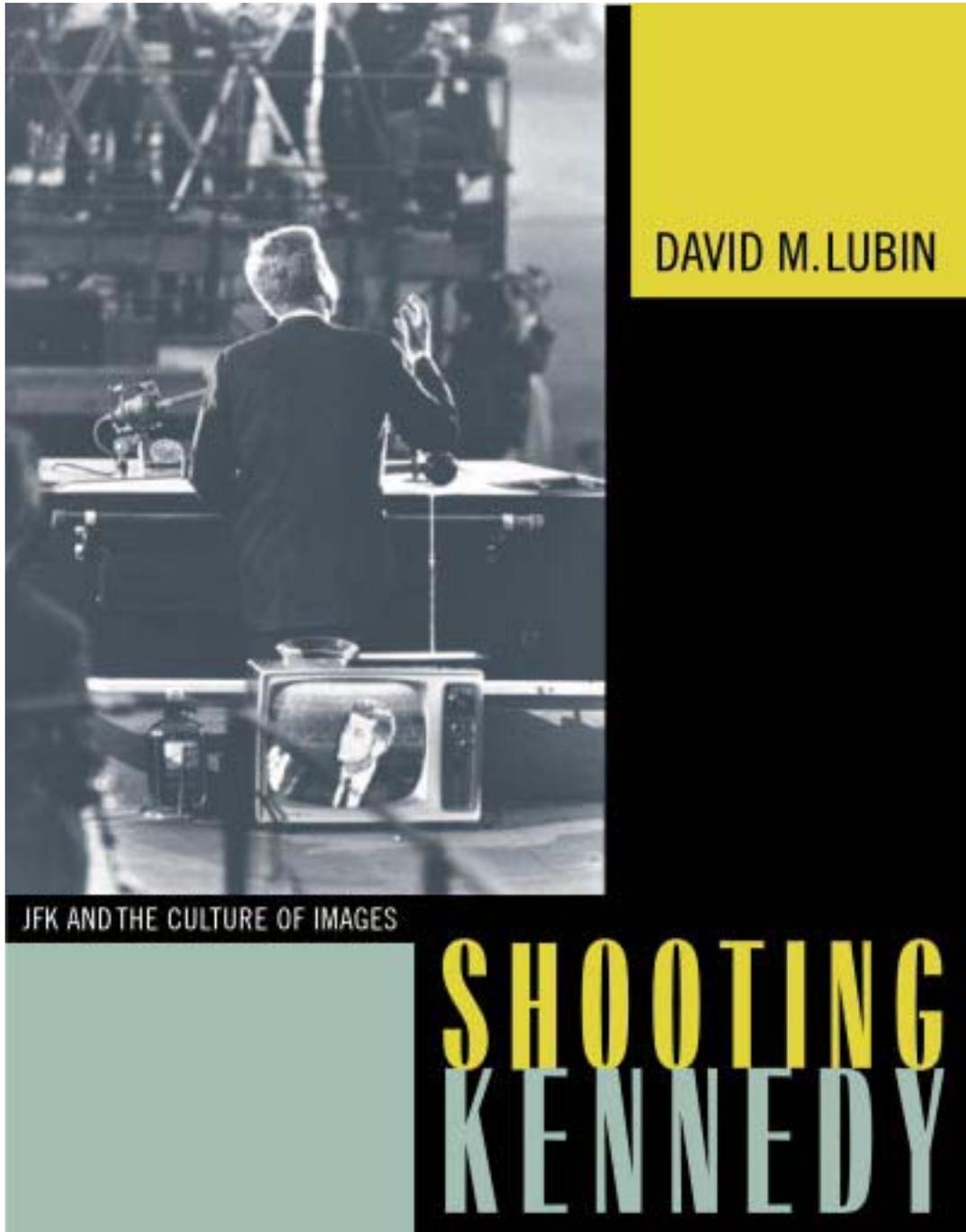


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4

Blue Sky, Red Roses

THIS WAS THE LAST TIME they would see blue sky together. What a lovely day it had turned out to be. When they awoke that morning in Fort Worth, the sky was seeping rain. Not pouring, mind you. It wasn't a hard rain that fell in Fort Worth, only a drear November rain that now seems an omen of tears to come. Everything always looks different in retrospect, and never more so than with the Kennedy assassination.

Had the rain continued, for example, the president's Secret Service agents would have shielded the passenger compartment of the presidential limousine with a protective glass covering that was used to keep rain off the first couple. It wouldn't have stopped an assassin's bullet, but it might have obscured his view. Even if the rain had not subsided, the president would most likely have waved off the bubbletop, had he been on his own. He thrived on direct contact with the crowds that turned out to see him and would not have minded a drenching if it granted him more eye-to-eye engagement.

It would not do, however, for the first lady to get soaked. Spectators who turned out for the presidential motorcade, as eager to gape at her as at her husband, would have been disappointed if she were partially hidden from sight by the rain-deflecting bubbletop. But Jackie's hair, her makeup, her elegant clothing—in a word, her image—were not meant for inclement weather. Or so, apparently, the president thought, and thus, had the rain continued, he probably would have agreed to the use of the bubbletop.

By the time they got to Dallas, the sky had dried its eyes. The day smiled upon them.

THEY FLEW INTO LOVE FIELD at 11:40 in the morning. They'd left Fort Worth a mere thirteen minutes earlier. Understand, Fort Worth and Dallas neighbor each other on the Texas plain, a mere thirty miles apart. The Kennedys could have gotten from one town to the other more rapidly and efficiently by car than by airplane. But neither speed nor efficiency was the primary consideration. Jack Kennedy grasped the importance of ceremony in public life. The arrival of the people's leader needed to be grand and majestic, an occasion of fanfare and spectacle. As I've noted, Kennedy was nothing if not a manager of image—his own, his wife's, his nation's. No president before him, with the possible exception of Franklin Roosevelt, had demonstrated such a gift for shaping his image, parceling it out, honing it, making it shine. Jack Kennedy got to the top by making himself *visible*, the object of the people's admiring and desiring gaze. His insistence on maximizing his visibility that day is what got him killed.

He knew the dangers. The Secret Service agents were continually urging him to remain behind cover—that of the bubbletop or their own protective ring of bodies—but Jack had too much at stake in living dangerously to acquiesce. Some men only affect a devil-may-care attitude about their own personal safety, determined, in reality, to keep out of harm's way. Kennedy seems to have been the opposite. While his public persona was that of a calm man guided by reason and circumspection, in fact he had a gambler's compulsive attraction to risk.

America had prevailed during the Cuban missile crisis, it was widely believed, because the president remained cool when others, his generals, for example, were inclined to be precipitate. But in private Jack courted danger, as if its adrenaline rush granted him the strength—the “vigah”—that his cortisone treatments for various physical ailments (and Dr. Jacobson's amphetamine cocktails) provided less reliably.

One day, for example, when sailing off Palm Beach with the fashion designer Oleg Cassini, a family friend, he decided to go for a swim, even though the Secret Service warned that sharks had been reported in the area. “The President jumped in, however, and it was quite a sight: the coast guard boats circling in close, creating almost a swimming-pool-sized protective circumference in the ocean, and there, in the middle, the President, treading water and puffing a cigar. He loved the grand gesture, the successful gamble. That morning, he had played against the sharks and won—and, signaling for a line, he allowed himself to be pulled back onto the yacht, triumphantly puffing all the while.”

Jack's bravado was that of a man who, his biographers concur, believed he should already have died from childhood illness, war injuries, life-threatening spinal surgery, or their lethal combination. As a conspicuously underweight member of Harvard's football team, he had thrown himself into the roughest possible situations to prove him-

self, getting knocked flat time and again by beefier players and always pulling himself up off the turf to embrace more punishment. Not long after college, he became a bona fide war hero. No one has ever suggested that during the war he deliberately placed himself in danger, but when he faced it, he seems almost to have relished the experience. The patrol torpedo (PT) boat he commanded in the South Pacific split in two when rammed in the middle of the night by an unsuspecting Japanese destroyer. Jack swam alongside his men to the nearest island, several miles away, towing, with a cord held between his teeth, a badly wounded sailor. On subsequent nights, he swam off to surrounding islands until finally he made contact with friendly islanders and through them got a message to headquarters that led to the rescue of his stranded contingent.

Some of Kennedy's critics charged that the PT-109 episode was embellished by journalists looking for a good story and made too much of by Joe Kennedy when his son ran for a seat in Congress. Jack, however, never boasted about the incident. When asked how he became a war hero, he replied, "It was involuntary; they sank my boat."

That has the laconic sound of something Jack's movie star hero Gary Cooper would have said, but it's witty too. "He appeared to be beautifully on to himself," Gore Vidal later remarked. "As a result, there were few intellectuals in 1960 who were not beguiled by the spectacle of a President who seemed always to be standing at a certain remove from himself, watching himself with amusement at his own performance. He was an ironist in a profession where the prize usually goes to the apparent cornball."

THE ENGLISH HEROES of Jack's childhood, such as the Knights of the Round Table, talked in flowery language, but those of his early adulthood, such as Lord Byron, taught him the pleasures of understatement. Kennedy's "It was involuntary; they sank my boat" exhibits the same wry eloquence as Byron's recollection of how he became a literary celebrity: "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." Given his own nature and aspirations, how could young Kennedy not have sought to model himself on an ironist who lived like an aristocrat, loved like a libertine, died like a hero?

