

It seemed from the interview that Manchester might be hinting that, far from a lone assassin ("a minor figure in the story"), there had been a conspiracy or even a seizure of the Government in Dallas on November 22. Only when "the battle of the book" erupted in November 1966 did it become clear that Manchester accepted and endorsed categorically the Warren Commission's verdict that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

~~The battle~~ The battle between Manchester and the Kennedys raged on the front pages and in the courts for some three months. The Kennedys sought to have ~~some~~ parts of Manchester's book suppressed, over and above deletions already imposed by their agents at an earlier time (indeed, Manchester claims in an article in Look of April 4, 1967, that Robert F. Kennedy tried to have the entire book suppressed); Manchester and his several publishers resisted. The scandal saturated the news media day after day, glutting and stupefying even the most ardent students of the assassination. Revelations poured out—of the progressive deterioration of relations between Manchester and his powerful adversaries, of the acrimonious accusations each hurled at the other with growing abandon, and of the actual ^{material in} ~~contents of~~ the manuscript whose suppression had been achieved or was being negotiated. Despite the endless flow of newsprint, it never became entirely clear what the hostilities were really about. Was it a struggle about material unflattering to the Kennedys? or about the ugly portrayal of LBJ by Manchester, which the Kennedys, knee-high ^{deep} in political strategy for the future, wanted to prettify? or both? Cynics went so far as to suggest that the battle had been joined ^{because} ~~to that~~ the Kennedys ^{wanted to} ~~could~~ make certain that the full ugliness of the portrait of LBJ would not be overlooked ^{even} ~~by anyone, whether or not he read the~~ ^{those who did not read the} book.

An out-of-court settlement was followed by a new saturation—this time, extensive excerpts from The Death of a President by William Manchester, published in Look in four successive installments, each preceded by full coverage of the contents in all the news media. Culminating this flow of gossip, controversy, disclosure,

and revelation, the release of The Death of a President by Harper and Row on April 7, 1967, with all its titillating secrets prematurely stale, could only be anticlimatic. Deprived of its value as sensation, the book is leaden and dull. The style is sophomoric and pretentious; ~~the~~ historical perspective is totally lacking, for Manchester's vision never rises above what ~~the~~^a public relations office might produce on behalf of the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party; the book is soaked in sentimentality and obsessed with trivia. In short, Manchester's book ~~manan~~ not only is hopelessly compromised ~~by its origin~~ as a work of managed history--it is mediocre in its vision, style, and structure. Louella Parsons would have done almost as well.

Since Manchester has the audacity to advertise his compromised, censored work as a "complete, accurate" history, it comes as an added surprise that he has not seen fit to ~~comply with~~^{Satisfy} a fundamental obligation of any researcher--the documentation ^{asserted} of fact. Manchester explains:

"I went to the mat with the issue of annotation. I arose with a painful verdict: no page-by-page footnotes, other than those necessary to the immediate sense of a passage. It hurt because I knew that every~~one's~~ statement, every fact, every quotation in my manuscript could be followed by a citation."

The reason, he explains, is the protection of sources. But he is "considering" depositing in the Kennedy Library the volumes of transcribed interviews and the portfolios of documents on which he relied, for the edification of qualified scholars after the death of all direct descendents of the murdered President who were living at the time of the assassination.

Since no critic of Manchester's book is likely to survive long ~~enough~~ enough to check his sources, it is fortunate that some tools are at hand already with which his accuracy can be measured. Before the book was ^{even} released, one

discrepancy was uncovered by a leading magazine. Manchester had written that no one of Kennedy's loyal lieutenants was present at Johnson's swearing-in aboard the Presidential plane, but photographs were published which showed that Ken O'Donnell was present. Confronted by the evidence, Manchester retorted, "Photographs can lie." (Meet The Press, NBC Television, February 12, 1967) But it never occurs to Manchester that photographs produced as evidence against Lee Harvey Oswald also can lie, for--and here is what indicts his book as wholly fraudulent and ridiculous--he swallows whole hog the discredited ~~finding in the~~ ^{thesis} Warren Report, [^] that Oswald was the lone assassin.

This is not to say that Manchester is not rather supercilious about the Warren Commission. He says in ~~Time~~ Look of April 4, 1967 (page 64 column 2) that, "Rather cannily, I thought, the Chief Justice had also invited me to read a first draft of the Report and declare, as a friend of the family, that its findings were acceptable to the Kennedys in every respect...I demurred, explaining that I felt it would be improper." One must agree ^{that} it was a highly improper request. Was the Chief Justice concerned with truth, or with pleasing the Kennedys? If they had demanded changes or deletions ^{in the Warren Report,} would the Chief Justice have complied? Could he decline, when he ^{himself} had sought the Kennedys' approval?

