

*Karass*

March 17, 1966

Dear Margie:

I loved your last letter although there was a sad quality about it that went somehow beyond the *sono triste*. I will assume that all *bon voyages* make you sad, as they do me; this is one of the ineffable counterpoints of life that are simply inescapable. You give good luck, *bon voyage* and your own happiness is diluted which seems odd and yet it is very logical since if one did not give something, one would give nothing and the happiness retained would be a hollow thing. It is all very puzzling, particularly to some people; it is easy to realize why the French intellectuals decided to invent existentialism. It seemed the only way to escape the imprisonment of the past and the inevitable tragedy of the future. The eternal Now was the only thing, and it is a good idea all right, the idea that life is for consuming, not for storing up, but in my own experience it is better in theory than in actuality. What the existentialist doesn't allow for is the *visceral* (non rational, non intellectual, non mental, non logical) nature of the living creature, a creature who is after all merely the sum total or end product of a long evolutionary chain and is therefore rather helplessly the creature of his emotions. For my own understanding, I have learned to divide myself into two men, the Head man and the Belly man. The Head man is nominally in charge and he is a very liberal guy, a Democrat, a Civil Rights activist, reasonable in every way - and also very limited. The other one, the Belly man is much less liberal, he can be anti-semitic, anti-Negro, even anti-Italian, and he has some very peculiar impulses and characteristics -- but he is less limited than the Head man. The Head man is like the mathematics done on a brown grocery bag as compared to the computer potentiality of the Belly man. All of this has a lot to do with writing, of course, and with automatic writing, and that is why I am not inclined to scoff at automatic writing. In automatic writing you are employing a higher, less understandable gear of the intelligence, in which the mental ingredients are being handled at an infinity of removals far beyond the ability of the rational mind. I find that my Head man imagines himself to be a Hemingway Hero, a player of the code game, but that when emergencies arise, he is let down by his Belly man, a rather chicken character I must say whose throat swells up and who is somehow incapable of the manly action his Head man envisages. I am sorry about this circumstance but I have ceased to apologize for it since I believe there is a kind of spectrum of chemical endowment possessed by men and my theory is that if you are the kind of Hemingway character who can exhibit grace under pressure you may also - and indeed may very likely possess Emersonian compensatory characteristics of a most unwelcome nature. (Example: the ice water hero may be an insensate thing) I don't know why I've gone on this way except to tell you something more about myself in return for what you've told me and to explain in a most devious and laborious manner my "life posture" (The boys in the back room tell me posture is in now and image is out) Von Gutt created a word in his fiction (Cat's Cradle): Karass. It means everyone who touches your life in any way; they are all in your karass. I'm proud to be in yours; I mean that literally.

Love,

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