

Battle of the Book: Privacy or History?

12/25/66 By William B. Collins
Of The Inquirer Staff

THEY were all appalled—all those well-bred people who had known each other so long, through marriage or Establishment connections, and their dismay spread to the rest of the Nation because none of us really will ever get over the murder of John F. Kennedy and everyone was pained to see his widow so deeply troubled.

The months of debate over the Warren Report dovetailed in some awful way with the sudden public controversy over a book that was supposed to tell the straight story of the assassination, a controversy that saw Jacqueline Kennedy go to court and lay claim to memories she did not want to share with history.

"The Death of a President," as the unpublished book is called, may or may not be the kind of account the Kennedy family had in mind when they first talked to author William Manchester about writing it. Perhaps Manchester wasn't the man for the job, but it was Manchester who, last week, probably came closer than anyone else to the real cause of the trouble.

'Dark Nightmare of Death'

"In life, John Kennedy belonged to all Americans," Manchester said. "His cruel murder deprived us all. I cannot help but feel that some of the present bitterness comes from the dark nightmare of his death and the impotence in the face of death which we felt then and feel now." *EVERYTHING BUT HIM. SOME EGO!*

Once Mrs. Kennedy had filed suit to prevent publication of the book, which Look magazine is serializing, the lawyers got very busy and, on Wednesday, came to an agreement that satisfied Mrs. Kennedy and she withdrew her court petition.

The crowning irony may be yet to come. Someone at Harper & Row, publishers of the book, said that copies of the typewritten text were "almost certainly" sold to outlaw publishers in Formosa where bootlegging books is a thriving industry. This raised the possibility that sections which Manchester had agreed to cut out even before the court suit was instituted might turn up in a pirate version of the book.

Mrs. Kennedy had objected to some of the more personal details that Manchester had in his book, details he had gathered from her in 10 hours of taped interviews back in 1964.

Then there was a school of thought that some allegedly unflattering passages in the book on President Johnson might hurt Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's political future. Manchester was said to have told of hostility toward Mr. Johnson on the part of the Kennedy family and White House staff.

Charges and Countercharges

Mrs. Kennedy, who was the one who picked Manchester for the job in the first place, made it clear that she felt she was protecting her privacy and her children's. Her suit was based on the charge that Manchester had broken an agreement not to publish the book until the Kennedy family had approved it.

The author said Mrs. Kennedy never asked to see the manuscript. Friends of hers read it and he made "appropriate changes" in consultation with them, he said. Manchester claimed that Robert Kennedy had given the green light in one telegram but the Kennedys said that a second telegram from the Senator nullified the first.

Look will publish an 80,000-word version of "The Death of a President" in four parts beginning Jan. 10. Last week's compromise with the management according to Mrs. Kennedy's attorney, Simon H. Rifkind, meant the deletion or change of "every passage of a personal nature under contention for several months."

Pain and Duty

William Attwood, editor-in-chief of Cowles Publications, publishers of Look, said the changes did not alter the book's historical accuracy.

Cass Canfield, chairman of Harper and Row, issued a pained statement saying he wanted the public to know "how badly I feel" that Mrs. Kennedy "is upset," but he said he felt a duty to go ahead with publication of the book.

Both Canfield and Attwood are old friends of the Kennedy's. Canfield's son was once married to Jacqueline Kennedy's sister, Lee Radziwill, and Attwood was on the JFK campaign staff in 1960.

Since the book will now surely be one of the all-time best-sellers, Canfield took the trouble to say that Harper will get a "small return" from the first printing and give the rest of the profits to the Kennedy Memorial Library. He pointed out that Manchester "is also making substantial contributions to the library from his earnings . . ."