

# Despite overkill, JFK is riveting docudrama

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Oliver Stone zealously pursues a conspiracy theory to explain President Kennedy's 1963 assassination in *JFK* (Warner Bros.).

Based primarily on two books, Jim Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins* and Jim Marrs' *Crossfire: The Plot that Killed Kennedy*, the movie chronicles the efforts of New Orleans District Attorney Garrison (Kevin Costner) to convict businessman and alleged CIA contact Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) of conspiracy in a well-orchestrated plot to murder the president.

Using a jumbled mix of docudrama recreations, archival footage, stills, TV clips and the Zapruder amateur footage of the shooting, Stone presents the portrait of a young, liberal president keen on pulling out of the early stages of the Vietnam conflict and suspected of being soft on communism.

This is posited as a direct threat to the military-industrial establishment bent on building popular support to force Castro from power in Cuba.

Wholly unconvinced of the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald (Gary Oldman) acted alone in assassinating JFK, Garrison

uncovers evidence that Oswald and his eventual killer, Jack Ruby (Brian-Doyle Murray), spent part of the summer before the assassination in the company of New Orleans homosexual businessman Shaw. Snitches Willie O'Keefe (Kevin Bacon) and David Ferrie (Joe Pesci) confirm this and Garrison brings Shaw to trial in 1968 despite key witness Ferrie's sudden, suspicious suicide.

Though Shaw is found not guilty in the movie, so much material contrary to the Warren Commission's findings is presented in the film. All this material gives the conspiracy premise the appearance of unassailable fact.

The subject matter is fascinating, but *JFK* is hard to digest with its parade of quick cuts, time shifts and unwieldy mix of film styles. Costner seems sure-footed in his portrayal of the obsessive prosecutor, dogged in his determination to bring the truth to light.

In the role of his wife and mother of his five children, Sissy Spacek tries to round out his persona, but is restricted to whining about his neglect of their family life.

Every possible argument against the one-man, one-gun Warren Commission report is aired in the three-hour, eight-minute running movie. The film



Warner Bros. Inc.  
Kevin Costner stars as New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in Oliver Stone's suspense drama *JFK*.

strongly suggests that the CIA, FBI, Pentagon and war profiteering corporations had a vested interest in replacing JFK with a more like-minded President Lyndon B. Johnson.

The movie's conclusion that the Warren Commission's report was not just badly flawed, but an outright cover-up, is plausible when not hampered by overkill — literally. The graphic Zapruder film of Kennedy's head splitting open, magnified on the big screen, is repeated several times.

Quite possibly the American people

will never have an adequate explanation of the Kennedy assassination, but this version of what really happened has returned the crime to the forefront of the public consciousness.

Due to brief but recurring shots of violence including staged and documentary footage of the assassination and subsequent graphic autopsy shots, fleeting shot of a homosexual party and intermittent rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

# Engrossing novel well worth republication, reading

*The Dean's Watch*, by Elizabeth Goudge, Servant Publications (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960); 383 pages; \$8.95.

By Monsignor Charles Diviney  
Guest contributor

This is a reprint of a novel written by a popular English author who died in 1984. Well-worth republication, it is one of the most engrossing pieces of fiction I have read in a long time.

The setting is a city in northeastern England, and the story's focal point is a gigantic Catholic cathedral. The cathedral is attached to a large monastery that has had a long and violent history. During the Protestant Reformation it was seized by the English Crown. Later, its priceless statuary and furnishings were ruthlessly and recklessly smashed by Cromwell and his soldiers.

The cathedral eventually was restored by the Anglican community, and the novel's action begins in 1865 with the appointment of Dean Adam

Ayscough as its pastor.

Ayscough is a brilliant man who had just succeeded in reorganizing, reforming and intellectually upgrading one of England's famous public schools.

He was a great and forceful administrator, but had difficulty in getting people to love him. They obeyed him, but mostly out of fear. He was painfully aware of his inability to communicate with others, even his beautiful wife, whom he loved dearly.

As the looming cathedral dominates the city and the surrounding villages scattered throughout the fens, so the dean dominates the lives of all in the city and its environs.

Leading the cast of characters is Isaac Peabody, an atheist by belief but by profession one of England's greatest horologists.

From Isaac we learn a great deal about the art of creating all kinds of time pieces — from the cathedral's massive clocks to the extraor-

inary pocket watches, including that of the Dean from which the novel's title is taken.

Isaac lives with his sister Emma, a bitter spinster who goes through the motions of Christianity, but with little kindness or charity. She and her brother have a servant, Polly, who is an orphan. A pretty, vivacious youngster, she falls in love with a young man named Job.

Miss Mary Montague is the only survivor of a large, noble family of which she was the ugly duckling. She overcomes her handicap, however, and becomes one of the most loving citizens of the community.

By contrast with the Dean, these and the lesser characters each undergoes a change of heart — an improvement, sometimes very slow, sometimes startling in its dramatic suddenness.

Isaac becomes aware of the existence of God when he realizes that his atheism was a reflection of a cruel and tyrannical God his father preached to

him when he was a child. Emma emerges from her miserable life through the Dean's counseling and the irrepressible joy of Polly. Polly becomes more radiant and lovable through her love of Job and, in turn, helps him to overcome unhappy memories of adolescence and enter a stable, creative manhood.

The story contains little violence, but the author manages to create an air of rising suspense, the climax of which is the smashing of a priceless clock during a scene of anger, suspicion and hostility. This incident changes several lives in an unpredictable fashion.

This novel demonstrates the great descriptive powers of author Elizabeth Goudge. She vividly depicted the countryside and drew characters that are fully alive and easy to visualize. Goudge also fully explained the religious services according to the Anglican liturgy, especially those taking place during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

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