

4/3/69

Dear Sylvia,

More, perhaps, than your kind comments about PMIII do I appreciate the constructive criticism. You are correct, I am and have been aware of it, and there is nothing I can do about it without sacrificing something else, as I will explain. I should have written to let you know PM got here, apparently in good condition, rewrapped by the postoffice in clear plastic(!) with most of the original wrapping gone - all of the back and part of the front and all four sides. What machines they have perfected for the mails! I have not unwrapped it because I want to take pictures and just haven't taken the time.

By normal standards, perhaps, I wrote PMIII "at fantastic speed". However, the actual writing was at a much slower rate than the rest of my work. This was, in part, because I was doing other things at the same time, things requiring time, like helping with the litigation, etc. I started it in New Orleans, while working on other things and continuing other investigations. I cannot write slowly, for a number of reasons. It must pour out. In itself that is no major problem with ordinary subjects, for the pace of publishing is slow and there is plenty of time for editing and revision. But there is no such thing as an end with me. Without checking my files, in addition to those things of which you know, seven published books and numerous investigations, I have major parts of six other books done and all of the investigation and research for all pretty well in hand. There is still another book I've mentioned to you, TIGER TO RIDE, researched two and a half years ago, notes thrice book-length. Have you any notion of the magnitude of the bite I've taken? Aside from Ruby, I've worked extensively in every major part of that enormity. And I've begun one novel and have book-length notes on two others, all non-fiction fiction, on this subject. And this is only part of what I've been doing. Of course, there remains the question, "Why not do less"? Valid, but I cannot, for several reasons, perhaps the most obvious one being who else is doing it? To the best of my knowledge, no one. Circumstances confine you and Maggie. The students are limited by their careers. I know no one else doing anything.

With the problems I've faced in publishing, I've pretty well decided they will neither end nor change, so, while I want to preserve the rights to my work, especially because it has been so extremely costly, I also want to make and leave a record. This and the desire to get on and do other things I have not yet gone into and a very strong desire to write on other subjects, drive me. Another compulsion of which I rarely think and never speak is the enormous, exhausting physical toll. I have aged more than I show, more than anyone realizes. It began to dawn on me when I saw myself going onto the Les Crane Show set, when I saw how I now walk. The life I have led can and should be expected to have consequences not usually elected. So, with everything else, I try and rebuild myself. Today, for example, after retiring after 11 last night I was up at four, worked until 8, when I took a short walk and fed the birds, drove my wife to work, got the mail, came home and read it, and by 9:30, with the mail to think about, went out to get some exercise, working on the place, taking down trash trees and digging up unwanted honeysuckle. Save for a 20 minute break, partly because the day is so pleasant, I continued this until 1 p.m., when I had a small lunch and did today's papers, clipping them and filing. I'll get a little more exercise before supper. This is more than average, but I feel I must try and rebuild the body. But it slows down the writing output.

I set about losing weight. After dropping 30 pounds, I feel less vigorous, not more. It has not speeded me up, not slowed down the physical deterioration. It has, perhaps, speeded that up. I amy outlast the kids still, still carry what they cannot, but do not for one minute think I do not feel it.

The life I've led would make a novel. When I'm 70 I'll write it. One literature professor is writing one on that part of it of which he knows dealing with New Orleans. Flattering. I think he'll never finish it, but it was well under way in July.

Had it not been for the kindness and tolerance of Matt Herron, who became a friend of Vince when he lived in Hills, I'd not have been able to spend as much time as I did in N.O. He put me up and put up with me and my hours. Matt began as a writer, found that painful and became one of the truly great photographers, then turned half hippie. He is a great, dedicated guy who is torn with a desire to quit the world while remaining deeply concerned with the inescapable evil. Last fall when I stayed with him he raised much the same points you do. I told him what I tell you here and more there is now no time for. We went over it for hours. I detailed what I had done to get editing, getting a promise of it from Dell that, like all the others, was not kept. I turned O in N.O. over ~~to~~ to Canyon, with carte blanche on editing, and you should see what they did to that book! I told Matt it was my dream to find someone who could afford to be my editor in residence, a young, single person who could take it as I ran it out and do what is necessary. But, when I have gone \$40,000 in debt and have no income, how I can pay anyone even a pittance I cannot see. There is a limit to what my property will bear and I fear I have passed that. Most of my indebtedness is due to be paid this September, and I have no idea how I can unless I sell the property by then. If I did not have to, in ten years, with the appreciation of values where it is, it would be enough for us to retire on. "Retire", for me, means to work without worry.