Another of Jack's idols was the English aristocrat Raymond Asquith, a prime minister's son who was killed in action in World War I. Kennedy read about Asquith in one of his favorite books, *Pilgrim's Way*, by the Scottish historian, diplomat, and spy novelist John Buchan (his 1915 book *The Thirty-nine Steps* gave rise to the modern espionage thriller). Appearing in 1940, at the start of World War II, *Pilgrim's Way* celebrated the bravery and self-sacrifice of the generation that had fought in the previous war. According to Buchan, who had been close to Asquith, his "debonair and brilliant and brave" friend readily put his life on the line for his country but never made a show of it, preferring instead to hide "his devotions under a mask of indifference."

A year after the assassination, Jackie recalled Buchan's elegant formulation about Asquith, which she thought applied equally well to her slain husband: "He disliked emotion, not because he felt lightly but because he felt deeply."

Buchan's verbal portrait of Asquith calls upon a classical rhetoric of patriotic obligation that Kennedy himself invoked, to great effect, during his presidency. "Our roll of honor is long, but it holds no nobler figure," Buchan writes of the fallen warrior. "He will stand to those of us who are left as an incarnation of the spirit of the land he loved." Buchan's parting remark about his friend—"He loved his youth, and his youth has become eternal"—might well have been in Jackie's mind when she requested that Jack's grave in Arlington National Cemetery be marked by an "eternal" flame.

"In the early deaths of war heroes in *Pilgrim's Way*," John Hellmann writes in his examination of literary and cinematic influences on the president, "Kennedy could see male beauty preserved by death, a narcissistic, much admired masculine image ennobled by self-sacrifice for a great cause." He continues:

On his way to the South Pacific, Kennedy was in a somewhat different situation from most of the men around him. While he enjoyed enormous advantages of wealth, he journeyed toward war with considerable reason to believe that an early death, or perhaps a debilitated life, awaited him if he survived to return home. Kennedy was hardly suicidal in his intent, but his recommendations of *Pilgrim's Way* to his fellow officers reflected his love of a book that depicted suffering and death in war in achingly beautiful, even homoerotic, terms—as an achievement of a masculine nobility that could never be lost.

Hellmann concludes that John Kennedy consistently, if unconsciously, courted danger as a response to his lifelong life-threatening physical infirmities and to the overweening political ambition fanned in him by his father. His ongoing sexual and political adventurism, his obsession with proving himself extraordinary "both in bed and on the podium," grew directly out of his self-perceived inadequacies.

JFK's identification with Byron and other heroes of English history drew him to a corollary idea—of America as "legitimate successor to the Empire as defender of freedom in the world." In his quest to achieve personal glories similar to theirs, JFK imbibed the ethos of eighteenth- through early-twentieth-century British imperialism and reinvented it for the new cold war era.

IN THE 1950S IAN FLEMING joined John Buchan and David Cecil on the list of authors whose books Kennedy enjoyed. Fleming's suave hero James Bond was in certain essentials a cold war counterpart to Richard Hannay, the protagonist of Buchan's ear-

lier spy novels. At home in elite society and able to maneuver through it with finesse, but not at all “unmanly” or effete, both characters could adapt to any situation and meet any challenge. Jack encountered the first of the Bond novels, *Casino Royale* (1953), when Jackie brought him a copy during his hospital stay after spine surgery in 1954.

The 007 ethos appears to have influenced not only Kennedy’s private but also his political intrigues. At a Georgetown dinner party with Ian Fleming in 1960, he listened seriously to Fleming’s schemes for sexually embarrassing Castro or even assassinating him with a poison pen or an exploding cigar. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in which he had relied on bad advice from the Central Intelligence Agency, Jack ruefully remarked, “It would have been better if we left it to James Bond.”

Bond was a fantasy figure for those like Jack Kennedy who had the wherewithal to emulate his social and sexual savoir-faire and for a wide range of other men during the cold war era. The Bond movies (*Dr. No* came first in 1962, followed by *From Russia with Love* in 1963 and *Goldfinger* in 1964) extended the impact of the imaginary secret agent on run-of-the-mill male fantasy, setting the hearts of boys and men aflutter with Bond on-screen (as embodied by the darkly handsome and debonair Sean Connery) as well as on the page (Fig. 34).

Take Lee Harvey Oswald, for example. In the summer of 1963, recently fired from his job as a maintenance mechanic at a coffee warehouse, he found himself with nothing but time on his hands. He used it to read, among other books, a biography of Mao Tse-tung, a diatribe on Communism by J. Edgar Hoover, a biography of John Kennedy, and four James Bond thrillers. While it remains a matter of speculation whether Oswald was an operative for the CIA, FBI, KGB, none of them, or all them, his credentials as an admirer of 007 are indisputable.

A 1964 reader’s guide to the Bond novels extols the fictional character’s sexual prowess:

Almost every personable female he meets seems more than ready to hop into bed with him at his merest nod. Waitresses brush against him provocatively, married women appear to be his for the asking, other men’s mistresses forget their lovers when they see him, and even expensive whores are willing to bestow their favours pour amour. . . . Occasionally, though, he meets a girl who has no immediate intention—or eventual intention, for that matter—of copulating with him. More often than not he wins her over. This is usually accomplished by derring-do.

“Derring-do.” The very term connotes something archaic, primitive, premodern. It comes from the Middle English verb phrase *derryngge do*, meaning “daring to do,” but Sir Walter Scott popularized it as a noun in his chivalric novel *Ivanhoe*. It thence

FIGURE 34 | *Dr. No*, 1962

came to mean daring, even foolhardy, action or reckless courage. The Romantics cherished derring-do because it showed an exhilarating carelessness toward circumspection and other middle-class conventions of behavior.

James Bond comes from a long line of male Romantic heroes who inspire ardor in readers by their nonchalant acceptance of extreme personal risk in the quest for some great, hallowed goal. Such a goal might be protecting Her Majesty's commonwealth from nefarious enemies (007), or launching a secret invasion of "freedom fighters" against Cuba (JFK), or gunning down the "treasonous" president of the United States (LHO).

AN UNSIGNED HANDBILL circulating in Dallas during the days leading up to the president's arrival featured front and side mug shots of Kennedy with the words "Wanted for treason" printed in bold type. Beneath them the handbill continued, "This man is wanted for treasonous activities against the United States." It accused him of "betraying the Constitution," "turning the sovereignty of the U.S. over to the Communist controlled United Nations," and (among other sins) lending his "support and encouragement to the Communist inspired racial riots." Whether Oswald ever saw this circular is unknown, but he certainly would have heard of such charges against the president.

My point is not Kennedy's treason or Oswald's guilt. It is that both men, along with millions of other readers who admired the Bond adventure tales, swilled the Romantic ideology of derring-do as a confirmation of potency, sexual and otherwise. That one man possessed it in exceptional, almost superhuman, abundance, and the other lacked it, almost pathetically, yet both were fans of Bond suggests how deep-seated this ideology is across the board, regardless of social standing or historical epoch. As the eighteenth-century London periodical the *Adventurer* asserted, "It is the ADVENTURER alone on whom every eye is fixed with admiration, and whose praise is repeated by every voice."

Jack's arrival at Love Field is thus emblematic of his adventurousness, his derring-do. When shown a reactionary diatribe against him in a Dallas paper earlier that morning, he had shrugged it off, saying, "Oh, you know, we're heading into nut country today." The crowds who came out to greet him and his wife at Love Field and on the motorcade route were unaware that he had maligned them, or that he was knowingly subjecting himself to risk by reducing his security among them to make himself more visible. But even if they did not understand that his coming to Dallas involved personal bravery—or, more accurately, disdain for personal safety—he embodied for many of them an up-to-date ideal of masculine courage, potency, and attractiveness.

IN THE FALL OF 1963 the title character of the unexpected box-office hit *Tom Jones*, winningly played by the young English actor Albert Finney, offered another embodiment of the masculine ideal. A spirited adaptation of Henry Fielding's eighteenth-century picaresque novel, the movie recounts the bawdy exploits of a handsome youth possessed of a genuinely sweet and guileless nature.

Finney's Tom is also unabashedly sexual. He hops from bed to bed with a zest matched only by that of the filmmakers, who avail themselves of a wide array of unconventional cinematic devices to record his romps and convey his joyful gusto. The only villains of the piece are the prudes who primly regard Tom as a depraved scoundrel.

FIGURE 35 | *Tom Jones* advertisement, 1963

Rejected by many studios before it was finally produced and went on to win the Best Picture Oscar, *Tom Jones* amounted to one of the most critically acclaimed and financially profitable early sallies in the sexual revolution of the 1960s (Fig. 35). The movie depicts free love as healthy, happy, and natural, and sexual repression as sick, twisted, and unnatural. And it does so in such a fun-loving way that despite its assault on traditional sexual and behavioral codes, legions of viewers who might otherwise have stood firm against its libidinal implications thronged to see it.

As a masculine ideal Tom Jones, like James Bond, exemplified a guilt-free attitude toward sex, a handsome, rugged manliness, and an insouciant wit and charm. Emerging from Air Force One in Dallas, John Kennedy was somewhat jowly, thanks

to the cortisone he was taking for his Addison's disease. Still, with his smartly cut suit and princely bearing, he looked every bit as much a hero of the era as the Bond of fiction or the Jones of film. The shape of his face and cut of his hair even resembled those of Albert Finney's Tom, and his toothsome grin was equally endearing.

The public at the time, not privy to Kennedy's extramarital "adventures," might well have turned on him had they known. Jack, after all, was a married man, whereas James and Tom were not. Spared such revelations, however, many Americans, both male and female, were captivated by his appearance, style, and youthful freshness, and they responded to him with ardent affection similar to that bestowed on the two imaginary heroes. Tennessee Williams was clearly mistaken when, after meeting Jack in Florida in 1958, he predicted that the senator could never get elected to the White House because he was "far too attractive." ("Look at that ass," he commented when Kennedy walked in front of him.)

