

Post 3/20/67

Manchester Accuses the Kennedys Of Playing Politics With History

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."

"In sum, over 75 per cent of the deletions proposed in (Mrs. John F. Kennedy's) behalf did not involve her," Manchester said. "They were an extension of the attempt to suppress vital facts."

But Manchester feels that his original problems arose from the attitude taken by Mrs. 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 arti-

cle, 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

See MANCHESTER, A6, Col. 1

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, proposed 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.

Truth Lost

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 said Kennedy aides Theodore Sorensen and Pierre Salinger both capitulated to the Kennedys' demands in books they wrote on the Kennedy years. Of six "quality" books on the Administration, he said, only "My 12 Years with John F. Kennedy" by Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln, the President's secretary, escaped censorship.

Manchester said his princi-

ally in his own dispute with the Kennedys was historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who called the book potentially great and suggested that Manchester restore some self-imposed deletions.

As early as mid-1964, Manchester asserts, "I found it

almost impossible to establish any satisfactory professional contact" with either Mrs. Kennedy or with the Senator. Manchester could recall "only three doors" that Mrs. Kennedy 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."

While writing the book, Manchester said, he pruned his budget and rented a cheap apartment in Southeast Washington, ate in Government cafeterias and walked instead of riding taxis. Typically, he said, he would start a day at the National Archives, walk to Capitol Hill, and then to the State Department. Often, he said, he walked across Memorial Bridge ("very tricky for pedestrians") to Arlington Cemetery — not entirely to save money but because I "simply couldn't bear to drive up to the President's grave."

Secrets Kept

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."

Manchester said Chief Justice Earl Warren gave him access to the testimony and all other evidence taken by the Warren Commission, then "rather cannily" invited him to "declare as a friend of the family" that the Warren Report findings were acceptable to the Kennedys. Manchester said he demurred on grounds it would be improper.

The author also said that the "prestigious names on Earl Warren's panel did little except add glitter; the long hours were put in by junior staff men." But Manchester nonetheless supports the Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald alone killed the President.