

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-89736-5 — The Letters of Ernest Hemingway
Ernest Hemingway , Edited by Sandra Spanier , Miriam B. Mandel
Excerpt
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THE LETTERS
April 1929–1931

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April 1929

To Henry Strater and Lansing Holden, Jr., [c. 7–20 April 1929]

Dear Mike—

Enclosed is a letter to Denny Holden and wife that I should have written long ago. How are you Kid?

[*Enclosed letter:*]

Dear Denny—

Ive never written to thank you for the Scotch the 300 yds of No 15 and the picture—you and Edith certainly made bums out of us attempting to act as hosts. We missed you badly after you went that night¹

Once we got into March we got plenty of tarpon—8 in two nights at Marquesas—9 in two nights the next time—Biggest 107—next 97—Nothing else over 65— We took a trip to Tortugas and had damn good fun—²

Sailed on this boat April 5 for Vigo—Coruña—Gijon and Boulogne—³ Have been asleep all afternoon and this letter shows it— But it was fine to meet you both and I hope we'll fish and drink together again some time soon— Bra had two bottles of Sea gin for you that he was all broken up you never called for—⁴

We drank it however—

Best always
 Hem.

JFK, AN with enclosed ALS; letterhead: Norddeutscher Lloyd Bremen / An Bord des D. „Yorck”

EH wrote this cover note and letter on separate sheets of the same letterhead stationery. They are enclosed in a single envelope addressed to “Henry H. Strater Esq. / Players Club / Gramercy Park / New York City / Estados Unidos.” The envelope bears neither a postage stamp nor a postmark and may not have been sent (see EH to Strater, 21 July [1929]).

- 1 Lansing (Denny) and Edith Holden (née Gillingham, 1896–1970), along with Henry (Mike) and Maggie Strater (née Margaret Yarnall Conner, 1895–1971), had visited EH and Pauline in Key West c. 4–22 February 1929. No. 15 refers to fifteen-thread fishing line with a test or breaking strength of 45 pounds, light tackle appropriate for marlin, tuna, sharks, and kingfish.
- 2 In a letter to Maxwell Perkins of [30 March 1929], EH had described the catch of eight tarpon, including one weighing 107 pounds, while fishing off Marquesas Keys about 25 miles west of Key West (*Letters* vol. 3, 554). EH and a group of companions made a fishing trip to the Dry Tortugas, another cluster of small islands in the Gulf of Mexico about 70 miles west of Key West, c. 19–25 March 1929.
- 3 EH was returning to live in Paris after spending the past year in the United States. He had sailed from Havana aboard the *Yorck*, a passenger liner of the North German Lloyd (Norddeutscher

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Lloyd) shipping company, accompanied by his wife Pauline (née Pauline Marie Pfeiffer, 1895–1951), their son Patrick (b. 1928), his sister Madelaine Hemingway (nicknamed “Sunny,” 1904–1995), and his son John Hadley Nicanor Hemingway (nicknamed “Bumby,” 1923–2000) from his marriage to his first wife, Hadley (née Elizabeth Hadley Richardson, 1891–1979).

4 Edward “Bra” Saunders (1876–1949), a Key West charter boat captain and fishing guide. In a January 1929 letter to Waldo Peirce, EH reported that Saunders had salvaged 45 bottles of gin from a “rumboat from Bahamas” that ran aground in shallow waters near Key West—likely the “Sea gin” he refers to here (*Letters* vol. 3, 500).

To Charles and Lorine Thompson, 21 April [1929]

April 21

Dear Charles and Lorine:

Outside the English Channel is acting like No-Man’s Land—¹ Bumby and Pat are fine but Pauline’s still sick— The grippe is better though— We land at Boulogne tonight and if we have luck will get the 9 o’clock train to Paris

Spain was fine. The weather was warm and we had a fine afternoon in Vigo— The next morning we were at Coruña and then all the next day along the coast of Spain— Snow still on the tops of the mountains—went ashore at Gijon at night and wandered around the town—then pulled out and across the Bay of Biscay and this morning in the English Channel with a norther blowing and a gray mist—

Won \$²⁰ in the pool yesterday— It’s [*illegible*] They’ve just posted the days now and we are still 89 miles from Boulogne— That means we may get there by 7 o’clock and there should be a 9 o’clock train to Paris—

Someone has written in pencil on the inside of our wardrobe— The Germans is a wonderful people but this boat is terrible!

Anyway we’re off it tonight—

Best to you both—

Ernest.

