

Publisher Faulted in Kennedy Book Flap

By MEG COX

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Despite all the publicity surrounding "The Last Brother," bookseller Roxanne Coady has sold just one copy of the new book about Edward M. Kennedy. If anything, she says, the allegations that author Joe McGinniss lifted much of his material from William Manchester's 1967 "The Death of a President" will help spur interest in paperback sales of that book instead.

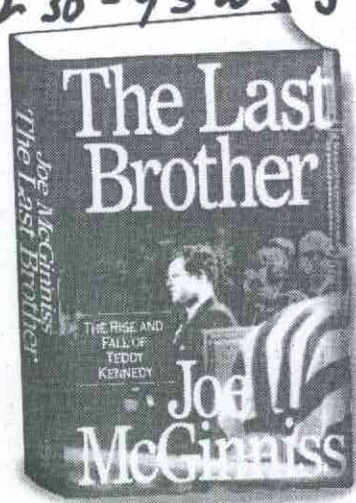
"All the controversy about 'The Last Brother' has left the impression that there isn't much new and it isn't well written," says Ms. Coady, whose store is in Madison, Conn. "The press says there's a lot taken from the Manchester book, which was terrific, so I'm putting up a special display of that."

Despite conventional wisdom that controversy always sells books, there are early signs that "The Last Brother" has been tarnished by a wave of negative publicity. The book just began arriving in East Coast stores early this week, and there is still a chance that it may land briefly on bestseller lists. But booksellers say it isn't flying out of stores so far, and some veteran publishers predict it won't be a success.

While author McGinniss is partly to blame for the public beating he's taking, critics say his publisher, the Simon & Schuster unit of Paramount Communications Inc., has mishandled the book from the start, making a bad situation worse. The brouhaha also raises troubling questions for the publishing industry about its responsibility to ensure a book's veracity and originality.

"Every publisher is learning a lesson from what Simon & Schuster has done: Always be upfront with the readers," says Harold Evans, publisher of rival Random House, a unit of Advance Publications Inc.

Publishers at other houses say they don't think the book would have come under nearly as much criticism if Simon &



Schuster had released the book with a full explanation of the author's intentions and technique from the start. In May, when the first section of the book was handed out as an advance-reading copy at the American Booksellers Association convention, it carried only a brief note on the copyright page that said: "Some thoughts and dialogue . . . were created by the author, based on research and his knowledge of the relevant people, places and events."

Jack Romanos, president of Paramount Publishing's consumer-books division, which includes Simon & Schuster, says he now regards as "unfortunate" the decision to include the disclaimer with the early excerpts, partly because the controversy took place without the book being available to speak for itself. He adds: "We still believe this is a very strong book and so does everybody else associated with it, including the Literary Guild [which chose it for a selection] and Vanity Fair [which is publishing an excerpt]."

Although initial reaction to the excerpt was largely positive as "a good popcorn read," booksellers say, a scandal was born as historians, including Mr. Manchester, got copies of the book (through Sen. Kennedy's minions, according to the author) and started shouting "plagiarism" to the press. Mr. Manchester has said he found more than 100 examples where Mr. McGinniss lifted his words almost intact, and he has threatened to sue. Mr. McGinniss says he never intended to write a scholarly biography and didn't do anything illegal or unprecedented in using previous works; he says his author's note was "misinterpreted," but largely blames himself.

"I wrote the one-paragraph disclaimer with the help of a Simon & Schuster lawyer, in an effort to show I was using an unorthodox method," says Mr. McGinniss. "In a way, I'm glad about the controversy, because I'm much happier with the longer author's note that is now included in the book." In the longer note, Mr. McGinniss says the book is "a rumination" designed to create "empathy" for Sen. Kennedy, and he names other authors who imagined what famous people were thinking.

Although he says his publisher has been "totally supportive" through the ordeal, Simon & Schuster hasn't always appeared that way to outsiders. With a range of executives answering media questions about the book, it began to look as though "The Last Brother" was a hot potato nobody wanted to handle. And with the flip-flopping on the author's note, the publisher gave the appearance that it was itself confused or defensive about the nature of the book.

