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Battle of the Book

"I have to try. We might lose this, but I have to try. I can't lose all that I've tried to protect for these years. We have to do what is necessary. We have to sue."

With those anguished words to close friends last week, Jacqueline Kennedy set in motion the biggest brouhaha over a book that the nation has ever known. The book was no ordinary one: it was William Manchester's *The Death of a President*, which has been awaited as the authoritative account of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas. The late President's family carefully hand-picked both the author and the publisher—neither of whom had sought the assignment—and offered them exclusive access to information and key figures, hoping thereby to avoid "distortion and sensationalism" and produce a sober, low-key retelling of the events of Nov. 22, 1963. The book was to be a *rara avis*: a history that would be independent but would still carry the authorization of the Kennedys and require their approval before publication.

Exhaustive Detail. Long the subject of speculation across the U.S., the 1,200-page manuscript of the book has proved to be something of a shock to just about everyone. Re-creating the events on and after the day of the assassination in exhaustive detail and in sometimes mawkish language, it describes Jackie Kennedy's every thought and emotion after her husband's death with such fidelity that the Kennedys—who have not read it but are familiar with its contents—feel that it contains things far too personal to print. "That's all she has left—her personal life," says a member of the family. "She wants to protect that."

To protect it, Jackie Kennedy's attorneys requested and received a "show-cause" order from the New York State Supreme Court requiring Manchester, Harper & Row, which was to publish the book April 7, and *Look* magazine, which was to begin serializing it Jan. 10, to explain in a hearing next week why they should not be barred from bringing out the book. The charge: Manchester and his publishers had violated a "Memorandum of Understanding" and gone ahead with the book without an O.K. from the Kennedy family.

The dispute has simmered behind the

scenes for months as rumors buzzed in Washington and New York about the book's incendiary contents, and about the problems between the Kennedys and the author and publisher. But the book has done far more than merely upset the Kennedys. It has set many New Frontiersmen against one another, caused the author to become ill and brought turmoil to the publishing world,

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JACKIE KENNEDY & RICHARD GOODWIN
Carborundum beneath the camellias.

leaving half a dozen publishers in Europe and the U.S. holding a manuscript that they are not sure they will be able to print. Its influence has also reached into the White House, where its prejudiced and one-dimensional treatment of Lyndon Johnson has created apprehension and resentment.

Already Ensnared. The book—originally titled *Death of Lancer* in reference to Jack Kennedy's Secret Service code name—paints, in fact, an almost unrelieved portrait of Johnson as an unfeeling and boorish man. Manchester's hostility to Johnson comes across with particular force in his description of the hours immediately after the assassina-

tion. In his original version, at least, Manchester told how the Kennedy contingent arrived at Dallas' Love Field with the President's body and was "dismayed" to find that Johnson's party had moved in to Air Force One. Johnson himself was already ensconced in the President's quarters. Moreover, the account portrayed L.B.J.'s aides as shocked and saddened but scarcely able to disguise their satisfaction at finally taking command.

So great was the tension aboard the plane during the flight back to Washington, according to Manchester, that after Air Force One landed at the capital, Kenny O'Donnell, one of the late President's oldest friends, literally blocked the exit when Lyndon Johnson tried to leave with Jacqueline. A fork lift was rolled up to the plane to remove Kennedy's casket, and Jackie stepped aboard with other members of the late President's party. O'Donnell prevented Johnson from riding down with the group.

What angered O'Donnell and other members of the Kennedy group, according to Manchester's account, were a number of incidents aboard the plane. One portrays L.B.J. as maneuvering to make sure that Jackie Kennedy was in photographs of his swearing in. Another describes how the Kennedy people dissociated themselves from Johnson's party, which was in the forward part of the plane. A high Kennedy aide remarked to a newsman: "Make sure you report that we rode in the back with our President and not up front with him"—meaning Johnson.

Multiplying the Impact. The Kennedys were upset by the anti-Johnson bias of the book, but what really moved them to try to block its publication and serialization is the almost embarrassingly personal material on Jackie's reaction to the assassination. In talking to Manchester, Jackie was totally unguarded; she expected him to use his own judgment in sorting out what material should and should not be used. According to the Kennedys, his judgment was bad.

