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World of Books



Mrs. JFK and the Manchester Project

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RECENT news stories have tended to create a mystery around William Manchester's forthcoming "The Death of a President," an item of some 900 pages which Harper & Row will publish during the winter, or early spring. This is the project Mrs. John F. Kennedy "commissioned" a few months after the assassination, hoping it would be the "authoritative" history of the tragedy.

Mrs. Kennedy selected Manchester, a veteran of *The New Yorker* and author of several books, on the basis of her high regard for Manchester's early biography of Mr. Kennedy, "Portrait of the President." Mrs. Kennedy is said to have withheld all personal and family information on the case from all writers but Manchester. Drew Pearson's associate, Jack Anderson, reported that everyone close to the Kennedys have refused to talk with Manchester's competitors, especially Jim Bishop, who is working on his own "The Day Kennedy Was Shot." Anderson quoted a letter Mrs. Kennedy wrote to Bishop which suggested that she "controlled" historic facts and sources of information.

Apparently Manchester's book is not a

refutation, or questioning of findings in the Warren Commission report, as recent works by Mark Lane, Edward J. Epstein and others have been. According to the trade paper *Publishers' Weekly*, Manchester interviewed some 1000 people and amassed 45 volumes of documents and transcriptions of tape recorded conversations before he started his book. Mrs. Kennedy herself gave some ten hours of taped interviews.

The trade paper reports that neither Mrs. Kennedy nor other members of the family have seen the manuscript, although a panel of advisors, including the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., have read it. The panel is said to have advised that portions of the work that might be considered to bear "an anti-LBJ bias" be deleted.

One sequence of Manchester's manuscript deals with the last Washington conversation between Mr. Kennedy and his Vice President, an argument over whether or not the President's trip to Dallas was really necessary. Mr. Johnson is said to have replied that his own influence had waned there, and that a Presidential appearance was essential.

"The Death of a President" undoubtedly will contain fresh personal and family sidelights to the tragedy. But the consensus seems to be that while the book should stir a wide international interest, no new data of bombshell proportions will be found in it — at least none that Jacqueline Kennedy does not wish to be made public at this point in history.



William Manchester