

A Book Agreement Neither

Jimmy Breslin

It was wrong from the start. On March 26, 1964, William Manchester, a writer, and Robert F. Kennedy signed a "memorandum of understanding" which contained 11 paragraphs, the most important one reading:

The completed manuscript shall be reviewed by Mrs. John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy and the text shall not be published unless and until approved by them.

The agreement was for the writing and publishing of a book called "The Death of a President." As a writer, William Manchester should not have signed any document containing a paragraph such as this. And to one who always has been identified with the business of written words, it is disappointing, at the least, to find the Kennedys asking for or accepting this type of control.

There are human circumstances here. The agreement was signed only four months after the assassination. The Kennedys were shaken, and also nervous about the large number of writers who had asked to do such a book. They understandably feared sensationalism. On the other hand, the lure of doing such a book must have been overpowering to a good writer. Manchester began speaking of the project as a public service.

But now they are left with an agreement both of them signed, and neither of them should have signed. They started this project in friendship. It was the Kennedys who approached Manchester and asked if he would write a book which would take two years of his life. Manchester was eager. And now it all winds up, this book about the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the way badly conceived literary projects always do. In total bitterness among the parties involved, and in the hands of lawyers.

PRESSES HAVE BEEN RUNNING

Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy has announced that she is going to court to try to prevent Look Magazine from publishing the serialization of the book. The presses printing Look's first issue carrying the book have been running for days now.

"They can just stop the presses," a lawyer connected with the case said last night. "We'll be in court within the 48 hours we promised. And I'll tell you something about this Mrs. Kennedy. She just has the guts to go into a courtroom." The last does not come in the nature of news.

Jacqueline Kennedy also wants to stop Harper and Row from publishing the book itself. This leaves Evan Thomas, an

old friend, the man who published John Kennedy's "Profiles in Courage," sitting in his office at Harper and Row with his lawyers in possession of a letter and telegram sent last July by Robert Kennedy releasing the book. And also a telegram sent a month later which contradicted the first letter and telegram.

Kennedy sent the first letter and telegram when the people he had asked to read the book advised him to release it immediately. He sent them also to assure Manchester, who felt destroyed after finishing the book, that his work would be published. Mrs. Kennedy was in Hawaii at this time. When she returned, and saw all the advance magazine publicity, she became upset.

Mrs. Kennedy did not expect the book to appear in magazine instalments, with accompanying splash. She insisted she wanted the book to appear only in a hard-cover edition, which she feels is less commercial. But apparently no clear arrangements had been made beforehand concerning magazine rights. Manchester's agent found Manchester owned these rights. He sold them to Look for \$650,000. Magazine serializations, however, are a part of publishing life in this country. And as for the taste issue in magazines, Mrs. Kennedy, directly after the assassination, in seeking a dignified way to publish a personal remembrance of her husband, turned to writer Theodore H. White and Life Magazine.

"The quarrel with the Manchester content is only with four or five pages out of the whole manuscript," somebody associated with the Kennedys said last night. "Most of it is highly personal. There are things which belong to a human being. Then some other things reflected unfairly on other people. Wasn't the copy all read before this? Yes, and the objectionable parts were deleted. But only in the copy that was going to form the book. The same things have not been deleted from the copy which is to appear in the magazine instalments."

EVERYTHING MUDDLED

Why a situation like this should occur is just another example of how muddled everything has become. Look, satisfied Manchester owns the rights to the material and apparently uninterested in the control issue between Manchester and the Kennedys, refuses to show any copy to the Kennedys. Bill Attwood, editorial director of Look, worked in the 1960 campaign for John F. Kennedy. It is unthinkable that he would publish any material, even a Manchester mistake in taste, for the sake of cheap reading.

Should Have Signed

The four or five pages in question are a bleak part of the tangle. Mrs. John F. Kennedy, emotionally upset, told Manchester in detail what she went through after Nov. 22. He put it down. Now, read to her two years later, she found it bothered her too much. Involved somewhere is also a letter she had written to her husband. How and why the material is in the book is a question. Nothing in life is worth upsetting a woman and her children. The hope is that Manchester wrote it well, and that people will read it well, and Mrs. Kennedy's reactions will be calmed by the results.

The notion is that perhaps a very old process in the writing business has been taking place. People simply are not able to be objective about anything on paper which concerns themselves. If this present situation follows the usual pattern of those things, the impact of the Manchester copy will be excellent and all objections will fade and everything will be forgotten.

POINT TO CONTROVERSY

But there is a point to this controversy which goes beyond one book, no matter how important a book it is, and one lawsuit, no matter how much it means to those involved. The major point is the paragraph in the agreement for "The Death of a President" which is causing the trouble.

For there have been several complaints from people in publishing in New York about controls, spelled out or implied, over book manuscripts emanating from people who once were

associated with President Kennedy. These complaints are important because they apply to more than just the Kennedys.

Yesterday, in going around New York, we found manuscript copies of a book about the late president. The book is called "The Pleasure of His Company." It was written by Paul Fay. Mrs. John F. Kennedy does not like the book. Last week, she turned down a donation to the Kennedy Library from Fay because of her dislike for the book. Yet even this book appears to have had controls over it. In looking over the manuscript copies yesterday, we found markings written across the top of the page in the bold hand of what appears to be Robert Kennedy.

One notation, on an early page, said, "Mr. Kennedy should not be called Joe, Big Joe, but Ambassador or Mr. Joseph Kennedy."

On another manuscript page was the notation, in the same handwriting, "I would like to see Red Fay write this story if my father was not ill—I think it is an outrage."

The anecdote under it was about Joseph P. Kennedy, who was comparing Hyannis and Newport. The anecdote was in taste and it told me something about Joseph P. Kennedy, and at the same time made a reader understand and like the man a little. But basically, it was an unimportant anecdote. What is important is the fact the anecdote does not appear in the published book.

Kennedy Sr. Has Anemia

BOSTON, Dec. 15 (UPI)—Former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, 78, confined to New England Baptist Hospital, is suffering from anemia, a source close to the family disclosed today. Hospital officials said the father of the late President Kennedy remained in satisfactory condition.

Dr. Russell Boles Jr., Kennedy's doctor, said he was treating him for a "circulatory condition" which has been "stabilized." He said his patient would remain hospitalized indefinitely. Kennedy entered the hospital Dec. 5 for removal of lesions from his chest.