

**Our Fearless
Correspondent**

Who Killed Manchester?

Charles McCabe

A PERFECTLY harmless and obscure magazine and book writer named Bill Manchester had the bad luck to write a book about John F. Kennedy in 1962 called "Portrait of a President," the New York Times called it "adoring."

Speaking only for myself, I imagine he wishes, at this juncture, he had never written that book.



Had he never written it, for one thing, he would never have found himself in the employ of the widow Kennedy, a lady whom I have never placed on the top of the Christmas tree.

Because of his adoration of her assassinated husband, Jacqueline Kennedy, in her own words, "hired William

Manchester to protect President Kennedy and the truth" in telling the story of the killing of President Kennedy in Dallas.

This whole business of hiring people to write raw history in a way to please a powerful family involved in the history is middling crazy to start with.

When the history involved is the most dramatic story of our time, it is indeed rough, especially when other writers not hired by Mrs. Kennedy have been denied access to primary sources.

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WHEN MANCHESTER was tapped by Mrs. Kennedy in 1964 to do the "official version" of

the assassination, he was leading a quiet life as managing editor of a small New England university press which put out books with titles like "Monastery and Cathedral in France" and "The Romantic Ballet in Paris."

Now he is a national figure. He is reported to have suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of the tensions involved in pleasing his employer.

His book is taking a terrible kicking about. Its publication and serialization in Look Magazine has been postponed until next Spring, presumably at the behest of the Kennedy family.

It is admittedly being censored. There have been many reports that, in view of the publicity its method of production has received, the Kennedy family is trying to kill publication of the book altogether.

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THE BOOK HAD some political dynamite in it, relating to the great unspoken feud between Mrs. Kennedy and LBJ. Some of the stuff has leaked. An especially riveting paragraph, which will not appear in the book (if that ever appears) was published recently by the Village Voice, an irreverent New York neighborhood newspaper. It reads:

"Just as Lyndon Johnson was to be sworn in as President, he asked Kenneth O'Donnell, JFK's closest aide, to fetch Mrs. Kennedy from her cabin. Mr. O'Donnell suggested that it might be better if Mrs. Kennedy were left to herself at that moment. Said Mr. Johnson: 'Listen boy, when I tell you to do something, I want you to do it, you hear me boy.'"

The veracity of this quote has not been questioned, and the tone is certainly pure Johnson.

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MRS. KENNEDY in a letter to another aspiring biographer made clear her relation to the whole project: Manchester, she said, "was to interrogate everyone who had any connection with those days — and if I decide the book should never be published — then Mr. Manchester will be reimbursed for his time.

"... All the people he (Manchester) spoke to were asked not to discuss those days with anyone else, and they have all kept that faith and will continue to."

One cannot imagine a more misguided approach to the writing of history. Nor can one help feeling more than a bit sorry for Bill Manchester, who got caught in the wringer.
