



Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon

Wayne Koestenbaum

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Jackie Under My Skin is a richly original and fascinating investigation into how Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis transformed our definitions of personal identity and style. For thirty years we have lived with our internalized images of "Jackie," but until now no writer has definitively explored what it feels like to exist in imaginative and heartfelt connection to this ubiquitous icon. In an elegiac gallery of fantasies and tableaux, Wayne Koestenbaum explains the late First Lady's mesmeric hold on America by anatomizing the myths and metaphors that have attached to her. Analyzing her iconography with both passion and precision, he places stories about Jackie - and photos of Jackie - within the context of literature, film, and the idiosyncratic imagination. Following her into America's dreamwork, far from pious "family values," Wayne Koestenbaum dares to see her as an embodiment of pleasure, a figure of Circean extravagance, and a unique and necessary emblem of that most exhilarating of pursuits: freedom without responsibility.

Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon Details

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From Reader Review Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon for online ebook

Dkaufman says

Beautifully written, but I found myself getting tired of the topic...For real fans of Jackie (maybe not me)

Avis Black says

After finishing this book you're still left wondering why the author is obsessed with Jackie Onassis, a subject he never really explains. Readable, if somewhat peculiar.

?oincidental Dandy says

At first, I was a bit apprehensive about reading this book (having skimmed through it, I wasn't certain I wanted to read yet another Jackie-as-popular-icon book). But, in fact, it turned out to be excellent; a commendable work. It looks at Jackie (& her larger-than-life persona) from every angle imaginable; it views her more than a mythical icon - she's analyzed more as an archetype.

A self-acclaimed "Jackie worshipper," the author is articulate in his arguments & theories - he writes beautifully, flawlessly - & provides the reader with much to consider about the woman who was once America's First Lady.

Janet Young says

I had a bit of trouble adjusting to the style of this book. Each chapter is more like a list than an essay, the ideas accumulate rather than build, there are very few transitions between ideas, and the final paragraph of most chapters is an additional list item rather than what I would consider a conclusion. However, these may be characteristics of deconstructionism or cultural studies; I'm more used to the nonfiction style of, say, Adam Gopnik's essay "Learning to Drive," in the February 2 New Yorker.

The over-the-topness of this book reminds me of Nicholson Baker's The Mezzanine, and some of the odd turns of phrase recall David Sedaris. I watched the author on YouTube to try to get a better sense of him, which helped capture the voice for me (and got me interested in another of his books, HUMILIATION).

In the end, the most important aspect of a book is whether it does what it sets out to do. This book demands to be accepted on its own terms, and it ends up being both entertaining and haunting. The last chapter is an absolute jaw-dropper.

I'd never been interested in Jackie prior to reading this book, but as with Deborah Solomon's biography of Norman Rockwell, I've become eager to learn more about a figure who was just wallpaper to me before.

oline says

the greatest book EVER in the history of the written word.

Eric says

At his most exasperating, Koestenbaum seems a child of the forced captive mating of Roland Barthes and Camille Paglia. He's got his dad's parenthetical prolixity, and his mom's loopy associative rants. And I would add *Jackie Under My Skin* to the pile of Books That Should Have Remained Essays. That said, some of the chapters—"Jackie as Dandy," "Jackie and the Media," "Jackie as Diva"—make this recommendably brilliant despite the 2(.5) stars I'm giving it. Koestenbaum's special strength is his 1970s New Jersey gay suburban fanboy youth, when he played pageboy at powwows of the muumuu'd "block ladies" with their endless cigarettes, endless gossip, devotionally dog-eared copies of *Valley of the Dolls* and "braying phlegm-laced laughs." Not just some academic going for his Walter Benjamin Merit Badge, he's a collector-cultist with a deep command of three decades of tabloids. I could read him all day on these vessels of Jackie's fame:

In a representative mid-1960s issue of *Movie Mirror*, the ads cater to housewives, dreamers, and drag queens—to anyone, particularly a woman, who is unsatisfied with her body or life, and therefore seeks marital aids, bust enlargers, diet secrets, negligees ("the undie world of Lili St. Cyr"), depilatories, star glossies, vanishing creams, inflatable female dolls, vibrators, correspondence courses, cellulite removers, harem jamas, "Shape-o-lette" Lycra spandex corsets, height-increase shoe pads, falsies, muumuus, sea monkeys, false finger nails, hormone creams, and wigs, including maxie wig, swept-back flipper, curly-cue s-t-r-e-t-c-h wig, and a bippy tail that functions as braid, bun, twist, or dome.

Jackie habitation of the block ladies' tabloids was somewhat new to me. I knew she was paparazzi-beset but my major image of Jackie was supplied by sedate commemorative ephemera of the type collected by my mom, and once pored over by me (her birthday falls on Nov. 22, and she recalls a 9th birthday party converted into a conclave of crying moms and sullenly drinking dads).

Koestenbaum introduced me to the Jackie that first overwhelmed him, the sybaritic 70s jetset Jackie, a gluttonous shopper with a swarthy billionaire rebound and a killer private-island tan.

