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The University Professors Teaching
Program
The University Professors Seminars
The Boston Conversazioni
The Boston, Melbourne, Oxford
Conversazioni on Culture and Society

February 28, 2002

William Kennedy
1441 Burden Lake Road
Averill Park, New York 12018

Dear Bill,

I don't think it's too late even now to tell you how deeply I loved *Roscoe*. I think it's your most successful novel yet, and I expect that more is to come. Heretofore, I was always concerned about your bringing together your singular and wonderful view of things with the idea of a large fiction always at the back of your mind, and I think you have finally united them both. I have always nagged at you to do just that, and I see that in spite of my nagging, you have presented me, and the American public too, with exactly what we have been longing for. I hope you will be able to forgive me for this delay, but it takes me longer than most to catch up with things.

Your gratified reader,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Saul".

Saul Bellow

Feb 4, '82

986 Taine Pl.
Victoria, B.C. Canada
V8X 4A4

Dear Bill:

What a delay! But the Dean, 18 months of high excitement, a long spree four a codger, wore me out. To get away from the ensuing noise of battle we made plans to retreat to British Columbia. We were smarter than we could know, because we got away from a disastrous winter, too. Here it rains and rains, but the green moss is delicious to see and there are snowdrops out already. The nervous system was not attuned to this sanctuary. For the first month I suffered acutely from what I called boredom: it was boredom but with a wash of deep fatigue, black-and-blue spread over the gray.

By now I've read Ironweed (when I saw the heading lemonweed, I preferred it; the novel has as much iron in it ~~w~~ as it needs). It's as good as Billy, in my opinion. The key is lower, closer to death at every point. This must be the first human examination of skidrow. I never saw another. Of an older/^{American} generation, Francis and Helen carried a more respectable, organized humanity with them when they began to sink. My guess is that today people sink from a more prosperous base but also a more disorderly one, they start out more chaotic, without Helen's music or Francis's conscience. Francis, a murderer, is also a traditional champion, the fated man, a type out of Icelandic or Irish epic. To kill is his destiny, and he kills American style, with techniques learned in play, throwing a stone like a baseball and then swinging a bat in Hooverville. He considers himself a man of sin. No family refuge for him.

All this you do beautifully. Here and there you go a bit too far. The Katrina idyll, for instance, is too idyllic. You ought to reconsider. Not that there were no beautiful pagan ladies, I knew a few myself, but I'm not entirely comfortable with K.

Your Esq article wasn't badly edited, as editing goes. As much as the subject permitted it was slanted towards sensationalism ~~was~~. Your original piece was excellent.

If ~~here~~ ^{now} and there I shrank, it was myself that made me shrink. I do say things like "my fucking mouth". All Americans do, but in print it looked out of character

Tell Cork he can count of me, and remember me to Dana. Yrs, as ever,

Paul

Oct 6, 1965

Dear Bill:

I was very glad to hear from you. I can't tell you how much it pleases me that you won't let these failures and discouragements stop you. It's admirable. And I think your instinct is sound. You do have something to say. It hasn't yet appeared in pure form. There's a good deal of static, or peripheral confusion. But I feel certain that one of these days you will find your form. Perhaps you have found it. Send me your new manuscript, and I'll read it as soon as I can and give you an opinion.

We have a new address: 5490 South Shore Drive Chicago 15

Regards to your wife

Best,

Saul

Dear Bill

They've speeded up my
treadmill. I thought to
toy with Broad way, but
that was my not ingenious
error. I've never worked like
this All best, Saul

a bind for time. Give
weeks. Towards the end
be happy to read
a written. Unless to
condition. One word
cross. All best

About June

Dear Bill - Well, I like it, with all its faults it keeps me reading. This is the result of your drive, for, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase it isn't so well put together. Your own feeling for its character, and esp. for P.R. keeps it going. It's odd, though. What happens to Aggie and Larry, and why does Herb insult his wife at the party, and where is she, in all this? What is missing is the special condition of these individuals, betrayed, drunk, impatient. These last terms are only generic. As types, we are familiar with drinking journalists, etc. and you've made them real and done a bang-up job, but they're not yet sharpened and pointed as individuals. Why does Rosemary go along with ~~all~~ these guys after she and Philan have made it, or begun to make it, together. Why doesn't he fully make up his mind about it? I know people are slack, but you can't afford slackness. You're harder - tittering with the Fairweather and Dooley's maids, and your large characters need a touch

of the same treatment. It's interesting that Phelan ^{is}
in defense of Rosemary, goes up to ^{the} Mrs. Dooly in her
own style. Things like that are worth reflection,
more of that, and less indulgence with him when he
goes on and on about his marriage. A real scene
with the wife would have been infinitely better.
After all, as a newsmen, he has seen graver in-
juries than his own. A "respectable" household for
such a skeptical man is paradoxical.

