

Sept. 9, 1969

Dear Marge:

Thanks for the good letter and the Michener reference which I had been unaware of. (I hope you don't make me selfconscious about thanking you from time to time. Upon reflection I find the thanking process is often an unconscious elliptical amenity, a kind of graciousness, a kind of pleasure to the thanker (as much as to the thankee.)

Re Michener: This confirms my opinion about this man who, I will grant, is a facile and profitable writer, an automatic writer, one might almost say, but I have always asked myself why he is never in any of the lists. I leave it to you to extract the answer to that one. In any case, the man's remark about Hemingway was so unkind and, more than that, so undiscerning. It is like asking a writer of 70 to have the brio of his youth. Everything passes. Everything changes. No story has a happy ending (as Fitzgerald said). If Hemingway had still been ~~eligible~~ for the Pamplona atmosphere when he turned off he would indeed have been a queer duck. It is because Hem strained all his life to develop, to find a new direction, that he seemed strained, self derivative and sometimes downright amateur. It is only the tried and true hacks, the professionals like Michener, the ones who do not adventure, who do only what they know, who go where the ending is already clear, it is only they who do not deteriorate --- and who do not make the lists I might ad.

Had you noticed that Norman Mailer, who, willy nilly, is one of our few great writers living today, started off his long space story in Life with a quote from Hem (that old whore death) and then expatiated on him at great length before getting on with Apollo. I was surprised to find that Mailer (or Aquarius, as he third persons himself in his Life account) was still horrified by Hem's death. I had thought him scornful and angry, partly because a book he sent Hem got sent back to him unopened and he never seemed to forgive Hem for that. What I am probably leading up to is that a first ranker like Mailer can say today that Hem was the greatest ~~man~~ American writer of his time and lived his life participating the way a good man should, but that Michener, who never participated in anything except a travel tour or a minor election, should find nothing but contempt for the old master.

No, I decided not to go to Mich. this year, although I had a marvelous invitation from a hotelier of Menonaqua Beach for a free ride when his paying rats left. Didn't have the call somehow and there were many little chores to do here. We have divided this house and are now renting the front (and lesser) half of it. At the time of my possible Mich. trip a rental had just fallen through and I felt I should stay. Now we have a single man there, an asst. librarian from our small college, name of George Banks, Jr., white, divorced, about 35. Nice fell, but what a slop (when I had to do some janitorial service there) But I suppose I was no great shakes at the domesticity bit before being roped ad married.

At the moment, Ruth and I are still flirting with the idea of traveling in a camper, she eagerly, me less so, we shall see. Had planned to pivot about you but I somehow knew you would go off again to Monterrey. I like Georgie for some reason or other....Rain, rain, rain. I transplant white pine trees to sequester myself from the hippies next door. Ruth and I are fine. I will work on the pix. Take care, and love,

reducing life with