Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, January 19, 1951

Linda Grace Hoyer
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Dear John:

The books on Abelard arrived, in good shape, yesterday and I shirked a stewardship committee meeting at the church to skip through the one by McCabe last night. Sometime, I'll read McCabe more slowly, I hope. Did you ever decide what Abelard's tragic flaw was? At first I thought envy had driven his enemies mad. But after my slight acquaintance with McCabe, I can see that Abelard was very strong medicine for them to take.

The enclosed photograph appeals strongly to your father and probably resembles all of Abelard's enemies more or less. No wonder Uncle Joe behaves so badly. These boys really look like something for the bear to hug.

I was going to tell you why your father read Hemingway's book. But I'm not sure of knowing yet. It proves Uzzell's system, if nothing else. If you have a basic conflict you have a story, it would seem, and, having a story you can forget all Aristotle said about noble characters, dianoia, and ideal truth. I found both the man and the girl very improbable. But of course I haven't been to Venice either at eighteen or fifty. I do know a little about circulatory troubles, however, and the usual reactions of young girls to fifty-year-old men and I thought her behaviour in general was out of this world. The man's preoccupation with the past while his present was being so pleasant struck your father as queer too. Of course no one but the publisher liked the book. But why did we read it? It might have been pure morbidity. Yet I doubt it. The book has a strange persistence from which I am not yet free. What is it?

Don Mac Neil said the temperature in Boston today (early) was forty-two degrees. Here it was forty. Chipper and Jolson have been sunning themselves out of doors for the first time this year. Grandma was spreading humus in the meadow (or was it Grandpa?). And, having hung up the wash, I expect to do something in the sun shine too. The package from Mary that came yesterday was overwhelming. There's another lounging robe of Aunt Bess's and 33 handkerchiefs (I counted them), and a picture of Jean, not a very pretty picture but having, like Hemingway's book, a strange force of its own.

The mail is due. So goodbye and good luck.

[Signature]