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Jackie in the Right



THE Manchester-Kennedy business is depressing from almost every point of view, though in the end, it seems to me, one must sympathize with Mrs. Kennedy.

She is not, to be sure, without the normal woman's vanities, but it is surely admirable, rather than otherwise, that she should have fully confided in William Manchester. To have done so was an act of faith in him as an artist. Was this reckless? But Mrs. Kennedy had been prudent enough to arrive at a "memorandum of understanding" which permitted her to exercise a veto power over what the artist proceeded to sculpt with that profusion of clay.

DISSATISFIED with the result, she now invokes that veto power at the expense of a public that has been brought to a nail-biting pitch of curiosity. Ultimately, hers is a futile position, like that of the censors who insisted on bowdlerizing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—it was only a matter of time before the original draft became universally available.

But Mrs. Kennedy must now be reckoning that that passage of time is itself valuable, that what she now finds tasteless, unfair, and provocative might in due course be more understandably so, less damagingly so; so that she is, after all, playing for time.

One's sympathy goes to her because she seems to be fighting for the residual privacies which are increasingly disallowed, in the august name of history. Mrs. Kennedy insists that her private emotions at the time of the assassination and for the period after it belong to her and not to the Library of Congress or to Mrs. Grundy.

Already the news has leaked out concerning what some of those emotions were, and though these emotions were and

are reprehensible, they are utterly, utterly natural and not, therefore, personally discrediting in the eyes of those who know the wayward impulses of bitterness. It is a fact that Lyndon Johnson wanted to become President of the United States, and it is a fact that he became President of the United States upon the assassination of John Kennedy; and therefore that he profited from tragedy.

But what should he have done? Resigned? The point is that the asking of that question is analytical, and in moments of overwhelming grief, one does not tend to be analytical. Even while knowing that one's emotions are irrational, one is saddled with them—and, under certain circumstances, one communicates them to people who write books.

Why did she do so? Because she trusted William Manchester. Why did she trust William Manchester? Because the gentleman wrote an obsequious biography about President Kennedy, on the basis of which it was widely supposed that he had, built in, a sort of Kennedy-protector, on which she could absolutely rely; and if reliance failed, she could invoke that memorandum of agreement.

IN A SENSE Manchester fulfilled his mission. He himself was so caught up in the project that he seems to have absorbed the identical emotions of Mrs. Kennedy, the existence of which she is now anxious to suppress. Manchester, in his treatments of Lyndon Johnson, seems to have projected the immediate posthumous, and completely understandable, bitternesses of Mrs. Kennedy. She has outgrown those bitternesses, and is now attempting to protect not only the innocent victims of them, but the man to whom she communicated them in particular; which is to say, William Manchester himself.