

Manchester Accuses the Kennedys Of Playing Politics With History

Port 3/20/67
William Manchester has rekindled the controversy over his book "The Death of a President" by accusing "the Kennedy court" of demanding politically motivated changes that would have called for "an outright distortion" of the events surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

A telegram from Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) last August pressing Manchester's publisher to neither publish nor serialize the book is attributed by Manchester to an irrational mental reaction stemming from the Senator's "unresolved grief."

Manchester's account of how he resisted "what can only be described as attempted political censorship" appears in the new issue of Look. The magazine will go on sale Tuesday.

The campaign to suppress parts of his book, which was initially commissioned by the Kennedy family in 1964, had a political basis, Manchester contends. As he puts it.

"A great many gifted men were staking their careers on an RFK Administration. Now, the pull of loyalty was irresistible; they flocked to the standard."

But Manchester feels that his original problems arose from the attitude taken by Mrs. John F. Kennedy, whom he describes as "a lovely, graceful, ineffably tragic queen regent."

In retrospect, Manchester writes, it is easy to see how the President's widow had come to think of the author as "a member of her court." She had even convinced herself that "she had 'hired' me," he notes.

Since her husband's death, Manchester says in his article, Mrs. Kennedy "had grown increasingly strong-minded" and it was "inconceivable" to her that "I should deny her anything."

Yet against her wishes the 44-year-old author, who regards himself as "a writer, not a courtier," signed and held

fast to a contract giving Look the serialization rights to his book in return for a record payment of \$665,000. It was that deal — which Manchester says was initially approved by Sen. Kennedy — that angered the President's widow.

In the tumult that followed, Manchester writes, "unbelievable charges were made, unforgivable words spoken and treasured friendships ruptured."

It was quite different, he said, from the time last summer when Mrs. Kennedy viewed the Manchester project as a volume "that would be bound in black and put away on dark library shelves." Now, Manchester estimates that the book, to be published by Harper & Row on April 7, will earn \$5 million for the Kennedy Memorial Library in Cambridge.

By mid-August, Manchester says, the sparks ignited by Mrs. Kennedy had incited the Senator into a "tigerlike"

rage toward Manchester. This attitude, in turn, made Manchester "mad enough to fight."

The issue was joined at an Aug. 12 meeting between the author and the Senator that was also attended by Evan Thomas, Manchester's editor at Harper's, and John Seigenthaler, a former Kennedy aide who had read the book on the Senator's behalf.

"Like her, he (Kennedy) appeared to be wholly irrational," Manchester recalled in his article. "He accused me of raising my voice. He pretended to leave the room, hid in an alcove, and leapt out, pointing an accusing finger at me. Once, he beckoned Evan aside and held a whispered conversation with him, glaring meantime at me."

It was after this encounter, according to Manchester, that Seigenthaler, now editor of the Nashville Tennessean, pro-

See MANCHESTER, A5, Col. 1

MANCHESTER—From Page A1

Manchester Says Kennedys Play Politics With History

posed to make 111 deletions from a manuscript that "had already [been] approved."

Among the requested changes, Manchester said, was "a new version" of President Johnson's Nov. 23 Cabinet meeting that would have eliminated "the friction between Johnson and Bob." Manchester refused to delete it.

In "the attempt to suppress vital facts," Manchester said, veracity seemed to have lost its meaning.

Manchester felt he had been faithful to his trust when he decided on his own accord to destroy 200 pages of his original manuscript, before the editing process began, on grounds that the material was either "too personal or needlessly critical of men still in public life."

Nevertheless, at what Manchester terms "the first stroke of midnight," Mrs. Kennedy moved to enjoin both Look and Harper's from publishing the text. The law suits were eventually withdrawn after the magazine and the publisher negotiated a series of changes and deletions with representatives of the Kennedy family.

Manchester implies that in filing the law suit, Mrs. Kennedy acted without her brother-in-law's assent. He says the Senator had assured him that there would be no law suit and that on the night the court papers were filed Kennedy had told a group of editors at his Hickory Hill home that he was "appalled" by the legal suit.

As early as mid-1964, Manchester asserts, "I found it almost impossible to establish any satisfactory professional



JACQUELINE KENNEDY
"... tragic queen regent"

contact" with either Mrs. Kennedy or with the Senator. Manchester could recall "only three doors" that Mrs. Ken-

nedy opened for him and none of them, he said, was vital.

Nevertheless, Manchester still looks upon the President's widow as "a heroine" and adds: "In our hour of disgrace and confusion, [she], who had lost more than any of us, held us all together, remained true to the leader we had lost and . . . rekindled our national pride."

In the course of his lonely research task, Manchester said he was entrusted with confidences that were so intimate and sensitive that "I couldn't hint at them with my own wife."

While the persons he interviewed would often break into tears over their recollections, Manchester said he had to keep a stoic and professional attitude. But, alone, it was different: "In the night, in Southeast Washington or in Texas hotels, I too wept."