Whether Jack himself identified with Tom, as he did with James, we do not know. But if he did catch the movie at one of Jackie's White House screenings in that final fall of his life, he would surely have found in the title character yet another English hero to list with his others, real and mythical—Lancelot and Arthur, Byron and Melbourne, Asquith and Bond.

ONE LAST ENGLISH HERO, or in this case antihero, needs to be added to the mix: T. E. Lawrence. An Oxford-trained archaeologist who served with British intelligence in the Great War and organized Arab tribesmen for a successful guerrilla campaign against the Turks, "Lawrence of Arabia" was one of the most enigmatic figures of the early twentieth century—a brilliant writer, a closeted homosexual, an antisemite with fascist leanings, and a leader of extraordinary charisma.

Lawrence, as his friend John Buchan wrote of him in *Pilgrim's Way*, "had a magnetic power which made people follow him blindly, and I have seen that in his eye which could have made, or quelled, a revolution." Buchan admitted to puzzlement at Lawrence's many contradictions. "I do not profess to have understood T. E. Lawrence fully, still less to be able to portray him; there is no brush fine enough to catch the subtleties of his mind, no aerial viewpoint high enough to bring into one picture the manifold of his character."

In 1963 David Lean's visually stunning desert epic *Lawrence of Arabia* provided an "aerial viewpoint," literally as well as figuratively, on the British warrior. The movie opens with an overhead shot of a young man striding across the pavement to a motorcycle awaiting him in the upper left corner of the Panavision screen. While the credits roll in the empty space to the right, the young man, Lawrence, played by Peter O'Toole, readies the machine for what soon turns out to be his final journey. Speeding

FIGURE 36 | *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962

off on a narrow English country lane, he swerves to avoid two bicyclists in his path and flies over an embankment to his death. Abruptly the movie cuts to St. Paul's Cathedral, where Lawrence's remains have been interred in state, and then to Cairo two decades earlier, where the story of the Arabian campaign begins.

The first half of the film exults in Lawrence's youthful impetuosity and brash idealism (Fig. 36). It also portrays him as taking an almost masochistic pleasure in subjecting himself to physical discomfort, even pain. When someone asks him how he "does that trick" of extinguishing a match flame by allowing it to burn down to his fingertip, Lawrence answers, "The trick is not minding that it hurts." In effect, that was Kennedy's own approach to the often excruciating physical pain and fatigue in his life, as well as the fear. He would have preferred not to come to Dallas in the first place, but political protocol necessitated the journey, and, despite the ominous hostility man-

ifest in the right-wing local press and the “wanted for treason” circulars, he fully intended to soldier on.

The second half of the movie devolves into a dark and at times nearly incoherent account of Lawrence’s deepening self-conflicts, his earlier exuberance and straightforward heroism now clouded by sadistic and masochistic impulses. In the concluding sequence, set in Damascus, he loses control of his men and comprehends fully how his dream of a united Islam has failed. Jack Kennedy, unlike the T. E. Lawrence of either history or Hollywood, was not given to depressive self-hatred, and he seems to have maintained a largely unflagging confidence in himself and his ability to better the world. If he was an idealist, he was, even more, a toughened political compromiser who recognized, and fully accepted, that any victory comes sown with the seeds of defeat. That, to him, was simply the way things were.

It’s easy to imagine Jack’s seeing himself narcissistically in 1963 as a latter-day Lawrence of America, dauntlessly uniting warring factions in his own party (the purpose of his stop in Dallas) and commanding the love and respect of the plebeians through his charisma. It’s impossible to imagine him identifying with Lawrence in the second half of the movie, a leader who falls into confusion, depression, and self-loathing.

Perhaps, had Kennedy remained in office longer, he too would have become irreparably scathed, suffering his own series of diplomatic debacles. What Damascus was for Lawrence, Saigon might have proved for Kennedy—the symbol of his ultimate political failure. As it happened, he reached Dallas before he ever got to his own version of Lawrence’s Damascus. In Jack’s case, the film ended before intermission.

LIFE’S FULL-PAGE COLOR PHOTO depicting the presidential couple arriving at Love Field opens the magazine’s coverage of the assassination. The rest of the pictures in the report are in black and white, as if the very colors of human life, not to mention happiness, had bled out of them. Blurry enlargements from the 8-millimeter Zapruder film, they look like smudges on the page.

In contrast, the Love Field arrival shot, taken by the veteran *Life* photographer Arthur Rickerby, seems larger than life—vividly colored, crisply focused, it fills the page (Fig. 37). The Kennedys look tall and vibrant. They come so close to the photographic picture plane that they seem within our reach, giants among us. *Life’s* editors clearly intended Rickerby’s photo as a resplendent, magical, wonderful *before* to the drab, dismal, and violent *after* in what turned out to be the best-selling issue of the magazine in its fifty-some-year history.

It is impossible to look at this image with a historically innocent eye. It comes to us today, as it did to viewers in 1963, replete with the poignancy of the conditional. The principals in the photograph, frozen in history, are forever poised on the precipice,



FIGURE 37 | Love Field, Dallas, November 22, 1963 (Arthur Rickerby, photographer)

about to suffer—he to die, she to scream—and Lyndon Johnson, that minor bumbling character who can be seen bending over behind Jackie, about to become the most powerful man in the world.

The photograph has the formal density of a carefully constructed painting. It is filled with intriguing visual symmetries and repetitions. Consider, for example, how the notched lapel of the first lady's suit echoes that of her husband's, but more loosely and expansively, or how the stripes of his shirt connect to the broad blue stripe on the jet and the stripes of the flag, as well as to the piping on her suit and the subtle striped pattern in its warp and weft. Note, too, how the geometric pattern of his necktie, with its neat rows of rounded rectangles, harmonizes with the bouclé fabric of her wool jacket as well as with the row of porthole windows on the jet and the three zeroes of the plane's call number lined up beneath the flag. The president's pocket handkerchief, the vice president's white carnation, and the first lady's white glove form an inverted triangle, compactly framing her. Particularly delicate is the way husband and wife fleetingly touch arms, his hand going one way, hers the other. Regardless of its original journalistic purpose and subsequent historical significance, the Rickerby photograph stands on its own as a richly complex visual artifact.

The accompanying text from *Life* commences, "Now in the sunny freshness of a Texas morning, with roses in her arms and luminous smile on her lips, Jacqueline Kennedy still had one hour to share the buoyant surge of life with the man at her side." Here is that sense of the conditional I mentioned that is the staple of legends about heroes, saints, and martyrs. *Life's* designers laid out the opening two pages of the report so that Jack, on the far left, seems almost to look past Jackie to the facing page, on which an uncaptioned black-and-white photo shows a bouquet of white roses abandoned on the back seat of the vice president's car. The direction of his gaze, as in Renaissance paintings, establishes a before-and-after narrative: triumphal entry of the hero on one side and on the other, as if he alone foresees it, a melancholy emblem of his imminent martyrdom.

Mrs. Kennedy carries a bouquet of red roses. Apparently all the local florists were sold out of yellow roses because of the many Democratic festivities planned. (The yellow rose is popularly associated with Texas, though the state flower is the bluebonnet.) Red was the next-best color available for welcoming the first lady. Lady Bird Johnson, the vice president's wife, and Nellie Connally, the governor's wife, according to William Manchester, received white roses. *Life* shows one of those bouquets left behind in the vice president's car; the other (whose roses look yellow, not white, despite Manchester's account) can be seen in the Zapruder film flying out of Mrs. Connally's arms when the president's head shatters.

Red roses have a long-standing tradition, which I take up in Chapter 5. Since the Middle Ages they have signified the spilling of holy blood, the martyrdom of a saint.

Although it was pure happenstance that Mrs. Kennedy received red roses instead of yellow, and though no one at Love Field, including the photographer, had any idea what was to take place a mere eight miles away, in retrospect—the only way in which anyone has *ever* viewed this photo—it prophesies death to come. It is a modern-day equivalent to a late Gothic or early Renaissance painting such as Stefan Lochner's *Madonna in the Rose Garden* (1450) or Martin Schongauer's *Madonna and Child in a Rose Arbor* (1473), both of which count on the viewer to invest the lovely red flowers on display with a sense of the mortal tragedy to unfold. Although the roses in the photograph in no way predicted the assassination, they have given that photo a sense of ineluctable tragedy, conferring on John Kennedy, whose political ratings were slipping, a beatific aura he did not possess at the time of his death.

Indeed, under normal circumstances an alternative cultural signification would have emerged from the photo. From ancient Rome to the Tournament of Roses parade in Pasadena each New Year's Day, roses have also been a sign of victory, pride, and triumph. That meaning is still visible in the Love Field photograph but inevitably tinged with a sad or bitter irony.

ROSES ARE NOT THE ONLY richly meaningful signifiers in the Love Field photo. The pages that follow examine three others: the first lady's garment, the president's body, and the airplane in the background.

Jackie's Chanel suit has become a legendary piece of clothing in American history, for even after it was soaked in her husband's blood she refused to change out of it for the long flight with his body back to Washington. When Lady Bird delicately suggested she might feel more comfortable in a fresh outfit, the newly made widow fiercely refused, explaining, "I want them to see what they have done to Jack." The suit features prominently in the photograph, to be examined in Chapter 7, in which she stands beside Lyndon Johnson aboard Air Force One as he takes the oath of office. In that picture the photographer cropped out the bloodstains, but they conspicuously appear in the press photos of her departing from the presidential plane at Andrews Air Force Base later that day (see Fig. 73). Viewers were startled.