As for the self-righteous Manchester, why did he consider it improper for the Warren Report to be submitted for Kennedy approval, while he himself subjected his manuscript to relays of Kennedy-appointed censors and consented to the mutilation of his work? Here is hypocrisy unabashed. If we had no information about the Warren Report, or the Manchester report, other than this, it would be enough in itself to brand both works as serving a purpose other than historical accuracy.

Although Manchester disdains the Warren Commission for glossing over the sins of the Dallas Police, the FBI, and the Secret Service, he has no criticism of its case against Oswald. ^{It was completed in March 1966, but it} ~~His~~ book [^] includes an epilogue written sometime after the

death of Jack Ruby on January 3, 1967. Yet Manchester virtually ignores the storm of controversy about the Warren Report which had built up since the preceding summer, with a progressive erosion of confidence in its findings--findings now repudiated by major national figures and institutions, by cardinals and judges, not merely by the eight or ten independent critics who stood alone, from the first, in rejecting the malodorous official case. Manchester, who never interviewed or psychoanalyzed Oswald, makes flat assertions about his actions and emotions in exactly the same manner as he relates the actions and emotions presumably described to him by persons whom he did interview. Pretending to an omniscience which he scarcely possesses, he tells us at what moment Oswald felt desperate and rejected, at what moment he "went mad," at what moment he fired a last shot--even that he slept soundly in his jail cell on the night after the assassination. This is a charlatan, not a historian; he exceeds even the excesses of the Warren Commission in his readiness to wrest incriminating "fact" from inimical evidence, in his violence to logic, in his unconscionable lack of fairness and objectivity. What are Manchester's forensic qualifications, that he ventures to pinpoint from vague, contrary, and non-existent data the very instant at which Oswald "went mad"? Self-interest alone should have compelled Manchester to greater discretion than to charge Oswald with paranoia, or Robert Kennedy with ~~an~~ dementia (as he suggests in his Look article): after all, Manchester is the only one of the three known to have been under psychiatric care.

He takes cognizance of the decline and fall of the Warren Report only once, *indirectly,* in a footnote defending his statement (and the Warren Report's) that a bullet entered the back of President Kennedy's neck. Manchester says:

"...the issue is resolved by the X-rays and photographs . . . the author has discussed (them) with three men who examined (them) before (they were) placed under seal. All three carried special professional qualifications. Each was a stranger to the other two. Nevertheless, their accounts were identical. The X-rays show no entry

wound 'below the shoulder'...the photographs
...reveal that the wound was in the neck."

Apparently we are supposed to take on faith not only Manchester's word for this or that, sans annotation, but also the pronouncements of three unnamed experts with whom Manchester conversed, ^{on an unspecified date!} But the historical record should not rest on the ^{unsupported} word of the historian, especially when ~~himself~~ his services have been leased by interested parties, and when he is demonstrably careless and unreliable on simple questions of fact. For example, Manchester repeatedly refers to Charles Brehm, an eyewitness to the assassination, as "Charles Brend;" he says that the Dallas office of the Secret Service is a five-man office, when the agent in charge testified that it was a seven-man office (Warren Commission Hearings, Volume XIII, page 57); and that FBI agent James Hosty learned on November 4, 1963, that Oswald worked at the Book Depository, when Hosty testified that he learned this on November 1, 1963 (Ibid., IV, page 450).

No, I am not about to take Manchester's word about the contents of the autopsy photographs, as described to him by anonymous experts, nor about anything else which depends on his scholarship or judgment. A ludicrous example of Manchester's judgment is rendered during his attack on Dr. Earl Rose, the Dallas Medical Examiner, for opposing the removal of the President's body. Manchester pours venom on Dr. Rose, who was merely attempting to comply with the law in good conscience, as he was charged to do. Under the law, the autopsy should have been performed by the Dallas Medical Examiner--and in the light of the ^{deficient and discredited} autopsy report that emerged from Bethesda, we can only wish that the spunky Dr. Rose had prevailed against the battery of Presidential assistants and Secret Service agents. There is no reason to believe that ^{Dr. Rose} ~~he~~ would have produced an autopsy report as incomplete, contradictory, and untrustworthy as that of the three Government

surgeons, who performed the Kennedy post mortem examination. This autopsy report on Oswald was a model. Both these autopsy reports were on the contrary, Dr. Rose's autopsy report on LHO is meticulous. Both autopsy reports were

available to Manchester, as well as the numerous books, articles, and press stories detailing the scandalous defects and contradictions in the Kennedy autopsy. Yet Manchester, conceding that "Rose had an ironclad case" for demanding custody of the body, says that "he should have realized that an assassination without a scrupulous post-mortem was unthinkable."

