

American Adulterer – A Novel by Jed Mercurio. Jonathan Cape 2009.

Jed Mercurio made his reputation as a writer with the BBC series *Bodies*, and has published two novels prior to *American Adulterer*. His third is a brilliant, compelling depiction of the life of John F Kennedy, referred to throughout as ‘the subject’. It is as powerful a portrayal of the dark side of Camelot as any you could find in non-fiction, with the added benefit that it contains a great deal about JFK’s medical symptoms and their treatment by a battery of doctors and quacks.

The reader is drawn into the story from the first words and held in a vice-like grip, alternately sympathetic and revolted, astonished and saddened. Mercurio writes with a doctor’s authority about JFK the patient, and the latter’s demise is made even more poignant by key aspects of his medical condition, which I shall not divulge here.

The depiction of the subject’s out of control libido, especially, is central to the novel, but sub-themes that bring added poignancy are his relationship with his wife and his children and his courage and power as a politician.

Everyone who remembers the day that JFK was assassinated recalls where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news, but readers of *American Adulterer* will be unable to shake the sense that if Lee Harvey Oswald’s bullets had not ended his life when they did, the golden Presidency of John F Kennedy could just have easily been finished prematurely by a wave of scandal or the combination of his serious illnesses.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh