

2/4/72

Dear Paul,

After hearing from you I made an appointment with a friend with one of the largest publishing houses. We were to have lunched the day I was to have gone to New York. But I did not get to go. That is postponed until some time after the middle of this month at the earliest. However, with the Hughes flap, I decided to raise the question more pointedly, although I really was not prepared to, by the norms of publishing. All I wanted to get was an initial expression of interest in the subject. I'll get to the norms in a minute.

The current controversy focuses attention and interest on such subjects. Because you are not a professional author and I presumed unskilled in what is commercially attractive, I felt this was the better approach. With an expression of interest there would, inevitably, be an expression of the kind of interest, meaning how the work should be angled, etc.

My friend, while a department head, is not the head of the department to which this would go. But crooked as publishing is, a most important consideration is a trusted and trustworthy friend. He took it up with his counterpart, who still is not the guy who makes the ultimate decision. He merely heads the right department. Today I got a copy of a memo back to my friend. It reads, "Great subject, but who knows is this fellow's friend can deliver the goods? Can we get more info — maybe an outline and a sample chapter? Better yet, why not bring it up at the next editorial meeting..."

There is a risk in this as it relates to this one house, which I regard as probably best for your interest for a number of reasons I won't go into with the tumb far from better, only out of splints. The risk is that they have nothing to evaluate except what they can consider to be the potential of the subject. Fortunately, I had written my friend a few of the things I thought it could contain, and I had made a point of your not being a professional writer but a professional fact-gatherer and a lawyer and above all, the man on the inside, the man in a position to know. If and when there is a decision or an evaluation, I'll hear and I'll let you hear. I think they have a weekly editorial meeting.

I have never asked you for an outline for several reasons, one being that on such a subject, with ^{out} a professional and more, a professional with a sharp commercial eye — it is not at all just literate writing that counts — there is risk that while the content and possible content might be there, the formulation might make an exciting subject be drab. Of course, I know a little bit, some of what is public knowledge and some of what is not. I think I knew enough to excite my friend, but I have no way of knowing if it is enough to enable him to excite others. So, when you can, if not an outline, it would be good for me to know some of the more exciting stuff so I can pass it on, and don't be afraid of the personal and the exotic. Unless something comes of it, it is all confidential anyway.

Instead of an outline, what I had suggested to my friend is a device I used with him with too much success, such that it is working against my interest! I happen to know of a very unusual love story (not my kind of writing), and a true one. So, I got together with the woman of that couple, the man being reluctant, and I interviewed her in depth for five hours and sent him the tapes. He started listening to them and his secretary stopped working. When he had to get to other things, she continued listening. At the end of the day she asked if she could take the recorder and the tapes home to finish listening to them. What an inside sales job! She was so excited when she brought them back the next day, he then took the recorder and the tapes home. He and his wife listened to them. She is a writer, and she fell in love with the story. She happens to be the right kind for that story. But she also happens to be latched to a number of contracts on which she must perform. So, I'm in the basket on this thing. Until she is free. But they are excited about the story itself. I think it has movie possibilities. So, what I had suggested to my friend when we first discussed this is that, if they can have an interest in the story, we find it possible for me to go down there if you are not coming up here and we try the same device. It has advantages and disadvantages. It takes more of the time of busy people whose time costs much. But it

is wormer, much more flexible, and more likely to get the mind of those whose minds must be captured working. You see, these people are used to dealing with professionals whose work they know, and when they get an outline from a known writer, that is all they need. I know of cases where a million bucks has been signed on a single sheet of paper, because of the author and what was known about him. This is not such a case. Here we have to depend upon a number of things, including getting them excited enough to arrange for just the right writer, for that can make the most enormous difference. That is where the amount of money is decided, right off the bat, and the value, even the possibility of the subsidiary rights, which, with a successful book, is almost always more profitable than the hardback royalties.

Let me explain this further. If you make an initial deal with a hardback publisher, which is the usual thing, he then seeks a deal for reprint in paperback. In turn for this, he gets half of what comes from paperback. Now, if we can interest the paperback first, which is the exception, then this 50% you do not give up. In turn, the paperback publisher places the book for hardback. This is not as easy, because the hardback publisher knows he is not getting 50% of the paperback rights. On the other hand, if it can be pulled, the paperback publisher sees to it that the book attracts enough attention in hardback, because its success in that form is what controls its possibilities for him. There is too small a margin of publisher profit in a paperback for the publisher to spend much in advertising.

Meanwhile, what can be most profitable, and I think is possible with this, given the right handling, is movie. This requires other things, besides just publishing success of a modest nature. I can be of help there when the time comes. While the movie can and sometimes does change the book all around, it is much better of the original writing is by one who understands the movie mind and market.

With luck, this need not be a longshot. It may take a little doing, a little selling, but if it can go this way, you'll do well. The other ways, for the most part, can't come close and are by no means foreclosed anyway. So lets go for the big stuff and see what we can do and what we run into. In this case, if there is a negative, I'll know the real poop. We may be able to overcome it there. But if we can't, we can be prepared for the next. My own opinion is that this is a natural. It is like the idea whose time has come. The timing may be the best because of the Hughes flap. But that, in turn, with interest, would mean some pressure to get it doen. If it does, that means the profit prospects are better.

And meanwhile, I have made a tentative exploration along a second line. My problems include being overly busy, broke, and this is the only time of the year we have any regular income. My wife is a tax specialist. I have to take her to and from work daily. I can get away if it is urgent, but we live in the country and the cab fare is a wee problem for us. We cope with it when necessary.

But, if you have any occasion for being in or near Washington in the near future, please figure on adding a day. I'll pick you up, you can stay with us, and I'll take you to the airport. While you are here we can talk into a tape machine and get enough down for others to get a notion of what is involved. I really do fear it in the kind of expression that has been required of you in your professional career. This is not to criticise that. It is, rather, to say that it is the kind of expression that doesn't sell publishers and make exciting reading.

I'll be in touch if and when I hear anything. Meanwhile, this is to let you know that I had not forgotten. Please excuse the typing that is probably worse than my usual very bad. I've been pushing too hard, have to get to bed, and want to mail this in the a.m. if we go grocery shopping. Let us keep our fingers crossed.

Sincerely,