We refer him to the curious admission by Dr. Thornton Boswell, one of the Bethesda autopsy surgeons, that he made an ^{unfortunate} "diagram error" because he did not realize, at the time of the autopsy, that the diagram in question would be made public. It is scarcely becoming to a "historian" to declare as "unthinkable" an unscrupulous performance which has already been admitted by its perpetrator.

All of Manchester's pronouncements about the criminal evidence in the assassination and about Oswald's guilt must be discarded, on grounds of his ignorant and uncritical adherence to the ~~findings and conclusions~~ Warren Report. His portrayal of Oswald is so wild of the mark and so deformed by a paroxysm of personal rage and disgust that ~~Manchester's~~ ^{his} portrait of Lyndon B. Johnson must also be questioned. Admittedly, what he describes is consistent with the Johnson we know—ruthless, oily, vulgar, hypocritical, vain, arbitrary, cruel, and power-hungry. Manchester vibrates with loathing of LBJ, but he doesn't have the courage of his loathing. He pays lip service to LBJ's *performance and talents*, and justifies, where he can, LBJ's actions in the aftermath of the assassination. But as I read, I kept wondering: Is Manchester trying to tell us something? Is he trying, without actually saying so, to suggest that Johnson was the prime mover of events in Dallas? Or that the Kennedy lieutenants thought ^{he was} ~~so~~ those who were on the flight back to Washington ~~and~~ who proclaimed that for them there ~~was~~ only ~~the~~ President on board ~~and~~ ^a was in ~~the~~ casket? ^{occasional} ~~One~~ ^{One} example of Manchester's ^{daring} is his condemnation of Dallas as a center of utter evil, populated by degenerate Nazi-like ultras and the totally uncivilized types who, in fact, are found there. He will not be safe if he visits

that city, for he has boldly given offense to its populace and its power-structure. What is not clear is whether Manchester loathes Dallas for what it is, or only because it was a declared enemy of ~~Manchester's~~ ^{his} idol, President Kennedy. For Manchester's view of the assassination is essentially personal, subjective, gossipy, and sentimental. The political context ^{the} and forces ^{at work} ^{behind the scene} have all but escaped his child-like preoccupations, ~~for~~ ^{How} can one understand that assassination in Dallas on Friday, November 22, 1963, without even mentioning the assassination in Saigon on Friday, November 1, 1963, and without seeing ^a ~~the~~ connection between those events and the present carnage in Vietnam? When we progress from the murder of ~~him~~ a head of a country, to the murder of a country, it is necessary at least to search for a possible relationship ~~between the events~~

When the real history of the assassination is written, it will perhaps become apparent that it was not at all a random, isolated, lunatic act, but a logical and inevitable piece in a large mosaic that is not yet complete. Manchester's book is not that history; it is already an anachronism, a ~~shabby~~ grandiose and empty bore, the taste of which one can hardly wait to get rid of. ^{It} During the battle-~~of-the-book~~, Manchester was hospitalized with a respiratory infection. Robert and Jacqueline Kennedy, ~~with legal action~~ ^{having} ^{legal action} instituted ^{against} him, wired Manchester their get-well wishes, inspiring Murray Kempton to white-hot rage. Kempton wrote in his column of December 28, 1966:

The Kennedys are not responsible for Manchester's illness. A man gets sick on his own. But they are responsible for everything that went before he got sick; they seduced him and then they betrayed him; and then they harried him and then they defamed him; and to hell with their good wishes when he is sick; let them go down on their knees for what they did when he was healthy. They will live long, and it is time for them to learn that a public relations sense is not a conscience.

When I read Kempton's column, I felt inclined to agree with him. Now that I have read Manchester's book, I think Kempton might better have said, "A plague on both your houses!" Manchester is no better than his formidable tormenters, and he may be worse. For his bad, careless, and untrue book, he will nevertheless become a very wealthy man, enriching himself by more than two million dollars on royalties and serialization rights alone. No one will call him a "scavenger," for he preaches the gospel of the lone assassin according to Warren, and that buys immunity. (Ask ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Gerald Ford, Jean Stafford, or Charles Roberts.) With that kind of money in his bank account, Manchester will not need to fret if he incurs the disrespect of the academic or literary world. He will not even need to worry about the displeasure of this President, or the next. In America, it does profit a man to lose his soul.

Sylvia Meagher
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