I don't know how much this helps. I'd like to do much
more, but there are limits to what's feasible. I
always read what you write with deep interest,
leaping over the defects, so I conclude you must be
a novelist. Perhaps what you need to do more is
put aside the impatience of the unpublished novelist
and sit thinking about your characters. Difficult ad-
vice a fellow. You want to be a successful pro,
of course. But what we really need is more depth,
from you. From me,
I will be at West Tisbury, Mass from July 1. All best
Saul (over)

of the name... **CARVER** ... **WIKI** ...

... **WIKI** ... **CARVER** ... **WIKI** ... **CARVER** ...

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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December 15, 1964

Mr. William Kennedy
R. D. #1, Box 487
Averill Park, New York

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Mr. Bellow has asked me to tell you that you're welcome to use his name as a reference. He is naturally extremely busy at the moment and hopes you won't mind his not replying personally.

Sincerely,



Anne Rankin
Secretary



Savoy Hilton

Fifth Avenue Overlooking Central Park at 58th Street, New York 22, N.Y.

Postmarked
June 24 '60
Chicago

Dear Bill -

Sorry abt this delay. (From the paper, you see how far behind I am). Your book is absorbing. It might have been compressed more but since it is mostly delightful, that is nothing but a technical beef.

Best luck with it

Saul

Dear Bill -

Delighted,

I took the miss home
with me a few days
ago, and had been
reading it slowly and
happily - love write

Congratulations

Saul

May 3, 1968

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL THOUGHT
CHICAGO • ILLINOIS 60637

January 4, 1972

Dear Bill:

Sorry I wasn't able to oblige you recently, but I try very hard to stay out of the way. I avoid the big culture scene and I lie low hoping to trap the truth as it comes crawling along. Not a very meritorious position. Nor do I have much chance of capturing truth, but I do feel that the so-called cultural life of this country has reached a point of hysteria which drives self-respecting people into the catacombs. I wrote the piece for Modern Occasions during a lapse. I fell into a state of prophetic anger and before I knew it I was being re-printed in the Intellectual Digest. The bed-bugs went out with DDT. Something had to replace them.

Ⓞ sometimes hear from Puerto Rico. Mrs. Summers writes to me. The pollution is awful, she says, and San Juan has gone utterly to hell, but the countryside is still beautiful if you don't catch Bilharic. All retreats sound lovely to me.

Tom MacMahon is very sick in Texas, I am sorry to say.

All the best to you and your wife,



Saul Bellow

Received 9/3/76
Dear Bill - The fact that you
didn't hear from me didn't
mean that I didn't like your
last book - I liked it a lot -
it only meant that I was (as I
have been for a decade now)
tied in knots. The book made a
considerable impression on me.
Of course I'll pack your appli-
cations
All best Saul

26 East 59th Street

7/16/84
Chicago, Illinois 60637

The beautiful lady from
ed me up, submitted a gray
entry. Wonderful what
do with a few red bones
imaginative reconstruction
and I (to change the

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL THOUGHT

1126 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO • ILLINOIS 60637

January 7, 1981

Dear Bill,

There is only one reason why I haven't been replying: I spend my mornings cantering and galloping on the typewriter, the afternoons in revision and my nights in what Shakespeare called the restless ecstasy. We would say threshing about. I got off a corking reference for the Guggenheim. I thought of sending you a copy but it's strictly against the regulations and I didn't feel like xeroxing forbidden papers. I'm still willing to do an interview. All I need is Time. It keeps getting scunter and scunter. I'm sorry your wife's shop has burned - what a way for me to find out that she had a shop.

I didn't take Mark Harris to heart at all. I haven't read his book and I rather enjoy the pummeling he's getting in the press. For once I am a contrast gainer and even getting some sympathy. I don't want that either. I turn my back on it all and wish that I had a back like one of Rodin's burghers of Calais - a big bronze back.

