: "What forms of resistance are likely to be efficacious in an era when traditional oppositions (avant-garde versus mass culture, art versus kitsch, private versus public) no longer seem to have cultural or political leverage"? (365).

A related question that might be asked is: What is there about pictures that make them more universal than words? Mitchell claims that "texts presents a greater threat to concepts of the 'integrity' or 'purity' of images than vice versa" (209), but this leads only to a further question: "Are images more truthful than text?" However one answers, it is clear that power is again a central component, and that as much as pictures may have power over us, so much do we participate and in this way become responsible for how we respond.

Conclusion

In discussing the relationship betweens politics and the arts, Walter Benjamin noted "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (243). Insofar as JFK's stylish presidency ended with his assassination, this may be true, but this same conjunction also ensure that he and his legacy would not be forgotten. Thus in commentary on his death, Sargent Shriver, JFK's brother-in-law, perpetuates the myth of Camelot, in describing in great detail the old Elizabethan ritual wherein after a king has died, the public gathers together to chant, "The King is dead, long live the King." In this transition of power, there is a moment of difficulty for the new king and the family of the dead king, and then everything becomes routine. In the case of Kennedy, however, the effect was somewhat different. As Shriver continues, "This was the first death of a hero; a person on whom people pinned their hopes" ("JFK – the End of Camelot" Barraclough Carey Home Video). After JFK died, young and old alike did not know where to look for hope for the future. He had visually, through his evolution into an icon, come to symbolize the ideals he had declared in his presidential agenda and the ideals associated with America: growth, youth, innocence, opportunity and eternal life, individualism and freedom. This also meant, however, that JFK had become a human icon, not a person or a president anymore, and in the process he had forever become alive through the breath of visual images and oral history. The physical presence of the eternal

flame in Arlington Cemetery was/is a constant reminder of his spirit, and in conjunction with documentaries has kept the dream alive by continually reliving, analyzing and evaluating the past, the present incorporates those details into its life.

After the assassinations of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, the young people of the sixties had no more heroes to lead them. As Todd Gitlin says, "Yet in memories of an idealized Camelot they had an image of a recent Golden Age to vivify the promise of liberalism" (295). In the sixties, no one felt he/she was getting a straight answer - not only from art, but from politicians, religion and other aspects of life. People were asking real questions: What is true art? Was the Warren Commission a joke? Was America being lied to about Vietnam? Questions of sincerity and authenticity arose in the realm of art and communications as well as in the personal and the political. In this line of questioning, we see the lines being blurred between fact and fiction, private and public, art and politics. John F. Kennedy served as a negotiator between these aspects, as a point of intersection for the arts and politics.

Given his success, it is not surprising that presidents after Kennedy have attempted and in the early days of their presidential reign have indeed been praised for the same talent. Reagan also capitalized on his experience as a Hollywood actor during his presidency. Many early movies depicted frontiersmen as willing to sacrifice all they had for the improvement of their family and their country, and it was by reason of his having played such roles that Reagan was perceived as a hero and someone who could play tough guy to international bullies. Time called his bluff during the Iran Contra affairs, but people still loved Ronald Reagan and treated him as "one of the good guys" in politics. He used his heroic image to show the public that he was capable of the

challenge of the presidency. Even if he was 73 years old and could not hear what the Ambassador from Iran was saying, and as long as he nodded at the right times, and put in his "Yeah," "I know what you mean," and "I feel the same way," and looked good on camera, performing as an actor, the public was satisfied. His serving in the Presidency for two terms demonstrates their satisfaction.

For example, Bill Clinton's Inauguration Day was compared to the "Age of Camelot," and he deliberately aligned himself with the Golden Age of the Kennedy Administration by inviting a poet – Maya Angelou – to read at his inauguration. By invoking the arts on such a historic occasion, the message becomes: Pay attention to me paying attention to the arts. Clinton's Camelot, however, fell quickly, and much had to do with the media overload to which the public is today subjected. In Kennedy's days, it was possible to have more control over the Presidential Image that the public saw, and he was able to maintain the hero profile described by Mailer.