Startled, because it was presidential blood and because first ladies had seemed until now to exist in a world magically sealed off from the messy stains of daily life and suffering—but also because in 1963 the item of apparel known as the Chanel suit was just about as solid a symbol of bourgeois female chic as could be found anywhere in the Western world. By wearing a Chanel suit, a woman gave notice that she was smart, classy, and independent. No one would have expected to see such a garment bloodied like a butcher's apron.

Even before the martyred president's blood was spilled on the suit, making it a holy relic (one kept locked in storage at the National Archives), Jackie's Chanel suit came with a great deal of twentieth-century history attached to it. The brand name Chanel belonged to one of the most impressive and influential women of that century, Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel.

Born in France in 1883 and reared as a poor orphan in a convent, Chanel had become Paris's leading fashion designer by the end of World War I. Like her friends Igor Stravinsky, Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, and Sergey Diaghilev (the Russian ballet impresario whom Jackie, in her youth, had idolized), she was a modernist. And she, more than any other individual, liberated women from the tight restrictions of belle époque fashions and offered them the comfortable alternative of modern styles.

Her designs offered women the relaxed freedom of movement previously reserved for men. Eliminating stays, bustles, and corsets and substituting silk, cotton, or wool jersey for satin, Chanel introduced loose-fitting sweaters, blazers, pleated skirts, trench coats, and the trademark "little black dress." By the 1930s she was the world's most famous clothing designer.

Arrested as a collaborationist at the conclusion of World War II and set free thanks to the intervention of her friend Winston Churchill, she departed for Switzerland and retirement, living off the revenue of her patented perfume, Chanel No. 5. In 1954, however, at the age of seventy-one, she threw herself back into the fashion business in vexation at the regression of women's fashions, as she saw it, toward a socially conservative and physically restrictive style. In particular, she took aim at Christian Dior's "New Look," which the couturier introduced in the early postwar era in an avowed attempt to make women feel feminine and glamorous again after the prolonged period of drab functionality that had characterized the war years. "Dresses must have a soul," said Dior. "In an age of machines, dressmaking has come to be the final refuge of all that is human, all that is personal, and all that can never be imitated."

Chanel accused Dior of treating women like armchairs to be upholstered: "He puts covers on them," she sneered. Her goal was to dress women as real-world beings who reasonably wished to combine elegance and functionality, practicality and chic, old-fashioned femininity and up-to-date independence. By the early 1960s the Chanel suit had become a wardrobe staple of the upwardly mobile American female. A Chanel suit fit almost every daytime occasion that required a woman to dress stylishly.

It was thus the perfect outfit to choose for riding in a presidential motorcade.

OR WAS IT? From the beginning of her husband's campaign for the White House, Jacqueline Kennedy's preference for clothing of French design provoked controversy.

Why weren't American-made clothes good enough for her, the critics demanded? Stung by such charges, Jack insisted that Jackie henceforth wear American-designed and American-made garments for her public appearances. One of the first steps she took after Jack's election was to engage the services of Oleg Cassini, an American-born fashion designer whose grandfather, a Russian count, had been an ambassador to Washington at the turn of the century.

Cassini had designed costumes for Hollywood, was once engaged to Grace Kelly, and was an old crony of Joe Kennedy's. He also had European mannerisms and taste, so for Jackie he was ideal, perfectly understanding and appreciating her taste for French couturier fashion but also meeting Jack's requirement that she wear American-made designs.

The national origins of Jackie's fashion wardrobe were not the only point of controversy during the 1960 campaign. Critics accused her of squandering indecent amounts of money on her clothes. In July of that year *Women's Wear Daily* reported her clothing expenses, which amounted to \$15,000 a year (equivalent to \$100,000 today)—potentially ruinous news for Jack, not because he couldn't easily foot such bills but because he could. His Roman Catholicism was one thing, and, as we've seen, he handled it well, but the vast wealth of the Kennedy family, and Jackie's sumptuous wardrobe, were another matter.

No one expected Jack to hide his wealth, but it wouldn't do to rub it in the voters' faces, either. That's when Joe Kennedy stepped in and told Jackie that from now on he, not Jack, would cover the bills. This arrangement would spare the new president further embarrassment about his wife's extravagance while enabling her to look as ravishing at state events as a fairy-tale princess gone to the ball. Joe understood that in the era of television, the taxpayers didn't want a dull-looking first lady in the White House. They wanted a living doll. But they wanted someone else to pay for her costumes, not their elected president and, by implication, themselves.

This was not the first outcry in recent years resulting from the cost of clothing a politician's wife. The most notorious example had occurred about a decade earlier, on September 23, 1952, to be exact. That was the evening that Senator Richard Nixon, who was then the vice presidential nominee for the Republican Party, appeared on national TV, immediately after an episode of *I Love Lucy*, to fight for his political life.

Newspaper stories had revealed that the senator was the beneficiary of a "slush fund" established for his "financial comfort" by a "millionaire's club" of California businessmen. Nixon's opponents demanded his resignation from the Senate and called on General Eisenhower to drop him as his running mate. Instead of rushing to Nixon's defense, Eisenhower left him dangling. In desperation, Nixon agreed to go on coast-to-coast radio and television, live, to answer the charges against him.

At the start of his allotted time, Nixon explained that the money set aside in the

fund wasn't for his own personal benefit but for the war that he was waging against Communist infiltration. He then devoted the remainder of his thirty minutes to an account of himself as an ordinary man from an ordinary background, blessed with an ordinary American family, shared with his wife, Pat. He wore ordinary suits, drove an ordinary car, and amassed ordinary debts.

Nixon did confess that he had accepted a gift from a supporter, a black-and-white cocker spaniel that his daughters named Checkers. "And you know the kids, like all kids, love the dog, and I just want to say this right now that regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it." He finished his apologia by proclaiming, "Pat and I have the satisfaction that every dime that we've got is honestly ours. I should say this—that Pat doesn't have a mink coat, but she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat, and I always tell her that she'd look good in anything."

The Checkers speech, as it came to be known, was a smashing success for Nixon. General Eisenhower put his arm around him and said, "You're my boy"; Checkers became the most famous pet in America, and the phrase "respectable Republican cloth coat" entered the language.

That is what Jack Kennedy was up against when he opposed Nixon for the presidency eight years later. On the campaign trail Jackie wore a bright red cloth coat designed by the French couturier Hubert de Givenchy that was passed off by the Kennedy press people as an inexpensive Ohrbach's copy, a claim *Women's Wear Daily* tartly disputed.

NOW IN DALLAS SHE WORE a bright pink Chanel suit. Whether it was an authentic Chanel (it was) or an American copy, costly or inexpensive, it was rife with class connotations and international implications unlikely to be missed in Dallas, a citadel of right-wing isolationism and populist anti-elitism. In 1960 Jackie would not have dared to dress in an article of clothing so conspicuously French or French inspired, but now, in 1963, she could get away with it, even in Dallas, because in general the American public was proud of her stylish elegance.

The turning point had come during Jackie's triumphal visit to Paris and Vienna in 1961. The crowds in those cities clearly adored her, and such rebarbative figures as the French president, Charles de Gaulle, and the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, whom she met in Vienna, were visibly enchanted by her. It was during this European tour that President Kennedy sardonically introduced himself as "the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris." The American public basked in the reflected glory of its first lady (Fig. 38).

After that, Jackie had much more leeway to flaunt her French taste. "Until Paris," Oleg Cassini has noted, "Jackie was nothing but a little housewife. But then, she single-



FIGURE 38 | Elysée Palace, Paris, June 1961

handedly began to create Camelot. The furniture, the ideas, the cooks, food, the fantastic people she invited to the White House—Casals, Bernstein, Frost. And she did it all herself. While Jack was busy with the presidency, Jackie was creating Versailles.”

So when Jackie sat at her dressing table in the presidential hotel suite in Fort Worth the morning of her short flight to Dallas, her decision was not whether to wear her

Chanel suit but which of two pairs of white gloves to wear with it. She also kept checking the weather and hoped that the rain would continue so that the bubbletop would be necessary and her coiffure thus protected from the wind. It all sounds silly now, but that's how the past always looks when viewed through the windowpane of tragedy.

JACK MAY HAVE GRUMBLED about the inordinate amount of time and money his wife spent on her clothes and appearance. But he himself was always visibly pleased by the results, and, like his father before him, he came to realize what an asset her beauty was to his political and diplomatic career. The grumbling may even have been for show, to make him seem like a regular guy, an ordinary American husband (well, not as ordinary as Nixon) like the long-suffering comic strip husband Dagwood Bumstead, from *Blondie*, or TV's humorously impatient husband Ricky Ricardo, from *I Love Lucy*. When Jack spoke from the back of a flatbed truck at an early morning rally of union workers outside the hotel in Fort Worth, he answered shouts of "Where's Jackie?" by pointing to her eighth-floor window. "Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself," he explained. "It takes her a little longer, but, of course, she looks better than we do when she does it."

Later that morning, when she finally made her entrance at a breakfast for two thousand cheering Texans, Jack remarked, "Two years ago I introduced myself in Paris by saying that I was the man who had accompanied Mrs. Kennedy to Paris. I am getting somewhat the same sensation as I travel around Texas. Nobody wonders what Lyndon and I wear." The comment elicited a wave of laughter from the crowd. One cynical journalist turned to a Kennedy advisor and asked, "When are you going to have her come out of a cake?"

