

April 7, 1969

Dear Marge:

Those were sweet comments that you and Georgie made re my story on Sunny. Sweet, sweet words, and it is rich business being compared to Baker. The odd thing is Baker is good when he's writing short pieces for the Princetonian or the N.Y. Times Sunday book review. But in this biog of his he is pretty awful because he follows the diary approach so relentlessly. There is no depth to anything. The criterion that controls him is time. If something happened on Tuesday the only place for it is with something else that happened on Tuesday, and the idea of the cogency of subject matter is ignored entirely. Perhaps this is the nature of a biography of this kind or any other kind but to me it doesn't work. And I suppose the saddest part is that it will have trouble holding reader interest as did the Papa Hemingway job, of which Baker is so contemptuous. The more I read Baker's book the more I am incensed with his hostile unfair attitude to Hemingway. And all under the guise of letting the chips fall where they may. They don't at all.

The chips are selected by Baker and in most cases they are unfriendly chips and on top of that he intrudes his little homilies to the dead Hemingway as if it is too bad that naughty man did not have the taste and morals of Baker and other good (and mediocre) men. When I realize that Baker avoided meeting Hemingway face to face even during the nine years since the successful publication of his critical work on Hem, I realize we are dealing with a biographer with a problem. In fact Baker seems to draw so heavily for direct information on Hemingway from Hemingway's wives, particularly Mary, that I have concluded the subhead of the title should be not "A Life Story" as Baker has it, but "A Wife's Story."

One odd thing I found from Baker's book - and I think I am the only one to put this together: Hem visited Hadley in Wyoming a few weeks before he visited you in Daytona Beach. He was 40 and apparently feeling pensive about the past. Here's a rough reconstruction:

Mid-August, 1939 - wrote Scribner's For Whom Bell Tolls had reached 76,000 words. No title.
Left Cuba, drove west: Pauline abroad. Asked his driver to pick up 2 younger boys in Conn. school and drive out to Wyoming ranch to meet him and Bumby. ~~Martha and Pauline~~
August 27, Hem, driving west, dropped off Martha in St. Louis to stay with her mother and drove on alone from there. No divorce from Pauline yet.
First wife, Hadley, vacationing in nearby Cody with husband; Hem visited her there, seeing her for first time in ten years.
Sept. 1939 Arrived at his dude ranch with outbreak of war in Europe. Hitler into Poland, etc.
Pauline flew out to join him at ranch and they agreed once and for all on a divorce.

(over)

- Sept. Called Martha to meet him at ranch and they went on further west, that is to Sun Valley for the first time. They were all there, Martha, Hem and the three boys.
- End of Oct. Brought novel to middle of chapter 18. A good friend was tragically killed with a shotgun by accident out there at that time and Hem wrote a eulogy for him. (Early November this was.) Man was Lawrence Van Gelder.
- Nov. Martha left to cover the Russian war in Finland for Colliers.
Worries about being alone at Christmas. Invited to Chicago for Christmas by Hadley and another friend but instead invited himself to Christmas at Key West but, as she had promised him, that house was bare of herself and children when he arrived there (after meeting you.)
- Dec. 12 EH wrote to Pauline's mother giving his side of it.
Hem's driver arrived to drive Hem back to Key West; but meanwhile Pauline had gone to New York with the younger boys.
- Dec. 15 Hem's visit with you. (I wonder now if he had been in rather recent touch with you or what it was that triggered his phone call to you on his way down Florida, other than his nostalgia for things past and his prospects of a bleak Christmas.)

Baker does not mention the stopover, of course. I have gone into all this detail as a means of perhaps stirring up dormant memories about the incident which is an important one to me. Naturally any physical details are welcome; I have quite a bit on this from earlier talks of ours and letters, but you were never able to remember very much about the physical circumstances of the meeting. (But you did remember that wonderful look in his eyes one time and this was the only second of contact that you thought you had.)

Item: Hem didn't start really talking about possible titles for For Whom the Bell Tolls until quite a bit later, according to Baker, but of course you remember much discussion of that subject then.

Item: After that barren Christmas in Key West, Hem's permanent address was his Finca in Cuba.

Item: Hem's 40th birthday had occurred on July 21 of 1939.

Item: Bell came out rather late in 1940. Hem found the title in the Oxford Book of English verse. The John Donne quote seemed perfectly to express the theme of his virtually completed book. The title more or less blessed and cursed both sides and this of course won Hem the furious criticism of the liberal left in the U.S. which of course thought nothing bad could be said of the anti-Franco forces.

Oh well, this is enough or far too much for now.

Love,