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Bobby on the Book

PETE HAMILL

The way Robert Kennedy sees it, the heart of the matter is the worth of a man's word. In this ugly public quarrel over William Manchester's book, Kennedy will almost certainly be the biggest loser because he has the most to lose. But he has apparently decided that some things are more important than being elected President of the United States. One is family loyalty. The other is a man's word.

"The agreement was made," Kennedy said yesterday in a telephone interview from Sun Valley, Idaho, where he is vacationing with relatives and friends. "If Manchester felt he couldn't abide by it, he should have said so then; not now, not two and a half years later.

"But the arrangement was made and he said it was satisfactory. I agree that there is a legitimate argument over whether the agreement ever should have been entered into. That's legitimate. But it should have been brought up then. Not now. If he had said then that he would be the final judge, that it was his own taste, his own judgment that would be the final, deciding factor, well, that would be different. But he didn't say that."

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The original agreement, dated March 26, 1964, and signed by Manchester and Kennedy, stated 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 John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy and the text shall not be published unless and until approved by them." Manchester interrupted a book on the Krupps to start on the Kennedy book, was released from an option by Little, Brown, the Boston publishing house, and started work. Harper & Row agreed to publish the book, with a small profit for itself, a small profit for Manchester and the rest of the profits to go to the Kennedy Library.

"He kept saying that he didn't want to take a penny out of it," Kennedy said. "But apparently \$650,000 makes a difference."

Kennedy was especially concerned about the charges that there was a Kennedy family plot to rewrite history.

"Look, I was the one who suggested to Jackie that she tell the whole thing to Manchester," he said. "The tapes were to be sent to the Kennedy Library, where they would be available to historians 50 or 75 years from now, when Jackie is gone, when all the living members of the family are gone.

"What she objected to were the kind of intimate personal details that she otherwise would have obviously kept to herself. But it was one thing to be on tape for the historians. It was something else to have it written down for you to see. It's not a matter of rewriting history; the material will be in the Kennedy Library for the historians of the future who want to find out about our time.

The Senator insisted that what counts now is not how he feels but how Jackie Kennedy

feels. He left no doubt at all that he was solidly behind her in the current court fight against Manchester.

"A lot [of the material culled from 10 hours of taped conversations with Mrs. Kennedy] he didn't use. And the parts that are being objected to would really only affect about four pages."

One journalist who read the 1,200-page manuscript said that Kennedy had not requested censorship of Manchester's manuscript.

"He just told us to read it and use our judgment," the journalist said. "He asked us to read it for accuracy as to names, places, times. As for censoring, there wasn't any. He never asked us to do anything except read it. I'm a good friend of Manchester, and I read it as much at his request as at Kennedy's request. Some places were overwritten, some people's names were wrong, identifications were not quite correct. Who did what at a specific moment, things like that. It was an editing job, much as a book editor would do at a publishing house. And I think it was a better book for it."

Kennedy, who spoke in quiet tones of resignation rather than anger, said that Harper & Row and Look might have underestimated Mrs. Kennedy's determination to prevent the book's publication until the requested changes had been made.

"I suppose they thought we wouldn't go to court because it would be too embarrassing, the political implications would be too embarrassing," he said. "But there are more important things than me."

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Sources close to Kennedy say that he was willing to let the book go as it was, rather than take the issue to court. But because of loyalty to the family, he went along with Mrs. Kennedy when she insisted on going through with a lawsuit.

"He thought it would be an ugly scene and he was right," one source said over the weekend. "He does feel that Manchester broke his word and a contract. And he thought that the publishers were bulling the book through. But when Jackie went ahead, he had to go ahead with her, no matter what personal damage it would cost him."

Another source close to the dispute said that one of the basic problems was the sheer size of the money involved. In hard cover, the book should be the biggest best-seller in many years, and a first printing of 100,000 copies is being prepared for April publication. The Book-of-the-Month Club has already guaranteed Harper & Row \$250,000. Dell Publishing has offered \$1,000,000 for the paperback rights.

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the largest such deal in publishing history. Look guaranteed \$665,000 to Manchester, plus a fee as a special consultant, and its Chicago presses are already printing 500,000 copies a day of the Jan. 10 issue, containing the first installment.

"I think Manchester was just overwhelmed by the size of the money," said one man who knew them both. "And so was Mrs. Kennedy. It sounds naive, but she apparently was appalled by the tremendous commercial bonanza involving the book. So when they decided to publish without her final approval, and still gave the impression that it was the authorized version, she decided to stop them."

The major puzzle in the argument is over precisely what it is that Mrs. Kennedy objects to so strongly. Robert Kennedy was not saying. But it is apparent that Manchester's account contained at least five sections, of varying length, which the Kennedy people objected to.

One, a too-vivid account of the actual shooting and the condition of President Kennedy when he arrived at Parkland Hospital in Dallas. "There was," said one who read the manuscript, "too much blood and guts." Manchester toned this down.

Two, an account in Mrs. Kennedy's own words, of the last night she spent with her husband, before moving on to Dallas on the morning of Nov. 22.