This is *Jackie Oh!*—or "Jacqueline Borgia," as Koestenbaum calls her—the source of so much titillated outrage in her former subjects, the Good People of America, who made her a tabloid icon:

In what kind of magazines did icon Jackie appear? Sometimes she materialized in magazines

that lived on the border of soft porn. For example, a *Jackie Kennedy Onassis* souvenir booklet from the late 1960s was published by a company, “Collectors,” that also issued *Peter Pecker, Oral Lust, Seduction of Suzy, Drugged Nurse, Queenie, Skirts, Whips Incorporated, Lesbian Foto-Reader, Adult/Lad Lovers, Punishment Journal, Chaplin vs. Chaplin*, and *Love Stories of a Wayward Teenager*. In contrast to these titles, children’s books about Jackie ostensibly aimed to teach youngsters how to read, or to offer moral uplift...It’s bizarre that there should be a children’s bio (“A See and Read Beginning to Read Biography” by Patricia Miles Martin) about Jackie O, since her image epitomizes late 1960s salacious yet safe “adult” pleasures. And yet icon Jackie had the knack of inhabiting the border of porn and pedagogy, and shuttling between the two without blinking: the same picture of Jackie could be a lech’s pinup, a patriotic talisman, and the picture that explained a baffling emergency headline.

Jackie Under My Skin begins with Kostenbaum standing in the cordoned crowd outside Jackie’s funeral cathedral; the first chapter, “Jackie’s Death,” records his discomfort and unease at “the media’s rehabilitation of the errant Jackie O.” “Only Maurice Tempelsman,” Koestenbaum writes of the service,

struck a note that recalled the Jackie O who had originally captured my affection: reading the C.P. Cavafy poem “Ithaka,” he artfully resummoned her years in Greece with Ari. It was wonderfully contrary to the spirit of the mawkish and idealizing media coverage that Jackie’s Jewish companion should have chosen a poem celebrating the louche and sybaritic virtues for which Jackie O, in the tabloids, had long been recognized. Of particular interest were the lines: “may you stop at Phoenician trading stations / to buy fine things, / mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony, / sensual perfume of every kind”—a passage confirming and blessing the acquisitive aspects of Jackie’s reputation that the media momentarily neglected.

Koestenbaum wonders about the future of Jackie’s “iconicity.” I think it’s safe to say that the 70s tabloid icon no longer has any power to shock, and has yielded entirely to the First Lady—just as we remember Thin Elvis and Black Michael—and after all, as he notes, Jackie chose to be buried at Arlington, next to Jack, under the eternal flame. (I wonder if Tempelsman also meant “Ithaka” to stand for Arlington, for the mausolean Kennedy Legacy; the poem’s last stanza, according to Wikipedia, reads:

*Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your final destination.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better for it to last many years,
and when old to rest in the island,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to offer you wealth.)*

Paparazzi images of the Aegean-yachting Jackie, once so scandalous and breathlessly consumed, are now mainly staples of fashion magazines whose editors wish to impart glamorous precedent to this or that season’s large sunglasses and strappy sandals. Which is all the more reason I’m glad Koestenbaum gave us this encapsulating, eccentrically tributary media memoir.

Borden says

I thought this book was going to be a joke, but it was really an interesting examination of someone who was a cultural phenomenon and icon. I was glad to see that I'm not the only one out there who has Jackie O. dreams.

Lily says

This book had a few interesting tidbits; otherwise it was an unending run-on of the author's opinion of what was behind Jackie's persona. The author seemed obsessed with making sexual comparisons with a lot of the incidents surrounding Jackie. If one wants to read this as a psychological fantasy/ historical novel, maybe it would suit the reader. The book could have been much shorter if a lot of the imagined facts, what I deemed page fillers, had been left out.

Jen Janik says

Interesting perspective on Jackie, but not my favorite. It was more like a stream of consciousness than quality writing.

Rick Rapp says

Going into this book, I knew I liked Jackie Kennedy and respected her for all she represented and had endured in her life. I had no idea how much I respected her until I got into this book. In the author's defense, he has a good writing style and his vocabulary is excellent (if pretentious.) But all in all, this book is vulgar. It focuses on Jackie's "iconicity" to use his word and posits such questions that begin with "What if Jackie had..." or "What if Jackie had never..." But she did, Blanche. Had this book ended 100 pages sooner, I might not have found it so tiresome and so disrespectful. For someone who professes high regard for his subject, I certainly didn't find it here. By his tasteless treatment of Jackie Kennedy, I found myself affirming the good I felt for and about her. Would I recommend this? Only with the warning label: Beware pseudo-intellectuals masquerading as deep thinkers.

Amy says

A great read and perhaps worth a revisit in an election year where scrutinizing a candidate's spouse (read "woman", read "wife") is a minor pop culture sporting event -- because of course the "First Lady" of the reigning superpower should represent all women ... HA! Jackie wouldn't stand for the conventional dither ... and neither does Michelle! Rock the bump!

Gina says

I liked reading about Jackie but didn't care for the author's interpretation.

Erin Tuzuner says

Divas and queer intellectualism at their finest.

Leslie says

Couldn't get through this. Was too much idol worship and no substance. Why I hate tabloids.
