

Foes of Mrs. Kennedy Routed in Book Fight

Harper & Row Eager to Cooperate with President's Widow on Offending Passage

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NEW YORK—The historic battle of the book is drawing to a close.

Some sporadic gunfire may yet be heard, but as things now stand the widow of John F. Kennedy has won the day and her adversaries in the dispute over "The Death of a President" are in orderly retreat.

The turning point in what must rank as one of the strangest controversies in the history of American publishing, a controversy as notable for the primitive passions aroused as for the highly civilized personalities of the principals, came Wednesday night.

Look Gives Up

That was when Look magazine, which will serialize a four-part 60,000-word abstract of the William Manchester book starting Jan. 10, finally gave in to a determined Jacqueline Kennedy.

Look's resistance crumbled after the former First Lady made good her threat to sue for an injunction aimed at blocking the publication of passages which she deemed tasteless and invasions of her and her children's privacy.

This left Harper & Row publishers of "The Death of a President," and author Manchester to carry on the fight alone as Christmas came and the disposition to reach peaceful accord was evident in all camps.

What remained to be done was to modify or delete those portions Mrs. Kennedy viewed as objectionable from the 300,000-word manuscript—which relates in hitherto unrecorded detail the story of the assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Harper & Row, a firm with a long and friendly relationship with the Kennedy family, was eager to cooperate.

Relations Sour

Manchester, whose relations with the Kennedys soured totally in the course of the controversy, remained a question mark. Under the terms of the conventional author-publisher contract, he must agree to any changes in hard-cover text, a power he did not have under his arrangement with Look.

However, the only apparent course of action open to Manchester in the event of a disagreement between him and Harper & Row on text changes would be to block publication of the book itself. This would open up a monstrously complicated can of legal worms and be painfully costly in the bargain, involving, for one thing, the return of a \$40,000 advance to the publisher.

Optimism was evident among Kennedy representatives that dealings with Harper & Row, and presu-

ably with Manchester himself, would be considerably easier than they had been with the editor of Look.

Book in Context

That, in the judgment of one close Kennedy aide familiar with the book, was because the book as a whole provided a "sense of context" which was lacking in the extracted parts selected for serialization.

This source took as an example the flight back to Washington in Air Force 1, with the dead President and his widow in the rear of the plane and the new President in the front compartment.

The anguish, uncertainty, fear, even anger, which manifested themselves and are related in the Manchester narrative, according to this source, "just can't be seen in true perspective unless you've already read of the horrors and frustrations and confusions that preceded them at the hospital."

Both groups—President and Mrs. Johnson and their aides, as well as the stricken Kennedy circles—had been "struck with thunder," this source said. "So to judge how they behaved, it's essential to have a sense of what went before."

Matter of Taste

Of course, the objections of Mrs. Kennedy to the book, in its abbreviated, serialized form were not entirely related to the problem of context. Taste and concern for personal privacy were said to be involved in the conflict with Look over some 10 or 12 passages which totaled 1,600 words.

Among the things to which Mrs. Kennedy reportedly objected were detailed accounts of the Kennedys' last night together in Texas, of how she covered her dying husband's wounds en route to the

hospital after the assassination, of how she referred to Lee Harvey Oswald as a "dirty little Communist," of her struggle with a nurse who blocked her way into the room where doctors were trying to resuscitate the President.

Also, there was the method by which Caroline was told of her father's death and the nature of letters Mrs. Kennedy and Caroline put in the coffin of the President.

Virtually all of this information came from interviews Manchester had with the widow three months after the tragedy.

Unaware of Purpose

Mrs. Kennedy's contention in the bitter conflict which ultimately arose was that she was never under the impression that these, to her, intensely personal revelations would appear so starkly in the Manchester book.

The widow's defenders argued that the tapes of her interviews were to be deposited at the John F. Kennedy Library and would be available to future scholars and historians.

They also argued that Manchester, by gaining material for the book in exchange for agreeing to submit it to Mrs. Kennedy for final approval, had no course but to bow to her wishes.

Of course, there was a very considerable body of spectators to the fray capable of sympathy for both Mrs. Kennedy and Manchester.

The web of misunder-

standing and bitterness in the battle over "The Death of a President" had its beginnings in an 11-point memorandum of understanding between Manchester and the Kennedys signed in March, 1964.

Manchester had written "Portrait of a President," an extremely favorable book about President Kennedy. He seemed a natural choice for the chronicle of the assassination.

Manchester agreed to the Kennedy project and the memorandum gave Mrs. Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy the right to review the manuscript and stipulated it should not be published until five years after the assassination, unless Mrs. Kennedy agreed to an earlier date.

In retrospect, key interviews in the controversy were the 10 hours Manchester spent recording on tape the innermost feelings of Mrs. Kennedy at the Kennedy home in Georgetown.

One thing is clear: they were almost cathartic sessions, comprehensive and moving. Friends say Mrs. Kennedy really didn't pose herself as she might have with another author because she felt protected by her contract and personal rapport with Manchester.

Passages Included

The original manuscript contained passages based closely on taped sessions.

Last spring the manuscript—more than 1,000 carefully typed pages—was finished.

When Look bought the magazine rights for \$600,000, insiders reported Mrs. Kennedy became concerned, fearing the President's death was being exploited for commercial purposes.

Equally important, Manchester's contract with Look took editorial control of the material out of his hands. On July 28, Sen. Kennedy sent a telegram to Manchester and a letter to Harper & Row stating the family would not place obstacles in the way of the book's publica-

tion. However, he cautioned that should the book be serialized, the family would expect the condensations not to lead to distortions.

In later legal arguments, the Kennedys contended the telegram was no more than a morale booster to Manchester, who had feared his book might never be published. Harper & Row

and Manchester, on the other hand, claimed the telegram signaled the family was satisfied with revisions and efforts for publication could begin.

Last summer the Kennedys decided the book should be published in 1967 rather than 1968—a Presidential election year. Look agreed.

Breaks Follow

In the following months, phone calls, meetings and misunderstandings followed. Manchester traveled to London trying to stay out of the limelight. As Kennedy friends made suggestions for changes, production deadlines loomed inexorably.

Suddenly it was December. Harper & Row and Look met to make their versions conform. Then Look refused to give the Kennedy intermediaries further access to page proofs, and on Dec. 9, Harper & Row—which plans to bring the book out in April—reached the same decision. However, both the magazine and book publisher remained willing to tell Richard Goodwin, a family friend and Mrs. Kennedy's liaison man, in general terms how his suggestions were being handled.

Mrs. Kennedy, after meeting with her lawyer Simon H. Rifkind, decided to sue, charging Manchester with breaking his agreement. And the battle was joined.