

# Manchester Says: 'I Had to Fight'

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By JOHN CORRY

The waitress said, "I see your picture all over now," and a man nearby pretended to be deep in a cup of coffee while he stared at him over the rim. William Manchester smiled a small, uncomfortable smile and spoke more softly. He was talking about his book.

"I had to fight for it," he said. "It was like my child. Wouldn't a parent dash into a burning house to save his child from the flames? That was just the way it was."

Not all the people involved in the dispute over "The Death of a President," the book Mr. Manchester wrote, agree with him.

Harper & Row, which will publish the book, had reservations about it. Mrs. John F. Kennedy called it "tasteless and distorted." After her suit to prevent its publication was ended in a settlement out of court, Senator Robert F. Kennedy told a friend:

"They have the money, and we have the public relations problem."

Mr. Manchester says he does not understand the Kennedys, but he insists that sometimes they made him feel as if he were a paid historian, although they did not support him financially while he wrote the book.

"Mao and Jackie are the two most inscrutable people I know," he said.

Mao Tse-tung is chairman of the Communist party of China.

While gathering material for the book, Mr. Manchester had two interviews with Mrs. Kennedy, recording about 10 hours of the conversation on four reels of tape.

The tapes are now in a safe deposit box. Simon H. Rifkind, Mrs. Kennedy's attorney, has one key to the box, Mr. Manchester the other.

"This is humiliating," Mr. Manchester said. "Am I a pervert? Have I ever belonged to any disloyal organizations? The Kennedys entrusted me



The New York Times  
William Manchester

with all kinds of confidences, and I never violated any of them, but now I'm suspect."

Mr. Manchester admits that Mrs. Kennedy made a deep emotional impact on him during the interviews. "She must be seen to be believed," he said. "When she turns on the charm, it's incredible."

"The one Kennedy I had to

please with the book was John F. Kennedy," he said. "I think I did that. You have to tell a story as straight as you can and to do less is to violate your integrity."

Mr. Manchester says Mrs. Kennedy first objected to publication of the manuscript when she learned that Look magazine had paid \$665,000 for its serialization rights.

However, the Kennedys say that Mrs. Kennedy did not know of the money involved in the sale to Look, and that she was agitated simply because Mr. Manchester had sold the manuscript without her approval of the text.

Furthermore, they say they understood that the money from the sale was going entirely to the Kennedy Library in Cambridge, Mass.

"Why would Mrs. Kennedy have been agitated about the money if she didn't know Manchester was getting it?" Richard N. Goodwin, one of Mrs.

Kennedy's advisers, said. Mr. Manchester says the controversy was unfortunate, and that if he had dealt more directly with Mrs. Kennedy or the Senator, not with advisers, it might not have arisen. "For the first time I know what it was like to live in a monarchy," he said. "It was like she was Marie Antoinette, completely isolated from the world around her by her court advisers."

## Feelings Transferred

Mr. Manchester, who wrote an earlier book about President Kennedy, "Portrait of a President," said that at first he had transferred his feelings about the President to Mrs. Kennedy and the Senator, and that this had been a mistake.

"They don't understand contemporary history," he said. "John Kennedy did."

Mr. Manchester denies that he suffered a nervous breakdown while writing the book, although he admits to having had emotional difficulties.

Mr. Manchester said he had entered a hospital on Nov. 26, 1965, suffering from exhaustion and had stayed in bed 12 days.

On the 13th day, he said, he arranged to have a doctor's vacant office put at his disposal and spent the next eight weeks working there on the book.

He stayed in the hospital, he said, to avoid phone calls and distractions. Before then, he said, he had worked virtually every day for two years, usually as many as 15 hours a day.

He does, however, say that his emotional problems were considerable. He recalls an evening in the previous spring, sitting at home, when his son asked him the date.

"I told him it was Nov. 22," he said. "I sat there, reading a paper for a full two minutes, and then realized what I had said. I looked at my son, and he was stricken, but for me time had stopped on Nov. 22, the day Kennedy was shot."

Mr. Manchester says that by the fall of 1965 he was becoming overcome with exhaustion.

"I was just tired," he said. "I would get a pen and look at the manuscript, and I just couldn't do anything. I was at this part about Lee Harvey Oswald and I would just sit and look at it. I would get a good night's sleep and still be tired. I'd just had it."

On the night of Nov. 22, 1965, precisely two years after

the assassination, he wrote that Lee Oswald was killed in the presence of more than 70 uniformed police officers.

He says that after that he sat and stared at his typewriter.

## 'Theater of Absurd'

"Oswald," he says. "This was the theater of the absurd. This was Camus. I was overwhelmed. A few days later I was in the hospital."

Mr. Manchester denies strongly that his book is unfair to anyone, although he admits that at times he had to be cautious to prevent his personal and political feelings from intruding into the book.

For instance, in a letter to Mrs. Kennedy he wrote:

"Though I tried desperately to suppress my bias against a certain eminent statesman who always reminded me of someone in a grade D movie of the late show, the prejudice showed through. This was cheap of me, but I suppose there is a little meanness in all of us."

But these unfair references, he wrote, "that might conceivably have rubbed off on the Kennedy family" were cut from the book.