

# Letters to the Editor

continued

Look 5/14/67

**Salinger:** "I am amused by Mr. Manchester's 'true story.' . . ."

**Manchester:** "I am glad the Kennedys are not responsible for Mr. Salinger's book. . . ."

## SALINGER vs. MANCHESTER

I have just read Mr. William Manchester's "true story" of the "facts" concerning the controversy over the publishing of his book, *The Death of a President* [William Manchester's *Own Story*, LOOK, April 4]. I hope the book is more accurate than the article because, as it relates to me, Mr. Manchester has completely succeeded in writing untruth.

First, I am constantly amused by Mr. Manchester's repeated reference to the fact that he was personally picked for the assignment by Mrs. John F. Kennedy. I suppose it makes him feel better to say this. But the fact of the matter is (and I am almost ashamed to admit it, now), Mr. Manchester was my choice to write this book. When he says on page 74 that my statements with reference to his contract with the Kennedy family were made as far as he was aware without my having seen the contract, he ignores the fact that I conducted all of the negotiations leading up to the contract. (I might say parenthetically that although Mr. Manchester is right that I did not draft the actual contract, I had read it long before I made my statements that he had welched on his agreement.)

A far more serious charge, however, is that my book was censored by the Kennedy family, or representatives of the Kennedy family. This is wholly and categorically untrue; something which Mr. Manchester could have ascertained by making one phone call—the type of phone call that any reporter would make. When I finished my manuscript and sent it to my publisher, I also sent a copy as a courtesy to Senator Robert F. Kennedy. I never heard from Senator Kennedy about the book until after it was published, nor did I discuss it with him. Senator Kennedy sent the manuscript to Professor J. Kenneth Galbraith. Professor Galbraith wrote me on March 1, 1966: "Few things have appealed to me more than the thought of censoring J.F.K.'s press secretary. Unhappily for my ambition—but not unexpectedly, it all strikes me as being

in the best of taste." Professor Galbraith went on to suggest that I delete three words from my 175,000-word manuscript. Mr. Ken McCormick, the editor of Doubleday & Co., my publishers, had incidentally suggested I delete the same three words because they were in poor taste. How Mr. Manchester reached the tortured conclusion, on page 69, that "Like Pierre Salinger the following year, Ted (Sorensen) took the easy way, giving way on point after point and weakening what should have been a great volume," is beyond my comprehension. But then, I have not been able to comprehend many of Mr. Manchester's actions in the last year anyway, so perhaps I am asking too much.

Finally, Mr. Manchester, in his effort to achieve a pose of martyrdom,

says that he (except for a \$3,000 contribution by some unnamed person) is the only one who was asked to give up any of his royalties to the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library. I was not asked to give any of my royalties to the J.F.K. Library, but it is a fact that Mr. Sander Vanocur, of NBC, and I produced a book in 1964 called, *A Tribute to John F. Kennedy*, which sold 125,000 hardback copies and almost a half-million paperback copies. Neither Mr. Vanocur nor I received five cents for this effort, and our contribution to the J.F.K. Library from the proceeds of this book was in excess of \$100,000. I do not consider this figure insignificant.

I regret having to write this letter as I regret the controversy which has surrounded the publication of *The Death of a President*. I have said publicly on many occasions that I consider Mr. Manchester's work extraordinary. I know the amount of work he spent on putting it together. I am only sorry that now he has allowed his usually good judgment to be warped as a result of the controversy which he himself precipitated. Hind-sight and experience would indicate that it was an error to make the contract with Mr. Manchester in the first place, but February of 1964 was a different time. The shock of the assassination of President Kennedy was too great and the judgment of too many people, myself included, too questionable under those circumstances to permit us to think through consequences of what we considered at that time a perfectly reasonable solution to an unreasonable problem.

PIERRE SALINGER  
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Let me be brief in the space remaining: (1) Mrs. John F. Kennedy herself told me that she had personally selected me to write the book, and she explained why. Pierre Salinger was not present. (2) The negotiations leading up to the contract were conducted in the Justice Department in March, 1964, by Robert Kennedy, the author, and their advisers. Mr. Salinger was not present. (3) Negotiations which led to formal approval of my manuscript by the Kennedy family were conducted by Robert Kennedy, the author, and their advisers between March and July of 1966. Mr. Salinger was not present. (4) I am glad to hear that the Kennedys are not responsible for Mr. Salinger's own book and (5) at no place in the above-mentioned article did I say that I was the only author asked to contribute to the Kennedy Library.

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Madison Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022.  
No anonymous letters will be considered for publication.