

Dear Rosenbergs All,

15 July 70

Thanks for the fine letter, despite the fact that it contained the sad news of your father's death. That makes you, I guess, the man of the family. What has happened to the firm, your brother, will your mother stay in Motown, or head for Florida? Move in with you? My questions, of course, are unseemly, but then I always had too much curiosity for my own good.

Your continued descriptions of MSU depress me somewhat, but at least you are teaching and writing while I seem to be bound into a daily routine that is frustrating, and a relation to the department and the college that is anomalous, to say the very least. From now until the end of the year I am dedicated to the albatross that I have laughingly called "the book" all these years. I manage to write most of the day--when I am not looking out of my Baker study window--play some tennis, then come home and watch the carpenters (more of that below). It is what I am relative to the department and college that bothers me. Only recently did I wake up to the fact that I am painted into a corner. (I used the passive voice in the last sentence on purpose; I am both victim and agent, a hellish state of affairs.) During the past year I performed tasks that should, in a sane world, be those of people who had a stake in this place, that is, the tenured. I led the 24/25 Brigade, I was Chairman of the Division, member of too many committees, got nothing done except a skinny review for RENAISSANCE QUARTERLY (see the most recent number, or I'll send you an offprint). In the ~~mean~~ meantime, Heffernan and Vargish get tenure, Saccio is knocking at the door, and Rick Taylor, Bless us!, is looked upon with favor. I feel that carnal desire you mentioned. But what is strange is that I am really not sure I want to stay here forever; I vowed never to play the tenure game with those bastards, and I swore when I left graduate school that I would cut my own patterns. So what am I complaining about? Simply angst.

Anyway, we proceed as if Dewingdom is our fate. In the house all winter long we kept saying things like, "What if we had a window here...a bedroom added there--a porch across the back...a new roof...a paint job...knock out this wall...." Well, we added to the mortgage, got some builders, and the place is just now torn apart and ready to be put back together. What baffles me is how I could so boldly decide on such a course, especially since I am very unsure about our staying at Dartmouth. Some nights, when all are asleep and only a dog howls in the distance, I see myself as another Bill Crawford, preparing for the end. Can I afford it? Who knows, who cares? You spoke of symbolic acts, and when I read that, I discovered that our remodelling the house was a symbolic gesture of some kind, perhaps indicating that we really did want to stay here after all.

At any rate, Norwich is glorious, country living seems to agree with Karen and the children more than I can say. Jane and Annie love the little red school house and seem to be learning more and enjoying life to an extent greater than ever in Hanover. As the seasons come and go, each tree and bush and lump of earth seems precious and all too interesting. Our neighbors are like us, reserved and wary, almost grumpy. No coffee parties or tall cool ones around the hibachi. Karen has become the Nature Lady for real. She had a part-time job at the College Museum helping with a federal project to bring conservation into the grade schools. She has read hundreds of books and pamphlets about our little friends in the woods--bugs and birds, leaves and flowers. Right now our house contains all manner of LIFE: cats, a mouse, a fish tank, a frog pond, numerous plants, a terrarium

inhabited by a newt, crickets, spiders, ants, and emmets. Each day the postman brings our reading matter. Not the TLS, N. Y. Review of Books, Art World, not that effete stuff for us. We get the Nat'l Geographic, Natural History, the Whole Earth Catalogue, ~~and~~ Audubon Magazine, and so on. Am I turning into a kind of Harry Bond? Do I give a crap about The Word? Dewingdom, here I come.

News of the Department:

Rewa is off to Delaware, not too happily, but with his winning resignation. He has just bought a "camp" outside of Norwich with 14 acres of land, a place to come in the summer and rent in the winter. I plan to take over his upstairs office when he leaves. I'm fed up with the heat in my office. When I enter the door in the morning the temperature is around 95, and it seldom falls below eighty.

Loomis gets more and more conservative, yet he remains charming. All of the quirks that for years were merely eccentricities have come to the surface, especially since the recent student uproars here. What, for him, were merely annoyances have now become causes. His conversation is just about impossible, particularly when he has had a few. All he pontificates about is how ~~many~~ evil things are, how stupid and self-pitying the students/ are, and how he has all the answers.

Hart booms along, oblivious to the horrors of "his" administration. He has become Nixon's official biographer, and will have some of the next year off to write a book about Tricky Dick. In addition, he is now a Hearst syndicated columnist, writing a conservative piece that will appear thrice weekly. He stands to make a bundle from the arrangement.