Other political figures, such as the late US Congressman Sonny Bono, former musician of Sonny and Cher, and actor Clint Eastwood, who served as Mayor in Carmel, California in the 80s, also provide stimulating examples of how much the arts can be conjoined with politics, and in the process they also further demonstrate how much the Kennedy Administration contributed to a greater respect for the arts.

Perhaps, then, the most appropriate way to conclude this study is to recall again the lyrics that inspired John F. Kennedy and the music he loved to hear as he went to sleep: *Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.*

APPENDIX

Illustrations

Fig. 1. ***Ich Bin Ein Berliner***. Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson. ***John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him***. New York: Columbia Records Publishing, 1965. 201.

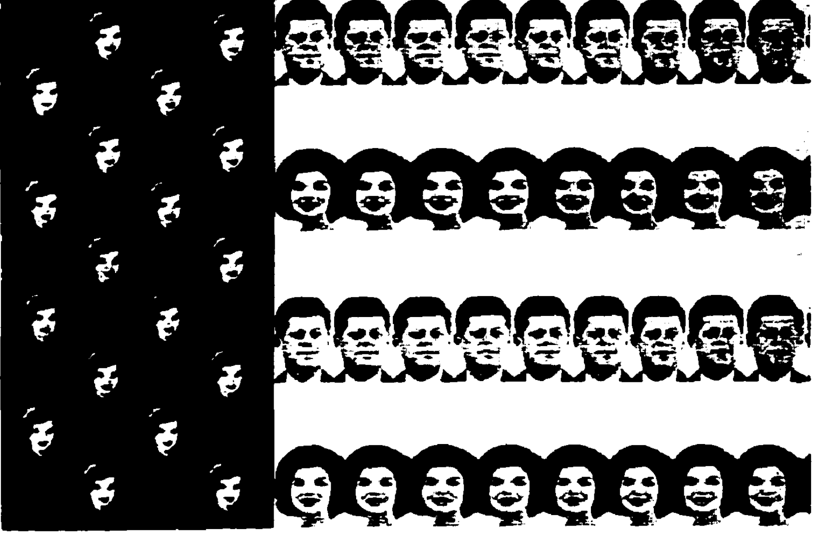

Fig. 2. Cover of *Show*. Reproduced from Robert MacNeil. *The Way We Were: 1963, the Year Kennedy Was Shot*. New York: Carroll, 1988. 69.

Fig. 3. Mayor Honey Fitzgerald and Grandson JFK.
Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson, *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him*. New York: Columbia Publishing, 1965. 47.

Fig. 4. The Kennedy Family. Left to right: Bobby, Jack, Eunice, Jean, Mr. Kennedy, Pat with Mrs. Kennedy behind her, Kathleen, Joe, and Rosemary. Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson. *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him*. New York: Columbia Publishing, 1965. 7.

Fig. 5. Picture on Back Cover of *Profiles in Courage*.
Reproduced from John F. Kennedy. *Profiles in Courage*.
New York: Harper, 1965.

Fig. 6. The Kennedy Family, 1960 Christmas Card. Reproduced from Jacques Lowe. *JFK Remembered.* New York: Random, 1993. 53.

Fig. 7. Senator John F. Kennedy in his Senate Office, Room 362, Fall 1958. Reproduced from Jacques Lowe. *JFK Remembered.* New York: Random, 1993. 8.

Fig. 8. The Night That Casals Played. Reproduced from Letitia Baldrige. *In the Kennedy Style: Magical Evenings in the Kennedy White House*. Toronto: Madison Press, 1998. 75.

Fig. 9. The Concert Hall, 1972. Reproduced from Ralph E. Becker. *Miracle on the Potomac: The Kennedy Center from the Beginning.* Silver Spring, MD: Bartleby, 1990. 109.

