

April 1, 1969

Dear Marge:

The Pny Express brought your answer today to mine of March 27 which is pretty damn swift is it not? The pieces do keep falling together. The process is odd, mysterious even. Sometimes it takes the 27th fact to unburden the one that really counts and of course you don't know this until after it has happened. That's what makes literary research a thankless task sometimes. People expect every question to have a certain amount of profundity and instant relevancy, but of course it doesn't work that way. The zipper must move through all the early links before it can open the last one. I remember Hadley one time. She rather turned me off by actually using the word trivial in connection with some questions I had been asking her by mail -- this was a long long time ago. I had asked if her hair was wet at the wedding because she had been in swimming a few moments before. This struck her as almost insolent, and our correspondence ended right then and there, and yet in Carlos Baker's book, just issued, I find a big fat reference to her hair being wet at the ceremony. Of course the witness isn't important or even the fact she had been swimming, but certainly these little facts are needed to make the recreation of scenes persuasive. Beyond that, of course, the wet hair and the swimming were important in themselves as indicating the mood of the moment. I think I asked her about the cigarette smoking too, and that probably turned her off, although I spared asking her about the condition of the Walloon cottage after their honeymoon because I did think that would have been a little ~~Sad~~ ^{Sad}. One of the Bacon boys had had to clean the place up and I guess not a dish had been washed the whole two weeks they were there. At least that's what Carl Bacon told me 45 years later. Originally I had been taken y Hadley because there was some indication that she had moved Hem most but this feeling wore off after a while. I specially didn't like her involvement with the bullfighter in the scenes that led to the Sun Also Rises and most particularly it didn't make me happy that she had carried that poor bull's ear around in her handkerchief for rather too long. Oh well. How did I get off on this. Well, let me work my way into a relevancy. The Carlos Baker book. I have just barely gotten into it since what I have been doing mostly is checking the index to see how much obsoletizing Baker has performed upon my own material (very little) but I have read enough to know that you will not like it one bit. And neither do I. Hem comes out of this a very bad sort of person even though Baker doesn't call him such himself. Baker characterizes Hem in a fairly even-minded way, good, bad, etc. in the forward, and then proceeds to allow Hem's life to speak for itself, so to speak. But there is a hidden mechanism guiding Baker which makes him portray Hem always in the most terrible light. And there are intruded little gratuitous remarks, as for example, after he quotes a letter of Hem's to G.E. Baker wonders whether it were politic or civilized to talk that way with a 15-year-old child. Now I ask you. Hem comes out of the book the worst kind of competitive, friend-destroying louse that one can imagine. Now we both know the man's limitations but I for one know there is a ticket that the world pays for genius and I also know that if Hem had been the nice guy that Carlos wished he would probably have not been the man who had such an enormous and durable impact upon literature. But beyond that, he was a sick man; and beyond that he was a driven man; and beyond that there were endearing sides to Hem. The Hem haters will ove this book and I

when he is shooting a tern while at sea, and then knocking off "the grieving mate." You can imagine what this does to someone like me who has almost a Sweitzer reverence for all life. As a Hem fan I had had a bit of rationalizing to do right from the start, the incessant game bird killing, the African shootings, the bull fights, etc. but I could always call this legitimate hunting by someone with a different programming than my own - and must everyone be like ourselves? The bull fights were ways in which Hem substituted for the sensualities of war, etc. etc. and after all Hem wasn't actually killing the bulls himself. But I admit killing the non-game bird terns under the critical eye of Archibald McLeish was pretty hard for me to take. But whenever this happens I try to convince myself that I am no lover of this man, it is his work that I love and that this work is of such a quality that it ill behooves me to carp from the sidelines. Well, in any case, I think Baker has done a tremendously scholastic job, my God the notes in back of the book would kill the average researcher; but I do not think the book succeeds except as a kind of outline of Hem's life. If it is considered that, a setting down of dates and places and wives and anecdotes then I think the book succeeds and is certainly necessary. But it is not a depth study of Hemingway despite the depth of the writing and the many words. It reads like a kind of diary, there is no real sweep and pull to it. Someone else will have to do this, perhaps, as Baker says, after the year 2,000. My only contribution to the story will be the impressions of people and places.

About the new departure in my life, it has not happened. I remain the same. What happened was that my old company, the polio foundation, after ten years, asked me to go back to work for them as P.R. director and I thought it over for a while and then turned it down. It would have been interestingly financially all right but it would ~~have~~ definitely have been a giving up ~~kind of~~ or a going back and my God I don't know how long I would ~~ever~~ have lasted in the rat race of jungle New York today.

Ruth and I are both okay, in the sense that neither of ~~us~~ ^{us} is dying. We show wear and tear, I'm afraid after this God awful winter but I am now buoyed up by the knowledge that I will see Spring come in here instead of being lost in the horse latitudes of New York. What a wonderful return of the birds we have had already, although actual spring is far away, buried somewhere under the three foot snow drifts that remain around us. All day today the song sparrow sings and I have hope again. All our love and best regards to you and your flock.