Jack Kennedy bought into the same assumptions as his audiences in Fort Worth, and throughout America, about the immutable differences between men and women. *The Feminine Mystique* was a best-seller in 1963, but so was Ian Fleming's *Spy Who Loved Me*, whose female narrator (scripted, to be sure, by a man) observed:

All women love semi-rape. They love to be taken. It was [Bond's] sweet brutality against my bruised body that had made his act of love so piercingly wonderful. That and the coinciding of nerves completely relaxed after the removal of tension and danger, the warmth of gratitude, and a woman's natural feelings for her hero. . . . [A]ll my life I would be grateful to him, for everything. And I would remember him forever as my image of a man.

Tom Jones, the movie, also featured "semi-rape" but treated it comically rather than heroically—as did the Broadway hit *Camelot*, in the "Fie on Goodness!" number. A

lustly chorus of knights, oppressed by the high morality of the king's regime, longs for the good old days and rues the present, when "virgins may wander unmolested." Not everyone in 1963, however, considered "semi-rape" and male sexual prerogative either sexy or funny.

In Sylvia Plath's *Bell Jar*, published in London early that year, the month before the author's suicide, the narrator, Esther, tells of nearly being raped by her date to a country club dance, a tall, dark, and handsome Latin American. She describes him as "a woman-hater" and explains, "I began to see why woman-haters could make such fools of women. Woman-haters were like gods: invulnerable and chock-full of power. They descended, and then they disappeared. You could never catch one." But *The Bell Jar* was not a best-seller, and the early reviews were not favorable. The author was called "neurotic" and her views deemed aberrant, far from the mainstream.

The stereotypical notions of innate sexual difference that were advanced in the media—in popular fiction, movies, television, comic strips, advice columns, marriage manuals, and so forth—also emanated from the political realm. Jackie's beautification of herself and Jack's "good-natured" jokes about it were important symbolic features of the political landscape—as central to it finally as the president's economic, diplomatic, and legislative initiatives. Jack's attempt to "take" Cuba in 1961 and his patient refusal to "back down" or "wimp out" against the Soviets during the missile crisis in 1962 implicitly demonstrated the behavior that, as most Americans learned from popular culture, was manly in the bedroom.

THE PRESIDENT AND HIS WIFE used to joke about the young females who mobbed his campaign appearances. They called them "jumpers" because, on what turned out to be the eve of the Beatles' invasion of America (launched some three months after Dallas), they were always hopping up and down with excitement to catch a glimpse of their idol as he passed by. In more ways than one JFK cashed in on that delirium. He not only exploited it for his own off-the-record sexual advantage but also used it to hot-wire his political life. It gave him the appearance of being adored by the crowds, and in American presidential politics that translates into clout with voters, legislators, corporate executives, union leaders, foreign heads of state, and everyone else with whom the president breaks bread.

A photograph of Jack at Santa Monica in August 1962, emerging from the surf with soaking wet trunks, underscores his sexual charisma (Fig. 39). At the time this picture was taken, Jackie and Caroline were on holiday in Italy. Jack was spending a long weekend at the beach house of his sister Pat Lawford. Three weeks earlier, in a nearby bungalow, his spurned mistress Marilyn Monroe had died from an overdose of sleeping pills.



FIGURE 39 | Santa Monica, August, 1962 (Bill Beebe, photographer)

In this picture, Kennedy does a Marilyn. This is his subway-grate photo, in which, like Monroe, he exudes primal sexuality and feeds off the onlookers' rambunctious response to it. The presidential body is muscular and all but hairless, save for a square patch in the center of his chest. His shoulders, broad and powerful, are those of an avid swimmer, which he was. He smiles happily, his eyes scrunched tight, like a child too long cooped up in the classroom and now at last free to romp. Women mob him. A few men appear in the crowd, but they remain in the background, looking on amused or admiring (or perhaps with Secret Service attentiveness).

This is a female moment, the picture seems to say. Jack stands at the far left of the image, as in the Love Field photo, but a female admirer squeezes into the narrow space between him and the picture's edge. She appears to be an older woman, considerably older than Jack. Because of the cropping, we catch only a glimpse of her. Dark glasses framed in flaring white plastic hide her eyes.

Nonetheless, she looks ecstatic, her glee at finding herself beside the president

FIGURE 40 | *Sunset Boulevard*, 1950

conveyed to us by her foreshortened arm and half-clenched fingers. She's Norma Desmond and he Joe Gillis, from *Sunset Boulevard*, the Hollywood exposé movie of a decade earlier that starred Joe Kennedy's former mistress, Gloria Swanson, as the older woman ready to seize in her clutches the young hunk of meat played by William Holden (Fig. 40).

In one sense, the photo seems brimming with joyous innocence, a snapshot of happy days when a politician could go out in public and literally "press the flesh" without fear of either assassination or sexual allegation. Yet it's also a macabre image. The older woman with a handbag seems almost to clutch his chest. The aligning of Jack's squinting gaze with that of the trim, well-toned woman in a polka-dot two-piece swimsuit would seem sexually meaningful in another context, but here we recognize her as his sister-in-law Ethel Kennedy.

The photo captures the crazy-carnival atmosphere of Federico Fellini's internationally acclaimed satire *La Dolce Vita* (1960), which outrageously draws comparisons between movie-star worship and religious hysteria. It's one of the few "art" films Jack is known to have liked. The Santa Monica shot, with its pack of predatory fans swarming after a handsome young man, also invokes the notorious climactic sequence of *Suddenly Last Summer*, Gore Vidal's screen adaptation of a Tennessee Williams one-act play that was being filmed in Florida when Kennedy and Williams met. In the movie's denouement, shown in flashback through the eyes of an emotionally devastated Elizabeth Taylor, whose aunt wants her lobotomized, cannibalistic Sicilian urchins swarm after Taylor's traveling companion, a homosexual predator who has been exploiting them, mob him, tear him to pieces, and devour him.

Suddenly Last Summer actually figures in an anecdote about Jack told by his friend Ben Bradlee. On the night of the West Virginia primary in 1960, Jack and Jackie nervously waited out the results in Manhattan with their good friends Ben and Tony Bradlee. (Ben, who worked for *Newsweek* at the time, later became the *Washington Post* editor whose reporters initiated the unraveling of the Watergate affair.) The two couples decided to relieve the pressure by taking in a movie. The picture that the Bradlees and Kennedys attempted to see was *Suddenly Last Summer*, but they didn't make it.

As Bradlee explains: "It was a film with a surprise ending, whose publicity included a warning that no one would be admitted after the show had started. And no one included the next president of the United States. No manner of identification could change the usher's instructions." That was that, so they crossed the street to another theater, one that specialized in porn:

This wasn't the hard-core porn of the seventies, just a nasty little thing called *Private Property*, starring one Katie Manx as a horny housewife who kept getting raped and seduced by hoodlums. We wondered aloud if the movie was on the Catholic index of forbidden films (it was), and whether or not there were any votes in it either way for Kennedy in allegedly anti-Catholic West Virginia if it were known that he was in attendance. Kennedy's concentration was absolute zero, as he left every twenty minutes to call Bobby in West Virginia. Each time he returned, he'd whisper "Nothing definite yet," slouch back into his seat and flick his teeth with the fingernail of the middle finger on his right hand, until he left to call again.

I've not been able to find a copy of *Private Property* anywhere (Fig. 41). It seems to be a lost and forgotten film, but the little I've turned up in Internet research suggests it offered a profeminist and anticapitalist critique of bourgeois marriage. Don't laugh. Its writer-director, Leslie Stevens, the son of a naval vice admiral who invented the gear deployed to halt incoming planes on aircraft carriers, started his writing career as a prodigy who contributed material to Orson Welles's left-wing Mercury



FIGURE 41 | *Private Property*, 1960

Theatre. After the war Stevens attended the prestigious Yale School of Drama. In the mid-1950s, Joanne Woodward starred in one of his off-Broadway plays that transferred to Broadway, and he wrote teleplays that appeared on such well-regarded live network series as *Playhouse 90* and *Kraft Theater*.

Stevens's claim to cult status today is due solely to the pathbreaking TV science fiction series *The Outer Limits* that, as an executive producer and sometimes writer-director, he unveiled in 1963. Like its rival series, *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits* brought to weekly prime-time television an often thought-provoking critique of mainstream norms and values, albeit in the form of quirky, edgy, or trashy tales of shock and horror. ("There is nothing wrong with your television. Do not attempt to adjust the picture.") Thus *Private Property* may have had more substance to it than Ben Bradlee deigned to notice. The title seems a deliberate amalgamation of Noël Coward's *Private Lives* and Friedrich Engels's *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

Even if no one in the Kennedy party was paying attention to *Private Property* that night, its "nasty" saga of the sexual exchange of women, together with the super-charged homophobic sexual psychosis of the gothic film playing across the street, *Sud-*

denly Last Summer, indicates that the Kennedys, Catholicism, the West Virginia primary, Jack's emergence from the Santa Monica surf, the erotic feeding frenzy surrounding him on that occasion, and *Life's* droll appreciation of his well-toned middle-aged physique (the caption notes that "he still has only a modest displacement" in the water): all of these loosely linked elements reveal the pervasiveness of culture (movies, sex, and magazines) in mid-twentieth-century politics and of politics in mid-twentieth-century culture.

CASTING OUR EYES BACK NOW to Love Field, 1963, we see none of the hysteria, the confusion, the animal sensuality, the implicit violence of Santa Monica, 1962. Decorum prevails. The only woman pressed close to Jack is his wife, and she's young, beautiful, radiant, and perfectly dressed. And he's all buttoned up in his natty lightweight wool suit with its neat little pocket kerchief, chalk-striped shirt, and geometrically patterned blue silk tie.

