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Book Leaves a Wounded Tiger

SOME SMALL THOUGHTS, mildly relevant and mildly irreverent, about the Kennedy-Manchester war which I still think is several furlongs behind the Viet Nam War in public interest and public concern.

Or should be.

I get the feeling that when the book is published there will be nobody to buy it except Mrs. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Everybody else seems to know all about it, the more succulent passages have been printed (Oh, man, have they been printed and printed) and gossiped all over the world.

The book has already set all kinds of journalistic records for stories crammed with "official spokesmen" and "you can print this but don't use my name."

I must confess to being numbed every time I read that the book has never been read by Mrs. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and the President. That suggests inhuman restraint, two character gifts never noticeably present in either the Senator or the President.

In the beginning I could understand why Mrs. Kennedy and the Senator had passed on reading the manuscript to avoid reopening wounds that are not now, nor ever will be, fully healed. I am not familiar with Mr. Johnson's reading habits but I rather doubt he has time for unpublished manuscripts.

But when this thing became the story of the day all over the world it is hard to understand how Mrs. Kennedy, her brother-in-law, and the President could avoid saying, "Okay, I've heard all about the book from friends. But now let's see what it REALLY is all about."

No matter what appears or does not appear in the book it has already hurt Mr. Johnson's public image. The quick

readers and the no readers already are convinced of unspeakable Johnson gaucheries on the funeral plane.

Whether they happened or not is secondary. Whether they are or are not omitted from the book (if they ever were written) is now academic. It now means nothing that a man is not being rude because he appears to be rude to distraught people.

The Senator has not been seriously wounded by the gaudy incident. Indeed he hasn't. And, of course, Mrs. Kennedy carries the admiration of a world that can easily understand the emotional confusion of a widow talking about her late husband.

We can now sit back and read galleys of endless double-talk by virtually all concerned. How much has been taken from the book? How little? What was changed? Why?

It is hard to believe that Mr. Johnson will not have to make some clear public statement no matter what appears in the book. He has been politically hurt by rumors, if nothing else. Silence—never a Johnson forte—will only add to the political wound.

The possibility is mighty remote that Mr. Johnson will see in all this publicity any degree of human error. He is bound to think he has rather been had. And whether it was by accident or design he jolly well has been had.

He is going to be a wounded tiger in that White House for the next few months and wounded tigers are not inclined to compromise although Mr. Johnson is the great compromiser of our day.

He is in a position now where no compromise is possible. The battle lines are drawn and they cannot be erased by mere double-talk even if the double-talkers are the best practitioners of that art in the English-speaking world.