

14 February 1967

Dear Shirley,

Thanks for sending me Striso's letter. After writing to you about him, I received a letter from him in which he apologized for having taken my time and I suppose implicitly for his state of intoxication—whether real or cleverly acted out. He went on to "explain" that just before his visit to me he had had "the bucket of hot rivets tessed at him" and that he was "backing away." By that, I assume I am to understand that this game is too dangerous to a big muscular powerhouse like him—so how much more dangerous to the likes of us?

I do agree with you that this man is the bad side of some coin, although I would not rule out the government. Fortunately, I, too, told him nothing—although until his visit, I had no grounds for distrust or suspicion since, unlike some of the other frauds or con-artists that have been contacting the critics, he did give his address, he could be reached at the phone at that address, and he writes a good letter. However, I am now certain in my mind after reading his letter to you that this is a man to stay away from. And that we should all be doubly careful with strangers bearing gifts, however plausible, empathetic, or ingratiating they may be. But do I take my own advice??? No. I have two strangers on the calendar—one tomorrow night, a student at Columbia School of Journalism who is writing his thesis on the critics of the WH; said he had interviewed Peter Kihss of the NY Times; I am leery, on general principle, and will ask to be shown identifications. The other one is coming next Tuesday night—a guy who sounds great on the phone, almost irresistible. He was at first a firm believer in the WH but has had a massive reversal of opinion and is now 100% with the critics. He has a men's clothing shop somewhere in New Jersey; he wants to bring me exciting things he has found in the exhibits that he feels have ~~not~~ been overlooked by the critics thus far. How could I take the chance of saying "no" to anyone who just might well be genuine—not that I think he will bring anything that we have in fact overlooked, that is not the real risk: the risk is that if he is genuine, how will he feel about the critics with whom he wants to ally himself if the first one he approaches is unwilling to give him a hearing? But maybe I will have my niece be present, so that I don't find myself alone with him, just to be doubly safe.

Now here is a piece of real bad news I just got last night, please pass it along to Penn: the twin-vermin, Schiller and Lewis, not content with their dirty platter and their defamatory venom in the WJTrib, are doing A BOOK on the critics—one chapter per critic—of which Dell is putting out 300,000 copies. Isn't that the creme-de-la-filth of human degradation? Schiller is ~~making~~ palmy-walzy with Liebelier, as you know, and has some kind of entre with Epstein (with whom I long ago ceased all communication, for his finkhood). Since Epstein is such an academic climber and gutless, ball-less blob, he must be terrified of this mountain of vulgarity and sharpness, Schiller, and probably sees him rather than antagonize such a ruthless character-assassin. This way, he buys a relatively "clean" press from the vermin twins. How low can a Harvard man GET? Got to run to a meeting in the Trusteeship Council. Thanks again, Shirley, and remember, onward and upward, it's darkest before the dawn, and other cheering cliches in which I cannot make myself believe at the moment. Affectionately,