

Box 792 Route I
Rahway, New Jersey

July 15, 1952

My dear Mrs Licht:

Periodically one of these enauiries turns up and right now I cannot remember what small town in Maine Henry is living in, but I will check with a friend of his in New York who may know and forward your letter for I am sure it will please him.

Yes, I knew Henry from the time he was about nineteen until he was in his middle thirties very well indeed; he was not precisely a student in my first teaching years but was a member of a poetry club I ran at "U. S. O. very early in my own career. I helped him for some time get at himself and his writing. He was a very poor and a very ingrown and insecure boy as I think the book indicates and he had written nothing but his talk and his love of words led me to believe he could. And the whole of Call it Sleep which was my title for the book grew out of a n essay about the rabbi. It took him about four years to do the book and meantime to learn every faucet of writing rapidly. The book was sold to second hand stores after Balaue went out of business, but also not until another book had been accepted by Scribners, was almost done. A story from this, or chapter did appear in a magazine. I think it was the Partican Review and I will try to find it for you, for I undoubtedly have it in my files as most of Henry's reviews, etc are still there. Two or three New Yorker stories, good, but not his kind appeared later when for a brief time he tried to write for money. The second book which I saw the full writing of was much greater than the first because it was not autobiographical but made the connection between minority suffering and labor organization. By this time Henry had become identified with a kind of father-figure who was very active in waterfront work into which for a time Henry also plunged.

As the book began to draw to gether, Henry in a very high strung and nervous state, felt (as he had in the earlier one) defeated. There followed a curious and very complicated sort of split in his interests. He had decided he wanted to marry and support children and had fallen in love with Muriea Parker, a minor but somewhat talented composer. Mainly, and late, I guess, he plunged into growing up and taking responsibility. Between strains as to jobs and strains as to his work, he broke pretty much with all his past. His sister (and I knew the family all of them) told me he destroyed in some fit of rejection the manuscript of the second book. He married has two lovely boys and went to Maine bought a farm, is farming and working as a male attendant in an insane asylum. He never seems to have been able to write since. Once about two years or more ago there was some talk of a wealthy friend helping him to return to New York but this friend died and I do not know what the results would have been. He has integrated his life in completely different patterns now. Scribners still has rights to the second book and was to reprint the first but so many years have gone by and the Editor (Tom Wolfs also) who was interested in him through in part me, is dead. I agree with you and worked with the conviction for many years, that Henry's talent was the highest. I've placed many students books and known a good many writers my own somewhat older age and his, none came near his intensity. But the intensity racked him and a feeling of financial insecurity also racked him. Now he is father, husband, landowner, and the last I heard most interested in a boy much like himself and his son.

It was for this son who had begun to stutter due to an uneven development mentally and emotional who sent the family to Maine (where several summers Henry had written) because it was a quieter life or psychiatry which was needed. In the past few years I've seen very little of the family and heard very little, but did have pictures of them and the place. If I can run down this material -- and a general upheaval of my life and files and books to the country and the rebuilding of an old farm here near my husband-- has gotten all my belongings into a wild uproar for I've had full teaching meantime and a sick mother - in- law and commuting. But papers are gradually turning up.

As I said, I know it would please them all to have your letter and I shall make an effort to track that little town down again and you may yourself hear from Henry.

Yours

Eas Lou Walton
(Mrs David Mandel)