

Sept. 9, 1968

Dear Marge:

I don't know where the time has gone, but I seem to be living another life, one more peasant-like than that detached Tacarina one, that is to say one in which I find a thousand things to do around the house or yard unrelated to writing or literature. One of these days, as they say on that funny ceramic tray one sees everywhere, "I've got to get organized."

I liked your last letter very much, and have I said recently how well you write, especially for an automatic writing person. No, I'm only kidding, but I do think there is an element of automatic writing in all good writing, and of course I don't mean that highly specialized ouji board kind of thing; I mean a kind of combination between the mind and the seat of the pants so to speak. The fact is I don't have too much faith in those 100 per cent intellectual persons who can account by plan and intent for every word they write. Such writing, if it exists, is marvelous --- and usually unreadable. I do think there has to be an unexplained little gush or jet force that gives a certain amount of thrust and persuasion to one's writing. It is for this reason that I have long since abandoned that perfectly splendid and logical collegiate way of writing, that is the complete laying out of an outline and sub topic notes, etc. I have concluded that this system is perfect except that it doesn't provide for a head of steam - or, as T.E. White says, the burst. He says that whether a writer succeeds or not depends on the endurance of his bursts and that the capricious reason he has been successful is simply that his bursts of creative writing last about a chapter and that all he has to do is burst 20 times and he has a book. Unfortunately I am not that effective a burster, and I am inclined to think that my bursts last only half-way through a sentence. Actually I suppose the most practical plan is to operate half by burst and half by intent without thinking much about it. This leads me to our mutual friend who was, I think, a kind of automatic writer himself in the best sense of the word. He had a way of screening out the false sounding, the needlessly expository, the unconsciously pretentious, the narrowly current, the digressive -- in a way that I have not seen matched in any other writer. His INDIAN CAMP, which some call slight, I call one of the most perfect prose poems ever written and I'm sure he was guided by a knowing outer hand that only partially worried about facts. It makes me laugh to read the learned dissertations on the motivations in this story, one new one I stumbled on lately, was that Uncle George was the real father of the Indian baby, if you can believe such nonsense. Of course if that was true it would help explain Uncle George's truly monumental hatred of EH. But all of this is so ridiculous when one considers the story by itself, one of those rare instances of a writer pointing truly and never wavering off to a sidepath. I have often thought Hem was a kind of poltergeist of the generation