Three, a detailed "heart-breaking" story of the movements of Caroline and John F. Kennedy Jr., and how the assassination and funeral were explained to them.

Four, an account of family bickering over where the President would be buried. Most felt he should be buried in Massachusetts. Defense Secretary MacNamara wanted Arlington, Mrs. Kennedy agreed, and the rest of the family deferred to her.

The fifth objection was over detail that for matters of taste Mrs. Kennedy apparently thought should be removed. For example, in the scene at Parkland Hospital in which she removes her ring and places it on the dead President's finger, Manchester notes that she dipped the ring in Vaseline.

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In addition, there was some feeling among the men who read the book for the Kennedys

(neither Jackie or Robert Kennedy has read it themselves, though Mrs. Kennedy heard some of the Look instalments on Saturday) that its tone was severely anti-Lyndon Johnson. Manchester has maintained that people who like Johnson would find it pro-Johnson; those who dislike him would find it anti-Johnson.

"It's not that simple," one source said. "The first draft that went around made Johnson sound like an arrogant boor. I understand a lot of that was straightened out since then."

Manchester apparently feels that he received the approval of the Kennedy family on July 28, 1966, when Robert Kennedy sent him and Harper & Row identical telegrams saying that since Manchester "had access to more information and sources than any other writer, members of the Kennedy family will place no obstacle in the way of publication of his work." But the telegram also said this:

"However, if Mr. Manchester's account is published in segments or excerpts, I would expect that incidents would not be taken out of context or summarized in any way which might distort the facts of or the events relating to President Kennedy's death."

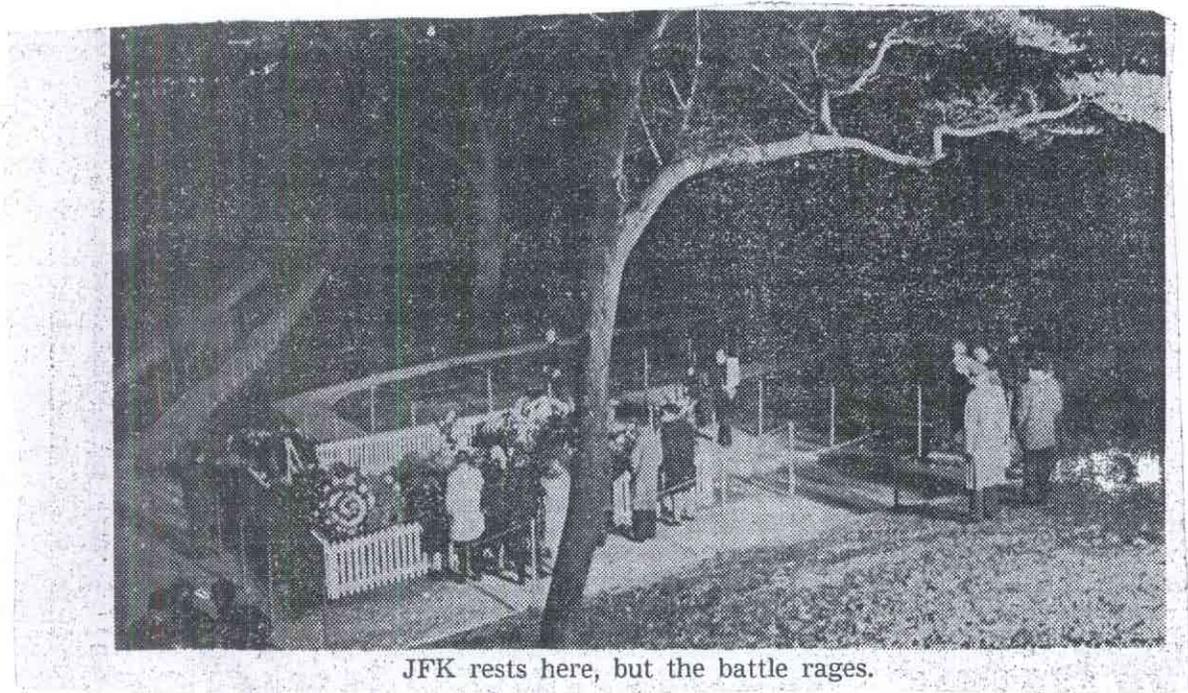
The other side claims that the telegram came after previous telephone discussion, and was in fact confirmation that the final version was ready for publication. But there is a subsequent telegram from Kennedy reminding Harper & Row that "Mrs. Kennedy and I must give permission for publication of book and that has not yet been given."

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So now it will go to the courts. It has become an argument between lawyers, with bitterness and regret on each side. All the old complaints about the Kennedys have been raised again: that they are ruthless, arrogant, and act like a special aristocracy.

And Robert Kennedy will be damaged the most. People who do not understand about close families, and especially the Kennedy family, will certainly not understand why he has become so involved.

"In the last analysis," he told The Post, "It's what she feels that's important here. It's very, very, very distressing to her; she is a very sensitive woman. I don't care what I feel about; it doesn't matter. I've only got one time around."



JFK rests here, but the battle rages.