Pauline is sending Mrs. Gallagher ^{5⁰⁰} to replace broken glasses— If she hadnt been sick she would have looked after that at the time— Thanks so much for sending the guns— The Tuna had left Vigo they pulled out in January and won’t be back until August— They migrate like Kingfish— How big are your Tarpon now?— Does Waldo still hold the record?²

You’d need all your thin blood for how cold it is outside now. They took the temperature of the water just now— It was 7.^{5°}— In the Gulf it was 20°

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Centigrade— It takes a better man than Pappa to figure those into Fahrenheit— But 20 is HOT and 7⁵ is DAMN COLD— I wish I were back thinning my blood— Just won [20 ?] in the pool— [*illegible line*]

RR Auction online catalog, Boston, 17 June 2015, Lot 645 (illustrated), ALS; letterhead: Norddeutscher Lloyd Bremen / An Bord des D. „Yorck”

On the envelope flap EH wrote, “Ernest Hemingway / Guaranty Trust of N.Y. / 1, rue des Italiens / Paris – France.”

- 1 Probably a reference to the area in the Gulf of Mexico that EH and his fishing companions called “No man’s land,” which he described in a January 1929 letter as a “2hrs/ and 45 minutes run beyond Marquesas” (*Letters* vol. 3, 506–7).
- 2 American painter Waldo Peirce (1884–1970) had visited EH in Key West and joined him on fishing expeditions in 1928 and 1929. In a letter of [30 March 1929] to Maxwell Perkins, EH reported, “We got 8 tarpon the last two nights at Marquesas– Waldo got one of 107 pounds” (*Letters* vol. 3, 554).

To Grace Hall Hemingway, [22 April 1929]

[*Madelaine Hemingway writes:*]

Dear Mother:

We have already been to one port—Vigo, Spain. We all went ashore and had a big time with the language. Ernie being the only one of the crowd we’ve accumulated here on this boat, that speaks spanish, we all clung to him with all we had. He ordered the food and ran the party in general. I acquired a beautiful white mantilla— Perhaps to be used in a wedding! Never know.

Will write more later it seems I must join a game of dominoes.—

The letters I intended to send at Vigo will get there faster by waiting to mail them in France so I held them over for that.

Last night we got off at Gijon, Spain and hired a car to take us up to town we only had one hour ashore but we had fun walking up & down the main street where they were having “fiesta.” I’m a nervous wreck but soon I will be alone and able to get some rest. I sent a wire from this boat to Miriam’s boat but have had no answer from her.¹

It will be heaven to get away from all the responsibilities—

Pauline has been in bed almost all the time. And [to] slave for an unappreciative audience is no fun.²

April 1929

Our boat is getting in to Bolougne too late to catch the train to Paris so that means one more night.

Soon I'll be able to write cheerful letters—but God knows there's no cheer in my heart now nor has there been for many moons.

I hope I won't be an old woman when I get back. Anyway Miriam will put me on my feet.

I must stop now for everything is getting wild again— Love to all you men.
 Sunny.

[EH writes on envelope flap:]

Rec'd your letter— Sunny fine—well installed and waiting Miriam—
 Thanks for property list—³ best love E.

JFK, ANS on envelope of ALS by Madelaine Hemingway; letterhead: Norddeutscher Lloyd Bremen / An Bord des D. „Yorck”; postmark: [Paris] / [R. DE V]AUGIRARD, [illegible] / 22 - 4

EH's sister Sunny apparently completed her letter by 21 April, when the *Yorck* docked at Boulogne. EH likely wrote the note to their mother on the envelope flap the next day, after arriving at the apartment at 6, rue Férou in Paris and reading his mail. On the envelope front he wrote: “via Paqueboat / ‘Homeric’ / partant Cherbourg 24 Avril” (directing that the letter be carried on the *Homeric*, sailing from Cherbourg on 24 April).

- 1 Miriam A. Rickards (1906–1969), Sunny's friend from Oak Park, with whom she planned to tour Europe. On leave from her studies at Grinnell College, Miriam had sailed from New York aboard the *De Grasse*, a passenger and cargo liner of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (French Line), which was scheduled to dock at Le Havre on 25 April 1929 but arrived one day early.
- 2 Sunny, who had stayed with EH and Pauline in Key West to help with childcare and typing the manuscript of *FTA*, shared lower-deck quarters with Patrick and Bumby and was largely responsible for them during the voyage. She would recall that Pauline “took to her bed” almost immediately after boarding the ship, yet “Somehow after the children were asleep at night, Pauline revived to enjoy life aboard” (M. Miller, 118).
- 3 EH had arranged lodging for Sunny in a pension at 3, rue de Fleurus. In her letter to EH of 7 April 1929, Grace Hall Hemingway enclosed a listing of the family's Florida real estate holdings, as he had requested (*Letters* vol. 3, 555). The failed investments included properties in St. Petersburg, Gulfport, and Clearwater (JFK).

