

2/12/72

Dear Jerry,

Your valuable mailing with West and other things did come this a.m. I'll lay it aside for reading in between other things, like when I have to rest my thumb, which is progressing only slowly. However, there are several things I may have addressed inadequately when you phoned yesterday, and the risk of being criticized for an avuncular attitude, not an uncommon criticism and coming from those older than you, too, I'll try, briefly.

I think it was Churchill who once said the farther back one could see, the farther ahead he could also see. One of the few advantages of age is the experience that can be drawn upon. While I'm invoking, there is also Al Smith and "Let's look at the record".

I recognize that a fair proportion of my letters are of the kind few people like to get and most of my friends dislike or disapprove. But the record, especially in the recent Lattimer flap, bears out their sometimes usefulness. If you doubt this is not unique, when you are here I invite you to inspect the character of the correspondence which led to my getting what I think is the most sensational and significant ~~stuff~~ stuff any of us has yet gotten. And while it has caused the Archives to slow down on me and to interfere in every way possible, it has also yielded much there, much I think of the greatest significance. Until my work ~~is~~ is in print, I am not disclosing any of it to those I have not. You have seen some. Howard has seen about all and read almost all of what I have written on it. Ask his appraisal. And ask him if I ever got a meaningful response to a polite letter to my ultimate sources and whether, in fact, it was not until I got real nasty that we were ever able to establish any kind of relationship. Just this past week I got something the Archives was holding back on me because I put someone else in a position to tell them to. It is important, and they had been holding it back, although I had seen it. By this means alone I have gotten from the Archives that of which no others have had any knowledge and no others have seen. I have reason to believe that not even Lattimer did.

You know about all the flowers blooming. Let me turn to the skinning of cats, re McMillan. I knew him when we were both younger, and I knew his first wife, an heiress who gave up what was then a fortune to marry him. He is now married to the much richer Priscilla Johnson, and he, inadvertently, disclosed that he is hung up on being married to women of wealth. You do not know these people, nor do you know what they have been into. Priscilla did some pretty nasty things with Marina and in the Oswald case. George is writing a really bad book, with contracts in 8 countries before writing began, with shrinks on the payroll and what he called a "happy contract" from the Time-Life publishing house. The potential for attention it has is at least as great as that for Frank's crap, where all the early indications are that only the exception and financially ruinous is in the works. Now with an investment of more than \$100,000, that being the advance to him, I think you can understand what Doubleday will have to do. That can't be as hurtful as what McM is up to, which I know. But I also know that McM is desperate, because he knows he is in trouble. His book is now three years late and his present, earliest forecast for it is after the election. In strictest confidence, he is offering Ray fabulous hourly rates for conferences guaranteed not to discuss the assassination. Frank ditto. I have these things in my possession, as I also have regular and prompt accounts of McM's phone calls. You do not know what McM wrote of me that led to this letter. Nor do you know my objectives in that letter. Are you willing to assume that I did write it for a purpose. Then let me get to the skinning of cats. First you decide if you want to skin a cat. Then you decide if there is a special cat you want to skin, bearing in mind, if you are not merely a sadist, that you have a reason for wanting to skin a cat. Then, unless you want just the skin, which doesn't interest me, what part of the cat you really want. Now I had a limited and special purpose in writing McM, and this was not my first letter, the other being entirely different in character and this being inspired by what he said of that, which came back to me promptly and I am certain accurately. I used part of it, the part you probably objected to most of all. I quoted it directly, without using quotes. And I had a subsidiary purpose, rupturing a relationship someone has with McM. One that can be very, very hurtful and that in his desperation McM will undoubtedly try to misuse.

My main purpose I am not now telling you. In time I will. But first of all, I want you to think about it on your own, beginning with the assumption that maybe I am not just nuts or ill-tempered. I think, especially for my years an experience, I am much more flexible than you, in everything except bone. I hold positions and argue them strongly, as HR will tell you, but he will also tell you that I yield and change, sometimes ~~with~~ immediately, sometime changing my mind on reflection. e has had many such experience. And he is ever so much more flexible than you. Recently he began doing his own thinking on a major topic on which he began stringly disagreeing with me. He has, on his own, now swung around almost 100% to my view. There are cases the other way, especially in POST MORTEM when I have accepted his views on many changes. Your, as you learn more and find you are doing some things both very well and very successfully, are getting a bit big for your britches. You have no monopoly. We are all that way at some point in our lives, most often at the beginning of maturity. Some of us never change. You have also recently let yourself be taken in by more people than I have commented on in yesterday's comment on your piece.

Here let me digress to tell you that I dropped everything to do it, with the intent to be helpful. I have not, for example, unpacked from Monday's trip to Wilmington. You are not alone in having gotten a response from CBS. Mine came from a higher leverl, and I have not answered that. I did not get around to remind Graham that he has not kept his promise until after I wrote you yesterday. This is something you have never done with any of my drafts when I asked it of you, and I am busier and more tired than you.

I did this not only as a personal favor to you but because I feel a responsibility to my younger friends. That responsibility begins with not giving them any shit, which, from your account of the reactions to your general fine Times pieces, is what every one your senior did, and you should be asking yourself why. And there are and have been serious problems in the critical community you should try to understand if you are to be part of it, try to understand its causes and roots, and then try not to make it worse. There is nothing you or anyone else can do to make it better.

Now it obviously is easier for me to sit down, if I have a view I want to prevail, and, with however many carbons necessary, set them forth. I have learned first of all that there are those who, if I say day, will say night. There are those who automatically oppose almost anything I say. And there are others who believe I try to impose my views on others. In addition, I do not consider myself incapable or error or wrong judgement. Therefore, especially with the younger ones, the only ones with whom I now have any real contact, I ask that you think for yourselves. This is something you should be doing anyway. For your own purposes and in getting practise at analyzing things and because it is the way, if you are so disposed, you can help me. Do this or not as you see fit on Mc Illan, because what is done is done. I do not and never did expect any answer from him. With the book he has planned, he'd be crazy to answer, and my earlier correspondence is of a different character. Company just came, family, and I have to know off. I add one thing: Not one of the senior critics responded to my request that they think through the problems that can follow any access to the autopsy stuff by anyone, especially Cyril. Neither Cyril nor Sylvia has even asked my reasons. And only today did Hoch ask them. I think my first alarm was six months ago. I suggest this means more than one thing, but once above all, that it is not I who am unwilling to listen to other views and to argue them. But coping with any possible problem has been my chore alone. I suggest that from what you know of and have seen, which is not everything, it is possible to deduce that I have done it with more success than a powerless, bankrupt has any reason to expect he can. I suggest that there are a few of us who had the means of converting the latter things into a big plus for us, and not one was unselfish enough to make it possible or to even ask if it could be possible. I accomplished nothing with what you would regard as polite letters. They were pointed or rough, and to date they have accomplished the intended purposes. I hew to the Ecclesiastes philosophy. I suggest it is good reading for the newly mature and maturing. You don't have to believe it, but you should consider it. This is one of the reasons I write some of the letters you do not like. Now let me ask you to look at the other side. You wrote nice letters to everyone. What did any one get you of any consequence? They made you feel good and important, but they stopped nothing (witness Leonard) and told us nothing of value. Best, HW