

Books & Art

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A Writer's Diary

Manchester 'Wrenched Apart' By Book Storm

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Middletown, Conn.

The William Manchester house on High street was as desolate early last week as if it had been dredged out of an 1840 tale by Hawthorne.

Paint was peeling off the gray clapboards and from the faded red front door. The summer screens were still up, and there were no Christmas decorations.

The Manchester house stared vacantly down a steep hill toward factories along the Connecticut River, and across to wooded hills untouched by homes.

In the streets of Middletown, people were becoming aware of Manchester only now. He was an unseen presence up on the hill, whom Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy had challenged by suit to prevent publication of his book, "Death of a President."

(Since then, action out of court appears to have resolved the controversy. But Manchester's ordeal will not readily fade from his or his family's memory.)

The newspapers have said he is "a recluse." And now people were saying he had kept to himself for his 12 years in Middletown.

A policewoman was warming herself in her car until children would come to cross the street, just down the sidewalk from the Manchester

home.

"No, I haven't seen them since this started," the woman said. "But then, I never did see them much before. Kept to themselves."

Wife's Words

It was after 2 P. M. when the front doorbell at the Manchester house rang.

Julia, Manchester's wife, answered, but warned: "I'm not going to sit down and talk." She let the visitor in out of the cold.

A baby was sleeping on the living room couch; children's toys were scattered on the hall floor.

Mrs. Manchester appeared distracted. Unsleepy.

"There have been so many phone calls. And a television crew was out on the sidewalk the other day, just standing."

Had the townspeople been any trouble? "Oh, no," she smiled and shrugged. "They don't even notice."

Has it affected Christmas? "Well, we haven't got a tree yet, if that's any indication."

A family Christmas? "Oh, perhaps we'll ask mother down. I guess we hadn't even thought about it yet."

Even inside, the house seemed vacant.

There are a few Middletown residents who have known the Manchesters during this storm.

One acquaintance, an opinion-maker in town, says, though not for attribution, that the Kennedy opposition to the book has fundamentally upset the man.

"He's been wrenched apart by the experience. It's baffled him. This is a family he admired. He thought he had their complete confidence. And now this."

Editor Says Little

The editor of the daily Middletown Press, Russell G. Doench, Jr., was having the author as a dinner guest on the evening that officials came

to the front door to try to present court papers on Manchester.

Doench hedges his impressions, says little for the record. He recalls that he interviewed the author for an educational TV station in the summer, forgets what was said.

The paper has no file of clippings on Manchester.

Up on High st., another acquaintance is the novelist Paul Horgan, director of the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University.

Manchester had done some work at the Center before he began the assassination book in 1964. Horgan refuses to speak.

A Center fellow this year is Richard Goodwin, advisor to the late President and now an advisor to Mrs. Kennedy in the dispute. Goodwin was not at his Middletown home.

The silence is something out of a Hawthorne tale.

A visitor walks out along High st., the week-old snow crusted hard and the 20-degree wind whipping off the hill.

It's only half a dozen blocks from Horgan's office, out past the Manchester house again, to the office of American Education Publications, Inc.

One man there will characterize Manchester.

Richard K. Tucker reported with Manchester on the Baltimore Sun in the late 1940s, came to AEP in 1957 following Manchester by three years, and now holds the author's old



William Manchester

... in dispute with Mrs. Kennedy

title of managing editor of secondary school periodicals.

Tucker dismisses the recluse idea. "He's just a really hard worker," he said. "He doesn't have time to waste."

Tucker judges Manchester as the professional reporter, the hard-nosed searcher for facts.

And he admits: "I was surprised at the commission"—that Manchester accepted the Kennedy family commission to write the book provided that he allowed them approval rights.

"He was always such a bug on press freedom.

"When we were on *The Sun*, he was the last man in the world who would let any politician look at his copy.

"Why, Bill was scrupulous about anyone trying to suppress public records.

"I remember one time when he and I all but swiped some files from a traffic judge. He was keeping two sets of accounts and doing a dandy business."

Every Detail

The former newsman cites the time Manchester outfitted himself in Army-Navy store leftovers, went from pharmacy to pharmacy buying poisons without prescriptions, and then wrote a series.

Tucker pictures Manchester as a man doing his professional responsibility—getting the complete story, telling every detail.

Manchester put influential people into his writing pretty early.

From the University of Mis-

souri Journalism School, he joined the Baltimore paper and turned his graduate thesis into a book on the paper's legendary social critic, H. L. Mencken.

Tucker said: "Bill told me one day that Mencken said to him: 'I've said what I've wanted about people all these years. You should say what you want about me.'

"Old Mencken didn't like what Bill found out about him. But he didn't object. He was a professional."

Tucker recalls that Manchester has been one of a stable of writers to whom *Holiday* magazine often turns for features.

"His book on the Rockefeller family came out of that," he said. "They objected to some of what he said. But, of course, they had no contract."

Manchester had been returning from Germany, where he was expanding a *Holiday* piece on the Krupp family into a book, when the legal storm broke.

Why Did He Agree?

What made Manchester, who was so concerned for a free, objective hand, agree to be bound by final approval from the Kennedys?

"The sincere and genuine admiration for John Kennedy," says Tucker. "The last thing in the world he'd want to do would be to capitalize on his relationship."

"There were such good relations with the Kennedy family that he didn't dream something like this could happen.

"I saw it as a labor of love—the only reason he'd undertake such a dreadful assignment." (Manchester is supposed to have viewed the assassination films 75 times.)

In sum, a Manchester friend says, the reason for the confrontation on the author's side was that Manchester's strong sense of the integrity of objectivity finally got the best of his loyalty to the Kennedy family.

"Bill gave in and gave in. Then somewhere, the objectivity and the loyalty came into collision."