Heffernan is a prick, and sour grapes in no way affect my judgment. I continue to find him impossible. Rick Pierce (you must remember the erstwhile Jack Parr of Sanborn) is up here for the summer, and I see the two of them playing tennis, then one-upping each ~~other~~ ^{other} after the game.

Vargish is sweet. He deserves tenure. Linden had a very bad winter, psychological and physical problems, but all seems worked out now. Tom is gratified that he has been promoted, and we are all happy for him.

Cox is perfection, as usual. Hunter is leaving for Vanderbilt and 28000 a year, every fourth year off. Alexis is going to Tufts for a one-year stint. Trafton is a good fellow, but limited, as I think I mentioned previously. The rest remain the same.

I would like to write some more, but the carpenters are just outside my window with a jack-hammer, tearing out our back steps. I can just barely hear the clack of the typewriter, and what nebulous thoughts I have are fractured by the noise. Besides, I must get over ~~me~~ to the library, my own special masochistic torture chamber. By the way, I am reading all of Fiedler. I started with BEING BUSTED, then went to AN END TO INNOCENCE, checked on some essays (be sure to read "The New Mutants" in PARTISAN REVIEW of about four years ago--zinger!), and now I am plowing through LOVE AND BEATH IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL. I look forward to WAITING FOR THE END and THE RETURN OF THE VANISHING AMERICAN. He is a jewel of a critic, and his style and attitudes toward literature ~~many~~ remind me of you. I guess you have read all his stuff and kept the secret from me. If you have not read him, by all means do so. I do not see how anyone could pretend to teach the novel without having read Fiedler. That's enough. Write when you get the chance, and if you can, come for a visit this summer. We'll have room to put you up for as long as you can stay.

Dear Rosenbergs,

26 September 1970

Have I answered your letter of July 1? If so, here's another installment. It is raining like hell, has been all day, and now that I have the wood in (Perrin and I rummaged around in his woods last week and came up with a cord, along with masses of rustic lore that bored me stiff), and I have some minutes saved from a life of sloth and self-indulgence, I figured I had better get down to my equinoctual epistle before you surprise me with your solstitial zinger. (Whad 'e say, whad 'e say?)

News from Turnpike Road, Norwich. This summer we added another bedroom, knocked down a wall, built a gigantic porch, put in a new water line, and painted the whole mess bright yellow-white trim-green shutters. The final result is worthy of a spread in VERMONT LIFE, and a great improvement over what we had. Of course, my mortgage with the College is massive, in fact, impossible. But when things get too tough I figure to get on with Manchesters or Dan and Whits to keep the wolf from the door. We have helped with some things, interior painting, exterior cleanup and landscaping, and other dreaded, dull, debilitating details. Nearly done now, and we are waiting for the carpet man. I got into all this at the urgings of Al Nelson, our own big butter and egg man, who presently has a large portion of egg on his face as a result of his high flying in the now low-flying stock market.

Fr.
I am on leave this term, a little like the gaolers giving the condemned man his choice of the world's menu the day before he meets the rope and the trap. Maybe the fatted calf, because I have a suspicion that I shall be let go "for my own good," Daftmouth's way of getting what they want, maintaining the fiction of the "three way route to tenure," and salving consciences all round. My suspicion is not just whistling in the dark. I sense the change around the halls of Sanborn--you must know what I mean--a slight chilliness, a deadening lack of attention or curiosity, a feeling that somehow the buiness and future of the Department are going on ~~mmmmmmmm~~ without my knowledge. So okay, I am ready, no gripes. In fact, a few days ago I came to the blinding realization that it is about time I moved on, got away from the Ivies and went back home--or close to it--back to the land of my fathers. I ~~mmmm~~ have seen the landscape, met the types, dug the "Protestant gentlemen" (as DeSantis used to call them), and taught the kids. Frankly, it has been fun, but I can live without it all, maybe should.

From the above you can gather that the book is unfinished. It keeps getting harder and longer. I am still interested and confident in what I have to write, but lack energy and that certain sort of obsessive madness that it takes to finish such a project. Parts of it, I am sure, could go easily to journals for scintillating articles that no one would care much about. What keeps me going is the simple fact that I have spent so much time on it already that I'll be damned if I'll abandon it now. All those years, all those notes, all that transportation, and, finally all that psychic electricity--no, I cannot let it all go into limbo.

If you hear of any jobs, let me know. I have high hopes of settling somewhere west of Nebraska and East of California, North of Mexico and South of Canada. But I guess I'll take anything that comes up.

In fact, I'd even go west as a Chairman or a Dean. I'd even teach a composition course every term. Don, I'd sacrifice!