In seventeenth-century Dutch memento mori paintings, a human skull can sometimes be found on or near a banquet table that overflows with material abundance. It is there to remind the viewer that death lurks close at hand for everyone, no matter how successful or rich. The Love Field photo, in conjunction with the Santa Monica picture, has a similar memento mori effect. Beneath these fine clothes strode that fine body; within the hour both would be awash in his blood.

Jack's face, you will notice, is full, even jowly. In his youth, Jack Kennedy had been almost painfully thin. At the time he graduated from Harvard, he was six-foot-one but weighed only 145 pounds. Biographers have suggested that when he first ran for public office as a congressman from Massachusetts, his gangly, underweight form made female voters want to take care of him and feed him a good home-cooked meal.

By the time he arrived at Love Field seventeen years later, he had fattened up. Age had done it—he was now well into his forties. But so had the cortisone he was taking to control his Addison's disease, a life-threatening glandular affliction. A side effect of the steroid replacement treatment was facial puffiness. Surely he also gained weight thanks to the round of state dinners that had become a fixture of his administration.

Jack was unhappy about putting on extra weight. "Few things interest him more than a discussion of his own weight," Ben Bradlee noted in his diary after an intimate dinner party at the White House during which the president indulged in two helpings of a rich dessert and bemoaned the extra pounds he was carrying of late. On another occasion JFK recoiled from a snapshot of himself in a bathing suit. "It shows the Fitzgerald breasts," he explained to his friends, adding, "Better get rid of that." In 1962, along with millions of other middle-aged American men, Jack began using a new product on the food market known as Metrecal. Produced by the Mead Johnson

Company, Metrecal was the first liquid dietary meal substitute to be sold nationally, and it was an instant best-seller on supermarket shelves. A can of Metrecal supposedly supplied all the daily vitamins and nutrients a person needed, with few of the calories that normally came along with them.

Metrecal appeared at about the same time that low-calorie soft drinks were introduced onto the market: Diet Rite Cola in 1962 and Tab in 1963. The first meeting of Weight Watchers, organized by a dieting housewife in Queens, took place in May 1963. Meanwhile the President's Council on Physical Fitness gave official encouragement to the exercise craze that was taking hold throughout the land. Toning up the muscles and eliminating excess pounds was now a matter not simply of narcissism but of patriotic duty, for a nation of fit citizens was a nation fit to combat foreign enemies. The Santa Monica photo shows the president leading the way, and the trend continued right up to the doorstep of Dallas.

Life describes him: "Vibrant with confidence, crinkle-eyed with an all-embracing smile, John F. Kennedy swept his wife with him into the exuberance of the throng at Dallas' Love Field." The photo, in emphasizing Kennedy's "vibrant" physical appearance, enhanced by the way his sun-burnished hair stands out against the deep blue sky, gave visual form to the word he had made a keynote of his presidency, "vigor."

The presidential historian Theodore White recounts that when he interviewed the president's widow for *Life* a week after the assassination and she relived her traumatic memories of it, she recalled, almost as in a reverie, "His head was so beautiful . . . his mouth was so *beautiful*." As we look again at the Love Field photograph, we can see how Jackie, in her serene proximity to the handsome, charismatic, vigorous presidential body, must have served as a fantasy stand-in, a surrogate, for millions of other American women, like those two middle-aged sea nymphs in Santa Monica who clung adoringly to the dripping wet surfside Adonis whose Metrecal- and exercise-regimented forty-five-year-old body sizzled with male pinup beauty.

RED, WHITE, AND BLUE predominate in the Love Field photo. The colors of the American flag that the presidential jet bears on its tail are also those of the French flag. France as a nation and, even more, as a cultural concept manifests itself in this photograph, and not merely in the cut of the first lady's clothes.

As I have noted, Jacqueline Kennedy, to many Americans, signified cultural sophistication—more specifically, *French* sophistication. Her preference for the French pronunciation of her first name ("Zhack-leen") and her birth name, Bouvier, were themselves continual reminders of Frenchness. So too were the many gala Washington dinners over which she presided, their menus prepared by the White House master chef, the Frenchman René Vedon. The night the world's most celebrated cellist,

Pablo Casals, performed in the East Room, dinner consisted of *mousse de sole*, *filet de boeuf*, *galantine de faisau au porto*, and *sorbet au champagne*.

That same year, 1961, a former State Department employee turned housewife, Julia Child, published her first cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. It quickly became a national best-seller. In 1963 Child introduced her now legendary TV cooking show, *The French Chef*. For a certain middle-class segment of the population, preparing and eating French food and drinking French wine became a means of achieving liberal sophistication—what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in another context, calls *distinction*, the means by which a social group attempts to link itself to higher-status social entities and distinguish itself from groups of lower status.

At the time, America was well on its way to becoming a “fast-food nation.” McDonald’s started up in 1954; Burger King in 1957; Domino’s, Hardee’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Pizza Hut all in 1960. TV dinners, frozen foods, and Jell-O were ubiquitous at mealtime in suburbia. Despite, or perhaps because of, this burgeoning of convenience foods geared to a hypermobile, hyperactive middle-class society, Jackie Kennedy epitomized an aristocratic “slow-food” ideal to which many Americans, at least in their dreams, aspired.

IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING, the presidential jet that stretches, white, blue, and silver, behind the heads of the first couple was French in origin. That’s because it bore the markings of one of the world’s leading industrial designers, Raymond Loewy.

Born in Paris in 1893 and trained as an industrial engineer, Loewy served in the French army in World War I before immigrating to the United States in 1919. He arrived in New York expecting to find an advanced industrial civilization and was rudely disappointed. “I was amazed at the chasm between the excellent quality of much American production and its gross appearance, clumsiness, bulk, and noise,” he later recalled. “Could this be the leading nation in the world, the America of my dreams? I could not imagine how such brilliant manufacturers, scientists, and businessmen could put up with it for so long.”

Loewy set out to remedy the situation, and, in so doing, he became one of the inventors of a new profession called industrial design. The idea was to take the bare bones of industrial products and give them an attractive, user-friendly flesh; to create, that is, a desirable (and desire-inducing) exterior for commercially manufactured products. One of his early successes, for example, was the 1934 Coldspot refrigerator that he designed for the Sears, Roebuck Company. Refrigerators until then were perfectly functional but unsightly machines, boxy and awkward. Loewy transformed them into white, gleaming, hygienic-looking totems of curvilinear modernity—a design concept that remained basically untouched for the remainder of the twentieth century. (Not inci-

dentally, the modern style of American appliances helped Vice President Nixon to “win” his Moscow kitchen debates with Premier Khrushchev in the summer of 1959 by underscoring Nixon’s claims for American advancement.)

Loewy and his staff went on to design the exterior look of General Electric toasters, Remington electric shavers, Coca-Cola fountain dispensers, Greyhound buses, Studebaker automobiles, the Lucky Strike package, the Shredded Wheat cereal box, the Shell gas station sign, and the universally recognized corporate logos for Exxon, TWA, United Airlines, Canada Dry, Nabisco, and innumerable other brand-name consumer products. Loewy developed streamlined styling for locomotives, automobiles, and luxury liners. In his later years he designed the living quarters for the astronauts aboard NASA’s Skylab.

To be sure, Raymond Loewy wasn’t the only American industrial design giant of the twentieth century. Others include Norman Bel Geddes, Henry Dreyfuss, Harley Earl, Charles and Ray Eames, Paul Rand, and Walter Teague. But Loewy was the most famous of the lot. In 1949 *Time* ran a cover story on him, and his witty 1951 autobiography, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone*, swiftly became an international best-seller.

Given his world renown and his unabashedly lavish and hedonistic lifestyle, Loewy would seem to have been an obvious choice for Jack Kennedy when he decided to redesign the look of Air Force One. Moreover, Loewy’s French origin and his claim to have received much of his inspiration from such creative geniuses as Picasso, Diaghalev, and Chanel would have made him attractive to Jackie as well. (When she was twenty-one, she had written, “The three men I should most like to have known were Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and Diaghiliff.” She added, “If I could be a sort of Overall Art Director of the Twentieth Century, watching everything from a chair hanging in space, it is their theories of art that I would apply to my period.”)

“*Air Force One* was Kennedy’s baby,” Loewy recalled years later:

He and I discussed what it should look like, and he asked me to come back soon with some sketches. A week later I showed him four different versions, large color drawings about thirty inches wide, of the exterior markings. In every case I had replaced red [the color then in use on the presidential aircraft] by a luminous ultramarine blue. There were also various versions of simple classic typography. Kennedy became increasingly interested and suggested slight modifications. For our appointment, I brought along sheets of colored paper, scissors, razor blades, and rubber cement. Since his desk in the Oval Office was relatively small, we just sat on the floor cutting out colored paper shapes and working out various ideas.

According to Loewy, “JFK enjoyed his plunge into industrial design so much that he told his secretary, Mrs. Lincoln, that we were not to be disturbed while we were

‘working.’” After the Air Force One redesign was completed, the president suggested that they develop other projects together. “My view was that industrial design principles could be applied nationally; the physical appearance of the country could be aesthetically upgraded, but only with government leadership. The task represented an enormous project, aborted by JFK’s assassination.”

What this may suggest is that Kennedy saw the nation’s aesthetic style not as something frivolous and inconsequential but as integral to its cold war initiative. He had good reason to do so. Early in 1960, when the Republicans still controlled the White House, Stuart Symington, a high-ranking Democrat (and incidentally a friend and patron of Loewy’s), declared in the Senate that the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in nuclear armaments, resulting in a potentially dangerous “missile gap.” When Kennedy’s presidential campaign took up that theme, urging greater military preparedness and a determination to close the gap, Republicans insisted that no such gap had emerged during the Eisenhower-Nixon tenure in the White House. No one, however, denied the existence of another, truly stupendous, gap between the Americans and the Soviets—in consumer goods. In this cold war campaign the Americans triumphed easily, with Raymond Loewy, as it were, one of the five-star generals.