"This whole thing suggests some kind of breakdown between author and publisher for this to have happened this way," says John Sterling, Houghton Mifflin Co.'s editor in chief for adult-consumer books. "Whatever the author's fault here, I think the publisher left him out to dry. When I saw [the first author's note] I was out-

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As.

Because Merck's planned acquisition of Medco is nearly certain to intensify price competition among drug makers, it will be an unattractive target for antitrust enforcers. Article on page B5.

appears to be looking to form strategic alliances with the fast-growing and powerful pharmacy discounters who compete with Medco. And investors, at least, are betting that the Merck/Medco deal could be the start of a series of drug-industry acquisitions of managed-care pharmacy groups.

In the past two days, shares of **Diagnostek Inc.** and **Caremark International Inc.** — companies that operate big mail-order pharmacy businesses — have climbed more than 10%. **McKesson Corp.**, which runs the PCS card-based program used at retail pharmacies, has seen its stock surge about 5%.

"We're seeing a change in how prescription drugs are being marketed," says **Nunzio DeSanto**, chief executive of **Diagnostek**, a sizable Medco competitor. "The buyer now really controls how drugs are being dispensed." As drug companies look for ways to keep their profits growing, he predicts, "I think we're going to see more consolidation and mergers."

Relations With Health Plans

For all the ebullience in some quarters, a sizable faction of the drug industry contends that Merck may be moving too fast with its Medco acquisition. Some drug companies say they will be less inclined to sell to Medco at deep discounts, once it is owned by Merck. And some discount pharmacy groups say they think Medco could lose standing with big health plans, which may worry that its ability to stock the most cost-effective drugs could be compromised by close ties to Merck.

"Why would any [drug] maker do business with Medco now that Medco is Merck?" asks a top marketing executive at one major drug maker, a competitor of Merck, that sells many of its products through Medco. The executive says his company isn't interested in providing "increased profits" to Merck, and is considering "new ways to offer buyers good

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Simon & Schuster Is Faulted for Handling Of Kennedy Book

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raged: Everybody knows you don't write a significant nonfiction book without explaining methodology and sources."

"I think the accusations of copyright infringement would have reared their heads anyhow," says **Howard Kaminsky**, chairman of **Hearst Corp.'s Trade Book Group**. "But the publisher has made the controversy last longer and drawn more attention to it with the caveat they issued at first."

Although the early reaction in the publishing community was that the **McGinniss** flap would make "The Last Brother" a sure bestseller, that assessment is already being second-guessed. That may be partly because of a flurry of nasty reviews, although such things haven't cooled demand for other hot books.

One Copy

"Controversy by itself doesn't guarantee big sales," says **Thomas McCormack**, chairman of **St. Martin's Press**. "Controversy about the contents of a book can help enormously, as can serious attempts to stop a book's publication. But controversy over the credibility of an author can hurt."

That may be the case this time. **Erik Barnum**, manager of **Sidney Kramer Books** in Washington, D.C., says he has sold just one copy of "The Last Brother," even though it is displayed in the window. **Perry Haberman**, manager of New York's **Madison Avenue Bookshop**, says: "We've sold about 15 copies this week, but with a book that's really hot, we sell 25 copies a day. I think it's pretty much dead in the water."

Even at the big chains, where blockbuster books tend to move quickly because they're discounted, "The Last Brother" isn't an early favorite. "It's a lackluster performance so far," says a spokeswoman for **Barnes & Noble Inc.** "It's in about half our stores now. I can't tell if it's not moving much because people have had enough about the Kennedys, or if they just don't realize the book is out yet."

The publisher says it already has shipped more than 250,000 copies of the book to stores, but bookstores are customarily allowed to return whatever doesn't sell.

"The ultimate jury is the consumer, and the verdict isn't in yet," says **Mr. Romanos** of **Paramount Publishing**. "I don't think we'll know for at least another week how big this is."