Matt had what he regarded as a swell idea. Vince can do it, he said, and without doubt he would. Apparently while not wealthy, Vince is well off. As Matt saw it, he would be glad to provide the nominal salary to some bright young person who could live here as part of the pay. Well, Vince has been silent. I mentioned ~~it~~ it to him once, right then. If he and Matt have discussed it, neither has mentioned it to me.

There are a number of people, including writer friends and acquaintances, who have declined over the years. I have tried, often, whenever I saw a slight chance. Those of us who are non-commercial are very few.

So, I come to what is my function, what do I do, what is most important of those things one man can assail and hope to accomplish in the hours I do spend working (until well after we moved here I did not average four hours a night of sleep, seven days a week, and more often than anyone should I worked around the clock, not even napping).

The toll on my Griselda is worse, for she has less stamina than I, has physical and medical problems I do not, and worries about me, if she does it in total silence. Her lot was not improved when she answered the phone 2:30 one morning and overheard a very polished, well-prepared threat by an extremist of the extreme of the radical right. Time was when she retyped my mss then we read them and she type them for offset. Now she types final copy from rough rough. I have yet to publish anything but a rough draft. The only one of the books I had time to take even a slight look at before publishing was PW. I have yet to read any one of them after publication, although I did get to go through most of WWII when travelling 12/66.

Your position, your comments, are completely correct. It is because you are right and because among intellectuals and opinion-makers this is quite important (and they are so important, whether or not they should be) this imposes an additional burden on my work that I take this time to respond and explain. The strange thing is that with the "common" man and woman the effect is opposite. Most of what they read today is either sterile or emasculated. They like the passion, and an astounding number have written to say so. I must have gotten about 2,500 unsolicited letters from total strangers. Most of them comment favorably on what is a literary defect.

Were I to make a serious effort to try and quiet it down as I do it, I'd be unable to work. That is the way I see and think it. I can write it no other way. Sometimes the ideas come jumbling out, and they get confused in a single structure when they should be separate or one eliminated. The editing problem is not a difficult one. It requires merely an editor. I can not get one. It is, as I see it, that simple.

The pace at which I write is, even to me, incredible. Once I'm steamed up, 10,000 words a day is no sweat at all. I can do that and other things, and have, on many occasions. I regret it shows, inevitably. I did 35,000 words of COUP D'ETAT on a weekend in June while preparing to go to N.C. I have never taken the time to really outline anything, and for only one book do I have any organization on paper at all (WW).

Other things have happened while I have been typing this, as happens also with my writing. I will be making a broadcast to California soon, so I must go get my wife and be back in time. I have yet to write a single book after the first where there were not such intrusions, vital and important, but, for a writer rather than a publicist or publisher, still intrusions.

Sylvia, a large part of each day goes into correspondence. Much of it may end up a futility, but I feel the effort is required. For example, the enclosed letter. I forgot to mail it and discovered the envelope yesterday. Now it happens I've had a response that is not entirely negative, and I've sought to take advantage of it. We'll see. The chances are against it, but I cannot, in good conscience, tell myself in advance it will not work. I have, with this heavy correspondence, accomplished a number of constructive things. You have an idea of a ~~little~~ little. There are also a varying number of concerned amateurs throughout the country who do things for me (us), and I share them. From time to time I put them in touch with each other. I've had a number of studies made this way, and they're good. On vehicles, on weapons, on descriptions of Oswald, etc. and one has done fine work on the rifle-Frazier.

It is particularly helpful when you take the time to make specific suggestions, for these I can pick up readily. The one problem is if it alters the length of the page. This would require repagging, which is a real chore, a great time-burner. I have those you made about FM with the master. These will go with the master of EMIII. Perhaps I'm wrong, but when I face a choice between writing and rewriting, with all the writing I project, I have no choice.

I still have insufficient copies of COUP. There is a two-month-old request from Europe, for example, and others in the US. The promised copies have not been made, hence I cannot send them. There are urgent personal things, for lawyers, I must do promptly. I hope, by the beginning or middle of next week, to do the postscript-epilogue of COUP.

Please do not feel embarrassed when you feel impelled to candor. I need and appreciate it. Hurriedly,