Let me tell you about the Department. Heffernan and Vargish were given tenure last Spring. They both deserved it, especially one of them. The other one got it because he wrote one fine book about Wordsworth. I have not read it, but, green with envy, I have perused the reviews while seated on the downstairs ~~toilet~~ toilets of Sanborn. The reviews were, with one dumb exception, full of praise, studded with words like, "eloquent," "masterful," "most important book since..." and so on. It was chosen to be a selection of the PMLA Book Club (a dubious distinction, but in our métier a distinction that pays off). Chauncey's book should make the Spring list. He is as frenetic as ever, maybe more so since now he is vice-chairman of the Department and worried about the direction in which the world goes. He is wonderfully paranoid about undergrads, and spouts the most hilarious nonsense about repressing students, the coming blow-up, and how he will deal with it. I have a hunch he admires Agnew. Cox remains a tower of multiform truth, racked by ironies, burdened ~~with~~ with his own genius, probing and talking, circling and thinking all the time. He is more wonderful to me each day. I must admit that he has taught me more about literature than any teacher I have ever had. Maybe his real place is that of a teacher of teachers. He is wasted on students. Believe it or not, he has mentioned leaving Dartmouth, says it is time for him to "move on." Saccio and Atkinson are trying to fill Hunter's bodkins this Fall, and while I wish them luck, I forecast a HAMLET played in socks and an OTHELLO in blackface. Ferrin is a Guggenheim Fellow this year, staying in Vermont except for a brief journey to Japan to collect matter relevant to his new book, an account of the Japanese reception and then rejection of gun powder. Sir Harry is on leave too, working on a book about, you guessed it, H U M A N I S M! He told me once that D. H. Lawrence, of all people, would figure largely in Harry's sage cogitations and resounding profundities. Dread, dread. Gaylord has finished his book on TROILUS, and is busy as hell with alumni, students, films, and assorted projects too numerous to mention. Finch is madder than ever, retires in about four or five years, has taken to wearing bright and flashy clothes ala Lou Morton, longish actorish hair. Vance has returned from Germany looking much older than I remember him, but then I have not seen him for two years. He is still fun, but his memory plays tricks on him now, and he is much less formidable. Bien is in the middle of an 18 month leave, trying to finish the book on that Greek fellow. One ~~more~~ story about Nelson must suffice; it is typical of many. Trafton went to France with the Foreign Study Program, left Nelson his car. The car was stolen from in front of Sanborn House, ~~had~~ had daylight, keys in the glove box. Car contained Nelson's golf clubs, etc., and a high-powered telescope Al had borrowed from the Physics Department to observe some wildlife. Vargish rises rapidly in the hierarchy of the College. He is the apple of Kemeny's eye, a crown prince of the College. Tomorrow the World. Harry Schultz, Terrie, and others remain the same. The new guys (and girl): Lou Renza, a swinger with creative writing background, very hip and with all the new stuff in the NEW YORK REVIEW, a type; Sidney Lea, a large and friendly giant, with a lisp, from Yale, not at all like Lanham; Graham Harley, from Oxford, a shrunken version of Storch, bearded, mousey, articulate and dangerous; Sam Pickering, Princeton, a southerner, a type, polite as hell and vain, earnest and respectful--I await his disillusionment with pleasure and malice; Peter Travis, Chicago and a medievalist, good chap, solid and quiet, self-possessed; Mrs. Netzband, a black, here to help Lincoln, from NY. no more info. By the way. Darrel is now divorced, bought a Porsche,

I am out of gas. we miss you, I think of you very often, especially as I pass your office on my way to the library. Winter is coming on. The year ahead looks grim, but maybe that's because of the day, and the fact that I lost badly at squash this afternoon. So you see, no changes. I could add some gossip about non-department people, but frankly it is not all that interesting. The College is healthy, the simple reason being John Kemeny as our President. He is smart, a leader, and full of humor and good ideas.

Den, I was sorry to hear about the death of your Father. You of course have my sympathy. I can offer no good words, you know them better than I. I trust Beth is well, analyzing Pseudo-Dionysius by now, and hard at work on Aramaic. Jeannine's health I hope is by now good. We love you and know that we'll all meet again soon.

About News. He has gone to Delaware, not cheerfully but with a manfull fortitude that I found admirable. Before he left he bought some land nearby with a small house on it. He plans to summer here. A good fellow who is another one I shall miss. Herbold is now at Univ. of Maine; Dawson works at Univ. of New Hampshire--birds of ill-omen?

Keep smiling,

Utah Jim

P.S. Have you connected with my friend Will Myer yet? If not, get to it! For your own good, as they say here. J.S.