Fig. 10. Robert Frost at Kennedy's Inauguration. Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson. *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him.* New York: Columbia Publishing, 1965. 110.

Fig. 11. Kennedy at Amherst College, 1963. Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson. *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him.* New York: Columbia Publishing, 1965. 214.

Fig. 12. Kennedy Courting the Press. Reproduced from Benjamin Bradlee. *That Special Grace*. New York: Newsweek, 1964. 2.

THE THIRD PRESIDENTIAL PAPER
—The Existential Hero

Superman Comes to the Supermarket

Not too much need be said for this piece: it is possible it can stand by itself. But perhaps its title should have been "Filling the Holes in No Man's Land."

American politics is rarely interesting for its men, its ideas, or the style of its movements. It is usually more fascinating in its gaps, its absences, its uninvaded territories. We have used up our frontier but the psychological frontier talked about in this piece is still alive with untouched possibilities and dire unhappy all-but-lost opportunities. In European politics the spaces are filled—the average politician, like the average European, knows what is possible and what is impossible for him. Their politics is like close trench warfare. But in America, one knows such close combat only for the more banal political activities. The play of political ideas is flaccid here in America because opposing armies never meet. The Right, the Center, and what there is of the Left have set up encampments on separate hills, they face one another across valleys, they send out small patrols to their front and vast communiques to their rear. No Man's Land predominates. It is a situation which calls for guerrilla raiders. Any army which would dare to enter the valley in force might not only determine a few new political formations, but indeed could create more politics itself, even as the guerrilla raids of the Negro Left and Negro Right, the Freedom Riders and the Black Muslims, have discovered much of the secret nature of the American reality for us.

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Fig. 13. Title Page from "Superman Comes to the Market." Reproduced from Norman Mailer. *The Presidential Papers*. New York: Putnam, 1963. 25

OF POETRY AND POWER

POEMS OCCASIONED BY THE PRESIDENCY
AND BY THE DEATH OF JOHN F. KENNEDY

Foreword by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

by Erwin A. Glikes and Paul Schwaber

BASIC BOOKS, INC.

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Fig. 14. Title Page of Book. Reproduced from Erwin Glikes. *Of Poetry and Power: Poems Occasioned by the Presidency and by the Death of John F. Kennedy*. New York: Basic, 1964.

Fig. 15. "The Great Debates: John F. Kennedy vs. Richard Nixon." ABC Home Video, 1989.

Fig. 16. The Kennedy - Nixon Debates. Reproduced from Goddard Lieberson. *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him*. New York: Columbia Publishing, 1965. 99.

Fig. 17. "The Great Debates: John F. Kennedy vs. Richard Nixon."
ABC Home Video, 1989.

Fig. 18. Kennedy at Coos Bay, Oregon. Reproduced from Jaque Lowe. *JFK Remembered.* New York: Random, 1993. 41.

Fig. 19. Jackie in Paris, June 1961. Reproduced from Jacque Lowe. *JFK Remembered*. New York: Random, 1993. 170.

Fig. 20. The Kennedys Arrive In Style to the Inauguration Ball. Reproduced from Letitia Baldrige. *In the Kennedy Style: Magical Evenings in the Kennedy White House*. Toronto: Madison, 1998. 23.

Fig. 21. Jackie Onassis Remembered: A Tour
of the White House with CBS and Charles Collingwood.
CBS Home Video, 1962.

Fig. 22. "JFK - The End of Camelot." Discovery Home Video. 1996.

