

WJT 12/21/66 (see reverse side)

Jimmy Breslin

All the Tumult And Shouting



THE STORY OF THE UNPUBLISHED book called "Death of a President" was about to fall to the level of gossip columns last night when the personal and legal arguments over the book appeared to be ending. People involved expect an announcement, probably today, certainly sometime before tomorrow morning, to end the matter.

The copy will be published in Look Magazine on schedule. Harper and Row will publish the book on schedule. Mrs. John F. Kennedy will not go into a courtroom. Neither will the author, William Manchester. There is no major yielding on either side. Despite the noise, there was not a large amount of the manuscript in contention. The argument over the content of the book originally consisted of only four to five pages of material, according to Sen. Robert Kennedy. Yesterday, it was down to individual sentences and words. Richard Goodwin, a former White House aide and Mrs. Kennedy's adviser during this controversy, spent yesterday at Look magazine's office on Madison Avenue for this purpose. The issue of author William Manchester's alleged breaking of a censoring agreement with the Kennedys seems to have faded. In fairness to him, it should be taken up again and examined closely when the dispute is over.

"There was no choice but to end the matter before Thursday, or we all would have been confirmed maniacs," one of the people involved said last night. On Thursday, the lawyers would have had to file papers in court for the magazine and the publishing house in answer to Mrs. Kennedy's suit. This is the last thing anybody wants to happen."

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AT THE END OF A DAY in which reporters were scrambling through the publishing business trying to get another passage from the book which would make a lead for the next edition, one of the people involved in the story was complaining loudly.

"What came out of this is that the very things Mrs. Kennedy did not want published, details which would not have been published by any editor involved anyway, whether they were given instructions or not, now have gotten out into newspapers and newsmagazines. The details are all over the place. They never would have been known if there hadn't been this controversy. So many people saw copies of the unedited manuscript. But it still would have been minor gossip around town. The details never would have seen print. Now, in the controversy, everybody is running around telling about them and the newspapers and newsmagazines grab it all up and print it. The very thing which never would have happened.

"The letter from Greece," he said sarcastically. "Mrs. Kennedy objected to it. That's what I read in the newspapers. In headlines. Well, yes, she did object to it. She objected to the last line in the letter. Only the last line. And it was a simple line. It was important to her. But not important enough to make a newspaper headline.

"The rest of the things I've read about in this area are just as ridiculous. The details of Mrs. Kennedy holding her husband's head on the way to the hospital in Dallas. That was taken out of the manuscript so long ago nobody seems to remember when. Normal editing by anybody would have removed it. Nobody ever had to worry about a detail such as this remaining in the book." Because it was already out.

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ANOTHER PERSON IN THE MATTER had what could amount to the last quote from an undisclosed person which will be needed on this matter. "The only time I was apprehensive was when the lawyers took over," he said. "There are about 30 partners in each of these firms and each partner comes to the meeting so he can interrupt the other partner. By the time they get finished, nobody knows where the situation stands."

So the book called "Death of a President" comes out on schedule. A little over three years after the man died. All of it, the life of John F. Kennedy, was in style and grace. And when he was put into the side of a hill in Arlington, it was with a terrible elegance which was designed to have the meaning of the man live forever.

And now people run through the street trading versions of where the blood ran before he was assassinated. Lawyers, agents, his family, go-betweens, publishers, writers, editors argue and trade charges in public. Newspapers feed off the rumors and then off each other. Some of the participants help the rumors along. Blame is put directly on this writer for going overboard with everybody else. The book is an important foundation for history. But the newspapers and newsmagazines were printing the pieces of history they learned of, and the backyard gore, as of equal importance. All the newspapers, put the New York Times right near the top of the list, printed so much gossip as news that the papers should have been delivered with the fish already inside. The Wall Street Journal was beautiful the other morning. It speculated that the book could cost Lyndon Johnson the Presidency. And, of course, some of the people involved in the story couldn't wait to read every line that was printed.

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IT WAS A PRIVATE ARGUMENT. There were mistakes in information, attitudes, viewpoints and legalities. A woman who has gone through so much was involved. She had never read the book. Many people made her unnecessarily fearful in their attempts to please her.

These are things which repeatedly happen in publishing projects. But then this one turned into a public feud and an author was badly mauled and it all was not much of a testimonial to the man the unpublished book is about.

"This kind of mess," Kenneth O'Donnell, a former aide to Jack Kennedy said yesterday, "oh, he'd love this."

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