

Jan mail

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Dear Dan,

If it has taken me some time to get around to writing to you, it certainly has not been from lack of thinking about you. I thoroughly enjoyed your last letter and the book reviews. I was in the States several times this past summer. I tried to get HFH in Newark in July, then in Chicago in September, both times without success. Everyone offered to order it, but as I was in each city for just a few days, this obviously would not work. I think I may have tried in Los Angeles in July, again without success. Finally, I asked my mother to get it at Powell's in Portland, Oregon. Powell's is a magnificent bookshop, and I figured she could get it there. She found an excellent hardcopy that was being sold at \$10. This was probably in late September or October. She decided to read the book first before bring^{ing} it to me in Sea Island, Georgia where we were scheduled to meet up at Christmas time. She read the book and thoroughly enjoyed it. I should perhaps add that my mother will be 90 in September and is in splendid health, both physically and mentally. She mentioned quite a few times how much she enjoyed the book. Then just before my departure in mid December, your inscribed copy came. Naturally I was delighted to finally see the book and touched by your kind inscription. My recollections of Clark Hall are happy ones and deeply etched into my memory. You made federal procedure and constitutional litigation a joy which, thirty years later, I still feel.

The Sokol family thus in December had two copies of your book, one in Oregon and one in France. I left mine here as I assumed that my mother was going to bring the copy she had purchased for me to Georgia. The assumption proved unfounded, as she thought I would bring my own copy and planned to keep the copy she now considered hers. So instead of reading *His Father's House* during our Sea Island holiday, I read Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, a book I recommend. Of course when I returned to France from a three week holiday, I had no time to read until I got on top of the backlog. However, last week I got to it and read it straight through in about four short sittings. By the end of the week I had finished the book.

It is a lovely novel. I confess that I approached it with some trepidation because I had not thought of you as a novelist and had some doubts as to whether you would be able to accomplish such an unusual coup. But you pulled it off splendidly. Naturally I particularly enjoyed it because of the associations with people and places I know and with your voice that would come through at times loud and clear. The book reads easily, and the pace accelerates as one gets into it. I found that each one of my reading sessions was longer than the previous one. It is well plotted. The characters are interesting, and so is the subject matter. The weakest part to me was your ear for dialogue. The bent may be there, but it has been lying fallow. The shift from voice to voice was thus not always as sharp as one would like, but this was more than made up for by the clarity and the sincerity of the telling. It felt genuine and that, I presume, is the touchstone. There were also some mechanical or technical difficulties in moving about which revealed the hand of a young novelist rather than a grizzled pro.

To me Wolf was the most interesting character and the expression of the effects of blindness the best part of the book. The comparison between the defeated Germany and the defeated Confederacy did not seem to me probed deeply enough, although I have nothing terribly concrete to suggest. Maybe it is part of a larger subject of defeat generally, the consequences it has on a people, and its dissipation or modification with time. The defeat of the Confederacy had an effect on you and on my contemporaries. It struck me forcefully when I first went South to Duke in 1956. But I wonder whether it has had any effect on your children or those of my Alabama roommate, Wray Eckl, with whom we stayed briefly in Atlanta in December. Every country is a prisoner struggling to escape from its past. The weight is so heavy in countries such as Japan, France, and England with which I have some acquaintance that one wonders whether there is any hope at all to the struggle. In some ways the bludgeoning defeat of Japan helped it to escape from some of the deadweight of its past. France has had no such luck, despite a couple of revolutions.

There was surprisingly little law in the book considering that you have passed your life in law. Perhaps writing fiction was an escape from the rationalities of the law to the softer, subjective flow of the emotions.

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The book is so permeated by the Bible that I had to have my King James version at hand just as I must always have my Code Civil next to me here in France. I presume that the misquote at page 184 as being from 2nd Corinthians when actually it is from 1st Corinthians was a cleverly laid plot to ferret out who is actually reading the book.

It is almost as hard for me to imagine that you have crossed the Retirement Line as it is for you. In my mind you are still about 35 years old, so I shall have to get used to you at your new age. I share your inability to comprehend the passage of time. I am about to turn 56, but I recall my father at about 85 telling me of events 75 years earlier and stating that they seemed as if they had just happened.

The Dillard Papers should definitely be published, and it would seem absurd for them not to be published by the University Press. I very much look forward to seeing those papers, although I know from having read some of his articles that his spoken magic largely vanished on the written page. He was one of the two best speakers I ever heard, and if we could only have captured all of his contracts classes on video it would have equalled the discovery of a new star.

I eagerly await your visit in June. Both Junko and I look forward to spending time with you and Jan. If I can get away I shall be very tempted to join you on a cruise up the Rhône. I believe I have even read an old book on Jefferson in France and have it in my library, published if I recall by a most unlikely publisher, the University of Oklahoma Press. I shall look for it this evening. I finished Dumas Malone's multi-volume work about a decade ago. I may have to brush up on it as well. What I am really curious to know is whether there is a Jefferson biography in French. My impression is that the French know little about him. I have had this on my list of things to check for about a decade as well.

No doubt we shall be in touch again before your visit in June.

Sincerely yours,



Ronald P. Sokol