To Maxwell Perkins, [23 April 1929]

Dear Max—

We're back in Paris. [EH insertion: Got in last night so] Havent seen Scott yet[.] They said at the bank he was in town— I'll see him soon and let you know—¹

April 1929

Have meant to send the contract but havent yet—never been anyone around to witness it—² Pauline has been very sick with the Flu— Baby has picked it up now— Bumby well however—

Am looking for another installment anytime— I wonder if you would have them send me a check for the 5000 still due on the serial— If it's not inconvenient—³ I may need to draw the same as an advance on the book— Please tell me if that's all right— Things going badly more or less with the family— Am ~~illegible~~ that have to pay more in taxes etc. ~~illegible~~ property ~~illegible~~ —⁴

Planned to work immediately on arriving here but everybody sick and the man who owns this place is selling it and we'll probably be kicked out— Was met with that news— I have 2 good stories to write— Suppose must reconcile to losing it—wanted it for a pied a terre for the rest of my life if possible.⁵

I don't know if Waldo showed you a portrait he did of me looking like somewhere between Balzac and Backhouse— His idea was it would be good to reproduce or use— But perhaps it wouldnt— I should think not except to use it alongside of some tough snap shot to contrast two versions of same pan ie. face)—otherwise in this age of psychoanalysis people would say (seeing you avoiding the barber) that you were going this—or going that— (a beard or any hirsute irregularity always an object of suspicion) when all you do is avoid the barber a certain length of time— I dont want to lose my faithful public through the use of Waldo's picture—⁶

I miss America and am homesick as hell— That's the best state to write well in— There's no such thing as America with a big A as in Waldo Frank— That's all horseshit—⁷ Nearly all generalities are (including this one I suppose)— A book of generalities is pretty awful— I mean the parts of America that I love— And of course it is always 20-1 that when you come back they will be ruined—

But we'll fish together again— With Waldo and Charles and Burge—⁸ If I ever get any money I'll get a boat and have Burge run it— It would be cheaper for a whole winter—

Best to you and from Pauline—
 Ernest

PUL, ALS

April 1929

The conjectured letter date is based on EH's return to Paris on 22 April 1929.

- 1 In his 18 April 1929 letter to EH, Perkins inquired about their mutual friend and Scribner's author F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), saying, "He will come out all right if things do not pile up on him too much, but I was worried about him" (PUL).
- 2 Perkins enclosed a contract for *FTA* with his letter to EH of 14 March 1929 (JFK), offering the standard royalty rate of 15% on all copies sold—the same terms that governed EH's first two Scribner's publications, *TOS* and *SAR*. EH would return the *FTA* contract with his letter to Perkins of 7 June, but after the book was published on 27 September and quickly became a bestseller, he would renegotiate the terms and a second, more favorable contract would supersede the original.
- 3 Scribner's paid a record \$16,000 for the serial rights to *FTA*, publishing it in six installments in *Scribner's Magazine* from May to October 1929.
- 4 The sentence is heavily canceled in pencil. After the 6 December 1928 suicide of his father, Clarence Edmonds Hemingway (b. 1871), EH assumed responsibility for the family's shaky financial situation. In her recent letter of 7 April 1929, Grace Hall Hemingway had updated EH on the details of the family's nearly worthless Florida real estate holdings (JFK).
- 5 Since 1 April 1927 (shortly before their marriage on 10 May), EH and Pauline had leased the apartment at 6, rue Férou, from René Pottier (1897–1968), French writer, painter, and member of the Academy of Colonial Sciences. They maintained the lease on the Paris apartment throughout the year they lived in the United States (April 1928 to April 1929), and they would keep it until they moved back to Key West in September 1931.
- 6 During his recent visit to Key West, Waldo Peirce (1884–1970) had painted an oil portrait of EH, signing it "For Ernest (alias Kid Balzac) Key West first April/29 – WP." The portrait of a mustached EH wearing a loose, open-necked white shirt, his dark hair covering his ears, bears a striking resemblance to a well-known daguerreotype of French realist writer Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) by French photographer Louis-Auguste Bisson. Peirce's portrait is reproduced in the plate section of this volume. "Backhouse" is a slang term for an outhouse or privy; EH may also be punning on "Bacchus," the Roman god of wine.
- 7 Waldo Frank (1889–1967), American novelist, magazine editor, social historian, and cultural critic who urged writers to develop a uniquely American art free of European influence. His best-known books include *Our America* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919) and *The Re-Discovery of America: An Introduction to a Philosophy of American Life* (New York: Scribner's, 1929), which was serialized in *New Republic* in 1927. In a letter to Owen Wister of 11 March 1929, EH had expressed irritation with *The Re-Discovery of America*, which linked EH's work with that of Sherwood Anderson and was critical of both (*Letters* vol. 3, 546, 548).
- 8 Birchland "Berge" Saunders (1897–1970), a Key West fishing guide and half-brother to Bra Saunders. Although EH consistently refers to him as "Burge," Birchland himself spelled it "Berge" (in a letter to EH of 6 September 1929, Bruce; also noted in Chamberlin, 97).

