

# The Kennedy Book Deluge

By *Lawrence Stern*

Washington Post National Editor

WHATEVER MAY BE THE FLUCTUATIONS of the Dow Jones Industrial Index, the Kennedy Literary Industry keeps soaring along its bullish course—the ultimate blue chip of them all.

In the beginning there was the Warren Commission Report, comprised of 26 sturdy and painstaking volumes. Then in an unrelieved bibliographic deluge came the critics and the appreciators and the memoirists.

Finally there arrived on the shelves the book that, so we were led to believe, would be definitive in both a literary and perhaps also judicial sense. It was William Manchester's "The Death of a President."

Alas, by the time "The Death of a President" made its debut much of its essential juices had been wrung out by magazine serialization as well as by newspaper and news magazine stories. Hardly a day went by without publication of a morsel or so from the book that was to make publishing history.

Moreover, the public appetites for the book had been titillated to the point of exhaustion by the Kennedy family's unsuccessful effort of a "President" and its advance serialization to suppress publication of both "The Death in Look magazine. The Battle of the Book," as it was called, certainly ranks in sheer newsprint tonnage as modern America's most celebrated pseudo-event.

But the deluge continues. Within six months after Manchester's book flooded the Nation's discount shelves, it begat two more books: "The Manchester Affair" by John Corry and "Why the Kennedys Lost the Book Battle—the Untold Story" by Lawrence Van Gelder (Award Books, 128 pp., 75 cents, and which is not worth reviewing).

Even Corry's book spawned if not another book at least an article in Esquire by former New York Timesman Gay Talese about Corry's problems with his book. Esquire accompanied the Talese piece with a chapter of Corry's book about Manchester's book about the assassination.

Manchester tried to fuse the art forms of history and the novel in "The Death of a President." It was a brilliant and poignant failure because of his inability to temper the love and awe he held toward his subject.

Corry's aim is nowhere near so high, nor could it be. It is a more familiar exercise in Kennedy circle voyeurism of the sort that has become a perfectly respectable enterprise for the media. "As a reporter writing about the argument, I knew that even the outermost circle could be exhilarating," Corry writes in his introduction.

Later he says: "Mrs. Kennedy, like F. Scott Fitzgerald's very rich people, is different

## Book Review

### 'The Manchester Affair'

By *John Corry* (Putnam's Sons, 223 pp., \$4.95).

from you and me. This is not to say she is better or worse. But her style is her own. As is Robert Kennedy, she is accustomed to people who are discrete and obedient." Yes, Hemingway dourly answered Fitzgerald, the rich are different; they have more money. The Kennedys had Jack, of course, which set them apart from people who merely had more money.

Corry's portrait of the Kennedy family in the throes of the book controversy differs little from the already-received public version. Jackie is imperious, wily and utterly female. Bobby is tough and shrewd. Ethel is unassumingly friendly—a Lucille Ball sort of role.

And so, as all the fans will remember from the papers, the Kennedys—Jackie and Bobby—ganged up on Manchester and Harper & Row and Look magazine to suppress the book. Why? Corry never really answers this central question.

The "political" excisions proposed by the family and their small army of reader-advisers were inspired, Corry suggests, by their concern that Lyndon Johnson would get so angry he wouldn't consider Sen. Kennedy as a vice presidential running mate next year.

"The Senator and his advisers allowed practical politics to determine what the historical record would show," he concludes.

The "personal" deletions were demanded by President Kennedy's widow, it is asserted, because of her celebrated passion for privacy. Corry records the suspicion of Manchester and others that the "personal" objections of her celebrated passion for privacy. Corry records the suspicion of Manchester and others that the "personal" objections of Mrs. Kennedy were really a mask for Sen. Kennedy's "political" concerns. But the reader cannot form a judgment on the basis of the available material, and perhaps he is not meant to form one.

Corry's political judgments are not compellingly original. "Now, Johnson is sensitive to the things people say about him," he writes. "If Manchester's book, which was authorized by the Kennedy family, contained an unpleasant picture it was not unlikely that Johnson would be offended and might make it more difficult for Bobby Kennedy at a national convention."

True enough.

Corry

August 19, 1967

Mr. J. R. Wiggins, Editor  
The Washington Post  
1515 L Street, NW  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Wiggins:

Your National Editor's lament about "The Kennedy Book Deluge" would come with better grace from the Post if it had not been part of the "deluge" and were this not a subject that, in a democratic society, cannot be exhausted.

The part of the Post is partisan: Without reason or thought, you oppose and assail those who question the dubious official investigation. To this end you serialized the slanders of the sycophantic coward, Charles Roberts, and were so impatient to spread the lies and misrepresentations of the also-partisan Associated Press that you published its entire book-length series in one single, awful bellyache.

Lawrence Stern is right in describing "Death of a President" as "a brilliant and poignant failure", wrong in attributing it to "the love and awe he held toward his subject". Those noble feelings that author reserves for himself. His failure is from simple and undeviating factual error. This and the ensuing scandal I predicted to the Post's editors more than a year before publication, to you personally fourteen months ago.

For the first time in the Post's own deluge, Stern shows the beginning of understanding in asking "why" in his review of "The Manchester Affair". When you understand why the Kennedy family had to file suit against the Manchestrarian assemblage, you will begin to understand the terrible trauma of the Warren Report.

I also predicted the suit and in countless radio and TV appearances explained why. My own book on it was a third completed before "Death" was published. I will complete it when I have finished the book I am now writing. Before then, my OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS will be published. At that time, should the Post again assume the mantle of a great newspaper, I will make available to you the more than 300 pages of official documentation I have for it.

Had you read the WHITEWASH series, you would know the answer. Had Stern, when he was assigned to read the manuscript of the first book, he, too, would have known. Had you listened to Dan Kurzman, who did read and understand it, your subsequent and very public self-demeaning would have been spared you, and our country might have been the better for it.

Why not make an honest woman of the old lady for whom you pimp on this subject and, with appropriate excisions, print this letter?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg