

Jim Bishop



Up to Here In JFK Books

This nonsense has gone too far. The literary tears in the Kennedy books and articles are bathed in fat checks.

Gore Vidal writes in *Esquire* that Jackie and Bob Kennedy selected William Manchester to write "the official" history of the assassination to stop me from writing one. I don't believe it.

My research of the tragedy started Nov. 24, 1963. It never stopped. One more year of research and I'll be ready to write "The Day Kennedy Was Shot." The only thing I can say for it is that it will be unbiased, as accurate as I can make it, and the only one without censorship.

If the public is as fed up with this stuff as I, it may be the last book on the assassination, and the only one that will sell one copy: my father.

★ ★ ★

NO MATTER what Jackie and Bobby say about the Manchester book, take my word: it is rich in substantive material and anecdote. The writing is sophomoric and slightly hysterical, but nothing can dull the deep tones of tragedy.

The story — almost all of it — is there. The teeth-jarring fight between the author and his sponsors has over-shadowed the book to the point where the public is now more interested in the story behind the book than the book itself.

The charges, the counter charges, the bustup of friendships soil the armor of a dead knight. In seven

months, the fight raged from Valhalla to the gutter, and now no one is clean.

My sympathy, for whatever it is worth, is with the author. Not because his calling and mine are akin. The book, as published, needs more editing, not less. It is pedantic and, in places, vicious. Still, an author is entitled to fall on his own head, without assistance.

★ ★ ★

THE BEAUTIFUL widow, who asked me to cease and desist, stop and buzz off, wrote to tell me that she had picked Manchester to "preserve the truth." When he completed the work, after more than two years of "agony," she rapped it as "distorted."

Therein lies an exquisitely delicate point. I have written 16 books and I do not know of any that completely pleased those closest to the subject. Mentally and emotionally, they see the story according to their individual light. The writer sees the drama just as clearly, but only according to his own God-given right to stare at truth. The two vary.

The difference between Manchester and me is that he is a reasonable human being. He tried to compromise. I will not. The last time I agreed to do it was when I wrote a small book called "A Day in the Life of President Kennedy."

Three months after the assassination, Pierre Salinger phoned one night with 60 odd small "corrections" made by Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

I truckled to her whim. When the book was published, she took her copy between two fingers and dropped it in a wastebasket. Had Manchester asked me, I could have told him that he must either write his own story, stubbornly independent of all other influences, or become a literary mutt, licking the hands of those who kick him.

Looking around the office floor, I find 47 separate works centered on the sad and magnificent figure of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. One consists of 26 volumes. They must go. I am wept out. I too had an abiding respect for him, but he didn't have to die for me to feel it.

Now, three years later, I find myself a little sickened by the word slingers who sing their individual dirges in bank vaults.