To Alfred Dashiell, [c. April 1929]

The author wishes to state that this book is fiction, that although it is written in the first person it is not autobiographical and that it is no more intended as a picture or criticism of Italy or Italians than was *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.
 [On verso:]

April 1929

I want this to go somewhere— I imagine in the back of the magazine under the personal column.

PUL, AL

The May 1929 issue of *Scribner's Magazine* featured the first installment of *FTA*, with EH's statement appearing verbatim in the back section of the magazine, titled "Behind the Scenes: Biographical Notes on Contributors to this Number." EH's statement also appeared in news announcements of the novel's forthcoming serial publication (including the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 27 April 1929, 8).

To John Dos Passos, [c. late April 1929]

Dear Dos—

Thanks ever so much for the jack—it came in handy as hell—¹ Sunny smashed the car etc. Flaming childhood.²

[W]e had a swell time all right— Forget [*page torn away; missing text*] Tortugas expenses unless you get a big [*page torn away*] We caught 8 at [*page torn away*] got weighed 107— [*page torn away*] has [*page torn away*] [*Fragment continues on verso:*]

[O]ur address 6 rue Férou
 Paris VI.
 or care Guaranty Trust Co of NY
 1, rue des Italiens

Will send this to Harper's—³ The address I [*page torn away*] down that night I lost [*page torn away*] Ad [*page torn away*]

UVA, ALFrag

This fragment is written on both sides of a page that has been torn diagonally, the lower portion of which is missing.

1 EH apparently had loaned money to Dos Passos so he could join EH and others on the March fishing trip to the Dry Tortugas. In an undated note to EH, Dos Passos had written that he was coming to Key West, adding, "Hope to have jack enough for trip to Marquesas and Tortugas" (JFK). Dos Passos had recently lost most of his investments in the production of his play *Airways, Inc.*, staged 19 February–17 March 1929 by the New Playwrights of New York during the theater's final season.

May 1929

- 2 EH's sister was involved in a collision while driving EH's Model A Ford—a wedding gift from Pauline's uncle Gus Pfeiffer (1872–1953), delivered to the couple shortly after their arrival in Key West in April 1928. The accident occurred when Sunny detoured to see a Key West cigar factory ablaze—probably the Ruy Lopez Cigar Factory, destroyed by fire on 27 March 1929. (For Sunny's account of the incident, see M. Miller, 116–17.)
- 3 The New York firm of Harper & Brothers had been Dos Passos's publisher since 1925, when it brought out his novel *Manhattan Transfer*. In 1930 they would publish *The 42nd Parallel*, the first novel in his *U.S.A.* trilogy.

To Grace Hall Hemingway, 10 May 1929

May 10—1929

Dear Mother:—

Enclosed please find check for 100 for month of May—also June July and August which you can cash as they come due.¹

Hope everything is going well. Sunny and Miriam are off next week on their Grand Tour.²

Pauline has been sick for about 6 weeks— Flu and finally sinus— Pat not too well— Bumby very well—

I am working very very hard— Have had no time to write—

Best to you all—
 Ernie

IndU, ALS; postmark: PARIS 110 / R. DE RENNES, 11 / MAI / 20 ^H 15

- 1 Starting in March 1929, when he received \$6,000 of the \$16,000 Scribner's would pay for the serialization of *FTA*, EH sent Grace monthly \$100 checks, adding occasional checks to cover unanticipated expenses. The envelope accompanying this letter bears the note "Important Checks / 1929" in Grace's hand.
- 2 Sunny and Miriam Rickards would tour France, Italy, and Switzerland for about a month, their trip arranged by the Thomas Cook & Son travel agency.

To Owen Wister, 12 May [1929]

May 12

Dear O.W.:—

I was more pleased than I can tell you that you spoke well of the book. It's splendid too that you are coming over— We will be in Paris until July 1,