New Year's greetings and all best,

Faul

1126 East 59th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637

May 6, '92

Dear Bill - I'm glad you turned again
to the family theme - you're always at your
best with the Phelans. I'm tempted to
speculate that our family - less out-of-the-
void colleagues are anti-family on
grounds of ideology (some from the Marx,
some from the Existentialist side). That's
okay for people who really come out of
the void. (Saul's group on the shores of
Rio) but for the majority it's an
affectation - a put-on.

For the likes of us, with powerful early
connections - well, we can say no to
those connections, whether it's yes or no
we have to live with them openly.

file

SAUL BELLOW

Joyce, who was so close to his Dublin
family (perhaps to his Poyes family as well)
was Bloom pining for his dead little
boy, his suicide father, cruel and kindly-
-neal, but not without ^{sympathy} feelings. If
Joyce been born in the fields, under a
cabbage leaf (as Samuel Butler would
have preferred to enter life) there w'd
have been no Ulysses.

With this elaborate purpose! I liked
Old Bones a lot. I need it in one that,
and it did me a world of good

Yours ever
Saul

the title, reservoirs probably gaining ^{2.}
on me). I didn't see Philly ~~Stark~~
Phelan but I was stung by
your lipstick outlaws and
smalls. Had I recommended you
for a grant after reading that
(which probably you didn't
get)? I suspect occasionally
that a favorable letter from
me is the kiss-of-death.

And yes, I understand about
poor Tom Guinzburg, a poor
D.P. with loads of money.

I'd love to see you again
and have a talk. We had
good talks at Rio Piedras but
we were bush-league prophets
(or futurologists, not to over-
load the great word "prophet")

We go back to Chicago after
Labor Day. Sometime in mid-
October or early Nov. w'd be
good for me, if you're

Aug 22 80
West Halifax Vt.
05358

Dear Bill -

I'm not what you'd think of
as a drifter but I do drift
in a real (i.e. barely conscious)
sense - a sort of desert rat
with a Smith Corona instead
of a prospector's mule. That
even the Committee on Social
Thought fully remembers me.
Just as well.

Your letter, which delighted
me, finally reached Vermont
where I've been dug in writing
(what else?) a small book -
something of a cherry bomb or
small grenade. I like to think.

I've seen some of your
writing. I liked one of your
books a lot (I can't recall

3
13
series, if I haven't
became too wanky
altogether.

Very glad to have
heard from you.

Yours ever
Paul

5901 N. Sheridan Road
Chicago, Ill 60660

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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1126 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO • ILLINOIS 60637

William Kennedy
R.D. 3, Box 508
Averill Park, New York
12018

Dear Bill,

My best thanks for the tape. I ran it on a rainy evening when there wasn't another movie in the house. I must say I view myself with feelings violently mixed. Always glad to stand up and testify in a good cause. I am also forced to marvel at my own deterioration.

I wish I had your skill at writing screenplays. Envidable. A cousin of mine who is in the delicatessen business wants me to write a TV play of which he will be the hero. His story is that of a strong man who had to close his doors because his customers were getting salmonella. In the end he was vindicated and reopened, and it is a rather stirring story at that. He's a dear man and I love him and would be happy to write something about him, but not for TV -- and not only because of technical ineptitude. Endearingly funny, very sympatico.

I hope you will send the opening chapters of your new novel.

I'm off to Dublin on Oct. 9th, not to visit the pubs like any honest writer, but to give a talk at Trinity College.

My very best to you,

S.B.

Saul Bellow

(Dictated by Mr. Bellow, but signed in his absence.)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL THOUGHT

1126 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO • ILLINOIS 60637
Nov. 21, 1985

William Kennedy
R.D. 3, Box 508
AverillPark, New York
12018

Dear Bill,

Much harassed and sorely pressed. If I don't get this note off to you now, I never will, so I am ad-libbing it and my secretary Janis is transcribing the message. In New York I was drowning in flu bugs and it was all I could do to get through the ceremony, much less greet my friends suitably afterwards. When I got back, I read your chapters-in-progress with mixed feelings, mainly enthusiastic. I was sorry to get to the final pages --- always the best test. I thought your book more of a swinger than most historical novels --- no objection mind you. And I was somewhat surprised by the change of style. That took some getting used to. The opening pages were singularly lush and I was in mid-jungle before I knew it, and without a compass. I am eagerly awaiting the rest of the story.

Forgive me for this machete-style communication.

I hope this catches you before you take off for Brazil.

Yours affectionately,

(J.F. for) S. Bellow

(Dictated by Mr. Bellow, but signed in his absence.)