

Manchester By Roscoe Drummond

Arch 4/5/67

Let the Reader Be Wary

MANY WILL SOON be reading William Manchester's "The Death of a President," the most publicized book of the 20th Century dealing with the most publicized assassination of all time.

Now all the miasmic controversy which climaxed its publication can be put aside and the book judged on its own merits.

My immediate reaction, after reading all 710 pages of it, is that in mood and balance Manchester has written a far-better, fairer, worthier work than I would have expected from all the advance and partisan leaks which marked the last-minute disputes between the author and Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy.

The book is not the whole of the story of the death of President Kennedy. Nor in its judgments about men and events is it the whole of the truth.

BUT MANCHESTER has made a valuable, honest, and controversial beginning. There is no doubt that it is going to be widely read. What is equally important is

that it should be wisely read.

The book proves that Manchester did not permit himself to be a writer under orders—although I believe no historian should enter into a contract with participants in the history he is writing giving them the right to clear the manuscript before publication.

But Manchester fought valiantly to preserve his independence and his integrity as a writer. The book proves he succeeded.

His honest effort to get at the truth about the emotion-laden cross-currents of events and personalities does not mean that he always got at the truth. When I suggest that the book needs to be wisely read, I mean that one should read the author's judgments with reservation and with awareness that more time and more knowledge may well alter the focus of some of Manchester's conclusions.

LET ME illustrate:

Manchester gives a version of the first Johnson Cabinet meeting which a senior Kennedy Cabinet member says seems to him to be describing a totally different meeting than he attended.

The book leaves me with the impression that Manchester thought President Johnson was pretty heedless

of the feelings of the Kennedys in his quick takeover of the Presidency. But a member of the Cabinet told me that at least 20 times in one day Mr. Johnson instructed him: "Do it the way the Kennedy family would like."

Manchester reports Johnson as rattled, in a "state of shock," and should be forgiven for bad and uncertain behavior. Charles Roberts, Newsweek correspondent who was himself on the scene and on the returning plane, reports the opposite: The takeover was "carefully, correct, considerate, and compassionate . . . Johnson, in my eyes, was the coolest man in Dallas or aboard Air Force One."



Drummond