In 1990, four years after Loewy’s death (at age ninety-three) and six months after the fall of the Berlin Wall that had been erected during Kennedy’s watch, the International Design Center in Berlin mounted a large retrospective exhibition of Loewy’s work as an industrial designer. (Interest in Loewy had been evident decades earlier: the first German edition of *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* in 1953 had sold out in four weeks!) The organizer of the exhibition explained that the many American industrial products with which Loewy was so intimately associated—“from the toothbrush to the locomotive, from the lipstick to the ocean liner”—had an almost magical appeal in Europe after World War II.

We had hunger, but [Americans] had superfluidity, our cities had been bombed to rubble, theirs were flourishing metropolises. Then the Marshall Plan not only helped the reconstruction of the West German economy, it also brought a hitherto unknown flood of American goods to Europe, and for a short time it really looked as if the so envied American way of life could become a European reality as well. . . . Up to the mid-sixties American product culture influenced the whole of Western Europe, and the lifestyle of the masses followed its model.

SIX YEARS AFTER KENNEDY’S DEATH, his friend and aide Theodore Sorensen countered those who belittled the former president as the epitome of style over substance, someone who ruled by smoke and mirrors, a man who was all flash, a handsome face

with a winning smile, a clever line, and a beautiful wife but no moral depth. “There is a tendency now to separate the style from the substance—to regard the ‘Camelot’ flavor of elegance and sophistication as a world of glittering parties, pageantry, and press repartee wholly apart from the grim world of international crises and the daily grind of political campaigning.” They were not in fact separate, Sorensen maintained. But by 1969 few readers were likely to believe him.

How many times have we been told that Jack won the election in 1960 only because he looked better and had a smoother presence on TV than Nixon did and because his father bought up needed votes in places like Chicago? We are constantly reminded that, despite all the idealistic talk and noble rhetoric, he sent Green Berets to Vietnam and propped up antidemocratic regimes simply because they opposed the Communists. That he or his minions plotted Castro’s assassination, allowed anti-Castro “freedom fighters” to be hung out to dry at the Bay of Pigs, and played a form of Russian roulette with the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis. That he provided little real support to the emerging civil rights struggle and associated himself with black leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., only when circumstances made it politically impossible not to do so. That he preyed upon any woman, available or otherwise, who struck his fancy, including one thought to be a Soviet spy and another who was a mobster’s girlfriend, and that no place on earth, including his wife’s bedroom in the White House, was off-limits for his adulterous escapades.

Neither condemning Kennedy nor rushing to his defense interests me here. I want to point out, however, that the debate about style versus substance, which has preoccupied JFK observers since the scandals of the late sixties (Chappaquiddick) and the early seventies (Watergate) made high-level political demystification a national obsession, was already part of the national *aesthetic* discourse. Here, too, Raymond Loewy is apposite. Style over substance was the very complaint Loewy’s critics brought against him. They accused him, along with his fellow industrial designers, not to mention legions of Madison Avenue advertisers, of littering the visual landscape with tawdry deceptions, the moral equivalent of lies.

From the lofty heights of design modernism, inspired by the Bauhaus School dictate that form follow function and its latter-day manifestation in the architecture of the International School of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Eero Saarinen, Loewy’s product design seemed reprehensibly commercial. In the eye of purists, the man was not really a designer but a stylist.

Loewy claimed that his work was truly modern and not marred by an overemphasis on style. Thus he objected when a friendly interviewer used the term “sheathing” to describe the machine exteriors he was so famous for creating, because Loewy thought the word suggested casing that is in some sense superfluous to the machine within, a mere adornment, rather than an integral expression of it. He insisted, that is, that the

outer styling of his toasters and trains, his locomotives and lipsticks, was always a truthful visual expression of their inner content.

He also attributed some of the disparagement of his work to jealousy. “I’m sure my life style was an easy target for other designers,” he said. “It probably made some of them resentful and critical, because luxurious living didn’t seem to interfere with the firm’s increased reputation and large output. But a good life has been as important to me as my work; *in fact, the two of them are bound up in each other for me*, and I hope that my work in industrial design, that industrial design itself, has made life better for others as it has for me” (emphasis added). The point is that for Loewy, and I think the same may be said of John F. Kennedy (and Jackie as well), style, including lifestyle, far from being extraneous, manifested inner content. That notion would have been familiar to Jackie from the writings of one of her cultural heroes, the British aesthete Oscar Wilde.

To this way of thinking, Kennedy’s wit and charm, his handsome face and sexy body, his aura of wealth and hedonism, his devil-may-care insouciance—all these were in fact the true substance, the true meaning, of his presidency rather than phony packaging. Let’s go back to the material and symbolic object that kicked off this discussion, Air Force One in the Love Field photograph. Kennedy seems to have understood that it was as much a vehicle for ideas as for people and that the bundle of ideas it conveyed were those of American newness, elegance, speed, comfort, and global reach.

Cynics might say, and I would concede, that Kennedy was advertising himself by way of Air Force One. But Air Force One was also advertising America to Americans (and to the rest of the cold war world), providing a symbolic self-image. It amounted to a looking glass that showed them their own dazzling and glamorous future. That’s what it’s doing there in that photograph, the American flag proudly affixed to its tail. Chapter 7 describes its return to Washington three hours later with that tail between its legs, but even then Air Force One continued to function as Kennedy had foreseen, as a flying symbol of modern America.

IN THE EARLY 1960S the greatest intellectual proponent of the notion that style is substance, or at least inseparable from it, was the controversial Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan. I suspect that Kennedy never read a word of McLuhan in his life, yet he was the McLuhanesque president par excellence. *Understanding Media*, McLuhan’s then baffling but now prophetic-seeming tome of 1964, introduced into discourse our present usage of the term “media” and such now commonplace concepts as “global village” and “information age.”

It was McLuhan who advanced the notion that Kennedy had triumphed over Nixon in the televised debates because his relative casualness and nonchalance were so much

easier for viewers to watch—that is, to invite into their living rooms—than his rival’s overinsistent, almost hectoring, style of debate. But what really made Kennedy a McLuhanite was his instinctive grasp and thoroughgoing demonstration of McLuhan’s overarching precept, “The medium is the message.” (An analogue can be found in the contemporaneous principle governing the New Criticism in literary circles, that a poem’s form is its content and not a mere container—“sheathing”—for some other and more important interior meaning. New critics were fond of citing the paradox posed by Yeats, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?”)

McLuhan subtitled his book *The Extensions of Man*, arguing that every medium of communication—handwriting, print, radio, television, and movies—is a tool or device to extend us out into the world beyond our own bodies. Air Force One was a means of transportation but also of communication, its Loewy-and-Kennedy-designed exterior bearing its “message” of sleek and beautiful American modernity to the public as it carried the passengers inside to Dallas.

It also functioned as both a symbol and an actual producer of the global village that McLuhan subsequently described. It took Kennedy to Berlin. Nine years after Kennedy’s death, it transported President Nixon to Beijing.

JET TRAVEL WAS A NEW, thrilling experience for most Americans in the early 1960s. Today’s travelers take the jet airplane for granted or, worse, put up with it while fearing or loathing it: the noise and pollution, the crowded seating, the lost baggage, the annoying delays, the vulnerability to terrorism, the catastrophic disasters that could happen to any of us or our loved ones next time around. But in 1963 jet travel seemed at once chic (the term “jet set” was popularized in 1960 by Oleg Cassini’s gossip columnist brother, Igor) and futuristic (as spoofed in the animated TV show *The Jetsons*, which premiered in prime time in 1962).

Even then, however, jet travel could seem alarming, as in two memorable episodes of the hit TV series *The Twilight Zone*. In “The Odyssey of Flight 33,” broadcast on February 24, 1961, a jet airliner en route from London to New York encounters a freak tailwind that causes it to accelerate to an unprecedented speed. The crew lose radio contact with Idlewild (later renamed Kennedy) Airport, and when they look out the window at the isle of Manhattan, they see dinosaurs instead of skyscrapers. Flight 33, having broken the sound barrier and the time barrier, has inadvertently flown into the Earth’s prehistoric past. It never manages to return to the present.

“Nightmare at 20,000 Feet,” broadcast on October 11, 1963, tells of a salesman flying home from the sanitarium where he was treated for a nervous breakdown. Looking out his window, he spots a furry, man-sized creature that lands on the wing and stares in at him. He realizes that the gremlin means to sabotage one of the engines. When

the salesman's repeated attempts to alert the crew meet with no success, he pulls out a pistol and shoots the gremlin, who sweeps off the wing into the night. The plane lands safely and the salesman is carried off in a straitjacket, grinning with satisfaction because he has saved the lives of everyone on board.

For most Americans airplane travel itself was exotic. More than 80 percent had never flown, and those who had were unlikely to have flown by jet. America's first coast-to-coast air service was introduced in 1929. With numerous stops along the way, the trip took forty-eight hours to complete. By 1934 propeller-driven aircraft could ferry passengers from New York to Los Angeles in a mere thirteen hours, with three or four stops. Only a quarter of a century later, in 1959, did regularly scheduled jet passenger service begin between those two cities, reducing the time involved by nine hours and eliminating all stops in between. The age of jet travel had arrived.

The public's romance with the passenger jet was still in full bloom when Air Force One touched down at Love Field. That is why it made perfect sense for Kennedy to *fly* rather than drive the thirty miles from Fort Worth to Dallas. He was staging a grand theatrical entrance that was about much more than his own godlike prowess (though it was certainly that too). It was about the prowess and modernity of America and its ability to soar powerfully and gracefully into the future.

The presidential plane also beckoned respectfully toward the past, because America had been settled by pioneer families who crossed the continent in their own horse- or mule- or ox-drawn wagons. That, in any event, has been the long-standing myth and rugged-individualist ideal that Kennedy's arrival on Air Force One—his personal intercontinental jet—amply reinforced. At the very least, it promoted the American travel business, which had been moribund and was suddenly growing apace into one of the nation's most profitable capital industries.

Even the name of the jet, or lack thereof, contributed to its aura. Earlier presidents had given their planes homey monikers: "Sacred Cow" (FDR), "The Independence" (Truman), "Columbine" (Eisenhower), but Kennedy never named this one, so by default it was called Air Force One, the radio control tower name the air force used to designate *any* aircraft that carried the president. The press loved the sound of it, and so did the public, because it symbolized the burgeoning military technology (and terminology) the nation embraced and the Space Age (and space race) on which it was eagerly embarking.

In 1959 the popular historian of rocketry and aeronautics Martin Caidin published a book-length paean to civilian jet travel, *Boeing 707*. He recounted the extraordinary thrill awaiting every passenger: "Up, up . . . soaring into the deepening blue, scorning the cloud mountains, gaining mastery of them all." Empyrean realms, hitherto the exclusive playground of the gods and, only more recently, of fighter and test pilots, were now accessible to anyone with the price of a ticket. Caidin pitied those who would elect

not to experience this wonder for themselves as “people who have never lived . . . trapped in a two-dimensional world, blind to the beauty which soars about their heads.”

COMPARE CAIDIN'S PANEGYRIC with a sour commentary published by one of his contemporaries:

Recently I boarded a plane at Idlewild Airport in New York at 6:30 one evening. The next morning at 11:30 I was in Amsterdam. The flight was routine, at an altitude of about 23,000 feet, far above the clouds, too high to observe landmark or seamark. Nothing to see but the weather; since we had no weather, nothing to see at all. I had flown not through space but time. My only personal sign that we had gone so far was the discovery on arrival in Amsterdam that I had lost six hours. My only problem en route was to pass the time. My passage through space was unnoticeable and effortless. The airplane robbed me of the landscape.

That is Daniel Boorstin writing in *The Image*, his full-scale attack on modern American culture, mordantly subtitled *A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. Published in 1961 and often reprinted since, Boorstin's book is worlds apart from Caidin's. But Boorstin is after much bigger game. His book needs to be seen as the era's most sustained criticism of the value system that Raymond Loewy and John F. Kennedy vigorously represented and Marshall McLuhan conceptualized. That is, to use a term derived from McLuhan's phrase “the global village,” Loewy and Kennedy both devoutly believed in and championed globalization, whereas for Boorstin the “shrinking” of the globe signaled the modern individual's loss of self and authenticity.

The Image insists that Americans—or, more generally, inhabitants of the modern era—finding it increasingly difficult to know who they are, also find themselves unable to distinguish readily between truth and falsehood, reality and hype, history and legend, travel and tourism, heroism and fame. *The Image* introduced the concept of “the pseudo-event,” a commercial celebration or political happening (a supermarket opening, a campaign rally) planned so that it seems to occur spontaneously, as though generated by the will of the public itself. The book defined the celebrity as a pseudo-hero, “a person who is known for his well-knownness.” A hero, according to Boorstin, is distinguished by brave or important achievements, whereas the celebrity's greatest accomplishment is simply to have become the focus of media attention.

Hence the saga of Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly across the Atlantic solo, who thereby became the most recognized individual in the world: “Lindbergh's singularly impressive heroic deed was soon far overshadowed by his even more impressive publicity. If being well-known makes a person a celebrity, here was the greatest.

Of course it was remarkable to fly the ocean by oneself, but far more remarkable thus to dominate the news. His stature as hero was nothing compared with his stature as celebrity.”

Boorstin distrusted style and anything that smacked of it. Style itself was “pseudo.” *The Image* doesn’t single out Loewy by name, but it is generally scorching in its attitude toward product design and packaging as well as advertising and celebrity endorsements. As for Kennedy, the political stylist par excellence, Boorstin tars him along with Nixon in a passage ridiculing the 1960 presidential debates:

These four campaign programs, pompously and self-righteously advertised by the broadcasting networks, were remarkably successful in reducing great national issues to trivial dimensions. . . . Public interest centered around the pseudo-event itself: the lighting, make-up, ground rules, whether notes should be allowed, etc. Far more interest was shown in the performance than in what was said. . . . Of course, a man’s ability, while standing under klieg lights, without notes, to answer in two and a half minutes a question kept secret until that moment, had only the most dubious relevance—if any at all—to his real qualifications to make deliberate Presidential decisions on long-standing public questions after being instructed by a corps of advisers. . . . This greatest opportunity in American history to educate the voters by debating the large issues of the campaign failed.

The Image abhors image making and image selling, at least insofar as they falsify everyday reality and distract an all-too-easily distractible public. Jack Kennedy—assisted by his father and wife and some brilliant photographers and a willing public—was the great modern master of the art (or pseudo-art) of making and selling an image.

RECALL MARTIN CAIDIN’S HYMN to the glories of jet travel: “Up, up . . . soaring into the deepening blue, scorning the cloud mountains, gaining mastery of them all.” Isn’t that what Kennedy’s own personal Boeing 707—and, by extension, the Kennedy presidency itself—were all about: offering the earthbound folk of America an exciting and inspiring, if perhaps only fantasy-based, excursion into the stratosphere, scorning the cloud mountains and gaining mastery of them all?

To be in love with John F. Kennedy in 1963—whether as his wife, one of his mistresses, an American voter, or even, let’s say, a citizen of postwar, cold war Berlin—must have been a way of accompanying him, imaginatively and emotionally, into that sky and feeling the supercharged oxygen of life hurtling through one’s veins.

Here, in *Life*’s full-page color photo, on a resplendent autumn day in Dallas, the sleek light-blue Boeing jet that measures the distance between the president and first

lady but also unites them in its expansive reach bespeaks the dreams and promises of that now long-vanished moment in modern history. The vivid hues of the red roses, the pink suit, the blue necktie, the blue sky, the white gloves, the blue-and-white striped shirt, and the white and blue stripes along the fuselage all come together in a single compact geometric unit affixed high on the tail of the jet, the U.S. flag, as if to stamp this glorious day with an affirmation of patriotic pride in America.

As a patriotic icon, the Love Field photo might be called *American Modern* in contrast with the famous Grant Wood painting of three decades earlier, *American Gothic* (Fig. 42). Wood's painting portrays an Iowa farmwoman and her husband or father (in truth the artist's sister and his dentist), rigidly posed in front of a neatly kept farmhouse marked by a pair of Gothic Revival upper-story windows. By the late 1950s it symbolized, with tongue-in-cheek irony or otherwise, depending on the viewer, quintessential plain, upstanding, hardworking American folk. As the art historian Wanda Corn has amply demonstrated, "a virtual torrent of takeoffs of *American Gothic*" began to appear in the 1960s, often with famous heads, including those of presidential couples, grafted onto the bodies of the two farm folk. In this instance, however, the upright presidential couple does not parody Wood's neo-Victorians but rather replaces them as archetypes of national identity.

The Kennedys are no farmers. Jack glows with a movie star's mien and is clad in Brooks Brothers, not overalls. Jackie, dressed in Chanel, looks like a million bucks, with her luxuriant hair and radiant smile. The key object in the foreground of the picture is not an old-fashioned pitchfork but an armload of roses, which, despite their earlier-noted iconographic suggestion of martyrdom to come, in this context bring to mind a victorious beauty pageant queen or a diva cradling flowers at her curtain call. The Victorian Gothic farmhouse window in the background of Wood's painting reappears as a row of jet portholes.

Wood's couple warily guards America's past, but this one strides confidently into its future. The Love Field photo thus provides a snapshot of Kennedy era modernity and an emblem of that era's aspirations.

If in Caidin's terms those who had yet to fly in a jet were "people who have never lived . . . trapped in a two-dimensional world, blind to the beauty which soars about their heads," JFK had not only lived but had offered others, symbolically and poetically, the opportunity to live free and soaring, released from the iron cage of the two-dimensional world of cold war dichotomies, style-versus-substance antinomies, or merely the dull prose of daily life.

AIR FORCE ONE WASN'T SIMPLY an airplane, it was a Boeing 707 that had coursed like Apollo's chariot through the blue sky over Dallas, and Kennedy wasn't simply a



FIGURE 42 | Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930, Art Institute of Chicago

celebrity but, to those transfixed by him, a genuine hero, part 007, part Lawrence of Arabia, part Tom Jones.

We shouldn't forget that in 1963 those figures were primarily inventions of the mass media and thus, in Boorstin's terms, pseudo-heroes. Nonetheless, they galvanized the imagination of millions of spectators worldwide, and to minimize the social and political importance of that mythmaking would falsify modern history. As the editor of the *Shinbone Times* says at the end of John Ford's 1962 western elegy *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, "When the legend becomes the fact, print the legend." I take his words to mean not that we must accept the legend as truth but that we must seek the truth in the legend, especially as it was understood at the time.

The movie *Tom Jones* comes to a rousing and rollicking end in rhymed couplets urbanely measured out by a deep-voiced narrator:

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call today his own,
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today.

Those lines might well have served as a motto for Jack Kennedy. Except that there was no need to wait for tomorrow to do its worst.
That was coming within the hour.