

Stamm

Jan. 30, 1967

MANCHESTER, HISTORICAL NOVELIST

In installment two in Look magazine, issue of Feb. 7, 1967, from Death Of A President, author William Manchester, first sponsored and then disavowed by Robert and Jacqueline Kennedy, escalates the assault on truth launched in the first installment two weeks before. Both friend and foe of the Warren Commission must take angry exception to his arbitrary howling errors of fact. More than one critic will note, with varying cause and effect, the historian turned psychiatrist in the first installment blossoms as a novelist in the sequel.

"Part Two" of the Look cliffhanger is of the genre of historical fiction. Possibly because of condensation for serialization in Look, it is barren of philosophic content and judgmental commentary. It does not expound ideas. Thus far, it is at the opposite pole from great works of historical literature. Its species is ~~Book~~ Book of the Month Club. Even so, it compares unfavorably with Gone With the Wind. In the latter work it is possible to find nobility of character revealed under the stress of great events. Manchester's canvas is smaller. He is concerned with a single event. This gives him the force of concentration. His characters are contemporary historical personages. All are reduced from mythic to human scale and are made to appear weaklings. He has no heroes and heroines, only an antihero, Oswald.

Like much of its kind, Manchester's opus exhibits the result of industrious research; it uses literary style, pen portraiture, drama, and irony to falsify historical truth. Its central theme is the familiar lie spread wide by the U.S. government with the assistance of the mass communication media: a single gunman named Oswald, unaided, slew the thirty fifth president of the United States. In support of this plot line Manchester makes liberal

use of the literary artist's privilege of rearranging fact in working out his plot.

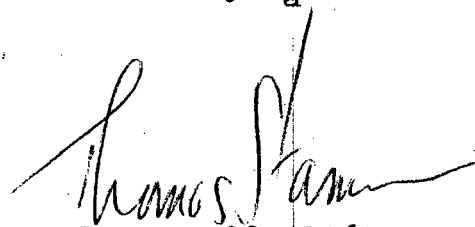
In two instances, at least, the result of this practice may have been the revelation of more than was intended. When Malcolm Kilduff, Kennedy's Assistant Press Secretary, asked permission of Vice President Johnson in Parkland Hospital to announce the President's demise, Johnson replied, according to Theodore H. White in *Making of the President*, 1964, it was better to wait until the Vice President and entourage had quit the hospital. The reason: "We don't know whether this is a world-wide conspiracy, whether they're after me as well as they were after Kennedy, or whether they're after Speaker McCormack or Senator Hayden. We just don't know." In his unsworn statement to the Warren Commission in July 1964 Johnson made no reference to this conversation, nor to the fact he, in common with almost everyone else in the world, thought the assassination was the work of a conspiracy. Manchester, who sought and failed to obtain an interview with President Johnson, assures us Johnson told Kilduff, "We don't know whether it's a Communist conspiracy or not." Dialogue, obviously, is not Manchester's forte. Was it of no significance that Johnson, who as Vice President thought the assassination politically motivated, gave official currency, as President, to the lie a solitary nobody decapitated the government of the United States? Did historian Manchester explore the matter? Did ^{the} novelist forbear to make use ^{of} this precious gift of literary irony? Or did the hardheaded editors of *Look* strike a blow for the cause of antiCommunism?

Connally fares worse than Johnson. Manchester portrays him terror struck and feeling doomed after he was hit, and shrieking,

"No, no, no, no, no! They're going to kill us both." Afficionados of accuracy have reason to complain: the Warren Commission quotes only three "noes." Where did Manchester get the other two? But truthseekers can rejoice. When the wounded Governor "panicked," the Commission was told and repeated, he exclaimed, "They're going to kill us all." Manchester changed only one word, it is true. And, in effect, made that change an accusation. For Connally, as he testified, uttered his despairing cry after he had recognized a single rifle shot, turned to his right to see the President over his shoulder, failed to see him, turned to his left and still did not see him, and was turning again to his right when he felt a bullet hit his back and thought he was about to die. Seconds later the President was struck fatally. At the moment of his own imagined doom, it is clear, Connally had no knowledge of the President's condition. The Commission's version of Connally's utterance suggests the possibility he had knowledge Kennedy was the target of murder which, unexpectedly, was about to include himself and even others. Manchester's gratuitously definitive "both" narrows the target to two individuals, Kennedy and himself, and makes stronger the possibility of his having had preknowledge of the assassination.

On the other hand, we must be grateful to Manchester for rebutting, albeit unwittingly, the "refutation" made by scrivener Richard Warren Lewis in the Jan. 22, 1967 issue of the World Journal Tribune Magazine, of Vincent Salandria's "supposition" the President's head snapped backward on impact of the fatal bullet because it was fired from the right and in front of the Presidential limousine. Lewis took Salandria and "most skeptics" to task for overlooking

"the forward rush of the motorcade following the impact of the fatal bullet - a movement which clearly destroys his supposition." Manchester, who takes no notice of the controversy over the point of origin of the fatal shot, nevertheless gives Lewis the lie indirectly. He narrates the efforts of Secret Service Agent Hill to overtake on foot and mount the rear of the Presidential limousine - "Hill had his fingers in the left grip and his toe on the last step 1.6 seconds after the last shot. He had just begun to surge up when (driver Secret Service Agent) Greer rammmed the accelerator to the floor. The Lincoln sprang forward..." leaving Lewis in the lurch. In behalf of Manchester, whose timing of Hill is supernaturally superior to the timing of Oswald's record-breaking descent from the sixth to the second floor of the Texas School Book Depository, it must be said, virtually all Commission witnesses agree the car accelerated after Kennedy was struck fatally. And so on and much more.


January 30, 1967