

Letter to Ernest Hemingway on *The Sun Also Rises* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

*The spelling and punctuation have not been
corrected and are Fitzgerald's own*

Dear Ernest:

Nowdays when almost everyone is a genius, at least for awhile, the temptation for the bogus to profit is no greater than the temptation for the good man to relax (in one mysterious way or another) — not realizing the transitory quality of his glory because he forgets that it rests on the frail shoulders of professional enthusiasts This should frighten all of us into a lust for anything honest that people have to say about our work. I've taken what proved to be excellent advice (On the B. + Damned) from Bunny Wilson who never wrote a novel, (on Gatsby — change of many thousand wds) from Max Perkins who never considered writing one, and on T. S. of Paradise from Katherine Tighe (you don't know her) who had probably never read a novel before.

[This is beginning to sound like my own current work which resolves itself into laborious + sententious preliminaries].

Anyhow I think parts of Sun Also are careless + ineffectual. As I said yestiday (and, as I recollect, in trying to get you to cut the 1st part of 50 Grand) I find in you the same tendency to envelope or (and as it usually turns out) to embalm in mere wordiness an anecdote or joke that casually appealed to you, that I find in myself in trying to preserve a piece of 'fine writing.' Your first chapter contains about 10 such things and it gives a feeling of condescending casualness.

P. 1. 'highly moral story'

'Brett said' (O. Henry stuff) 'much too expensive'

'something or other' (if you don't want to tell, why waste 3 wds. saying it. See P. 23 — '9 or 14' and 'or how many years it was since 19XX' when it would take two words to say That's what you'd kid in anyone else as mere 'style' — mere horseshit I can't find this latter but anyhow you've not only got to write well yourself but you've also got to not-do what anyone can do and I think that there are about 24 sneers, superiorities, and nose-thumbings-at-nothing that mar the whole narrative up to P. 29 where (after a false start on the introduction of Cohn) it really gets going. And to preserve these perverse and willful non-essentials you've done a lot of writing that honestly reminded of me of Michael Arlen.

[You know the very fact that people have committed themselves to you will make them watch you like a cat. +if they don't like it creep away like one] For example.

Pps. 1+2. Snobbish (not in itself but because the history of English Aristocrats in the war, set down so verbosely so uncritically, so exteriorly and yet so obviously inspired from within, is shopworn.) You had the same problem that I had with my Rich Boy, previously debauched by Chambers 8 ect. Either bring more thot to it with the realization that that ground has already raised its wheat + weeds or cut it down to seven sentences. It hasn't even your rythm and the fact that may be 'true' is utterly immaterial.

That biography from you, who allways believed in the superiority (the preferability) of the imagined to the seen not to say to the merely recounted.

P.3. 'Beautifully engraved shares' (Beautifully engraved 1886 irony) All this is O.K. but so glib when its glib + so profuse.

P.5. Painters are no longer real in prose. They must be minimized.

[This is not done by making them schltors, backhouse wall-experts or miniature painters]

P.8. 'highly moral urges'

'because I believe its a good story' If this paragraph isn't maladroitt then I'm a rewrite man for Dr. Cadman.

P.9. Somehow its not good. I can't quite put my hand on it — it has a ring of 'This is a true story ect.' P. 10. 'Quarter being a state of mind ect.' This is in all guide books. I haven't read Basil Swoon's but I have fifty francs to lose.

[About this time I can hear you say 'Jesus this guy thinks I'm lousy, + he can stick it up his ass for all I give a Gd Dm for his 'critisism'. But remember this is a new departure for you, and I think your stuff is great. You were the first American I wanted to meet in Europe — and the last. (This latter clause is simply to balance the sentence. It doesn't seem to make sense tho I have pawed at it for several minutes. Its like the age of the French women.

P. 14. (+ thereabout) as I said yesterday I think this anecdote is flat as hell without naming Ford which would be cheap.

It's flat because you end with mention of Allister Crowley. If he's nobody its nothing. If he's somebody, it's cheap. This is a novel. Also I'd cut out mention of H. Stearns earlier.

----- Why not cut the inessentials in Cohens biography? His first marriage is of no importance.

When so many people can write well + the competition is so heavy I can't imagine how you could have done these first 20 pps. so casually. You can't play with peoples attention — a good man who has the power of arresting attention at will must be especially careful.

From here Or rather from p. 30 I began to like the novel but Ernest I can't tell you the sense of disappointment that beginnin with its elephantine facetiousness gave me. Please do what you can about it in proof. Its 7500 words — you could reduce it to 5000. And my advice is not to do it by mere pareing but to take out the worst of the scenes.

I've decided not to pick at anything else, because I wasn't at all inspired to pick when reading it. I was much too excited. Besides This is probably a heavy dose. The novel's damn good. The central theme is marred somewhere but hell! unless you're writing your life history where you have an inevitable pendulum to swing you true (Harding metaphor), who can bring it entirely off? And what critic can trace whether the fault lies in a possible insufficient thinking out, in the biting off of more than you eventually cared to chew in the impotent theme or in the elusiveness of the lady character herself. My theory always was that she dramatized herself in terms of Arlen's dramatization of somebody's dramatization of Stephen McKenna's dramatization of Diana Manner's dramatization of the last girl in Well's Tono Bungay — who's original probably liked more things about Beatrix Esmond than about Jane Austin's Elizabeth (to whom we owe the manners of so many of our wives.) Appropos of your foreward about the Latin quarter — suppose you had begun your stories with phrases like: 'Spain is a peculiar place — ect' or 'Michigan is interesting to two classes — the fisherman + the drummer.' Pps 64 + 65 with a bit of work should tell all that need be known about Brett's past.

(Small point) 'Dysentry' instead of 'killed' is a cliché to avoid a cliché. It stands out. I suppose it can't be helped. I suppose all the 75,000,000 Europeans who died between 1914–1918 will always be among the 10,000,000 who were killed in the war.

God! The bottom of p. 77 Jusque the top p. 78 are wonderful, I go crazy when people aren't always at their best. This isn't picked out — I just happened on it.

The heart of my criticism beats somewhere upon p. 87. I think you can't change it, though. I felt the lack of some crazy torturing tentativeness or security — horror, all at once, that she'd feel — and he'd feel — maybe I'm crazy. He isn't like an impotent man. He's like a man in a sort of moral chastity belt.

Oh, well. It's fine, from Chap V on, anyhow, in spite of that — which fact is merely a proof of its brilliance.

Station Z.W.X. square says good night. Good night all.