The New York Times Book Review

Paperbacks

Best Sellers

Mass Market Paperbacks

Signet, $1.95.) Five deft exercises in the storyteller’s art, by the author of “The French Lieutenant’s Woman.”

9 APPOINTMENT IN DALLAS, by Hugh C. McDonald. (Holt, $1.95.) The final solution to the assassination of JFK, proffered by a retired Southern California law enforcement officer.

10 SOMETHING HAPPENED, by Joseph Heller. (Ballantine, $2.25.) The middle-aged anguish of a middle-rung corporation man.

Assassin’s trail? Hugh C. McDonald, retired California law enforcement officer and helicopter service operator, has a wondrous tale to tell. Back in 1964, while serving as head of security for Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, he was told by his sometime C.I.A. boss the name of the man who actually killed John F. Kennedy. “Saul,” a professional assassin, had been hired by “certain private interests” who had reason to desire Lyndon B. Johnson in the Presidency; Lee Harvey Oswald had been recruited to fire at the same time to cover up the hired killer’s guilt.

A man obsessed, McDonald stalked the elusive Saul across Western Europe in circumstances worthy of a novel of international intrigue. At last, in 1972, he met his man in London’s Westminster Hotel and obtained his confession. Saul disappeared into the shadows. McDonald hurried home to sell his story. But publishers here, fearing lawsuits, would have none of it unless it was presented as fiction.

Finally he decided to publish the account, himself, arranged with the Kable News Co., a large paperback distributor, to handle it under its Zebra imprint. Last month Kable sent out 700,000 copies of “Appointment in Dallas: The Final Solution to the Assassination of JFK,” narrated with total recall and embellished with fuzzy pictures of Saul. McDonald embarked on a cross-country tour of TV stations.

The true story at last? The equivalence of flakiness? Whatever the book is, it’s No. 9 on this week’s mass market best seller list.

Novelizations. Movie tie-ins are the specialties of some of the savviest pros in the paperback industry. Most large houses have an editor whose duty it is to follow the flicks, poring over trade journals daily, making the rounds in Hollywood three or four times a year. Sometimes he can arrange for the purchase of a novel still in manuscript that seems destined to become a film. Often, when he hears of a likely script, he buys tie-in rights from the producer, arranges for a “novelizer” to convert it into a book.

Usually a novelization is little more than a faithful transformation of the script into narrative style: heavy on dialogue and the movements and facial expressions of the characters, short on psychological undertones. This month four books based on just-released films are in the racks: “The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes’ Smarter Brother,” by Gilbert Pearlman (Ballantine); “The Black Bird,” by Alexander Ed-wards (Warner); “Embruny,” by Louis Charbonneau (Warner), and “Lucky Lady,” by Julie Rood (Bantam).

Because its producer expects “Lucky Lady” to be one of the year’s biggest grossers, Bantam’s print order is 350,000 copies (instead of the average 110,000 to 250,000). Of Julie Rood, they’ll say only that it’s “the pseudonym of a West Coast-based historical novelist.” Of the fact that the eager-to-please-the-public producer substituted a cheery conclusion even while Bantam was shipping out its first copies with a sad ending . . . well, in the publishing world such embarrassment just can’t be avoided.