

April 8, 1969

Dear Marge:

Like very much your little essay on Ernest's rejection. Your argument can be reinforced at one point at least, that is the disappointment of Marcelline being selected as the college material. (I think the war at this point complicates that issue somewhat and it may be oversimplistic to push the issue.) But the fact is that Hem in later years told friends his mother should not have spent \$3,000 on that Longfield cottage because it was money robbed from her children's education. I don't recall he said this in the context of his own college hopes, but now that you mention it, and knowing he graduated from high school at the same time as Marce, it becomes clear that this is one of the things he held against his mother. (Although it is the mother's treatment of the father, it seems to me, that played as important a role as any in Ernest's hatred - and I do believe this was a true hatred, not simply a sublimated love. Right up to the end he could tell his friends that his mother was nothing but a bitch, although I'm told by his Key West driver that noone else could speak disparagingly of either his mother or Pauline, only himself.)

The only trouble I find with the rejection theory is that it applies so much to us all, and I suppose what you mean is that in Ernest this feeling of rejection was more intense than it is for most of us. Intellectually, of course, he must have had ample proof from an early age that he was one of God's anointed, and so he had no sense of inferiority here. The rejection must have belonged to another sector, that he wasn't as loveable as somebody else, namely Marcelline, I suppose. I don't know. Perhaps you would like to develop this more for this simple minded poysen - I mean how Hem's rejection differed from the fate that waits for us all. Of course the word rejection has become so much used in our modern times that it has almost lost its meaning in some ways. Another thing, don't you think that period was waiting for rejection anyway? I mean that easy victorian time was so phony in so many ways, so hypocritical, so based on values we have come to reject that it hardly seems to be pathological of Ernest to reject it. I think he was put into the world to reject those values.

Example: the great moralist Dr. Hemingway shooting game birds out of season and burning the feathers of a grouse once when he thought the game warden was coming. I mean, here was this martinet of morality trying to get away with something when it was in his field of interest. He thought Enrico Caruso a terrible man because he was arrested for "mashing" on one occasion. "A heinous crime," he called it in Ernest's presence, and yet when it was in his field of interest he thought nothing of bending the code a bit. Once he shot dead a neighbor's cat in his chicken coop, instead of chasing it or complaining about it. You can't tell me he didn't thrill when he pressed that trigger. That was his mashing. That was the phoniness of those times that perceptive little boy realized. Perhaps we are talking about the rejection that one generation foists upon another.

One of the difficulties is that Hemingway, although he came along to reject that culture was really very much a part of it and so wound up feeling like a phony himself.

Curious thought: Hem was quite a superficial anti-semitic from all accounts in the early days - I don't mean anything vicious in the modern sense, just the (ugh) normal thing, and one is entitled to wonder where this feeling did not come from if not from that pure white bosom of his family.

To me, the thing that distinguishes Hem from the rest of his disillusioned generation was that he had an almost poltergeist ability to get it right on paper. He followed his instincts instead of intellectualizing his feelings to death, and this is why there is such a remarkable consistency in what he has to say. If we follow our minds we are in very bad trouble catching the patterns of what goes on around us, and our brain flip flops and what issues is a confused mass of opinions. But if we follow our feelings, we are dealing with that old favorite of ours, the bellyman, and he is more or less unchangeable. I have always admired Hemingway because he could give voice to his bellyman as no one else. In a sense he was almost indulging in automatic writing; he was a creature for his times, and by charting the course of his writing we can put a pretty accurate stethoscope to the underlying current of the people. He was always criticized for not dealing in abstractions, but to me this was the most brilliant decision he ever made. The path of intellectualizing leads only to a swamp. Hem tapped the true feelings of his time.

I think where Hem started to decline as a creative figure was when he started to try and understand what he was doing. The things that he had to say about writing and life and all the rest are intensely interesting to me, but come, finally, under the heading of tour de force; the brio of the young man creating in a lovely vacuum is gone.

Please, Marge, excuse these maunderings of mine. You see what one gets into. And don't infer in any of this a rejection of mine of your theory. I merely seek to nail it down with more from you.

Harold Loeb has a theory that the importance of his wound is not the one put forward by Philip Young, that is that it led tension forevermore to his writings. Harold has the feeling that Hem was surprised as hell at his own bravery under fire and that this gave him a sense of reassurance that he never possessed before, and that few men are privileged to feel. He couldn't believe it. Old Hem was a tall story man from infancy. He pictured himself as a hero, but he didn't believe a word of it, as none of us do about ourselves. But when he was hit by the mortar at Fossalta in Italy and learned he had helped a wounded man in his extremity and was looked upon as a hero by the Italians, he almost felt it was somebody else. This, Loeb feels, is what gave Hem's imaginative soul, the confidence that all men need but most proceed through life without. It comes to me now he had this experience before that summer with you and I feel you don't believe a word of the foregoing, or that it didn't show itself to you. To you, even then, Hem was very shy still. I wonder what you think of Harold's theory or if you saw any evidence of the impact of the wound that summer and fall in Petoskey.

Love,