Some of the anecdotes that he included have appeared before, but Manchester tells them through Jackie's eyes, thus multiplying the impact. One scene that agitated the Kennedys was his description of Jackie's horror-stricken reaction as she saw her husband's skull shattered by Assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's last—and fatal—shot. Numbed and bewildered, she cradled her hus-

band's head in her lap, sought to cover his gaping wound with her hand—as if by that act she could heal him.

At Parkland Hospital, she tried to enter her husband's room, but was blocked by a nurse until a doctor appeared and told the nurse to let her in. Through the day, Jackie refused to change from her blood-spattered clothes so that, as Manchester quotes her, "they can see what they've done." Another section that disturbed Jackie was Manchester's account of her feeling of emptiness and despair when she went to bed at the White House on the night of the assassination. In helpless, futile anguish, she tore at the pillow that night.

Jackie wanted at least three other things deleted from the manuscript. One is an emotionally charged account of

spoken favorably of Manchester, whose 1962 *Portrait of a President* was a glowing—one reviewer called it "adoring"—tribute to J.F.K. Manchester, 44, an ex-Marine, agreed to the conditions laid down by the Kennedys.

On March 26, 1964, he and Bobby Kennedy signed the eleven-point "Memorandum of Understanding." The key paragraph said that "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." Another said that "the book may not be published before Nov. 22, 1968," unless the family agreed. A third ruled that "no motion picture or TV adaptation shall ever be made based on the book," and gave the Kennedys the right

family) and four indifferently received novels—none of which came close to bestsellerdom—he halted work on a book about Germany's vast Krupp industrial empire, set up shop in a cubicle in Washington's National Archives building. Next door was Evelyn Lincoln, J.F.K.'s White House secretary.

For as many as 15 hours a day for the next 21 months, Manchester gathered material, accumulating 45 volumes of tapes, notes and documents. From Cape Cod to Dallas, he conducted 1,000 interviews with 500 people. He spent a day in Gettysburg with Dwight Eisenhower, 3½ hours over lunch with Chief Justice Earl Warren. In Dallas, he retraced on foot the route of Kennedy's motorcade. A meticulous reporter, he scoured hungrily for the small details that help illuminate the larger ones: how a flock of pigeons took wing from the roof of the Texas School Book Depository when Lee Harvey Oswald fired his first shot; how an undertaker, before driving Kennedy's body to Love Field, asked a reporter whom he should ask about payment. Manchester saw the film of the actual assassination no fewer than 75 times.

The pivotal interview was the one with Mrs. Kennedy. For more than ten hours during two days in April 1964, Manchester taped her recollections at her Georgetown home in Washington. In his foreword he wrote: "Mrs. Kennedy asked but one question before our first taping session. 'Are you just going to put down all the facts, who ate what for breakfast and all that, or are you going to put yourself in the book, too?' I replied that I didn't see how I could very well keep myself out of it. 'Good,' she said emphatically." As a friend of Jackie's told Chicago Daily Newsman Peter Lisagor, she thereupon "poured out her soul to Manchester as if he were a psychiatrist." Jackie, who was then thoroughly obsessed with the assassination, spared no details.

Though Lyndon Johnson had an inkling that Manchester was no friend and refused to see him, most of the principals spoke at length with the author—and with nobody else. When Jackie learned that Jim Bishop (*The Day Lincoln Was Shot*) was working on a book, she sent him a handwritten letter begging him "to please not go ahead with your intended book, *The Day Kennedy Was Shot*." Wrote Jackie: "I hired William Manchester to protect President Kennedy and the truth. If I decide the book should never be published, then Mr. Manchester will be reimbursed for his time. Or if I decide it should be known, I will then decide when it should be published." Said Bishop angrily: "She's trying to copy-right the assassination."

Pure Agony. Manchester noted that at least half of the people he interviewed "experienced moments of emotional difficulty" when asked to relive the assassination. Nor was he exempt. Months after Kennedy's funeral, Manchester re-



THE SWEARING IN ON AIR FORCE ONE

Fact was the issue in some passages, taste was the issue in others.

how the children, Caroline, then 5, and John, 2, learned of their father's death. Another was a letter that she had placed in her dead husband's casket before it was sealed. A third was a series of letters she had written, often in conjunction with her daughter Caroline, to Jack; she was particularly upset at the inclusion of a letter that she had sent him from Greece the month before his death.

Adoring Tribute. The roots of the current controversy were put down in the weeks just after Nov. 22, 1963. Besieged by requests for interviews, the Kennedys decided that, as a close friend says, "we had to choose a writer who would be given exclusivity—then Mrs. Kennedy would have to go through the painful process only once."

The family approached two authors—Theodore H. White (*The Making of a President*) and Walter Lord (*Day of Infamy*). Both declined, mostly because the Kennedys were asking for final-review rights of the book. Someone recalled that Jack Kennedy had

of approval over sale of other rights—including magazine serialization.

Harper & Row, something of a Kennedy "house," was chosen to be the publisher. Harper Executive Vice President Evan W. Thomas II, son of quadrennial Socialist Presidential Candidate Norman Thomas, had edited Jack Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*, Bobby's *The Enemy Within*, ex-Presidential Speechwriter Theodore Sorensen's *Kennedy*. Thomas foresaw trouble, at first declined the offer to edit and publish the book. But Bobby finally persuaded him. All profits after the first printing were to go to the John F. Kennedy Library at Harvard. Manchester got an advance of less than \$50,000 for expenses from Harper, and there was a vague understanding that he might make \$150,000 from the book.

Pivotal Interview. Manchester immediately went to work, focusing on the period of Nov. 20-25, 1963. The author of two well-received biographies (of H. L. Mencken and the Rockefeller

called how "I still wake up at night and hear the stutter of the drums on Pennsylvania Avenue." An intense, emotional man, he became so immersed in his subject that he began referring to his wife Julia as "Jacqueline." As a result of the pressure, he became ill earlier this year, required hospitalization and received treatment from the same psychiatrist who tended Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife Zelda.

"It's been pure agony," said Manchester at one point, and the agony did not end when he turned his manuscript—pruned from 1,400 to 1,200 pages—over to Harper's Thomas at the turn of the year. Neither Bobby nor Jackie wanted to read it because, as a friend said, it would be "far too painful." But they farmed out copies to five close friends, most notably John Seigenthaler, an ex-Justice Department aide who is now editor of the Nashville Tennessean, and Edwin Guthman, a former aide of Bobby's who is now national news editor of the Los Angeles Times.

The two read the book mostly for factual accuracy. Among other things, they failed to grasp the full implications of its portrayal of Johnson—possibly because neither is a full-fledged L.B.J. fan. When they met with Editor Thomas in Washington in May, all three agreed that "Manchester had used bad judgment, even bad taste in places." They suggested a number of changes to the author—but not enough to balance the book's bias. For once, the Kennedys' early-warning system had failed.

Ancillary Deals. At this point, Manchester began to worry when—or whether—the book would be published. "I was told by Harper's representative," said Bobby, "that Manchester was becoming ill from an obsession with the thought that the book might never be published." Consequently, Bobby sent him a telegram in July saying that "members of the Kennedy family will place no obstacle in the way of publication." The Kennedys insist that the telegram "contained neither a waiver of any of the approval rights" nor an approval of the timing of publication.

But Manchester construed it as such, and went ahead with some ancillary deals. A copy of the text went to United Artists—despite the ban on movie sales. Without the Kennedys' O.K., rights for British publication were sold to London Publisher Michael Joseph for an unspecified sum and to the Book-of-the-Month Club in the U.S. Manchester's agent, Donald Congdon, sent 25 copies of the manuscript to six magazines—*LIFE*, *Look*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's* and *Good Housekeeping*—for bids.

When the bids were opened July 29, all but *LIFE* and *Look* were quickly eliminated. Congdon admitted that at one point "*LIFE* did offer the most dough," but *LIFE* was unwilling to meet Congdon's insistence that Manchester should have complete control over the serialization—down to headlines and captions. *LIFE* ultimately went to \$600,-

000; *Look* got it for \$665,000, and gave Manchester considerable control. *LIFE* offered him only what it has given to authors from Winston Churchill to Arthur Schlesinger Jr.: the right to recommend changes and approve the final excerpts. As for the money, Manchester received \$365,000 from *Look* in August, was to be paid the rest in five installments ending in 1971.

Ear-Searing Lecture. Just after the *Look* deal was closed, Jackie Kennedy returned from a Hawaii vacation. "She reacted strenuously to the magazine idea," said Evan Thomas. "The promotion, the fireworks—it was bothering her emotionally." She was even more deeply disturbed after former Kennedy Speechwriter Richard Goodwin, a

the autumn, Kennedy advisers met frequently, zeroing in finally on two major objections: the book was still too anti-Johnson, and much of the material from Manchester's interview with Jackie was mawkishly handled. Copies of the *Look* galleys were sent to the White House, where Bill Moyers read them but offered no suggestions.

After Thanksgiving, semifinal page proofs of the book were sent to the Kennedys by Harper. The Kennedys now claim that changes that they had recommended had not been made, and that portions deleted from one section had been slipped into another. A full 15 pages of Jackie's personal reactions remained in the proofs. "I read them with horror," said one family friend.



THE ARRIVAL AT ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE
Not much left except her personal life.

neighbor of Manchester's near the Wesleyan University campus in Middletown, Conn., saw the author's agreement with *Look*. Goodwin, realizing that Manchester had assured the magazine of no interference from the Kennedys, took alarm. He and Manchester flew up to Hyannis Port with *Look's* publisher, Gardner Cowles, and there Jackie gave them an ear-searing lecture.

At that point began what a member of the Kennedy family describes as "a long era of negotiations." Through its agents, the family took a closer look at Manchester's first manuscript and realized that much more was wrong than a few factual errors. Pamela Turnure Timmins, Jackie's secretary, drafted a three-page memo detailing passages that Jackie found objectionable. Bobby met with Manchester at his Senate office in Washington and at his Virginia home the following month to discuss changes. Kennedy agents told *Look* that they had to approve the articles, but *Look* rejected the suggested changes. Through

Goodwin called on Manchester, told him of all the objections that remained. "I'll go think about them—and talk with my lawyer," said Manchester. He seemed in no mood to yield. A monthly Manhattan tabloid, *Books*, quoted him as taking, around that time, the position: "Let's get out the book as I wrote it—and to hell with the Kennedys."

Mail Now. In a final effort to reach agreement, Goodwin sent *Look* and Harper a memorandum indicating ten personal passages about Jackie that the Kennedys were anxious to delete; at that point, they were not even attempting to change the book's tone toward Johnson, despite their alarm at it. Two Harper executives flew to London, where Manchester was working on his interrupted Krupp book, to discuss the changes. Later they said that some changes had been made, but refused to show the galleys to the Kennedys. *Look* also refused to show them its galleys. Jackie finally decided to sue. Bobby would have preferred avoiding a court

case, but once Jackie made up her mind, he went along with her.

Her first step was to notify *Look* and Harper—which had never expected her to go to such lengths—that she intended to take court action to stop publication. That threw both companies into turmoil—not to mention the London Sunday Times, *Paris Match*, West Germany's *Der Stern* and Italy's *Epoca*, which had paid *Look* nearly \$300,000 for European rights and had launched promotion campaigns. *Look* similarly was flooding the mail with warnings that "the only way you can be certain of reading every installment is to mail your introductory *Look* subscription now." Moreover, eight pages of the first installment were already being run off in Chicago for *Look's* Jan. 24 issue, due on newsstands Jan. 10. "It would cost a lot of money to stop it now," groaned

courts to enforce my rights and postpone publication until the minimum limits of my family's privacy can be protected."

Some 45 hours after issuing her statement, Jackie lowered the boom. She asked New York State's Supreme Court to prevent Manchester, *Look* and Harper from publishing the book on the ground of breach of contract. "I have never seen Manchester's manuscript," she said. "I have not approved it, nor have I authorized anyone else to approve it for me." Publication at this time, she said, would not only be "a violation of my rights, but will cause me great and irreparable injury. It will result in precisely the sensationalism and commercialism which we—Robert F. Kennedy and I—sought so strenuously to avoid. The threatened publication is in total disregard of my rights and, if it

publication date or that "I have broken faith with Mrs. Kennedy." Though he said that he had made substantial changes at the request of the Kennedys, he insisted that "in the last analysis, this is my book. Neither Mrs. Kennedy nor any member of the Kennedy family nor anyone else is in any way responsible for my research or the content of my work. It is my responsibility."

Whether the court upholds or rejects Jacqueline Kennedy's complaint, *Look* is in a bind. Its Jan. 24 issue was on the presses at R. R. Donnelley's Chicago plant last week, but the editors were not saying how many copies had been run off or if they could change the contents. The Harper book also faces an uncertain fate. To some observers, it would seem that enough Kennedy representatives had pondered and pored over the manuscript to constitute a committee of approval, and that the Kennedys had adequate opportunity to make all the changes they wanted. But the changes failed to satisfy the Kennedy most intimately involved—Jacqueline—and she is a woman who has at her disposal a huge reservoir of public sympathy and admiration. Moreover, Jackie is so obviously and sincerely agitated over the whole affair that, after a meeting with attorneys at week's end during which parts of the book were read, she emerged, with Dick Goodwin, on the verge of tears.

Binding Obligation. It was, everything considered, a most unseemly spat. Neither side had expected it to go so far, but it finally got out of hand. Why the Kennedys had waited so long to make their personal objections felt has not been explained; they obviously made a mistake in expecting to exert so much control at so late a date. Nonetheless, the author who agreed to their conditions was bound by them. Freedom of the press—or precise historical objectivity—was not really at issue, since Manchester willingly limited that freedom by taking on contractual obligations with the Kennedys.

From all the evidence, Manchester has compiled an invaluable source book—one of those rare books that not only report history but make it. Even so, it is not the book that the Kennedys thought they were getting. To be sure, Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy provided Manchester with the raw materials that he later used in a way that displeased them. What nobody seemed to take into account is that the assassination is still so fresh in people's memories and has left so many exposed nerve ends that any painstakingly detailed, step-by-step retelling is premature at this point. The book in no way contradicts the findings of the Warren Commission. But it is seriously flawed by the fact that its partisan portrayal of Lyndon Johnson is so hostile that it almost demeans the office itself. Manchester's *Death of a President*—if it ever reaches print—will surely be rated as a compelling narrative, but hardly as impartial history.



AUTHOR MANCHESTER

Still hearing the stutter of those drums.

Cowles Editor in Chief William Attwood, who had been Jack Kennedy's ambassador to Guinea and Kenya. "I don't see any way it can be stopped."

Five Remedies. Jackie did. The woman who had enchanted Manchester with her "camellia beauty," as he once described it, now showed a broad vein of Carborundum beneath it. Calling newsmen to her Park Avenue office, she did not show up herself, but sent over a statement composed by Ted Sorensen, who wrote her husband's most memorable speeches. The book, it said, "is in part both tasteless and distorted." It was replete with "inaccurate and unfair references to other individuals"—obviously, Johnson—"in contrast with its generous references to all members of the Kennedy family." Most important, to expose "all the private grief, personal thoughts and painful reactions which my children and I endured in those terrible days does not seem to me to be essential to any current historical record." Jackie's statement concluded: "As horrible as a trial will be, it now seems clear that my only redress is to ask the

goes forward, will utterly destroy them."

She requested five remedies: 1) that Manchester, *Look* and Harper be barred from publishing the manuscript until she okayed the text and publication date; 2) that they be permanently enjoined from using any of the letters from herself and Caroline that might be in Manchester's possession; 3) that they be prohibited from using material from Manchester's taped interview with her and return all the tapes; 4) that *Look* be prevented from using her name in advertisements, as it has been doing; and 5) that she be granted punitive and compensatory damages and court costs.

No Joy. At first silent, Manchester finally spoke up after Jackie filed her suit. In recent months, he had been "hiding—a sort of recluse," according to an acquaintance in Middletown. Just before leaving for England last month, he told a WCBS-TV interviewer that "all sorts of things have happened to the book. I certainly cannot feel any sense of joy or even of genuine achievement." Now confronted with a lawsuit, he denied that he had jumped the gun on the



EDITOR THOMAS