

8 March 1975

Dear Harold:

In your March 6 mailing you include a couple of memos to Lesar about the problems of publishing Post Mortem, and at the bottom of one of these memos you type in a question asking if I would consider condensing and popularizing a version for possible paperback publication in case a deal with a publisher can be worked out.

As you probably have expected, I am willing to consider it but the longer I do so the more I discern against it. Your confidence is noted and much appreciated, but what experience I have is in an entirely different field. True, I have done considerable editing and much rewriting, but on material which is so comparatively simple that it would be rash to tackle something of this dimensions. News, even longer features, only rarely skirts the subtleties and fine distinctions which a book-length work necessarily ^{relies} on, and the news editor practically never gets into such areas, really, much less into such fineries as sustaining mood and tone which you say Kabak has mentioned to you. I think turning an amateur like me loose on a job of this breadth would be to risk losing valuable time and winding up with a poor result that well might have to be done all over again by ~~xxxx~~ the person who ought to tackle it in the first place -- a real pro with plenty of experience in reducing precisely this type of work to popular proportions. I'm sure the publishers have such people, but I've never known one. Much less do I consider myself qualified to be one.

Almost equally weighty in my mind is the distance involved. I think anyone attempting such a job should be within reasonable access to the author, to avoid the serious misinterpretations and inevitable misunderstandings if ready consultation is not available. Such consultation is essential, especially at first, when it would be necessary to get your agreement on how much to ~~mix~~ boil things down and how to boil them. Simple cutting will not do. Your message has to be maintained. Cutting it in half is not the answer or anything resembling an answer. There would simply have to be a great deal of rewriting in order to maintain spirit and continuity, and this cannot be done without your approval, especially at first. Only two ways of consulting would be possible, mail and telephone. Mail would be unbearably slow, and telephone impossibly expensive. I'd advise against trying either. You need someone who can boil down a representative sample, talk it over with you, thresh out differences of opinion with you, and then go on from there. I don't see how it could work from here.

If I did, my answer would be different. It's simply that I do not want to risk anything that would damage or delay you more than you've been already. I think that would be wrong, regardless of how well-intentioned I might be. Good intentions are not good enough in this case. You need highly experienced help who has done the same sort of job before. I haven't, and it would be dishonest to suppose I have anything that could take its place. I'm truly sorry.

Best,  jdw