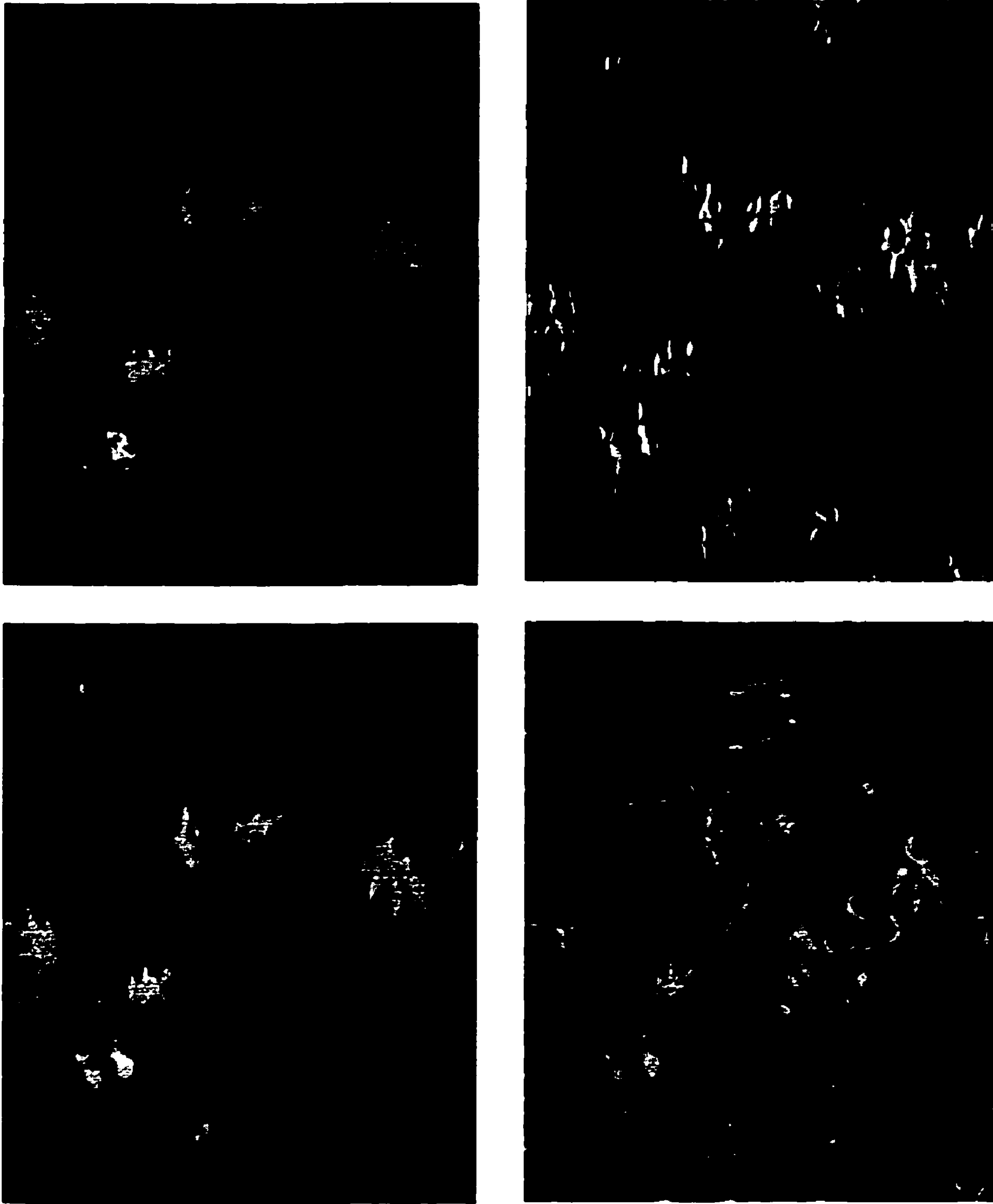

Fig. 23. "JFK - The End of Camelot." Discovery Home Video, 1996.

Fig. 24. "Sixteen Jackies." Reproduced from Art Simon. *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996. Photo Insert.

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- Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from JFK are from Sorenson's *Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, 1947 – 1963*. New York: Delacorte, 1988.

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